Strategic
ASSESSMENT

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Abstracts

The Strait of Hormuz: Assessing and Neutralizing the Threat / Amos Yadlin and Yoel Guzansky

In early January 2012, Iran completed one of the largest naval maneuvers in its history east of the Strait of Hormuz. This maneuver is part of the military preparations and propaganda campaign that includes explicit threats to close the Strait. This essay considers the chances that the Iranian threats will be realized, and contends that the Iranian ability to block the Strait hermetically over an extended period is doubtful. Even were Iran capable of blocking the Strait effectively and for a prolonged period, such a move is contrary to fundamental Iranian interests and is liable to threaten the regime's stability. The essay also explores potential sources for additional oil supply and alternative supply routes as ways to compensate for any damage to the global energy market caused by Iranian provocation.

A Mixed Blessing: Hamas, Israel, and the Recent Prisoner Exchange / Yoram Schweitzer

The deal between the Israeli government and Hamas, which saw the return of Gilad Shalit to Israel and the mass release of Palestinian security prisoners, raised anew some fundamental issues that inevitably accompany deals of this sort between Israel and terrorist groups. In addition, because at first glance the deal presents as an exclusive Hamas victory, it is important to underscore the price Hamas paid in the exchange and the criticism leveled at it on the intra-Palestinian arena. It is similarly important to point to Israel's achievements in the negotiations, in addition to the primary achievement of freeing the captured soldier. Given the host of contributing elements, the exchange does not represent a classic zero-sum game, even though many of the gains made by Hamas are the costs paid by Israel, and vice versa.

Something New Under the Sun: Public Opinion and Decision Making in Israel / Tamar Hermann

In recent years, Israel has experienced a significant shift in the relationship between the civilian population and its political leadership. This transformation is manifested in both the voters' view that the status of elected officials has declined, and in the public's growing demand to have a voice in strategic decision making processes. This crisis of trust emerging against the background of a much more vocal "street" means that the relationship between the public and its leaders has become an arena of contention in terms of setting the national agenda. This will presumably affect the ability of leaders to make strategic decisions on the assumption that the public will back them without hesitation. In other words, this situation is liable to undermine the chance of mobilizing critical public backing if and when leaders try, want, or are forced to make far reaching strategic political decisions.

Barack Obama and the Middle East Three Years On / Mark A. Heller

Few American presidents in recent years have taken office with such an ambitious Middle Eastern agenda as did Barack Obama in early 2009. Overall, Obama's outreach has yielded decidedly modest results: while US forces have exited Iraq, stability there as well as in Afghanistan is far from assured; Iran continues to proceed toward a nuclear capability; and the Israelis and Palestinians are no closer to concluding a peace agreement. Moreover, the concerted effort to rebrand America among Arabs and Muslims has had little success. However, Obama's seeming inability to make serious headway on the subjects of material concern to him in the Middle East is less a function of any fundamental misunderstanding of the world and a propensity to rely on soft power, and more the intrinsic limits of American power.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority: When Parallel Lines Might Converge / Anat Kurz

The impasse that has characterized the Israeli-Palestinian political process has commonly been dubbed a "political freeze." Nevertheless, the word "freeze" is far from describing relations between Israel and the Palestinians. Indeed, the conflict theater is as dynamic as ever,

notwithstanding the lack of progress toward a settlement and the decelerated pace of the PA's march toward international recognition of Palestinian independence. Ironically, it is precisely the political stalemate that has clarified issues that Israel and the Palestinians should have a joint interest in addressing and rethinking. Ongoing cooperation can serve as a basis for restoring mutual trust, so that with changes in the political atmosphere on both sides, it can also be a basis for resuming concrete negotiations.

To Iraq and Back: The Withdrawal of the US Forces /
Ephraim Kam

Following its overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, the United States set several goals in shaping Iraq and the regime that would govern there. The US sought to build a stable democratic state with a moderate government that would not be another base for terror or a regional threat, and would be a long term strategic partner. This essay examines the extent to which the United States has achieved these goals or stands to achieve them in the future. Much depends on the degree of inter-sectarian violence in Iraq, the performance of the local security forces, the success of the democratic institutions, the future of US-Iraqi ties, and Iranian intervention in Iraq. Although Israel is not a direct party to events in Iraq, the regional implications of the situation and the withdrawal of US forces are likely to have a negative effect on Israel's interests.

Beyond the "Divine Victory": New Challenges Facing Hizbollah /
Benedetta Berti

Common wisdom dictates that the recent shifts in the Middle Eastern balance of power and the regional rise of political Islam will highly benefit groups like Hamas or Hizbollah. However, a closer look at Hizbollah's current security and political environment reveals serious cracks in the group's self-portrait as a paragon of internal control and external strength. Hizbollah finds itself under threat because of ongoing political change at the regional level, increasing domestic tensions within Lebanon, and internal organizational setbacks. Taking into consideration both the possibility of Hizbollah losing its current political backing within Lebanon, as well as the threat represented by the potential fall of the

Assad regime, the group is now facing one of the most serious challenges since its foundation in the early 1980s.

Extended Deterrence in the Middle East: A Fuzzy Concept that Might Work? / Carlo Masala

"Extended deterrence" threatens a nuclear-strategic response in case of a nuclear attack on the territory or troops of one's allies. Extended deterrence today differs from the old East-West conflict concept by being much broader in its instruments, which makes it at least theoretically possible to tailor extended deterrence more precisely to regional needs. This essay aims to explore the possibilities of extended deterrence in the Middle East in light of an Iranian nuclear military capability. The author argues that familiar European and Asian deterrence models are not applicable to the region. Examining four other plausible models, the author contends that unilateral US declarations to Israel and Arab states comprise a weak form of extended deterrence against a nuclear Iran, but currently the only option that appears at all realistic.

The Strait of Hormuz: Assessing and Neutralizing the Threat

Amos Yadlin and Yoel Guzanksy

> "Iran will not repeat its warning ... the enemy's carrier has been moved to the Sea of Oman because of our drill. I recommend and emphasize to the American carrier not to return to the Persian Gulf."
>
> Ataollah Salehi, Iran army chief, January 3, 2012

Introduction

In early January 2012, Iran completed one of the largest naval maneuvers in its history ("Velayat 90") east of the Strait of Hormuz. This maneuver, like similar maneuvers in recent years, is part of the military preparations and propaganda campaign that includes explicit threats to close the Strait.[1] Iranian declarations that it will not hesitate to block the Strait have become more recurrent and intense, and aim to persuade the world that Iran has credible operational capabilities to realize its threat in any future conflict.[2] The maneuvers and the rhetoric alike are designed to deter the international community not only from a possible attack on Iran, but also from taking punitive steps short of war – such as crippling sanctions or a naval blockade – in order to magnify the potential cost of any possible confrontation.

The Strait of Hormuz is considered the most important maritime choke point in the world, and any interference with oil tankers passing through it would have an immediate effect on the global energy market. Ninety percent of oil exports from the Gulf pass through the Strait, which is under Omani and Iranian sovereignty. At its narrowest point,

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the Strait is no more 33 km wide,[3] and the width of the international shipping channel is only 10 km. Close to 17 million barrels of oil a day passed through the Strait in 2011, which translates into some 15 tankers a day traveling from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Iran, and Iraq (as well as liquid gas from Qatar), destined for the most part for Asian markets. These figures, along with the fact that Iran controls a number of key islands near the Strait, allow it, at least in theory, to disrupt the area's oil transport with relative ease. This reality constitutes a fundamental consideration in any scenario of a future confrontation with Iran.

The purpose of this essay is to consider the chances that the Iranian threats will be realized, and assess the implications of a scenario in which naval traffic in the Strait, including some 40 percent of the world's oil trade, will be obstructed – a scenario that deters the international community from stepping up political pressure on Iran and applying force against its nuclear facilities. The essay contends that the Iranian ability to block the Strait hermetically over an extended period – an assertion raised from time to time[4] – is doubtful, and the international community has better tools at its disposal than in the past to cope with any interference to traffic in the Strait. Moreover, even were Iran capable of blocking the Strait effectively and for a prolonged period, such a move is contrary to fundamental Iranian interests and is liable to threaten the regime's stability, as it would damage Iran's economy – the import of refined oil and the export of crude oil (representing some 80 percent of the regime's income) – and lead to a confrontation with the US and other navies, which enjoy clear operational advantages. It is also not inconceivable that an Iranian attack on the freedom of movement in the Strait would generate a United States response that could include, in addition to damage to most of Iran's naval assets, possible damage to Iranian strategic facilities, including nuclear sites.

The Iranian Threat

Analysis of the rationale for an Iranian action of this sort and the chances of its success – central questions in any discussion of the topic – must be based on an understanding of Iran's capabilities with regard to naval traffic in the Strait and the oil facilities of Saudi Arabia and other oil exporters in the Gulf. The Iranian threat relies on capabilities that may be divided into two types of military force, naval power and missile power.

The naval threat is a direct asymmetric threat that would be implemented primarily against naval traffic in the Gulf. Because of the weakness of the regular Iranian navy and US naval superiority in the Gulf arena, Iran has given priority to acquiring and building a large number of small, rapid vessels (some of which are unmanned) and midget submarines, and has retrofitted civilian ships for military missions. The Revolutionary Guards navy, which operates these crafts, assumed responsibility for the Gulf arena in 2007. Some of the Revolutionary Guard naval vessels are armed with anti-ship missiles, some have been adapted to lay naval mines, and others carry explosives. One of the motives for using these methods is to allow for deniability, such that a response to an attack by these means would be less severe, as it would be difficult to attribute unequivocal responsibility to Iran. The result is that for all intents and purposes the Iranian navy in the Gulf has adopted guerilla features, including midget submarines for landing commando forces and rapid boats designed for hit and run missions via "swarming," i.e., stealth boats engaged in simultaneous attacks. Indeed, it is precisely the primitive nature of the Iranian tactic – quantity over quality – that is liable to present a challenge to the US navy in any possible confrontation and offset the advantage enjoyed by the Fifth Fleet. For example, while the United States has improved its capabilities of removing naval mines (including through the use of unmanned platforms), it will still need help from other nations in a confrontation with Iran with regard to mine removal (the US has "only" 4 minesweepers permanently stationed in the Gulf).

In recent years there have been many reports about Revolutionary Guards vessels provoking Western vessels in the Gulf. These events are more show than real in terms of tangible damage – Western ships have not actually been attacked – but these actions do say something about Iran's intentions and capabilities. The frequent provocations are meant to send the message to the US that Iran sees the Gulf as its own backyard and will not hesitate to exact a heavy toll if and when it is attacked or, more recently, in response to the imposition of more severe sanctions. In 2011, the US expressed concern about the growing friction between the navies that has already resulted in an increasing number of incidents liable to escalate into a comprehensive confrontation.[5] Such developments prompted the US to suggest to Iran that the navies maintain a hotline, but

the initiative was rejected by Iran, which claimed that the US presence in the Gulf is in any case illegitimate.[6]

Missile fire, which poses an indirect threat, is intended to threaten and/or target military and energy producing facilities on the western shores of the Gulf. Iran maintains the largest surface-to-surface missile arsenal in the Middle East. The assessment is that Iran has more than 1,000 missiles in the 150-2,000 km range.[7] Most of the missiles – ineffective in damaging naval vessels in the Strait of Hormuz – have sufficient range to directly threaten critical oil facilities in the Gulf states. Action of this sort would not necessarily be linked to an initiated Iranian move in the Strait; nonetheless, Iran's threat is that any American reaction to Iranian activity in the Strait would be met with a counter-move, which might also include damage to oil infrastructures in the Gulf states.

Due to its aging air force and its difficulties in obtaining original spare parts in the West, Iran has chosen to focus on a gradual but methodical beefing up of its ballistic missile force. At the same time, it is also increasing the ranges and improving the accuracy level and destructive power of its missiles, and working to shorten the missiles' exposure times (by moving to reliance on solid fuel). As a result, there is a growing concern among the Gulf states that in a possible campaign against Iran, strategic installations on their soil would be exposed to more intensive and prolonged missile fire than what Iran was previously capable of.[8] In a rare statement, Admiral Ali Shamkhani, former Defense Minister of Iran and military advisor to Supreme Ruler Ali Khamenei, described the nature of the Iranian response to the Gulf states should Iranian nuclear facilities come under attack: "Iran would launch a blitz of missiles at the Gulf states…and the missiles wouldn't only be directed against American bases in the region but also at strategic targets, such as refineries and power stations…The goal would be to stun the American missile defense system using dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of missiles that would be launched simultaneously at selected targets."[9] An Iranian attack on Gulf state installations, whether American bases or key oil facilities, remains the most significant threat for those regimes. A representative of Saudi King Abdullah said the King "worries more about an Iranian missile launch against Saudi oil facilities than a terrorist attack….because he can take preventive measures against terrorism but not against Iranian missiles."[10] Because Iran would find it difficult to seal the Strait of

Hormuz hermetically and this would almost certainly entail a confrontation with the superior US navy, the fear among the Gulf states is that Iran would be impelled to place a greater emphasis on missile attacks against the Gulf states.

Based on an assessment of its interest and capabilities, Iran might well consider taking steps against the Gulf states, the US navy, and naval traffic in the Gulf in one of the three following systemic alternatives, which represent three different sets of strategic considerations.

The first alternative is prolonged low intensity harassment, based on the rationale of reducing the risk and minimizing the damage to its oil exports. Iran would likely prefer to focus on regular low intensity harassment of international ships for as long as possible, while leaving the Gulf open to its oil exports and attempting to avoid taking responsibility for the episodes. In this scenario, it may be that, inter alia, Iran would use "civilian" ships that have been retrofitted, pursue terrorism by proxy, and/or go beyond its territorial waters in an effort to try and blur its own fingerprint. Iran would thereby both reduce the probability of a comprehensive confrontation with the US navy, which enjoys clear superiority, and also exact a steep toll of the global energy markets, if only because of rising insurance premiums. This approach would create a crisis atmosphere and affect the oil markets adversely. At the same time, Iran would likely find it difficult to maintain deniability over time, especially given the high sensitivity to the situation in the Gulf and the intensified international campaign against its nuclear program. Thus even in an "optimistic" scenario – a partial, brief blockage of the Strait countered by efficient, rapid international action to open it – the significance of a limited campaign on the global energy market is liable to resonate beyond the direct effect of the events themselves, because of the concern about an ongoing shortage of Gulf oil.

The second alternative is a "noisy" attempt to block the Strait, based on the rationale of a regional power realizing its threats and brandishing an iron fist at its enemies.[11] Certainly in response to an attack on its nuclear facilities and other strategic sites on its soil, but also in case sanctions grow ever harsher and it is pushed to the wall, Iran is liable to mine central shipping channels and try to attack oil tankers and cargo ships entering and leaving the Gulf with shore-to-sea missiles. Still, given the basic weakness of the Iranian air force, the high US capability of crippling shore-to-sea missile batteries, and its vastly improved capability of clearing a lane through Iranian mine fields relatively quickly, the United States would likely be able to open the Strait at a tolerable cost. "Optimistic" assessments say that the US Fifth Fleet can open the Strait within two weeks, though there are more pessimistic assessments that speak of up to a two month period.[12]

The third alternative is expanding the campaign beyond the Strait of Hormuz, based on the rationale of taking the campaign to the enemy's soft underbelly in response to aggression against Iran. Because of the centrality of the Strait, it would be very difficult to limit a confrontation, once launched in connection with the passageway, in time and place. For example, the US may want to punish Iran by pushing the confrontation onto Iranian territory, while Iran is liable to choose to attack with surface-to-surface missiles or terrorist cells, targeting oil terminals, processing facilities, and oil refineries in the Gulf.

Most of the research on the effect of a confrontation with Iran on the energy market has thus far dealt with the effect of disruption to free shipping in the Strait. Little if any attention has been paid to the possibility that Iran might choose to attack oil installations using surface-to-surface missiles.[13] However, since an attempt to block the Strait of Hormuz would succeed only in part, it is important to examine the possibility of surface-to-surface missile fire at oil facilities on the west side of the Gulf – as threatened by senior Iranian officials. Indeed, an Iranian surface-to-surface missile attack against the oil facilities of the Gulf states (should the facilities in fact be damaged) is liable to have a more severe impact on the global energy market than even a successful blockage of the Strait, because of the damage to oil production over time.

In light of Iranian threats to attack strategic oil facilities in the neighboring states, the Gulf states have in recent years labored to improve

their missile defense capabilities, in part by purchasing PAC-3 Patriot systems (and intending to purchase Aegis and THAAD systems in the future), though apparently these are not yet fully operational. Because Saudi Arabia has the world's largest proven oil reserves and is the world's largest oil producer and exporter, it is liable to be the central target for Iranian attack. A successful Iranian attack on key oil installations in the Kingdom, such as Ras Tanura or Abqaiq (an installation that stretches over 3 sq km, processing two-thirds of all Saudi oil), located within a 300 km range of Iran, would be devastating to the global energy market.

However, the first (publicly available) study of its type, published in 2011, suggests that this Iranian capability is limited and the Iranian missile threat against oil infrastructures in the Gulf is usually exaggerated.[14] Moreover, Iran would presumably seek to prevent a more extreme punitive retaliation on the part of the US and would be concerned about expanding a confrontation that would hurt US allies. Therefore, the Iranian threat against deterrence targets before a possible attack would not be identical to an Iranian cost-benefit analysis of realizing the threat after an attack. At the same time, Iran is quite liable to engage in selective air, land, and sea attacks against critical installations. Furthermore, the assessments about the size of the Iranian stockpile and the level of precision of its missiles are not up to date and likely underestimate the arsenal. Finally, the psychological impact of an attack on a key Saudi oil installation is also apt to sow panic in the markets, without any direct relation to the actual damage caused.

An alternative threat is Iran's recourse to terrorism and sabotage. In the last decade there have been several attacks against oil facilities and tankers in or near the Strait. In 2002, the French tanker *Limburg* was attacked outside the Strait by a racing boat loaded with explosives. In the attack, attributed to al-Qaeda, one person was killed and 90,000 barrels of oil were spilled into the sea. A similar method was adopted during the failed 2010 attempt to sink the Japanese tanker *M-Star* in the Strait by the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, also an organization affiliated with al-Qaeda. Iran is liable to adopt this type of modus operandi. In April 2011 there was an incident between a British vessel anchored in Bahrain and a ship, apparently Iranian, loaded with explosives that tried, according to British sources, to collide with it in a fashion similar to the 2000 attack against the *USS Cole* in the port of Aden, Yemen.[15]

Previous incidents have shown how difficult it is to sink oil tankers given their size and internal structure and oil combustibility. Consequently, they are even more resistant to shore-to-sea missiles and mines than combat ships.[16] Thus alongside attempts to attack tankers, Iran is liable to attack oil facilities on the west shore of the Gulf, first and foremost the eastern province of Saudi Arabia where Iran enjoys some support from the Shiite population, which constitutes the majority there. In recent years Saudi Arabia channeled significant resources to this threat, and with the help of the US established a 30,000-strong force whose sole objective is to defend the strategic installations in the Kingdom, first and foremost its oil facilities. This force was established as part of the lessons learned from al-Qaeda's failed attempt to damage the Abqaiq facility in 2006. In late 2011 there was an increasing rise in the scope of violent events among Shiites in the oil regions, which could have implications for the security of the energy facilities in the region.

Thus Iran can disrupt the flow of oil from the Gulf by interfering with international shipping in the Strait for only short periods of time, if only because of the firm United States commitment to maintain the free flow of oil through the Gulf. In response to the explicit Iranian threats to block the Strait, the US has declared that any disruption to shipping there "will not be tolerated," with the US Navy "always ready to counter malevolent actions to ensure freedom of navigation."[17] In January 2012 it was reported that the Obama administration even transmitted a direct message in the same spirit to Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei, saying that every disruption of international shipping in the Strait represents the crossing of a red line and will incur an American response.[18] Despite Iranian threats, the US, Britain, and France have continued to navigate warships to and from the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz.[19]

> Iran's principal "oil weapon" is not a reduction in the amount of its oil on the market, rather the possibility of damaging the Gulf states' oil exports.

At the end of the Iran-Iraq War, during what became know as the "tanker war," an Iranian attack on naval vessels resulted in the US escorting Kuwaiti oil tankers (Operation Earnest Will) to and from the Gulf, and in one case, after an American frigate hit an Iranian mine, the United States damaged a major portion of Iran's viable naval force in the Gulf (Operation Praying Mantis). In response to current

Iranian threats, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta coupled the severity of this issue with Iran's development of nuclear arms: "We made very clear that the United States will not tolerate the blocking of the Straits of Hormuz... That's another red line for us [in addition to the nuclear issue] and...we will respond to them."[20] While Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey acknowledged Iran's ability to "close the Strait for a period of time," he emphasized that the United States would act to open it: "We are investing in capabilities to make sure that, if that happens, the US will be able to beat them."[21] The United States maintains a significant naval and aerial presence in the Gulf and has military bases in most Arab Gulf States, first and foremost the Regional Command of the United States CENTCOM in Qatar and the US Navy's Fifth Fleet base in Bahrain.

Some of the tools currently available to the international community also include growing additional international military presence near the Strait.[22] In 2009 France opened a naval and aerial base in the UAE and there are several international task forces operating in Bahrain, such as CTF-152, designated to ensure freedom of shipping in the area. In early 2012 it was reported that in light of the tension with Iran, the US increased the ORBAT stationed permanently in the Gulf in order to be better equipped to handle any possible development.[23]

Nonetheless, the effect of oil exports on the Gulf should Iran choose to interfere with shipping in the Strait of Hormuz in one of the methods described herein is far from negligible. A possible blockade of the Strait would affect a significant portion of Gulf oil exports, first of all that of Saudi Arabia. For the sake of comparison, the start of the 2003 Iraq War (March-December 2003) resulted in a drop of 2.3 million barrels a day, and the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq (August 1990-January 1991) resulted in a drop of 4.3 million barrels of oil a day from the markets.[24]

Interference with traffic in the Strait will likely have economic and political implications for Iran itself, given the regime's overwhelming dependence on the export of crude oil (with expected revenues for 2012 reaching $100 billion). Unlike the Arab Gulf states and Iraq, Iran exports most of its oil via the Strait. About 90 percent of Iran's imports and 99 percent of its exports occur via maritime routes, and primarily through the Strait of Hormuz.[25] Iran produces about 3.5 million barrels and exports about 2 million barrels of oil per day (the assessment is that because of the aging of existing oil fields and the sanctions, Iran, according to an

annual calculation, loses some 300,000 barrels of oil per day). Reducing Iran's oil exports will likely create an immediate demand for additional oil. Nonetheless, Iran's principal "oil weapon" is not reducing the volume of its oil on the market, rather the possibility of damaging the Gulf states' oil exports.[26]

Reducing the Iranian Damage to the Global Energy Market

If nonetheless Iran decides to block the Strait of Hormuz (the first two alternatives), the United States and its allies have better tools than in the past to offset some of the disruption to the flow of oil through the Strait. First is the use of strategic reserves: today most of the world's oil reserves are located in the United States and China, and are sufficient for 45-90 days, according to varying estimate (1.5 billion barrels). These reserves can reach the international market and fairly rapidly increase the available oil supply and moderate the heightened cost. Using these reserves could prevent an immediate paralysis to routine global economic activity caused by oil shock.[27] Releasing oil from the strategic reserves is an irregular step (oil was released from the reserves after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and after the damage inflicted by Hurricane Katrina in 2005), but on June 23, 2011, the International Energy Agency (IEA) announced the release of 60 million barrels from the strategic oil reserves starting in July (some 2 million barrels per day). Oil prices reacted by dropping but within a few days rose again. The unusual step was explained as being the result of interruption in the supply of oil from Libya and the global economic situation. Another measure tried with some success in the early 1990s when Kuwait was invaded was storing (unsold) oil in tankers near the markets. The bottom line is that allowing the reserves of all IEA countries to flow at maximum capacity would compensate for the loss of 14 million barrels a day for one month (out of the 17 million barrels of oil moving through the Strait every day).[28]

A second available measure involves alternate routes. Saudi Arabia has an east-west pipeline that stretches some 1,400 km from Abqaiq in the eastern part of the Kingdom to Yanbu on the Red Sea, with the capacity of transporting 5 million barrels of oil a day (this pipeline currently seems to be working at half capacity because most of the Saudi oil goes to markets in the Far East). Were it in fact possible to add another 50 percent to its capacity, plus the release of oil from strategic reserves, this would cover

the loss of oil from the Gulf for 90 days. In addition to this pipeline, there is a natural gas line (with a capacity for moving 0.5 million cubic m a day).

There are other pipelines in Saudi Arabia, such as the Basra-Riyadh-Red Sea line (IPSA) used to export Iraqi oil during the Iran-Iraq War. Refitting part of the pipeline (for natural gas) on Saudi territory also in favor of Kuwaiti oil is possible in the long term in case the Strait is blocked (Kuwait is the only significant oil exporter without a port outside the Strait). There is also the Dhahran-Tyre pipeline (the Tapline) that runs through Jordan. Use of it was discontinued because of Jordan's support for Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War. The two pipelines together have a capacity of 2.15 million barrels of oil a day. In addition, Iraq produces 2.5 million barrels a day, and some of this can be transported in existing pipelines to Turkey and Syria (because only half of Iraq's oil exports go through the Strait, although these pipelines have been targeted for sabotage and terrorism in recent years). Finally, there is a pipeline inside UAE territory completed in late 2011 that bypasses the Strait, running from Abu Dhabi to Fujairah. It was scheduled to begin transporting oil in January 2012, but because of delays it is expected to go into operation in mid 2012.[29] The pipeline, whose cost thus far is estimated at some $3.3 billion, will be able to transport up to 2.5 million barrels a day, an amount that approaches the total UAE production capacity.

