

Iran: From Regional Challenge to Global Threat

A Jerusalem Center Anthology

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Foreword

Shimon Shapira

This anthology of thirty recent studies by eleven leading security and diplomatic experts outlines the Iranian threat to Israel, the Middle East region, and the West. The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, a major Israeli think tank focusing on Israeli diplomacy and security issues, offers this collection of its most recent published studies to enable policy-makers, opinion-makers, academics, and students to become better informed about the many facets of the Iranian threat to world peace.

Over the last decade many books have been written on the challenge posed by Iran to the West as a whole. But today these challenges have become more apparent than ever. Iran's progress in developing nuclear weapons is now openly acknowledged by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN watchdog, based in Vienna. Iran's efforts to reach beyond the Middle East in order to penetrate the Western Hemisphere reached new levels when the U.S. disclosed that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was seeking to work with a Mexican drug cartel in order to carry out a mass-casualty terrorist attack in the heart of Washington, D.C., aimed at the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. Finally, Iran's repeated threats to close off the Strait of Hormuz, and its naval maneuvers in that area, underlined how Tehran sought to use the dependence of the world on Persian Gulf oil to force the West to adopt new policies. These events together have made an updated analysis of Iranian policies more urgent than ever.

Part I – "The Military Threat from Iran" – opens with a section focusing on the threat from an Iran armed with nuclear weapons. Dore Gold, President of the Jerusalem Center and former Israeli Ambassador to the UN, begins with a current description of "What Is Happening to the Iranian Nuclear Program?" He assesses the chances of the West increasing sanctions against Iran in order to

deter it from developing nuclear weapons.

Three senior Israel Defense Forces (IDF) officers – Maj.-Gen. (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, Maj.-Gen. (ret.) Aharon Ze'evi Farkash, and Brig.-Gen. (ret.) Yossi Kuperwasser follow with a critical look at the November 2007 "U.S. National Intelligence Estimate on Iran and its Aftermath." Farkash notes: "ironically, the NIE opens the way for Iran to achieve its military nuclear ambitions without any interference," while Kuperwasser concludes that the National Intelligence Estimate was "a very poor intelligence product."

Kuperwasser, former Head of Research and Assessment for IDF Military Intelligence, then surveys "The Limited Influence of International Sanctions on Iran's Nuclear Program." Kuperwasser finds that "there is no indication that international sanctions can be relied upon as a source of real leverage to force the Iranian government to pull back from its clear intention to complete an advanced nuclear program for military purposes. Unfortunately, the Iranians have exploited the time they have been granted while sanctions were tried to complete most of the technological groundwork for reaching this goal."

IDF Lt.-Col. (ret.) Michael (Mickey) Segall writes in "Iran Signals Its Readiness for a Final Confrontation" that since the publication of the November 2011 IAEA report, which explicitly spotlights Iran's plans to build nuclear weapons, senior figures of the Iranian regime and the state-run media have begun to use threatening, defiant, and sometimes contemptuous language toward Israel and the United States. Segall states that, from Iran's standpoint, an ongoing, head-on confrontation with the U.S. and Israel would serve its purposes in the region and build its image as a key actor that stands firm against the West and provides an alternative agenda to reshape the Middle East. Hence, compromise has almost ceased to be an option for Iran.

The countries of the Middle East will probably be more predisposed than the Cold War protagonists to brandish their nuclear weapons, not only rhetorically but also through nuclear alerts or nuclear tests, leading to situations of multilateral nuclear escalation, says Dr. Shmuel Bar in "Can Cold War Deterrence Apply to a Nuclear Iran." Bar, who is Director of Studies at the Institute of Policy and Strategy at IDC Herzliya and served for thirty years in the Israeli intelligence community, adds that such multilateral escalation will not be mitigated by Cold War-type hotlines and means of signaling, and the absence of a credible nuclear second-strike capability may well strengthen the tendency to opt for a first strike.

Opening a review of other potentially aggressive Iranian military capabilities, Uzi Rubin, who served as head of Israel's Missile Defense Organization between 1991 and 1999, observes in "New Developments in Iran's Missile Capabilities: Implications Beyond the Middle East" that Iran is vigorously pursuing several missile and space programs at an almost feverish pace with impressive achievements. The Iranians have upgraded their ballistic missiles to become satellite launchers. To orbit a satellite is a highly sophisticated endeavor. A space launcher that can orbit a satellite weighing 300 kg can be altered into an ICBM

that could drop more than 300 kg on Washington.

Michael Segall in "The Revolutionary Guards' Qods Force—Mission Accomplished!" addresses the significance of the revelation of the involvement of the Qods Force (including its senior figures') in the assassination plot on the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. on U.S. soil revealed in October 2011, as part of a pattern of Iranian involvement in international terror.

Dore Gold takes a look at Iran's moves to control the Persian Gulf and Iranian threats to the movement of 20 percent of the world's oil trade in "The Iranian Navy, the Strait of Hormuz, and Beyond."

In "Does Iran's June 2011 Military Exercise Signal a New Defense Doctrine?" Michael Segall points out that in the midst of the large-scale missile exercise called "Great Prophet 6," underground missile silos were disclosed, large numbers of surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) of different ranges were fired, and a new radar system was revealed.

Segall then assesses the significance of Iran's major air defense drill held in September 2011 in "Iran Holds Major Air Defense Drill amid Tensions with Turkey." The exercise took place in the midst of escalating Iranian rhetoric towards Turkey as a result of Ankara's decision to deploy a radar system in its territory that is part of the NATO anti-ballistic missile system.

Part II deals with ideology in Islamic Iran. Dore Gold begins by describing the influence of the Revolutionary Guards in Iran in "The Emergence of Iran's Revolutionary Guards' Regime." Given the heavy indoctrination of the Revolutionary Guards and the ongoing influence of Iran's most hard-line clerics on their officer corps, it would be an error to assume that their emergence in Iranian politics as the dominant internal force will make Iran more pragmatic and rational in any confrontation with the West. Moreover, their religious and ideological training raises serious questions about whether Western deterrence doctrines can be expected to work with a nuclear Iran.

Michael Segall then asks: "Is Iran a Role Model for Arab Revolutions?" He concludes that the collapse of the old Arab order in the moderate Sunni countries of the Middle East is, at least in the short-to-medium term, favorable to Tehran and has significantly improved that country's geo-strategic status and its ability to promote an ambitious agenda, which it defines as "a change in regional equilibrium." Iran is taking advantage of the current commotion in the Arab world and Western confusion to intensify its intervention and influence throughout the neighboring Persian Gulf, as well as in other regions that were formerly under U.S. and Western influence, while also exploiting the assets of Hizbullah, Syria, and Hamas.

Segall notes how the "Revolutionary Guards' Influence Grows in Iran as Opposition Falters." Since its foundation at the time of the revolution as scattered groups with loose ties, the Revolutionary Guards has developed into an economic-military-political powerhouse; in practice, it is the central power and

source of influence in Iran.

Finally, Iran expert and former U.S. Defense Department official Dr. Harold Rhode looks at "The Sources of Iranian Negotiating Behavior," by identifying patterns exhibited by the Iranian government and the Iranian people since ancient times. Most importantly, he identifies critical elements of Iranian culture that have been systematically ignored by Western policy-makers for decades. It is a precise understanding of these cultural cues that should guide policy objectives when dealing with the Iranian government.

Part III focuses on Iran's efforts to extend its penetration into Latin America and Africa, as well as its drive for regional hegemony in the Middle East. Michael Segall in "Latin America: Iran's Springboard to America's Backyard" notes that ever since Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005, Iran has been working resolutely to establish a foothold in the Latin American countries. His partners in promoting this policy are the presidents of Venezuela and Bolivia.

Col. (ret.) Dr. Jacques Neriah, a foreign policy advisor to former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in "An Iranian Intelligence Failure: Arms Ship in Nigeria Reveals Iran's Penetration of West Africa," describes how Iran has invested heavily in strengthening its diplomatic, economic and security ties with West African countries since the Khomeini revolution, especially Senegal, Mauritania, Gambia, and Nigeria. Iran's goal is clear: to obtain African support for Tehran's policies, and most recently for its nuclear program, in international forums.

Michael Segall then looks at "How Iran Helped Assad Suppress Syria's 'Arab Spring.'" Since the beginning of the protest wave against Bashar Assad's regime in Syria, Iran has backed Damascus and assisted it in both the security and propaganda aspects of its violent repression of the protests. Tehran charges that Syria is the victim of an attempt by the West, led by the United States, to overthrow the Assad regime, under cover of the "Arab Spring." At the same time, Iran sees the "Arab Spring" – or, as it calls it, the "Islamic awakening" – as a golden opportunity to export Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution to the changing Arab world.

Segall then discusses how "Iran Sees New Opportunity for Regional Domination Despite Turkish Competition," noting how the Iranian political-military leadership has argued that the protest movements in the Arab world draw their inspiration from Iran's Islamic Revolution. Turkey and Iran are currently in competition to lead the changes now shaping the Muslim world. Initially, Iran reacted with restraint toward Turkey, but now it appears to be fighting back. Iran has accused Turkey of sponsoring "liberal Islam" and cooperating with the West. In any case, both countries remain hostile toward Israel.

Segall follows with an analysis of "Deteriorating Relations between Iran and Turkey," emphasizing the extent of the struggle between the two countries for regional hegemony.

Focusing on Bahrain on the Arabian peninsula, Jacques Neriah explores "Could

the Kingdom of Bahrain Become an Iranian Pearl Harbor?," while Michael Segall explains "Why Iran Is Pushing for a Shiite Victory in Bahrain." Bahrain is geographically situated opposite Iran on the Persian Gulf, yet hosts the main naval base of the American fleet in the Gulf region. Iran has claimed sovereignty over Bahrain, maintaining that it formerly constituted Iran's fourteenth province. Iran is acting vigorously to overthrow the current regime using clandestine cells and organizing the Shiite population for protests, aided by Lebanese Hizbullah.

Finally, former Israeli Ambassador to Egypt Zvi Mazel reviews the "Rising Tension between Iran and the Gulf States." He notes that the Gulf states are largely conducting a policy of appeasement toward Tehran while they are helplessly watching Iranian nuclear weapons development with increasing dread.

Part IV addresses the Iranian threat on Israel's northern border through its creation of the Hizbullah militia. Brig.-Gen. (ret.) Dr. Shimon Shapira begins with an analysis of "Hizbullah's Veneration of Iranian Leader Ali Khomeini," followed by his assessment "Has Hizbullah Changed? The 7th Hizbullah General Conference and its Continued Ideology of Resistance," which analyzes the group's most recent political manifesto published in November 2009.

Shapira then looks at "Ahmadinejad in Lebanon," explaining how Iranian President Ahmadinejad's visit to Lebanon in 2010 constituted an additional stage in the process of the Lebanese state's collapse. He notes that following the visit, Hizbullah supporters will find it difficult to argue that theirs is a national Lebanese party operating in the Lebanese reality on behalf of Lebanese objectives. Ahmadinejad arrived in Lebanon not as the head of a friendly country who wants to promote good relations with a sovereign state, but as the supreme commander who came to review his soldiers at the front against Israel, and as an investor who was coming to check on his investments.

In "Countdown to a New Lebanon Crisis: Iran Sends a Signal to Obama Through Beirut," Shapira illustrates how the main political developments in Lebanon are being decided today in Tehran and not in Washington. He asserts that failure to respond to these Iranian-sponsored provocations will only invite further adventurism by the Tehran regime elsewhere in the region.

Shapira then discusses "The Fantasy of Hizbullah Moderation," noting how John Brennan, President Barack Obama's advisor for homeland security and counterterrorism, stated that the U.S. administration was looking for ways to build up "moderate elements" within Hizbullah. But Hizbullah is part of the Iranian security apparatus. Saying that Hizbullah has moderate elements that have moved away from terrorism ignores how Hizbullah is serving its Iranian patrons.

Michael Segall expands on how "Iran Changes the Balance of Power in Lebanon," noting the lack of initiative on the part of Western countries in response to Iran's efforts.

Focusing on Hizbullah's future aggressive plans regarding Israel, Shimon Shapira offers details on how "Hizbullah Discusses Its Operational Plan for War

with Israel: Missile Fire on Tel Aviv and Conquest of the Galilee."

Jacques Neriah follows with "Iran Steps Up Arming Hizbullah Against Israel." Israeli and Western intelligence services have long been aware of Syrian and Iranian involvement in Hizbullah's arms buildup. Damascus Airport has been identified as the transit point for airlifts of Iranian arms that were subsequently transferred to Hizbullah via the open Syrian-Lebanese border, under the supervision of the Syrian security services.

Finally, Shimon Shapira concludes with a look at "Hizbullah's Predicament in Light of Syria's Decline," where he assesses Hizbullah's status in the wake of the tenuous survival of the Assad regime in Syria, as well as in light of the international tribunal that has accused four Hizbullah members of involvement in the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

Brig.-Gen. (ret.) Dr. Shimon Shapira
January 2012

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Part I – The Military Threat from Iran

The Threat from Nuclear Weapons

What Is Happening to the Iranian Nuclear Program? (February 2012)

Dore Gold

Over the last decade, a clear international consensus has slowly emerged that Iran was not just pursuing a civilian nuclear program, as Tehran argued, but rather was seeking nuclear weapons. True, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty guarantees the right of signatories, like Iran, to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, but that did not include a right to enrich uranium in order to produce indigenous nuclear fuels that could be employed for nuclear weapons. Many countries with nuclear power infrastructures, like South Korea, Finland, Spain, and Sweden, actually received their nuclear fuels from abroad.⁽¹⁾ Even in the U.S., 92 percent of the uranium used in 2010 by nuclear power plants was of

foreign origin.(2) But unlike these other cases, Iran chose to establish its own uranium enrichment infrastructure at Natanz and suspiciously kept it totally secret from the world until 2002, when it was revealed by the Iranian opposition. A second secret enrichment facility, near Qom, buried deep inside a mountain, was disclosed in 2009.



Iran's Uranium Conversion Facility outside of Isfahan in 2005. (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi)

Because of the way Iran proceeded with its nuclear program, international suspicions of its purpose only increased. The official Iranian line that its nuclear infrastructure was for the production of electricity lost all credibility over time, especially in light of its enormous oil and gas reserves which were a far more economical source of energy. In February 2006, French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy bluntly stated that "it is a clandestine military program." (3) Even the Russians could no longer protect what Iran was doing by saying that it was for purely civilian purposes. Thus, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev frankly admitted in July 2010, "We are not indifferent to how the military components of the corresponding [nuclear] program look." (4) More recently, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta was interviewed by CBS News on December 19, 2011, at which time he stated that Iran could have a nuclear weapon in "about a year...perhaps a little less." For Washington, it was no longer a question of whether Iran wanted a nuclear bomb, but rather when it would obtain one.

While Iran's continuing enrichment of uranium that began in 2007 has defied no less than six UN Security Council resolutions, unfortunately there has been a tendency, at times, over the last five years to play down the immediacy of the Iranian nuclear threat. (5) This new conventional wisdom helped remove the

urgency many in the West felt with respect to the Iranian nuclear program. For example, on August 19, 2011, the *New York Times* published a major article entitled: "US Assures Israel that Iran Threat Is Not Imminent."⁽⁶⁾ The authors claimed that because Iran had been facing increasing problems with its nuclear program, the Obama administration concluded that it would take a year or more for Iran to make the final sprint to a nuclear weapon. According to the article, the critical question was how long it would take the Iranians to convert their supplies of low-enriched uranium to weapons-grade uranium to make a bomb: what has been called by experts, "nuclear breakout."

These optimistic assumptions about the Iranian nuclear program continued to appear. For example, the *Washington Post* ran a dramatic headline at the top of its front page on October 18, 2011, which read "Iran 'Setback' on Nuclear Program." In its opening paragraph, the article explained that beyond the reported cyber-attack that afflicted Iran's nuclear facilities last year, the equipment in its main uranium fuel plant was performing poorly; specifically, its centrifuges for enriching uranium were old and they had a shortage of spare parts. Because of its prominence, the report in the *Washington Post* set the news agenda for the days that followed. *Time* magazine featured the story. So did CNN. Even Fox News reported that Iran was having "major problems" with its nuclear program. One of its lead commentators, Charles Krauthammer, spoke about the Iranian nuclear program being "devastated" and suggested that the West had been able to "disarm and retard the program."⁽⁷⁾ Hearing all this commentary in the U.S., it might be possible for some to conclude that the international community can relax a bit and not be so worried about an imminent Iranian atomic bomb.

As background to the debate over the Iranian nuclear program, it is important to know some basic essentials. Uranium is normally found in two forms or isotopes: U-238 (with a nucleus made up of 92 protons and 146 neutrons) and the lighter isotope, U-235 (whose nucleus is made up of 92 protons and 143 neutrons). It is only the lighter isotope, U-235, that can undergo nuclear fission and release the energy needed for a nuclear reactor or an atomic bomb. But natural uranium is only 0.7% U-235 and 99.3% U-238. Iran has converted its uranium ore into a gas, at a facility in Isfahan, and then injected the uranium gas into centrifuges that spin at high speeds to increase the amount of U-235, at its Natanz enrichment plant. A civilian reactor needs only 3.5% U-235, which is called low-enriched uranium (LEU), while for nuclear weapons, high-enriched uranium (HEU), which is based on 90% U-235, is required.

Most international concern was directed toward Iran's uranium enrichment efforts under the assumption that Tehran had decided that its nuclear weapons would be based on weapons-grade uranium. In comparison, North Korea's first nuclear test was based on a plutonium bomb. Iran had an active plutonium effort underway. It was building a heavy-water reactor at Arak and a heavy-water production plant. Iran told the IAEA that the heavy-water reactor would only be ready at the end of 2013. While UN resolutions called on Iran to suspend all heavy-water projects and Iran nonetheless persisted with this work, the more

near-term threat to international security clearly came from its uranium projects.

The Growing Stockpile of Low-Enriched Uranium

Iran's known nuclear facilities are monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which uses cameras and makes regular onsite visits to learn what is going on. According to the May 2009 report of the IAEA, Iran had 4,920 operational centrifuges in Natanz enriching uranium. But in the May 2010 report that number dropped to 3,936 – a thousand fewer operational centrifuges than in 2009. This change was one of the main factors that led some analysts to conclude that the Iranian nuclear program was in trouble; the stories on the problems that the Iranians faced were based on the view that some of their centrifuges were breaking down or were not as efficient as previously thought and had to be repaired or replaced. It would be reasonable to ask how Iran could make a final dash to weapons-grade uranium with faulty centrifuge machines. For example, Gary Samore, President Obama's advisor on nuclear issues, has been quoted as questioning the "technical competence" of the Iranians.(8)

Yet there were important counter-trends that contradict the conventional wisdom that was being heard in 2011 about a contracting Iranian nuclear program. First, the overall quantities of low-enriched uranium in Iranian stockpiles are steadily growing. If Iran had 839 kg. of low-enriched uranium, according to the June 2009 IAEA report, it had 2,427 kg. by the May 2010 IAEA report. In November 2011 the IAEA report stated that Iran had 4,922 kg. of low-enriched uranium. If all Iran requires is 914 kg. of low-enriched uranium to produce sufficient weapons-grade uranium for a single bomb, then Iran already has enough uranium on hand for at least four or five nuclear bombs, should it decide to further enrich its stock of low-enriched uranium.(9)

The rate of uranium enrichment, according to these reports, has also been accelerating. According to data developed by the Institute for Science and Technology, in May 2009, the Iranians were producing a little over 80 kg. of low-enriched uranium every month. A year later in May 2010, the rate of production increased to 120 kg. per month. By May 2011, the monthly rate of production was nearly 160 kg. per month – almost double the rate in 2009.(10) In short, Iran was managing to produce low-enriched uranium despite all the reported problems it was having with its aging centrifuges.

Another area of concern about the Iranian uranium enrichment program was connected with the Fordow facility near Qom. Iran had kept this facility a secret, until it informed the IAEA in September 2009. At the time, the Iranians informed the IAEA that they planned to install 3,000 centrifuges there. But what made Fordow a special concern was the fact that it was built deep inside a mountain that is roughly 200 feet in height, and hence far better protected than the Natanz facility (which is estimated to be only 25-30 feet deep). The November 2011 IAEA report revealed that Iran had already transferred "one large cylinder" containing an unspecified amount of low-enriched uranium from Natanz to Fordow. Presumably, the Iranians hoped to produce either 20-percent-enriched

uranium or even weapons-grade uranium, without the fear of a Western air attack.

Producing 20%-Enriched Uranium

The second counter-trend that showed Iran's nuclear program was not regressing involves its decision to enrich uranium beyond the 3.5% U-235 level up to 20% U-235. When the West refused to supply 20%-enriched uranium for the small Tehran Research Reactor, where the Iranians produce medical isotopes, Iranian nuclear experts went ahead in June 2010 and fed their 3.5%-enriched uranium into the centrifuges to produce 20%-enriched uranium, by themselves. With a stockpile of 20%-enriched uranium, the Iranians would cut by more than half the time they needed to take the next enrichment step to weapons-grade uranium.(11)

This demonstration of Iran's enrichment capabilities certainly undermined assessments in the West that doubt Tehran's technical competence. On July 11, 2011, Britain's foreign secretary William Hague wrote an op-ed in *The Guardian* entitled, "Iran's Nuclear Threat Is Escalating." He estimated that it would only take two to three months of additional enrichment of the 20%-enriched stockpile to make weapons-grade material. Moreover, he added that Iran was planning to shift the production of 20%-enriched uranium from an above-ground facility in Natanz to the new Fordow facility near Qom that is deep underground and had been kept secret until September 2009.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad appointed Fereydoun Abbassi-Divani on February 13, 2011, to head Iran's atomic energy program. His promotion to this sensitive position should have raised eyebrows in the West. The UN Security Council designated him in 2007 as one of a list of Iranians suspected of involvement in "Iran's nuclear or ballistic missile activities." He is thought to have been involved in the Iranian weaponization program.(12) Before this appointment he headed the physics department at Imam Hossein University, which is linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

In June 2011, Abbas-Davani announced that Tehran was planning to triple its capacity to produce 20%-enriched uranium. Yet in an August 2011 interview published by the Iran News Agency, he admitted that Iran had produced 20%-enriched uranium in quantities that "already exceeded the required amount for the Tehran Research Reactor." Indeed, the November 2011 IAEA report indicates that Iran has already produced 73.7 kg. of 20%-enriched uranium. Given that Iran needs only 6 to 10 kg. per year to fuel the Tehran Research Reactor,(13) Iran has already produced more than seven years of fuel.(14) Moreover, that 20% stockpile could grow much larger if the Iranians install faster centrifuges for uranium enrichment. What will Iran do with all the excess of 20%-enriched uranium that it accumulates? Abbas-Davani's proposal to massively increase Iran's production of 20%-enriched uranium has clear military implications.

How is Iran going to triple the production of 20%-enriched uranium? It could devote more centrifuges to 20% enrichment, or it could employ more advanced centrifuges that operated much faster. The standard centrifuge that Iran used was known as the IR-1. The new generation of Iranian centrifuges, known by professionals as the IR-2m and IR-4, by some estimates would be able to increase the output of each machine by 600%.⁽¹⁵⁾ A more conservative estimate is that the output of the new centrifuges is 4 to 5 times greater than the older machines.⁽¹⁶⁾ By August 2011, Iran had installed 136 IR-2m centrifuges and 27 IR-4 centrifuges at the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP) at Natanz.

It appeared that at this stage the Iranians wanted to test the performance of the new centrifuges before replacing the older centrifuge machines on a wide scale. Abbas-Davani made clear in June 2011 that Iran ultimately planned to install the advanced centrifuges at the Fordow plant where production of 20%-enriched uranium would be located in the future. The main, unanswered question is how many enrichment sites Iran presently has. In August 2010, Iran announced that it was building ten new enrichment sites that were to be built inside of mountains.⁽¹⁷⁾ Construction of these new plants was to begin in early 2011. But where are these sites? The IAEA admitted in its May 2011 report: "The Agency's knowledge about Iran's enrichment activities continues to diminish."

So where does Iran stand with respect to an atomic bomb, given both of its paths to weapons-grade uranium: converting low-enriched uranium to weapons-grade fuel and the fast track they are developing with 20%-enriched uranium? Olli Heinonen, the former deputy director-general of IAEA and one of its chief inspectors, told the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee on June 23, 2011, that he expects Iran to have the ability to produce up to 250 kg. of 20%-enriched uranium, which would be sufficient for two atomic bombs, by the end of 2012. The entire stockpile of 3.5%-enriched uranium, according to Heinonen's estimate, could reach 7-8,000 kg., which could be converted with further enrichment to enough weapons-grade uranium for several more atomic bombs. He concludes that both paths of enrichment could yield together between 125 and 150 kg. of weapons-grade uranium by the end of 2012.⁽¹⁸⁾ Between 20 and 25 kg. of weapons-grade uranium is needed for a single bomb.

Nuclear Warhead Design

There are, of course, three dimensions to any nuclear weapons program: enriched uranium, ballistic missiles, and nuclear warheads. The latter issue also grew in importance for the IAEA. This began to become evident in February 2008 when, Heinonen, then IAEA deputy director-general, gave a highly classified briefing to representatives of more than 100 states. According to a description of the meeting reported by David Sanger of *The New York Times*, Heinonen displayed original Iranian documents that he stressed came from several member states of the IAEA, and not just from the U.S.⁽¹⁹⁾ In June 2010, the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* reported that the material came from a joint operation by German and American intelligence agencies. The IAEA had the

international standing to authenticate U.S. intelligence reports for those who doubted their veracity. When the IAEA said they were true, many more states were willing to accept them.

The Iranian documents detailed how to design a warhead for the Shahab-3 missile, which has been operational in the Iranian armed forces since 2003. While the Iranian documents made no reference to a nuclear warhead, they did show the arc of a missile's flight and that the warhead of the missile had to be detonated at an altitude of 600 meters. To the IAEA experts, a conventional explosion at that altitude would have no effect on the ground below. But 600 meters was the ideal altitude for a nuclear explosion over a city. As Sanger points out, it was in fact the height of the Hiroshima explosion. Despite the substance of his presentation, Heinonen did not yet say that the Iranians were producing nuclear weapons, but he left his audience in Vienna with many questions they had not asked before.

By May 2011, the IAEA became far more explicit in its report on Iran than Heinonen had been in 2008. Its report raised concerns about the "possible existence" of seven areas of military research in the Iranian nuclear program, the last of which was the most alarming: "the removal of the conventional high explosive payload from the warhead of the Shahab-3 missile and replacing it with a spherical nuclear payload."

Yet, the IAEA was not ready to say it had reached any conclusions. It only sought "clarifications" about its suspicions.

The most important of the IAEA reports on Iran was released in November 2011 and proved to be significant in a number of ways. First, it showed that the IAEA no longer had "suspicions" about the Iranian weaponization program – it had what it called "credible" intelligence. The appendix of the report, moreover, devoted a whole section to the "credibility of information." It was not relying on the Iranian laptop that was at the heart of Heinonen's 2008 presentation, but also on a much larger volume of documentation. The report states that the agency has more than 1,000 pages of material to substantiate its claims. In case there were suspicions that this material came from U.S. intelligence agencies alone, the report makes sure to clarify that the sources involved "more than 10 member states."

Second, the material that the IAEA presented pointed clearly to the fact that Iran wanted to develop a deliverable nuclear weapon. The Iranians had sought to obtain uranium for a secret enrichment program that would not be under IAEA safeguards. The uranium that would come out of this clandestine program would be further processed to produce the uranium metal required for a nuclear warhead. The planned warhead design also underwent studies that investigated how it would operate if it was part of a missile re-entry vehicle and had to stand up to the stress of a missile launch and flying in a ballistic trajectory to its target. The IAEA concluded that "work on the development of an indigenous design of a nuclear weapon including the testing of components" had been executed by the Iranians. That "indigenous design," however, required external help. The IAEA

report discloses that aspects of Iran's nuclear weapons "design concept" came from a foreign country, presumably from a state that possesses nuclear weapons.

The November 2011 report also contained references to documentation in Farsi detailing the safety arrangements that would have to be put in place for conducting an actual nuclear test. There were also public statements in 2011 that provide additional evidence that the Iranians were moving in the direction of an atomic bomb. For example, on June 23, 2011, Agence France-Presse quoted Mahmoud Ahmadinejad boasting on Iranian state television: "If we want to make a bomb, we are not afraid of anyone and we are not afraid to announce it; no one can do a damn thing." He then added for the record, "we do not want to," but his initial statement demonstrated how confident the Iranians have now become as their nuclear program progressed.

Timeline to Nuclear Weapons

The public data published by the International Atomic Energy Agency clearly points to the fact that the Iranian nuclear program is advancing. But, as noted earlier, there are conflicting assessments about the urgency of the problem. There is a mistaken impression in the West that Iran's ability to enrich uranium has been severely set back. The numbers do not indicate that such a conclusion is warranted. Hague's warning in June about the Iranian nuclear program at least indicates that one of the main Western powers sitting in the UN Security Council is aware of the severity of the situation.

There are elements of the Iranian nuclear program that are known to the international community. But there is also a great deal about the program that is not known that makes the calculation of a timeline for Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons capability very difficult. Are there more secret enrichment plants like the Fordow facility that was only disclosed in 2009? Even Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta inserted this caveat into his assessment during a December 19, 2011 interview on CBS in which he said that Iran could have a bomb by the end of 2012:

One proviso, Scott, is if they have a hidden facility somewhere in Iran that may be enriching fuel.

Pelley: So that they can develop a weapon even more quickly...

Panetta: On a faster track...

Pelley: Than we believe...

Panetta: That's correct.

There are other factors that can affect the timeline for the Iranians. How quickly are the Iranians intending to install their latest-generation centrifuges that can enrich uranium at a much higher rate than the older IR-1 centrifuges that they have been using until recently? All of these calculations are relevant should the Iranians decide on a strategy of "nuclear breakout" – expelling all IAEA inspectors, shutting down their monitoring equipment, and making a final dash for

a bomb. When North Korea undertook this approach in 2002, the West did not respond with any effective steps. Why can't Iran adopt this approach as well?

Professional assessments about the timeline of the Iranians to obtain an atomic bomb thus have varied. For example, Gregory Jones, an adjunct senior defense policy analyst at the RAND Corporation, suggested that Iran's breakout timeline at the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant was as follows: he asserted that Iran could produce 20 kg. of weapons-grade uranium – enough for one nuclear weapon – in two months. In contrast, the Institute for Science and International Security assessed that a breakout scenario would take at least six months. In either case, Iranian nuclear weapons were no longer years away. Both analyses believed that Tehran could cross the nuclear threshold in a matter of months.(20)

Despite the dramatic information disclosed in the November 2011 IAEA Report, the Russians and the Chinese appeared to prefer to drag their feet on initiating harsh sanctions against Iran in the UN Security Council. A 2011 UN report assessed that sanctions were only having a limited impact on the regime in Tehran. The report concluded that the sanctions that had been imposed on Iran were "not yet having an impact on the decision calculus of its leadership with respect to enrichment and heavy water-related activities."(21) And while EU governments agreed in principle to impose an oil embargo on Iran in January 2012, it did not appear to be comprehensive, allowing for exceptions in implementation that take into account the special needs of Greece, Italy, and Spain and their economic conditions. At least six months were expected to pass before the European oil sanctions would be fully put into effect.

Similarly, while President Obama signed into law a defense authorization bill in early 2012 that imposed new sanctions on Iran's central bank, the harshest measures in the legislation will also not go into effect for at least six months. Yet by June 2012, the Iranian nuclear program will have advanced considerably further. The critical question that remained unanswered in the first part of 2012, was whether the most painful economic sanctions the West might institute, at this late date, would influence Iranian decision-making with regard to its nuclear-weapons program. It seemed doubtful that Iran would fully halt its drive to nuclear weapons and provide the transparency to the West to verify that its program had indeed been halted.

How far will the Iranians push their nuclear efforts in the year ahead? Writing in *Foreign Affairs* (Jan.-Feb. 2012), Matthew Kroenig, a former Special Advisor on Iran policy in the Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense (during 2010 and 2011), outlined what should be the "red lines" of the U.S. as the Iranians progress:

1. Iran expels the IAEA inspectors from its nuclear facilities.
2. The Iranians enrich their uranium stockpiles to the weapons-grade level of 90%.
3. The Iranians install their advanced centrifuges at their underground Fordow facility near Qom.

In January 2012, the IAEA verified an Iranian announcement that Tehran had

begun production of 20%-enriched uranium at the fortified Fordow facility, indicating that the Iranians were prepared to move close towards crossing at least the last of these red lines, though without advanced centrifuges at this stage. *Kayhan*, the Iranian daily that was close to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, wrote in its editorial, in response, that as a result of the enrichment effort in Fordow, Iran was entering "the zone of immunity," a term the Iranians borrowed from the West.(22) Iran was not only prepared to engage in nuclear brinksmanship, but it was also positioning itself to shorten the time frame necessary for the final dash to nuclear weapons, when it takes that decision in the months ahead.

Appendix I

The Growing Iranian Stockpile of Low-Enriched Uranium

September 2008 - 480 kg.

November 2008 - 630 kg.

February 2009 - 839 kg.

February 2010 - 2,065 kg.

May 2010 - 2,427 kg.

September 2010 - 2,803 kg.

November 2010 - 3,183 kg.

May 2011 - 4,105 kg.

November 2011 - 4,922 kg.

February 2012 - 5,451 kg. (of which 985 kg. used for further enrichment and other purposes)

Source: IAEA

Appendix II

Iran's Stockpile of 20% Enriched Uranium

May 2010 - 5.7 kg.

September 2010 - 22 kg.

November 2010 - 33 kg.

February 2011 - 43.6 kg.

May 2011 - 56.7 kg.

November 2011 - 73.7 kg.

February 2012 - 109.2 kg. (of which 8 kg. removed and used for other

purposes)

Source: IAEA

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The U.S. National Intelligence Estimate on Iran and Its Aftermath: A Roundtable of Israeli Experts

(March 2008)

Maj.-Gen. (res.) Aharon Ze'evi Farkash, former Head of IDF Military Intelligence

Maj.-Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror, former Head of Research and Assessment, IDF Military Intelligence

Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser, former Head of Research and Assessment, IDF Military Intelligence

- The opening sentence of the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of November 2007 stated: "We judge with high confidence that in Fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program." This conclusion put the U.S. intelligence community at odds with Israel, which believes that Iran only engaged in a temporary halt in 2003, and since that time the Iranian nuclear weapons program had been resumed.
- Israel is not alone in disagreeing with the conclusion of the NIE. Already in December, just after the NIE's release, Britain's *Daily Telegraph* reported London's response with the headline: "Britain: Iran 'Hoodwinked' CIA Over Nuclear Plans," stating that Britain's intelligence chiefs had "grave doubts that Iran...mothballed its nuclear weapons program."
- It was in the context of the Western detection of their nuclear program and the Iraq War that led Iran to halt its nuclear program across the board in 2003, with the exception of their surface-to-surface missile program. But prior to that freeze, Iran had been developing a military nuclear capability under a broad civilian cover for fifteen years.
- The Iranian ballistic missile program is part of the Iranian nuclear weapons program; Iran does not have a civilian space program and it is doubtful that it would develop ballistic missiles with a range of thousands of kilometers in order to carry conventional warheads alone.
- Between 2003 and 2005, the Iranians refrained from any nuclear activity under the influence of the impression created by America's pre-emptive policies in the region, which served as the main instrument that enabled the Europeans to force Iran to postpone uranium conversion and enrichment. But when the Iranians realized in 2005 that there was no actual threat behind their fears of U.S. pre-emption, they decided to start conversion and then enrichment. As a result, the Iranians already have

prepared enough uranium hexafluoride gas (UF₆) for more than ten atomic bombs.

Yaakov Amidror:

The NIE - More Confusion than Clarity

The U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of November 2007, entitled *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*, has created more confusion than clarity. To many observers who heard news reports when it was first released, it appeared that the U.S. intelligence community had concluded that there was no longer any nuclear threat from Iran. That impression was fostered by the opening sentence of the report: "We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program." Moving beyond the NIE's first sentence, however, there are other conclusions that seem to suggest the very opposite.

It might be suggested that the seemingly contradictory statements in the NIE are due to the fact that it is a product of sixteen different agencies that belong to the US intelligence community.⁽¹⁾ But this would be too simple an explanation. There must have been a consensus of those drafting the report that caused them to lead with the idea that in 2003 Iran was no longer developing nuclear weapons. This conclusion put the U.S. intelligence community at odds with Israel, whose Defense Minister, Ehud Barak, stated openly that Iran only engaged in a temporary halt in 2003, and since that time the Iranian nuclear weapons program had been resumed.

It was not the first time that the U.S. and Israel disagreed over their assessments about Iran. In 1995, I was the head of the Research and Assessment Division of IDF Military Intelligence and we found the first signs that the Iranians were going nuclear. In those days, we thought the most important action that we could take was to brief our counterparts in Washington and convince them that this was a danger soon to be faced by the entire Free World. It was not easy to convince them that this subject should be on the table. We sought to do so at a meeting in Washington where a very well-known ambassador represented the U.S. side and I tried to convince the Americans that the Iranians had indeed decided to go nuclear.

At the end of our discussions, the U.S. side gave us the impression that they were thinking to themselves: "After we Americans finish off Iraq as an enemy of the State of Israel, then you Israelis are going to build a new threat because you cannot live without such a threat." During my more than four years as the head of the Assessment Division, this was one of my great failures. It took American experts another two years, until 1997, for the American intelligence community to understand that the Iranians were going nuclear.

Today, Israel is not alone in disagreeing with the conclusion of the NIE. Already in December, just after the NIE's release, Britain's *Daily Telegraph* reported London's response with the headline: "Britain: Iran 'Hoodwinked' CIA Over

Nuclear Plans," stating that Britain's intelligence chiefs had "grave doubts that Iran...mothballed its nuclear weapons program." (2) French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel also went out of their way to state that Iran still remained a danger and pressure had to be kept up over its nuclear program. (3) Even officials at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), who were traditionally more forgiving about Iranian behavior than the U.S., expressed doubts about the NIE right after it was released. One official stated: "We don't buy the American analysis 100 percent. We are not that generous with Iran." (4)

While we are dealing only with the public version of the NIE, we understand that there is no fundamental difference between this version and the unpublished version. For this reason, it is very important that the NIE be carefully analyzed. There is no argument about the civilian side: Iranian enrichment efforts continue. But what we need to focus upon are Iran's purely military capabilities. We believe that this report of the U.S. intelligence community was a huge mistake from both a methodological and professional point of view. I would not have permitted such a report to be issued by Israeli Military Intelligence while containing such holes in its arguments.

It is noteworthy how Admiral Mike McConnell, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, tried to correct the impression created by the NIE in his remarks to the Senate Intelligence Committee in February 2008: "The only thing they've halted was nuclear weapons design, which is probably the least significant part of the program." (5) For a detailed look at the NIE, Maj.-Gen. (res.) Aharon Ze'evi Farkash, who served as head of Israeli Military Intelligence from 2001 to 2006, offers his own insights into the evolution of the Iranian nuclear program.

Aharon Ze'evi Farkash:

No Evidence that Iran Did Not Renew Nuclear Weaponization Work

In August 2002, Iran understood that the Western countries - U.S., the EU-3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom), and Israel - had obtained hard information that Iran was conducting a clandestine nuclear weapons program. Shortly thereafter, in March 2003, the regional environment quickly became dominated by the outbreak of the Iraq War and the downfall of Saddam Hussein. By July 2003, the Iranians opened negotiations with the EU-3, which sought to halt the Iranian nuclear program. At the end of the same year, Qaddafi stopped Libya's nuclear military plans.

It was in the context of the Western detection of their nuclear program and the Iraq War that led Iran to halt its nuclear program across the board in 2003, with the exception of their surface-to-surface missile program. But prior to that freeze, Iran was developing a military nuclear capability under a broad civilian cover. The participants were the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and the Iranian

Ministry of Defense (MOD).

A nuclear weapons program is comprised of three key elements:

1. A delivery system, requiring the development of surface-to-surface missiles.
2. The accumulation of fissile material through uranium enrichment and plutonium production.
3. Weaponization - preparing a warhead from the fissile material and fitting it into a missile.

Several of these elements in the Iranian nuclear program were in fact soon resumed.

At the beginning of 2003, the Iranians were concentrating all their efforts on the centrifuge program at their facility in Natanz, where they had managed to build a cascade with 164 centrifuges. Today, they have reached a capacity of 3,000 centrifuges. If parts of the nuclear weapons program were restarted, there is every reason to believe that all parts were reactivated as well. Indeed, Iran's development of surface-to-surface missiles had never ceased, even when uranium enrichment had been temporarily halted.

At the same time, the Iranians were busy with procurement activities, with a focus on obtaining all the materials and components needed for uranium enrichment. At the beginning of 2004, we know that Iran was attempting to procure fast high voltage switches suitable for a nuclear weapons system. The Iranian Ministry of Defense was also supervising the mining of uranium in southeast Iran.

According to information provided by the Iranian opposition, Lavizan was one of the sites that dealt with Iran's weaponization program, and the IAEA requested to visit Lavizan in September-October 2003. By March 2004, the Lavizan facility had disappeared; it had been dismantled. When Iran renewed its nuclear enrichment program in January 2005, there is no evidence that they did not renew the work of the weaponization group at the same time.

Editor's note: In February 2008, the Iranian opposition charged that Iran had erected a new command and control center: code-named Lavizan-2. In addition, they identified yet another facility at Khojir, where they claimed the production of nuclear warheads was being undertaken.(6)

Developing the Missiles to Deliver a Nuclear Payload

Together with developing a nuclear weapon, Iran has been developing an appropriate long-range delivery system. Its Shihab 3 missile can carry a warhead of approximately 700 kilograms over a distance of 1,300-1,500 kilometers. These missiles are under the command of the Revolutionary Guard, not the Iranian military. The Revolutionary Guard reports to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and it is not under the authority of President Ahmadinejad. Iranian missile exercises

showed that the missiles are aimed at both Tel Aviv and Riyadh.

Iran is continuing to develop even longer-range missiles with a range of 3,500-5,000 kilometers that could reach all of Europe (perhaps with the exception of Portugal), while those with a range of 6,000-10,000 kilometers could reach the east coast of the U.S. The original missile technology was delivered to the Iranians by North Korea, and the Iranians have made substantial efforts to improve their range. As we know, the Iranian ballistic missile program is part of the Iranian nuclear weapons program; Iran does not have a civilian space program and it is doubtful that it would develop ballistic missiles with a range of thousands of kilometers in order to carry conventional warheads alone.

European Reaction to the Iranian Missile Threat

As Director of IDF Military Intelligence, I briefed leaders in Europe about Iran's nuclear military plans and met personally with decision-makers in Italy, France, the UK, and other European countries over a period of six months. Most of the European leaders understood the data about Iran's nuclear plans, but their response was not encouraging.

The Europeans said they did not understand why Israel was trying to scare them with a nuclear military threat since they had lived with such a threat during the Cold War. They were also of the opinion that, in the end, if Iran did achieve a nuclear military capability, the U.S. and Israel would solve the problem, and I believe this remains their attitude today.

What Does the NIE Say?

The U.S. National Intelligence Estimate summary report says that in 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program, but the NIE's headline finding is written in such a way that guarantees that its other conclusions will be misunderstood.

- In Paragraph C, the NIE summary states that Iran made significant progress in 2007 installing centrifuges at Natanz. Based upon this finding, Israeli military intelligence estimates that late 2009 is the earliest possible date that Iran will be technically capable of producing enough highly enriched uranium for a weapon.
- Paragraph D of the NIE says that Iranian entities are continuing to develop a range of technical capabilities that could be applied to producing nuclear weapons if a decision is made to do so. Thus, Iran's continuing civilian uranium enrichment program could produce enough fissile materials by the end of 2009 or 2010.
- Paragraph F of the NIE notes: We assess that Iran probably would use covert facilities rather than its declared nuclear sites for the production of highly enriched uranium for a weapon.

- Finally, Paragraph H of the NIE states: We assess that Iran has the scientific, technical, and industrial capacity to produce nuclear weapons if it decides to do so.

All of this means that the Iranians will have enough fissile material no later than 2010 and that if they decide to build a nuclear military plant, no one can promise that we or the Americans will know about it, if they indeed actually did halt their nuclear weapons program in 2003. It would be a mistake to conclude that Iranian nuclear weapons ambitions have been halted on the basis of reading the first sentence of the NIE alone.

In my view, any distinction between Iranian military and civilian nuclear programs is artificial. The enrichment of uranium, critical to both civilian and military uses, is continuing. Once they have enough enriched uranium, they will be 3-6 months away from building a nuclear bomb if they decide to do so.

Pressure on Iran Dissipates after the NIE

After the NIE report was released, the declaration that Tehran had halted its nuclear weapons program was reported by all of the world's major media without any contradicting information. Soon thereafter, Russia and Iran reached agreement on a schedule to complete the plutonium-based nuclear facility in Bushehr.

This was followed by an announcement that China and Iran had signed a \$2.3 billion economic agreement related to energy that had been on hold for more than half a year. Prior to this, China had come to join the economic pressure on Iran. In addition, Ahmadinejad formally visited Riyadh, and a new Egyptian-Iranian relationship began to develop for the first time since Sadat's assassination.

The NIE has clearly weakened international support for tougher sanctions against Iran, and it closes off any military option for the Bush administration. The NIE has sent a signal to Tehran that the danger of external sanctions has ended. Furthermore, the NIE has weakened Turkey and the moderate Sunni countries in the region that were seeking to build a coalition against Iran. So, ironically, the NIE opens the way for Iran to achieve its military nuclear ambitions without any interference.

Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser:

The NIE: A Very Poor Intelligence Product

The main problem with the NIE is the phrasing of its message. It's a very poor intelligence product because it is not only a matter of what you say but also how you say it and what you don't say.

One of the major issues that arise from the report is its admission that the

Iranians had a nuclear weaponization project for fifteen years, from the end of the 1980s until 2003. How far did the Iranians go in those fifteen years? How many obstacles do they still face? By saying that if the Iranians have the ability to enrich uranium, they can have a bomb within a very short period of time, the NIE actually alludes to the idea that the Iranians have already gone a very long way in the context of weaponization. So why doesn't the NIE say so explicitly? The first thing an intelligence organization has to know is to ask the right questions, but this question is not asked, nor is it answered.

Furthermore, it is a totally wrong approach to make this differentiation between the military and the civilian parts of the Iranian nuclear program. It's all one program. Part of it can be justified by civilian needs, so the Iranians do it under civilian cover. Part of it cannot be justified by civilian needs, but it is all part of the same program, and the part of the program that is designated to develop the fissile material is ongoing.

Between 2003 and 2005, the Iranians refrained from any nuclear activity. They were under the influence of the impression created by America's pre-emptive policies in the region in Iraq and Afghanistan, which served as the main instrument that enabled the Europeans to force Iran to make a deal and to postpone uranium conversion and enrichment. But when the Iranians realized in 2005 that there was no actual threat behind their fears of U.S. pre-emption, they decided to take the risk and start conversion and then enrichment.

In other words, once the U.S. appeared to be entangled in Iraq, a situation to which the Iranians themselves made no small contribution, Tehran could return to vigorously advancing its nuclear program. The fact is that Iran has moved forward with conversion. As a result, the Iranians already have prepared, through the conversion process, enough uranium hexafluoride gas (UF₆) for more than ten atomic bombs.

Iran has moved forward with enrichment too. There is a debate in the NIE report over where exactly the Iranians are in their enrichment R&D. Some claim that maybe they have not yet reached the point where they can really perform enrichment in a robust way and not worry about failing. But there's no doubt that they have spent at least two years on R&D.

If we believe the NIE judgment about their technical capabilities, then the Iranians are not far away from the point where they will have the ability to produce an ample supply of enriched uranium in order to make a bomb. Bearing in mind that they probably have everything else they need to proceed, the Iranians will be able to do whatever is still needed to finish their weaponization activities without being worried about a military move. Only such a military move can really stop them right now. So we see the harsh repercussions of the very poor work that the American intelligence agencies have done.

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The Limited Influence of International Sanctions on Iran's Nuclear Program (December 2011)

Yossi Kuperwasser

The revolutionary Islamic regime in Iran has for years maintained a defiant policy toward the Western world and especially its leader the United States. Even if for extended periods it downplayed the problematic aspects of its activity, when because of external and internal constraints it seemingly had to defer to national concerns, the commitment of the regime's hardcore ideological elements to advancing the goals of the Islamic Revolution did not wane.

Thus, the Iranian leadership persisted in supporting terrorism, striving to make Iran a regional power, promoting its acquisition of strategic weaponry, and its attempt to undermine the stability of the region's pragmatic regimes. The dual perception of Iran in the West during the years of Mohammad Khatami's presidency enabled Tehran to advance its policy without coming under significant pressure. In other periods, the sanctions that were adopted to get it to change its policy had only negligible significance, especially since it was only the United States that actually implemented them.

Until 2004, and especially following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Iranians took seriously the possibility that the failure of the

negotiations with the Europeans would lead to a UN Security Council resolution to legitimize a U.S. strike on Iran's nuclear infrastructure, which was then much more vulnerable than today.

Considering, then, both the West's often feeble and halfhearted response to any threat to its values and interests and Iran's impressive ability to use negotiations to mislead and deceive the West, a situation has emerged where, no matter how grave Iran's misdeeds, the international community will always avoid adopting sanctions serious enough to discourage Tehran's defiant behavior. It does not matter that the current Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, openly threatens to change the world order, and that the whole world agrees that Iran is marching resolutely toward nuclearization, while calling for Israel's destruction in violation of international law, denying the Holocaust, and strengthening support for the Palestinian terror organizations, Hizbullah, and the radical Shiite elements in Iraq.

The reactions to Iran's progress toward uranium enrichment are perhaps the best example of the weakness of the West's approach to this country. Repeatedly, Iran has been warned about crossing red lines, such as uranium conversion or launching research and development for enriching uranium in centrifuges; again and again it has ignored the warnings and has not been penalized in any way that would cause it to seriously reconsider.

Not surprisingly, then, Iran assumes that in the future, too, the international community including the United States will not take any significant action against it. The Iranians well understand that effective sanctions require broad international agreement and that the chances of obtaining such agreement from Russia, China, Europe, and the nonaligned countries are poor, since these states too are interested in altering the world order and in hampering the United States, particularly under the Bush administration. Even if Russia and China merely see Iranian actions as a tool for subverting and weakening Washington and are not partners to Iran's aspiration to become a great power, they are less concerned than the Americans, or even the Europeans, about the implications of Iranian nuclearization and also more skeptical about the amount of time that Iran needs to reach its treasured goal.

Furthermore, in light of America's past travails in Iraq and Israel's inability to defeat Hizbullah in the 2006 Second Lebanon War, the Iranians realize that the United States and Israel will have a hard time mobilizing political support domestically and internationally for significantly intensifying the pressures on Iran, let alone for a military action against it.

This means Tehran sees no need, despite the sanctions adopted by the UN Security Council, to stop its nuclear project or change its policy in any of the other areas where it has friction with the international community, including its support for terrorism and its human rights violations. At the same time, the Iranians do not appear to be complacent. They know that one reason for the international reticence is the fear of what an Iranian reaction could mean for

regional and international stability and for oil prices, along with the assumption that it would be hard for a military strike to achieve the hoped-for results.

Thus the Iranians continue to amass strategic weapons and Russian-supplied advanced air defenses, which are meant to minimize the effectiveness of an air or missile attack against vital Iranian targets. They warn that their response to any attempt to push them into a corner will be "dreadful and terrible," hoping thereby to improve their deterrence vis-a-vis the international community, and they try to convey that the underground facilities they have built to shield their enrichment endeavors would make attacking their nuclear program a mission impossible.

But is Iran really immune to any attempt to force it to act against its will, will it not laugh if it is tickled, will it not feel pain if it is pinched, and will it not be deterred if it is threatened? The history of recent years indicates that Iran, too, has weak points that, if probed, would make it react in a way consistent with a Western rationale; that is, it would try to minimize the chances of the damage it might undergo. Thus, when the European troika demanded in 2003 that Iran freeze its nuclear activity, Iran decided to respond. If the Europeans had not, as Iran insisted, removed significant operative parts from the original draft of their conditions for starting negotiations with Iran, Iran may possibly have acceded to the stricter conditions. In any case, for almost two years the Iranians reluctantly slowed the development of their nuclear program. Moreover, the episode of the detainment of the British sailors in March-April 2007 ended, to the surprise of many, with their rapid and unconditional release as Iran hastily folded all the flags it had flaunted at the start of the affair.

What is the common denominator of these two cases? It is the Iranian regime's fear that rigidity in their opening positions could lead to a harsh punishment that might include a military action against it. Until 2004, and especially following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Iranians took seriously the possibility that the failure of the negotiations with the Europeans would lead to a UN Security Council resolution to legitimize a U.S. strike on Iran's nuclear infrastructure, which was then much more vulnerable than today. Even the Europeans made quite explicit use of this threat, which at that time appeared credible and intimidating, as a main means to get the Iranians to freeze their activity.

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But when America's image was weakened by its entanglement in Iraq, to which the Iranians themselves made no small contribution, the Iranians allowed themselves to treat the American threat lightly and to return to vigorously advancing their nuclear program. Also in the much smaller episode of the captive sailors, it was Britain's threats, which were interpreted as readiness to use military force to gain the prisoners' release, that convinced Iran to give up its

demands in quite humiliating fashion (even though some analysts who ascribe ingenuity to every Iranian move saw adroitness here and an achievement for Ahmadinejad).

This common denominator certainly has not disappeared from the eyes of those Western actors seeking to stop the Iranian nuclear program. The lesson they propose learning from it, however, is not the need to create fear of a military strike among the Iranians, but rather that Iran can be induced to change its policy. This means that accurately mapping Iran's weak points and then focusing pressures on these points could create greater constraints on Iran's decision-makers, heighten their fears about regime stability, and ultimately convince them that it is best to give up the nuclear program.

Although it is clear that this viewpoint stems largely from the reluctance of all the actors about the military option, it is worth examining this assumption in depth to see if it has any basis and what are the necessary conditions for successfully pressuring Iran to halt its nuclearization effort. This article will scrutinize these points of vulnerability and the relations between them and the different possible strategies for stopping Iran's nuclear program and obstructing its attempts to spread its radical ideology with the aim of undermining Middle Eastern stability, Israel's security, and proceeding on a path to changing the world order.

Before beginning the analysis of the Iranian vulnerabilities, it is necessary to understand the broader cultural, ideological, and political context. An Islamic revolutionary regime has ruled Iran since 1979. As a matter of basic ideology, it sees itself as having an eternal and perpetual mission of imposing Islam on all the world by exporting its revolutionary ideology and making itself a source of emulation, just as the religious leader is a source of emulation (*Marja Taklid*) whose ways one should follow on the personal level (*Velayat-e Faqih*).

An Islamic revolutionary regime has ruled Iran since 1979. As a matter of basic ideology, it sees itself as having an eternal and perpetual mission of imposing Islam on all the world by exporting its revolutionary ideology and making itself a source of emulation.

The regime, in other words, is committed to changing the reality in which it acts. From its standpoint regional stability is an unacceptable reality because it contradicts its revolutionary worldview. Based on its self-definition, it is obligated to create turbulence that ultimately will help it advance its goals. The anxiety of devotees of regional and world stability about threats to that stability contributes to Iran's sense of self-confidence and power.

Agreeing to give up the nuclear program is therefore almost an existential issue for the Iranian regime, since it would mean accepting the prevailing world order and forgoing the ambition to become a regional let alone a global power. Without nuclear weapons, not only would Iran's ability to outwardly project power and influence decline, but giving up the program could also make it appear docile and vulnerable and detract from its regional and international standing. Clearly Iran can allow itself tactical leeway and agree, in case of need, to temporarily slow the

program's pace so as to buy time and weaken opposition. In today's Iran, however, the nuclear issue has taken the place of the revolutionary fervor of the early days of the revolution, so that totally relinquishing the program is unthinkable.

Agreeing to give up the nuclear program is therefore almost an existential issue for the Iranian regime, since it would mean accepting the prevailing world order and forgoing the ambition to become a regional, let alone a global power.

Second, the revolutionary Islamic worldview regards suffering and sacrifice as supreme values in this world, and upholding them as essential to defeating the enemies of Islam. In the eyes of radical Islam, those enemies' culture centers on the vague and empty pursuit of hedonistic happiness. Even former president Khatami believed so, not to mention President Ahmadinejad, who tried to explain the cultural disparity to President George W. Bush in his famous letter. Suffering and sacrifice not only guarantee attainments in this world but win the truly great prize for the believer: certain entry to heaven with considerable special benefits. Patiently submitting to threats to make Iran suffer is unthinkable to those who view the world through such a lens. Not only is there no justification for it but it means a total collapse of the value system that the regime is based on.

Despite Iran's enormous oil and gas reserves, ironically, one of its most glaring areas of vulnerability is in the economic sphere. Iran is a country whose revenues almost completely from the export of crude oil.

Hence Iran's response to these threats is to flaunt its counter threat, namely, the mobilization of the Suicide Brigades, which are deployed and ready to carry out their mission if required. The means the Iranians used in fighting Iraq prove that this is not just lip service. Here too, of course, there are limitations. The boastful declarations are not translated into the language of action immediately, but only when conditions are ripe. The use of this threat, however, indicates that for the regime the issue is extremely important and indeed existential.

Third, it is important to understand that at all times the regime's immediate target audience is the Iranian public itself, and that the central question it constantly deals with concerns ensuring its survival and stability as an Islamic revolutionary regime. Giving up the nuclear program is tantamount to domestic political bankruptcy. Tactical maneuvers are clearly acceptable in light of the difficulties and weaknesses to be detailed below, but abandoning the program means acknowledging that the regime has lost its way and made grave errors, and would likely encourage the regime's critics and opponents to dare to threaten the continued existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the form it has had for almost thirty years. Regionally speaking, such a concession would likely lead to the serious weakening of the entire radical Islamic camp, which leans to a large extent on the Iranian revolution, or at least to boosting the status of other radical

actors, such as al-Qaeda, as leaders of the camp to the detriment of Iran. Clearly the regime cannot allow such scenarios to materialize.

At the same time, the regime is clearly aware that its survival and ability to provide for the seventy million Iranians depends on some degree of connectedness to the outside world. Iran does not intend and cannot allow itself to be economically and politically ostracized by the international community, or even by its near environment. This assumption underlies the international community's recent economic-sanctions policy. The question is whether this dependence on economic, security, scientific, and political contacts with the world can override ideological and political considerations and whether damaging these contacts would suffice to get Iran to give up its nuclear program.

Reasons for Assuming the Economic Sanctions Might Work

What, then, are the components of Iran's vulnerability and what is their significance for the chances of stopping the nuclear program? Despite Iran's enormous oil and gas reserves, ironically, one of its most glaring areas of vulnerability is in the economic sphere.(1) Iran is a country whose state revenues stem largely from the export of crude oil and natural gas. The dependence on the import of non-crude-oil raw materials, refined derivatives, intermediary goods, machines, and consumer products is highly significant. This is despite the fact that the percentage of those employed in the oil economy is very low and most employment is in the fields of agriculture, industry, and services.

The dependence on trade with the world is so significant (in 2005 Iran's imports came to about \$43 billion) that Iran can be gravely damaged by constraining its ability to export oil or preventing the supply of refined products such as gas distillates, since about 40 percent of Iran's fuel-product consumption comes from imports. Iran has been heavily subsidizing gasoline, half of which is imported because of its limited refining capacity.

Iranian society has low per capita income and the Iranian economy suffers from economic difficulties and a low growth level; its real GDP growth appears to be declining and according to one estimate, its growth rate may have dipped to 3 percent.(2) According to an analysis by the World Bank, Iran must create 700,000 jobs per year, but only 500,000 new jobs have been created annually at the economy's current growth rate.(3) It is not surprising to find that over the past five years Iran's unemployment rate has been relatively high: over 10 percent. Moreover, through most of the last decade Iran has suffered from an average inflation rate of 14 percent.(4) And Iran is a classic consumer society particularly with respect to the urban middle class, which is trying to match the world's advanced societies in terms of individual standard of living. This creates demand pressures that, if unanswered, could lead to rapid inflation or social discontent based on these economic factors.

The dependence on trade with the world is so significant (in 2005 Iran's imports came to about \$43 billion) that Iran can be gravely damaged by constraining its ability to export oil or preventing the supply of refined products such as gas distillates, since about 40 percent of Iran's fuel-product consumption comes from imports. Iran has been heavily subsidizing gasoline, half of which is imported because of its limited refining capacity. The same applies to a long list of other products such as food, of which about 50 percent is from imports, industrial machines, and electronic consumer products, whose non-provision to Iran would paralyze its economic activity. In June 2007, Iran even instituted gas rationing, which led to rioting and acts of arson in Tehran.(5)

According to an analysis by the World Bank, Iran must create 700,000 jobs per year, but only 500,000 new jobs have been created annually at the economy's current growth rate.

Another area where the Iranian economy is greatly dependent on connections with the world is that of financial services. To maintain its international network of economic ties, and to ensure that the capital it accrues via the revenues from oil export is optimally invested, Iran requires extensive financial activity in the external world. This is carried out mainly by the large Iranian banks, headed by the Central Bank, the National Bank (Bank Melli), and the Export Bank (Saderat), and via deposits in large banks in the world.

Iranian vulnerabilities in the oil sector may in fact be growing. Iran needs to invest about \$10 billion annually in its energy sector to maintain current output from its oil fields; however, Tehran is only spending a third of that amount. For that reason, Iran's oil minister, Kazem Vaziri-Hamaneh, announced in September 2006 that the country's oil production could drop 13 percent annually unless there is new investment in its energy infrastructure.

Iran's vulnerability in this field was already exposed in the episode of the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, when Iranian funds were frozen and put in an escrow account. Iran's foreign currency holdings are currently estimated at over \$60 billion and are held mainly in Western banks. Another additional financial service for which Iran is greatly dependent on the world economy is the insurance field. As the premiums levied on trade insurance with Iran and on insurance for Iranian assets increase, the pressure on the Iranian economy grows. Prohibiting insurance on investments in Iran would likely cause Iran substantial damage.

The reliance on outside technology is an important component of Iran's economic dependence on the global economy. Iran indeed prides itself on its technological achievements and on its scientists who have been able to produce relatively advanced weapons and to cross technological thresholds in the nuclear field. Nevertheless, these achievements would not have been possible without substantial external assistance. Russian, Chinese, and North Korean assistance

was required for producing the various kinds of missiles and for the nuclear breakthrough, where Iran apparently also benefited from Pakistani knowledge. In civilian fields as well, and especially with respect to the oil sector, Iran needs foreign, and particularly Western, knowledge to improve the functioning of its economic system and to bolster oil output so as to meet the growing demand.

Iranian vulnerabilities in the oil sector may in fact be growing. Iran needs to invest about \$10 billion annually in its energy sector to maintain current output from its oilfields; however, Tehran is only spending a third of that amount.(6) For that reason, Iran's oil minister, Kazem Vaziri-Hamaneh, announced in September 2006 that the country's oil production could drop 13 percent annually unless there is new investment in its energy infrastructure.(7) There are predictions that at that rate Iranian oil exports will shrink to zero by 2015.(8) It should be remembered that presently *half* the Iranian government's revenue comes from the very same oil exports that are about to dramatically decline.(9) Yet at the same time, the Iranian government has had to sharply increase the Iranian state budget in recent years to meet its growing needs, including subsidies.

Because taking a decision on substantial sanctions, and the subsequent effectiveness of their implementation, depend on creating a broad and stable international consensus, those actors not interested in adopting tough measures against Iran for political reasons such as Russia, China, and even Europe could prevent the taking of significant decisions or foil their effective implementation. Iran is hoping that, should European companies follow the U.S. lead in curtailing their ties to the Iranian energy sector, Chinese or Indian companies will be able to fill the vacuum.

