

Strategic ASSESSMENT

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Strategic ASSESSMENT

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

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Abstracts

Iran on the Threshold / Amos Yadlin and Yoel Guzansky

According to the familiar public discourse, two extreme situations could evolve from the current Iranian nuclear predicament. The first and most problematic scenario that has been discussed extensively in recent years is an Iranian “breakout” toward nuclear weapons. The second and preferred scenario is a situation in which Iran faces heavy enough international pressure and tough enough international sanctions and decides to halt its nuclear project completely. Between these extremes there is a third option: Iran maintains a strategy that leaves it “decision making distance” from nuclear weapons. This article considers the prospects of the international community allowing Iran to achieve the status of a “threshold state” and analyzes the benefits and limitations of this middle road.

An Attack on Iran: The Morning After / Ephraim Kam

In recent months there has been talk both in Israel and abroad about the possibility of a military operation against Iranian nuclear installations. This essay seeks to examine the developments that might ensue following a military strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities. Assuming that a strike has been carried out by Israel and/or the US, it seeks to analyze the possible results in various realms and their significance. The extent of damage to the nuclear facilities is the factor that would have the greatest effect on both the amount of time the Iranian nuclear program would be delayed and the severity of the Iranian response. In any case, however, the larger the scope of the operation, the more extensive the ramifications are likely to be, and the results of the operation would be much more impressive if carried out by the US rather than Israel.

Tradition and Modernity in the “Arab Spring” / Asher Susser

The terms chosen to describe the revolutionary events that swept the Middle East in the past year reflect a set of cultural contexts, worldviews, expectations, and hopes. In the West, use of the term “Arab Spring”

presumed an affinity with previous “springs,” characterized by national uprisings intended by peoples to shake free of repressive rule and replace it with a secular/liberal/democratic regime. In 2011, the conceptual premise was that if such was the case in Europe, then such is the case in the Middle East. However this description is a striking case of “false universalism,” as the deep undercurrents of Middle East political culture differ from those of the liberal/secular Western world, first and foremost because Middle East societies are for the most part not secular. This article explores the gap between the universal expectations and hopes of the commentators (and in their trail, politicians) and the actual results.

The Future of Israel’s Agreements with its Neighbors / Oded Eran

Among the key questions emerging in the wake of the civil uprising in the Arab world are the impact on Arab-Israeli relations and the effect on existing formal agreements between Israel and its neighbors. These agreements, which have been upheld for years, have helped maintain a sense of relative stability and prevent the recurrence of major hostilities. However, the Arab uprisings have cast doubt as to the robustness of these agreements and their ability to withstand the pressures from political elements that opposed these agreements. This article reviews Israel’s agreements with Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinians, and Syria, and considers if the Arab “street,” which has become a more potent factor in Arab policy, will force a change in any of these agreements.

The Turmoil in Syria: What Lies Ahead / Benedetta Berti

After over a year of internal unrest and oppressive violence against the civilian population, Syria recently saw the implementation of an official ceasefire, followed by the deployment of UN observers to guarantee the actual cessation of hostilities. However, an analysis of the history of the protests and the ongoing violence within Syria reveals both the tenuousness of the current ceasefire as well as the precariousness of Syria’s political future. This article looks at Syria following implementation of the ceasefire, explaining the roots of the current predicament, assessing possible developments, and analyzing the potential impact of the ongoing crisis on the region, with a specific focus on Israel. Finally, it discusses the role of the international community in mitigating the violence and facilitating a political resolution to the crisis.

Targeted Killing in the US War on Terror: Effective Tool or Double-Edged Sword? / Yoram Schweitzer and Einav Yogev

Against the growing challenge posed by sub-state organizations, whose actions regularly endanger uninvolved civilians and consciously ignore the legal regulations and restraints of humanitarian international law, states have resorted increasingly to targeted killing operations that make use of advanced technological capabilities. This article describes the policy of the United States concerning targeted killing in its war on terror. Alongside the operational advantages are political challenges, specifically as they emerge in US-Pakistan relations, and within the framework of the public debate in the United States regarding the targeted killings in Yemen. In addition, the article examines whether there is a connection between US and Israeli operational policies, notwithstanding the fundamental differences between the two countries and their respective conflicts.

US Combat against the Afghanistan Insurgency: President Obama's Approach / Nadav Kedem and Shmuel Zatliff-Tzur

President Obama chose to implement a different policy in Afghanistan than what was designed under the Bush administration. Under Obama's leadership, a decision was made to substantially beef up US forces in Afghanistan, and significant resources were invested in building the Afghan state and its security forces. Obama's main goals were to defeat al-Qaeda; strike a hard blow against the Taliban, which had become much stronger and was threatening Afghanistan's stability; and help the Afghani government consolidate a governmental and security infrastructure in the country. This article offers an interim assessment of the Obama administration's policy in Afghanistan, and assesses the prospects for achievement of the US goals before the withdrawal of the American troops, scheduled for the middle of 2013.

Civilian Nuclear Programs in the Middle East: Nuclear Spring or Nuclear Autumn? / Yoel Guzansky, Ephraim Asculai, and Gallia Lindenstrauß

In recent years, a not-insignificant number of states in the Middle East have begun to consider seriously nuclear infrastructures for civilian purposes, and some have even begun building them. Iran's advanced

nuclear program and the fears it has spawned have apparently been the catalyst for initiating these ambitious programs. However, those countries that are now examining the nuclear path claim that their main interests are producing electricity and/or desalinating water, and not achieving a nuclear balance with Iran. This article surveys the motives behind the civilian nuclear programs in Middle East states, assesses the significance of these programs, and provides an up-to-date snapshot of the situation.

Iran on the Threshold

Amos Yadlin and Yoel Guzansky

The Third Way

According to the familiar public discourse, two extreme situations could evolve from the current Iranian nuclear predicament. The first and most problematic scenario that has been discussed extensively in recent years is an Iranian “breakout” toward nuclear weapons. An Iranian advance toward military nuclear capability would be a violation of Iran’s commitments to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This could be expected to cost Iran dearly with tough sanctions and perhaps even military action against it. The second and preferred scenario is a situation in which Iran faces heavy enough international pressure and tough enough international sanctions and decides to halt its nuclear project completely. At the same time, stopping uranium enrichment activity in Iran, transferring all the enriched uranium outside the country, ceasing the weaponization, and meeting the NPT’s requirements for transparency involves risks and concessions that the Iranian regime is in no hurry to take upon itself.

Between these extremes there is a third option: Iran maintains a strategy that leaves it “decision making distance” from nuclear weapons. In recent years a number of senior Iranian officials have expressed support for this third option, which would allow Iran to prove – as it consistently claims – that it “does not seek” to acquire nuclear weapons.¹

According to the third option for Iran – an option that surfaces little in the public debate² – Iran would reach the advanced status of a “nuclear threshold state” and retain this status for the long term. While there is no single unequivocal definition in the professional literature, it is customary to define a nuclear threshold state as a state that controls most

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of the components of the nuclear fuel cycle, with an advanced scientific-technological infrastructure, a reserve of fissile material, and the ability to fit a nuclear warhead to the appropriate platform. All that is needed in such a situation is a strategic decision to cross the threshold and attain nuclear weapons. Therefore, we can already define Iran as a threshold state or as being very close to that status.

Similarly, the “threshold point” is not a single point; it includes a range of actions that could be completed in time periods ranging from several days to a number of months, in accordance with the technological and project development of a state with nuclear potential. The strategy Iran has been using for many years is to walk on a technical path that it sees as legitimate, which includes broad-based development of the technology and infrastructure necessary to obtain nuclear weapons within a few months, but stops short of the last actions to assemble and test the weapons. Thus irrespective of the question of where Iran is now in this “threshold zone,” Iranian nuclear weapons may be not much more beyond decision-making distance.

Iran conducts an ongoing strategic situation assessment on whether and at what pace to advance its nuclear program (which naturally also affects the question of if and when to take military action against it). On the one hand, the lesson it has learned from the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime in Libya, and its fear that the Assad regime in Syria will also be toppled, is likely to bring about a desire to “immunize” itself against an attempt to overthrow the regime in Tehran and therefore to accelerate nuclear development. The Iranian regime also fears that its internal stability will be undermined and the Arab spring will visit Iran. On the other hand, Iran is confronting a more complex set of economic and political pressures than in the past, and it may well abandon its aggressive line. Especially if it estimates that the probability of a military strike against it has increased, it will seek to avoid breaking out to the bomb, and will perhaps even be more flexible on the nuclear issue.

Indeed, Iran is not advancing toward the bomb at as rapid a pace as it could. It appears to realize that such progress would bring with it negative strategic repercussions. Iran might thus sit on the fence and avoid making a decision, especially if in its assessment, a breakout to nuclear weapons is likely to constitute a reason for an outside force to attack the country, which would exact an intolerable price. Nevertheless, an Iranian decision

to remain in this status for a prolonged period, or a failure to decide on its future course, would introduce an increasing degree of uncertainty. Such a situation is likely to strengthen Iran's deterrent image because it would always leave doubt as to Iranian capabilities and intentions and would allow Iran to make its nuclear capability operational within a short time. In turn, this state of uncertainty will increase the drive to deny Iran nuclear capability before such capability becomes operational. This drive requires some restraint on the part of players in and outside of the region.

The use of force against Iranian nuclear facilities has serious implications for Israel, but the ramifications of an Iran with military nuclear capability are even more serious. Some may claim that under certain circumstances, the intermediate option actually becomes the lesser of all evils, provided that the international monitoring regime is effective and is able to prevent Iran from breaking out to nuclear weapons in a short period of time – that is, to keep Iran years away from nuclear weapons.

Iran's nuclear efforts, whether they were intended to produce a bomb or to stop on the threshold of the production phase, would be far less threatening and would arouse less suspicion and opposition if the Iranian regime did not have a reputation for deceit and concealment of nuclear activity, for issuing detailed threats to the country's neighbors, for intervening in the internal affairs of states in the region, and for financing and assisting terrorist organizations. The need to avoid strategic surprises is liable to prompt states to invest resources in improving their intelligence monitoring capabilities in order to clarify where Iran is on the nuclear threshold spectrum. If there is no close inspection and no restrictions are placed on Iranian uranium enrichment, states that feel threatened by Iran's capabilities will likely be more prepared to take risks and attempt to damage Iran's nuclear infrastructure.

Achieving the status of a nuclear threshold state has many advantages for the Iranians. Such status is likely to strengthen the regional and international as well as domestic standing of the regime, since there is still a great deal of public support for nuclear technology development. Iran could also leverage its status as a threshold state by combining political and economic demands with direct or implicit threats to cross the nuclear threshold. A possible result of such a situation would be that

Iran would be rewarded for not crossing the threshold and would achieve an improved strategic position and deterrent capability in the region.

Moreover, an attempt to prevent Iran from crossing the threshold, assuming that there is quality intelligence that will indicate movement toward the threshold, is likely to cost the international community dearly in political, economic, and other terms. Thus if Iran stops on the verge of developing nuclear weapons, while reaching understandings on the issue with the P5+1, over time it may be able to chip away at the economic pressure it is under and even provide itself with immunity from further sanctions and from a military strike, because it will be considered to have responded to international pressure. At the same time, this would allow Iran to plunge deeper into the “zone of immunity” and protect its nuclear sites actively and passively in a manner that would make it difficult to strike them. In such a situation, Iran could, therefore, receive many of the strategic advantages associated with possessing nuclear weapons without actually possessing them.

In light of the dangers inherent in Iran’s becoming a nuclear threshold state, it is essential to determine whether the United States and Israel define the red lines regarding Iran in the same way. Iran as a threshold state is liable to be a highly problematic strategic challenge for Israel, but perhaps the lesser – and acceptable – of all evils for the United States. Indeed, from statements and leaks from US government officials, it appears that the United States is prepared to accept Iran’s remaining on the threshold spectrum, as long as it does not break out to nuclear weapons. A threshold state, in contrast to a state with a policy of ambiguity, is subject to full IAEA monitoring, and therefore a breakout to nuclear weapons would presumably be discovered in a relatively short time. Senior US officials, including the Secretary of Defense and top military figures who are eager to calm their Israeli counterparts, claim that the United States will know how to identify an Iranian breakout to nuclear weapons through use of satellite photographs, human intelligence, and information conveyed by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors.³ However, there is a not-insignificant difficulty in coping with the intelligence challenge presented by the Iranian nuclear program, inter alia because of the small number of principal figures and scientists who can be monitored to provide useful information – a function of Iran’s

meticulous compartmentalization and its strategy of concealment and deception.

Israel is not convinced that the United States is capable of identifying an Iranian breakout to nuclear weapons, and in any case it is not prepared to take the risk of such a breakout. The two states have different perceptions of the threat and differing military capabilities, and for Israel, the red line is much nearer than the United States acknowledges. The most difficult problem from Israel's point of view is the need to rely on intelligence systems to provide adequate warning – in this case not of war, but of the assembly of nuclear weapons. This is a complex problem, especially when the timetable is very limited. Israel feels that reliance on such an intelligence warning is not a reasonable gamble. This is its main argument for claiming that Iran as a threshold state creates an unstable and intolerable situation, especially when it is far from exhibiting transparency and has a history of concealment and deception. Consequently, Iran is likely to cross Israel's red line when the plant in Fordow, near Qom, is fully operational. In contrast, the American line is very faint and difficult to identify. It is grounded in US policy, which seeks to delay the inevitable, and to the extent possible, avoid a decision.

If Iran remains a threshold state, will this change Israeli forecasts on the nuclear arms race in the Middle East, part of every discussion of the implications of Iran's going nuclear? Stopping Iran before the threshold is likely to slow down the nuclear arms race in the region because states that feel threatened by nuclear weapons in Iran would then be likely to feel less committed to development of their own independent nuclear program. Nevertheless, it is not inconceivable that other states would actually seek to adopt the "Iranian model," and this would necessarily lead to the creation of a wide array of nuclear threshold states in the Middle East.

Iran's retaining the status of a threshold state, if it is reliably kept years from nuclear weapons, could also be advantageous in some way. The fear shared by many Israelis of living in the shadow of the bomb would be diminished if Iran remained far away from a breakout moment, and if it refrained from taking steps indicating it was once again seeking to approach a position from where it could break out at relatively short notice.

A Bad Deal on the Horizon?

A round of talks between the P5+1 and Iran on the nuclear issue was held in Istanbul in April 2012, and another round is expected to take place in Baghdad in May 2012. In spite of a decade of fruitless dialogue, the two sides have an interest in holding negotiations: Iran, in order to avoid further tightening of sanctions, and President Obama, in order to put off difficult decisions, at least until after the presidential elections in November 2012. Although the opening positions of the sides are far apart, the nature of negotiations is to bring positions closer together, especially considering that the two sides have a clear interest in creating an image of success for the process, if only in order to remove the option of an Israeli strike.

The common assessment is that in any possible deal between the international community and Iran, Iran will be granted legitimacy for enriching uranium. The difference between a “good deal” and a “bad deal,” therefore, is not the legitimacy of enriching uranium, but the parameters that will prevent Iran from obtaining the capability to break out to nuclear weapons, which will stop the clock or even turn it back (by removing most of the enriched material from Iran), and will prevent it from entering the zone of immunity. These parameters actually exhaust the non-military options for stopping Iran’s military nuclearization.

A “good deal” will thus include significant restrictions on continued uranium enrichment in Iran, the removal of most of the enriched uranium from the country, the closure of the facility in Fordow, an Iranian response to the open questions from the IAEA, and Iranian agreement to close inspection (including implementation of the IAEA’s Additional Protocol). Such a deal would ensure that the Iranian effort to break out to nuclear weapons would take much longer and that Iran would be outside the zone of immunity. The deal would not meet the maximal demands made of Iran in the past, but it is better than the alternatives of “the bomb or the bombing.” However, there is very little likelihood that Iran will accept the terms of such an agreement.

If agreements are reached between the international community and Iran, Iran, in exchange for tactical measures and minor limitations on enrichment and/or inspection, will be able to continue its civilian nuclear program.

From Israel's point of view, the main disadvantages of a dialogue with Iran include the possibility that Iran will receive legitimacy for enriching uranium without verification that the enriched material is removed from the country and without the closure of the Qom facility, so that the nuclear clock would not be stopped; the immunity it would receive from attack, at least during the talks; the time it would gain, especially if amassing of uranium is not stopped; and the fear that international pressure on Iran will be reduced.

It is not inconceivable that the US administration will seek to increase the size of the pie in order to add levers for pressure on Iran and discuss issues besides the nuclear issue. Possible American "carrots" to be presented to Iran include security guarantees, that is, removing the military option from the agenda; removing Iran from its political isolation; and granting it economic aid, including investments and access to Western technology. Such inducements are likely to bring about the continuation of the contacts, which suits Iranian interests.

Israel must demand that the United States focus on the Iranian nuclear issue, the most problematic issue from the strategic point of view, even if this leads to a crisis in the talks. It should be made clear to Washington that until a suspension of uranium enrichment is achieved, Israel has no interest in expanding the talks with Iran to other subjects. From the Israeli point of view, an achievement in the talks with Iran would be a verified complete cessation of all fuel cycle activities in Iran; full implementation of the Additional Protocol of the IAEA; closure of the Fordow facility; removal of all enrichment products in Iran; and establishment of an effective international mechanism to inspect suspension of enrichment. However, as it considers the issue on a more closed level, it is perhaps worthwhile for Israel to adopt a more modest goal.

The talks with Iran, at least as long as they continue and certainly if they result in the sides' reaching any understandings, will limit Israel's ability to present a credible threat to use force, which is an essential element in the attempt to change Iranian policy. On the other hand, Iran, by creating difficulties and illustrating that it is not interested in seriously discussing its nuclear project, will give greater legitimacy to the potential use of force against it. In any case, a prolonged round of talks with Iran is likely to aggravate the trend toward international acceptance of a situation in which Iran is slowly becoming a nuclear state.

Conclusion

Much has been written about the negative strategic consequences of Iran's possession of nuclear weapons, and conversely, about the problematic implications of attacking Iran's nuclear facilities. Much less has been written on the likelihood and the implications of Iran's stopping on the threshold.

In our assessment, this could be a preferred strategic option for Iran: to be strategic decision making distance from nuclear capability. This option is dangerous because Iran would retain the possibility of arming itself with nuclear weapons within a short time when conditions were optimal from its point of view, for example, a crisis in another corner of the world, American attention focused on other strategic threats (such as Pakistan, North Korea, or China), and an international community that is tired and has become accustomed to the idea of a nuclear Iran.

As a threshold state, Iran would continue – and with greater self-confidence – to work to exert its influence and engage in negative intervention in various theaters in the region, without the restrictions and risks that would apply if it chose to break out to the bomb. The threshold state status would provide the Iranian regime with prestige and a certain amount of immunity from attack, and it would be more difficult than in the past to mobilize support for sanctions against Iran, especially as long as there is a sense that it is possible by various means to keep Iran from crossing the nuclear threshold.

The third option is important, and its implications must be clear. Any agreement with Iran, or out of weakness, acceptance of leaving Iran with uranium enrichment capability without restrictions as to the purpose, location, and control of the material, is tantamount to recognizing Iran as a threshold state. It would appear that the third option is becoming attractive to Iran, and perhaps also to the West, which is seeking to postpone any decision on the Iranian nuclear issue and fears the price of attacking Iranian nuclear sites.

Notes

- 1 "Khamenei: We'll Attack with the Same Force as Israel and the United States," *Ynet*, March 20, 2012.
- 2 See Yoel Guzansky, "Compromising on a Nuclear Iran," *Strategic Assessment* 12, no. 3 (2009): 87-96.
- 3 David Sanger, "On Iran, Questions of Detection and Response Divide U.S. and Israel," *New York Times*, March 6, 2012.

An Attack on Iran: The Morning After

Ephraim Kam

In recent months there has been talk both in Israel and abroad about the possibility of a military operation against Iranian nuclear installations. Several factors have contributed to this development: reports that progress on the Iranian nuclear program is bringing Israel closer to the moment of decision about a military strike; the public debate on the topic in Israel; Israel's desire to increase the pressure on Iran and other governments to take effective steps to stop the program; efforts by the American administration to try to ensure that Israel does not act against Iran independently of the United States; and Iran's counter measures, indicative of the pressure within the Iranian leadership due to concern about a possible strike.

This essay seeks to examine the developments that might ensue following a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. The essay does not deal with the operational aspects of a strike or other considerations relevant to such a decision. Rather, assuming that a strike has been carried out by Israel and/or the US, it seeks to analyze the possible results in various realms and their significance.

The underlying assumption of this analysis is that a military operation would focus on Iran's nuclear facilities for the purpose of stopping or at least delaying the nuclear program for a considerable period of time. In any case, the essay is not assuming a widespread ground campaign, territorial conquest, or an attempt to change the Iranian regime, the way the US set out to do in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, even within this assumption, a military strike could consist of varying scopes: an attack

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on a single nuclear installation as a deterrent or a warning; a limited strike against two or three of the most important installations to destroy or severely damage them; an extensive strike against all the important installations as well as against sites involved in the manufacture of other weapons of mass destruction; or a strike on additional strategic military capabilities, such as missile sites, navy units, or Revolutionary Guards targets in order to damage Iran's response capabilities.¹ This essay will not analyze the implications of all these alternatives, but in general, the larger the scope of the operation, the more extensive the ramifications are likely to be.

Principal Considerations

In terms of the implications of a military strike, it is necessary to distinguish between two basic scenarios: (a) an attack carried out by Israel, and (b) an attack carried out by the US. There is also the possibility of a joint US-Israel strike, which given American involvement would be similar in most ways to an American strike.

