Strategic ASSESSMENT

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Strategic ASSESSMENT

The purpose of *Strategic Assessment* is to stimulate and enrich the public debate on issues that are, or should be, on Israel's national security agenda.

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Abstracts

The Promise and Perils of Engagement / Mark A. Heller
Barack Obama's presidency appears to be making "engagement" the watchword of its foreign policy and ushering in a new era of engagement in international relations. However, engagement is a rather nebulous concept that must be sharpened in order to fulfill its potential and avoid its pitfalls. And while some attempt to engage Iran is certainly indicated by the failure thus far of alternative approaches, engagement stands little chance of success unless all the components of a coherent strategy are worked out. Even then, Obama may eventually face the dilemma posed by the conclusion that regarding Iran, neither engagement nor non-violent coercion will resolve the problem.

The Iranian Nuclear Program: Waiting for Obama / Ephraim Kam
There is currently no substantial obstacle to Iran's effort to obtain nuclear weapons. President Obama's decision to initiate a direct dialogue with Iran, which has meanwhile led to a soft approach towards Iran, has given Iran a great deal of time while subject to no pressure to halt its nuclear program. The freezing by the US of its military option – and Israel's as well – nullifies one of the principal points of pressure on Iran. Iran is now on the path to a nuclear weapons capability, so far with no interference, while its progress in uranium enrichment is exceeding expectations.

Iran's Ballistic Missiles / Yiftah S. Shapir
This past year was particularly productive for Iran's missile and space program. Overall, however, here is little solid information about the Iranian missile threat, and much of the information appearing in the media is based on more or less reasonable estimates. When a nation attempts to deal with an external threat, relying on ominous estimates is only logical. Yet just as there is a price for relying on rosier estimates, relying on the dire ones also carries a cost – constructing defenses against what turns out to be a nonexistent or reduced threat.

Battling for Consciousness / Yossi Kuperwasser

The battle over consciousness has always been a part of confrontations between states and societies, but its relative weight in these confrontations has risen considerably in recent years. Terrorist organizations in general and radical Islamic groups in particular were among the first to understand the change in the nature of the battle over consciousness. In order to challenge the radical organizations in this battle, it is necessary to forge a joint effort at both the national and the international levels. What has been done to date in this field is very little, and in no way reflects the enormity of the challenge and its importance to modern warfare.

Palestinian Duality: Territories, Governments, Agendas / Ephraim Lavie

For the first time in the history of the Palestinian national struggle, there are two separate leaderships pitted against one another that came of age in Palestinian territory and have, since 1967, experienced the struggle against the Israeli occupation. Fatah and Hamas are awaiting the publication of President Obama's political program, and each is trying to take advantage of the change in American policy to strengthen its status at the expense of the other. Moreover, the generation-based succession within the Fatah leadership during the movement's recent sixth general convention dramatized further the reality of fragmented Palestinian national unity.

The Lebanese Parliamentary Elections: Back to the Future? / Benedetta Berti

Lebanon's recent parliamentary elections indeed constituted a significant political development and changed the internal balance of power somewhat. Despite the obstacles, the March 14 coalition gained another, largely unexpected, political victory. Election results strengthened the Arab identity of Lebanon and its pre-existing regional and international alliances, and have averted or at least stalled the gradual shifting of Lebanon towards the Iranian-Syrian axis At the same time, the sectarian dynamics of the political system and the fragmented composition of Lebanese society drastically limit the elected government's political maneuverability and the concrete possibilities for political change.

Guardians of a Tense Peace: US Combat Forces in Iraq / Clint ZumBrunnen

The semblance of stability in Iraq throughout the spring of 2009 has created a tendency among Americans to label the Iraq War a "victory." Such thinking overlooks the sectarian chaos of 2006 and 2007 and downplays the fact that Iraq's explosive internal disputes are largely held in check by the immediate presence of US combat power. This essay conveys a more sober assessment and contends that any precipitous withdrawal of US combat power will greatly reduce US leverage in Iraq and risk a return to the sectarian strife of 2006, simply because few of Iraq's serious internal conflicts have been resolved.

Russia in the Middle East: An Unlikely Comeback / Olena Bagno

Russia's upgraded political clout in the Middle East was facilitated by its strengthened energy sector and the lack of viable success of recent US-led military and political initiatives in the region. However, the practical implications of a stronger Russian presence should not be overestimated. Western experts believe that Moscow is unable to replace Washington as the primary ally of regional actors aligned with the US. A significant increase of Russian influence in the region is not to be expected, and instead, Russia will likely remain a secondary, pragmatic, and emotionally uninvolved actor.

Killing Pakistan from Within / Meirav Mishali-Ram

Over the last two years, Pakistan has made frequent headlines around the world regarding the ongoing escalation within its borders. Pakistan finds itself in the eye of the storm, having to redefine its policy in relation to organizations that until not long ago operated under its auspices but have in recent years become state enemies. The complex relationship the state forged with the terrorist organizations over the years is a source of confusion and inconsistency in Pakistan's policies vis-à-vis the threat of jihad from within. The increasing terrorism in Pakistan is a central link in the global jihad and a major challenge confronting the international struggle against it.

The Promise and Perils of Engagement

Mark A. Heller

Barack Obama's presidency appears to be making "engagement" the watchword of its foreign policy and ushering in a new era of engagement in international relations. The rush of enthusiasm generated by Obama's "fresh" approach to the rest of the world owes something to the longstanding belief that more can be accomplished by interacting positively with rivals and adversaries than by confronting or even just shunning them. But it is no less a function of the relief felt by many at the mere fact that Obama has branded his policy differently than did his predecessor, or in other words, that Obama is simply not George W. Bush. However, engagement is a rather nebulous concept that must be sharpened in order to fulfill its potential and avoid its pitfalls. Most importantly, it must be rigorously pursued as a policy instrument, not as an end in itself.

Engagement: Strategy or Therapy?

There is no universally accepted definition of engagement as a political strategy. The British government's Sustainable Development Commission extols it as a useful "generic term to explore all approaches of engaging stakeholders, rather than to describe a specific process. It can be taken to cover a whole spectrum of different types of engagement and activities." A more jaded view in the London *Sunday Times* claims that it used to mean an appointment or a promise to marry, but that at least in the domestic discourse, it is now used by politicians who "want to 'talk to' or even 'listen to' the electorate (the latter is more common)," most often by Members of Parliament about to lose their jobs. In foreign policy, the term is widely understood to

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mean a conscious effort not just to communicate directly with other international actors (as, for example, the first Bush administration did with Saddam Hussein in 1991 just before it launched a devastating war to eject Iraq from Kuwait), but also to interact in a constructive manner in order to facilitate, through positive rhetorical gestures and material inducements, the non-violent achievement of foreign policy objectives. As such, engagement is understood to be the polar opposite of a confrontational though equally non-violent approach to rivals and adversaries: ostracism and boycott.

Engagement and its Alternative: The Performance Test

The debate between these two approaches is sometimes couched in humanitarian terms. For example, when diplomatic boycotts are accompanied by economic and social sanctions, critics often charge that these measures inflict hardship on ordinary people or innocent bystanders rather than on the true architects of objectionable policies – particular leaders or even an entire regime. For the most part, however, the arguments revolve around a more pragmatic question: "Which approach is more likely to elicit desired changes on the part of the targeted actor?" Advocates of engagement insist that interaction will dispel possible misunderstandings, improve the psychological climate for agreement by reducing insecurities and suspicions of hostile intent, and change the incentive structure for compliance by enhancing the stakes of the adversary in positive outcomes, whereas isolation and boycott will intensify both the will to resist change (lest compliance be taken as surrender) and the capacity to do so (by stimulating national or group solidarity) on the other side. Defenders of attempts to isolate and/or boycott governments and regimes argue that such actions will undermine the targets' ability to persist in objectionable policies, or even to survive, by depriving them of legitimacy, material resources, and domestic support while empowering – at least psychologically – their internal and foreign rivals.

Shunning has almost never proved to be successful. It is therefore puzzling why so many actors have adopted that approach and persisted in it for so long.

History does not readily supply any persuasive conclusions about this debate, precisely because it involves so many different variables

and has produced such mixed results. On the whole, however, it seems that the degree to which policy and/or regime changes can be attributed to shunning depends on the comprehensiveness of the boycott and the breadth of the multilateral coalition arrayed against the targeted party. That is probably why the dissolution of the apartheid system in South Africa is one of the few cases cited as a successful use of this approach (though there were certainly other factors at work as well). Still, such cases are quite rare. Ordinarily, attempts to isolate a particular actor, when pursued only by a narrow coalition, and certainly by only one international actor, seem to have had little direct effect on the policies of the targeted party, and certainly on the survival of its regime. This is so even when the isolator is a superpower (e.g., the United States) and the targeted party is a small state hitherto highly dependent on its bilateral relationship with that superpower (e.g., Cuba under Castro). Indeed, the basic explanation given by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for the Obama administration's decision to abandon the effort of previous administrations to isolate Iran was that "it didn't work." That may be undeniable, but it begs the question whether it didn't work because it is inherently unworkable or because it was applied by too few international actors to make it effective.

The Historical Record

Given the rather modest track record of efforts to shun and isolate, it is actually striking that so many parties have persisted so long in them. Nevertheless, the list is quite impressive. Apart from the South African and Cuban cases, the more blatant examples, just since World War II, include total American boycotts of the People's Republic of China, Libya, Iraq, and Iran; European efforts to boycott and isolate the government of Alexandr Lukashenko in Belarus; the Hallstein Doctrine, whereby West Germany boycotted not only the German Democratic Republic (until the adoption of *ostpolitik* by Chancellor Willi Brandt) but also other countries that recognized the GDR (until that was conceded to be unworkable); PRC efforts to isolate the Republic of China (Taiwan); attempts by some Arabs to isolate Egypt after it signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979; and, of course, the longstanding refusal of all Arab states (until 1979) and Iran (since that same year) to have any truck or trade with Israel. In addition to these examples of state shunning,

there are numerous cases of third party shunning of non-state actors, usually because of their involvement in terrorism, the most prominent Middle Eastern examples being the refusal by Israel and many Western countries to engage the PLO (until the 1980s), Hizbollah, and Hamas.

Of course, not all cases even in this incomplete roster share the same characteristics. In some, the purpose of the isolators was to persuade/coerce the targeted parties "merely" to change policies, on matters ranging from domestic governance (Belarus) through mass destruction weapons development (Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea) to support for or practice of terrorism (Iran, Libya, non-state actors). In others, the purpose – or, at least, aspiration – was rather to effect the entire collapse of the regime or political system (e.g., South Africa, PRC, and Cuba). In the most extreme cases, the purpose was to end the existence of the targeted actor as a separate political entity (e.g., East Germany, Taiwan, and Israel). Even in two of these extreme cases, however – East Germany and Taiwan – it is noteworthy that the prime isolators eventually reversed course and decided that engagement was actually a more promising path to what remained their absolutist objective. Only with respect to Israel have adversaries maintained what is almost a hermetic seal on relations, both official and unofficial; any willingness to engage on the issues has been with third parties, in the hope of generating pressure on Israel, rather than with Israel itself.

The Attractions of Engagement

Yet whatever the purpose of shunning, it has almost never proved to be successful. Indeed, there are even instances of governments (e.g., Albania, Myanmar) sometimes consciously practicing self-isolation as strategies of regime survival. Given that history, it is therefore puzzling why so many actors have adopted that approach and persisted in it for so long. Most of the explanations appear to be connected with prestige or domestic politics, i.e., the reluctance to admit that an existing policy has failed or the impact of domestic pressure groups. The latter factor has been particularly prominent in the United States (e.g., the so-called "China Lobby" in the 1950s and Cuban-Americans since 1959), though it is hardly confined to that country or even to democratic countries in general. It might well be the case that the firm stance against any sort of "normalization" with Israel, even in countries that

have peace agreements with Israel and certainly in those that don't, is also a reflection of sensitivity to Arab public opinion, regardless of how authoritarian those countries' regimes are in other respects. These factors, though not totally insignificant, have nevertheless proved increasingly unable to counter the performance test.

By that same test, however, the record of engagement is not that much more impressive. Its most frequently-cited success is the transformation of Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, often attributed to West Germany's *ostpolitik* and other forms of Western engagement over the years (e.g., Pugwash conferences, economic ties, cultural exchanges, Helsinki/CSCE). Yet even that conclusion is not indisputable. It is equally plausible that Communism in the Soviet Union and its East European satellites was intrinsically dysfunctional and that the internal strains were intensified in the 1980s by a combination of technological change (East Germans, at least, had long watched West German television) and economic stress caused by an inconclusive war in Afghanistan and a self-defeating effort to compete in an accelerated arms race. In any event, this one outcome, as historically momentous as it may be, is too ambiguous to provide conclusive proof of the comparatively greater effectiveness of engagement.

So why does the tide of conceptual battle between shunning and engagement seem to be turning in favor the latter, at least in the West? Apart from the performance test results, the most probable explanation stems from the growing belief, not necessarily that real conflicts of interest, ideology, or identity do not exist, but rather:

1. That these conflicts are often exacerbated by misunderstandings and exaggerated suspicions, and that the obstacles to conflict resolution can best be overcome by engagement. This belief is grounded in empirical historical research about the outbreak of the First World War and the Korean War – though not the Second World War – as well as in the evolution of the European Union over the last half of the twentieth century, a bloc for which engagement has become a cardinal precept of foreign policy; and
2. That even if engagement ultimately does not produce the desired outcomes, there is little "downside" risk in trying, that is, no serious cost is incurred even if it fails.

It is important to stress that the logic of engagement is more sophisticated than the simple bromides often used to justify it. Advocates of engagement often cite Winston Churchill's dictum that "jaw-jaw is better than war-war." But engagement is more than simple communication, which may be enhanced by direct interaction but is not strictly dependent on it. Talking can also take place with the help of or even through the medium of third parties. Instead, engagement also implies some gestures and actions directed at the various lower echelons of the other party's political structures, media, and public opinion. Moreover, "war-war" is not the only alternative to "jaw-jaw," since the absence or failure of talks can also be non-violent sanctions or simply the prolongation of the status quo. Nor is the cliché that "peace is made with enemies" very instructive; its relevance depends on the nature of the enemy and the kinds of behavior and policies it pursues that engagement is intended to influence.

But while some enemies may indeed be irreconcilable – the whole world is not divided only between current partners and future partners – and some behaviors or policies cannot plausibly be changed by non-coercive means, it can be credibly argued that the applicability of these generalizations to specific cases can only be determined through a good faith effort at engagement. Ordinarily, however, this cannot be carried out without risk or cost. One immediate cost is the de facto legitimization of the hitherto shunned target of engagement. The very fact of direct interaction with adversaries confirms their importance or viability, which explains why such parties are so desperate for highly publicized meetings and negotiations with other international actors, even (as in the case of Hamas) when the international actors are marginal and/or lame duck members of the British Parliament or former American presidents out of office for three decades. This is not just a matter of prestige. Engagement of international actors has important ramifications for local and regional balances of power, because it empowers the local or regional actor being engaged – some Iranian commentators have already characterized Obama's

Engagement recommends itself either because it will work or because the exercise will overcome obstacles that prevented previous exercises in shunning, boycott, and confrontation from working.

demarche as an admission of American weakness – while undermining the self-confidence of its rivals or adversaries. In many cases, local or regional contests are played out in front of audiences or publics whose positions are influenced by a sense of future power dynamics, i.e., of whose side history is on, and that is why ambivalence is probably a charitable adjective to describe the attitudes of some Arab states, the March 14 coalition in Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority toward Western proposals to engage Iran, Hizbollah, and Hamas, respectively.

Secondly, engagement implies the risk that its authors will invest their self-esteem in its success, thereby preventing them from dispassionately assessing its efficacy. Rather than ever concluding that it hasn't worked, they will persuade themselves that it just hasn't worked yet, and that what is needed is not policy adjustment but just more effort. True, the same instinct may also operate when policies of coercion and even military force are being pursued; there too, policymakers are often inclined to throw good money (as well as lives and other resources) after bad, rather than tacitly acknowledging that they were wrong. The difference, however, is that at least in the early stages, such policies are less likely to provoke international and even domestic pressure to persist. By contrast, policymakers tempted to reassess engagement, whenever they do so, will almost certainly be advised by the international community that it is still too early to despair.

Notwithstanding these concerns, engagement in recent years has become increasingly prominent in the political strategies of major powers, not just because its alternative is seen to be so futile (if not counterproductive), but also because efforts to pursue it are seen to be necessary to reduce tensions with allies and friends who do adhere to the approach and to accumulate the domestic and international political capital that could sustain more effective sanctions (non-violent and even military) if engagement eventually fails to produce the desired results. In other words, engagement recommends itself either because it will work or because the exercise will overcome obstacles, especially the absence of a sufficiently broad international coalition, which prevented previous exercises in shunning, boycott, and confrontation from working.

The United States and Iran

Engagement has been a longstanding pillar of European policy. Contrary to widespread perceptions, it has also rarely been entirely absent from American policy. Under Obama, however, the United States has embraced engagement in a way that is presented – and interpreted – as a major reorientation in America's approach to the world. In many major speeches, including his inaugural address, Obama has signaled his intention to extend an open hand to others and to keep it open to whoever does not respond with a clenched fist. (Secretary of State Clinton has also announced a desire for a comprehensive "reset" of relations with Russia.) These rhetorical signals have been accompanied by concrete gestures. To Cuba, Obama has proposed to ease restrictions on financial transfers and travel of Cuban-Americans to Cuba and to readmit Cuba to the Organization of American States. To Syria, Obama has sent a special envoy and signaled his intention to dispatch a resident American ambassador after several years during which the post was vacant. An ambassador will also be sent back to Venezuela. And to the Muslim world, Obama has spoken of his desire for mutually respectful relations, adopted a much more assertive position on Israeli settlements, expunged the phrase "war on terror" from America's diplomatic lexicon, and issued a directive to close the detention center for "illegal combatants" at Guantanamo Bay. However, the most dramatic reversal – which amounts to a categorical renunciation of his predecessor's policy – has been Obama's initiative to engage Iran.

On March 20, the president addressed Iranians directly on the occasion of Nowruz (the Iranian New Year) and stated that he would seek full normalization of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. He also abjured any intention of promoting regime change and committed himself to comprehensive negotiations without preconditions (meaning the end of any insistence on suspension of uranium enrichment as a precondition for negotiations). Such words and actions have prompted some of Obama's critics to characterize his policy as soft, if not altogether naive. True, Obama did not have much foreign policy experience before he took office and his domestic record bespeaks a worldview committed to compromise and non-confrontation. But his administration is staffed with officials and advisers who can hardly be described as novices in the ways of the world, and the notion that he is bent on a course of

appeasement is at least premature, if not altogether farfetched. At the same time, efforts to accommodate friends and foes alike have already run into some notable resistance. Friends in Europe have been reluctant to accept detainees to be released from Guantanamo or to increase their contributions to the military effort in Afghanistan; foes, particularly in North Korea, have undertaken nuclear explosive and missile tests that look suspiciously like an exercise in open defiance. The most critical challenge of all, however, will almost certainly be in Iran.

The Iranians have already indulged in slightly more sophisticated variants of North Korean-style defiance, rebuffing requests to engage immediately and insisting that nothing productive could begin until after the Iranian presidential election on June 12. This is not an inconsequential matter, since it earned Iran several more months of interference-free work on their nuclear program, and the hiatus will almost certainly be prolonged by post-election uncertainty. Indeed, Iran's ability to continue exploiting American willingness to engage in order to move its nuclear program toward some kind of definitive breakthrough will be the decisive criterion for determining whether engagement is a more effective strategy than shunning or whether it will ultimately be subject to the same assessment as that of policy under Bush: it did not work.

To avoid the second outcome, the architects of American policy will need to inject content into the amorphous hopes widely invested in engagement. In particular, they will have to:

1. Delineate and prioritize concrete policy objectives, especially with respect to Iranian nuclear capabilities;
2. Specify the inducements they will be prepared to offer in case clarifications of misunderstandings and assurances of good will do not suffice to produce an agreed outcome;
3. Stipulate criteria by which to judge whether or not the process is advancing desired outcomes, or at least continue to promise that it will, i.e., a set of performance benchmarks;
4. Set a timetable or at least a general framework within which objectives must be achieved (because the passage of time is a factor in the Iranian program and a return to the pre-engagement status quo is not an acceptable alternative to successful interaction);

5. Reach some prior understanding with America's most important partners, especially in Europe, about what constitutes a "good faith" effort to achieve a non-coercive resolution; and
6. Prepare a contingency or fallback plan in case engagement is deemed a failure.

There are already some indications that some of these elements of a coherent strategy are being put into place. Secretary Clinton, for example, has stated publicly that if engagement doesn't work, the result will be brutal pressure of a sort that America under Bush was unable to orchestrate but that Obama, seen to have made the effort, would be able to do. Similarly, President Obama has indicated that he expects to be able to make some kind of judgment about the viability of the process by the end of the 2009; some lower-ranking officials have even stipulated the UN General Assembly meeting in late September as the target date. But there is no sign that a comprehensive approach has yet been formulated (not that it would necessarily have been made public if it had) and uncertainty persists about how the administration intends to use engagement as a concrete policy instrument. Moreover, some of the components of an effective policy, especially coordination with and cooperation of European allies who are also major trading partners of Iran, may well be beyond even Obama's capacity to secure, regardless of how open-minded and open-hearted he appears to be.

Some attempt to engage Iran is certainly indicated by the failure thus far of alternative approaches. But engagement stands little chance of success unless all the components of a coherent strategy are worked out, and even then, Obama may still eventually face the dilemma posed by the conclusion that neither engagement nor non-violent coercion will resolve the problem.

The Iranian Nuclear Program: Waiting for Obama

Ephraim Kam

In March 2008 the UN Security Council imposed a third round of economic sanctions on Iran. Like the preceding rounds, these sanctions lacked force and did not propel Iran to suspend its nuclear program. Since then, however, very little has been done to obstruct Iran's race to obtain nuclear weapons. Approaching the end of its term, the Bush administration lacked the energy to mobilize efforts to stop Iran. The Obama administration is still feeling its way on the Iranian issue, and wants to try a new path – direct dialogue – in the hope that this will produce better results. European governments are waiting for the US administration to make a move, and it is unlikely they will confront Tehran with serious obstacles. Meanwhile the Iranian nuclear program is moving ahead without interference.

The Obama Scenario: Direct Dialogue

President Obama's initiative to engage Iran in direct dialogue and persuade it to halt its drive to nuclear armament has not fully taken shape. It is not clear if the administration intends to conduct bilateral talks with Iran or involve other governments in the talks, and whether the administration plans to focus mainly on the nuclear question, or whether from the outset it will try to extend the agenda to cover all current issues in American-Iranian relations. Nor is it clear what incentives it will offer Iran to suspend the nuclear program, what it will regard as success, and how much it is willing to concede on this matter.

Remarks by the president and his aides indicate that they are not very optimistic that a dialogue with Iran will succeed. The administration is

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apparently trying to conduct the dialogue, which has strong support in the US and Europe, in order to fully explore any possibility, however narrow, and in order to provide a better basis for imposing heavy sanctions on Iran after all diplomatic means have been exhausted, so that it can say that it tried everything. It therefore follows that the administration envisions at least two stages in dealing with the Iranian question. The first stage, direct dialogue in the framework of talks, has not yet been launched. If the talks fail, the administration in a second stage will strive to persuade the European, Russian, and Chinese governments to take its side, and will demand their cooperation in imposing severe sanctions on Iran in order to force it to abandon its nuclear program.