Iran's oil industry urgently needs foreign investment to promote its expansion; according to one estimate by the director of the National Iranian Oil Company, Ghalam Hossein Nozari, the Iranian energy sector needs \$94 billion in foreign investment by 2014 to maintain current production rates.(10) But in the current international political environment, total foreign direct investment in Iran is plummeting from nearly \$500 million in 2004 to \$30 million in 2006.(11)

Apart from preventing the export of Iranian oil, which would be problematic because of its effect on world oil prices, the components of Iran's economic vulnerability are relatively easy to exploit as a means of exerting pressure. This is on condition of broad international agreement, including Iran's main trading partners. Although the possibility of such an approach naturally arouses interest in the international community, there are "flies in the ointment":

- a. The international community acts with great caution in this context because of fear, bordering on anxiety, lest overly severe steps create a boomerang effect and a further rise in oil prices. This is despite the fact that the world is much less dependent on economic ties with Iran than Iran is dependent on the world.

b. The international actors are very cautious lest their measures harm the Iranian population instead of focusing on the regime or on those elements directly involved in the nuclear program. This stems from a moralistic assumption that there is no justification to cause suffering to those not directly responsible for the acts because of which the sanctions are imposed, as well as concern lest sanctions that harm the population end up helping the regime mobilize broad public support for its defiant policy. The regime could portray the sanctions as proving the existence of an international conspiracy against Iran and Islam and as evidence of the West's cruelty, justifying the struggle against it and the continued efforts at nuclearization.

c. No actor is eager to forgo an opportunity for economic gain and creating employment opportunities in its country, except perhaps for cases involving an activity that clearly and directly assists the nuclear program. Moreover, when a decision on sanctions is taken there is concern that private actors will seek and find ways to get around them.

d. Because taking a decision on substantial sanctions, and the subsequent effectiveness of their implementation, depend on creating a broad and stable international consensus, those actors not interested in adopting tough measures against Iran for political reasons such as Russia, China, and even Europe could prevent the taking of significant decisions or foil their effective implementation. Iran is hoping that, should European companies follow the U.S. lead in curtailing their ties to the Iranian energy sector, Chinese or Indian companies will be able to fill the vacuum.

e. Iran is likely to try and diminish part of the economic harm to it by heavy subsidization of alternative export industries, even if their profitability is doubtful, and by investment in developing channels of export and investment that circumvent sanctions, even if this means imported goods and services become considerably more expensive. Iran's foreign currency holdings would enable it to finance such a policy for a relatively long period. Indeed, Ahmadinejad is already trying to promote such a policy under the heading of "self-sufficiency" or "*chodkapay*" in Farsi. Not surprisingly, this policy is undermining the public's confidence in the economy, encouraging capital flight, and increasing the ferment among the workers because in the short term it damages the industries that require the import of machines and raw materials. In the long term, however, it will likely make it easier for Iran to cope with an economic boycott if one is indeed imposed.

The possibility has recently been raised of unilateral sanctions by large financial organizations, such as the US pension funds, which have decided to divest their shares in foreign companies doing business with Iran.

Moreover, a historical perspective on the effectiveness of economic sanctions, which have always suffered from the above-noted problems, indicates that in themselves they are insufficient to dissuade regimes that are determined to persist in a problematic policy, especially when the resultant suffering of the population makes it possible to erode the sanctions and strengthen domestic support for the policy. The failure of UN sanctions against Iraq, which the Saddam regime constantly circumvented with the help of many states and international corporations, is perhaps the best evidence of this. One may argue that unlike the Iraqi case, political power in Iran is not totally held in the hands of a single dictator but rather by several centers of power. Some may envision that it is possible to play them off against each other. However, when it comes to the nuclear issue, the radical clerics' leadership is strong, determined, and monolithic enough to defy economic sanctions.

In sum, Iran suffers from considerable vulnerability in the economic sphere, but the prospects of exploiting this to convince Iran to change its policy on the nuclear issue are not good. Preventing the export of distillates and prohibiting the activity of Iranian banks abroad may be the most effective measures, but the chances of reaching full and stable international agreement on implementing them are not high. There is a possibility of sanctions by part of the international community, that is, a coalition of the willing, but these would probably be less significant and many of the abovementioned limitations would pertain to them.

The effects of these efforts are largely psychological, but they have produced relatively quick, tangible outcomes. European banks, such as the Swiss bank UBS, have either ended or reduced their dealings with Iran.

For years the only country that has imposed its own sanctions on Iran has been the United States. This has not, however, entailed any sacrifice for the Americans because in any case they have not had economic relations with Iran since the Islamic Revolution. Although the American law on which the sanctions against Iran are based (ILSA, which later became IFSA) also permits applying sanctions to non-American firms that invest in developing the Iranian oil economy, these have never been imposed in practice because of opposition by the European countries and because the different U.S. governments have requested a waiver on the ground that such sanctions deviate from the national interest.

The possibility has recently been raised of unilateral sanctions by large financial organizations, such as the U.S. pension funds, which have decided to divest their shares in foreign companies doing business with Iran. In parallel, the U.S. government has engaged the financial community directly, stressing the risks of investing in Iran. The effects of these efforts are largely psychological, but they have produced relatively quick, tangible outcomes. European banks, such as the Swiss bank UBS, have either business with Iran. This is rapidly creating a difficult environment for Iranian foreign trade. Over the past year there has been a sharp decrease in export credits from Germany,

France, and Japan.(12)

All these actions undoubtedly create pressures on the Iranian regime – and on President Ahmadinejad in particular. The mounting failures of the Iranian economy provide ammunition for his domestic rivals, but whether these actions alone can bring a change in Iranian nuclear policy is doubtful.

Furthermore, some foreign banks are refusing to issue new letters of credit to Iranian companies.(13) All these actions undoubtedly create pressures on the Iranian regime – and on President Ahmadinejad in particular. The mounting failures of the Iranian economy provide ammunition for his domestic rivals, but whether these actions alone can bring a change in Iranian nuclear policy is doubtful. They might undermine, over time, domestic stability and strengthen his opponents, but it is not at all clear that they can effectively bring to a halt a nuclear program that enjoys popular support.

The second area of vulnerability in terms of its salience is domestic stability. Iran is undoubtedly vulnerable in this regard, given the opposition of large parts of the population to central elements of the regime's domestic policy and the criticism of some elements of its foreign policy. Much of the Iranian public does not look kindly on curtailing individual freedom, particularly restrictions involving attire and public behavior, and is embittered by the difficulty of obtaining the products of Western culture. Not inconsiderable parts of the public are fed up with the economic policy that is unable to convert the huge revenues from oil into accelerated growth and a higher standard of living.

Others strongly oppose the discrimination against ethnic groups such as the Baluchis or the Arabs in Khuzestan, and discontent is sometimes seen in other sectors of the society such as students, bazaar merchants, teachers, workers in general and oil-sector workers in particular. There are also, of course, tensions in the political circles, where the more pragmatic elements who have been elbowed out of the ruling institutions still hope to reverse that process. Emigrants who oppose the regime are conducting a propaganda war against it.

The radical opposition organization Mujahideen Khalq – about which Tehran has lately been less concerned – prefers to use terror to undermine the regime, and local Sunni terror groups are forming such as the Jund Allah organization on the Pakistani border. As noted, foreign policy is also a subject of criticism, including the wastefulness with which monies are transferred to Palestinian actors, along with Iran's radical support for Israel's destruction and Holocaust denial, which are seen as coming at the expense of Iranian interests.

Despite the vulnerability in this sphere, it is hard to see how the desired results could be achieved through activity directed at Iran's domestic arena. First, the Iranian public has internalized the lessons of the revolution regarding the instability it fostered, and of Khatami's careful and failed attempt to change the situation. This public has very little taste for the disorder likely to result from challenging the regime, and so long as the regime does not strictly oversee

individual life outside of public places, the public prefers "the devil it knows" – the present situation – to the fear and uncertainty entailed in subverting the public order, or in confronting the regime on the nuclear issue. Furthermore, the public views the progress in the nuclear program as a justified and appropriate national achievement.

Even if there are disagreements about policy toward the world community in this sphere, so long as the international response to the project's continuation does not cause suffering to the public and does not involve attacking the nuclear sites while inflicting harm on the population, the public tends to support the regime's nuclear policy (which is presented to it as intended for peaceful purposes and attaining national prestige through the mastery of advanced technology, though the public understands that the real purpose is nuclear weapons). In addition, it has very little belief in its ability to withstand a frontal clash with the security arms of the regime, or with the ruling doctrine of the Islamic elite. The leaders of the 2009 disturbances against the Iranian regime are also supporters of its nuclear program. Thus, the divided Iranian public is not an effective tool for stopping the nuclear program.

It is precisely in the military domain that Iran is most vulnerable. The Iranian weapons industry is indeed impressive in the context of developing states, but the Iranian armed forces, which include the standing army and the army of the Revolutionary Guards, generally possess outmoded weapons even though the Revolutionary Guards have strategic weaponry and battle tactics that somewhat compensate for their weaknesses, and despite Russia's readiness to supply advanced air-defense systems to Iran.

It is indeed clear that assisting actors in Iran who favor extensive reform is very important in a long-term perspective. It is doubtful, however, whether the regime's stability can be affected in the relatively short-term context that remains before the nuclear project is completed (several years), let alone before Iran crosses its last technological threshold – the ability to enrich uranium in centrifuges (several months if not less).

It is precisely in the military domain that Iran is most vulnerable. The Iranian weapons industry is indeed impressive in the context of developing states, but the Iranian armed forces, which include the standing army and the army of the Revolutionary Guards, generally possess outmoded weapons even though the Revolutionary Guards have strategic weaponry and battle tactics that somewhat compensate for their weaknesses, and despite Russia's readiness to supply advanced air-defense systems to Iran. Although these systems can provide a reasonable level of local protection, they cannot ensure systemic and comprehensive defense of the widely dispersed strategic weapons deployment, let alone overall protection for all of Iran.

Regarding strategic weapons, which enable force projection beyond its borders, Iran also suffers at present from a lack of redundancy, augmenting its vulnerability. Ground-to-ground missiles of the Shahab-3 and BM-25 types, the spearhead of this deployment, are indeed capable of hitting targets in Israel and possibly even in the heart of Europe, but the amount of launchers and missiles in Iran's hands is limited. The Second Lebanon War also reduced Iran's ability to use the territory of Lebanon, via Hizbullah, as a sort of "land" aircraft carrier for attacking Israel, even though Hizbullah's rockets arsenal has since been replenished. At the same time, Iran has considerable ability to strike its neighbors with relatively short-range missiles, which have better accuracy than what the long-range missiles afford. This especially endangers U.S. targets in Iraq and strategic targets in states in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly Saudi Arabia. Iran also explicitly and vocally threatens that terror attacks will be perpetrated throughout the world if it is attacked, and it is indeed strengthening its capabilities designed for that purpose.

Iran has now mastered all the required technologies for the process of uranium enrichment except for enrichment in centrifuges. It mines uranium, processes it into "yellowcake," and then converts it into usable material for enrichment (UF₆). Today it already has about 250 tons of UF₆ that may suffice for perhaps eight atom bombs.

In sum, Iran's difficulty in defending itself against a military attack is one of its main weak points. To cover up this weakness Iran is trying – along with the effort to improve its defensive capability – to develop a dimension of deterrence based on ability to strike its neighbors, Israel, and targets throughout the world with missiles and terror, and by using a rhetoric of intimidation stressing that Iran's rationale for action knows no inhibitions. As always, the effectiveness of the Iranian deterrence is determined by the actors it is used against. Thus, if it turns out that attempting to persuade Iran to forgo the nuclear project by exploiting the other weak points does not succeed, the West led by the United States, Israel, and the Gulf states will have to decide if they prefer to cope with the dangers entailed in attacking Iran or with those stemming from its nuclearization.

The nuclear program is in itself an Iranian vulnerability. The program is meant to enable Iran to operate a full nuclear fuel cycle, involving both enriching uranium in centrifuges and a plutogenic basis. Both channels require serial processes, with the nonexistence of any one stage in the process precluding the entire process. The enriched-uranium channel is the critical path to completing the program, both because it is more advanced than the plutogenic channel and because at the present stage it involves very little dependence on external knowledge and materials. Iran has now mastered all the required technologies for the process of uranium enrichment except for enrichment in centrifuges. It mines uranium, processes it into "yellowcake," and converts it into usable material for enrichment (UF₆). Today it already has about 370 tons of UF₆ that may suffice for perhaps twelve atom bombs after it is fed into centrifuges and

enriched to weapons-grade uranium. Hence, the chances that preventing foreign assistance for this project – prevention that is essential in itself – would cause the project's cessation are very low at the present stage.

The program's vulnerability to a military operation is also diminishing the more time that passes, thanks to the technological sophistication, advances in producing the raw materials and intermediate products, and the improvement in protection of the program's components, particularly the underground enrichment facility in Natanz. At the same time, given quality intelligence and air supremacy it is still possible to deal a harsh blow to Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Iran is aware of its likely difficulty in denying air supremacy to those who may try to strike its nuclear sites, and also of the extent for the process of uranium of intelligence penetration of the program – evident from the diaspora opposition's repeated disclosures about what is happening in the program.

The continually emphasized point that this case does not resemble the 1981 attack on the Iraqi Osirak reactor is indeed correct for many reasons, including that the Iranian nuclear program is dispersed among many sites. This does not mean, however, that a strike on each of the sites would be insignificant or that their number is so great that there is no point in trying. Altogether, this is a mission that advanced Western air forces ought to be capable of performing. Iran's military vulnerability should, then, be of concern to it, since if it reacts harshly to a strike it will risk a wider military reaction beyond the nuclear sphere that, ultimately, would be incomparably more disastrous for Iran than it would be dangerous for the actors that might take part in such a campaign.

The political field emerges as one of those where the potential for Iranian vulnerability is particularly significant. Iran's decision to continue progressing with the nuclear program even after its exposure indicates, among other things, an assessment that the West will be deterred from a military strike on the program and that Russia and China will forestall far-reaching political measures against Iran and block any attempt to gain international legitimacy for a military operation. Seemingly, this assessment appeared somewhat less valid in light of Russia and China's agreement to enable international sanctions against Iran because of its failure to meet the United Nations' demands. The Iranians, however, seem to see this as an insignificant concession aimed at improving Russia and China's ability to prevent more substantial sanctions.

That assessment, however, will probably turn out to be mistaken. The United States and Israel have already proved several times that the restraint and hesitancy that characterize them for protracted periods do not indicate how they will act when faced by what they perceive to be an intolerable affront. Saddam erred in assessing America's reaction both in 1991 and 2002-2003. Arafat erred in assessing Israel's reaction before the Defensive Shield operation, and Nasrallah indeed admitted that he erred completely in assessing Israel's reaction in the Second Lebanon War. These errors stem both from the mistaken use of the inductive method to assess human behavior and from the mistaken assumption that the West has lost its will to fight for its values and security.

Examining the sanctions the international community has so far imposed on Iran reveals that they are particularly soft and concentrate on the nuclear program itself. Security Council Resolution 1747 indeed broadened and detailed the Iranian actors involved in the nuclear project and created a better basis for enacting sanctions that were already imposed against the Iranian nuclear industry by Resolution 1737. However, the restrictions in the resolution concerning areas where there is substantial Iranian vulnerability reflect how much Russia and China have succeeded to prevent the adoption of tougher measures against Iran.

For example, Article 6, which deals with weapons export to Iran, makes no explicit prohibition of exporting weapons to it but merely calls on all countries to "exercise vigilance and restraint" regarding the sale, supply, or transfer of weapons to Iran. The resolution also, amazingly, underlines its own irrelevancy because it bothers to specify those weapons regarding which it calls upon the countries to exercise restraint – and precisely air defenses, the most problematic military means that Iran receives from Russia, are omitted from the list.

Also Article 7, which calls upon (but does not obligate) states and financial organizations to avoid giving financial aid and new loans to Iran, does not pertain to the aid these bodies have already committed themselves to, and in any case does not refer to aid for humanitarian needs or development. Thus the resolution empties this article of any real content. The decision to forbid purchasing weapons from Iran is of course for purposes of protocol only, since clearly it will not induce Syria, Hizbullah, and Hamas to end the military assistance they receive from Iran.

In short, the sanctions imposed so far testify more to the impotence of the international community than to its mobilization for a real struggle against the Iranian nuclear bomb. Those who favor the sanctions can of course claim that they constitute a significant achievement in light of the obstacles the sanctions policy had to surmount, that these are first steps in a graduated process, that since Russia, China, and the Europeans have accepted the principle of sanctions it will be hard for them to block the continued ascent, and that the pace of intensifying the sanctions will accelerate in the future. Happy is the believer! In reality, the actors who are promoting this policy seem to feel obligated to present it as having chances of success despite their awareness that the likelihood of convincing Iran to abandon its nuclear program this way is very low.

What then must be done to convince Iran to give up its nuclear program? What is needed is to bring home to the Iranian leadership the tension between continuing the program and the survival of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

It is essential to recall that economic sanctions take a very long time to have a decisive effect. Those advocating the use of sanctions alone simply ignore the problem of the timetable – that is, the fact that the program's technological hourglass is so close to running out that there is almost no chance of preventing

Iran, in this fashion, from crossing the last technological barrier to mastery of all the necessary technological aspects of producing nuclear weapons.

In August 2011, the International Monetary Fund issued a study that indicates that after all is said and done, the international sanctions regime on Iran has not harmed its economy.⁽¹⁴⁾ It reports an Iranian GDP growth rate of 3.5 percent. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) also issued an upbeat report on another important aspect of the Iranian economy: while foreign direct investments declined from \$ 3.136 billion in 2005 to \$1.647 billion in 2006, they began to rise significantly in 2009, reaching \$3.617 billion in 2010.⁽¹⁵⁾ In the meantime, high global oil prices have assisted the Iranian regime in offsetting any other negative effects of international sanctions. In short, there is no indication that international sanctions can be relied upon as a source of real leverage to force the Iranian government to pull back from its clear intention to complete an advanced nuclear program for military purposes. Unfortunately, the Iranians have exploited the time they have been granted while sanctions were tried to complete most of the technological groundwork for reaching this goal.

Notes

1. Patrick Clawson, "Could Sanctions Work against Tehran?" *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2007.
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Iran Signals Its Readiness for a Final Confrontation

(November 2011)

Michael Segall

- Since the publication of the November 2011 IAEA report, which explicitly spotlights Iran's plans to build nuclear weapons, senior figures of the Iranian regime and the state-run media have begun to use threatening, defiant, and sometimes contemptuous language toward Israel and the United States.
- From Iran's standpoint, an ongoing, head-on confrontation with the U.S. and Israel would serve its purposes in the region and build its image as a key actor that stands firm against the West and provides an alternative agenda to reshape the Middle East. Hence, compromise has almost ceased to be an option for Iran.
- The current round of the conflict between Iran and the United States and Israel over Iran's (military) nuclear program should be seen in a much wider context, one that centers on shaping a new landscape in the Middle East. Iran views itself as "the next big thing" in the region and behaves accordingly – at the moment with no significant challenge or response from the United States and the West.
- If in the past Iran held clandestine contacts with Islamic movements, mainly from North African Arab states, on Sudanese soil (such as *Ennadha*, which has now won the Tunisian elections), it can now openly boost its influence in countries where the "U.S.-supported dictators" have fallen.
- Iran no longer fears openly acknowledging that it has built capabilities for reacting to an attack – including the Palestinian organizations in Gaza and Hizbullah in Lebanon – and depicts them as part of its defensive strategy and response in case of a confrontation with Israel and the United States.
- At home, the growing strength of the Revolutionary Guards enables them

to increasingly influence foreign policy and mainly to export the revolution in ways not seen in the past. The top commanders of its elite Quds Force are emerging from the shadows and will have a key role in the future struggle against the U.S. and its remaining allies in the region, particularly Israel. Iran, as its president said, is preparing for the "final confrontation."

The animated talk in Israel and the West about a possible attack on Iran's nuclear facilities is naturally arousing great interest in Iran. Initially, the Iranian leadership chose not to react and made only minor statements about this discourse. But since the publication of the November 2011 report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA),(1) which spotlights the military dimension of Iran's nuclear program and its plans to build nuclear weapons, senior figures of the regime and the state-run media have begun to use threatening, defiant, and sometimes contemptuous language toward Israel, the United States, and IAEA Chairman Yukiya Amano, who was described by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as "America's lackey" and as having "no authority of his own." (2) Iran's ambassador to the IAEA Ali Asghar Soltanieh declared: "This report is unbalanced, unprofessional, and prepared with political motivation and under political pressure mostly by the United States...this is in fact a prime historical mistake." (3) Concurrently, Iranian spokesmen and commentators emphasize Iran's power, its capability to react "decisively" (including along Israel's borders), and its ability to withstand both sanctions and a military offensive.

"The Final Confrontation"

Of all the Iranian statements, one made by Ahmadinejad stands out. During a meeting with supporters, he said, "the West is mobilizing all its forces to finish the job because it is clear as day that NATO is yearning to act against Iran." He added in an apocalyptic-messianic spirit that the conditions taking shape in the region are not normal (a hint at the Imam Mahdi),(4) and that "we are nearing the point of final confrontation." Such a confrontation, he explained, will not necessarily be military and could take a political or other form. Ahmadinejad stressed that Iran is now almost at the apex of its power, but could, if it does not demonstrate resolve, absorb a blow from which it will not recover for at least five hundred years. He also warned that an attack on Syria by NATO would cause a regional explosion.(5)

Iran is not only observing the crisis brought on by the IAEA report but also the changing Middle East and its own role in it. On November 4, Iran honored the anniversary of the 1979 takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran (right in the midst of the debate on the possibility of a Western attack). Indeed, Iran views the upheaval in the Middle East and the growing Islamic trends (with Tunisia as an example) as further proof of the (divine) justice of its path. These are added to a series of "glorious" achievements, as Iran sees it, over the course of more than a decade – the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the Second Intifada, the wars in Afghanistan (the harsh blow to the Taliban) and Iraq (the fall of Saddam), the

Second Lebanon War, and Israel's 2009 Gaza operation.

Hubris?

From Iran's standpoint, a head-on confrontation with the United States and Israel would serve its purposes in the region and build its image as an actor that stands firm against the Western powers and does not submit to pressure. If there still was any chance of Tehran agreeing to concessions in its sporadic talks with the West about its nuclear program, the Middle Eastern turmoil has now made a compromise all but impossible. Indeed, given the harsh IAEA report, more critical than in the past and providing more detail on the military aspects of the nuclear program, compromise has almost ceased to be an option for Iran, which is deliberately ramping up its defiance in light of Middle Eastern and world developments.

Tehran is also encouraged by the positions of Russia and China, which are granting it (along with its client Syria) immunity against any stringent Security Council sanctions. Specifically, Iran is encouraged about its ability to withstand sanctions by Russia's statements since the IAEA report's publication (6) (which have made much mention of Iran's reaction to the report). So Iran has been exuding confidence – sometimes verging on hubris – and is prepared to take risks, even to the point of trying to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States and thereby moving the Middle Eastern playing field to Washington itself.

An interview that Ahmadinejad gave in early November to the Egyptian paper *Al-Akhbar* accurately reflects Iran's interpretation of recent Middle Eastern developments and the threats it faces. The United States, Ahmadinejad asserts, is indeed looking to attack Iran, as was President Bush, but

what a huge difference there is between Bush's fate and the status Iran enjoys today....Iran is becoming a more and more advanced country and therefore can counterbalance and contend with the global powers....The Zionist entity and the West, and especially the United States, fear Iran's power and (growing) role and so are trying to enlist the world for a battle to contain and reduce its power and role....They must know that Iran will not allow such a development.

The Iranian president claims further that the United States aims to safeguard the "Zionist entity," but will fail in that endeavor because this entity has no place in the Middle East and is destined for extinction. If, Ahmadinejad suggests, the peoples of the region were to hold a referendum on the Zionist entity's existence among them, it is clear what the results would be. "This entity can be compared to a kidney transplanted into a body that has rejected it...it has no place in the region and the countries will soon get rid of it and expel it from the region...it will collapse and its end will be near."(7)

Iran continues to project military, political, and economic power in the region, and sees the Israeli and American focus on possibly attacking it as aimed at

undermining its rising status in the changing Middle East – and also as manifesting the West's loss of its traditional mainstays of power in the region. Iranian propaganda claims that the talk about attacking it is not serious "because no such option really exists," and that the real aim of such talk is only to encourage tougher sanctions – with poor chances of success given Russia and China's position.

Political and Military Bluff

In an editorial that analyzes the discourse surrounding an attack on Iran (quoting *Ha'aretz*, *The Guardian*, and President Shimon Peres), Iran's conservative Mehr news agency assessed that "the Israelis are trying to set the stage for the imposition of stricter sanctions on Iran." Mehr observed: "Over the past few days, Western media outlets have created brouhaha about the possibility that the Zionist regime may make a unilateral military strike against Iran." The article noted, "Israel recently test-fired a ballistic missile, purportedly capable of reaching Iran," and that "the Israeli military, which is usually secretive about its activities, allowed media people to report on the event."

The editorial concludes by saying, "it is clear that a military attack on Iran cannot be a viable option for Israel" and offers several reasons for this:

- (1) They know that a strike could not stop Iran's nuclear program.
- (2) Even Israeli and U.S. strategists, who believe that the strike could delay Iran's nuclear program, say that the strike would only set back Iran's program for two years, and thus it would not be worth the trouble to start a war with Iran.
- (3) Any attack against Iran would strengthen Iran's national cohesion.
- (4) Iran has shown that it is totally prepared to counter any military threat and is capable of involving regional and extra-regional countries in any possible war.
- (5) U.S. and Israeli intelligence and military officials do not believe that Iran's nuclear program is their number one threat. They know that the Arab Spring is a much greater threat to their interests.

So, what is the reason behind the new political game directed at Iran?

It seems that the Israelis are trying to set the stage for the imposition of stricter sanctions on Iran, but the biggest obstacle is the fact that Russia, China, and some members of the European Union are strongly opposed to new sanctions.

All this rhetoric about war is being used to compel these countries to stop opposing the moves to impose new United Nations Security Council sanctions on Iran, which they prefer to the outbreak of a dangerous war, which could have serious repercussions for the world.

(8)

In a similar spirit, Esmaeil Kowsari, deputy chairman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Majlis, asserts that

recent threats made by officials of the U.S. and the Zionist regime are a political and military bluff. The Zionist regime and the U.S. are in no position to attack Iran....The U.S. and the Zionist regime are gripped by an intense fear and great concern in dealing with developments in the region and the world. And after losing their strongholds and illegitimate interests in regional countries, they are trying to extricate themselves from this situation.(9)

Active Diplomacy

Amid the Israeli media campaign about a possible attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, commentators in Iran's leading conservative outlets have called on the country's leaders to adopt an active diplomacy to counter it. Behind this "murky" campaign, they claim, stands Israel's fear that Middle Eastern developments have removed the nuclear issue from the Western agenda and that the tide is not in Israel's favor. Thus, these commentators contend, Israel is using a tactic of trying to scare the world and draw attention to the nuclear issue, hoping thereby to increase the pressure on Russia and China to support further Security Council sanctions. This, in these pundits' view, is primarily psychological warfare by Israel and the West and does not stem from a real intention to attack Iran.

They argue, then, that Iran needs to take two clear stances toward the world. First, it should emphasize that no military attack on its nuclear facilities will benefit the attackers because these sites are dispersed and underground. Second, it should declare that if there is an attack, even if it fails to damage these facilities, it will be considered an act of aggression and a violation of international conventions, and therefore Iran will quit the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and no longer be obligated to the IAEA or allow the presence of nuclear inspectors. According to the commentators, such a threat would have a great impact. And to further neutralize the psychological warfare, Iran should espouse an active diplomacy and convey its positions to the other states such as Russia and China. (10) Other commentators have suggested putting the Russian step-by-step initiative on the agenda.(11)

A Crushing Response

Senior Iranian military officials, clerics, and commentators have adopted threatening language, warning that Iran will react with great severity to any attack on it.

- Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei: IRGC and Basij (volunteer) forces will respond to any aggression with a strong slap and an iron fist that "the enemies, the U.S., its allies, and the Zionist regime, in particular, should take into consideration, that the Iranian nation is not to attack any country

or nation but rather is to strongly react to any aggression or threat so that the aggressors and attackers would collapse from inside....The Iranian nation will not remain only an observer of the threats of the absurd materialistic powers....Only a nation with a stable power of self-defense can survive in a world where, unfortunately, relations between nations and countries are based on the power of weapons."(12)

- Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi said any sort of hostile act against Iran's territorial integrity would be met by a rapid, firm, and crushing response by its armed forces.(13)
- Yadallah Javani, politburo chief of the IRGC (Revolutionary Guards), said that "if the Zionist regime commits such a mistake [as attacking Iran], it would mean that it has entered the final days of its existence since the Islamic Republic of Iran is a powerful and strong country which can defend its territorial integrity and interests across the globe, especially in the Middle-East.... The Islamic Republic of Iran *has some means and possibilities in areas very close to the Zionist regime* and can easily give a response to Israel to make its leaders repent their action" (emphasis added).
- Javani also pointed to the Israeli military's successive failures and defeats in the thirty-three-day war in Lebanon in summer 2006 and the twenty-two-day offensive in Gaza in winter 2008-2009, and underlined that Israel is not strong enough to threaten Iran.(14)
- Deputy Chief of Staff for Cultural Affairs and Defense Publicity Brig.-Gen. Massoud Jazayeri said that Iran will not be handcuffed if comes under enemy aggression. Israel's Dimona nuclear plant and all other parts of Israel are within the reach of Iranian missiles. "The easiest target for Iranian military capabilities is the (Dimona nuclear) reactor....Our capabilities and our defensive tactics will definitely make the enemies, including the U.S. and the Zionists, repent....Tel Aviv knows well that any small step against Iran will be linked with the existence of this fake entity...such a military step from the Zionist entity against Iran will lead to the total disappearance of this entity from existence...if smoke columns rise from our nuclear facilities, then this smoke could rise from other installations and places....Our military information on our enemies is good and sufficient."(15)
- Ayatollah Seyed Ahmad Khatami, a member of the Experts Assembly, said, "Today Iran is mighty, strong and powerful and will retaliate against any plot so powerfully that it would become a lesson for others."(16) Another member of the same assembly, Hossein Ebrahimi, warned that "before [being able to take] any action against Iran, the Israelis will feel our wrath in Tel Aviv." Ebrahimi "assessed Israel's military capabilities during the Second Lebanon War, 'and found it weak.'" He stated: "The Israelis entered the war with the capabilities they had but earned nothing but humiliation....I do not think that Israelis along with the Americans and

Britons will commit such a folly....If the threat is carried out, they will see the political might of the (Islamic) establishment, the solidarity of the Iranian nation, and the strength of the country."(17) Still another Experts Assembly member, Mahmud Alavi, said, "Washington and Tel Aviv are aware of the fact that putting their anti-Iran threats into practice would cost them dearly, and thus they would not become involved in such folly." He added "that the United States and Israel know that such empty threats cannot intimidate Iran and also know that they would receive a crushing response if they ever attacked the Islamic Republic."(18)

Particularly notable are the tough statements of Sadollah Zarei of Kayhan newspaper, which reflects the outlook of the leader of Iran. Zarei claims it is very unlikely that Israel has any plan to attack Iran or even to take part in a larger attack; the regional conditions and Israel's capabilities do not allow it. "Iran is too great for the Zionist regime to threaten it." Four regular Iranian missiles, Zarei asserts, will cause a million Zionists to become refugees, while even if Israel fires a hundred missiles at Iran not even a few houses will be demolished. He stresses that Iran's power and ballistic-missile capability can cause a total Israeli defeat and adds: "Iranian missile fire on Israel will not involve any expenditures from the national budget, because Iran sells missiles in thirty-five countries of the world and builds its operational missiles from the profits of these sales. Hence, with very little money it will be possible to destroy Tel Aviv and the occupied lands."(19)

"The Next Big Thing"

To sum up, the current round of the conflict between Iran and the United States and Israel over Iran's nuclear program should be seen as another battle in a much wider campaign, one that centers on shaping a new landscape in a Middle East that is still in upheaval. Iran views itself as "the next big thing" in the region and behaves accordingly – at the moment with no significant response from the United States and the West. The November 2011 IAEA report will probably temporarily increase the pressure on Tehran and lead to limited measures against it. It appears that ultimately, however, the unhurried approach of the international system, though it certainly wants to leverage the IAEA report for "crippling" sanctions (mainly on Iran's banking and energy sectors) and for another round of talks with Iran (the Russian proposal?), will again be stymied by Russia and China, which will act to soften any measures.

Given its assessment of the international and regional balance of power, Iran's audacity is growing even in areas distant from the Middle East (as revealed in its recruitment of a Mexican drug cartel for the assassination plot against the Saudi ambassador). In the Middle East itself, Iran's perception is that the dams have burst. If in the past it held clandestine contacts with Islamic movements on Sudanese soil (such as *Ennadha*, which has now won the Tunisian elections), it can now openly boost its influence in countries where the "U.S.-supported dictators" have fallen. Iran no longer fears openly acknowledging that it has built

capabilities for reacting to an attack – including the Palestinian organizations in Gaza and Hizbullah in Lebanon – and depicts them as part of its defensive strategy and response in case of a confrontation with Israel and the United States.

Standing up to the United States and Israel on the nuclear issue well serves Iranian interests in the Arab street, which was and remains hostile toward those two countries. As Islam regains its hold over the Middle East, after years in which it was repressed by the Arab regimes, Iran's confidence grows that it can determine the new power equations in the region and drive the United States out of it – as well as Israel.

At home, the growing strength of the Revolutionary Guards – who play a central role with respect to both domestic politics and the Iranian nuclear program, its protection, survivability, and the missiles that are eventually supposed to carry nuclear warheads – enables them to increasingly influence foreign policy and to export the revolution more boldly and in ways not seen in the past. Indeed, recently *Kayhan* made an extraordinary admission that testifies to Iran's self-confidence perhaps more than anything else. It stated that the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards has already been clashing for some time with U.S. forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere:

The Quds Force is more than an active operational force; it is an ideology that *does not recognize borders*, a worldview whose tenets and beliefs directly conflict with Western culture....Since conquering Iraq and Afghanistan and entering the region, the United States has experienced more than ever the taste of conflict with the Quds Force as profoundly and tangibly as possible. America's appreciation of Iran's regional power is based mainly, and perhaps exclusively, on the experience of clashing with the Quds Force (emphasis added).(20)

Asr-e Iran also writes openly about the Quds Force's active presence in Iraq, and its contribution to bolstering Iran's status, to the detriment of Saudi Arabia.(21)

In light of the Quds Force's involvement in planning the putative hit on the Saudi ambassador in Washington, there have been American suggestions to assassinate senior Quds Force figures including its commander, Kassem Suleimani. This has sparked a wave of adulation for the force and its leaders in the Iranian media; they are seen as playing, and as destined to play, a key role in the struggle against the United States and Israel. Suleimani's name was also recently mentioned as a candidate for the next president of Iran (in 2013). The previous commander of the Quds Force, Ahmad Vahidi, is now defense minister. Iran indeed views itself as prepared for a final confrontation.

Notes

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Can Cold War Deterrence Apply to a Nuclear Iran?

(March 2011)

Shmuel Bar

- The policy documents published over the last year by the Obama administration indicate that it believes in the efficacy of traditional Cold War deterrence as the remedy to the challenge of rogue states acquiring nuclear weapons. This does not seem to be based on a sound strategic analysis but on the desire to project a purely defensive posture. Another assumption emerging from the administration's policy statements is that the Iranian regime is "rational" and hence deterrable.
- It is argued that a nuclear Iran will be risk averse and that "the Iranians are a rational people" and are not "suicidal." But the cultural propensity of a people toward "rationality" does not determine the behavior of their autocratic leadership.
- The claims by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that he communicates with the Hidden Imam should be taken seriously and should be seen in the context of an ideology purportedly held by key elements within the IRGC and the Basij.
- We should ask whether a polynuclear Middle East could be avoided in the wake of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons. The answer to this question seems to be clearly negative. Failure to prevent Iran from nearing the nuclear threshold will undoubtedly intensify the drive of other states in the region for nuclear weapons.
- How will a polynuclear Middle East function? It is nearly certain that it will not look like the latter years of the Cold War. The religious and political drivers that will determine nuclear decision-making in the countries of the region will preclude integration of many of the checks and balances which evolved between the superpowers in the Cold War era.
- The most powerful driver that has the potential to impel the region to nuclear war is religion. Both Sunni and Shiite traditions of Jihad view the willingness to challenge superior force as an exemplary deed. In Shiite Islam, this is augmented by the idealization of suffering and martyrdom.
- Given weak command and control structures in the region, nuclear weapons may filter down to quasi-states (such as Kurdistan or the Palestinian Authority), terrorist organizations, and rival ethnic groups for whom the acquisition of nuclear weapons by a hostile state would be an incentive to acquire at least a limited WMD capability.
- The countries of the region will probably be more predisposed than the Cold War protagonists to brandish their nuclear weapons not only

retorically but through nuclear alerts or nuclear tests, leading to situations of multilateral nuclear escalation. However, such multilateral escalation will not be mitigated by Cold War-type hotlines and means of signaling, and the absence of a credible second-strike capability may well strengthen the tendency to opt for a first strike.

Background

The prospect of Tehran acquiring nuclear weapons has evoked debate in academic and strategic circles regarding the applicability of Cold War models of deterrence to a nuclear Iran. There is first and foremost the question of whether the Iranian leadership is indeed as committed as it professes to be to its radical and apocalyptic worldview or, perchance, it is more pragmatic than it seems and therefore will be as responsive to deterrence as was the former Soviet Union. The debate also extends to whether scenarios for a "polynuclear" Middle East are likely and whether the Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons might lead to a breakdown of the whole international nonproliferation regime or to a multilateral confrontation between countries in the Middle East.

Much of this debate focuses on the relevance of the lessons of the only historical example of rivalry between nuclear powers – the Cold War between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Some invoke the experience of that era to argue that a polynuclear Middle East can still be averted by extended assurances by the United States or NATO to their allies in the region, or that a nuclear Middle East may even provide the foundation for stability based on a Middle Eastern version of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).(1)

According to this line of thought, the very possession of nuclear weapons tempers military adventurism and inculcates a degree of strategic responsibility commensurate with the grave consequences that would result from nuclear conflict. This point of view refers to the fears that permeated the Western military establishments of a nuclear China and the fact that a nuclear Indian subcontinent did not result in nuclear war, despite mutual hostility and frequent outbreaks of crisis. Others(2) emphasize the differences between the Cold War and a nuclear Middle East and point out that most of the characteristics of the Cold War that contributed to the fact that it did not escalate into nuclear crisis are conspicuously absent in the Middle East. Some even challenge the conventional wisdom regarding the history of the Cold War and the causes for its propitious outcome, arguing that the Cold War era was far less stable than it appeared to be, that it was not the very nature of the nuclear weapons which averted confrontation but other factors, and that cultural differences, absent or different in the Middle East, played a critical role in the behavior of the parties to that conflict.

This debate coincides with a reexamination by the United States and its NATO allies of the very fundamentals of the doctrine of deterrence. The policy documents published over the last year by the Obama administration(3) indicate that it believes in the efficacy of traditional Cold War deterrence as the remedy to the challenge of rogue states acquiring nuclear weapons. Moreover, these

documents indicate that the key to deterrence should not be punishment (which was a key building block of MAD)(4) but, rather, denial.

This preference does not seem to be based on a sound strategic analysis of the efficacy of such deterrence but on the desire to project a purely defensive posture. Another assumption emerging from the administration's policy statements is that the Iranian regime is "rational" and hence deterrable.

This analysis challenges a number of fallacies inherent in these assumptions: the fallacy that deterrence doctrine may be applied equally toward adversaries of fundamentally different cultural, structural, and political features; the fallacy that possession of nuclear weapons dictates, *ipso facto*, a sense of responsibility and a need to put safeguards in place against unintended use; the non-distinction between bilateral and multilateral deterrence; the disregard of the implications of religion – particularly of Islamic concepts of war – for application of deterrence; and the implications of different paradigms of command and control than those that existed in the Cold War nuclear powers.

The fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt and the potential spillover of political unrest into other countries in the Middle East have strengthened Iran's hand in the region and made any forceful policy of dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions much more costly.

The argument which was frequently raised that the U.S. could prevent a polynuclear Middle East by assurances of extended deterrence to its allies is much less convincing in the light of the prospects of Egypt – one of the mainstays of American influence in the region – co-opting the Muslim Brotherhood into government and the possibility of regime change in countries in the Gulf such as Bahrain. The willingness of such new populist (and partially Islamist) regimes to rely on American assurances will be even less than that of their predecessors and their motivation to acquire the holy grail of a nuclear weapon will be greater. This situation is still in flux but must be in the back of our minds when addressing the issues discussed below.

The Myth of Cold War Stability

Deterrence doctrine during the Cold War was perceived, by and large, as a "one size fits all" doctrine based on a rational-actor model. As such, Cold War deterrence doctrine obfuscated cultural and religious factors that have a potentially far-reaching influence on the susceptibility of the target leadership to deterrence. In his analysis of the fallacies of Cold War deterrence, Keith Payne points out that the narrative of that era is anachronistic – colored by the fact that in the end nuclear war did not break out. It refers primarily to that part of the Cold War which followed the Cuban Missile Crisis, before the two superpowers developed the stockpiles and delivery systems for MAD and the command and control mechanism to prevent such a catastrophe, and ignores the evolution of the relationship between them in the first part of that era and the cases in which they came close to the brink of nuclear war.

In retrospect, the Cold War was far less stable than it seemed to be.⁽⁵⁾ The U.S. deployment in Western Europe and in the Middle East played a pivotal role in American deterrence vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the risk of nuclear war was far higher than the conventional wisdom indicates and, as mutual deterrence evolved, it provided an "umbrella" for conventional and low-intensity conflicts. Furthermore, while the leaderships of the United States and the Soviet Union did make most decisions on the basis of a cost-benefit calculus and compatibility between goals and courses of action, their perception of reality (the "data set") on which the rational process was applied was deeply influenced by cultural perceptions. In many cases, the decision of adversaries to back down from conflict was not due to the deterrent signals that the other side transmitted (these were frequently not even received or were misinterpreted) but to other factors that the adversary was not even aware of.⁽⁶⁾

Ultimately, the doctrines of strategic decision-making (on deployment and use of nuclear weapons) of both the U.S. and the Soviet Union were rationalist, centralist, and neutralized from populist considerations and public pressures. Never during the Cold War did either superpower initiate a nuclear crisis for domestic consumption. To assume that this precedent will guide future nuclear rivalries between countries with different decision-making mechanisms would be naive.

One of the key lessons of the Cold War era and of the post-Cold War conflicts is, therefore, that the efficacy of a deterrent signal depends ultimately on the ability of the signal to penetrate filters of history, culture, language, ideological axioms, and social-psychological factors. To develop a doctrine of "tailored deterrence" it is necessary to understand these factors along with the psyche of the leadership of the party to be deterred, identification of the decision-makers with the interests which are threatened, and the dynamics of threat assessment within that leadership.

Iran and the Rational-Actor Model

Some analysts maintain that for the foreseeable future, Iran will not dare confront Israel with nuclear weapons in the light of the latter's quantitative and qualitative nuclear superiority and formidable missile defenses. It is argued that a nuclear Iran will be risk averse and hence deterrable.⁽⁷⁾ This is based on the premise that "the Iranians are a rational people" and are not "suicidal" and that the ostensibly "irrational" apocalyptic Mahdivist elements are either projecting an image of irrationality as a means of deterrence or alternatively – to the extent that they believe in the narrative they profess – are effectively controlled by the rational "Supreme Leader" who represents a traditional risk-averse tradition. Some⁽⁸⁾ even argue that the ascendancy of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in itself bodes well for the prospective "rationality" of the regime, as the organization has material interests which it will strive to preserve, and hence will shy away from potentially devastating conflict.

Others, such as James M. Lindsay and Ray Takeyh,⁽⁹⁾ downplay the

implications of a nuclear Iran and argue that such an Iran can be contained by American statesmanship. Lindsay and Takeyh argue that the record of Iran has been pragmatic, that the regime prefers power to ideological purity, and that this pragmatism will continue to define it even after it acquires a nuclear weapon. The danger that Iran would use its proxies – first and foremost Hizbullah – to deliver nuclear weapons in order to maintain deniability is ruled out on the basis of historic precedent (Iran has not provided chemical weapons to its proxies). Similarly, the possibility of a cascade of regional proliferation resulting from a nuclear Iran is presented as not likely – again in the light of historic precedent in the Cold War. By minimizing this possibility, the authors free themselves from the need to examine a scenario of inadvertent nuclear confrontation between more than two nuclear powers.

However, proof by historic precedent is tenuous. The Middle East is not equivalent in terms of culture, politics, religion, and regime nature to Europe or East Asia. The primary fault of these two scholars, however, is the assumption that the U.S. can contain Iran by projection of deterrence. The constraints that they propose for American action in the face of a nuclear Iran leave very little room for credible deterrence: the U.S. should not impose crippling sanctions on the Iranian regime (as that would harm "Iran's disenfranchised citizenry") but should rather "improve export controls" – i.e., to close the stable door after the horse has bolted; it should refrain from expanding the sale of weaponry to the region and abstain from signing security pacts with the countries of the region. What will be left to assure America's allies (the ones that will remain) will be America's word of honor that it will provide extended deterrence to those countries – however, in the spirit of the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review Report (NPR) – not necessarily by retaliation for a nuclear attack with nuclear weapons.

This logic is fundamentally flawed. The cultural propensity of a people toward "rationality" does not determine the behavior of their autocratic leadership.⁽¹⁰⁾ Furthermore, the claims by President Ahmadinejad that he communicates with the Hidden Imam should be taken seriously.⁽¹¹⁾ Since such a claim is so patently unorthodox and politically counterproductive for his relations with the ayatollahs in Qom, it should be seen in the context of an ideology purportedly⁽¹²⁾ held by key elements within the IRGC and the Basij (the popular Islamic militia), according to which by confronting the enemies of the Hidden Imam, his believers can induce the apocalypse and hasten his advent. Even if Ahmadinejad himself has doubts regarding the real nature of the epiphany that he has experienced, the claim that he has received "extended assurances" from Heaven can seriously constrain his capacity to retreat from potential conflict. Anticipation of the appearance of the Mahdi who will fight on the side of Allah's soldiers – if only they show themselves worthy of Him by proving that they rely only on divine provenance – heightens the risk. Even without going as far as imputing apocalyptic goals to regional leaders, it may be argued that their domestic posturing as believing in such goals or in claiming divine protection from any devastating reprisal from the enemy will feed the potential for escalation.

On the other hand, to assume the restraining authority of the Supreme Leader is

also flawed. Khamenei's authority has eroded since Ahmadinejad's election and we should expect further degrading of the Supreme Leader's status after his death. The regime has become increasingly dominated by the IRGC – a development which manifests itself in all three centers of power: the Supreme Leader's office (now effectively staffed by senior IRGC officers who serve as information filters for the Supreme Leader); the presidential office, staffed predominantly by former Basij (the "popular militia" now integrated into the IRGC) officers; and the IRGC itself with both its military and economic arms. The Bazaar and even the clerical elite in Qom have become less and less central for the regime. The weight of decision-making in the Iranian regime will continue to shift from the Supreme Leader to the IRGC for the foreseeable future.

Another argument in favor of assuming that Iran will behave according to a rational-actor model is that the ascendancy of the IRGC as the main power broker is actually a blessing in disguise. This hope is based on the assumption that the IRGC's growing economic interests will make it more concerned about stability and hence more "rational" and more susceptible to deterrence. True, the IRGC has a wide range of material interests. However, the dynamics of decision-making in that organization tends to be risk-prone and with a penchant for brinkmanship. There is no reason to assume that this will change when Iranian self-confidence is bolstered by a nuclear capability. Furthermore, the IRGC itself is the embodiment of the revolutionary nature of the Iranian regime.

In addition, the Iranian regime is, by its own admission, in favor of revolution and against the status quo in the region. Since its inception, it has been committed to "propagation of Islam" (*tablighi eslami*) and "export of revolution" (*sudur inqilab*). The former is viewed by the regime as a fundamental Islamic duty and the latter as a prime tenet of the regime's ideology, enshrined in the constitution and the works of the Imam Khomeini. Together they form a worldview that sees Islamic Iran as a nation with a "manifest destiny": to lead the Muslim world and to become a predominant regional "superpower" in the Gulf, the heart of the Arab world, and in Central Asia. While the claim that the Iranian regime will moderate its goals after it acquires nuclear weapons (due to the sense of enormity of the destructive capacity of those weapons) cannot be summarily disproven, it may be argued that it does not reflect earlier experience with the Iranian regime and that the cost of it being tested and failing would be too high.

Another argument is that the use of nuclear weapons has been declared "illegal" by the supreme authorities of Iranian Islam. While traditional Shiite scholars have expressed reservations regarding the Islamic legality of use of nuclear weapons, those ayatollahs who are considered close to the regime – and particularly to the IRGC – have indicated that Islamic law may justify the acquisition and even use of nuclear weapons.⁽¹³⁾ The claim that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei had issued a fatwa declaring the use of nuclear weapons "*haram*" – forbidden by Islamic law – has never been substantiated. This constructive ambiguity leaves the regime the option to justify the brandishing and use of nuclear weapons if the occasion arises. On the other hand, there has been increasing support for acquisition of nuclear weapons and even justification of their use by clerics

associated with Ahmadinejad.(14)

The Iranian regime has a history of initiating crises with its neighbors for domestic purposes or because of "one-upmanship" and struggles between different foci of power. Even assuming the underlying "rationality" of each of the components of the regime – the Supreme Leader, the IRGC, and the clerical hierarchy in Qom – the sum of those parts may not necessarily yield a "rational" decision-making process. The extension of Iranian missile range will play a part in encouraging Iranian brinkmanship in the region, thinking that a nonconventional missile capability that extends to Western Europe would be a sufficient deterrent against Western responses to its regional policies. It is not difficult to imagine scenarios in which Iran brandishes its nuclear weapons in an effort to impose reduced oil production on its Arab neighbors, increases its subversion of Gulf states under the cover of a nuclear umbrella, or steps up its destabilization of Lebanon under that cover. There is no guarantee that such brinkmanship will not ultimately escalate into nuclear confrontation.

Another factor which raises doubts about the validity of the rational-actor model in the case of Iran is the centrality of the ethos of martyrdom for the Iranian regime, which may well contribute to escalatory rhetoric and action through subversion and even conventional military action. Religion and nationalistic fervor have contributed in the past to a predilection by the Iranian regime for brinkmanship and for perseverance in conflicts despite rational considerations against such behavior. A case in point is the continuation of the Iraq-Iran war of the 1980s with enormous costs in human lives and material due to Khomeini's insistence that the elimination of Saddam Hussein was a religious duty and that the war could not end without achieving that goal. There are no grounds to believe that the possession of nuclear weapons will fundamentally change these patterns of behavior.

Finally, Iran's nuclear status may not remain under exclusive Iranian control. Weapons of mass destruction may filter down to Iranian surrogates and proxies such as Hizbullah, Hamas, and others. The argument that no nuclear power has ever provided nuclear weapons to a nonstate proxy is not one that can guide us. The very weakness of the Iranian nuclear posture in its initial stage (a small arsenal, a fear that its few weapons may not penetrate Israel's defenses, and even if they do, the absence of a capability for a retaliatory strike if Israel does succeed in striking Iran) may lead the Iranian leadership – quite rationally – to develop a strategy of "forward deployment" of nuclear weapons with its proxies in Lebanon and alternative means of delivery that are not missile-based (by sea or small aircraft from Lebanon). The level of trust and symbiosis between Hizbullah and Iran would provide the Iranians with a level of comfort that no state has ever enjoyed with a proxy nonstate organization.

The Shape of the Polynuclear Middle East

Along with the question of Iran's own behavior as a nuclear power, we should ask whether a polynuclear Middle East could be avoided in the wake of Iran's

acquisition of nuclear weapons. The answer to this question seems to be clearly negative. Failure to prevent Iran from nearing the nuclear threshold will undoubtedly intensify the drive of other states in the region for nuclear weapons. An Iranian bomb would be perceived in the Sunni Arab world as an Iranian (i.e., anti-Arab) and Shiite (i.e., anti-Sunni) capability. Furthermore, the increased demand for nuclear materials and know-how in the Middle East will probably encourage potential suppliers – first and foremost Pakistan and North Korea. The possibility of a "meltdown" in these countries may bring the elements responsible for the nuclear program to enter the market. Increased demand may even bring Chinese and Russian companies back into the market as well. Increased supply will most likely induce additional demand, with countries in the Middle East and other regions speeding up their nuclear programs to take advantage of what this market has to offer.

An argument heard frequently is that the neighbors of Communist China in the 1950s were similarly motivated to acquire a nuclear capability as a counterbalance to that of Beijing, but they were persuaded not to go down that path by American assurances of extended deterrence. This logic leads some to believe that such an offer to the countries of the Middle East may stem the tide of proliferation in that region. Indeed, such a suggestion was even raised openly by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. This suggestion ignores the damage that the credibility of such guarantees will have sustained after the U.S. has failed to prevent Iran from going nuclear and the decline in American stature in the region after the withdrawal from Iraq. Difficulties will come both from domestic American considerations and from domestic pressures in the region, with America's allies facing Iranian-led and Islamist opposition to close security relations with the U.S.

The initial countries which will attempt to acquire a military nuclear capability would include: Saudi Arabia (which will probably exploit its links to Pakistan or attempt to purchase a "turnkey" capability from other sources); Turkey (particularly if its relations with the EU and NATO continue to deteriorate); Egypt (which would view itself as the champion of the Sunni Arab world against the nuclear threat of Shiite Iran, even under a regime dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, which would add the need for a counter-balance to Israel to its motivations); Iraq (which will have to start from scratch in terms of hardware but has the human capital for a new nuclear program); Syria (which almost succeeded in clandestinely constructing a nuclear reactor acquired covertly from North Korea, obviously intended for the production of weapons-grade plutonium for a nuclear weapons program, and may do so again in the future); Libya and, in its path, other North African countries (Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco).

How Will the Nuclear Middle East Function?

So how will this polynuclear Middle East function? Although the answer is not clear, we may say with a high level of certainty that it will not look like the latter years of the Cold War. The religious and political drivers that will determine nuclear decision-making in the countries of the region will preclude integration of

many of the checks and balances which evolved between the superpowers in the Cold War era.

A principal difference between the two cases derives from the multipolar nature of the region and the size of the nuclear arsenals. Mutual deterrence in the Cold War was facilitated by the fact that each party to the conflict knew that the other party was virtually the sole possible origin of a nuclear attack. However, this will not be the case in the Middle East. The existence of a number of mutually hostile nuclear states will create ambiguity regarding the source of any threat, and hence the target for reprisal. Nuclear alerts or actual launching of weapons by one party will not be interpreted only by the party it was intended for but by all other parties.

At the same time, a key ingredient of the Cold War that prevented escalation to nuclear war – MAD – will be absent from the Middle East for some time to come. For the foreseeable future, none of the nuclear states in the Middle East will possess a capability for total destruction of any – and certainly not all – its adversaries. Hence the "cost" of nuclear war in the region will be less than was perceived in the Cold War. For some time to come, the new nuclear powers will also lack a credible second-strike capability based on a large-enough stockpile of nuclear weapons and the ability to protect them from a first strike. Therefore, even if a regional nuclear power were able to retaliate effectively against one adversary, there would remain the possibility of retaliation by one of the allies of the attacked country. This will increase the inclination of a country, which sees itself threatened, to deliver the first strike.

Another key difference lies in the injection of populist considerations in the deployment and use of nuclear weapons. In all the nuclear states of the Cold War era, there was little or no public involvement in the formulation and implementation of nuclear strategy. To the extent that public input existed (for example, in public fear of nuclear war in the United States or in the campaign of the Church of England against a British policy of nuclear deterrence),(15) it was limited and was always on the side of caution. The ability of the American and Soviet leaderships to make decisions on strategic issues with minimal domestic input was much greater than that of the regimes in the Middle East. The leaders of both countries identified with their constituent populations enough so that they could be deterred by "counter-population" and "counter-value" threats.

The most powerful driver, however, which has the potential to impel the region to nuclear war, is religion. Islam plays a pivotal role in the political culture of the Middle East. Belief in divine intervention may counterbalance the strategic advantage of the enemy, fostering a cost-benefit calculus in which the reward for obedience to divine will and the punishment for disobedience – both in the hereafter – will transcend any earthly punishment that the enemy can inflict. Both Sunni and Shiite traditions of Jihad view the willingness to challenge superior force as an exemplary deed.(16) In Shiite Islam, this is augmented by the idealization of suffering and martyrdom as exemplified in the martyrology of Ali and his sons. Thus, discretion becomes a breach of faith and not "the better part of valor." In the case that a leader – such as Ahmadinejad – truly believes that he

can evoke divine intervention by challenging superior force, he will surely be less susceptible to deterrence. However, even if he does not personally expect divine intervention, the very indoctrination of the military leaders and the rank and file in this spirit is a potent anti-deterrent.

Another important aspect is the absence of a religious taboo in Islam on the use of nuclear weapons. While the public discourse in the Middle East perceives nuclear weapons as a means that will allow their owner to deter its enemies by threat of total annihilation, it does not reflect the sense of a "taboo" on the actual use of nuclear weapons that developed in the international community. This is particularly evident in Islamic writings – both Jihadi-Salafi and mainstream – which tend to analyze nuclear weapons as extrapolations of weapons which existed in the early days of Islam and were permitted by the Prophet, so that their use is permissible.

Because of the absence of MAD, a nuclear attack may be perceived as survivable, especially if such a notion were to be legitimized by religious edict. Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes with an "*apres moi le deluge*" mentality may choose to predelegate authority to particularly loyal, predesignated, trusted field commanders in case of decapitation of the leadership. Such behavior may also be compatible with a leader or regime that has a strong apocalyptic, or messianic, belief, and views such action not merely as revenge but as possibly hastening the apocalyptic or messianic stage of history, and ultimate victory.

Political Structures and Command and Control

Even if we assume that the leaderships of the region will normally wish to avoid nuclear confrontation, the command and control (C2) capabilities in the region's regimes and military establishments raise serious problems. The factors that will influence the C2 paradigms of nuclear weapons in the Middle East include a wide range of political, military, bureaucratic, religious, and technological issues. The C2 paradigms that will evolve in the Middle East may not be able to cope with the hair-trigger situations that nuclear confrontations create.

Nascent nuclear powers in the Middle East will begin with different concepts of deployment, command and control. The Iranian motivation for acquisition of nuclear weapons is not only as a deterrent against its enemies but also as a means to achieve a hegemonic status in the region. To implement this, Iran will have to operationalize its nuclear capability into its day-to-day strategic posture. Such operationalization of nuclear assets will create a need for more elaborate models of C2. Other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, may view the weapons almost exclusively as deterrents, and hence to be stored away until extreme circumstances warrant their deployment. However, the attitude of one party toward its nuclear assets will affect that of its potential adversaries. Those states that may initially not opt for operationalization of the weapons may be forced to adopt a more operational (and hence more demanding in command, control, and communication, or C3, procedures) attitude as a response to the behavior of their neighbors.

In the light of recent events, special attention should be paid to the implications of a nuclear Muslim Brotherhood-ruled Egypt. If the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) rules Egypt, it will move to acquire military nuclear capabilities. This would be especially true if Iran, and perhaps other states following Iran, appear to be aspiring to a nuclear weapons capability, including Saudi Arabia, or a post-Saudi regime in Arabia, or perhaps Turkey. The Muslim Brotherhood will view this as the implementation of an explicit divine instruction for Muslims to possess all the means required to deter their enemies. In addition, it will consider the possession of such capabilities as the guarantor of its survival in power, deterring external forces from seeking to topple it. Committed to the liquidation of Israel, it will see the possession of nuclear weapons as putting it in a position to abrogate the peace treaty with the Jewish state and to threaten the latter with conventional military action, under the protection of a nuclear "equalizer" that might be perceived to negate any Israeli deterrence in this regard, or even use nuclear weapons if they come to be perceived as valid instruments in the surge towards victory over "infidel" forces of one kind or another. In this sense, an ideologically religious, fundamentalist Egypt would bear some striking similarities to an ideologically radical Iran with nuclear weapons, where vast geographic, demographic and natural resource reserves could lead a strongly willed anti-status-quo leadership to launch nuclear weapons in the belief that it could still prevail in a nuclear exchange, while absorbing relatively high attrition rates, which other, less populated or smaller states in the region could not. Religious fervor and commitment, while not necessarily being irrational per se, could in this sense contribute to nuclear blows by miscalculation, rather than by premeditated design.

Command and Control paradigms that will emerge in the region will probably be closer to the early – and unstable - structures of the veteran nuclear powers, with adaptations for regional cultural, political, and religious idiosyncrasies, and will not necessarily reflect the accumulated lessons of those powers. Furthermore, the suspicion toward the West in the region is likely to bring its actors to reject solutions that are based on "off the shelf" Western technology, and to try to develop local solutions, which will be, initially at least, less sophisticated.

In contrast to the Western system of delegation of authority and decentralization of information on a need-to-know basis, we will probably encounter in the Middle East a more individualized chain of command consisting of fewer, but highly loyal and trusted, individuals, with less compartmentalization between them. It is highly unlikely that any of the regimes in the region will adopt procedures for verification of the orders of the head of government (by deputies or ministers). In regimes such as the Iranian or future Jihadi-Salafi ones in which the leader is perceived as inspired by Allah (the Sunni concept of *Amir al-Muminin* – Commander of the Believers, or the Iranian doctrine of *Vali-Faqih* – Supreme Leader), restriction of his discretion by a lesser individual would be tantamount to imposing restrictions on the will of Allah. Even the argument that the verification is not meant for regular situations but for contingencies during which the leader may be incapacitated, for any reason, would be difficult to support in these regimes.

Research and development (R&D) establishments in the Middle East are also liable to play a role in the decision-making processes even after completing development of the weapons, similar to that of A. Q. Khan in Pakistan. Since these are usually linked to military organizations, they may emerge as "back doors" to the C3 system for the weapons they devised. Thus, these organizations may become "loose cannons" in scenarios of breakdown of the states. Nuclear weapons may filter down to nonstate entities in such a scenario in two ways: to any of a plethora of quasi-states with differing levels of control (Kurdistan, Palestinian Authority), terrorist organizations (al-Qaeda, Hamas, Islamic Jihad), and rival ethnic groups for whom the acquisition of nuclear weapons by a hostile state would be an incentive to acquire at least a limited WMD capability; and to "proxy" or "surrogate" terrorist groups (such as Hizbullah). The Cold War experience that nuclear powers did not transfer nuclear weapons or technology to their allies or proxies would not apply. The break in the dam-gates of proliferation would make it easier for those entities to acquire the weapons, and the states may have an interest in providing them to keep control over their own proxies.

Conclusion

A nuclear Middle East will be very different from the Cold War in a wide range of aspects. True, we may safely assume that the leaders and peoples of the region have no desire to be the targets of nuclear weapons. However, the inherent instability of the region and its regimes, the difficulty in managing multilateral nuclear tensions, the weight of religious, emotional, and internal pressures, and the proclivity of many of the regimes in the region toward military adventurism and brinkmanship do not bode well for the future of this region once it enters the nuclear age. Nuclear war need not erupt as a result of a conscious decision by a leadership to use nuclear weapons. It is more likely to result from escalation scenarios, misinterpretation of intentions of the other side due to poor intelligence and lack of communication between antagonists, inadvertent use, poor command and control constraints, and underestimation of the other party's response to nuclear brinkmanship. Such behavior in a polynuclear environment would be tantamount to lighting a match in a gas depot.

The countries of the region will probably be more predisposed than the Cold War protagonists to brandish their nuclear weapons not only rhetorically but through nuclear alerts or nuclear tests in order to deter their enemies, leading to situations of multilateral nuclear escalation. Once one country has taken such measures, the other nuclear countries of the region would probably feel forced to adopt defensive measures, and multilateral escalation will result. However, such multilateral escalation will not be mitigated by Cold War-type hotlines and means of signaling, and none of the parties involved will have escalation dominance. This and the absence of a credible second-strike capability may well strengthen the tendency to opt for a first strike.

Notes

1. Among them Kenneth Waltz: "Adversary states that acquire them are thereby made more cautious in their dealings with each other....The like lihood of war decreases as deterrent and defensive capabilities increase. Nuclear weapons, responsibly used, make wars hard to start. Nations that have nuclear weapons have strong incentives to use them responsibly. These statements hold for small as for big nuclear powers. Because they do, the measured spread of nuclear weapons is more to be welcomed than feared." Kenneth Waltz, "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981). Thomas Schelling has also suggested that ultimately Cold War logic will prevail in a polynuclear situation as well. See also Anthony H. Cordesman, "Iran, Israel, and Nuclear War," PowerPoint presentation, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), November 19, 2007.
2. See Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).
3. The administration issued six major policy documents from February 1 to May 29, 2010: (1) the Quadrennial Defense Review Report (QDR); (2) the Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report (BMDR), both issued on February 1; (3) the Nuclear Posture Review Report (NPR), issued on April 6; (4) the New START Treaty signed by the presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation (Prague, April 8); (5) the Washington Nuclear Summit Conference declaration, issued on April 12; (6) and the National Security Strategy for 2010, issued on May 29.
4. The Nuclear Posture Review states for the first time that the U.S. will respond to use of nuclear weapons against its allies "not necessarily with nuclear weapons."
5. See Bruce Blair, *The Logic of Accidental Nuclear War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1993).
6. Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky 2001); Keith B. Payne, *Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).
7. For example, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Fareed Zakaria, *Newsweek*, October 3, 2009; *Washington Post*, February 22, 2010.
8. Fareed Zakaria, *Newsweek*, October 3, 2009.
9. James M. Lindsay and Ray Takeyh, "After Iran Gets the Bomb – Containment and Its Complications," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 2, April-May 2010, pp. 33-50.
10. Germany during the Third Reich is a case in point. Former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara noted regarding the Cuban missile crisis: "It was luck that prevented nuclear war. We came that close to nuclear war at the end. Rational individuals: Kennedy was rational; Khrushchev was rational; Castro was rational. Rational individuals came that close to total destruction of their societies. And that danger exists today." Robert McNamara, "The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara," transcript, http://www.errolmorris.com/film/fow_transcript.html.
11. We may make a comparison, *mutatis mutandis*, with the assumption before 1939 that Hitler was a "rational man" with whom one could do business and his claim to be guided by his "provenance" (*Vorsehung*), which brought him to override the decisions of his generals – and contributed greatly to his downfall.
12. The extent to which various ayatollahs associated with the IRGC have adopted a "Mahdivi" ideology is debated. There is no doubt, however, that the centrality of the Mahdi in the IRGC's ideology is much greater than in traditional Shiite doctrine or even in Khomeini's doctrine, which founded *Vilayat e Faqih* on the grounds of the occultation of the Imam.
13. Shmuel Bar, "Iranian Defense Doctrine and Decision Making," Institute for Policy and Strategy, October 2004, 51.