Two essential reasons create a fundamental difference between an American strike and an Israeli attack. One, the US has much better operational capabilities to strike at Iran, both because of the quality of its weapon systems and armaments and because of the much shorter distance between its departure bases and the Iranian targets. Therefore, the US is in a better position than Israel to carry out repeated strikes against targets to ensure their destruction; time-wise, the US is also able to carry out a longer military operation. For the same reason, the US is also in a better position to attack a wider circle of Iranian strategic targets, should it see the need to do so. The second reason: the US has greater deterrent capabilities than Israel and better capabilities to confront the Iranian response and withstand international criticism.

An analysis of the ramifications of a military strike must examine some central issues:

- a. The ramifications of the strike for the future of Iran's nuclear program and for Iran's determination and capabilities in this realm.
- b. Iran's response against Israel, the US, and perhaps also America's other allies after coming under attack. In this context, it is also necessary to examine the extent to which a strike could set off an extensive confrontation in the region.

- c. The position of international actors, including among the Arab and Muslim world, regarding a strike.
- d. The ramifications of a strike on the oil market.
- e. The ramifications of a strike for Iran's internal situation, especially the degree of the Iranian public's support for the regime and the status of the opposition movement.

Some central elements would affect the ramifications of a strike, the most important being the stance of the US on a strike, regardless of whether the US or Israel undertakes it. In this context, an Israeli strike raises several questions. Would the American administration give Israel the green light to embark on such an operation? What would the position of the administration be were Israel to embark on an operation without American agreement or coordination with the administration? Would the US help Israel, even if the operation were not coordinated, in handling the Iranian response and the subsequent international pressure? And would the administration itself take steps against Israel were an Israeli operation to be carried out without coordination with the US?

An additional important element would be the success of the strike. If the results are considered a success, one could expect the steps and criticism aimed against Israel (and/or the US) to be limited and fade with time, as was the case after the operation against the nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981. The reason is that despite the widespread reservations about a military move, a large majority of the governments involved would like to see the Iranian nuclear program stopped, even by military means. Here, however, the critical question is what would constitute success. Generally speaking, the destruction of at least some of the critical nuclear facilities that would delay Iran's quest for nuclear weapons by a minimum of three to five years at a tolerable cost to the attacking force would be considered a successful result.

A third factor would be the circumstances under which an operation would take place, especially if these could justify the strike insofar as the involved governments are concerned. Circumstances that would help justify a strike include significant new revelations about the Iranian nuclear project that would serve as persuasive evidence that Iran has

It is unlikely that Iran would be interested in expanding the circle of confrontation to other nations in the case of an attack by Israel.

decided to break out towards nuclear arms; the recognition by Western governments that political means to stop Iran have exhausted themselves and hit a dead end; blatant steps by Iran in the nuclear context such as withdrawing from the Non-Proliferation Treaty; or the possibility – albeit slim – that Iran would undertake a first strike and attack before a military move is made against it, as it is currently threatening to do.

A fourth element concerns the future and reconstruction of Iran's nuclear program. The common assumption is that an attack on its facilities would not stop the program, but would at most postpone its completion by several years. This is a realistic assumption. It is likely that the Iranian regime would feel committed to rebuild its nuclear facilities as fast as possible and continue to advance the program while assimilating lessons from the strike, including improving fortifications and dispersing the sites. This assumption rests on several foundations: the Iranian regime has a principled interest in possessing nuclear arms; the program plays a key role in the regime's conduct, so that stopping it would constitute a defeat for the regime and an impressive victory for the regime's bitter enemies; significant progress has already been made and efforts and resources invested to date essentially obviate the possibility of the regime abandoning it now; and the regime's belief that a strike is but a first step in an attempt to depose it. Nonetheless, should Iran become convinced that the attacker is determined to stop the program, even if this requires the attacker to attack the sites over and over again, it may be that reconstruction efforts would be abandoned over time. Such a possibility applies primarily if a strike is carried out by the US.

The possible effort to reconstruct the nuclear program has another aspect. Iran is expected to take advantage of an attack to build future legitimacy in the international arena for the development of nuclear arms. To this end, it may try to exploit a strike to free itself of the sanctions and IAEA inspections, and perhaps even withdraw from the NPT without having to pay a steep price. Moreover, if Iran has yet to decide to break out towards nuclear weapons, a strike is liable to give it justification for doing so.

Finally, a central element would be Iran's response to a strike. There is hardly any doubt that Iran would respond to an attack with the use of force, unlike Iraq's decision in 1981 and Syria's decision in 2007 to refrain from retaliating. A strike would be seen by Iran as part of the unremitting

struggle against its bitter foes, in which it cannot show any weakness and avoid retaliation for so flagrant a move; Iran's desire for regional hegemony would compel it to react forcefully to a strike; and Iran has publicly avowed to respond to a strike against it with force. Still, Iran would have to take into account its limited capabilities when deciding how to respond.

An Israeli Attack against Iranian Nuclear Sites

The starting assumption is that should Israel decide to carry out a military strike against Iran, it would concentrate on critical nuclear sites. This does not mean that Israel would not examine more extensive possibilities, especially in order to limit Iran's capabilities of response. For the move against Iran's nuclear sites to be deemed a success, the key question is: how much more time would Iran need to complete its nuclear project? There is only a slim chance that Iran would abandon the project altogether as the result of a single – even if successful – strike. Moreover, assessing the delay in the Iranian timetable would depend primarily on the extent of the damage to the sites, the time Iran would need to rebuild, and Iran's determination, factors that cannot be known ahead of time. One may assume that some of the buildings and equipment would be damaged in a successful strike but some would survive and/or be able to be rebuilt, while the manpower at the sites would suffer little injury. That is to say, the technology and know-how would be affected only in part and could serve as the basis for site reconstruction.

However, beyond these general assumptions, important questions remain, such as: how much time would it take Iran to recover from the strike until reconstruction begins? Would it be possible to use the current sites, or would it be necessary to build new ones? Have the Iranians already constructed alternate sites – perhaps small underground facilities – to be used in case existing sites come under attack, thereby shortening the time it would take to rebuild the program? Would the Iranians run into trouble acquiring equipment to reconstruct the sites? Would a successful strike require them to invest time and effort to improve the means for reinforcing the sites? For many years Iran has taken a possible Israeli and/or American attack on its nuclear facilities into consideration and has prepared for such a scenario. These preparations are liable to shorten the time needed for reconstruction.

In light of these questions, the American administration has estimated that a military strike would buy one or two years of breathing space, whereas the Israeli estimate is a gain of three to five years.² The difference between the two assessments could be critical. If the American estimate is correct, one to two years might not justify a military strike. Even a longer delay, however, prompts the question of what might be gained. The main hope is that within such a period, the Iranian regime would change, which in itself could remove the Iranian threat. However, for the moment the regime seems to be stable, and despite the potential for change there is no guarantee that this will occur in the next few years. Moreover, even if the regime changes, there is no guarantee that its successor would forfeit the development of nuclear arms. Today there seems to be widespread general support for the nuclear program as a national project. Still, one could expect that the significance of the Iranian nuclear threat would shrink under a more moderate regime, even if Iran at that time possessed nuclear weapons.

A further central question concerns Iran's response to a military move. An Israeli strike against Iran would create a long term account between the two countries that is not likely to be settled for many years, on the part of the regime and among the Iranian people. This means that an Iranian response would be launched immediately and then continue for a long period. Iran has two ways to retaliate: missile and rocket fire, either from its territory or via its proxies, and acts of terrorism.

Iran has dozens of launchers and hundreds of missiles of various ranges and with them can reach every part of Israel. Iran has threatened to respond to an Israeli attack with massive missile fire, and it would likely do so very soon after an attack. Iran also has limited capabilities to attack Israeli targets from the air, because it has 24-32 Sukhoi-24 planes with sufficient range to reach Israel. However, it is highly doubtful that Iran would use this option given Israel's air force and aerial defenses.

In addition, Iran would likely ask Hizbollah and Hamas to direct massive rocket fire toward Israel from Lebanon and Gaza, though a positive response by Hizbollah and Hamas is not a foregone conclusion. Hizbollah may fear that Israel would use such fire to settle its accounts with the organization, while Hamas is not as intimately connected to Iran as is Hizbollah and is under no obligation to risk its own welfare on behalf of Iran. Nonetheless, Hizbollah and perhaps Hamas too would likely join

in an Iranian response with massive rocket fire aimed at Israel. Even were Hamas to decide not to open fire at Israel, smaller organizations in the Gaza Strip – especially Islamic Jihad, with its closer connections to Iran – might do so. Furthermore, Iran would presumably employ the terrorist networks it has established in various states to carry out large showcase attacks, directly and/or via Hizbollah, against Israeli and Jewish targets in Israel and abroad.

Were Iran to respond with missile fire against Israel, the more likely possibility is that these missiles would carry conventional warheads. However, Iran has missiles with chemical and perhaps also biological warheads in its possession. It is less likely that Iran would use these missiles because it has no doubt that Israel possesses a reserve of nuclear arms, and it would have to consider the possibility that Israel would respond to non-conventional fire with a nuclear attack. Still, the scenario cannot be ruled out completely.

Even were an attack to be carried out by Israel, the US could find itself involved in the confrontation under two possible situations. Were Iran to decide, justifiably or not, that the US was a partner to the Israeli attack, it is liable to attack American targets, especially in the Gulf region. Alternately, the US may see a need to help Israel face Iran if the confrontation between them expands and becomes more complicated, e.g., by setting up anti-missile defense systems in case of need. In this context, some worry that a military operation in Iran could lead to a regional war in which the US and the Gulf states would also become entangled. However, the likelihood of this scenario is low and deterioration would have its limits. There would be no ground campaign to speak of, rather aerial attacks and missiles. Most importantly, Iran would probably not attack US and Gulf targets excessively, if it decides to attack them at all. In any case, it is unlikely that Iran would be interested in expanding the circle of confrontation to other nations in the case of an attack by Israel; the more reasonable possibility is that in such a scenario most nations in the region would not become embroiled in violent action.

The results of a military operation would be much more impressive if carried out by the US rather than Israel.

An additional issue is the significance of an attack for the international community. An Israeli attack on Iran would not have

international support. All the governments involved, other than the American administration, have expressed reservations about such a move, both publicly and privately. While the American administration has not ruled it out in principle, it too has reservations about it under current circumstances. Consequently, Israel is liable to find itself harshly condemned and accused of fostering regional deterioration, and the focus of criticism may shift from Iran to Israel. One cannot rule out the possibility that sanctions would be imposed on Israel and that the issue of inspecting Israel's nuclear capabilities would be raised again. The key to the severity of such steps would to a great extent lie in the stance adopted by the American administration. In tandem, it would be more difficult to continue to level harsh sanctions against Iran: various nations are already less than keen on this option, and an Israeli attack might provide the excuse to scale back their involvement.

The stance of the American administration would be greatly affected by prior coordination between the US and Israel. Were Israel to receive the green light from the American administration to attack and were Israel to coordinate the attack with it, the administration may work to reduce the criticism directed at Israel. Conversely, were Israel to surprise the administration and carry out an attack without prior coordination, even were Israel to inform the administration at the last moment, the US could join in the criticism of Israel and take steps against it. The issue has broader significance: the move against Iran would not end with only a military strike, even if successful. A political/diplomatic move would be necessary to ensure the strategic gain, including increasing the pressure on Iran and entering into negotiations from a position of power in order to define the terms of an arrangement with Iran on the nuclear issue. The administration's stance would have a great deal of influence on the political/diplomatic stage, and would determine whether the level of willingness to exploit the military strike to stop Iran outweighs the criticism of Israel for having attacked. The answer to this question would also be affected by the attack's rate of success.

In addition there is the reality that many Arab nations are afraid of a nuclear Iran, and some of the Gulf states have encouraged the administration to do everything possible, even using military force, to prevent this. However, even if these nations were to view an Israeli attack with favor behind tightly closed doors, they would almost certainly use

such an attack to criticize and isolate Israel. Should such an attack create a harsh climate for Israel in the Arab and Muslim world, this might adversely affect Israel's relations with Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey.

Finally, the possibility of failure must also be considered, whereby there is no significant damage to the nuclear sites and/or the attack comes at a high cost. This of course is the worst scenario from Israel's point of view, because the nuclear threat would remain unchanged, Iran would have the justification it wants to break out and attain nuclear arms, Israel's deterrence would be damaged, and Iran would be liable to decide to take action against Israel.

An American Attack on Iran

The US has much better capabilities than Israel to undertake a military action against Iran, and therefore has a variety of options regarding the use of force, including:

- a. Imposing a naval blockade against Iran as a warning, without opening fire.
- b. Attacking regime targets, such as Revolutionary Guards targets, government facilities, or missile and naval units, both for the sake of warning and also to damage Iran's response capabilities.
- c. Attacking nuclear targets, and perhaps also other strategic-military sites.

Among the American capabilities, the most important in the context of attacking the nuclear facilities in Iran is the ability to carry out repeated attacks over time, thereby ensuring not just the success of the operation but also prolonging Iran's timetable for completing its nuclear project by a significant period of time. Furthermore, while Iran would want to rebuild its sites, repeated American attacks could convince Iran that the American administration is determined to stop the nuclear project, that there is no point in continuing the efforts to reconstruct the facilities, and that Iran would be better off abandoning its efforts to attain nuclear arms. Were the US willing and determined to attack Iran repeatedly, one may assume that it would gain more than just a one or two year postponement in the Iranian nuclear timetable – as the administration currently predicts – and could conceivably even stop the project altogether.

Iran would also likely respond to an American attack. Such a response could bear several features. First, there is a reasonable probability that

Iran would attack American targets in the Middle East, whether military or civilian, especially in the Gulf region, using rockets and missiles and terrorism, whether perpetrated by Iran itself or by its proxies. In such a case, the most vulnerable American targets are likely to be in Afghanistan, Iraq, Gulf states, and Persian Gulf waters. While the American forces have withdrawn from Iraq and cannot be targeted for attack there, tens of thousands of American soldiers stationed in the Gulf and thousands of American civilians who have remained in Iraq as consultants are liable to serve as targets. Even if the preference is for attacks in the Gulf area, because Iran has better capabilities for attacking American targets there than elsewhere, Iranian terrorist attacks could occur in other locations too. The probability of an Iranian terrorist attack on US soil is more remote, and in any case Iran would try not to leave its fingerprints so as not to encourage an escalation in counterattacks against it.

Second, as a result of an American attack Iran would likely respond with missile fire and terrorist attacks against Israel, even if Israel does not participate in an initial strike. The reason is twofold: as far as Iran is concerned, Israel is America's partner in creating the threat against it, and Israel is responsible for inciting the administration to attack. Also, in practical terms, it is convenient for Iran to attack Israel.

At the same time, Iran would likely restrain its response toward the US, both because of concern about a comprehensive conflict with a superpower with inestimably better military capabilities than its own and also because of the fear, deeply rooted in the Iranian leadership, that the US would use the circumstances to try to topple the Islamic regime in Tehran. Iran would therefore have to find the golden mean between the desire to respond to so flagrant an attack on its strategic capabilities and the concern that an over-reaction would boomerang.

Iran is also liable to attack US allies, especially in the Gulf, with missiles and terrorism. Iran has already issued public warnings that it would attack any nation aiding an attack against it. Still, it is probable that in such a scenario Iran would again refrain from escalating its response, fearing an American over-reaction.

In turn, the US would likely respond with force to Iran's retaliation. Therefore, it is precisely the scenario of an American attack that is liable to widen the circle of confrontation, though even then it is likely

that it would not lead to an expanded regional conflict because of Iran's expected cautiousness and America's deterrent capabilities.

At this point, no Western government other than Israel would support a military operation, and would certainly not take part should the American administration decide to act. This lack of support stems not only from the West's reservations about the use of force and concern about its ramifications, but also from the fact that to date the administration has done nothing to shore up the political support and perhaps also the support of the Security Council that it would need for an attack. Unless the administration rallies international support, it is liable to be exposed to much international criticism as well as criticism on the home front. This could lead to a wave of anti-American and anti-Israel demonstrations in the Arab and Muslim world. Therefore, should the administration decide on attacking Iran, it is likely to prepare the political ground before undertaking the operation, both among its allies and at home; in that case, the picture could change, at least in part. If the administration does in fact gain support for an attack, its subsequent political situation would be better, and any criticism would be more muted. Moreover, even if it does not garner sufficient international support, the administration would still be able to handle such criticism without any particular difficulty, in part because nations are interested in seeing the Iranian nuclear enterprise stopped.

Two Additional Implications

An Israeli or American attack on Iran can be expected to have a negative effect on the oil market, for two direct reasons: one, Iran has threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz in retaliation for an attack. The probability of Iran making good on this threat is low, because Iran would be damaging its own oil exports more than anything else, and because the US and Great Britain have explicitly stated that they would open the Strait by force. At the same time, the probability of this threat rises should Iran be prevented from exporting its oil. The second reason could be Iranian attacks on oil installations and tankers belonging to the Gulf states should America

An American or Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would likely rally a large part of the Iranian people around the regime, at least in the immediate aftermath.

Therefore, Iranian opposition elements have also expressed reservations about an attack.

attack Iran. However, even if Iran avoids taking these steps, the price of oil is liable to increase, at least temporarily, as a result of the tension and uncertainty that would ensue in the wake of a military operation. Should oil prices rise, the attacker – Israel and/or the US – would be blamed.

Another issue concerns the effect of an attack on Iran's internal system. It is reasonable to assume that an American or Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would rally a large part of the Iranian people around the regime, at least in the immediate aftermath. While some Iranians are interested in regime change, they would not welcome an external attack on a national project such as the nuclear program. In this sense, an attack could actually help the regime and hurt the opposition, and therefore Iranian opposition elements have also expressed reservations about an attack. Nevertheless, the fundamental internal opposition to the regime among many Iranians would not disappear, and after some time it would likely break out again.

Conclusion

There is a great deal of uncertainty regarding the consequences of a military operation in Iran because of the many variables, chief among them the extent of damage to the nuclear facilities. This factor would have the greatest effect on both the amount of time the Iranian nuclear program would be delayed and the severity of the Iranian response. In any case, it is clear that the results of the operation would be much more impressive if carried out by the US rather than Israel.

Assessing the Iranian response is an important factor in any decision by Israel or the US to embark on a military operation against Iran. There is little doubt that Iran would respond to the attack, by itself or through its proxies, and that such a response might be painful. However, some considerations are likely to restrain and curtail Iran's response, first of all Iran's limited military capabilities and its fear of an extensive conflict with the US, in the case of an American attack. Therefore it is more likely that the circle of confrontation would include Iran and its proxies, Israel, the US, and perhaps also some of the Gulf states, in a limited scope. However, the probability of a regional conflict seems low.

Even if an Israeli attack is successful, it carries several risks: in addition to Iran's response, Israel would face a wave of international criticism, at least in the short term, and would perhaps also have to deal

with sanctions; Israel would be blamed for the increase in oil prices; and the Muslim and Arab world would see waves of criticism and fury against Israel liable to damage Israel's relations with Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey. Moreover, an Israeli attack would apparently not stop the Iranian nuclear project for more than a few years, and Iran would seek to exploit the attack to gain legitimacy for its nuclear program, rid itself of inspections and sanctions, and even attempt to break out towards nuclear arms. The worst scenario of all would be a failed attack, because the nuclear threat would remain in place and Israel's deterrence would be damaged.

Should an attack be carried out by the US, the chances for success would be significantly increased. America's operational capabilities would allow it to undertake repeated attacks on the nuclear sites and thereby increase the damage to them, earning a longer postponement of Iran's nuclear arms ambition or persuading Iran to abandon the project altogether. Nonetheless, even an American attack would bear its own risks: an Iranian missile and/or terrorism response against the US and Israel and perhaps also US allies in the Gulf, increased oil prices, and criticism and fury around the world directed at the US and Israel.

At the same time, should a military operation be successful and Iran's acquisition of nuclear arms be delayed by several years, this would have strategic significance: there would be a window of opportunity for eliminating Iran's nuclear development; Iran's regional status could be weakened, thus also weakening the radical camp in the area; the Israeli and/or US deterrence against Iran would be strengthened; the position of the US in the region, which has declined in the last ten years in part because of its entanglement in Iraq, would be enhanced; and the self-confidence of the Gulf states vis-à-vis Iran would be strengthened.

Notes

- 1 Anthony Cordesman, *Israeli and US Strikes on Iran: A Speculative Analysis* (Washington, DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 5, 2007).
- 2 See, for example, remarks by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta at the Saban Forum, December 2, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4937>; Ronen Bergman, "Will Israel Attack Iran?" *New York Times Magazine*, December 25, 2011.

Tradition and Modernity in the “Arab Spring”

Asher Susser

Terminology has analytical significance, and word choice is not detached from basic assumptions and even conclusions that could be categorical – some more, others less. Thus the words that researchers, commentators, and observers chose to describe and analyze the revolutionary events that swept the Middle East in the past year reflect a set of cultural contexts, worldviews, expectations, and hopes. In the West, commentators adopted the term “Arab Spring” to describe what the Arabs themselves primarily cast as “revolution” (*thawra*). The use of “spring,” whether consciously or not, evokes historical analogies with the “Spring of Nations” in Europe in 1848, or the “Prague Spring” of 1968, or spring 1989 in Europe with the fall of Communism. All these were characterized by national uprisings intended by peoples to shake free of repressive rule, which was to be replaced by secular/liberal/democratic regimes. In 2011, the conceptual premise was that if such was the case in Europe, then such is the case in the Middle East. This expectation was reinforced by the widespread use of the newest symbols of modern communication, the Facebook and Twitter social networks. Their use led to the common adoption of terms such as the “Facebook Revolution,” meant to stress the integration of Middle Eastern societies in universal processes of change, e.g., globalization, suggesting a growing emulation of and similarity to the West.