In addition, natural gas has been transported from Qatar to the UAE to Oman since 2007 in smaller quantities and usually for local consumption through the Dolphin line, which moves gas at low yield, partly because of disagreements among the Gulf states. In addition to laying pipelines that bypass Hormuz, it is possible by means of various methods, such as with the enhancement of chemicals, to increase the yield of existing pipelines. It is estimated that the use of these additives in the east-west pipeline would increase its yield by 6 percent to more than 8 million barrels a day (this would obviate transport through the Strait but raise the cost of oil transport, with Asia the primary destination).[30] In the long term, it will be possible to connect Saudi Arabia's pipeline system with that of Oman and thereby avoid the need to go through the Strait altogether. Thus far the potential

> While the rhetoric of recent years has often led to the assumption that Iran intends to block the Strait of Hormuz, this intention seems far from self-evident, as it is not in keeping with Iran's true interests.

is not being realized because of territorial disputes and the desire of various countries not to move their only source of income elsewhere. In a future crisis and lacking the naval transportation alternative, there may be a change in this system of oil pipelines.

A third measure involves exploiting the Saudi capacity for over-production. Saudi Arabia is the only country with significant so-called swing capacity. According to Saudi statements, its swing capacity stands at 4 million barrels a day, which exceeds the entire Iranian production capacity.[31] True, some estimates posit the Saudi production capacity to be no greater than 12.5 million barrels a day. However, assuming the Saudis produce 10 million barrels daily (January 2012), the margin available is currently 2.5 million barrels a day, which still exceeds the total amount of Iranian exports.[32] Saudi Arabia, together with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, have in recent months accelerated the rate of oil production in order to moderate possible price increases (they did so unilaterally because of the refusal by Iran, Iraq, and Venezuela to increase OPEC's production quota). Therefore, with the yield of current pipelines, it will be possible to transport the rest of the Saudi production capacity, 2.5 million barrels a day, using the current system of pipelines. Moreover, it was reported that Saudi Arabia has agreed to increase its rate of production in order to offset the possibility that Iranian oil will go off the markets because of sanctions against Iran or because of Iranian punitive measures.[33]

Conclusion

Iran will likely try to avoid a comprehensive campaign in the Gulf that could well cost it dearly in military, political, and economic terms. However, it will continue to threaten to close the Strait of Hormuz, a threat that serves its strategic deterrence well, while taking advantage of the unique geographical conditions of the Strait and the global sensitivity to every tremor in the world's energy market. As evidence that Iran will likely actually not block the passageway, consider that even at the height of the tanker war (1984-1987) the Strait remained open. Moreover, blocking the Strait violates international law and may justifiably be considered grounds for going to war against Iran.[34] Thus while discussion of this issue in recent years has often assumed that Iran intends to block

the Strait, this intention seems far from self-evident, as it is not in keeping with Iran's true interests.

Furthermore, Iran's ability to block the Strait effectively over a long period of time is not assured, because any such attempt would immediately generate US military intervention designed to open the international shipping lane to oil and gas tankers. Within the limitations of uncertainty regarding any forecast of a military confrontation, one could say that in light of its superior military capabilities, the US could open a blockade at a tolerable cost. While the importance of the Strait and its relative vulnerability, as well as the global economic state and the sensitive energy market (especially in the northern hemisphere in the winter), are liable to amplify any event, the global energy market is in the long run affected primarily by supply and demand, certainly more than by psychological factors alone.

Use of alternate land-based pipelines can compensate for the loss of a significant portion of the oil exported from the Gulf through the Strait. This capability will grow if flow-enhancing additives are used and existing pipelines are rehabilitated and put into action. Together with the oil that can be released and transported from the strategic reserves, and taking advantage of Saudi Arabia's swing capacity, this amount may compensate for the amount of oil normally moving through the Strait of Hormuz and significantly mitigate the ramifications of a blocked passageway. However, the effectiveness of these steps, especially the use of the strategic reserves, is limited to 45-90 days, and would decrease the longer such a crisis lasts.

There is also a possibility, though of lower probability, that Iran would choose to attack critical oil facilities in Gulf states with surface-to-surface missiles or through terrorist cells. In such an event, the negative effect on the ability to export oil from the Gulf is liable to be far more severe. However, because of its high cost, Iran would presumably be deterred from taking such a step of its own volition and would do so more in response to a military attack against it. Yet alongside its rhetoric, Iran has in the recent year also significantly increased its acts of provocation against Fifth Fleet and British Royal Navy vessels in the Gulf.[35] US attempts, even in the last year, to establish a hotline between the sides were met with Iranian refusals, increasing the concern that Iran and the United States are liable to be dragged into an involuntary escalation over

the Strait, where every tactical incident could develop into an event with far reaching ramifications for the global economy and regional stability.

Overall, the international community has better tools than in the past to deal with a possible blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. Nevertheless, it is important to continue to develop the ability to cope with the possible ramifications of an event in the Strait as described above: in the short term to increase the oil capacity of existing pipelines and reactivate others, and in the mid and long terms to lay alternate pipelines that bypass the Strait according to the model currently in use in the UAE. Because of Iran's frequent threats and maneuvers in the region and the growing discussion of the possibility of attacking Iran's nuclear facilities, a certain sense of urgency in the Gulf states has been created in this context.[36] Likewise, China – the nation that would be hit hardest should there be a disruption to the flow of oil from the Gulf – would do well to assume a more significant role in keeping the shipping lanes open and make clear to Iran the heavy price it would have to pay should it decide on taking extreme steps. Because of the difficulty of the Gulf states to cope with Iran's asymmetrical capabilities by themselves and the doubts that arise from time to time about United States willingness to come to their defense, a more aggressive and internationally-backed American response than what was demonstrated in the past is now necessary, including maintenance of a continuous military presence and a credible military option to the Iranian threat.

Notes

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A Mixed Blessing: Hamas, Israel, and the Recent Prisoner Exchange

Yoram Schweitzer

What is known as the Shalit deal between the Israeli government and Hamas, which saw the return of Gilad Shalit to Israel on October 18, 2011 and the mass release of Palestinian security prisoners, among them prisoners serving life sentences for the murder of Israelis,[1] raised anew some fundamental issues that inevitably accompany deals of this sort between Israel and terrorist groups. Unlike in 1985 with the Jibril deal, when Israel released 1,150 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for three Israeli soldiers and whose high cost is reminiscent of the most recent swap, the price Israel paid in October 2011 was extensively and publicly debated. In addition to the cost itself, the reason for the heated discussion lay in the open, multi-channeled media coverage and the nature of contemporary public discourse. Hamas, whose negotiators were well aware of prisoner exchange precedents between Israel and terrorist organizations that had held soldiers and civilians in captivity, foremost among them the Jibril exchange model, presented the results of the deal as an historic victory for the Palestinian people.[2] For their part, spokespersons for the Israeli government claimed that although the deal was a bitter pill for Israel to swallow, Hamas was in fact forced to make significant concessions it had previously refused to make and accept certain conditions insisted upon by Israel. The spokespersons claimed that with this in mind and under existing circumstances, this was the best deal possible.[3]

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The purpose of this essay is to examine the achievements as well as the costs that the two parties to the deal had to pay, which on the face of it seems like an exclusive Hamas victory. Thus, it is important to underscore the price Hamas paid in the exchange and the criticism leveled at it on the intra-Palestinian arena, despite the immense joy surrounding the prisoner release. It is similarly important to point to Israel's achievements in the negotiations – primarily regarding damage control – which joined the central achievement of freeing the captured soldier and bringing him home. It must also be kept in mind that the deal was only one of a host of local and regional interests in the greater Israel-Hamas dynamic, and between the principal parties and the states and organizations active in the region that affected and were affected by the entire process.

Toward the Exchange

The agreement between Israel and Hamas, signed in October 2011 and brokered by Egypt, ended the difficult, enervating negotiations that lasted five and a half years, marked by various ups and downs and even periods when communication between the sides broke off entirely. In March 2009, there were intensive negotiations in Cairo with Egyptian mediation between an Israeli delegation headed by Ofer Dekel, the coordinator on behalf of then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and Yuval Diskin, then head of the General Security Services (GSS), and senior Hamas representatives. Those talks resulted in an agreement-in-principle on a list of 325 out of the 450 prisoners Hamas sought to release.

At that time two basic disagreements came to the fore: the first vis-à-vis the 125 "heavy" prisoners, i.e., those responsible for numerous Israeli fatalities and symbols of the Palestinian struggle (including prisoners who planned some of the large scale attacks before and during the second intifada), women who had been sentenced to life in prison, Israeli Arabs, and residents of East Jerusalem.[4] The second disagreement focused on the question of expulsion.[5] Some nine months later, in November-December 2009, following several months when there were no contacts between the parties, Haggai Hadas, the new coordinator on behalf of Prime Minister Netanyahu, with the help of the new German mediator, Gerhard Konrad, reached a final outline that was ready to be signed. However, then too some issues remained unresolved, especially with regard to a certain category of prisoners and the number of those who would not be allowed

to return to their homes. These outstanding points prevented conclusion of the agreement and the negotiations again were deadlocked.[6]

The May 2011 appointment of David Meidan as the Prime Minister's new coordinator, the tightened relationship between senior officials in the Egyptian security services of the the post-Mubarak and Omar Suleiman era on the one hand, and senior Hamas representatives on the other, and the growing instability in the Arab world all created new constraints for both the Hamas and Israeli leaderships, and spurred the sides to hold several rounds of negotiations in Cairo during August-October 2011. The conclusion of these negotiations was made possible in large part because of the flexibility on both sides, manifested in Hamas' agreement to concede its longstanding demand to release all the "heavy" prisoners from Israeli prisons and willingness to accept the expulsion of a significant number of the released prisoners from the West Bank, some to the Gaza Strip and some abroad.[7] For its part, Israel overturned its refusal regarding the release of Israeli Arabs and agreed to free additional prisoners from the "most wanted" list.

The agreement signed in Cairo stipulated that in exchange for the release of the Israeli soldier, prisoners would be released in two stages. In the first stage, on October 18, 2011, Gilad Shalit was freed along with 477 male and female prisoners whose names were agreed on by Hamas and Israel. In the second stage, which took place on December 18, 2011, 550 additional Palestinians who were chosen by Israel alone were released. Most were figures of lesser importance who had been sentenced to relatively short prison terms or were nearing their release date. There were no Hamas members among them, most were Fatah members, and 180 prisoners were without organizational affiliation (see box, p. 26). Contrary to the extensive media interest in the first stage of the deal, the second stage drew relatively little media attention, both on the Israeli and the Palestinian sides.

Hamas: Achievements, Failures, and Criticism
Hamas Achievements
The agreement provided Hamas first and foremost with temporary prestige, important primarily but not only for Palestinian public opinion, and extending beyond the intra-Palestinian arena as well. For the first time in its history, Hamas held a living captured soldier for an extended

Prisoners Released in the Shalit Affair

October 2009: 20 female prisoners were released from Israeli prisons in exchange for a videotape of Gilad Shalit.

- 16 of the prisoners, aged 15-26, had been sentenced for "minor" crimes (e.g., attempted murder, possession of a knife, membership in an illegal association), and 4 others were awaiting the end of their legal proceedings.
- Most were scheduled to be released in 2009 and 2010.
- Their organizational affiliations were as follows: 7 were active in the PFLP, 6 in Hamas, 5 in the Islamic Jihad, and 2 in Fatah.[1]

October 18, 2011, Stage 1 of the exchange: 477 prisoners were released – 450 men and 27 women.

- 247 prisoners were released to their homes, as follows: 131 returned to the Gaza Strip, 110 to the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and 6 to Israel within the Green Line. Security limitations, including compulsory registration with the police and prohibition from entering Israel proper, were imposed on 55 (i.e., half) of the prisoners released to the West Bank.
- 206 prisoners were expelled, 163 to the Gaza Strip and 43 abroad.
- Of the 110 returning to the West Bank, 57 were affiliated with Hamas and the rest with other organizations (including Islamic Jihad, Fatah, and the Popular Resistance Committees). Of the prisoners expelled abroad, 41 belonged to Hamas.
- 27 female prisoners were released – 24 to the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and 1 to Israel, and 2 were expelled abroad.
- 303 of the released had been sentenced to life terms. 330 of the prisoners were sentenced in connection with the murder of Israelis. The 477 prisoners were responsible for attacks and bombings in which 569 Israelis were murdered.[2]

December 18, 2011, Stage 2 of the exchange: 550 prisoners were released.

- 300 were Fatah members, 50 Popular Front members, 20 Democratic Front members, and 180 were without organizational affiliation.[3]
- 510 of the prisoners returned home to the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), 39 returned home to the Gaza Strip, and 1 returned home to Jordan.
- A total of 9 female prisoners were released in the second stage of the exchange.

Note: The figures that appear here, as well as the figures given throughout article, are based on data received from the Amnesties and Pardons unit in the Ministry of Justice, considered by the author to be the most reliable source.

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period and foiled Israel's attempts to discover his whereabouts, making it impossible to free him via a military operation. Hamas thereby forced the Israeli government to negotiate and free over one thousand security prisoners in order to bring a single soldier home alive.

Specifically, Hamas could point to the following achievements:[8]

a. The release of a total of 1,027 male and female prisoners[9] in exchange for one Israeli soldier. This created an unprecedented balance regarding the price of a single Israeli captive.[10]

b. Of those released, 303 prisoners, both male and female, were sentenced to life in prison; 148 were sentenced to several life terms, and 20 were sentenced to more than 10 consecutive life sentences each.

c. The release of prisoners, sentenced to varying prison terms, whom Israel had initially opposed including in the list of prisoners to be freed, among them convicted murderers from the second intifada who had served only a few years of their sentences.

d. The release of 7 Israeli Arabs (6 of them in the first stage of the exchange) and 16 residents of East Jerusalem (14 of them released in the first stage of the exchange).

An examination of these achievements indicates that Hamas' primary gain was its success in forcing Israel to concede some of the principles presented by Israeli decision makers during the negotiations process as red lines, just as in the past Israeli leaders had declared there were red lines the government would not cross. In addition, Hamas gained other successes, difficult to quantify empirically, including diverting a disproportionate amount of time and attention of Israeli political leaders, commanders, and security and intelligence personnel for routine work on this tactical subject, notwithstanding Israel's host of strategic challenges. Moreover, through its conduct, Israel indirectly granted Hamas greater importance beyond its actual significance: first, by upgrading its position vis-à-vis Israel's entire range of considerations; second, by stepping up attempts at international mediation, which led to courting senior Hamas officials to help end the affair; third, in light of Hamas' successful abduction and Israel's helplessness, by granting Hamas points on the inter-Palestinian arena over its major political rivals, primarily Fatah and the Palestinian Authority; fourth, by granting partial temporary immunity to senior Hamas personnel involved in the

negotiations (during Shalit's captivity some senior Hamas operatives were assassinated, but none from the organization's negotiating team); fifth, by arousing friction between segments of Israeli society for and against the deal; and, finally, by wracking the nerves of Israel's citizens, for whom the fact that a soldier was held captive by an enemy with as cruel an image as held by Hamas represented an open wound and source of constant worry.

Another aspect that marked the second stage of the deal and contributed to Hamas' winning image was the shaky relationship between the PA and the current Israeli government. It was agreed long before through the German mediator that for this stage, Israel alone would determine the identity of the prisoners released. Israel sought to have this move double as an Israeli gesture toward President Husni Mubarak of Egypt and PA leader Abu Mazen. This would ostensibly downplay Hamas' success and create the impression of an independent political achievement for the PA in having secured the release of a larger number of prisoners than freed by Hamas. However, since then Mubarak was removed from power and relations between Abu Mazen and the current Israeli government are at an all time low because of the unilateral steps taken by the PA in the UN. Consequently, Prime Minister Netanyahu refused to make any gesture toward Abu Mazen and consult his representatives about the prisoners to be freed. This dulled the move meant to give points to the PA in its struggle against Hamas for the hearts and minds of Palestinian voters who are scheduled to go to the polls in May 2012 to choose their leadership.

Hamas Failures
Throughout the years of negotiations, senior Hamas officials solemnly declared their resolute refusal to buckle under Israeli pressure and concede any of their demands. For example, Khalil al-Haya said, "There will be no Shalit deal until the Israeli occupation meets Hamas' demands."[11] Similarly, senior members of the Popular Resistance (who took part in Shalit's abduction) announced that Shalit would not see his family until all their demands were met.[12] However, despite these declarations and the successes described above, Hamas negotiators were forced to concede some of the principles they had declared inviolable in order to free their prisoners, including:

a. *Reducing the number of prisoners freed*: Hamas conceded at least 50 of the 125 names it had for years insisted on releasing in this swap, first and foremost individuals it had defined as symbols of the struggle, such as Abbas Sayyad (sentenced to 35 life terms), Abdullah Barghouti (sentenced to 67 life terms), Hassan Salameh (sentenced to 38 life terms), Ibrahim Hammad (his trial for the murder of 90 Israelis is still ongoing and he has not yet been sentenced), Marwan Barghouti (Fatah's most notorious prisoner, sentenced to five life terms), and Ahmad Sadat (Secretary General of the Popular Front, sentenced to 30 life terms).[13]

b. *Expulsion from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip and abroad*: The number of prisoners who did not return home as part of this swap is higher than in the past – 163 were expelled to the Gaza Strip and 43 abroad. The conditions of release for these prisoners have turned the Gaza Strip into a jail of sorts for them.

c. *Prisoner limitations and conditions*: It was agreed that the freed prisoners would stay in the Gaza Strip and would not be able to return to their homes in the West Bank for periods ranging from three to 20 years (depending on the GSS assessment of their risk level). Afterwards, they will be able to return to the West Bank, gradually, on condition they have demonstrated good behavior,[14] i.e., have not been involved in terrorism in any form. Similarly, there are security limitations on the prisoners released to their homes in Israel: they will not be allowed to enter the West Bank. Prisoners released to the West Bank are obligated to report to local police stations according to a prearranged schedule.

In addition to the total cost one may add the heavy pressure exerted by Israel on the Gaza Strip, for which Gaza Strip residents paid dearly, both in terms of their welfare and in the form of hundreds of deaths as a direct or indirect result of the abduction of Shalit and the prolonged negotiations over his release.

Criticism of Hamas

As the deal was signed and the first stage carried out, Hamas leaders such as Ismail Haniyeh hurried to take credit for the organization's successes and use the festive mass welcome rallies for the prisoners to declare that the prisoner exchange was an historic achievement and that it was "a strategic turning point in the struggle against the Zionist enemy."[15] Haniyeh went so far as to claim that the achievement was not that of

Gaza Strip residents alone, but also those of the West Bank, Jerusalem, the 1948 areas, and even the Golan Heights.[16]

However, alongside the self-congratulatory aura, some disgruntled voices emerged from the Palestinian camp. These were sounded by those unhappy with the final results of the exchange because it did not meet the sweeping promises that had been made publicly by Hamas spokesmen throughout the negotiations, and by those who also questioned the steep cost exacted by Israel of the Palestinians throughout Shalit's time in captivity. For example, senior PA officials criticized Hamas for not standing firm on principles it had declared as categorical. Issa Karaka, the PA's Minister for Prisoner Affairs, said that "unfortunately, the negotiations should have centered more on the political, symbolic, and national meaning represented by senior leaders such as Marwan Barghouti and Ahmad Sadat."[17] Similar sentiments were expressed by Riyad al-Maliki, the Foreign Minister of the Palestinian government in the West Bank, who said that although "we are very happy about the release of the 1,027 prisoners, we are very disappointed that some of them will move to Gaza or abroad and will not be allowed to return to their families in the West Bank."[18] Chairman of the Palestinian Prisoner Club Kadoura Fares agreed, and in further criticism stated that he does not understand how Hamas could have agreed to leave Palestinian prisoners who had already served 20 or more years of their life sentences in jail. He added, "Expulsion is a punishment. If they try to sell to the Palestinian people that expulsion is an achievement, well, I'm not buying it." Fares even mocked Hamas directly when he expressed his bitterness at the confusion at times among Hamas' negotiators about the number of female prisoners in Israeli prisons: "I thought that if it took Hamas five years to negotiate they'd at least know all the details. I'm really very surprised that they don't know the precise number of female prisoners."[19] In addition, prisoners who were not included in the swap were vocal in their dissatisfaction. One of the most veteran prisoners not to be freed, Karim Yunis, convicted in 1983 of the murder of the soldier Avraham Bromberg, wrote an irate letter to the Hamas government protesting the organization's conduct, and stated emphatically that "this is a knife in the back." He expressed outrage that he was not included in the list, which in his eyes was politically oriented and insufficient.[20]

Joining this domestic criticism was criticism from without. Alongside the praise, the international Arab press also voiced criticism of the exchange. For example, *a-Sharq al-Awsat* quoted Yusef Sharqawi, an analyst and political activist, who said that "unfortunately, the deal bears the fingerprints of the Israeli intelligence services responsible for the terms of the deal." Sharqawi claimed he would have "preferred a different deal, but Hamas silences any criticism leveled against it."[21] Other publicists questioned "the historic achievement Khaled Mashal keeps talking about" and stated that without the inclusion of senior members of the resistance movements, such as Hassan Salameh, Abdullah Barghouti, Abbas Sayyad, Ibrahim Hammad, and Marwan Barghouti, the exchange could not be called "historic." The expulsion of many prisoners from the West Bank, alongside Israel's refusal to swear it wouldn't assassinate the released prisoners in the future, made the deal problematic.[22]

An examination of these voices from the Palestinian street, the Palestinian leadership, and the Arab press indicates that the primary criticism of Hamas was its agreement to the expulsion of many of the freed West Bank prisoners to the Gaza Strip and abroad, a decision seen as a direct assault on the Palestinian ethos of return to the land.[23]

Hamas attempted to confront the criticism leveled against it on the respective fronts. Abu Obeyda, the spokesman for the military wing of Hamas, was forced to explain why Hamas did not achieve all of its demands and spoke of the difficult conditions under which Hamas representatives were operating. Sallah Aruri, one of the founders of the military wing of Hamas and a Hamas negotiations representative, spoke of complaints against the movement by relatives of those prisoners who were not freed.[24] Mahmoud a-Zahar, a Hamas senior official who was involved in the deal through its last stages, claimed that Abu Mazen demanded the release of Gilad Shalit in exchange for lifting the siege on the Gaza Strip without the release of any prisoners at all; accordingly, "all of Abu Mazen's achievements in negotiations with Israel do not equal Hamas' achievement in this exchange" and thus he was in no position to criticize the deal.[25] However, despite the attempts at public diplomacy and propaganda, unidentified Hamas sources admitted that many Hamas members were shocked by the concessions made by the organization in recent months: "Despite the great joy, one can see dissatisfaction on people's faces."[26] It is quite possible that some of the

criticism is politically motivated, as Hamas achievements are a thorn in the side of Fatah or the PA, or that it stems from the bitterness of families whose relatives were not included on the list, among them Hamas stalwarts. Nonetheless, the criticism clearly expresses an atmosphere of protest against the sectarianism displayed by Hamas in choosing the prisoners to be freed, despite the explicit promises for a sweeping release of all senior prisoners from all the various organizations.[27]

Israel: Costs, Achievements, and Criticism

Costs to Israel

Israel agreed to pay a significant cost, which included:

a. The release of an unprecedented number of convicted murderers, among them many murderers sentenced to numerous consecutive life sentences.

b. The release of murderers, both men and women, who were notorious symbols for their involvement in painful attacks indelibly inscribed in the nation's memory of the bloody history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

c. The release of Israeli Arabs, thereby allowing Hamas to gain popularity and status as the only organization capable of bringing about their release, which is not a regular legal option for criminal murderers (i.e., not terrorists), either Jew or Arab, or Jewish security prisoners (such as Ami Popper,[28] Yoram Shkolnik,[29] and others) regarding sentence commutation.

d. Encouragement of further abductions by terrorist organizations.

e. A potential risk for escalated terrorism due to the return of skilled terrorists to the arena.

f. Over the five and a half years Israel incurred various additional costs, which went beyond the tactical surrender and display of weakness, as a result of not having a military option to free Shalit. The intensive and disproportionate preoccupation with the issue and the investment of resources exposed Israel's limited ability to force Hamas to free the captured soldier. This situation granted Hamas much political and propaganda gain and positioned it as a partner of significant standing in talks with many elements in the world, including leading European nations such as Germany and France, and Middle Eastern nations such as Egypt, Qatar, and others. The prolonged negotiations and the delay in closing the deal cost Israel dearly in the deeper rift

in the intra-Israeli discourse, which reached its climax on the eve of the signing of the agreement, generating doubts among many Israelis in the leadership's ability to make a sound decision and in the Prime Minister's moral authority. Doubts were raised about the validity of the fundamental values of today's Israeli society, such as mutual responsibility and the obligation to redeem captives. These joined the long suffering of the captured soldier and his relatives and the wrenching of Israel's nerves over a drawn out period. By contrast one could present the advantage that the extended time frame allowed Israel to prove it is not prepared to pay any price, something that forced Hamas to soften its intransigence and cede some of its demands.

Israel's Achievements

Indeed, Israel could point to the following achievements:

a. Israel did not free a significant number (about 50) of the most senior prisoners whose names were given by Hamas throughout the negotiations as an essential, non-negotiable condition for the release of Shalit.

b. Israel succeeded in setting a framework for the agreement that anyone released and subsequently arrested again for terrorist activity would have the crimes for which s/he had already been tried and sentenced reapplied, and that his/her sentence would be extended by the sentences previously meted out.

c. Israel stipulated the return of those expelled to the Gaza Strip or abroad to their homes in the West Bank according to terms set by the GSS, on condition that they would never again be involved with terrorism.

d. Israel alone determined the identity of the prisoners released in the second stage of the exchange.