From the beginning Obama promised that he would take a hard line in talks with Iran and conduct them from a position of strength. So far, however, this tough approach is not much in evidence, and the administration has made a series of concessions that weaken its stance. It has abandoned the demand put forward by the Bush administration and European governments, backed by a UN Security Council resolution, that Iran suspend its uranium enrichment as a precondition for dialogue. The administration has avoided setting a clear timetable for dialogue, even though this reticence plays into Tehran's hands and allows Iran time to promote its nuclear program. It accepted the Iranian position that talks would begin after the Iranian presidential elections, thereby granting Iran at least six months without any negotiations or pressure whatsoever. In addition, the administration did not reach, and perhaps did not try to reach, agreement in advance with the other governments to stiffen sanctions against Iran in the event that the dialogue fails.

The most important concession, however, concerns the military option. Over the past year, even before the Bush administration left office, senior American defense officials made it clear, both on and off the record, that they opposed military action against nuclear facilities in Iran at this stage. Their principal grounds for opposing such action were that an attack on the facilities would not destroy the Iranian nuclear program; at best it would delay it, but Iran would subsequently reinforce and safeguard its facilities. Uncertain perhaps of the operational capability to achieve the desired results, they were

concerned about the Iranian response and the possibility that an attack would prompt a wave of instability in the region. No less important, senior US defense officials have for the present ruled out the possibility not only of an American attack, but also of an Israeli attack, and have underscored their expectation that Israel will not surprise the American administration with an attack against Iranian nuclear installations.

To this picture should be added the remarks in early July 2009 by Vice President Joe Biden, who said that as a sovereign state Israel was entitled to decide for itself what measures against Iran its interests dictated, whether or not the US agreed with them. According to Biden, if the Netanyahu government decides to change its current course of action towards Iran, it has the sovereign right to do so. At first glance, Biden's statement seemed to put the military option back on the table and signal that the administration does not rule out Israeli military action. This insinuation, however, was completely neutralized when President Obama quickly made it unmistakably clear that his administration was not giving Israel a green light for a military strike against Iran, even though he could not dictate to other countries what their security interests were.

However, instilling anxiety in Iran about a military strike is a key element in intensifying the pressure. In a well-known assessment from December 2007, the American intelligence community noted that Iran froze the military element in its nuclear program in 2003 probably due to Iran's fear of attack following the American military campaign in Iraq. While President Obama still mentions (less frequently since he entered the White House) that all options are open, this statement in itself, given the objections of senior defense officials to a military strike, can no longer have the necessary effect on Iran. When the threat of military action has receded to this extent and the threat of sanctions is also minimal, the chances of motivating Iran to suspend its nuclear program are slim.

> The difficulties, misunderstandings, suspicion, and residual tension in American-Iranian relations that defeated many prior efforts to promote dialogue over the past 30 years can be expected to foil any new efforts.

The unrest in Iran following the presidential elections will complicate any potential dialogue even further. While the Obama administration

has decided that it is willing to initiate a dialogue with Iran despite the recent events there, such a dialogue will be more difficult once the legitimacy of the Khamanei-Ahmadinejad regime has been undermined in Iran and internationally. The US will find it harder to negotiate with a regime that has demonstrated its inflexibility by publicly repressing a broad popular movement that seeks freedom of expression. It is also not clear how much effort the Iranian leadership will be able to invest in a meaningful dialogue with the American administration when its attention is perforce focused on internal affairs. Indeed, Tehran may try to use the internal situation as an excuse for dragging out the talks and gaining further time. On the other hand, the severe criticism in Western countries of the regime's internal behavior is likely to contribute to their readiness to intensify the pressure on Iran. At the same time, it is doubtful whether such criticism will help achieve real support in these countries for a military option against Iran, both because the opposition to such action is substantial, and due to concern that a military strike would unify the Iranian people in support of the regime.

It appears that the Obama administration took a soft approach to Iran in order to create the most comfortable possible conditions for dialogue. If the talks with Iran fail to make progress the US will likely toughen its stance, and since early July 2009 there are indications that this is in fact the trend to prevent Iran from gaining time through mere foot dragging.. Similarly, the G-8 announced in early July 2009 that if progress in negotiations with Iran was not forthcoming, they would be forced to take decisions at their next meeting, in September 2009. Defense Secretary Gates also clarified that Iran has until late September to respond affirmatively to the US offer of dialogue. In addition, the State Department requested ten nations to limit the sale of processed uranium – "yellow cake" – to Iran, assessing that Iran's supply of "yellow cake" will dry up by 2010.

Overall, however, the chances that direct dialogue between the US administration and Iran will stop the latter's nuclear program are poor, if such negotiations do in fact take place. The reason is simple: Iran will probably not abandon its drive to obtain nuclear weapons, which it regards as a primary strategic goal, and will exploit any arrangement to maneuver its way towards this goal. Moreover, the difficulties, misunderstandings, suspicion, and residual tension in American-

Iranian relations that defeated many prior efforts to promote dialogue between the two countries over the past 30 years can be expected to foil any new efforts.

If the dialogue fails to achieve progress, the administration will move to stiffen sanctions against Iran, and is investigating the leveling of heavy oil-related sanctions, as well as financial and trade pressures. However, the chances of persuading European governments and particularly Russia and China to take part in stronger sanctions may well be no better than in the past, even after the possibility of direct dialogue has been exhausted. The considerations of these governments remain as they were, and already in May 2009 the Russian minister of foreign affairs stated that Russia should not be expected to join in applying heavier pressure on Iran. Therefore these governments may agree to do more than in the past, but it is doubtful if they will endorse significantly stronger sanctions.

For this reason, the US administration must already consider a scenario in which dialogue does not halt Iran's effort to acquire nuclear weapons, and the administration finds itself unable to muster sufficient international support for a substantial stiffening of sanctions. There are three alternatives in this situation:

1. Undertaking a package deal with Iran, whereby Iran would be permitted to continue its nuclear program, including uranium enrichment, or in Iran's words, "to complete the nuclear fuel cycle," under tighter and mutually agreed inspection and restrictions. Obama hinted at this possibility in his speech in Cairo, when he recognized Iran's right to a nuclear program for peaceful purposes, if it fulfills the conditions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In the political and professional community in Europe and the US there is growing willingness to accept this option as the lesser evil, in the hope that it will halt Iran's march to a nuclear bomb.
2. Returning to the military option. In principle this is possible, and Obama himself has already stressed, at least in the past, that he regards this as a legitimate option. If the administration weighs this as a realistic option, however, it will have to deal with the objections on the part of the American defense establishment and lay the groundwork in American and global public opinion, mainly in the Western world and the Muslim-Arab world.

3. Accepting the possibility that Iran will obtain nuclear weapons, despite the efforts to prevent it. The administration certainly regards this as the worst option, and is committed to preventing its materialization. Eventually, however, it may conclude that it is unable to prevent Iran from going nuclear at a reasonable price, as in the case of North Korea. If so, it will have to act in several directions before Iran acquires nuclear weapons: deterring Iran from considering the use of nuclear weapons, mainly against Israel; strengthening Israel's deterrent capability against a nuclear Iran with words and actions; curbing possible tendencies in other Middle Eastern countries to join the nuclear arms race; and preventing Iran from using its nuclear power to strengthen its influence in the Persian Gulf, mainly with respect to Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and Iraq. In July 2009 Secretary of State Clinton announced that the US would provide Israel with a nuclear umbrella against an Iranian nuclear attack, and would consider offering a defense umbrella in the Middle East against Iran's aggressive aspirations. Clinton's statements were designed to augment Israeli deterrence, and perhaps also to persuade Israel not to undertake a military option, strengthen the confidence and security of the Gulf states, and obstruct any momentum among Arab states to follow Iran's lead and enter a nuclear arms race. And yet while Clinton denied it, these same remarks might suggest that the administration has come to terms with a nuclear Iran and is preparing accordingly.

Although the worst scenario is acceptance of a nuclear Iran, the possibility of a package deal with Iran is highly problematic. The idea is to allow Iran to enrich uranium on its own territory under tighter inspection arrangements than at present, and on condition that the enrichment is low level and non-military. In a worse (and far less acceptable) scenario, Iran will be permitted to reach the nuclear weapons threshold and stop there, without actually producing a weapon. Since it must be assumed that Iran will not forego nuclear weapons, and given its expertise and many years of experience in concealment and committing fraud with respect to its nuclear activity, this arrangement will likely not stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. This means that Iran is liable to exploit any arrangement to advance toward nuclear weapons, albeit at a slower pace.

Has the Obama administration already decided in principle to accept this kind of package deal? Probably not, for several reasons: to date the administration has not said so; it is not expressing optimism about the chances of reaching an arrangement; it is under pressure not to make this kind of deal, not only by Israel but also by moderate Arab countries;[1] and the administration presumably realizes that such a deal would be a major victory for Iran and would not prevent it from going nuclear. At the same time, if there is no progress by way of dialogue and it proves impossible to recruit support for harsher sanctions, the administration is liable to consent to such a deal, if it believes that the alternatives are worse.

The Iranian Perspective

Iran's status on the nuclear question is comfortable, given the current situation. It is subject to little pressure. The expectation of dialogue with the US gives Iran time to achieve progress in its nuclear program, with no quid pro quo on its part. The opposition of Western countries on the nuclear issue is eroding, which is likely to eventually lead to a package deal comfortable for Iran. Above all, the threat of military action has been frozen. There is another reason for Iran to celebrate: the international response to North Korea's behavior on the nuclear issue was limited and ineffective, which is encouraging Iran to move ahead.

Iran has an interest in direct dialogue with the US administration on its own terms. All four Iranian presidential candidates in principle supported such dialogue. Dialogue helps Iran gain time to move its nuclear program forward, and may relieve tension with the US, alleviate the American threat against Iran, and bring Iran out of its partial diplomatic isolation. If the dialogue achieves progress, it is likely to lead to an arrangement and cooperation with the US on bilateral and regional problems of importance to Iran. Now that the Obama administration has abandoned the precondition of uranium enrichment suspension and recognized Iran's right to maintain a civilian nuclear program, dialogue is likely to lead to an arrangement consistent with Iran's positions. In these circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that Iran's red line will be the demand for uranium enrichment on its territory, both because such an arrangement will leave it with the

possibility of continuing its development of nuclear weapons, and because there is a chance that this demand will be accepted in the talks.

Iran can profit in many ways from direct talks with the US. A positive outcome could strengthen Iran's regional position; generate an American commitment to refrain from undermining the Islamic regime; yield major economic and technological benefits for Iran, including for its oil industry infrastructure, which needs upgrading, and its civilian nuclear program; and lead to the cancellation of the American and Western sanctions against Iran. Iran, however, has been aware of these possible gains for several years, because most of them have been offered since 2002 in the framework of a comprehensive deal in negotiations with the European governments, backed by the US. Nonetheless, even in exchange for these benefits Iran was unwilling to abandon its quest for nuclear weapons, and Iran will presumably continue to embrace this strategic goal.

Iran is indeed taking full advantage of the time it has gained. According to the June 2009 report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran has accumulated a significant amount of low level enriched uranium. This will enable it to produce 25 kilograms of high level enriched uranium, considered enough to manufacture an initial nuclear bomb. Furthermore, according to the report, by the end of 2010, if not before, Iran will be able to produce four times this quantity. Iran achieved this capacity several months earlier than expected, due primarily to the installing and effective operation of a large number of centrifuges for the enrichment of uranium.[2] Even outgoing IAEA director general Mohammad ElBaradei uncharacteristically admitted in June 2009 that Iran was attempting to obtain technology that would enable it to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran will be hard pressed if its dialogue with the US administration fails and the US somehow succeeds in recruiting international support for significant sanctions and if the administration puts the military option back on the table. If the sanctions are effective, for example in the Iranian oil sector, they are liable to be painful, particularly in view of the global economic crisis and the drop in oil prices compared with last year. Even in this case, however, it is more likely that Iran will not abandon its basic aim of attaining a nuclear military capability. The Iranian regime is liable to decide to incur a high economic cost for some

period of time, provided that it eventually gets its hands on nuclear weapons.

The Significance for Israel

Although Israel is at the forefront of the countries threatened by Iran, it has no direct role in the diplomatic effort to halt the Iranian nuclear program. Israel conducts no negotiations whatsoever with Iran, and does not belong to the group of countries that does. Its influence on diplomatic efforts in this sphere is restricted to three aspects. First, Israel carries some weight with the American administration (and to a lesser degree with the European governments), which is aware that a nuclear Iran would pose a threat to Israel above all. Second, Israel can deliver whatever quality intelligence it possesses about the Iranian nuclear program, which can help intensify the pressure on Iran. Third, Israel's military option against Iran can also bolster the diplomatic pressure on Iran, both because Israel frightens Iran and because the European governments and so far the US as well are concerned about the consequences of this option, and may thus increase the pressure on Iran in order to avoid it.

Until now, Israel has not opposed the idea of dialogue between the Obama administration and Iran, both in order to enable the administration to explore fully the potential of such a dialogue and use it to exert heavier pressure on Iran, and in order to avoid an unnecessary confrontation with the administration that such opposition could create. If it develops, however, a dialogue could potentially arouse friction with the administration, which is liable to move in directions contrary to Israel's interests. Meanwhile, the administration's soft approach to Iran does not increase pressure on Iran; rather, it plays into its hands. Even more important, the administration is liable at some point to reach a comprehensive deal that leaves Iran with the possibility of continuing its quest for nuclear weapons, and may even reconcile itself to the scenario of a nuclear Iran. Averting these risks may therefore require a diplomatic and publicity campaign on Israel's part.

The administration's approach imposes significant limitations on Israel's military option, which is already complicated and problematic. Before Israel can decide on a military strike, it will have to answer a series of difficult questions: whether its intelligence is accurate enough

to enable it to significantly damage the targets; what the chances are that such a complicated operation will succeed; what the consequences of failure would be; the extent of damage to the Iranian nuclear program that an attack would cause and how long the program would be delayed; how Iran would respond to an attack on it; how other countries would respond; and what are the consequences of accepting a nuclear Iran.

The American position plays a particularly important role in Israel's considerations. If the administration decides to embark on its own military operation against Iran, it will thereby solve Israel's dilemma. Alternatively, Israel at the very least requires American understanding, if not consent, for its own military operation. If the American administration publicly objects to an Israeli attack, Israel will find it very difficult to act independently for two reasons: first, the Persian Gulf region is an operational theater for American forces, and an attack is likely to require coordination. Second and no less important, when such important American interests are at stake in an attack against Iran, Israel cannot afford to strike in the face of American opposition.

Finally, Israel has shared interests with moderate Arab countries, headed by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, in blunting the Iranian threat and preventing it from obtaining nuclear weapons. However, this group of countries is neither organized nor united, and they are hard pressed to endorse any joint action against Iran. It is extremely unlikely that this group will cooperate with Israel on this issue, other than in secondary and clandestine spheres.

Conclusion

In the current situation, there is no substantial obstacle to Iran's effort to obtain nuclear weapons. President Obama's decision to initiate a direct dialogue with Iran, which has meanwhile led to a soft approach towards Iran, has given Iran a great deal of time while subject to no pressure to halt its nuclear program. The internal unrest in Iran is liable to extend this period even further. The freezing by the US of its military option – and Israel's as well – nullifies one of the principal points of pressure on Iran. Iran is now on the path to a nuclear weapons capability, so far with no interference, while its progress in uranium enrichment is exceeding expectations.

Since Iran will likely not forego its strategic goal of obtaining nuclear weapons, the key lies with the Obama administration. The main risk is that the administration will come to terms with uranium enrichment in Iran, leaving Iran with the option of continuing its nuclear weapons program, or even worse, will accept the scenario of a nuclear Iran. The principal prospects for success require the administration to harden its attitude towards Iran significantly, including by persuading European, Russian, and Chinese governments to step up the sanctions and by unfreezing the military option. Increased pressure is not a guarantee that Iran will be stopped, because Iran is liable to decide to pay a heavy price to attain nuclear military capability, and because sanctions can be violated and bypassed. Without heavy pressure, however, there is almost no chance of obstructing the Iranian nuclear program.

Will internal Iranian developments affect its attitude on the nuclear questions? For now, the answer seems to be no. There is agreement among all parts of the Iranian political spectrum, both radical and reformist, that Iran should continue its nuclear program. Under internal pressure, the Iranian regime will be eager to demonstrate its power and success, including in the nuclear sphere. Potential lies in the long term, however difficult it is to estimate a timetable: whether a moderate regime will eventually emerge in Iran and alter its attitude towards the US and Israel. In that case Iran will assume a different and less threatening significance, even if it eventually obtains nuclear weapons.

Notes

1 During his visit to Cairo in May 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said the US was aware of concern among Arab countries about a grand bargain between it and Iran, but that this concern was entirely unrealistic, because it was unlikely that such a deal would be reached; AFP, Cairo, May 5, 2009.

2 See Ephraim Asculai, "World Passivity in the Face of Advanced Nuclear Challenges," *INSS Insight* No. 112, June 8, 2009.

Iran's Ballistic Missiles

Yiftah S. Shapir

Introduction

Last year was particularly productive for Iran's missile and space program. In February 2009 the first Iranian satellite, the Omid, was launched on the locally manufactured satellite launcher Safir. Some two months prior, in November 2008, the Iranians held the first test launch of their two-stage ballistic missile, the Sejjil, which unlike its predecessors is propelled by solid fuel. An additional test with the same missile took place in May of this year.

Iran's missile system has generated headlines since the mid 1980s, but reports have generally been clouded as a result of the secrecy shrouding the Iranian program. These have been joined by vague and at times contradictory official announcements that have helped Iran to glorify its image both for domestic and foreign audiences, in terms of performance (e.g., the missile range), manufacturing capabilities, and operational capabilities. On the other hand, Iranian spokespeople at times try to obscure Iranian intentions and even assuage fears in the international arena (e.g., that the missiles are for defensive purposes only).

However, despite the fact that some of what has been written is exaggerated, the Iranian missile threat does exist, and it is important to try to understand it as it is. This essay attempts to examine what we know about this aspect of Iranian armament programs and to separate solid information both from good estimates and from clear overstatements.

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Shehab-1 and Shehab-2 Missiles[1]

Iran began to equip itself with ballistic missiles only in the course of the Iran-Iraq War, when it received Russian-manufactured Scud-B missiles from Libya. The first operational use of them was made in March 1985. Later in the war, Iran purchased more missiles, first from Libya (and possibly also from Syria), while at the same time turning to North Korea, who apparently became its main missile provider. At the height of the war, during the "War of the Cities" (March-April 1988), Iranian forces launched 77 missiles on Iraqi cities.

Towards the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Iran, with North Korean assistance, started to manufacture its own missile, called the Shehab-1. In the meantime, the Koreans developed an improved version of the missile (called the Scud-C in the West; apparently its North Korean name was Hwasong-6), with a range of some 500 km. By 1991, the capability for manufacturing this missile had already been transferred to Iran (and also to Syria) where the missile was named the Shehab-2.

There is no definitive data about the number of Shehab-1 and Shehab-2 missiles that Iran acquired. During the entire Iran-Iraq War some 120 missiles were fired. It was estimated that by the end of the war, Iran was left with only a few, but later Iran started to accelerate the rate of production and also bought ready-made missiles directly from North Korea. Because there is no reliable information about the number of missiles manufactured and purchased, all data published on the subject is speculative. The usual numbers mentioned are 18 launchers and some 300 missiles, but other sources estimate twice as many. The numbers are apparently based on an analysis of possible war scenarios, whereby it was possible to arrive at the number of missiles likely to be fired. (If so, it seems the calculation is based on an estimate of three missiles per launcher for each day of fighting over a six-day fighting period.) This estimate is also based on the assumption that a nation would not invest resources in manufacturing a larger number of missiles than it needs. In any case, in recent years Iran has not hesitated to launch Shehab-1 and Shehab-2 missiles in military exercises, and therefore it seems it is not worried about shortages in wartime and is interested in demonstrating the abundance of missiles at its disposal.

Shehab-3 Missiles

As early as 1988, North Korea started to develop a missile with a range far greater than that of the Scud, though based on the same technology. From its earliest days Iran was likely involved in this project, and may even have helped finance it. The first prototype of the missile was spotted by American intelligence in 1990, but its first successful test took place in 1993. It would seem that already in 1994 Iran started receiving components of the missile and apparently also the technology for assembling it, and later, for manufacturing it. In Iran, the missile was called the Shehab-3. Precisely at the same time, technology for missile manufacturing was also transferred to Pakistan, where the missile was called the Ghauri.

The first Iranian test launch of the missile took place in 1998, but it was only in 2001 that Iran officially announced that it was beginning its own manufacture of it. The Iranian program, however, encountered problems, which apparently were overcome only in mid 2003.

In 2004, a different model of the Shehab-3 missile was publicly unveiled for the first time. Externally, the missile had a different nose section, resembling a baby bottle. Contradictory reports in the Iranian media attributed different ranges to the missile, varying from 1,500 to 2,000 km. In the professional literature, this missile was named the Shehab-3A or Shehab-3M (these appellations were given to the missiles by researchers outside of Iran; this essay will use the term Shehab-3M). In September 2007, a missile, called the Ghadr-1 (or Qadr-1) by the official announcer, was displayed in a parade. The announcer declared that the missile had a range of 1,800 km. However, it appeared identical or almost identical to the Shehab-3M. (Since then, Iranian spokespeople have not used this term; opposition elements have used "Ghadr" for other missiles.)

The Shehab-3 has a mobile launcher, apparently locally manufactured, and built on the rear platform of a semi-trailer. A thorough examination of the photographs published by official Iranian sources reveals that there are at least five variations of this launcher. As with the Shehab-1 and 2, what we do not know about the Shehab-3 exceeds what we do. In addition to questions about the manufacturing of the missile, the number of missiles and launchers made to date is a matter of conjecture. Most sources estimate that there are up to six operational launchers,

while the number of missiles is estimated at several dozen. In this case too there are sources that estimate much higher numbers, but neither the low nor the high numbers rest on concrete information.

In addition, in the case of all models of the Shehab-3, there are many questions about its actual performance. The standard claim for the range of the Shehab-3 is about 1,300 km, and for the Shehab-3M about 1,500 km. Very few researchers have actually undertaken an in-depth technological estimate of the missile on the basis of the little bits of available information. These researchers have estimated that if the warhead weighs 1,000 kg, the range of the Shehab-3 cannot exceed 930 km, and that of the Shehab-3M – 1,100 km. Decreasing the weight of the head to 500 kg would increase the range by only 200 km, i.e., 1,100 and 1,300 km, respectively.[2]

The Sejjil[3]

Published information about the development of solid fuel ballistic missiles has been around for over a decade. Initial reports were about "exchanging the Shehab engine," but at a later stage reports surfaced about the development of a solid fuel-propelled ballistic missile called the Ashura. At the same time, Iranian opposition elements reported on the existence of two missiles, the Ghadr-101, a single-stage missile, and the Ghadr-110, a two-stage missile. The names and the existence of these missiles have no confirmation from any other source.

In November 2008, the first test launch of a missile now called the Sejjil took place; a second test was held in May 2009. In both cases, official Iranian media published photographs of the launch, from which it is possible to conclude the following: the missile is a two-stage missile propelled by solid fuel; its dimensions, based on the photographs, seem very much like those of the Shehab-3; and the launch vehicle strongly resembles that of the Shehab-3. An in-depth technical analysis undertaken by scientists on the basis of the photographs concludes that the missile is capable of carrying a payload of 1,000 kg to a range of up to 2,200 km. Decreasing the warhead to 500 km would allow it a range of close to 3,000 km.