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However this description is a striking case of "false universalism,"¹ due to its remoteness from reality and a flawed vision reflective of the inability, or unwillingness, to recognize the cultural difference of "the other." The deep undercurrents of Middle East political culture differ from those of the liberal/secular Western world, first and foremost because Middle East societies are for the most part not secular. These are societies in which the public ascribes great importance to belief, religious ritual, and religion itself as a central component of collective identity. Paradoxically, in the Western world, where there is unprecedented openness to multiculturalism, there is also an unwillingness to genuinely recognize the political/cultural difference of the other. Between outsiders' expectations at the start of this past year's events in the Middle East – establishment of liberal/secular governments on the ruins of the old regimes – and the Islamist reality that ultimately emerged, there is little resemblance. How can one explain the gaping chasm between the universal expectations and hopes of the commentators (and in their trail, politicians) and the actual results? How could these individuals have formulated assessments so detached from reality?

Terminology and Academic/Intellectual Contextualization

Any attempt to explain this mistaken assessment requires an exploration of the deep processes of change that have occurred in the Western academic and intellectual world in the post-modern era, which began to take shape after the unimaginable horrors of the Second World War. The eclipse of morality during this war, epitomized by the extermination of six million Jews in Europe through a huge, organized scientific/industrial complex of mass murder, and the use of nuclear weapons – the fruit of technological progress of the exact sciences – in order to annihilate vast numbers of Japanese at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was unprecedented in human history. These events challenged the existence of a value-free science. The recruitment of the exact sciences for blatantly immoral goals called into question the ability to separate between science and values, morals, and even politics.

If the field of exact sciences was so affected, then all the more so were the humanities and social sciences. Following the war, an accelerated process of democratization took place at universities in the West, particularly in the US. Intertwined with the struggle for equal rights, higher

education became accessible to a range of populations and was no longer the exclusive domain of a narrow elite. Along with the democratization of higher education came the demand for democratization of the humanities and social sciences, particularly history. No longer acceptable were histories of the ruling elite written by members of this very sector, in order to preserve the existing balance of power and perpetuate what critics deemed were existing political, social, and economic wrongs. Rather, a history of the masses must be written – of the simple man and of those hitherto excluded from the ruling historical narrative, such as minorities and women – in order to rectify the injustices of the past.

An integral part of this demand to “reform the world” was the argument that one cannot separate between historical research and the ideological, moral, and political inclinations of the writers of history themselves. There is no objective truth, maintains this argument – a contention that challenged the underpinnings of rational thought of the modern enlightenment and instead claimed an infinite number of possible historical narratives. Narrative, according to this school, depends on the political agenda of every author, and accordingly, history ought to be written in order to alter the existing balance of political power. Historical inquiry is supposed to serve political change rather than strive unrealistically for an objective truth that doesn’t actually exist. Thus “political correctness” sought to succeed the quest for historical truth.²

This post-modern discourse did not bypass Middle East studies, as was expressed poignantly in Edward Said’s frontal assault on modern Middle East theory in his highly influential book *Orientalism*. Said attacked Middle East scholars for having overemphasized the cultural difference of Middle Eastern nations due to the preponderant weight they ascribed to Islam and its culture in the life of those nations. He categorically rejected the “notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically ‘different’ inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture, or racial essence proper to that geographical space.”³

Between outsiders’ expectations at the outset of the events – establishment of liberal/secular governments on the ruins of the old regimes – and the Islamist reality that ultimately emerged, there is little resemblance.

According to Said, the old Orientalism, as in other fields of research, seeks to serve a balance of political forces, in this case, the supremacy of Western powers over nations of the Middle East. In ascribing to Islam an unchanging nature, Orientalists, maintained Said, are afflicted by "essentialism" or even racism, intended to serve the vision of the West as eternally preferable and superior to the failing and backward Middle East. Consequently, Said urged Middle East studies to correct its ways, which were the result of arrogance, overconfidence, and isolation from other fields of knowledge. He recommended that it adopt a universal, multidisciplinary approach supported by contemporary human sciences such as anthropology, sociology, political theory, and economic history. This is how "the study of so-called Oriental problems" should be pursued, precisely as any other area of the world.⁴

This article is not intended to object to interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary scholarship, nor is it designed to defend the old Orientalism in its various forms, which are, indeed, not above criticism. However, it is intended to criticize "false universalisms," i.e., those "misconceptions that arise from the tendency to assume" that the Western historical experience with social and political development is "the universal norm and has been identical for the entire world" – whereas in fact, "other religious traditions have had a different historical experience and memory with respect to the role of religion in public life, and it is precisely this memory and experience that shapes contemporary attitudes [in the Muslim world]."⁵ Furthermore, the article seeks to criticize the tendency to "explain events as if they were generic phenomena inextricably linked to paradigms of a universal nature.... Such universal paradigms attempt to explain widely divergent historical developments as if differences in culture, time, and place had no vital bearing on historical outcomes."⁶

At the height of the Western academic debate over Orientalism, the well-known American scholar Michael Hudson warned his colleagues "not to throw out the political culture baby with the Orientalist bathwater."⁷ For the most part, his call was not heeded, and in the enlightened Western world, developments have reached total absurdity to the point where modern Middle East scholars and observers avoid dealing with political culture almost entirely. "Saidian" pressure has won, a Pyrrhic victory it must be said, by deterring and intimidating people

from dealing with the differences or the political-cultural particularities of Middle Eastern societies, out of fear that they might be denounced and condemned as "Orientalists," "essentialists," or heaven forbid, "racists."

The use of the term "spring" in all its European analogies and the exaggerated focus on the almost magical power of Facebook and Twitter, are intended – whether consciously or not – to foster a sense of similarity between Middle Eastern peoples and their Western counterparts. Technology serves as the perfect representative of the uniformity of a universal and global world, and thus the commentators created the impression that there was no difference between virtual presence and real power in the public space. They could also ignore, reject, or totally deny the importance of the far more profound undercurrents of Egyptian society, and their political-cultural dimensions, as if they were irrelevant.

The media focused on the young people in Tahrir Square, most of whom were representatives of liberal groups. They continually interviewed English speaking, "Oxbridge-style" intellectuals, repeatedly claiming that the revolution was not Islamist, that it did not represent Islamist demands, and that the Islamist political forces were actually a marginal phenomenon. It was as if those hundreds of thousands of people in Tahrir Square, rather than the eighty-five million others who were not there, represented all of Egyptian society (not to mention the fact that in Egypt, the number of illiterate men and women far exceeds the number of those who are connected to the internet). It seems that from all the excitement of witnessing the young secular/liberal generation of the "Facebook Revolution," most Western observers failed to see the full picture that was unfolding before their eyes even in Tahrir Square itself. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood were present amid the crowd, but very wisely took positions on the margins in order to prevent the army from acting against them and/or not to arouse Western anxieties. The Western media greatly admired the exemplary conduct of the demonstrators, who posted guards at the square's entrances so as to maintain security and non-violence. They witnessed an impressive civic spirit as the demonstrators organized the cleanup of the square following the first phase of the struggle against Mubarak. But those same observers did not report, or did not know, that those who posted the guards at the entrances and organized the cleanup operation were members of the Muslim Brotherhood. It was they too who

actually supplied the microphones to the demonstrators. Only they had the necessary organizational capacity for these efforts.

Within Israeli academia, a debate developed regarding the events in Egypt between those academics of the Saidian school and their opponents. The latter maintained that the Middle East was on the verge of an Islamic tidal wave while the former adopted the "politically correct" position of Western academia and media. They argued that a new Middle Eastern democracy was taking shape here and now. In the new world of Facebook and Twitter, an Islamic takeover of Egypt was not expected, they assessed; in the free and democratic space that was filling the void left by the disintegration of Mubarak's National Democratic Party, the Muslim Brotherhood was more likely to decline than to grow. Large segments of the Egyptian public would have political alternatives that were not previously available. New parties would arise and could siphon off some of the Muslim Brotherhood vote. The Brotherhood "would remain an important part of the Egyptian polity, but not the biggest or the most important part."⁸ Not a word of this assessment proved correct. There was not a shred of connection between the "politically correct" evaluation of the "Arab Spring" and the facts of life.

The Arab Awakening, Then and Now

Another term used in describing the shockwaves in the Middle East that was more appropriate and compatible with reality, less charged and evoking fewer unrealistic expectations, was the "Arab awakening." Here, however, an historical remark is in order, along with a distinction as to what is happening today. "Arab awakening" is not a new term; its origins are found in the beginning of the previous century. It was used by the Arabs themselves (*nahda*) to describe the beginnings of Arab nationalism, which became most pervasive in the Middle East in the first half of the twentieth century. One of its better known manifestations was the Arab revolt led by the Hashemites against the Turks in the First World War, followed by Arab struggles to achieve national independence and unity. At the same time, it is important to point out just how and to what extent that period was different from the current phase.

For most of the twentieth century, Arab nationalism was the ideological platform for secular politics in the Middle East. Arab nationalism, at least in theory, is basically a secular ideology. The unifying factor of the Arab

collective is the Arabic language and not the Islamic religion. Therefore, Arabism unites Muslims and Christians equally. Indeed, the leading ideologues of modern Arab nationalism included no small number of Christians. Moreover, Arab nationalism, as a secular foundation, created new opportunities for the integration of minorities into Arab politics. A good example of this was the ascent to power of the Alawis in Syria; they and other minorities took over the Ba’ath party, among whose founding fathers was the Christian Michel Aflaq.

But in recent generations, we have been witness to an entirely different phenomenon, which was highlighted in the “Arab Spring”: the collapse of Arabism and with it a retreat of the secularization process in the Arab world. Secular politics declined in tandem with the defeat of Arabism, and it is this retreat that is at the foundation of the vast difference between the “Arab awakening” of the previous century and that of our time.

Many factors have combined to produce this retreat of the secularization process. The “Arab awakening” in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries was a national awakening of a secular nature. It was part of a broader process of modernization, dominated by an attempt to imitate and adopt Western ways. Westernization was a means for the Arab world to confront the West as an equal, through a process of emulation. At that time, the Western powers were at the peak of their economic, political, cultural, and ideological expansion; naturally, they were a model for emulation. On the other hand, in the post-modern age, the West is much more restrained, less sure of itself, and consumed with doubt and self-criticism. Furthermore, the Western world in recent years is in regression. That same West – secular, democratic, liberal, of economically huge proportions – is now undergoing one of the deepest economic-political and historical crises ever. As an ideal model for emulation, it lost its appeal long ago.

It seems that from the excitement of witnessing the young secular/liberal generation of the “Facebook Revolution,” most Western observers failed to see the full picture that was unfolding before their eyes even in Tahrir Square itself.

Another source of modernizing inspiration following the Second World War was the Soviet model. The Soviet Union, which in a single generation transformed czarist Russia from one of the backward

countries of Europe to a superpower that only the US could rival, was a paragon for regimes and movements across the Arab world. They viewed the Soviet model as a fast track to national, military, and political power. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, nothing of this model remains, and overall, the external secular models, once a shining source of inspiration in the modern Middle East, are no more.

Yet even more important is the failure of Arabism, and in its wake, the decline of the Arabs and the collapse of their secular political platform. The political void that emerged in the wake of Arab weakness is being filled by non-Arab powers, Iran and Turkey, but they too are not secular models of emulation. Turkey is located at one end of the spectrum of Islamist models, and Iran is on the other. Turkey is a more moderate model that still has a strong secular dimension; at the other end of the spectrum is Iran of the ayatollahs. Neither state is a secular model of emulation, the likes of which young Arab officers such as Gamal Abdel Nasser and his generation admired and sought to imitate. The Turkish Republic of Kemal Atatürk is no more, and Prime Minister Erdoğan is leading Turkey in another direction, a far cry from the purist Kemalism of the past.

From a geopolitical standpoint, contemporary Turkey and Iran are reconstructing the borders of old between the Ottoman Empire and Persia. Iraq is reemerging as the border state between the region of Turkish influence in northern Iraq and the region of Iranian influence among the Shiites of the country. Thus the borders between Sunna and Shia are being redrawn. The countries of the region no longer distinguish between themselves based on their regimes, republics against monarchies, or the old Cold War divisions of pro-American countries versus their pro-Soviet counterparts. These distinctions are way out of date. In the spirit of the secular retreat, inter-state relations are presently governed by the religious sectarian fault line of Sunnis versus Shiites: Turkey and the Sunni Arabs are in one camp, and Iran, with the Shiites of Iraq and Shiite Hizbollah in Lebanon, are in the other. Syria, in which the Alawis (supported by the Shiite camp) are fighting a desperate and bloody civil war with the Sunnis, finds itself at the heart of a regional struggle of the rival sectarian camps, fighting between themselves for their domestic sectarian allies: Iran and its Shiite allies in favor of Bashar

al-Assad, pitted against the Sunnis, backed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab League.

If such are relations between states in the region, then all the more so are political relations within the various Arab states. Against the backdrop of the retreat of the secularization process, we are witnessing the revival of traditional or neo-traditional political forces in all the Arab states without exception. Political Islam, sectarianism, and tribalism once again dominate the politics of all Arab countries. In Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen the dominant political players are neither the secular-liberal groups nor the Facebook and Twitter stars of the Western media and its satellites, but the more traditional forces.

Egypt is the most conspicuous example of the clear victory of political Islam. Events there became clear in extremely short order. On February 18, 2011, one week after the fall of Mubarak, the "demonstration of the million" gathered in Tahrir Square to celebrate the victory. Following Friday prayers, addressing the crowd was none other than the spiritual father of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and one of the most popular preachers in the entire Arab world, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Scheduled to speak after him was the darling of the Western media, the young Egyptian hi-tech specialist Wa'il Ghunayyim, a Google employee who became famous for his part in organizing the first demonstrations in Egypt. Ghunayyim, however, did not speak. Upon approaching the speaker's podium he was forcefully removed by men of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁹ If in the beginning the Brotherhood acted cautiously in the back seat, they were now in the driver's seat and in assault mode; they were unwilling to allow Ghunayyim and his like not only to steal the show but even to participate in it.

About a month later, on March 19, a referendum was held in order to approve amendments to the Egyptian constitution and thus pave the way to new elections. The Islamist forces supported approval of the amendments while the liberal secularists and the Coptic minority opted to reject them. They wanted to gain time to organize politically and face what began to look like a clear advantage of the Muslim Brotherhood and the radical Salafis. In the referendum the liberal secularists were resoundingly defeated. The percentage voting in favor of the amendments, i.e., the desired position of the Islamists, amounted to no

less than 77.2 percent. The die was cast, and it was utterly clear where the wind was blowing.

The elections for the two houses of parliament in late 2011 and early 2012 were the proverbial *coup de grace*. In the lower house, the Muslim Brotherhood took 46 percent of the seats while the Salafis gained another 24 percent; combined they thus controlled 70 percent of the house. Their achievements in the elections to the upper house were even more impressive. In the upper house, the Muslim Brotherhood alone took 58 percent of the elected seats¹⁰ while the Salafis took another 25 percent, i.e., more than 80 percent combined. The extremely radical Salafis are neither convenient nor natural partners for the Brotherhood, who are more pragmatic. But this does not alter the fact behind the numbers themselves, namely, that the secular/liberal forces are – at least for the meantime – nothing more than a minor addendum in Egyptian politics. All this lies in total contradiction to almost everything written and said by most analysts and opinion makers in the West in the early days of the “Arab Spring.”

Moreover, the elections in Egypt are not exceptional or limited to the “Arab Spring.” In all free and relatively fair elections in the Middle East since 1989, Islamist forces have almost invariably gained more votes than any other party or grouping. Such was the case in Jordan in 1989, Algeria in 1991, Turkey in every election (except for one) since 1995, the West Bank and Gaza in 2006, Tunisia and Morocco in 2011, and Kuwait in early 2012. In elections in Tunisia and Morocco following the “Arab Spring,” Islamic parties took the lion’s share of seats and became the leading parties in both countries (42 percent in Tunisia and 27 percent in Morocco).

In Iraq and Syria, the revival of traditional forces is reflected within their political systems, which are both entirely sectarian. The toppling of the Ba’ath regime in Iraq was in fact the deposal of the Sunni Arab minority from its height of power and the enthronement of the Shiite majority in its stead. Iraq’s present-day instability and lack of security stems first and foremost from Sunni unwillingness to come to terms with its newly inferior status, as Shiites fight to preserve their freshly won political superiority. In Iraq, with the removal of the Ba’ath from power, the Americans talked about “de-Ba’athification,” reminiscent in tone and content of the “de-Nazification” of Germany after the Second World War. However, this analogy is totally baseless.

In Iraq, the removal of the Ba'ath as an Arab, socialist secular party was not the real issue. The truly important point in Iraq's transformation lies in the sectarian significance of the toppling of the Ba'ath as a mechanism for control by the Sunni Arab minority over the Shiite majority in Iraq. This ties in with the Ba'ath in Syria having become a mechanism of control of the Alawis and other minorities over the Sunni majority. In Syria, the elevated Alawite minority has held tightly to the reins of power (supported by the Christians and a portion of the Sunni mercantile elite), opposing the Sunni majority dispossessed by the Alawis half a century ago. Thus a seemingly absurd situation has arisen in which the anti-Ba'ath government in Iraq supports Ba'athi rule in Syria. But in truth, this is not at all absurd. What is genuinely important in these relations is not the Ba'ath party and its secular ideology, rather the fact that the Shiites in Iraq are supporting their Alawi allies in Syria in their joint struggle against their Sunni enemies.

In Bahrain, the "Arab Spring" erupted in February 2011, in a fierce popular uprising against oppressive monarchic rule. However, in Bahrain too it was clearly a sectarian struggle of the Shiite majority against the rule of the Sunni minority, headed by the al-Khalifa family that had ruled over them for generations. The regime in Bahrain had a hard time controlling the situation. Thus, in March 2011, a military force from Saudi Arabia and its Sunni allies in the Gulf invaded the island and crushed the Shiite rebellion. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are so close to one another that a causeway spanning no more than 25 kilometers connects them. In the eyes of the Saudis and their allies, the fall of Bahrain to the Shiite majority would mean that the neighboring island could become an Iranian outpost. Thence Iran might act to exert its subversive influence in the Arabian Peninsula – and under no circumstances could the Saudis afford to accept such a situation. This is especially true since a Saudi Shiite minority (some 10 percent of the population) resides entirely in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, where the country's main oil deposits are located.

Against the backdrop of the retreat of the secularization process in the Arab world, we are witnessing the revival of traditional or neo-traditional forces in all Arab countries. Political Islam, sectarianism, and tribalism once again dominate the politics of all Arab countries.

Observers and commentators in the West, surprised by the force of the Islamist victory in the Arab upheavals, have offered a series of explanations, or excuses, for this phenomenon, all in order to continue to deny the obvious: that in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries society tends to be religious and pious to one degree or another. The peoples in these countries trust in the authentic Islamic messages delivered by those who speak in the name of faith, which is familiar and readily understood by all. The needy who suffer all sorts of deprivation also believe that with the help of those parties, as well as the Almighty, they will be delivered from their unbearable economic distress. The Islamist parties have great attraction and are widely accepted by the general public that genuinely identifies with them.

Periodically we hear the repeated mantra of other explanations, whereby the broad public supports the Islamists almost against their will and with no real alternative, rather than out of genuine identification. The Islamist parties, we are told, are very well organized and have existed as parties for a long time. Thus they enjoy an unmistakable organizational advantage over the secular/liberal parties that have just emerged. Yet this explanation is hardly adequate. If it were correct and comprehensive, then how does one explain the impressive achievement of the Salafis, who just like other new parties lack any previous political experience and organizational know-how? Another explanation, from the field of political economy, tells us that the impoverished masses vote for whoever has helped and continues to help them with welfare. In this regard the Brotherhood is known for having an extensive network of support for the needy. This doubtlessly explains part of the phenomenon. However, this explanation would hardly account for the fact that the major professional associations, of doctors or lawyers and others too, largely composed of middle and even upper middle class members are all also controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood. Similarly, is one to believe that in Kuwait, one of the richest countries on earth, the Brotherhood won the recent elections because of its alms for the poor?

Islam and Modernity in the "Arab Spring": The Bottom Line

The revolutionaries in the Arab world set out in their struggle for the universal values of liberty, justice, dignity, and economic prosperity. Before our eyes we are witnessing the building of societies that comprise

many of the characteristics of modern politics. These are societies that are becoming less autocratic and more pluralistic, enjoy more civic involvement, and sport a public opinion that is more alert and influential. All this is accompanied by the cutting edge of modern communication as an integral part of the new politics.

However, within these modern states, the political forces on the playing field are all deeply rooted in traditional politics, such as political Islam, sectarianism, and tribalism (Libya and Yemen are striking examples of tribalism in action). This does not necessarily mean that democracy will not develop in these societies sooner or later. However this is not the most likely eventuality, and certainly not an inevitable outcome.

Notes

- 1 This term is taken from Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 2 This discussion is to a large extent based on Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994).
- 3 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 322.
- 4 Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 326-27.
- 5 Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy*, p. 177.
- 6 Jacob Lassner and Ilan Troen, *Jews and Muslims in the Arab World: Haunted by Pasts Real and Imagined* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), p. xi.
- 7 Michael Hudson, "The Political Culture Approach to Arab Democratization: The Case for Bringing it Back in, Carefully," in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble, eds., *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, vol. 1: *Theoretical Perspectives* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995), p. 65.
- 8 "There Goes the Neighborhood," *The Jerusalem Report*, February 28, 2011.
- 9 Hasan Abu Talib, "Al-ikhwan wa-thawrat al-shabab," *al-Ahram*, February 23, 2011.
- 10 In the Egyptian upper house, *Majlis al-Shura*, 180 out of 270 members are elected; the rest are to be appointed by the as-yet unelected president.