The most important Israeli achievement lies in the fact that unlike the May 1985 Jibril exchange, in which Israel paid the full price demanded by Jibril (except for 37 prominent prisoners Israel took off the list at the last moment[30]), Israel ultimately managed to minimize the security risk of the current exchange by imposing limitations and conditions that are likely to deter some of the released from engaging in terrorism again (table 1). Control over determining whether these conditions are met remains in Israeli hands, such that if necessary Israel can punish these individuals with the full legal backing of the agreement. In addition, Israel also

Table 1. Terms of the 1985 Jibril exchange and the
2011 Hamas exchange

	1985 Jibril exchange	**2011 Hamas exchange**
The number of prisoners released	1,150 – of which some 150 were imprisoned in the Ansar camp, some 640 in Israeli prisons, and some 360 were foreign prisoners	1,027 male and female prisoners
Prisoners released to the Gaza Strip	79 prisoners	333 prisoners – 170 returned to their homes, 163 were expelled
Prisoners released to the West Bank	475 prisoners	620 male and female prisoners – of them, 110 were released in the first stage of the exchange
Prisoners released to East Jerusalem		16 male and female prisoners
Israeli Arabs released	41 prisoners	7 prisoners
Women released		36 prisoners – of them, 27 prisoners were released in the first stage of the exchange
Prisoners released abroad	Some 360 prisoners returned home	
Prisoners expelled abroad		43 male and female prisoners
Prisoners defined as "having blood on their hands"	80 prisoners	454 male and female prisoners – of them, 414 prisoners were released in the first stage of the exchange

managed to insert into the agreement security limitations imposed both on the prisoners expelled from the West Bank and on the prisoners who returned there: they are under Israeli intelligence surveillance and are aware that family reunification and return home depend on a demonstration of good behavior and abstention from terrorism. The subjection of the prisoners freed to their homes to the security limitations imposed on them – manifested in their having to report to their local police stations – is a significant tool, not only because it touches on the former prisoners' natural desire to return to their land and homes, thereby also serving as a moderating influence on their conduct and ensuring that they do not return to terrorist activity, but also demonstrates the sovereignty of the Israeli legal system and actually bears out the effectiveness of Israel's deterrence.[31]

Criticism of the Exchange in Israel

The criticism in Israel of the exchange obviously reflected the feelings of those opposed to the deal, but it also emerged from political opposition elements that criticized the Prime Minister for his conduct and attacked him for doing the exact opposite of what he expressed in former vehement statements that condemned any agreements that included concessions to terrorism. The critics said that in his speeches Netanyahu tried to head off the criticism: he, who had been one of the sharpest critics of deals with terrorists (his adamant criticism of the Jibril exchange stands out in particular), justified his current decision by saying that only a few prisoners were returning to the West Bank, and those who did would be under constant Israeli intelligence surveillance.[32] Criticism made by government ministers included that of Uzi Landau, who voted against the deal in the government debate and said, "We all pray that Gilad Shalit comes home safe and sound, but the exchange is a huge victory for the terrorists and damages Israeli deterrence and security."[33] Other criticism sounded both by coalition and opposition figures related to the damage to Israel's strategic deterrence by the exchange and the victory given to Hamas. Opposition leader Tzipi Livni said that "Israel has been weakened by the exchange." According to Livni, the Prime Minister was pushed into making this "leadership decision" and "the people of Israel forced the decision to free Gilad on the government."[34] After the exchange, various publicists expressed their dismay over the number of "heavy" prisoners freed,[35] and particularly strong criticism came from bereaved families whose relatives were the victims of terrorism planned or aided by prisoners who were freed.[36]

The government ministers who supported the exchange rushed to counter the public criticism and publicly express their support. Minister of Defense Ehud Barak declared that the defense establishment fully supported the decision and would act to the best of its ability to make sure that no threat to the citizens of Israel would be realized. Minister of the Interior Eli Yishai noted that this was a very difficult and complex yet correct decision.[37] Prime Minister Netanyahu, who presented the proposed agreement for government approval, defended his decision by laying out the difficulties the government had to confront, such as the general framework outlined by the previous government and the long, exhausting negotiations that despite efforts by the government in prior

years failed to achieve an agreement. However, according to Netanyahu, the last weeks of the summer of 2011 brought about a renewal of the negotiations, this time via the mediation of the Egyptian government. Cognizant of the existing tension between the desire to bring an abducted soldier (or citizen) home and the need to protect Israel's citizens, he gave explicit instructions to uphold vital principles and guidelines regarding the security of the State of Israel and also to bring the soldier home. Netanyahu averred that the agreement expressed the right balance among all the considerations: this was the best agreement that could be reached at this time.[38]

Conclusion

After a negotiations process that lasted five and a half years, Israel and Hamas signed an agreement brokered by Egypt that resulted in the release of more than 1,000 prisoners. This constituted an undeniable victory for Hamas. Given that Israeli governments had no option other than to negotiate with Hamas via mediators in order to free the captured soldier held in Gaza, all that was left to do was to minimize the cost, and this is what the Israeli government representatives did during the entire process. For its part, Hamas took advantage both of its success in hiding Shalit's whereabouts from Israel's intelligence services and of the extended negotiations in order to exploit them fully to their advantage and thereby achieve some secondary successes. One, Hamas conducted tough negotiations alongside psychological warfare designed to exhaust the Israeli side, embarrass the Israeli government, and hurt the Israeli public, whose extreme sensitivity to the lives of captured soldiers is well known. Two, Hamas used the approaches by various state entities and other mediators working to effect the exchange to establish its standing as a legitimate, relevant actor in the local and regional political arena. Three, the organization's senior members who were involved in the negotiations received at least a temporary insurance policy on their lives. Moreover, Israel's attempts to pressure Hamas by linking the blockade on Gaza – imposed without any relationship to Shalit's abduction – with the rapid conclusion of the negotiations failed. While the blockade has taken a severe economic toll of Hamas and Gaza Strip residents and affected their daily lives, it has also helped Hamas paint Israel as a state that behaves inhumanely towards non-affiliated Palestinians in Gaza and boost the efforts to delegitimize Israel.

Given the host of contributing elements, the exchange does not represent a classic zero-sum game, even though many of the gains made by Hamas are the costs paid by Israel, and vice versa. For example, the cost Israel paid instilled an understanding in Palestinian society and among Palestinian organizations, first and foremost Hamas, that the only way to effect the release of almost five thousand security prisoners still jailed in Israel is by using the abduction weapon. This cost is liable to emerge as worse than the potential threat mentioned by Israelis opposed to the exchange, namely that it would lead to more victims of terrorist acts, perpetrated by released prisoners returning to terrorist activities. On the other hand, Israel succeeded in fulfilling the unwritten contract the state has with its soldiers and their parents that it would do everything it could to bring its soldiers back should they fall into enemy hands. This obligation has a moral value that while not quantifiable, is priceless in terms of maintaining the ethos of responsibility on behalf of the society and self-sacrifice in the IDF. In addition, Israel's success in imposing conditions for return to the West Bank on those expelled to the Gaza Strip and abroad, and in creating the fear among them that they may be prevented from returning home and will also have to pay for their past crimes should they again engage in terrorism, may be a deterrent and reduce the risk that they will personally act against Israelis once more.

In light of the central danger – future abductions of Israelis, soldiers and civilians alike – Israel's security establishment is working hard to raise the awareness of this issue among soldiers and the greater population. In the IDF, a senior officer with the rank of brigadier general has been appointed to examine the military and operational actions needed in case of an abduction. The recommendations of the Shamgar Commission, appointed by Defense Minister Barak to formulate policy principles and a new strategy of action for situations of extortionist negotiations with terrorist organizations holding Israeli hostages, were submitted to the government. To date the Commission's report has not yet been made public, and it is unclear how this and/or future Israeli governments that may have to confront such situations during their terms in office will implement the Commission's findings. If and when the recommendations are made public, they are likely to spark a searching public debate on morality and security whose urgency was amply demonstrated by the recent prisoner exchange.

Notes

My thanks to Einav Yogev, research assistant, and Ilona Dryndin, intern in the INSS Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict Program, for their assistance with this essay and their help with research on prisoner exchanges in Israel.

1   Yoram Schweitzer, "The Israel-Hamas Prisoner Exchange: From Tactical Failure to Strategic Challenge," *INSS Insight* No. 289, October 24, 2011, http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=5599.

2   In his speech in Gaza Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the Hamas government, declared, "The deal is a strategic turning point in the struggle against the Zionist enemy…Through resistance we freed the land and the people," *RNNNEWS*, October 18, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gp9zKih1_sw.

3   "Netanyahu's Address at the Start of the Special Cabinet Meeting to Authorize the Shalit Deal," Prime Minister's Office, October 11, 2011, http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMO/Communication/Spokesman/2011/10/spokestart111011.htm.

4   Shlomo Tzezena, "A Better Deal than in the Past," *Yisrael Hayom*, October 14, 2011.

5   News agencies, "Report: Israel Prepared to Release Prisoners Demanded by Hamas," *NRG Maariv*, March 13, 2009, http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/865/697.html.

6   Ronen Bergman, Itamar Eichner, and Smadar Perry, "1,027 Prisoners for Gilad," *Yediot Ahronot*, October 12, 2011.

7   Yoav Limor, "From Gaza to Mitzpeh Hila in Five Years," *Yisrael Hayom*, October 14, 2011.

8   Hamas' claim that these are precedent-setting achievements is not precise. Israeli Arabs and East Jerusalem Arabs were released for the first time in the 1985 Jibril exchange. See Yuval Yoaz, "This is how we Secured Gilad Shalit's Release: The Head of the Pardons Department Speaks," *Globes*, November 10, 2011, http://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000696315.

9   This number is on top of the twenty additional female prisoners released in October 2009, in exchange for a sign of life in the form of a videotape of Gilad Shalit. The figures presented here, as well as the figures given throughout article, are based on data received from the Amnesties and Pardons unit in the Ministry of Justice, considered by the author to be the most reliable source.

10   While Israel paid steep prices in prior prisoner exchanges, it never before crossed the 1000:1 ratio. In the 1983 PLO exchange, Israel released 4,400 prisoners from the Ansar camp and 100 security prisoners from Israel for 6 Nahal soldiers held by the PLO (at a "cost" of 750 prisoners for every Israeli soldier). In this exchange most of the prisoners released were minor terrorists (if that) who had been captured during the First Lebanon War.

11   "Hamas Official: No Shalit Deal until Demands Met," *Ma'an News Agency*, January 14, 2010, http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=254158.

12 "PRC: We'll Hold Shalit until Demands Met," *Ma'an News Agency*, December 27, 2009, http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=250062.

13 Roni Sofer and Ali Wakad, "The List of Unreleased Prisoners: Murderers of the Large Attacks," *Ynet*, March 17, 2009, http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3688058,00.html; Barak Ravid and Hayim Levinson, "Ibrahim Hammad, Abdallah Barghouti and Marwan Barghouti Will Not Be Freed," *Haaretz*, October 11, 2011, http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/shalit-deal/1.1521459.

14 Limor, "From Gaza to Mitzpeh Hila in Five Years."

15 "Jubilation after Swap Deal in Gaza," *Ma'an News Agency,* October 18, 2011, http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=430508.

16 Ismail Haniyeh's speech on the prisoner exchange, note 2.

17 Interview with Issa Karaka, *al-Watan*, Radio Palestine, October 18, 2011, http://www.alwatan.sy/dindex.php?idn=110603.

18 "Hamas Responds to al-Maliki's Criticism about the Prisoner Exchange," October 14, 2011, http://www.islammemo.cc/2011/10/14/135757.html.

19 http://www.palpress.co.uk/arabic/index.php?action=detail&id=24542 .

20 Karim Yunis' letter to Hamas, "The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine," October 17, 2011, http://www.pnrb.info/?page=show_details&Id=1818&table=table_27&CatId.

21 Kafah Zabon, "Joy and Disappointment in the Palestinian Street after Publication of Prisoner List," *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 18, 2011, http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=645159&issueno=12009.

22 Tom Perry, "Hamas Steals Abbas Thunder with Prisoner Deal," *Ma'an News Agency*, October 12, 2011, http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=428458.

23 Member of Knesset Avi Dichter, a former head of the GSS who is well versed in the Palestinian mindset, feels that expulsion is the worst punishment for Palestinians: "First of all, you are removing the terrorist from his home base, removing him from his family and friends. Then you're chucking him into Lebanon where he doesn't know any of the activists. He comes from Gaza, from one of the refugee camps, where he knew everyone, knew whom to turn to, knew who was operating whom, and so on. In Lebanon, he has to start all over again. He arrives someplace with an existing hierarchy, he has to deal with all the old lions and foxes, he has to carve out a niche for himself, and many of them never manage to fit in." Interview with Avi Dichter, October 3, 2011.

24 Kafah Zabon, "Resentment in Hamas about Excluding Central Names from Shalit Exchange," *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 16, 2011, http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=644803&issueno=12007.

25 Jack Khoury, "Hamas Scoffs at Criticism of Shalit Swap: 'Abbas Couldn't have Secured such a Deal,'" *Haaretz.com*, October 16, 2011, http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/hamas-scoffs-at-criticism-of-shalit-swap-abbas-couldn-t-have-secured-such-a-deal-1.390196.

26 Amit Cohen, "Israel will Act the Same Way also in Next Abduction," *NRG Maariv*, October 28, 2011, http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/299/799. html?hp=1&cat=875&loc=3.

27 The Minister for Prisoner Affairs in the PA, Issa Karaka, said that "although I welcome it, the exchange does not include Marwan Barghouti or Ahmad Sadat or senior commanders from Hamas' ranks. See "The Exchange Is Official, Does Not Include Old Prisoners," *el-Khabar*, December 19, 2011, http://www.elkhabar.com/ar/monde/274576.html.

28 In May 1990, Ami Popper carried out a shooting attack at the Gan Havradim junction in Rishon Lezion. Seven Palestinians were killed and eleven injured. He was sentenced to seven life terms plus another 20 years in prison. In 1999, President Ezer Weizmann commuted his prison sentence to 40 years.

29 In March 1993, Yoram Shkolnik shot and killed a Palestinian terrorist who tried to perpetrate an attack in Sussiya and was caught by the security services. He was sentenced to life in prison. In 1997, President Ezer Weizmann commuted his sentence, and in 2001 Shkolnik was released from prison under security limitations (he was prohibited from entering the West Bank).

30 Interview with Kuti Mor, August 10, 2011.

31 Interview with a senior official in the Ministry of Justice, December 29, 2011.

32 Yossi Werter, "Divided Heart," *Haaretz*, October 14, 2011.

33 Attila Somfalvi, "Shalit Exchange Approved: Ready to Embrace Him," *Globes*, October 23, 2011, http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4134293,00.html.

34 Channel 2 News website, "Livni on the Shalit Exchange: Red Lines were Crossed, Israel is Weakened," http://www.globes.co.il/news/article. aspx?did=1000691311.

35 Ben Caspit, "The Big Winner," *Maariv*, October 21, 2011; Ben-Dror Yemini, "Systems Subverted," *Maariv*, October 14, 2011; Ben Caspit, "Shalit Exchange: Mashal is the One who should be Saluting Netanyahu," *NRG*, October 22, 2011, http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/297/383. html?hp=1&cat=404&loc=5.

36 For example, Simo Avrahami, whose son was one of the soldiers lynched in Ramallah in 2002 (two of the perpetrators were released in the exchange), said: "I have nothing bad to say about the Shalit family. They behaved the way any family whose son was abducted is expected to behave. But I did expect the Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, and the Minister of Defense, Ehud Barak, to show some discretion and not deceive thousands of bereaved families." Yoav Zeitun, "Father of Ramallah Lynch Victim: I will sit *shiva* again," *Ynet*, October 17, 2011.

37 Omri Nahmias, "Shalit Deal Approved with Large Majority: 26 Ministers in Favor, 3 Opposed," *Nana*, October 12, 2011.

38 "Netanyahu's Address … to Authorize the Shalit Deal," note 3.

Something New Under the Sun: Public Opinion and Decision Making in Israel

Tamar Hermann

In recent years, Israel, like many other states around the world, has experienced a significant shift in the relationship between the civilian population and its political leadership.[1] This transformation is manifested in part in the reality that the status of elected officials has lost its luster, such that in the voters' view leaders no longer embody the same professional and moral authority,[2] and in the public's growing demand to have a voice in strategic decision making processes. The prevalent media commentary − and therefore also the broader public discourse − claims that the root of this phenomenon lies in the lower quality of the leadership, a function of "the decline of the generations." However, as will be discussed below, logic dictates that this is not a question of the declining quality of the "human assembly line," i.e., that somehow people who have the capacity of becoming great statespeople are no longer born. Rather, this is a phenomenon connected to a new, profound, and complex set of circumstances, manifested for example in the changing paradigms and relationships regarding the authority of elected officials and voter demands. Significantly, a parallel change is apparent in realms other than politics, e.g., authority relations within the nuclear family and in the schoolroom, the status of the boss at work, and even in the fact that a physician's medical opinion is immediately checked by many against what "Dr. Google" has to say. In light of these new circumstances,

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it is therefore highly doubtful if at present leaders who are regarded as parental figures can emerge, leaders to whom the public looks admiringly and whose opinions are accepted unquestioningly on the basis of a deep trust in the correctness of their decision, even if these decisions entail high costs and risks, such as decisions made once upon a time by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, or David Ben-Gurion.

Public Influence on Political Decisions

One of the results of this change in authority-based relationships is that topics considered in the past as belonging to the realm of "higher politics," i.e., issues that only those in upper level political places can handle in a skilled, informed manner, first and foremost foreign affairs and security matters, are viewed today as eligible for vigorous public debate – often to the chagrin of officeholders and professionals who feel that their areas of expertise are being encroached upon. The current debate about the value, possibility, and foreseeable outcome of an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities, or the need to avoid such an attack, is only one example of many in this context.

The shift in authority relations between decision makers and the public at large is more apparent in democratic regimes (though not exclusively so, as demonstrated by the Arab awakening this past year). This is not only because they offer freedom of expression and assembly and do not pose a direct threat to anyone who publicly disputes the positions of the leadership or even the leadership's right to make decisions without consulting with the sovereign, i.e., the people, but also because the democratic model is fundamentally based on the assumption of equality among people in terms of their intelligence and moral essence. Democracy defines the people as the sovereign and the decision makers as those who have been appointed only for a limited term. In other words, according to the democratic model, elected decision makers do not necessarily possess essential qualities lacking in regular citizens. Instead, they are viewed as people who chose to compete in the political arena and were elected for a certain set period of time in which they are supposed to serve the public interest to the best of their abilities and nothing else. They are not loftier than the people who elected them and no divine or other grace imbues their decisions. However, political action is very often convoluted and secret and requires rapid decisions, making it difficult to share the

process routinely with the public, and certainly not in times of crisis. Therefore decision makers demand the right to decide without revealing their rationale to their voters and without obtaining their approval in "real time," even if their decisions have far reaching implications. This demand is no longer viewed kindly and contributes to the ongoing tension in the relations between the public and the political elite.

This dilemma between the view of the people as sovereign and the claim that leaders must be allowed to do their job without public interference at every step has no one textbook solution; rather, it has a spectrum of solutions. At one end of the spectrum is a purist approach saying that the public must be involved in political doings only at the polls, i.e., the job of the public is to decide who decides, and that between election campaigns the public must leave affairs of state to the elected echelon and its experts. Should the outcomes prove disappointing, the citizens can, according to this view, always change their leaders in the next elections. However, for the system to function properly, in between elections the public must trust its leaders blindly to do the best they can for the public good.

The opposite purist approach contends that the public must always keep a sharp eye on the leaders and be consulted every time there is a significant issue on the national agenda, because (a) the citizen, as a moral agent, has the right and the obligation to formulate decisions that affect his or her future; (b) decisions affecting national destiny often involve not only professional considerations but also ethical and even ideological ones in which elected officials have no objective advantage over their voters; and (c) decision makers are not free of narrow interests and are not always well equipped with all the knowledge necessary to reach optimal decisions from the point of view of the general good. These respective viewpoints are well reflected by the following two statements, demonstrating that even the political elite itself is divided on the question of the proper measure of involvement. The first text quotes Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who feels that the public debate over fateful decisions ought to be limited, while the second quotes Yossi Sarid, a former politician, minister, and Knesset member, who holds that the public must not be excluded from the preliminary debate about such decisions.

The festival surrounding Iran requires self-scrutiny. One must ask what exactly we were doing here. Was the discourse deep or shallow? The way in which the discourse was held, including the contribution of previous officeholders, was at times disgraceful...It is only proper that such a discourse be responsible and serious, and that it be clear that Netanyahu and Barak are not Bublil and Bashevkin [stars of a popular TV reality show]. We consider the situation day in and day out, and do so responsibly. There is no risk here, we're not acting alone, and in any case everything requires the government's authorization.[3]

To ask, always to ask, and not accept any answer as a convention; to investigate, always to investigate, because things that are unusual to you aren't clear to them; do not be tempted into stupidly thinking that they, up there, know so much more and therefore will make the smart decisions. Don't agree to concede your sovereignty of thought and deposit it with either God or man.[4]

Between the one purist approach and the other, represented by separate political practices, there is a range of approaches and views, including deliberative approaches[5] and various sorts of referendums.

Beyond the fundamental question of if, when, and how the elected decision maker must consult the public, there is another no less thorny question. Let us assume that the voice of the public or a particular population sector is heard on high. To what extent should that voice affect the decision, and how can one assess, after the fact, whether it had an effect or not? This question too lacks a single clear answer, because first of all, the system has many players, both individuals and organizations, fiercely competing for influence. Ex post facto, it is usually difficult if not impossible to isolate the particular influence of any one actor. In other words, the system comprises many sides whose respective powers change from one issue to another and from one time to another, wielding influence that is not fully transparent and effecting results in a way that is not fully clear.

Second, public opinion, if it exists at all,[6] is not always uniform. In fact, it is almost never uniform. In a democratic society, one should expect opinions to differ and expect that any decision is likely to have been influenced by or be contrary to some segment or another of "public opinion." For example, figure 1 shows the division in Israeli-Jewish public

opinion about the government's approach to the "price tag" phenomenon (acts of violence perpetrated by extreme rightists in response to actions either by Palestinians or Israeli establishment authorities against their sector or philosophy), segmented by the self-identification of the interviewed parties as to their degree of religiosity.
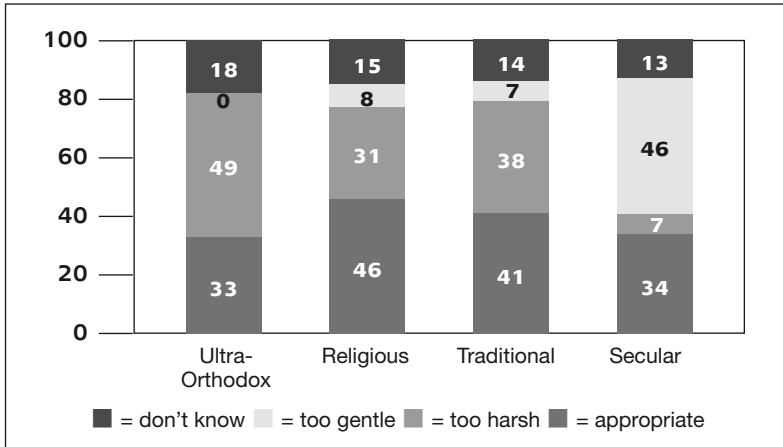
Figure 1. Assessment of Israeli authorities' response to "price tag" actions (percent of a Jewish sample according to self-definition of religiosity)

Source: Ephraim Ya'ar and Tamar Hermann, *Peace Index*, October 2011, Israel Democracy Institute and the Evans Program for Conflict Resolution Research, Tel Aviv University[7]

In other words, if the policy towards the "price tag" perpetrators becomes harsher, it would be in keeping with one "public opinion" (primarily secular) and against a different "public opinion" (traditional, religious, and ultra-religious), and vice versa. In this context it is also impossible to avoid the question of what constitutes the relevant public opinion, i.e., whose opinions should decision makers take into account and whose opinions are they free to ignore, and who decides who's "in" and who's "out." As figure 2 demonstrates, it becomes clear that today there is a large majority of the Jewish population in Israel that does not see Arab citizens as constituting part of the "public opinion" that ought to be considered when making fateful decisions affecting the nation, not only in the realm of security and foreign affairs but also in terms of government and the economy.

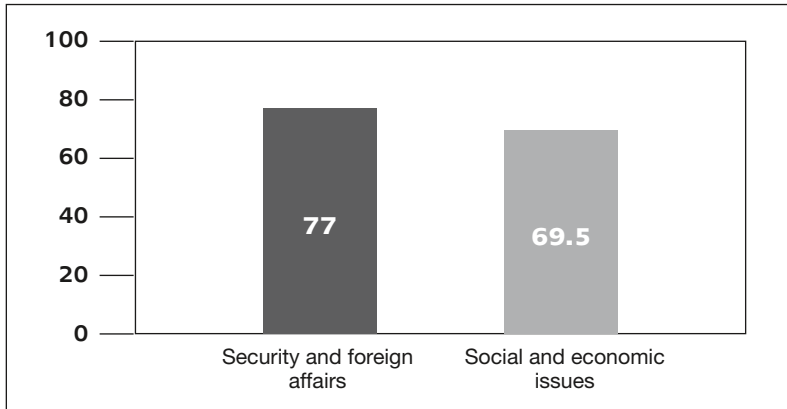**Figure 2**. Agree that a Jewish majority is required in order to make decisions on the following issues (percent of a Jewish sample)

Source: Tamar Hermann et al., *2011 Democracy Index* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2011), p. 97.