14. In April 2006 one of the prominent disciples of Ayatollah Misbah e Yazdi (the spiritual leader of many of the IRGC leaders), Hojat al-Islam Mohsen Gharavian, ruled that the use of nuclear weapons is legal in Islam as "One must say that when the entire world is armed with nuclear weapons, it is only natural that, as a counter-measure, it is necessary to be able to use these weapons. However, what is important is what goal they may be used for." Safa Haeri and Shahram Rafizadeh, "Iranian Cleric Okays Use of Nuclear Weapons," Iran Press Service, February 20, 2006, http://www.iran-press-service.com/ips/articles-2006/february-2006/iran_nuke_20206.shtml. Other clerics who have been rumored to approve use of nuclear weapons include Misbah e Yazdi himself, Ayatollah Janati, Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi, Ayatollah Mohammad Fazel Lankarani, Ayatollah Lotfollah Safi Golpaygani, and Ayatollah Javad Tabrizi.

15. The Church of England published a report in 1982 entitled "The Church and the Bomb." A significant portion of it focused on the morality of nuclear deterrence, asking whether the prevention of the ultimate immorality of the actual use of nuclear weapons justifies the lesser immorality of the threat of using them in order to deter their use. The report determined that first use of nuclear weapons is, by definition, morally unacceptable, and that a strategy of deterrence based on the possession of nuclear weapons is totally immoral. However, the report avoided the question of whether, if nuclear conflict and mass destruction of human life were to be the probable alternative to a strategy of deterrence based on the possession of nuclear weapons, the latter may not be the lesser evil. David Martin and Peter Mullen (eds.), *Unholy Warfare: The Church and the Bomb* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 173-177, 181-182, 214.

16. Surat al-Anfal, verse 65: "O Prophet! Rouse the believers, to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred; if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the unbelievers: for these are a people without understanding."

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Other Iranian Military Capabilities



Behind a poster of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reading: "Missile maneuver of the Great Prophet," Iran's Revolutionary Guards tests the long-range Shahab-3 missile in 2006. (AP Photo/Mehr News Agency, Sajjad Safari)

New Developments in Iran's Missile Capabilities:

Implications Beyond the Middle East

(August 2009)

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- Iran is vigorously pursuing several missile and space programs at an almost feverish pace with impressive achievements. The Iranians have upgraded their ballistic missiles to become satellite launchers. To orbit a satellite is a highly sophisticated endeavor. It requires proficiency in stage separation and advanced guidance and control systems to insert the satellite into a stable, desired trajectory. They took the Shahab, extended it a bit, added a new lightweight second stage, and now they have the Safir space launch vehicle. The very capability to build a two-stage satellite launcher, rather than the usual three-stage rockets for space-lift vehicles, is quite remarkable by itself – an impressive engineering achievement.
- In spite of the Missile Technology Control Regime and in the face of sanctions, Iran has succeeded in acquiring the needed infrastructure and to raise a cadre of proficient scientists and engineers backed by academic research institutes. Iranian missile technology now seems to be more advanced than that of North Korea.
- The solid-propellant Sejil missile signifies a technological and strategic breakthrough. This missile already poses a threat to a number of European Union countries. Based on its demonstrated achievements in solid propulsion and staging, Iran will face no significant hurdle in upscaling the Sejil into a compact, survivable intermediate-range ballistic missile. A range of 3,600 km. will be sufficient to put most of the EU under threat.
- Contrary to a recent report by U.S. and Russian scientists published by the EastWest Institute in Washington, D.C., the solid-propellant technology demonstrated by the Sejil gives the Iranian a key for longer-range missiles that could be deployed in a survivable manner from Western Iran. The report claims that it will take the Iranians just six years to develop a nuclear warhead that could be carried by a ballistic missile. By that time the Iranians might already have the appropriate missiles to carry such warheads. The West would do well to start preparing its defenses right now.

Iran Invests in Nuclear and Missile Technology

The cumulative weight of Iranian missile development achievements in the last two years puts Iran's programs into a context which might be wider than the Middle East. Up to now, the Iranian programs could fit only a local scenario. However, recent developments may show not necessarily the intention but at least the capability of the Iranians to extend their missile program to potential targets beyond the Middle East.

The Iranians love to show their hardware in parades. They have two armed forces: the army and the Pasdaran, the Revolutionary Guard. The army holds its parade on April 22 every year, while the Pasdaran holds its parade in December. During the big parade the army held in 2008, they displayed guns and artillery, all of which had been purchased before 1979 during the time of the Shah. They showed a modern tank that they make in small numbers, but most were Soviet T55s, a tank from the 1950s. Obviously they are not investing much money in ground forces or in new armament.

During the air show, some 220 planes flew above Tehran, but, again, they were F5s made in America and bought during the Shah's time, Mirage F1s, and Iraqi aircraft which were flown to Iran during the Gulf War. There were F4 Phantoms, F14 Tomcats, and MIG 21s. The most modern fighter aircraft they flew was a MIG 29 from 1992.

So we see that the money is not being invested in the ground forces or in the air force. Where is the money going? It goes into nuclear technologies and missiles. They can make all the excuses in the world that everything is for peaceful purposes, but the fact is that Iran's biggest budgets are going to nuclear technology and missile technology.

Iran's Engineers Become More Advanced than North Koreans

In 1988 the Iranians had only Scud B and Scud C missiles. Ten years later they had their first operational Shahab III. The Iranians bought the Shahab, which has a range of 1,300 km., from North Korea, including the production line. We now see the Iranians building underground silos for the Shahab, to make it more survivable.

The Iranians are also now capable of taking an unguided rocket like the Zalzal – that Hizbullah also has – and turning it into a guided rocket with a range of 200 kilometers. This is an original Iranian project; we don't see it anywhere else.

They have also upgraded their ballistic missiles to become satellite launchers. To orbit a satellite is a very complicated project. There are missile stages, and a careful guidance and control system to insert the satellite into a stable, desired trajectory. They took the Shahab, extended it a bit, added more propellant, and now they have the Safir space launch vehicle. They launched it twice and the second time it was successful; for a while they had a test satellite in orbit. They built a two-stage satellite launcher with a very elegant upper stage, incomparable

to anything we know – an impressive engineering achievement.

Up to now, North Korea has been the fountainhead of technology to Iran. In the 1990s and the early 2000s we saw the North Korean No-dong missile appearing in Iran, as well as the Shahab II and Shahab III, which in North Korea are called the Wassong V and Wassong VI. The Scud is a North Korean invention which was also exported to Iran. But looking at April's North Korean satellite launch attempt, they used a satellite launcher that looks nothing like what we see in Iran. It was completely different, much bigger and heavier, and with three stages.

This means that the connection between Iranian and North Korean technology is not that tight anymore, and the pupils are now the teachers. The Iranians have reached a level of proficiency which has disconnected them from North Korea and in some cases they are more advanced than the North Koreans. The Iranians are now going to deploy a missile which is nothing like what the North Koreans have, so a connection may now be the other way around. Start watching Iran not as a market for North Korean merchandise but as an exporter of Iranian missile technologies.

Iranian Breakthrough: A Solid Fuel Missile

On May 19, 2009, the EastWest Institute issued a report entitled *Iran's Nuclear and Missile Potential: A Joint Threat Assessment by U.S. and Russian Technical Experts*, claiming that "There is no reliable information at the present on the state of Iran's efforts to develop solid propellant rocket motors." The next day, on May 20, the Iranians successfully fired a solid fuel Sejil rocket. Solid propellant leaves a trail of particles behind, while liquid propellant has transparent flames that don't leave any trail, so video reports of the launch are quite revealing.

What is also impressive here is the pace of development. In 2005 we heard for the first time about the coming of the Sejil. The first flight occurred thirty months after the end of development of the solid propellant motors. Iran's space program is even more impressive.

They have the engineers to understand what they are doing. They have the system engineers to engineer fixes and they have the program managers to run the whole program. They have demonstrated the ability to manufacture a 14-ton solid propellant rocket motor, and they have the infrastructure they need. To build such a rocket you need big, expensive installations. They are not available for sale, they are controlled by the Missile Technology Control Regime, but Iran has managed to acquire them. All this infrastructure is in Iran. Another point on the proficiency of their engineers: I received a list of Iranian technical publications from the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, all of them dealing with big solid propellant rocket motors.

The Iranians conducted six major tests of multi-stage missiles in eighteen months by two different teams from two different test ranges with all the instrumentation and flight control guidance system telemetry. When there is a challenge, they overcome the challenge.

Europe Coming into Iranian Missile Range

The Iranian defense minister has spoken of two missiles: the Kadr I that goes 2,000 km. and the Sejil that goes more than 2,000 km. Why is 2,000 km. significant? Less than 2,000 km. does not threaten Europe. Beyond that you are starting to threaten Europe.

Two weeks after the EastWest Institute report came out, Ted Postol of MIT, one of its authors, published an addendum to the report. Based on data he presented, our calculations show that the Sejil has an actual range of about 2,500 km. Such a range could reach Warsaw and, indeed, six European Union countries: Poland, Slovakia, Rumania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Greece. The Tabriz launch area in Iran is as big as Azerbaijan, bigger than Israel and half of Jordan. It's about 50,000 sq. km., full of mountains, valleys, and canyons. You can hide thousands of ballistic missiles there with a very high probability of survival. So the capability to make a survivable missile that can threaten Europe now exists in Iran.

Iran is vigorously pursuing several missile programs and a space program at a feverish rate. No one else, except the Chinese perhaps, is working at such a speed. In spite of all the sanctions, the Iranians have managed to acquire all the needed infrastructure to make advanced missiles and develop a technology cadre. They are building up technological universities. They have been in the business for twenty years.

The solid propellant Sejil is the watershed breakthrough. The Iranians have the technology right now to produce an intermediate range ballistic missile that can threaten Europe. Whether they do it or not involves the question of intention, but they are capable of doing it. The EastWest Institute report estimates that it will take Iran about six years to fit a nuclear warhead on a missile. If this is true, then the time to start missile defense in Europe is now. The fact that the Iranians are building that capability is something that should be brought to public view.

The distance from Iran to Israel remains the same no matter what missiles the Iranians develop. From an Israeli anti-missile defense perspective, the threat remains more or less the same, whether it's a Shahab III or a Sejil. But while the implications of Iran's continued missile development are not so great from an Israeli point of view, they may be quite significant for those who live beyond the Middle East.

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The Revolutionary Guards' Qods Force – Mission Accomplished!

(December 2011)

Michael Segall

In mid-October 2011 the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) uncovered a plan to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States. According to the charge sheet, Iran was behind the plot, and the operational body responsible for planning and carrying out the assassination attempt – by means of one of the Mexican drug cartels – was the Qods Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC-QF), which among other things handles special operations outside of Iran.

The revelation of the IRGC-QF's (including its senior figures') involvement (closely detailed in the indictment)(1) in an assassination plot on U.S. soil quickly made the IRGC-QF in particular, and Iran's involvement in international terror in general, a hot issue in Iran and to a lesser extent in the United States and Europe. The U.S. Treasury sanctioned the five individuals tied to the Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States including IRGC-QF Commander, Qasem Soleimani who "oversees the IRGC-QF officers who were involved in this plot. Soleimani was previously designated by the Treasury Department under E.O. 13382 based on his relationship to the IRGC. He was also designated in May 2011 pursuant to E.O. 13572, which targets human rights abuses in Syria, for his role as the Commander of the IRGC-QF, the primary conduit for Iran's support to the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate."

For the United States this was hardly the first encounter with the IRGC-QF. U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan pay a daily toll for the organization's activity and the assistance it provides, among other things via Lebanese Hizbullah, to the radical Shiite organizations in Iraq and to the Taliban in Afghanistan. Yet – even after the exposure of the pretentious plan to assassinate the Saudi ambassador, which also would have spelled harm to Americans in the vicinity of the attack – the U.S. administration continues to display forbearance toward Iran's terror activities in general and those of the IRGC-QF in particular. This despite the administration's awareness of the damage the IRGC-QF causes in America's main spheres of activity and to its vital and strategic interests in the region, particularly the attempts to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, cultivate Middle Eastern democracy, and stabilize Afghanistan. Yet the domestic Iranian discourse shows that the IRGC-QF stands to play a central role – especially when it comes to exporting the revolution – in the new shaping of the Middle Eastern order.

In the chapter on "State Sponsors of Terrorism" in the State Department's annual *Country Reports on Terrorism*, the IRGC-QF has steadily played a "starring" role for years. The 2011 report noted, among other things:

Designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism in 1984, Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism in 2010....Iran's Qods Force

provided training to the Taliban in Afghanistan....Since at least 2006, Iran has arranged arms shipments to select Taliban members, including small arms and associated ammunition, rocket propelled grenades, mortar rounds, 107mm rockets, and plastic explosives.

Despite [Iran's]pledge to support the stabilization of Iraq...[t]he Qods Force continued to supply Iraqi militants with Iranian-produced advanced rockets, sniper rifles, automatic weapons, and mortars that have killed Iraqi and Coalition Forces, as well as civilians. Iran was responsible for the increased lethality of some attacks on U.S. forces by providing militants with the capability to assemble explosives [explosively formed penetrators, EFPs] designed to defeat armored vehicles. The Qods Force, in concert with Lebanese Hezbollah, provided training outside of Iraq as well as advisors inside Iraq for Shia militants in the construction and use of sophisticated improvised explosive device technology and other advanced weaponry.(2)

The Mission: To Set Up Hizbullah Cells All Over the World

The IRGC is comprised of ground, air, navy, missile, Basij (volunteers), and Qods (Jerusalem) forces (the IRGC-QF). All military forces (army and IRCG) are subordinate to the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. As part of the growing domestic discourse on the IRGC-QF, the conservative Mashregh website (that describes itself as mobilized for soft warfare) quoted from Khamenei's words a short time after he took office in 1989 on the role and missions of the IRGC: the third mission (the first and the second being to defend the revolution domestically and externally), that of the IRGC-QF specifically, is to "set up Hizbullah cells all over the world as part of the...Islamic Revolution in the world." According to Khamenei, there is no doubt the IRGC will take part in this task: "we are not claiming that we will send our military forces to other places and intervene in the internal affairs of others, but rather that the Islamic Revolution is not without responsibility [and cannot remain indifferent] in the face of armed Hizbullah cells throughout the world."(3)

The IRGC-QF, which operates outside Iran's borders, is tasked with forging contacts with Islamic organizations and nonstate actors; and with recruiting them and providing them weapons, training, finances, and ideological indoctrination in camps in Iran and other venues such as Sudan, Lebanon, and Iraq. The IRGC-QF is the most important and effective tool of the Iranian leadership and decision-makers for exporting the revolution through subversive activity against moderate Arab regimes, along with high-profile terror attacks. To maintain plausible deniability, the IRGC-QF uses proxies – such as Lebanese Hizbullah, Hizbullah Hejaz, Hizbullah-Bahrain, and Palestinian secular (PFLP-GC) and Islamic (Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad) organizations – to carry out its missions. As noted, in the recent scheme to assassinate the Saudi ambassador the IRGC-QF headquarters tried to enlist the services of a Mexican drug cartel.

The IRGC-QF's operative wing is divided into specific "corps" for each country or

area. There are directorates for: Arabian Peninsula/Gulf states, Iraq, Lebanon, North Africa, Europe and North America, and so on. The IRGC-QF has covert sections in Iranian embassies, which are closed to most embassy staff. IRGC-QF operations are coordinated between the IRGC, the MOIS (the Ministry of Intelligence), and the Foreign Ministry (usually when an IRGC-QF operation is exposed and there is an urgent need to deny Iran's involvement).(4)

It should be stressed that the IRGC-QF has performed its mission faithfully and until recently stayed out of the spotlight and the international and local media. Despite Western and Arab intelligence agencies' awareness of the force's activity and attempts to curtail it, Iran as a state has never paid any political, economic or military price at all on this score. This has only bolstered its self-confidence as it continues to empower the IRGC-QF as an executive arm for special operations and meting out Iran's "punishments" all over the world.

Deterrence and Counterattack

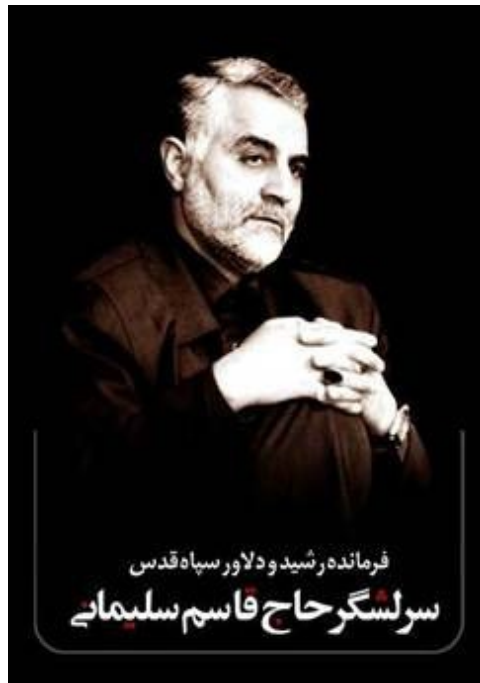
The present Iranian domestic discourse on the IRGC-QF comes after many years in which secrecy and a mystical halo surrounded the force and its commanders. The IRGC-QF acted beyond Iran's borders, assisted and trained terror organizations and Islamic groups that opposed the moderate (particularly North African) Arab regimes in various places in the world, built up Hizbullah's power in Lebanon, equipped Palestinian organizations with rockets and anti-tank missiles, and is responsible for continued shedding of American blood in Iraq and Afghanistan. The IRGC-QF was involved and, directly and indirectly, remains involved today in terror attacks throughout and beyond the Middle East against American, Arab, Israeli/Jewish, and other targets on orders from the Iranian leadership.

The growing publicity in Iran surrounding the IRGC-QF, the elite force of the IRGC, is not only a reaction to the exposure of its involvement in the plot on the Saudi ambassador's life. It also is part of Iran's wider strategic response to the changes in the regional and international arena and the intensification of military and political (involving sanctions) threats. Iran has boosted the power of the IRGC-QF and its leader, viewing them as part of the response to those looming threats. This pertains to both deterrence and the response to a possible attack. Khamenei's statement that Iran will respond to a strike in kind has aroused much interest in Iran. The IRGC-QF is supposed to hit back at "enemy" territory, both by itself and through proxies it has cultivated for years for the "moment of truth." Components of the IRGC-QF are also supposed to be included in Persian Gulf operations against the American fleet and in blockading the Strait of Hormuz.

"There's No Point Shooting a Corpse"

Since the IRGC-QF's activity on U.S. soil was revealed, and in light of recent proposals by several U.S. security officials to assassinate senior IRGC-QF figures including its commander Qasem Suleimani, Iran has directed

unprecedented media and public attention to the force's missions, targets, and commanders. The suggestions to assassinate IRGC-QF leaders have also prompted disdainful responses and harsh threats. The Basij commander, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naghdi averred that should the United States assassinate such persons we will not draw our weapons against them "because there is no point shooting a dead corpse." (5) The mouthpiece of the IRGC-QF, Sobhe Sadeqh, asserted that those who speak of assassinating the force's commanders "are not mentally healthy" and that U.S. policy in the region is in "no man's land." (6) Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the IRGC aerospace force commander, advised U.S. army chiefs that "you must not forget that there is a large presence of American commanders in Afghanistan, Iraq, and countries of the region. If you kill one of us, we will kill dozens of you.... [You] threaten a fish in the sea? Even after the Iran-Iraq War you do not understand that our commanders continue to live with the sweet taste of martyrdom and are always prepared to embrace death in the way of God?" (7) The conservative newspaper Javan wrote that Suleimani's pronounced capacity "to achieve victory without using military force accounts for the accusations that have been leveled against him and Iran and the great apprehension on the part of the West." (8)



IRGC-QF commander Qasem Suleimani, terror mastermind

The "Golden Age" of Exporting the Revolution

The "Arab Spring," or "Islamic awakening" as Iran calls it, has put the export of the Islamic Revolution – and hence the IRGC-QF – at the center of Iran's

concerns. Tehran is trying to translate the changes in the Middle East into achievements, particularly when it comes to spearheading the Islamist agenda. This entails a recurrent emphasis, including by senior Iranian figures, that the "Islamic awakening" has been influenced by the Iranian Revolution and, even more, by Iran's steadfastness against the West in protecting this efflorescence for more than a year.

The fall of the pro-American regimes in Egypt and Tunisia, along with the upheavals in some of the Gulf states, have led Iran to activate the IRGC-QF all the more, and with it the Iranian propaganda network – particularly its Arabic TV channel *Al-Alam* that is directed at the Arab-Islamic street. The aim is to consolidate achievements in those Arab states that have been "liberated from the yoke of the West and capitalism" while renewing ties with the Islamic organizations that, with the help of Lebanese Hizbullah, Iran has clandestinely supported. These include Ennahda in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan, and others.

The newspaper *Kayhan*, which is close to Khamenei and generally reflects his positions, addressed precisely this topic, particularly – and in an unprecedented manner – the activity of the IRGC-QF over the years and the source of its power. The article is worth quoting at length as it illuminates the rationale that guides the Iranian leadership in these days of "Islamic awakening" and weakening American and Western influence in the region (not least the departure from Iraq, the likely course of events in Afghanistan, and the fall of Mubarak).(9) For example:

In various spheres of activity in the Middle East, from Lebanon to the Palestinian territories, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the United States' concern with the IRGC-QF in general and its commander Qasem Suleimani in particular has been disclosed all at once, but without doubt it did not emerge all at once. For over a decade the Americans have feared the IRGC-QF...ever since the United States conquered Iraq and Afghanistan and entered the region, it has tasted more than ever the taste of conflict with the IRGC-QF in the most profound and tangible sense possible.

Kayhan also asserts that

America's appreciation of Iran's regional power is based mainly, and perhaps exclusively, on its [bitter] experience of encounters with the IRGC-QF. When about a decade ago the Americans decided on a massive military presence in the region...they thought the Middle East was an open expanse with no competitors; yet now they understand well and realistically their operational, intelligence, and political limitations and have no choice left but to pack their bags and leave the region.

Kayhan continues in this defiant vein:

While many may not be aware of it, the important truth is that the IRGC-QF and its commander Qasem Suleimani have personally

played the most important role in deflating the American war machine in the Middle East....They cannot understand what the IRGC-QF is, how it operates, and what goals it has set for itself....Whatever the American view, the IRGC-QF is in fact more than a tangible, operational force; it is an ideology, an ideology that does not recognize borders, a doctrine that includes terms and beliefs that exist in direct confrontation with Western culture. If the Americans want to understand why the IRGC-QF is so powerful and successful, they will have to put aside their "James Bond"-type assessments and think about the ideological underpinnings of this force:

- **The power of revolutionary Islam:** The fear driving the Americans to leave Muslim soil forever is not the fear of the missiles of Hamas or the guerrilla fighters of Hizbullah, but fear of the ideology that was embraced by 30 Hizbullah fighters in the village of Ayta al-Shaab in Lebanon during 33 days of siege. When the Americans understand the secret of this steadfastness, they will also appreciate the power of the IRGC-QF, of Qasem Suleimani, and of Hasan Nasrallah.
- **Its profound bitterness toward Israel (the "occupying and criminal regime"):** The struggle against Israel and, concomitantly, against everything connected to the United States in the region is the main engine of revolutionary Islam in the area. This is a point White House leaders have never understood as Islamic revolutions erupt in the region. The uniqueness of the IRGC-QF lies in the fact that, during all those years when the United States thought the presidents of Egypt and Tunisia and the king of Saudi Arabia were keeping the region under American control and making it a safe place for Israel, it was the IRGC-QF that kept alive the glowing ember of the struggle against the Zionists in the hearts of the believers, fanning it day by day until the flames of the fire blazed and now are burning the Americans in the region.
- **Fear of the spread of the paradigm of the Islamic Revolution:** The United States has understood that the return of political Islam to the region will ultimately foment the spread of the model of the Iranian Revolution....The IRGC-QF is indeed arming the warriors of the region – but not with weapons, rather with an ideology that is a thousand times more potent than any weapon. Qasem Suleimani has not provided weapons to anyone in the region; there is no need for it, since he has taught the warriors of the region how to think in order to strike the body of imperialism....The fear of the IRGC-QF is the fear of the loss of the significance of the borders. The IRGC-QF has taught the believers to fight the enemy on his home turf.

Martyrdom

Qasem Suleimani is not only commander of the IRGC-QF but also a very close associate of Khamenei. He is also emerging as one of the candidates for the

presidency of Iran, and his media prominence in recent weeks may be intended to serve that purpose. Recently in the framework of "Basij Week," Suleimani gave a programmatic speech in which he disclosed his worldview and his assessments of developments in the region.⁽¹⁰⁾ The speech constitutes a sort of direct continuation of the *Kayhan* article and others in that spirit; it attests that an overall situation assessment has been made in Iran regarding the threats confronting it and the options available, and that it was decided to adopt a uniform propagandistic line. That line stresses the ideological role of the IRGC-QF while obscuring its (proven) military involvement in various parts of the world.

Suleimani, who usually distances himself from the media and the public eye, said that the recent threats on his life reflect the Americans' lack of understanding of the culture of the Basij and *shahada* (martyrdom); the Americans and the West, he claimed, still fail to grasp that martyrdom is every Basij member's ideal. Thus no one fears threats; they only bolster one's resolve. Suleimani asserted that the United States' threats against Iran "stem from the mistaken assessments of the enemy who still does not understand that it is impossible to threaten the Iranian people....Every time one breaks the bottle it becomes sharper." Suleimani, who is entrusted to carry out the policy of exporting the revolution and molding the transformation of the Middle East to fit Iran's worldview, stated that "the Islamic awakening is a voice that you [i.e., Iran's enemies] do not hear, and you must know that the United States does not just face one Iran but rather tens of countries [based on the model of] Iran that have emerged in the region. The people have risen up against the United States." He referred to Egypt as "another Iran" and addressed the Western countries:

You still have not achieved an understanding and accurate assessment of this matter. You must know that Egypt is a second Iran that has been born in the region, and Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen have also turned into another Iran.... You who analyze these uprisings [i.e., the Arab Spring] do not see that they began in mosques? You do not see that the peoples turn to the voice of Islam and turn their back on your evil.

Suleimani added that viewing the events in the region as a social awakening is mistaken, and averred: "Whoever says this is fooling himself. This awakening is solely Islamic."

Dr. Amir Mohebbian, a university lecturer and expert on political affairs, published a rare and unprecedented article on Khamenei's website that undoubtedly received his approval. The article, in considering possible scenarios of attacks on Iran, refers to the IRGC-QF. Mohebbian analyzes the failure of the various Western strategies (sanctions, political subversion, pressure on Syria and Hizbullah) and maintains that the threats to assassinate the IRGC-QF commander are intended by the West, among other things, to restrict his movement and prevent him from aiding Syria. Mohebbian also claims that the West fails to understand the mission of the IRGC-QF and the centrality of its "ideological and intellectual foundations"; instead the Western states focus on its operational functions and the assistance it extends, they believe, to various

organizations in the world.(11)

Pax Irana?

In sum, the growing Iranian focus on the IRGC-QF is no accident. It is a central aspect of Iran's approach to recent Middle Eastern developments, particularly the empowerment of the Islamist movements. These are the movements with which the IRGC-QF maintained clandestine ties for years, training and financing their activists, and helping them aspire to regime change and the ouster of the "Arab Western rulers who do the West's bidding." Iran is appropriating the rise of the Islamist movements to itself, claiming that for many years they viewed Iran as an Islamic model for confronting imperialism and all it represents. Here Iran has put special emphasis on the profound ideological gap between it and the United States in particular and the West in general when it comes to understanding the far-reaching Islamic processes occurring in the Middle East. From Iran's standpoint, it is the determined ideological cultivation – centering on Islam, steadfastness, and the readiness for sacrifice (and not democracy and Western values) – that has ultimately, with the help of the IRGC-QF, fomented the long-awaited transformation.

The IRGC-QF, which until recently acted behind the scenes, has now moved to center stage. From Iran's standpoint, and in terms of the role Khamenei assigned to the IRGC-QF when he came to power, the mission of exporting the revolution and bringing about a dramatic change in the Middle East is being crowned with success. Not in vain is the organization called the Qods (Jerusalem) Force, since liberating Jerusalem is the aspiration of all Muslims and hence a common denominator that speaks to the Arab-Islamic street.

In light of the transformation occurring in the Middle East and its Islamic coloration, Iran seeks to present an organized plan of action as well as tools – such as the IRGC-QF – to implement it. The West, which for years ignored the activity of the IRGC-QF and other Iranian elements that used terror and subversion in the service of an aggressive foreign policy, now also stands to pay a price for the blindness it has displayed toward Iran and recently toward Syria (where Iran continues to meddle).

Iran is now better positioned to promote the changes in the Middle East. It is acting out of a sense of power, sometimes verging on the power-drunk, which takes the form of defiant and intensifying measures against the United States and the West. During the recent takeover of the British embassy in Tehran, students flaunted pictures of Suleimani. For them he is an apt model for the reshaping of the Middle East – without Britain and the United States (and Israel) – in line with the Islamist paradigm that the IRGC-QF has been exporting, throughout the years of Iranian revolution and "steadfastness," to the Arab world and even beyond it, all the way to the backyard of the United States in Latin America.

If in the past the United States had trouble achieving its strategic goals in the

Middle East including Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and the Palestinian sphere – not least because of the obstacles the IRGC-QF placed in its path – the task will be made a hundred times more difficult by Iran's progress toward nuclear weapons. And if that were not enough, Islamist regimes are now popping up one after the other in the Arab world. Some of the Islamist movements taking power – in Tunisia, Morocco, the "Palestinian Authority," and perhaps Egypt – have wrested their "Islamic winter" from Arab rulers with the assistance of Iran, among other things by means of the IRGC-QF, and apparently have had their fill of Pax Americana.

Iran, which for many years has cultivated the Islamist movements without paying any price for it, is now reaping the fruits of its labor and attributing its success to the IRGC-QF.

Notes

1. <http://www.justice.gov/opa/documents/us-v-arbabsiar-shakuri-complaint.pdf>.
2. <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2010/170260.htm>.
3. <http://www.mashregnews.ir/fa/news/78963/%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%88%DB%8C-%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B3-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%84-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7>.
4. Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities* (CSIS, 2007), 78-80.
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Iran and the Strait of Hormuz



The Iranian Navy, the Strait of Hormuz, and Beyond (February 2012)

Dore Gold

Iran has been seeking to establish itself as the hegemonial power in the Middle East. Its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, gave an interview to the Iranian daily *Ressalat* on July 7, 1991, and asked a rhetorical question: "Do we look to preserve the integrity of our land, or do we look to its expansion?" He then answered his own question: "We must definitely look to expansion." And indeed, in the years that followed, Iranian forces have been involved in regional subversion from Lebanon to Saudi Arabia and most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. Khamenei's spokesman, Hossein Shariatmadari, wrote on July 9, 2007: "Bahrain is part of Iran's soil." In 2009, Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri, who was Khamenei's candidate for president in 1997, bluntly called Bahrain Iran's "14th province." For the last twenty years, the Iranian leadership has been remarkably consistent.(1)

Within the Iranian parliament there were voices supporting this neo-imperial role for Iran as well. A member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee released a statement reminding the Arab states as a whole that "most of them were once part of Iranian soil." The Sunni Arab leaders monitored these Iranian ambitions. Once, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah complained about the rise of Iranian power in the aftermath of the Iraq War, berating a high-level U.S. official: "You have allowed the Persians, the Safavids, to take over Iraq." (2)

Reference to the sixteenth century Safavid Empire emanated from the fact that under its rule, Persia made Shiite Islam its official religion. Moreover, the Safavid Empire stretched eastward to Herat in Afghanistan and westward to Baghdad, covering both shorelines of the Persian Gulf. If Iran indeed had ambitions to restore the glory of the Safavid Empire, the ultimate political fate of the Arab Gulf states, from Kuwait to Oman would be in the balance.

Perhaps for this reason, the Iranians from time to time related to the Persian Gulf as an internal sea and not as an international waterway. For example, in 1997, Maj.-Gen. Mohsen Rezai, commander of the Revolutionary Guards, stated: "Let me send a clear message to the Americans; the Persian Gulf is our region; they have to leave the region." (3)

What military measures was Iran taking to realize these long-term goals? After the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Tehran focused on building its military power in two fields: ballistic missiles/weapons of mass destruction and naval power. Its ground and air forces did not receive the same degree of investment and modernization. Iran also intensified its efforts to become the dominant power inside the Persian Gulf. Back in 1971 it was the Shah of Iran who seized the island of Abu Musa from the Emirate of Sharjah, which would eventually join the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Subsequently, he sent forces to occupy two additional islands, Greater and Less Tunb, which belonged to the Emirate of Ras al-Khaima.

While the Shah agreed that Abu Musa should be under the joint administration of the UAE and Iran, the Islamic Republic changed that policy. After a high profile visit of President Rafsanjani to the island in early 1992, Iran evicted the UAE, keeping the island under its exclusive control. The UAE argues that the islands are occupied territories, though since 1995, Tehran regards the islands as an inseparable part of Iran.

Iran integrated Abu Musa into its strategy to dominate the Persian Gulf and especially the 35-mile-wide Strait of Hormuz, its outlet to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. During the 1990s Iran deployed ground forces on Abu Musa and equipped them with Chinese HY-2 Silkworm anti-ship missiles. There have been reports that the Iranians also deployed 130-km.-range C-801 anti-ship missiles on Abu Musa as well as a Revolutionary Guard contingent. At the time of the Iran-Iraq War, Iran's Revolutionary Guards began to operate from a number of Persian Gulf islands, such as Sirri, Larak, and Hormuz, as well as from oil platforms at sea. This is the context for understanding the importance Iran attached to the islands it occupied that belonged to the UAE. Additionally, the two Tunbs are nearly adjacent to the outbound shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf

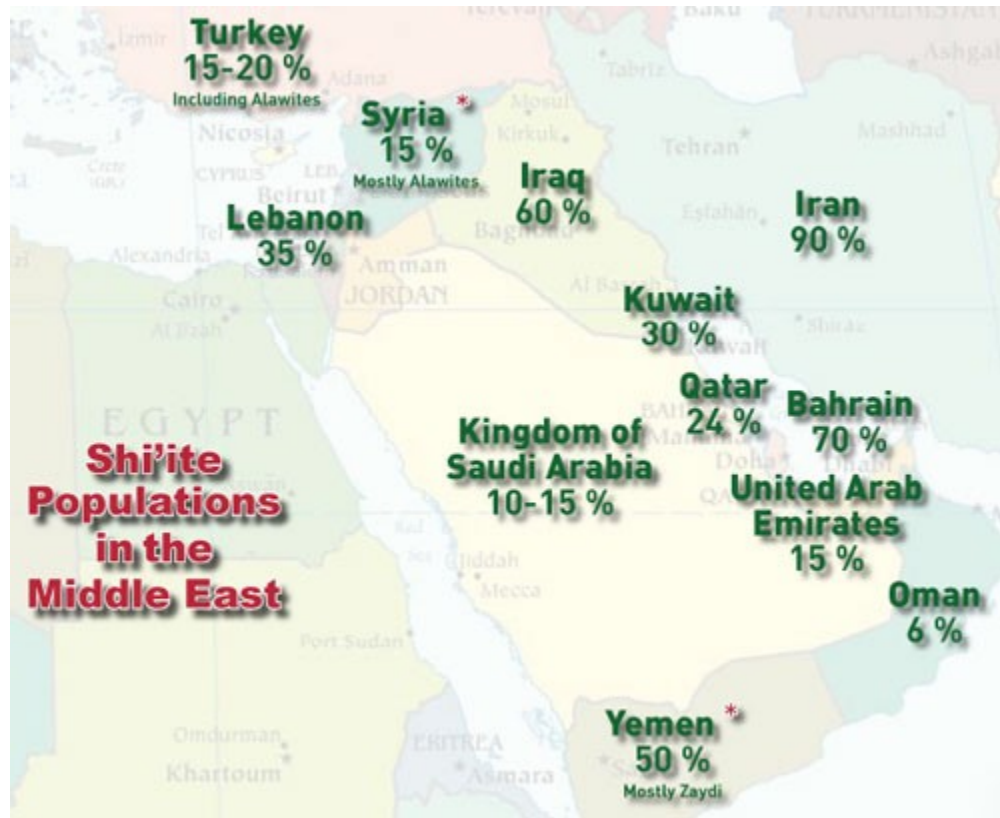
through which oil tankers generally move as they head to the Strait of Hormuz, making them critical for an Iranian strategy that aims to control the flow of oil through this strategic waterway.

Iran engaged in other political-military activities that served its strategic interest in the Persian Gulf to remove the American military presence and dominate the region by itself. Already in 1995, the Bahraini government shared intelligence with the Clinton administration that Bahraini Hizbullah was working with the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards to install a pro-Iranian government in Bahrain, which that same year became the headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Fleet. Were such a change to transpire, one of the first initiatives of such a government would undoubtedly be to evict the U.S. Navy from Bahrain by closing down its main naval base. Subsequent protests by Bahrain's Shiite majority against the ruling Sunni government, like those held in 2008, frequently featured signs reading "U.S. Bases Out of Bahrain."

More generally, Iran has been seeking to recruit supporters for its regional subversion operations from the disfranchised Shiite communities of the Arab Gulf states, who constitute 30 percent of the population of Kuwait, 16 percent of the UAE, and close to 50 percent of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Indeed, it was a Saudi branch of Hizbullah, known as Hizbullah al-Hijaz, which conducted the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing attack that was directed against U.S. Air Force personnel. The U.S. had definitive intelligence that Iran orchestrated the attack.

(4)

Shiite Populations in the Middle East



Iran also wanted to demonstrate that its naval power was not just confined to the Persian Gulf, within its immediate neighborhood, but that its warships can reach into the Indian Ocean and even as far as the Mediterranean Sea. In December 2010, the Iranian Navy held a joint exercise with Djibouti, which is near Bab al-Mandab at the entrance to the Red Sea. On February 22, 2011, Iranian naval vessels passed through the Suez Canal for the first time since 1979. This Mediterranean mission was well beyond what might be expected of the Iranian Navy. It should be remembered that the regular Iranian Navy still consists of relatively old ships from the time of the Shah, which its commanders hope to modernize with new weapons systems, particularly naval missiles. According to a report by the Office of U.S. Naval Intelligence, the Iranian Navy is preparing itself to project its power beyond the Strait of Hormuz with new naval bases in the Gulf of Oman that will be ready in 2015. Previously, Iranian warships have in fact reached Sudan and Somalia, but they had not entered the Mediterranean.(5)

Iran had a number of interests in the area of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Improved naval access to these waters was critical for Iran if it wanted to re-supply its allies who were engaged in different insurgencies in the region. For example, on October 26, 2009, the Yemeni Navy seized an Iranian cargo ship, the Mahan-1, which was loaded with anti-tank weapons that were destined for the Houthi rebels fighting the Yemeni government. While theologically, the Houthi were Fiver Shiites (as opposed to Twelver Shiites in Iran), Tehran took their

cause under its wing as part of its strategy to support Shiite militant groups across the Middle East.(6)

During the previous decade, Iran sought to re-supply Palestinian organizations, as well as Hizbullah, by dispatching multiple cargo ships under foreign flags. Iran sent the *Karine-A*, intercepted by Israeli naval commandos in the Red Sea on January 3, 2002. The Israeli Navy also intercepted the MV *Francop* in the Mediterranean on November 3, 2009, which carried thousands of rockets destined for Hizbullah. On March 15, 2011, the Israeli Navy captured the cargo ship *MV Victoria*, which was bound for the Gaza Strip – it carried thousands of mortar shells as well as C-704 anti-ship missiles. During this period, Iran also sought to re-supply Hamas with weaponry delivered to Port Sudan, on the Red Sea.(7)

Despite these tangible interests the limits of Iranian naval power suggest that the dispatch of Iranian ships to the Suez Canal and then into the Mediterranean was at this point ultimately political and not based on any ambitious military mission to confront another navy. It was a classic case of naval diplomacy. In short, a Mediterranean deployment was clearly premature for the Iranian Navy. What then could be the mission of the Iranian warships? What is the political message that their deployment suggests? Up until last year, Egypt led the Sunni Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia and Jordan, which have been seeking to contain the spread of Iranian power.

However, with Egypt neutralized for now, the Iranians wanted to send a signal that they were prepared to fill the vacuum created by the fall of President Mubarak by dispatching warships through the Suez Canal for the first time. Iranian spokesmen sometimes expressed intentions that went beyond the Middle East, despite the fact that Iran was incapable of sustaining such long-distance deployments. Thus, on September 28, 2011, the commander of the Iranian Navy, Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, announced that Iran intends to dispatch a force to the Atlantic and to maintain an impressive presence near U.S. territorial waters.

From the perspective of the Iranian leadership, which reiterates on multiple occasions that the U.S. and the rest of the West are powers in decline, there is likely a view that the fact that Washington could not help its old ally, Mubarak, means that U.S. power in the Middle East is waning. Looking at events in Cairo from the perspective of Tehran, it appeared that America was not able to defend what should have been its own interests (it does not matter that President Obama had no intention of saving Mubarak, given the extent of the demonstrations in Cairo).

Indeed, already in April 2009, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad warned Washington: “We say to you today that you are in a position of weakness. Your hands are empty and you can no longer promote your interests from a position of strength.” The Iranian naval move is a simple signal: wherever the U.S. withdraws from, Iran will be there to enter. Should Iran cross the nuclear weapons threshold, this kind of assertiveness will only increase.(8)



The Strait of Hormuz. (AP Photo/Bill Foley)

This provides some of the context for understanding what Iran was doing in the Strait of Hormuz at the end of 2011. True, Iran directly confronted the U.S. Navy in 1988 at the end of the Iran-Iraq War and was badly beaten. Having used its sea mines against the *USS Samuel B. Roberts*, the U.S. Navy countered with a series of actions that led to the sinking of an Iranian frigate, two Iranian oil platforms, and a number of speedboats. Despite this history, on December 28, 2011, Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, the commander of the Iranian Navy, announced that Tehran could close the Strait of Hormuz, which is only 21 miles wide at its narrowest point. No other waterway had such a significant impact on the movement of global oil, considering that 17 million barrels of oil had moved every day through the Strait of Hormuz during the previous year. This amount constituted roughly 20 percent of the oil traded worldwide.(9)

Iran undertook a variety of escalatory moves. In early January 2012, Iran's army chief of staff, General Ataollah Salehi, issued a warning after the aircraft carrier *USS John C. Stennis* left the Persian Gulf and entered the Gulf of Oman: "Iran will not repeat its warning...the enemy's carrier has been moved to the Sea of Oman because of our drill. I recommend and emphasize to the American carrier not to return to the Persian Gulf....We are not in the habit of warning more than once." To underline their threat, the Iranians released footage of the *USS John C. Stennis*, filmed from an Iranian naval surveillance aircraft.



The U.S. Navy aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis. (AP Photo/US Navy, Ron Reeves)

Two weeks later, Iranian speed boats came within 500 yards of the *USS New Orleans*, an amphibious transport dock, in the Strait of Hormuz. It was not the first time Iran issued a direct threat to American aircraft carriers. Speaking on Channel 1 of Iranian Television on July 19, 2011, Brig.-Gen. Amir Ali Hajizdeh, commander of the Aerospace Force of the Revolutionary Guards, focused on the U.S. carrier presence. He plainly said that a U.S. carrier "is a target for us."

Could the Iranians make good on these threats? Their strategy was based on asymmetric warfare at sea, which would seek to prevent the deployment of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf for as long a time as possible, using hundreds of anti-ship cruise missiles they have dispersed on islands, oil platforms, as well as along their long shoreline. The U.S. would have to first suppress and degrade the anti-ship missile threat throughout the Persian Gulf before it could send in ships to clear Iranian mines in the Strait of Hormuz. That could take time. The Iranians clearly will seek to drive up the price of oil as much as possible, undermine Western economies, damage U.S. ships, and in the end break the will of the West. In early January 2012, Admiral Sayyari managed to push up the price of oil by 4 percent in less than a week.(10)

Regardless of the Iranians' motives, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey took seriously their threats. Speaking on the CBS news program *Face the Nation* on January 8, 2012, he admitted: "They've invested in capabilities that could, in fact, for a period of time block the Straits of Hormuz. But he added: "We've invested in capabilities to ensure that if that happens, we can defeat that. And so the simple answer is yes, they can block it." The U.S. response to the latest Iranian threat to American carriers was to dispatch the

USS Enterprise to the Middle East; it was expected to reach the Persian Gulf with another six ships, which are part of its carrier strike group, in March 2012. In the meantime, the U.S. had two carriers in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf.

At this point, no escalation followed from the U.S. naval moves. Tehran was not ready for a showdown in the Persian Gulf. As in past confrontations between Iran and the U.S., Tehran retreated when confronted with American determination. In mid-January, the deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards withdrew the Iranian threat to U.S. warships in the Gulf. He recognized that "U.S. warships and military forces have been in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East region for many years." At the same time, the U.S. sent an aircraft carrier, the *USS Abraham Lincoln*, through the Strait of Hormuz. The January 2012 crisis appeared to pass. But both sides were building up their capabilities for the future should a naval conflict break out.

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Does Iran's June 2011 Military Exercise Signal a New Defense Doctrine?

(July 2011)

Michael Segall

Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is in the midst of a large-scale missile exercise called "Great Prophet 6." During the exercise, underground missile silos were disclosed, large numbers of surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) of different ranges were fired, and a new radar system was revealed.

The main spokesman during the exercise was the IRGC's aerospace commander, Amir Ali Hagizadeh. In a wide-ranging interview aimed at Arab audiences on the Arabic-language TV channel *Al-Alam*, he discussed at length the IRGC exercise and its objectives. One received the impression that Iran was well-prepared from a public relations standpoint to present the exercise to regional and international media and decision-makers (a short video was shown on Iranian TV and even uploaded to YouTube).(1)

The extensive interview with Hagizadeh, combined with statements by other senior IRGC figures, suggests that – along with Iran's ongoing, intensive development of its nuclear program, particularly in the areas of uranium enrichment and possible launch platforms for nuclear weapons – Iran also is devoting much thought to aspects of its deterrence doctrine against those it regards as its main threats in the region, namely, Israel and the United States.

In that doctrine, a capability to fire ballistic missiles stealthily and surprisingly from hidden launch sites, and to hit American and Israeli targets in the region, holds a central place – while the doctrine still leaves wide room for ambiguity about Iran's "real" capabilities.

Hagizadeh made clear that Iran aims to integrate its SMM force, which is subordinate to the IRGC, to a considerable extent into its asymmetric-response doctrine, which is a central component of its defense doctrine and national security strategy. At the end of the video shown on Iranian TV at the beginning of the exercise, he emphasized that Iran is not trying to engage in a technological race with the world, but is organizing its defense systems to conduct asymmetric warfare and, implicitly, to cope via asymmetric means with technologically superior enemies. (In the navy as well, the IRGC seeks to apply this doctrine vis-à-vis American superiority, particularly with respect to "swarms" of small boats that Iran intends to use in attacks against the U.S. fleet.)

Hagizadeh also said that Iran had begun building silos in concealed sites throughout its territory fifteen years ago. He defined the missile test-fire during the exercise as "successful," and said that last year the United States monitored Iranian missile fire in the Indian Ocean and is well aware of these missiles' accuracy. He added that the United States had made things easier for Iran by

building forty to fifty bases at a distance of 200-300 kilometers from Iran, so that Iran does not need to build missiles with a range longer than 2,000 kilometers (which covers Israel and part of Europe). A senior Iranian naval commander noted that during the exercise, Iran "tested 14 ballistic missiles in safe places and they cannot be identified by the enemy under any circumstance."(2)

The IRGC aerospace commander referred directly to regions where Iran is already implementing its asymmetric operational strategy regarding the use of SSMs of different ranges. He threatened that: "If the Zionist regime attacks Iran, it will successfully hit the heart of Tel Aviv before the attack planes leave Iranian territory." He went on to imply that Iran has good intelligence-gathering capabilities for Israel because, using radar, it can detect the departure of Israeli planes at the moment of take-off from the "Palestinian territories" (meaning Israel).(3)

In a rare statement, the senior IRGC figure referred to a major component of Iran's deterrence – its long arm, Hizbullah. Responding to a question about how many missiles Iran has and their deployment areas, Hagizadeh noted that since this information is classified he will answer indirectly. He then said that during the Second Lebanon War (the "Thirty-Three Day War"), Hizbullah kept firing missiles throughout the conflict and, unlike in usual circumstances where the ability to fire decreases with time, Hizbullah in fact increased its rate of fire and even the range of the missiles, while Israel failed to destroy the organization's weapons caches. It is evident that Hagizadeh views Lebanon as a forward missile base for Iran.

He also emphasized that, before the war, Iran devoted much effort and planning to ensure that, once hostilities broke out, it would be able to supply Hizbullah with all the missiles it needed without relying on other countries.

Iran declares publicly that it perceives Lebanon as a "first line of defense" in its national security strategy – both as a deterrent factor and as a response factor – and regards continuous rocket fire as an asymmetric response to Israel's technological superiority, particularly when it comes to its air force.

At the same time, while continuing to equip Hizbullah with SSMs of different ranges, Iran continues to equip itself with long-range, locally-produced missiles with which it can strike Israeli territory from within its own territory, and is adopting a policy of ambiguity regarding the progress of its nuclear and missile program. Tehran is leaving the work of assaying its total military capabilities to Israel and the West, thus gradually shaping its deterrence doctrine vis-a-vis a possible future attack against its nuclear facilities and its allies in the region – Syria and Hizbullah.

Notes

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Iran Holds Major Air Defense Drill Amid Tensions with Turkey (September 2011)

Michael Segall

On September 6-15, 2011, Iran held a four-stage major air defense drill. The exercise took place in the midst of escalating Iranian rhetoric towards Turkey as a result of Ankara's decision to deploy a radar system in its territory that is part of the NATO anti-ballistic missile system. Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi said: "The deployment of the NATO missile system in Turkey is not justified and will not be beneficial to regional nations. We regard the move as very harmful."(1) The Iranian press constantly spews toxic rhetoric regarding the Turkish move, while the conservative press went as far as describing Turkey as a Western puppet.

During the exercise – which was covered widely in the Iranian media (and less so in the Israeli and international press) – the spokespeople of the Iranian air force made sure to emphasize and highlight the advanced capabilities of Iran in the production of combat aircraft, technology development, and production of advanced and precise weaponry, missile defenses, electronic warfare capabilities, airspace control, and advanced, long-range radar systems. Special emphasis was given to Iran's ability to independently develop, design, and manufacture weapons, and its capability to defend itself regardless of external factors.(2)

The Largest Exercise Since the Islamist Revolution

The drill, named "Devotees of the Sanctity of the Supreme Leader (Jurisconsult)," was held in northeastern Iran and was described by the commander of the Iranian Air Force, General Hassan Shahsafi, as unique in the era of the Iranian revolution. He added: "As acknowledged by Iranian observers and experts, the drills were the Air Force's largest exercise since the Revolution (in 1979) and its most massive operational presence in fully combat conditions since the Iraqi-imposed war (on Iran 1980-1988). ... These war games showed that our defensive power in both military dimensions and soft war has grown several times more than the extent to which the ill-wishers of the Islamic Republic

intensify their animosity towards the Iranian nation." Farzad Esmaili, commander of the Khatam Al-Anbia Air Defense Base, said ahead of the drill that "to see but not to be seen is one of the achievements of air defense in Iran."(3)

In addition to Iranian-made airplanes – the Azarakhsh (Lightening) and Saeqeh (Thunderbolt) – F-4, F-5, Sukhoi-24 (SU-24), MiG 29 fighter bombers, cargo and transportation planes, and the logistic C-130 all took part.

The First Stage began with a flight by Iranian-made Saeqeh fighter planes. According to the drill spokesman, Saeqeh, F4 and F5, Sukhoi 24 and MiG 29 fighter, C130 transport planes and spy-planes (drones) participating in the maneuvers are able to identify each other and the characteristics of different aircraft, enabling pilots from different bases in Iran to meet up and exchange a great deal of experience and data. He went on to say that the morale of the pilots taking part in the maneuvers is high and that "the pilots are prepared to sacrifice themselves" and are completely prepared for any possible threat or danger.(4)

In the Second Stage, Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) domestically-manufactured Saeqeh and Azarakhsh fighters carried out mission flights including night missions and bombardment of the specified target areas in complete radio silence. In addition, "vast electronic warfare operations were held successfully in all frequency bands." Drill spokesperson Brigadier General Hoseyn Chitforush said: "In addition to the fighters' flight at the appropriate altitudes, keeping complete radio silence, actions included launching of a mobile tactical control tower and DF (Direction Finder) navigation systems, digital recording of meteorology and conversations, and utilization of secure communication layers in all spots covered by the drill's overall territory."(5) He said the IRIAF "needs to hold more night drills, as the threats at night are of great sensitivity." During the second stage of the aerial war game, Iran unveiled *domestically manufactured unmanned aerial vehicles that successfully flew on reconnaissance missions.*(6)

During the Third Stage on September 12, Iran unveiled "a new command-and-control (C&C) system that has been in use in different stages of the drills,"(7) and seven squadrons of F4, F7, MiG 29, and Sukhoi SU-24 fighters as well as the logistic C-130 planes and home-made Saeqeh fighter jets. In this stage, Saeqeh, F-4, F-5, MiG-29 and Sukhoi-24 fighters flew in flight formation over the exercise area and, using a variety of tactics, fired diverse types of ammunition and rockets at the pre-designated targets. At this stage, which Iran described as central in aerial maneuvering, Iran introduced what it described as one of its biggest achievements in the field of missiles. According to Iran, during the unique exercise an F-5 fired a missile that was intercepted immediately by a missile fired by a MiG-29. The MiG succeeded in identifying and destroying the missile very quickly with its advanced radar system.(8) In addition, an F-4 bomber launched Qassed (Guidance) super-heavy smart bombs at a target. According to Iranian reports, the 2,000-pound smart bombs are able to fly a 40 km distance with a smart guidance system and hit the target without the pilot's control. The drill's spokesman said that Mig-29s successfully test-fired air-to-ground missiles during the drills.(9)

During the Fourth Stage on September 13, the last phase of its four-stage air drill, Iran tested live munitions and missiles. IRIAF Commander Brigadier General Hassan Shahsafi stated: "At present the TACON (Tactical Control) systems and PAR (Precision Approach Radar) that have been designed and built domestically are ready to start work in the different operational zones." He said that the IRIAF is using mobile communication centers, mobile watchtowers, mobile digital telecommunication centers and tens of other new home-made projects during the exercises.

Iran Reveals Advanced and Diverse Weaponry

During the exercise and afterward, Iranian spokesmen revealed additional capabilities in air defense. However, as of now, their operational readiness is unclear:

Deceive and detour incoming guided missiles. The Deputy Commander of the Khatam Al-Anbia Air Defense Base for Electronic Warfare, Colonel Moharram Qolizadeh, referring to the key role of electronic jamming systems in successful electronic warfare, said that Iran is seeking to deceive and detour incoming guided missiles. He said: "We have a project at hand that is in fact a stage ahead of jamming to 'deceive' the incoming missiles....At this stage, we disrupt transmission of data to the data processing unit of incoming missiles and reprogram it with our own information and redirect the missile towards our desired point." He also referred to the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) by the enemy in order to identify sensitive areas in Iran and stated that "all the operations of these types of planes are under our surveillance, and we are capable of disrupting them."(10)

Smart missiles capable of destroying mobile targets. Home-made anti-radar smart missiles are capable of destroying mobile targets with 100 percent precision. Air Force Deputy Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Alavi said that an air-to-ground missile was fired from a Sukhoi Su-24 fighter and destroyed the target with 100 percent precision. He added that the IRIAF also tested laser, thermal and TV-guided missiles with various ranges.(11)

Cosmos Radar. The Head of Operations at Khatam Al-Anbia Air Defense Base, Behrooz Jahedi-Rad, said that the Iranian long-range radar system "Cosmos Radar" is now undergoing field trials. He underlined that once the system is operational, it will be able to detect and destroy low-flying aircraft, cruise missiles, and strategic long-range aircraft. Jahedi maintained that the "Cosmos Radar" has a range of 3,000 km and will be used by Iran to cover territory beyond Iranian airspace.(12)

Iranian experts are designing a version of the Russian S-300 advanced anti-aircraft missile system. Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base Commander Brigadier General Farzad Esmaili said that Iranian experts have begun designing and building an Iranian version (Bavar [Faith] 373) of the S-300 anti-aircraft missile system after Russia failed to deliver the system to Iran.(13)

Iran's defense minister and air force commanders emphasized during the exercise the excellent flight capabilities of the Iranian pilots and the advanced technology available to them, both defensive and offensive. The exercise took place in the midst of high tension between Iran and Turkey, because of its decision to place parts of NATO's missile defense system in its territory, and also because of the cessation of Turkey's support for Damascus and for joining the criticism of the harsh regime of Bashar Assad. Turkey's claim that the moves are not directed against any country is not accepted by Iran. The two countries are competing for the same sphere of influence and they recently became very aggressive. (Turkey threatens military action in the Mediterranean and Iran emphasized recently that it would not hesitate to intervene militarily in places that hold strategic importance for it.) The two countries are on a path of conflict. The Iranian show of force was intended to signal to Turkey that there is another important regional player that cannot be ignored.

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Part II – Ideology in Islamic Iran



Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, bottom center, reviews Basij paramilitary troops in Tehran, Nov. 26, 2007. Revolutionary Guards commander Mohammad Ali Jafari salutes, at right, and army commander Ataollah Salehi salutes, at left. (AP Photo)

The Emergence of Iran's Revolutionary Guards' Regime

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Iran's increasingly confrontational stance with the West coincided with the surprise victory on June 24, 2005, of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the hard-line mayor of Tehran, in a runoff election for the Iranian presidency. His biography was considerably different than his most prominent predecessors. He had no clerical background. His formative years were during the Iran-Iraq War when he was attached for a brief period to an engineering unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Later, he joined a Revolutionary Guards intelligence unit, although he was never technically one of their officers, since he was seconded to Revolutionary Guards from the popular Basij paramilitary. Details surrounding his exact combat background remain murky. Nevertheless, his name came to be connected with one of the most daring commando operations in the Iran-Iraq War when the Revolutionary Guards infiltrated over 100 miles inside Iraqi territory in 1987 to sabotage the Iraqi oil refineries in Kirkuk.(1)

During this period, Ahmadinejad established close ties with commanders in the Revolutionary Guards who would later become important political allies. Indeed, two decades later, Ahmadinejad would turn to his fellow veterans from the Revolutionary Guards to take up key positions in his government. He gave veterans from the 1980 Iran-Iraq war nine of twenty-one ministerial portfolios.(2) His first Minister of Defense, Mostafa Mohammad Najjar had been a brigadier general in the Revolutionary Guards, while his successor, during Ahmadinejad's second term, Ahmad Vahidi, had been the commander of the Quds Force, the elite foreign operations unit of the Revolutionary Guards.

Ahmadinejad's Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2005 through 2010, Manouchehr Mottaki, had served as a liaison officer between the Revolutionary Guards and the Iranian Foreign Ministry. Finally, Ahmadinejad replaced Hassan Rowhani, a cleric, as the Secretary to the Supreme National Security Council and chief nuclear negotiator with Ali Larijani, who also came out of the Revolutionary Guards. Larijani was succeeded in late 2007 by Saeed Jalili whose background was in the Revolution Guards Basij militia.

Ahmadinejad swept the provincial governors who had been appointed by President Rafsanjani and President Khatami in Iran's thirty provinces from power, replacing them with Revolutionary Guard officers and other officials who came out of the Iranian security services. More than any of his predecessors, Ahmadinejad opened the door to the Revolutionary Guards to emerge as another power center in the Iranian governing system, whose importance would continue beyond Ahmadinejad's term in office.

A former prosecutor-general of the Islamic Republic called this massive entry of the Revolutionary Guards into the Iranian political world nothing less than a "military takeover." Ahmadinejad's support of the Revolutionary Guards was very

much a reciprocal relationship – he gave them important appointments, and they fully backed him politically. In fact, during the 2005 campaign, the Revolutionary Guard command and its Basij militia functioned like party activists in a western presidential race: they turned out the vote, acted as election monitors, and even got into the business of buying votes.(3)

After his victory, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Yahya Rahim Safavi, commented: "President-elect Ahmadinejad is a son of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard." He then added: "It is our duty to make sure that he succeeds."(4) For his part, Ahmadinejad interpreted his election mandate as an expression of the people's desire to see "a revival of the Islamic Revolution's ideals." He believed his rise to power marked a turning point for Iranian history because, in his words: "A new Islamic revolution had arisen."(5)

In the legislative branch of the Iranian system, the rising influence of the Revolutionary Guards was also accompanied by a decline in the power of Iran's clerics, which constituted a majority in Iran's first Majlis, or Parliament, but by 2008, only had 30 representatives out of 290.(6) At the same time, the Council of Guardians, which screens candidates for the Majlis, gave preference for war veterans from the Iran-Iraq War when they gave approval for those seeking to run in Iran's parliamentary election. Iran looked less like a theocracy and more like a country ruled by military elites.(7) They not only assured Ahmadinejad's 2005 election victory on the second ballot, but also his re-election in 2009 on the first ballot, setting off mass demonstrations over voting irregularities.

The Adoption of Apocalyptic Ideologies by the New Elites

Besides the escalation of Ahmadinjad's anti-western incendiary rhetoric, the second feature of his presidency that has received enormous attention has been his repeated references to the imminent return of the Twelfth or Hidden Imam. In Twelver Shiite tradition, Muhammad ibn Hasan was the twelfth descendent of the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib. He was born in 868, but at the age of six, he disappeared into an underground dungeon in Samarra, Iraq. According to Shiite tradition he is expected to reveal himself as the Mahdi (literally, the "Rightly Guided One") at the end of days before the Day of Judgment, when a new era of divine justice will prevail, and Shiite Islam will be recognized as the true global faith. The Mahdi is also called by other names, like Imam al-Zaman, sometimes translated as the "Lord of the Age." For a time in the tenth century, Shiites believed they could be in contact with him through intermediaries, but even this connection was severed in 941.

Ahmadinjad made the re-appearance of the Twelfth Imam as the Mahdi into a hallmark of his presidency. He declared in an address to the Iranian nation shortly after his 2005 election victory: "Our revolution's main mission is to pave the way for the reappearance of the Mahdi."(8) What he meant was that government policy should seek to hasten his return.(9) In September, he sponsored in Tehran the first annual International Conference of Mahdism Doctrine.(10) He required his cabinet members to sign a symbolic pledge of

allegiance to the Twelfth Imam.(11) And in the years that followed, he invoked the Mahdi's name at special historical events for Iran, like the launch of the first Iranian satellite into orbit on an Iranian rocket.



The Jamkaran Mosque in Qom, promoted by the Iranian regime under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a pilgrimage site where the Hidden Imam is expected to reveal himself as the Mahdi. (Mohammad Akhlaghi, Fars News Agency)

Ahmadinejad made well-publicized visits to the Jamkaran Mosque, which was built on the basis of a tradition that the Hidden Imam re-appeared in 984 and ordered its construction; in the past, it had been a site of pilgrimage for those anticipating his arrival and who make requests to him by dropping petitions into the Jamkaran well. According to some Shiite traditions, the Mahdi will emerge at the site by coming out of the very same Jamkaran well. Despite his government's economic struggles with unemployment at 30 percent, Ahmadinejad allocated \$20 million in 2005 to expand the mosque complex at Jamkaran, and further funds for commemorating the Mahdi's birthday. Until the 1990s, Jamkaran had actually been a minor pilgrimage site. By 2000, it evolved into a major center of Shiite pilgrimage. Its small mosque was replaced in the following years with an enormous shrine. The Iranians planned on building a facility for hundreds of thousands of pilgrims.(12) There is no question that Ahmadinejad and his supporters were exploiting this decade-long trend and adding to it a new state-sponsored Mahdism for purposes of political mobilization, especially in Iran's rural areas.