The Future of Israel's Agreements with its Neighbors

Oded Eran

Introduction

The civil uprising in the Arab world, which has already caused deep political change and has the potential of transforming the region, has shaken many of the long held conventions that prevailed in the Middle East and North Africa. Among the key questions emerging are the impact on Arab-Israeli relations and the effect on existing formal agreements between Israel and its neighbors. These agreements, which have been upheld for years, have helped maintain a sense of relative stability and prevent the recurrence of major hostilities such as the 1948, 1967, and 1973 wars.

At present, four agreements between Israel and its neighbors are in place:

- a. The Separation of Forces Between Israel and Syria (1974)
- b. The Treaty of Peace between Israel and Egypt (1979)
- c. The Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (1993) with the Palestinians
- d. The Treaty of Peace with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (1994).

However, the Arab uprisings have cast doubt as to the robustness of these agreements and their ability to withstand the pressures from political elements that opposed these agreements, and in fact refused to recognize the State of Israel. More specifically, implementation of the agreements was subject almost solely to the discretion of the Arab governments involved, and since the uprising a new element has joined the equation:

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the “street.” The attack in Cairo on the Israeli Embassy on September 9, 2011 was more than a break-in into the building, and formal relations will almost certainly cool more than before.

Israel's Treaty with Egypt

The case of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty, which may well be the first litmus test, is particularly important, as other Arab governments will likely follow the Egyptian example under the new Egyptian government.¹

The 1979 Egypt-Israel Treaty of Peace was signed in Washington in the presence of the President of the United States; it was approved by the parliaments of Egypt and Israel, ratified by both states, and registered with the UN. The treaty was an attempt to carefully balance the requirements and interests of both sides.

As an international agreement, the treaty is subject to the rules of international law concerning the interpretation and implementation of treaties. These rules stipulate that a change of regime in one or both parties does not affect the validity of a treaty; treaties are considered binding on the states involved and not only as regards particular regimes or governments. Furthermore, one near-immutable aspect of a peace treaty is the delimitation of borders. Once a border is agreed upon, it remains in force unless changed by agreement, even if the parties subsequently abrogate the peace treaty and go to war. A border remains valid even if the states involved change not only their regimes but their very existence; new states inherit the borders of the previous state. Hence the Egypt-Israel border will remain defined, whatever happens to the treaty.

The question arises as to what rules apply to changes to the treaty that are less dire than a reversion to the state of armed conflict. Parties to a treaty are at liberty to make agreed changes, but any unilateral act is liable to be seen as a violation of the treaty.

The treaty refers to “normal relations” between the parties,² including “diplomatic, economic and cultural relations.” An annex³ spells these out in greater detail, referring to “good neighborly relations” and “cooperation in promoting peace stability and development” and the duty to “abstain from hostile propaganda against each other.” Subsequent to the Treaty of Peace several implementation agreements were signed.

It is noteworthy that the operative clauses of the treaty make no reference to “friendly relations,” just to “normal relations.”⁴ It is

conceivable that a fundamentalist Islamic regime will attempt to further cool relations, but it does not need to change the treaty to do so. If and when Egypt requests a formal change to the Treaty of Peace, for example, eliminating diplomatic relations, Israel will no doubt refuse to consider it. A unilateral Egyptian step would be a clear violation of the treaty and there is a high possibility that the US Congress would take action against Egypt. The US made a formal commitment to Israel that in case of a violation or threat of violation it would “consult with the parties with regard to measures to halt or prevent the violation.”⁵ A similar undertaking was subsequently made to Egypt.

The stipulation regarding the limitation of forces in Sinai raises more complicated issues. It was a matter of vital importance for Israel that there be no Egyptian forces with an offensive capability stationed within striking distance of Israel’s border. The treaty incorporates this principle, while at the same time recognizing the need not to appear to be limiting Egyptian sovereignty in Sinai. It achieved this balance by allowing Egypt to maintain a sizable force in western Sinai, consisting of a full mechanized infantry division of 22,000 personnel with substantial elements of armor, artillery, and anti-aircraft missiles.⁶ In central Sinai Egypt could maintain a specified number of border units,⁷ and in the area adjacent to the Israeli border an unlimited number of “civil police.”⁸ Sinai was thus to be under full Egyptian sovereignty and not even designated a demilitarized area, but was subject to a voluntary regime of limitation of forces. The Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai was given the task of observing and monitoring the limitation of forces but was not granted any operative or executive powers. In order to provide reciprocity Israel agreed to a limitation of forces in a strip some 10 km wide on the Israeli side of the border, and for the first time in its history, Israel allowed an international force, the MFO, to monitor this Israeli territory.

The treaty explicitly stipulates that “the parties agree not to request withdrawal of the United Nations [MFO] personnel,”⁹ and thus a unilateral request by Egypt would be a serious violation of the treaty. These security arrangements, however, “may at the request of either party be reviewed and amended by mutual agreement of the parties.”¹⁰ Since parties to a treaty are always able to review any stipulation in a treaty between them “by mutual agreement,” this clause clearly points

out that the parties envisaged the possibility that future relations between Israel and Egypt could become so close and friendly that there would be no need for any security arrangements. That situation has not developed and the security arrangements of the treaty are now even more vital than they were in 1979. Furthermore, on the Israeli side any change in the security arrangements would require approval of the Knesset.¹¹ Any attempt to adjust the treaty's security arrangements could be politically volatile. Israel, however, has in the past shown flexibility in interpreting the phrase "civilian police" in Sinai and agreed to the posting of increasing numbers of semi military "border guards" in the Sinai area adjacent to Israel's border.¹²

The recent elections in Egypt resulted in an overwhelming victory for the two parties that represent the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist movement – the Freedom and Justice Party and the Nour Party, respectively. It is clear that the Muslim Brotherhood will form the new government, though it is not clear who it will choose as partners to the coalition. Nor is it clear what would be the division of powers in Egypt's new constitution and what would be the new parliament's role regarding, for example, the existing treaty between Israel and Egypt.

Statements made by Muslim Brotherhood leaders since the start of the uprising in January 2011 indicate tension between the ideological inclination to extricate Egypt from the treaty's obligations and the political and economic implications of such a move.¹³ Dr. Rashad al-Bayoumi, a leading Brotherhood figure, expressed his views on this issue in a long interview:

We respect international agreements and major political issues, whatever they may be. However, with regards to an objective and academic look [at this issue] it is the right of either side, or any one side, to review and discuss according to the circumstances and requirements. The Camp David Accords were never put to the people or even to the parliament in the proper manner, but rather these were enforced from above. One of the most important articles of this agreement was the establishment of a Palestinian State. Very well, but let us ask: where is this [Palestinian] State?

After accusing Israel of genocidal plans against the Palestinian people and castigating his country for selling gas to Israel at one fifteenth of its real price, he added: "All of this must be put to the people, and it is

the people's right to reconsider these conventions. Of course, we do not accept the Camp David Accords at all, but re-evaluating and dealing with this must be done according to the law."¹⁴

In the coming weeks the Muslim Brotherhood will find itself at the helm with new responsibilities. Egypt's enormous economic problems have multiplied and become exacerbated since al-Bayoumi gave his interview, reflected somewhat in the tone of more recent statements. American officials and journalists have visited Cairo more frequently than before, having realized the political earthquake that occurred in Egypt. Most met with Muslim Brotherhood officials and newly elected parliamentarians, and one told *Time* magazine, "The parliament has the right to revise whatever was passed without the public's consent. But to revise does not necessarily mean to eliminate."¹⁵ Reacting to journalists' questions during a daily news briefing about another statement by al-Bayoumi, that the treaty with Israel was not binding and that the Muslim Brotherhood did not sign it, US State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland said: "We have had other assurances from the party with regard to their commitment not only to universal human rights but to the international obligation that the Government of Egypt has undertaken." Asked repeatedly on the issue of the treaty she said, "They have made commitments to us along those regards (sic). And as I said, we will judge those parties by what they do."¹⁶

The statement is evidence of the effort the US has invested in ascertaining the future of the main pillar of any peace process and certainly one in which the US would wish to play the central role. Whether the US efforts are successful remains to be seen when the new political framework in Egypt – the new constitution and the division of power – is established. Interviewed by the *New York Times*, the leader of the Freedom and Justice Party, Essam el-Erian, said that the Brotherhood would honor the Camp David Accords. "This is a commitment of the state, not a group or a party, and this we respect." In the *New York Times* report of the same interview there is an additional sentence: "Ultimately, he added, relations with Israel will be determined by how it treats the Palestinians."¹⁷ This last sentence is

Israel should prepare itself for an Egyptian request to renegotiate the military annex of the 1979 treaty. If the Egyptian demands are reasonable, Israel would be wise to agree to them.

indeed the reflection of a long discussion el-Erian held with the BBC a month earlier, in which he avoided giving a clear answer on whether his party would respect the treaty with Israel, and he repeatedly blamed Israel for crimes against the Palestinians.¹⁸

While it is not clear whether the Nour Party representing the Salafi Call Society would be part of the Egyptian future government, its position on the treaty with Israel is important. An official statement on its website issued on December 25, 2011, "A declaration from the Nour Party on the treaty of peace and normalization with the Zionist entity," is a very vague and conditional statement. The statement puts Egypt's relations with the Arab and Muslim states as a first priority, along with relations with the Palestinians. It mentions that the treaty was signed by a dictatorial regime and requires a change, to be reached by legal means. It emphasizes that the party is strongly opposed to any normalization and dialogue with the Zionist entity.¹⁹

Amr Moussa, Egypt's former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Secretary General of the Arab League and a leading candidate for president said,

And I believe that we should adhere to this treaty, as we do with all of our international commitments and treaties, as long as the other party adheres to it too. However, within a security context in Sinai, the treaty has to be revisited. Unfortunately, the treaty in its current form has led to the Egyptian government's inability to enforce the rule of law in Sinai and on the border. Egypt as a sovereign state should be able to fully secure its borders.²⁰

The unavoidable conclusion from these statements is that Israel should prepare itself for an Egyptian request to renegotiate the military annex of the 1979 treaty. If the Egyptian demands are reasonable, Israel would be wise to agree to them. Additional Egyptian forces might reduce the chaos in the Sinai. Furthermore, obtaining a renewed confirmation for the treaty from a Muslim Brotherhood government would include political dividends far beyond the Egyptian-Israeli relationship. It is imperative that the US continue the efforts to preserve the treaty and prevent its deterioration through excessive Egyptian demands.

The annual US military assistance to Egypt, the recent US injection of an additional \$2 million, and the US influential role in the international

financial institutions will most probably have an impact on the attitude of the new Egyptian government to the treaty with Israel.

The Peace Treaty with Jordan

The treaty with Jordan is in the same category as the treaty with Egypt – a comprehensive agreement signed between two states. While it has limitations on deployment of forces, it also has territorial arrangements in the Emek Ha'arava and Naharayim areas, which may be reviewed.²¹ The treaty has met strong opposition in Jordan ever since it was concluded. Opposition to the treaty is common to a large segment of the Palestinian population, especially the religious elements and the white collar professional associations. Like President Mubarak, King Hussein and his successor Abdullah II dismissed the calls for abrogation of the treaty and for sending the Israeli ambassador home, but did very little to counter the boycott imposed by the professional associations and their efforts to stifle normalization activities. For the time being, the organizations involved in the protests against the government in Jordan have not made the treaty with Israel a major cause beyond their pre-January 2011 levels. That may change, especially if there is a major deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations or a successful challenge to the Israeli-Egyptian treaty. The Islamic Action Front, the largest Islamic political force in Jordan, is closely linked to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. As in the case with Egypt, Jordan's future attitude to the treaty with Israel will be dictated to a large extent by vital strategic interests.

Long term security perspectives, the water issue, relations with the US, and a perceived role in Jerusalem all command Jordan to maintain the treaty of peace with Israel, albeit at a bare minimum level. The success of the Jordanian monarch to fend off pressure to abrogate the treaty will depend on developments in the Israeli-Palestinian political process and Israel's contribution to the Jordanian economy. Water, energy, and infrastructure joint projects would serve to fortify the treaty. The recent Israeli government decision to construct a railway between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea may, if the project incorporates the Jordanian Aqaba port, increase economic activity and help silence some of the anti-Israeli elements in Jordan.

The Agreements with the Palestinians

The Oslo set of agreements represents a different category – agreements between a state (Israel) and an organization (the Palestine Liberation Organization). In an exchange of letters, the Chairman of the PLO recognized the right of Israel to exist in peace and security, and the Prime Minister of Israel affirmed Israel's recognition of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people. Subsequent agreements to the Declaration of Principles (September 13, 1993) such as the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area (May 4, 1994) and the Interim Agreement between Israel and the Palestinians (September 28, 1995) have been only partially implemented. The five year period stipulated in these agreements for reaching a comprehensive solution has long passed. The two sides have unsuccessfully attempted to renew the negotiations, which are now stalled.

The uprisings in the Arab world have further complicated the situation. These uprisings have ushered in a long period of instability and unpredictability. This allows the Israeli government to claim that under these circumstances it is unable and cannot be expected to take decisions pertaining to its long term security. The Israeli government further claims that the Palestinian approach to the United Nations and other organizations to obtain recognition of its statehood and membership is a violation of the Oslo Accords, being unilateral actions and not agreed upon. The reconciliation attempts by Fatah and Hamas, the two major Palestinian movements, have been given a boost by the Arab uprising and are a serious threat to the Oslo Accords. It is quite possible that in an effort to reach common ground, the two movements will remove a reference to the agreements with Israel from any reconciliation agreement.

In the wake of the 2006 Palestinian elections and the Hamas takeover of Gaza, the Quartet (US, EU, Russia, and the UN) has conditioned its willingness to deal with Hamas on Hamas' recognition of Israel, renunciation of terror, and acceptance of the past agreements reached between Israel and the Palestinians. At the same time, the Arab uprising forces the US and the EU to conduct a dialogue with movements that adhere to systems of values not wholly commensurate with their own. It is possible that a declared rejection of the Oslo Accords by Hamas will not be tolerated by the international community, which in practice will ignore the three preconditions and substitute them with a vague formula.

It may be too late to salvage the Oslo Accords, but there is a need to preserve a legal basis and framework for the conduct of ongoing Israeli-Palestinian coexistence and *modus operandi*. This can be achieved by a new interim agreement that is accepted by Israel and the Palestinian Authority/PLO as a step in an agreed-on roadmap toward a two-state solution. The abandonment, even if only *de facto*, of the Oslo Accords by one of the two sides to the conflict can serve those in the Israeli and Palestinian camps who object to this solution and add further instability to a region already quite volatile.

In late March 2012 it was reported²² that under pressure by President Obama, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) dropped a threat in his intended letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu to dismantle the PA. The threat may have to do not only with Abu Mazen's protest against Israeli policies but with his frustration at not being able to attain reconciliation with Hamas. The consequence and implications of such a move could throw the immediate region into turmoil.

The Separation of Forces Agreement with Syria

The Separation of Forces agreement with Syria is the longest surviving bilateral agreement between Israel and any of its neighbors. It pertains to a single issue and lacks any framework or mechanism in which the two sides can conduct a dialogue, yet the 1974 agreement served its purpose and was scrupulously maintained. During all the tensions between Lebanon and Israel and the 1982 and 2006 Lebanon Wars, Syria and Israel have refrained from direct confrontations on the Golan Heights.

The Syrian regime is currently fighting the opposition, which in spite of more than close to 10,000 dead and even greater numbers of injured shows no signs of relenting. However, even if the Assad regime falls, it will take quite a long time for a new government to stabilize the country, which is ethnically and religiously heterogeneous (60 percent Sunnis and 40 percent Kurds, Christians, Druze, and Alawites). A new Syrian government will most likely loosen its links with Iran if not sever them altogether and take a similar attitude towards Hizbollah.

From Israel's point of view these positive though currently hypothetical developments present a dramatic strategic shift. Syrian detachment from Iran and Hizbollah would have been an Israeli demand if and when negotiations with Syria resumed. The Israeli government

ought to adopt a dynamic attitude towards the uprising in the Arab world and seek opportunities. The Syrian current situation presents an opportunity and the Israeli government should aim to establish a political dialogue with the Syrian opposition. The political and territorial price that Israel would have to pay for a peace treaty with Syria, which is complemented by Syria separating itself from Iran, has always been known. A new government in Damascus might be more open to ideas on special regimes in the Golan Heights concerning the uses of this area and the Syrian military deployment there following an agreement

In light of the stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the negative impact of a possible reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah on the prospects of renewing these talks, it may be worthwhile pursuing the Syrian track in advance of the Palestinian track.

Admittedly, this scenario is highly hypothetical. President Assad is under pressure, but the opposition is divided and cannot change the situation without major foreign intervention or a collapse from within the ruling power in the country. The rising influence of the Muslim Brotherhood across the Arab world may also be reflected in Syria and its new government, if one is established in Damascus. An Egyptian demand to reopen the military annex of the treaty with Israel may induce a government in Damascus to make a similar demand challenging the thinning of forces on the Golan Heights, offering no guarantees on dissociation from Iran and Hizbollah. In such a case Israel would have no reason to accept a Syrian demand risking, as it may be, the total collapse of the 1974 Separation of Forces agreement. Syria is in no position, militarily and economically, to wage a war against Israel, especially following a long period when its army is engaged in a painful civil war. It is therefore unlikely that it would venture a confrontation with Israel, starting with a unilateral abrogation of the 1974 agreement. The more plausible result of the current situation in Syria is therefore a status quo with no movement on the formal arrangements between Israel and Syria.

Notes

- 1 The legal chapter on Egypt was contributed by Prof. Robbie Sabel.
- 2 Article III(3) of the treaty.
- 3 Annex III to the treaty.
- 4 The preamble to the treaty refers, however, to "friendly relations and cooperation in accordance with the UN Charter."

- 5 Article 2, "Memorandum of Agreement between the Governments of the United States of America and the State of Israel," March 26, 1979.
- 6 Article II(1)(a) of Annex I of the Egypt-Israel Treaty of Peace.
- 7 Article II(1)(b) of Annex 1 of the Egypt-Israel Treaty of Peace.
- 8 Article II(1)(c) of Annex I of the Egypt-Israel Treaty of Peace.
- 9 Article IV(2) of the treaty. The original intention of the parties was that the monitoring be carried out by a UN force, but they later agreed that the functions be carried out by the MFO.
- 10 Article IV(4) of the treaty.
- 11 This was the opinion of the Legal Advisor to the Knesset when the issue of stationing 750 Egyptian border police arose in 2005. The Israeli government's position was that there was no change in the treaty, but nevertheless the issue was brought to the Knesset and approved by vote.
- 12 A written agreement on this issue was reached between Egyptian and Israeli security officials in 2005 but never officially published and there have been further understandings.
- 13 See an analysis by Jonathan D. Halevi, "Are Egyptian Islamic Parties Planning to Nullify the Peace Treaty with Israel?" Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Vol. 11, no. 22, December 26, 2011.
- 14 *A-sharq al-Awsat*, February 27, 2011. Speaking to a Japanese television on February 4, 2011, al-Bayoumi said, "After President Mubarak steps down and a provisional government is formed, there is a need to dissolve the peace treaty with Israel." See <http://www.jta.org/news/article/2011/02/04/2742851>.
- 15 *Time*, January 3, 2012.
- 16 US Department of State – daily Press Briefing for January 5, 2012.
- 17 As reported by David Kirkpatrick in the *International Herald Tribune* and by Thomas Friedman in the *New York Times* on January 10, 2012.
- 18 Interview on *Hardtalk*, December 11, 2011. On January 8, 2012 *Haaretz* reported that el-Erian's reaction to Ms. Nuland's statement was that no promise to honor the treaty was given; the treaty was not sacred and it was possible and desirable to make changes in it.
- 19 The Nour Party spokesman, Youssef Hamad, told Israel's Army Radio that his party was committed to the agreement but that there might be articles it would want to change in negotiations. See "An Islamist Talking to an Israeli!" *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 26, 2011.
- 20 Interview in *Foreign Policy*, February 15, 2012.
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The Turmoil in Syria: What Lies Ahead

Benedetta Berti

After over a year of internal unrest and oppressive violence against the civilian population, Syria recently saw the implementation of an official ceasefire, followed by the deployment of UN observers to guarantee the actual cessation of hostilities.¹ However, an analysis of the history of the protests and the growing divide between the Assad regime and the Syrian population reveals both the tenuousness of the current ceasefire as well as the precariousness of Syria's political future. Similarly, a closer look at the ongoing violence taking place within Syria curbs the enthusiasm of those who asserted that a diplomatic mission such as the one headed by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan would be sufficient to ensure the implementation of a stable political solution.² In this sense, the recent ceasefire should not be seen as tantamount to the end of the Syrian crisis, and should instead lead the international community to renew its political, diplomatic, and economic efforts to resolve the conflict, calling for stronger and better coordinated international involvement.

The article looks at Syria in the period following implementation of the ceasefire, explaining the roots of the current predicament, assessing possible future developments, and analyzing the potential impact of the ongoing crisis on the region, with a specific focus on Israel. Finally, the analysis discusses the role of the international community in mitigating the violence and facilitating a political resolution to the crisis.