Third, it is difficult to assess the effect of the public because decision makers generally try to conceal it: for many of them, admitting that such an effect exists decreases their value as "policy experts." It is only rarely that they whip out the subject of the public will and put it on full display, usually when that public will matches their own priorities or when they worry about electoral backlash. A rare instance of such an admission by someone who was party to making upper level decisions is a statement by Ami Ayalon, former head of Israel's General Security Services, that the IDF withdrew from Lebanon in 2000 due to public pressure (contrary to the repeated claim made by then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak that the public pressure manifested by the Four Mothers movement had no effect on him whatsoever).[8] Another example of public influence, albeit in the opposite direction, i.e., of a government action designed to prevent a swell of public opinion in a direction deemed undesirable by the government, was the testimony by Dov Weisglass, the close confidant of then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, that the unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip was meant in part to pull the rug out from under the Geneva initiative, which at the time was gaining popularity in public opinion.[9]

Fourth, the relationship between the public and the decision makers is often a two-way street, making it impossible to identify cause and effect − the public position and the leadership position − with any certainty.

Nonetheless, identifying priorities in time may indicate the direction of influence, from top to bottom or from bottom to top. For example, in May 2002, when then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was vehemently opposed to the idea of a unilateral withdrawal from the territories, there were already clear indications of the existence of a small majority of the Jewish population (51 percent) in favor of such a withdrawal, in light of the deadlock in the negotiations with the Palestinians (36 percent were opposed while the rest were undecided).[10] This would seem to imply a certain response by decision makers to public opinion, continually consulted by contemporary leaders via polls, surveys, and other samplings they may commission.

Narrowing the Gap between Politician and Voter

What, then, are the elements of change in the relationship between the public and decision makers mentioned at the start of this discussion?

a. The complexity of the problems facing decision makers is growing as the complexity of the political-economic world increases because of, e.g., accelerating globalization processes placing national decision making in a much broader geographical and regional context than ever before. Thus decision makers find themselves at a loss or conflicted among one another in the face of problems, and are struck by the difficulty of trying to formulate a uniform, resolute policy.[11]

b. Politics as a whole, and electoral politics in particular, are becoming increasingly personal, i.e., decision makers at the top are much more exposed to personal criticism than in the past when they were merely part of the leadership and could often justify their actions as being "at the behest of the movement/party." Frequent media revelations about personal-political considerations erode the public's trust in the unbiased manner of the decision making process and decision makers' moves, especially given the already low esteem in which political institutions have been held in recent years.[12]

c. As noted, decision makers very frequently commission public opinions polls. Although such surveys, generally conducted in confidence, are in theory only meant to determine the effect that a decision will have on their popularity, in practice this means not just an output but also an input − consciously or not, the results of the polls affect the decision makers as they undertake their next moves.[13]

d. In recent years media coverage of the political elites and their political moves has been unprecedented in its intensity. The sense of awe that ordinary citizens used to have for their leaders, often inspired by distance, has been considerably eroded since the close-up came into being. Every tasteless joke and bead of sweat that pops out under pressure are covered and reported to viewers and listeners in real time, not to mention reporting straight from the battlefield, as was the case in the Second Lebanon War (2006). Having to perform at all times in front of the camera and near a microphone creates pressure, making it difficult to take measured, reasoned decisions.[14]

e. The easy access by the public – whose educational level is constantly rising – to a range of information channels and to an unprecedented abundance of commentary creates a much more informed public than existed 20, 50, and certainly 100 years ago. The internet and other modern means of communication create a situation in which the public feels equipped with information that is (almost) as good as that held by the decision makers; accordingly, it is only right that its preferences be heard and taken into account. The empowerment of the citizen, a significant improvement in the democratic performance, thus closes the gaps that in the past fed the public's willingness to accept the elected echelon's decisions as divinely ordained.[15]

The narrowing of the distance between the public and the decision making process – though to a great extent it is only virtual – is seen by many in the political elite as a negative, if only because it limits their freedom of action. In this context, one shudders at the memory of the unfortunate slip by Likud MK Meir Cohen-Avidov, who called the members of the Mothers against Silence protest movement, which called for the withdrawal of troops from Lebanon, "the cows of Bashan" (a derogatory epithet used by the prophet Amos) – contending they were not worthy of interfering in a critical national issue of this sort. However, he was hardly an atypical MK or a voice of the past. For example, only recently the incumbent Finance Minister, Dr. Yuval Steinitz, expressed himself similarly – though in somewhat more refined language – when asked about the large protest march planned as part of the public campaign for the release of Gilad Shalit: "The decisions about the release of Gilad Shalit cannot be made in the street, in marches or by referendum. They are not the decisions of public opinion."[16]

Within the political elite, those who oppose the public demand for a voice in decision making processes support their position with claims – some of which have been scientifically refuted[17] – about the supposed instability of public opinion and the political ignorance of the man or woman on the street. However, figure 3, based on *Peace Index* findings from the recent decade that show (1) the annual averages of support for conducting negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and (2) the annual averages of the belief that these negotiations will bear fruit in the visible future, demonstrates that Israeli public opinion is in fact remarkable for its stability – to the point of stagnancy – rather than for acute swings, reducing the chance for a strategic reversal. The maximal distance between the annual averages over the last decade is about 12 percent when it comes to "support" and some 11 percent when it comes to "belief." Moreover, the gap between the two annual averages also remained remarkably constant throughout the decade, with a gap of only 12.4 percent between the maximal point (33.4 percent) and the minimal point (21 percent).
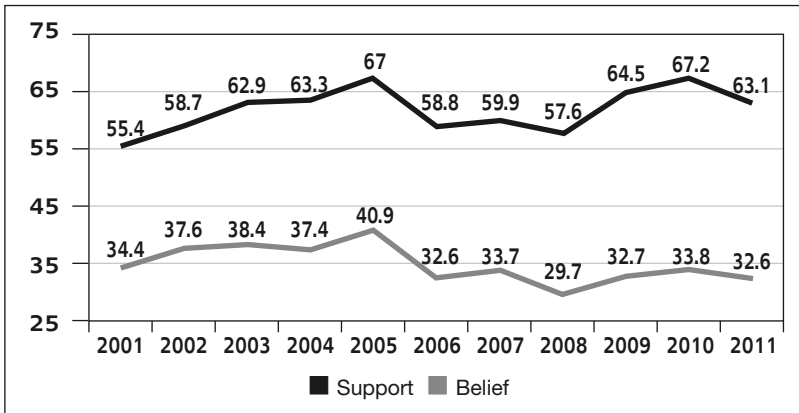
Figure 3. On negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, 2001-2011 (percent of a Jewish sample)

Significantly, the Israeli public describes itself as highly interested in political matters. Indeed, when it comes to the general public's knowledge of political issues (and the Israeli public ranks very highly relative to other publics in the world when it comes to knowledge of and interest in politics), the situation is much less dire than claimed by those opposed to public involvement. Thus, in an empiric examination recently conducted

regarding a set of questions involving political knowledge, the following distribution emerged: 21.4 percent of respondents in a representative national sample were seen as having a low level of knowledge, 62 percent as having an average level of knowledge, and 18.4 percent as having a high level of knowledge.[18] Figure 4 presents the percentage of Israeli citizens (Jews and Arabs) who think of themselves as having a high degree of interest in politics.
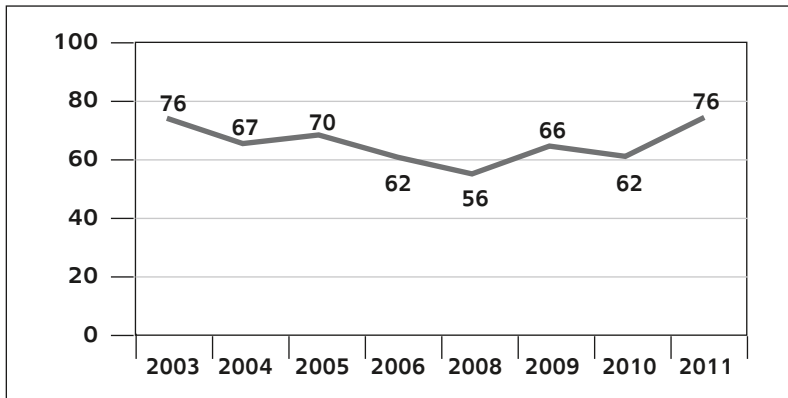
Figure 4. Israelis who consider themselves as having high political awareness

Source: Hermann et al., *2011 Democracy Index*, p. 148.

The fact that the public takes an interest and apparently is knowledgeable about politics does not necessarily mean that its preferences are free of error. However, that is also true about the preferences and decisions of those in the political leadership. Furthermore, no one argues that the decision makers must follow what the public says exactly in the way dictated by the public. Instead, they are supposed to use their professional considerations and those of their advisors and explain to the public why they chose this way or that. In this context one should note the frequent claim that one of the reasons – even if not the main one – for the collapse of the Oslo process was the fact that the Rabin government may perhaps have made the right decision, but it certainly did not make an effort to try to explain it to the public in order to enlist its support for the move.

Nevertheless, decision makers try to preserve this niche for themselves and restrict outside interference. An excellent example of

this tendency is represented by the serious charges heard in government corridors against former security personnel expressing their opinions about the Iranian issue in public. No one disputes their expertise, yet once they leave the system they become part of that "public opinion" whose sound effects elected officials would like to reduce. Thus, MK Zeev Begin, speaking of public statements made by former Mossad head Meir Dagan against an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities, proclaimed:

> This is a breach of trust, simply disgusting; this is a villain-ous act stemming from people's megalomania... Public of-ficials commit themselves to keep state secrets they came to know as a result of being in public office without a statute of limitations, even after leaving their jobs. I think we need to view these acts with all due gravity because they generate the kind of media discussion that truly sabotages the gov-ernment's ability to make decisions.[19]

The media, which broadcasts public sentiments on political issues, also comes under occasional attack. Here the charges generally focus on the media being a tool used to manipulate public opinion by certain interest groups. Indeed, when it comes to this point, the media outlets often attack one another. For example, one paper wrote the following of Channel 10's decision to screen a documentary about the campaign to free of Gilad Shalit at the same time that Channel 2 was screening the popular TV reality show "Big Brother":

> Is Channel 10 trying to change and influence the public agenda and the discourse of the next day? Is it possible that someone over there decided to flip a switch in his head and remind us that there is a bigger, more important tribal bon-fire than the one conducted by Erez Tal? It may be that on Sunday night we will all be put to the test, one that will place a mirror in front of us all that will reflect not only our view-ing preferences but also our priorities as a society.[20]

However, the claim that the media is a tool wielded by interest groups lacks serious weight in light of the prominence of digital media in the public discourse, especially media such as Facebook, Twitter, and cell phones. With these media it is impossible to speak of editorial decisions of one kind or another meant to manipulate public opinion, because every individual with the appropriate device and desire becomes a news editorial staff-of-one who writes, broadcasts, photographs, and provides

commentary on personal, municipal, national, and even global events, and distributes these to masses of readers or viewers.

Is Anything New under the Sun?

Focus thus far has been on general trends that may be identified in Israel as well as in other democratic nations that have changed the relationship between the public and its leaders, and consequently, it would seem, also the relative impact of these two elements on national decision making. One is of course free to question these distinctions and say that there was always some sort of opposition to steps initiated and taken by the leaders, including those with tremendously high levels of public support, from David Ben-Gurion to Ariel Sharon. Therefore some would, along with Ecclesiastes, say that there is nothing new under the sun.

However, those who study Israeli society are convinced that this is not the case, and that at this time Israel is experiencing an unprecedented deterioration in the credit the public is willing to extend to its leader. There are sociologists who go so far as to point to a grand transformation in the Israeli public, which signals the appearance of a breed of "new Israelis":

> The new Israelis are not prepared to let anyone hide from them the processes determining their lives: market mechanisms, the power of the tycoons, and the arrangements made by the state and its institutions. The new Israelis do not humbly accept sovereign declarations that always claim that "this is not the right time for budgetary demands," or that the state "is doing everything in its power" for the public good. The new Israelis demand transparency in the conduct of the state because they understand that when a state operates in the dark it is contrary to the public good. They demand to be included in public activity because they understand that blind faith in the establishment will again make them hostages to the state, lacking the ability to tell themselves that they are solid, moral and ethical Israelis.[21]

Indeed, the empirical data indicates that the lack of public satisfaction with their leadership has reached new heights, especially with regard to the attention decision makers pay to their voters, the set of considerations guiding them, their professional ability, and their integrity. Even after the wave of protests of the summer of 2011, the majority of the Israeli public still feels that it has little political influence, as demonstrated by figure 5. A clear majority (63 percent) feel that politicians are not responsive to the

opinions of the "ordinary person on the street," and that the public has no voice in the national decision making circles.
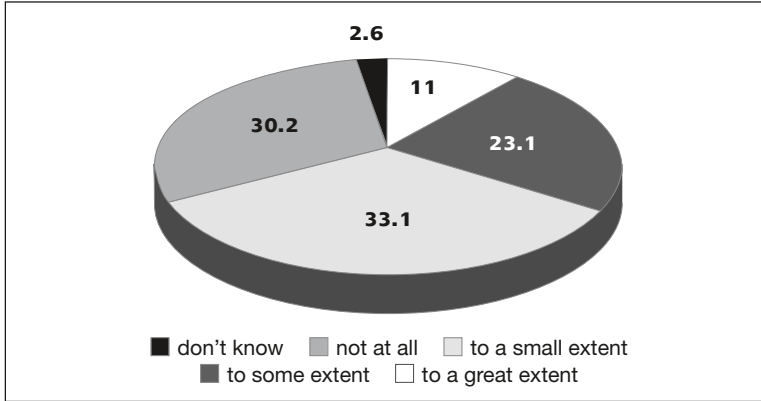
Figure 5. To what extent can you and your friends affect government policy? (sample of Jewish population, in percent)

Source: Hermann et al., *2011 Democracy Index*, September

In addition, as charted in figure 6, today – as opposed to the past – the large majority also thinks that the government does not bother to explain its decisions to the public.
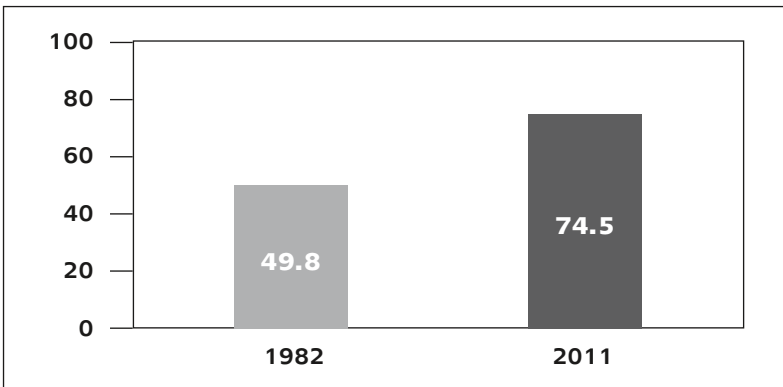
Figure 6. Percent of those who think that recently the government has not done enough to explain its decisions to the public

Source: Hermann et al., *2011 Democracy Index*, September

If the public thought that the government does what it is supposed to do, it could be that the sense of having little or no influence and the lack of governmental attention to the public would not be as disturbing as they are. However, as charted in figure 7, today most of the Israeli public, including the 18-34 year age cohort, which jumpstarted the recent wave of protests, feels that the government is handling the nation's problems poorly:
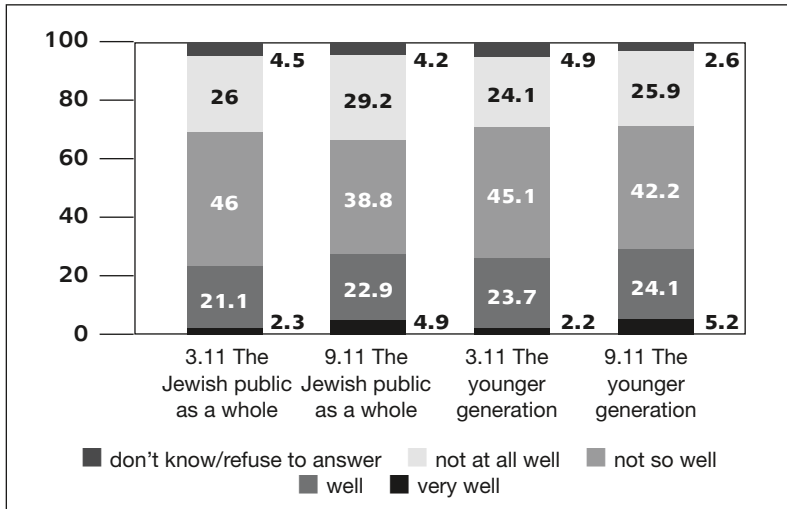
Figure 7. How well do you think the government is handling the nation's problems? (Jewish population, in percent)

Source: Hermann et al., *2011 Democracy Index*, September

The most prominent and troubling finding within this general picture of alienation between the public and its leaders is that the Israeli citizen seems to have adopted a national set of priorities that is manifestly different from that of the sitting government. As shown in table 1, which presents the percentages of what respondents in a representative national sampling said was the most important national priority in their opinion, citizens are no longer bothered by the faulty connection between them and their leaders (only 1.2 percent said that this is the supreme national priority), and that improving the systems of governance in Israel hardly interests them at all (5.5 percent). Even attaining peace with the Palestinians is a relatively lowly priority (12 percent), while strengthening Israel's military power ranks even lower

(8.4 percent). Instead, undisputedly, the top national priority of the "new Israelis'" is closing the social and economic gaps, a topic the government barely dealt with until recently; even now, as much as it attends to these issues, it seems to be doing so with marked unwillingness, as if coerced.

Table 1. Most important national priorities
(national sample, in percent)

Issue	March 2011	September 2011
Integrating the ultra-Orthodox into the job market	2.7	7.8
Closing socioeconomic gaps	24.9	40.2
Improving relations between Jewish and Arabs citizens	2.7	2.0
Strengthening the connection between elected politicians and the citizens	.90	1.2
Helping young people become homeowners	11.9	12.2
Making peace with the Palestinians	14.0	12.0
Strengthening Israel's military capabilities	23.9	8.4
Improving Israel's international image and status	10.2	7.8
Improving the systems of governance	4.2	5.5

Source: Hermann et al., *2011 Democracy Index*, September

This severe crisis of trust emerging against the background of a much more polyphonic "street" means that the relationship between the public and its leaders has in fact become an arena of contention in terms of setting the national agenda. Decision makers are trying to defend their exclusive prerogative while the public is demanding its right to have a say. Moreover, it also seems that each side is armed with its own agenda. This will presumably affect the ability of leaders to make strategic

decisions on the assumption, which was once a given, that the public will back them without hesitation and contribute its share, even in the case of painful decisions. In other words, this situation is liable to undermine the chance of mobilizing critical public backing if and when leaders try, want, or are forced to make far reaching strategic political decisions in the future. In this sense, it would seem that there is definitely something new under the sun.

Notes

1   For more on the change in the relationship between the public and the political leadership, see E. J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992); R. Dalton, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2004); and C. Boggs, *The End of Politics: Corporate Power and the Decline of Public Sphere* (NY: Guilford Press, 2000).

2   On the erosion of authority, see J. Rosenau, "The Relocation of Authority in a Shrinking World," *Comparative Politics* 24, no. 3 (1992): 253-72.

3   Ehud Barak, quoted in *Globes*, November 8, 2011, http://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000696031.

4   Yossi Sarid, "Don't Go There," *Haaretz*, November 11, 2011.

5   E.g., Ronen Gopher, "Participatory Deliberative Democracy: Practices from Around the World," http://snipurl.com/21z90hy.

6   The famous French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, for example, claims that "there is no such creature" as public opinion as expressed in public opinion surveys and polls. See "Public Opinion Does Not Exist," *Issues in Sociology* (Tel Aviv: Riesling Press, 2005), pp. 207-16.

7   Available online at http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=235&monthname=%D7%90%D7%95%D7%A7%D7%98%D7%95%D7%91%D7%A8.

8   Ami Ayalon, in Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Generals Speak: The Collapse of the Oslo Process and the Violent Israel-Palestinian Confrontation* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Davis Institute, 2003), pp. 5-12.

9   Ari Shavit, "The Full Interview with Dov Weisglass," *Haaretz*, October 8, 2004, http://news.walla.co.il/?w=/9/609133.

10   http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?mark1=&mark2=&num=97.

11   For an interesting discussion of the effect of globalization on Israeli policy in the Israeli-Palestinian context, including the context of decision makers and public opinion, see G. Ben Porat, *Global Liberalism , Local Populism* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

12   For more on the low level of trust in political institutions in Israel, see, e.g., T. Hermann et al., *2011 Democratic Revolt* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2011), pp. 139-45.

13 For the effect of polls, see, e.g., R. Hinckly, *People, Polls and Policymakers: American Public Opinion and National Security* (New York: Lexington, 1992).

14 For more on the role of the media in the connection between spectators and national leadership, see, e.g., M. Schudson, "What's Unusual about Covering Politics as Usual," in B. Zelizer and S. Allan, eds., *Journalism after September 11* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 36.

15 See, e.g., Ole R. Holsti, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus," *International Studies Quarterly* 36 (1992): 439-66.

16 "Hamas: Gilad Shalit is not in Jail" *Ynet,* June 26, 2010, http://reshet.ynet.co.il/%D7%97%D7%93%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%AA/News/Politics/Security/Article,46359.aspx.

17 For refutation of the traditional position (the "Almond-Lipmann consensus") that public opinion on national matters is not based on knowledge and shifts with the wind, see B. I. Page and R. Y. Shapir, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), ch. 9; W. Chittick, K. R. Billingsley, and R. Travis, "Persistence and Change in Elite and Mass Attitudes toward U.S. Foreign Policy," *Political Psychology* 11, no. 2 (1990): 385-401.

18 Hermann et al., *2011 Democracy Index*, p. 249.

19 Army Radio, http://glz.co.il/NewsArticle.aspx?newsid=92824.

20 "Preferences: Gilad Shalit Competes with 'Big Brother' for Your Attention," *Akhbar Ha'ir*, December 4, 2009, http://www.mouse.co.il/CM.articles_item,1318,209,42791,.aspx.

21 Gad Yair, "Ron Arad and the New Israelis in Israel," *Haaretz*, October 16, 2011, http://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/1.1567286.

Barack Obama and the Middle East Three Years On

Mark A. Heller

Few American presidents in recent years have taken office with such an ambitious Middle Eastern or, indeed, global agenda as did Barack Obama in early 2009. At first glance, that was rather surprising given that the American voters who elected him were almost exclusively preoccupied with the financial and economic crisis afflicting the country since 2008; that foreign affairs played practically no part in the election campaign; and that Obama himself had virtually no history of involvement in foreign policy during his brief career in national politics before putting himself forward as a presidential candidate. However, Obama also inherited from his predecessor, George W. Bush, a host of serious problems that he could not ignore – declining international confidence in American leadership; rampant anti-Americanism in the Middle East, and even among American's traditional allies elsewhere; and ongoing involvement in two ground wars as well as the borderless war against terrorism – all of which both posed security challenges and impinged directly or indirectly on the prospects for global and local economic recovery. Consequently, he immediately embarked on a series of initiatives under the overarching theme of "engagement" that aimed to enhance America's reputation and restore its popularity around the world. Engagement was pursued across a broad front and directed at a variety of targets, but it particularly addressed audiences in the Muslim world by focusing on issues in and about the Middle East.

As the US enters another presidential (and Congressional) electoral season, there are some indications of economic recovery. These as yet are tentative and erratic, and thus the state of the economy remains the

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primary concern of most Americans and most American politicians. Nevertheless, Republican aspirants have invested some of their time in criticizing Obama's foreign policy performance, especially in the Middle East. Administration spokespeople have in turn naturally defended it, and the material for a three-year balance sheet is beginning to emerge.

Leading Middle East Action Items

By the absolutist standards of his most idealistic disciples at the beginning of this three-year period or of his most outraged detractors at the end of it, Obama has clearly failed. He has not established Jeffersonian democracy in Iraq, Afghanistan, or anywhere else in the region; he has not produced an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement; he has not disarmed Iran; and he has not made America universally respected, loved, feared, and obeyed. Perfectionists – and not just Republicans on the campaign trail – may therefore be tempted to label him a colossal failure.[1] However, by the more reasonable standards of previous administrations or of what is feasible in the real world, the record is more ambiguous.

If there is a single conclusion that most closely approximates a "bottom line" in the balance sheet, it is that Obama's outreach has produced modest results, except, ironically, with respect to the one objective that was conspicuously underplayed at the outset of his tenure but was seen as the signature feature of his predecessor's Middle East policy – democratization. Even there, the achievement was palpable only with respect to a necessary precondition for democratization – the weakening or removal of autocratic regimes – and only to a limited degree could be attributed to the actions of the administration. There was not much evidence in early 2012 that the downfall of autocratic rulers was actually precipitating the emergence of democratic political cultures and systems. The implicit assumption behind the optimistic response to the outbreak of anti-regime upheavals in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, encapsulated in the very term "Arab spring," was that such an evolution would occur. But subsequent developments point to the distinct possibility that it is Islamist forces that are best poised to profit from these developments, and while Islamism may indeed enjoy more widespread support than did the dictators whose overthrow made it possible for it to flourish, the new order may ultimately prove just as illiberal as the old, and even less protective of minorities and women. In

short, the initial sympathy for the unprecedented wave of popular, anti-regime activism was soon followed by growing concern that the Arab spring might actually mutate into an Islamist winter.