The missile is at present in development, and to date has undergone only two tests. In my estimation, some five years are needed to complete the missile's development and to introduce it into operational status.

As it enters active service, it will gradually replace the Shehab-3, which by then will be outdated and will gradually be phased out of service.

Other than the data supplied by the opposition regarding the existence of the Ghadr-101, there is no information about the development of a mid-range ballistic missile that would gradually replace the Shehab-1 and 2 as the operational missile for ranges of up to 500 km. Operational logic, however, requires the development of such a missile, and it is safe to assume that is has been developed in tandem with the two-stage Sejjil. In other words, I estimate there is a missile that is the first stage of the Sejjil without the second stage, or that such a missile is being developed.

BM-25

According to reports, in 2005 Iran received 18 missiles called BM-25 from North Korea, which were actually Russian missiles of the R-27 model (a model called the SS-N-6 in the West). This was a ballistic missile, with a 2,500-3,000 km range, meant to be launched from submarines. The missile was in use in the USSR in the 1960s, but was withdrawn from service. Based on these reports, North Korea obtained a number of such missiles and transferred some to Iran.

The reports were not verified by other independent sources, and it is also not known whether the missile has been modified for launching from a ground-based launcher or has been introduced into operational service in Iran. Uncharacteristically, Iran has not reported the existence of this system in service. The standard assessment has been that the missiles were purchased in order to serve as models for reverse engineering processes, by which Iranian (and North Korean) engineers were hoping to acquire more advanced technologies than those they already have.

Safir

In February 2009, Iran launched its first homemade satellite using the Safir satellite launcher, also locally manufactured. This was the climax of an effort Iranian spokespeople had talked about for years: the desire to acquire independent satellite launch capabilities. The successful launch of the satellite was preceded by a number of tests – of sub-orbital rocket launches – in February 2007, February 2008 (when the Iranian media

called the missile the Kavoshager, though the name may have indicated the payload rather than the missile), and again in August 2008. At that time, the satellite launcher was also put on public display, the name used was Safir, and photographs were published.

The Omid satellite itself was a small research satellite, carrying communications equipment, telemetry, and long distance sensors. It entered orbit at altitudes of 252.7-384.5 km in a trajectory with a 55-degree incline, and circled the earth every 90.8 min. In late May 2009, the satellite completed its mission, and probably reentered the atmosphere where it was incinerated.

Based on analyses of photographs and video clips, it seems that the launcher is propelled by liquid fuel. According to every indication, its first stage is based on the Shehab-3/No-Dong technology, whereas its second stage, also propelled by liquid fuel, is much shorter, and propelled by an engine with two combustion chambers – very different from the engine of the Scud and its clones. In the estimation of some researchers, this was the Russian R-27 (otherwise known as the SS-N-6 or BM-25) missile's vernier motor – a small motor used to steer the missile. Because this engine uses more energetic fuels, it was enough to propel the Omid satellite – probably weighing no more than 20 kg – into a low earth orbit. On the basis of this estimate, Iran (and North Korea) acquired the old missile in order to use its engine as is (which does not exclude the possibility of attempts at reverse engineering in order to arrive at independent manufacturing of those parts).

The Safir satellite launcher is part of Iran's ambitious satellite program. Iran intends to launch other satellites into space, both indigenous and foreign, using both local satellite launchers and launchers bought from foreign suppliers. The Safir is a notable technological achievement, but it represents the peak of the technology it uses. It cannot carry into space satellites weighing more than 20-30 kg. If Iran intends to launch other satellites, the current launcher will limit the possibilities. Heavier satellites will require the development of a different satellite launcher based on more advanced technology.

Many experts have dealt with questions focusing on possible uses of the Safir as a missile for operational purposes, specifically, as a surface-to-surface missile with a greater range than the Shehab-3. In my estimation, such a discussion is futile. A satellite launcher is launched

from a fixed launch pad and is assisted by a launch tower. Preparing it for launch is a long project. It is hard to imagine it as a missile in any kind of operational scenario. It is inflexible and cannot be hidden, is vulnerable to preemptive attack, and in current scenarios does not bestow any sort of operational advantage. It is also safe to assume that the satellite launcher is under the purview of a non-military institution.

The Technology

Engines. This year Iran proved its capabilities with two-stage systems, both liquid fuel and solid fuel technology. However, a close look at the achievements reveals their limitations, especially with regard to all the liquid fuel missiles launched to date, which were all based on Scud technology. We know nothing about any Iranian or North Korean success in designing a new engine or in constructing a different engine, not to mention engines propelled by more energy efficient fuels.

The Shehab engine is identical to the Scud engine, except that it is about 1.5 times larger. A development process of this sort has no precedent in the history of rocket engine development. In fact, the difficulty this entails is so great that some researchers have estimated that the photographs of the engine displayed were doctored, and that the missile uses a foreign-bought engine, apparently from Russia. In either case, it is still an engine based on proven technologies from the 1950s. Currently, Iran does not have the technology to launch missiles to greater distances or to carry heavier satellites.

Guidance systems. Does the Shehab-3 use a Scud-generation guidance system or does it have a more advanced one? Concrete information is unavailable, but Iran's success in launching the Omid signals that is has access to more advanced systems than those of the Soviet Scud. Thus it is safe to assume that the ballistic missiles have also benefited from this capability and they are capable of attaining greater precision than the Scud. Still, these are inertial guidance systems, operating only during the acceleration stage. There is no information about the existence of guidance systems for the final steering stage, or about the existence of steering capabilities of the penetrating body during the penetration stage.

Solid fuel technology. Solid fuel missile technology differs in essential ways from liquid fuel technology, and therefore involves a very different type of expertise. The engineering problems in production involve precise casting of the fuel, with uniformity and composition critical to the missile's performance. Because of this, the difficulty grows exponentially the larger the missile. Therefore, the capability of manufacturing short range artillery rockets is very far from that of manufacturing long range ballistic missiles, even though the type of propellant is the same.

Iran was exposed to solid fuel technology when it started to manufacture the Oghav artillery rocket, apparently a version of a Chinese rocket, back during the Iran-Iraq War. During the 1990s, Iran developed a large number of artillery rockets with increasing diameters and ranges (the largest of which was the Zelzal-2 with a diameter of about 61 cm). It apparently also advanced from dual-based engines to engines using composite fuel. Such technology requires extremely meticulous quality control during the manufacturing process, but allows for the production of engines with large diameters.

With the launch of the Sejjil, Iran proved that it has the technological capacity to manufacture a two-stage engine with a diameter of about 1.25 m. (The Sejjil's diameter is estimated to be similar to that of the Shehab-3.) As with other missiles, the question remains whether this is the result of Iranian development or imported technology.

Indigenous Manufacturing Capabilities

It is well known that when Iran started to launch missile manufacturing processes it had to import numerous components that could not be made in Iran. In particular, it was estimated that Iran was incapable of manufacturing the missile engines or guidance systems. Today there is no definitive information on the subject; there are those who doubt Iran's capabilities of manufacturing its engines and guidance systems (especially the gyro systems). The tendency is to compare Iran's' capabilities to what Iraq possessed in the past, but it seems that for a long time Iran has demonstrated far greater capabilities. In my estimation, Iran is currently capable of manufacturing the engines at home.

As for the gyro systems, when Iran put the guidance system of the short range Fatah-A110 missile on public display; it showed a small gyro with only one degree of freedom, insufficient for a full inertial guidance system. There were those who viewed this as the outer limit of Iranian capability, and therefore concluded that for guidance systems Iran is dependent on imports or at least on imports of their critical components. By contrast, others feel that Iran has the capability of also fully manufacturing the guidance systems at home. It is likely, however, that Iran still needs many items that can be obtained only outside of Iran, such as electronic components and certain metals, but they have no trouble attaining them.

North Korean Assistance

The improved Scuds and the No-Dongs were developed in North Korea, where engineers were successful in both reverse engineering and in introducing improvements and expansions. Nearly two decades have passed since then, and Iran is much less dependent on North Korea. In fact, it may be that by now the flow of technology has reversed. Examples of this are the Shehab-3M and the success of the Safir satellite launcher.

Furthermore, it is a commonplace that the technological and scientific knowledge of a country is closely linked to the relationships that the country's scientific elite has with science communities around the world. While North Korea has remained a sealed society, Iran has never been cut off from the world, and in particular, from the world of technology. Under these circumstances, it has a better basis for generating scientific and technological achievements than North Korea.

Chinese Assistance

Solid fuel technology could not have reached Iran from North Korea, which itself lacks it. Thus the most probable source of assistance was China. China sold arms to Iran as early as the Iran-Iraq War, when Chinese assistance included artillery rockets as well as sea-to-sea missiles, all propelled by solid fuels. In the early 1990s, China began to market the M-9 (known in China as the DF-15) and the M-11 (known in China as the DF-11) missiles in the region. There is no definitive information about the sale of these missiles to any nation in the region,

but hypotheses have been raised about the missiles being sold to Pakistan and Iran. When Pakistan publicly displayed the Shaheen-2 and Ghaznavi missiles, some claimed they were identical to the Chinese M-9 and M-18 missiles. (An examination of photographs of the Sejjil shows that it does not resemble the Pakistani missile.)

It is likely that Iran was in need of external assistance in order to adopt the technology, and China is of course the most probable source for this technology. The questions remaining are: were the Sejjil engines cast in an Iranian factory or were they imported in toto? Does Iran have the capability of casting such engines? And is this capability dependent on the presence of foreign experts, or has Iran overcome the problems and adopted the technology fully?

Another type of assistance, also likely with Chinese roots, lies in the guidance systems. China has great capabilities in the field of guidance systems, and if Iran is acquiring the guidance systems for its missiles rather than manufacturing them at home, China is almost certainly the most important source.

Russian Assistance

Another open question concerns Russian aid to the Iranian missile program. Officially, there is no such assistance, and it is indeed likely that if such assistance does exist, the government either does not know about it or is turning a blind eye. There are those who are convinced that neither Iran nor North Korea is capable of developing the No-Dong/Shehab-3 engine without the help of Russian experts.

In addition, highly reliable information indicates that during the 1990s Iran was able to obtain RD-124 engines developed at the end of the 1950s, serving the Russian R-12 missile (also known by its American name, the SS-4). Other assistance apparently took the form of supplying Iran with the R-27 missile via North Korea. How these missiles found their way from Russia to North Korea, and whether the Russians knew about their transfer to Iran are open questions, especially in light of the fact that Russia committed itself to destroying these missiles as part of the INF agreements with the United States in 1987. However, it is hard to believe that the missiles came to North Korea and from there to Iran without the agreement – or at least studied ignorance – on the part of the Russian authorities.

Conclusion

When discussing the Iranian missile threat it is important to remember that there is very little solid information, and much of the information appearing daily in the media is based on more or less reasonable estimates.

The existence of the Shehab-3 is a documented fact. Tests carried out with this missile (ten to date) were followed by Western intelligence services, even though the information gathered by the services was never published. The range of the missile and its payload capacity are a matter of speculation, but at least here the range of uncertainty is fairly clear: a range of 900 to 1,500 km and a payload capacity of 500 to 1,000 kg (varying according to the different models of the missile).

In estimating the current threat, the number of missiles in storage is an important variable, as is Iran's capability of manufacturing them domestically. Here, the range of uncertainty is quite wide: from a few missiles according to the most skeptical to several hundred according to the most alarmist, and from zero manufacturing capability or great dependence on imports, to almost unlimited capability of production at home.

In addition, satellite launching capability is another proven fact, including the existence of a dual-stage launcher with liquid propulsion, and this would seem to indicate the existence of the necessary technologies for launching satellites in the fields of propulsion, steering, and guidance. Uncertainty remains with regard to Iran's capability of manufacturing these technologies indigenously and independent of foreign assistance, and its capability of retooling the missiles to become operational ballistic missiles. Here, speculation outweighs solid information.

As for the solid fuel missiles, the existence of an experimental two-stage missile with solid fuel propulsion is, again, a proven fact. However, even according to the most pessimistic forecasts, this missile is still in development, and it will be several years before it can become operational. It is almost certain that when the time comes the same questions about independent manufacturing will arise, as well as questions about the number of missiles liable to be part of Iran's active order of battle.

When a nation attempts to deal with an external threat, relying on ominous estimates is only logical. At the same time, it is important to remember that just as there is a price for relying on rosier estimates (if I have failed to prepare, my enemy can hurt me), relying on the dire ones also carries a cost (which I paid by spending on constructing defenses against what turns out to be a nonexistent threat). It is also clear that should a decision be taken to invest in defenses, decision makers will tend to prefer the pessimistic estimates and publicize those rather than the conservative assessments. However, researchers and intelligence personnel must not allow this pressure to color their work.

Notes

1 The missile's name is often spelled "Shahab" or "Shihab." Consultation with speakers of Farsi convinced me that the spelling "Shehab" is the best representation of the actual pronunciation.

2 The sources for the technical analysis are: Charles P. Vick, www.globalsecurity.org; Theodore Postol, *Technical Addendum to the Joint Threat Assessment on the Iran Nuclear and Missile Potential*, The East West Institute, May 2009 at www.ewi.info/; Robert H. Schmucker, *Iran and Its Regional Environment*, Second Transatlantic Conference, Berlin, March 2006 at www.hsfk.de; and Norbert Brügge, *Space Launch Vehicles* at www.b14643.de/Spacerockets_1/.

3 There are at least six different transliterations of the missile's name in different sources.

Battling for Consciousness

Yossi Kuperwasser

The Battle over Consciousness: More Important than Ever

The battle over consciousness has always been a part of confrontations between states and societies, but its relative weight in these confrontations has risen considerably in recent years. Several developments account for this new balance. First, the "industrial war," in which conventional armed forces face one another in a mutual attempt at destruction and territorial gains, became a fairly rare event, particularly for advanced Western armies that enjoyed a decisive advantage in this kind of encounter. Moreover, it became clear that military gains in such wars did not in fact ensure victory in the confrontation as a whole, but only changed its features, and in a way that increased the importance of the battle over consciousness. Second, wars of terrorism between states and armed organizations (usually state-supported, and occasionally state-like themselves) that have come to replace the "industrial wars" as the most common type of confrontation naturally focus on the attempt to influence perception (terrorism is just that: the attempt to instill fear and a sense of powerlessness in the mind of the object) and thereby achieve territorial and political assets, because it is clearly impossible through this kind of warfare to take direct control of territory or cause decisive damage to an army. Third, the growing power of the media and the revolution in the speed of application (especially as the use of the internet expands) have made the media an element that is not subject to the control of regimes, and thus is all the more difficult for liberal democracies and even autocratic regimes to regulate.

Terrorist organizations in general and radical Islamic groups in particular were among the first to understand the change in the nature

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of the battle over consciousness. They therefore focused the physical battle (terrorism and other activities) on moves designed to serve the battle over consciousness, so that gradually the growing synergy between the two resulted in their becoming complementary halves that together make up the whole of the confrontation. By contrast, liberal democracies, including Israel, ran into enormous difficulties when attempting to adapt their conduct to the new reality. While the new dominant concept in the United States' way of thinking about war "among the people," which deals to a large extent with the effort to capture the hearts and minds of the people, stresses the importance of involving all government elements in the war (the so-called "whole-of-government approach"), it still largely classifies the battle over consciousness as a separate effort, undertaken primarily by civilian entities. Such efforts have been pretentiously labeled "strategic communication" and "public diplomacy," but are not viewed as justifying the investment of significant national resources or their full integration as a leading element of the confrontation. In the West this component is still viewed as "psychological warfare," something that is intended first and foremost to improve one's capabilities of attaining military goals.

The Three Spheres of Battle

The battle over consciousness is multi-dimensional. The main sphere is the population among which the armed organizations operate. These organizations usually invest most of their efforts in this sphere, where they primarily confront internal rivals (as in the case of the Palestinians), and to a lesser extent liberal democracies. At the same time, the sphere of the battle over society in the liberal democracies involved in the confrontation and the sphere of the battle in the international arena not directly involved in the confrontation are also of great importance. The contest in each of these spheres has its own distinguishing characteristics requiring specially tailored efforts. Nonetheless, because of the relative transparency of the different spheres of battle, considerable coordination between the different messages is required.

As a rule, the message of the radicals opposed to liberal democracies claims that they are the victims of a cruel, cynical, corrupt, and powerful enemy that exploits and oppresses all members of their society, whom

they purport to represent (and which enjoys the cooperation of the radicals' adversaries at home). Therefore, the message contends, their struggle is not only just but is also justified in using unconventional tools, such as terrorism or non-conventional weapons, and the radicals themselves ought not to be viewed as responsible for having chosen this path. At the same time, they claim, not only is the struggle against the enemy not hopeless, but its success is ensured and is merely a matter of time. This combination of claims, directed at various target populations in specifically measured doses, stands to be well received for a number of reasons. First, it is always possible to demonstrate its validity. If liberal democracies succeed in the physical battle, this is proof of the message that stresses their power. Merely surviving in the face of such an enemy is an important achievement. Any deviation of the liberal democracies from their own rules of warfare, based on international law, is stark proof of their cruelty and hypocrisy. Conversely, any achievement by radical elements underscores the certainty of their final victory, inevitable given the cruel, defiled, corrupt, cowardly enemy as well as the unlimited willingness of the radicals to suffer and sacrifice (the idea of suicide is to a large extent intended to strengthen this message) and have those civilians identified with the enemy camp pay a steep price.

The second reason is the basic asymmetry in the rules of the game in everything having to do with the battle over consciousness. Liberal democracies are committed to rules of political responsibility; refrain from manipulating the media; lack an internal consensus, which preempts the broadcast of a uniform message; suffer from bureaucratic and political awkwardness, which slows down processes of learning and change; are given to leaks; are closely watched by the media; and have insufficient knowledge infrastructures and human resources for a battle over consciousness. By contrast, the radicals who see the rules laid down by liberal democracies as elements of the current world order they are interested in changing may not have direct control of main media tools and their resources may be relatively small, but they do not hesitate to manipulate the media and are hardly committed to the notion of political responsibility or any kind of accountability. Their relatively single-minded opinion allows both the presentation of a uniform message and rapid adjustment of activity in the battle over consciousness in response to changes in reality and available means.

Third, in each of the battle spheres one may point to the unique advantages enjoyed by the radicals. In the battle over consciousness among the population from which they emerged, the radicals have a distinct opening advantage. In addition to the fact that this population identifies with whoever is seen as its authentic representative, the radicals' political thought shares a common language with popular terminology and the native political system. In addition, the population is exposed to developments – both because of the limitations of language and because of the effectiveness of the radicals' apparatus in the battle over consciousness – first and foremost through filters and prisms loyal to the radicals (e.g., prominent clerics and media such as al-Jazeera) or subject to their direct control. The ability of liberal democracies to penetrate this sphere is quite limited and is based to a great extent on the relatively moderate elements in the population that are usually wary about challenging the radicals' basic assumptions and are not as effective as the radicals, partly because they suffer from weaknesses similar to those of liberal democracies. In this context, President Obama's speech was an event of great importance, because through it America managed for a moment to appear effectively in this sphere's confrontation arena. It is still too early to judge the extent to which this foray will prove useful in the long term.

In the battle over the consciousness of the populations of those liberal democracies directly involved in the confrontation, the radicals and their enemies enjoy more or less equal capabilities. At issue is the relevance of the radical message, which threatens the population that is not eager to plunge into an extended confrontation when it is doubtful it would achieve victory at a reasonable price (in lives and the scope of financial investment). Liberal democracies, characterized by a sense of accountability, tend to feel responsible even for an alienated population that defies social and governmental norms. These factors join the primary forgers of public opinion – academics, intellectuals, and major opinion makers in the media – who are not, of course, controlled by the regime, but often feed on one another and herald the radicals with hardly any criticism, in contrast to their highly negative and often hostile attitude to their own government. The direct ability the radicals have to disseminate their messages to the population thanks to the

freedom of expression and freedom of the press in Western countries constitutes another important tool.

In liberal democracies that are directly involved in the confrontation, these advantages are offset to an extent by the natural commitment of the population to rally against those seeking to harm it. However, in the battle over the consciousness of the international community not directly involved in the conflict, the radicals enjoy the aforementioned advantages though with fewer reservations. It is enough to observe the manner in which the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation in the leading Western – including American – media was portrayed in Operation Cast Lead to understand the significance of this phenomenon. To this one must add the growing influence of populations from the same origins as the radicals who reside in the liberal democracies not directly involved in the battle over public consciousness.

An astounding example was demonstrated by the French journalist Charles Enderlin, the Israel correspondent for the France 2 television station, who in late September 2000 covered the death of the Palestinian child Muhammad al-Dura. In a recent documentary by the German station ARD dealing with the al-Dura controversy, Enderlin was asked about the possibility that the Palestinians were actually using staged violence for television consumption ("Pallywood," as coined by prominent blogger Prof. Richard Landes). He replied:

> This is not staging, it's playing for the camera. When they threw stones and Molotov cocktails, it was in part for the camera. That doesn't mean it's not true. They wanted to be filmed throwing stones and being hit by rubber bullets. All of us — the ARD too — did reports on kids confronting the Israeli army, in order to be filmed in Ramallah, in Gaza. That's not staging, that's reality.[1]

The Battle's Main Themes

In practice, the battle over consciousness focuses on two principal contexts. One is the public's perception of the chances each side has to achieve its goals and the scope of investment and suffering required to attain them. To a large extent, this context deals with the battle over perception of the stamina of the two parties involved in the confrontation. In general, the radicals are convinced that the stamina of the society they ostensibly represent is greater than that of their decadent

enemy, and they do not hesitate to broadcast this message and anchor it in what they perceive as the hesitant, conciliatory, and weak conduct in liberal democracy's society and regime. In general, there is a positive correlation between the physical battlefield and the war over social stamina: the better the results are on the physical battlefield, the easier it is to create a perception of stamina, and vice versa. Nonetheless, the correlation is not a simple one, and its effectiveness depends on how well the battle over consciousness is conducted, and the connection that is drawn with the physical battlefield.

For example, how the United States in effect conceded the mission in Iraq because of the escalation of the wave of terrorism there in 2006 may serve as an excellent test case. American consciousness was trained to think – by means of al-Qaeda's propaganda machine and leading American media, as well as considerable assistance from internet activity opposed to President Bush – that there was no viable exit from the difficult situation in Iraq. The bipartisan commission of inquiry established by Congress, headed by former secretary of state James Baker and Congressman Lee Hamilton, hurried to declare in a report supported by several research institutions – that in turn were basing themselves on the same messages – that there was no choice but to reduce drastically America's military presence in Iraq. This position remains imprinted on American consciousness to this day, and seems to have had a considerable effect on the outcome of the presidential elections. Those leading the physical military campaign did not share this opinion and suggested an alternative, focusing not on reducing but rather on increasing the forces (the surge) and expanding the military activity as a basis for the battle over consciousness of the leaders of the Sunni tribes. President Bush chose this option, which proved itself to a large extent on both the physical battlefield and the battlefield of perception in Iraq, along with essential improvements in the synergy between the two. Nonetheless, the dissonance vis-à-vis American perceptions of the war was never repaired, and therefore despite the changes in Iraq, the understanding about the necessary policies did not change and al-Qaeda's achievements in 2006 remained unchallenged both in theory and also in terms of their impact on American policy. An additional example in this context is the Second Lebanon War, where Hizbollah's messages resonated with the Israeli media and created

a perceptual image only loosely based on reality. This has become increasingly clear over the three years since then, and in particular in the results of the Lebanese parliamentary elections in June 2009.