Ahmadinejad took his beliefs abroad, as well. In his debut before the UN General Assembly on September 17, 2005, Ahmadinejad ended his address with a clear reference to the Mahdi:

From the beginning of time, humanity has longed for the day when justice, peace, equality and compassion envelop the world. All of us can contribute to the establishment of such a world. When that day comes, the ultimate promise of all Divine religions will be fulfilled with the emergence of a perfect human being who is heir to all prophets and pious men. He will lead the world to justice and absolute peace. O mighty Lord, I pray to you to hasten the emergence of your last repository, the promised one, that perfect and pure human being, the one that will fill this world with justice and peace.(13)

Upon his return to Iran, Ahmadinejad visited Qom, the religious center of Shiite learning, and shared with the ayatollahs with whom he met that a "halo-like light" enveloped him during his UN address. He told them that someone in the audience told him that the halo formed around him as he began to speak and remained with him until he finished. He confided to the religious leaders: "I felt it myself too." He then explained: "I felt all of a sudden the atmosphere changed, and for 27-28 minutes none of the leaders blinked." The importance of what had happened according to Ahmadinejad was as follows: "They were astonished, as if a hand held them there and made them sit. It had opened their eyes and ears for the message of the Islamic Republic."(14)

Ahmadinejad's beliefs about the Mahdi's arrival had two distinctive characteristics. First, this is not an event for some day in the distant future; it is imminent. It was reported in November 2006 that Ahmadinejad told a visiting foreign minister from an unnamed Islamic country that the current crisis in Iran "presaged the coming of the Hidden Imam, who would appear within two years."(15) Presumably he was referring to the Iranian nuclear crisis with the West. On another occasion he said that it was his mission to hand over Iran to the Mahdi at the end of his presidency.(16) He completely rejected the view of his critics, who said that the arrival of the Mahdi was a matter for the distant future: "It is very bad to say that the imam will not emerge for another few hundred years; who are you to say that?"(17)

Second, under conditions of global conflict and even chaos, the Mahdi's arrival can be accelerated.(18) For example, in a meeting with French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy and two other EU foreign ministers in New York on September 15, 2005, Ahmadinejad shifted the focus of their conversation unexpectedly and asked the European diplomats: "Do you know why we should wish for chaos at any price?" He then answered his own rhetorical question: "Because after chaos, we can see the greatness of Allah."(19) Given this belief structure, the more confrontational Iran becomes in its relations with the West, the more its religious objective of bringing about the Mahdi's arrival is served.

Belief in a Messiah is part of the religious doctrine of the other monotheistic faiths, as well. Traditionally, Shiites have not been messianic enthusiasts to the

extent of Ahmadinejad and his followers, preferring to pursue a more quietist approach to their religion in which they are not trying to manipulate the timing of the end of days.(20) In fact Shiism's mainstream leaders have voiced serious reservations about Mahdism. The same can be said for parts of the Iranian establishment. Former President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani attacked the rising interest in the arrival of the Mahdi when it appeared it was becoming more popular under Ahmadinejad: "The affairs of a country and nation cannot be run on the basis of a claim made by someone that the Lord of the Age is pleased. No one has met the Lord of the Age and we haven't heard him. So how can such a claim be made?"(21)

It is the combination of these two features of his world view that have very disturbing implications. According to Shiite apocalyptic thought, after the Hidden Imam returns, the world will be enveloped by war and plague. Mehdi Khaliji, an Iranian Shiite scholar who was trained in the Iranian religious seminaries of Qom, has noted that there are apocalyptic *hadiths* (received Shiite traditions) that the Mahdi will not return unless one-third of the world's population is killed and another third dies.(22) But Ahmadinejad and his followers believe man can actively create the conditions for the Mahdi's arrival in the here and now, rather than at some distant date at the end of time. What is unclear is whether creating the pre-conditions for his appearance includes instigating violent scenarios that have been traditionally reserved for the period after he arrives.

Where did Ahmadinejad obtain this world view and how prevalent was it among the Iranian elites? While Mahdism was not promoted by Ayatollah Khomeini at the start of the Islamic Revolution, it seemed to have been given a boost during the Iran-Iraq War, among officers serving with the Revolutionary Guards. References that the Mahdi would help Iran win the war became common. Iranian state media carried stories of soldiers who claimed to have seen the Mahdi on a white horse leading them into battle.

Khomeini's government used belief in the Mahdi to motivate hundreds of thousands of volunteers who were part of the Revolutionary Guards' Basij militia. It even hired professional actors to play the role of the Mahdi on the front lines; they would wear a white shroud and ride a white horse while blessing the troops. This technique helped boost morale and provide young recruits with the motivation to become martyrs in human wave attacks against the Iraqi Army.(23)

Just before his death, Khomeini spoke openly about the arrival of the Mahdi as the near-term development, connected to the hegemonic ambitions of the Islamic Republic: "our revolution is not specific to Iran' the revolution of the Iranian people is a point of beginning for the flaring of the great Islamic revolution in the Muslim world under the banner of the Guardian Imam (Mahdi)." He then expressed his hope that the Mahdi's "reappearance take place in our present times." The function of the Islamic Republic, according to Khomeini, was to prepare for the advent of the Mahdi and the objective of establishing "a global Islamic Government."(24) Hence, the ideology of Ahmadinejad and his regime did not represent a sharp break from what Khomeini himself declared in his final years.

It should have come as no surprise that high-ranking members of the Revolutionary Guards continued to believe in the coming of the Mahdi well after their service along the Iraqi front in the 1980s. Indeed, the veterans of the Iran-Iraq War became an important reserve for the spread of Mahdism especially within the Revolutionary Guards. Brigadier General Mohammad Ali Jafari, who replaced General Safavi as commander of the Revolutionary Guards, told his fellow officers from the Revolutionary Guards in January 2008: "Our Imam did not limit the movement of the Islamic Revolution to this country, but drew greater horizons. Our duty is to prepare the way for an Islamic world government and the rule of the Lord of the Time [the Hidden Imam]."(25) The Iranian Chief of Staff Major General Seyed Hassan Firuzabadi, was also a veteran of the Revolutionary Guards; on July 12, 2009, the Iranian news agency published a letter by Firuzabadi addressed to the Hidden Imam.(26)

Given this background, the prevalence of Mahdism and apocalyptic religious beliefs among Ahmadinejad's allies in the Revolutionary Guards makes sense. It is also significant given that the Revolutionary Guards have developed detailed programs for political and religious indoctrination of its soldiers and officers.(27) This ideological training includes courses in the fundamentals of Islamic belief which stress, inter alia, studies on the imamate and the Hidden Imam.(28) Thus the Revolutionary Guards' control of Iran's most sensitive weapons systems, like its ballistic missiles forces, and especially its nuclear program, might be cause for special concern if they do, in fact, believe it is their destiny to hasten the return of the Mahdi by inciting world chaos.(29) It has been observed that there are factions among its mid-ranking commanders who have apocalyptic views and who regard themselves as "soldiers of the Mahdi."(30) This element believes in actively taking measures to prepare for the Mahdi. Because of a lack of documentation, it is difficult to establish the extent to which Mahdism has penetrated the Revolutionary Guards officer corps. Nevertheless, it would be an error to rule out the influence of these doctrines at multiple levels of the Revolutionary Guards' chain of command.

Ahmadinejad's Mahdism was not only a religious tradition that he adopted from his time with the Revolutionary Guards. During his student days in the late 1970s, he was linked with a secretive Islamist movement known as the Hujjatiyya Society.(31) Founded in 1954, its twofold mission was to fight the Bahai faith and pave the way for the appearance of the Mahdi. It did not accept Khomeini's doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*, the rule of the jurisprudent, since the imminent arrival of the Mahdi make a cleric to represent him in the interim unnecessary.

Khomeini cracked down on the movement in 1983, but it had already gained adherents among significant Iranian elites, including two future foreign ministers of the Islamic Republic: Kamal Kharrazi, who served under President Khatami, and Ali Akbar Velayati, who would continue to exercise influence as the diplomatic advisor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.(32) At the time the Hujjatiyya was banned, two ministers of the Iranian government were dismissed because of their association with the movement.(33) Moreover, the purge of Hujjatiyya members led to the dismissal of eight of the provincial

governors in the Islamic Republic. Yet, despite the moves against the Hujjatiyya, it continued to have influence on certain sectors of the Iranian government and on key individuals who would take on important positions in the Islamic Republic in the years to come.

When Ahmadinejad came into power, one of the few high-level officials from the previous Khatami government he did not seek to replace was Gholam Reza Aghazadeh, the head of Iranian Atomic Energy Organization. Aghazadeh is rumored also to be a Hujjatiyya member.⁽³⁴⁾ The Hujjatiyya was organized through secret societies and under different organizational names, so the extent of its membership is difficult to discern. Nevertheless, there are indications that the Hujjatiyya has penetrated some of the most sensitive positions in the Iranian political establishment.

Regardless of the level of support in the Islamic Republic for Ahmadinejad's advance of Mahdism in public discourse, Iranian officials noted the renewed political activity of the Hujjatiyya even before the 2005 presidential elections. President Khatami's spokesman said openly in early 2003 that there were Hujjatiyya Society members who were infiltrating the Iranian government.⁽³⁵⁾ His minister of the interior went so far as to say that the Hujjatiyya represented "a clear and present danger for national security."⁽³⁶⁾ Ahmadinejad's Mahdism had been advanced and supported by those who served as his religious mentors, particularly Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-e Yazdi, who attributed Ahmadinejad's victory in the presidential elections to the will of the Mahdi.⁽³⁷⁾ Like his predecessors, after he won the elections, Ahmadinejad headed for the city of Qom to meet with Iran's top clerics. Yet before sitting with the grand ayatollahs, it was noticeable that he went to consult first with Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi, where the two had a high-profile exchange in a large conference room meeting that was well attended. Moreover, Ahmadinejad's confidential advisor, Mojtabi Samarah Hashemi, is also known to be very close to Mesbah-e Yazdi. Therefore, his views are particularly important to consider.

In 2005, Mesbah-e Yazdi's monthly publication argued that the Koran "calls on believers to wage war against unbelievers and prepare the way for the advent of the Mahdi and conquering the world."⁽³⁸⁾ In other words, he made an explicit link between armed conflict and the Mahdi's arrival. He has been quoted making statements that extol violence more generally: "We must wipe away the shameful stain whereby some people imagine that violence has no place in Islam."⁽³⁹⁾ One of his disciples, Mohsen Gharavian, gave a lecture at the religious seminary in Qom providing the religious justification for actually using nuclear weapons, according to Islamic Law. The reformist Internet daily, Rooz, noted that it was the first time any of the top religious leaders in Iran had given explicit authorization for the use of nuclear weapons. It was the first public policy change to come out of "the Mesbah Yazdi group."⁽⁴⁰⁾

Mesbah-e Yazdi's own lectures repeatedly stressed the theme of hastening the coming of the Mahdi. He spoke at an event in October 2006, marking the Mahdi's birthday. Among the actions that he considered to be the "noblest duty" were those that "weaken the control of the oppressive and tyrannical regimes over the

oppressed" – which was a new religious justification of the export of the Iranian revolution. He let his audience understand that these actions can hasten "the return of the Hidden Imam." He continued: "If we wish to expedite the Mahdi's coming, we must remove any obstacles." (41) In the same address, he stressed that the "greatest obligation of those awaiting the appearance of the Mahdi is fighting heresy and global arrogance" (emphasis added). (Global arrogance is a euphemism, used by Ahmadinejad as well, for the West as a whole, but primarily the United States.) (42)

Mesbah-e Yazdi is portrayed by his opponents as an isolated figure whose impact on past Iranian political life was very limited. This assessment does not take into account that Mesbah-e Yazdi did not operate overtly, but rather behind the scenes. He quietly built up his influence with key Revolutionary Guards and Basij figures over many years. (43) Moreover, he seems to have slowly erected a network of supporters and allies from his teaching position at the Haqqani School in Qom, which graduates attended before entering top positions in the Revolutionary Guards, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, as well as in the Iranian Judiciary. (44) The Haqqani School was also known to have employed faculty who came out of the Hujjatiyya. It provided many high officials to the Islamic Republic.

Indeed, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Revolutionary Guards, Brigadier General Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr, who supported the hard-line faction in the Revolutionary Guards, was a Haqqani graduate. (45) Moreover, three Haqqani graduates became Ministers of Intelligence and Security: the infamous Ali Fallahian (from the Mykonos attack in Germany and AMIA operation in Argentina), Ali Younesi, and Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Ejehei. (46) The latter, an Ahmadinejad appointee, was believed to have a Hujjatiyya background, as well. (47) The belief in the imminent arrival of the Mahdi made many inroads into Ahmadinejad's government.

Mesbah-e Yazdi also had influential allies like the Iranian professor, Ahmad Fardid, who, while a specialist in German philosophy, subsequently became a devoted supporter of Mahdism as well as an advocate of neo-Nazi anti-Semitic theories. (48) He may be one of the contributors to Ahmadinejad's outspoken anti-Semitism. As in the case of Mesbah-e Yazdi, Fardid's students were appointed to top positions in Iranian press and cultural institutions. (49) Fardid also served as a lecturer in the Political Bureau of the Revolutionary Guards, whose mission was to ideologically inculcate its elite personnel. (50) By 2011, there appeared to be a growing rift between Ahmadinejad and Mesbah-e Yazdi, who began to join the chorus of religious leaders who attacked Ahmadinejad for saying that he was directly connected to the Hidden Imam. (51)

There were other important religious authorities with whom Ahmadinejad met, who took strong positions advocating the study of Mahdism. One of Iran's leading hard-line clerics who supported speculation about the Mahdi was Grand Ayatollah Nouri-Hamedani from Qom. He explicitly asserted in one of his sermons that one of the pre-conditions for the Mahdi's appearance is the killing of the Jews: "One should fight the Jews and vanquish them *so that conditions for*

the advent of the Hidden Imam can be met [emphasis added]."(52) This might help explain how in Ahmadinejad's circles, the preoccupation with the arrival of the Mahdi and the destruction of Israel appeared at times to be mutually supportive. Internally, Nouri-Hamedani called on the Shiite religious seminaries in Qom to do more research into religious texts concerning the Hidden Imam. In 2008, the former president of Iran, Ali Akhbar Rafsanjani, described the penetration of Mahdist beliefs in the Islamic Republic as a whole saying, "we find it to be very widespread in Iran today.(53)

Ahmadinejad's focus on the arrival of the Hidden Imam, or Mahdi, was not initially opposed by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Prior to Khamenei's entry into politics, he received his religious education not in Qom, but rather in Mashhad, where it is not uncommon to find clerics who claimed to be in direct contact with the Hidden Imam. Indeed, the founder of the Hujjatiyya, Sheikh Mahmoud Halabi, came out of the Mashhad seminary. Khamenei thus would not find Mahdism alien in any way. Reportedly, he told former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar back in 2004, before Ahmadinejad's election, that the Islamic Republic was waiting for the return of the Hidden Imam, at which time he expected the destruction of Israel.(54) Khamenei described Mesbah-e Yazdi as "one of the leading scholars of Islam."(55)

A revealing exchange between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad disclosed what were the real potential sources of tension between them. Khamenei mocked Ahmadinejad's observation that he would only serve as president for two years until the arrival of the "Lord of the Age." Ahmadinejad retorted that while the Supreme Leader thinks that he appoints the Iranian president, in fact, it was the "Lord of the Age" who made the appointment.(56) In 2011 Khamenei openly attacked those who said they were taking instructions from the Mahdi, or that they were in contact with him. The commander of the Basij, Mohammad-Reza Naqdi, was even more explicit about criticizing Ahmadinejad's use of messianism for political purposes in their quarrels with Iran's Supreme Leader; he issued a warning to the Iranian public against "those with apparent interest in Messianism [Mahdaviat] who may fight against the Guardianship [of the jurist]."(57) This was clearly not an attack against the idea of the returning Hidden Imam, but rather it was directed against those who exploit it for their own political purposes – namely President Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad, The Revolutionary Guards, and the Destruction of Israel

Another trademark of Ahmadinejad's presidency was his call for the destruction of Israel. During his speech at a conference entitled the "World without Zionism," held in Tehran on October 26, 2005, Ahmadinejad declared: "Our dear Imam ordered this Jerusalem-occupying regime must be erased from the page of time." The *New York Times* translated his words as meaning that Israel "must be wiped off the map." Just like the case of his talk about the Mahdi, the call for the destruction of Israel was widespread among Iranian elites and especially at the

command level of the Revolutionary Guards. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared in a Friday sermon on December 15, 2000: "Iran's position, which was first expressed by the Imam and stated several times by those responsible, is that the cancerous tumor called Israel must be uprooted from the region."

The Revolutionary Guards, as defenders of the Iranian regime, adopted the ideological positions of the Supreme Leader faithfully. Thus their former commander, General Yahya Rahim Safavi, gave a speech in February 2008 in which he said: "With God's help the time has come for the Zionist regime's death sentence." His successor, General Muhammad Ali Jafari, picked up on Khamenei's theme of Israel being cancerous in a message to the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah: "In the near future, we will witness the destruction of the cancerous microbe Israel by the strong and capable hands of the nation of Hizbullah."(58)

The Revolutionary Guards had many opportunities to express their position that Israel must be destroyed. At a Tehran center of the Basij Resistance, the mobilization forces of the Revolutionary Guards, the Iranians hung a banner saying in Farsi and English: "Israel should be wiped out of the face of the world." The Revolutionary Guards had operational responsibility for Iran's missile forces. It was therefore noteworthy that they repeatedly placed billboards on the side of transport trucks that carried Shahab-3 missiles, which called for eliminating Israel. For example, Iranian television broadcast a parade in Tehran on September 22, 2004, in which one of these billboards stated in Farsi and even in English: "Israel must be wiped off the map." Since the Shahab-3 had sufficient range to strike Israel, the Revolutionary Guards were essentially linking their military capabilities with their intentions against Israel rather explicitly.

More recently, after the November 2011 death of Major General Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam, a senior commander from the Revolutionary Guards who pioneered Iran's missile program, it was revealed that he wrote in his will that he wanted it written on his tombstone: "Here lies buried the man who wanted to destroy Israel."(59) Thus the idea that Iran's missile forces were being developed for the purposed of destroying Israel was well-embedded in the thinking of Ahmadinejad's allies in the Revolutionary Guards.



Footage from Tehran military parade, Channel 1 (Iran), *IRINN* TV (Iran), September 22, 2004



Footage of Shahab-3 missile transport vehicles on parade. Visible on the front is a draped slogan stating "Israel Must Be Destroyed." Islamic Revolutionary Guards in Tehran, Islamic year 1389 (March 2010-March 2011)

Ahmadinejad's Rivalry with Khamenei

To the extent that Khamenei would have problems with Ahmadinejad, they ultimately would emanate from their potential political rivalry, for the Iranian president's Revolutionary Guards regime has progressively become an increasingly stronger center of power that could pose a challenge in the future to the clerics, especially if an alternative cleric to Khamenei were chosen to lead them. These tensions turned into an open clash on April 17, 2011, when Ahmadinejad fired his Intelligence Minister, Heydar Moslehi, who was close to Khamenei. Within a week, Khamenei forced Ahmadinejad to reinstate him. The leadership of the Revolutionary Guards, who had been instrumental in bringing Ahmadinejad to power, clearly sided with Khamenei in this contest for power, but had also proven again that they were the real force in Iran deciding who would lead.(60)

With Ahmadinejad's second term coming to an end in 2013, it is not clear who his replacement might be or even if Khamenei might just eliminate the presidency, preferring instead a stronger prime minister. But however this issue is resolved, it is likely that the Revolutionary Guards will have a pivotal role in the next Iranian regime, making it necessary to understand their orientation concerning the issues at the top of Iran's national security agenda.

The Mahdist Narrative and Deterrence

Despite these political struggles, the Mahdist narrative advanced by Ahmadinejad received a boost from the Arab uprisings in 2011. This was the theme of a DVD entitled *The Appearance Is Imminent*, which was issued by a Mahdist institute in Iran that distributed several million copies of the film.(61) The film analyzes the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the outbreak of civil war in Yemen, and the chaos in Iraq as part of the pre-conditions for the Mahdi's arrival. The cult of the Mahdi was still very much alive, affecting all levels of the Iranian system from the Revolutionary Guards to significant parts of the general populace. While these beliefs might have been ridiculed by many urbanized Iranians, especially those who had undergone a degree of secularization, they still had appeal for those residing in small towns and villages across Iran. Thus while Ahmadinejad was in his second and final term, his cult-like obsession with Mahdism, which had served as a central theme in his religious style of governance, would continue to influence the Iranian political system in the future.

How does Mahdism affect the nuclear issue? The Iranian internet daily *Rooz* tried to analyze the link between the two subjects: "Some of those close to Ahmadinejad, who frequently speak [of the need] to prepare the ground for the Mahdi's return, explicitly link the [fate of] the Iranian nuclear dossier to this need."(62) The article described how in private meetings, these associates of the Iranian president stressed that Iran's resistance to global pressure on the nuclear

front was one of the ways to prepare the ground for the era of the Mahdi.

The question of whether Iran's nuclear capabilities would help bring about the Mahdi's arrival or be used in the violent era which he would usher in is somewhat academic, since in Ahmadinejad's view, the Mahdi is to join this world imminently, and not at some distant date at the end of history. In any case, the Islamic Republic of Iran has demonstrated a propensity to be willing to absorb enormous losses in the battlefield rather than to accept a rational reading of its national interests.

For this reason it continued its war on Iraq for six years, even though it recovered all its lost territories that had been occupied by Saddam Hussein by 1982.

Moreover, in 1988 when Iran accepted a cease-fire, it was the commander of the Revolutionary Guards who opposed stopping the Iran-Iraq War and wanted to go on fighting.⁽⁶³⁾ Thus the ideological proclivities of the Revolutionary Guards must be taken into account when trying to calculate how Iran might behave with nuclear weapons, especially as its political power in Iran is on the ascendancy.

Given the heavy indoctrination of the Revolutionary Guards and the ongoing influence of Iran's most hard-line clerics on their officer corps, it would be an error to assume that their emergence in Iranian politics as a dominant internal force will make Iran more pragmatic and rational, if it gets into a confrontation with the West. Moreover, their religious and ideological training raises serious questions over whether Western deterrence doctrines can be expected to work with a nuclear Iran.

Notes

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Is Iran a Role Model for Arab Revolutions?

(March 2011)

Michael Segall

- From Iran's point of view, recent developments, especially in Egypt (long considered in the West as an anchor of stability and the initiator of a peace treaty with Israel), represent an improvement in Iran's strategic status.
- Moreover, recent events have focused all attention on the Middle East arena and removed Iran's nuclear program from the spotlight. The increase in the price of oil to over \$100 a barrel has also led to the erosion of the effectiveness of sanctions on Iran (whose utility has yet to be proven).
- The Chief of Staff of Iran's Joint Armed Forces, Maj. Gen. Seyyed Hassan Firuzabadi, said that the Islamic wave sweeping the region marks the beginning of a process that will end with the downfall of Israel, and Zionists fleeing to their countries of origin. He added that signs of such fear are already clearly visible on the faces of Israeli leaders.
- After the U.S. overthrow of the Iraqi regime in 2003, Iran felt itself to be under siege. Now, Tehran sees itself on the way to completing a regional "siege" of Israel – with Hizbullah in the north and Hamas in the south. Iran also believes that Jordan to the east will join the waves of protest, marking the fall of another nation that signed a peace treaty with Israel.
- The collapse of the old Arab order in the moderate Sunni countries of the Middle East is, at least in the short-to-medium term, favorable to Tehran and has significantly improved that country's geo-strategic status and its ability to promote an ambitious Shiite pan-Islamic agenda.
- Iran is taking advantage of the current commotion in the Arab world and Western confusion to intensify its intervention, influence, and meddling in regions that were formerly under U.S. and Western influence, by deploying its Al-Quds force (a special unit for "exporting" the Islamic revolution beyond Iranian borders), while also exploiting the assets of

Hizbullah, Syria, and Hamas.

The Breakdown of the Pro-Western Arab Regimes

The historic shake-up that has swept the Middle East, overturning the order that had existed for decades, caught Iran in the midst of celebrating the 32nd anniversary of the Islamic revolution. Although Iran was not the motivating force behind the various revolutions in Sunni Arab regimes, Iranian leaders took the credit.

From Iran's point of view, recent developments, especially in Egypt (long considered in the West as an anchor of stability and the initiator of a peace treaty with Israel), represent an improvement in Iran's strategic status, at least in the short term. For Iran, the downfall of pro-Western Sunni Arab regimes and the overthrow of their rulers has a direct impact on the process of regional empowerment and reflects the strength of Iran's message to Arab nations over the heads of their rulers.

Iran perceives Hizbullah's domination of Lebanon, the Hamas takeover in Gaza, the continued advancement of the Iranian nuclear program, and now revolutions in the Arab world as all denoting the success of its Islamic revolution. Moreover, recent events have focused all attention on the Middle East arena and removed Iran's nuclear program from the spotlight. The increase in the price of oil to over \$100 a barrel has also led to the erosion of the effectiveness of sanctions on Iran (whose utility has yet to be proven).

Pan-Arabism Out, Pan-Islam In

Almost nothing remains of the "moderate" Sunni Arab camp. The few moderates that are left fear for their positions and are busy trying to maintain stability in the internal arena. Against this background we see Iranian warships being dispatched to the region via the Suez Canal, carrying not only a military but also a political and strategic message.

Furthermore, recent events have effectively blocked pan-Arabism and the establishment of a unified moderate Arab camp that might serve as a counter-weight to the Iranian rejectionist and defying camp. With the Western overthrow of the last symbol of Arabism and Arab strength – Saddam Hussein – no charismatic Arab leaders now remain or are likely to appear any time soon.

Tehran Hastens to Fill the Void

Iran (and Turkey too) now seeks to fill the resulting void, serving as an *Islamic* model of opposition and independence. While Sunni nations are likely to be preoccupied with establishing new governments at home, Iran will continue to underline its own Islamic style as an overall ideological-political framework or model for the establishment of a new order in the Middle East. Pan-Islamic

beliefs, whether Iranian or Turkish in nature, will most likely permeate the newly emerging Middle East. At the same time, Iran will also continue to pursue activities in Africa and South America (where Hizbullah, Iran's proxy, has increased its drug-smuggling activities to the U.S.)(1) as it attempts to challenge the West on those fronts too.

Iran believes that the growth of popular movements opposing Sunni Arab regimes (especially Bahrain, see below) has produced conditions that enable it to further expand its own regional influence. It is expected to step up the use of its Al-Quds force (a special unit designated for subversive activity and "exporting" the Islamic revolution beyond Iran's borders) in collaboration with Lebanese Hizbullah to intensify its meddling in Arab countries currently undergoing internal unrest.

In the past, Iranian subversion and efforts to spread the Shia doctrine in Arab countries encountered opposition on the part of local security forces. Furthermore, countries that previously contained Hizbullah and Hamas and promoted the peace process (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan) have now been weakened and are preoccupied with problems at home, while Iran is vigorously cementing its status as leader of the camp opposed to the peace process and American-Western intervention in the region.

The Iranian Press Sees the Destabilization of Israel

Many Iranian spokesmen and analysts see recent events as a catalyst leading to Israel's destabilization in the region, in light of a weakening U.S. position and that country's desertion of regional allies, particularly Egypt. According to the Iranian press, the Muslim Brotherhood and other political groups in Egypt must now expose the (negative) role of the United States and Israel in everything connected with (in their words): "Mubarak's crimes against the Egyptian people." There are further claims that President Obama, for whom the Egyptian revolution was a harsh blow, is now trying, at almost any cost, to prevent it from spreading quickly to other areas under the rule of America's allies.

The Iranian press – always highly critical of Egyptian rulers who are seen as responsible for peace with Israel, called upon Egypt's new leaders to try "the sweet experiment which many nations around the world are observing" – freedom from Western influence.(2) In similar vein, Iranian newspapers describe the fall of U.S.-dependent regimes as striking a severe blow to the United States and Israel.(3) The Chief of Staff of Iran's Joint Armed Forces, Maj. Gen. Seyyed Hassan Firuzabadi, said that the Islamic wave sweeping the region marks the beginning of a process that will end with the downfall of Israel, and Zionists fleeing to their countries of origin. He added that signs of such fear are already clearly visible on the faces of Israeli leaders.(4)

The Great Shia Eruption

At the same time, Iran may seek to exploit the current fragility of the Sunni Arab world to establish Shia strongholds in Sunni Arab areas, although its aspirations in this area are usually covert. Iran is likewise taking advantage of the U.S. liberation of Iraq – although Iraqi Shiites differ from the Iranian model and generally demand a separation between religion and state – to restore Shia power in the Islamic world. Iran's first success was recorded in Lebanon with the establishment of a Hizbullah-backed government, followed by waves of protest in predominantly Shia Bahrain and eastern Saudi Arabia.

The Iranian state media in English (Press TV) and Arabic (Al-Alam News Network), both directed at non-Iranian audiences, provide wide coverage of the events and underscore protests in Shia areas throughout the Arab world.

From Siege to Counter-Attack

The shake-up in the traditional Arab order reinforces the Iranian leaders' sense of justice in their own system and cause. After the U.S. overthrow of the Iraqi regime in 2003, Iran felt itself to be under siege, with Afghanistan to the east, Iraq to the south, the Gulf States also to the south, and Azerbaijan to the north. It now feels better placed to break out of that siege and even make inroads into neighboring regions as well as other parts of the world.

In fact, Tehran sees itself on the way to completing a regional "siege" of Israel – with Hizbullah in the north and Hamas in the south. Iran also believes that Jordan to the east will join the waves of protest, marking the fall of another nation that signed a peace treaty with Israel.

The Historic Islamic Mission

In recent months President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has frequently promoted Iranian-style revolutionary Islam as a viable alternative. At a press conference on February 23 to mark the unveiling of a supercomputer of Iranian manufacture, Ahmadinejad announced that "the world is on the verge of huge, worldwide changes and developments, from Asia to Africa, from Europe to North America." He also called for a restructuring of the Iranian Foreign Ministry to adapt to "the historic mission of the Iranian nation today. Today we need passion, character and drive in our foreign policy. We need to employ all our capabilities and talents and all the new ideas of the revolution should back and guide our foreign policy."(5)

In his messianic style, Ahmadinejad referred to a "huge and ever-growing wave," claiming that developments in the Arab world represent only one part of this and that "we are waiting for that main upheaval and the great wave which will uproot all of those deceptions in the world."

He called on Arab national leaders to respect the people's desire for reform and

change: "Why do they perform so badly that the people are forced to put pressure on them and call for reforms?" He also severely criticized Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi(6) and condemned the harsh stance that Gaddafi adopted to suppress his people: "How can a leader bomb his own people and then say that whoever protests will be killed? This is unacceptable."(7) The Iranian Red Crescent Society even offered to send help to the Libyan people.(8)

Ahmadinejad also spoke critically of the West, accusing it of trying to hold back progress, prosperity and development in other countries: "Material thinking represented by Marxism and Capitalism, both of which are the same, crushed the human truth and redirected people towards selfishness and material tendencies, but the Islamic revolution of Iran renewed the main identity and the true nature of people...the leaders of arrogance were shouting that they wanted to nip the revolution in the bud, but now the revolution has taken them by the throat in their own palaces. They are inactive and are retreating now and are opposed by free people who are moving on a perfect path and are putting pressure on them."(9)

The Islamic Revolution as Role Model

The Iranian leadership sees the turmoil in Arab countries as an "Islamic awakening in the Arab world" against all "despotic" Arab rulers, who are seen as traitors to the Islamic Revolution initiated by Khomeini, and commends Iran's steadfast resilience in the face of Western efforts to undermine and compromise its independence:

- In a Friday prayer sermon delivered on February 4 at Tehran University, religious leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said: "The Iranian nation is seeing for itself how its voice is heard in other regions of the world. Today's events in North Africa, Egypt, Tunisia and certain other countries have another sense for the Iranian nation. They have special meaning....This is the same as an 'Islamic awakening,' which is the result of the victory of the big revolution of the Iranian nation." The Iranian leader referred to Iran's independence since the revolution and its lack of dependence on the West, saying: "The former Shah used to seek U.S. consultation in all affairs, which means dependence on the U.S." Speaking of the uprising in Egypt, he remarked: "The Egyptian nation feels humiliated due to the support of Hosni Mubarak's regime for Israel and following the U.S....the feeling of being humiliated was the reason for the Egyptian nation's uprising."(10)
- Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said that the outbreak of an Islamic awakening across the Middle East is the direct result of the determination and resilience demonstrated by Iran over many years in its struggle against the West. He described the people's uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia and the pro-democracy protest underway in Libya and Bahrain as miracles, with 32 years of Iranian revolution behind them. Salehi drew a comparison between the Iranian revolution of 1979 and recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa, claiming that

those nations view Iran as a role model.(11)

- The Speaker of the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) pointed out that the Western superpowers played no role in the people's revolutions currently taking place in the Middle East. He described the weakening of the U.S. grasp in the region, saying that for years it supported dictatorial regimes around the world, but must now withdraw in the face of the widespread popular uprisings which represent a kind of Judgement Day for the U.S. (12)
- The head of Iran's national broadcasting network (IRIB) said that "the slogans, inclinations and demands of the people during the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East have all been inspired by the Islamic Revolution (of Iran)....What is more important is that today's Iran has become a model for the people of those countries, of which the Westerners are very scared. Western politicians, writers and analysts have also acknowledged this influence in their speeches and articles."(13)

At home, Iran successfully managed to forcibly contain the public protest which again threatened to erupt following the internal upheavals in the Arab world. The Majlis (parliament) issued a statement noting: "The sorrowful incidents which have occurred in Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Morocco and the merciless killing of people by the despotic rulers are reminiscent of the crimes perpetrated by all dictators who tried to remain in power throughout history....We, the representatives of the great Iranian nation, condemn these crimes and once again announce that we strongly back the Islamic nations' campaigns."(14)

First We Take Bahrain

Iran's recent successes, growing confidence, and progress towards a nuclear weapon inspire hope in the hearts of oppressed Shia populations throughout the Arab world, particularly in Bahrain and eastern Saudi Arabia. Iran is investing resources in furthering this activity, with a focus on the Revolutionary Guards' Al-Quds force. Lebanese Hizbullah activists are also working on Iran's behalf in Iraq, the Gulf States, and Egypt to disseminate the Shia message and encourage Shiites to oppose the regimes, while also trying to convert Sunnis to Shiism.

In this context, Bahrain represents the soft underbelly. A number of senior Iranian commentators have referred to Bahrain in the past as the 14th Iranian province, including Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, former Speaker of the Iranian Majlis, and Hossein Shariatmadari, editor-in-chief of the conservative *Kayhan* newspaper, who is close to the Iranian leader.(15) Iran has claimed sovereignty over the island kingdom of Bahrain since it was under Persian rule for two centuries beginning in 1602. When Britain decided to withdraw its troops from the Gulf in 1968, Iran renewed its claim of sovereignty, but in a 1970 plebiscite sponsored by the United Nations, the island's residents decided on independence rather than annexation to Iran. In 1971 Bahrain was recognized as an independent country. Thereafter, the Shah abandoned Persian claims, but these have been heard again since the Islamic

Revolution in Iran. Egyptian President Mubarak visited Bahrain in 2008 to express his support against a background of Iranian threats.

The Sunni Bahraini royal family fears repeated attempts at destabilization by Iran, using Shia opposition elements. Shiites represent over 70 percent of Bahrain's population, some of whom are Arab and some Persian. However, they do not serve in any positions of power or have any influence over what takes place in the kingdom. Some were arrested last year in a preventive action by security forces.

On two occasions, Bahrain accused Iran of subversion on Bahraini territory: in 1996 the kingdom exposed a local Hizbullah cell calling itself the Military Wing of Hizbullah-Bahrain, detained many of its operatives, and deported some. Similar claims arose in 1981 when Bahrain exposed the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, which attempted to carry out a coup on its territory.

Now, in light of recent changes in the Arab world, the weakness of Arab leaders, and the renewal of protest in Bahrain, the kingdom fears a combination of stronger Iranian involvement and highly motivated demonstrators as a spin-off of the protest momentum in other Arab nations.

The U.S. Fifth Fleet is headquartered at Bahrain, serving as a base to defend the Gulf States from an Iranian threat. The U.S. has urged Bahraini leaders to continue promoting reform and democratic processes in the kingdom. But at the same time it fears an Egyptian-style scenario, with the loss of this important base in the Persian Gulf. Iran has stepped up naval exercises in Gulf waters in recent years, while continuing to maintain dormant cells for terrorism and insurrection in Bahrain and other Gulf nations, awaiting the moment to order an upswing in Iranian subversive activity in those countries.

Tehran feels that now is the right time to step up its intervention in events in the Gulf States, especially among the Shia population. In nearby Saudi Arabia, there is a growing fear of a greater Shia challenge to the kingdom. A change of regime in Bahrain could result in greater marginalization of the United States in the Gulf and the further reinforcement of Iran's status as a key force in the region, representing an intrinsic threat to the small Gulf States.

In summary, the collapse of the old Arab order in the moderate Sunni countries of the Middle East is, at least in the short-to-medium term, favorable to Tehran and has significantly improved that country's geo-strategic status and its ability to promote an ambitious agenda, which it defines as "a change in regional equilibrium." It is taking advantage of the current commotion in the Arab world and Western confusion to intensify its intervention and influence throughout the neighboring Persian Gulf, as well as in other regions that were formerly under U.S. and Western influence, while also exploiting the assets of Hizbullah, Syria, and Hamas.

Notes

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3. *Quds*, February 24, 2011.
4. "Iran," February 26, 2011.
5. Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, January 31, 2011.
6. IRINN, February 23, 2011.
7. IRINN, February 23, 2011.
8. IRNA, February 23, 2011.
9. Fars News Agency, February 5, 2011.
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11. <http://presstv.com/detail/166867.html>
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Revolutionary Guards' Influence Grows in Iran as Opposition Falters

(March 2011)

Michael Segall

On March 8, 2011, Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi Kani, 80, was elected Chairman of the Assembly of Experts, the body that will elect the next Supreme Leader of Iran. The election was called after the incumbent, Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, fearing defeat, withdrew his candidacy, stating that he did not want to hurt the standing of the assembly.

Rafsanjani served as President of Iran from 1989 to 1997. In 2005 he ran for a third term in office but lost to rival Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Relations between Rafsanjani and members of the assembly who support Supreme Leader

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his regime sharply deteriorated over the last year. The Assembly of Experts, which consist of 86 senior Islamic scholars, represents one of the most powerful and important center's of Iran's religious and Islamic establishment.

Failure to Stop Ahmadinejad

During the September 2007 elections for chairmanship of the assembly, Rafsanjani, nicknamed "the shark," beat Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, a hardliner even by Iranian standards. The defeat of Jannati, a member of the Assembly of Experts who is very close to Ahmadinejad's mentor, Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi, was perceived as a blow that could weaken Ahmadinejad. Yet today the star of Ahmadinejad and the Revolutionary Guards continues to rise, and the power base and influence of Rafsanjani, who could (still) constitute a challenge to the current regime, is fading.

In the June 2009 elections, Rafsanjani hesitantly supported the reform camp and even called for the release of the demonstrators in a Friday sermon (July 17, 2009). But by refraining from giving sermons in Tehran since then, his influence has shrunk greatly, even while he continues to publish occasional statements on his website.

A former president of the Expediency Discernment Council (1989-1997), Rafsanjani still holds on to power as chairman of the council, and in the West he is often regarded as the "good conservative" – someone who can initiate changes. Since the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, he has been trying to contain the growing influence of the Revolutionary Guards.

The division between him and the elite under the leadership of Ahmadinejad continues to deepen. Rafsanjani's family members are under government surveillance, particularly his daughter, Faezeh, and her son. Faezeh, a member of the Green Movement, was arrested on multiple occasions. Revolutionary Guards spokesmen and other senior Iranians claim that they incited against the regime before, during, and after the June 2009 elections.

The perception that Rafsanjani advised Khomeini to stop the war against Iraq also plays into the rivalry with the Guards. Article 150 of the Iranian Constitution establishes that "The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, organized in the early days of the triumph of the Revolution, is to be maintained so that it may continue in its role of guarding the Revolution and its achievements." The Guards are interpreting this article very broadly.

Today, the Revolutionary Guards are gradually completing their takeover of Iran, as Rafsanjani and other senior figures of the first generation of the revolution are being pushed out of positions of power and are being replaced by the Guards and their allies in positions of religious leadership. Despite international sanctions and growing international attention to the political developments in the Middle East, the Iranian regime is still confident enough to act against those, among them Rafsanjani, who played a central role in the history of revolutionary Iran.

Additionally, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi, Mohammad Khatami, and other leaders of the reform movement have felt the regime's noose tightening around them in the past few weeks. While in the past the Iranian regime avoided cracking down on them harshly, it seems that today they are showing less restraint.

The Constraints on the Revolutionary Guards Are Eroding

Since its establishment, the Revolutionary Guards have built up their role to "guard the Revolution and its achievements." Ahmadinejad's presidency represents a golden opportunity for the organization, which is attempting, now more than ever, to recreate in practice the first days of the revolution – expressing revolutionary passion through the support of terrorist groups and "liberation movements" in the Middle East and beyond.

The Revolutionary Guards see in the current developments in the Middle East fertile ground to expand its activities in order to gain influence among Islamist elements in Arab countries that are experiencing great historic changes. Currently, the Guards can easily activate sleeper cells in the Arab countries and increase assistance to the rising Islamist elements (especially to Shiites). This happens at a time when the opponents of such an adventurous policy, like Rafsanjani, are getting weaker. In this context, the changes within the Revolutionary Guards and the appointment of Ali Akbar Salehi as Minister of Foreign Affairs indicate the eroding constraints facing the policy of exporting the revolution.

The growing self-confidence of the Revolutionary Guards is displayed decisively in its continuous weapons shipments to terror groups in Africa and the Middle East. For example, most recently, the ship Victoria carried advanced weaponry including C-704 anti-ship missiles and mortars (like those that are fired at Israeli towns) to Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in Gaza. This also testifies to the strengthening of Iran's strategic cooperation with Syria.

Taking Revenge

Ahmadinejad and the Revolutionary Guards are taking revenge on the old guard of the revolution and are turning towards the outside world – the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. They aim to turn Iran into a world player that can influence global events. Weapons smuggling to the Middle East and Africa, and drug trafficking in Latin America present opportunities for changing the playing field.

In the shadow of the changes in Middle East and the catastrophe in Japan, Iran continues to pursue its nuclear program. The missions undertaken by the Revolutionary Guards since its establishment, and even more so since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, have changed the organization and its role in Iranian society. Since its foundation at the time of the revolution as scattered groups in various

Iranian cities with loose ties, the Revolutionary Guards have developed into an economic-military-political powerhouse, in practice, the central power and influence in Iran. All those who were able to oppose this process – Rafsanjani and others – have been pushed aside in order for the Revolutionary Guards to slowly complete their takeover of Iran.

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The Sources of Iranian Negotiating Behavior (2010)

Harold Rhode

Executive Summary

- This analysis identifies patterns exhibited by the Iranian government and the Iranian people since ancient times. Most importantly, it identifies critical elements of Iranian culture that have been systematically ignored by policymakers for decades. It is a precise understanding of these cultural cues that should guide policy objectives toward the Iranian government.
- Iranians expect a ruler to demonstrate resolve and strength, and do whatever it takes to remain in power. The Western concept of demanding that a leader subscribe to a moral and ethical code does not resonate with Iranians. Telling Iranians that their ruler is cruel will not convince the public that they need a new leader. To the contrary, this will reinforce the idea that their ruler is strong. It is only when Iranians become convinced that either their rulers lack the resolve to do what is necessary to remain in power or that a stronger power will protect them against their current tyrannical rulers, that they will speak out and try to overthrow leaders.
- Compromise (as we in the West understand this concept) is seen as a sign of submission and weakness. For Iranians, it actually brings shame on those (and on the families of those) who concede. By contrast, one who forces others to compromise increases his honor and stature, and is likely to continue forcing others to submit in the future. Iranians do not consider weakness a reason to engage an adversary in compromise, but rather as an opportunity to destroy them. It is for this reason that good-will and confidence-building measures should be avoided at all costs.

- What Iranians really believe, they usually keep to themselves. Instead, they tell those with power what they think their leaders want to hear. This is the concept of *ketman*, or dissimulation. Iranians do not consider *ketman* (*taqiya* in Arabic) to be lying. And they have developed it into a fine art, which they view as a positive form of self-protection.
- Western cultural biases regarding, and demanding, honesty make it easy to misunderstand Iranians. Iranians have learned to cope with adverse situations by being warm, gracious, polite, and obsequious. Westerners, especially Americans who place a high value on candor, straightforwardness, and honesty, are often bamboozled by Iranians who know that those in the West are easily taken in by their effusively friendly, kind, generous, and engaging behavior.
- Negotiations are opportunities to best others, to demonstrate power, and to make sure opponents know who is the boss. In politics, Iranians negotiate only after defeating their enemies. During these negotiations, the victor magnanimously dictates to the vanquished how things will be conducted thereafter. Signaling a desire to talk before being victorious is, in Iranian eyes, a sign of weakness or lack of will to win.
- When the West establishes itself as the most powerful force and shows strength and resolve, Iranians will most likely come on board. They do not want to be on the losing side. If military action is eventually required, the targeting of national symbols and leadership strongholds may be enough to demonstrate that the balance of power in Iran is quickly shifting. By applying this principle, the West may not need to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities or launch a large-scale invasion to bring down Iran's rulers and stop the nuclear program.
- Iranians look around them and see that others in their neighborhood such as Russia, Israel, Pakistan, India, and China all have the bomb. To say that Iran shouldn't have the bomb is considered an affront to Iranian patriotism. Using a little ingenuity, we could drive a wedge between the Iranian government and the Iranian people. We should make clear that we are not opposed to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. We are only opposed to the current government having a nuclear arsenal because it is the largest state-sponsor of terrorism in the world and does its utmost to undermine its neighbors and remove U.S. influence in the region. If the current government acquires nuclear weapons, it might very well use them.
- If the West is to succeed, Iranians must be convinced, in terms they understand, that America is prepared to establish itself as a powerful force and help the Iranian population liberate themselves from the tyranny under which they live.

Understanding Key Iranian Cultural Cues

The Iranian regime currently sits on the threshold of developing nuclear weapons, a scenario that endangers the entire Middle East, the United States, and even Iranians themselves. Yet this situation is by no means a new development.

Since the onset of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Iranian government has been using every means at its disposal to terrorize the world. Governments in the West have tried various approaches to dealing with the Iranian regime including appeasement, negotiations, and sanctions. Yet the Iranian government has not been dissuaded from sponsoring and implementing terror tactics, and has not been convinced to halt its illegal nuclear program.

To the contrary, for the past 31 years the Iranian government has been further emboldened by the West's inability to deter the agenda of the Islamic Revolution.

The regime, today led by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, continues to widen its global axis of influence as it races toward nuclear weapons capacity at an alarming pace.

Time is running short for the international community to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, which will undoubtedly be used as leverage over its neighbors in the region as well as the West, if not detonated.

If the international community is going to succeed in aborting Iran's nuclear agenda, a rapid reassessment of policy is needed. The root causes of 30-plus years of diplomatic failures must be exposed, and alternative strategies must be quickly implemented.

This analysis will not suggest precise courses of action for dealing with the nuclear threat the world now faces at the hands of the Iranian regime. Rather, it identifies patterns exhibited by the Iranian government and, for that matter, the Iranian people since well before the onset of the Islamic Revolution.

Most importantly, it identifies critical elements of Iranian culture that have been systematically ignored by policymakers for decades. It is a precise understanding of these cultural cues that should guide policy objectives toward the Iranian government.

Many of the cultural elements found within Iran do not neatly align with values embedded in Western-style diplomacy. Yet, if our understanding of Iranian culture does not improve, and if Iranian values and cues are not internalized, we may find ourselves outsmarted and bullied by an Iranian government operating under an active nuclear umbrella.

The Resilience of Iranian Culture Following Arab Conquest

The best way to understand the Iranian mind is to examine Iran's storied history, and consider how Iran has survived as a cultural and political entity since the

advent of Islam.

Iranians have a strong sense of patriotism and loyalty to their country.(1) Unlike most other Muslim countries in the Arab world, Iran has existed as a cultural and political entity for more than 2,500 years, long before the advent of Islam. Thus, Iranians have always had a distinct sense of unique cultural and political identity.

Unlike most other Muslim countries in the Arab world, Iran has existed as a cultural and political entity for more than 2,500 years, long before the advent of Islam.

Prior to the Arab-Islamic conquests of the seventh century, Iran had a long tradition of conquering other nations and absorbing other peoples.

In order to protect its longstanding history, when conquered themselves, Iranians allowed themselves to become subjected to foreign rule, yet developed a resiliency to the politics and culture of their conquerors. Iranians essentially persuaded their conquerors, "Come in and rule us, but do so using our ways, and assimilate into our culture."

In the 630s, Arab Muslims poured out of the Arabian Peninsula to conquer the world in the name of Islam. Within 100 years they had captured the Arab world, crossed the Straits of Gibraltar into Spain, and had expanded eastward into what is today Pakistan. By 750, most of what we know today as the Arab world – the Middle East and North Africa – had become Arabicized, linguistically and culturally. The local languages and cultures were decimated. But not in Iran.(2)

During the 300 years that followed, the few Iranian documents and literature that came out of the period were almost exclusively written in Arabic and are Islamic in nature. Yet by the 900s, history notes an incredible transformation. The Persian language re-emerged as the spoken and written language of Iran, albeit written in Arabic letters and with many Arabic words, but it was, linguistically and culturally, distinctly Persian.(3)

These Persian-speakers were now Muslims, but unlike their neighbors to the West, they did not become Arabs.

To understand how this transformation occurred is to understand the resiliency of the Iranian people. As a former conqueror, the Iranian population included senior government officials who had the experience of ruling empires. The nomadic Arabs who conquered Iran did not have experience ruling large territories and foreign peoples. They needed help.

Persians stepped in and taught the nomads how to rule, and to do so in the Iranian style. As a result, Persian culture was able to absorb its invaders and teach its conquerors how to rule. Gradually, the new rulers became culturally Persianized, even if they were Arabs.

Within approximately 150 years of the Arab-Islamic conquests, Persian/Iranian political culture became dominant in much of the eastern part of what we today know as the Middle East, and in the eastern Islamic world which extended deep

into today's India.

In approximately 750, Abu Muslim, of the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan, led a revolt against the Arab-Islamic Umayyad dynasty that was ruling the Islamic world from Damascus. Abu Muslim installed a descendent of the Muslim prophet Muhammad's uncle Abbas as the new caliph. The Persians essentially put the Abbasids in power and taught them how to rule a large empire using Persian political culture as their guide. The Islamic capital was moved from Damascus eastward to Baghdad, a city much closer to the Iranian cultural orbit.
(4)

Persian political culture soon began to dominate the capital of the Islamic Empire in Baghdad. And the sophisticated and cunning Iranians, who were responsible for creating the Abbasid dynasty, similarly developed a new Islamic culture based on a synthesis of the dynasty's Arab rulers(5) and Persian culture. As such, Iranian culture was able to successfully withstand its Arab conquerors. The Abbasid dynasty would reign 500 years until 1258, when the Mongols sacked Baghdad.

Major Principles of Iranian Culture

Many of the Iranian cultural concepts that were identified in classical Islamic times are present in Iran to this day. Understanding these concepts provides insight into how to deal with contemporary Iran's government and its people.

What follows are a series of important principles or aspects of Iranian culture, with vignettes and episodes that illustrate these principles in action. It is important to note that both humor and proverb provide deep insight into a culture, and Iranian culture is rich in both.

1. Respect for Power, Hero Worship

Iranians expect a ruler to demonstrate resolve and strength, and do whatever it takes to remain in power. As such, it is the prerogative of Iranian rulers to be magnanimous or cruel. Iranians fear but respect cruelty as a tool of maintaining power. Rulers are expected to be cruel, and Iranians have a long tradition of placating their rulers.

The Western concept of demanding that a leader subscribe to a moral and ethical code does not resonate with Iranians. Telling Iranians that their ruler is cruel will not convince the public that they need a new leader. To the contrary, this will reinforce the idea that their ruler is strong.

Iranians respect power. What Iranians don't respect is weakness. It is when a ruler appears weak that Iranians quickly turn on him, and look for another ruler to "worship."(6)

It is only when Iranians become convinced that either their rulers lack the resolve to do what is necessary to remain in power or a stronger power will protect them against their current tyrannical rulers that they will speak out and try to overthrow leaders.

Iranians respect power. When a ruler appears weak, Iranians quickly turn on him, and look for another ruler to "worship."

Khomeini retrieves the honor of Iran and of the Muslim world and humiliates the U.S.

For centuries, it appeared to the Muslims that the non-Muslim world had been conquering and dividing up the Muslim world. The West had thus humiliated the Muslims, who proved powerless to stand up for themselves. The greatness of Ayatollah Khomeini, from a Muslim point of view, was that he was able to make the West answer to his dictates, in particular, humiliating the U.S. and restoring the Islamic world's honor.

Khomeini provided a model to the Muslim world, which observed carefully as America submitted to Khomeini's demands, particularly during the 444-day U.S. Embassy hostage crisis.

While America and the West had the opportunity to restore their own honor and respect, and stop Khomeini in his tracks, they did not. The Western display of weakness encouraged Khomeini to escalate the situation and continue to humiliate America.

That is why so many young Muslims – both Shiite and Sunni – affixed Khomeini's picture everywhere throughout the Muslim world. Khomeini restored Islam's honor. And Iran is continuing to follow Khomeini's model today through its dogged pursuit of nuclear weaponry and its undermining its neighbors. Moreover, Iran's regime is strengthened by what is, at best, the West's weak response.

Iranian students in 1978: "Death to the Shah, Long Live Khomeini, Who is Khomeini?"

During the earlier and mid-stages of the Iranian Revolution when the Shah was still in power, an American studying at a university in a religious city in Iran related the following story:

He asked his fellow students which of six Grand Ayatollahs(7) their families followed – including the as-yet-publicly-unheard-of Ayatollah Khomeini. The students either feigned ignorance or mentioned the name of the well-known, non-political, Chief Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariat-Madari.(8)

Shortly thereafter, people began rioting in the streets against the regime. After the Shah proved either unable or unwilling to put down the riots, these same Iranian students began demonstrating in the streets, chanting, "Death to the Shah, Long Live Khomeini."

In the Islamic Revolution of 1978/79, Iranians saw that power was shifting and quickly gravitated to Khomeini, the new strong man, even though most had no idea who he was.

At the time of the revolution, the Shah proved he was weak because he did not put down the riots, and this grand ayatollah named Khomeini kept saying publicly

what he planned to do after the Shah left. The Shah and his allies either did not or could not stop Khomeini from talking.

The students, who felt the current shifting, believed they had better jump on Khomeini's bandwagon to protect themselves. What these students shouted at these demonstrations meant little to them emotionally. What really mattered was that they not end up supporting the losing side.

Somewhat surprisingly, these same students, after demonstrating for Khomeini, contacted the American studying with them and asked him, "Who is Khomeini?"

The students wanted to know about Khomeini, for whom they had just demonstrated, and remembered that the American had previously mentioned Khomeini's name. They assumed he knew more about Khomeini than they did, so they contacted him. Iranians saw that power was shifting and, in typical Iranian fashion, quickly gravitated to the new strongman, even though most had no idea who he was.

From the Western point of view, this teaches us a great deal about the Islamic Revolution of 1978/79. While it appeared that the country genuinely supported Khomeini, most did not even know who he was.

2. Respect for Iran's History

Iranians are proud of their 2,500-year history and want to see their nation's pride restored. Iranians feel humiliated that their beloved country is vilified abroad, and a large number know that their tyrannical, terrorist rulers are the reason their country is seen as a pariah. They want to be able to travel the world freely, as citizens of a highly-respected country, as they had done under the Shah.

Yet this desired return to normalcy is unlikely under the current regime. Positive change is unlikely to occur until Iran is ruled by a regime that seeks freedom for the Iranian people, ends its support for international terrorism, and supports an inclusive polity where every Iranian has an opportunity to succeed.

Nevertheless, as long as the current leadership is perceived as the strongest power in the country, Iranians will not rise up to overthrow their rulers. And unfortunately, the balance of power within Iran is unlikely to shift without support – probably both overt and covert – from the outside.

How Iran became Shiite

Before the Safavids came to power in Iran in the early 1500s, all of the states surrounding Iran were ruled by Sunni Turks who adhered to the (relatively liberal) Hanafi law school.

By choosing Shi'ism, the Safavids – who were themselves Turks – provided Iran with another layer of protection against the surrounding states and thereby gave Iran another way to preserve its unique cultural and political identity. Even more amazing is that most of Iran, which had been overwhelmingly Sunni prior to the Safavids, converted to Shi'ism within 100 years.

Has the Iranian government made the Iranian people anti-Muslim?

Even though the regime calls itself Islamic, many mullahs loathe the regime because they believe it is destroying Islam. It is estimated that more than 75 percent of the mullahs oppose the regime but do not do so actively because public opposition might get them arrested or worse.

Today, many mullahs are afraid to walk the streets in religious garb because drivers "accidentally" go through puddles and splash dirty water on them, or throw things out the window at them and drive away. When mullahs travel on buses or walk the streets in clerical garb, the other travelers often subject these mullahs to scorn and harassment.

3. Compromise and Good-Will as Signs of Weakness

To those in the West, compromise and gestures of good-will are seen as useful tools displaying reasoned thinking, to accomplish mutually beneficial results. Iranians internalize these concepts very differently.

In Iran, compromise is seen as a sign of submission and weakness. Compromise actually brings shame on those (and on the families of those) who concede. By contrast, one who forces others to compromise increases his honor⁽⁹⁾ and stature, and is likely to continue forcing others to submit in the future.

Good-will and confidence-building measures are interpreted as a lack of strength or resolve. To Iranians, these measures are seen only as concessions, in the most negative connotation of the word.

One coming from a position of strength will only make a concession if he is absolutely sure that doing so will actually consolidate and therefore increase his power. If one believes that his adversary will gain even the slightest advantage through such a measure, he will never concede an inch.

Iranians do not consider weakness a reason to engage adversaries in compromise, but rather as an opportunity to destroy them.

Iranians loathe weakness. Iranians do not consider weakness a reason to engage adversaries in compromise, but rather as an opportunity to destroy them. It is for this reason that measures of good-will and confidence-building should be avoided at all costs.

Talking with the Iranians

In late 2006, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq and the U.S. commander of the Multi-National Force in Iraq held talks with the Iranian ambassador to Iraq. From the Iranian cultural vantage point, the fact that the U.S. was willing to sit down with Iran was proof that the U.S. was weak and looking for a way out of Iraq. The Iranians responded by escalating the attacks against the U.S. inside Iraq. These attacks only subsided when the Iranians saw America show resolve militarily by responding with great force. Only then did they back down.

Later, when the Obama administration signaled its desire to sit down to negotiations with the Iranians, the Iranians hardened their stand on the nuclear issue. Talking before winning shows weakness, and the Iranian government

interpreted Obama's attempts at dialogue as a sign of weakness. What we in the West see as good-will, the Iranians understand as weakness, so they had no incentive to soften their positions. And when Iranians smell weakness, like others in the Middle East, they go in for the kill.

Iran's diametrically opposite reactions toward the U.S. and the USSR following responses to acts of Iranian aggression

During the 1978-79 revolution, why did the Iranians react so vehemently and violently against the Americans, who though not Muslim believe in God, yet kowtowed to the Soviets who were atheists?(10)

The Iranians feared the Soviets. When harmed, Russians have a reputation for killing people. Americans, on the other hand, have a reputation for trying to negotiate. Our leaders and diplomats often say, "Oh, what have we done to offend you? How can we put it right? Perhaps we can make some kind of compromise?" Iranians see the typical Russian reaction as exhibiting strength. They see America's reaction as exhibiting weakness.

Iran released the U.S. diplomats it had held hostage for 444 days an hour before Ronald Reagan became president. They believed Reagan was a cowboy and feared he would "level" Tehran.

When the Iranian terrorists took U.S. diplomats hostage in 1979,(11) they originally expected to hold them for a few days, hoping to sabotage meetings then taking place in Algiers between U.S. National Security Advisor Brzezinski and Iranian Prime Minister Bazargan. President Carter and his advisors called for negotiations to "end the crisis." The Iranians understood the American reaction as fearful. No one asks to negotiate before he wins. The "student" terrorists saw they had a good thing going and extended the hostage crisis for 444 days. Muslims around the world admired them for humiliating the Americans and restoring Iran's – and the Muslim world's – honor.

When and why did the hostage-holders release the American diplomats? Iran put the hostages on a plane less than an hour before Ronald Reagan became president. The hostages left Iranian airspace when Reagan raised his hand and took the oath of office. The Iranian "students" believed Reagan was a cowboy and feared he would "level" Tehran.

Interestingly, during the hostage crisis, a group of Iranian terrorists also occupied the Soviet embassy in Tehran. But they quickly left, because Moscow informed Tehran that if the Iranians did not leave the Soviet Embassy within hours, Tehran would be bombed.

In both the American and Soviet cases, what determined Iranian actions was the credible threat of force versus a position of compromise, not Shari'a laws regarding Christians and atheists.

4. Ketman/Taqiyah: Masking One's True Thoughts – Dissimulation(12)

Iran is a "top to bottom" society. The flow of information emanates from above

and almost never from below. Leaders tell the population what they are expected to do, and the population falls in line. Iranians do not reverse the flow of information. Unless their leaders appear weak, the people do not stand up and tell their leaders the truth.

What Iranians really believe, they usually keep to themselves. Instead, they tell those with power what they think their leaders want to hear. This is the concept of *ketman*, or dissimulation. Iranians do *not* consider *ketman* (*taqiya* in Arabic) to be lying. And they have developed it into a fine art, which they view positively as a form of self-preservation. Through the rampant use of this device, it is nearly impossible to determine what Iranians really believe.

It comes as no surprise that when Iranians think they aren't being observed, they often do the opposite of what they may have just said they believe. As a result, Iranian rulers have almost no way of knowing what people think, and must resort to manipulation and force to keep themselves in power.

Ketman makes it very difficult to measure public opinion, because the primary consideration of people being interviewed is whether and how the interviewer could hurt them. Iranians will only say what they truly believe when they are absolutely sure they will not suffer adverse consequences.

The Onion

It is not surprising that Iranians love the symbolism of the onion to describe their culture. The core of an onion is surrounded by many layers. For more than 2,500 years, Iranians have surrounded themselves like an onion with layers and layers to protect their core. The core is so well protected through layers of obfuscation that Iranians themselves often may not know what their core beliefs are regarding many issues.

5. Dealing with *Ketman/Taqiyah*

Western cultural biases regarding, and demanding, honesty make it easy to misunderstand Iranians. Iranians believe that history has been unkind to them, and have learned to cope with adverse situations by being warm, gracious, polite, and obsequious. Westerners, especially Americans who place a high value on candor, straightforwardness, and honesty, are often bamboozled by Iranians who know that those in the West are easily taken in by their effusively friendly, kind, generous, and engaging behavior.

Iranians put a great deal of thought into determining what they think we want to hear.

Iranians put a great deal of thought into determining what they think we want to hear. Furthermore, when obvious contradictions are pointed out that Iranians don't want to address, they usually just stare back as if they do not understand or see the logical inconsistencies.

Iranians oftentimes will express empathy and sympathy with beautiful and kind words. But these words will usually not be backed by any action and can often be

rendered meaningless. Iranians are very skilled at lulling individuals into traps and pulling the wool over unsuspecting eyes.

It is because of ketman that Iranians themselves attach little meaning to words, which are often empty, and place much more emphasis on action. Westerners should similarly judge Iranians primarily by their actions, and place diminished reliance on statements.

Compartmentalizing reality: Iranian Ambassador on ABC's "Nightline"

Shortly after the Iran-Iraq War started, Ted Koppel of ABC's "Nightline" program invited Iranian Ambassador to the UN Mansour Farhang to appear on his program and explain Iran's stance on the war. Farhang had spent many years in the U.S. and was well acquainted with American culture.

Farhang accused the Iraqis of violating international law by having invaded Iran. Koppel responded indignantly, asking Farhang, "How dare you talk about violating international law? You are now holding 51 American diplomats hostage, in flagrant violation of international law. Farhang responded without batting an eyelash: "Your diplomats are our guests." From Farhang's facial gestures, a viewer would have had no idea that Farhang thought he was lying. And there was nothing Koppel could do to make him say otherwise.

6. Trust, Loyalty

When the Shah's regime began to totter, many people who had been loyal to the Shah for years went over to the side of the Islamic Revolution. They did this overnight, hoping to protect themselves, their families, their investments, etc.

It is extremely difficult to know precisely where an Iranian's loyalty lies. What matters most to Iranians is survival. Iranians will often make bargains as a means to protect themselves, not as a means of aligning with likeminded individuals.

Iranians are typically not willing to sacrifice much, let alone their lives, for an idea or for a leader. (And when they do, it is almost always as part of large groups.)

Opinions and deeply-held beliefs are secondary. Most Iranians are prepared to diametrically change their opinions the moment they perceive it to be in their interest to do so.

Being pro-Shah and pro-mullah at the same time

Before the revolution, an American noted that a certain family in Tehran hung pictures on the living room wall of themselves with the Shah and the Shah's wife. This family had many American friends. When the mullahs took over in 1979, this family remained in Iran. This seemed strange since, to the outside observer, their wall pictures and friendships with Americans were recipes for trouble with the new regime.

About five years later, another American visited this family in Tehran and dined at their home. The American visitor was told by their mutual American friend about the pictures that had been on the wall. The American visitor noticed that there were photos on the wall of this family with senior mullahs, taken about 10-15

years previously.