Still, an opening for democratization, however contingent, did at least emerge. That harbinger of possible positive change was not matched in most of the issue-areas to which Obama had explicitly dedicated himself. In Iraq, conditions enabling an orderly American withdrawal seemed at first glance to have prevailed. There were recurrent incidents of sectarian violence in Iraq but attacks against coalition forces declined precipitously. Moreover, Iraqi government performance settled into some modicum of routine, and a semi-autonomous administration functioned smoothly in Iraqi Kurdistan. Obama succeeded in fulfilling the obligation undertaken by Bush (and ratified by Obama) to end active combat operations of American forces in Iraq by August 2010 and to withdraw them entirely by the end of 2011. That gratified American voters, who approved of the withdrawal by a margin of three to one. This success, however, was the result of a unilateral decision, and could not be replicated if associated measures to consolidate it depended on the cooperation of others. Thus the United States was unable to secure agreement for an ongoing advisory and training presence. Even more critically, serious reservations remained about the capacity of Iraq to sustain a stable and secure democracy following the American departure, given growing doubts about the construction of an inclusive Iraqi national identity, some contentious issues that remained unresolved (e.g., agreed division of oil revenues), and the willingness of Iraqi governments to pursue policies that did not subvert other American interests in the region, given the proximity and influence of Iran. A hint of Iraq's future regional orientation may have already came in its abstention on the resolution to suspend Syrian membership in the Arab League or to join in the sanctions imposed on that country.

Similar uncertainty attended the course of events in Afghanistan. Although Obama had endorsed the operation in Afghanistan as a "war of necessity" (in contrast to the "war of choice" in Iraq that he had consistently opposed), the prosecution of the war during his first year in office unfolded in a similarly discouraging manner, with high casualties, increasingly brazen challenges by the Taliban, and unimpressive progress in the buildup of local security forces. In response, Obama initiated a

protracted reassessment of strategy and ultimately opted for the same solution adopted by Bush in Iraq – a "surge" aimed at extending central authority and buying time for the ultimate handover of responsibility to the Afghan government. The strategy did produce some positive results: the buildup and training of the Afghan National Army proceeded apace, Taliban sanctuaries were increasingly brought under government/coalition control, and insurgent attacks declined by about 25 percent in 2011. All of this permitted Obama to begin drawing down forces and reaffirm his commitment to end combat involvement in Afghanistan by 2014. However, as in Iraq, the durability of whatever intensive involvement by the American-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) had achieved remained highly questionable because of the persistence of sectarian violence and skepticism about the integrity and even viability of the central Afghan government following the end of ISAF's combat role (and Hamid Karzai's term of office). Moreover, much of the progress on the ground was purchased by operations to deny Taliban sanctuary across the border in Pakistan, especially by means of drone attacks. But the collateral damage produced by those attacks (together with accusations of Pakistani duplicity) resulted in a serious deterioration in US-Pakistani relations, raising concerns that whatever Afghan vulnerabilities remain after 2014 might be exploited by Pakistan to quickly undo whatever gains may be in place when the US war in Afghanistan comes to an end.

Iran

If this review of developments with respect to democratization, Iraq, and Afghanistan arguably sustains a conclusion that "the jury is still out," the same cannot be said of the other major items on Obama's Middle East agenda. The most prominent of those items with direct national security implications was Iran. Obama reiterated the commitment he inherited from Bush not to allow Iran to acquire a nuclear military capability. His initial approach, however, was to pursue this objective through engagement. Thus, Obama made a number of conciliatory gestures, referring respectfully to the Islamic Republic, sending Iranian New Year greetings to the Iranian people, and even refraining from expressing any support for or encouragement of the Green Movement that emerged to

protest the fraudulent reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in mid-2009 and went on to mount a serious challenge to the regime.

However, when the "open hand" that Obama extended in his inaugural address was answered with a "clenched fist," the President switched to a different tack. The United States coordinated some international economic sanctions and unilaterally imposed others of an even more stringent nature. It was also assumed, or at least suspected, of being involved in some active measures, such as the cybernetic and/or kinetic sabotage of nuclear-related facilities and the elimination of some individuals involved in the nuclear weapons program. Nevertheless, Obama was unable to mobilize comprehensive international support for what Secretary of State Hillary Clinton once termed "crippling" sanctions despite efforts to "engage" major global actors such as Russia, China, and Turkey. And he was unwilling until late 2011 − perhaps in response to escalating criticism by Republican presidential hopefuls − to take some of the most drastic unilateral economic measures urged on him by others (such as a complete break in dealings with the Central Bank of Iran), or to communicate the existence of a credible military threat if all other measures fell short. As a result of these actions, the Iranian nuclear weapons program suffered some setbacks and delays, the Iranian economy began to exhibit symptoms of serious stress (such as price inflation and currency devaluation), and the Iranian regime began to show signs of distinct nervousness. Still, there was little evidence to indicate that the nuclear program itself was paralyzed or even critically disrupted, and none at all to suggest that the regime was giving any serious consideration to the idea of abandoning it altogether.

The Israeli-Palestinian Process

Obama's efforts to promote an Israeli-Palestinian peace process were, if anything, even less productive. The advancement of Israeli-Palestinian peace was perhaps the most important substantive component of his Middle Eastern agenda as well as its symbolic centerpiece − apparently on the assumption that the American approach to this issue was a major, if not the major irritant in American relations with the Arab and Muslim worlds as well as with many of America's European allies. Obama therefore began to address it from his first full day in office and become personally involved, if only to preempt the accusation leveled against all

of his predecessors that they had done too little and acted too late. This involvement included pressure on Prime Minister Netanyahu to adopt positions that did not deviate materially from the policy preferences of previous American administrations but was applied in a manner that resulted in considerable friction between Obama and Netanyahu. It did, however, lead to some noteworthy concessions by Netanyahu, including a highly publicized affirmation of the principle that the conflict should be resolved on the basis of two states for two peoples and a ten-month moratorium on settlement construction. Nine months into the moratorium, PLO Chairman and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas was induced − or coerced − to restart negotiations that had been suspended since late 2008, but after less than a month of futile and aimless contacts, Abbas refused to continue unless Netanyahu extended the moratorium and accepted terms of reference, especially on territory, proposed by the Palestinians. Those conditions may well have been unacceptable to Netanyahu's coalition under any circumstances, but the chances of their being endorsed were certainly not helped by Obama's inability to secure any rhetorical concessions from Abbas, particularly a reciprocal commitment to the principled formula of two states for two peoples, or even any modest confidence building measures by other Arab states.

The US continued to urge a resumption of negotiations, sometimes unilaterally and sometimes through the Quartet mechanism, but by mid 2011, enthusiasm for ongoing and intense American involvement in what was increasingly referred to as the "so-called" peace process was clearly waning. It was not clear whether this was the result of a growing appreciation of the complexities of what at the outset might have seemed a fairly straightforward task; frustration that Obama − notwithstanding engagement with the Arab/Muslim world and willingness to confront Israel − was no more able than his predecessors to bridge persistent gaps between Israeli and Palestinian positions; distraction by the dramatic events grouped under the rubric of the "Arab spring"; or greater sensitivity to domestic political considerations as America began to move toward the 2012 election campaign. If the explanation is exclusively or even primarily domestic politics, then it is possible that Obama, if reelected, will re-launch a vigorous effort on this front in 2013. If the explanation is a combination of all of the above factors, then future American policy

– whether under Obama or under a Republican president – may well be less proactive.

Of course, it could be argued that Obama's demarche at the beginning of his administration was a serious misstep that, by making it impossible for the Palestinians to appear more flexible than the United States, virtually guaranteed the stalemate that followed. However, it is also the case that it did not precipitate a stalemate. That was something that Obama inherited from the inability of Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to reach agreement during their negotiations and by Abbas' suspension of further contacts in response to Operation Cast Lead in late 2008. In any case, it is impossible to know whether a different administration or a different approach by this administration would have made any substantial difference. All that can be said with some certainty is that after three years of striving for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement or at least what might look like a viable peace process, Obama's reach continued to exceed his grasp.

The Attempt to Rebrand America

Still, one might have expected that the very act of trying would earn Obama some political credit in Arab/Muslim eyes (even as it raised doubts about him in Israel and among Israel's supporters – Jewish and non-Jewish – in the United States). However, that objective also remained elusive. Obama's activism on the Israeli-Palestinian issue was part of the broader effort at engagement that was intended to rebrand America and rehabilitate its reputation. Other components of engagement included a drastic revision of America's diplomatic lexicon that eliminated references to the "war on terror" or even the concept of "terrorism" itself and excised any terms connoting a religious connection to America's newly defined enemy – "violent extremism" – in order to avoid offending Muslim sensibilities. Instead, the administration consciously stressed shared Muslim-American values, interests, and history. The chief spokesman for this kind of public diplomacy was the President himself, who conveyed the message personally on a number of

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high profile visits to Muslim capitals, including Ankara, Riyadh, Cairo, and Jakarta.

The pursuit of popularity was not necessarily a foreign policy end in itself. Favorable views of the United States would certainly make it less uncomfortable for American diplomats to interact with their counterparts in other countries, but the real driver was probably the expectation that more congenial atmospherics would dispose foreign governments to comply more willingly with American policy preferences. How much such "soft power" is actually translated into policy formulations remains an open question, but the fact remains that while Obama's approach did enhance America's standing in many other countries outside the Middle East, especially in Europe (where George W. Bush's reputation was toxic), it failed to make much of an impression among those publics that were its primary target.

On the specific issue with the most immediate security implications, a variety of attitudinal surveys in Muslim countries indicate that hopes that the Obama presidency would offer a brake on social support for jihadist violence "have proven to be a mirage."[2] More generally, perceptions of American policy, the United States, the American people, and Obama himself range from indifferent to extremely negative. The October 2011 University of Maryland Annual Public Opinion Survey (carried out in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates) found that while 26 percent of respondents had a very favorable or somewhat favorable attitude toward the United States (as opposed to 15 percent in 2009) and 56 percent had a somewhat or very unfavorable attitude (as opposed to 84 percent in 2009), positive views of the President himself had declined to 34 percent (from 39 percent in 2009) and negative views had risen to 43 percent (from 24 percent in 2009). Moreover, only 20 percent remained hopeful about Obama's Middle East policy (vs. 47 percent in 2009) and 52 percent were discouraged (as opposed to only 15 percent in 2009).

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Pew Foundation findings were even less encouraging. The 2011 survey of 22 Middle Eastern and South Asian states exposed highly unfavorable views of the United States in Egypt (79 percent – higher than the 75

percent recorded in the last year of Bush's administration), Jordan (84 percent), Turkey (75 percent), and Pakistan (75 percent). Of course, all such surveys need to be treated with a certain degree of skepticism. The Pew project indicated that 17 percent of Egyptian respondents preferred that the Muslim Brotherhood lead the next government, whereas actual results in the parliamentary elections there gave the Brotherhood closer to 50 percent of the vote; the University of Maryland survey suggested that roughly a third of voters would support an "Islamic party," whereas the Muslim Brotherhood and the more radical Nour Party actually polled more than twice as many votes.[3] But even allowing for some reservations about the accuracy of such surveys, most of the evidence tends to confirm the broad-brush conclusion that Obama-style engagement has signally failed to improve America's standing in most of the Arab/Muslim world.

On the specific question of general perceptions of America, the most plausible explanation for Obama's failure, at least in Arab countries, appears to lie in the salience of the US-Israel relationship. The 2011 University of Maryland survey, for example, revealed that 46 percent pointed to Palestine/Israel as the single issue in US policy that most disappointed them, more than all the other issues combined (Iraq, attitudes toward Islam, Afghanistan, human rights, democracy, and economic assistance). Moreover, 55 percent mentioned an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and 42 percent suggested stopping aid to Israel as one of two steps that would most improve their view of the United States. But such conditions set a standard that no US president can realistically be expected to meet, because the content of the peace agreement that the US would be required to deliver goes far beyond what even Western governments more sympathetic to the Palestinians, not to speak of the US (much less Israel) have ever endorsed. For example, the same Maryland survey showed 37 percent of respondents citing the "right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes" as the single most central issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, more than either a fully independent contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza or Arab sovereignty over East Jerusalem.[4] This context points to a

> Most of the evidence tends to confirm the broad-brush conclusion that Obama-style engagement has signally failed to improve America's standing in most of the Arab/Muslim world.

rather perverse aspect of popularity, i.e., not as an end in itself but rather as a dimension of "soft power": the ability to encourage others to comply with American preferences requires the United States to comply with their preferences. That is a dilemma that Obama has not resolved any more did any of his predecessors or, it is probably safe to predict, will any of his successors.

Moreover, Obama himself was not dogmatically committed to his initial approach. Engagement was posited as the antithesis of the belligerent unilateralism widely but simplistically attributed to the Bush administration (especially in its second term) that had so compromised America's standing in the world. However, the administration quickly internalized the understanding that engagement needed to be supplemented by pragmatism and the use of various other tools, including those taken from the repertoire of administrations never accused of naiveté or appeasement. Thus, Obama implemented a surge in Afghanistan and expanded the use of cross-border drone strikes in Pakistan, ratcheted up the pressure on Iran, approved the targeted assassination, i.e., extra-judicial killing, of prominent terrorists (including Osama Bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen), and put in place an enhanced homeland security system that thwarted several serious attempted terrorist attacks on American soil. None of this suggests that any failures to achieve foreign and security objectives stemmed simply from Obama's inhibitions about the use of hard power.

> The explanation for Obama's seeming inability to make serious headway on the subjects of material concern to him in the Middle East resides less in any fundamental misunderstanding of the world grounded in a community organizer's propensity to rely on soft power and more in the intrinsic limits of American power.

The Limits of Power

In fact, the explanation for Obama's seeming inability to make serious headway on the subjects of material concern to him in the Middle East (and elsewhere) resides less in any fundamental misunderstanding of the world grounded in a community organizer's propensity to rely on soft power and more in the intrinsic limits of American power. The United States retains military power unmatched by any potential adversary or combination of adversaries in the Middle East.

That power is sufficient to overwhelm regional military forces and destroy hostile regimes, which it did in Iraq, Afghanistan, and even Libya. But the application of military force depends on the existence of political will, which in turn depends at least in part on the appearance of multilateral legitimacy and partly on the conviction that military force will produce not only destructive but also constructive results at a reasonable cost. The experience of Iraq and Afghanistan has undermined confidence that the latter result will ensue, and there is therefore diminished enthusiasm for further such exercises – which is why the United States chose to "lead from behind" in Libya.

And apart from military force, which is beginning to be constrained by economic exigencies and is in any event not applicable to most of the challenges facing the United States, there are simply not that many effective instruments in the American tool box. Israeli-Arab peace negotiations could be usefully shepherded by the United States (more than by any other international actor) if there is a strong and urgent underlying desire by both parties to reach a peace agreement, but that has not been the case. Nation-building can be assisted (even by military means) if the rudiments of an overarching national identity exist, but it is questionable whether that is truly the case in Iraq and Afghanistan (or Yemen or Libya), notwithstanding the proclivity of American spokesmen to conflate the terms "nation" and "state." And democratization can be encouraged by a clearer signal that the United States is no longer on the side of the old order (even if withdrawal of support for authoritarian rulers is interpreted by other authoritarian rulers to mean that America is no longer a reliable partner) and by technical and financial support for institution-building.[5]

Still, such measures are likely to have a perceptible, near term impact only if the underlying socio-political culture includes some receptivity to ideas of pluralism, tolerance, and sovereignty of the individual, and that is also not always the case. At best, there is only the embryo of such a culture, embodied by the more secular middle class younger generation who first took to the streets of Tunis and Cairo and captured the imagination of people in the West before they began to be eclipsed by other, perhaps more deeply-rooted social formations in their societies. The embryo of that culture might still develop in a manner congenial to liberal democracy, but if it does, it will not be because of engineering

by American soldiers, economists, social workers, intellectuals, or presidents, either Barack Obama or whoever might succeed him in office.

Notes

1   See, for example, Barry Rubin, "Navigating the New Middle East? The Obama Administration is Lost at Sea and on the Rocks," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 15, no. 4 (December 2011).

2   Gordon L. Bowen, "Has Outreach to the Muslim World by the Obama Administration had an Impact on Muslim Attitudes toward Terrorists and Terrorism?" *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 15, no. 1 (March 2011): 65.

3   True, it could be argued that the surveys more accurately reflect real opinion and that the election results were manipulated, as some Egyptian opponents of the Brotherhood and Nour have argued.

4   Nor was it even clear that an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement would suffice to salvage America's popularity. The Maryland survey showed that while 35 percent of Egyptian respondents now favor canceling the peace treaty with Israel (with 37 percent in favor of maintaining it), Israeli agreement to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital would reduce support for canceling the peace treaty by only 4 percent – to 31 percent – and raise the number supporting maintenance to only 41 percent.

5   For an example of how this course could and should be pursued, see Kenneth M. Pollack, "America's Second Chance and the Arab Spring," *Foreign Policy* 5 (December 2011).

Israel and the Palestinian Authority: When Parallel Lines Might Converge

Anat Kurz

Skepticism regarding the chances of formulating an historic compromise, fostered by a long series of failures to achieve this end, has eroded the willingness of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to return to the negotiating table. In recent years, differences between the sides on opening conditions for talks, and indeed, the very purpose of the talks, have magnified this fundamental obstacle to resumption of the dialogue. The PA demanded, inter alia, a complete freeze on Israeli construction in the West Bank as a condition for returning to negotiations, and it also demanded that discussions begin with the question of borders. Israel, for its part, has called for a resumption of dialogue without preconditions, although it has also demanded that the issue of security arrangements be placed at the top of the agenda. Looking ahead, it has conditioned the conclusion of an agreement on Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. In January 2012, meetings were held between Israeli representatives and the PA, hosted by Jordan and sponsored by the Quartet, for the purpose of finding common ground for resuming the talks. However, it is doubtful that these meetings will evolve to become formative milestones on the road to breaking the prolonged stalemate and settling the conflict.

The impasse has commonly been dubbed a "political freeze." Nevertheless, the word "freeze" is far from describing relations between Israel and the Palestinians. Indeed, the conflict theater is as dynamic as ever, notwithstanding the lack of progress toward a settlement and the decelerated pace of the PA's march toward international recognition of

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Palestinian independence. Ironically, it is precisely the political stalemate that has clarified issues that Israel and the Palestinians should have a joint interest in addressing and rethinking.

Deadlock

In recent years the Palestinian Authority, in its stronghold in the West Bank, has concentrated on construction and rehabilitation in key areas, namely, security, economics, and governance. This undertaking, which is supported by extensive international economic and institutional aid, is intended to strengthen the PA's domestic position. Through its achievements, the PA has sought to demonstrate to residents of both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that it is able to offer them a better present and greater hope for the future, certainly more than what Hamas is offering to the population under its control. At the same time, in the absence of a basis for restarting concrete negotiations with Israel, the PA pinned its hopes on the international community and initiated a well-orchestrated campaign to garner international support for Palestinian independence.

The Palestinian Authority submitted a request on this matter to the United Nations when the General Assembly met in September 2011. The request was intended to demonstrate political activity and create a fresh basis for international pressure on Israel, which would perhaps even include an attempt to impose a settlement on Israel.[1] If this were to happen, the PA would be freed from the need to justify concessions to Israel in the face of the expected public protest at home. Indeed, even agreeing to borders on the basis of the 1967 lines and the division of Jerusalem is likely to be interpreted as an historic concession that the PA is not authorized or entitled to make. Nonetheless, the PA was forced to acknowledge that the request to the Security Council to recognize a Palestinian state would not be approved, at least not at the current time.[2] In the months preceding the General Assembly meeting, Israeli diplomacy focused on frustrating the PA's intention to bring the recognition issue to a vote. However, the Palestinians' disappointment was not an Israeli achievement, rather, the result of opposition by the US administration and its intention to veto any positive decision on the matter.

At the same time that the government of Israel attempted to thwart the Palestinian Authority's diplomatic ambitions, it was careful to

maintain ongoing security cooperation with Palestinian security forces operating in the West Bank. This cooperation focused on the battle against opposition forces that were seeking to escalate the conflict with Israel, mainly Hamas activists. Israel continued to support economic development in the West Bank, further cultivating Benjamin Netanyahu's "economic peace" option, which is supposed to quell the impetus toward a violent struggle. Even so, this policy did not soften the criticism Israel received for the obstacles it placed in the way of reviving the dialogue with the Palestinian Authority. And indeed, Israel was the main target of the international demand to resume the dialogue. Though the pressure was felt even before the wave of popular uprisings in the Middle East began in late 2010, it increased because of the turmoil, which intensified international interest in stabilizing the region. In this context, both Israel and the Palestinian Authority were asked to return to the negotiating table and thereby do their part to reduce points of regional friction.

When Palestinian momentum at the UN slowed down, there was a sense in the international arena that hopes of reinvigorating the Israeli-Palestinian political process had ebbed. Since the failure of the proximity talks between Israel and the PA, launched under American auspices in 2008 and broken off when war between Israel and Hamas erupted in Gaza in late 2008, the Obama administration has avoided proposing a formal program for negotiations. It can be assumed that it will continue to do so – especially during a presidential campaign – as long as sweeping Arab support for negotiations is not assured, and certainly as long as a breakthrough in relations between Israel and the PA is not assured. The Quartet has not presented a new negotiations proposal either, but on September 23, 2011, toward the end of the General Assembly, it issued a call to the sides to restart the dialogue within three months. The Palestinian Authority responded by expressing willingness to suspend actions in international forums to give resumption of negotiations a chance, though in practice its contacts with international bodies continued. For his part, Prime Minister Netanyahu answered the call by confirming Israel's readiness to return to the negotiating table.[3] And indeed, in early 2012, toward the end of the period allocated by the Quartet for renewing negotiations, representatives of the sides met in Amman. This meeting, the first in a series whose purpose was to formulate a joint platform for dialogue and which ended a period of some three years of severed

contact between the sides, did not raise expectations of real progress toward a settlement. In the background could be heard the declaration by Mahmoud Abbas that the Palestinian Authority does not intend to forego a freeze on settlements as a condition for resuming the dialogue, and that in light of the failure of the Quartet-sponsored talks, the PA would intensify its diplomatic and legal moves in the international arena.[4]

In any case, it appears that the heightened regional instability, the rising power of the masses in Middle Eastern countries, and the rapid increase in the strength of political Islam in the region have only made the conditions under which Israel and the Palestinian Authority might once again attempt to break the deadlock much more difficult. Beyond ideological dictates and political reservations, the fear that public protest will erupt among the Palestinians, inspired by the assertiveness shown by the masses in neighboring countries, will make it difficult for the PA to retreat from rigid bargaining positions. The government of Israel will likewise find it difficult to approve additional territorial redeployment in the West Bank. Its willingness to take electoral risks by executing a withdrawal and an evacuation of settlements, which in any case is limited, will be further reduced by the fear that security threats will be exacerbated by regional radicalization. The Arab regimes' awareness of the strength of the "street" and the proven attractiveness of political Islam are expected to limit their willingness to back a settlement. This would be the case even if the PA responded favorably to an international demand or to a pragmatic call by Israel to return to the negotiating table.

> Despite threats that if there is no concrete progress toward independence the PA will be dismantled and will abandon the West Bank to total Israeli control, the PA's ongoing efforts to consolidate its domestic power as well as its international standing are not consistent with any sign of self-dissolution.

Status Report

With the loss of momentum in the international arena, the Palestinian Authority continued to invest most of its resources in rehabilitating institutions in the West Bank. These efforts are underway both in preparation for future sovereignty and as political ammunition for the PA, as its copes with the erosion in its position given the bleak political horizon. Indeed, from time to time Palestinian

spokesmen have threatened that if there is no concrete progress toward independence the PA will be dismantled and will abandon the West Bank to total Israeli control.[5] Nevertheless, the PA's ongoing efforts to consolidate its domestic power as well as its international standing are not consistent with any sign of self-dissolution. Like any state authority or political party, the Palestinian Authority does not represent only an ideological idea or political strategy; it is a body that also unites personal and organizational interests, especially those of Fatah. Dismantling the PA would constitute an admission of an historic failure, with a high personal and collective price.[6]

Efforts by the Palestinian Authority to regulate its relations with Hamas should be seen in this light. The agreement of understandings between Fatah and Hamas was formulated under Egyptian auspices and signed in Cairo in May 2011. The so-called "national reconciliation" agreement was a fundamental prescription for institutional coordination between the rival camps, which are far from genuine reconciliation and are determined to continue to vie for supremacy among the Palestinians. The understandings they reached focused on the intention to establish a temporary government that would prepare for elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council and the presidency, that is, to test, through elections, the balance of power between Fatah and Hamas as it has taken shape in recent years. By means of the election plan, the PA sought to strengthen its democratic image in preparation for the UN vote.

Given the delay in the Palestinian Authority's moves at the UN, the PA once again senses the indispensability of its popular support base, which set in motion past attempts to regulate inter-organizational relationships. Furthermore, as a result of the political impasse and the harsh international criticism of Israel, the PA leadership assessed correctly that its international standing would not be harmed by a rapprochement with Hamas. As for Hamas, its political leadership assessed that institutional coordination with the Palestinian Authority will aid it in extending its influence beyond the borders of the Gaza Strip.[7] At the same time, the weakening of the Bashar al-Assad regime and

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Hamas' fear of losing its stronghold in Damascus, which was validated in December 2011, prodded the organization to draw closer to Cairo and attempt to use the increasing strength of the Islamic camp in Egypt to consolidate its position. Hamas therefore agreed to the Egyptian demand to sign understandings with Fatah.