The second context concerns the justness of each side's goals and the means to achieve them. In other words, here is a confrontation over how – in the consciousness of the different target populations – the narrative each side uses in order to justify its objectives is perceived, and the measure of legitimacy of the policy to attain the goals derived (which is linked to the public images of the respective sides' leaders). For example, Israel succeeded in fostering widespread supportive international consciousness for the narrative whereby it must cope with a security threat to its very existence because of its neighbors' hostility, the attempt by Iran to attain nuclear weapons, and the terrorism wielded against it. At the same time, it earned little legitimacy for many of its steps to confront the security risks (e.g., the separation fence, targeted killings, security blockades, roadblocks, and so on), primarily because these measures are reputed to cause suffering to a large population and be disproportionate when compared to the level of threat, even though in practice it is clear that Israel takes the suffering liable to be caused to an entire population into account when it tries to determine how to act in order to maintain its security. Beyond this, one of the most significant challenges Israel faces is the need to highlight the gap between the narrative used by the Palestinians for their own internal target population and the narrative presented to the international community. Unlike the direct correlation between the physical battle and the levels of social stamina, the correlation between the physical battle and the battle over consciousness regarding the justness of policies and measures is much more complex and requires careful management. How the perceptions of the international community evolved during Operation Cast Lead is a good example of the damage that the lack of such coordination is liable to cause.

Cyberspace as a Battlefield for Perception

In recent years, cyberspace and the internet in particular have become increasingly important in the battle over consciousness. In this dimension of the battle the direct involvement of liberal democracies and established regimes is relatively limited. However, it offers a

great deal of freedom of action for the armed organizations, which view it as an essential tool for shaping public opinion, especially among the young, alongside its use for operational purposes, given a limited ability to use conventional mass media. (Today some of the organizations such as Hizbollah and Hamas, having already attained quasi-state status, operate radio and TV stations, yet continue to expend much effort on cyberspace activity because of its importance, especially with regard to target foreign populations.) Radical organizations have consistently demonstrated their ability to adapt quickly to changes in the world of communications and take advantage of breakthroughs and opportunities. For example, years ago they exploited the ubiquity of the tape recorder, which nullified the ability of developing countries to prevent the masses from listening to undesirable messages (or even Oriental music in Israel), and later took advantage of the proliferation of non-state satellite television stations (starting with CNN and followed by al-Jazeera and its competitors in the Arab and Muslim world). Therefore, the speed and efficiency that characterized their adjustment to the possibilities created by cyberspace in the battle over consciousness were to be expected.

Unlike liberal democracies, radical organizations attribute supreme importance to the battle over consciousness in general and cyberspace in particular. Therefore in this area their activities are coordinated with their leadership and their operational wings. They sponsor many internet sites; some are news sites of their own media, forums, and chat sites, and others are sites belonging to organizations that are spin-offs from the main organizations, including sites of their operational terror branches. Each is directed at a different target audience and represents a particular component of the overall message. So, for example, Hamas operates some twenty internet sites, Hizbollah about fifteen, al-Qaeda several dozens directly and hundreds of sites related to it indirectly, and so on. The organizations aim most of their messages at the populations they purport to represent, but other target audiences are not neglected and hence the websites appear in different languages: English, Spanish, French, Persian, Russian, and Hebrew. A report prepared by the Senate's Homeland Security Committee in May 2008 entitled *Violent Islamist Extremism, the Internet, and the Homegrown Terrorist Threat* laid out in detail the extent of the phenomenon and its severity. It revealed

that al-Qaeda exploits the internet not only for propaganda but also for recruitment and virtual training camps, virtual mosques, and virtual schools, so that the internet allows al-Qaeda to bypass the limitations that the international community tries to impose on its activities. Al-Qaeda also uses the internet to connect activists with their supporters, to acquire and impart ideology and operational skills, and to raise funds.

In pursuit of their internet activities, radical organizations take advantage of the international community's weakness in protecting the web as well as liberal democracies' commitment to freedom of expression and the willingness of internet service providers to cater to anyone without vetting their clients thoroughly, despite sporadic attempts to curb their activities.

What Can and Should Be Done?

In order to challenge the radical organizations squarely in the battle over consciousness it is necessary to forge a joint effort at both the national and the international levels and combine prevention and reaction with initiative and creativity. The goal is to realize maximum synergy with the operational campaign and take full advantage of intelligence, both to identify activity of the radical organizations and to boost our own activity in the battle over consciousness in general and in cyberspace in particular. What has been done to date in this field is very little, and in no way reflects the enormity of the challenge and its importance to modern warfare.

There is an obvious difficulty in publicly analyzing the means of action required in this context. Some of the activities that have already been undertaken can serve as examples (the attempts to convince international internet service providers to refrain from offering services to illegal entities, while creating an appropriate infrastructure in international law, and establishing official and semi-official internet sites providing reliable information). Other activities require an insightful, systemic analysis of the battlefield. The important role played by blogging as a system for disseminating unedited information and for overseeing the work of the institutionalized media has been demonstrated time and again in recent years. Thus, for example, bloggers were the ones to reveal the Photoshop changes that Reuters

had made to illustrate Israeli attacks in Lebanon and forced the agency to apologize. Sites to spread visual information such as YouTube and Twitter and social network sites such as Facebook open up a vast world of opportunities for both sides, and it is critical to prepare thoroughly and quickly to meet these challenges.

Clearly, the use of intelligence in the battle over consciousness in general and in cyberspace in particular must be cautiously applied and necessitates the development of an appropriate and updatable doctrine that would on the one hand ensure effectiveness by tapping the full potential of the capabilities through quick, expert use, but would on the other hand insist on the reliability and trustworthiness of the contents, safeguard the sources and the information, and above all prevent any possibility that intelligence would be used for political purposes. At the same time, it is clear that just as in any battle, high quality intelligence is a necessary condition for success. Intelligence must identify and understand the factors that affect the cultivation of consciousness in the different playing fields, track the enemy's doings, and provide reliable timely information in order to foil the hostile messages and formulate counter-information.

Notes

1 Richard Landes, "Revisiting 'Al Durah' in Time of Iranian Media Control," June 23, 2009 http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/revisiting-al-durah-in-time-of-iranian-media-control.

Palestinian Duality: Territories, Governments, Agendas

Ephraim Lavie

Since the June 2007 Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, the reality of two systems of Palestinian self-government, one in the West Bank under Fatah, and the other in the Gaza Strip under Hamas, has become ever more entrenched. The generation-based succession within the Fatah leadership during the movement's recent sixth general convention dramatized further the reality of fragmented Palestinian national unity. Thus for the first time in the history of the Palestinian national struggle against Israel, there are two separate leaderships pitted against one another that came of age in Palestinian territory and have, since 1967, experienced the struggle against the Israeli occupation.

Fatah, led by Abu Mazen, is trying to regain its stature at the helm of the Palestinian national leadership after years of the movement's ideological and organizational weakening, especially since the death of founding father Yasir Arafat. This past year it managed to strengthen its image as a governing body that maintains an effective governing bureaucracy in the West Bank, imposes law and order, and boosts the economy. More recently, the sixth general convention contributed to its organizational and ideological rehabilitation. The internal elections to the movement's institutions decided the inter-generational struggle that sapped the movement over the past 15 years, by weakening the old guard that came from Tunis and boosting the status of the younger generation born in the territories. In addition, a pragmatic national

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platform was adopted that replaces the previous platform (of 1989), which was not updated despite the far reaching political developments over the years, and will henceforth be an ideological basis for the movement. Nonetheless, Fatah's primary strength remains its control of the PLO, so that if from a political viewpoint its stature has dropped since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (1994), it still symbolizes representation of the diaspora and the problem of the refugees on the one hand, and the Palestinian national adherence to a political option on the other.

Hamas, which established a stable government in the Gaza Strip and survived Operation Cast Lead, is determined to prevent the Palestinian Authority from regaining control of the Gaza Strip. It is preparing for a confrontation with the new Fatah leadership over the Palestinian national leadership. In addition, it is struggling to gain formal Arab and international recognition of its rule of the Gaza Strip[1] by presenting softened stances regarding the conflict with Israel.

The leaderships of the two movements are awaiting the publication of President Obama's political program, particularly in the aftermath of Obama's meetings with regional leaders and the pressure exerted on Israel, which propelled Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to accept the principle of two states for two peoples.[2] Each side is trying to take advantage of the change in American policy to strengthen its status at the expense of the other: Fatah expects the United States to continue supporting the PA and its military power and renew the political process, while Hamas seeks recognition as a democratically elected legitimate political force, with positions that must be taken into account.

Fatah and Self-Rule on the West Bank

The Palestinian Authority's governance of the West Bank has become a more effective bureaucracy that is managing – albeit gradually – to impose law and order and bring about social and economic stability. Yet while the PA is benefiting from the support of Arab countries, Israel, the United States, and the EU, it lacks the capability to usurp Hamas' rule of the Gaza Strip. Senior officials in the PA were disappointed that Israel opted not to topple the Hamas government during Operation Cast Lead. They fear that Israel's policy towards Hamas might encourage

the international community to recognize Hamas, which would then continue to entrench itself as a governing entity and amass legitimacy on the political level as well at the expense of Fatah and the PA.

The PA recognizes that Hamas, which is determined to expand its control to the West Bank, is a real threat to the PA's status and continued existence. The fierce violence that Hamas directed at various elements in the Gaza Strip has made it clear to the PA that Hamas will stop at nothing in order to consolidate its rule and suppress any locus of resistance. In the past year, the PA, through its security apparatus trained by US security coordinator Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton, increased its control of Hamas' social, religious, political, and military activities in the West Bank. Young, professional, determined commanders (such as Majd Farraj, Ziad Hab al-Rieh, Kamal al-Sheikh, and Hazam Attalla) have been appointed to lead the PA's security apparatus. They cooperate with one another and coordinate security activity with Israel.

Indeed, concerns over the PA's survivability and the vitality of the security apparatus have sharpened the motivation among these commanders toward efficacy and professionalism. This was evident during Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip, when the security services continued to operate against Hamas on the West Bank, which included arresting activists, and did not respond to Hamas' demand to halt security coordination with Israel. In late May-early June 2009 the security services arrested Hamas military personnel in Qalqilya and Tul Karm, actions that were accompanied by exchanges of gunfire and fatalities; questioned professors at An-Najah University in Nablus and City Councils members identified with Hamas in Nablus and Bethlehem; and court-martialed a number of activists from El-Bireh and Nablus on charges of "disrupting public order" and "attempting to launch a military coup in the West Bank."

> The stability the PA has shown in the past year as a governing body could not compensate for the fact that the PA lacks both conceptual-ideological and organizational-political unity.

Similarly, the PA *waqf* bureau recently published regulations for activity in mosques, including supervision of imams and preachers, uniform sermons during Friday prayer services, and bans on all activity other than prayer.[3] These guidelines join previous directives, including dispersing the Hamas-controlled religious charity

committees (*lijan al-zaka*), and ousting Hamas personnel from the boards of directors of charitable institutions and appointing others in their stead.[4] Significantly, the PA has not met with public resistance to its anti-Hamas activity. It presents its accomplishments in this sphere to the international community as evidence of its uncompromising commitment to fulfill the security terms of the Roadmap in advance of the renewal of the political process.

The PA's control is essentially based on Salam Fayyad's government, which for now enjoys the support of Abu Mazen and some of Fatah's veteran political leadership. Prime Minister Fayyad, who himself does not come from within Fatah's ranks, is considered a technocrat with integrity who leans towards the nationalist stream but lacks a public power base. He has demonstrated his authority as an efficient prime minister, contributing to governmental stability: he dictates the policies of the government ministries and manages the economic and security systems. As such, Fayyad is gradually consolidating his status at home, despite the opposition of some central veteran Fatah figures such as Azam al-Ahmad, as well as some members of the intermediate and younger generations. Fayyad has managed to prove his commitment to PA interests and show governing capabilities, including the ability to stand up to the Hamas threat in the West Bank and to earn recognition as a partner fit for political and security talks with Israel.

The stability the PA has shown in the past year as a governing body that suits Israel, Arab states, and the international community could not compensate for the fact that the PA lacks both conceptual-ideological and organizational-political unity due to the organizational and ideological weakness that has plagued Fatah in recent years. The Fatah old guard continued to retain the movement's leadership, even though it lost public trust. Intermediate generation activists, wanting internal cohesion and a prominent leadership, knew full well that to a large extent the movement managed to survive in the West Bank because of Israel's presence there and because of the Olmert government's gestures towards Abu Mazen (such as prisoner releases) during their dialogue. For members of the intermediate generation, Fatah's sixth convention was the only opportunity to rescue the movement from its drawn-out decline and revive its ideology and crumbling institutions.

Their hope is that the movement's internal elections, which brought an end to the inter-generational struggle in the leadership and the adoption of an accepted platform, can help consolidate the movement's ranks and restore Fatah's position as a national movement leading the Palestinian people. Abu Mazen and Fatah's new leadership hope that the PA's achievements in stabilizing the workings of everyday life in the West Bank, along with the efforts to rehabilitate the movement's public standing, will be accompanied by a renewal of the political process and tangible progress towards an agreement with Israel. They understand full well that their ability to market Fatah as a viable alternative to Hamas depends on the success of the political process. They are banking on the policy of the new American administration, which is determined to bring Israel and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table. Yet therein lies the rub: the fact that Fatah's political power depends on an agreement with Israel relegates it to a position inferior to Hamas, which enjoys popular support and is not dependent on Israel.

Hamas and Palestinian Self-Rule in the Gaza Strip

In the Gaza Strip, Hamas' hard line bureaucratic government is deepening its roots. The movement's leadership is determined to foil any Israeli or international attempt to wrest its power and enable the PA to regain control of the Gaza Strip. Hamas continues to struggle for its status as a legitimate political player that won free, democratic elections in the Palestinian system and thereby deserves recognition of its government. It does not accept the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, at least while reforms that would allow its inclusion in the organization at a level or proportion commensurate with its political strength have not been instituted. It does not recognize the lawfulness of the Fayyad government, which did not receive a vote of confidence from the Legislative Council,[5] and it is resolved to neutralize any Fatah or radical Islamic power base, using violence if necessary.[6]

Hamas continues to struggle against the embargo imposed on the Gaza Strip and the closed border crossings. It currently seeks to concentrate on civilian activity and avoid another military confrontation with Israel, which might threaten its government. It has attempted to

restrain the various organizations active in the Gaza Strip and prevent terrorist attacks against Israel, including rocket attacks. Senior Hamas personnel explain that the movement will maintain the calm as long as this serves the interests of the Palestinian people. They point to the fact that Israel too is careful to preserve the calm and is working through Egypt to extend it, and emphasize that it is precisely now, with a new, right wing Israeli government, that the crossings do not close the moment there is rocket fire at Israel.[7]

While the military option failed to lift the embargo and open the crossings, other ways have so far similarly not borne fruit: the national dialogue has not led to the establishment of a unity government, which might have been able to pave the way to opening the crossings with Israel and Egypt, and an agreement about renewing the calm with Israel and opening the crossings seems distant given the right wing government in Israel. In addition, Hamas' attempts to begin rebuilding the ruins of Gaza in the wake of Operation Cast Lead are delayed because of insufficient construction materials, such as iron and cement, that Israel has not allowed into the Strip in the quantities required (the crossings are open for humanitarian needs only). Under these circumstances, Hamas is counting on the international community: it expects that the pressure leveled on Israel by the American administration and the European Union to expand the border openings to include construction materials for rebuilding the Strip will bear practical fruit.[8]

Amidst all this, Hamas is working to restore its damaged military power and rebuild its military wing in the form of a regular army whose primary long term goal is to be a defensive force. With the help of its rocket and surface-to-air missile systems, this force is supposed to create deterrence vis-à-vis Israel in order to avoid an extensive military confrontation, and thus prevent the bombing of government and military installations. Hamas estimates that such a balance of deterrence would allow for stability and calm over a long period, even in the absence of an agreement with Israel, and would allow the movement to consolidate its rule of the Strip and focus on the work of reconstruction.

The National Dialogue

After Operation Cast Lead, and in light of the possibility that Israel and Hamas would progress towards a deal on prisoner release and regulate the calm between them, the PA evinced interest in promoting the national dialogue and forming a unity government. The PA is aware of the growing popular support for Hamas in the Gaza Strip and West Bank after what was seen by the Palestinian public as refusal to capitulate to the IDF, and sought to defend its public status. However, the rounds of talks that have so far taken place in Cairo between Hamas and Fatah with Egyptian mediation have generated only partial agreements over the disputed issues, including establishing a unity government, adopting an electoral system,[9] setting a date for the elections,[10] and reorganizing the security apparatus.

Although the sides have declared that the national dialogue is a priority, thereby appeasing the Egyptians and responding to respective public sentiments, it seems that they harbor only limited interest in the subject. Fatah estimates that the chances for achieving understandings between Israel and Hamas about a period of calm and prisoner releases have narrowed, whereas Hamas prefers to shrug off the pressures on it to accept a formula that would allow the PA a foothold in the Gaza Strip, have it compromise its refusal to accept Israel, and commit itself to agreements signed between Israel and the PLO. Different formulae suggested by the Egyptians to settle the disputes between the sides, such as leaving the governments of Hamas and the PA in place and establishing a supreme body to coordinate between them, or establishing an inter-organizational council subject to Abu Mazen to supervise the rebuilding of Gaza, have been rejected.

> The fact that Fatah's political power depends on an agreement with Israel relegates it to a position inferior to Hamas, which enjoys popular support and is not dependent on Israel.

One way or the other, Egypt is continuing its efforts to bring the two sides closer, knowing that it cannot impose its stances on them. The committees established to settle the outstanding problems between Hamas and the PA continue to operate; in addition to these, a reconciliation committee convenes in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank under Cairo's aegis and with Egyptian representation. The purpose of the committee is to dispel the tensions

between the sides in both regions in all matters pertaining to mutual attacks: political arrests, infringements of human rights, and the closings of institutions.[11] According to the Egyptian plan, once the committees complete their work, the sides, under Egyptian sponsorship and with the support of the Arab League, will announce an agreement in Cairo that will mend the rift in the Palestinian nation.

The Political Process

Fatah's Position

The PA is currently actively engaged in two parallel efforts: one, led by Abu Mazen and the Fatah leadership, is geared at attaining a comprehensive political settlement with Israel while opposing partial agreements and the establishment of a state with temporary borders. The second effort, led by Prime Minister Fayyad, focuses on implementing the work plan aimed at building government institutions and strengthening the PA's economic, social, and security foundations, so that a Palestinian state will become a fact in at most two years. Fayyad attributes double importance to this: first, the ability of the PA's institutions to become the institutions of a future state will forestall any Israeli or international protestation that the Palestinians are not ready to establish a state; and second, it will imbue in the Palestinian people the belief that it is capable of realizing its desires on its own.[12]

Abu Mazen and other Fatah leaders are encouraged by the new winds blowing from the Obama administration regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, including a qualitative change regarding the settlements in the territories – from "an obstacle to peace" to the concept that the settlements are illegal and therefore require removal; disregard of guarantees given to Israeli governments by the previous administration; and legitimization of popular resistance to the Israeli occupation in the spirit of America's idealization of human rights. Abu Mazen believes that in his meeting with President Obama at the White House he succeeded in proving that the PA is a mature entity managing security and social issues and is a fitting partner for political and security dialogue.

Abu Mazen hopes that increased American involvement in the Palestinian arena, reflected so far in generous assistance to the PA's budget, continued building of the PA's military force – used primarily

against Hamas' civilian and military infrastructures in the West Bank, and the administration's interest in rehabilitating Fatah will continue to expand. Abu Mazen believes that the new American administration is interested in strengthening the PA and Fatah in their confrontation with Hamas, and in creating the conditions that would restore the PA to power in the Gaza Strip. In addition, Abu Mazen estimates that the PA is in a superior political position compared to Israel's in terms of fulfilling its part of the Roadmap, even though the administration has urged it to step up its activities in preventing incitement and fighting terrorism.

This approach of the American administration, which places the ball in Israel's court, has prompted Abu Mazen and fellow Fatah leaders to remain locked in a holding pattern while enjoying pan-Arab support. They expected that American pressure exerted on Israel would end construction on West Bank settlements and pave the road to a renewal of the political process from the point at which it was halted. These expectations, however, were challenged following Netanyahu's Bar Ilan speech on June 14, 2009 and the American-Israeli dialogue to formulate understandings on these issues. Fatah's leadership argues that Netanyahu has no intention of stopping settlement construction, has emptied any future Palestinian state of value, and has added the provocative demand that Israel be recognized as a Jewish state: previous documents and agreements, including the peace agreements between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Jordan, the Oslo Accords, discussions about the permanent agreement, and the Roadmap all deal with the recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace and security and without reference to its Jewish character.

Fatah fears that the positions and demands presented by Netanyahu in his speech were meant to set conditions that will preempt a political settlement, and that the inevitable outcome will be the strengthening of Hamas. In the sixth general convention, the new leadership, based largely on the local representation, adopted a national agenda that seeks to end the occupation and establish a state within the 1967 borders, but at the same time emphasizes the legitimacy of the struggle. It distinguishes itself from Hamas by affirming its commitment to the Roadmap and the Arab peace initiative, which stresses the Arab world's commitment to the two-state solution on the basis of the 1967

borders. The Fatah leadership made it clear that it would not request a revision of the Arab initiative in order to make it easier for Israel to accept it, particularly regarding the issue of the right of return.[13] Fatah also declared at the convention that in the absence of progress towards ending the occupation, it retains the right to struggle through civilian revolt (*atzian madni*) and popular unarmed resistance (*muqawama jamahiriya*) against settlements and the security forces protecting them. Barring progress towards a two-state solution, it would struggle for a bi-national state between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, or for the unilateral declaration of an independent state in the 1967 borders.

Fatah's leadership now expects the American administration and the international community to act determinedly and nullify Netanyahu's conditions for the renewal of the political process, as well as impose a freeze on construction in the settlements and renew the political process. It also hopes that its opposition to recognizing Israel as a Jewish state will not be interpreted as a Palestinian preference, but rather as a pan-Arab principle.

Hamas' Position

Hamas continues to adhere to its ideology and has not changed its political positions: it opposes recognition of Israel and a political settlement with it, and does not support the Arab peace initiative.[14] In this sense, the split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for the moment serves the interests of Hamas' leadership because it lowers the chances for a real political process culminating in a settlement. Hamas' political ambition is to lead the Palestinian people and stop the trend that began with the Oslo process of narrowing the Palestinian issue to the West Bank and Gaza Strip alone. As far as Hamas is concerned, the Palestinian question must encompass all of the Palestinian diaspora and present the refugees' right of return as the key issue in the conflict with Israel, which in effect undermines the legitimacy of Israel's existence.[15] Therefore Hamas' leadership was pleased that President Obama referred to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as starting in 1948 rather than in 1967.

At the same time, Hamas' leadership is facing regional and global developments that impact on its status in various ways and are likely

to influence its positions. On the one hand, it enjoys support among Islamic elements in Jordan and Egypt,[16] urging it to cling to its rigid political positions. Hamas' leadership has also been encouraged by what it sees as the gradual recognition of Hamas by the international community: the fact that Obama avoided calling Hamas a terrorist organization; meetings of former President Jimmy Carter and British members of parliament with Hamas' leadership in Damascus and the Gaza Strip; the meeting between American diplomat Thomas Pickering and senior Hamas officials in the Gaza Strip; the meeting of Judge Richard Goldstone, the head of the commission of inquiry on the war (Operation Cast Lead) in the Gaza Strip and the UN's Human Rights Council with Ismail Haniyeh – all of these imbue Hamas with hope for a change in international attitudes towards it. On the other hand, the movement's leadership is well aware that the chances for a change in the American and international community's stance towards Hamas are slim as long as it continues to reject the Quartet's three conditions: recognition of Israel, honoring signed agreements with Israel, and renouncing terrorism.