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Ceasefire, Political Deadlock, Military Stalemate: The Syrian Predicament

When the wave of unrest that that shook the region with the so-called “Arab Spring” initially hit Syria, there was widespread skepticism regarding the opposition’s capacity to have any substantial effect on President Bashar al-Assad and his entourage.³

To be sure, like Tunisia and Egypt, Syria is an authoritarian regime ruled through emergency laws and oppression by an out-of-touch ruler who does not represent his constituents. Moreover, with the country controlled for decades by the Alawite minority, which represents roughly 10 percent of the entire Syrian population, the overwhelming Sunni majority has for years been treated like second-class citizens – a powerful, potential precondition for revolution. In addition, in early 2011 Syria was in a state of severe economic crisis, with rampant unemployment and growing social inequalities.⁴

At the same time, the iron fist with which Damascus had crushed any previous internal protest – epitomized by the bloody repression of the Muslim Brotherhood-led revolt in Hama in 1982 – was largely interpreted as the main obstacle in creating momentum for the anti-Assad forces to rise up and challenge the regime. Even after Hafez al-Assad’s death in 2000, his son Bashar effectively followed his father’s footsteps in violently suppressing any internal opposition. He did so first in the 2000-2001 so-called “Damascus Spring,” a civil society movement that rose in the aftermath of Hafez’s death, demanding social and political reforms. More recently, he similarly crushed a Kurdish revolt in 2004 and a wave of internal protests in 2005, following Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon.⁵ In addition, the complex and difficult relations between Syria’s different religious, ethnic, and sectarian groups (Christian, Sunni, Alawite, Kurdish, Druze) and the deep political and religious-secular divides within communities themselves were likewise seen as a leading factor in preventing the rise of a strong opposition to the Assad regime.

However, and notwithstanding this plausible assessment, the strength and size of Syria’s coercive apparatus and the existing divides within anti-Assad groups were not enough to prevent the rise of a genuine nonviolent protest movement in early 2011. Subsequently, the initially spontaneous protests taking place in the periphery of the country escalated in size and

magnitude and extended geographically, in part because of the regime's violent over-reaction to the protests.

Indeed, the Syrian government's reaction to the initial protests only added fuel to the fire, precipitating rather than diffusing the crisis. The chosen approach, which included a mix of cosmetic political changes, a refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the protests, and violent crackdowns on demonstrations that initially were for the most part peaceful, largely backfired, escalating the crisis from local demonstrations to a full fledged mass civil and political movement. Moreover, as the regime's brutal repression of the protests continued, the movement gradually shifted from strategic non-violence to armed struggle.

Since then, extremely high levels of violence have been one of the defining characteristics of the Syrian conflict, as the two sides became increasingly entrenched in their positions, driving themselves into a bloody stalemate. This predicament, which is still valid as of April 2012, largely depends on two factors, first, the strength and cohesion of Syria's coercive apparatus. The regime in Syria managed to survive and remain in power since the 1970s largely by preserving total internal control. This has been achieved by investing in a coercive apparatus, relying on extensive clientelism, and exercising direct control over all institutions of government.⁶ As a result, Assad today can still count on the loyalty of the armed forces in particular and the coercive apparatus in general. Unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, in Syria the military and security apparatus, far from being perceived as a *super-partes* institution, is closely identified and connected to the regime, and therefore Assad's potential downfall also represents a direct threat to its own status and power. The security sector thus has a strong incentive to continue backing Assad, which in turn explains why there have not been mass defections from the Syrian military, and why the regime has so far not imploded from within.

In addition, the Assads have survived and prospered as a minority regime by ensuring strong internal control, projecting power, and enforcing a zero-tolerance policy with respect to internal dissent. This also explains the nature of the predicament Syria currently finds itself in: the regime, built on coercion and force, is unable to genuinely implement much-needed reforms and begin a serious dialogue with the opposition, as this would be tantamount to the demise of the unrepresentative, elitist, authoritarian, and centralized regime. From the regime's point of view,

the current crisis is perceived as a zero-sum game, leaving little hope for a peaceful negotiated political transition.

The second factor underlying the current deadlock and virtual stalemate is the general weakness of Syrian civil society, the sharp internal divides within the anti-Assad forces, and the lack of a widely cross-sectarian anti-Assad political alliance.⁷ In fact, the protest movement is largely Sunni, with the Kurdish and the Christian minorities hesitant to become involved. In addition, not only does the Syrian National Council – the “government in exile” in Turkey – not speak authoritatively for all the Syrian political forces, but also the Free Syrian Army lacks strong command and control and the capacity to oversee and coordinate the activities of all the anti-Assad armed groups on the ground. This situation, the product of decades of systematic targeting and destroying of any internal political opposition by the Alawite regime, makes it harder for the incumbent political coalition to confront the relatively strong and united Assad regime.

This combination of a powerful, determined, yet largely illegitimate regime and a popular yet divided and militarily weak opposition has created a bloody stalemate. Moreover, the zero-sum game prism through which the Syrian regime has looked at the crisis and the accompanying escalation of violence has deeply affected the political opposition as well, which now also believes to be engaged in a “death struggle” with the regime.⁸ In this context, it is clear that an externally-imposed ceasefire alone is unlikely to lead to a smooth political resolution of the crisis.

Looking Ahead: Scenarios and Regional Impact of the Crisis

Given the current impasse in the Syrian crisis, the possible future scenarios for Syria are not reassuring.

First, without further international involvement in support of the anti-Assad forces, the current ceasefire could represent an opportunity for the regime to regroup and attempt to crush the political opposition and restore the status quo ante. However, it is unlikely that this “victory” would truly represent a lasting one for the regime, as the past months have deeply eroded its internal legitimacy as well as the Syrian social fabric. The regime would therefore survive, but it would be increasingly isolated from both its population as well as from the international community. From a regional perspective, this scenario would represent

a powerful rollback to the ongoing “Arab Spring,” while it would also reassure Syria’s regional allies, such as Iran and Hizbollah, which have been investing in Assad’s remaining in power.

A second, more nuanced, variation of this scenario would be for the ceasefire to hold and for the two parties to develop an uneasy internal equilibrium. While this would prevent the country from drifting into renewed immediate violence, it is unlikely that the ceasefire alone – failing to impose the capitulation and exile of Assad – would lead to a negotiated political transition. In other words, under this “prolonged ceasefire” scenario, the two sides would regroup and prepare for the next round of hostilities.

Third, with the ceasefire looking increasingly shaky, Syria could revert back to internal conflict, with the potential of escalating into a full-fledged civil war. This scenario is increasingly more likely due to the combination of the growing number of defections from within the ranks of the regime and the rising financial help provided from the Gulf states to the armed opposition.⁹ This scenario would have staggering humanitarian consequences for the Syrian people, and would also be risky for the rest of the region and for the international community alike.

Ongoing instability in Syria combined with the growing influx of Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries could further contribute to the instability of the region, especially in the case of Jordan.

Finally, provided there is strong international involvement and possibly even international military intervention, the internal balance of power could switch in favor of the opposition forces, leading to either the internal implosion of the regime or its military defeat. Assad’s capitulation represents a best case scenario in the attempt to avoid prolonged internal conflict and regional instability. However, the departure of the dictator from the political scene, either by death or exile, would not guarantee per se the end of the hostilities. In this sense, only a combination of international involvement in the post-conflict phase and the facilitation of a politically negotiated agreement between the different stakeholders would lead to a true cessation of hostilities. Although this scenario is not risk-free, given the impossibility of knowing what post-Assad Syria would look like, an assessment of the severe humanitarian, political, and security implications of prolonged internal violence suggests that the status quo is untenable.

From an Israeli perspective, the ongoing Syrian crisis is similarly worrisome, with every scenario holding potential risks. The “business as usual” option (with Assad managing to the dodge the bullet and remain in power) would not represent a serious threat, as over the past decades Israel has already developed a *modus vivendi* with Assad. However, the reinstatement of the status quo would also be a positive development for Israel’s regional foes like Iran, and it would represent a missed opportunity to redefine the balance of power in region. In addition, with the Syrian opposition repressed and confined again to the margins of society, Israel could indeed have concerns regarding radicalization and the drift towards radical Islamic extremism of the anti-Assad opposition.¹⁰ In turn, this may lead to increased disturbances in the border area between Israel and Syria.

Instability and the potential explosion of a civil war in Syria could be even more worrisome for Israel. On the one hand, a weakened Syrian regime would negatively affect Syria’s allies like Iran and Hizbollah, certainly a positive development for Israel. However, the increasing lawlessness within the country is not a positive development for Israel, as it could potentially affect the quiet of the Syrian-Israeli border. In addition, an unstable and conflict-ridden Syria could become a magnet for foreign jihadists, something that is particularly worrisome when put in the context of Syria’s extensive chemical stockpile, believed to be one of the world’s most sophisticated.¹¹

Likewise from an Israeli perspective a post-Assad regime would represent both a new threat, given the potential rise of an antagonistic Islamist government,¹² and an opportunity for Iran’s sphere of influence in the region to be weakened and for a new chapter with its northeastern neighbor to be opened. Given the risks of the alternative scenarios, this might be the least negative option.

The Syrian Crisis: The Role of the International Community

With the two sides in Syria deadlocked and perceiving the conflict as a zero-sum game, it appears obvious how third parties can play a powerful role in shaping the conflict. However, when assessing the role and impact of the international community in Syria, it is impossible not to note how the lack of agreement on intervention has seriously undermined the potential to positively affect the situation on the ground. For its part, this

international cacophony over Syria is dictated by the radically different priorities and interests of external actors involved in the crisis.

On the one hand, Assad can count on a slim yet committed number of allies, starting with his regional partners, Iran and Hizbollah.¹³ In addition, Assad has been able to fend off international intervention due to Russia and China's refusal to authorize stronger international involvement in the UN Security Council. Their reasoning is simple: both countries strongly resist the notion of "contingent sovereignty" behind the authorization of international humanitarian interventions. Specifically, China and Russia have been particularly skeptical towards authorizing "responsibility to protect" (R2P) missions such as in Libya, feeling that they were "fooled" into abstaining from stopping the intervention in Libya only to later discover that the R2P doctrine had been used as a pretext to bring about regime change. In addition, Moscow has relied on its alliance with Assad both to project power in the Middle East as well as to reassert its role in the international community. In turn, this implies that any serious effort to resolve the crisis in Syria needs to include a deal brokered with Moscow. This is an extremely difficult task, as Russia is highly hesitant to give up its role as "spoiler" and the power it derives from this role.

On the other hand, the countries, both regionally and internationally, that have openly opposed the Assad regime and backed the opposition have been unable to decide on a common approach to deal with the Syrian crisis. In this sense the most supportive parties of the anti-Assad forces have certainly been Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in light of the direct interests of the Gulf countries in seeing the demise of a close friend of their main foe, Iran. As such, these countries have severed diplomatic relations with Syria, openly taken steps to financially support Syria's opposition, and urged the international community to intervene militarily to impose regime change.¹⁴

Turkey has also taken an increasingly forceful stand with respect to the Syrian crisis, shifting from an initially conciliatory posture to open calls for Assad to step down and for the creation of "safe zones" to protect the Syrian refugees within Turkey and the establishment of humanitarian corridors within Syria.¹⁵ In April 2012, Syrian shootings of Syrian refugees within Turkish borders led to an irate response from

Ankara, which went as far as invoking article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (the mutual defense assurance clause for NATO members).¹⁶

Aside from Turkey, other NATO member states have been far less enthusiastic in promoting the idea of military intervention in Syria, with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen repeatedly insisting NATO has no intention of intervening.¹⁷ This is hardly surprising, given the ongoing economic crisis, the growing public reluctance to become involved in “out-of-area” operations, the relatively lesser national interests at stake in Syria, and the lack of a clear UNSC authorization to act. In addition, the idea of becoming involved in yet another complex internal conflict with major post-conflict stabilization challenges leaves NATO countries extremely reluctant to bet on military intervention to facilitate the ousting of Assad.

Therefore, until now, the anti-Assad coalition, loosely brought together by the United States through the Friends of Syria group, has so far only been able to agree on a very general set of measures to put pressure on the regime. This approach includes, first, placing diplomatic, political, and economic pressure on the regime to increase its isolation. This objective is achieved by downgrading diplomatic relations, imposing a series of economic sanctions, and politically supporting the opposition forces. An important example of this type of political pressure is the suspension of Syria from the Arab League in November 2012.¹⁸ However, the lack of unity and coordination within the Arab League has diminished the political impact of the measures designed to isolate Assad. The international community has also focused on sanctions, including freezing of assets and oil and arms embargoes, while banning transaction with both the Syrian government and its central bank.¹⁹

These measures can be useful in helping to further erode the domestic legitimacy of the regime, facilitating defections and further alienating the Syrian people from Assad. However, in order for these measures to be effective, there must be a better coordinated and stronger reliance on all the tools in the political and diplomatic toolbox. This would involve at the very minimum a coordinated strategy to cut off diplomatic relations with the regime as well as increase the economic pressure on Damascus. However, for this strategy to work, the Friends of Syria should also be much clearer on their desired end goal: there should be an open call for

Assad to step down, while offering the dictator exile and immunity in exchange for leaving the political arena while he still can.

In addition, for this coercive diplomacy strategy to work, there must also be a concerted effort to foster a supportive relationship with the Syrian opposition forces. In the last Friends of Syria meeting in Istanbul there was already a trend towards increasing non-lethal aid to the opposition forces, including communication equipment to help them coordinate their efforts.²⁰ This should also be accompanied by political outreach and efforts to assist the anti-Assad opposition forces in bridging their divisions, a key requirement in ensuring their legitimacy. The relationship with the opposition should be strongly based on an idea of “conditionality”: assistance in return for complying with international humanitarian law and for absolutely refraining from reprisals and acts against the civilian population. This would be particularly important in post-Assad Syria, to avert the country’s descent into a downward spiral of sectarian violence.

An effective strategy to deal with Assad and his regime should also deal more directly with the “elephant in the room”: how to effectively pressure Russia to relinquish its support for the Syrian regime.

Finally, while currently there seems to be little or no serious international consideration of military intervention, renewed attention should be given to both how to project a credible threat of force as well as to the study of additional options, including the use of a multi-national stabilization force to engage in a limited R2P operation.²¹ Similarly, post-Assad contingency plans should also be devised to contain the chances of descending into renewed internal violence.

In other words, with the ceasefire ever more shaky and with both parties involved in the Syrian conflict perceiving the situation as a zero-sum game, the international community has an important role to play in mitigating both the potential for long term internal violence as well as regional instability, which would have adverse consequences on all of Syria’s neighbors, including Israel. However, for the international community – through the Friends of Syria framework – to step up to the plate, there must be both a clear investment in economic, political, and diplomatic pressure to force the capitulation of Assad, as well as extensive contingency planning to ensure that the post-regime change transition does not lead to a new chapter of internal violence and regional instability.

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Targeted Killing in the US War on Terror: Effective Tool or Double-Edged Sword?

Yoram Schweitzer and Einav Yogev

Introduction

In recent years, sub-state organizations operating as institutionalized, hierarchical military organizations and “terrorilla armies”¹ have improved their operations and upgraded their capabilities. These organizations, which consciously ignore the legal regulations and restraints of humanitarian international law, undertake operations that are generally characterized by extreme, indiscriminate violence against civilians and are intended to provoke the government into a disproportionate response. The organizations hope that a state’s over-reaction will harm uninvolved civilians, alienate them due to their sense of the injustice done to them, and motivate them to take an interest in, support, and possibly become involved in terrorist activity. In addition, terrorists hope that a wide ranging state response to their actions will stir up local and foreign public opinion against the government, which will be cast as overly aggressive.

This type of challenge from sub-state entities requires an attacked state to adjust its combat strategy and provide as effective and precise a response as possible to those who attack its citizens, and both seek shelter and launch their operations from among populated areas. Thus, in the hope of not harming innocent citizens, and with the knowledge that a widespread retaliatory attack might incite the victims and their families and undermine the legitimacy of the government among public opinion at home and abroad, a state is interested in targeting as specifically as

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possible those engaged in planning and perpetrating acts of terror, while avoiding or limiting collateral damage. Today, this response is provided inter alia through increasing use of targeted killing operations that exploit advanced technologies.

This article describes and analyzes the policy of the United States in its war on terror vis-à-vis targeted killing. Alongside the operational advantages are political challenges, specifically as they emerge in US-Pakistan relations and in the public debate in the United States regarding the targeted killings in Yemen. In addition, the article will examine whether there is a connection between US and Israeli operational policies, notwithstanding the fundamental differences between the world's superpower, which is occupied with global interests and considerations, and Israel, engaged in a national and regional conflict, and despite the different historical contexts, that is, the length of the respective conflicts and the intensity of the respective threats.

The United States and Targeted Killings against al-Qaeda and the Global Jihad

The public debate concerning the legitimacy and effectiveness of targeted killing blends together different concepts, contexts, and methods of operation, resulting in a decided lack of clarity as to the realistic goals the tactic can achieve. This article focuses on the operational aspects of targeted killing, defining it as a pinpoint military operation carried out by a military or by an intelligence agency, by a single agent or by several people, who reach the target and attack it.² The operation can be executed from a distance, through fire, explosive device, or manned or unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

The context in which targeted killings occur is important. Depending on the circumstances, the actions can be carried out from time to time against significant targets involved in terrorism. An example would be targeting an organization's leader, or an activist or group of activists, whose elimination is expected to disrupt the activities of the entire organization or even prevent planned terror attacks that are liable to be launched in the near future. Alternatively, when there is an ongoing and uninterrupted struggle against intensive terrorist activity that is directed at civilians, the pinpoint strikes against operators and perpetrators of terror are employed by the state to thwart and disrupt the adversary's

terrorist activity, to keep its commanders busy seeking hiding places, and sometimes, to deter. However, because targeted killing skirts the accepted norm among democratic states of due judicial process, it sparks criticism and controversy regarding the legitimacy and legality of the practice. Furthermore, if the targeted killing is carried out by one state on the sovereign territory of another, it may create tension and harm interstate relations.

The United States began to carry out sporadic targeted killing operations against al-Qaeda leaders as it confronted the violent challenge posed by the organization to the United States following the September 11, 2001 attacks. In the wake of the attacks on US territory, then-President George W. Bush formulated a strategy for a war on terror, and thus in addition to the conventional warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq and the battle on the intelligence, police, financial, and legal fronts, the President ordered US security forces to pursue al-Qaeda's commanders and activists everywhere in the world where there was reliable information that the organization was planning terror operations or that there were operatives who could not be arrested. Thereafter a number of al-Qaeda operational commanders were killed in aerial operations: in 2002, Abu Ali al-Harithi, the local commander in Yemen was killed; in 2005, Abu Hamza Rabia, head of al-Qaeda's international operations division was killed in Pakistan; and in 2006, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the al-Qaeda commander in Iraq was killed.

The targeted killings continued sporadically, benefiting from the decided technological advantages of the United States, primarily precision fire from UAVs armed with missiles. This operational tool was chosen as the principal vehicle for targeted killings for several reasons: it took the adversary by surprise; it could be used from a distance, without risk to soldiers; and it could overcome the difficulty of reaching the targets physically. This tool was discovered to be especially helpful in combat against senior al-Qaeda figures and their collaborators who hid in areas whose topography made movement and access difficult, taking shelter among a population that was partly sympathetic to them and had principled objections to the presence of foreign soldiers on its soil.

In early 2009, when President Barack Obama took office and realized the severity of the continued threat to US citizens on sovereign US

territory as well as the ongoing threat around the world from al-Qaeda and global jihad elements, he adopted a combat strategy that included:

- a. a significant increase in US conventional military forces in the main theaters of war in Iraq and Afghanistan;
- b. increased intelligence and operational cooperation with US allies;
- c. assistance in rebuilding institutions and economic and social infrastructures in societies damaged by the fighting or by subversive terrorist activity;
- d. training of army and security forces in countries hit by terrorism.

This policy has shown success, and according to past and current senior US officials, the “Obama doctrine” has proven to be more effective than previous approaches to the war on terror.³ In addition, in order to boost the war against al-Qaeda, combat operations involving targeted killings of terrorists using US technological capabilities were stepped up significantly. With a determination that surprised many people, Obama expanded the authority of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to carry out targeted killing operations against al-Qaeda leaders and senior activists, their affiliates throughout the world, and foreign elements that trained in camps in Pakistan. In fact, Obama approved more targeted killing operations than any other president in modern history: during his presidency, the number of targeted killing operations almost doubled, from 33 in 2008 to 53 in 2009, and later, it spiraled to 118 in 2010.⁴ Thus, most of al-Qaeda’s senior commanders were killed in aerial operations one after the other, along with senior Taliban and Haqqani network⁵ officials, who collaborated with them in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Support for claims of the effectiveness of the targeted killing policy in the war against al-Qaeda appears in Bin Laden’s writings found in his hiding place after his assassination. Bin Laden revealed that he was very concerned about the damage sustained by his organization from the UAV attacks in the tribal areas of Pakistan, which he believed was the only weapon capable of harming al-Qaeda. According to his writings, al-Qaeda activists complained to him that after the tribal area became a free-fire zone exposed to US fire, they were unable to train or maintain communications, and their ability to move freely and recruit new troops was limited.⁶

The United States pursued targeted killing not only against al-Qaeda operatives, but also conducted pinpoint strikes against squads of Muslim

operatives from Western countries who had trained in Pakistan among the Taliban and al-Qaeda and intended to undertake attacks in Western countries. These targeted killings were carried out not only through aerial fire, but also through helicopter raids by commando ground forces, such as: the operation in which Bin Laden was killed in Abbottabad, in the heart of Pakistan, in May 2011; the killing of Saleh Ali Nabhan, a senior operative of al-Qaeda and the Somali Shabab, who was killed by a US commando force that raided his hiding place in Somalia; and the death of Fazul (Haroun) Abdullah Mohammad,⁷ Nabhan's partner in African operations, who was killed by a Somali policeman who stopped his car at a random checkpoint and claimed that the suspect had attempted to flee. (The circumstances of his death actually remain a mystery, since it is not clear whether this was a planned ambush.)