Nonetheless, it is doubtful that the rival camps will succeed in coordinating with each other in a way that will allow elections to be held in May 2012 as scheduled.[8] Mahmoud Abbas demanded that Salam Fayyad remain head of the provisional government in order to continue to control the division of Palestinian Authority resources. This same interest was the basis for Hamas' opposition to the demand. Aside from the dispute on this issue, it is expected that both sides will be deterred from holding elections by their inability to assure their own victory. It was international players, mainly the United States and the European Union, eager to see Palestinian institutional reform and democratization, which urged the PA to hold elections in January 2006. Yet this time it appears that external actors, excluding Egypt, will not insist that elections be held as long as they are not convinced that Fatah, which is committed to the political process, will form the next government.

Even if elections are held, their results and the prospects of establishing a national unity government are difficult to predict. In 2006, Fatah rejected the Hamas offer to join the government because it meant transferring the Ministry of the Interior, that is, control of the PA's security apparatus, to Hamas. The unity government established in 2007 under pressure from Egypt and Saudi Arabia was short lived because disputes between the camps, including over relations with Israel and the political process, continued, and they overshadowed the benefits inherent in institutional coordination. Hamas' determination to reject the Quartet's preconditions for dialogue – recognition of Israel, cessation of violence, and recognition of agreements signed in the past between Israel and the PLO – prevented the unity government from formulating a political platform that would allow the resumption of negotiations with Israel. The resulting Israeli and international boycott of the Palestinian Authority brought about the end of the government. Yet again, it is most likely that establishment of both a provisional government that will prepare for elections in 2012 and a government based on election results will be delayed.

For his part, Abbas informed representatives of Palestinian factions that the establishment of a provisional government was dependent on the Quartet's agreement, that is, on eliminating the danger of a boycott of the PA. He also expressed reservations about the prospects of a unity government with Hamas, lest it provide Israel with another justification, as he put it, for the absence of political contact.[9] In turn, Hamas political bureau head Khaled Mashal declared that from now on the organization's activists would focus on the popular struggle. However, the denial by a Hamas spokesman that a decision had been made to change the movement's modus operandi testified to the growing friction between the wing headed by Mashal, based outside of Gaza, and the Gaza-based leadership under Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. In January 2012 the Hamas leadership announced that Mashal planned to resign from the Hamas leadership, and subsequently – and without coordinating with the Haniyeh camp – Mashal agreed to appoint Abbas as head of the provisional government. Further evidence of the evolving rivalry and controversy in Hamas ranks was a declaration by Mahmoud a-Zahar. According to a-Zahar, in contrast to the message originating with Fatah to the effect that Mashal and Abbas had agreed that the struggle against Israel would continue by non-violent means in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Hamas did not intend to cease the violent struggle in Gaza and from Gaza.[10] Moreover, while Abbas stated that Hamas and Fatah had agreed to pursue establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, Haniyeh declared there was no change in the organization's guiding strategic goal. Haniyeh thus reinforced the concern that from Hamas' point of view, establishment of a Palestinian state would be nothing more than a step on the way to implementing the strategy of stages in the struggle against Israel. In so doing, he added a stumbling block on the path to establishing a Palestinian government that includes Hamas but would still be a candidate for negotiations.[11]

Israeli spokespersons, like their Palestinian counterparts, have repeatedly assigned responsibility for the break in the political process to the other side. In addition, Israel countered the PA's moves with measures of a punitive nature. Israel's response to the plan for institutional coordination between Fatah and Hamas was to stop the transfer of tax revenues to the PA, though the funds were released under international pressure after the EU expressed its willingness to compensate the PA

for losses it would incur because of the delay in the payments. Prime Minister Netanyahu and other spokesmen also warned that Israel would take unilateral measures in response to international recognition of a Palestinian state. In keeping with this line, Israel's response to the PA's acceptance into UNESCO in October 2011 was again to stop the transfer of tax revenues, although they were released following international criticism and under pressure from the United States.[12] Building permits for projects in the Jerusalem area issued in November 2011 were likewise presented as a unilateral response to the PA's unilateral application to UNESCO. However, the government of Israel retracted this statement because of its absurdity; after all, building in the West Bank has continued for years, whether there was a political process or not and irrespective of the PA's ties with international institutions.[13] The issue reappeared in the headlines in December 2011, following another report about the Housing Ministry's intention to expand construction beyond the Green Line, including in Jerusalem. As a result of international condemnation, a denial was again issued about the connection between construction and the PA's diplomatic moves, with the addition of the familiar statement that building would continue in neighborhoods that will remain under Israeli sovereignty according to any realistic outline of a future settlement.[14]

Points of Convergence?

Israel and the Palestinian Authority repeatedly stress their fundamental commitment to a permanent settlement based on the partition of mandatory Palestine into two states. Yet public opinion considerations and political calculations, in addition to security and economic concerns, feed the perception on both sides that the gaps in their positions are insurmountable, which delays the resumption of purposeful dialogue between them. As a result, it appears that both Israel and the PA are acting contrary to their stated intentions and their strategic interests, at least on the level of formal pronouncements.

The longer the deadlock continues and the longer a Palestinian state is not established, the more Israel distances itself from what it demands that the PA recognize as a condition for an agreement: Israel as a Jewish state.[15] Furthermore, the continuing centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the regional agenda threatens Israel with a deterioration in relations with Arab states and reduces the chance of establishing

constructive ties with them, even on the basis of a cold peace and non-belligerence. Although the lack of progress in the political process is not at the top of Israel's public agenda, the government's approach to this issue is a target of harsh political and media criticism. Israel is also risking further erosion in its international standing by maintaining its image as the party that refuses concessions and rejects a settlement.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority clings to rigid opening conditions for negotiations, which delay its path to an independent state. Its inability to change the political reality, whether through negotiations with Israel or through the UN, threatens it with a loss of domestic authority and standing, as well as the loss of international status. After all, the legal basis for its existence and its political legitimacy is commitment to a compromise that will involve establishment of a Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders. The PA also needs negotiations with Israel, even if it is only a dialogue concluding with partial understandings and a "shelf plan," to realize the promise of independence and garner public support, which would obstruct Hamas' drive to become the supreme Palestinian ruling authority.

Thus, domestic-political, diplomatic-international, and long term strategic considerations should guide the government of Israel and the PA to keep their commitment to a settlement and to direct dialogue on the agenda. In order for declarations of intention on this issue not to lose their significance and their power of persuasion, Israel and the PA would do well to help each other return to the negotiating table.

> Domestic-political, diplomatic-international, and long term strategic considerations should guide Israel and the PA to keep their commitment to a settlement on the agenda and help each other return to the negotiating table.

As became clear yet again in the meetings in Amman in January 2012, it is difficult to overcome basic differences. The two sides will therefore have to focus on strengthening the security and economic arrangements that have served as the basis of their interaction in recent years, with a not-insignificant degree of consistency and success, and give them renewed public affirmation. This would validate the interim situation that has been ongoing for years, and on a daily basis is apparently not entirely uncomfortable for both sides. Given the PA's fundamental opposition to

the term "interim" and to the idea of an "interim agreement," especially one not anchored in a binding plan and a timetable for a permanent settlement, it would be a mistake for Israel to insist on calling it by this name and would, in fact, invite rejection.

Moreover, it is possible that a gesture by Israel, first and foremost, a "quiet" freeze on construction in the West Bank and Jerusalem – or at least ensuring that this issue assumes a much lower profile on the public agenda – as well as the transfer of territories to PA control and the release of political prisoners, would reduce the motivation for an uprising on the Palestinian street and soften international criticism against Israel for its conduct in the West Bank and toward the PA.[16] Should Israel offer gestures without a direct stipulation of a return gesture from the Palestinian Authority, this would aid in quieting public protest against the PA for cooperation with Israel, which is interpreted as surrender without assurance of a political gain.

Given the political deadlock, it is difficult to assume that Palestinian pursuit of independence will be removed from the international agenda, or that in the absence of a breakthrough in the negotiations, the PA will forego its international initiative. Furthermore, it is possible that even if the regular dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian representatives is resumed, such as the talks that began in January 2012 in Amman, the PA will nonetheless pursue its diplomatic momentum. Therefore, the government of Israel would do well to reexamine the issue of international recognition of a Palestinian state and focus on the negotiating advantages that might be provided by a declared Palestinian state's need to conduct negotiations to implement concrete sovereignty and become sustainable. By joining the international support for Palestinian independence, especially while updating existing agreements and presenting them as intended to promote realization of the idea, Israel would lessen the international pressure it faces and allow the resumption of negotiations. This policy would also aid Israel in mobilizing international support for its positions on the contours of a permanent agreement and understanding for its reservations about Palestinian demands in this context.

Another interest Israel and the PA have in common is regulating relations between Fatah and Hamas. The political and security implications of the alternative are well known: a division into two Palestinian authorities, with the Hamas-led authority aspiring to

undermine the position of the authority headed by Fatah, through escalation in waves of violent conflict with Israel, among other methods.

As for the PA, it cannot continue for the long term to conduct itself as if it were the only authority among the Palestinians. Its efforts to push Hamas to the sidelines, like Israel's efforts, have thus far failed. This may be mainly because of the political impasse and the lack of political hope that would aid it in curbing the local Islamist wave, which is part of an accelerating regional trend resulting from the frustration of particularistic nationalist aspirations. And yet, progress toward national unity will not be without risks for the PA.

The Palestinian Authority will have to try to prevent Hamas from escalating the conflict with Israel, though its ability to influence Hamas is limited: Hamas' public standing is inferior to Fatah's, and Hamas is still based in a region that is cut off geographically, politically, and militarily from the Palestinian Authority.[17] If another round of conflict takes place between Israel and Hamas, the PA will be forced to choose between supporting Hamas, thereby lending further validity to its status, and opposing it (as it did during the late 2008-early 2009 war between Israel and Hamas). If it refrains from criticizing Hamas, it will perhaps score points among some in Israel, but it will risk public criticism at home. Moreover, adoption of Hamas' political dictates will end the chances to promote a permanent settlement and diminish international support for the PA. On the other hand, pronouncements on a commitment to a settlement not accompanied by progress in the political process will continue to arm Hamas in the battle for public opinion against the PA. Accordingly, the PA should soften its conditions for a return to the talks and thereby spur Israel – or more precisely, make it difficult for Israel to refuse – to return to the negotiating table, even if in the initial stage the agenda is limited to negotiations on resuming the negotiations.

The political and public opposition in Israel to the attempt at institutional coordination between the organizations and their joint intention to hold elections is understandable: Hamas rejects the principle of an agreed-upon permanent settlement, and there is a fear that it will grow stronger in the West Bank as well, with the threatening military aspects this entails. Yet this firm opposition also ignores the chance that integrating Hamas into the official Palestinian system would be a stage on the way to establishment of a functioning, legitimate national

authority. Over time, this authority would not be able to completely deny the need for legitimacy and international aid. Therefore, the possibility that its platform would include a willingness in principle to consider a permanent settlement with Israel should not be ruled out. Over time, and especially if this authority engages in purposeful negotiations with Israel, there would presumably be an erosion of the motivation of the Hamas leadership and activists to continue the violent struggle.

One could claim that unilateralism that brings together Israeli and Palestinian interests is also a possibility. Thus, the PA would continue to pursue international recognition of Palestinian independence, and Israel would reexamine the former convergence plan in the West Bank. If these plans are put into action, a new political-territorial situation will be created in the theater of conflict, which will seemingly exempt the sides from the need to confront difficult and complex problems with ideological, security, and political ramifications. Yet even if the Palestinian Authority declares unilateral independence, it will still need to coordinate with Israel lest it find itself without security and economic support. The socioeconomic tension that would then be created in the West Bank would be liable to ignite violence, which would loosen the PA's security and administrative hold over the area. The violence would also inevitably spill over to Israel. If Israel chooses unilateral withdrawal, it will accelerate its marginalization in the international consensus, since withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, which is a defined area, is not like withdrawal from the West Bank. Unilateral withdrawal from parts of the West Bank would likely not involve massive evacuation of settlements and would perforce not include a proposal for land swaps. Therefore, the move would be interpreted as abandonment of the path to an agreed-upon settlement and a step that will eliminate the chance to establish a Palestinian state with reasonable territorial contiguity. Unequivocal unilateralism is thus a problematic option rife with risks for both sides.

> Unequivocal unilateralism is a problematic option rife with risks for both sides.

Conclusion

In recent years, the rift between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has been limited to the political realm, and even with a political impasse,

the parties have maintained security and economic coordination. This ongoing cooperation can serve as a basis for restoring mutual trust. Later, with changes in the political atmosphere on both sides, it can also be a basis for resuming concrete negotiations. In order to allow matters to develop in this direction, both sides will need to keep channels of communication open, and from among the main bones of contention isolate those points where the parallel lines they pursue may converge.

First and foremost, Israel and the PA will need to expand their current agreements for conflict management and anchor them in official understandings, a kind of admission of the benefit they both reap from relative quiet. So that security stability in the West Bank will not continue to be an argument in favor of the status quo, rather a means of maintaining the relevancy of joint pursuit of fulfilling the idea of partitioning the land, Israel and the PA will need to take steps that show an intention to translate into action declarations on a willingness to promote a settlement. Israeli gestures to the Palestinians should demonstrate incipient changes in the situation. Similarly, it is up to the PA to soften its preconditions for resuming negotiations. Since the PA is expected to continue to mobilize international support for recognition of a Palestinian state, Israel ought to examine the possibility that such recognition would be a basis for future negotiations over borders and security arrangements with Israel. At the same time, since it will be difficult for the PA to pull back from a process of institutional rapprochement with Hamas, Israel should also attempt to examine intra-Palestinian reconciliation as a step that is likely to promote the establishment of a unified Palestinian national authority, which would be able to implement understandings, if and when they are concluded.

Notes

1   According to a public opinion poll, more than 80 percent of the respondents supported the PA's UN initiative. See Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) Poll No. 41, September 21, 2011.
2   "Palestinians Resigned to Defeat in UN Bid," *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 10, 2011.
3   *Quartet Statement*, New York, September 23, 2011, www.un.org/news/dh/infocus/middle_east/quartet-23spt2011.htm; Isabel Kershner, "Israel Supports Proposal to Restart Mideast Talks," *New York Times*, October 2, 2011; "Quartet's Efforts Futile without Settlement Halt, Says Official," *Palestine News and Info Agency*, October 26, 2011. On the PA's commitment to the

Quartet to suspend actions in international forums until the end of January 2012 as a gesture to the Quartet, see Barak Ravid, Avi Issacharoff, and Natasha Mozgovaya, "Palestinian Authority Plans Diplomatic Offensive against Israel," *Haaretz*, January 2, 2012.

4   "Abbas: All Options Open if Nothing Comes out of Quartet," *Palestinian News and Info Agency*, January 1, 2012; Barak Ravid, Nir Hasson, and Avi Issacharoff, "Erekat Gives Molho Documents with Palestinian Authority Positions on Borders and Security," *Haaretz*, January 4, 2012.

5   Ali el-Saleh, "Abbas to Dissolve Palestinian Authority," *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 30, 2011.

6   The Palestinian Authority proposed to the US administration a temporary suspension of moves in the UN in exchange for resumption of the transfer of tax monies, which were frozen by Israel in response to the PA's acceptance as a member of UNESCO in October 2011. See Barak Ravid, "PA to Israel: We'll Freeze Moves in the UN in Exchange for Transfer of Funds," *Haaretz*, November 17, 2011. This request, which in any case was not accompanied by a change in policy in the international arena, indicated nothing but an intention to survive. On the issue of the PA's economic difficulties, see David Brodet, "The Fragility of the Palestinian Economic Situation," in *Ramifications of the Palestinian Financial Crisis*, Bitterlemons.org., December 5, 2011.

7   "While Mr. Abbas Seeks a Virtual State at the UN, Hamas Controls a Real One," *Economist*, September 24, 2011; "Iran Reduces Funding to Hamas," *Middle East Newsline*, October 3, 2011.

8   Saleh al-Naami, "Al-Zahar: Inter-Palestinian Reconciliation will not Take Place because Abbas is not Serious about It," *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 30, 2011; "Factions Warn of 'Last Chance' ahead of Unity Talks," *Ma'an News Agency*, December 17, 2011; "Palestinian Factions Walk Out of Cairo Meeting," *Ma'an News Agency*, December 21, 2011.

9   Saleh al-Naami, "National Unity Gov't Formation depends on Quartet's Reply – Abbas," *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 26, 2011.

10   Avi Issacharoff, "The Hamas Spring," *Haaretz*, December 30, 2011; "Hamas Denies Reports of Ceasefire," *Ma'an News Agency*, January 1, 2012; "Hamas: Peaceful Resistance not Applicable to Gaza," *Ma'an News Agency*, January 4, 2012.

11   Itamar Marcus and Nan Jacques Zilberdik, "Hamas Leader Haniyeh: Goal is Destruction of Israel in Stages; Abbas: Hamas Agrees to 1967 Borders," *Palestinian Media Watch*, December 27, 2011.

12   Barak Ravid, "Clinton Personally Demands that Netanyahu Release Tax Monies to the Palestinians," *Haaretz*, November 23, 2011; Barak Ravid, "Forum of Eight Releases Funds to Palestinians," *Haaretz*, November 30, 2011.

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To Iraq and Back:
The Withdrawal of the US Forces

Ephraim Kam

"There will probably be unfinished business for many, many years to come."

Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, Commander,
United States Forces – Iraq, November 21, 2011

It is now final: the withdrawal of US military forces from Iraq was completed in late 2011. The US administration and military commanders in Iraq had hoped to leave several thousand soldiers there in order to continue to train and assist Iraqi security forces, especially in protecting the borders and airspace, separating the Kurdish area in the north from the Arab area, and gathering intelligence. This is also what most Iraqi leaders wanted, including Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite. Yet domestic US pressure and pressure from Iran precluded an agreement on the continued presence of US forces in Iraq, and in the fall of 2011 the Obama administration decided to remove the last of the forces – some 45,000 soldiers – by the end of the year.

The decision in principle to withdraw the forces from Iraq was taken in 2007, during the Bush administration. The years 2004–2007 were the most difficult ones in Iraq, with over 820 US soldiers and 20,000 Iraqi civilians killed in the course of each year. The multiple casualties strengthened the feeling in the United States that the occupation of Iraq was an error and its objectives were not fully achievable, which increased the pressure on the administration to end the Iraqi affair. Yet implementation of the decision was postponed for fear that what had been achieved would be erased, terrorism in Iraq and the surrounding area would increase, and

Dr. Ephraim Kam, Deputy Director of INSS

the United States would lose its credibility among its friends and enemies. Indeed, since 2007, US forces, with the assistance of Iraqi security forces, have succeeded in significantly reducing the level of violence in Iraq: the number of casualties among US forces has fallen from a peak of some 900 fatalities in 2007 to 54 in 2011, and the number of casualties among Iraqi civilians has declined from a high of 34,500 in 2007 to some 2,500 in 2010.[1] Thus, the military achievements, the decline in violence, the building of Iraqi security forces and their relatively successful integration into operational activity, and the start of construction of democratic institutions in Iraq gave rise to hope that the processes would continue, which enabled the withdrawal of forces. Against this backdrop, the United States and Iraq signed basic documents in November 2008 that defined the future of strategic relations between the two countries and determined that US forces would be withdrawn gradually from Iraq by the end of 2011.

Both Iraq and the United States paid a heavy price over the nine years. The United States lost some 4,500 soldiers in Iraq – only 160 of them during the conquest of the country and the rest afterwards – and some 32,000 were wounded. Other coalition forces suffered some 300 killed, most of them British. War expenditures are estimated at 900 billion to 1 trillion dollars. The results for Iraq are much more serious. The number of Iraqi citizens killed is estimated at 100,000–120,000, if not more, and some 10,000 members of the Iraqi security forces have been killed. The large majority of Iraqis killed were injured by Iraqi militias and organizations. The Iraqi economy has been damaged severely, and in spite of the country's oil wealth, its GDP per capita has fallen in rank to 158 in the world. Some 2.25 million Iraqis have fled the country, primarily to Jordan and Syria, and a similar number have been uprooted from their homes within Iraq.

The Iraqi Problem: The Level of Violence

Following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, the United States set several goals for itself in shaping Iraq and the regime that would govern there. The administration sought to build Iraq as a stable democratic state with a moderate government that would not be another base for terror and a threat to its neighbors, and would be a long term strategic partner. To what extent has the United States achieved these goals, or will achieve them in the future?

The key to achieving these goals lies in Iraq's internal stability. The massive number of refugees and people killed in Iraq and the serious damage to the Iraqi economy are an outgrowth of the fighting by various organizations − such as al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Promised Day Brigade, a Shiite militia headed by radical leader Muqtada al-Sadr − in their effort to drive the US forces out of Iraq. But even more so, they reflect the hostility and animosity that erupted in the wake of the US military intervention among the three main communities in Iraq. The Sunnis, who ruled Iraq for generations despite their constituting only 20 percent of the population, have now been driven from power. Reluctant to accept this lesser position, they continue to fight for their status. The Shiites were oppressed in Iraq for generations despite their being the majority, but the fall of the Saddam regime and the process of democratization led by the United States created an historic opportunity for them to seize positions of power, and they do not intend to cede them. The Kurds, who seized upon the 1991 Gulf War as their historic opportunity to build an autonomous region, aspire to strengthen and expand it. The hostilities and the large number of casualties also reflect the fundamental weakness of the central government in Iraq, under which each of the sectarian groups has established armed militias to fight one another, although the civilian population constitutes the principal victims.

The conspicuous drop in the number of attacks and casualties in Iraq since the middle of 2007 is a result of both US operational activity and the establishment and training of Iraqi security forces, with close assistance from the United States. These forces grew from 30,000 in June 2003 to 800,000 in June 2011, of whom 270,000 were in the army and the rest in the police. The Iraqi army, in cooperation with US forces, played an important role in reducing the violence in Baghdad between 2005 and 2007. US military commanders agree that the Iraqi security forces are gradually improving and are better prepared than in the past to maintain internal stability, even independently. The encouraging aspect is that since mid-2010, US forces have engaged not in combat but in consulting, training, and provision of logistical and intelligence aid to Iraqi security forces. Only a small number participated in joint patrols and manned joint checkpoints with the Iraqi army, and the task of fighting al-Qaeda in Iraq and other opposition forces was given to the Iraqi security forces. Evidence of the growing effectiveness of the security forces is that the

number of terrorist attacks and the violence did not increase during this period.

What is likely to change after the withdrawal of US forces? In spite of the significant improvements in the Iraqi security forces, there is no guarantee that this performance will continue once the US forces depart. Starting in early 2012, Iraqi forces have begun to shoulder the burden of internal security by themselves. They are required to operate in uncertain and problematic situations, without the safety net of the US presence in times of serious distress and with the turmoil in the Middle East adding to this uncertainty. The Iraqi forces have learned to cope with organizations such as al-Qaeda in Iraq and extremist Shiite and Sunni militias, but al-Qaeda in Iraq remains a dangerous organization with the ability to rehabilitate itself and carry out serious terrorist attacks. Anti-terror activity depends on high quality intelligence, and the withdrawal of US forces is liable to limit the ability to obtain such intelligence. US forces played an important role in stabilizing the border between the Kurdish and Arab areas, but it is doubtful if Iraqi forces can cope with conflicts between Kurds and Arabs – which are an additional burden beyond the sectarian tensions within the Iraqi forces themselves. Finally, continued US aid for training, force preparation, and intelligence gathering will require substantial budgets, and it is not clear if the money will be found.

On the eve of the completion of the evacuation of US forces from Iraq, the commanding general, Lloyd J. Austin III, estimated that extremist organizations such as al-Qaeda in Iraq or al-Sadr's militia will attempt to fill the vacuum that will be created in the wake of the withdrawal. As a result, the level of violence in Iraq will likely rise, although no dramatic breakdown in the security situation is expected.[2]

Whither the Political Arena in Iraq?

The toppling of Saddam's regime and its political infrastructure, and the US attempt to build a democratic regime in its stead changed Iraq's political arena entirely. The democratic process propelled the Shiite majority, which constitutes 60 percent of the population, to become the most important political player in Iraq; the Sunnis are fighting for their former positions of power, sometimes by means of terror; the Kurds have extended their control in their autonomous region in the north and have also been integrated into the country's leadership (for the first

time, Iraq's president is a Kurd); and the central administration in Iraq has been severely weakened but must cope with armed militias from the three communities chipping away at its strength and authority, while weathering a difficult economic situation. In addition, outside elements, mainly the United States and Iran, are deeply involved in Iraq.

As a result, the Iraqi political system does not function properly at any level and suffers from partial paralysis. The process of building the coalition that is the foundation of the current government continued for eight months, and the ministries of defense and the interior remained without a minister for a long time because of disputes between the sides. The government is under heavy pressure from various elements and is divided between rivals. The two senior leaders in Iraq do not speak to each other, and the assumption is that it will take years until the political system functions effectively. All of this has resulted in a serious erosion of public confidence in the leadership and the new political system.