The internal strife in Iran, Hamas' (logistical) ally, and the results of the Lebanese elections create the impression that the fundamentalist movements in the region are weakening. These developments highlight the close connection between Iran (which is neither Arab nor Sunni) and Hamas, and contribute to the isolation of Hamas, which is also opposed to the Arab peace initiative, thereby cutting itself off from the Arab consensus. This state of affairs forces the leadership of Hamas to present an approach to the United States and the international community that is pragmatic, at least according to its own definitions.

Hamas is currently seeking to present a new face to the international community in order to be accepted as a legitimate political player, and thus ensure its continued existence, an end to its pariah status, and an end to the embargo of the Gaza Strip. The leadership looks favorably on efforts by various elements in the international community to find a formula that would allow Hamas to meet, in one way or another, the conditions set down by the Quartet.[17] In recent months, Hamas leaders have been issuing political declarations with what they think of as pragmatic contents on political issues. In interviews with the media, Khaled Mashal, the head of the Political Bureau, muted the importance of

Hamas' charter and said that the formula was two decades old, whereas Hamas is currently operating on the basis of reality on the ground and in a manner that is likely to serve its immediate interests. He declared that the movement would not recognize Israel, but promised that Israel would be part of the solution: Hamas is interested in a ceasefire agreement with Israel and in a deal over prisoner exchanges, and is prepared to establish a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders in exchange for a ten year *hudna*, on condition that this include East Jerusalem, the dismantling of the settlements, and the right of return.[18] After meetings in Egypt with the minister for intelligence and the general secretary of the Arab League, Mashal noted that he conveyed a message regarding Hamas' agreement to political negotiations over the establishment of a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders.[19] From Hamas' perspective, this positive attitude was already expressed in the National Conciliation Document ("Prisoners Document"), formulated in 2006.

On the other hand, Hamas' leadership continues to oppose the minimalist demand proposed in the national dialogue, whereby a unity government, to be established with its participation (though not with Hamas as a movement), would commit itself to all the agreements the PLO has signed with Israel. For now, it is avoiding such a move – even though it might lead to recognition by the United States and the international community in general – because it views that step as deviating too far from its ideology, necessitating the recognition of the State of Israel. Recently, Haniyeh even made it clear that the openness Hamas has displayed with regard to the end of the occupation and a settlement with Israel is linked to Hamas' "stages" plan.

Implications for Israel

The victory of the intermediate generation in Fatah's inter-generational struggle deepened the historical process of weakening the Palestinian diaspora as a political force and entrenching the West Bank and Gaza Strip as the Palestinian center. The Palestinian system that Israel faces today comprises two rival national movements, Hamas and Fatah, that are led by members of the same generation that came of age in the territories and whose consciousness was molded by life under Israeli occupation and the struggle against it. However, even if the Palestinian diaspora lost much of its political power, it retains its value as

representative of the charged refugee question: the platforms of Hamas and Fatah alike, whether as a means of securing public legitimacy or in order to preserve their national identity, are adamant on the centrality of the right of return.

Theoretically, the territorial and political split allows Israel to enjoy relative calm and stability in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and continue a no-war-no-peace situation. Israel's interest in strengthening the economic and social situation in the West Bank in the last year offered Fatah an opportunity to present itself to the Palestinian people as an alternative to Hamas that is better able to advance Palestinian national political interests and effect a change in daily life (e.g., removal of roadblocks, greater freedom of movement, and an improved economic situation). Fatah's leadership now expects that this development, along with efforts to rehabilitate the movement's ideological and organizational frameworks – as expressed in the sixth convention – will help it regain the public's confidence. However, while Fatah's success largely depends on a renewal and successful conclusion of the political process with Israel, the conditions for this do not currently exist. Israel demands that Fatah recognize its Jewish character and agree to an end to the conflict, yet at the same time continues with settlement expansion. The Fatah leadership lacks any real potential to relax its principles regarding the permanent agreement's core issues, such as Jerusalem and the right of return.

In the wake of Operation Cast Lead, Hamas has been deterred from any further military confrontation with Israel that might topple its government, and aspires to preserve security calm. Israel appears interested both in weakening Hamas' rule and preventing its military resurgence, but in fact has adopted a policy that strengthens it both at home and abroad: through Egypt it is conducting an indirect dialogue with Hamas to formulate a deal for the release of the captive soldier Gilad Shalit, and it is avoiding military action to defeat it. A change in Israel's position on the crossings, such as opening them to let in cement, iron, and other materials necessary for the reconstruction of the Strip, alongside anchoring

Israel appears interested both in weakening Hamas' rule and preventing its military resurgence, but in fact has adopted a policy that strengthens it both at home and abroad.

the situation of calm in an (indirect) arrangement between Israel and Hamas, presents Israel with both advantages and risks: while stability in terms of security is possible, it also gives Hamas the breathing space it needs to improve its standing in the public eye and rebuild its military, and decreases international legitimacy for Israel undertaking an extensive military operation to topple Hamas' government.

In Fatah's eyes, Israel's present policy vis-à-vis Hamas serves the Israeli interest in a continued Palestinian territorial and national division, since it allows Hamas' strengthening and continued hold on the Gaza Strip at Fatah's expense. Indeed, Hamas has succeeded in preserving its public status despite its political ostracism, the embargo on Gaza, and anti-Hamas moves by PA security services in the West Bank. The damage to the military and organizational infrastructures did not alter its ideological bases and did not undermine its stature. Its principles are still accepted by many sectors within the Palestinian community, including in the West Bank.

The impression that Israel's current policy contributes to stability and calm and may bring about a change in the balance of power in the Palestinian arena in favor of the nationalist stream is misguided. The PA's security coordination with Israel is deemed by Palestinians as cooperation for the purpose of enforcing its rule and battling Hamas, even though Israel continues with its settlement project and refuses to renew the political process. Continuation of this policy will deepen the damage in public stature to Abu Mazen and Fatah and will erode value earned by the transfer of authority to the security forces in the West Bank, from the removal of roadblocks to normalizing daily life. Moreover, it will underscore to the Palestinian population that yet once more Fatah cannot end the occupation or conclude a political agreement.

A process of this nature, along with the fact that the Fayyad government lacks broad popular support, may enhance Hamas' relevance as an alternative and increase the danger of a renewed outbreak against Israel. In these circumstances, Fatah and Hamas might well find it in their interests to pool their efforts and cooperate against Israel.

Notes

1 The Egyptian foreign minister announced that Egypt considers Hamas a Palestinian faction and does not recognize its rule of the Gaza Strip.

2 It is unclear whether Prime Minister Netanyahu meant an independent, sovereign Palestinian state, or a protectorate lacking these characteristics. The Palestinians object to the latter option.

3 Palestine News Network, August 5, 2009.

4 Palestine Ala'an, July 19, 2009; and Palestine-info, August 8, 2009. The PA appointed trusted associates to institutions and non-profit agencies instead of Hamas loyalists. However, for the most part the administration is less efficient and contributors' willingness to continue offering financial support has decreased.

5 See interview of senior Hamas member Iman Tah, al-Jazeera, June 13, 2009.

6 In response to the recent extensive arrests made by the security apparatus in the West Bank, Hamas' apparatus retaliated against Fatah in the Gaza Strip and arrested movement activists and senior personnel. Hamas leaders repeated their threats to the PA's security apparatus leaders and senior Fatah members wherever they may be found. In mid August Hamas security services acted against a radical Islamic group (Jund Ansar Allah) that announced the establishment of an Islamic emirate in Rafah, and killed its leaders and some of its operatives.

7 Al-Jazeera interview with Iman Tah, June 13, 2009.

8 *Haaretz*, June 18, 2009. For the moment, the American administration has refrained from throwing all its weight into pressuring Israel about the border crossings as long as Hamas refuses to accept the Quartet's conditions.

9 Fatah's leadership demanded that a system of proportional representation be adopted. Egypt suggested a compromise to introduce a mixed election system, with dominance given to the proportional method (75 percent proportional and 25 percent regional).

10 It was recently reported that Hamas and Fatah have agreed to postpone the elections until a rapprochement is reached or until January 2011. Earlier, Abu Mazen had announced his determination to hold the elections for the presidency and the Legislative Council at their legally stipulated date (January 2010) in order to maintain the legitimacy of the Palestinian institutions and renew the activity of the Legislative Council, which came to a halt with Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip.

11 This tension was exacerbated when Fatah activists were denied exit from the Gaza Strip to attend the Fatah convention in Bethlehem.

12 On various occasions, Salam Fayyad has expressed his opinion that the negotiations over a permanent settlement with Israel are less important than the construction of the institutional infrastructure of the PA, which is a precondition for establishing a Palestinian state. See, for example, Fayyad's speech at al-Quds University on June 22, 2009, The Voice of Palestine (in Arabic), June 23, 2009.

13 The Fatah leadership insisted that the Arab peace initiative not be revised; this has been a consistent Fatah position. See al-Jazeera, April 21, 2007, http://www.aljazeeratalk.net/forum/showthread.php?t=21856/.

14 Some 70 senior Sunni clerics, headed by Sheikh Yousouf al-Kardawi and Dr. Suleiman al-Ouda, recently published a religious ruling backing Hamas' positions and challenging the American administration and the PA adopting the Arab peace initiative, which calls for normalization with Israel in return for Israel's withdrawal to the 1967 borders. The religious ruling opposes the internationalization of Jerusalem or the holy sites because it would mean conceding Muslim sovereignty, and it opposes normalization with Israel because it would mean supporting the Israeli conquest of al-Aqsa. Clerics have authorized Sheikh Raed Salah, head of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, to distribute the religious ruling inside Israel and the territories. See http://www.shams.co.il/Read.php?category=news_women&article_id=2711.

15 Senior Hamas official Iman Tah said recently: "Hamas came into being with the goal of preserving the national rights and principles of the Palestinians, topped by right of return, and will not concede this right nor give in to pressure …until the return of all the refugees to our homeland and the birthplace," al-Jazeera, June 13, 2009.

16 The Muslim Brotherhood, led by the Brotherhood's general supervisor, Hamam Sa'eed, held a demonstration in Amman. During the demonstrations, the authorities were denounced for having the Jordanian security forces train the Palestinian policemen because the latter would be sent to act against Hamas in the West Bank. In Egypt, a religious ruling by the former mufti of Egypt was made public; it prohibited Egyptian security services from destroying the tunnels between the Gaza Strip and Egypt.

17 E.g., regulating a long term period of calm with Israel and arriving at understandings regarding management of the daily life of the population, which would amount to de facto recognition of Israel.

18 See interview with Khaled Mashal in *New York Times*, May 5, 2009.

19 Ahmad Yussuf, Ismail Haniyeh's advisor, stated that Hamas is prepared to work in every possible way with the American administration to establish a Palestinian state. See *Haaretz*, June 18, 2009.

The Lebanese Parliamentary Elections: Back to the Future?

Benedetta Berti

In the aftermath of the June 7 Lebanese parliamentary elections, the political victory of the anti-Syrian March 14 coalition has been interpreted as a sign of concrete and definitive change, marking the peak of Lebanon's democratization process. Some analysts, however, have criticized the enthusiastic undertone of this approach, arguing that the electoral results do not constitute a reliable indicator of change and that "other forces" – such as Hizbollah – still determine the political course of the country.

Both these perspectives seem to fall short of grasping the Lebanese political system as well as the power dynamics within the country. At the same time, both approaches do represent reality, albeit partially: the past elections indeed constituted a significant political development and changed somewhat the internal balance of power. At the same time, the sectarian dynamics of the political system and the fragmented composition of Lebanese society drastically limit the elected government's political maneuverability and the concrete possibilities for political change.

The Legacy of Taif and the 2009 Elections: Connecting the Dots

The Lebanese political system is based upon the principle of political sectarianism, whereby each ethnic-religious community within Lebanon is assigned a number of fixed seats. This principle, established by the 1943 National Pact,[1] was then ratified de facto by the Taif Accord,[2] the political platform that allowed Lebanon to transition out of the bloody civil war that raged from 1975 to 1990. Although the 1989 Taif Accord

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called for the abolition of political sectarianism, in practice it preserved the confessional basis of the political system, limiting itself to altering the quotas assigned to each community and allocating the same number of seats to Christian and Muslim sectors of the population.

As such, the Accord had the effect of further entrenching preexisting sectarian dynamics – a trend that was then preserved during the years of Syrian "tutelage." For example, the 2000 and 2005 electoral reforms passed under direct Syrian influence focused primarily on restructuring the boundaries of the electoral districts engaging in systematic gerrymandering in order to maximize the chances of pro-Syrian candidates to be elected in each district.[3] Moreover, in those years, the absence of a nation-building project and of a nation-based – instead of a community-based – notion of politics only enhanced the weakness of the national political system and the government's effectiveness and legitimacy.

In order to address these practical and logistical fallacies, the Lebanese parliament charged the National Commission for a New Electoral Law, led by Fouad Boutros, to restructure the existing law. The Boutros Commission,[4] created in August 2005, presented the Lebanese parliament with the Electoral Draft Law in May 2006.[5] The main Lebanese political parties then agreed to discuss this draft as part of the commitments undertaken in the context of the May 2008 Doha negotiations,[6] and finally approved a modified version on September 29, 2008. The new law contains important improvements that addressed some of the previous shortcomings in the Lebanese electoral system.

The key to understanding the victory of the March 14 coalition lies in the ongoing split of the Christian vote, and in the underperformance of Michel Aoun's Christian Free Patriotic Movement.

Among these improvements, the most significant change was the restructuring of the Syrian-based demarcation of the electoral districts, as agreed at the Doha conference. Accordingly, the new law replaced the previous 14 electoral districts with 26 smaller districts, which largely coincide with the existing *qadas* (administrative districts).[7] The new electoral system, based on an amended version of the 1960 electoral law, produced more proportional results than the Syrian-based one, as it prevented occurrences of one political group

winning with a narrow majority all the seats in a large electoral district, thus leaving the other groups underrepresented.[8] Moreover, the new law also established 13 "mono-confessional," or largely homogenous electoral districts.[9] This provision was adopted to ensure that "Christian seats" would be elected by a Christian-majority electorate, but it also contributed to further strengthening sectarian dynamics.[10]

However, despite the improvements in the demarcation of electoral districts, the new electoral law nonetheless suffers from a series of shortcomings. First and foremost, the 2009 law failed to adopt the most important recommendation of the Boutros Commission, namely to introduce the principle of proportional representation into the Lebanese electoral system. Originally, the Boutros Commission proposed electing the 128 MPs through a mixed system, with 77 deputies selected according to the current majoritarian system and 51 representatives with a proportional system.[11] This reform, which mixed *qada*-based votes and *mohafaza* (regional)-based votes, aimed to guarantee the "principle of effective representation" mentioned in the Taif Accord. The proposed reforms would also have partially corrected the anomaly of the Lebanese system whereby Christian representatives needed far fewer votes than Shiites in order to be elected, since the Shia population, unlike the Christians, has been increasing exponentially in recent decades, while the number of seats allocated to the community has remained unchanged.

The Electoral Results: Reading between the Lines

The newly approved electoral law failed to address these issues and left in place the preexisting majoritarian block vote system. This arrangement guarantees each voter the right to cast as many votes as the number of seats allocated in the voter's electoral district. The seats are then awarded to the candidates with the highest number of electoral preferences within their own confessional group.[12]

As a result of this failure to undertake strong electoral reforms, the 2009 electoral results still presented a discrepancy between the number of votes obtained by each party and the corresponding seats allocated. Accordingly, the incumbent coalition, led by Saad Hariri's Future Movement, won 71 of the 128 available seats, but obtained only roughly 45 percent of the total electoral votes; while the Hizbollah-led

March 8 coalition gained 57 seats, receiving, however, the remaining 55 percent of votes.[13] These results, albeit skewed by the nature of the electoral system, did not represent a dramatic departure from the 2005 electoral results. More specifically, both the Hizbollah-Amal bloc and the Future Movement obtained substantially similar results during the previous electoral round. This result is hardly surprising given the power distribution within Lebanon, as both the Hariri movement and the Hizbollah-Amal bloc are the "pre-assigned" recipients of the vast majority of the Sunni and Shia votes, respectively. In this sense, the key to understanding the victory of the March 14 coalition lies in the ongoing split of the Christian vote, and in the underperformance of Michel Aoun's Christian Free Patriotic Movement (FPM).

With the Sunni and Shia votes split between the March 14 and the March 8 coalition, the opposition's political calculations relied on the electoral triumph of the FPM, which promised to win 70 percent of the Christian votes.[14] General Aoun, a former military commander and popular anti-Syrian politician, returned to Lebanon in 2005 to contest the first elections that took place following the Syrian withdrawal. On that occasion Aoun won 21 seats in the parliament and instantly became one of the key leaders of the Christian community. Despite sharing an anti-Syrian agenda with the March 14 coalition, the FPM did not form an alliance with Hariri's bloc after clashing on several points, including Aoun's request to obtain five cabinet seats for his Change and Reform Movement – a demand that was promptly rejected by the March 14 camp. As a result, General Aoun gradually drifted toward the Hizbollah-Amal bloc and in February 2006, the FPM signed a memorandum of understanding with Hizbollah, marking the beginning of a highly improbable political alliance between two parties with widely different political agendas and constituencies.[15] In 2009, the FPM ran under the umbrella of the March 8-led opposition forces, and concluded its electoral race with 27 seats. This constituted an important electoral result that confirmed Aoun's political relevance, but it also fell short of winning the large majority of the 64 Christian seats. Consequently, the Christian leader of the Lebanese Forces Samir Geagea, head of one the main Christian parties within the March 14 coalition, observed: "Following these elections, no one can claim

he represents the Christians. I hope you look at the figures in all the regions. None of us represents the Christian but together we do."[16]

Many commentators, especially within the Western media, linked the victory of the March 14 forces and the shift within the Christian electorate to the so-called "Obama effect," affirming that the new US foreign policy strategy for the Middle East boosted the legitimacy of the US-allied March 14 coalition. Although the new US administration likely had a certain degree of positive impact upon the credibility of the Hariri-allied parties, it seems that the real causes behind the repositioning of a slice of the Christian voters lie within domestic politics. Specifically, several factors contributed to the underperformance of General Aoun's Change and Reform movement. Perhaps chief among them is the growing unease among parts of the Christian community vis-à-vis Hizbollah, especially following the armed clashes in Beirut in May 2008, when the Shia organization turned its own weapons against other sectors of the Lebanese society. Such fears intensified after Maronite patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir voiced his concern about unspecified threats to Lebanon's Arab identity, which many read as a cautionary warning against the rise of Hizbollah and the March 8 coalition.

March 14's Second Chance: The Challenges Ahead

The nature of the Lebanese political system and the principles of confessional politics shed light on the preexisting constraints that the winning March 14 coalition must face in implementing its political agenda.

First, the government's room for political maneuver is drastically reduced by the ongoing political tension existing within Lebanese society and the need to avoid another round of violent confrontations among different political streams. This situation is partially a consequence of the existing sectarian system. Indeed, the first and most serious limitation of Lebanese confessional politics is that it both reproduces and enhances societal divisions and conflict dynamics. The Lebanese social structure is already highly fragmented, and is prone to conflict along sectarian lines. By reproducing and institutionalizing existing sectarian divisions, the political system tends to become another arena for sectarian conflicts to develop and play out, instead of a means to address and resolve such conflicts based on a national reconciliation

platform. A second consequence of replicating existing societal sectarian dynamics within the political system is that any political dispute is automatically treated as a sectarian one, dangerously blurring and merging the two spheres. In this sense the system is self-reinforcing, and any elected government's first concern will inevitably be to prevent the occurrence of sectarian violence, even at the price of prolonged political stagnation. This situation is worsened further by the profound political rift between the March 8 and the March 14 coalitions. Although the parties agreed on a truce and formed a temporary unity government in May 2008, the core differences among the coalitions persisted and involved issues such as the determination of Lebanon's identity and foreign alliances; the creation of a national defense strategy and the disarmament of all militias; the status of the resistance and Hizbollah's weapons; and the growing Sunni-Shia divide within the country.

Under these tense political circumstances, the March 14 bloc's actual capacity to implement substantial reforms will at best be slowed by the need to prevent further internal violence. Moreover, the electoral results do not grant the winning bloc the popular legitimacy and political power to reverse fully current national political trends. Hizbollah deputy secretary general Na'im Qasim acknowledged this in an interview with al-Jazeera: "Neither team – regardless of whether the opposition or the pro-government team wins – can change today's political course….The other side is the side that is ruling the country now. It has a parliamentary majority. Over the past four years, it has been trying to create a political track that is different from the current track, which underscores the importance of the resistance and Lebanon's independence away from trusteeship. Has it managed to do anything?"[17]

A first answer to Qasim's question about the political will and capacity of the newly elected March 14 coalition may be provided by the majority's approach towards an executive cabinet. In forming the new cabinet, the newly elected prime minister – likely Sa'ad Hariri – will presumably rely on a national reconciliation and unity model, trying to bring the March 8 coalition on board. However, this endeavor might be compromised by the opposition's request to be awarded veto power in the new cabinet. The Lebanese constitution establishes that any policy deemed of "national interest" cannot be approved without

a two-thirds majority of the cabinet. Accordingly, the opposition aims at maintaining the arrangement establishment by the Doha Agreement, which awarded the March 8 bloc 11 of the 30 cabinet seats.[18] Although Hizbollah's leaders have not stated their official position vis-à-vis the veto question, other March 8 members, including Marada Movement leader MP Sleiman Franjieh and FPM leader General Aoun, have voiced their interest in obtaining the "blocking third" in the cabinet, and threatened to refuse to join the government if not granted their request.[19] If the opposition were to follow up on this threat, Lebanon could be drawn back into political paralysis – a situation that would reproduce the opposition's longstanding boycott that started in November 2006 and came to an end with the Doha Agreement, after the armed confrontation in May 2008.

On the other hand, March 14 members have been adamant in explaining why awarding the opposition veto power would be equally paralyzing to the political system. Comments made by former president Amin Gemayel[20] and Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea[21] echoed current PM Fouad Siniora's view on the blocking third: "This experience was not successful and everyone must bear this in mind."[22] Under these conditions, March 14 forces could decide to refuse to grant the March 8 bloc veto power, and they could rely on President Suleiman, asking him to act as guarantor within the cabinet. This arrangement might be accepted by the opposition, since a new round of protests and boycott could cost the March 8 coalition too much political capital. This formula could finally provide the March 14 coalition with enough political strength to implement its political agenda, at least partially.

> The first and most serious limitation of Lebanese confessional politics is that it both reproduces and enhances societal divisions and conflict dynamics.