After dinner, while drinking coffee in the salon, the American visitor casually mentioned that their mutual American acquaintance had described a very different set of pictures on the wall. The family members laughed and said, "Tell our mutual American friend that the pictures now hanging on our walls were in a very safe hiding place during the previous regime. And tell him also that the pictures he remembered from before are in that very same hiding place."

Iranians, in short, believe they must be ready for anything and these pictures were proof that whatever happened, this family could demonstrate that they supported whoever was in power. Iranians have developed a fine sense of being able to know the exact moment to display whatever pictures or other evidence they need to prove fidelity.

Curiously, this is similar to the old American political adage often heard in Washington: "I have one set of principles. But if you don't like them, I have another."

7. Keep Your Options Open: Have Friends in Every Camp

Rulers can change their minds in an instant. Coups can happen without notice. For this reason, it is good to have connections – and especially relatives – among all groups vying for power.

It is not uncommon to observe several sons of a single family aligned with various groups. One son may be in a religious seminary, others in various opposition groups, and still others in the bazaar (in the business world). On the surface, it might appear that these sons hold views that are diametrically opposed to each other. But Iranians see this as hedging their bets. Regardless of who comes to power, their family and interests are protected.

The importance of having connections everywhere

A young Iranian was studying engineering in an American university. He had a brother who was studying to become a mullah in Qom, another brother working with their uncle in the bazaar in Tehran, and another in the Tudeh – i.e., the Iranian Communist party. Still another was very active in an opposition group in Los Angeles. When asked how it was possible that brothers and extended family members seem to be in almost every camp, the student laughed and in a moment of candor said, "You don't understand us. Like any good Iranian family, we hedge our bets. None of us believe in anything in particular. All we care about is our own security. By having someone in every camp, we know that whoever ends up ruling our country, our family will be protected."

8. The Art of Negotiation

Negotiations are opportunities to best others, to demonstrate power, and to defeat opponents. Iranians do not see bargaining as an opportunity to establish win-win situations. Contracts are little more than pieces of paper Iranians will sign, if these papers can advance their interests. Their signatures are not guarantees that they will carry out the terms of the contract.

With Iranians, offering to come to the negotiation table before winning can escalate violence and invite demands for further concessions.

In politics, Iranians negotiate only after defeating their enemies. During these negotiations, the victor magnanimously dictates to the vanquished how things will be conducted thereafter. Signaling a desire to talk before being victorious is, in Iranian eyes, a sign of weakness or lack of will to win.

Iranians will usually attempt to capitalize on a perceived weakness. When dealing with Iranians, it is important to understand that offering to come to the negotiation table before winning can escalate violence and invite Iranian demands for further concessions.

The art of "besting": Business dealings with Iranians

American businessmen in Iran in the 1970s learned that Iranians often violate signed contracts. If a contract called for twelve monthly payments for work performed over a year, the Iranians typically refused to pay the last payment if it was due after the work was completed. Taking them to court didn't help.

Some smart Americans then devised a creative way – using what they had learned about Iranian culture – to get all of their money in later contracts. The Americans divided up the sum they wanted for the contract into eleven payments and added in a little more money for good measure, with the twelfth payment essentially a bonus for them, knowing that they would likely never receive it. This guaranteed that the Americans got paid what they wanted, and allowed the Iranians to believe they were besting the Americans. Two can play this game.

9. Patience: An Essential Element in Iranian Life

Iranians are known for the production of beautiful rugs. Rug-making is an art and each rug can take months or even years to complete. Patience is therefore an essential component of rug-making. There is no timeline. The rug is simply finished when it is.

As a result, Iranians have learned how to wait and steadily prepare to reach their goal. By contrast, Western culture calls for delivering instant results. In the Iranian view, the one who can wait out an opponent usually wins.

10. The Game of Chess as a Window into the Iranian Mind

Many centuries ago, Iranians either invented or adopted the game of chess as their national game. This is a game of skill where players calculate at least two or three moves ahead, and similarly calculate the moves that will be made by their opponents.

Iranians adopted the game of chess as their national game. In a conflict, they think several moves ahead, and carefully consider the moves their adversaries will make in response.

Iranians are therefore excellent planners and have a keen ability to

compartmentalize thought. In a conflict, they think several moves ahead, and carefully consider the moves their adversaries will make in response. Iranians are great game planners and do their best to leave as little as possible to chance.

A chess move to protect the Iranian flank: The Iranian government's attempt to return assets to a former senior Iranian official who is well-connected to senior U.S. government officials

Many former high-ranking officials under the Shah escaped to the West in 1979. The assets of these officials were nationalized by the Islamic Revolutionary regime. Many of these officials kept out of the limelight, and stayed away from Iranian politics either within Iran or abroad until the mid-2000s.

In the mid-2000s, one of these former officials related the following story: This official had begun to meet with people well-connected in both the American and European governments. As senior Iranian officials began to learn of these meetings, Iran's current government officials sent documents through mutual acquaintances that demonstrated that the family properties had never actually been nationalized, and that the assets of this official living abroad still belonged to him. Moreover, the Iranian government made it clear that it was even prepared to buy the property and transfer the money in dollars abroad.

Why did senior Iranian government officials do this? Because they wanted to ensure that if things go wrong for them in Iran, that they have good contacts outside the country that might be able to provide them a soft landing. The Iranian government officials did not offer to return the property to its rightful owner because it was "the right thing to do." These current officials were simply looking for ways to "prove" that they had been working with the opposition all along, should the current Iranian regime fall. As every Iranian knows, it is important to have allies/contacts in all camps.

Additionally, by dangling the possibility of the return of these properties to their owners living outside the country, the Iranian government also neutralized them. Many of these exiled Iranians realized that if they spoke out against the current regime, they might lose the opportunity to regain their Iranian assets.

In one chess move, the Iranian government managed to neutralize its potential enemies and set up a situation that can protect them from possible revenge, should their government fall.

11. The Purpose of Holding Meetings

Meetings hold enormous symbolism for Iranians. The fact that a meeting takes place matters much more than what is said at such a meeting. Meetings confer legitimacy and offer prestige. When Westerners request a meeting with a particular Iranian, it is perceived as a granting of legitimacy and power that they otherwise might not have.

The fact that a meeting takes place matters much more than what is said at such a meeting. Meetings confer legitimacy and offer prestige.

12. Working Together/Cooperation

Though they often profess great loyalty to causes and people, at the core Iranians do not trust each other and they don't trust outsiders. Iranians, therefore, have great difficulty working together. This is one of the primary reasons it is difficult to create a united Iranian opposition movement. Getting Iranians to work together can be like "herding cats," i.e., it is nearly impossible.

Each opposition group leader sees himself as a little Shah, and almost always badmouths or belittles the others until a single force emerges as most powerful. This situation can be immobilizing to policymakers in the West because it becomes exceedingly difficult to know whom to believe and whom to support.

That said, there is a way to make Iranians cooperate. If the Iranians are clearly shown that the strongest powers in the West – the U.S. and its allies – support a particular leader or group, history demonstrates that Iranians will almost assuredly flock to that leader.

13. Western Strength

When the West establishes itself as the most powerful force and shows strength and resolve, Iranians will almost assuredly come on board. They do not want to be on the losing side. If it looks like the West will help to establish one opposition group or individual as leader, Iranians can be expected to jump on the bandwagon.

It is important to note, however, that when confronted with Western power, Iranian leaders, given the nature of their culture, would almost assuredly "modify their views" in an attempt to protect themselves. Faced with American strength, Iranian leaders can be expected to instantly change and oppose exactly what they claimed to support beforehand.

If the West wants to bring about a different type of regime in Iran, it must support those forces inside Iran which demonstrate by their actions that they support Western values and freedoms. At that point, the West is likely to find that Iranians living outside Iran will help provide whatever financial, technical, and political assistance may be necessary to change the regime.(13)

Military action may be used as a complimentary tactic to help accomplish the goal of regime change. If military action is eventually required, the targeting of national symbols and leadership strongholds may be enough to demonstrate that the balance of power in Iran is quickly shifting. By applying this principle, the West may not need to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities or launch a large-scale invasion to bring down Iran's rulers and stop the nuclear program.

As Iranians spend a lot of time trying to determine whether a particular party actually wields power, any confrontation – military or diplomatic – is to be avoided until one is clearly prepared to use overwhelming force. Otherwise, any victory will be pyrrhic at best.

How did the Iran-Iraq War end?

One week before Khomeini called for an end to the Iran-Iraq War, the USS

Vincennes, an American naval ship stationed in the Persian Gulf, mistakenly shot down an Iranian civilian airplane, killing all 278 people on board. For the U.S., this was a terrible tragedy. The U.S. government apologized profusely for having made such a horrible blunder. For Khomeini and most Iranians, however, this was a sign that the U.S. was now prepared to exercise its power. Most Iranians were absolutely sure that the U.S. had intentionally shot down the plane. To them, this act "proved" that America was showing strength and resolve.

One week before Khomeini announced an end to the Iran-Iraq War, the USS Vincennes, an American naval ship stationed in the Persian Gulf, mistakenly shot down an Iranian civilian airplane, killing 278 people. Most Iranians were absolutely sure that the U.S. had intentionally shot down the plane in a show of strength.

About a week later, Khomeini publicly announced an end to the bloody, eight-year war, saying that Iran had to swallow this "poison" in order to prevent dire consequences for the country. From an Iranian point of view, the Vincennes incident proved that the U.S. was willing to use power mercilessly and Iran had therefore no choice but to give in to the apparent American demand to end the war.

14. Modern Disdain for Islam

Today, even religious figures who love Islam are watching the younger generation of Iranians live the most un-Islamic lifestyles they can get away with. For example, the rage in Tehran among teenagers is to come to parties and take off their outer clothes, revealing amazingly suggestive outfits. They then engage in activities which are un-Islamic to say the least. When asked about Islam, a large number of youngsters, who are very well-informed about the latest trends outside Iran,(14) laugh; and when they feel safe, explain that they are at best indifferent to Islam and at worst disdainful of their religion.

Iranians love to tell anti-Muslim and anti-mullah jokes. Many see Islam as an Arab imposition on Iran. Iranians look down on Arabs and call them lizard-eaters and/or rodent-eaters.

The sudden emergence of the Baha'i faith

In the 19th century, the Baha'i faith emerged in Iran. Their prophet, Baha-ullah who was an ex-Shiite, claimed that God sends prophets in every age. This is an anathema to traditional Islam. Traditional Muslims believe that Muhammad was the final prophet; God would send no others after him. The Baha'is disagree.

Converting to the Baha'i faith is apostasy according to Muslim law, which is punishable by death. But as the Baha'is won militarily, significant numbers of Iranians converted to the Baha'i faith. When the tide turned and the Shiites started winning, people re-converted to Shi'ism, often claiming that they never had converted to the Baha'i faith in the first place.

The people's reactions were typically Iranian. In each case, they shifted their

allegiance to the winner. This begs the question of whether Iran could leave Islam. In the end, Iran adopted Islam as a way of protecting itself against the foreign conquerors. Could it be discarded if no longer needed?

This story might also explain why numbers of Shiite Iranians in the West are converting to Christianity,(15) but other non-Iranian Muslims are not.

15. The Nuclear Issue

The Iranian government claims that it needs nuclear power for domestic energy consumption. This claim is curious because Iran has the second largest proven energy reserves in the oil-rich Gulf, and because the country exports electricity to both Iraq and Afghanistan. So if Iran needed energy, it could use the power it exports for its own internal needs.

For the Iranian government, the nuclear issue plays a double role. When Iran acquires nuclear bombs, it will gain the political independence it needs to dominate the Middle East, and to promote its form of Shi'ism throughout the Muslim world.

When Iran acquires nuclear bombs, it will gain the political independence it needs to dominate the Middle East, and to promote its form of Shi'ism throughout the Muslim world.

Iran's leaders are being very sly in this regard. Iran's government knows that all Iranians, wherever they live, feel personally attacked when Western leaders say that Iran should not be allowed to have nuclear weapons. Iranians look around them and see that others in their neighborhood such as Russia, Israel, Pakistan, India, and China all have the bomb. To say that Iran shouldn't have the bomb is considered an affront to Iranian patriotism.

Using a little ingenuity, we could drive a wedge between the Iranian government and the Iranian people. We should make clear that we are not opposed to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. We are only opposed to the current government having a nuclear arsenal because it is the largest state-sponsor of terrorism in the world. If Iran had a government which was more concerned with the welfare of its own people, instead of meddling in the affairs of others, it would be much less likely to use such weapons if it had them.

If the current government acquires nuclear weapons, it might very well use them and cause the outside world to retaliate against Iran. We should remind the Iranian people that if the current Iranian government had nuclear weapons and used them, the outside world would have to retaliate, which could result in the deaths of countless Iranians.

Ahmadinejad's popularity among the (non-Iranian) masses throughout the Muslim world

Ahmadinejad was a virtual unknown in the Muslim world before the Revolutionary Guards/Basij engineered his first presidential election.(16)

And while Iranians would normally pursue their agenda non-confrontationally, by

sweet-talking their enemies, Ahmadinejad has been acting in surprisingly atypical fashion, by being direct and crass with the so-called enemies of the Islamic Republic.

Ahmadinejad has denied the Holocaust, called for the liquidation of Israel, and has stepped up the pursuit of nuclear power – in blatant violation of UN resolutions.

The passive reaction of the international community to Ahmadinejad's words and actions have demonstrated to the Muslim masses – especially to the Sunnis – that their own leaders are traitors because they either could not or would not stand up to the West and help restore Islam's honor.

This is why Ahmadinejad's picture has been put up throughout the Muslim world, even in places such as Malaysia and Indonesia where there are few, if any, Shiites. And this explains why he has become something of a folk hero throughout the Muslim world.(17)

Many Muslims, especially among the Sunni masses, believe that Ahmadinejad and Khamenei – even more than Khomeini – is succeeding in restoring Islam's honor by acquiring the most powerful weapon in the world. (This, of course, petrifies/terrorizes the Sunni Arab kings, tyrants, and dictators who realize that a nuclear Iran is even more threatening to them personally than to Israel, Europe, and the U.S.)

Conclusion

Clearly, in many aspects, Iran's ancient culture is very different from the West. It is, therefore, not surprising that we are often perplexed by how Iranians act. Unfortunately, all too often we have insisted on employing mirror-imaging, or seeing Iranians as we see ourselves. This has enabled Iran to continually outsmart the West.

Iranians may be skilled chess players, but the West has produced many more world-class chess players than has Iran. With a little ingenuity and gamesmanship, the West should be able to outfox the Iranians at their own game.

Using the ideas presented above, Western leaders might consider meeting publicly with opposition leaders, supporting Iranians who want to liberate their homeland from tyranny, and numerous other measures which could weaken the current regime's control and eventually bring it to its knees.

But if the West is to succeed, Iranians must be convinced, in terms they understand, that America is prepared to establish itself as a powerful force and help the Iranian population liberate themselves from the tyranny under which they live.

In short, if the West will step back and consider how best to understand and use Iranian culture in order to accomplish policy goals, there is a good chance of devising policies that will benefit the West, the Iranian people, and the world.

Notes

1. Sunni Arabs' loyalty lies primarily with the Arab people, not necessarily with a particular country.
2. Until the Arab conquests, the overwhelming majority of the peoples of today's Arab world spoke Aramaic, a language closely related to Arabic. The peoples of North Africa (mostly the Egyptians and Berbers) spoke Hametic languages, which are linguistically related to the Semitic languages. Iranians spoke what we today call "Middle Persian," which was an Indo-European language.
3. Persian was first revived in Samarkand and Bukhara, in today's Uzbekistan. These cities were and still are culturally and linguistically typically very Persian. (Since the Soviet period, Persian has been called Tajik in Central Asia. Yet Tajik, Dari in Afghanistan, and Persian in Iran are different names for dialects of the same language.)
4. Even the name "Baghdad" is Persian, meaning "God gave."
5. We only know about the male line. According to classical Islamic rules, the ruler of a state must be descended from the male founder of the state. For Muslims, the mother's line is rather unimportant and we know very little about the rulers' mothers. It would not be surprising if we someday learned that their mothers were Iranians/Persians.
6. Interestingly, the Iranians call themselves "*Bod Parast*," which means "idol worshippers." "Idol" here means a strong leader. (As an aside, the word "*Bod*" originally comes from the word "*Buddha*," whose statues were destroyed by the Taliban in Afghanistan.)
7. Theoretically, Shiites are supposed to pattern their lives after a grand ayatollah, meaning they are to follow his religious dictates and support him financially.
8. These students would not have gotten into trouble by mentioning his name because he was known to keep out of politics.
9. For Iranians and other Middle Easterners, honor here mean "what others say and think about you." This view of honor has little to do with the Western view of honor – i.e., doing the right thing.
10. In Islam, atheists such as Communists, in this instance, are to be offered the choice of Islam or death. By contrast, Christians and Jews are allowed to live under Muslim rule, as long as they submit to the rules of the "*Dhimma*," which means that they accept their position as being politically and socially inferior, as second-class, tolerated citizens.
11. What follows is taken from the memoirs of the Iranian "student" hostage-takers.
12. *Taqiyah* is used by the Shiites, but not rejected by the Sunnis. It appears in the Quran, where Muhammad tells Muslims that under threat of death, you may renounce Islam publicly as long as you do not do so in your heart. *Taqiyah* and *ketman* are Arabic words which were adopted into Persian and are used interchangeably in Persian.
13. There is a large and very wealthy Iranian diaspora which has the resources and connections to fund such an opposition.
14. It is thought that Persian is either the 3rd or 4th most commonly used language on the Internet, and young Iranians are ingenious at getting around their government's censorship of the Internet.
15. Shiites are converting to Christianity specifically in the Netherlands and southern California.
16. From what we know, it appears that Ahmadinejad's 1st and 2nd presidential victories were election coups by the Revolutionary Guards/Basij. During the first election campaign, it was obvious that he would lose. After the election booths closed, the vote counting began. From what we know, Ahmadinejad was trailing by a large margin. Around 2:00 a.m., the Revolutionary Guards/Basij entered the place where the votes were being counted and, miraculously, an

additional 7.5 million votes for Ahmadinejad were found. He thereby "won" the first round of the elections. Ahmadinejad then easily won the next round of voting and was elected president. As for Ahmadinejad's 2nd election "victory," Iranians understood that the government-announced election results were at best a farce. The government announced the nation-wide election results within an hour of the polls closing. If these election officials are to be believed, that would mean that Iran has a much more sophisticated technological system for tabulating election results than all Western countries – a remarkable feat indeed.

17. Parallels between Ahmadinejad and Adolf Hitler during the 1930s are striking. Hitler's generals urged him not to invade the Saarland because they feared the West would react militarily and thereby further humiliate Germany. Hitler thought otherwise. When the West did not respond to Germany's remilitarization of the Saarland, Hitler went further, annexing Austria, and after Munich, gobbled up the Czech lands. After each aggressive act, the West either appeased or remained silent. Thus, Hitler proved to his generals that the West was a paper tiger.

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Part III – Iran Spreads Its Tentacles

Latin America: Iran's Springboard to America's Backyard (December 2011)

Michael Segall

- Ever since Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005, Iran has been working resolutely to establish a foothold in the Latin American countries – in the U.S.' backyard. The Iranian president's partners in promoting this policy are the presidents of Venezuela and Bolivia, who provide him with a springboard for activity in Latin America.
- Iran is exploiting its growing ties and common interests with Latin American countries to deploy there its familiar pieces from the Middle Eastern and African chessboards. Those "pieces" include subversive and propaganda activity, terror and smuggling, and the development of long-arm military capabilities. In this context, there have been reports that Iran is seeking to establish a missile base in Venezuela, at the doorstep of the "great Satan."
- In addition to terror and criminal activity by Iran and Hizbullah among the Muslim base in Latin America, Iran and its emissaries in the region also engage in extensive social, cultural, and religious activity aimed at exporting the Islamic Revolution and, primarily, at disseminating and introducing Shiite Islam, even to the point of converting various

populations throughout the continent to Shia.

- Iran's infrastructures in Latin America could, in time of need, help Iran act against the United States itself or against Western interests in Latin America in various scenarios: if its nuclear installations are attacked by Israel and/or the United States, or if, should Iran's sense of isolation and encirclement intensify, it seeks to initiate crises with the U.S., perhaps on the model of the Cuban missile crisis. In the interim, Iran is exploiting the relative proximity to the U.S. to illegally penetrate its territory (via Mexico) as well as prepare a terror and sabotage infrastructure within the U.S. itself.
- The infrastructures Iran is creating – some of which are already operative and some in formation – will have a dual implication if Iran manages to obtain nuclear weapons and operate these infrastructures under the cover of its nuclear umbrella.

Ever since Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005, Iran has been working resolutely to establish a foothold in the Latin American countries – the United States' backyard. Until recently, this region was not one of Iranian interest, given the cultural and historical disparities between Iran – even under the Shah, let alone the Islamic Republic – and the countries of the region. The Iranian president's partners in promoting this policy are the presidents of Venezuela and to a lesser extent Bolivia, who provide him with a springboard for activity in Latin America.



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, left, and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, right, in Iran, July 2, 2007. (AP photo/Hasan Sarbakhshian)

Ahmadinejad and Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez share a revolutionary vision that they present jointly despite the huge differences between their two countries. Both seek to create new, global, hegemonic power on the ruins of American dominance. Chavez views himself as the heir of the nineteenth-century revolutionary Simon Bolivar, the "Liberator of the Americas" from the yoke of the Spanish conquest. Ahmadinejad, in his meetings with Latin American officials, misses no opportunity to portray Iran and other countries that espouse an anti-American ideology in Latin America and Africa as worthy substitutes for the United States and the allegedly collapsing capitalism it represents.

For example, in a Tehran meeting with Uruguay's Foreign Minister Luis Almagro in April 2011, the Iranian president said that "under such conditions that the oppressive order ruling the world is moving towards demise and the world needs a fair order, the two countries can have further cooperation with each other in various fields." (1) And in a meeting with the Venezuelan ambassador in Tehran, Ahmadinejad said: "Independent and justice-seeking nations and governments have been vigilant against Imperialism's plots and would not be deceived by them." (2)

Moreover, in an October 2010 meeting with his Bolivian counterpart President Evo Morales, the Iranian president said that "undoubtedly, the reinforcement of the independent nations' front will benefit the global peace and security, and will further undermine the capitalist system.... The course of the history [sic] is changing in favor of the independent nations and we should smartly take advantage of the current situation." (3) Later, in a meeting with the Bolivian president of the Chamber of Deputies, Ahmadinejad reiterated: "Brotherhood and proximity of freedom-seeking nations not only strengthens their resistance vis-a-vis the arrogant powers, but they play a constructive and crucial role in setting up a new world order." (4)

In general, Iran's continued investment in its relations with Latin American countries is part of a strategy aimed, first, at purchasing (in both senses) a foothold for influence in Africa and the Middle East, where countries, in Iran's view, have been harmed by "American imperialism and exploitation," and second, at offering a "just" Islamic alternative to the supposed American crimes. In this context Iran maintains, at various magnitudes for each country, an extensive network of contacts in the diplomatic, energy, economic-commercial (serving as the main lever of persuasion in recruiting support), and financial (including establishing joint banks to bypass sanctions) spheres, while promoting cooperation with regard to industry, establishing plants, signing mass communications agreements, and the like. On 27 February 2007 Iran staged "The First Conference on the Issue of South America: Its Role and Place in the New International Order," (5) and in December 2008 it presented the first exhibit on the development of Iranian-Latin American economic cooperation. (6)

In his address to the 65th general session of the UN General Assembly in September 2010, Ahmadinejad stated: "The two vast geographical spheres,

namely Africa and Latin America, have gone through historic developments during the past decades....The awareness and wisdom of the leaders of these two continents has overcome the regional problems and crises without the domineering interference of non-regional powers. The Islamic Republic of Iran has expanded its relations with Latin America and Africa in all aspects in recent years."(7) In October 2010, the presidents of Venezuela and (as mentioned) Bolivia visited Iran.

In April 2011, General Douglas Fraser, head of the U.S. Southern Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Iran had expanded its ties in Latin America beyond its close relationship with Venezuela. A member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Iranian *Majlis* (parliament), Mahmoud Ahmadi-Bighash, said: "The U.S. is fearful that the Islamic Revolution in Iran has increased the awakening of Middle Eastern and North African nations." He further added that "Islamic inspirations are behind the revolutions in the Middle East but the revolution of Latin American countries will pursue" the path of democracy.(8)

The background of Iran's vigorous anti-U.S., anti-Western activity on various fronts is its sense of encirclement stemming from Operation Iraqi Freedom and, in recent years, the sanctions aimed at preventing its nuclearization, with its concomitant growing isolation in the international arena. During this time Iran has also been adding an ideological component to the equation. It presents itself – along with those states in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East that, in Iran's view, are now liberating themselves from the yoke of imperialism by protesting against the old, corrupt, U.S.-supported regimes – as destined to provide a suitable alternative to an America in decline.

New Equations

Iran under Ahmadinejad's presidency has constantly sought international and regional recognition of its power and capability to influence both regional issues (the peace process, Iraq, Afghanistan, the stability or overthrow of regimes) and international ones (the nuclear issue, oil and gas prices, the security of navigation in the Persian Gulf). Hence it is attempting to confront the United States with new power equations, one of which involves activity in Latin America – that is, the United States' backyard, parallel to the American presence in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Azerbaijan that envelops Iran.

As part of the Iranian aspiration to be an "appropriate alternative" to American hegemony, it finds common ideological denominators, despite the vast religious disparity, with the leaders of countries that take an anti-American stance and are prepared to cooperate with Iran in promoting a joint political and economic agenda. Iran, for its part, exploits its ties with these countries to bypass sanctions and obtain dual-use equipment for its nuclear program, while continuing its ties with North Korea in that context, as recently revealed in a United Nations report by a special experts' committee.(9)

Iran Deploys Its "Chess Pieces"

Iran is exploiting its growing ties and common interests with Latin American countries to deploy there its familiar pieces from the Middle Eastern and African chessboards, where it displays great activity. Those "pieces" include subversive and propaganda activity (spreading Shiite Islam), terror, and smuggling (drugs, weapons). According to unverified reports in Die Welt, Iran is building, with the assistance of the Khatem al-Anbia command of the Revolutionary Guards, an intermediate-range missile base in Venezuela while collaborating with Caracas in developing SSM.(10) The German daily claims that according to an agreement, Iranian Shahab 3 (range 1300-1500 km), Scud-B (285-330 km), and Scud-C (300, 500, and 700 km) missiles are to be deployed in a base that is indeed at the doorstep of the "great Satan."(11)

Such infrastructures could, in time of need, help Iran act against the United States itself or against Western interests in Latin America in various scenarios: if its nuclear installations are attacked by Israel and/or the United States, or if, should Iran's sense of isolation and encirclement intensify, it seeks to initiate crises with the United States, perhaps on the model of the Cuban missile crisis. In the interim, Iran is in any case exploiting the relative proximity to the U.S. to illegally penetrate its territory (via Mexico) as well as prepare a terror and sabotage infrastructure on U.S. territory.

Iran seeks to erode U.S. political and, to an extent, economic influence in the Latin American countries, to weaken the countries that support the United States (such as Colombia), and to recruit, by inducements and promises of economic aid (which it does not always provide in practice), support for Iran and its policy. Furthermore, Iran is enlisting Latin American countries to serve the anti-Israeli agenda. In reaction to Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, Venezuela expelled the Israeli ambassador and created a hostile atmosphere for Jews that led to intensified anti-Semitic manifestations, such as the damaging of the long-established, main synagogue of Caracas, Tiferet Yisrael, and the destruction of sacred books there – an attack that Chavez condemned. Bolivia, too, severed diplomatic relations with Israel over the military campaign. The strengthened Iranian-Venezuelan ties have led over one-quarter of Venezuela's Jews to emigrate.

Bases of Recruitment and Support

Throughout Latin America about 4.5-6 million Muslims reside, the majority Sunni and the minority Shiite. Among this Muslim population two communities are prominent: one that originated in India, Indonesia, and Pakistan, the other consisting of Muslims who originated in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine and who emigrated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Muslim population centers, with an emphasis on the Shiites, form a convenient recruitment base for Iran, both in terms of promoting its revolutionary objectives and helping terror elements operate on its behalf in the region.

In addition to terror and criminal activity by Iran and Hizbullah among the Muslim base in Latin America, Iran and its emissaries in the region also engage in extensive social, cultural, and religious activity aimed at exporting the Islamic Revolution and, primarily, at disseminating Shiite Islam, even to the point of converting various populations throughout the continent to Shia. The Islamization activity is conducted by the Ahel al-Beit organization, which works to disseminate Shia throughout the world, and by other Shiite centers in Latin America.(12) Ahel al-Beit operates a website in Spanish targeted at Latin American audiences.(13) Local elements who are recruited are sent for indoctrination in Iran, which includes religious studies and military training, and subsequently return to their countries. They maintain contact with Iranian and Hizbullah elements operating in their country and serving as the operational arm of Iranian policy (in mosques, social frameworks, etc.). Additionally, Iran works to strengthen cooperation in the field of mass communications, and to establish contact with Latin American residents in their languages. For example, Ahmadinejad's adviser for media affairs, Ali Akbar Javanfekr, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Venezuelan news agency AVN to bolster cooperation regarding exchanges of news and photographs.(14)

The Handwriting Is Already on the Wall

The United States is well aware of the sharply escalating Iranian activity in Latin America. In recent years many intelligence, State Department, army, DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration), and other operatives have warned about this trend and its negative short-, medium-, and long-term repercussions for U.S. citizens and U.S. allies in Latin America. Some of the fresh evidence on Iranian's involvement there was provided by General Douglas M. Fraser, head of U.S. Southern Command, to the Senate Armed Services Committee on 5 April 2011:

Iran continues expanding regional ties to support its own diplomatic goal of reducing the impact of international sanctions connected with its nuclear program. While much of Iran's engagement in the region has been with Venezuela and Bolivia, it has nearly doubled the number of embassies in the region in the past decade and hosted three regional heads of state in 2010. Currently, Iranian engagement with Venezuela appears to be based on shared interests: avoiding international isolation; access to military and petroleum technologies; and the reduction of U.S. influence....In addition to extra-regional state actors, members of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) from the Middle East remain active in Latin America and the Caribbean and constitute a potential threat. Hizbullah supporters continue to raise funds within the region to finance their worldwide activities.(15)

A special, updated CRS (Congressional Research Service) report from February 2011,(16) "Latin America: Terrorism Issues," highlights Iran. The United States expresses concern about Venezuela's lack of cooperation in the struggle against terror and its support for terror groups in Colombia. The report also focuses on

Iran's intensified activity in Latin America, primarily regarding its attempts to circumvent the sanctions (Venezuela having promised to supply Iran with refined oil in case of sanctions), and its ties with Lebanese Hizbullah. There is also emphasis on the growing ties between Iran and Venezuela, both members of OPEC, since Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005. The report states: "A major rationale for this increased focus on Latin America appears to be Iran's efforts to overcome its international isolation. The personal relationship between Ahmadinejad and Chavez has driven the strengthening of bilateral ties." In May, Iran's deputy minister of industry and minerals noted that Venezuela is Latin America's largest importer of Iranian industrial products and minerals.(17) Also in that month, the Iranian ambassador to Caracas said that "the relations between Iran and Venezuela are based on mutual interests and are affected by the common points of the two countries' revolutions, including movement towards self-reliance on the domestic level and justice-seeking and confrontation against hegemonic policies on the international scene."(18)

In September 2009, Chavez visited Iran and signed a series of contracts and agreements in the energy field. Some contravene the sanctions imposed on Iran and American legislation in this area. The Venezuelan president also expressed support for Iran's nuclear program, and reports divulged that Iran would assist Venezuela in uranium prospecting.(19) This ran counter to UN Security Council Resolution 1929, which prohibits Iranian investments in uranium mining outside of Iran.

The Iranian-Venezuelan cooperation continues to progress in many areas. For example, the head of the Khatem al-Anbia command of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, General Rostam Ghasemi, stated in May 2011 that the command was currently dealing with the planning and construction of a tanker with a 120-ton capacity for Venezuela.(20) As noted earlier, this arm of the Revolutionary Guards is responsible for the building of the Iranian missile base in Venezuela (which, for its part, denied that this was happening). It also carries out most of Iran's national strategic projects in the field of infrastructure, such as the reinforcement of sensitive nuclear sites.

The growing apprehension in the United States over expanding Iranian activity in its backyard was already apparent during the presidency of George W. Bush, especially in light of the increasing U.S.-Iranian friction over the protracted nuclear crisis and the sanctions. The longer the sanctions continue, the more effectively Iran contends with them – both by creating acquisition routes that bypass the sanctions and by building capabilities to respond should it be attacked or feel that the economic and diplomatic noose is tightening around it. Iran wants to prepare its response options against the United States and will not hesitate to use them (as it already has in the Middle East, in the cases of the 1983 and 1984 bombings of the U.S. embassy and the Marine barracks in Beirut, and the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia).

Priority Intelligence Requirements

One of the major indications of U.S. awareness of the gravity of the threat that Iran is building in Latin America is a telegram, revealed by WikiLeaks, that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sent at the beginning of 2009 to all U.S. embassies in Latin America. It stated that Iran was trying to forge ties with Latin American countries in an attempt to break out of its growing diplomatic isolation, and that Iran viewed leftist countries as partners in its anti-American doctrine. The telegram also said Ahmadinejad was the main force behind this policy, and that his collaborator, the one who "opens doors" for him in the Latin American countries, was Chavez, noting Iran's extensive ties with Venezuela that emphasize military cooperation (which formed the context of the *Die Welt* report). It was this cooperation, the telegram asserted, that posed the most tangible and immediate danger. Clinton also mentioned in this regard Hizbullah's freedom to raise funds and carry out activities, and the fact that it viewed Venezuela as a safe haven from which it could operate unhindered. The telegram further notes that Iran had established cultural centers in sixteen Latin American countries while having ambassadors posted in ten additional ones.(21)

Moreover, the telegram conveys a long series of questions (known as PIR, priority intelligence requirements) from the State Department to U.S. embassies and to cross agencies Iran specialists. This attests, perhaps more than anything else, to Washington's growing concern over the Iranian activities and looming threats in Latin America and its desire to map out their details. It should be noted that the telegram's extensive attention to these matters demonstrates that the various U.S. intelligence and enforcement agencies have already accumulated a large body of information about the Iranian activities.

The main U.S. concerns are: what is the extent of Iran's activity in Latin America; to what extent are Iran and its partners in the region acting against the United States and its interests; and who stands behind, shapes, and implements this activity (possibilities include Iran's Foreign Ministry, Intelligence Ministry, and Revolutionary Guards)? How is the activity coordinated in the field; how does Iran spread its cultural-religious influence in the region? What are the Shiite contexts of this activity in each particular country; what is the size of the Shiite Muslim communities that constitute Hizbullah clans; how do the Iranian diplomatic delegations in the region operate?

The PIR goes on to extensively detail the Iranian areas of activity in Latin America that perturb America. Does Iran intend to use Latin America as a platform for terror activities, directly or via surrogates? Does it support terror activities in Latin America itself; are officials within the Iranian regime working to establish networks of cells for future terror activity? Do Iran and Hizbullah share similar objectives in the region, and to what extent is the Jerusalem (Qods) Force of the Revolutionary Guards (the operational arm of the Revolutionary Guards for subversive terror activities outside of Iran) involved? Further questions include: are the Iranian cultural centers and the intelligence and Revolutionary Guards operatives in contact with converts to Islam; how are Latin American recruits who

have undergone training in Iran and the Middle East operated; what do converts engage in after returning from religious study and indoctrination in Iran; are Iranian elements attempting to penetrate American territory or private American companies via Latin America; how is Iran working in Latin America to bypass the sanctions; is Tehran involved in any way in efforts to counter narcotics trafficking; and what is the extent of Iran's military contacts with regional countries and particularly Venezuela – including refurbishing F-5 aircraft engines, purchasing unmanned aerial vehicles, and the use of aircraft of the Venezuelan oil company PDVSA for weapons transfers from Tehran and Damascus?

Concern over the Level of Subversive Activity

Already on 27 January 2009, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said he was disturbed "by the level of subversive activity that Iran is conducting in a number of Latin American countries and especially in its south and center....It is opening many offices and many fronts, via which it is meddling in what goes on in some of these countries." He added: "the truth is that I'm more concerned over Iranian involvement in this region than over Russia's involvement."(22)

In a February 2010 meeting between Eliot Engel, ranking member of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, and President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner of Argentina, it was stated that the United States was concerned over Iran's growing activity in Latin America, and over cumulative evidence that Chavez was providing Iran with logistical and political support to conduct terror activities.(23)

A status evaluation performed (according to WikiLeaks) by the U.S. embassy in Brazil in July 2008 said, among other things, that Iran was pursuing an aggressive foreign policy in Latin America. It was trying, in the course of frequent visits to the region by Iranian officials, to persuade countries, including Brazil, to join the anti-American bloc of which Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela were already members. Additionally, Iran was conducting "soft diplomacy," appealing to public opinion in Brazil and pointing to "parallels between Brazil's peaceful nuclear energy program and [Iran's] purported wish for a 'peaceful' one of [its] own."(24)

Venezuela as a Springboard for Revolutionary Guard Activity in Latin America

In *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009* (published in August 2010), the U.S. State Department expressed concern over intensified ties between Venezuela under Chavez's rule and "state sponsor of terrorism Iran,"(25) and especially between Iran and other Latin American countries.(26) An additional unclassified report of the U.S. Defense Department presented to Congress, entitled "Iran's Military Power," said among other things that the Qods Force of the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC-QF) maintains an operational infrastructure around the world and recently an appreciable increase was recorded in its Latin American presence as

well, especially in Venezuela, and that if Iran were to intensify its activity in these countries it is plausible that contact with the IRGC-QF would be "frequent and consequential."

The report notes further that the IRGC-QF operates out of embassies, charitable foundations, and religious and cultural institutions to strengthen ties with local populations, with an emphasis on Shiites; and that it operates paramilitary bodies to support terror groups. The IRGC-QF was, indeed, involved in the abovementioned bombings of the U.S. embassy and the Marine barracks in Beirut (1983 and 1984), the terror attack on the Jewish Community Center's AMIA building in Buenos Aires in 1994, the abovementioned terror attack on the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996, and in many of the attacks on coalition forces in Iraq.(27) The CRS report and others connect Iran, including former President Rafsanjani, and Hizbullah to terror attacks in Argentina.

Narco-Terrorists

Dennis Blair, the former head of American intelligence, presented to the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2009 an annual report on threats facing the United States. In this context, Blair referred to the personal ties forming between the Iranian and Venezuelan presidents. He emphasized that Venezuela constitutes a bridge for Tehran in establishing contacts with additional Latin American countries. In his view, the strengthening of ties between Chavez and Iran, together with the rampant corruption in Venezuela, created a convenient environment that Hizbullah was exploiting. Blair added that Venezuela occupied second place after Colombia as a source for exporting cocaine in Latin America, and first place in terms of smuggling drugs by air to global markets.(28)

In January the chief of USEUCOM (the United States European Command), James Stavridis, in the course of a conference at the Center for Strategic Studies (CSIS) in Washington that focused on Latin American issues, warned about the link between narco-terrorism and terrorism connected with the activity of radical Islamic groups that could have destructive repercussions. Stavridis expressed apprehension about the involvement of "external players" (a broad hint at Iran) that could transform narco-terrorists into those involved in radical Islam right at the United States' doorstep. He noted while pointing to a picture of Ahmadinejad (alongside those of the presidents of Venezuela and Bolivia) "that this gentleman is the president of a state that is financing and supporting terror and he is a very dangerous person and is present and active in this region of the world."

In a similar vein, Charles Allen, who served as chief of intelligence analysis at the Homeland Security Department, assessed that Hizbullah and al-Qaeda were already involved in raising funds in Latin America, and could establish ties with drug barons and exploit them to carry out terror attacks against the United States. Drug barons already specialize in producing forged documentation, concealing weaponry, smuggling, money laundering, and providing safe havens. He added that while for the moment this was of low plausibility, some of the Latin American regimes offered "fertile ground" for such activity given their corruption

and feeble security services.(29)

An investigation by the Fox News network, quoting former senior officials in the DEA and the Homeland Security Department, found that Hizbullah operatives are involved in setting up networks for drug and weapons smuggling in collaboration with the drug cartels in Mexico. Hizbullah operatives are smuggled via these networks into the United States by tunnels equal in sophistication to those that enable weapons smuggling into Gaza. In this context, Jameel Nasr was arrested after journeying many times to Lebanon where he met with senior Hizbullah figures. As Rep. Connie Mack, chairman of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, remarked: "I think the question that we all have to ask is, when the terrorists come into Latin America, when they move into Mexico, how many have come into the United States? Our government doesn't know the answer to that question. That should make all of us very fearful."(30)

In January 2011, a book celebrating suicide bombers was been found in the Arizona desert just north of the U.S.-Mexican border. Published in Iran, it consists of short biographies of Islamic suicide bombers and other Islamic militants who died carrying out attacks. Immigration officials have discovered other items along the U.S.-Mexico border of Middle Eastern origin, including Iranian currency and a jacket covered in patches including an Arabic military badge that illustrates an airplane flying into a tower.(31)

The DEA's *National Drug Threat Assessment 2010* points out that only a small number of aliens (out of hundreds who make the attempt) from countries of particular interest to the United States (such as Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan) who try to cross the border illegally from Mexico to the United States are encountered by law enforcement bodies. The report notes that a number of alien smuggling organizations (ASOs) have a special interest in entering the United States. "However, among the aliens from special-interest countries who have been encountered at the U.S.-Mexico border over at least the past five years, none documented as a known or suspected terrorist has been identified as having been assisted by a DTO (drug trafficking organization)."(32)

The U.S. State Department's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2009* notes that in the course of a large arrest operation by the DEA, its agents established a direct connection between the traditional drug cartels in Colombia and Middle East money launderers affiliated with Hizbullah. The report also mentions a Hamas-Hizbullah money-laundering collaboration in the tri-border region between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay.(33) Thus, in actuality, the Iranian presence in Latin America constitutes a transnational threat from Latin America passing through the Middle East and Africa, and primarily in Western Africa where Hizbullah maintains a prominent presence. The problematic Latin American region and its Middle East connections received detailed reference in the March 2010 testimony of Anthony Placido, assistant administrator for intelligence of the DEA, to the House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs:

The relatively small quantity of drugs being smuggled out of the tri-

border area would not necessarily be a top priority for the DEA when contrasted with the multi-ton shipments transiting the Eastern Pacific and Caribbean corridors. However, with the cost of drugs being far lower in this region, they can be resold in other countries for large profits desired by those seeking funds to further terrorist activity such as Hizbullah....DTOs based in the Tri-border Area have ties to radical Islamic terrorist groups such as Hizbullah. It is important to note that this is not an emerging threat per se, but one that has existed since the late 1980s or early 1990s....There are numerous reports of cocaine proceeds entering the coffers of Islamic Radical Groups (IRG such as Hizbullah and Hamas in Europe and the Middle East).(34)

In October 2009, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, held a special hearing with Prof. Norman A. Bailey of the Institute of World Politics. He referred extensively to Iranian involvement in the international drug trade while exploiting the concrete factories it was establishing in Venezuela, among other places, in the region of the Orinoco River Delta, and their transfer routes. He summed up:

Iran over the past several years has built up an extensive network of facilities throughout the region, concentrated in Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Central America and Panama and involved with the financing of terrorist organizations, drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, money laundering, the provision of chemical precursors to the Colombian drug cartels and diamond smuggling (Venezuela has been expelled from the international agency charged with regulating the diamond trade). It is becoming increasingly clear that one of the principal motivations of all this activity is to be able to retaliate against the United States if it is attacked, particularly through the destruction of the Venezuelan oil facilities and blocking the Panama Canal. In short, the Iranian penetration into the Western Hemisphere indeed is a security threat to the United States and the rest of the Hemisphere.
(35)

Rep. Sue Myrick (R-N.C.) sent a letter in mid-2010 to Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano requesting that she thoroughly examine reports on collaboration between Hizbullah and the drug cartels along the border with Mexico, and establish a special task force to deal firmly with the serious threat to U.S. security. Myrick cited the views and findings of former intelligence officials and others. One of them was a "high-ranking Mexican Army officer" who, she said, believes Hizbullah could be training Mexican drug cartels to make bombs. "This might lead to Israel-like car bombings of Mexican/USA border personnel or National Guard units." (36) Over the past two years, the issue of Hizbullah and Hamas involvement in using drug cartels to raise money and perpetrate terror activity has arisen in numerous hearings.

Drug smuggling, and the raising as well as laundering of money, serve to finance Iran and Hizbullah activity in Latin America. The huge investments that Iran is making primarily via the Revolutionary Guards, which is expanding its military

and civilian activity in Latin America and also developing means of asymmetrical naval warfare, can serve as an infrastructure for drug smuggling from Latin America into the territory of the United States and Europe.

Colombia is investing prodigious resources and activity against drug smuggling by sea, including the use of submarines and mini-submarines(37) to interdict smuggling that is conducted via connections between international crime organizations from Africa, Mexico, and Latin America and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Since 2000, over twenty-seven tons of cocaine that were smuggled by submarines have been seized.(38) Recently it was revealed that submarines and swift boats have been used for drug smuggling in the region of Delta Amacuro in Venezuela. A submarine capable of transferring up to twelve tons of drugs was seized in Ecuador in July 2010 with the involvement of DEA agents.(39) There is ongoing, vigorous interdiction activity by the DEA and by Latin American countries to prevent drug smuggling to the United States and Europe.

On December 13, 2011, the *New York Times* offered a glimpse at the clandestine methods that Hizbullah uses to finance its operations through laundering drug money and injecting it into its "legitimate financial system. According to the report, "intelligence from several countries points to the direct involvement of high-level Hizbullah officials in the South American cocaine trade." Agents had known that there was a major money launderer whose phone was in Lebanon. Now they had a name: Ayman Joumaa....The indictment goes beyond the Europe-based operation....It charges him with coordinating shipments of Colombian cocaine to Los Zetas [the same cartel IRGC-QF tried to recruit to carry out the assassination attempt against the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S.] in Mexico for sale in the United States, and laundering the proceeds."(40)



Head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, Sept. 3, 2007. (AP Photo/ISNA, Mehdi Ghasemi)

The commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Mohammad Ali Jafari, recently referred to an expanded role for submarines, and mini-submarines in particular, in Iran's asymmetrical naval warfare, and the integration of the Revolutionary Guards in this endeavor. He said the Revolutionary Guards are operating in underwater environments in an asymmetrical fashion and in small dimensions, and in any case they have no intention of manufacturing large submarines because these are vulnerable. Jafari explained that when it comes to augmenting capabilities for contending with enemies in asymmetrical warfare, one should also employ asymmetrical methods in manufacturing equipment.

He further explained that the underwater equipment must be quicker and smaller yet with similar functions to swift boats on the surface, which the enemy fears. Jafari added that currently the Revolutionary Guards not only possess the capability to defend the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz but also to contend with enemies in distant regions. "We are investing a huge effort in building these capabilities so that we can strike the enemy in the same way that the enemy stationed in areas far and beyond the confines of the Persian Gulf can strike Iran by airplanes and missiles." (41) Asymmetrical naval-warfare capabilities that the Revolutionary Guards are building could be used to strike a naval vessel in the maritime space between Latin America and the United States as well as to assist drug smuggling into the United States and Europe.

Recently, Mohammad Javad Larijani, head of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, warned that if the West continues to criticize Iran over the execution of drug criminals, Iran will permit heroin transit through its territory on the way to Europe. Iran also has the capability to do so via Latin America. (42) Flooding the West with drugs is not a novel Iranian idea; Lebanon also serves as a conduit for that purpose, and now Iran apparently is acting in this regard from Latin America as well.

The advantage of the mini-submarines – of the type that Iran uses as well – is that they can stealthily carry huge amounts of drugs in comparison with swift boats that generally serve for this purpose. Aside from drug smuggling, submarines can carry an explosive charge that can damage naval or merchant vessels operating in the Pacific Ocean, (43) and can be used to smuggle weapons into the United States as well. Iran is capable of implementing its threats against the United States in the context of asymmetrical warfare, and it can utilize the narco-terrorist infrastructure that it is building in the Latin American countries.

The revelation in October 2011 of an attempt to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington is indicative of the ties between elements of the IRGC-QF and Iranian intelligence and the Mexican drug cartels (and possibly in other places as well, such as Colombia) and of the increased activity of the IRGC-QF in Latin America. On October 11, the U.S. Justice Department

announced that "Mansour Arbabsiar and Gholam Shakuri have been arrested on suspicion of plotting to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States, Adel al-Jubeir, by means of members of a Mexican drug cartel [Los Zetas]." The charge sheet describes in detail Arbabsiar's activity, meetings in Mexico, and links to the IRGC-QF. This includes meetings he held with them in Iran:

The criminal complaint alleges that, from the spring of 2011 to October 2011, Arbabsiar and his Iran-based co-conspirators, including Shakuri of the Qods Force, have been plotting the murder of the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. In furtherance of this conspiracy, Arbabsiar allegedly met on a number of occasions in Mexico with a DEA confidential source (CS-1) who has posed as an associate of a violent international drug trafficking cartel....Arbabsiar arranged to hire CS-1 and CS-1's purported accomplices to murder the Ambassador, and Shakuri and other Iran-based co-conspirators were aware of and approved the plan. With Shakuri's approval, Arbabsiar has allegedly caused approximately \$100,000 to be wired into a bank account in the United States as a down payment to CS-1 for the anticipated killing of the Ambassador, which was to take place in the United States.(44)

That same day the U.S. Treasury Department

announced the designation of five individuals, including four senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) officers connected to a plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador...and to carry out follow-on attacks against other countries' interests inside the United States and in another country....Treasury also designated the individual responsible for arranging the assassination plot on behalf of the IRGC-QF.

Designated...were: Mansour Arbabsiar, a naturalized U.S. citizen holding both Iranian and U.S. passports who acted on behalf of the IRGC-QF to pursue the failed [assassination]; IRGC-QF commander Qasem Soleimani; Hamed Abdollahi, a senior IRGC-QF official who coordinated aspects of the plot and oversaw the other Qods Force officials directly responsible for coordinating and planning this operation; Abdul Reza Shahlai, an IRGC-QF official who coordinated this operation; and Ali Gholam Shakuri, an IRGC-QF official and deputy to Shahlai, who met with Arbabsiar on several occasions to discuss the assassination and other planned attacks.(45)

Iran has been active in Latin America and (together with Hizbullah) has forged ties with regimes (Venezuela, Bolivia) and crime organizations in South America, including the one that, according to reports, makes use of the Mexican border to get people into the United States. Yet, even in this context, the attempt to assassinate – by means of an emissary – the Saudi ambassador on American soil constitutes a kind of quantum leap in relation to Iranian anti-American activity. This is made no less true by the fact that Iran tried to use a Mexican drug cartel as a subcontractor for the mission and thereby maintain plausible

deniability.

Note also that this is not the first time Iran has engaged in terror or collected intelligence on regime opponents on American soil. In 1980, Iran recruited an American convert to Islam to assassinate Ali Akbar Tabatabai, who served as an attache in the Iranian embassy in Washington and gathered information on Iranian exiles who were living in the United States and broadcasting from there to Iran.(46)

At present, Shiite Iran and the Sunni Arab world are waging a battle of the Titans over who will reshape the Middle East. Iran chose Saudi Arabia as a target because Iran sees it as a major obstacle – not least because of its ties with the United States – to accelerating the transformation of the Middle East and the fall of the pro-American regimes. To Iran's regret, Saudi Arabia has remained stable (thanks in part to the generous sums doled out to its residents in an effort to buy that stability) and also helped Bahrain maintain its stability by sending in the Peninsula Shield Force to assist the Khalifa family in putting down the Shiite protest. Iran, for its part, continues to view Bahrain and its Shiite majority as an Iranian asset and is providing funds and training to the Bahraini Shiite opposition.

It should be emphasized that this is not the first time Iran has tried to murder Saudi officials. It did so in the past when it assassinated Saudi diplomats in Turkey and Thailand as revenge for the killing of four hundred Iranian pilgrims during the *hajj* in 1987. Iran apparently perpetrated those acts with the help of Hizbullah – its long arm for carrying out special terror attacks while maintaining distance and "clean hands."

If it ultimately turns out that there were indeed plans to assassinate the Saudi ambassador and commit other terror attacks on U.S. soil, it illustrates that Iran is broadening its conflict arena with the United States and is no longer content just to "play" in the U.S. backyard in South America, instead bringing the endeavor to U.S. territory itself. Given the intensified struggle between (Shiite) Iran and (Sunni) Saudi Arabia and the United States over the reshaping of the Middle East, Iran is trying to signal that it can kill two birds with one stone.

Iran's leadership and media have sprung to the defense of the IRGC-QF, heaping praise on it and asserting that it "does not engage in terror acts," while emphasizing America's fear of Iran. In an extraordinary editorial, the newspaper Kayhan, mouthpiece of the leader of Iran, went so far as to openly acknowledge that the IRGC-QF has long been waging a struggle against U.S. forces in the region, to the glory of IRGC-QF commander Qassem Suleimani:

The IRGC-QF is more than an active operational force; it is an ideology that does not recognize borders, a worldview whose tenets and beliefs directly conflict with Western culture....Since conquering Iraq and Afghanistan and entering the region, the United States has experienced more than ever the taste of conflict with the IRGC-QF as profoundly and tangibly as possible. America's appreciation of Iran's regional power is based mainly, and perhaps exclusively, on the experience of clashing with the IRGC-QF.(47)

The Iranian leadership, including Ahmadinejad, has accused the United States of trying to "cook intelligence" in various domains (nuclear, human rights, terror) so as to set the stage for action against Iran.(48) Iran's foreign minister charged the United States was fabricating a case against Iran as in the affair of Iraq and the uranium from Niger: "The Americans raised documents like this [IAEA report] in the past: the Niger scandal."(49) The Iranian media have also liberally quoted international terrorism experts, including Americans, who denied the U.S. allegations that the IRGC-QF was involved in an assassination attempt on U.S. territory.(50) The hubbub in the Israeli and world media over a possible attack on Iran, which began shortly after the assassination affair was exposed, has only redoubled the already-high Iranian sensitivity. In recent months Iran has waged an extensive propaganda campaign, including accusing the West (particularly Britain and the United States) of interfering in its domestic affairs and subjecting it to a "soft war" by means of the BBC, the VOA, and other sophisticated tools.

To sum up, it appears that the attempt to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States tallies with the growing strength, and influence on decision-making processes, of the IRGC-QF within Iran. Suleimani is very close to the Supreme Leader and has won much praise in *Kayhan*, which reflects his view. Moreover, the attempt marks a new level in the use of terror as a major tool of Iranian foreign policy and the role of radicalization and defiance in that policy. All this stems directly from the changes in the Middle East and Iran's desire to influence them, dictate them, and lead the new Islamic axis while excluding the United States and the remaining Arab "moderate" elements such as Saudi Arabia. The ultimate aim is to constitute an Islamic alternative to the long-standing U.S. hegemony in the Middle East.

Iran is in the grip of a kind of hubris. It believes – not least for ideological-religious reasons – that the Islamic worldview is gaining a hold over the Middle East, and that this is the time to ramp up the export of the revolution to the region while intensifying defiance of the United States and its allies. In the short-to-medium term, then, Iran is on a direct collision course with the United States in this part of the world.

It bears emphasizing that so far Iran has paid no price for its involvement and assistance to terror – not when it murdered regime opponents on European soil, not when it trained Islamic-movement operatives from North Africa in Iran and Sudan, and not when it armed Hizbullah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad with long-range rockets. Despite occasional arrests of IRGC-QF operatives who were active in Iraq and inflicted heavy casualties on U.S. and Iraqi forces, the United States has chosen not to deal with the issue, even when it was proved that the IRGC-QF is supplying weapons to the Taliban in Afghanistan (as *Kayhan* indirectly acknowledged in its article). This lack of response has only boosted Iran's self-confidence and daring. The big question is whether the United States will also ignore this Iranian plot on its soil (and thereby invite further such activities) or decide to address the Iranian terror threat. Whatever course it chooses will also affect the nature of the changing Middle East. Continued ignoring of Iran's audacity both in the terror and nuclear domains, along with its

growing involvement in the Arab vacuum, is likely to negatively impact the emergent Middle East and damage the influence and interests of the United States and its allies in the region.

What Next?

The operational infrastructure that Iran is establishing with the assistance of IRGC-QF and Hizbullah activists in Latin America, under the patronage of Venezuela and other countries, can assist it in damaging American and Western interests in case it is attacked or if it senses that such an attack is imminent. True, there are American bases (the command of the 5th Fleet in Bahrain, for example) alluringly nearby,⁽⁵¹⁾ but the fact that Iran can now harm U.S. interests in Latin America and even in U.S. territory is even more attractive, demonstrating to the United States that Iran, too, has a long arm and creating a strategic balance whereby, if the United States acts in Iran's backyard, Iran can reciprocate.

Iran's activity in Latin America also provides a springboard for its activity in other global arenas. The common denominator and the tools serving this activity are identical. In its aspiration to regional and global hegemony, Iran seeks to fulfill two major needs: to break out of its international isolation and to erode the sanctions imposed on it. In this context the United States plays an important role both as the leader of the sanctions-and-isolation endeavor and as the country that, in Iran's view, is usurping its role as leader of the free world.

The tools that Iran is wielding in the battle are identical – terror, the drug trade, military and economic assistance to various actors, and a great deal of anti-American rhetoric. Lebanese Hizbullah serves as Iran's long arm in theaters of activity throughout the world. This starts with Iraq, where Hizbullah is assisting and training the Shiite militias that have carried out sophisticated terror attacks against coalition forces and the Iraqi state in the making. It continues with the Gulf States (Bahrain, Kuwait, and others), Israel, the Palestinian Authority, West Africa, up to the Brazil-Paraguay-Argentina border triangle. Together with the Qods Force of the Revolutionary Guards, Hizbullah serves as Iran's "hit man" for terror attacks, having perpetrated these in Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and the like.

The various U.S. intelligence and enforcement agencies are well aware of this Iranian and Hizbullah activity, although the issue does not receive its proper place in the U.S. public discourse and the price Iran is made to pay is low. Likewise, the deep involvement in terror in other arenas, and particularly the Palestinian one (involving assistance to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad), carries a low price tag. This allows Iran to persist in this endeavor and lay the groundwork for a future opportunity to act, either at its own initiative or as a response to action against it.

Iran is constantly and assiduously moving its pieces on the global chessboard, lying in wait for an opportunity to launch a surprise. Its moves are quite familiar to

intelligence personnel and decision-makers in the Western states, and the only question that remains is what will be their next step in confronting the Iranian threat. It should be kept in mind that the infrastructures Iran is creating – some of which are already operative and some in formation – will have a dual implication if Iran manages to obtain nuclear weapons and operate these infrastructures under the cover of its nuclear umbrella.

The Iranian Shah has been checkmated but the Iranian threat is very much alive.

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51. Recently Jafari said in an interview to FARS News that despite Iran's ability to extend the range of its missiles, it had no intention of doing so as its regional adversaries, with an emphasis on Israel ("the regime occupying Jerusalem"), were already in range of Iranian missiles and even if the major American forces were sustaining the Israeli threats, they too were close to us and completely within our range (of missiles).

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An Iranian Intelligence Failure: Arms Ship in Nigeria Reveals Iran's Penetration of West Africa (October 2011)

Jacques Neriah

- Since the Khomeini revolution, Iran has invested heavily in strengthening its diplomatic, economic, and security ties with Western African countries, especially with Senegal, Mauritania, Gambia, and Nigeria.
- Traditionally, Senegal had been a Sunni Muslim nation from the Sufi tradition. But in the wake of Senegal's openness toward Iran, scores of Shiite clergy from Lebanon entered the country to spread Shiism. President Wade even allowed the establishment of a Persian-language school at Senegal University in 2003 and a Shiite *hawza* (traditional Islamic seminary) at the University of Dakar.
- In Nigeria, more than half of the population practices Islam. During his last visit to Nigeria in July 2009, Iranian President Ahmadinejad met with Nigerian *ulema* (Muslim religious scholars), and welcoming crowds in the streets of the capital, Abuja, cheered his convoy.
- A weapons ship departed from the Iranian port of Bandar-Abbas and arrived in the Apapa port of Lagos, Nigeria, in July 2010. On October 26, 2010, the shipping containers were opened and the weapons were discovered.
- Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki was then sent to Nigeria, where he told authorities there had been a mistake and that the weapons' destination was actually Gambia. Senegal has accused Gambia of providing arms for anti-government forces, especially for the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance in South Senegal.
- Sayyed Akbar Tabatabaei, the Africa commander of the Quds Force (the branch of Iran's Revolutionary Guards charged with exporting the revolution overseas), found refuge on Mottaki's plane and flew with him to Iran. On February 23, 2011, Senegal cut diplomatic ties with Iran. The whole affair was a failure on the part of Iranian intelligence.

Iran Invests in African Ties

Since the Khomeini revolution, Iran has invested heavily in strengthening its

diplomatic, economic, and security ties with Western African countries, especially with Senegal, Mauritania, Gambia, and Nigeria. Iran's goal is clear: to obtain African support for Tehran's policies, and most recently for its nuclear program, in international forums.(1)

Senegal

While Mauritania has over the years become Iran's closest ally in the sub-Saharan Sahel region of Africa, its relations with Senegal were the warmest in Western Africa. Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade visited Iran at least six times from 2003 to 2009, while President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad went to Senegal on at least three occasions.

A no-less-important visitor was Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi who visited Senegal in July 2007. Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei had appointed Shahroudi to head the Iranian legal system for the decade from 1999 to 2009. Given the closeness between the two, Shahroudi's mission to Senegal reflected the importance of that country in the eyes of decision-makers in Tehran.

On July 22, 2007, after meeting with the president and prime minister of Senegal, Shahroudi stated, "We believe it is our duty to expand relations with Islamic nations and to make use of the ability and potential of these states in order to spread Islam."(2)

These political and security ties were also naturally supported by economic projects in Senegal, such as doubling the capacity of the country's oil refinery and the establishment of an assembly facility for Iranian cars.

Shiite Missionaries in Africa

The Senegalese-Iranian alliance also included a cultural-religious aspect. Traditionally and historically, Senegal had been a Sunni Muslim nation from the Sufi tradition. But in the wake of Senegal's openness toward Iran, scores of Shiite clergy from Lebanon entered the country to spread Shiism, the most prominent of whom was Sheikh Abdul-Mun'am Az-zain, who had established an Islamic Center in Dakar in 1978 after spending a period as a student of Khomeini when the Ayatollah lived in exile in Najaf.

Despite the opposition of the Senegalese regime to Shiite missionary activities (President Abdou Diouf ordered the closure of the Iranian Embassy in 1984), the current leadership did not deal with the issue. President Wade even allowed the establishment of a Persian-language school at Senegal University in 2003 and a Shiite *hawza* (traditional Islamic seminary) at the University of Dakar, known as the Hawza ul Rasul al Akram.(3)

Gambia

As opposed to Senegal, which plays a central role among French-speaking

African countries and enjoys significant standing at international forums, the situation in Gambia is different in Iranian eyes. Gambia spreads over 11,000 square kilometers, a tenth of which is covered by the water of the Gambia River, and has 1.7 million inhabitants. Its importance lies in its location and probably in the fact that the Iranians consider the country beneficial for their regional needs. Iranian ties with Gambia developed after the 1994 military coup led by Yahya Jammeh, who has served as president, with an iron fist, ever since. (The Gambian president became known earlier when he claimed he'd found a cure for HIV/AIDS using natural herbs.) Relations with Iran quickly became pivotal for Gambia as a major \$2 billion deal was signed for the export of Iranian vehicles. President Ahmadinejad was Jammeh's guest of honor at the 2006 African Union summit which took place in Gambia.(4)

At the same time, relations between Gambia and Senegal have been problematic for quite some time because Gambia is suspected of providing funds and weapons for anti-government military groups in Senegal.

Nigeria

Years before Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran became interested in Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and the fifth largest provider of oil to the U.S., where more than half of the population practices Islam. Iran identified Nigeria as a regional power that could serve its interests in Africa and provide support at international forums. Economic ties between the countries were forged in the late 1990s and were accelerated after Iranian President Khatami's visit there in 2005. The main topic during the Iranian visits was Nigeria's energy shortage. Iran urged Nigeria to adopt nuclear technology, which greatly worried the United States. During his last visit to Nigeria in July 2009, President Ahmadinejad promoted nuclear energy as a cheap energy source.

Nonetheless, Ahmadinejad's visit will be remembered first and foremost for his meeting with Nigerian *ulema* (Muslim religious scholars), and for the welcoming crowds in the streets of the capital, Abuja, cheering his convoy.

Iran has also closely followed the ongoing violent tensions in Nigeria between radical Muslim and Christian groups and especially between Muslim radicals and the government, which declared an all-out war on them.