The key to the stability of the Iraqi political system is genuine reconciliation among the three sectarian groups. Several important steps have been taken in this direction in recent years, some of them with the encouragement of the United States. However, the reconciliation process thus far is still superficial and is liable to be undermined, mainly by inter-sectarian violence. Even if the level of violence has declined since 2007, on the order of 2,000-3,000 people killed every year, as was apparent in 2009-2011, it is still high. If General Austin's assessment is correct, the level of violence is likely to rise even further after the withdrawal of US troops. The three communities have an interest in preserving the cohesiveness of Iraq, yet each of them believes that promoting its interests depends on reducing the power of the others, and they are prepared to compromise on some of their power and aspirations and cooperate among themselves only if they believe the new regime will guarantee their interests. This means that it will take years until a serious reconciliation is achieved between the sides.[3]

> The Iraqi political system does not function properly at any level and suffers from partial paralysis; the key to its stability is genuine reconciliation among the three sectarian groups.

The democratization process led by the United States was tied to this. This process had several achievements. Millions of Iraqis have voted in parliamentary and municipal elections several times since

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2005, a constitution was drafted, and many institutions have been built under the new regime. But elections and a constitution alone are not a democracy. The democratic process is still shaky and not sufficiently rooted, and its future will depend on the degree of social reconciliation and inter-sectarian violence. If the inter-sectarian reconciliation does not deepen and the violence increases, and if the central administration remains weak and unstable, the democratic process will also fail. Some think that the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq will aid in deepening democracy because it will force the Iraqis to take responsibility for their future. However, it is difficult to assume that the very fact of the withdrawal from Iraq will aid in democratizing the country. The United States did not obstruct democratization, but provided encouragement, and as long as the country has deep inter-sectarian divisions and the level of violence and terror attacks remains high, it will be difficult to promote the democratic process. If the democratic process fails, the possibility that a dictatorship would come to power, even a radical dictatorship, cannot be ruled out.

In 2006–2007, at the height of the violence in Iraq, there was a major fear that Iraq would be divided into two or three states based on sectarian makeup. This did not occur, and the possibility of this division appears even less likely today. Most Iraqis are eager to prevent the dissolution of Iraq, which would leave it small and weak; the various communities, and particularly the Shiites and the Sunnis, are heavily involved with one another, and it would be difficult to separate the populations; and it would be difficult to divide control of the oil resources, especially when there is no oil in the Sunni regions and their economy is dependent on the other communities. However, even if Iraq does not dissolve, it will not be the unified state under a strong government that it was in the past. The Iraqi constitution states that the country will have a federal structure, and the question is what balance will be created, what the division of power will be between the central government and the sectarian elements, and how the government will cope with the armed sectarian militias.

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

Along with the reversal in the internal system in Iraq, the most significant result of the US occupation of Iraq is Iran's success in penetrating the Iraqi arena and expanding its influence. This result was apparently not

anticipated by the US administration. On the contrary, after the US intervention in Iraq, Iran was fearful that it would be the next target of a US military move; this fear gradually declined, though it recurs periodically. Furthermore, Iran quickly realized the advantages of the new situation. From one point of view, eliminating Iraq from the Gulf region as a central military player removed a longstanding significant strategic threat to Iran. As Iraq was also the only regional actor with the ability to offset Iran, there is now no regional player that can fill this role. In addition, and from a no-less-important perspective, Iran also identified the possibility of becoming an influential player in Iraq itself. This possibility depends on having the Shiites the leading players in Iraq; on the weakness of the central government; and the rivalry among the armed militias.

Iran's involvement in Iraq has several objectives. First, Iran sought to encourage the establishment of a Shiite majority government that would be under its influence. To this end, Iran pressured Shiite leaders to bring about the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq as soon as possible and prevent the formation of long term strategic ties between the United States and Iraq. For Iran, the importance of expanding its influence in Iraq has increased further because this has become its main battlefield with the United States. This is due to Iraq's importance to the construction of the Shiite axis, and because the connection to Iraq could be some sort of substitute for an alliance between Iran and Syria if the Assad regime falls and Syria is dismantled. Thus it is important that Iraq not become a renewed strategic threat that can compete with Iran. At the same time, because Iran fears that instability in Iraq could spill over into its own territory, it is eager to see Iraq as a stable and unified state.

Iranian influence in Iraq rests on Iran's ties with the Shiite community, including parties, armed militias, political leaders, clerics, and economic institutions. In order to strengthen these ties, Iran has been sending the Shiite militias money and advanced weaponry since 2003, and through members of the al-Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards and Hizbollah who have infiltrated into Iraq, assists them with training, technical and logistical help, and intelligence. Iran has also been a partner in attacks on American

> For Iran, the importance of expanding its influence in Iraq has increased because this has become its main battlefield with the United States.

soldiers. According to American estimates, Iran was behind specific attacks, including the murder of Iraqi administration officials, mortar and rocket attacks, and the kidnapping of American soldiers. Iran is deeply involved in Iraqi politics and has influenced the elections, the formation of political blocs, and the appointment of the prime minister. At the same time, Iran has ties to Kurdish organizations, and even to Sunnis. Iran is also building official ties with the government of Iraq through economic investments, is playing an ever larger role in the Iraqi economy, and is infiltrating the Iraqi security forces.

Iran's achievements in Iraq are significant. Although it was unable to prevent the signing of the strategic agreement between Iraq and the United States in 2008, it did succeed in having a clause included in the agreement prohibiting use of Iraqi territory to attack other states. Beyond Iran's connections with many institutions in Iraq, the government of Nouri al-Maliki, which was established in 2010, includes many Iranian allies and affords it new opportunities. Iran played a role in pressuring the al-Maliki government not to extend the presence of US forces in Iraq beyond 2011.

On the other hand, there are limits to Iranian influence in Iraq. Iran's attempts to build ties with many institutions created a conflict of interests and alienated some of the organizations that are connected to it. There are important groups in Iraq that oppose Iranian influence in the country, particularly among the Sunnis and the Kurds, but among the Shiites as well. The traumas of the Iran-Iraq War have not been forgotten by either side, and Iran's limited military incursions into Iraqi territory in recent years, especially in the Kurdish north, have not increased the Iraqis' trust in Iran. There is also Turkey, which is certainly disturbed by Iranian intervention in Iraq and perhaps will find a way to cooperate with Iraqi elements and the United States in order to curb Iranian influence.

Thus far, the United States has not succeeded in curbing the increase in Iranian influence in Iraq, despite its efforts. This has become more difficult after the withdrawal because without a military presence, US influence ebbs, and Iran has closer ties to Iraq than does the United States. The very fact of the withdrawal is an achievement for Iran: it pursued this end for many years, and the withdrawal from Iraq will reduce the US threat to Iran. No less important, the withdrawal will turn Iran into the most important external actor in Iraq − if it is not already − and will

provide it with additional ways to expand its influence there and in the region. There is no doubt that Iran will attempt to exploit any vacuum or weakness in the Iraqi system to promote its influence.

In the longer term, Iran's position in Iraq will depend on two complexes of factors. One is the Iraqi government's approach and the internal situation in the country. Critical factors will be the Iraqi government's ability to build a long term strategic partnership with the United States, in the spirit of the agreement between them; to maintain its independence from Iran; and to stress Iraqi nationalism. The security situation and the violence in Iraq will also affect this dynamic, as will the tension between the Shiites and Sunnis. The more these grow and the weaker the government of Iraq, the greater will be the need of various Iraqi elements for Iran, and vice versa. On the other hand, the efforts by the United States are also likely to have an impact on Iran's position in Iraq. If the US government harnesses its capabilities to curb Iran's pursuit of regional hegemony, it will be possible to reduce Iranian influence in Iraq. After adjusting for these factors it appears that in any case, Iran will be able to retain a significant amount of influence in Iraq in the future as well.[4]

The Future of US-Iraqi Strategic Cooperation

US forces have withdrawn from Iraq, but there will continue to be a civilian presence there and a military presence in its neighborhood. A total of 10,000–15,000 American civilians will remain in Iraq – diplomats, private security company employees, and military and economic advisers – who will deal with issues of security, training, and economic development. NATO countries are also likely to assist Iraq with training. Following the withdrawal from Iraq, the United States will place larger forces – as yet their size is unknown – in several Gulf states, in order to aid Iraq in crisis situations, to deter Iran from taking aggressive steps, and to strengthen the security of the Gulf states.

Most Iraqi leaders and military commanders realize that Iraq needs security aid and guarantees from the United States. Security forces are still very dependent on the United States for internal security needs, especially in logistics, intelligence, training, and force buildup. The state of defense against external enemies is much more serious. Iraq currently has no real ability to protect itself from external enemies. The

Iraqi army now includes thirteen infantry divisions, and it is building its first mechanized division. It has only some 150 M-1 Abrams tanks that it received from the United States, and it intends to purchase additional tanks. As yet it has no air force to speak of. Iraq is supposed to receive 36 F-16s starting in 2014–15, and it is seeking to purchase a total of 96 such planes. It lacks artillery capability, not to mention rocket and missile capability.[5]

According to US estimates, it will take at least ten years and significant financial resources for Iraq to build an effective military force. Building this capability has been delayed by budgetary problems in Iraq and in the United States, and the withdrawal of US forces is liable to delay it even further. For the time being, no attack on Iraq by one of its neighbors is expected, and the United States serves as a deterrent toward external threats. However, Iran and Turkey from time to time conduct limited incursions into Iraqi territory in the Kurdish area, exploiting Iraq's military weakness. Furthermore, the US administration will need to consider what military strength it is prepared to build in Iraq, considering the possibility that a radical regime may rise to power and threaten its neighbors or become a satellite of Iran. Moreover, on the eve of the withdrawal from Iraq, the commander of US forces stated that he is not sure if the Iraqi government will ask for this aid or request it from other countries – evidence of US skepticism of the Iraqi government's willingness to fulfill the strategic agreement with the United States, and disappointment with the government's performance and with Prime Minister Maliki, regarding both the relationship with the United States and inter-sectarian reconciliation.

The future of US-Iraqi strategic relations will depend on the Iraqi government. It is not clear if the government has decided how to build its military capabilities, what American aid it will request, and how it will seek to implement the strategic framework agreement with the United States. Given the internal tensions in Iraq, the pressure from Iran, and the reservations of some elements in Iraq concerning continuation of the relationship with the United States, it remains to be seen how the framework agreement will be implemented. In the meantime, the sides have agreed to continue training police forces, but agreement has not yet been reached on training the army after the US withdrawal. Even once

this is agreed on, the question of funding will remain, as the United States cannot fund most of Iraq's security needs.

The Significance of the Withdrawal for the United States

On the eve of the withdrawal, General Austin stated that the conditions for withdrawing the troops are the best they have been since 2003. Indeed, the United States is withdrawing its forces when the level of violence has dropped significantly, democratic institutions and security forces are under initial construction, and agreements have been made on strategic ties with the United States. From this vantage, the United States can claim that its intervention in Iraq has not failed because it laid the foundations for a new Iraq, and that henceforth, the future of Iraq will be in the hands of its government and citizens.

Yet the picture is more complicated. The United States will need to ask itself if the results of its intervention in Iraq justified the heavy price that it – and the Iraqis – paid in blood and treasure. In a comprehensive perspective, the Bush administration believed that toppling Saddam's regime would leave a better Middle East: have the changes in Iraq and the surrounding area actually built a more stable and better strategic situation? It will take at least a few more years to examine the results of the US intervention in Iraq, and it is doubtful that the balance will appear favorable. The goals of the intervention were not clear from the beginning. As a result of the al-Qaeda attack on the United States, the Bush administration sought to topple the Saddam regime because in its assessment, the regime was connected to terrorism and was involved in developing weapons of mass destruction. It quickly became clear that the Saddam regime was not connected to al-Qaeda, and no signs were found that it continued to develop WMD after the 1991 Gulf War. The goals of the intervention in Iraq were therefore redefined: the goal was to topple the Saddam regime because it was one of the sources of evil in the Middle East, and to establish a moderate stable regime in its stead that would be tied to the United States and the West.

> With the withdrawal, the United States will need to ask itself if the results of its intervention in Iraq justified the heavy price that it – and the Iraqis – paid in blood and treasure.

The United States laid the groundwork for achieving these goals, but thus far, it has done no more than that. Saddam's regime was toppled quickly, and this was an important demonstration that the United States was determined to use force to protect its interests. However, the US administration had no clear idea how to build a new government and society in Iraq, and it did not sufficiently take into account the sectarian rift in Iraq, the outbreak of inter-sectarian violence, and the possibility that Iran would exert its influence in Iraq. Thus, the United States laid democratic foundations in Iraq, but they are still shaky, and so far they have brought the Shiites to power and increased inter-sectarian tensions. In addition, a radical regime in Iraq that threatens its neighbors is not out of the question. Although the level of violence has dropped, it is still high and likely to erupt again. The US administration has no solid approach to curb the increased Iranian influence in Iraq. Finally, the future of the strategic connection between Iraq and the United States is not in the hands of the US administration, rather in the hands of an ineffective Iraqi government that is subject to pressures, and Iran is doing its best to interfere with this relationship.

Since 2003, Iraq has been struck by wide scale terrorism, more than any other country in the Middle East. Thus far, the terrorism has been directed inward, at the inter-sectarian conflict and against US forces. Once US forces are stationed outside Iraq, terrorism will not be directed against Americans, other than at several thousand American citizens who are supposed to help the government of Iraq and who are a likely target for terrorist attacks. The open question is whether the terrorist energies that have amassed in Iraq will seek new targets outside Iraq, namely, moderate Arab regimes, US targets in the Gulf, or Israel. The possibility cannot be ruled that thousands of jihadists who gained experience in Iraq will turn to other targets, as happened after the evacuation of Russian forces from Afghanistan.

Iraq's moderate neighbors – Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, Jordan, and Turkey – are also worried by the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. They fear both that the violence and instability will spill over into their territory, and that Iraq will become an important link in the Shiite axis led by Iran, especially against the backdrop of the turmoil in the Arab world. Several regional states in addition to Iran are involved in Iraq in order to protect their interests. Turkey carries out occasional military actions

in northern Iraq against Kurdish opposition strongholds, and serves an important economic function in northern Iraq. Saudi Arabia is apparently transferring funds to Iraq in order to strengthen Sunni organizations. But the main expectation of the moderate states is that the United States will continue to work to stabilize Iraq and contain Iran, not only in Iraq but in the region as well, with the Iranian nuclear program commanding the primary attention. They are therefore likely to ask the United States not to cut itself off from Iraq and to maintain large forces in the Gulf region.[6]

Will American credibility and standing in the region likely be harmed as a result of the Iraqi affair? This will first depend on developments in the region not intrinsically tied to the US: the level of violence and stability in Iraq, the character of the regime and the development of democracy, and mainly the extent to which Iraq develops strategic ties with the United States at the expense of Iranian influence. To this should be added future developments stemming from the turmoil in the Arab states. The second variable is the future activity of the United States to strengthen its standing and deterrent capability, and its main test will be the Iranian issue, especially in the nuclear context and Iranian influence in Iraq.

The issue of American use of force is connected to this. In 2003, the United States showed resolve by sending a large military force a significant distance in order to bring about the fall of a regime that in American eyes had crossed a red line. A year-and-a-half prior to that, it did the same in Afghanistan. However, its entanglement in these two countries and the heavy price that it paid significantly reduce the possibility that it will do so again, especially considering the special circumstances that prompted it to launch these two operations, i.e., the al-Qaeda attacks on the United States. Once the US is no longer entangled in Iraq, its soldiers stationed there are no longer a target for an Iranian response. Nonetheless, despite its importance, the withdrawal from Iraq in and of itself will likely not change the US approach to attacking Iran because the administration still has other significant reasons to avoid an attack. Unless mitigated by other factors, these reasons will likely continue to block US military action in Iran.

Significance for Israel
Israel is not a direct party to events in Iraq. It cannot in any way influence internal developments in Iraq, Iranian intervention in Iraq, or US

conduct on this issue. Nevertheless, Israel has been and will be affected by developments in Iraq. It achieved its main strategic gain from the US intervention in Iraq in 2003 when Iraq disappeared as a military player and was thus removed from the map of threats to Israel. Lacking an army of any substance and an ability to defend itself from an external enemy, Iraq today is not at all equipped to attack any country.

There will be no threat from Iraq toward Israel for many years to come because building military power will demand an extended period of time, and even then Iraq will likely not be able or permitted to build strategic capabilities in weapons of mass destruction for a further period. Iraq's diplomatic position and economic situation will also remain damaged for years. The United States has begun to arm Iraq to provide it the ability to defend itself against external enemies, especially Iran, and thereby reduce Iranian influence in Iraq. However, the US administration will presumably not supply Iraq with far reaching military capabilities that would threaten its neighbors, as long as it is not clear that at the Iraqi helm will be a moderate regime that will maintain ties with the United States and not become an Iranian satellite. Other states, especially Russia, might arm Iraq if it severs ties with the United States, but such a process would be slow and continue for many years. Iraq's shaky economy will not allow it to build significant strategic capabilities in the coming years, including non-conventional capabilities.

If in the coming years it becomes clear that the credibility and deterrent capability of the United States have been harmed because the Iraqi affair is deemed a failure and Iran is not contained, this will have a negative impact on Israel as well, especially regarding the Iranian challenge.

Nevertheless, the regional implications of the situation in Iraq and the withdrawal of US forces are likely to have a negative effect on Israel's interest. First and foremost, Iran's regional standing and influence have been strengthened, and they are likely to grow even stronger in the wake of the US withdrawal. Second, the weakness of the Iraqi government provides freedom of action not only to Iran, but also to other radical elements. As long the limited freedom of action applies to Iraq itself, the impact on Israel will be minimal. Nevertheless, if the radical camp in the region is strengthened, this will have a negative impact on the moderate Arab camp, especially Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and thus on

Israel as well. Third, the instability in Iraq and the Iranian influence are likely to spill over into Jordan, especially considering the turmoil in the Arab world, which has already sparked protests in Jordan. An unstable regime in Jordan would have a negative impact on Israel, and if terrorist elements operating in Iraq begin to turn outward, Israel is a likely target.

The withdrawal of US forces from Iraq carries additional meaning for Israel. One of Israel's considerations vis-à-vis a military action against Iranian nuclear sites is the need to coordinate such action with the United States because Iraqi airspace was a theater of operations for US forces. The significance of this consideration will now be greatly reduced, even if it does not disappear entirely, when the United States is no longer responsible for Iraqi airspace and there is no Iraqi air force.

Finally, the question of the United States regional position now faces a new challenge. The evacuation of forces from Iraq and the reduced responsibility of the United States for events taking place there will enable the US administration to deal with other problems, and its main test will be how successful it is in handling the Iranian threat. However, if in the coming years it becomes clear that the credibility and deterrent capability of the United States have been harmed because the Iraqi affair is deemed a failure and Iran is not contained, this will have a negative impact on Israel as well, especially regarding the Iranian challenge.

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Beyond the "Divine Victory":
New Challenges Facing Hizbollah

Benedetta Berti

Since the beginning of the Arab uprisings in late 2010, the Middle East has experienced fast-paced and pervasive social and political change. The so-called "Arab spring" has been redefining the balance of power and reshuffling the political cards in the region, affecting all existing political and military organizations alike.

In this sense, Hizbollah is no exception. However, while scholars and decision makers agree that the past year has been a crucial one for the Lebanese Shiite organization, there seems to be widespread disagreement over the impact of the ongoing regional and domestic developments on Nasrallah's organization.

On the one hand there is a relatively widespread belief that the shifts in the Middle Eastern balance of power and the regional rise of political Islam will highly benefit groups like Hamas or Hizbollah, as well as their so-called "axis of resistance." Even many who disagree with this concept, objecting to the overly simplistic downplaying of the differences between the local political processes and the distinct Islamist parties, concur that Hizbollah has not tremendously suffered from the ongoing social and political change. On the contrary, they argue, the group has been able to weather the storm of the "Arab spring" by repositioning itself at the center of the Lebanese political arena, enjoying both the rise of a friendly government under Prime Minister Najib Mikati as well as the de facto marginalization of the pro-Western March 14 forces and their Cedar Revolution. At the regional level, Hizbollah has also seen the demise of old regional foes, chief among them the Egyptian regime under Mubarak.

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Based on these assessments, Hizbollah, unaffected by the Arab uprisings, presents as a remarkable island of stability in a rapidly changing region. However, a closer look at Hizbollah's current security and political environment reveals certain serious cracks in the group's self-portrait as a paragon of internal control and external strength. Specifically, there is reason to believe that Nasrallah's organization is under serious threat as its legitimacy and relevance in the region are called into question. Hizbollah finds itself under threat because of ongoing political change at the regional level, increasing domestic tensions within Lebanon, and in the wake of internal organizational setbacks.

The Regional and Ideological Threat: The Unpredictable Impact of the "Arab Spring"

With the onset of the Arab uprisings in late 2010, Hizbollah's stance with respect to the protest movements in the Middle East was one of unequivocal support, especially in the cases of Tunisia, Egypt, and Bahrain.

The fall of the Egyptian regime was particularly welcomed by Hizbollah, which saw in the downfall of Mubarak the decline of one of the organization's main regional opponents. Mubarak, defined by the organization as an Israeli and American puppet, was critical of the Lebanese Shiite group during the 2006 Second Lebanon War. In turn,

> Despite the widespread belief that Hizbollah has emerged unscathed, if not strengthened, by the ongoing Arab uprisings, the group has indeed been negatively affected by the ongoing regional and domestic change.

over the past few years, Nasrallah's group has repeatedly expressed its opposition to the Egyptian regime, criticizing its relationship with Israel, its opposition to Hamas, and its role during Operation Cast Lead (2008-9), and going as far as calling for a popular uprising against the government.[1] After the collapse of the Mubarak regime, Hizbollah argued that it found itself in a much stronger position, as "the major blow to the resistance… was the participation of the Egyptian regime in the Camp David agreement and consequently the emergence [i.e., departure] of Egypt from the Arab-Israeli struggle."[2] With Mubarak gone, Hizbollah contended, soon the Israeli-Egyptian détente would also collapse, shifting the balance of power in the Arab-Israeli conflict in favor of the "resistance."

Similarly, Hizbollah leveraged the political unrest elsewhere in the Middle East to boost its cause and advance the discourse of the "resistance." In the words of Nasrallah, the protests represented "the revolution of the poor, the free, the freedom seekers, and the rejecters of humiliation and disgrace which this nation [Egypt] was subject to due to giving up to the will of America and Israel....It is the revolution... against...the regime's policy in the Arab-Israeli struggle."[3]

These attempts to capitalize on the "Arab spring" and reframe the ongoing uprising as a process favorable to Hizbollah are particularly interesting: they show how the organization feels the need to have its discourse included and validated by the protests. In other words, Hizbollah is attempting to forge a link between its "resistance" and the "Arab spring," mostly because the protesters themselves had *not* made such a link. From a political and ideological perspective, Hizbollah and its political discourse have not in fact been a prominent feature in the "Arab spring." The protests failed to explicitly include the Arab-Israeli conflict among the list of main grievances, focusing instead on local economic, social, and political demands.

However, these attempts to reframe the uprisings have become increasingly difficult since the beginning of the political unrest in Syria. In fact, when the "Arab spring" finally hit Hizbollah's longstanding friend and ally, the Assad regime, Nasrallah's group adopted a remarkably different posture.

Instead of enthusiastically supporting the protests, as in the cases of Egypt and Bahrain, Hizbollah immediately sided with the government, with Nasrallah praising the role of Syria in the Middle East and with the Hizbollah-controlled media creating ad hoc campaigns to discredit the anti-regime movement, for example by downplaying its size or by accusing the protesters of having been paid to take part in the anti-regime demonstrations.[4] Even as the anti-Assad regime demonstrations escalated, revealing the depth of the internal divisions within Syria, Hizbollah still remained unwavering in its commitment to the Alawite regime.

As such, the unlikely alliance between the protestors behind the "Arab spring" and Hizbollah has been deeply challenged by events in Syria, showing the existing rift between the discourse of the uprisings, centered on rights and freedoms, and that of Hizbollah, paying lip service

to the importance of establishing a free society while strongly supporting political repression in Syria

Trying to minimize the negative impact of supporting Syria, Hizbollah's secretary general denied the application of a double standard, arguing that the Assad regime is fundamentally different from its regional counterparts. In fact, Hizbollah affirms, Syria is the only country that strongly opposes US-Israeli interests in the region, and it is also the only country where the population is strongly divided between pro-Assad and anti-Assad forces.[5] Moreover, according to Secretary General Nasrallah, Assad has undertaken important internal reforms, thus complying with the demands of the protesters.[6] In this sense, Hizbollah asserted that the ongoing demonstrations are merely a consequence of Assad's unwillingness to "bow" to US-Israeli interests, rather than the result of concrete unaddressed social and political grievances.[7]

However, despite this reframing of Hizbollah's support for the regime, public opinion within the region does not seem to be convinced by Nasrallah's defense. First, the political opposition in Syria has been extremely critical of Hizbollah's support of the regime, with the protesters burning Hizbollah flags and openly calling for the Lebanese Shiite group to "back off."[8] Within Lebanon, the Sunni community has been equally critical of Nasrallah's group, with Saad Hariri, leader of the March 14 coalition, rhetorically asking: "Is there in history any resistance movement that supported an oppressive ruler against oppressed people or supported despotic regimes against peoples demanding freedom?...It is shameful that Hizbollah views the Syrian uprising from the perspective of the Iranian interest, not the will of the Arab people."[9] The pro-March 14 newspaper *Now Lebanon* similarly stated, "Any ally of a dictator is an enemy of the Arab street."[10]

Therefore, Hizbollah's ongoing support for the Assad regime represents the Achilles' heel of the group's strategy to ride the wave of the "Arab spring." Moreover, this backing also threatens the group's standing and popularity across the region.