However, the litmus test of this arrangement or any other political formula adopted to create the new executive will be the government's capacity to deal with some of the main outstanding political issues unaddressed during the March 14 camp's first term, including the issue of Hizbollah's weapons. On this front, it seems that the March 14 forces will have to recognize the existing power dynamics within the country, and avoid any direct confrontation with Hizbollah regarding its weapons. In fact, while the opposition may be

co-opted into relinquishing its veto power pending strong involvement by President Suleiman, the chances for compromise will likely end if the government attempts to "attack" Hizbollah's military power. This point was made clear by Hizbollah's violent reaction in May 2008 to the Siniora cabinet's attempts to remove Hizbollah sympathizer Wafic Shkeir from his post as security chief at the Hariri International Airport, and to shut down the organization's communications network. Similarly, in the aftermath of the elections, Hizbollah's parliamentary leader Mohammed Raad warned that a political crisis would explode if the government insisted on focusing on Hizbollah's weapons.[23] On the same issue, Na'im Qasim has also stated: "These weapons are linked to the resistance and the resistance is linked to dialogue. Dialogue requires agreement among the parties. Accordingly, this issue is not linked to the results of parliamentary elections."[24]

Lebanon's Political Future: A Cup Half Full?

The newly elected government thus faces considerable internal pressure that significantly limits its ability to implement its political platform fully. A delicate internal sectarian balance and a significant level of popular support and political power awarded to the opposition forces all contribute to slowing down the March 14 reformist agenda, and will likely prevent the government from addressing core issues like the status of Hizbollah's weapons. This situation, therefore, questions those analyses interpreting the election of the March 14 coalition as a watershed event in Lebanese politics, marking the peak of its democratization process. But does it constitute sufficient proof for those commentators who have clamed that nothing has changed within the internal power balance and political system? Not likely.

Despite all the existing obstacles, the March 14 coalition has gained another, largely unexpected, political victory and now finds itself in a more favorable position to advance its political agenda. The opposition forces' prolonged boycott and violent protests had a significant political impact on their legitimacy, and in the future, March 8 forces could be less adamant in relying on these tools – provided the government does not cross Hizbollah's weapons red line. As a result, the ruling parties may find themselves with more leeway than during their previous mandate.

More importantly, March 14's electoral victory had the core result of strengthening both the Arab identity of Lebanon as well as its preexisting regional and international alliances. Furthermore, the electoral victory has averted or at least stalled the gradual shifting of Lebanon towards the Iranian-Syrian axis, a trend that would have been accelerated exponentially by the victory of the March 8 forces.

In his pre-electoral campaign, Hizbollah's secretary general Hassan Nasrallah spoke to the larger geo-political significance of the elections by proposing, in the case of victory, to start acquiring weapons from Syria and Iran.[25] More specifically, he stated: "Who is ready to arm the Lebanese Army? Vote for the opposition and then I will tell you who. For instance, did the Lebanese Government ask for weapons, missiles, or military capabilities from our brothers in Syria, and Syria said no? No…Iran wants to include Lebanon in the Syrian-Iranian axis by arming the army."[26] It is highly significant, both domestically as well as internationally, that Lebanon rejected the Iranian-armament option and chose to maintain its bonds with the moderate Arab regimes and with the West.

From an Israeli perspective, the fact that Lebanon's announced shift towards the Iranian-Syrian axis did not occur constitutes a significant and positive regional development. At the same time, however, it seems highly unrealistic to expect that the victory of the March 14 coalition will initiate a rapprochement between the two countries, or even ease the security concerns over Hizbollah's weapons. The newly elected government lacks both the political capacity and the popular support to either initiate or sustain a détente with Israel. Only three years have passed from the last armed confrontation between Israel and the Hizbollah forces on Lebanese soil, and a Lebanese-Israeli reconciliation process seems both unrealistic and politically unfeasible, especially without the involvement of Damascus. Nevertheless, the Lebanese government's core interest in domestic stability implies that it will be highly committed to the status quo and will rebuff attempts

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to reignite an armed confrontation with Israel. Similarly, Israel should have a vested interest in refraining from actions that would delegitimize the elected government and boost the support and legitimacy of the opposition forces.

In conclusion, the latest parliamentary elections must be understood as an important political development for the Lebanese state and its role within the international community, but it is too early to assess whether this victory will be enough to consolidate the Cedar Revolution and continue the push towards a normalization of the Lebanese political system.

Notes

1 The National Pact of 1943 laid the basis for the current multi-confessional/sectarian political system and it assigned a fixed quota of seats in the Chamber of Deputies to the main sectarian groups present in Lebanon. See William Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 2nd edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

2 Republic of Lebanon, Council of Ministers Secretariat-General, "The National Commission on Electoral Law (NCEL)," August 9, 2005. Available from: http://www.lebanon- elections.org/English/index.php?page=decision.

3 Doreen Khoury, "Lebanon's Election Law: A Cup Half Full," *Daily Star*, October 10, 2008.

4 Republic of Lebanon, Council of Ministers Secretariat-General, "The National Commission on Electoral Law (NCEL)."

5 National Commission on the Parliamentary Electoral Law, "Parliamentary Electoral Draft Law," May 31, 2006. Available from: http://www.elections-lebanon.org/elections/docs_2_1_1_e.aspx?lg=en.

6 The Doha negotiations and agreement are the culmination of the political crisis that began in December 2006 between the ruling coalition and the Hizbollah-led opposition over the failure to create a national unity government between the majority coalition – the March 14 Alliance – and the opposition parties. This lack of agreement led to the resignation of the opposition ministries from PM Fouad Siniora's cabinet in November 2006 and to a longstanding boycott, causing the de facto paralysis of the Lebanese government and deeply impairing its decision making process. The crisis escalated from peaceful protests to armed confrontation in May 2008, after the March 14 government attempted to remove Hizbollah sympathizer Wafic Shkeir from his post of security chief at the Hariri International Airport, and to shut down the organization's communications network. Hizbollah read these acts as a declaration of war and on May 7, 2008 the organization sent its gunmen to seize parts of West Beirut – the Sunni area

where most supporters of Rafiq Hariri's Future Movement are located. The seizure of Beirut led to a series of bloody engagements between the different sectarian groups, leading to the worst episodes of violence since the civil war. ("Hezbollah Militants Take over West Beirut, "CNN, May 9, 2008 (available from: http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/05/09/beirut.violence/index.html). To solve the conflict, the parties agreed to meet in Doha (Qatar) from May 16 to May 21, 2008, and subsequently consented to forming a unity government, reforming the electoral law, initiating a national reconciliation process, and denouncing the use of force to solve internal political conflicts. See "The Doha Agreement," *Now Lebanon,* May 21, 2008. Available from: http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=44023&MID=115&PID=2.

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10 Ibid.

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Guardians of a Tense Peace: US Combat Forces in Iraq

Clint ZumBrunnen

Introduction

The semblance of stability in Iraq throughout the spring of 2009 and anticipation of the pending withdrawal of US combat forces have created a tendency among Americans to label the Iraq War a "victory."[1] Such thinking overlooks the sectarian chaos of 2006 and 2007 and downplays the fact that Iraq's explosive internal disputes are largely held in check by the immediate presence of US combat power. Accordingly, this essay conveys a more sober assessment of the Iraq War. It shows that while Iraq's virulent Sunni insurgency has been largely subdued by a methodical counterinsurgency plan, the plan worked only once Sunni tribal leaders found it in their best interests to realign with US forces and reenter the Iraqi political system under the aegis of US support. It then argues that the haphazard approach the US has taken toward tempering intra-Shiite rivalries and checking the aspirations of the Kurds since 2003 has allowed other volatile conflicts to smolder. Any precipitous withdrawal of US combat power will greatly reduce US leverage in Iraq and risk a return to the sectarian strife of 2006 simply because few of Iraq's serious internal conflicts have been resolved. A brief chronicle of Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish positions in Iraq from 2003 through the spring of 2009 develops this argument. Against the backdrop of this argument, the essay concludes by suggesting that serious efforts toward determining the future distribution (among Iraqis) of Iraq's oil wealth be exerted while enough US combat power remains on the scene to enforce any brokered agreement.

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The Sunni Insurgency

The Sunni Arab minority's insurgency in Iraq quickly became the most serious problem facing the US in the Middle East. Most Sunnis believe that it was Sunnis, not Shiites or Kurds, who built modern Iraq out of a tribal backwater. They therefore found it inconceivable to honor the Shiite dominance created by the 2003 invasion, and thus it was the Sunni insurgency that derailed Washington's initial "plan" for Iraq in 2003.

The various factions that joined the Sunni insurgency in 2003 had two common goals, even if their long term visions for Iraq diverged.[2] The first was to inflict enough casualties on coalition forces to compel them to leave, and the second was to incite a sectarian civil war in which Sunnis would ultimately prevail over the new "illegitimate" government. In pursuing these goals, insurgents put aside ideological differences and fought to undermine the new government's authority. They put the coalition perpetually on the defensive and forced it into an anti-insurgent raiding strategy that alienated the Sunni populace. They increasingly targeted civilians, government forces, Shiite militias, and shrines. The 2006 bombing of the al-Askariyya mosque finally pushed Iraq into "a sectarian hell."[3]

Yet the marriage of convenience[4] that kept Sunni insurgent factions fighting on the same side was consistently strained.[5] It finally ended when the sectarian war that the Sunnis had labored to start against the Shiites began to go poorly. Rather than vanquishing their enemies, the Sunnis endured a series of armed defeats at the hands of Shiite militias. Then, as Sunni resolve weakened in the late summer of 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) increasingly tried to assert its dominance over the insurgency. Sunnis whom AQI deemed insufficiently committed to the ongoing struggle were subjected to acts of extreme brutality.[6] In turn, AQI's viciousness pushed fellow insurgents into the long process now referred to as the "Sunni Awakening." Starting in Anbar Province, onetime Sunni insurgents gradually began to aid US forces in a mutual fight against AQI. Their motivations, however, had little to do with measures initiated by the coalition. Sunnis simply realized that they could no longer afford to fight US forces, the government of Iraq (GOI), and the Shiite militias, and contend with AQI at the same time.[7] They approached US forces for a deal, not vice versa.

Still, the Sunni realignment driven by the "Awakening" might have faded if, after three and a half years of frustration, US leadership had not finally switched to a methodical counterinsurgency strategy that the Iraqis could understand. Between early 2007 and early 2009, US Generals David Petraeus and Ray Odierno positioned their forces and resources to act as never before, willing to wield sufficient military strength, economic resources, and political clout to recruit and protect new allies (no matter what their odious pasts) in order to destroy the enemies of US objectives in Iraq.[8] Therefore, as the Sunni tribal leaders and their bands of former insurgents turned to the US for aid in a fight against a common enemy (AQI), they found a willing partner. Specific US units were ordered to protect former insurgents and their communities from AQI reprisals.[9] Meanwhile the coalition soaked up vital intelligence these groups possessed about AQI.[10] As Sunni popular support slowly turned against the insurgents, US commanders offered enticing economic incentives to locals.[11] Sheikhs, tribal leaders, and local powerbrokers entered into short term security contracts with US commanders *outside* the purview of the GOI, knowing stiff penalties would follow when things did not go well.[12] Commanders then devoted resources to economic reconstruction in Sunni-dominated provinces.[13] Such boosts helped dry up support for insurgents and provided another avenue for Sunnis to generate wealth, shrewdly checking the power some local leaders had amassed through the aforementioned security contracts. Finally, the US-led coalition promised to use its clout to pressure the Shiite-dominated government to incorporate Sunni security contractors into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)[14] and begin a process aimed at reaching an agreement to share both oil wealth and political power.[15] In return for all this, the Sunnis largely ceased their struggle with the GOI, joined the fight against AQI, and returned to Iraqi politics.

> In contrast to the methodical approach finally taken to quell the Sunni insurgency, the US approach to the growth of Shiite militias has consistently been tentative and reactionary.

US forces have thus skillfully inserted themselves into Iraq's Sunni power structure, becoming what Bing West suggests is Iraq's "strongest tribe."[16] They can be expected to both champion Sunni demands in the reconciliation process and help the Shiites forcefully crush another

Sunni uprising should it occur. Because the Sunnis recognize the US has learned to fill *either* role, it is now conceivable for them to accept the Shiite dominance created by the 2003 invasion. Sunnis still want their slice of the oil revenue and the largest possible share of power, but a tentative course of participation and reconciliation seems the only way to get either. This strategic calculus is unlikely to change as long as the US has the robust capacity to conduct combat operations in Iraq.

The Shiite Militias

In contrast to the methodical approach finally taken to quell the Sunni insurgency, the US approach to the growth of Shiite militias has consistently been tentative and reactionary. Such an approach has encouraged the growth of powerful militias and institutionalized an explosive split along class lines among Iraq's Shiites that endures to this day.

In 2003, the vast majority of Shiites welcomed the fall of Saddam and agreed that their best opportunity to shape Iraq had finally arrived.[17] Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani, an Iranian and long-time resident of Najaf, emerged initially as the most powerful Shiite in Iraq and set out to ensure Shiite participation in shaping the new government.[18] Shiites were suspicious of US motives but willing to cooperate. Had it been otherwise, the US-led coalition could have found itself fighting both Sunni and Shiite insurgencies by mid-2003.

Shiites expected the coalition to reestablish basic services quickly and withdraw soon thereafter, leaving them firmly in control. Neither of these expectations was fulfilled. Lawlessness, joblessness, and a total absence of basic services prevailed throughout 2003.[19] Moreover, by March 2004 many Shiites were convinced that the upcoming June 30 transfer of sovereignty was a ploy to whitewash an indefinite US occupation. When conditions improved little under the besieged Iraqi Interim Government and its successors, militias became the surest route to secure power in Iraq's Shiite provinces. The US was reluctant to confront these militias, however, because it was completely preoccupied with the Sunni insurgency.

Against this backdrop, the upstart Muqtada al-Sadr entered the crowded political arena. Unlike the clerics led by Ayatollah al-Sistani or the leaders of the once-exiled Supreme Council for the Islamic

Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and Da'wa parties, Sadr advocated violent resistance to the US-led coalition and pushed for a strong Shiite-dominated central government. His nationalist and populist message resonated with dispossessed Shiites as conditions worsened and his boldness increased. Already in October of 2003, his growing militia, the Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM), ambushed a US patrol and brazenly took over a compound built for the US-sponsored district council in Sadr City.[20] In August 2004, he gained prestige among Iraqis and impressed the Iranians with a suicidal stand against the full might of the US army's assault on Najaf.[21] He lost control of Najaf and Kufa in the clever ceasefire deal brokered by his rival Ayatollah Sistani, but by 2005 he was as popular and as strong politically as ever. His portrait could be found in villages throughout Iraq, elements of his militia were trained and supplied by Iran, and he learned to shrewdly move in and out of the government while simultaneously denouncing its failings.[22] US authorities passed up several opportunities to eliminate him in 2004 for fear of inciting a full-fledged Shiite insurgency.

Meanwhile, consistent US backing of SCIRI, Da'wa, other "moderate" Shiite parties, and Kurds at the expense of Sadr's bloc helped institutionalize the split between Sadrists and most of the remaining Shiite community. In turning to the "moderates" because it had no other option, the US essentially sanctioned SCIRI's takeover of Iraq's Interior Ministry in 2005 following the January elections.[23] That SCIRI dropped "revolution" from its name, becoming the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), and renamed its security wing (an organization deeply at odds with Sadr's JAM) to the Badr Organization did not change the fact that a militia became firmly entrenched in the official security apparatus of the Iraqi state.[24] Still, from 2005 until late 2007, ISCI's supporters and Sadrists tacitly cooperated in the sectarian war against Sunnis.

As soon as the new US counterinsurgency strategy began to subdue the Sunni insurgents, however, an escalating struggle for power developed between Sadrists and the government's ISCI bloc.[25] ISCI adroitly used its influence in the government to shape US actions against JAM during the surge.[26] Recognizing the seriousness of the threat, Sadr ordered his organization to avoid confronting the coalition, though violence against his enemies in government continued. In

August of 2007, Sadr's forces clashed with Badr guards in Karbala, and Sadrists were filmed shooting at the Hussein shrine and killing worshippers. Emboldened by the public's outrage, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki (leader of Da'wa) flew to Najaf and conspicuously arrested a JAM leader. Muqtada himself, sensing that ISCI might persuade the government to harness US forces against him, declared a six-month unilateral ceasefire and withdrew his faction from the Shiite governing coalition.[27] Sensing its advantage and over-confident in the wake of recent successes against the Sunni insurgency, Maliki's government launched a hurried and poorly planned operation against JAM in Basra in the spring of 2008. A near failure, the assault was saved only after thousands of reinforcements and US air support were called in.[28]

The Basra fighting confirmed the strength of Sadr's organization, its enduring animosity toward the Iraqi government, and the influence of Iran, which brokered the 2008 ceasefire. It also taught Sadr that confronting his enemies while they have the (even reluctant) support of US combat forces[29] is futile. He has since called for a makeover of JAM into a social movement and commanded his supporters to use restraint in dealing with targets other than the "occupation forces."[30] Some analysts indicate that the new trend means the Sadrists are increasingly fragmented, weak, and less relevant.[31] Yet such analysis overlooks the enduring grievances of the repressed Shiite underclass that spawned the Sadrist movement in the first place and discounts the ability of Iran to resurrect Sadr should it opt to do so. It is quite likely that Sadrists are simply waiting for a better day to fight – when US combat forces are no longer available to influence the outcome.

The Kurdish Question

With similar lack of methodology, the US has unwittingly navigated a brinkmanship course with the Kurds, Arabs, Turks, and Iranians over the issue of an autonomous Kurdistan. It has done so by continually deferring the problematic dispute over oil-rich Kirkuk and Khanaqin districts to a later date.

Since 2003, the power of the US-led coalition has both encouraged the Kurds to be opportunistic and subtly discouraged them from overstepping their bounds. The early favor afforded Kurdish forces allowed them to confidently push into what are now the disputed

territories of Kurdistan on the heels of US units.[32] Shortly thereafter, the Kurds began a campaign to establish permanent dominance over the region. They initiated a sort of ethnic pressure program to reverse the anti-Kurdish demographic trends enforced under Saddam Hussein.[33] They organized their kinsmen for success in the upcoming elections and gave serious thought to Kurdish territorial aims in the new Iraqi constitution, a document that bears the marks of opportunistic Kurdish influence.[34] Its "disputed territory" clauses were crafted by Kurdish representatives to ensure that oil-rich Kirkuk and nearby areas, which constitute 13 percent of Iraq's known oil reserves, would eventually fall under Kurdish control.[35] Had the process for resolving the disputed territories proceeded according to Kurdish semantics in the constitution, Kurds would almost certainly have already obtained all they sought in 2003.[36]

Yet Kurdish leaders were careful not to overstep their bounds. They did not push for the immediate inclusion of Kirkuk in the autonomous region. They were not overly brutal in their ethnic pressure campaign. They did not actively try to challenge US policy by calling for independence, and they only threatened force when their vital interests were endangered.[37] In short, they have heeded the indirect signals the US has sent warning them not to push too hard. In 2007, they reluctantly accepted a US-mediated power sharing deal with local tribal sheikhs in Kirkuk that rewarded leaders of the "Sunni Awakening." In late 2007, the US gave tacit approval to Turkish operations against rebels in northern Iraq when Kurdish authorities refused to take action – signaling that US support was linked to the Kurds' loyalty to the US agenda. Even when the US has turned to the United Nations to help solve the disputed issues of territory and oil rights, the Kurdish protests have been muted.[38] The Kurds understand that they have been both empowered by the goodwill of the US-led coalition and restrained by its status as the main powerbroker in Iraq. Similarly, the Iraqi government (as well as Turkey and Iran) still believes that the US will use its power to safeguard some Kurdish interests as long as it has

The Kurds understand that they have been both empowered by the goodwill of the US-led coalition and restrained by its status as the main powerbroker in Iraq.

the power to do so.[39] This fine balance has made deferring the Kirkuk dispute possible, even if unwise.

Recent events, however, have demonstrated the potential explosiveness of the dispute. Since early 2003, Kurdish peshmerga forces have occupied the Khanaqin district, first on behalf of the coalition and later with tacit agreement from the GOI. In mid August 2008, Iraqi army units entered towns in the district without informing the peshmerga of their intentions. They carried a demand from Prime Minister Maliki for Kurdish forces to withdraw within twenty-four hours. The peshmerga commander refused, resulting in a tense standoff. Eventually the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and Baghdad negotiated an agreement that left the peshmerga in control of the city of Khanaqin and the ISF in control of a number of other towns in the district.[40] In spite of this agreement, the ISF entered Khanaqin city in late August with a warning from the Iraqi government that any Kurdish forces deployed outside the official borders of Kurdistan would face legal actions.[41] Another negotiated agreement forged under coalition pressure diffused the standoff, but the reluctance of the US to involve its troops in the process signaled to both Kurds and the Iraqi government that the US would increasingly play the role of bystander.

The blood spilled and the treasure spent in 2007 and 2008 to subdue the Sunni insurgency have bought the US some time and space. At the very least, that time and space should be used aggressively to "persuade" Iraq's government to face its most fundamental problem: the oil question.

Although Khanaqin is more of a side issue for the Kurds than the dispute over Kirkuk,[42] such indifference on the part of the US regarding Khanaqin has at once undermined the Kurds' overall position and emboldened the Maliki government to wield the ISF more aggressively against Kurdish forces. In short, the shifting US position has destabilized the status of the conflict. Both sides are now edgier because there is less certainty that the US will intervene to prevent one side or the other from exploiting an advantage. And since any grand bargain between Arabs and Kurds mediated by the UN will likely require a powerful military force for enforcement, knowledge that US forces will withdraw completely by 2011 lessens the chance for a nonviolent solution to the dispute. Accordingly, both the peshmerga

and the ISF continue to prepare for eventual conflict.[43] The tense peace that presently exists between Kurd and Arab owes itself to the mere presence of a powerful US combat force and the uncertainty over how it might be used to influence the fortunes of either side.

Conclusion

The correlation between fragile stability in Iraq and the presence of US combat forces is difficult to ignore, even if it is true that US forces do not control the country. Although some will surely decry such an idea as "Orientalist," the enduring contribution of the surge and the US counterinsurgency operations from 2007 to mid 2008 seems to have been a demonstration – to all powerbrokers in Iraq – that the US is quite formidable when its forces are guided by a methodical plan. Thus, rivals on either side of Iraq's Sunni vs. Shiite, intra-Shiite, and Arab vs. Kurd disputes have since calculated that potential gains from open conflict are not worth the risk of exposing their assets to the destructive power of US forces. Such a fragile and tense peace hardly qualifies as a victory. Yet the blood spilled and the treasure spent in 2007 and 2008 to subdue the Sunni insurgency have bought the US some time and space. At the very least that time and space should be used aggressively to "persuade" Iraq's government to face its most fundamental problem: the oil question.

Anxiety over who will control Iraq's 112 billion barrels of proven reserves underpins the most explosive of Iraq's disputes. Justly addressing the grievances of Iraq's Sunnis, lower-class Shiites, and Kurds regarding the distribution of Iraq's oil wealth would go a long way toward tempering Sunni dreams of retaking the government by force, diminishing the appeal of Muqtada al-Sadr's populist-nationalist message, and diffusing the Kurds' uncompromising claim on Kirkuk. Simply put, oil was the key to Iraq's modern past, it is the key to Iraq's present, and it will be the key to Iraq's near future if there is to be one. Yet shockingly, no progress on Iraq's Hydrocarbon Package has occurred since October of 2008,[44] emphasizing its low priority to both US and Iraqi policymakers.

The intent here is not to say that there is only one dimension to Iraq's problems or that simply solving the oil question will lead to a peaceful and viable Iraq. Rather, it is to suggest that the oil issue is so

bound to Iraq's future viability that it should demand both the utmost priority and the focus of all US instruments of national power. This is where the additional role US combat forces fill in Iraq comes into play. Not only are these forces the guardians of a tense peace; they are also the instrument of power that lends credibility to other US levers at the negotiating table. Degrading their capability before any long term agreement exists on an issue so vital to Iraq's future weakens US ability to shepherd all sides into a compromise, and more ominously, invites a return to the sectarianism of 2006 and 2007.