Political Challenges at Home and Abroad

In recent years, the nature of the US war on terror around the world, and the lack of transparency concerning targeted killing operations defined as classified, have been a source of both tension between countries and ongoing criticism of US policy. This criticism has come mainly from Pakistan, since many of the targeted killings have been carried out on Pakistani territory. President Obama and senior administration officials have argued that the use of UAVs for direct strikes at those responsible for carrying out terror attacks is proportional and is undertaken as judiciously as possible, and that only rarely are uninvolved civilians injured by these operations. However, the failure to include Pakistan in the campaign, most of which is underway on Pakistani territory, and the President's public declarations that if his country has reliable intelligence about high value terrorist targets it will continue to act unilaterally because it does not receive local cooperation, have aroused Pakistani public opinion against him. Indeed, the US approach has fueled strong suspicion and deep resentment of the United States among many in the Pakistani public.

The likely negative impact of targeted killings by one sovereign state on the territory of another sovereign state is manifested particularly acutely in the complex relations between the two countries. After Bin Laden was killed, the political disputes rose harshly to the surface and ignited a sharp public debate in Pakistan, which even reached the Pakistani parliament,

on the continued US covert presence and independent US operations, especially the targeted killings in Pakistan and the flagrant violation of Pakistani sovereignty. The turmoil increased after an incident in which US planes, as a result of problems in coordination between the forces, accidentally fired on a Pakistani military force in November 2011, killing twenty-four Pakistani soldiers. This incident aroused tremendous anger and sharp public and political criticism of the government of President Zardari, and has clouded relations between the two countries. Together, these various events intensified the demand to reveal the scope of covert US intelligence activity in Pakistan, along with a demand to stop such activity completely and cease targeted killing operations immediately. In fact, in the first months of 2012, there was a significant decline in the number of US attacks on Pakistani territory with UAVs: from January-March, there were only eleven attacks, as opposed to twenty-eight in the same period in 2010.⁸ In effect these operations were suspended for a period of time, and today, high level discussions are underway on whether and how to continue them with joint US-Pakistani cooperation and monitoring. The senior military and political echelons in the two countries are engaged in intensive discussions on how to solve these disputes.

In Yemen, which is the center of activity for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the pace of targeted killing operations has increased as well. AQAP is one of al-Qaeda's closest and most dangerous affiliates, and its members are responsible for two terror attacks that were intended for US territory. The organization's activity in Yemen has also posed familiar dilemmas for the US administration in its relations with the local government, even though it received tacit agreement from the government to operate in Yemeni territory. However, in contrast to the tension that has arisen between the United States and Pakistan, targeted killing operations in Yemen have prompted a public discussion within the United States itself, largely because President Obama approved the targeted killing of Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen who served as a senior operative in the ranks of AQAP; al-Awlaki was accused of involvement in terrorist activity against US citizens and of public activism in support of terrorism. He was killed in Yemen in September 2011 by aerial fire, together with Samir Khan, a US citizen of Pakistani origin who served as editor of *Inspire* magazine, the mouthpiece of AQAP. One month later,

an aerial targeted killing operation aimed at Ibrahim al-Bana, media chief for the organization, also killed al-Awlaki's sixteen year old son. These special circumstances led to a legal, constitutional, and moral debate among experts on human rights law and security officials concerning the state's right to make use of targeted killing in response to the involvement of a US citizen in terrorist activity. Human rights organizations believed that execution of three US citizens by the US government without due process and public scrutiny established a dangerous precedent.

The public discussion, which actually began when the intention to target al-Awlaki was announced, even before he was killed, illustrated the dilemmas concerning the manner in which governments use targeted killings and the degree of public transparency in their decision making process. While US administration officials have insisted that the Justice Department examined and approved these targeted killings, they have refused to publish the complete document that would substantiate their claims. Thus, if most of the information on fighting al-Qaeda leaders and other operatives is classified and available only to a small number of relevant establishment officials, according to opponents of targeted killings, the lack of transparency in the decision making process is liable to create an opportunity for abuse of authority, or at best, to cause errors. Furthermore, the system is apparently not subject to judicial review by an outside party, and for better and for worse, the decision as to whether there are sufficient indicators for an attack rests with the government. Therefore, the internal procedures the government has established and institutionalized for the purpose of overseeing decision making and making the decisions compatible with international humanitarian law are vitally important. However, by nature these procedures are likely to be classified, so that an outside observer would not be able to assess and judge them.⁹ Consequently, perhaps the US administration would do well to consider taking the path outlined by the Israeli Supreme Court on this issue: having an outside commission (headed by a retired judge) check the propriety of the targeted killing operation and confirm it for the public.¹⁰

In spite of criticism at home and abroad of the intensive US campaign of targeted killing of terrorist figures from the global jihad who threaten to operate on US territory, foremost among them al-Qaeda, this policy has become such an integral and central element in US successes against

these adversaries that senior US government officials have claimed that al-Qaeda is close to being defeated.¹¹ Yet notwithstanding the success, and although the threat of terror is far from disappearing from the agenda of the United States and its allies, as long as there is a sense that the danger of domestic terror in Western countries, and especially the United States, is waning, it is not clear how long the United States can adhere to its policy of targeted killing. The tension it has caused to US foreign relations with America's allies in the war on terror, the fear of retaliatory actions by terrorist organizations in Western countries, the reservations of Western democracies about covert, unmonitored methods of operation, and the harm to uninvolved civilians raise questions concerning the continuation of this policy.

The Israeli Case

Israel faces similar dilemmas to the United States in its struggle against terror, specifically regarding organizations that operate on Israeli territory, along the country's borders, and around the world. Like the United States, it uses targeted killings as a main tool in its war on terror. In the past, Israel made sporadic use of covert, pinpoint, targeted killings to eliminate heads of organizations and major operatives, whose deaths were meant to harm the organizations and disrupt their activity. On several occasions this policy created complications for Israel with countries on whose sovereign territory these operations were carried out. For example, in 1973 major tension arose between Israel and Norway because of the accidental killing of a Moroccan waiter in Lillehammer incorrectly identified as Ali Hassan Salameh, the commander of the Black September organization, who was responsible for the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972. Israel nearly had a serious diplomatic rift in its delicate relations with Jordan in 1997, following the botched Mossad attack in Amman on Khaled Mashal, head of the Hamas political bureau. Following the capture of its agents, and in order to avoid a break in relations with one of its important allies in the Arab world, Israel was forced to release Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin from prison, where he was serving a life sentence. There was also a great deal of tension between Israel and Canada when Canadian passports were found in the possession of the perpetrators.

Along with these covert operations, Israel also used open aerial targeted killing operations during the second intifada, especially against the instigators of suicide bombings. As Palestinian organizations made escalating use of suicide bombers, the list of targets was expanded until it included the senior leadership of these organizations. Overall, the Israeli public has supported targeted killing operations because of the large number of Israeli deaths caused by those targeted. However, in at least one case, namely, in July 2002, a public debate arose after an aerial targeted killing operation against Salah Shehadeh, one of the heads of the military arm of Hamas. In addition to Shehadeh and his assistant, Zaher Nasser, fourteen uninvolved civilians nearby, about whom there was no prior information, were accidentally killed. This led to a public debate in Israel that included publication of a letter by several pilots expressing their opposition to this policy.¹² However, in spite of the challenges and the various dilemmas – and given the attempted ground attacks and the launching of rockets, missiles, and mortars from Gaza at Israeli cities and villages, and more recently from Sinai as well at the southern border – targeted killing operations using fire from helicopters and UAVs have continued.

Israel's March 2012 targeted killing from the air of Zuhir al-Qaisi, secretary general of the Popular Resistance Committees, because of his involvement in planning an attack on the Israeli-Egyptian border, drew in its wake a round of continuous rocket fire at southern Israeli cities. It also engendered a media debate on the wisdom of Israel's use of targeted killing in its war on Palestinian terror.¹³ Nevertheless, in spite of questions raised by the Israeli media concerning the effectiveness and the wisdom of targeted killings in Gaza – which in many cases are followed almost immediately by fire at Israeli cities – it seems that Israel, perhaps even more than the United States, still opts to use its technological-operational advantage for precision strikes at those directly involved in carrying out terror operations. To be sure, targeted killing of senior figures in terror organizations has not solved and was not intended to completely solve the problem of terrorism, nor has it stopped terrorist activity by the organizations whose senior officials have been killed. However, it has more than once prevented or delayed terror attacks and forced the terrorist organizations to suspend activity and expend time and resources finding replacements for the leaders who were killed,

most of whom were not on the level of their predecessors. This is also true of targeted killings from the air conducted to thwart terror squads and rocket launching squads that are set to fire at Israel. In these cases as well, any expectation that this will completely prevent rocket and terror attacks from the southern border, which are part of the ongoing war of attrition that the organizations in Gaza are seeking to conduct against Israel, is entirely unrealistic.

In conclusion, the use of targeted killings in the combat strategy of Israel and the United States has inherent dilemmas, advantages, and disadvantages. Careful, intelligent, and controlled use of this tactic is required, both through wise political action and through judicial review, so that it is not a double-edged sword, but a sharp and precise weapon against the modern manifestations of terrorism.

Notes

- 1 Military “terrorilla” organizations are sub-state groups that from their inception established their militant status through the use of terror, that is, sporadic violence against civilian targets. Afterwards, they added guerilla and hit-and-run operations to their repertoire, and eventually they built an orderly, institutionalized military force with companies, regiments, and even brigades (although at this stage, on a smaller scale than those of a conventional army), and used combat tactics combining all of these elements. See Yoram Schweitzer, “The Limitations on Fighting a Terrorilla Army: Lebanon and Gaza as Test Cases,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2009): 35-42, <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291272780648.pdf>.
- 2 In Israel there is a legal definition of targeted killing: According to the fundamental ruling HCJ 769/02, “The Public Committee against Torture in Israel et al. vs. The Government of Israel et al.,” it appears that targeted killing, in its legal definition, is used against “civilians who directly carry out a hostile act” (and on this issue see Article 51[3] of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention).
- 3 David Rohde, “The Obama Doctrine: How the President’s Drone War is Backfiring,” *Foreign Policy*, March-April 2012.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 The Haqqani network is a crime family that established its empire in Afghanistan and Pakistan, based on kidnapping, extortion, and smuggling, and has strong ties with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. See Mark Mazzetti, Scott Shane, and Alissa J. Rubin, “The Haqqani Network: The Crime and Terror Empire that Causes Obama to Lose Sleep,” *Haaretz*, September 26, 2011, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/world/1.1483970>.

- 6 David Ignatius, "10 Years after 9/11, al-Qaeda is Down but not Out," August 24, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/10-years-after-911-al-qaeda-is-down-but-not-out/2011/08/23/gIQARQ3tZJ_story.html.
- 7 Saleh Ali Nabhan was killed in September 2009. The leader of al-Shabab, which is affiliated with al-Qaeda, he was number three on the FBI's most wanted list. Justin Fishel, "FOXWIRE: Navy Seals Kill Wanted Terrorist in Somali Raid," Fox News, September 14, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2009/09/14/foxwirenavy-seals-kill-wanted-terrorist-somali-raid/>. Fazul Abdullah Mohammed was killed in June 2011. He was responsible for al-Qaeda operations in Africa and was a commander of al-Shabab. Jeffery Gettleman, "Somalis Kill Mastermind of 2 U.S. Embassy Bombings," *New York Times*, June 12, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/12/world/africa/12somalia.html?_r=2&scp=4&sq=somalia&st=cse.
- 8 Peter Bergen and Jennifer Rowland, "CIA Drone War in Pakistan in Sharp Decline," CNN, March 28, 2012, <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/27/opinion/bergen-drone-decline/index.html>.
- 9 Robert Chesney, "Who May Be Killed? Anwar al-Awlaki as a Case Study in the International Legal Regulation of Lethal Force," in M. N. Schmitt et al., eds., *Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law*, Vol. 13, 2010, DOI: 10.1007/978-90-6704-811-8_1.
- 10 See note 2. The examination is done after the fact, and the committee must check and confirm that there was indeed well established and verified information indicating that the target of the killing was actually a terrorist who took direct part in a hostile act (gathering intelligence, transporting or dispatching terrorists, making decisions on carrying out attacks, or planning attacks). In addition, the committee must confirm that targeted killing was used only in the absence of a less damaging military alternative, that is, only when arrest was not possible. Finally, the killing must meet the test of proportionality. If it finds that there were deviations from the legal requirements, the committee is authorized to convey its findings to the attorney general, the military advocate general, the defense minister, and/or the head of the General Security Services for the purpose of considering criminal proceedings.
- 11 Phil Stewart, "Leon Panetta Says al-Qaeda's Defeat 'Within Reach,'" *Reuters*, July 9, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/09/us-afghanistan-usa-panetta-idUSTRE76818V20110709>.
- 12 "Reserve Air Force Pilots: We Won't Attack in the Territories," *Ynet*, September 24, 2003, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/1,7340,L-2767679,00.html>.
- 13 Roni Shaked, "Assassinations Are No Longer Effective," *Yediot Aharonot*, March 11, 2012; Yoav Zitun, "2 Killed in Gaza Strike, Including Terror Chief," *Ynet*, March 9, 2012, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4200651,00.html>.

US Combat against the Afghanistan Insurgency: President Obama's Approach

Nadav Kedem and Shmuel Zatliff-Tzur

Following the September 11 terror attacks in the United States, then-President George W. Bush ordered a US military ground invasion of Afghanistan to rout al-Qaeda, which was supported by the Taliban government. After eight years of a US policy in Afghanistan designed by the Bush administration, President Obama chose to implement a different policy. Under Obama's leadership, a decision was made to substantially beef up US forces in Afghanistan, and significant resources were invested in building the Afghan state and its security forces.

Obama's main goals were to defeat al-Qaeda; strike a hard blow against the Taliban, which had become much stronger and was threatening Afghanistan's stability; and help the Afghani government consolidate a governmental and security infrastructure in the country. President Obama indicated that the summer of 2011 would be the date for withdrawing most US forces from Afghanistan. However, after a situation assessment it was announced at a NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010 that the military withdrawal from Afghanistan and the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghanis would take place only in late 2014. Following a subsequent situation assessment in early 2012, US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced that the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghanis would be moved up to 2013, about a year ahead of schedule.¹

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The United States viewed Pakistan as an essential partner to achieving its goals in Afghanistan in the war on terror. However, this cooperation has had ups and downs over the years. The US has strongly criticized Islamabad for providing refuge for Taliban activists and their affiliates, who operate from Pakistan against Western forces in Afghanistan, without Pakistani opposition. For its part, Pakistan claims that US aerial attacks are blatant violations of Pakistani sovereignty and arouse public opposition to US policy, which is considered fundamentally anti-Islamic. Yet in spite of the differences of opinion, the two countries need each other. The US needs Pakistan for dealing with the insurgent organizations that find shelter in the tribal areas, and Pakistan needs US economic and military aid, which it gets in return for cooperating with the US.

The purpose of this article is to offer an interim assessment of the Obama administration's policy in Afghanistan ahead of the planned withdrawal, against the backdrop of US domestic policy considerations in advance of the November 2012 presidential elections and the triangular relations between the United States, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The article will present US goals in Afghanistan as outlined by President Obama and will assess the prospects for their successful achievement before the withdrawal.

A New US Strategy for Afghanistan

Under President Bush, US combat in Afghanistan focused on pursuit of al-Qaeda by US commando forces and regular army forces and removal of the Taliban regime from government. In the first years of the fighting, the Americans scored significant achievements, including the fall of the Taliban regime and its flight, along with al-Qaeda, to the mountainous areas of Pakistan. However, once the Bush administration's attention was diverted from Afghanistan to Iraq, the Taliban and al-Qaeda managed to resurrect their military and human infrastructure in Afghanistan and Pakistan. At the same time, the new Afghani government, headed by Hamid Karzai, has not succeeded in implementing stable governance throughout the country, and the Taliban and its affiliates, who resumed operations against Western forces in Afghanistan, entered the vacuum.

In January 2009 the new Obama administration inherited this problematic legacy, with the Taliban already operating from bases in Pakistan – which sheltered them from NATO operations – and beginning

to control large areas of Afghanistan. The organization established shadow governments that controlled the southern provinces of Afghanistan, principally Helmand and Kandahar, which served as bases for recruiting and beefing up manpower, and also as traditional spiritual centers that supported Taliban ideology. Al-Qaeda's military apparatus was placed under Taliban command, and together they carried out terror attacks and guerilla operations against Western forces in Afghanistan. Another local player with power and military capabilities that joined in the anti-Western actions was the Haqqani network, which had extensive ties with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The network is spread out over a wide area that includes parts of eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan, and carries out showcase guerilla and terrorist attacks in order to become a major player in any future political agreement. The renewed terrorist activity sparked fear that the Afghani Taliban would once again take control of the government, provide refuge for al-Qaeda, and allow an infrastructure for terror attacks outside of Afghanistan. For this reason, President Obama viewed fortification and stabilization of the central government in Afghanistan as the principal challenge in preventing terrorist elements in the country from threatening US national security.²

Underscoring the need for a policy shift, Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense in 2009 in the Obama administration, claimed that President Bush's strategy in Afghanistan was not effective because troops there were too few and spread too thin. He warned that failure in Afghanistan would be a major setback for the US administration's ability to fight terror; it could embolden insurgents, as it did when they ousted the Soviets from the country, and thus a new US strategy was needed for the region.³

Three alternatives were proposed for US policy that focused on counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy, which includes beefing up fighting forces and at the same time establishing effective government and security institutions. As part of this strategy, there was an attempt not only to confront terrorism but also to rebuild the failed state that had served as a fertile ground for the growth of terror. The COIN strategy aspires to achieve legitimacy from the local populace and win over hearts and minds, and in so doing, help dry up the sources of support for terror. It was hoped that the promotion of personal safety, good governance, the rule of law, and infrastructure building, a higher standard of living, and

similar improvements would win the West the sympathy and support of the population.

Vice President Joe Biden feared that expanding the war would lead to Afghani alienation and dependence on foreign aid. He therefore proposed that US efforts be focused on building the Afghan state, and that most of the fighting force be withdrawn within eighteen months. In contrast, General Stanley McChrystal, commander of US forces in Afghanistan, claimed that the weakness of Afghani security forces made it necessary for the United States to bear the burden of the war. He therefore demanded that the fighting force be beefed up significantly, without committing to a target date for completing the mission. Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton proposed an intermediate approach of pushing the Afghan government to take responsibility for the country, with the United States and NATO bearing the burden of the fighting. They proposed a smaller increase in forces than McChrystal suggested and a declared end date.

Ultimately, it was decided to add 30,000 US troops in an attempt to defeat the militants, including in areas that until then had not been under the control of Western forces. At the same time, it was decided to build and train an Afghani force that would be capable of confronting terrorism, and significant resources were invested in massive development of a civilian infrastructure in Afghanistan for the benefit of the country's citizens. Obama hoped in fact to cultivate Afghanistan's local ability to confront insurgents, in order to enable the US army's gradual withdrawal and the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghanis. In addition, an understanding developed that success in the battle in Afghanistan would require cooperation with Pakistan in order to act against the Pakistani Taliban, which was operating against the Pakistani government and providing support for fighters in the Afghani Taliban.⁴

US Measures for the New Approach in Afghanistan

According to a Congressional report, the United States saw economic aid to Afghanistan as the key factor in promoting stability in the country and winning the hearts and minds of the populace. This, in fact, was the basis of the COIN strategy. The purpose of the aid is to create the conditions necessary for developing a stable democratic government that is capable of coping with the militants on its own. During Obama's

tenure, there has been a significant increase in the economic investment directed at developing Afghanistan's security and civilian apparatuses. As a result, the educational system has improved, enrollment in schools has increased, and there has been a significant turn for the better in the healthcare system. Nevertheless, the report warns that the lack of supervision and incorrect allocation of resources are likely to make it difficult for the local government to monitor aid and prevent corruption.⁵

Much effort was also invested in developing the capabilities of the Afghani army and police, which number some 320,000 personnel, in order to prepare them to confront the insurgents independently.⁶ However, rampant corruption and the ethnic diversity of the troops (among other issues) call into question their future loyalty to the state. In addition, in light of the economic difficulties that NATO countries and the United States in particular are facing, the cash flow for maintaining Afghani security forces will be reduced over time, which is likely to harm their ability to assume security responsibility for the country.⁷

As of January 2012, the number of Western and foreign troops in Afghanistan was about 130,000, with some 90,000 of them American. Figure 1 presents the number of US forces in Afghanistan from 2002 until early 2012, with the increase in the number of troops after President Obama took office clearly evident.

There were three main types of operational tactics employed by the United States in an attempt to defeat the insurgents during the fighting in Afghanistan: extensive ground operations, pinpoint commando actions, and use of unmanned aerial vehicles to strike terrorists hiding in Pakistan.