The ongoing unrest in Syria portends a serious threat to Hizbollah in additional ways as well, as prolonged internal violence and regime weakness could hinder Syria's ability to stay involved in Lebanon and continue to back Hizbollah, as well as its ability to direct weapons and logistical support from Iran to Hizbollah efficiently. If the Syrian regime

were to fall, Hizbollah would lose a crucial ally in the region, and it may have a hard time building good relations with the same opposition forces that it previously accused of being on the US payroll. Indeed, regime change in Syria could provide the Cedar Revolution and Hizbollah's political opponents within Lebanon a powerful second wind.

Finally, the potential impact of the "Arab spring" could extend even beyond the ideological level and the deterioration in the status of Hizbollah's ally, the Assad regime. Indeed, the ongoing Arab uprisings also have the potential to impact negatively on the group's main strategic partner, Iran. The Islamic Republic is challenged by the "Arab spring," both ideologically as well as practically, as the regime fears that the protests will rekindle the internal opposition forces to the establishment that sparked the 2009 mass protests against the government. In turn, a weakened Iran represents a serious problem for Hizbollah, as the group has historically counted on the Islamic Republic for logistical assistance, as well as ideological and political backing.

The Domestic Threat: The Weakening of the Internal Political Alliance

Hizbollah's ongoing support for the Assad regime in Syria is also highly significant at the domestic level. Specifically, Hizbollah's stance vis-à-vis Syria has been one of the key reasons behind the rising tensions between Hizbollah and the March 14 bloc, led by the Future Movement and the Sunni community. This rise in inter-sectarian Sunni-Shiite tensions within Lebanon is a problematic trend for all political groups alike, including Hizbollah. However, the rivalry and intense political opposition between the Hizbollah-led March 8 political bloc and the March 14 coalition is nothing new: this trend has been an important feature of Lebanese domestic politics since the Syrian withdrawal in 2005.

What is different today is that Hizbollah is also beginning to face increasing pressure both from the political opposition and from within the ranks of its own political allies. In turn, this represents a new and serious domestic threat. In this sense, the main worrisome development for Hizbollah is the progressive cooling of relations between the group and Prime Minister Mikati. Most prominently, Mikati and Hizbollah

have been increasingly at odds with respect to the issue of the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL).

Always starkly against the Tribunal, Hizbollah has adopted an increasingly defiant attitude regarding the STL, especially since the indictments were issued in August 2010 against members of Nasrallah's group. For example, following the indictments, the secretary general mocked Lebanon's international commitments to the UN court by repeatedly asserting that no political force or government would be able to arrest the suspects, adding, "I believe that not in 30 days or 60 days or one year or two years or 30 years or 300 years, they would find, detain or arrest them."[11] More recently, the group stated that it would veto any measure undertaken by the Cabinet to provide new funding for the Tribunal.

For his part, Prime Minister Mikati has attempted to thwart criticism from the international community by stressing his government's respect of all existing international commitments, insisting on both his intention to cooperate with the STL and apprehend the suspects as well as his commitment to continue financing the STL.[12] Indeed, the Prime Minister has openly admitted he considers this to be a crucial issue, one worth fighting for. In other words, with Hizbollah plainly opposing the STL funding and Mikati publically pushing for it, the level of tension within the pro-Hizbollah government reached unprecedented heights. A crisis was averted once Mikati found a way to finance the Tribunal without submitting the proposal to a vote in the Cabinet, thus saving face and avoiding a political crisis.

> In the long term, the differences between Hizbollah and Prime Minister Mikati represent a serious threat to the Lebanese-Shiite organization and its capacity to preserve a non-hostile political environment.

However, in the long term, the differences between Hizbollah and Mikati represent a serious threat to the Lebanese-Shiite organization and its capacity to preserve a non-hostile political environment. The differences between the two political actors are in fact not limited to the issue of the STL. The Prime Minister is quietly attempting to downplay Lebanon's support for Syria (for example, by abstaining in the UNSC vote against the European draft resolution condemning the events in Syria), while Hizbollah is making no secret of its support for the Assad

regime. Nasrallah recently minimized the ongoing cross border Syrian incursions,[13] while Hizbollah's parliamentary representatives contested the investigations by Lebanon's Internal Security Services into the kidnappings of Syrian dissenters residing in Lebanon.[14] In the long term, this rift puts the Prime Minister in a very difficult situation, challenging him either to concede to Hizbollah's demands – which in turn would result in a loss of his domestic and international credibility – or to resign from his post, catapulting the country into another political crisis.

The rising tensions between the Prime Minister and Hizbollah have been accompanied by other cracks in Hizbollah's political coalition. For example, recent declarations by Druze leader Walid Jumblatt have strongly emphasized his personal differences with Nasrallah's organization, including on STL funding and on the relationship with Syria.[15] For the time being, Jumblatt has expressed interest in remaining part of the "pro-Hizbollah" government, but the alliance is particularly weak and heavily tied to political developments in Syria.

The possibility of the Party of God losing its current political backing and the country submerging into another crisis deeply threatens the group's political power and role within Lebanon, while also questioning Hizbollah's capacity to remain relevant in the rapidly changing region.

The Internal Threat: The Impact of the Counter-Intelligence War

In addition to the ongoing turmoil at the regional and domestic levels, Hizbollah may be facing internal problems, suggested by the November 2011 alleged uncovering of a CIA-orchestrated spy network that infiltrated Nasrallah's organization. Even if this episode was reported by most international media as an isolated incident, the truth is that the alleged uncovering of a CIA spy ring is just the latest chapter in Hizbollah's post-Second Lebanon War "counter-intelligence war."

Indeed, following the war Hizbollah focused on improving both its intelligence and its counter-intelligence capabilities. Regarding the former objective, the group has been engaged in attempting to improve its knowledge of its main enemy, in part through recruiting informants and attempting to set up spy rings within Israel.[16] With respect to counter-intelligence, Hizbollah has emphasized both the importance of preventing infiltration and information leaks from within the organization, as well as the priority of investing further in its independent fiber optic

communications network, sponsored by Iran, specifically to prevent the infiltration and disruption of its own communications system.

In this context, the group has relied specifically on an ad hoc secret body created in the early 2000s to perform the role of internal watchdog, prevent infiltration, and enforce organizational security: the "counter-intelligence" (*amn al-muddad*) unit.[17] Using both SIGINT − through its sophisticated electronic apparatus, courtesy of Iran − as well as HUMINT, the group's efforts to pursue alleged double agents and prevent internal infiltration has adopted a renewed, more aggressive, and increasingly public dimension in the post-2006 years. Indeed, since 2006 the group has focused on an aggressive campaign to target alleged spies and informants operating within Lebanon. This project gained momentum and stamina in 2009.[18]

However, despite the domestic relevance of these episodes, the event that truly changed the internal narrative over this issue was the June 2011 reports over the direct infiltration of "agents" within the ranks of Hizbollah proper. In fact, in June 2011 Hizbollah revealed that it had uncovered a spy cell operating within its own ranks, and that the suspected spies included over five Hizbollah members.[19]

These reports contributed to undermining Hizbollah's reputation in terms of its unity and cohesion, as for the first time the group admitted to infiltration of its ranks. In this context, it is not surprising that when in September 2011 new reports in the Arab press stated that Hizbollah had uncovered five additional suspected "Israeli" spies operating within its own ranks, the Lebanese Shiite organization was quick to dismiss the reports as "fabrications."[20] However, in November 2011, the group took the opposite stand and openly announced that it had foiled another internal infiltration, unmasking a number of Hizbollah members who were allegedly serving as CIA informants. The announcement was again denied by US official authorities in Lebanon, but confirmed unofficially by operatives among the local staff.

In disclosing such information, Hizbollah is carefully balancing two mutually exclusive needs: the need to boost its reputation by promoting its alleged achievements and the equally important organizational need to preserve its reputation of unity, cohesion, and strength. Thus, while the group is anxious to promote its counter-intelligence, it also wants to preserve its reputation of cohesion and unity and downplay the level of

internal defection. In the aftermath of the 2006 war, the group's reputation for invulnerability has taken a series of important hits, first with the 2008 assassination of Imad Mughniyeh in Damascus, and then with the repeated reports of internal infiltration, first revealed in June 2011. At the time, Nasrallah's revelations were quite explosive, undermining his earlier claims that Hizbollah was immune to infiltration and somewhat tarnishing the group's aura.[21] To counter the (from Hizbollah's perspective, intolerable) perception of internal weakness stemming from the alleged internal breaches, Hizbollah has labored to downgrade their size, minimize the number and rank of officials involved, and also argue that in many cases the alleged spies were not in fact directly affiliated with Nasrallah's group.

At the same time, news reports from the Arab world have focused on attempts to grasp the internal consequences of exposing the alleged spy rings. Accordingly, Hizbollah, known to take internal security extremely seriously, has undertaken an in-depth internal investigation of its rank and file to prevent further cases of collaborators and double agents, leading to the removal of some high level officials over their alleged inefficiency in preventing infiltration, while openly tackling the previously unmentioned issue of internal corruption. [22]

While it is almost impossible using open intelligence to conduct a precise evaluation of the actual extent and impact of the "spy files" and the related measures undertaken by the group, it remains clear that the reports of the such internal security breaches in the Lebanese media represents an important juncture in Hizbollah's recent history, pointing to the existence of an internal challenge to the group, which joins the aforementioned regional and domestic challenges.

> Hizbollah's support for the increasingly alienated Assad regime in Syria has contributed to lowering the organization's regional standing and its ability to ride the wave of the "Arab spring."

Hizbollah in 2012: An Assessment

Despite the widespread belief that Hizbollah has emerged unscathed, if not strengthened, by the ongoing Arab uprisings, this article contends that the group has indeed been negatively affected by the ongoing regional and domestic change.

Regionally, the group's support for the increasingly alienated Assad regime in Syria has contributed to lowering the organization's regional standing and its ability to ride the wave of the "Arab spring." Moreover, the ongoing downfall of the Assad regime represents a concrete threat to the organization, which now risks losing one of its historically crucial allies. The potential for this wave of social and political protests to extend to Iran also deeply threatens Hizbollah's security and political environment. Domestically, in addition to the preexisting tensions between Hizbollah and the March 14 political opposition, Hizbollah's overconfidence in dealing with its own political allies is resulting in a decline in domestic political support, a trend exemplified by the progressive cooling of the relations with Prime Minister Mikati. Internally, the recent revelations of the alleged infiltration of Hizbollah have tarnished the group's aura of invulnerability and its myth of solid internal cohesion. Even though Hizbollah has attempted to diminish the impact of the internal breaches by downplaying their size and magnitude, the revelations were damaging and have triggered some internal reorganization to prevent any recurrences.

> The fall of the Assad government would not be enough to bring about Hizbollah's demise, but would be sufficient to weaken its standing, both domestically as well as regionally. At the same time, no one should be fooled into believing Hizbollah would go down without a strong fight.

In this context, taking into consideration both the possibility of Hizbollah losing its current political backing within Lebanon, as well as the threat represented by the potential fall of the Assad regime, the group is now facing one of the most serious challenges since its foundation in the early 1980s.

Considering the sophistication and magnitude of the group's military apparatus and its solid partnership with both the Lebanese-Shiite community and Iran, the fall of the Assad government would not be enough to bring about the demise of the group but would be sufficient to weaken its standing, both domestically as well as regionally. This could certainly be seen as a positive development for Israel, in contrast with the grim assessments that the "Arab spring" will inevitably worsen Israel's position in the region on all fronts. At the same time, no one should be fooled into believing Hizbollah would go down without a strong fight.

Nonetheless, significant political change in Syria would be a highly problematic development for Nasrallah's organization, especially now that the group finds itself in a position of internal weakness and regional ambiguity. Given the alternative scenarios, Hizbollah may attempt to try to preserve this current uneasy status quo, hoping for Syria to ride out the political storm as quickly as possible.

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Extended Deterrence in the Middle East: A Fuzzy Concept that Might Work?

Carlo Masala

Introduction

"Extended deterrence," or "active deterrence," as it is sometimes called, threatens a nuclear-strategic response in case of a nuclear attack on the territory or troops of one's allies. This essay aims to explore the possibilities of extended deterrence in the Middle East in light of an Iranian nuclear military capability. Two preliminary remarks are necessary in order to frame the line of reasoning on the issue.

Discussion of the possibilities and pitfalls of extended deterrence in the Middle East does not intend to insinuate that diplomatic efforts to stop the Iranian regime from constructing a nuclear device have failed or that a nuclear Iran is already a given. Exploring the possibilities of extended deterrence in the Middle East is, rather, an attempt to be intellectually honest and anticipate that all the efforts underway for almost a decade will fail because the Iranian regime might be determined to produce nuclear warheads or reach the breakout point in which it will become a "virtual nuclear power." Both possible trajectories will have a decisive impact on the nuclear realm, but even more so, on the political balance of power in the region. They have the potential to reshuffle relations in the region, not only between Iran and Israel but also between Iran and the Arab states in the Middle East. If such a development is perceived as detrimental to the already fragile security situation in the Middle East, academics and practitioners had better start thinking about a "plan B" in case Tehran goes nuclear.

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A second preliminary remark that must precede any analysis of extended deterrence and its applicability to the Middle East concerns the nature of the subject to be explored. Although over almost six decades there has been a profusion of literature on the mechanisms of deterrence and extended deterrence (joining the same number of critical studies on why deterrence and extended deterrence might not work),[1] we still don't know much about deterrence and extended deterrence. This paradox can be explained by the simple fact that so far we have not experienced the failure of a deterrence relationship, resulting in a nuclear war between two powers. Both the proponents of deterrence as well as their critics believe – in the theological sense of the word – that deterrence either works or doesn't, but both camps don't know for certain. The consequences of this highly unsatisfying state of the art is that neither "the more may be better"[2] nor "the dead end of deterrence"[3] approach provides any form of guidance for policymakers having to deal with the issue at stake. If academics want to speak truth to power they need to be aware of first, the limitations of their theories, and second, that the real world can't be grasped with parsimonious concepts.

With these words of caution the essay proceeds as follows. First it approaches the topic by defining extended deterrence, which in the 21st century differs from the old East-West conflict concept by being much broader in its instruments. Turning then to some conceptual problems concerning extended deterrence, the essay argues that in order for extended deterrence to work it must be able to answer three conceptual problems that all are related to the credibility of a threat. After this conceptual clarification the essay introduces the two extended deterrence models familiar from past and present, namely, the European and the Asian models. They differ slightly but decisively. The purpose of presenting these two models is to ask if they are applicable to the Middle East. It will be shown that for different reasons this is not the case, and that neither the European nor the Asian model seems to be a viable approach to the situation in the Middle East. The last section of this paper looks at different possible ways deterrence can be extended to the Middle East. It argues that for the time being only unilateral US guarantees can pave the way for something that comes close to extended deterrence in this highly volatile region.

The Difficulties of Extended Deterrence

During the Cold War extended deterrence used to be a public good provided by the US and the USSR to some of their allies. Usually extended deterrence materialized in a system of formal alliance relationships among states with either the US or the USSR as formal guarantor. At the time, extended deterrence used to be mainly nuclear. Stretching a nuclear umbrella over allies served two purposes: first, preventing allies from going nuclear themselves, and second, preventing an adversary from attacking an ally (either in a conventional or a nuclear strike). It might seem surprising that extended deterrence is also mentioned here as a tool against any conventional aggression, but in the early days of the Cold War, NATO's strategy of massive retaliation threatened the USSR and its allies with a nuclear attack in case of conventional aggression. Extended nuclear deterrence as an instrument against conventional aggression is essential if the opponent is perceived as a predatory, revisionist state that wants to change existing balances of power to its own advantage by all available means.

The main purpose of extending nuclear guarantees, however, used to be to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the concept of extended deterrence occupied a smaller academic focus, and especially with the rise of violent non-state actors, the question arose whether deterrence and thereby also extended deterrence play any role in security politics of the 21st century.[4] Interestingly, this academic debate is out of sync with political reality. In light of existing or emerging nuclear powers, states in Asia as well as in the Middle East are exploring the possibilities of slipping under a renewed or new nuclear umbrella in order to gain more security vis-à-vis a potential nuclear threat.

While extended deterrence used to be primarily nuclear, today extended deterrence is only partly nuclear and also entails missile defense and to a certain extent means such as prompt global strike (PGS) capabilities.[5] Today extended deterrence, if provided in order to prevent a nuclear attack on an ally as well as excessive conventional aggression, rests on a mix of instruments that make it at least theoretically possible to tailor extended deterrence more precisely to regional needs or to the needs of the guarantor and the guarantee.

If we turn to the question of essential prerequisites for viable extended deterrence, it must be kept in mind that extended deterrence faces three problems that must be solved before there is any validity to the concept of extended deterrence.

a. The threat needs to be credible to an adversary on behalf of or in collaboration with a third party;

b. The elite of both the guarantor and the guarantee need to be convinced on a bipartisan basis that extended deterrence is credible;

c. The domestic audiences of both the guarantor and the guarantee need to believe that extended deterrence is necessary and practicable.

With the nature and the conceptual problems that accompany extended deterrence as background, the applicability of extended deterrence to the Middle East given an Iranian nuclear capability can now be examined.

Extended Deterrence in the Middle East: Difficult but Possible?

Broadly speaking, there are two familiar models of extended deterrence in the 21st century: the European and the Asian models. Both models rest on a significant number of conventional ground, air, and naval forces stationed in the respective regions. They differ with regard to the forward deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW). While nuclear deterrence to US allies in Asia is provided through capabilities stationed in the US, the European model rests on the forward deployment of NSNW as well as a form of nuclear participation within NATO.[6]

At first glance both models are not applicable to the Middle East. Neither is it thinkable that Arab countries will accept the deployment of US forces on their soil (especially given the anti-US sentiments among large parts of the population), nor is it likely that the US will deploy NSNW in the region (given the volatility of existing regimes). Although large numbers of US ground, air, and naval forces are already stationed in the Arabian Gulf, extended deterrence rests on a country-based strategy, meaning that in every country that enjoys a nuclear umbrella, a tactical link such as US installations or US troops must be present. As of today it is hard to envision that US forces will be stationed in Egypt or Jordan. Indeed, the already existing US ground presence in the Arabian Peninsula is a constant source of tension between the leaderships of those countries with a US presence and their populations. As long as the

population is not convinced that such a presence is needed to guarantee national sovereignty and survival, the credibility of extended deterrence is weakened.

Thus if both models are not applicable to the region, how can extended deterrence be tailored to the Middle East?

This depends partly on the answer of four "known unknowns." First, how will a nuclear Iran behave? Will it be a defensive status quo or an offensive revisionist power? Second, how can extended deterrence be provided to the region, given the Arab-Israeli divide? Third, given their security cultures, will Arab states and/or Israel trust external guarantees? And lastly, how can Iran be made to believe, in case Tehran develops long range delivery systems in the future, that the US is willing to live up to its commitments?

Based on these unknowns, four models on how extended deterrence can be guaranteed for the region are plausible and should be discussed with regard to their applicability to the Middle East. The models are multilateral agreement, a regional security system, the Holocaust declaration, and unilateral US guarantees.

One possibility of providing the region with a kind of extended deterrence entails nuclear great powers declaring their willingness and their readiness to defend Israel and Arab states, if necessary by nuclear means, if Iran attacks. Together with a declared willingness to use PGS capabilities and with the Israeli Arrow system, this form of guarantee could either be provided by a joint P5 declaration or a Russian-US statement on the Middle East and nuclear weapons. At first glance this option looks appealing, since the major nuclear powers of the 21st century (US, Russia, and China) would pool their capabilities and send a clear and strong signal into the region. Even if Russia and China currently object to any stronger sanctions (not to speak of military action) against Iran, they both share a strategic interest that there not be nuclear escalation in the Middle East. In a mid-term perspective it is possible that these three countries, together with the two European nuclear powers, would be willing to extend their deterring capabilities to the Middle East.

Such an option, however, would face an enormous credibility gap, which thereby makes it unlikely that it will ever materialize. The likelihood that Israel would consider such a guarantee as credible must be considered as extremely low. The option of multilateral guarantees

might be appealing to some or all Arab states in the Middle East, but given Israel's historical record with Russia and France and the current behavior of China and Russia vis-à-vis the Iranian file, it is hard to imagine that the Israeli elite as well as public opinion would perceive such guarantees as credible. Multilateral agreements would also give Iran an opportunity to try to drive a wedge among those countries that would provide extended deterrence to the Middle East. The conclusion, therefore, is that multilateral agreements provided by the P5 or by a Russian-US consortium could not be implemented due to a lack of credibility.

A veteran idea that is frequently aired when it comes to Middle Eastern security is that of a regional security system. With regard to the purpose of extending deterrence, such a system would comprise Arab states and Israel as well as external powers such as the US and maybe Russia. Participants in such a system would commit themselves to defend any member of the system attacked by an outsider with all means available (nuclear, PGS, and missile defense). Such an arrangement would make the system look very much like a formal alliance. A regional security system could be designed as single purpose (exclusively against the external threat posed by a nuclear Iran) or multipurpose (trying to create interdependencies among signatory states in the field of security). Although the theoretical literature on building alliances suggests that given an external threat alliance building is even possible among states that have enmities, it seems unlikely that Arab states would be willing to form an institutionalized regional security system to oppose the Iranian threat. Furthermore, if bilateral relations between Israel and Arab states would not be settled beforehand, such a system would always face a high degree of instability, and intra-system balancing would impede the system itself from being credible in the eyes of the Iranian regime.

Charles Krauthammer has proposed the so-called "Holocaust declaration"[7] as one form of extending deterrence to parts of the Middle East. Within this framework, the US would state unilaterally that it would not allow a second Holocaust to take place, meaning that the US would be willing to use nuclear weapons in order to prevent Iran from exterminating the Jewish state. This kind of unilateral extended deterrence just for Israel would face two major obstacles. First, it would single out Israel as the only state in the Middle East that is of concern to the US and thereby potentially have a detrimental effect on US-Arab

relations, and second, the Israeli elite might feel limited in its freedom of maneuver vis-à-vis Iran and beyond.

Thus, these three models on how to extend deterrence to the Middle East suffer from logical flaws given the political reality in the region. Currently the major obstacles for establishing an overall (meaning including Israel and the Arab states) system of extended deterrence are the lack of trust among Arab states and Israel and Arab security cultures, which make it hard to believe that Arab leaders and the Arab street are to be convinced that the US would defend them in case of an Iranian assault.

Realistically speaking, the creation of a comprehensive and credible system of extended deterrence must start from unilateral US statements to Israel and the Arab states that the US will not allow any other country to blackmail or threaten its allies in the region. This means of extending unilateral deterrence guarantees is far from perfect. It is weak in the sense that there will be no link between the strategic nuclear capabilities of the US and the security of its allies in the region (as in the case of Europe or Asian countries). It will suffer from the basic credibility problem of extended deterrence,[8] which Charles de Gaulle captured so precisely in the 1960s when he asked Adenauer if the German chancellor really believed that the US would risk the destruction of New York for the liberation of Hamburg. The credibility problem nowadays is even worse since the current US administration has shifted its attention to the Pacific and does not seem too determined to stop Iran "by all means necessary" from going nuclear. Added to this, US credibility and its commitment to get tough on Iran if the mullah regime, once nuclear, threatens US allies might suffer from the fact that the US has lost two conventional wars in the broader region (Iraq and Afghanistan), and public opinion does not support getting bogged down again in the Middle Eastern quagmire.

But given the aforementioned obstacles facing other forms of extended deterrence in the Middle East, unilateral guarantees might currently be the only form of extending deterrence to the region. Those who point to the fact that Israel has sufficient deterrence capabilities of its own and does not need any kind of extended deterrence[9] are right from a purely military perspective but utterly wrong given the political signal sent to Iran if the US extended its deterrence only to Arab states. This signal could be interpreted by the political and religious leadership in Tehran as a crack in US-Israeli relations and as an isolation of Israel in the Middle

East. In turn such a policy could cause Iran to step up its aggressive provocations (via its proxies in the region) below the threshold of a direct attack against the Jewish state. For political reasons it would be necessary for the US to extend its deterrence to Israel too.

Thus unilateral declarations by the US to be willing to extend its deterrence to the Middle East is the weakest form of extended deterrence, but currently the only option that appears at all realistic. In the mid-term (assuming that Iran goes nuclear) a more credible and stable system of extended deterrence for the region is needed. Such a system might be composed of unilateral Israeli capabilities, multilateral security agreements between Israel and the Arab states, and US nuclear guarantees for all members of a security architecture of this form. But there is a long way to go before time will be ripe for such a system.

Notes

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1   Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).
2   Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better," *Adelphi Papers* No. 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981).
3   Kyron Huigens, "The Dead End of Deterrence, and Beyond," *William and Mary Law Review* 41, no. 3 (2000): 943-1046.
4   On this discussion, see Bruno Tertrais, "In Defense of Deterrence: The Relevance, Morality and Cost-Effectiveness of Nuclear Weapons," Paris, 2011.
5   Prompt Global Strike (PGS) is a US effort to develop a system that can deliver a precision conventional weapon strike anywhere in the world within one hour, in a similar manner to a nuclear ICBM.
6   For a detailed account of both models see Clark A. Murdock, *Exploring the Nuclear Posture Implications of Extended Deterrence and Assurance*, CSIS, 2010.
7   Charles Krauthammer, "The Holocaust Declaration," *Washington Post*, April 11, 2008.
8   Vesna Danilovic, "The Sources of Threat Credibility in Extended Deterrence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 3 (2001): 341-69.
9   A summary of this debate is provided by Shen Dingli, "Extended Nuclear Deterrence: Fading Fast," *Interpreter*, February 3, 2011, http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2011/02/03/Extended-deterrence-fading-fast.aspx.

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