Notes

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5 From the beginning, AQI started to appropriate formerly exclusive sources of Sunni income for themselves such as highway banditry and drug and weapons smuggling. Equally problematic were AQI's efforts to imbed itself in society by forcing prominent families to marry their daughters to foreign fighters and to usurp the authority of local Sunni sheikhs. See Dave Kilcullen, "Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt," *SmallWarsJournal.com*, August 29, 2007, http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2007/08/anatomy-of-a-tribal-revolt/.

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Russia in the Middle East: An Unlikely Comeback

Olena Bagno

During the Cold War not many diplomatic decisions could have been made either in or regarding the Middle East without taking Soviet interests into account. In the post-Cold War period, however, Russia-Middle East relations have gone through many reversals.[1] In 1992-95, Russia's role in the region was purely nominal and generally compliant with the US standpoint. This changed in 1996 with the appointment of Yevgeni Primakov, a trained Arabist, as foreign minister. Russia supported Arab states verbally but did so carefully, always bearing in mind its relations with the US and Israel.

Since Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 2000, Russia's relations with the Arab world have been marked by self-interested pragmatism, without any predetermined pro-Arab sentiments, but free of the inferiority complex towards the West that developed in the aftermath of the Cold War. Russia's upgraded political clout in the Middle East was prodded by its strengthened energy sector and the lack of viable success of the US-led military and political initiatives in the region. However, the practical implications of a stronger Russian presence should not be overestimated. Western experts believe that Moscow is unable to replace Washington as the primary ally of regional actors aligned with the US. "[The] security [of those states] would not be enhanced by trading their alliances with Washington for ones with Moscow. Nor do any anti-American regimes in the Middle East have any illusions that Moscow will protect them either."[2] In Russia, the situation is interpreted differently, though the practical result is the same. According to Primakov, Russia is not interested in becoming an

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alternative player in the Middle East, but rather an equal partner in the conflict resolution club. Russian policy in the Middle East unfolds in accordance with Moscow's global agenda and is implemented via multi- and bilateral ad hoc coalitions. Russia acts visibly in the UN Security Council and keeps open the channels of communication with regional actors not always seen as legitimate in the West.

This article first briefly outlines major directions of Russian foreign policy. It continues with illustrations of Russian foreign policy implementation in the Middle East and concludes with steps that might be taken by Israel to accommodate Russia's diplomatic initiatives.

Russian Foreign Policy Objectives

In recent years Russian foreign policy has stressed the value of legally binding agreements, elevated over the political declarations and personal rapport that characterized the Gorbachev-Yeltsin era. Acting abroad, Moscow pursues three principal objectives: multipolarity; regional security; and promotion of economic interests in its "natural sphere of influence" and worldwide (mainly cooperation in the energy, military, and technology sectors). A review of its foreign policy doctrine reveals that Russia aims to:

1. Become an influential world center
2. Create favorable external conditions for the modernization of its economy
3. Influence global processes through the UN (using its veto right in the Security Council)
4. Search for common interests with other actors to advance Russia's national priorities and ensure its international position
5. Promote good neighborly relations, and assist in eliminating the existing hotbeds of conflict (which is apparently a lip service goal, in light of its actions in Georgia in 2008, the handling of the crisis over gas transit through the Ukraine to Europe in the winter of 2009, and the "milk war" with Belarus in June 2009)
6. Provide comprehensive protection of rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad
7. Propagate its culture and cultivate a positive image of the country.[3]

Multipolarity

Multipolarity (goals 1, 3, 4) is to be promoted by offsetting the unilateralism of the US (for example, through non-cooperation with the NATO/US decision to deploy interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar system in the Czech Republic), cooperating with other centers of power, giving more weight to the UN, and avoiding cooperation in situations when Russia is "led"[4] by the US/NATO. Russia does not accept America's explanation of a direct link between Tehran's nuclear ambitions and the US missile defense plans for Poland and the Czech Republic. President Medvedev's remark that "the wish to ensure absolute security in a unilateral way is a dangerous illusion"[5] exemplifies this non-cooperation. Russia does not object to a United States-Russia-Europe joint missile defense system. However, it was made clear in the past and during the US-Russian summit in Moscow in July 2009 that it views it as "joint missile defense architecture" which should result from "joint decision making."[6]

Moscow aims at reestablishing its cooperation with the West from a position that will take into account its improved international prestige. In this vein, renegotiation of the START-1 accord, despite the declaration of intentions signed during the Moscow summit, may not conclude quickly, as the Kremlin[7] will link these talks to American plans to deploy an anti-missile shield in Europe. Therefore, "the talks will be used to boost Russia's prestige as an equal partner with the US."

> The Middle East serves as an arena for balancing US political clout to secure Russia's international standing. However, this does not mean that Moscow wants Washington to cede its position as the regional leader.

To secure multipolarity Russia also advances relations with non-Western political actors (e.g., the BRIC cooperation with the non G-8 states;[8] the strategic India-China-Russia triangle; the Sino-Russian strategic partnership,[9] the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); the Eastern Siberian pipeline.). It also maintains dialogues with sometimes ostracized parties, including Iran, North Korea, Hizbollah, and Hamas. These relationships strengthen Russia's international image as a potential mediator, though the latter objective is becoming harder to achieve in light of Obama's diplomatic overtures to the Arab world.

Regional Security

Russia's "Monroe doctrine"[10] interweaves with the objective of securing economic interests in the neighboring states. Creating a security circle of loyal "satellite" regimes around its borders is vital for Moscow to prevent disintegration from within, especially in the northern Caucasus. Simultaneously, it preserves the powerhouse role in the former Soviet republics, especially in the energy sphere, where it strives for control over regional transport routes to Europe. Gas supplies via Russian-controlled pipelines (to northern and southern Europe) are used for political leverage in transit countries (e.g., Ukraine) and in Europe.

Moscow is intensifying cooperation with secular Muslim regimes (e.g., Tajikistan and Azerbaijan[11]) without intervening in their domestic affairs; Central Asian states respond in kind by turning a blind eye to Russia's controversial policies on Islam. The Georgian crisis did not harm Moscow's stance in the West. Moreover, it strengthened Russia's reputation among the former Soviet republics, as it brought the power factor to the forefront of political interactions in the region[12] and showed Moscow's readiness to deploy force if its position is ignored. Hence, pro-Western Central Asian regimes (as in Azerbaijan) are discouraged to emphasize their pro-Western orientation,[13] though the US administration has repeated that "Azerbaijan will find a strong friend and partner in the US."[14]

Economic Interests

Against the background of the economic recession Moscow tried to bail out governments in Russia's "traditional sphere of interest" ($2 billion loans to Kyrgyzstan and Belarus, a $3 billion grant to Kazakhstan, and plans to establish a $10 billion regional bailout fund for post-Soviet states). This program was intended as a good bargain in exchange for preferential access for Russian businesses and weakening regional ties with NATO. However, the loan promised to Belarus was not provided, which led to political tensions that intensified with the "milk war" between Minsk and Moscow in June 2009. As a result of the tension Belarus did not attend the Collective Security Treaty Organization meeting held in Moscow on June 16, 2009.

Russia imitates the EU's strategy of trying to spearhead political integration by establishing an economic and custom union with former

Soviet republics (e.g., Belarus, Kazakhstan) as an alternative to the EU. But in contrast to the "first Europe," the "second Europe"[15] (Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Georgia) is much less willing to integrate with its natural hegemon.

Overall, then, Russia aims at multipolarity, advanced by means of ad hoc coalitions;[16] strengthened regional security; and stronger influence in its historical sphere of interests that covers the Commonwealth of Independent States, Eastern Europe, and the Central Asian region.

Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East

Moscow's policies in the Middle East derive from its three general objectives. Multipolarity, regional security, and economic interests often interface in policies towards particular regional political actors, when no single underlying foreign policy motive can be identified (e.g., vis-à-vis Iran). In general, the Middle East serves as an arena for balancing US political clout to secure Russia's international standing. However, this does not mean that Moscow wants Washington to cede its position as the regional leader. The decline of its influence may not be in Russia's medium term interests.[17] At present Russia benefits from its role as facilitator without being held responsible for the outcomes. Russia also lacks the logistical means[18] to assume the leading position in the region. For example, it excludes a peacekeeping role as costly and potentially harmful for its image in the Arab world and chooses to capitalize on its broadly advertised, though hardly visible on the ground, humanitarian assistance.[19]

With regard to the regional security objective, a presence in the Middle East fosters conditions for stability inside Russia with its growing Muslim population. According to a 2002 census, Russia is home to 14.5 million Muslim citizens and 5 million Muslims from former Soviet Union republics. Muslims comprise about 10 percent of the population, and by 2050 are expected to grow to 25 percent. A Middle East presence also helps the fragile normalization in the Caucasus. Overall, therefore, Russia is interested in a politically stable Middle East. Military or social tensions provoked by the presence of foreign militaries, civil wars, acts of terrorism, or political destabilization are apt to cause a chain reaction in Russia, as it lacks "defense perimeter installations which used to defend former Soviet borders."[20]

Russia advances its economic interests via cooperation with Arab states, and this effort was boosted following a setback caused by the military and political dominance of the US. In March 2003 Zarubezhneft CEO Tokarev argued that "the Americans do not need anyone else in Iraq; they will control Iraqi crude themselves."[21] However, during his Moscow visit in April 2009 Iraqi prime minister al-Maliki said that the Iraqi authorities were prepared to guarantee investment protection for Russian firms and resume its pre-war contracts with Russian oil companies. There are also speculations that the sides were moving towards the restoration of military ties.[22] Russia acts to enhance trade volume with Arab countries, which constitutes an important market for its military industry. At the same time, it is careful about providing state of the art weaponry that can affect the fragile security equilibrium in the region.

Three leading regional issues illustrated briefly below exemplify implementation of Russia's major foreign policy objectives in the Middle East.

Israel, the Palestinian Issue, and Syria

Pundits,[23] echoed by governmental officials,[24] suggest that Moscow has recently adapted a holistic approach towards the Middle East. Friendship shown towards Islamic people combines with good Russian-Israeli bilateral relations. The latter exemplify Moscow's strategies to advance multipolarity and, via UN-backed diplomatic action, reduce the US hegemonic influence on Israeli-Palestinian-Syrian relations. Military cooperation with Syria receives a low profile in Moscow. In May 2009 Russia halted a contract for supply of MiG-31E – an export model of the MiG-31, named "Foxhound-A" in NATO classification. Some suggest this resulted from pressure by Israel; others believe that Damascus did not have money to pay for the project and the pragmatically oriented Russian government did not want to add to the debts Syria already owes it. On the other hand, Russia's political establishment is eager to play a more important role in mediating and co-sponsoring the Arab-Israeli conflict resolution process. This is viewed as a low cost tool for boosting Russia's international standing and advancing multipolarity.

In the years of the Putin administration, Moscow's position regarding the Middle East peace process vacillated, depending on the

political currents. In general, though, it did not "seek to synchronize the progress of the settlement in all directions."[25] This tone has since changed. Alexander Saltanov repeated Lavrov's words that the region needs "the full-scale negotiations in three directions: Israeli-Lebanese, Israeli-Syrian, and Israeli-Palestinian."[26] Lavrov[27] urged Israel to engage in dialogue with its neighbors within the framework of the Arab peace initiative. Recently Russia acquired a strong supporter when Obama encourarged the Arab League to revise the text of the initiative to make it more appealing to Israel.[28]

Signals transmitted from Moscow suggest that at the next meeting of the Quartet it will act to advance negotiations based on previous agreements. That implies "the creation of an independent Palestinian state within generally recognized borders, the ending of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, including the Golan Heights, the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations – in other words, the achievement of a comprehensive peace in the region."[29] The question of feasibility of this goal bothers Russian officials less. A senior diplomat noted, "We are interested in promoting peace talks between the parties and the Arab initiative is a legitimate framework for advancing the process…On the other hand, we understand the security concerns of Israel and will leave the resolution of the most controversial issues to Israel and the Palestinians."[30] Moscow is eager to harvest the diplomatic yield from the peace process without giving an account for the quality of the crops.

Between March and June 2009 Lavrov referred to the Arab peace initiative on several occasions. It was labeled as the only basis for negotiations, as it "adds a very important element to the land for peace formula.…The Quartet will vigorously seek to ensure the talks with the Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese proceed exactly in this vein. We are convinced that this must be a pivotal concept at the Moscow Conference."[31]

> Russia is less fearful of a nuclear Iran than the US. On the other hand, Moscow's response to Israel may be less severe and will likely not last long should Israel unilaterally decide to attack the Iranian nuclear facilities.

To strengthen its status as a communications channel, the Russian political establishment capitalizes on its rich Chechen experience in turning non-state militant actors (the Kadyrov, the Salimov brothers) into loyal forces. Moscow maintains a dialogue

with the non-state regional actors delegitimized in the West, when Hizbollah and Hamas are positioned as legitimate interlocutors[32] and not terrorist organizations.

Iran

Russia's stance on the Iranian problem is an issue where all three major foreign policy objectives are intertwined. Moscow views the situation as complex but not critical.[33] It is less concerned about Iran's missiles and more about Tehran's calculated efforts to earn the status of a regional power. "No matter what happens, Iran, not the United States, will remain an important neighbor to Russia."[34] For that reason, Moscow wants to seize the opportunity to tighten relations with Tehran. Commercial and geopolitical dividends from these relations will improve Russia's regional security and advance its economic interests. Russia cooperates with Iran (e.g., 29 SA-15 Gauntlets, worth $1.5 billion, were delivered to Iran in 2006[35]) and works with Iran to develop technology and communications, infrastructures, energy, oil, and gas sectors.

In contrast to Russia's perception of Saudi Arabia's behavior during the second Chechen war, Iran is viewed as acting responsibly in Central Asia and Central Caucasus. It does not attempt to openly challenge Russia's influence over the former Soviet republics in this region. In addition, disagreements concerning the Caspian coastline became less prominent because Russia sided with Iran in their joint dispute over a proposed oil pipeline between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. Moscow would prefer Iran's nuclear program to remain civilian, though an Iran with nuclear weapons "would hardly pose a greater security risk than Pakistan, and the Russian leadership may be prepared to accept such a prospect."[36]

In terms of regional security objectives, Iran is viewed in Russia as a key regional player. Moscow states that the ongoing security issues, in particular Afghanistan, cannot be addressed without close cooperation with Iran. Speaking in Washington, Lavrov declared that "to have a direct dialogue with Iran is the only way to proceed in this region.…Yes, Iran has influence in the region. Iran has influence, and Iran has always had influence in Afghanistan, now has influence in Gaza. In Lebanon it has good standing.…Don't rely on force alone…respect the traditions."[37]

On the other hand, in July Moscow permitted the US to fly war materiel through Russian airspace to Afghanistan in exchange for a halt of the program to place a missile interceptor base in Poland and a radar station in the Czech Republic.

The Moderates: Egypt and Saudi Arabia

Russia interacts with moderate Arab states mainly to promote its economic interests, though multipolarity is also advanced as a byproduct of Moscow's bilateral relations with Cairo and Riyadh. Moscow cultivates economic relations with Cairo, which offers little support to the Islamic revival in Russia, does not compete with it in the energy market,[38] has stable diplomatic relationships with Israel and the US, and has strong economic ties with Russia (1.8 million tourists annually; trade volume in 2008, excluding tourism, was estimated at $2 billion).

Until 2008 the lack of domestic stability inside Russia stirred up tension with the Gulf states. Tension was also aroused with Moscow's conviction that Riyadh tolerated Muslim charity groups funding separatist rebels in Chechnya.[39] However, regional security considerations were removed from the agenda after a series of visits by Saudi dignitaries and officials to Russia that followed Putin's visit to Riyadh in 2007. This intensive exchange of delegations has warmed relations between the two states. In 2008 Bandar Bin Sultan Bin Abdel Aziz al-Saud signed an agreement with Moscow to enhance their military and technological cooperation. All the above indirectly enhances Moscow's salience in the Middle East strategic calculus and advances its pursuit of multipolarity.

Assessments

Israel should understand Russia's interests in order to devise strategies that would address Moscow's diplomatic initiatives without damaging relations between the two countries. Israel would do well to adapt its moves to Russia's diplomatic aspirations and produce messages that Russia is prepared to internalize.

First, for the time being, nothing need be said or done to irritate both Russia and the US. Each for its own reason is interested in dealing with the Iranian problem by non-military means. Russia is less

fearful of a nuclear Iran than the US. On the other hand, Moscow's response to Israel may be less severe and will likely not last long should Israel unilaterally decide to attack the Iranian nuclear facilities. On a declarative level Russia opposes the attack but in practice it may gain from it economically and politically. Unilateral action against Iran would increase Iranian vulnerability and make it a more agreeable energy supplier and a consumer of Russian industrial technology.

Second, the message that Israel accepts Russia as one of the key players in the conflict resolution process, aired by Foreign Minister Lieberman during his Moscow visit, should be reinforced. Israel may want to urge Moscow to assume a leading role in the Quartet if Russia accepts Palestinian demilitarization as a condition for negotiations. That would satisfy the Kremlin's aspirations for multipolarity, will not make much impression in the White House, since clearly no party is capable of usurping the US' primary role in the region in the foreseeable future, and will delegitimize the present version of the Arab initiative.

Third, Israel should capitalize on the common concerns regarding the radicalization of Islam. This message should be conveyed to the Russian Security Council, the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, and the relevant political figures (e.g., Saltanov) who may have some influence on shaping foreign policy.

Fourth, the economic attractiveness of the Israeli–Russian business partnership should be revived and underscored. In Israel this aspect of bilateral relationships with Russia is often neglected while for the Russian side it is one of the leading considerations in articulating its foreign policy goals.

A significant increase of Russian influence in the region is not to be expected. Russia will remain a secondary, pragmatic, and emotionally uninvolved actor. Its attitude towards Israel as a low cost tool to advance Russia's multipolarity goals will not alter unless Israel turns into an attractive economic partner. However, its position with regard to the Arab League peace initiative may become tougher,[40] since it now coincides more with the US position than in the past. In addition, the current US administration is more willing to make room for Moscow's political and economic interests in the region.

Notes

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1 From 2000 until 2003, there was a rapprochement with the West under the banners of "European choice" and alignment with the US. For the next four years, Moscow adapted the politics of non-alignment, emphasizing its independence and simultaneous aversion to conflict. In 2007, in the overview published on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, "newly acquired independence in formulating and advancing its foreign policy goals" (Vladimir Putin, 2008, official address from www.mid.ln.ru) was named as the most significant achievement of Russian Foreign Policy. During the 44th Munich Conference on Security Policy, Putin "invited" the West to consider Russian interests but said this "compulsion to partnership" was unproductive. In 2008-9 Russia moved in the direction of isolation from Western "partners." In 2008 the country's leadership felt confident domestically, but in 2009 the consequences of the global financial crisis became too cumbersome, and the rapprochement was relaunched though a new "reset" stage is to be accompanied by "legally binding" agreements. The shifts were conditioned by changes in the economic situation and the related growing confidence of Moscow's political leadership. However, the goal of multipolarity remained a constant component of Russian foreign policy, while strategies and secondary ongoing goals have evolved according to the political and economic situations.

2 Mark N. Katz, "Comparing Putin's and Brezhnev's Policies toward the Middle East," in *Society* 45, no. 2 (2008): 177-80.

3 Foreign policy doctrine of the Russian Federation (excerpts from the full text), http://www.mid.ru/ns-osndoc.nsf/osndd?openView&Start=1&Count=30&Expand=2.1.

4 From "Geographic Directions of Russian Foreign Policy Development," http://www.mid.ru/ns-osndoc.nsf/osndd?OpenView&Start=1&Count=30&Expand=2.2#2.2 N 431-27-03-2007.

5 Dmitry Medvedev, "Building Russia-US Bonds," *Washington Post*, March 31, 2009.

6 Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, March 20, 2009, http://www.acronym.org.uk/docs/0903/doc10.htm. Konstantin Kosachyov, head of the Russian lower house's international committee said in July 2009 that "strong signals are coming" from both President Obama and his inner circle indicating that "the Americans have, as a minimum, halted and as a maximum are reviewing" their missile defense program. Source: http://www.globalsecurity.org/space/library/news/2009/space-090708-rianovosti01.htm. On the other hand, Sergei Karaganov stated that "discounting the military transit agreement, everything Presidents Medvedev and Obama agreed on, are but declarations of intention." Source: Sergei Kara-

ganov, "Good Judgment, Negotiations in Moscow Stopped the Deterioration Trend," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, July 8, 2009.

7 Alexander Goltz, "Why Obama Angers Kremlin," *Yezhednevnyi Zhurnal*, January 23, 2009.

8 The BRIC nations now occupy over 25 per cent of the planet's land surface and make up over 40 per cent of its population. According to Vyacheslav Nikonov, president of the Polity Foundation, by the middle of the century they might account for more than 50 per cent of the world's economy, Interfax, June 2, 2009.

9 Sergei Lavrov, in an interview to the Chinese newspaper *Keczi Dzhibao*, April 3, 2009.

10 A foreign policy approach presented by President James Monroe, which suggests that the US must retain distinct spheres of influence from Europe and the rest of the Old World.

11 Medvedev's meeting with two new ambassadors to Baku and Dushanbe, March 17, 2009, http://www.novopol.ru/text63882.html.

12 Pavel Baev, "Virtual Geopolitics in Central Asia: US-Russian Cooperation vs. Conflict of Interest," *Security Index* 14, no. 1 (2008): 29-36.

13 Oleg Vladykin, "The Point of No Return is Close," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 4, 2008.

14 "US to Cooperate with Azerbaijan on Energy, Says Obama," Asbarez.com, June 2, 2009, http://www.asbarez.com/2009/06/02/us-to-cooperate-with-azerbaijan-on-energy-says-obama/.

15 Sergei V. Lavrov, "Russian Foreign Policy and the New Quality of the Geopolitical Situation," http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/itogi/BC2150E-49DAD6A04C325752E0036E93F/.

16 These ad hoc relations serve Russia's immediate interests but do not influence or have implications for the formulation of Russian foreign policy in other areas.

17 Katz, "Comparing Putin's and Brezhnev's Policies toward the Middle East."

18 Eric Margolis, "Russia: Big Threat or Paper Bear," March 24, 2009, http://www.lewrockwell.com/margolis/margolis142.html.

19 During the Lebanon war Russia sent four IL-76TD jets with humanitarian cargo and teams of medics. After Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, the Russian ambassador to Israel emphasized the importance of his country's humanitarian involvement, which was already mentioned in Medvedev's address. The idea was to send two jets with humanitarian cargo to Gaza and donate to the PA fifty armored troop carriers and two civil helicopters, though there is no official information on whether these plans were actually implemented.

20 Andrej Kreutz, *Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?* (Prager, 2007), p. 10.

21 *Kommersant Daily*, April 11, 2009.

22 Ibid.

23 Ekaterina Stepanova, *Russia's Middle East Policy: Old Divisions or New?* PONARS Policy Memo No. 429, Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Moscow, December 2006, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/pm_0429.pdf.

24 Foreign Minister Lavrov's press conference, March 2, 2009; address by Russian ambassador to Israel Peter Stegny at Tel Aviv University, March 11, 2009.

25 Vladimir Putin, official address on November 11, 2008; see also Lavrov press conference, November 8, 2008, http://www.ln.mid.ru/bl.nsf/8d1d0629a4b238e7c3256def0051fa29/dc3e9d2cafc0a813c32574fe004e1f26/$FILE/11.11.2008.doc.