Islamist activity is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria but dates back to the 1960s. At the time, Saudi Arabia stood behind the financing and instruction of the different Islamic groups. It is estimated that there were over two hundred organizations involved in activities aimed at strengthening Nigeria's Islamic character. Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, a student of the Saudi school, established The Society for the Eradication of Evil and the Establishment of the Sunna, better known as *Ian Izala*, which flourished during the military rule in Nigeria and was committed to supporting Islamic education.

In the '80s and '90s, graduates of this movement established additional radical movements like the Muslim Brothers and the Movement for Islamic Revival,

whose leader, Abubakar Mujahid, proclaimed after 9/11 that the destruction of the Twin Towers was an appropriate and just response to American provocation. Mujahid was earlier a student of Sheikh Ibrahim Alzakzaky, the undisputed leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria. Alzakzaky, born in 1953, is a Nigerian Shiite from Kaduna state. A protege of Iran, he is involved in disseminating Shiite theology and creating a radical socio-economic and military system that resembles that of Hizbullah in Lebanon. According to estimates, the sheikh has a supporter base numbering over a million people. His organization has been involved in many confrontations with the army and the Christian population. Reports claim that they are responsible for thousands of deaths in Northern Nigeria in the last decade. The sheikh himself ended up in almost every prison in Nigeria in the '80s and '90s, but he has kept up his activities.(5)



Hizbullah in Nigeria, photo courtesy W. Thomas Smith, Jr., senior military analyst, *World Defense Review*, May 23, 2008, <http://www.victoryinstitute.net/blogs/utb/2008/05/hezbollah-in-nigeria/>

In the new millennium, there are many armed Islamist groups fighting the Nigerian government with the aim of undermining stability and seeking to force the state to adopt an Islamist regime. Twelve out of the 36 states that make up the Nigerian Federation have already introduced Sharia law. Northern Nigerian Muslim states have been turned into a battleground between the army and armed groups, many of whose fighters come from Chad, Algeria, and even Afghanistan.

One of the most deadly organizations calls itself *Boko Haram*, which in the local Hausa dialect means "non-Islamic education is a sin." Its leader, Ustaz Mohammad Youssouf, born in 1970 and married to four wives with 12 children, established the organization in Kanamma village in Yobe state, not far from the

Niger border. He named his training camp "Afghanistan" and referred to his men as "Taliban." Youssouf was killed after being taken into custody on July 30, 2009. His financier, Buji Foi, was also executed a few days later.(6) After Youssouf's death, the organization continued to operate under the leadership of Moallem Sanni Umaru,(7) and is financed by a Saudi, Al-Muntada al-Islami.

An Iranian Weapons Ship Docks in Nigeria

In April-May, 2010, Iran decided to send a weapons ship to Nigeria. Two members of the Revolutionary Guards were selected for the mission, posing as businessmen. The Marshall Islands-based *M/V Everest*, which belongs to the world's third largest shipping company, the French CMA CGM owned by Lebanese businessman Jacques R. Saade, transported the cargo, disguised as "packages of glass wool and pallets of stone." The sender was the Iranian company International Trading and General Construction (ITGC).

The ship departed from the Iranian port of Bandar-Abbas and arrived in the Apapa port of Lagos in July 2010. Those familiar with the port know that unloading the cargo can take three months, sometimes even more. In the meantime, it became known that the original documents listed the "port of Abuja" as the destination, which shows a lack of knowledge of Nigerian geography since the capital, Abuja, is located 500 kilometers from the sea. Because of this mistake, the sender was forced to change the destination on the travel documents, which raised the suspicion of customs officials. It later became known that the Nigerian intelligence services (SSS) had already begun to follow the cargo while it was in Bandar-Abbas.(9) The SSS, which answers directly to the president, was convinced that the weapons were to be sent to the address listed in Abuja.(10) WikiLeaks documents also revealed that the intelligence services are well aware that Iran supports terrorism in Nigeria.(11)

On October 26, 2010, the shipping containers were opened and the weapons were discovered. The thirteen containers of weaponry clearly violated UN Security Council Resolution 1929 (of June 9, 2010), imposing additional sanctions on Iran. In addition to Iranian embarrassment over the weapons, \$10 million worth of heroin hidden in engine parts shipped from Iran was seized at Lagos Airport as well.(12)

Iran: Weapons Were for Gambia

When Nigerian authorities requested information from Tehran about the identity of the cargo's recipient, they were rebuffed. Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki was then sent to Nigeria to solve the problem. Mottaki met with Nigerian authorities and explained that there had been a mistake and that the weapons' destination was actually Gambia. Meanwhile, new shipping documents were produced for the cargo, which listed the private address of Gambian President Jammeh as the destination.(13)

As soon as President Jammeh heard of this, he hastily cut diplomatic relations with Iran, froze all economic projects, and ordered Iranian diplomats to leave Gambia within forty-eight hours. The Gambian president had good reasons for all this:

1. He wanted to avoid being seen as someone the Iranians could use as an agent to whitewash their deeds.
2. He was well aware of the international significance of breaking the Iranian embargo, especially as far as the United States is concerned.
3. Most important, he feared a Senegalese response. Senegal has accused Gambia of providing arms for anti-government forces, especially for the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance in South Senegal. A Senegalese parliamentarian even declared that Jammeh "has been caught red-handed!"(14)

Nigeria Responds

The Nigerians were not convinced by Mottaki's explanations and demanded the arrest of the two Iranians responsible for the shipment. One of them, Azim Aghajani, was arrested (and released on \$260,000 bail), but his trial was postponed and the location of the trial was moved from the capital Abuja to Lagos "for convenience." It turned out that Aghajani received his Nigerian visa on the recommendation of Sheikh Ali Abbas Usman, better known as Abbas Jega, who used to work at Radio Tehran's Hausa-language service and studied in Iran. Abbas Jega was also arrested, along with two customs officers, and they all are awaiting sentencing.(15)

The second Iranian, Sayyed Akbar Tabatabaei, the Africa commander of the Quds Force (the branch of the Revolutionary Guards charged with exporting the revolution overseas), had received his entry permit to Nigeria to "provide administrative support" to the Iranian Embassy, as per the request of the Iranian Foreign Ministry. Holding diplomatic immunity, Tabatabaei found refuge on Mottaki's plane and flew with him to Iran. Subsequently, according to reports, he was sent to Venezuela to oversee the Quds Force's recruitment in Latin America. (16) Mottaki was replaced as foreign minister during a later visit to Senegal, as Tehran was dissatisfied with his failure.

Nigeria reported Iran to the UN Security Council, of which it is a member, where all the known details were disclosed. Nigeria is likely to take practical decisions regarding Iran only after the court rules in the case of Aghajani. Nevertheless, on February 23, 2011, after having been convinced that the weapons were meant for the rebels of Casamance, Senegal cut diplomatic ties with Iran.

An Iranian Intelligence Failure

This is a very strange story with the end not yet in sight. The affair bears witness to Iranian thoughtlessness and most of all to a lack of learning from the

experiences of others who were burned by their arrogance and lack of understanding of the realities of contemporary Africa. The failure of Iranian intelligence in Western Africa is also striking, especially of those who are affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards.

No doubt the whole affair hurt Iran's standing in Western Africa and its efforts to build a front against the United States and the international community. It is indeed a failure on the part of Iranian intelligence and someone will have to pay the price for the lack of understanding of inter-African realities, for the disrespect of leaders, who were perceived as obvious supporters because of their corruption, and for the erroneous evaluation of U.S. and other foreign intelligence services regarding their ability to know what is taking place in Iran.

No doubt also that in the aftermath of Gaddafi's demise, Iran will find it more difficult to impose its influence in North Africa and the Sahel areas. Indeed, with Gaddafi's elimination, one of al-Qaeda's staunchest opponents, the Islamist groups as a whole and al-Qaeda in particular find themselves more potent, better armed, and with greater liberty of maneuver. In recent years, al-Qaeda has been gaining new territories in West Africa, especially in South Morocco, Mali, Niger and northern Nigeria, a fact that will definitely set the limits to further Iranian intervention and presence in the area. Nevertheless, the Shiite potential in West Africa – mainly due to the sizeable presence of Lebanese expatriates and a continuous effort of Shiite clerics to convert local Muslims to Shiism – will continue to serve Iran and Hizbullah as a basis for subversive activities in this area of the world.

Indeed, in mid-March 2011, Israeli naval commandos took over the weapons ship Victoria, which was on its way to El-Arish carrying weapons from Iran to Hamas in Gaza. This ship also belonged to CMA CGM, the same shipping company involved in the weapons shipment discovered in Nigeria. This raises some fundamental questions about the possible association of some of its people with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

Notes

1. Michael Rubin, "Iran's Global Ambition," *Middle Eastern Outlook*, American Enterprise Institute, March 17, 2008.

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4. Ibid.

5. Peter Pham, "Militant Islamism's Shadow Rises over Sub-Saharan Africa," *World Defense Review*, www.worlddefensereview.com/pham/050406.

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11. Ibid.
12. Robert Tait, "Iran Dealt Losing Hand in Gambia Gambit," Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty, November 24, 2010; *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 2010.
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How Iran Helped Assad Suppress Syria's "Arab Spring" (July 2011)

Michael Segall

- Since the beginning of the protest wave against Bashar Assad's regime in Syria, Iran has backed Damascus and assisted it in both the security and propaganda aspects of its violent repression of the protests. Tehran charges that Syria is the victim of an attempt by the West, led by the United States, to overthrow the Assad regime, under cover of the "Arab Spring."
- At the same time, Iran sees the "Arab Spring" or, as it calls it, the "Islamic awakening" as a golden opportunity to export Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution to the changing Arab world.
- Yet with the turmoil in Syria, Iran now finds itself confronting a real possibility of losing one of its most important allies. The fall of the Assad regime would likely undermine the resistance camp and break the continuity of the "Shiite crescent" stretching from Iran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.
- Reports have emerged about elements of the Iranian IRGC's Al-Quds Force (responsible for subversion and special operations outside of Iran), advisers from Iran's domestic Law Enforcement Services, as well as Hizbullah men working throughout Syria to help Assad repress the popular protests. Iran also apparently provided Syria with advanced

eavesdropping equipment which enables the identification of activists who converse by phone or use social networks on the Internet.

- Damascus occupies a pivotal point between the old Middle Eastern order and the new order that Iran is seeking to shape in keeping with its worldview. Syria's special status in opposing a Pax Americana (a minority position among the Arab states) and having good relations with the two past superpowers of the Middle East - (Ottoman) Turkey and (Persian) Iran - is what gives it a key role in the region and perhaps explains (in part) the West's reluctance to take a clear position, instead preferring a wait-and-see attitude toward the ongoing violent repression in Syria.
- The departure of Assad, the last of the brave Arab leaders who defy the West, and coming on the heels of Saddam Hussein's downfall, would likely herald the end of the era of Arab nationalism and facilitate the formation of a new Arab and/or Islamic identity. In the shadow of the growing assertiveness of (Shiite) Iran and (Sunni) Turkey, both of which seek a great-power role, the Arab world finds itself divided and lacking any guiding paradigm as the old order falls apart.

Since the beginning of the protest wave against Bashar Assad's regime in Syria, the Iranian regime has backed Damascus and assisted it in both the security and propaganda aspects of its violent repression of the protests. In contrast to its position on what it calls "the Muslim awakening in the Middle East and North Africa that draws inspiration from the Islamic Revolution" in Iran, Tehran does not view the Syrian protest and its violent repression as part of this phenomenon. It sees instead a desperate attempt by the West, led by the United States, to act under the pretext of this protest to overthrow the Assad regime, which constitutes part of the "resistance camp" against Western hegemony in the region.

Having gained experience from the violent (and so far successful) repression of the Iranian protest wave following the controversial elections of 2009, Iran is sending advisers from its domestic security body, the Law Enforcement Services (LEF), and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRCG) to help its ally and important member of the resistance camp stay afloat.

The Resistance Camp under Challenge

Despite their ongoing close ties, which are rooted in Syria's backing of Iran in the Iran-Iraq War, Iran sees Syria as the weak link of the resistance camp. Iran is the leader of this camp, which also includes Hizbullah, which recently completed its takeover of Lebanon, and the Damascus-based Palestinian terror organizations (such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad). In Tehran's view, the resistance camp is meant to constitute a "fighting alternative" to the Western agenda in the region with its partners, the moderate Arab states (the "moderate camp"). Iran seeks to weaken the West's presence, influence, and power in the region, and to undermine the process of political accommodation in the region, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere.

Concurrent with the upheaval experienced by Damascus are powerful domestic processes in Iran connected to generational shifts and the redefinition of the Islamic Revolution in more nationalistic terms. This is the context of the fierce internal power struggle between President Ahmadinejad and his supporters, and Supreme Leader Khamenei and the old religious establishment, with each side trying to overcome the other and diminish its powers.

At the same time, Iran sees the protest wave in North Africa and the Middle East as containing the potential for a more Islamic Middle East, necessitating renewed efforts to export the revolution beyond the borders of Iran. Iran sees the "Arab Spring" or, as it calls it, the "Islamic awakening" as a golden opportunity to export the Islamic Revolution of the Khomeini school to the changing Arab world and remake it in the image of that revolution. Yet with the turmoil in Syria, Iran now finds itself confronting a real possibility of losing one of its most important allies. The fall of the Assad regime would likely undermine the resistance camp and break the continuity of the "Shiite crescent" stretching from Iran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Thus, Iran is showing a profound determination to preserve Assad's rule.

Assistance to Libya, the Taliban, and the Extremist Shiites in Iraq

Iran also fears possible intervention by NATO in Syrian territory (including via Turkey). It has harshly criticized the NATO forces' activity in Libya "against a civilian population," and in Iraq and Afghanistan as well. Tehran also provides weapons to elements that are fighting the alliance. Lately there have been several disclosures of weapons transfers to the Taliban in Afghanistan and to the extremist Shiites in Iraq, who threaten the stability of the political process and have killed many American soldiers and Sunni civilians.(1)

It was reported in *Le Monde* in July that the Al-Quds Force of the IRGC, which is responsible for subversion and special operations outside of Iran, is supplying weapons to Gaddafi's forces in Libya so he can strike the "American-French-British axis of evil," according to a direct order by Khamenei and against the opinion of Ahmadinejad.(2)

The Export of Surveillance and Security Equipment for Violent Repression

A short time after the disturbances in Syria began and with the mounting flow of Syrian refugees into Turkey, reports began to emerge about Iranian elements ("bearded and speaking substandard Arabic") of the Al-Quds Force under the command of Qassem Suleimani, as well as Hizbullah men, working throughout Syria to repress the popular protest. An Iranian exile website wrote that the repression in Syria is being carried out by a Syrian contingent of the IRGC that has been operating in Syria, and has been responsible over time for military, intelligence, and logistical assistance to Hizbullah in Lebanon. With the outbreak

of protest in Syria, the IRGC dispatched special emissaries, commanders of the Basij (volunteer forces of the IRGC that also repressed the uprising in Iran), to Damascus to help Assad.(3)



Iranian Revolutionary Guards captured in Syria by the Free Syrian Army in 2012. (YouTube screenshot)

The Syrian security organizations, despite their ongoing, clandestine activities against opposition groups over the years, have avoided any hands-on attempts at repression of the wide-scale protests, which erupted simultaneously at several locales. Instead, here, too, they turned to Tehran, which was quite natural in light of the longstanding security cooperation between them. Moreover, a study by the International Crisis Group, which offers an in-depth analysis of the roots, characteristics, and trends of the protest ("the regime's downfall is almost certain"), quotes a Syrian security official's assertion that over time Iran has spread networks throughout the Syrian security organizations: "Iran has a big say in what is going on here more generally. They have made serious inroads with this president, unlike his father."(4)

The Internet site of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria reported that the bodies of five Hezbollah activists were conveyed to Baalbek from Syria after they were shot by the Syrian army while firing at Syrian protesters.(5) The opposition has posted numerous videos on the Internet where it claims that Hezbollah operatives took part in firing at the Syrian population,(6) mocking Nasrallah's statements that "Hezbollah is not involved in the events."(7) Videos also show protesters burning Hezbollah and Iranian flags and shouting "Allah Akbar," "The people want the regime to fall," and "No Iran and no Hezbollah."(8) Posters and books of Nasrallah were also set alight.(9)

Beyond the active involvement of Iranian elements in the repression, it was reported that Iran also provided Syria with logistical equipment, sniper rifles of its

own make, and advanced Nokia Siemens Networks (NSN)(10) devices for disrupting Internet activity, which allow the identification of activists who converse by phone or use the social networks on the Internet. Iran has accumulated great experience in the use of such equipment for monitoring sensitive events (religious and national holidays, student days, various remembrance days), the mapping and detention of activists, the infiltration of social networks, the blocking of sites, and the dismantling of cellular networks. Recently, after an in-depth inquiry using open sources, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) determined that Iran had not been sold equipment for "monitoring, filtering, and disrupting information and communications flows." It also stated, among other things, that while NSN had in the past sold Iran technology for its cellular telephone network, "Iran's need to obtain monitoring and filtering technology from outside sources may be lessening as it develops indigenous censorship and surveillance capabilities, possibly in response to sanctions against Western companies selling it sensitive technology."(11) If so, and given the longstanding security cooperation in sensitive security areas, it was easier for Iran to transfer such systems to Syria (which could also use them for surveillance of Israel).

After the repression of the protest in Iran, some Iranians boycotted NSN and even sued it for selling listening and monitoring equipment to the Iranian government, which led to the arrest of many Iranians who used cellular phones and social networks. The company admitted that in 2008 it had sold Iran a monitoring system called the Lawful Interception Management System (LIMS). (12) Nobel Prize winner and human rights activist Shirin Ebadi, who is subject along with her family to persecution by the Iranian authorities, accused NSN of funneling equipment, technology, and software for monitoring cellular phones and SMS messages to the repressive Iranian regime, which used these for the surveillance and detention of demonstrators.(13) Some Tehran residents have vandalized Nokia advertisements and splashed them with green paint - the color of the reform movement in Iran.(14)

Reformist elements in Iran have criticized Iranian aid to the Syrian president. The reformist religious figure Ayatollah Dastgheib condemned the outsourcing of "the national wealth of Iran to Syria and wasting it on the repression of the Syrian people, instead of providing this aid to the Iranian people themselves."(15)

Pointing the Finger at Iran

As information accumulated on involvement by Iran and/or elements under its sponsorship in repressing the Syria protest, the European Union on June 23 imposed sanctions against the leadership of the IRGC and certain Syrian security elements. The Council of the European Union charged that IRGC commander Mohammad Ali Jafari, Al-Quds Force commander Qassem Suleimani, and IRGC deputy commander for intelligence Hussein Taeb "were involved in providing equipment and support to help the Syria regime suppress protests in Syria."(16)

On June 29, the U.S. Treasury Department named Ismail Ahmadi Moghadam and Ahmad-Reza Radan, chief and deputy chief, respectively, of the LEF,

pursuant to Executive Order 13572 of April 2011 on "Blocking Property of Certain Persons with Respect to Human Rights Abuses in Syria."(17) "In April 2011, Radan traveled to Damascus, where he met with Syrian security services and provided expertise to aid in the Syrian government's crackdown on the Syrian people. The LEF has provided material support to the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate and dispatched personnel to Damascus in April to assist the Syrian government in suppressing the Syrian people."(18) In September 2010, the U.S. listed Radan in the annex to Executive Order 13553, which targets those responsible for or complicit in serious human rights abuses in Iran since the June 2009 disputed presidential elections. In June 2011, the U.S. designated the LEF and Moghadam pursuant to this executive order.(19)

Wall-to-Wall Support

Along with military, technical, and intelligence assistance, Iran has sided with Syria on the political-propaganda level and supported its policy and responses to growing Western pressure. A French newspaper, *Les Echos*, quoted the Center for Strategic Research, which is under Khamenei's authority, as saying Iran had transferred emergency equipment to Syria totaling about \$6 billion.(20)

Essentially, Iran is fully committed to helping Syria. The most senior Iranian echelon, including the supreme leader and the president, has backed the Syrian president's legitimacy and handling of the crisis. Iran also harshly criticized "the hypocritical involvement of the West, particularly the United States, in Syria's internal affairs," while repeatedly emphasizing that the disturbances in Syria, which "were instigated by the West," were fundamentally different from the "Islamic awakening" throughout the Middle East and North Africa and were aimed at weakening the resistance camp. The Iranian press, too, was harnessed to the propaganda effort, and its headlines trumpeted support for Assad while praising his "wisdom" and "brave and clever" speeches, which were highly reminiscent of Ahmadinejad's speeches after the elections, with their disdain toward the opposition and blaming mainly foreign elements for the protests and for attempting to stir up sedition.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stated:

The events in Syria are fundamentally different in nature from those occurring in the other countries of the Middle East. By trying to simulate in Syria the events that occurred in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya, the Americans are trying to create problems for Syria, a country that is on the path of resistance....The Islamic awakening in the regional countries is anti-Zionist and anti-American in nature....America and Israel are clearly involved in the events in Syria....The movement of the people of Bahrain is similar to the movement of the people of Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, and there is no sense in distinguishing between these similar movements.(21)

Ahmad Musavi, Iran's ambassador to Syria, praised the Iranian media in general and Iran's Mehr news agency in particular for giving

appropriate and accurate media coverage to the events occurring in the region....The news agencies that are connected to world imperialism and Zionism are distorting the reality of the revolutions in the region. The slaughter and repression of civilians in Bahrain, and the slaughter of the Syrian police and security people, gets no coverage in the Western media or in the regional media that are controlled by the West. Instead, mendacious films are disseminated in the world concerning the developments in Syria.(22)

Other Iranian officials and media also emphasized these claims.(23)

On July 10 the IRGC published an announcement condemning the visit of U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford to the city of Hama, claiming that, in light of the sensitive situation in Syria and the attempt by different groups in the country to launch a national dialogue, this visit constituted gross interference in Syria's internal affairs. The IRGC accused the United States of taking a misleading and hypocritical position in a desperate attempt to rehabilitate its status in the region, which had eroded thanks to its protracted involvement and hegemonic policy. The IRGC called the U.S. ambassador's visit to Hama a "dangerous step" intended to "normalize" foreign involvement in the internal affairs of other countries and compromise the national sovereignty of governments.(24)

Iran also tried to get Russia to help calm the winds in Syria. At the end of June, Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov met with the Iranian ambassador in Russia to discuss the situation in Syria, at the ambassador's request. The Iranian ambassador also met with Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin.(25) The Russian Foreign Ministry announced that the two sides called to stabilize the situation there as quickly as possible.(26)

Restructuring Relations in the Fragile Turkey-Iran-Syria Triangle

Turkey's evolving critical attitude toward the events in Syria has fostered Turkish-Iranian tensions. Iran, for its part, is critical of Turkey's position and its disapproval of Assad's conduct, and several Iranian editorials and opinion articles have called on Turkey to "return to the resistance camp" in the region.(27) This criticism has again brought to the surface the longstanding rivalry between Iran and Turkey, and particularly Tehran's fear of Turkey's membership in NATO and the alliance's large bases in Turkey. Recently Iran's Majlis (Parliament) Research Center stated that NATO's defense shield in Turkey should be viewed as a threat to Iran.(28)

Some of the articles, including in the newspaper *Kayhan*, which reflects the view of Khamenei, have also implicitly threatened Turkey that if it does not change its new anti-Syrian stance, it is likely to find itself encountering both domestic and foreign criticism and challenges from various religious and ethnic groups that seek good relations with Iran, Syria, and Iraq, and facing a decline in its regional status. It has also been written in the Iranian press that, given the Arab peoples' bitter memory of the Ottoman period, Turkey cannot play an independent role in

the Islamic world and must cooperate with Iran rather than adopt the positions of the West.(29) At the time of the Turkish foreign minister's mid-July visit to Iran that focused on the crisis in Syria, the IRGC's weekly newspaper harshly criticized Turkey for "standing with the United States." The paper warned that if Turkey, which thinks Assad's fall would promote its regional aspirations, should continue on the course of escalation, Iran would be forced to choose between Turkey and Syria and "undoubtedly the strategic interests and ideology of Iran will lead to the choice of Syria."(30) In a similar spirit, a commentary carried by the semiofficial Fars news agency, which is identified with Ahmadinejad, accused the Turkish government under the headline: "Did the Turkish People Expect Their Government to Implement the Policy of the United States and Israel?"(31)

The Iranian Khabar-online site wrote that the expansion of Turkey's influence in the Middle East was carried out in full agreement with (Sunni) Saudi Arabia, and that the media clash between Prime Minister Erdogan and President Shimon Peres, which made Erdogan the "Rambo" of the Middle East, along with the flotilla to Gaza, were aimed at enabling Turkey to augment its influence in the Arab world. These events gave Turkey an opportunity to intervene in the revolutions in the Arab countries, including the one in Syria, to the discomfiture of Iran.(32)

The ongoing protest in Syria has indeed recalibrated the delicate triangle of relations, which had not yet fully developed in any case, between Ankara, Damascus, and Tehran and proves, again, that the movement of the Middle Eastern tectonic plates under the impact of the protest wave has not yet ended.

Prospects

The Iranian assistance to Syria also accords with the emergence of the Sunni-Shiite divide, as represented mainly by Saudi Arabia and Iran. These two are waging a kind of Cold War across the Middle East (with Iran also supporting the Shiite rebels in Yemen and Bahrain). Thus, just as Saudi Arabia aided the Bahraini kingdom, where a Sunni minority rules over a Shiite majority, Iran has assisted its Alawite-Shiite ally Syria.

Hizbullah, whose situation and stances constitute a sort of mirror image of its patron, Iran, has sided – as dictated by Iran – with the repressive Syrian regime. As a result, it is forfeiting much of the esteem it had built up among the Syrian population (and elsewhere in the Arab world) by fighting Israel. Nasrallah has sided with the protesters and against the regime in (Shiite-majority) Bahrain, Libya, and Egypt.

Unlike developments in Tunisia and Egypt, the events in Syria are likely to have far-reaching repercussions on the reshaping of the Middle East. The regime stands at a strategic crossroad regarding almost all the core issues of the Middle East and is also part of a broader struggle which constitutes another element of the Sunni-Shiite Cold War. Damascus also plays a direct (and negative) influence on the peace process and provides a safe haven to all the rejectionist

Palestinian terror organizations (Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, PFLP-GC) that oppose the Palestinian Authority and the peace process. Moreover, Syria is a fundamental member-state of the resistance camp, which is led by Iran and is central to the division between the anti-American axis and the moderate Arab camp. Finally, in general, Damascus has maintained a unique status in the Arab world as the last of the Baath regimes, and in having enjoyed good relations with Turkey and Iran, the two powerful, non-Arab, former-empire actors in the region that are striving to regain their old status.

Damascus also occupies a pivotal point between the old Middle Eastern order and the new order that Iran is seeking to shape in keeping with its worldview. Syria's special status in opposing a Pax Americana (a minority position among the Arab states) and having good relations with the two past superpowers of the Middle East – (Ottoman) Turkey and (Persian) Iran – is what gives it a key role in the region and perhaps explains (in part) the West's reluctance to take a clear position, instead preferring a wait-and-see attitude toward the ongoing violent repression in Syria.

The departure of Assad, the last of the brave Arab leaders who defy the West, and coming on the heels of Saddam Hussein's downfall, would likely herald the end of the era of Arab nationalism and facilitate the formation of a new Arab and/or Islamic identity. In the shadow of the growing assertiveness of (Shiite) Iran and (Sunni) Turkey, both of which seek a great-power role, the Arab world finds itself divided and lacking any guiding paradigm as the old order falls apart.

The repression of the protest in Syria has cut into the unity of the resistance camp, which has seen a central political component - Syria - undermined. This camp has recently absorbed a number of shocks (along with some achievements that may turn out to be temporary, such as Hizbullah's taking control of the Lebanese government). Senior figures in Hizbullah have been implicated for the Hariri assassination. Hamas has been harmed by Assad's attempt to exploit the Palestinians via the Nakba and Naksa events as a means to divert attention from Syrian domestic repression. And secular Palestinian organizations such as the PFLP-GC that are sheltered in Damascus have found themselves on the defensive as residents of the Palestinian refugee camps have protested the use of their relatives and friends as Nakba and Naksa tools.

With Syria being the main conduit for missiles and rockets to Hizbullah in Lebanon, Assad's fall might be expected to particularly impact on continued logistical support to the movement. However, the IRGC's aerospace commander, Amir Ali Hagizadeh, who was its main spokesman during live-fire exercises for ground-to-ground missiles, rocket artillery, and surface-to-sea missiles in July, (33) said Iran has devoted much effort and planning to ensure that, once hostilities broke out, it would be able to supply Hizbullah with all the missiles it needed without relying on other countries.(34)

Dangerous Cards

At present it appears that Iran is mobilizing all the means at its disposal to protect its strategic ally Syria. At the same time, it is probably already examining ways to retain its influence over a post-Assad Syria, and it may come to view Iraq, after U.S. forces withdraw, as a fitting alternative for its ongoing subversive activity in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

During a July visit to Iraq by U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, he again emphasized his great concern over the growing Iranian involvement in arming the extremist Shiite militias with EFPs, explosively formed penetrators. In a similar vein, Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Iran was directly involved in assistance to terror groups that are causing the deaths of American soldiers.⁽³⁵⁾ The increased Iranian aid to the Shiite insurgents in Iraq could be aimed at signaling to the United States the likely price of the loss of Syria. It should be emphasized that in the past, too, Iran boosted assistance to the Iraqi insurgents in line with political developments in the region.

Iran may still have more cards to play when it comes to helping Syria. It tried to heat up the Israeli-Syrian border twice – on Nakba Day on May 15 and again on Naksa Day on June 5 – in a bid to divert attention from the Syrian domestic arena. Recently, Lebanon, whose government is under Hizbullah influence, has been raising the issue of the maritime oil and gas fields claimed by Israel, perhaps in an attempt to foment a regional crisis that would, again, divert attention from the repression in Syria.

A Second (and Last) Opportunity for Obama

The U.S. president again faces an opportunity to intervene and influence the reshaping of the Middle East. This could involve removing or at least greatly weakening the heart of the "Axis of Evil" – Iran – which leads the camp of those opposing U.S. policy in the region and seeking to undermine the moderate Arab states (and the Palestinian Authority).

The U.S. administration, which already squandered one opportunity to influence the reshaping of the Middle East when it failed to support the protesters in Iran, is again showing hesitancy precisely when it has another golden opportunity to overturn a main domino of the resistance camp, which would negatively affect Iran and Hizbullah. Obama's statement that Assad is "losing legitimacy in the eyes of his people" represents another step on the way to changing the U.S. position toward the Syrian regime.⁽³⁶⁾

Jackson Diehl, writing in the *Washington Post* on June 20, concludes: "The damage to U.S. interests from a UN resolution on Palestine would pale compared to the consequences of an Iranian-backed victory by Assad in Syria or the failure of NATO in Libya."⁽³⁷⁾

Notes

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19. <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/pdf/2010-24839.pdf>.
20. Reuters, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/15/iran-syria-aid_n_899840.html.
21. <http://www.leader.ir/langs/FA/index.php?p=contentShow&id=8267>.
22. <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1346938>.
23. Iran's former ambassador to China, Dr. Javad Mansouri, said:

Several Western states are trying to ride the popular protest wave and exploit it as a cover for settling old accounts in certain places. Specifically, this is the case in Syria, where the role of the external stimuli is much greater than the role of the popular protests against the government. In other words, unlike other countries of the region, the popular nature of the uprising in Syria is overshadowed by external players that have been seeking to topple the Syrian government for a long time....The situation in Syria is quite different than the situation in other countries of the region because the United States and Israel are directly interfering in the current crisis, but in other countries, the role of the people has been more important from the very beginning. http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=243284.

The IRGC's bulletin wrote:

Imperialism was surprised and, fearing the Islamic awakening in the region, tried to contain it. After the fall of the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia, the West understood that it had to manipulate the events so they would serve its own interests. Thus Syria became the natural candidate for this activity. First they infiltrated money and

satellite media into Syria, then they engaged in incitement and agitation. They armed Syrian groups and stirred up armed clashes between the citizens....The Zionist regime, which had experienced failures against Hizbullah and Hamas and blamed Iran and Syria for these failures because of their support for these organizations, wanted to create a crisis so as to weaken the resistance camp in the region and pressure Bashar Assad to carry out significant reforms in Syria and, among other things, sever his ties with Iran, end the assistance to Hizbullah, and expel the Palestinian organizations. Indeed, an international front was established to promote the plot against Syria, a front that was composed of the United States, world Zionism, the March 14 movement, "the mercenary forces of the King of Jordan," the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC], and the Saudi Bandar bin Sultan. Iran's posture toward the events in Syria was the most appropriate and wise one because there is no real revolution in Syria but instead a fabricated crisis. If it had been a real revolt of the Syrian people to uproot corruption, dictatorship, and dependency on the United States and the Zionists, Iran would have had no fear of supporting such a revolution. But the Assad regime is interested in reforms and, compared to the other regimes, its dependency on the United States and on Zionism is at the most minimal level possible. <http://www.sobhesadegh.ir/1390/0506/p03.pdf>

The conservative newspaper *Siyasat-e Ruz* wrote:

The United States is trying to weaken Iran by exerting pressure on Syria through various tactics; on the one hand the United States is interested in engaging Iran through dialogue on the nuclear issue, but at the same time it is trying to isolate it by intervening in Syria's internal affairs. *Siyasat-e Ruz*, July 4, 2011.

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28. <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9004250674>.
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30. <http://www.sobhesadegh.ir/1390/0508/p08.pdf>.
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32. Khabar-online, June 25, 2011.
33. <http://jerusalemcenter.wordpress.com/2011/07/06/does-iran%E2%80%99s-latest-military-exercise-signal-a-new-defense-doctrine>.
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Iranian Political-Military Involvement in the Middle East and South Asia



Iran Sees New Opportunity for Regional Domination Despite Turkish Competition (September 2011)

Michael Segall

- The Iranian political-military leadership has argued that the protest

movement in the Arab world draws its inspiration from Iran's Islamic Revolution. In the Iranian conceptual lexicon, one does not encounter the concept of the "Arab Spring" that is so prevalent in Arab and Western political discourse. Instead, Iran has coined the term "Islamic awakening," which also reflects Iran's policy, course of action, and aspirations.

- Senior Iranian officials contend that the first lines of Iran's defense pass through Lebanon and Palestine. From Iran's perspective, compelling Israel to constantly deal with threats on its northern and southern borders renders the possibility of an Israeli attack on Iran more remote.
- The struggle against Israel also constitutes an important recruiting tool in the protracted battle with "Western arrogance that implanted the Zionist entity deep in the heart of the Muslim world, and the world of Islam." A revival of Iranian activity to export the Islamic Revolution is now gathering fresh impetus in the Arab world, and an anti-Israel dynamic is being fed by an Arab street that has shaken off fear of its rulers.
- In contrast to the perceived economic enfeeblement of the Western economies headed by the United States, which constitute the bases of support for the "Zionist regime," Iran offers a substitute view of a new world order and an alternative, defiant Islamic agenda.
- Yet it is doubtful if the struggle against Israel and "global Zionism" will transform Shiite Iran into an acceptable party that can lead the change in the Middle East, given the fundamental apprehension of the "Shiite demon" among Sunnis that lingers on under the surface. In addition, Iran is fated to pay a price for its continued backing of the Assad regime in Syria.
- Turkey and Iran are currently in competition to lead the changes now shaping the Muslim world. Initially, Iran reacted with restraint, but now appears to be fighting back, accusing Turkey of sponsoring "liberal Islam" and cooperating with the West. In any case, the focus of the two remains the same – hostility toward Israel and seeing who can harm it the most.

For Iran, the tremors the Middle East is experiencing represent an opportunity to alter the political-religious landscape in the region from top to bottom. Nevertheless, some of these tremors, primarily in Syria, pose a strategic risk for Iran and have already engendered tension in its relations with Turkey after only a brief "golden age."

The Iranian leadership – both its spiritual leader and president, as well as most of the senior military echelon – has argued that the protest movement in the Arab world draws its inspiration from Iran's Islamic Revolution. They also believe the protests can alter the region's landscape and historic strategic equations, to transfer control over regional affairs to the states of the region while simultaneously ejecting the superpowers. In the Iranian conceptual lexicon one does not encounter the concept of the "Arab Spring" that is so prevalent in Arab

and Western political discourse. Instead, Iran has coined the term "Islamic awakening," which also reflects Iran's policy. Since the protests began, Iran has sought to color them with vivid Islamic hues and even attempts to leverage them to dovetail with Iranian regional interests and aspirations. Iran has even launched a website entitled Islamic-awakening.ir that functions as a venue for describing regional events in the spirit of its political doctrine and ideology.⁽¹⁾

The Revival of Khomeini's Legacy

This doctrine was broadly and systematically deployed in the course of the speeches and ceremonies marking "International Jerusalem (Qods) Day" that is commemorated annually during the last week of the month of Ramadan (this year on August 26). This event, which has taken place since 1979 following a decision by Khomeini and the Iranian government, is intended to convey Iran's deep support and commitment to the Palestinian cause and its desire to "liberate Jerusalem." Khomeini's dogma continues to serve as an anchor that currently dictates, defines, and shapes the Islamic Revolution's objectives. This includes Iran's export of the revolution and its aspiration to realize these objectives. Part and parcel of these objectives are a hostile attitude towards Israel and the constantly reiterated calls for Israel's (the "Zionist regime's") extermination and removal from the region.

"Qods Day" occurred in 2011 in the eye of the storm represented by the upheavals in the Arab world and the destruction of the old order in the Middle East. From the standpoint of Iran, the downfall of the moderate, "westernized" Arab rulers – and particularly Egyptian President Mubarak who constituted a major impediment towards realizing the Iranian vision and even served as a tool of the "arrogant powers" – is considered additional proof of what the Iranians define as "divine intervention" in Middle East events.

From the Iranian standpoint, the major events shaping the region emphasize the righteousness of Khomeini's path and doctrine. The majority of Iran's enemies have receded: the Soviet Union collapsed; Saddam Hussein was defeated and the Iraqi threat has faded; al-Qaeda has been weakened; the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has collapsed; Hizbullah has become the ruler of Lebanon and stood up to Israel for 33 days during the Second Lebanon War; Hamas in Gaza has drawn closer to Iran and managed to contend with Israel in the 2009 Gaza War; Iran's nuclear and missile programs are progressing despite international pressure; and the Shiites in Bahrain are in ferment. Finally, the Arab world is fragmenting while their Islamic components (some of which have received clandestine Iranian support) not only display unity but may capture power should democratic elections take place. They also express positions similar to the Iranian position in everything connected to relations with Israel.

Thus, after an Egyptian mob occupied Israel's embassy in Cairo, the Iranian leadership and state-run media outlets stated that the event marks the end of Israel's presence in Egypt. The *Basij* (the volunteer arm of the Revolutionary Guards) issued a statement to mark the capture of the "Zionist espionage den in

Cairo by Egypt's Muslim warriors" ("espionage den" is a popular phrase in Iran that refers to the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979). The statement further read:

Islamic Iran has expressed its opposition to the Zionist regime since its establishment and has always been the only country to oppose the peace talks between the Arabs and Israel, thus forming the greatest obstacle to fulfillment of the satanic schemes of the Israeli regime and puppet Arab governments in the region. The U.S. and its strategic ally Israel greatly fear the establishment of a strong Islamic bloc headed by Iran that will change the balance of power in the region and the world, and are therefore trying to foment plots as well as intelligence and espionage schemes to prevent the occurrence of similar revolutions.(2)

Decline of the West Presages a New Islamic Age

According to Iran's appraisal, the power of the Western and Western Islamic Arab regimes that restrained and prevented the people from expressing their true sentiments and strangled their protests in everything connected with Israel and the intervention by the Western states in the region is increasingly eroding. This, in fact, is heralding a new Islamic age in the Middle East led by Iran, whose revolution – so Tehran believes or at least outwardly pretends – furnishes inspiration for the Arab masses. Even prior to the Middle Eastern upheavals, Iran attempted to find ways to reach the hearts and minds of the Arab masses over the heads of their tyrant-leaders. Currently, Iran feels itself more comfortable and confident in promoting its anti-Western and anti-Israel/Zionist rhetoric and agenda, proposing an Islamic alternative under its patronage for shaping the Middle East, as the country that has consistently stood up to "Western hegemony."

Given the dramatic Arab weakness and the weakening of the superpower grip over the region, Iran is displaying increasing self-confidence. This finds expression in its hardening positions and its confrontational agenda with the West on almost every major issue in the region. These include Iran's vigorous opposition to a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians and support for continuation of the armed struggle and "resistance" to Israel's existence; support for Syria (and Syria's clampdown on pro-reform protesters) as a major state in the camp opposing Israel and the West, despite the severe and persistent violence by the Syrian regime against the opposition; support for Palestinian terrorist organizations and Hizbullah; provocative military maneuvers including the launch of long-range, ground-to-ground missiles and sailing Iranian frigates through the Suez Canal; and the promotion of an ambitious nuclear program that recently found expression in the transfer of centrifuges to the new installation in Fordu near Qom, its enrichment of uranium to a level of 20 percent(3) and the connection of the Bushehr nuclear power plant to the national electricity grid.(4)

Khamenei: Seeking to Create a Solid Islamic Bloc

The statement by Khamenei (whose status has recently been reinforced at the expense of Ahmadinejad) during a meeting with professors and academics in Tehran on the eve of "Qods Day" accurately reflects the new Iranian credo and Iran's vision for a Middle East after the "end of the age of the superpowers" and the "puppet Arab rulers."(5)

The Iranian leader is aware of the greatness of the moment, but he is also aware of the implicit dangers for Iran and its vision. He said:

The Middle East is experiencing a vast change that implies both prospects and risks. The major risk that is implausible is that the superpowers will return via propaganda to rule over the region for another 50-60 years. They've already begun this with the dangerous precedent of Libya. They are exploiting the vacuum and are attempting to establish a foothold.

Nonetheless, Khamenei estimates that

The most plausible scenario is that the determination of the people will lead to the establishment of countries ruled by the people, and as such they will be popular-Islamic countries as their people are Muslims in various forms....(This) despite the aspirations of the arrogant superpowers, the United States and the Zionists, to force their will upon them....If elections were held today in all the (liberated) countries, the result would favor Islamic tendencies....Who could have imagined that tendencies in Egypt would be so clearly Islamic?...The plausible scenario is that regional developments will lead to the creation of a solid and clear Islamic bloc in which many members of the elite will participate.

Khamenei emphasizes that

In any event, Iran cannot remain indifferent in the face of these dramatic developments. One thing is clear, recent regional developments have demonstrated that all Western economic, political, and managerial theories have been proven false, valueless, and have reached a dead end in the region; despite all the efforts that they made, their presence in the region is being constantly eroded. All this only demonstrates (what Iran has always contended) that we must rely now more than ever on ourselves and on the Islamic school of thought.

In his address for "International Qods Day," Khamenei tried to connect the Middle East upheaval and the Palestinian issue into a single, systematic doctrine and demonstrate that Iran has always served as a major actor that is genuinely concerned with the Palestinian interest. Khamenei said:

This is the day that the Iranian people can raise a shout for justice with the help of other enthusiastic peoples whose number is only

increasing, a shout that the arrogant superpowers had attempted to strangle over the past 60 years, ever since the establishment of the State of Israel.

Khamenei notes that

Without the Iranian shout at least another hundred years would have elapsed and in their course they would have attempted to wipe Palestine off the geographic map....They almost succeeded....But Iran's Islamic Revolution dealt a blow to their schemes....The Islamic Revolution, the declaration of Jerusalem Day, the transformation of the Israeli Embassy in Tehran into the Palestinian Embassy, constituted a warning and an aggressive (Iranian) preventive measure that opposed the schemes of the superpowers (to remove the Palestinian issue from the agenda).

The Iranian leader emphasized an important element that senior Iranian officials had refrained from emphasizing until recently, and this constitutes a major component in Iran's national security strategy. Khamenei emphasized that

Most fortunately, Jerusalem Day has expanded...and constitutes a sort of backstop for Iranian security. Iranian citizens must recognize the fact that every single person taking part in the Qods Day parades is performing his role in preserving Iranian security and the achievements of the Islamic Revolution.

The words of Khamenei dovetail fully with statements by senior Iranian officials who contend that the first lines of Iran's defense pass through Lebanon and Palestine. The Iranian investment in Palestine and Lebanon constitutes part of its national security strategy. From Iran's perspective, compelling Israel to constantly deal with threats on its northern and southern borders renders the possibility of an Israeli attack on Iran more remote, weakens Israel internally (causing damage to its rear), and strikes at its legitimacy in the international arena.

Ahmadinejad: The West and the Zionist Regime Have No Place in the New Middle Eastern Landscape

With variations, Khamenei's messages recur in announcements, addresses, and editorials in the Iranian press that have all closed ranks behind the conclusion that the regional revolutions have their origin in the trailblazing Iranian Islamic revolution that occurred 30 years ago.

Ahmadinejad's inflammatory address in what has become an annual event did not mince words when it came to denigrating Zionism and the West, and reiterated his standard repertoire, with Holocaust denial and calls for Israel's extermination.(6) He described the "history of Palestine" at length and how the West assumed control over Palestine and installed the Zionist entity there while exploiting the Arab nations' weakness and the "flaccidness of the Ottoman Empire" (a barb at Turkey).

In this fashion the Zionist regime became the critical sacred axis of the West and the colonialists....I'm prohibited from speaking or protesting the reasons for its establishment, not even in the name of free speech....Every mention of the Zionist regime constitutes a sin....The Zionist regime serves as a common denominator for all uncultured, inhuman, arrogant and colonialist nations...and constitutes a reflection of the image, values and principles of the Western capitalist world....Its purpose is to preserve an atmosphere of fear, intimidation, terror, aggression, division, and deceit in the region on a permanent basis in order to lay the groundwork for continued influence and control by the Western countries and to thwart the technological and scientific development of the countries of the region.

Ahmadinejad said that the entire foundations of the Zionist regime are predicated on a lie and the Holocaust is one of these lies. According to him the Zionists don't act only against the Palestinians and the countries of the region, but also serve as a Western tool for exercising control the world over, in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. With this background in mind, the Iranian president determines that Qods Day is a "day of unity for all lovers of justice and freedom and the monotheistic religions against oppression, and with God's help will lead to the total liquidation of the Zionist regime."

Given the expected Palestinian moves at the United Nations, the Iranian president warned that

Formal recognition for the Palestinian state is not the final objective. It is only a first step towards the liberation of all Palestine....The Zionist regime constitutes the heart of bacterial and cancerous cells. If it remains even on one inch of Palestinian soil it will again expand and lurk in ambush for an opportunity to injure everyone....The Palestinian resistance must be certain to avoid tying itself to a weak government (the Palestinian Authority) on a small portion of Palestine....The Palestinian nation and regional nations must never forget the sacred objective of entirely liberating Palestine....Palestinian honor, greatness and power are implicit in a continuation of the struggle for liberating Palestinian soil in its entirety....Any waiver of this objective is tantamount to suicide and provides an opportunity for the enemy to destroy and kill.

Similar to Khamenei, Ahmadinejad also warned the countries of the region against Western intentions to stage a renewed takeover of the region. He said:

Those responsible for all the dictatorial regimes, the tyrants, and the penury of peoples, after they've been kicked out the door, are currently attempting to reenter via the window under the pretense that they are trying to provide democracy and liberty to the nations of the region....We must all stand guard....Liberty, justice, free elections, and the right of self-determination are the privilege of all nations including those in our region and North Africa. Nevertheless, we must be vigilant

and cautious and recognize the fact that these rights can never be the result of the NATO gun barrel (policy) and the American armed forces.

In his conclusion, the Iranian president directed a message to "the Zionists and their bosses":

Your entire existence bespeaks robbery...you have come to kill...destroy...but your time is up....The nations have awakened; their power of faith has again resurfaced. Your interest is to return to your home, to the places from where you came....Go back to your homes....Don't think for a moment that with formal recognition for the Palestinian state you'll arrive at security and rest....This is only the start....You have no place among the nations of the region....You will not be able to persist in your shameful lives, not even on a single grain of Palestinian soil.

In a message to the Western countries, he said:

Four hundred years of colonialism and 100 years of slavery, wars and plunder are enough....You think that you can again draw the geographic lines in our region, control the oil and the will of nations through your plans, but you're mistaken....The nations have arisen from their slumber. They are at peak vigilance and readiness....The Middle East will be reshaped. The nations will no longer agree with the previous situation; they're looking forward to shaping it in their image, in the image of the region in line with Islamic thought....You must recognize the fact that you (the West) and the Zionist regime will have no place in the new Middle Eastern landscape.

To the Arab leaders:

How many states in the region neglected their peoples in the course of recent decades and only coveted the pleasures of power and tribal brawls. I tell them: Desist, don't play into the hands of the enemy. This is the final and decisive round. Be attentive to your nations, be partners to the divine awakening of the region's peoples against the colonial powers....Have you paid attention that the Americans and Zionists are not loyal friends? And they will sacrifice you on behalf of their interests.

A Permanent Fixation

Khomeini's heritage, reiterated by Iranian leaders again and again, continues to guide the second generation of the revolution. It is an everlasting constant that one must not deviate from, but one can fine tune and adjust it to the times and the location. This principle views the struggle against Israel as something that does not stand independently, but constitutes an important recruiting tool and common denominator with fellow-Muslims in the protracted "hundreds of years-long battle with Western arrogance that implanted the Zionist entity deep in the heart of the Muslim world and the world of Islam."

A revival of the complex web of Iranian activity to export the Islamic Revolution is now gathering fresh impetus in the new atmosphere that has been created in the Arab world, and an anti-Israel dynamic is being fed by an Arab street that has shaken off fear of its rulers. This has occurred primarily because the fetters that Arab leaders imposed on Iranian activity that targeted Islamic opposition groups have eroded and because the "Arab-Islamic street," that previously responded passively to anti-Israel demonstrations (given the repression by the security forces), has now awakened.

Since all the Arab countries are currently preoccupied with their own internal problems while neglecting the realm of joint Arab action, this leaves the regional arena to Iran, which launches diverse initiatives such as broad assistance to Somalia, and attempts to establish direct links with Islamic parties in various countries after years when these contacts were conducted clandestinely.

The Iranian promotion of its revolutionary aspirations and its drive for regional Islamic hegemony by denying the existence of the State of Israel (referred to as the Zionist regime; the regime that occupies "Al-Qods") allows Iran to display an activist approach to Arab problems in general and to the Palestinian problem in particular. This creates a stark contrast with the feebleness displayed by Arab rulers. Iran currently possesses a broad ideological and practical platform for effectively realizing and practicing the vision of Khomeini, the revolution's founder.

For example, Revolutionary Guards Politburo Chief General Yadollah Javani said: "Recent events in the region and the wave of Islamic Awakening in the countries which had earlier been strategic allies of Israel are factors accelerating the collapse of the Israeli usurper regime." Iranian Ambassador to Beirut Qazanfar Roknabadi said: "The Zionist regime is on the verge of collapse after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak."(7)

Through its rhetoric defaming Israel and Zionism and its active support (with weapons, training, and guidance) of Palestinian organizations, Iran has captured the attention of broad publics in the Arab and Islamic world (including communities in Latin America, Asia and Africa). Iran transmits these messages via its own television channels in Arabic and many other languages. Recently Iran also inaugurated a Spanish television channel.

Ahmadinejad's acerbic anti-Israel rhetoric is not his own invention. He is in fact remarketing the slogans of the original revolution, recasting them to conform to the times and linking them to the new and rapidly changing geo-strategic reality being created in the region and in the world (including the perceived economic enfeeblement of the Western economies headed by the United States, which constitute the bases of support for the "Zionist regime"). In contrast, they position Iran as a stable and robust actor with a systematic and coherent ideological, political, and religious doctrine that offers a substitute view of a new world order.

Furthermore, as world public opinion focuses on the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East, this has diverted the spotlight from Iran as it continues to promote its nuclear programs. From this standpoint, the Middle East upheaval has served

Iranian interests admirably.

The Iranian-Turkish Rivalry

Iran senses that with the disappearance of problematic rulers, the conflict with Israel and the West can be turned into something essentially Islamic. However, precisely in this realm Iran is encountering an old rival in the form of Turkey. In this context, the longer the protests in Syria continue and escalate while Iran continues to stand by the Syrian regime, the gap between Ankara and Tehran deepens. Turkey's recent decision to allow the deployment of a NATO anti-ballistic missile defense system in its territory added more tension to Ankara-Tehran relations. Iran's president carefully chose his words, saying, "Turkey is among our brothers and sincere friends; however, when enemies set up a missile shield there and admit it is against Iran, one should be careful."

Iranian criticism of Turkey has intensified in recent weeks, with senior clerics such as Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi criticizing Turkey for ceasing to support Syria and aligning itself with the "arrogant powers." He said: "We did not expect Turkey to approve of the arrogant powers and be at their complete disposal." (8) Former judiciary chief Ayatollah Hashemi Sharoudi charged that Turkey was using developments in the region to promote liberal Islam. He stated that "the arrogant Western powers are afraid of regional countries' relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and are making efforts to introduce innovative models of Islam, such as liberal Islam in Turkey, and are seeking to replace the true Islam with them." (9) The terms "liberal Islam" and "untrue" were concepts reserved by Iran for describing Islam in Saudi Arabia – Iran's sworn enemy, Egypt, and Jordan, attesting to the deterioration of relations with Turkey. Numerous editorials in the Iranian press have also addressed the rivalry emerging between Iran and Turkey and the clash between the two over the Syrian issue and regional aspirations.

The Struggle Against Israel: The Common Denominator with the Sunni Arab World

The struggle against Israel and "global Zionism," together with Holocaust denial, constitute the almost exclusive common denominator that connects Iran with the mostly Sunni Arab world. It provides Iran with tools that allow it to bridge Arab-Persian and Sunni-Shiite differences over the heads of the Arab leaders, but it is doubtful if this will transform Shiite Iran into an acceptable party that can lead the change in the Middle East, given the fundamental apprehension of the "Shiite demon" among Sunnis that is encouraged by Saudi Arabia.

There are initial feelers out to resume diplomatic relations between Iran and Egypt and an Iranian parliamentary delegation headed by the Chairman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Majlis has visited Cairo. A number of Egyptian delegations have visited Tehran as well. However, the underlying suspicion between the two countries is still great. The Iranian paper *Jomhuri-e Eslami*, which led the critical line against Egypt during the Mubarak

era, recently wrote under the headline "Talks with Those Who Stole the Revolution" (the supreme military council), that the Egyptian revolution was still facing problems, and criticized Iranian officials who were hastening to reestablish relations with Egypt. It claimed that conditions had not yet matured for establishing full diplomatic relations with Cairo.(10)

Iran views the new reality in the Middle East as a moment of opportunity to promote the Islamic agenda that it has always preached. Although Iranian propaganda and the anti-Israel messages that emerge from it are currently identical to the calls heard on the Arab street, and dovetail with the Islamic agenda that occasionally peeps out in the new Arab agenda, it is highly doubtful that they will suffice to improve Iran's status in the Arab countries since the basic antipathies that have hitherto limited Iranian activity in the region linger on under the surface. The continued Iranian assistance to Bashar Assad, who persists in killing his own people, may further alienate those who made the revolutions in the Arab world - both those that have already occurred and those on the way. Iran is fated to pay a price for its continued backing of the Assad regime.

In addition, the Turks have entered the Middle East arena, seeking to advance a neo-Ottoman agenda within the same void that Iran is seeking to fill. Turkey is competing with Iran on the same "street" and its leaders are offering the same aggressive messages toward Israel. Turkey has had a number of successes in its competition with Iran – from sending the flotilla to Gaza and its international aftermath to the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador, Erdogan's visit to Egypt, and its threats to confront Israel at sea (which also serve as a counterweight to the passage of Iranian warships through the Suez Canal).

Iran claims that those who overran the Israeli Embassy in Cairo received their inspiration from the takeover of the American Embassy in Tehran in 1979, but the memory of the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from Ankara is fresher. Turkey and Iran are currently in competition to lead the changes now shaping the Muslim world. Initially, Iran reacted with restraint toward Turkey, but now it appears to be fighting back. Iran has accused Turkey of sponsoring "liberal Islam" and cooperating with the West. Escalating tension between the two may be expected in the battle for the hearts of the "free Arabs." In any case, the focus of the two remains the same - hostility toward Israel and seeing who can harm it the most.

President George W. Bush's tidings of democratization as a balm for the area, after the liberation of Iraq, have finally arrived in the Middle East. Now these tidings are shared by the entire Middle East, which has become an arena for clashes between the West, revolutionary Iranian Islam, and the Turkish Islamic model.

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Deteriorating Relations between Iran and Turkey (September 2011)

Michael Segall

In recent weeks there have been significant signs of a rapid deterioration in relations between Iran and Turkey. This centers on growing Iranian resentment of the critical position that Ankara has adopted towards continued violent oppression by Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian security forces of that country's popular uprising, while ignoring warnings from Turkey, the Arab League, and other countries to find a solution to the crisis. At the same time, Ankara has consented to stationing on Turkish territory a U.S. radar system which is part of the NATO anti-ballistic missile system shield. This development has generated extensive criticism in Iran, which insists that such a system compromises its national security.

Certain voices in Iran claim that Turkey is unfit to play any role, let alone be at the forefront of the "Islamic awakening." Nor should it be considered a role model for countries in the region, which are engaged in a struggle to liberate themselves from the yoke of Western superpowers, since Turkey plays into the hands of the West and, in effect, is affiliated with the Western camp rather than the true Islamic one. Iran has also expressed the extremely harsh criticism that the Islam of Turkey is a liberal Islam – actually "state Islam," and not part of the true Islam as represented by Iran.

A Power Struggle over Regional Hegemony

Turkey and Iran are engaged in a power struggle over regional hegemony, each attempting to use different Islamic and political models to shape and spearhead change in the region. Both are targeting the same public – the "Arab and Islamic street" – and both use the Palestinian problem and the attitude to Israel to their advantage. The Syrian crisis spelled the end of the Iranian-Turkish-Syrian honeymoon and is now straining relations and bringing latent rivalries to the surface.

Turkey has already succeeded in its involvement in the Palestinian issue with the Gaza-bound flotilla. The recent expulsion of the Israeli Ambassador from Ankara and the severing of military links were perceived on the "Arab street" (and in Iran too⁽¹⁾) as winning moves. Much to Tehran's chagrin, the supply of Iranian missiles and other weapons to Hamas in Gaza and the training of Hamas forces remains far from the spotlight.

Moreover, continued Iranian aid to Syria, despite the ongoing oppression, is causing Iran to lose respect both in the "Arab street" and among Palestinian organizations, whose members have been used on more than one occasion as "cannon fodder" in Assad's struggle.

At this stage, the Iranian criticism of Turkey emanates from the religious establishment and the conservative press, while the Iranian leadership – the President and other leaders – is currently refraining from joining in, but it is being published in the state-sponsored media.

"Liberal Islam"

Iran accuses Turkey of collaborating with Western efforts to overthrow the Syrian regime because of that regime's determined adherence to the struggle against Israel and support of groups opposing Israel. Religious leader Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem-Shirazi censured Turkey, saying: "[Iran] did not expect Turkey to approve of arrogant powers and be at their complete disposal and to harm crisis-stricken Syria."⁽²⁾ The former Chairman of the Supreme Council, Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi, blamed Turkey for exploiting regional developments to further its own interests by promoting "liberal Islam"⁽³⁾ – a term previously applied in Iran to describe Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Shahroudi said that the West fears support from nations in the region for Iran and its ideological philosophy, so it is seeking to propose and promote "creative models of Islam" along the lines of the "liberal Islam" of Turkey to replace the true Islam as represented by Iran.

Farhad Bashiri, a member of the Iranian Majlis and the Iran-Turkey parliamentary friendship group, said Turkey's positions "in recent years have demonstrated only tenuous links to the foundations of religion and Islam, but it appears that such links do not have deep Islamic or religious roots." He added that the Turks undoubtedly wish to revive the Ottoman Empire, and hence are capitalizing on the atmosphere created in the Islamic world to achieve their goals.⁽⁴⁾ Bashiri

went on to say that Turkey is currently aligned with the West, which shows that there is no room for support of Islamic and anti-American movements in the Arab world according to the ideology of Turkish leaders. He claimed that by implementing Western policy, Turkey is undermining Islamic movements in the region.

"Anti-Missile Defense System in Turkey Is a Threat to Iran"

On the military front, Iranian Defense Minister Brig. Gen. Ahmad Vahidi has stated that the imminent deployment of an anti-ballistic missile system in Turkey is planned to be used for aggression against the Islamic Republic and its interests. He said that "the West claims the radar system in Turkey is meant to confront Iranian missiles, but it should be aware that we will not tolerate any aggression against our national interests and any such attack will elicit a crushing response." He added: "We believe that the presence of the Americans and Westerners in Islamic countries is troublesome and harmful and disturbs security in those Muslim states....We do not consider the presence of Western entities in any country, and especially Islamic countries, as something that serves the interests of those countries."(5)

Esmā'īl Kosari, a member of the Majlis Committee of National Security and Foreign Policy, said that "the contradictory behavior of Turkey is not acceptable to the regional countries," that Turkey's decision to allow the installation of anti-ballistic missile radar is indicative of a double-standard policy, and stressed that Ankara lost the reputation and prestige that it had gained through its recent positions in support of the Muslim nations. A spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry said: "We think NATO's objective in deploying military forces in the region is seriously suspicious....We think the stationing of NATO military forces would disrupt security in the region." The Majlis Research Center last month published a study which determined that the deployment of an anti-ballistic defense system in Turkey constitutes a threat to Iran.(6)

An editorial in the conservative newspaper *Jomhuri-e Eslami*, under the headline "Turkey's Flexibility and Its Negative Outcomes," claims that Turkey should not have agreed to make its border with Iran a hostile one. If Ankara believed that ingratiating behavior toward the West would serve its interests, the UN Palmer Report proved that all of its expectations and beliefs had completely collapsed. According to *Jomhuri-e Eslami*, Turkey appeared to have forgotten that it faced governments that easily deny reality and even claim the opposite. The article concluded that Turkish flexibility would result in a paradox and even an ambiguous deadlock. *Turkish politicians would do well to make a concerted effort towards understanding reality and avoid making any more mistakes while withdrawing their tractability vis-a-vis NATO and Western plans.*(7)

An article on the "Iranian Diplomacy" website (which focuses on Iran's foreign policy) says that while Turkey expected an apology from Israel, it was subjected to a "cold shower," and estimates that with U.S. mediation, Israeli-Turkish relations will eventually return to their former status. If we examine all these

factors, alongside Turkey's consent to station NATO anti-ballistic missile radar umbrella on Turkish territory, it may be concluded that although Turkish foreign policy is looking to the East, in formulating its long-term interests and strategy it is in fact looking towards the West. Neither Turkey nor Israel really wishes to cut off relations, and Turkey will therefore continue to await some kind of go-ahead from Israel to continue relations. I do not believe that the tension between the two countries will be long-lasting, because cooperation with Turkey is important to the United States in light of events in the Middle East.(8)

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Could the Kingdom of Bahrain Become an Iranian Pearl Harbor? (February 2011)

Jacques Neriah

The Islamic Republic of Iran has reiterated in the past that its military strategy is based on "asymmetric warfare" – Tehran will not confront the U.S. and its allies directly, given the superior military technology of the West, but rather through subversion and terrorism. Bahrain is, in fact, the ideal target for such an Iranian strategy. The actual stakes in the struggle for Bahrain are far greater than one would think, given its small physical size (760 sq. km.) and its tiny population (738,000).

When the U.S. entered the Second World War, Imperial Japan launched a sea-borne airstrike against the headquarters and ships of the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in 1941. Today, as is well known, the headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Fleet is in Bahrain. Iran does not need to employ its air force against the U.S. naval facility, but only to topple the pro-American regime of the al-Khalifa family and replace it with a new Bahraini regime backed by the Shi'a majority which seeks the immediate withdrawal of the fleet. In 2005, Shi'a demonstrators marched in Manama, Bahrain's capital, showing their support for Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Three years later in 2008, Shi'a demonstrators waved Hizbullah flags in Manama and called for closing U.S. bases in Bahrain.

The recent events in Bahrain have underlined the very volatile situation in which the small kingdom has been managing its affairs for the last two decades.

Nothing could be as descriptive of its unique situation as the narrative of the American analyst whose paper was leaked to the public through WikiLeaks: "The Sunni ruling family of tiny, Shi'a-majority Bahrain have long recognized that they needed outsiders – first the British, then the United States – to protect them from predatory neighbors, Iran foremost among them. Both Shahs and Ayatollahs have asserted claims to sovereignty over Bahrain from time to time. While keeping close to their American protectors, Bahrain's rulers seek to avoid provoking Iran unnecessarily, and keep lines of communication with Iranian leaders open."

The Sunni al-Khalifa family took Bahrain in 1783 from another Arab clan that acknowledged Persian overlordship. In 1971 the British colonizers left Bahrain at a time when the last Shah of Iran asserted and then withdrew a claim of sovereignty over the tiny island. After the Islamic revolution, the Iranian regime claimed sovereignty over Bahrain from time to time. Tensions between Bahrain and Iran developed again in February 2009 when Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, an advisor to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said Iran had sovereignty over Bahrain. He called Bahrain Iran's 14th province (Saddam Hussein called Kuwait Iraq's 19th province during the 1991 Gulf War). Bahrain halted natural gas negotiations with Iran in protest of the comments and demanded an official apology. Former Iranian Foreign Minister Manoucher Mottaki visited Bahrain at the time and presented an official apology.