Most of the ground operations in Afghanistan have focused on Taliban strongholds in the Helmand and Kandahar southern provinces and in the eastern provinces located near the mountainous areas of Pakistan. One of the main problems with wide-ranging ground operations against Taliban outposts is that after a military action, troops would leave the area. The Taliban would then conquer the area again, which dragged NATO forces into new battles over areas they had already cleansed. In order to address this problem, it was decided that Afghani police and government forces would advance in the wake of the troops in order to take control of the area after the conclusion of the military act. However, even after this plan was implemented in various places, the Taliban succeeded in returning to action and threatening the local residents.⁸

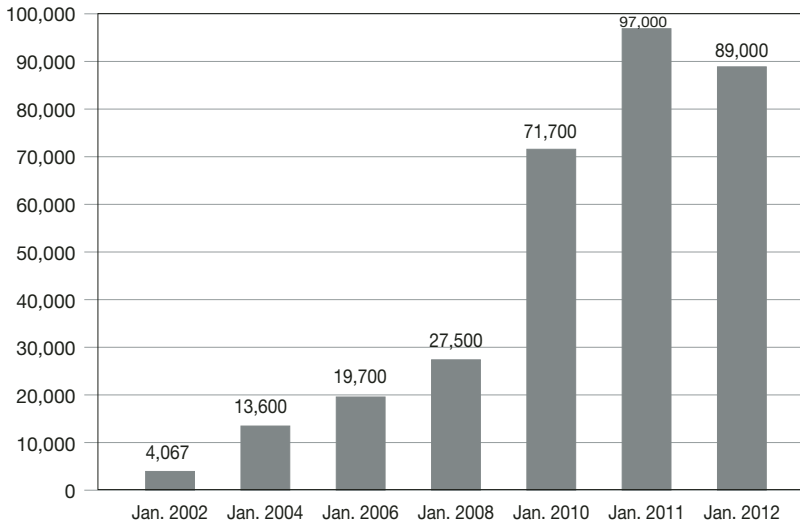


Figure 1. US Troops Deployed in Afghanistan, 2002–12

Source: Livingston and O’Hanlon, “Afghanistan Index,” p. 4.

Another military tool was nighttime commando raids on residential complexes suspected of hiding terrorists and weapons. During 2010, there was a significant increase in the number of night raids. According to US officers, thousands of armed men were killed and arrested during these raids, which, they claim, shows how critical they are (table 1). Nevertheless, the night raids are a source of tension between Afghanistan and the United States because innocent civilians are frequent casualties. Afghanistan’s President demanded that the United States stop them, declaring that if they continued, he would not sign a strategic agreement with the West.⁹

Table 1. Insurgent Casualties during Special Forces Operations in Afghanistan, 2010-11

	2010		2011	
	Killed	Arrested	Killed	Arrested
Leaders	~235		~1,500	
Fighters	~1,066	~1,673	~3,200	~8,000

Source: Livingston and O’Hanlon, “Afghanistan Index,” p. 10.

A main tool for fighting terrorist organizations in their hiding places in Pakistan is the extensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The number of attacks grew significantly under the Obama administration, with some 240 carried out between 2009 and 2012. These attacks dealt significant blows to al-Qaeda: its leadership has been weakened, and its ability to carry out attacks in the region has been greatly reduced (table 2).¹⁰ The deaths of twenty-four Pakistani soldiers from US fire on November 26, 2011 sparked major tension between Pakistan and the United States and brought about a two-month halt in the aerial attacks. US and Pakistani officials claim that this break was exploited by the militants to rebuild and reinforce the connections between them in order to coordinate the effort against Western forces.¹¹ On January 10, 2012, the aerial attacks against the insurgents in Pakistan were resumed, and as of late March 2012, eleven attacks of this kind had been carried out.¹²

Table 2. Insurgent Deaths as a Result of Aerial Attacks in Pakistan, 2009-12

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Leaders	~16	~18	~13	~4 ¹³
Fighters	~447	~783	~392	~73

Source: Roggio and Mayer, "Charting the Data for U.S. Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004-2012"

In June 2011, President Obama declared that the United States had succeeded in achieving the goals adopted with the decision to add forces in Afghanistan: addressing the al-Qaeda challenge, impeding Taliban momentum, and training Afghani security forces.¹⁴ Indeed, with the number of terror attacks falling by 9 percent, a NATO spokesman in Afghanistan called 2011 a "remarkably successful year" in the fight against the insurgents. He claimed that the militants had lost their hold on territories in the south and east of the country, near the border with Pakistan.¹⁵ Ostensibly, this is significant success, yet the situation on the ground may indicate a different trend.

The Taliban Response to the US Strategy

NATO officers have declared that the Taliban is not capable of holding on to territory, but in actuality, control of the ground is not necessarily

the most important factor for influencing the populace. In order to avoid direct encounters with NATO forces, the Taliban has changed its strategy of operation, opening a psychological front once it transferred the fighting to cities so that NATO would lose its aerial advantage; it has executed targeted killings of senior Afghan figures; waged showcase terrorist attacks; and damaged civilian infrastructures, such as blowing up cellular antennas. The goal is to show the population that the Taliban is alive and kicking and that the government was not capable of protecting its citizens.¹⁶

According to a UN report, 3,021 civilians were killed in Afghanistan in 2011. This is an 8 percent increase over 2010, and the fifth year in a row in which the number has risen. In 2011, 431 people were killed in suicide attacks, an 80 percent increase over 2010. In 2011, 77 percent of all conflict-related deaths of civilians were attributed to “anti-government elements,” including the Taliban. In 2011 there was also a significant increase in the number of incidents aimed directly at politicians, senior military figures and police, and civilians suspected of collaborating with Western forces. The most blatant example was the assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the High Peace Council, who was killed at his home by a suicide bomber in September 2011.¹⁷ The report concludes that Afghanistan is becoming dangerous for the average citizen.¹⁸

For the insurgents, carrying out complex terrorist attacks was another way to demonstrate their capabilities. These attacks were generally aimed at government symbols and included suicide attacks followed by a concentrated assault on the target by a number of teams in an attempt to hole up there. In order to be able to fight for a protracted period, the terrorists would carry with them large quantities of weapons and food. One of the most prominent attacks was on the US embassy in Kabul in September 2011. Terrorists took control of a multi-story building near the embassy and fired rockets at the embassy building. Only after some twenty hours of fighting did security forces manage to gain control of the building and kill the terrorists.¹⁹

Another method used by the insurgents to harm Western forces is the recruitment of Afghan security forces to kill Western soldiers. This issue caused a serious deterioration in the level of trust between the sides, because it was difficult for the Western troops to know which of the Afghans would shoot at them.²⁰ This modus operandi has had strategic

ramifications, evident in France's declaration that it was moving up the withdrawal of its troops from 2014 to 2013 following the death of four French soldiers at the hands of an Afghani soldier on January 20, 2012.²¹

Pakistan's Importance in the Eyes of the United States

The United States sees Pakistan as a key player in the war against terror and in future developments in Afghanistan. However, the US capability to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan is limited when the organization enjoys safe refuge in Pakistan. The killing of Osama Bin Laden by the United States in the heart of Pakistan in May 2011 and the accusation by senior US officials that Pakistan is aiding terrorist organizations to carry out attacks against Western troops in Afghanistan have raised the level of tension between the two countries.²²

The United States has invested much effort in reaching appropriate understandings with Pakistan concerning the fight against terror, but apparently to no avail. Pakistan is a divided and torn country, with a limited level of governability and a government and military with conflicting interests on the issue of cooperation with the Americans. Even if the United States could reach an acceptable agreement with officials within Pakistan, it is doubtful if Islamabad could fulfill its part of the agreement. Moreover, it appears that Pakistan and the United States have relatively conflicting interests concerning a political settlement in Afghanistan. Although this article does not offer an explanation of overall Pakistani policy, a number of major points in dispute should be noted. While the United States is interested in leaving behind a unified, functioning Afghanistan, Pakistan is interested in a weak neighbor that can be easily influenced. There are those who believe that Pakistan is interested in an Afghanistan that is strong enough to prevent an export of violence, but too weak to promote an independent policy.²³ Any successful compromise in Afghanistan will aid in building a political entity that is too strong for Pakistan's taste. Pakistan's dual policy – support for some of the terrorist organizations on the one hand, and declarations of cooperation with the Americans in fighting terror on the other – allows it to retain US aid, but also to use these organizations as convenient bargaining chips. Pakistan is interested, *inter alia*, in ensuring acceptance of its Western borders, control over the Pashtuns in its territory, and a reduction in the ties between Afghanistan and India to the extent possible.

Afghanistan is likewise a playing field for other states in the region. Iran, India, Russia, China, and other countries, in addition to Pakistan, have vested interests in what transpires there. Iran, which fears a US presence in Afghanistan, is attempting to encourage anti-American sentiment in the country and allows Taliban members to take shelter in its territory. Iran and Afghanistan have signed a defense agreement, and Iran is bribing Afghani officials in order to promote its goals in the country.²⁴ In addition, because NATO supply routes in Pakistan have been shut down, Russia, which fears the spillover of terrorism and drugs from Afghanistan, has recently examined the possibility of allowing NATO to establish a permanent logistics base in Russia for NATO forces in Afghanistan.²⁵ This may indicate that Russia fears pernicious developments following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The combination of Afghanistan's basic weakness, the division between the various factions in the country, and the intervention of foreign states is therefore a problem for reconstructing the country. As a result, given the interests of other countries in Afghanistan, it is highly doubtful whether a COIN strategy can work, even if the United States were prepared to commit to Afghanistan for a longer period.

Have US Goals in Afghanistan been Achieved?

Two contradictory positions may explain the acceleration of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. On the one hand, US military officials, in particular Defense Secretary Panetta, claim that good control has been achieved over the country: terrorist leaders have been killed, attempts at state-building are bearing fruit, and a US agreement with the Taliban that is good for the United States is within reach. Therefore, an early withdrawal and a focus on aid to the Afghan government are the necessary steps. On the other hand, a document written by the CIA and other US intelligence agencies shows little progress in Afghanistan. The US army has not achieved significant control over the territory, despite having inflicted heavy losses on the Taliban. The Taliban and its affiliates are still operating from Pakistan and from the eastern provinces of Afghanistan, and the Afghan government is corrupt and ineffective, which means that the military gains are in danger. The large number of losses and domestic economic problems make it difficult for the United States to invest the necessary efforts to confront the Taliban.²⁶ Hence, the

US withdrawal from Afghanistan is likely to be seen as a move intended to reduce the cost in human lives and the heavy economic burden.²⁷

Bob Woodward reveals that President Obama was skeptical about the COIN strategy. In his book *Obama's Wars*, he presents the decision-making process behind the change in policy in Afghanistan in 2009.²⁸ Woodward claims that Obama was more interested in an honorable withdrawal from the country than in long term nation-building in Afghanistan. He saw the building of the Afghani state as a secondary goal and as a means of allowing a safe withdrawal of forces. Senior US officials provided the President with a series of explanations as to why a COIN strategy would not succeed in Afghanistan. Thus, for example, General Karl Eikenberry, former commander of US forces in Afghanistan and today the US ambassador there, claimed at a meeting of the National Security Council in October 2009 that the COIN strategy was too ambitious, given the limitations in resources and the lack of a reliable ally in Kabul.²⁹ Then-Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen added that it will take three to five years to build an Afghan army of some 240,000 soldiers.³⁰

The considerable effort made by the United States in Afghanistan has in fact borne its first fruits. However, there are widespread reports of corruption, lack of discipline, and disloyalty among the troops, and their level of skill is low. State-building is a long process that requires a large investment over the course of many years, and functioning institutions cannot be created in a short time. According to a World Bank report, it will take Afghanistan approximately thirty years to recover completely and function as a state with a stable government.³¹

It can be assumed that Obama had the necessary tools to understand that it is not possible to implement a full COIN strategy in Afghanistan in such a short period of time without a strong, loyal ally in Kabul. The intervention of foreign players in the process, especially Pakistan, does not contribute to the effective implementation of the strategy. Therefore, the building of the Afghani security forces and the transfer of responsibility to them can be seen as secondary goals whose function is to serve the central goal of a safe withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Regarding the military goals in Afghanistan, the United States under Obama has inflicted extensive damage on al-Qaeda and its ability to threaten US physical security from its seat in Pakistan. Nevertheless, it

will be difficult to see the Taliban significantly routed, as evidenced by its activity in recent years. Through its special envoy, Mark Grossman, the United States is conducting negotiations with Taliban officials in order to reach a political settlement that will allow the withdrawal of US troops. Ostensibly, the US military campaign, along with Afghan state-building, is supposed to help the negotiations succeed. The Taliban should be convinced that it will not defeat the United States and the Karzai government, and therefore that it is preferable to compromise on limited control of Afghanistan in exchange for a cessation of fighting. The initial proposal by the Obama administration to the Taliban and the Haqqani network included demands to “renounce violence; irrevocably cut their ties with al-Qaeda; and abide by the Afghan constitution, including its protections for women and minorities.”³²

Nevertheless, it is not likely that this proposal will be accepted. First, the United States is already committed to withdrawing from the region, regardless of whether a political compromise is achieved. Panetta’s announcement that the withdrawal will occur earlier is only likely to emphasize the US commitment to a rapid withdrawal. Second, if Pakistan is not included, the ability to defeat the Taliban is likely to be very limited. It appears that the Taliban and the Haqqani network do not have much interest in agreeing to the US proposal. A compromise with the United States may well in fact be considered surrender just before victory. Even if agreement is achieved between the sides, it is very doubtful whether the Karzai government, working with a limited number of US troops, could enforce it. It is possible that after the US withdrawal, the Taliban and the Haqqani network will attempt to establish control over the country, which is a nightmare scenario for Afghanistan’s minority groups.

The issue of the withdrawal is troubling to Afghanistan’s minorities in general, and to the Shiite Hazaras, who were slaughtered under the rule of the Sunni Taliban, in particular. They claim that the Taliban will fill the vacuum left by NATO forces after the withdrawal and that the road to a civil war will be short. Hazara leader Mohammad Mohaqiq, a former member of the Northern Alliance, which fought the Taliban, stated: “I don’t believe in a miracle occurring, that the Taliban will change their way of thought, accept the Afghan constitution, [and] believe in democracy.”³³

Various claims have been made concerning the change in US policy, connecting the move to the economic crisis and the election campaign in the United States. In a speech declaring success against al-Qaeda and the

Taliban, President Obama mentioned in the same breath the heavy costs associated with fighting in Afghanistan. According to the President, the United States does not need to waste billions of dollars overseas while it is fighting an economic crisis at home. In addition, America is tired of dealing with the issue. The trauma of September 11 is receding, and the popularity of investing significant resources in the region is declining.³⁴

Indeed, it appears that the economic crisis is having a tremendous impact on the American way of thinking. Long term commitments and state-building processes are not consistent with a reduction in defense expenditures in the United States in the coming decade. Obama's State of the Union address in January 2012 reiterated the principles of his approach. Most of the speech focused on the economic crisis, including the need to reduce defense expenditures. Obama emphasized the strikes against al-Qaeda leaders and the interruption of the Taliban's momentum, but he did not discuss efforts at state-building in Afghanistan much. According to the President, American successes in Afghanistan make it possible to withdraw forces from a position of strength.³⁵ In practice, it is doubtful whether the United States can quickly reduce the large budgets allocated to the region without this backfiring. A hasty retreat is likely to cause the collapse of the local economy and to indicate that the United States has failed in building the Afghani state.

A Look toward the Future

Time will tell if the United States does in fact keep its commitment to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2013. It appears that United States policy is relatively flexible, given the commitment to continue to support the Afghan government while leaving advisors and Special Forces there. At least in the medium term, the combination of continuing US support, the existing infrastructure of the Afghan government, and the Taliban's preference for focusing on Afghanistan can be expected to allow the United States to contain the Afghan problem. This does not mean that the situation in Afghanistan will be totally calm or that the current Afghan government will survive over the long term. Nevertheless, it is possible that from the point of view of the United States, as long as events in Afghanistan do not threaten US security, the situation will allow it to focus on other challenges, including Iran.

Therefore, the conclusion is that the United States has not succeeded, in spite of tremendous efforts, in reaching all the *official* goals it defined in 2009. While al-Qaeda has been greatly weakened, the goal of building the Afghani state and creating a strong government with security forces that are effective in the fight against insurgents has not been completely achieved. It is doubtful whether the current Afghani government will last for a long time without a massive US troop presence.

Nevertheless, the main goal of the US fighting in Afghanistan was to protect the physical security of the United States. It is not likely that the Taliban will strike targets outside Afghan and Pakistani territory in the near future. Therefore, if the Taliban does not cooperate any more with al-Qaeda in the global campaign against the United States and the violence in Afghanistan does not harm US physical security, this goal will have been achieved. Such a state of affairs could be registered as a relative success, and thus an early US withdrawal from Afghanistan would not be a failure. On the other hand, if after the US withdrawal the Taliban again took control of the government and provided shelter for organizations with ties to global jihad, then it would appear that the enormous investment in Afghanistan did not achieve its goal, despite the strategic change made by Obama. In such a case, US fighting in Afghanistan is likely to be recorded in the pages of history as a failure.

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Civilian Nuclear Programs in the Middle East: Nuclear Spring or Nuclear Autumn?

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In recent years, a not-insignificant number of states in the Middle East have begun to think seriously about nuclear infrastructures for civilian purposes, and some have even begun constructing them. While several of the states, such as Egypt, have considerable experience in this field, others, such as the Arab Gulf states, have no prior experience to speak of. Interestingly, the latter have thus far shown the most progress, as demonstrated by the United Arab Emirates, which is expected to be the first Arab state to operate power reactors in the region. Iran's advanced nuclear program and the fears it has spawned have apparently been the catalyst for initiating these ambitious programs. However, those countries that are now examining the nuclear path claim that their main interests are producing electricity and/or desalinating water, and not achieving a nuclear balance with Iran.

The purpose of this article is to understand the motives behind the civilian nuclear programs in Middle East states, assess the significance of these programs, and provide an up-to-date snapshot of the situation. The fact that the preferred path for some states that developed military nuclear capability in recent decades was through civilian nuclear development sparks fears concerning the civilian nuclear programs in the Middle East. Therefore it is generally preferred that states seeking to develop new nuclear programs not be allowed to carry out nuclear fuel production and post-irradiation fuel reprocessing on their territory. These restrictions

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have aroused resentment among the “new nuclearizers,” and states such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan have declared that they will retain the right of access to fuel cycle technologies, first and foremost to carry out the process of uranium enrichment on their territory.

Jordan

Jordan’s increased demand for energy (an annual increase of 7 percent), the lack of significant oil and gas reserves – the kingdom imports some 95 percent of its energy needs, and about one-fifth of its GDP is devoted to this procurement – and the damage to the supply of gas from Egypt create a difficult challenge for the kingdom. The fact that there are large amounts of uranium in Jordan (10,000 tons) influenced the kingdom’s decision to establish a nuclear power reactor in the country. At the same time, there are several fundamental problems in establishing reactors in Jordan: aside from budgetary difficulties and the dangers of operating reactors in seismologically sensitive areas, there are technical problems and international pressures connected with the prevention of proliferation of nuclear weapons.

It has been reported that Jordan is seeking to connect its first power reactor to the power grid by 2019, with an output of 1,000 megawatts of electricity, an ambitious goal by any standard. According to the Jordanian energy minister, the plan is to build a power station forty kilometers northeast of Amman, which will be cooled by water treated at a purification plant.¹ It can be assumed that this is technically feasible. According to the Jordanians, large scale desalination of water in Jordan (from the Red Sea-Dead Sea canal) will require large amounts of electricity. Another problem is the human infrastructure required to build and operate the power reactor, from engineers and technicians for construction and operation, to government officials for licensing and supervision who will define the standards and monitor the building and operation of the reactor. In addition, a major financial investment is required, since with nuclear reactors the basic investment is between \$1.5 and 3 billion, and there are also costs for building, operating, and eventually decommissioning the reactor. These more or less double the expenditure.² Reactor operating costs, which also determine the final cost of the electricity, depend on the price of nuclear fuel, and herein

lies another problem: enrichment of the uranium that serves as fuel in nuclear reactors.

Jordan is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Additional Protocol, and is a participant in the International Framework for Nuclear Energy Cooperation (IFNEC) – whose goal is “to facilitate cooperation among the IFNEC Participants in pursuing the expansion of clean, sustainable, nuclear energy worldwide in a safe and secure manner, while at the same time reducing the risk of nuclear proliferation.”³ However, Jordan has announced its intention to retain the right to enrich uranium. The fundamental problem with this announcement is the possibility that Jordan, if it has a working enrichment facility, could divert uranium and enrich it to a military level. This is a serious temptation, especially if the Middle East awakening comes to the kingdom and Jordan’s government is taken over by extremist elements who could use the facilities for the production of high enriched uranium, suitable for use in nuclear weapons. The United States is working resolutely against the Jordanian drive to realize its option to enrich uranium, but thus far, it has not been especially successful. Another problem is that Jordan lacks the necessary professional manpower and technological infrastructure (and to a certain extent, the necessary supply of electricity) to build and operate a large enrichment facility that would provide nuclear fuel to a power reactor. If the fuel were supplied from Jordanian sources, it would be so expensive as to make the nuclear power reactor project economically unfeasible.

In the past, Jordan accused Israel of pressuring South Korea and France not to sell nuclear technologies to the kingdom. The Jordanian King even alleged that Israeli actions on this issue brought Israel-Jordan relations to their lowest point since the peace treaty was signed in 1994. According to the King, there are countries, especially Israel, that are worried that Jordan will become economically independent. Noting that reactors for generating electricity exist in many places in the world and that there would be more and more of them, he added that Israel must deal with its own affairs.⁴

Egypt

Egypt has had an interest in nuclear development for many years. It established a center for nuclear research at Inshas that included a small

Soviet-made research reactor that went critical in 1961. This center has trained personnel and carried out various studies on nuclear issues. Since the 1980s, Egypt has considered building power reactors that would supply a significant portion of its energy consumption. The site chosen was al-Daba'a, near the Mediterranean, west of Alexandria. On a number of occasions, Egypt sought construction estimates for the first reactor, but it never reached the point where a contract was signed and implementation of the plan began. The presidential plan of 2006 revived Egyptian ambitions. Currently the plan is for one or more reactors, each with an output of 1,200 megawatts. In 2009, Egypt was able to supply over 22,000 megawatts of electricity. Thus, the additional supply from nuclear power stations would not have been a problem, both because of the relatively small part this power source would play, and because of the electric grid's ability to carry the additional load.⁵ Egypt does not yet have large scale proven sources of uranium, although it is continuing to search for them and is also considering building a plant to produce uranium from the phosphates in its possession.