26 Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for the Middle East Alexander Saltanov, interview, April 14, 2009, interview posted on http://www.ln.mid.ru/bl.nsf/78b919b523f2fa20c3256fa3003e9536/d33bdd3fed5b4b16c325759a0020ebbe/$FILE/15.04.2009.doc.

27 Speech by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at Sharm al-Sheikh, March 2, 2009, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/2fee282eb6df40e643256999005e6e8c/eb6c3ce003a7ab1ec325756e003a2862?OpenDocument.

28 Barack Obama's official address in Cairo, June 4, 2009.

29 Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for the Middle East Alexander. Saltanov, interview with *The Diplomat*, January 2009, http://www.russianembassy.org.il/article.php?id=509.

30 Address by Ambassador Stegny at Tel Aviv University, March 11, 2009.

31 www.mid.ru.

32 Ibid.

33 Fyodor Lukyanov, "Russia-NATO – Strengthening the Adversary," *Russia in Global Affairs*, April 6, 2009, http://www.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/0/11462.html.

34 Andrey Frolov, "Iran's Delivery System Capabilities," *Security Index* (Summer/Fall 2007): pp.31-50.

35 *Udmurdskaya Pravda*, January 12, 2007.

36 Frolov, "Iran's Delivery System Capabilities."

37 Jessica Tuchman Mathews, Sergey Lavrov, "Foreign Minister Lavrov on Russia-US Relations: Perspectives and Prospects for the New Agenda," May 7, 2009, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=1336&prog=zru.

38 "Medvedev Relates to a Dialogue with Cairo as a Strategic Dialgoue," ITAR-TASS news agency, July 14, 2008. On the other hand it is still unclear how Russia will react to Egypt's decision to sign the political declaration during the "south corridor" summit in Prague (May 2009). The document signed by Egypt, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia was not supported by Kazahstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It supports the construction of a new Nabucco pipeline that will transport Caspian gas to Europe bypassing Russia.

39 Kreutz, *Russia in the Middle East*.

40 Lavrov said in Damascus on May 24, 2009: "We are convinced that, based on the positions which at Russia's initiative were confirmed in the UN Security Council on May 11, it will be possible for all the parties to work to prevent a rollback in the peace process and to resume it not from a clean slate but on a solid international legal basis. The international legal framework, which the Security Council has unambiguously confirmed, consists of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the Roadmap and the Madrid principles and, what's particularly important, the Arab peace initiative that presupposes vacation of all occupied territories in exchange for the recognition of Israel by all Arab countries. I shall stress that the Arab peace initiative is not just the initiative of Arab states; it has been unanimously backed by all 57 member countries of the OIC," http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/D966237B8355C881C32575C1003362FC.

Killing Pakistan from Within

Meirav Mishali-Ram

Over the last two years, Pakistan has made frequent – albeit less than flattering – appearances in headlines around the world regarding the ongoing escalation within its borders. The growth of Islamic terrorism, the murder of Benazir Bhutto, an upset in the general elections at the beginning of 2008, and President Musharraf's subsequent resignation are some of the events pointing to the country's undermined stability. Pakistan finds itself in the eye of the storm, having to redefine its policy in relation to organizations that until not long ago operated under its auspices but have in recent years become state enemies. An amalgam of local, regional, and international elements, the increasing terrorism in Pakistan is a central link in the global jihad and a major challenge confronting the international struggle against it.

Islamic terrorism based in southern Asia, in particular the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas, commands extensive international attention and effort. The close relations between the populations on both sides of the border connect the wars raging in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and their ramifications go far beyond the regional arena. Here, however, radical Islam, which is sweeping many countries around the globe, is joined by a tribal aspect, and what emerges is ethnic identity infused with religious zeal. The relations between the Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan and Pakistan are the basis of both cooperation between the Islamic organizations and recruitment of support among the tribes. The joint Muslim and tribal identity contains the risk of an ethnic-national awakening that is liable to ignite the longstanding territorial conflict between the two neighbors, a conflict that would threaten them both, but Pakistan especially.

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The growing terrorism in Pakistan is closely linked to jihadist organizations that have undermined Afghanistan's foundations for three decades. The Afghan Taliban is essentially a Pakistani creation: most of the leaders are graduates of the Islamic madrasas that proliferated in Pakistan in the 1980s. Pakistan viewed war with Afghanistan as an opportunity to advance its goals in establishing a friendly Pashtun administration, and helped the Afghani mujahideen in their war against the Soviets. In so doing, Pakistan shortsightedly nurtured a jihadist culture in its tribal regions, and is now reaping the fruits of that myopia. In 1997, the American embassy in Pakistan warned that the Taliban brand of Islam taking over Afghanistan might "infect" Pakistan. The same year, a report by Pakistan's Interior Ministry warned that Taliban-inspired Islamic militancy had spread throughout Pakistan's tribal regions and could potentially threaten the rest of the country.[1] However, it appeared as a problem for another day. Yet now, one decade later, the day has arrived: Pakistan is facing the domestic complications that the Taliban has created within the country that undermine its stability. Now, when it has to formulate new policies to reflect a changing reality, voices from the past impede its action. The complex relationship the state forged with the terrorist organizations over the years is a source of confusion and inconsistency in Pakistan's policies vis-à-vis the threat of jihad from within.

The Tribal Strip: Fertile Ground for Radical Islam

With a population of 5.5 million suffering from acute ongoing neglect – the worst rates of poverty, illiteracy, and economic underdevelopment in Pakistan – the tribal regions (Federally Administered Tribal Areas – FATA) are ripe for falling under the control of religious leaders. The process of Islamization started in the 1980s and reached its current peak with local Taliban terrorism created in the image of the brutal fundamentalist Taliban of Afghanistan.

The American invasion of Afghanistan had a decisive effect on the Talibanization of Pakistan and the deterioration of its internal stability. The attack on the Taliban in Afghanistan did not defeat them, nor did it eliminate them. It pushed the Taliban out of Kabul into the south and the east, and channeled their activities to neighboring Pakistan, where operatives found shelter and a base for organizing in the tribal regions

near the Afghan border. The American attack aroused the Pashtun tribes' desire to join the holy war against the foreign invader alongside their Afghan brethren. The Pakistani government and the tribal leaders forbade going to war, thereby arousing the fury of the young, who wondered how politics and economic aid could change the definitions of war: the jihad they waged against the Soviets became terrorism the moment the United States took center stage.

After two years of the war in Afghanistan, the effect on nearby Pakistan grew more severe and the government lost control of the tribal regions. The autonomous region, which was always governed by local leaders with only loose oversight by the state, came under the control of radical religious leaders fomenting anti-government agitation. The tribal strip became a base for coordination and action of various Islamic organizations at the national, regional, and global levels – including not only Afghani and Pakistani Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives but also Chechens, Uzbeks, and Arabs from various countries – and the trend is only continuing. The war waged by the coalition forces in Afghanistan has run into a dead end: not only has it not resulted in the capture of Osama Bin Laden or the defeat of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, but in the last two years it is also clear that they have succeeded in regrouping and gaining power, and are in control of significant portions of southern and eastern Afghanistan and areas around Kabul. A similar process is taking place in Pakistan, reflected in the spread of the Taliban beyond the tribal strip and the hold the organization has taken of the northwestern province (NWFP), the Swat Valley and its surroundings. From here, the threat against the nation's internal security and integrity is becoming ever more severe and concrete.

> The complex relationship that Pakistan forged with the terrorist organizations over the years is a source of confusion and inconsistency in its policies regarding the threat of jihad from within.

The Taliban's success in Pakistan has also strengthened al-Qaeda and expanded the organization's room to maneuver and its capability to recruit young fighters – Afghani, Pakistani, and foreign. Chaos is a convenient medium for al-Qaeda, which operates in coordination and even growing operative cooperation with the Taliban. However, alongside the cooperation there is also a

distinction between the two. Mullah Omar explained the difference by saying that the Taliban's objective is the expulsion of American forces from Afghanistan, while al-Qaeda's objective is jihad. Even if the goals of the Afghan Taliban are broader than those declared by its leader, the distinction is still valid: the Taliban is essentially a national organization, whereas al-Qaeda is an international player. As long as there are foreign, especially Western, forces on the scene, there remains a solid base for cooperation between the two. After the withdrawal of the foreign forces, it is not at all clear that shared goals would continue. The Taliban bore the brunt of America's fury and paid the price for the terrorism of 9/11 carried out by al-Qaeda; it is doubtful they would be willing do so again. Recently, the Taliban spokesman explained that al-Qaeda is welcome in Afghanistan, but emphasized that the organization is a guest there: "We are the boss," he insisted.[2] Similarly, a close yet complex relationship between the two organizations exists on the other side of the border, in Pakistan.

Pakistan and Terrorist Organizations: Ambivalence and Shortsightedness

The Pakistani government under President Asif Ali Zardari is committed to fighting the Muslim militants behind the murder of his wife and head of the People's Party, Benazir Bhutto. However, the relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban over the years has been more complex: not only did the state create and cultivate this connection, but over time it viewed the organization as an investment and refused to take significant steps to curb its influence. Elements within the security forces nurtured the anti-Indian organizations active in Kashmir and gave refuge and support to those opposing the Soviets in Afghanistan. Even after the American invasion of Afghanistan and the establishment of cooperation with the United States, Pakistan refused to sever its contacts with jihadist groups: the Americans would be here today and gone tomorrow, whereas the Pashtuns, Afghanis, and Pakistanis are here to stay. Therefore, it was better to nurture and maintain the relationships with Afghanistan's dominant group as an insurance policy for future relations between the countries, including the preservation of the status quo along the border.

And so, even when Pakistan realizes that it has become a target of jihad, it seems that it prefers to maximize short term gains at the expense of promoting long term goals. Concerned that a defeat in the tribal regions would, with Kabul's encouragement, arouse the Pashtuns to demand separation, Islamabad has distinguished between the local Taliban challenging the regime and the Afghan Taliban, which is currently not viewed as a threat against the state or the army and against which, much to America's dismay, it is investing only limited efforts. According to Pakistan, the real danger lies in an India growing strong to the east, threatening Pakistan much more than any seditious group from within.

However, a closer look at the Taliban groups reveals an even more complex picture. There are differences of opinion within the groups concerning goals, as well as personal rivalries between various leaders. Thus in addition to the difference between the Pakistani and Afghani Taliban, there is also a distinction between those who are engaged in a struggle against the Pakistani regime and those who oppose attacking Muslims and would rather concentrate on a holy war against the foreign forces, NATO soldiers, and the United States. Therefore, Pakistan distinguishes between "good" and "bad" Taliban, and recruits Taliban operatives it considers moderate to help it struggle against groups fighting the military. These operatives do not hide their ties to al-Qaeda or their intention to continue to fight against the Americans.

It is a complex and dangerous game. In addition to a clear conflict of interest with regard to the United States, which is striving to stabilize the border region and excise Taliban terrorism from Afghanistan, cooperation with Taliban groups arouses questions about Pakistan's long term vision. Experience should have taught the countries that tolerance of terrorist organizations, even those that advance the state's goals in the foreseeable future, is liable to strengthen them to the point that control over them is lost and they turn on their former supporters. Such examples are plentiful, even in southern Asia. President Zardari recently expressed his regrets for the active role his country played in creating and nurturing Islamist terrorist organizations as part of its foreign policy with regard to India and Afghanistan: "The terrorists of today were the heroes of yesterday until 9/11, when they began to haunt us as well," he said.[3] This insight would do well to assume

an operational dimension: Pakistan must understand that the Afghan Taliban's ability to continue fighting the United States and NATO in Afghanistan from within safe regions in Pakistan is a threat not only against its neighbor but also against the host. The jihadist culture that has already seeped into Pakistan and started to spread beyond the tribal regions is the true threat to Pakistan's future – its identity, stability, and future territorial integrity.

A key element in the campaign is of course the Pakistani military, which in practice controls foreign and security policy, including Pakistan's nuclear program. Even the powerful intelligence services (ISI), formally subordinate to the government, are to a great extent controlled by the army. In order to maintain its political status publicly, the military relies on a strong external enemy in the form of India and on cultural cohesiveness in the form of Islam. In recent years, the military's central strategy focused on the balance of power vis-à-vis India and launching terrorist operations against it, especially in Kashmir, and creating strategic depth in Afghanistan as a complementary regional strategy. The war against Islamic terrorism at home, which until recently was not seen as an essential threat to the nation, was a tactic not conducted in either a cohesive or a decisive fashion.

While past links of the armed forces and the intelligence services with the terrorist organizations are not doubted, current ties between them are subject to dispute. A troubling assessment is that the military recruits Taliban groups that serve its internal and regional interests; worse still, though less plausible, is that elements within the army and the intelligence services work together with groups actually operating against the state. There are elements in the armed forces that are convinced that the Taliban targets the government only because of the latter's treaty with the United States, yet the moment cooperation with America ceases, the organizations will once again start coordinating their actions with the military, as in the past.

Still, it seems that even the military elite senses that the security apparatus has lost control of the monster it created. This realization process, however, is slow, while the terrorist threats are growing apace. The current anti-Taliban campaign was preceded by different efforts to rein in the rebellious militants. The military stands behind the agreement signed with the Taliban in February of this year, which

allowed them to impose *sharia* law in the Swat Valley. The agreement was preceded by a series of failed military operations conducted in the tribal region since 2004, operations that cost the lives of thousands of soldiers and civilians. These losses not only failed to weaken the Islamic organizations; they even secured their status. A change in the military's attitude to the terrorist organizations started to emerge after the Taliban breached the agreement by failing to meet their commitment to lay down their arms and not to spread beyond the agreed-upon regions in the northwestern province. In recent months it seems that for the first time the army is conducting a determined, well organized war against the terrorist organizations in the northwest and the tribal regions.

However, the defeat of the Taliban and al-Qaeda is not imminent. The growing pressures on them in the northwestern areas might push them southwards to Baluchistan. For many years, that province, rich in natural gas, has known violent struggles of Baluchi nationalists against the government as well as attacks on neighboring Iran, causing tensions between the countries. Al-Qaeda and the Taliban have a history of cooperating with Baluchi terrorist organizations, and this may allow the Pakistani Taliban movement to join forces with the Baluchis and find refuge in Pakistan's largest province. Such a development would move some of the problem of Islamic terrorism to the Pakistan-India border and exacerbate the Baluchi threat to the country's stability.

There is also ambivalence among the wider public with regard to the war on the Taliban. On the one hand, there is basic opposition to Taliban-style radical Islam; on the other hand, there is much fiercer opposition to the internal war being conducted with American sponsorship. Thus, while the public at large and the opposition parties support the military campaign against the Taliban, there is a great deal of hostility at the American attacks within Pakistan's borders. Many Pakistanis blame the United States for the ensuing chaos, first because it financed the mujahideen in the 1980s and then disappeared from the scene as soon as the war in Afghanistan was concluded, and second, because in the aftermath of 9/11, it pushed Pakistan into a war that is viewed as an essentially American campaign.

However, despite the rapid deterioration in internal security, the threat is still not concrete outside the northwestern regions, and a large scale anti-Taliban awakening is not yet in the offing. The little protest

seen so far has been voiced by the educated elites in the urban centers of Islamabad and Lahore, especially as a result of the Taliban expansion into Punjab. In fact, only few believe that the Taliban can take over control of the entire country. At the height of the attack in the Swat Valley, internal surveys indicated that the public ranks the economy as Pakistan's most significant problem, exceeding the threat of terrorism and the problem of the refugees fleeing the embattled regions in the country.[4]

The Complexity of the Campaign: Internal Stability, Regional Status, and American Interests

Confronting the terrorist organizations operating in Pakistan is linked with wider goals advanced by the United States, particularly in Afghanistan. Therefore, Pakistani policy is largely dependent on American interests, aid, and pressure.

American strategy in the south Asian arena known as Af-Pak stresses the close relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The commander of the American forces in Afghanistan was recently replaced in an effort to inject a more forceful spirit into the military activities. President Obama announced a significant beefing-up of American forces in Afghanistan – adding 21,000 soldiers by the end of the year. Pakistan, by contrast, has no intention of allowing American soldiers into war. While the Afghan army is not yet capable of conducting the war on its own and needs foreign soldiers to conduct the campaign, the Pakistani army is waging war on the terrorist organizations in its country while accepting external assistance such as financing, training, and instruction for the war on terror.

So far, the relationship between the two arenas of battle has harmed Pakistan. The growing American pressure in southern Afghanistan is expected to increase the number of Taliban fighters and Afghani refugees crossing into Pakistan and to escalate the struggle there further. The United States and Britain, the main partner to the campaign in Afghanistan, are aware of this phenomenon, and they are laying out a strategy of coordinated action on both fronts, including improved security and intelligence coordination between the two neighboring countries and the establishment of joint guard posts along the border. The American objective is to stabilize the border region on both its

sides in order to stifle the campaign waged by the Taliban in southern Afghanistan; to this end, it is necessary to apply pressure to the oxygen lines coming from Pakistan. The basic expectation is that Pakistan will stop serving as a safe haven for activity by al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and other terrorist organizations operating within as well as from it. The minimalist demand is that the security services sever their ties with the jihadist organizations: that is in the interests of the United States, of neighboring countries, and essentially of Pakistan itself. The importance of Pakistan as a central partner in the war on terror, as defined by the United States, is undergoing a practical test.

While America's involvement is necessary to Pakistan to face the threats of jihad, it is also harmful. The Taliban is essentially a local problem: militants operating in the name of Islam, invoking extremist interpretations, using brutal enforcement methods in a nation lacking widespread support for radical Islamic parties. Foreign involvement is the very catalyst that arouses more identification with them and helps their efforts to spread and recruit new members. The foreign enemy is even encouraging cooperation with al-Qaeda, which deals in global terrorism, and expands the borders of the battlefield. Hence the paradox: while the United States is certainly part of the solution, it is also part of the problem. In Pakistan, there are accusations that the United States not only drove Pakistan into a war serving American goals that has so far cost the lives of over 2,000 Pakistani soldiers, but has also adopted a policy that does not advance Pakistani interests. The United States, it is argued, weakens Pakistan's status in the regional arena, harms its long term investment in Afghanistan, and strengthens India, its primary rival. Islamabad claims that the United States has already sanctioned India's nuclear weapons, is intensifying security relations with India, and is not pressuring it to reach a solution on Kashmir. As if that were not enough, the United States is strengthening the ties between Delhi and Kabul and India's influence over Afghanistan.

Conclusion: The Threat against Pakistan

Within the inner circle, Islamic terrorism is a threat to Pakistan's identity and its territorial integrity. More than the danger that the terrorist organizations will take over the country and its nuclear facility, the concrete threat is long term and is linked to the Islamist culture

spreading beyond the tribal regions and the northwestern province. The thousands of Islamic madrasas operating there must be given particular attention: these are hothouses of radical Islamic growth and ready recruitment centers. Their continued flourishing will only feed the culture of jihad and allow its spread both to defiant Baluchistan and to Punjab and Sindh, Pakistan's most populated and developed provinces.

From an internal point of view, one may say that the Taliban is a more urgent threat than al-Qaeda and other foreign organizations that have found refuge in Pakistan, because the Taliban is a homegrown product, drawing legitimacy and support from parts of Pakistan's own society. The Taliban offers an alternative to the dominant political parties in the tribal regions – the secular Awami National Party and moderate Islamic parties. In fact, it molds an ethno-religious identity: Islamism is part of the Taliban's understanding of Pashtun identity. That operates in addition to the Pashtuns' very loose identification with the state, as the Pashtuns view themselves as part of "Afghania" or "Pashtunistan" and would like to unite with their brethren on the other side of the border who represent the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

Therefore, Pakistan's immediate goal is gaining control of the northwest and the tribal strip along the border known as the Durand Line, drawn by the British in the nineteenth century and never recognized by Afghanistan. Such control would in the long run serve one of Pakistan's most important and longstanding interests: preventing a Pashtun separatist struggle. To this end it will have to invest in development of the tribal regions that have traditionally been discriminated against in terms of budgets and infrastructures. As part of political development, it is necessary to strengthen the traditional tribal local leadership and restore its status and legitimacy, while granting political rights that are today denied to the parties in these regions. Creating the link and identification with the state is also dependent on economic development – massive investment in education and reduced poverty and unemployment, factors that arouse hostility and drive many young people to the armed organizations.

The direct regional ramifications of developments in Pakistan concern the future of the Indian-Pakistani conflict and the war in Afghanistan. Taking a wider view, one may also discern influences on

Islamist struggles in other nations in the region, including Uzbekistan and Chechnya. Radical Islam, inspired by and in cooperation with al-Qaeda, seeks to undermine the current order and stability of nations that do not operate on the basis of Islamic law and strives to create a united Islamic nation in central Asia, with Uzbekistan at its center. Continuing the confrontation between Indian and Pakistan suits these larger objectives.

From Pakistan's perspective, India is its most significant threat, and it is interested in arriving at a solution to the conflict over Kashmir. Its ambivalent relationship with the terrorist organizations is a serious hurdle on this road. Delhi claims that Islamabad never ceased its policy of terrorism-by-proxy, and despite steps taken against Kashmiri terrorist organizations since the end of 2001 and despite its consistent statements denouncing terrorism, Pakistan is accused of not having withdrawn its support from its own creation in the preceding two decades. The terrorist attack in Mumbai in November 2008 raised the tension level between the two rivals yet again and severed the contacts between them, the last in a series of attempts at dialogue that have been made over the years.

Of course, there is also the continuing turmoil in Afghanistan, fed by organizations taking refuge in Pakistani territory. President Karzai has accused Pakistan of not taking decisive steps against the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda. Such criticism can also be heard in the United States, partly because a significant portion of the billions of dollars in aid Pakistan has received in recent years has found its way to arming Pakistan against India rather than against the Islamists. Now the United States wants to make the financial aid promised by President Obama conditional on increased control of Pakistan's use of the money.

The international community is particularly concerned about the developments in Pakistan because of its nuclear weapons. Certainly the greatest fear is of an Islamic revolution whereby nuclear weapons will fall into the hands of Islamic extremists. Yet while this scenario is not impossible and merits serious concern, it appears that the Pakistani military has a strong hold over the country, certainly the nuclear facilities, such that the threat is not imminent. Pakistan receives technological assistance to safeguard its facilities, without direct military involvement.

The main importance of Pakistan in the war on global terrorism lies in its being the earthquake's epicenter from where shockwaves emanate outwards in far reaching waves – local, regional, and international. Uprooting the Pakistani terrorist infrastructure, starting in the tribal regions of Pakistan and continuing across the border with the south and east of Afghanistan, is thus the first necessary condition in a series of actions and represents a basis for attacking one of the most secure grounds of global jihad. Pakistan, a central link in this chain, faces a strategic decision: to continue playing with fire by cooperating with the terrorist organizations, or to join fully in the international war against them.

The risk of a terrorism spillover from Pakistan – including the leak of nuclear know-how and measures and their immediate impact on Islamic organizations – stands to become a problem in the Middle East. While the Pakistani and Afghani Taliban are engaged in local terrorist activity, the range of various other organizations in Pakistan, chief among them al-Qaeda, is much wider. The spread of Islamic fundamentalism threatens Arab states that are battling to secure their identity as moderate secular Muslim states with multiple international connections, including with the Western world. More than ever, radical Islam threatens these countries' stability. In the age of globalization, it represents a trans-national infrastructure for terror, with the Middle East one of the most dangerous of the world's loci of terror.

Notes

1 Global Research, August 31, 2008, National Archive, http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=10015.

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