It should come as no surprise that Bahraini rulers view Iran with deep suspicion and support fully the U.S. efforts to pressure and contain Iran. According to another leaked WikiLeaks document of April 2008, on the eve of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to Bahrain in 2008, the king reiterated that his number-one security concern was Iran. The king told the American who prepared Rice's visit that the purpose of the meeting was to demonstrate that "we have an alliance that will not stand by and watch countries fall to Iran one by one."

Bahraini officials often tell their American counterparts that some Shi'a oppositionists are backed by Iran. The king himself has claimed that members of the opposition have received training in Lebanon with Hizbullah officers (even

though the Americans were unable to confirm this report). The last known and proved Iranian involvement in Bahrain occurred in the mid-1990s when followers of Ayatollah Shirazi, who had received money and weapons from Iran, were rounded up and convicted of sedition (and later pardoned, while some engage today in legal politics). The Bahraini government presented evidence in Washington that the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards was involved in a 1995 Shiite uprising.

Nevertheless, as neighbors, Iran and Bahrain have had a long relationship centered largely around bilateral trade, though basic tourism and necessary regional cooperation also play a part. Since the international community and the United States in particular began to condemn Iran for its nuclear program, Bahrain's relations with the Islamic Republic have become increasingly strained. Bahraini officials have publicly stated that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapons program in violation of its Non-Proliferation Agreement obligation. Moreover, according to the WikiLeaks document referring to Bahrain, dated August 2008, roughly 30 percent of the Bahraini Shi'a follows clerics who look to more senior clerics in Iran for guidance. The majority look to Ayatollah Sistani in Iraq and a few to the late Muhammad Fadlallah and others in Lebanon. Bahrain's most popular cleric is Sheikh Isa Qassim, who has occasionally endorsed the Iranian regime's doctrine of "*velayat-e-faqih*" (guardianship of the jurist – the Supreme Leader). According to the same WikiLeaks report, a number of Bahrain's middle-aged clerics studied in Qom during the years when Saddam Hussein obstructed study in Iraq.

In other words, Bahrain rulers are practically sitting on a barrel of explosives whose detonator lies in the hands of the leaders of Iran. Bahrain's precarious regime lies on a very unstable social fabric:

- a. 60-70% of Bahrain's 500,000 citizens are Shi'a, while the other half-million residents are guest workers.
- b. Shi'a are poorer than Sunni Bahrainis.
- c. About 15% of Bahrainis are Persian and speak Persian at home and tend to belong to the professional classes.

The protests of mid-February and the subsequent violent repression by the authorities have underlined once more the deep grievances of the Shi'a majority. The protesters' demands have two main objectives: to force the ruling Sunni monarchy to give up its control over top governmental posts and all critical decisions, and address the claims that the Shi'a face systematic discrimination and are effectively blocked from key roles in public service and the military. Specifically, the protesters called for the government to provide more jobs and better housing, free all political detainees, and abolish the system that offers Bahraini citizenship to Sunnis from around the Middle East.

As a measure of appeasement, King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa has ordered an increase in food subsidies and social welfare payments, and a grant of 1,000 dinars (\$2,653) to each Bahraini family. According to Bahraini newspapers, more

than 71% of the families entitled to this grant have utilized it. The ruling family entrusted the management of the crisis to Crown Prince Salman, who called for a dialogue with an opposition inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian models, which is not ready at this point to compromise before satisfying its main demands.

No doubt this dire situation is not pleasant for the U.S. Due to their deep interests in Bahrain and the Persian Gulf, the Americans have been monitoring the domestic situation there for quite some time. Nevertheless, the analysts seem to have been very condescending towards the Bahraini monarchy to which it attributed a closer grip and control of the country, together with a proclaimed policy of liberalization. On the one hand, the Americans were very much aware of Bahrain's deep social, political, ethnic, and religious problems, but on the other hand, this did not trigger warnings regarding the capabilities of the regime to deal with such dire crises as the actual one. On the contrary, the Americans painted the rulers in a very positive way and stressed their commitment to political reform and reconciliation.

The December 2009 WikiLeaks document states as follows: "King Hamid understands that Bahrain cannot prosper by repression....There is more religious freedom in Bahrain than in most neighboring countries...two election cycles have seen the integration of the Shi'a opposition into the political process. While a Shi'a rejectionist fringe continues to boycott the process, their influence remains limited as the mainstream Wifaq Party has shown an ability to work with the government to achieve results for its constituents. Discrimination against Shi'a persists, however, and the government has sought to deflect criticism by engaging with Wifaq and focusing more public spending on housing and social welfare projects. So long as Wifaq remains convinced of the benefits of political participation, the long-term outlook for Bahrain's stability is good." (!)

The protests in Bahrain, home to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, have created a serious situation for the U.S. national security and for its economic interests. According to a late 2009 WikiLeaks document, U.S. companies have won major contracts between 2007-2009 that include Gulf Air's purchase of 24 Boeing 787 Dreamliners, a \$5 billion joint venture with Occidental Petroleum to revitalize the Awali field, and well over \$300 million in foreign military sales.

Bahrain has been a faithful ally to the U.S., has developed very close intelligence cooperation with the U.S., especially on issues of counter-terrorism, cooperates in the military and naval fields, as well as in the organization of an anti-Iranian Arab alliance. Under American aegis, Bahrain has improved its stance on human rights and political freedoms, although it seems not enough to prevent the outburst of protest that occurred in mid-February 2011.

The U.S. has every reason to be worried if Bahrain tumbles under Iranian hegemony. Indeed, all the ingredients are present for a potential change in Bahrain. It is also obvious that only through the use of force can the Bahraini regime survive. For how long? Certainly for as long as the U.S. is willing to support the regime and ignore its actions against human rights, and as long as there is no overt confrontation with Iran. Even more worrisome for the U.S. is the

fact that this Shi'a protest could very easily expand to the neighboring eastern Saudi shore of Al-Ahsaa where most of the population is also Shi'a. Such a situation and potential continued unrest could create a serious challenge to the military presence of the U.S. in the Gulf area, especially if it is exploited by Iranian agents interested in provoking havoc in an "American preserve" at a time when Tehran itself is feeling the weight of popular protest, encouraged openly by the Obama Administration.

In view of the above, there is a clear possibility that the American naval presence in Bahrain will become a target for potential Iranian terrorist acts.

It should be stressed that Iran has already identified a situation of American weakness in protecting its allies in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Iran therefore is increasing its support to subversive elements throughout the Persian Gulf and especially in Bahrain.

Finally, it seems that if Iran perceives a situation where the U.S. would treat the king as it treated Mubarak earlier, this would definitely encourage Iran to increase its offensive subversion in Bahrain and possibly in eastern Saudi Arabia.

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Why Iran Is Pushing for a Shiite Victory in Bahrain (June 2011)

Michael Segall

- Bahrain is the locus of a titanic struggle between regional powers representing polar extremes of Islam (Shiite Iran vs. Sunni Saudi Arabia), and international powers' economic and geo-strategic interests.
- Washington has been regarded as Bahrain's main ally. The command of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, operating in the Persian Gulf as a counterweight to Iran, is located in Bahrain. Yet Washington finds it difficult to formulate a consistent policy toward the protest there.
- Bahrain is now at one of the most sensitive points in its history: it is truly in the Iranian lion's maw, still hosts the main naval base of the American fleet in the Gulf region, and is a microcosm of the current struggle between the old and the new in the Middle East.
- Iran has claimed sovereignty over Bahrain, maintaining that Bahrain formerly constituted Iran's fourteenth province. Iran is acting vigorously in

Bahrain to overthrow the regime through planting clandestine cells and organizing the Shiite population for protests, and is being aided by Lebanese Hizbullah.

- The battle in Bahrain has not yet concluded. Iran seeks to use the kingdom as a springboard for continued influence and, given U.S. and Western indecisiveness, Saudi Arabia finds itself almost alone in confronting Iran.

The Special Case of Bahrain

The ongoing crisis in Bahrain, where the Shiite majority (70 percent) is challenging the Sunni royal family, has gradually come to reflect major processes of change that will reshape the political, politico-religious, and social reality in the Middle East. These processes will also redefine the relationship between the region and the United States in particular and the West in general, as well as the tension-laden relationship between Sunnis and Shiites.

At first glance, Bahrain may appear merely another arena where the popular protest sweeping the Arab world has spilled over. A closer look will reveal, however, that Bahrain constitutes a unique case, one that is likely to appreciably influence the change processes in the Middle East. It signifies, perhaps similar to Iraq, "the sum of all fears" and mirrors the weaknesses of the Arab and Western worlds in the face of the Iranian buildup and power projection.

At the same time, the Bahraini case highlights the internal disputes within the Shiites themselves regarding links with Iran and Lebanese Hizbullah. A majority of Shiites remain conflicted over the source of religious authority (Khamenei of Iran or Sistani of Iraq), while ethnic and religious rivalries – Arab-Persian and Sunni-Shiite – continue. Bahrain is the locus of a titanic struggle between regional powers representing polar extremes of Islam (Shiite Iran vs. Sunni Saudi Arabia), and international powers (struggling to keep up with the dramatic changes sweeping the region).

The process of stabilizing Iraq, with its difficult but encouraging experience with democracy since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, has also paved the way (more than the social networks) for the current wave of protests in the Arab world, which is (adversely) influenced by events in Bahrain. The reactions in Iraq still clearly reflect the ethnic-religious fault line: the Shiites support the protest of their Bahraini brothers, while the Sunnis back the external (Saudi) involvement and the continued rule of the Sunni royal family.

An additional major factor in the Bahraini imbroglio is the United States. Washington finds it difficult to formulate a consistent policy toward the protest there, given Bahrain's centrality in terms of future measures against Iran. Washington has been regarded, at least up to the present, as the kingdom's main ally. The command of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, operating in the Persian Gulf as a counterweight and deterrent to an Iran that maintains a prominent presence in those waters, is located in Bahrain, and indeed the United States has recently

beefed up its presence in the kingdom. At the same time, the Iranian propaganda machine is taking advantage of the undecided and hesitant American policy toward the Bahrain Shiite protests.

A Major Conflict Arena

Bahrain is, then, gradually becoming a major irritant and conflict arena in the Persian Gulf between the two regional powers. (Shiite) Iran views itself as the representative of what it defines as the new order, soon to be constructed on the ruins of the American/Western old order and the Arab regimes supported by it. Iran skillfully exploits the weaknesses and divisions among the Arab states and their primary preoccupation with preserving their own stability and discerning the U.S. position toward them, while seeking to strengthen its own involvement. On the other side, (Sunni) Saudi Arabia is fighting a desperate rearguard battle to salvage something of the old order that is collapsing at its feet. This accounts for Iran's major efforts within the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and other inter-Islamic forums to showcase the Bahraini protesters and the obliviousness of the Western and Sunni world to their entreaties and plight.

The entry of the Saudi forces as part of the Peninsula Shield Force, in the framework of the defense agreements between the Gulf states and Bahrain, has advanced the Saudi front line with Iran, added new content to the historic rivalry between the two countries, and sparked a high-intensity renewal of the propaganda war and tension between the two aspirants for leadership of the Muslim world. With Bahrain bordering Saudi Arabia, should the former fall to the Shiites – an outcome that Iran is working for more than ever – it will give Tehran direct access to the very heart of the Sunni world. That is precisely why the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) sent the Peninsula Shield Force to help Bahrain protect "vital installations and interests," and also proposed at its last meeting to admit the kingdoms of Jordan and Morocco to the Council and broaden the front against Iran.

Choose Your Religious Authority

The entry of Saudi forces (other GCC states also contributed soldiers) played into the hands of Iran and the Bahraini opposition, which contended that the Kingdom of Bahrain is de facto a Saudi satellite. The gradual transition of the Bahraini opposition from the quiet protest (which did not lead to tangible reforms) characteristic of its approach for years to a violent struggle, stimulated by Iran and assisted by Lebanese Hizbullah, reinforced the Shiite elements in Bahrain that support the Iranian Shiite model – that is, the rule of the religious jurisprudence (*Velayat-e-faqih*), currently Ayatollah Khamenei. Conversely, this transition weakens the Shiite elements that support the quietist Shiite model, which is manifested at present in Iraqi governance and whose principal representative is Grand Ayatollah Sistani; even some of the Shiite elements in Lebanon (such as Grand Ayatollah Fadlallah before his death) support this

model.

Iran, for its part, is worried about the large-scale support that Sistani is gradually accumulating among the Shiites in Bahrain and among other Shiite concentrations in the Gulf (and in Lebanon, and even in Iran itself). Thus Iran is trying to bolster those Shiite elements that view the Iranian leader as a source of religious emulation and to foster among the Bahraini Shiites (some of whom are of Arab and some of Persian origin) a unique Shiite identity that is oriented to the Iranian leader. Tehran provides generous financial support to the Bahraini Shiites, assists their organizations, and, with the help of Hizbullah, even supplies some of them with weaponry.

Over the past few months the tensions accompanying Iranian-Bahraini relations, which have existed since the kingdom's establishment in the 1970s, have increased. The background is the spread of protest against tyrannical regimes throughout the Arab world and Iran's exploiting the protest to push its ambitious agenda of strengthening the region's Shiite elements in particular and promoting its influence in the awakened Middle East in general. Tehran will host (June 3) an International Conference on Islamic Awakening and regional developments.

Bahrain, the Fourteenth Province of Iran

Iran has claimed sovereignty over Bahrain and found historical documentation to support this. Bahrain was under Persian rule from 1602 to 1783. After Britain, at the close of the 1960s decided to withdraw its forces from the Persian Gulf, Iran renewed its demands for sovereignty over the island. In a 1970 plebiscite, however, the residents of Bahrain, called upon to choose between independence and annexation to Iran, opted for the former, and in August 1971 they attained it. The Shah of Iran did not raise the issue, but it arose once again after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and Tehran periodically puts it on the agenda along with its demands for sovereignty over the three disputed islands (Abu Moussa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb) at the opening of the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Senior Iranian officials continue to maintain that before its independence Bahrain constituted the fourteenth province of Iran and even was represented in the Majlis. They also scathingly criticize the Shah's "shameful" decision to forgo Bahrain. For example, the editor in chief of the influential Iranian newspaper *Kayhan*, who is a close associate of Khamenei, wrote in July 2007 that "the governments of the Gulf States were established as a result of the direct intervention of the global arrogance [i.e., the Western powers]...and they are accused by their peoples of collaboration with the Zionist entity....They know full well that the earthquake that Iran has created [i.e., the Islamic Revolution] will [sooner or later] lead to the collapse of their illegal regimes." He stated that this was not just his personal opinion but also that of the peoples of Iran and Bahrain. (1) Such assertions disputing Bahrain's Arab character, independence, and sovereignty, though rare, feed Bahraini and Arab suspicions regarding continued Iranian subversion and repeated attempts to overthrow the Royal House.

Iran does not limit itself to words and is acting vigorously in the territory of Bahrain primarily via the Shiite population and Lebanese Hizbullah advisers (a model it is also adopting in other regions, such as Iraq). It seeks to promote its interests and lay the groundwork for overthrowing the regime in Bahrain through planting clandestine information-gathering cells, organizing the Shiite population for protests, and engaging in subversive activity. Many telegrams revealed by WikiLeaks supported the suspicion that the Bahraini Royal House (and other Gulf states including Saudi Arabia) expressed to senior American parties about the diplomatic ("Bahrain is part of Iran") and military (nuclear and maritime) threats posed by Iran, along with its subversion in Bahrain, growing influence in the region (primarily in Iraq and in the Gulf waters), and the need to formulate a regional response - both Arab as well as an international defense umbrella - against these threats. Former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was one of the Arab leaders who enlisted in support of Bahrain following the Iranian threats.

Bahrain: Lebanese Hizbullah Is a Terrorist Organization Operating in Bahraini Territory

Recently senior Bahraini officials have revealed in interviews to the Arab media the role that Iran and Lebanese Hizbullah are playing in subversive activity on Bahraini territory. This is not the first time that accusation has been made, but its timing is important given the continued clashes in Bahrain and the overt and ongoing support for them by Iran and Hizbullah.

The Bahraini foreign minister, in an interview to the pan-Arab newspaper *Al-Hayat*, accused Hizbullah of training Bahraini citizens in Lebanon and other places and emphasized that his country was capable of "proving its claims." He defined Hizbullah as a "terrorist organization" and called its leader Hassan Nasrallah's claim that he would intervene in Bahrain "terror and intervention in the internal affairs of Bahrain." The foreign minister also accused the Iranian foreign-language propaganda organs – the (Arabic) *Al-Alam* satellite TV station and the (English) Press TV – of "spreading lies," and called on Iran to desist from its attacks on Bahrain.(2) These networks indeed present daily propaganda supporting the Shiite protests in Bahrain and condemning Bahrain's rulers and the Saudi involvement in the kingdom.

In another interview the Bahrain interior minister said Iran was seeking to overthrow the Bahraini regime, as it had already tried to do at the start of the 1980s when it was behind a failed coup attempt and again in 1994 when it established Hizbullah cells in Bahrain and also trained its fighters in Syria.(3) In his view the protesters' modus operandi and the support that they obtained for it from Tehran indicated that most of the Shiite protesters in Bahrain were connected to Hizbullah.(4)

The Second Deputy Chairman of Bahrain's parliament, Sheikh Adel al Ma'awda, said that "Iran's expansionist ambitions have been revealed to the world and that this is a policy that has been universally rejected by everybody...while if Iran is aiming to bring justice, it should start with itself, and lift its injustice against its

own Shiite population, as well as the Sunnis, and it should be more concerned with fixing its own situation."(5)

Regarding the tension that brought Bahrain to cancel flights to Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq, the Kuwaiti paper *As-Seyassah* wrote that the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) were working on a joint decision to expel from their territory all Lebanese Shiites who maintained contacts with Hizbullah. The paper also wrote that the GCC states had obtained convincing evidence from intelligence bodies in Bahrain, France, and the United States that Hizbullah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps were working hand in glove with local religious (Shiite) elements who were leading the protests in Bahrain and eastern Saudi Arabia (which is rich in oil and has a large Shiite minority). The paper quoted a high-level Bahraini who said that "No Lebanese Shia with connections – or suspected of connections – to Hizbullah or the Revolutionary Guard will remain in the Gulf. They must understand this from now on."(6) Note that when Nasrallah announced his willingness to assist the Shiite protest in Bahrain, former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri hastened to contact the King of Bahrain and condemn Nasrallah's words.(7)

An Ongoing Effort

The Iranian attempts to undermine the Bahraini Royal House, referred to recently by senior Bahraini officials, are not new. In the past as well, Bahrain accused Iran of subversion in its territory, and in 1996 it even uncovered Hizbullah cells there that were implanted with Lebanese Hizbullah's encouragement and assistance, going by the name of Hizbullah-Bahrain – the Military Arm. Earlier, in 1981, the security authorities uncovered the "Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain," which worked under Iranian tutelage to promote a revolution in the country. The Iranian modus operandi is similar in every state where a Shiite majority or minority exists: it recruits Lebanese Hizbullah, which possesses the know-how and experience it has accumulated in wars with Israel as well as the advanced training it has received in Iran, to identify, recruit, and train local elements that can in the future constitute Hizbullah cells in their countries. In this manner Hizbullah-Hijaz, Hizbullah-Iraq, Hizbullah-Bahrain, and other groups were established. This formed the background for Morocco's severance of ties with Iran.

In Bahrain, Iran has found a convenient infrastructure for political-religious subversion. First, the proximity to Iran makes it easier to assist the Bahraini Shiites. Second, the Shiite population has in recent years grown more receptive to Iran, given its disappointment over the reform process instituted by King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, which was intended to weaken the Shiite opposition by including it in a fairly toothless parliament; the Shiite successes in Iraq have also inspired the Bahraini Shiites. Third, regional and international developments have helped whet Shiite appetites: the democratic elections in Iraq whose results reflected the Shiite majority, and the strengthening of Lebanese Hizbullah since the Second Lebanon War with its substantial political consolidation in Lebanon

(including the removal of Hariri and the appointment of a prime minister who is a Hizbullah lackey). Fourth, Iran is currently riding the protest wave in the Arab world, trying to make it a catalyst for change in Bahrain, a change it has been promoting behind the scenes for many years, given Bahrain's importance in terms of opening the gates to Saudi Arabia's backyard.

Hence the scope, depth, and characteristics of the Iranian meddling in Bahrain differ from Iranian subversive involvement in other Gulf and Arab states, although there too an escalation has recently occurred that reflects Iran's growing self-confidence. Bahrain is now at one of the most sensitive points in its history: it is truly in the Iranian lion's maw, still hosts the main naval base of the American fleet in the Gulf region, and is a sort of microcosm of the current struggle between the old and the new in the Middle East.

Shiite Social Networks

The Shiite social media networks in Bahrain (and their links with Shiite social networks in other Shiite concentrations) play an important role in spreading the protest, stoking it, and coordinating it with Shiite bodies outside of Bahrain. Bahraini bloggers (some of whom have been arrested by the authorities), opposition forums and Internet sites were also active during the previous rounds of both quiet and violent antiregime protest during 2007 and 2008. A unique aspect of the Bahraini virtual domain is its attachment to the broader Shiite context and connections. In the virtual Internet realm the Bahraini Shiites find an attentive ear, words of encouragement and practical advice, common denominators, and they derive ideas in the Shiite context that go far beyond the Bahraini playing field. Thus the Shiite protest in Bahrain sometimes finds expression in the forums of Lebanese Hizbullah. Pictures and clips uploaded in Bahrain resonate in Hizbullah forums, in forums and blogs in Iraq, and the reverse. Thus, with Iranian inspiration, a sort of Shiite virtual brotherhood has emerged that ultimately overflows from the virtual dimension to the actual one.

Iran Sees an Opportunity

Given the special importance that Iran accords Bahrain, senior Iranian spokespersons including Khamenei view developments there as an important, almost divine, event – a continuation of the successes in the region over the past few years: the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the Second Intifada, the Second Lebanon War, the Gaza War. The Iranian leader has already stated on several occasions that "in the Arab and Islamic domain, a fundamental development is occurring that attests to the vigilance of the Islamic Umma [nation]...a new movement has begun in the region. This is a movement of the Islamic nation, a movement with Islamic slogans heading toward Islamic goals and illustrating the general awakening of the peoples, and God willing, this movement will certainly achieve victory."

Seemingly, Khamenei says, developments in Bahrain resemble those in the

other countries; "their main desire is to hold elections but, in reality, the people have no...voting rights....They are suffering from oppression." He accuses the West of hypocrisy in its policy toward the Bahraini protests, arguing that the West does not rush to support the insurgents there because they are Shiites, while employing the propagandistic claim that this is a Sunni-Shiite struggle. Khamenei asserts that the Bahraini struggle is similar to that in other Arab countries and hence worthy of support. He adds that Iran supports Bahrain precisely as it has supported the Palestinians' struggles for thirty-two years. "We do not make any distinction between Gaza, Palestine, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen. Tyranny against nations is doomed everywhere." (8) In actuality, as noted, Iran views Bahrain as the weak link and an opportunity to tilt the balance in its favor in the regional struggle it is waging against Saudi Arabia, the representative of the old order, and its ally the United States.

"The Revolution Sweeping the Islamic Countries Will Also Cross the American Border"

The issue of the demonstrations against the royal family in Bahrain occupies a major place in the Iranian media, receiving extensive coverage in the written press and in its editorials. Likewise, the political portions of Friday sermons in Tehran deal at length with the Shiite protest in Bahrain and the agitation in the Arab world (this being primarily criticism of Libya, which Iran continues to hold responsible for the disappearance of Imam Moussa Sadr in its territory).

Ahmad Jannati, secretary of the Guardian Council and one of the major Friday preachers, asserted that the Bahraini regime has oppressed the Shiites for years and called upon the Bahraini Shiites, in the spirit of the Iranian struggles of martyrdom and the heritage of Karbala (involving the death of Hussein the Third Imam in the Battle of Karbala of 680, which became a tenet of Shiite belief and a paragon of self-sacrifice), to oppose the enemy. He stated: "You should either get martyred or win. This should be your slogan." Jannati emphasized that the hand of the United States is apparent in all the "crimes" perpetrated in Bahrain and called upon all members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to assist the Bahraini people. He added that "with Allah's help, the revolution sweeping the Islamic countries will also cross the American border....We expect this to occur....America is in a process of decline (politically and economically) whether it cares to admit it or not." (9)

The dispatch of a GCC intervention force to help Bahrain overcome the protests, of course, is widely condemned by Iran's religious and political elites and remains on the country's agenda. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad denounced the Saudi military involvement and accused the United States: "this military invasion was a foul and doomed enterprise....The U.S. seeks to save the Zionist regime [Israel] and suppress popular uprisings. So it supports certain governments." (10) Grand Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi denounced Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for sending forces to defend what he defined as "the Sunni rulers' crackdown in Bahrain against the Shiite demonstrators" and stated: "It is out of

the ordinary that a *seemingly* Islamic state should send armed forces to slaughter people of another state."(11)

The English-language government media outlets in Iran, intended for propaganda purposes, emphasized the "protest wave in the Arab world against the dispatch of a Saudi assistance force to repress the Shiite protest,"(12) as well as "the training that the Bahraini security forces receive from corrupt and 'bloodthirsty' British military security bodies."(13)

In a comprehensive interview to the FARS news agency, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards claimed that the double standard "imperialism" was displaying in Iran "accurately reflects and also exposes the mendacity of the imperialist world." He underlined that the common denominator of all the revolutions against the "corrupt regional rulers" was these rulers' loyalty to the United States and Israel, that the Bahraini ruler had awarded the United States direct access to the Persian Gulf via a naval base in an Islamic region, and that "the inhabitants of Bahrain cannot tolerate this language." The Revolutionary Guard commander called the Saudi military intervention in Bahrain a "strategic mistake" that would hasten its demise, and said that soon "the hand of divine intervention will facilitate a response to the crimes of Saudi Arabia."(14) The commander of the ground forces, Ali A'rasteh, spoke similarly and noted that the U.S.-assisted Saudi presence in Bahrain was intended to check the influence of the Islamic regional awakening.(15) Ayatollah Hossein Nouri Hamedani, a close associate of Ahmadinejad, said an Islamic Middle East was taking shape and the efforts of the United States to create a region with Israel as its focus had failed. (16) The United States had also nurtured the Royal Houses in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE so as to maintain its regional dominance, but today "these puppet regimes" were being undermined and Saudi Arabia was destined to be undermined as well.(17)

The Iranian press strongly echoes the regime leaders' statements on the issue and refers to the events in Bahrain as a turning point. Among other things it is claimed that, after the disturbances and the clashes between the Royal House and the Shiite demonstrators, the situation in Bahrain will in any case never return to its former state; and that the residents of Bahrain can no longer protest the iniquities they suffer quietly, since now "the stage of their armed resistance to the dictatorship in their country" has arrived and they are left with no other option. The situation is analogized to Hizbullah's struggle: "If Hizbullah in Lebanon could vanquish Israel and its well-equipped army, then Hizbullah-Bahrain can without a shadow of a doubt dispose of the Bahraini army and the Saudi expeditionary force, since today it is much easier to provide weapons to the Bahraini protesters than it is for the Bahraini Royal House to hire Saudi mercenaries."(18) Extremist elements in Iran such as Ansar Hizbullah have discussed methods for conducting a *jihad* against what they term "the slaughter of Bahraini Shiites by the Wahhabi Saudis."

The Iranian Evil

On the other hand, and quite unsurprisingly, the international, Saudi-controlled, pan-Arab press fires right back and hurries to defend Gulf solidarity and the expeditionary force to Bahrain. It levels the habitual criticism that Iran is pushing the Bahraini Shiites into extreme positions and demands, hindering a reasonable solution to the crisis despite the long way that the Bahraini Royal House has gone toward the Shiites in recent years:

The Iranian government announced that it opposes the deployment of Saudi forces in Bahrain and demanded that they be withdrawn. However, Iran's approval or objection means nothing, because the GCC countries are all members in the Peninsula Shield, which is aimed at protecting member states from foreign interference and threats, while the Bahraini government has accused Iran of meddling in its affairs and incitement.(19)

The allegedly hypocritical position of Nasrallah, Iran's prot 'g ', and his statement that he is prepared to assist the Shiites in Bahrain, have also drawn scathing criticism in the pan-Arab press:

Why didn't we hear any support from Hassan Nasrallah, a man who shows such contempt for double standards, for the first indications of a popular revolution in Syria?...What is the noble Hassan Nasrallah's view of the despotism and tyranny of the Iranian government, not only against the oppressed Sunni minority, who are deprived of the most basic religious and political rights, but also against the reformists, the majority of whom were disciples of the Khomeini revolution who have now dispensed with their robes?...Hassan Nasrallah was not wise when he said there was no difference between the Gaddafi family and the al-Khalifa family, as there is a massive difference between the two. Now he must answer us regarding the difference between the families of Gaddafi, al-Assad, and Ahmadinejad.(20)

The Saudi press defended the decision to send forces to assist Bahrain, emphasizing the continued Iranian subversion in the region, its many years of meddling in Bahrain, and its "evil" regime. The newspaper *Al-Jazeera* asserted that "Iran's embassy in Bahrain, like other Iranian embassies in the Arab Gulf states and Iraq, is an espionage den with stockpiles of weapons and intelligence and IRGC cadres who direct, control and lead sleeper cells of saboteurs."(21)

The clash between the Arab-Sunni and Persian-Shiite camps surrounding the crisis in Bahrain also included an exchange of verbal brickbats between senior Iranian clergy and the prominent Sunni preacher Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi. The Iranian clergy accuse him of making discriminatory statements about the protests in Bahrain when he called for their suppression. Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem-Shirazi inquired: "How can an open-minded religious scholar make such remarks? The meaning of the statement by Mr. Qaradawi is that we discriminate between Muslims Qaradawi supports who are protesting in Egypt, and war in Libya, but when it comes to Bahrain he defends dictatorship."(22)

Multidimensional Aspects

Ultimately, the continuing crisis in Bahrain is not confined to the Shiite majority's demands for change and their proper and full integration in Bahraini political and economic affairs. It also reflects developments in Bahrain's strategic environment: the "Shiite renaissance" in the Arab-Islamic domain, primarily in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon; the strengthening of Iran and of Hizbullah, its "performance contractor," in that domain; the changes occurring in the nature and intensity of American influence with, as an outcome, the weakening of the moderate Arab camp and particularly Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt (which, since Mubarak's fall, has again been signaling Tehran about its desire for improved relations); and, above all, the ever-deepening Sunni-Shiite fault line in the region.

The Shiites, who have lived with a sense of discrimination since the dawn of Islam, now draw inspiration from this and aspire, under Iran's leadership, to occupy a historic place of honor and lead the Islamic world in a sort of new world order.

The battle in Bahrain has not yet concluded. Many hands are stirring the pot there. Iran is trying to bring about a transformation, and will use the kingdom as a springboard for continued influence over the Sunni world. Saudi Arabia is attempting to repair and preserve the existing situation, and finds itself almost alone in a confrontation with an Iran that is proceeding toward nuclearization and playing in its own backyard. Iran has, indeed, been showing satisfaction over the nuclear issue's relegation to the margins of the global agenda.

The United States, for its part, continues to display indecisiveness in Bahrain and is hampered by constraints related to its deterrent policy toward Iran. In the absence of any creative solution, Washington may again be counting on the quietist Shiites of the Sistani school to calm the atmosphere in Bahrain as well. Despite hardly being mentioned lately, Iran's nuclear program continues to progress, and pressure on Iran could lead it into tougher actions against Bahrain.

What is happening in Bahrain, then, could be the "perfect storm" from Iran's standpoint, one that could eventually tilt the balance in its favor. The pendulum is moving, albeit slowly, in Iran's direction; Washington continues to lose leverage while Iran keeps gaining assets (in Iraq and Lebanon). Nevertheless, the fall of the Syrian regime could constitute a problem for Iran and move the pendulum to the other side, given the possible effects on Hizbullah and on the assistance to Shiite actors in Iraq, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. This would be a good time for Washington and the West to re-think how to help the opposition in Syria.

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Rising Tension between Iran and the Gulf States (May 2010)

Zvi Mazel

- The Gulf states are conducting an appeasement policy toward Tehran while with increasing dread they helplessly follow the nuclear crisis, epitomized by Iranian determination and aggression in the face of American weakness.
- In the last few weeks we witnessed a number of acrimonious exchanges between the Gulf states and Iran following the exposure of an Iranian clandestine network in Kuwait and renewed tension between the UAE and

Iran over the continuous occupation by Iran of three islands belonging to the UAE. An Iranian spokesperson said that the Emirates states belonged to Iran and when the time came, they would come under Iran's control.

- The official Iranian news agency warned the Gulf states against pursuing confrontation: "There is no lion in the region save for the one that crouches on the shore opposite the Emirate states. He guards his den which is the Persian Gulf. Those who believe that another lion exists in the vicinity (meaning the U.S.) – well, his claws and fangs have already been broken in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine."
- It is Qatar, which hosts large American military bases, that maintains the most cordial relations with Iran. Qatar is also influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite the fact that the Brotherhood members are Sunni, they have elected at this juncture to support Iran in its conflict with the United States.
- The provocative naval maneuvers that Iran continues to conduct are indeed intended as a warning to the United States and Israel, but they also convey a clear message to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states: "We are here alongside you and we have massive power. Do not dare to provoke us."

The Impotence of the Gulf States

Relations between Iran and the Gulf states are more strained than ever. Iran is issuing threats and working non-stop to undermine their stability. It repeatedly declares that these countries are part of its historic territory and it will take them over at the appropriate time.

In the meantime, Iran is exploiting their territory and services to circumvent the sanctions that were already imposed on it over the last two years. Straw companies were established in Dubai and apparently in Bahrain and Kuwait as well to purchase sophisticated products on Iran's behalf that were needed to advance its nuclear program. The banks in these countries also provide a smokescreen for illicit transactions and money-laundering by Revolutionary Guard leaders. The Gulf states are aware of what is going on, but in the meantime, they are conducting an appeasement policy toward Tehran – even if they themselves have no confidence in it. All this is occurring while with increasing dread they helplessly follow the nuclear crisis, epitomized by Iranian determination and aggression in the face of American weakness.

Iranian Subversion and the Gulf States

The tension level in the region has increased in recent days as once again a measure of Iranian subversion in the Gulf states came to light.⁽¹⁾ In Kuwait a spy network acting on behalf of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards was uncovered; it intended to establish the infrastructure in anticipation of a takeover of the

country: to incite the Shiites against the regime, establish sleeper cells to act when the time came, and provide support for illicit economic activity.(2)

This time parliament members insisted that Kuwait not back down from confronting Iran, and the attorney general has already submitted an indictment to the courts. Kuwait, located between Iraq and Saudi Arabia on the Gulf shore, is considered a stable and moderate country, with close ties to the United States. It provides strategic depth and a lifeline for the American army in Iraq. American soldiers on their way to and from Iraq pass through Kuwait, and the U.S. Army's weapons and munitions are funneled via Kuwait.

Tension with the Emirates over the Occupied Islands

The confrontation between Iran and the United Arab Emirates escalated as UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan compared the continuous occupation by Iran of three islands belonging to his country to "the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands." (3) Iran conquered these islands (Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb) during the time of the Shah in 1971, the year that the Emirates gained independence from British rule. In recent years Iran has settled the islands and established military camps there. The rulers of the Emirates, on the other hand, continue to reiterate their demand that Iran restore the islands or agree to international arbitration. Iran refuses. The issue is also on the Arab League agenda, and at every senior-level conclave the demand to restore the islands to their legal owners is emphasized.

Iran Responds to Kuwait with Derision and Menace

The Iranian response to Kuwait and the UAE was as brutal as ever. Iran totally denied that spies acting on its behalf were operating in Kuwait and warned the entire regional media "not to take lightly their responsibility to publish credible information and particularly [avoid] baseless information." This affair recalls the exposure of a Hizbullah cell in Egypt whose members were placed on trial and sentenced to long prison terms.(4) In this case, Hizbullah conceded its guilt, but explained that the intention was to assist Hamas in Gaza against Israel. Nevertheless, everyone knows that Hizbullah was operating in the service of Iran to strike at Egyptian stability.

In a response to the declaration by the UAE foreign minister, the charge d'affaires of its embassy in Iran was summoned to the Foreign Ministry where he was read a protest, whose main points were that "the Iranian people considered itself aggrieved by the foreign minister's declaration and that the response to these declarations would be severe." An Iranian spokesperson even said that the Emirates states belonged to Iran and when the time came, they would come under Iran's control.

The Lone Lion in the Gulf

With these incidents in the background, the official Iranian news agency published a notice warning the Gulf states against pursuing confrontation in the following picturesque language:

There is no lion in the region save for the one that crouches on the shore opposite the Emirate states. He guards his den which is the Persian Gulf. Those who believe that another lion exists in the vicinity (meaning the United States) - well, his claws and fangs have already been broken in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine. No good can be expected of him or his hunting sorties. Today he is counting the days until he finds a way out that will allow him to escape by the skin of his teeth. Iran, the Emirates, and the other countries in the region will remain, by dint of geography, neighbors forever.(5)

This is indeed an interesting and realistic expression of the condition in the region as long as the West does not alter its weak policy.

A Rise in the Level of Escalation with Bahrain

Iranian confrontation with Bahrain made recent headlines when the director of the Bahraini anti-drug trafficking apparatus, Mubarak bin Abdallah al-Marri, said at a regional conclave in Riyadh that Iran operated directly to smuggle drugs into Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and that both countries had thwarted many smuggling attempts by sea in Iranian vessels coming from Iranian territory.(6) A year ago, one of Khamenei's advisors announced that Bahrain was the 14th district of Iran, an announcement that triggered severe responses in the Arab world. Egyptian President Mubarak immediately flew to Bahrain to express his support. Intermittent reports are published about Iranian subversion in Bahrain with the assistance of Shiite citizens who constitute about 60 percent of the population.(7)

It is to be recalled that the Bahraini authorities produced intelligence for the Clinton administration in the mid-1990s that Iran was behind a subversion campaign to overthrow the Bahraini government. In 1995, Tehran acquired a new incentive: the U.S. upgraded its naval presence in Bahrain to become the headquarters of the newly-created U.S. Fifth Fleet. Successful Iranian subversion in Bahrain would also have a major strategic consequence by forcing the withdrawal of the U.S. Navy from its main base in the Persian Gulf, just as Iran seeks to establish itself as the hegemonial power of the entire region.

Qatar – The Odd Man Out in Its Support of Iran

It is precisely Qatar, which hosts large American military bases, that maintains the most cordial relations with Iran. This policy apparently derives from the desire of Qatar's ruler, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, who is engaged in a protracted dispute with Saudi Arabia, to flaunt his independence as compared with the other

Gulf states which efface themselves before Saudi Arabia. Qatar is also influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, which maintains a large and influential presence there. Despite the fact that the Brotherhood members are Sunni, they have elected at this juncture to support Iran in its conflict with the United States.

Two years ago, the Qatari ruler invited Iranian President Ahmedinejad to a summit meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council without informing his colleagues, who expressed their displeasure. He also sent his chief of staff to Tehran to examine options for military cooperation.⁽⁸⁾ During Israel's Gaza Operation, he even convened an Arab summit, together with Syria, that called for severing relations with Israel, thus arousing Mubarak's ire.

The Qatari shift occurred right after the Bush administration released its 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran that suggested the Iranians had suspended key aspects of their nuclear weapons program back in 2003. From the perspective of the Persian Gulf states, this was the first indication that they might not be able to rely on U.S. determination to block Iran's quest for regional hegemony, and the Qataris sought a rapprochement with Iran instead.

Oman, situated astride the exit from the Persian Gulf, attempts to maintain balanced relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, and recently refused to join a convention for a monetary union of Gulf states.

Saudi Arabia's Plight

Saudi Arabia, the largest Sunni state and the caretaker of Islam's holy places, is worried. Despite the fact that it has expended prodigious sums on the purchase of American weapons and equipment, its small army is incapable of deterring or even contending with Iran. It is doing its utmost to assist Sunni forces struggling against the spread of the Shiite wave under the baton of Iran, as we have witnessed in Iraq, Lebanon, and most recently in Yemen with the Houthi revolt that is supported by Iran. Eastern Saudi Arabia, where the country's largest oil reserves are located, contains a sizable Shiite minority. Their incitement by Iran could trigger a civil war and inflict mortal damage on Saudi oil resources and exports, the cornerstone of the Saudi economy and the royal family's power.

At this stage, although Saudi Arabia is in the same camp with Egypt versus Iran, Riyadh prefers to maintain relative calm in its communications, to avoid provocation and aggravated tension, in the belief that its friend the United States will protect it. Yet Saudi-owned media outlets openly admit the magnitude of the Iranian threat. For example, Abd al-Rahman al-Rashed, director-general of the Saudi *Al-Arabiya* network, wrote in the Saudi London daily *Asharq al-Awsat* that nuclear weapons in Iran's hands would help it dominate the Middle East region through subversion: "We fear the logic of the current regime in Tehran, which spent the country's funds on Hizbullah, Hamas, the extremist movements in Bahrain, Iraq and Yemen, and the Muslim Brotherhood, and supported every extremist in the region. The Ahmadinejad regime aspires to expansion, hegemony, and a clear takeover on the ground, and to do this he needs a

nuclear umbrella."(9)

Given the failed attempts by the West to impose sanctions on Iran, and the voices emerging from Washington that diplomacy is the way to solve the crisis and that the military option is off the table, Ahmedinejad has nothing to fear, at least at the current stage. He feels he can advance his subversive plan and strike at the countries of the region. The provocative naval maneuvers that Iran continues to conduct are indeed intended to deter the United States and Israel, but they also convey a clear message to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states: "We are here alongside you and we have massive power. Do not dare to provoke us." Meanwhile, the United States offers no response.

Notes

1. Iran has trained secret networks of agents across the Gulf states to attack Western interests and incite civil unrest in the event of a military strike against its nuclear program, a former Iranian diplomat has told the *Sunday Telegraph*. Trained by Iranian intelligence services, they are also said to be recruiting fellow Shias in the region, whose communities have traditionally been marginalized by the Gulf's ruling Sunni Arab clans. The claims have been made by Adel Assadinia, a former career diplomat who was Iran's consul-general in Dubai and an adviser to the Iranian foreign ministry. Colin Freeman, "Iran Poised to Strike in Wealthy Gulf States," *Sunday Telegraph* (UK), March 4, 2007.
2. In the wake of the arrests, Bahraini authorities said they had arrested a Bahrain national suspected of links to the Kuwait spy operation. "Gulf Leaders Back Kuwait in Alleged Iran Spy Case," AFP, as reported in *Asharq al-Awsat*, May 12, 2010.
3. "Iran Occupation of UAE Islands like Israel's: FM," *Al Arabiya*, April 21, 2010, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/04/21/106444.html>.
4. Miret El Naggar, "Hezbollah Spy Cell in Egypt Found Guilty of Terror Plots," *McClatchy-Christian Science Monitor*, April 29, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2010/0429/Hezbollah-spy-cell-in-Egypt-found-guilty-of-terror-plots>.
5. IRNA news agency, as reported in *Asharq al-Awsat* (UK), May 2, 2010.
6. "Iran Accused of Money Laundering, Drug Trafficking," *Arab Times* (Kuwait), May 7, 2010, <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/NewsDetails/tabid/96/smId/414/ArticleID/153492/reftab/96/t/Iran-accused-of-money-laundering-drug-trafficking/Default.aspx>.
7. While it's unclear whether the Kuwaiti cell indeed extended to Bahrain and the UAE, Bahrain has also been subject to subversive activities in recent years. On the eve of the Gaza war of 2008-2009, the Bahraini authorities announced the arrest of a group of Shia militants who had received training in Syria, accusing them of planning terrorist attacks during Bahrain's national day celebrations. As for the UAE, it followed Kuwait's lead by deporting foreigners, especially Lebanese Shia. Starting in summer 2009, scores of Shia were suddenly expelled. Tony Badran, "The Shape of Things to Come with Iran," *Now Lebanon*, May 13, 2010, <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=167522>.
8. "Iran, Qatar Sign Defense Cooperation Agreement," *Tehran Times*, February 25, 2010, http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=214868.
9. L. Barkan, "Reactions in the Gulf to Tension over Iranian Nuclear Issue," MEMRI, April 8, 2010.

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Part IV – The Iranian Threat on Israel's Northern Border

Hizbullah: A Creation of Iran



Lebanese and Hizbullah militants celebrate the Israeli Army pull-out, May 24, 2000. (Corbis photo)

Hizbullah's Veneration of Iranian Leader Ali Khamenei (June 2011)

Shimon Shapira

Iranian leader Khamenei is the model individual for the Hizbullah movement in Lebanon. He has been Hizbullah's source of religious and political authority since succeeding Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. Two statements by Hizbullah leaders Hassan Nasrallah, the general secretary, and Hashem Safieddin, head of the organization's Executive Council and Nasrallah's designated successor, provide an authentic picture of the close link between the leader of Iran and his loyal followers in Lebanon.

Nasrallah and Safieddin very precisely describe Khamenei's special status in Hizbullah as the one who has dictated the Shiite movement's strategic steps in

Lebanon at the crucial moments of its history there.

The total veneration of Khamenei highlights one of the important attributes of the Imam in the Shiite faith, which views him as an infallible figure who is clairvoyant and makes correct decisions. He is infallible even when all the information and circumstances seemingly point to the diametrically opposite decisions.

It must be emphasized these are not religio-legal decisions, where Khamenei's prowess is well known and much more esteemed in Lebanon than in Iran, but strategic and political ones that indicate his total sway over Hizbullah's decision-making process in Lebanon. Nasrallah was aware of this in his younger days, when he went to complete his studies in the religious seminaries of Qom and made efforts to introduce himself to Khamenei (see below). Hashem Safieddin, who, with Nasrallah's blessing, is fortifying his status as Nasrallah's designated successor, also knows it well.

On 6 June 2011 an extraordinary conference was held in Beirut. It dealt with the intellectual personality of the Iranian leader, Khamenei, and was called "Convention of Renovation and Jurisprudence of Imam Khamenei's Intellect." The conference was organized by the Iranian embassy in Beirut, and this is the first time it was convened outside of Iran. It comes as no surprise that of all the countries in the world, the first country chosen to host such a conference was Lebanon, where reverence for Ali Khamenei appears to be greater than in Iran itself. Religious figures and intellectuals from all circles of the Islamic world took part in the conference. Iran was represented by former leader of the parliament, Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel, and the ambassador in Beirut, Ghadanfar Rokon Abadi. The conference's honorary guest was Hizbullah leader Nasrallah who, as usual, spoke via a TV screen, and whose speech was published on the official Internet site of the Iranian leader.

Nasrallah's lengthy speech sheds light on his special relations with Khamenei, to whom he first introduced himself in 1986. That was four years after Hizbullah was created by Iran; Nasrallah was twenty-six and had just begun his path in the Shiite movement in Lebanon. In 1988, with the conclusion of the bloody battles between Hizbullah and the Amal movement, which took the lives of more Shiites than any war with Israel, the young Nasrallah went for a year of study in the Qom seminaries to complete his religious education. Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the architect of Hizbullah who after serving as ambassador in Damascus was interior minister and deputy prime minister, brought Nasrallah to Khamenei, then president of Iran. Khamenei also held the "Lebanese portfolio" as part of his membership in the Tripartite Committee, which also included parliamentary chairman Hashemi Rafsanjani and head of the judicial authority Moussavi Ardabili.

The Figure of Khamenei

In Nasrallah's view, as reflected in his speech, Khamenei is an extraordinary leader in terms of faith, leadership, and knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence

(*Fiqh*). He is aware of the problems and needs, and knows how to offer solutions that are consistent with principles. He is always abreast of the fine details and can offer the opinions of an expert.

Nasrallah notes that many in the Islamic world are ignorant about Khamenei, and hence he receives little admiration even in Iran itself. He has been besieged by enemies and his friends do not appreciate him as they should.

One's responsibility, said Nasrallah, is to present this great Imam to the members of the Islamic *umma* so that they can benefit from his leadership and erudition in this world and the next; hence, the conference was of great importance.

In a meeting with Iranian members of the Basij militia who came to Lebanon, Hashem Safiedden said things in a similar spirit: "For us Ayatollah Khamenei is not a simple leader. He is our model for life, a symbol of steadfastness, and our master" (as quoted from the Iranian newspaper *Kayhan* on 31 May 2011 by Amir Taheri in *Asharq Alawsat*, 10 June 2011).

Khamenei's Influence on Hizbullah

In his speech Nasrallah noted Khamenei's enormous influence on Hizbullah since the beginning of the 1990s, after he succeeded Khomeini in 1989 as leader of Iran. The convening of the Madrid Conference in 1991, against the backdrop of the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the dramatic changes that came in its wake, presented the United States as the sole superpower pushing the Arabs toward a compromise with Israel. The general feeling in the region, Nasrallah said, was that the United States was in a position to impose such a compromise with Israel. Yet the Imam Khamenei, Nasrallah emphasized, had a different, contrasting outlook. Khamenei claimed that the Madrid Conference would not lead to any results and that the United States would not succeed to impose any sort of compromise. Twenty years later, Nasrallah observed, the participants of that conference in Madrid acknowledge that nothing was achieved there, the peace talks failed, and the last two decades have brought only disappointment, despair, and confusion as a result of that failed conference, showing that Khamenei correctly analyzed the regional and international situation, notwithstanding the overall mood in the region at that time.

In 1996, Nasrallah pointed out, Israeli-Syrian contacts were held, predicated on Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's willingness to withdraw to the 4 June 1967 lines. Here again, it appeared certain in the region that a compromise would be reached, the disputes had been resolved, and all that remained was to work out the details. Thus Hizbullah found itself confronting appeals to end its struggle against Israel. Hizbullah was told, as Nasrallah mentioned, that the efforts against Israel were futile and without benefit, and the movement was encouraged to abandon the path of (military) resistance against Israel precisely at the time that its anti-Israel struggle was intensifying. Hizbullah was advised, Nasrallah stressed, that there was no more need to make sacrifices in the fight against Israel. Some even claimed that Hizbullah, too, should opt for the path of

compromise with Israel, alter its principles including those that were most fundamental to it as a resistance movement, and change its name, organizational structure, and political objectives.

Khamenei, Nasrallah underlined, claimed otherwise. The Iranian leader clearly asserted that the talks would not produce any results, and no compromise would be reached between Syria and Israel. Khamenei recommended that Hizbullah continue to intensify its *jihad* against Israel, ignore all the pointless theories about compromise, and strive for victory over Israel. Rabin was assassinated, Peres lost the election, and Netanyahu took office. Khamenei's position remained unequivocal and consistent: the anti-Israeli *jihad* movement would prevail. His outlook was rooted in the religious faith that guided Hizbullah. After 1996, Khamenei maintained that Israel had sunk into a quagmire and could no longer conquer Lebanon. In his view, everything depends on acts of *jihad* by Hizbullah against Israel.

On the eve of the 1999 Israeli elections, Ehud Barak declared his desire to withdraw from Lebanon. Even after he was elected, said Nasrallah, Hizbullah did not believe he would carry out the withdrawal; they thought he would retract what he said before the elections. Meanwhile, the heads of Hizbullah met with Khamenei in Tehran. The Hizbullah leaders assessed that Israel would not pull out of Lebanon; Khamenei held the opposite view, saying Hizbullah's victory was just around the corner and much closer than its leaders thought. Khamenei's expectations ran counter to Hizbullah's information and analysis of the situation; he instructed Nasrallah to gear up for victory and prepare the movement for the period after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. That, Nasrallah said, was why Hizbullah changed its position and readied itself for the Israeli retreat.

Israel's decision to launch the Second Lebanon War was taken, according to Nasrallah, with international support including a number of Arab states. Its purpose was to destroy the resistance (i.e., Hizbullah's military capacities). Under the conditions of Israel's brutal use of force in Lebanon, said Nasrallah, to contemplate a victory for Hizbullah or even to speak of survival would have been insanity. Yet, during the bombing of the Dahiya neighborhood in southwestern Beirut, Nasrallah received a recorded announcement from Khamenei. This was a lengthy message that, if written out, would undoubtedly have taken up several pages. Its main points:

- This war was identical to the war that the Jews of Medina declared against the Prophet Muhammad, which was intended to annihilate Islam and the believers.
- They were to trust in God, and Khamenei promised them that they would be victorious in the war. The victory would be so great that they would become an invincible force.

In the circumstances prevailing at that time, certainly at the beginning of the war, who, Nasrallah wondered, could have predicted its outcome?

Hashem Safieddin (as quoted from *Kayhan* by Amir Taheri) underlined the fact

that: *"Without the direct, minute by minute, command and supervision of Grand Ayatollah Khamenei, Hizbullah would not have achieved its great victory against Zionism and America."...Safieddin insisted that, from start to finish, the conflict had taken place under Khamenei's 'direct command and supervision.'"*

Nasrallah went back to the period after September 11, when the United States had sown fear among the Muslims of the region. People then thought, Nasrallah remarked, that the United States was going to rule the region for another hundred or two hundred years. Others compared the situation to the Crusades. Nasrallah, for his part, went to meet with Khamenei in Iran and requested his guidance. The words of the Iranian leader stood in contrast to all the opinions heard at that time. Even in Iran, Nasrallah noted, there were official actors who told him Hizbullah would have to adjust to the new reality, hold a dialogue with the United States, and even reach a compromise with it. Khamenei, as mentioned, had a different view; he, in Nasrallah's telling, said there was nothing to worry about: the United States had reached its pinnacle and from now on its status would decline. And indeed, Nasrallah concluded, after the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the weakening of the United States had begun, marking the beginning of the end of America and its plans for the region.

As for Israel, Nasrallah reiterated the basic positions of Iran and Hizbullah: it was in decline, and the Zionist regime would be destroyed in the near future. Khamenei considers that a compromise with Israel will not achieve anything, and that the Palestinian struggle has fostered a new generation of fighting Palestinians who believe more than ever that they will return to their homeland. From all that has been learned, says Nasrallah, about Khamenei's success in assessing past situations, and with the help of Allah, Israel is approaching the end of its existence.

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Has Hizbullah Changed? The 7th Hizbullah General Conference and Its Continued Ideology of Resistance

(December 2009)

Shimon Shapira

- Some Western analysts believe the political manifesto published in the wake of Hizbullah's 7th General Conference at the end of November 2009 represented a fundamental change in Hizbullah policy.

- While its link to Iran as the ultimate source of authority was not mentioned in this or any previous political manifesto, this link – that is part of Hizbullah's essence – appeared in the "Open Letter" (*Resala Maftuha*) of 1985, which remains the founding manifesto of Hizbullah and continues to serve as the movement's ideological basis.
- The preface to the latest manifesto describes the decline of the United States as the sole superpower and the retreat of American power throughout the world. In reflection of these global changes, Hizbullah offers its resistance to Israel and the United States as the model for emulation throughout the world.
- Hizbullah's vigorous insistence that it retain an army of its own that does not heed the authority of the state but rather the representative of Iran's leader in Lebanon makes a mockery of the clauses in the political manifesto about Lebanon being the eternal homeland. Furthermore, by building a state-like system parallel to that of the Lebanese state, and one that relies on aid and funding from Iran and Syria, Hizbullah does not contribute to the strengthening of Lebanon.
- The decision of the Lebanese government to recognize the continued legitimate existence of Hizbullah's armed militia demonstrates less a case that Hizbullah underwent a process of "Lebanonization," but rather that the Lebanese state has undergone a process of "Hizbullazation."
- Hizbullah's alleged move toward pragmatism is based to a large extent on an Iranian decision to create a new atmosphere in Lebanon that will allow it to work unmolested. Iran is looking for strict silence in the Lebanese arena in order to enable Hizbullah to reconstruct its strategic capabilities (including long-range rockets and missiles) in Lebanon in order to make use of these capabilities at a time to be determined by Tehran.

Hizbullah wound up its clandestine 7th General Conference at the end of November 2009 that took place and lasted about four months. Hassan Nasrallah was again chosen to be Hizbullah's general secretary and, as with previous conferences, the movement published a political manifesto. Some Western analysts believe the manifesto represented a fundamental change in Hizbullah policy. Indeed, a few days after it was proclaimed, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband told the Beirut *Daily Star*, "carefully considered contact with Hizbullah's politicians, including its MPs, will best advance our objective of the group rejecting violence to play a constructive role in Lebanese politics."⁽¹⁾ Later, British spokesmen denied they had changed their policy toward Hizbullah.

Hizbullah's 6th General Conference was convened in 2004 and, according to the movement's by-laws, the 7th General Conference was to have convened in 2007. However, due to the Second Lebanon War and the debates and internal struggles that erupted in its wake within Hizbullah, together with the death of Hizbullah military commander Imad Mughniyeh in a car bombing in Damascus in February 2008, the conference was postponed twice and was finally convened in

2009.(2)

Hizbullah's Leadership

Anyone proposing that Hizbullah has fundamentally changed should carefully examine the organization's leaders elected by the 7th General Conference. The newly elected Shura Council is comprised of:

- Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah – Secretary-General
- Sheikh Naim Qassem – Deputy Secretary-General
- Sayyed Hashem Safi al-Din – Head of the "Shura Council Executive"
- Sheikh Mohammed Yazbek – Head of the Spiritual Body
- Sayyed Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyed – Head of the Political Council
- MP Haj Mohammed Raad – Head of the Loyalty to Resistance Bloc (the Hizbullah faction in the Lebanese Parliament)
- Hussein Khalil – Political Assistant to the Secretary-General
- The name of the member of the leadership who replaced Imad Mughniyeh, who headed the Jihad Council – the supreme military body – and represented it in the Hizbullah leadership, was not publicized for security reasons.

Aside from the members of the Shura Council, Hizbullah has not published the names of other officeholders in the movement and close associates have made it clear that no substantial change has occurred in the movement's structure and leadership.(3) It would seem that whatever changes occurred involved primarily second and third echelon officeholders in the party hierarchy as well as in the intra-party administrative frameworks at the unit and subunit levels. These changes were intended to incorporate new people into the leadership of the militia in order to infuse the ranks of Hizbullah with new blood.

It is plausible to assume that Nasrallah viewed changes in Hizbullah's military framework following the Second Lebanon War and the death of Imad Mughniyeh to be among the 7th Conference's top priorities, in order to rehabilitate and strengthen Hizbullah's military power and to prepare for the next conflict with Israel. Concomitantly, Nasrallah sought to contend with the penetration of Hizbullah ranks by Israeli intelligence, whose footprints are periodically discovered.

The Political Manifesto

On November 30, 2009, Hizbullah's new political manifesto(4) was read by Hassan Nasrallah from a hiding place and was projected on giant screens at a

press conference in Beirut.

As with previous political manifestos,(5) the new manifesto – 32 pages long and published in a sky blue binding – reflected the changing political reality in which Hizbullah operated and the process of Hizbullah's integration into the Lebanese state and its institutions. While the theoretical-ideological foundation focusing on the link to Iran as the source of authority (*wali al-fakih*) was not mentioned in any of these manifestos, this link - that is part of Hizbullah's essence - appeared in the "Open Letter" (*Resala Maftuha*) of 1985, which bore the portraits of Imam Khomeini and Sheikh Raghib Harb.(6) The Open Letter of 1985 remains, at least formally, the founding manifesto of Hizbullah and continues to serve as the movement's ideological basis.

The preface to the latest manifesto emphasizes that it was intended to present Hizbullah's political position within the framework of the international and Lebanese reality in which Hizbullah was operating. This reality includes historical changes presaging the decline of the United States as the sole superpower, the collapse of financial markets in the United States and worldwide, and the confusion and impotence of the American economy. All this, claimed the manifesto, presages the retreat of American power throughout the world and the beginning of the accelerated decline of Israel. In reflection of these global changes, Hizbullah offers its resistance to Israel and the United States as the perfect solution. In its view, resistance has become an international value that constitutes a source of inspiration and a model for emulation to all those who aspire to freedom and independence throughout the world.

The first chapter of the manifesto surveys American aspirations for global hegemony since World War II and concludes:

There is no doubt that the American Terrorism is the origin of all terrorism in this world. The Bush administration has turned the United States into a threat menacing the whole world on all levels and dimensions, and if an international survey was to be made, the U.S. would turn out to be the most hated in the world.

The second chapter deals with Hizbullah's status in Lebanon, and here we observe a significant change in Hizbullah's position toward the Lebanese state:

Lebanon is our homeland and the homeland of our fathers and ancestors. It is also the homeland of our children, grandchildren, and future generations. It is the country to which we have given our most precious sacrifices for its independence and pride, dignity and freedom.

We want a unified Lebanon for all Lebanese alike. We oppose any kind of partition or federalism.

With regard to the resistance (*muqawama*), it emphasized that:

It derives from the eternal threat of Israel to Lebanon and the difficult circumstances arising from the absence of a Lebanese authority. These required a campaign to obtain a homeland via armed

resistance. The crowning achievements are the liberation in 2000 and the historic victory in July 2006.

The manifesto does not deal with the issue of the continued existence of the Hizbullah militia. This is a fundamental issue that is not open to discussion from Hizbullah's standpoint. Thus, Nasrallah makes clear that it was impossible for Hizbullah to disarm.⁽⁷⁾ Instead, the Hizbullah leader emphasized that the main effort is now invested in:

creating a defense strategy that will be based on the integration of the resistance that will assist in the defense of the homeland, strengthen its security and stability, [and]...liberate what remains under "Israeli" occupation in the Shaba farms and Kfar Shouba hills and the Lebanese village of Ghajar, as well as liberating the detainees and missing people and martyrs' bodies.

With reference to the political regime in Lebanon, Hizbullah calls for the abolition of the political sectarianism on which the Lebanese state is predicated. Nasrallah explained at a press conference:

Let's be realistic, the abolition of political sectarianism in Lebanon is one of the most difficult issues....Unfortunately, many of those who call for and advocate the abolition of political sectarianism are not serious about the issue.

This committee may continue its dialogue for five, ten, twenty or even thirty years because, ultimately, no one can just simply describe a method of how to abolish political sectarianism....Possibly, after a long debate...we may reach the conclusion that realism necessitates that we accept sectarianism and that any efforts to the contrary would be a complete waste of time; that abolishing political sectarianism in this country is impossible.

The manifesto praises the excellent relations between Lebanon and Syria and views them as a mutual political, military, and economic necessity. It views Islamic Iran as a primary and important country and a chief supporter of the Palestinians. However, it includes no reference to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei as being Hizbullah's source of authority, and does not mention Hizbullah's loyalty to the Iranian leadership.

Nasrallah was asked at the press conference about the 1985 Open Letter that spoke of a single leadership for Iran and Hizbullah. He responded:

We have provided [in the new manifesto] a political document, but have not dealt with aspects of belief, ideology, or intellectual culture....Our position on the question of the source of authority (*wali al-fakih*) is an intellectual, ideological and religious one, and not a political position subject to review.

In other words, according to Nasrallah, Hizbullah remains ideologically the same party it was back in 1985. Indeed, one analyst with a deep understanding of the Shiite group called the new Hizbullah political manifesto "a point-by-point

expansion" of the principles laid out in its founding document in 1985.(8)

The third chapter of the manifesto deals with Palestine in the peace agreement process, the status of Jerusalem, and the Palestinian resistance. After determining that Zionism is a racist movement, Hizbullah makes it clear that the liberation of Palestinian lands including Jerusalem is a mission that is imposed upon the Arab and Islamic world. Hence it is clear that in its own self-appraisal, Hizbullah enjoys no special advantage or preferred status in leading the Palestinian struggle against Israel. At the same time, Hizbullah rejects any agreement with Israel that will be predicated on recognition of the legitimacy of its existence or any concessions on Palestinian lands. It was emphasized that this position is consistent, fixed and final, and there can be no retreat from it even if the entire world were to recognize Israel.

While the 7th Conference was taking place in Lebanon, its original architect, Ali-Akbar Mohtashemi-Pur, was staying in Damascus. Mohtashemi, who crossed the lines and joined the reformist camp, participated in a conclave of support for Palestine that took place at the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, where he was attacked by Iranian representatives who were supporters of Ahmedinejad.(9)

Summary

As reflected in its political manifestos, Hizbullah has been focusing on consolidating its status within the internal Lebanese arena since 1992 when Hizbullah received the authorization of Iranian supreme leader Khamenei, its source of authority, and sent its representatives to Parliament, and in 2005 when it sent its representatives into the Lebanese government in the wake of the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon, in order to guarantee the continued existence of its independent military force.

The Lebanese flag, which was brutally trampled by Hizbullah during the 1980s, now occupies a place of honor alongside the yellow banner of Hizbullah. The impression is that Hizbullah has adopted the Lebanese state and in its self-appraisal has become an authentic representative of Lebanese national identity. There is a perpetual gap between the pragmatic spirit coming from the Hizbullah political manifesto and Lebanon's political reality. Hizbullah's vigorous position insisting that it retain an army of its own that does not heed the authority of the state but rather the representative of Iran's leader in Lebanon makes a mockery of the clauses in the political manifesto about Lebanon being the eternal homeland. Furthermore, by building a state-like system parallel to that of the Lebanese state, and one that relies on aid and funding from Iran and Syria, Hizbullah does not contribute to the strengthening and health of the Lebanese homeland that Nasrallah says he wants to preserve and nurture. Finally, the subversive conduct of Hizbullah, which acts against the interests of the Lebanese state and sends forth subversive and violent elements into nearby countries such as Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan, makes the concept of loyalty to the Lebanese homeland void of any content.