The main concern that arises with Egypt from time to time is the possibility that it will want to develop nuclear weapons. Presidents Sadat and Mubarak apparently decided against this, but not all Egyptian officials were in complete agreement. During one of its routine visits, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) discovered uranium particles enriched to a high level, and Egypt had no satisfactory explanation for this.⁶ In addition, Egypt has refused to sign the Additional Protocol, which would allow the IAEA to carry out more thorough inspections on Egyptian soil. There have been additional reports that in 1984, Egyptian Defense Minister Abu Ghazala sought approval from President Mubarak to develop nuclear weapons, but Mubarak refused, and Abu Ghazala was fired.

To a certain degree Egypt today suffers from political distress because of Iran's increased power and status, including in the military nuclear realm. Therefore, there is a not-insignificant chance that Egypt will want to acquire a military nuclear capability, especially if Iran achieves this capability. There is no doubt that Egypt has the necessary technological and human infrastructures, and promoting this project is mainly contingent on a political decision. If Egypt takes such a decision, the project will require many years, but without undue interruption it

could ultimately be realized. This would undoubtedly negatively affect the entire issue of power reactors, since delivery of the reactors and fuel for these reactors and removal of spent fuel would be harmed. Egypt's economy would be harmed because international aid would cease, and it is not clear that wealthy Arab states would come to its rescue. If Egypt pursues this direction and the change of government in the country brings extremist Islamic groups to power, their control of nuclear weapons would endanger the region and the entire world.

The Gulf States

In December 2006, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states announced that they were seeking to develop a shared nuclear program,⁷ and in March 2008 the program received the approval of the IAEA.⁸ In spite of the six states' cooperation, however, the possibility of a joint nuclear power station appears less likely, and some of the states intend to focus on promoting a national nuclear program.⁹ While these countries are advancing toward connecting their electric grids, in practice, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait have signed bilateral agreements and have established national authorities to deal with research and policy planning on the nuclear issue. These steps toward development of independent nuclear programs leave the GCC as the institution that sets goals, studies the issue, and serves as a framework for negotiations with the IAEA.

Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar

For some of the Gulf states, the idea of turning to nuclear energy is not new. As long ago as the mid 1970s, Kuwait decided to build an experimental nuclear power station.¹⁰ In March 2010, Kuwait announced its renewed interest in establishing a civilian nuclear program. It signed a cooperation agreement with the IAEA and established the Kuwait National Nuclear Energy Commission (KNNEC), whose function is to examine construction of nuclear power stations and the issues of security and safety, inspection, supervision, and legislation in the field.¹¹

According to Kuwait, the main drive behind its nuclear development is to cope with the rising demand for energy and reduce air pollution. The emirate has decided to build four nuclear power stations, each with a capacity of 1,000 megawatts, by 2022.¹² In June 2010, the United States and Kuwait signed a memorandum of cooperation dealing with

a range of issues, including nuclear legislation, regulations, security, and safeguards; radiation protection; and human resource planning in the nuclear field.¹³ Yet in spite of the emirate's activism, it appears to be having second thoughts, and it is not interested at this point in pursuing an independent nuclear capability.¹⁴ Kuwait was never very committed to the issue, but doubts concerning the nuclear program grew after the Fukushima disaster.¹⁵

In 2006, Qatar also began to consider the possibility of building a civilian nuclear program. In Qatar's case, the rationale is to continue to export large quantities of oil, and even more so, gas. This export is the basis of the Qatari economy. While Qatar has signed nuclear research cooperation agreements with France and Russia, the program is still in the research stage and no concrete plan to build nuclear reactors or nuclear power stations has been declared yet. Bahrain and Oman have also declared their intention to build nuclear programs. However, they have taken few steps in this direction, and it is not inconceivable that they will make do with cooperation, even if it is limited, within the GCC framework.

The United Arab Emirates

Estimates are that electricity consumption in the United Arab Emirates will reach 40 gigawatts by 2020. Today, the country's production capacity is half of that. According to estimates, exclusive reliance on renewable sources of energy, such as sun and wind, will provide up to 7 percent of the federation's energy needs. In response to these estimates, Abu Dhabi has begun to prepare to develop a civilian nuclear infrastructure. At this point the nuclear program includes the construction of four reactors, which are supposed to be connected to the electric grid by 2020.

Toward late 2008, an agreement began to be formulated on civilian nuclear cooperation between the United States and the UAE. The 123 Agreement, named for the relevant clause in US law that discusses nuclear cooperation, was signed in January 2009. It includes an agreement by the parties to cooperate on various civilian nuclear issues, such as professional exchanges, technical aid, and transfer of components and equipment. A main clause in the agreement prohibits any fuel cycle activity in the UAE (which means reliance on imports of nuclear fuel from other countries and sending spent fuel outside of the

country). This clause, in addition to a commitment to work transparently with the IAEA, has contributed to assuaging US fears, and was critical in the attempt to establish this agreement as a model for the future. In December 2009, the United Arab Emirates chose the South Korean firm KEPCO to build the reactors. The agreement to build and operate the reactors and to supply fuel for three years totaled some \$20 billion, with the first reactor scheduled to be connected to the electric grid in 2017.¹⁶ In March 2011, a ceremony was held marking the start of work at the site chosen for the reactors (Braqa, near the Saudi border), and since then, it has been progressing according to schedule.

The UAE has succeeded in overcoming economic, regulatory, and political obstacles on the way to a full nuclear program. In spite of its commitment to transparency on the issue vis-à-vis the international community, there are still fears of proliferation by the UAE. One of the main gaps is connected to the need to work for tighter control over exports. Indeed, Dubai, which served as a base of operations for the smuggling network of Pakistani scientist A. Q. Khan, is a smuggler's paradise and serves as a main channel for Iran to bypass Western sanctions. Many Iranians live in Dubai, and Iranian front companies that smuggle banned substances to and from Iran operate from Dubai.

Of all Middle East states, the United Arab Emirates has made the most progress in developing a civilian nuclear program driven by "objective" energy needs. A great deal of money has been invested in the program, backed by a coherent policy that is committed to transparency and to the use of the most advanced technology. The timetables for completing the project are ambitious and in fact unprecedented: a decade between the publication of policy on the issue and the date to connect the reactor to the electric grid. The Achilles' heel of the project remains human resource development. In spite of fears that the reactors will become a target for terrorist attacks and concerns about building them in a region prone to war, the federation is attracting foreign governments and companies and is showing its economic power by offering experts from all over the world attractive working conditions.

Saudi Arabia

Although Saudi Arabia has the largest proven oil reserves in the world and is the world's largest exporter of oil, in recent years the kingdom

has begun preparing openly to develop nuclear energy for purposes of electricity production and water desalination, and it is expanding its efforts to build a knowledge infrastructure on the subject. To this end, it has dedicated a series of projects and signed nuclear cooperation agreements with a number of countries. It has been reported that the process of choosing sites for the reactors has already begun and that the kingdom intends to finish the construction of the first reactor by 2020.¹⁷ The Saudi foreign minister has sought to assuage fears that his country intends to develop nuclear weapons, expressing the hope that the announcement of intention to develop this nuclear capability would not be misunderstood. He noted that it was not secret and was progressing openly, the goal being to obtain technologies for peaceful purposes.¹⁸ Yet in spite of this and other declarations, the kingdom has in the past signaled that it will not give up uranium enrichment capability, as the United Arab Emirates did in exchange for foreign aid in building nuclear facilities.¹⁹

The internal Saudi consumption of oil and gas has risen at an average annual rate of 7 percent, which is liable to endanger the kingdom's ability to serve as a regulator of oil output in the future. Today the kingdom consumes some 2.8 billion barrels a day, which is about one quarter of its entire output; at this rate, in another twenty years or so, it will not be able to export oil at all.²⁰ In addition, the kingdom desalinates over 70 percent of its drinking water, and the demand for energy is expected to rise, from 44,000 megawatts today to over 75,000 megawatts projected for 2020. Therefore, nuclear energy (along with renewable energy) has become another way to vary the kingdom's sources of energy, reduce the dependence on oil and gas for internal consumption, and allow export of a larger share of oil and gas.

In April 2010, King Abdullah published an order establishing a nuclear agency, the King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy (K.A.CARE), to coordinate policy, legislation, and research on a range of applications in the nuclear realm, under his direct responsibility. The enormous potential of the Saudi nuclear program is attracting many companies from all over the world. In February 2011, Saudi Arabia signed the first agreement of its kind for international nuclear cooperation. According to the official announcement, the agreement that was signed between Saudi Arabia and France will allow Saudi experts to learn from

the French about technological possibilities, economic requirements, and possibilities of developing qualified nuclear personnel.²¹ In late 2011, Saudi Arabia also signed an agreement with South Korea to build and operate nuclear reactors in the kingdom, and in early 2012, it signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with China. In February 2012, in the first conference of its kind in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi “roadmap” to nuclear energy was presented, which includes ensuring the supply of fuel for the long term and preparing a technical cadre in the relevant professions.²²

According to the announcement, the kingdom will invest over \$100 billion over two decades to build no fewer than sixteen nuclear reactors for purposes of generating electricity and desalinating water.²³ It was also reported that the United States has begun discussions with Riyadh on a deal – perhaps in light of the parameters of the memorandum of understanding between the two countries from 2008 – in which the kingdom made a commitment, not legally binding, not to “pursue sensitive nuclear technologies.” The deal would permit the Saudis to engage in civilian nuclear activity, and in exchange the United States will supply it with nuclear know-how and training, as well as nuclear materials. It is not clear whether the agreement being formulated has terms similar to the agreement signed by the United States with the UAE. However, several members of Congress expressed doubts as to the commitments the kingdom will take on itself in regard to plutonium separation and uranium enrichment and the ramifications of this step for the region.²⁴ In addition, it is not clear whether the kingdom will agree to the same commitments made by the United Arab Emirates in exchange for international aid, including signing the Additional Protocol of the IAEA.

Beyond limited experience in the use of nuclear technologies for medical and agricultural purposes, the kingdom’s nuclear knowledge infrastructure remains minimal. In spite of Saudi Arabia’s relative cooperation with the international community in civilian nuclear matters, the kingdom is a signatory to the Small Quantities Protocol, which in practice exempts it from intrusive inspections and makes it difficult for the IAEA to verify that in fact it is not carrying out forbidden development. The Saudi authorities have never confirmed this, but for years various publications have hinted that Saudi Arabia is working or intends to work to develop military nuclear capability. A series of

unusual statements on the nuclear issue coming from Riyadh for the first time in the past year, all of them emphasizing Saudi Arabia's intention to consider the nuclear path if the international community is not able to stop Iran from achieving its objective, supports this sentiment.²⁵ These statements, unlike past statements, publicly and explicitly address the military nuclear issue and suggest that there may be a shift in Saudi nuclear policy.

Turkey

In the past decade, Turkey's consumption of electricity has grown by an average of more than 8 percent per annum, and estimates are that demand for electricity will increase at an average rate of 6.5 percent a year until 2030.²⁶ Turkey mainly relies on energy imports, and its goal is to decrease this dependence and diversify its sources of energy. One of the methods it has examined for several decades and is investigating even more so at present is building a civilian nuclear capability. Since the 1960s, Turkey has made five attempts to develop civilian nuclear capability, but problems – mainly US opposition, difficulties with financing, and lack of political stability – brought this endeavor to a halt.²⁷ Today, Turkey has a limited infrastructure for civilian nuclear development, specifically, three small facilities for research and testing.²⁸ While uranium has been found in Turkey, mining it is considered expensive relative to uranium deposits in other countries, and Turkey has no infrastructure for commercial mining.²⁹ In connection with 2023 Vision, marking 100 years of the Turkish Republic, the Turks declared their intention to build three nuclear reactors in the country using know-how from foreign companies. There is also a long term plan to build some twenty reactors by 2030.³⁰ Domestically, there is some opposition to nuclear development because of the high risk of earthquakes in parts of the country. Nevertheless, there is no significant "green" political association or opposition.

After the failure of the commercial tender for building the first nuclear power station in Akkuyu on the Mediterranean coast, Turkey signed a \$20 billion deal with Russia in 2010 to build reactors with the aid of Rosatom, the Russian state-owned company. The reactors are supposed to be operational starting in 2019.³¹ Rosatom is responsible for raising the funds for construction, but Turkey has made a commitment to purchase most of the electricity produced by the power station, which will have

four light water reactors, each with an output of 1,200 megawatts. The power plant will be a “turn-key project,” with Rusatom responsible for supplying the fuel rods and reprocessing the spent fuel.³² Turkey is planning another reactor at Sinop on the Black Sea coast, and there are plans to build a third reactor also on the Black Sea, near the border with Bulgaria, in Igneada.³³

Turkey currently has no actual plans to develop fuel cycle capabilities, but Prime Minister Erdoğan has declared that his country retains the right to do so.³⁴ The Turks fear that if the enrichment process takes place outside of the country, Turkey will remain dependent on outside parties to supply its energy needs. Turkey is also angry that states already in possession of nuclear capability are increasing the supervision of and restrictions on development of nuclear capabilities. Turkey, which has signed all the main treaties for preventing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons in particular, is very critical of the fact that the nuclear powers do not keep their NPT Article IV commitments to recognize without discrimination the right of non-nuclear states to engage in nuclear development for peaceful purposes.

Unlike in the past, Turkey today has the necessary economic resources and political stability to progress on a civilian nuclear route. Furthermore, it would appear that its growing energy needs justify a turn in this direction. There are still obstacles domestically, for example, the relatively small number of scientists in this field and insufficient regulatory infrastructure. However, at least in the first stage the choice of a “turn-key project” is supposed to solve the problem of lack of Turkish experience. In the future, the Turks aspire to a civilian nuclear program that has elements of self-reliance.

In recent years Turkey has also invested much effort to increase its influence in the Middle East. Therefore, in the long run the possibility that Turkey would move from the civilian to the military path cannot be ruled out. While unlike other states in the Middle East Turkey has NATO’s nuclear guarantee, if in the future the guarantee is perceived as less reliable, Turkey’s tendency to rely on itself will likely grow stronger.

North Africa

In the late 1980s, Algeria had a fairly developed nuclear program. Although it is a signatory to all the relevant treaties, over the years the

international community has expressed concerns that the program also has military applications. Algeria has significant uranium deposits as well as two nuclear reactors, which were built with the aid of Argentina (a small reactor for medical research purposes) and China (a 15 megawatt heavy water reactor). Concern that Algeria was seeking to acquire military nuclear capability led to heavy US pressure, and as a result, Algeria signed the NPT in 1995. Algeria is also a signatory to the Pelindaba Treaty, which established a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in Africa and entered into force in 2009.³⁵ Algeria has a number of nuclear cooperation agreements – with the United States, Russia, China, France, and Argentina – that were signed in 2007 and 2008. In 2009, it was announced that Algeria plans to have an operational nuclear reactor by 2020.

The previous regimes in Tunisia and Libya also had such ambitions. In 2008, Libya, under Muammar Qaddafi, and Tunisia, under Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, signed nuclear cooperation agreements with France that included training of personnel, aid in mining uranium, and a French offer to build a water desalination reactor in Libya. The fall of the regimes in Libya and Tunisia brought all progress on this issue to a halt.³⁶ Morocco, in contrast to its neighbors, does not have oil and gas reserves, but it does have a not-insignificant quantity of uranium. (In 2007, an agreement was signed with the French company AREVA to extract the uranium deposits.) A small American-made research reactor (2 megawatts) is under construction near Rabat. In January 2011, approval was given to establish a government nuclear agency, and a draft law on the issue was prepared. It was also announced that by 2014, tenders would be issued for international companies to build two reactors, each with a 1,000-megawatt capability, which would apparently not be operational before 2020, in order to meet growing energy needs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.³⁷

Conclusion

The current role of nuclear power as a source of energy in the Middle East is negligible. However, no fewer than thirteen states have declared in recent years that they intend to develop a civilian nuclear infrastructure.³⁸ While most of the projects discussed here are far from finished, it is likely that early in the coming decade Turkey and the UAE will begin to produce some of the electricity they require using nuclear reactors. Egypt, Algeria,

and Saudi Arabia also have the capability to set up civilian nuclear programs in the future. Many of the states make convincing arguments regarding the value of the projects: the growing demand for energy; reduced dependence on fuels that pollute; and release of a larger share of oil and gas for export. However, additional considerations – of prestige and regional standing that naturally accompany nuclear development – cannot be ruled out. In addition to the civilian nuclear programs, there are concerns about the safety of nuclear facilities and materials from terrorist elements, and about constructing such sensitive facilities in potential areas of conflict.

There is a long road ahead until the process surveyed here can be called a nuclear spring or renaissance. Many of the declarations are not reliable, and many states have not yet resolved fundamental issues connected to nuclear development, including the long term safety of the fuel supply, arrangements for handling spent fuel, and regulatory and political solutions. Some of the states have not yet resolved issues such as project funding, necessary changes to the electric grid, and more sensitive issues concerning access to uranium enrichment and plutonium separation technologies. The Fukushima disaster in March 2011 was the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986, but thus far it has not had a significant impact on the policy of the countries surveyed here other than Kuwait, which stopped its nuclear development. Moreover, countries such as Saudi Arabia are even accelerating processes connected with nuclear development.

The activities taking place outside the reactor site are those that present the most difficulties for the “new nuclearizers”: the need for the fuel cycle, starting with the front end nuclear fuel production, and including the back end treatment of spent fuel after its removal from the reactor.³⁹ The issue of access to fuel cycle technology is also the most worrisome for those who fear a transition from civilian nuclear programs to military programs (only two states outside of Europe, Japan and Mexico, which have a well developed civilian nuclear infrastructure, have not considered the military nuclear option

Most of the states surveyed here do not constitute a threat in the foreseeable future in terms of nuclear proliferation. The danger of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East is not connected, at least in the short term, with development of civilian nuclear programs.

at any time).⁴⁰ Some of these states wish to retain the right to maintain such capabilities but still lack the ability to do so. The international community has good tools to cope with this danger, if only because of the dependence of most of these states, and to a lesser extent, Egypt and Turkey, on building nuclear infrastructures and training personnel. Thus, for example, both Turkey and the UAE chose, at least in the first stage, to receive the fuel from outside sources and send the spent fuel back to Britain or France, in the case of the UAE, or Russia, in Turkey's case. However, economic considerations are liable to bring about a situation in which countries that export nuclear technologies will be less punctilious about the restrictions so as not to lose potential markets.

The rationale behind the 123 Agreement between the United States and the UAE was to set a binding precedent, a sort of gold standard, which would henceforth apply to all states seeking to build a civilian nuclear infrastructure. However, since then, countries like Saudi Arabia and Jordan (and states outside the region, such as Vietnam), have been less prepared to adopt similar terms, especially regarding relinquishing enrichment and separation capability. It appears that the United States, which is seeking to avoid loss of markets in its competition with countries such as Russia, France, and Korea, is likely to put aside the precedent that it sought to establish, and to adopt a strategy of judging on a case by case basis. Aside from the possible danger of the agreement already signed with the United Arab Emirates, according to the policy being formulated, a number of "new nuclearizers" will be able to enrich uranium. It is not inconceivable that others will seek to do likewise.

The Obama administration, which has championed the battle against nuclear proliferation, must turn back this policy and meet the standard that it set. If it does not, the nuclear nonproliferation regime will be badly harmed. Selective application – precisely at this time, when the international community is having difficulty stopping uranium enrichment in Iran – not only does not necessarily ensure that those states will acquire the facilities and the know-how from the United States; it will probably harm the NPT, if only because of the importance of the United States in the nuclear field and the contribution of bilateral agreements, such as that with the UAE, to stemming nuclear proliferation.

In spite of the differing characteristics of the states surveyed, most of them, perhaps other than Saudi Arabia, show a relatively high level

of transparency as a means to gain the support of foreign governments and companies in promoting the projects. One of the most compelling arguments made by those who support stopping Iran before it acquires military nuclear capability is that other states in the region will follow in the nuclear path. However, the expected pace of civilian nuclear proliferation in the Middle East now appears to be slower than was believed in the middle of the previous decade, when the start of the programs was announced. This is because of various obstacles, some political and diplomatic, but mainly economic and technical. As a result, only a small number of states that had declared their intention to establish viable nuclear programs have succeeded in doing so.

This article has sought to provide an up-to-date picture of the situation regarding civilian nuclear development in the Middle East. For this reason, it has not discussed states such as Iran, which is working on the military aspects of nuclear development, and Syria, which was previously engaged, and perhaps is still pursuing an endeavor of this sort. Most of the states surveyed here do not constitute a threat in the foreseeable future in terms of nuclear proliferation. The danger of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East is not connected, at least in the short term, with development of civilian nuclear programs, and certainly according to the model adopted by the UAE. However, there are several states that pose a greater risk.

All the states discussed here are signatories to the NPT, although Egypt and Saudi Arabia have not adopted the IAEA Additional Protocol, an issue that must also be resolved as a condition for international aid in this area. Furthermore, as Iran's nuclear program progresses, it is not inconceivable that various actors will look for shortcuts and seek not only to promote a civilian program, but also to acquire the components of off-the-shelf weapons. Some of the civilian nuclear projects can still be presented as competitors to the Iranian model, as they prove that it is possible to promote a nuclear program according to accepted standards and receive aid from the international community. But given that nuclear technology has a dual use, and the fact that several of the states surveyed fear Iran's nuclear ambitions, the possibility that some of them will in the future seek to realize the military potential latent in their projects cannot be ruled out.

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