It would seem, therefore, that the decision of the Lebanese government headed by Saad Hariri to recognize the continued legitimate existence of Hizbullah's armed militia demonstrates less a case that Hizbullah underwent a process of "Lebanonization," but rather that the Lebanese state has undergone a process of "Hizbullazation." Parallel to adopting the Lebanese identity, Hizbullah preserves its essential link to Iran: its commitment to the Iranian leader as the source of authority surpasses any other commitment including on the political level. Hizbullah adopts decisions on war and peace taken by Iran, the sole recognized source of authority, and not only on theoretical and religious issues, as Nasrallah may wish to claim.

Hizbullah's alleged move toward pragmatism is based to a large extent on an Iranian decision to create a new atmosphere in Lebanon that will allow it to work unmolested. After the Second Lebanon War that erupted at Israel's initiative and caught Hizbullah by surprise, Iran ordered Hizbullah to restrain activities against Israel and intensify its integration into the political life of the Lebanese state. Iran is looking for strict silence in the Lebanese arena in order to enable Hizbullah to reconstruct its strategic capabilities (including long-range rockets and missiles) in Lebanon in order to deter Israel, and to make use of these capabilities at a time to be determined by Tehran in the event that deterrence fails. This is the main reason for the quiet prevailing in South Lebanon, and it seems that Israeli deterrence of Hizbullah plays only a minor role.

Notes

1. Josie Ensor, "Britain Open to Contacts with Hizbullah," *Daily Star* (Beirut), December 1, 2009.
2. *As-Safir*, November 24, 2009.
3. Ibid.
4. *Al-Manar*, November 30, 2009.
5. This manifesto joins a series of previous political manifestos that were published at the end of the general conferences that Hizbullah conducted in May 1993 (the 3rd Conference), summer 1995 (the 4th), summer 1998 (the 5th), in 2004 (the 6th), as well as the election manifestos for the parliamentary elections in which Hizbullah participated in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2005. For an analysis of Hizbullah's political and election manifestos, see Shimon Shapira, *Hezbollah between Iran and Lebanon* (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz Hameuhad, 2000), pp. 186-192.
6. For an analysis of the "Open Letter," see Shapira, pp. 126-8.
7. Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed, "Nasrallah: Prime Minister of Lebanon," *Asharq Alawsat*, December 7, 2009.
8. Tony Badran, "For Hezbollah, Lebanon Is an Afterthought," *Now Lebanon*, December 8, 2009, <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=131055>.
9. www.mowjcamp.com/article/id/64087.

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Ahmadinejad in Lebanon

(October 2010)

Shimon Shapira

- Iranian President Ahmadinejad's visit to Lebanon constitutes an additional stage in the process of the Lebanese state's collapse. From now on, Hizbullah supporters will find it difficult to argue that theirs is a national Lebanese party operating in the Lebanese reality on behalf of Lebanese objectives.
- Ahmadinejad arrived in Lebanon not as the head of a friendly country who wants to promote good relations with a sovereign state, but as the supreme commander who came to review his soldiers at the front against Israel, and as an investor who was coming to check on his investments.
- As opposed to the Sunni axis headed by Saudi Arabia and Egypt that is trying to protect the Sunnis in Lebanon, a radical Shi'ite axis headed by Iran has taken shape that includes Syria, the new Iraq, and the new Lebanon (Hizbullahstan).
- The feeling in Tehran is that the more Hizbullah is strengthened, the more the motivation of the United States and the West to invest in Lebanon will decline, and the country will fall like a ripe fruit.
- In contrast with the display of force by the Iranian president in Lebanon, Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah cut a sorry figure, orating from his bunker without the courage to stand at Ahmadinejad's side. The only place where Nasrallah feels secure is at the Iranian Embassy in Beirut.

Hizbullah's First Loyalty Is to Iran, Not Lebanon

Iranian President Ahmadinejad's visit to Lebanon, the first since he was elected in 2005, and the second by an Iranian president since the Islamic revolution (Mohammad Khatami visited in 2003), constitutes an additional stage in the process of the Lebanese state's collapse. From now on, Hizbullah supporters will find it difficult to argue that theirs is a national Lebanese party operating in the Lebanese reality on behalf of Lebanese objectives. Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah's declaration from May 2008 that he was proud to be a member of the Wali-al-Faqih Party (loyal to Iran's "Supreme Leader") has received redoubled force.(1)

True, the visit opened with Ahmadinejad's declaration of "the deep historical and cultural roots shared by Iran and Lebanon." However, it concluded with a meeting

with the Hizbullah leader in the Iranian Embassy in Beirut, where Nasrallah presented to the "supreme commander" a rifle that he claimed belonged to an Israeli soldier that was taken as booty during the Second Lebanon War.(2)

The Iranian president also honored the father of Imad Mughniyeh, the commander of the "Two Victories" (the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 and the "Divine Victory" in the 2006 war) in an emotional meeting in Beirut, and met Mughniyeh's son in Bint Jbeil. Furthermore, instead of conducting official diplomatic meetings with Lebanese officials in Beirut, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki visited the shrine of the late Hizbullah leader Abbas Musawi in the town of Nabi Sheeth near Baalbek.(3) Iranian Intelligence Minister Heidar Moslehi, who accompanied Ahmadinejad, summed up the visit by noting that it would "promote unity in Lebanon."(4)

Ahmadinejad's visit to Lebanon was portrayed as combining two themes: recognition and respect of Lebanese sovereignty, with visits to the presidential palace in Baabda, meetings with Prime Minister Hariri and the heads of the various communities and parties, and the signing of a series of bilateral agreements, while also visiting Hizbullah strongholds in Dahiye and in southern Lebanon. However, this simplistic description ignores the deep implications of the visit. Ahmadinejad arrived in Lebanon not as the head of a friendly country who wants to promote good relations with a sovereign state, but as the supreme commander who came to review his soldiers at the front against Israel, and as an investor who was coming to check on his investments. Since the Second Lebanon War, Iran has quadrupled Hizbullah's missile force and has invested about \$1 billion in rehabilitating the war's devastation.(5)

Despite Iran's economic problems and intensifying criticism at home over its involvement in "Palestine and Lebanon" that steals precious assets from the Iranian state in favor of the adventurous policy of the Islamic Revolution, Iran continues to vigorously support and buttress Hizbullah, whose forces are considered the shock troops of Iran's Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon. Ali Jafari, commander of the Revolutionary Guards, accompanied Ahmadinejad to Lebanon to guarantee by his very presence the strengthening of this connection. Jafari did not participate in the official visits with the commanders of the Lebanese army, but held clandestine meetings with his own officers in Lebanon.

Anyone who viewed the pictures from Ahmadinejad's visits in Beirut and southern Lebanon could not fail to notice the symbolism from what was visible and what was missing. There were no pictures of the Lebanese president or prime minister, or even of the Shiite Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament. The dominant pictures were of Iranians: Ahmadinejad, Khamenei and Khomeini. The sole Lebanese figures were Hassan Nasrallah, Imad Mughniyeh, Moussa Sadr (an Iranian-born Lebanese Shi'ite religious leader who disappeared in 1978), and a series of shahid-martyrs who fell in battle with Israel.

What are the primary implications of the visit by the Iranian president?

Implications for Lebanon

Ahmadinejad's visit reinforces Hezbollah's position in the Lebanese arena. Iran's unequivocal siding with Hezbollah is now public and provocative, and is no longer ambiguous. The victor in the choice between Hezbollah and the Lebanese state is now clear to everyone. In the very sensitive days before the publication of the UN investigative report on the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Iran has made it clear that it will not allow its handiwork in Lebanon to be harmed. After a long campaign of delegitimation by Hassan Nasrallah against the investigative commission, the Iranian president arrived and sought to make the role of the international system superfluous by announcing in Beirut that Israel was the one that murdered the prime minister, and therefore the findings of the international investigative commission are of no value.

Furthermore, the Iranian president left no doubt that Iran would stand alongside Hezbollah in any struggle that might develop against it. Iran's and Hezbollah's threats that they will not accept any findings of the commission against Hezbollah members leave the explosive situation in Lebanon intact. The danger still exists that Hezbollah will take to the streets and start a conflagration.(6)

This situation highlights the weakness of the Lebanese state and its sovereignty. It cannot defend itself at home and has no capability of recruiting genuine supporters from abroad, neither from the West nor from the Arab countries. In this way, Hezbollah, with its civilian and military infrastructures, has become the true Lebanese state. The Hezbollah takeover of the Lebanese state has now progressed to an additional stage and the argument has been strengthened that the Lebanese state has undergone a process of Hezbollahization, more than Hezbollah has undergone a process of Lebanonization.

Implications for the Arab World

By flying the flag of the Islamic Republic on the presidential palace in Baabda in Beirut, Iran made it clear that there is a new axis in the Middle East. As opposed to the Sunni axis headed by Saudi Arabia and Egypt that is trying to protect the Sunnis in Lebanon, a radical Shi'ite axis headed by Iran has taken shape that includes Syria, the new Iraq, and the new Lebanon (Hezbollahistan).

The main questions at this stage are to what extent Egypt and Saudi Arabia will stand up to Iran's destructive behavior in Lebanon and how long the Arab hand will be extended to assist the Lebanese prime minister and the groups that he represents. Syria, whose status in Lebanon has been damaged, has not yet given up its influence there and it is maneuvering between its friends and rivals. But it is clear to Syria that there is a new master in the house of Lebanon whose interests do not always coincide with those of Damascus.

Implications for the U.S. and the West

Iran presents itself as an alternative to the United States and the West. It embraces the "new Christians" in Lebanon and promises to protect their status as France, the United States and Britain had done previously, and is even willing to make a false representation in recognizing their special status and the sovereignty of the Lebanese state. Given Western threats to cease supporting the Lebanese army, Iran is able to offer a complete range of weapon systems and generous assistance to rehabilitate the country's economy. The feeling in Tehran is that the more Hizbullah is strengthened, the more the motivation of the United States and the West to invest in Lebanon will decline, and the country will fall like a ripe fruit, in the spirit of Ayatollah Khomeini's call for overthrowing the U.S. and the West's outpost on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Implications for Israel

The words of the Iranian president regarding the extermination of the Zionist state were uttered near the border with Israel in the Lebanese town of Bint Jbeil, a symbol of Hizbullah's struggle, which was destroyed in 2006 and rehabilitated by Iran. The local stadium was filled with pictures, flags, and symbols of the Islamic Republic to exemplify that an Iranian force is stationed on the border with Israel and taking part in the *jihad* against Zionism. Add to this the missile force that was built first and foremost as a deterrent to dissuade Israel from damaging Iran's nuclear capabilities, but also to be ready for deployment should Israel attacked Hizbullah.

In contrast with the display of force by the Iranian president in Lebanon, Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah cut a sorry figure. While the Iranian guest swept up the Shi'ite multitudes who support Iran and Hizbullah with his hateful words against Zionism that intensified the closer he approached the border with Israel, Nasrallah continues to orate from his bunker and cannot muster the courage to emerge into daylight and stand at Ahmadinejad's side. The only place where he feels secure – how symbolic – is at the Iranian Embassy in Beirut.

Notes

1. Tariq Alhomayed, "Welcome Ahmadinijad!" *Asharq Alawsat*, October 13, 2010.
2. An Israeli Army spokesperson said that the type of assault rifle given as a present to the Iranian president had not been in use by the IDF since 1974 and it is a virtual certainty that it was not captured during the Second Lebanon War.
3. *Al-Safir*, October 15, 2010.
4. *Fars*, October 16, 2010.
5. "Iranian Interests in Lebanon," *Daily Star* (Lebanon), October 14, 2010.
6. Ash Jain and Andrew J. Tabler, "Ahmadinezhad's Lebanon Visit and the Fate of the Hariri Tribunal," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policywatch* No. 1710, October 12, 2010.

* Appendix: For Ahmadinejad and Nasrallah's speeches see
<http://www.nowlebanon.com//Print.aspx?ID=208406>.

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Countdown to a New Lebanon Crisis: Iran Sends a Signal to Obama through Beirut (January 2011)

Shimon Shapira

- On January 12, 2011, just as Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri was meeting with President Barack Obama in the Oval Office of the White House, the pro-Iranian Hizbullah forced a collapse of the Lebanese government. Ten of its ministers held a press conference announcing their decision in Beirut that was broadcast live on Lebanese television during the Obama-Hariri summit.
- The Hizbullah leadership was seeking to pre-empt the publication of the decision of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), which is expected to charge that senior Hizbullah members were involved in the 2005 assassination of Rafiq Hariri.
- The STL was formed as the result of a request by the Lebanese government to the UN in December 2005. The STL was then established pursuant to UN Security Council Resolutions 1664 and 1757; the latter resolution was adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which is generally reserved for acts of aggression.
- The main motivation of Hizbullah was linked to Hariri's refusal to respond to its repeated demands to announce that the STL was illegitimate and its decisions do not obligate the Lebanese government. Hizbullah was not alone in making demands on the Lebanese government regarding the STL. The Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who rarely expresses his views on internal Lebanese affairs, nonetheless stated: "This tribunal is receiving orders from elsewhere and whatever ruling it hands down is null and void."
- Iran is signaling to the Obama administration, and to the West as a whole, that the main political developments in Lebanon are being decided today in Tehran and not in Washington. Failure to respond to this Iranian-sponsored provocation will only invite further adventurism on the part of

the regime in Tehran elsewhere in the region, as it seeks to further establish its hegemony in the Middle East.

On January 12, 2011, just as Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri was meeting with President Barack Obama in the Oval Office of the White House, the pro-Iranian Hizbullah forced a collapse of the Lebanese government. Ten of the Hizbullah-aligned ministers and one other resigned. The ministers held a press conference announcing their decision in Beirut that was broadcast live on Lebanese television during the Obama-Hariri summit. Hizbullah turned to Lebanon's president, Michel Suleiman, demanding that he immediately choose a new Sunni leader to replace Hariri, who will form a new government. Suleiman subsequently asked Hariri to head a caretaker government.

The Hizbullah leadership was seeking to pre-empt the publication of the decision of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), which is expected to charge that senior Hizbullah members were involved in the 2005 assassination of Rafiq Hariri, father of the current prime minister. International indictments would also be issued. The STL was formed as the result of a request by the Lebanese government to the UN in December 2005. The STL was then established pursuant to UN Security Council Resolutions 1664 and 1757; the latter resolution was adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which is generally reserved for acts of aggression.

Hizbullah chose to collapse the Lebanese government at that moment in order to portray Prime Minister Saad Hariri as an American puppet. Yet the main motivation of Hizbullah was linked to Hariri's refusal to respond to its repeated demands to announce that the STL was illegitimate and that its decisions do not obligate the Lebanese government. Whether Hizbullah can force the Lebanese system to form a new government before the STL issues its conclusions is questionable. At the very least, Hizbullah's action will forestall any further moves to support the STL, since these would require a 2/3 majority of the 30-man Lebanese government, which can no longer be reached following the wave of resignations.

Hizbullah was not alone in making demands on the Lebanese government regarding the STL. The Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who rarely expresses his views on internal Lebanese affairs, nonetheless stated during a meeting in Tehran with the Emir of Qatar in December 2010: "This tribunal is receiving orders from elsewhere and whatever ruling it hands down is null and void."⁽¹⁾ In his view, the tribunal was being controlled by other powers who were encroaching on Lebanon and undermining it. The Iranian ambassador to Lebanon, Ghazanfar Roknabadi, was explicit on this point during this past week: "U.S. intervention has resulted in the failure of efforts to bring peace and stability to Lebanon."⁽²⁾

Iran had multiple interests at stake. In recent weeks, Saudi Arabia and Syria had been coordinating to head off a new Lebanese crisis. The two countries had reportedly taken the position that the decisions of the STL should be made

public. Iran firmly objected and preferred to see Syria take its position of complete rejection of the STL. Furthermore, it did not want to see its main regional partner get drawn into Saudi Arabia's orbit on this matter. Collapsing the Lebanese government was one way for Iran to put the final nail in the coffin of the Saudi-Syrian initiative.(3)

There is a tendency in the West to underestimate the Iranian role in Hizbullah decision-making. But it should be remembered that Hizbullah was created in the offices of the Iranian ambassador to Syria, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi in 1982. Deputy Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Sheikh Naim Qassem, admitted in 2007 that Hizbullah does not pursue its own policy but rather submits to the authority of the Iranian leadership, which instructs it even on military-operative issues. This is based on the ideology of the Iranian Islamic regime, set forth by Ayatollah Khomeini, whose key principle is the rule of the jurisprudent (*vilayat al-faqih*), the title presently used by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.(4)

What are the implications of this new crisis in Lebanon as it begins to unfold? First, Iran is signaling to the Obama administration, and to the West as a whole, that the main political developments in Lebanon are being decided today in Tehran and not in Washington. From Iran's viewpoint, Hariri can sit in the center of American power in the White House, but it is Iran, though Hizbullah, that decides what is happening on the ground. Iran is testing U.S. power and determination and Middle East states are closely following the outcome.

There is a view that Iran feels it has more freedom of action in Lebanon today than it did in the past: the Obama administration has not embraced the anti-Hizbullah March 14 movement to the same extent as the Bush administration. Meanwhile, Iran's other major ally in Lebanon, Syria, has restored much of the power and influence it lost a number of years ago when it was forced to withdraw its troops from Lebanese territory.(5)

Hizbullah has also produced a fragile situation that could easily get out of control. Under present conditions, even an unimportant incident could spark a major political firestorm in the streets of Beirut that will bring about the complete collapse of Lebanon's central government.

The present situation Hizbullah has created marks the beginning of the countdown to a much bigger crisis that will enable both Hizbullah and its Iranian sponsors to complete their takeover of the Lebanese state.

The U.S. and its Western allies, particularly France, have an opportunity to demonstrate their resolve to block Iranian expansionism in the Middle East by taking back the reins of what is transpiring in Lebanon today. They can also serve the interests of international justice by ensuring that the STL actually moves against the murderers of Hariri. But a failure to respond to this Iranian-sponsored provocation will only invite further adventurism on the part of the regime in Tehran elsewhere in the region as it seeks to further establish its hegemony in the Middle East. It will also reward Hizbullah, which remains one of the most dangerous international terrorist organizations targeting the West.

Notes

1. "Khomeini Gestures Involved," *Now Lebanon*, December 21, 2010.
2. "U.S. Intervention Has Undermined Lebanon's Stability," MNA, January 12, 2011.
3. Jumana Al Tamini, "Saudi-Syria Mediation Efforts Fail," *GulfNews.com*, January 13, 2011.
4. "Hezbollah's Policy of Terrorist Operations against Israel Requires Jurisprudent Permission of the Iranian Leadership," Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Israel Intelligence Heritage & Commemoration Center (IICC), April 29, 2007, http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/hezbollah_e0407.htm.
5. Nada Bakri, "Hezbollah Forces Collapse of Lebanese Government" *New York Times*, January 12, 2011, <http://gulfnews.com/news/region/lebanon/saudi-syria-mediation-efforts-fail-1.745502>.

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The Fantasy of Hizbullah Moderation (May 2010)

Shimon Shapira

- John Brennan, President Barack Obama's advisor for homeland security and counterterrorism, recently stated that the administration was looking for ways to build up "moderate elements" within Hizbullah. The fact that Hizbullah is part of the Iranian security apparatus did not seem to affect his analysis of the organization.
- Immediately following the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, Iran undertook a strategic decision to export the Islamic Revolution to the Arab and Islamic expanse. In Iran a special apparatus was formed to set up and support Islamic movements throughout the Islamic and Arab world that were prepared to adopt Iran's model of Islamic rule. Lebanon was the first target selected, given its unsettled political condition and its large Shiite population which had maintained links with Iran for many years.
- Hizbullah is not a national Lebanese movement, as has been frequently claimed in the West. Hizbullah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, and his men are not loyal to the president of Lebanon or to the government of Lebanon, but rather to Iranian leader Ayatollah Khamenei. Nasrallah's deputy, Sheikh Naim Qassem, admitted to the Iranian Arabic-language television station *al-Qawathar* in March 2007 that Hizbullah requires permission from

Iran's supreme leadership for its operations.

- In the words of U.S. Defense Secretary William Gates, one should view Hizbullah's military force – which extends far beyond the military force of any other political movement in the world, as well as beyond the force of many sovereign states – as the long arm of Iran.

During a public appearance in Washington, John Brennan, President Barack Obama's advisor for homeland security and counterterrorism, revealed that the administration was looking for ways to build up "moderate elements" within Hizbullah which, he explained, had evolved from being a "purely terrorist organization" to becoming a part of the Lebanese political system. That Hizbullah was part of the Iranian security apparatus did not seem to bother Brennan or affect his analysis of the organization's motives.

It was not the first time he had made this observation. Writing in July 2008, Brennan suggested it was possible to increase Hizbullah's "stake in Lebanon's struggling democratic process." While acknowledging Iran's material support for Hizbullah, he clearly played down the Iranian role in the operational decisions made by the organization's leaders. For Brennan, Hizbullah was an authentically Lebanese organization whose assimilation into Lebanon's political system should be encouraged by Washington.(1) Moreover he observed that as Hizbullah became a "vested player in the Lebanese political system," there had been "a marked reduction in terrorist attacks carried out by the organization." The key factor in any presentation of Hizbullah as a potentially more moderate organization seeking to integrate itself as another Lebanese political party was to downgrade Iran's role in Hizbullah decision-making.

Brennan was not alone in not fully grasping Iran's pivotal role for Hizbullah. A major 2009 study by the Rand Corporation on Iran suggested that Hizbullah was "taking great pains to distance itself from Iranian patronage."(2)

Even Israeli experts and politicians at times have seen Hizbullah as primarily influenced by the Lebanese internal scene. A variation on this theme is the notion that Hizbullah owed its origins and growth over the years to the Israeli presence on Lebanese soil. For example, in an interview marking a decade since the Israeli retreat from Lebanon, Defense Minister Ehud Barak stated: "Hizbullah was nonexistent when we went in; it was our stay there that established it. Hizbullah got stronger not as a result of our exit from Lebanon but as a result of our stay in Lebanon."(3) With this statement, Barak reinforced the erroneous argument purporting that Hizbullah was established in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

The Birth of Hizbullah

The historical facts are totally different. Immediately following the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, Iran undertook a strategic decision to export the Islamic Revolution to the Arab and Islamic expanse. For this purpose, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini appointed Ayatollah Ali Montazeri to create the "second

revolution." In Iran a special apparatus was formed, staffed by Montazeri's men, whose job was to set up and support Islamic movements throughout the Islamic and Arab world that were prepared to adopt Iran's model of Islamic rule.(4)

Lebanon was the first target selected, given its unsettled political condition and its large Shiite population which had maintained links with Iran for many years. During the 1970s Lebanon had become the crucible for the senior Iranian revolutionary leadership. There its leaders took refuge and trained with weapons. Khomeini's tape-recorded messages were also produced in Lebanon and then disseminated throughout Iran to spread the imam's doctrine.(5)

The Iranian drive to take over the Amal movement, the dominant Shiite movement in Lebanon prior to 1982, was unsuccessful. Amal refused to accept the principle of *Vali-e Faqih*, a fundamental principle of the Islamic Republic that mandated religious and political fealty to the Iranian leader. Amal refused because it viewed itself first and foremost as a Lebanese movement loyal to the Lebanese state. The Iranians sought a new Shiite movement that would be loyal to Iran.

After Iran failed in its attempt to take over Amal, Tehran made a decision to establish a Shiite movement that would constitute an alternative to Amal and would faithfully represent Iranian aspirations in Lebanon. The task of setting up the new movement was entrusted to the Iranian ambassador in Damascus, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, prior to the First Lebanon War in summer 1982.(6) Mohtashemi formed the "Lebanon Council" which included representatives of pro-Iranian Shiite movements. He headed that body until the consolidation of all the Lebanese Shiite movements that opposed and/or had split off from Amal, and then founded Hizbullah.(7)

Iran exploited the governmental vacuum that was created following the Lebanon War in 1982, and sent to Lebanon a task force of some 1,500 Revolutionary Guard instructors and fighters. Their job was to train and advise those who were the first to join Hizbullah and assist in the formation of the new movement's institutions, whose nucleus had been established in Baalbek. Hizbullah's second leader, Abbas Moussawi, took part in the first Revolutionary Guard course in Lebanon.

There is no doubt that the First Lebanon War, as well as the entry of the multinational force with the participation of American, British, French, and Italian military contingents, served as a glaring target for Hizbullah and accelerated its military empowerment. Furthermore, the prolonged Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon (1982-2000) greased the wheels of Hizbullah's Islamic revolution and led to its military, political, and social build-up. The Lebanese state failed to impose its governmental authority on the Shiites in southern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and southern Beirut. The monopoly on the use of force, a major constituent of state sovereignty, was expropriated by Hizbullah from the Lebanese government.

The Hizbullah militia under the authority of Hassan Nasrallah is inordinately more powerful than the Lebanese army under the command of the Lebanese

president, and the system of civil institutions built by Hizbullah provides more effective answers to the needs of the population than those supplied by the Lebanese government. Indeed, in 2002 the monthly salary of a worker in the Hizbullah civilian apparatus ranged between \$600 and \$800, while the salary of Lebanese government workers did not exceed \$500 a month.(8)

Hizbullah and the Failure of the Lebanese State

Hizbullah is not a national Lebanese movement, as has been frequently claimed in the West, although it is represented in the Lebanese parliament by virtue of a special dispensation granted by Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 1992. (9) The movement has been represented in the Lebanese government since 2005, following the departure of Syrian forces from Lebanon. Nasrallah acts as the personal emissary of Khamenei in Lebanon. He and his men are not loyal to the president of Lebanon or to the government of Lebanon, but rather to the Iranian leader who is the *Marja-e Taqlid* (source of emulation), the *Vali-e Faqih* who has the ultimate say within the organization.

This loyalty is not purely religious, and it is totally different from the authority exercised by the pope in the Vatican. This involves political subordination in every shape and form. Indeed, in March 2007, Nasrallah's deputy, Sheikh Naim Qassem, admitted to the Iranian Arabic-language television station *al-Qawathar* that Hizbullah requires permission from Iran's supreme leadership for its operations.(10)

For this reason, one should view Hizbullah's military force – which extends far beyond the military force of any other political movement in the world, as well as beyond the force of many sovereign states – as the long arm of Iran, in the words of U.S. Defense Secretary William Gates. Since 2006, and the strengthening of the strategic pact between Iran and Syria that intensified the military empowerment of Hizbullah, it appears that the Syrian president as well regards Hizbullah as his long arm. The growth of this Iranian and Syrian proxy on the soil of a failed Lebanese state that has forfeited its sovereignty makes Hizbullah the real ruler of Lebanon. It is just a matter of time for the process to mature into a Hizbullah decision to translate its demographic power into political currency and establish the Islamic Republic of Lebanon.

The Danger of Misreading Hizbullah

Misreading Hizbullah can lead to policy errors. In 2000 it was popularly thought that if Israel unilaterally withdrew from southern Lebanon, then Hizbullah would lose its motivation to keep fighting and would dissolve into a political party that would disarm. Yet it was precisely after the Israeli pullout when Hizbullah began its massive build-up of rockets, including long-range Iranian rockets that were ultimately used in the 2006 Second Lebanon War.

Some analysts have also tried to identify moderate trends in Hizbullah by

drawing a false distinction between its "military wing" and its "political wing." This differentiation between different wings of Hizbullah was advanced by the British government in early 2009. As Middle East expert Tony Badran has astutely observed, this is a false distinction.⁽¹¹⁾ As he notes, Nasrallah's deputy, Naim Qassem, told the *Los Angeles Times* last year that Hizbullah's leadership controls both the social welfare work of the organization as well as its *jihadi* activities: "The same leadership that directs the parliamentary and government work also leads *jihad* actions." In other words, Hizbullah is a highly centralized organization.⁽¹²⁾ Hizbullah's own analysis of itself contradicts what Brennan has been writing and stating in recent years.

Today, saying that Hizbullah has moderate elements that have moved away from terrorism can lead the political echelons in the West to ignore how Hizbullah is serving its Iranian sponsors by directly threatening Israel's civilian population. On May 20, 2010, Hizbullah military sources boasted to the Kuwaiti daily *al-Rai* that Israel will be bombarded with 15 tons of explosives a day if a future war breaks out.⁽¹³⁾ Hizbullah clearly does not care about the implications of its military build-up for the people of Lebanon, because it only seeks to serve the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Notes

1. John Brennan, "The Conundrum of Iran: Strengthening Moderates without Acquiescing to Belligerence," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 618, July 2008.
2. Frederick Wherey et al., *Dangerous But Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitation of Iranian Power in the Middle East* (Rand, 2009). See also Steven Simon and Jonathan Stevenson, "Disarming Hezbollah," *Foreign Affairs* website, January 11, 2010.
3. *Yediot Ahronot* [Hebrew], May 7, 2010. Barak told Newsweek on July 18, 2006: "When we entered Lebanon...there was no Hezbollah. We were accepted with perfumed rice and flowers by the Shia in the south. It was our presence there that created Hezbollah." Quoted by Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 33.
4. Shimon Shapira, *Hizbullah between Iran and Lebanon* (Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2000), p. 90.
5. For information about the Iranians who operated in Lebanon, see the first chapter in the important compendium, H.E. Chehabi, ed., *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies and I.B.Tauris, 2006).
6. Manal Lutfi, "Syria: Between Tehran and Hezbollah," *Asharq al-Awsat*, June 16, 2008.
7. Shapira, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-139.
8. Dima Danawi, *Hizbullah's Pulse: Into the Dilemma of the al-Shahid and Jihad al-Bina Foundations* (Beirut: 2002), p. 50, n. 30.
9. Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within* (London: Saqi, 2005), p. 191.
10. http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hezbollah_e0407.pdf.
11. Tony Badran, "Hezbollah is Not the IRA," *Now Lebanon*, February 2, 2010.
12. This point is made in Michael Young, "A Foolish Quest in Hezbollahland," *Now Lebanon*, May 21, 2010.
13. "Hezbollah Sources: Israel Will Be Bombarded with 15 Tons of Explosives a Day in Case of War," *Naharnet*, May 20, 2010, <http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?>

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Iran Changes the Balance of Power in Lebanon (January 2011)

Michael Segall

- What is striking about the current crisis in Lebanon is that the efforts to resolve it are being made by countries in the region, with hardly any initiatives on the part of Western countries, enabling Iran and Syria to continue to stir the pot unmolested.
- Iran no longer hesitates to state publicly that its forward defense line now passes through "Lebanon and Palestine." In practice, the Lebanese-Israeli border is in fact Israel's border with Iran.
- For Iran, Hizbullah serves as a live and successful model for revolutions, one which is reflected in other organizations such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian terror organizations, as well as extreme Shiite organizations in Iraq trained by Lebanese Hizbullah.
- Hizbullah is nourished by the growing strength and power of Iran and draws upon its successes. Both parties recognize that the fall of one also signifies the demise of the other.
- The Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigating the Hariri murder, which is about to publicize its findings, may offer an opportunity for the West to reverse the trend and take the initiative to reduce Iranian influence in Lebanon, and weaken the power of Tehran to damage the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Iran Offers to Solve the Crisis It Caused

Immediately after the political crisis in Lebanon erupted when Saad Hariri's government collapsed following the resignation of the Hizbullah ministers, Iran's leadership and media hastened to blame the United States, the "Zionist entity" (Israel), and the West for the failure of the Syrian-Saudi mediation initiative, in particular, and for "sabotaging" efforts to find a solution to the Lebanese political crisis, in general.

As in other issues where Iran operates *sub rosa* to create and stoke crises (Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Palestinian issue) and then offers its good services to solve them, this applies equally to the Lebanese case. Iran, which actually directed its protege and faithful facilitator in Lebanon – Hizbullah – to create a crisis, currently displays feverish activity and feigns the image of someone interested in solving it "within a regional framework and without foreign intervention," while "preserving the unity of Lebanon."

Western Countries Display Little Interest in Lebanon

Given the continued crisis, what is striking is that the efforts to resolve it are being made by countries in the region, with hardly any initiatives on the part of Western countries, which for some time now have hardly displayed any involvement in what transpires within the internal Lebanese arena, while Iran and Syria continue to stir the pot unmolested.

At the same time, the Iranian-Turkish rapprochement has also found expression in the Lebanese issue during recent months. Iranian President Ahmadinejad had a telephone conversation with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan regarding the implications of the Lebanese crisis and emphasized that countries in the region were the ones who had to find a solution to the crisis in which Lebanon had become enmeshed by fully cooperating among themselves and eschewing foreign intervention.⁽¹⁾

According to reports in the Turkish media, the Turkish prime minister also had a telephone conversation with King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia and the Emir of Qatar, and said that following the contacts that he had with Lebanese leaders (a meeting in Turkey with Saad Hariri), Saudi Arabia and Qatar, a multilateral meeting was possible with representatives from the United States, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt participating.

Up to now Iran has refrained from specifying the names of Western countries that could constitute part of a mediation initiative and an international effort for solving the crisis in Lebanon, and possibly differences exist on this issue between Iran, Turkey, and Syria. Iran has no interest in awarding Turkey credit in the Arab world as the one who contained the crisis. Iran has still not managed to recover from the Turkish success in the Gaza flotilla incident and the reverberations that it aroused in the Arab world, and Iran has no wish to provide Turkey with a toehold in Lebanon at its expense.

Iran Blames the U.S. and Israel

The Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon, Ghazanfar Roknabadi, has held separate meetings with various powerbrokers in the Lebanese arena (Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, Speaker of Parliament Nabih Beri, head of the General Union of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade Chambers Adnan Qassar, and army commander General Jean Kahwaji) to discuss the political crisis. Following his meetings, the

Iranian ambassador declared: "The U.S. and the Zionist regime (Israel) caused the Saudi-Syria initiative to fail in order to create an atmosphere of disunity. At this stage, these are the Lebanese that can transcend this critical situation through their wisdom."(2) Druze leader Walid Jumblatt's recent announcement that he will support Hizbullah ahead of internal Lebanese discussions to pick a new prime minister has increased the chances of the formation of a Hizbullah-led, Iranian-influenced coalition, which would constitute a major victory for Iranian interests in Lebanon.(3)

Other Iranian spokesmen accused "foreign elements" of creating the crisis in Lebanon. Acting Iranian Foreign Minister and the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali Akbar Salehi declared immediately after the outbreak of the crisis that "the involvement of malevolent foreign elements who do not really care about the Lebanese issue" was the backdrop to the failure of the Saudi-Syrian mediation initiative in Lebanon, and he called upon the parties in Lebanon to display vigilance and preserve unity. He added that this initiative had won the backing of various countries in the region and could bring about a solution to the crisis.(4)

Mohammad Reza Raouf-Sheibani, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Middle Eastern Affairs, also claimed that the United States and Israel "sabotaged" the initiative and efforts to bring about a solution to the political crisis in Lebanon, and therefore one should blame them for everything related to the collapse of the Lebanese government. The Iranian press declared that "the United States and Israel are trying to sow discord between the various groups in Lebanon in order to goad Lebanese society into civil war."(5)

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ramin Mehman-Parast said that the various groups and organizations operating in Lebanon could reach agreement among themselves: "Since different Lebanese groups enjoy great political wisdom and maturity, they can find a proper way to arrange for the future status of their country through consultations within a legal framework."(6) He added, "What has come about in Lebanon is completely natural and there is no concern. Groups and parties in the country are highly politically mature....A complete political process accompanied by democracy is emerging in Lebanon and we hope that vigilance, tact, and national unity will not allow interventionists to play a destructive role."(7)

Part of a Broader Iranian Strategy

The long-term strategy adopted by Iran towards the Lebanese arena, with Hizbullah playing a decisive role in its implementation, constitutes part of a broader strategy that allows Iran to position itself as a rising regional and international power and in practice as the "just, Islamic alternative" to American hegemony.

In this context, the provocative visit by Ahamadinejad to Lebanon in October 2010 constituted an important milestone, and the well-planned crisis that Tehran

and Hizbullah have executed is but another stage in the "Iranian-Shiite Conquest of Lebanon." The Iranian success in Lebanon stems, *inter alia*, from the U.S. failure in the Lebanese arena and its continued neglect (and that of the West, in general), to the benefit of Hizbullah and Iran, that has intensified during the stewardship of President Obama.

Dashed Hopes

While during the administration of President George W. Bush, Lebanon became the major hope for Arab democracy (after Iraq), the country was almost totally neglected during the Obama era. The problematic Syrian regime was also partially whitewashed (a short while before the crisis in Lebanon erupted, the new U.S. ambassador to Damascus arrived in the Syrian capital). Syria and Iran could again feel at home in Lebanon after a brief "cooling-off" period that followed the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, while they flagrantly ignored UN Security Council Resolution 1701 at the end of the Second Lebanon War.

President Bush's message that democratization constituted a balm against terror, which rattled the cage of the status quo in the Arab world, reached Lebanon and "threatened" the Iranian Islamic model that Hizbullah was to implement in stages. In practice, Lebanon became the arena for a clash between two overarching concepts engaged in a struggle to achieve the greatest influence in Lebanon, in particular, and the entire Middle East, in general: Western democratization (represented by the former American and French support for the government of Fouad Siniora) and revolutionary Iranian Islam (Hizbullah and the opposition to the pro-Western government in Lebanon).

The West's weak response and lack of long-term commitment failed to neutralize or contain the growing Iranian influence in Lebanon via Hizbullah, and those Lebanese who had sensed a fluttering of democracy became increasingly disenchanted.

Lebanon Transformed into a Forward Iranian Outpost

Iran exploited the hesitations and changes in Western policy toward Syria and Lebanon, transforming Lebanon into a forward Iranian outpost with tens of thousands of rockets and missiles of various ranges aimed at Israel. Iran no longer hesitates to state publicly that its forward defense line now passes through "Lebanon and Palestine." In practice, the Lebanese-Israeli border is in fact Israel's border with Iran. Hizbullah has become an Iranian organization in every sense of the word and the organization's secretary-general serves as the Iranian leader's representative in Lebanon. Lebanon, which is used to suffering and civil wars, has become a battleground for Iran and Syria and an efficient tool for promoting their national security interests.

In this context, one should recall the tremendous importance that Iran attributes

to Hizbullah's confrontation with Israel during the Second Lebanon War and its results. While the IDF withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 marked for Iran the first victory of the Islamic Revolution outside of Iran, the Second Lebanon War and the Gaza operation (Operation "Cast Lead") which followed in 2009 have become epic and celestial events.

For Iran, Hizbullah serves as a live and successful model for revolutions, one which is reflected in other organizations such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian terror organizations, as well as extreme Shiite organizations in Iraq trained by Lebanese Hizbullah. Hizbullah is nourished by the growing strength and power of Iran and draws upon its successes. Both parties recognize that the fall of one also signifies the demise of the other.

The Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigating the Hariri murder is about to publicize its findings that cast blame on Hizbullah and, according to newspaper reports, also on Iran for having ordered the killing. This offers an opportunity for the West to reverse the trend and take the initiative to reduce Iranian influence in Lebanon, and weaken the power of Tehran to damage additional processes in the region such as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Lebanon currently constitutes one of the main fronts in a quasi-Middle Eastern Cold War. On one side stands a self-confident and confrontational Iran that is leading the "resistance camp," together with its proteges, Hizbullah and Hamas, who oppose a "Pax Americana." On the other side are the United States and the West, which have hitherto vacillated in everything connected to handling Iran. At the moment, the initiative (and the safety catch) are in the hands of Iran and its proteges who are capable of initiating violent crises when the timing is suitable from their standpoint, in accordance with developments in the various arenas (Lebanon, the Palestinian issue, Iraq).

Will the West and, first and foremost, the United States take advantage of the report incriminating those responsible for the murder of Hariri, and use it as a lever to reverse the trend and efficiently contend with the growing shadow of Iran over the Middle East? One hopes they will understand that dealing with "Iran first" is a precondition for handling regional crises, though the plausible assumption is that they will not do so.

Notes

1. <http://abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&Id=221327>
2. <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/160221.html>
3. Jumblatt leads a bloc of 11 parliamentarians and his support is vital to decide who forms the new government.
4. http://tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=234106
5. *Quds*, January 13, 2011.
6. <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8910251005>
7. <http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1695412&Lang=E>

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Hizbullah Today

Hizbullah Discusses Its Operational Plan for War with Israel: Missile Fire on Tel Aviv and Conquest of the Galilee

(November 2011)

Shimon Shapira

- In recent weeks Hizbullah leader Hasan Nasrallah held a series of meetings with his top-level military command as well as field commanders responsible for preparing for war with Israel. According to a source close to Hizbullah, Nasrallah's operational directive was that in the next military conflict with Israel, Hizbullah will hit Tel Aviv with missiles at the outset of the war, while also dispatching forces to conquer the Galilee.
- Hizbullah forces are being trained to fire at least ten thousand missiles, right at the war's outset, at military and strategic targets such as airfields, military camps, and vital facilities including maritime ones, followed by the firing of rockets from launch sites whose location will come as a surprise to Israel.
- The operational plan was formulated in tandem with senior Iranian strategic experts and will include a force of five thousand fighters who have recently trained in Iran, tasked with taking over designated zones in northern Israel including Nahariya, Shlomi, and Carmiel.
- It was said that engineering units of the Iranian army had mined areas in the eastern Bekaa Valley that were seen as possible landing sites for Israeli special forces, and that Hizbullah had equipped itself with "smart" Iranian anti-tank missiles that can disrupt the defensive systems of Israel's Merkava tanks.
- Nasrallah's recent escalation of public statements stems from heightened fear in Hizbullah that an Israeli and/or American attack on Iran is drawing nearer. As a strategic arm of Iran, Hizbullah sees itself as Iran's first line of defense against Israel.

On 27 October 2011 the Lebanese newspaper *Al Joumhouria* reported that in recent weeks the leader of Hizbullah, Hasan Nasrallah, held a series of meetings

with the organization's highest level military command, as well as field commanders and operational-level commanders responsible for preparing Hizbullah's military force for war with Israel. Nasrallah updated his commanders on regional developments, the situation in Lebanon, and on Hizbullah's internal and organizational affairs. Nasrallah emphasized the supreme importance of maintaining the organization's field security, given U.S. and Israeli intelligence organizations' successes in penetrating Hizbullah and recruiting individuals holding sensitive posts. The exposure of agents within Hizbullah was profoundly unsettling to Nasrallah and the other leaders.

According to a source close to Hizbullah, Nasrallah's operational directive to the commanders was to prepare for the fact that in the next military conflict with Israel, Hizbullah will hit Tel Aviv with missiles at the outset of the war, while also dispatching forces to conquer the Galilee. The source stressed that this is an operational directive and not a matter of psychological warfare.

Hizbullah's conclusion from the lessons of the Second Lebanon War is that, next time, Israel will have no red lines in waging all-out war against Lebanon and Hizbullah. Hence, Hizbullah is planning "many surprises" that will change the force equation with Israel both at the start of the conflict and during its operational phase.⁽¹⁾

The Operational Plan

The operational plan to conquer the Galilee was first aired in Nasrallah's announcement on 16 February 2011, as part of events marking the third anniversary of the assassination of Hizbullah commander-in-chief Imad Mughniyeh. Nasrallah told his fighters to be prepared for the fact that, should Israel launch a war against Hizbullah, they will be conquering the Galilee. Since that announcement, Hizbullah forces have been training and preparing to carry out Nasrallah's order.

This preparation includes:

- Identifying landing sites for Israeli helicopters where explosive charges have been laid and dispersed.
- Deploying substantial rocket and artillery firepower in areas Hizbullah does not see as suitable for guerrilla warfare, mainly in parts of the Bekaa Valley.
- Visits by commanders to the front, which have included delegations of military experts headed by Haj Zu Alfikar. He is none other than Mustafa Badr Aldin, Mughniyeh's replacement as the most senior security-military figure in Hizbullah, who is continuing to act despite an extradition order against him for the murder of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. The senior military delegation visited the Bekaa Valley and southern Lebanon.
- The end of a series of intensive training sessions for some 727 fighters in Iran, who learned new combat methods for guerrilla and special

commando units.

- The completion of courses for operators of advanced missiles and anti-tank weapons. Here it was said that Hizbullah had equipped itself with "smart" Iranian anti-tank missiles that can disrupt the defensive systems of Merkava tanks on the way to striking them.

The military scenario for which Hizbullah forces trained is the firing of at least ten thousand missiles, right at the war's outset, at military and strategic targets such as airfields, military camps, and vital facilities including maritime ones, followed by the firing of rockets from launch sites whose location will come as a surprise to Israel.

The Operational Plan to Conquer the Galilee

The source said that the operational plan Hizbullah has formulated in tandem with senior Iranian strategic experts is based on using a force of five thousand fighters who have recently trained in Iran, particularly in the context of this plan. Another report said that in recent weeks Hizbullah forces had completed intensive training in Iran and had been deployed in southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley. It was further reported that in the area of Maydon in the western Bekaa Valley, Hizbullah engineering units had finished excavation work and the improvement of positions, while engineering units of the Iranian army had mined areas in the eastern Bekaa Valley that were seen as possible landing sites for Israeli special forces tasked with attacking Hizbullah's missile and artillery deployment.(2)

The source close to Hizbullah said its fighting force would number five brigades, each consisting of a thousand fighters. Each brigade has a designated combat zone in northern Israel that it is tasked with taking over. Each brigade is familiar with the layout and special topographical conditions of its sector and has trained to conquer it.

- *Brigade 1* will take over the town of Nahariya or parts of it, after crossing the border in the area of Rosh Hanikra. According to Hizbullah information, means of protection in that area are meager, the distance is small (seven kilometers), and there are no military capabilities or special topography that will retard the unit in achieving its goal. Concurrently, a force of 150 fighters from the first brigade will reach Nahariya by sea in speedboats that Hizbullah already possesses. This force's mission is to take as many hostages as possible so as to prevent Israel from bombing the Hizbullah forces in this sector.
- *Brigade 2* will take over the town of Shlomi, which has 6,500 residents and is about 300 meters from the border. The aim is to cut the IDF's supply lines and force it to send reinforcements from the east.
- *Brigade 3* was ordered to reach the town of Carmiel and conquer areas south of it with the aim of blocking traffic from Acre, on the Mediterranean

coast, to Safed.

- *Brigade 4* will take over the communities of Malkiya, Ramot Naftali and Yiftach in order to prevent the IDF from firing from these areas into southern Lebanon.
- *Brigade 5* will serve as a strategic reserve force for special missions.

Syria

Hizbullah is discussing the question of whether Bashar Assad will take part in the war, and is not excluding this possibility, particularly in light of Syria's domestic situation. On 27 October 2011 the newspaper Al Akhbar, which is close to Hizbullah, disclosed that Nasrallah had met with Assad a few days earlier in Damascus. It said Nasrallah had come to explain to Assad why Hizbullah insists that the Lebanese government stop contributing to the funding of the international investigatory commission (the STL) on former Lebanese premier Hariri's murder. Assad, according to the paper, did not give a clear answer on the issue and only emphasized the need to maintain the Lebanese government's representation. If such a Nasrallah-Assad meeting indeed occurred, it can reasonably be assumed that the subject of a military conflict with Israel was central to it.(3)

A day after the article appeared in Al Akhbar, the paper published a correction saying the Nasrallah-Assad meeting had not occurred and apologizing for the error.(4) It should be stressed that the paper is very close to Hizbullah and not infrequently serves as Nasrallah's mouthpiece. It is hard to imagine that it would publish a detailed report of this meeting, including specific quotations, against Hizbullah's wishes. It could be that, on second thought, Hizbullah decided the timing of the article was unwise. As Assad kills his people, Hizbullah faces bitter criticism for supporting him and is losing its standing in the Arab street. Indeed, since the reports in the Lebanese press on Hizbullah's operational plan and preparations to implement it, Hizbullah has in no way related to these matters either directly or indirectly.

Summary

Nasrallah's recent escalation of public statements on concrete targets for the next war – rocket fire on Tel Aviv at its outset and the conquest of the Galilee, along with the completion of military preparations – does not come in a vacuum. They stem from heightened fear in Hizbullah that an Israeli and/or American attack on Iran is drawing nearer. Hence, as a strategic arm of Iran that sees itself as Iran's first line of defense against Israel, Hizbullah is seeking, with Iran's help, to deter Israel. This explains Nasrallah's care in emphasizing that he is not referring to an offensive thrust by Hizbullah but, rather, a harsh response to an Israeli move that would engulf Lebanon in war. But even if what is envisaged is a reaction by Hizbullah, let alone a surprise move by Nasrallah, it is important to

see the picture as reflected in Hizbullah's vision.

Notes

1. *Al Joumhouria*, 27 October 2011.
2. *Al Shiraa*, 27 October 2011.
3. *Al Akhbar*, 27 October 2001.
4. *Al Akhbar*, 28 October 2011.

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Iran Steps Up Arming Hizbullah Against Israel (January 2011)

Jacques Neriah

- Israeli and Western intelligence services have long been aware of Syrian and Iranian involvement in Hizbullah's arms buildup. Damascus Airport has been identified as the transit point for airlifts of Iranian arms that were subsequently transferred to Hizbullah via the open Syrian-Lebanese border, under the supervision of the Syrian security services.
- A senior Pentagon official has divulged that Hizbullah has 50,000 rockets and missiles, including 40-50 Fatah 110 missiles and 10 SCUD-C ground-to-ground missiles. Furthermore, some 10,000 Hizbullah fighters have been provided with a broad range of modern weapons, while the Iranian Revolutionary Guards have trained Hizbullah teams to operate these weapons.
- Currently, the Iranians exercise more control than ever over Hizbullah. Iranian General Hassan Madavi, Commander of the Lebanon Corps of the Revolutionary Guards, sits in Beirut alongside scores of Iranian officers and experts.
- The Iranian intelligence services, operating in the framework of the Revolutionary Guards, have built many cells in Africa, most of which rely on Shiite emigrants from Lebanon. This is being undertaken in the framework of the African Division of the Jerusalem Corps of the Guards, an effort headed by Gen. Qassem Suleymani. After training in Iran, they serve as a nucleus for recruiting others and provide a base for Iranian

intelligence activity in their countries.

- In South Lebanon, with the assistance of the engineering units of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Hizbullah has dug tunnels that conceal its fighters from the watchful eye of Israeli UAVs that patrol the region. Hizbullah command centers were also equipped with an independent communications network funded by Iran.
- Hizbullah also continues to conceal its war materiel in mosques, schools, fire stations, and the like. According to Israeli intelligence, at least 100 Lebanese villages have become genuine military bases.

New Missiles Target Israel's Home Front

In January 2010, American intelligence services reported the transfer of 26 M-6002 missiles of Syrian manufacture to Hizbullah in Lebanon. These missiles, with a range of over 250 km., are intended to reinforce Hizbullah's ability to strike at the Israeli home front if and when hostilities erupt. This unverified report corresponds with other efforts by Syria, Iran, and Hizbullah to prepare for a new round of hostilities with Israel.

It is an open secret that the Syrian-Lebanese border has been deliberately left wide open by Syria in order to guarantee the supply of war materiel to Hizbullah. The Lebanese Army is thinly deployed along the 359-km. border with Syria and is unable to block the movement of Hizbullah fighters or Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Any thoughts of attempting to block the border must also take into account the presence of belligerent Palestinian units such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah Intifada that answer to Syria.(1)

Israeli and Western intelligence services have long been aware of Syrian and Iranian involvement in Hizbullah's arms buildup. Damascus Airport has been identified as the transit point for airlifts of Iranian arms that were subsequently transferred to Hizbullah via the open Syrian-Lebanese border, under the supervision of the Syrian security services.

Hizbullah's Logistics Network

In the spring of 2010, Western intelligence services received a rare glimpse into the logistics network built by Syria, Iran, and Hizbullah for the passage of weapons from Iran to Hizbullah in Lebanon. This network was built following the slaying of Hizbullah military commander Imad Mughniyeh and was intended, first and foremost, to guarantee Hizbullah's clandestine activity and the security of its fighters and commanders.

Three logistic bodies handle the mission of weapons transfer.(2) They are dealing with at least 40,000 rockets of all sizes that passed from Iran to Hizbullah, which were intended to replenish the weapons arsenal that was lost in

the Second Lebanon War and provide Hizbullah with the ability to strike deep into Israel - capabilities superior to those it possessed in 2006. A senior Pentagon official has divulged that Hizbullah has 50,000 rockets and missiles, including 40-50 Fatah 110 missiles and 10 SCUD-C ground-to-ground missiles.(3)

According to a U.S. State Department cable dated Feb. 25, 2010, and released by WikiLeaks, "the Government of Israel is concerned that Syria intends to imminently transfer SCUD-D missiles to Hizbullah in Lebanon. We share this concern. The transfer of such weapons would constitute a significant escalation of a potentially volatile situation that could threaten regional stability." U.S. diplomats were instructed to "caution" the Syrian government "against such a serious escalation," and warn it that "operational support for Hizbullah is a strategic miscalculation that is damaging" to Syria's long-term national interests. (4)

Furthermore, some 10,000 Hizbullah fighters have been provided with personal weapons, intermediate and long-range missiles, and high-trajectory and flat-trajectory weapons. According to *Ha'aretz*, Iran has even provided Hizbullah with UAVs and perhaps even with attack aircraft. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards have been identified as being responsible for training Hizbullah teams to operate these weapons systems.(5)

Unit 108, whose main office is located in Damascus, is the main body in the organizational chain that engages in weapons transfers, and it was involved in transferring the M-6002 missiles. The mission of this unit is to transfer weapons that arrive from Iran and from logistics bases in Syria to logistics bases located along and near the Syrian-Lebanese border. "Regular" warehouses are located in Damascus, in Duma near the Syrian capital, and near Adra, adjacent to Damascus International Airport. "Reserve" warehouses are located in the region of Aleppo, Homs, and the coastal city of Tartous.

The second body in the logistics chain is Unit 112, whose job is to disperse the war materiel among Hizbullah bases in the Bekaa Valley and elsewhere. The transfers take place in convoys of trucks that frequently change their license plates.

Finally, there are two sub-units of Unit 100, whose job is to transfer Hizbullah fighters and Iranian advisors between Syria, Iran, and Lebanon. This is the unit that dispatches Hizbullah cadres to Iran for training on the missile systems that Iran supplies.

It should be emphasized that currently, the Iranians exercise more control than ever over Hizbullah. Iranian General Hassan Madavi, Commander of the Lebanon Corps of the Revolutionary Guards, sits in Beirut alongside scores of Iranian officers and experts.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards Develop New Arms Smuggling Routes

On November 3, 2009, the Israeli Navy intercepted the cargo ship MV Francop, which carried Iranian weapons bound for Hizbullah. The ship was heading for the Syrian port of Latakia. Nearly 500 tons of weapons were seized, hidden in 36 containers. There were 2,800 short-range 107mm and 122mm rockets as well as 106mm recoilless artillery shells, grenades, and ammunition.(6) Once the Iranians became aware that Western intelligence services and Israel were focusing their information-gathering efforts on Lebanon, Syria, and Iran, they sought to develop alternative sea routes after the weapons-smuggling route in Sudan was exposed and attacked in March 2009.

In March 2010, five Italians and two Iranian citizens were arrested in Italy on charges of weapons smuggling. Investigators discovered that the network had been active since 2007 and engaged in the purchase of war materiel in Europe and its transfer via England, Switzerland, and Romania to Iran.(7) Albania served as a transfer base for weapons that were purchased for Hizbullah in the Ukraine. (8) In Thailand as well, a shipment of war materiel was seized that had been sent from North Korea to Hizbullah, after a technical malfunction compelled the plane to make an emergency landing in Bangkok and thus exposed the shipment.(9)

A new African weapons route was exposed in October 2010 when Nigerian authorities seized 13 containers at the port of Lagos that had arrived from Iran, containing 107mm rockets, bombs, grenades, rifles, machine guns, and ammunition, camouflaged as building material.(10) The Nigerian authorities were induced to take action with encouragement from the United States. Furthermore, UN Security Council Resolution 1929 permits countries to take over ships suspected of transferring war materiel in order to examine their cargo.

As a result of the ship's exposure, Iranian official Ali Akbar Tabatabai'i, the person responsible for the African Division in the Revolutionary Guards' Jerusalem Corps, who was directly responsible for dispatching the ship to Nigeria, was compelled to flee and seek sanctuary in the Iranian Embassy in Abuja, the Nigerian capital. From there, he made his way directly to the private plane of Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, who was visiting the country at the time, and from there to Iran. However, Tabatabai'i's assistant, Azim Agha Jani, was arrested by the Nigerian authorities.(11)

The Role of the Lebanese Shiite Diaspora

The Iranian intelligence services, operating in the framework of the Revolutionary Guards, have built many cells in Africa, most of which rely on Shiite emigrants from Lebanon who live in Africa. This is being undertaken in the framework of the African Division of the Jerusalem Corps of the Guards, an effort headed by Gen. Qassem Suleymani. According to the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Shiraa*, Imad Mughniyeh was the architect who initiated the establishment of support cells in Lebanese Shiite communities outside of Lebanon. Lebanese recruited for the

Iranian intelligence efforts were invited to visit Iran, where they underwent training in the field of intelligence. Upon their return, they serve as a nucleus for recruiting others and provide a base for Iranian intelligence activity in their countries.(12)

Proof of such involvement of Lebanese citizens was provided in June 2010 when a Lebanese civilian was arrested in Paraguay by Interpol and accused of financing Hizbullah.(13) That same month, two Lebanese residents of Ohio in the U.S. were arrested and charged with assisting Hizbullah.(14)

There is no doubt that the Lebanese Shiite community overseas provides a convenient recruiting ground for Iranian intelligence. Their familiarity with the area in which they live, their ability to move freely, their command of the local language, and their ability to obtain the support of local officialdom through bribery or business dealings all provide Iran with a significant advantage. However, due to the recent stiffening of sanctions against Iran and the increased interdiction activity by Western intelligence services led by the United States, some reservations have been heard about following Iran blindly. Iran's strategic objectives do not necessarily dovetail with the narrow interests of the Lebanese Shiite diaspora community, which is largely focused on seeking an easier life and turning a profit.(15)

Hizbullah's Feverish Preparations for Renewed Conflict

Following the Second Lebanon War, Hizbullah reorganized its command-and-control system. In South Lebanon, with the assistance of the engineering units of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Hizbullah dug tunnels that conceal its fighters from the watchful eye of Israeli UAVs that patrol the region.

Hizbullah command centers were also equipped with an independent communications network distinct from the system covering all of Lebanon. A U.S. State Department cable dated Apr. 16, 2008, and released by WikiLeaks, "decried the establishment of a complete fiber optics network by Hizbullah throughout Lebanon." Lebanese Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamadeh cited the Iranian Fund for the Reconstruction of Lebanon as the source of funding for the network.(16)

As in the past, Hizbullah also continues to conceal its war materiel in mosques, schools, fire stations, and the like.(17) According to Israeli intelligence, at least 100 Lebanese villages have become genuine military bases.(18)

All this attests to the feverish preparations that Iran is making, not only in anticipation of a renewed military conflict between Hizbullah and Israel, but also in anticipation of the possibility that Hizbullah will move to subdue the Lebanese government, should it decide to do so.

Notes

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- Common Borders Are Open to the Syrians," *Asharq Alawsat* (London), November 11, 2008.
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 8. Iran Tracker.
 9. Ibid.
 10. Alex Fishman, "The Iranian Octopus," *Yediot Ahronot*, October 31, 2010.
 11. Hassan Zabaraa, "Iranian Intelligence in Africa Threatens the Life and the Interests of the Lebanese," www.alshiraa.com/details.php?id=6569.
 12. Ibid.
 13. Iran Tracker.
 14. Ibid.
 15. Hassan Zabaraa.
 16. <http://cablesearch.org/cable/view.php?id=08BEIRUT523&hl=Iran+Syria>.
 17. Sanaa Aljaq. See also "Hizbullah Tunnels Under Border," *Jerusalem Post*, July 13, 2010.
 18. *Ha'aretz*, July 8, 2010.

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Hizbullah's Predicament in Light of Syria's Decline (July 2011)

Shimon Shapira

- Five years after the Second Lebanon War, a war whose results Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah considers a "divine victory," Hizbullah has currently reached one of its lowest points due to the endangered survival of the Assad regime in Syria, as well as the international tribunal that has demanded the extradition of four Hizbullah members suspected of

murdering former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

- Damascus functions as the primary bridge between Iran and Hizbullah in terms of all military and other assistance arriving from Tehran. This comes on top of the direct transfer of rocket and missile weaponry from the Syrian army's arms depots to Hizbullah's fighting units.
- Hizbullah has adopted a clear-cut stand in support of Bashar Assad, and therefore Hizbullah flags are being burned in the streets of Syria together with Nasrallah's portrait. Without Syrian backing, Hizbullah will find it hard to continue dictating political moves in Lebanon.
- Recent signs of Hizbullah's weakened position include the public revelation of an espionage network run by the CIA of people in important positions within the movement; the open sale of alcoholic beverages in Nabatiye, Hizbullah's capital in southern Lebanon; and the attempt by the Lebanese government to appoint a security chief for Beirut International Airport from within the Maronite community, contrary to Hizbullah's wishes.
- In light of all this, Nasrallah is looking for a new pretext to confront Israel, focusing this time on the gas fields that Israel is developing within its maritime economic zone. Nasrallah believes his threats will distract attention from the decline in Hizbullah's status and the international accusations that it currently faces.

Hassan Nasrallah delivered an address on July 26, 2011, commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Second Lebanon War. He recounted the war's achievements from his perspective, including Hizbullah's increased military build-up and its power to deter an Israel that is frantically maneuvering to protect its civilian rear. As a result, Israel has strictly preserved the quiet in southern Lebanon. Nasrallah made it clear that Israeli warnings about "surprises" that it was preparing for Hizbullah in the event of a military confrontation were merely psychological warfare that was doomed to fail. In response to the demands by the international tribunal in The Hague (STL) to extradite Hizbullah members accused of murdering former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, Nasrallah observed that the accused are examples of the "honorable resistance" and they would not be extradited.(1)

Nasrallah used the occasion to make it clear that in addition to acting as the defender of Lebanese security, henceforth he would also protect the Lebanese state's natural resources. "Lebanon now has a real chance to become a wealthy state since treasures of natural gas and oil lie opposite its shores." "These treasures do not belong to any sect or party, but constitute the national treasures of the Lebanese state and are valued at billions of dollars. This represents an opportunity to improve living conditions in Lebanon and pay off the Lebanese state's debts. This is a golden opportunity and we must behave responsibly." Israel claims about 850 km of maritime waters that contain Lebanese gas and oil and Israel has no rights to this gas and oil, Nasrallah said.

Nasrallah demanded that the Lebanese government act expeditiously to chart

Lebanon's maritime boundaries and commence production at the appropriate time. The Hizbullah leader clarified that this was the Lebanese government's top national priority. Nasrallah followed this up with threats: "I can say with confidence that Lebanon is capable of defending its oil and gas installations. We will avenge any attack on these installations. We warn Israel against taking any steps whatsoever to steal natural treasures from beneath our territorial waters."(2)

Five years after the Second Lebanon War, a war whose results Nasrallah considers both a "veritable miracle" and a "divine victory" that God bestowed on his party, Hizbullah has currently reached one of its lowest points. Nasrallah is confronting a genuine crisis that poses a significant challenge to Hizbullah's status in Lebanon.

Two major reasons account for this strategic reversal:

- The endangered survival of the Assad regime in Syria.
- The international tribunal in The Hague has demanded the extradition of four Hizbullah members suspected of murdering Prime Minister Hariri. Heading the group is Mustafa Badr al-Din, who replaced Imad Mughniyeh as head of the military and security wing and is part of the Hizbullah leadership.

The threat to the Assad regime's survival is having a direct impact on Hizbullah's strategic position in both the internal Lebanese arena and vis-a-vis Israel. It is true that Iran gave birth to Hizbullah as a small militia during the era of Hafez Assad, but during the reign of Bashar Assad it matured and attained the dimensions of a state in social, economic, and military terms, one that threatens the very existence of the Lebanese state. Syria represents the womb in which Hizbullah was born and it served as the militia's adoptive mother that suckled and nurtured it, together with Iran, since its establishment.

Damascus functions as the primary bridge between Iran and Hizbullah in terms of all military and other assistance arriving from Tehran. This comes on top of the direct transfer of rocket and missile weaponry from the Syrian army's arms depots to Hizbullah's fighting units. Hizbullah has adopted a clear-cut stand in support of Bashar Assad, and therefore Hizbullah flags are being burned in the streets of Syria together with Nasrallah's portrait. The images of Saladin and Gamal Abd el-Nasser that were once displayed together with that of Nasrallah have been replaced by derogatory slogans against the Shiite leader who is offering support to the Alawite leader in the mass slaughter in Syria. It is now clear to Hizbullah that without Syrian backing it will find it hard to continue dictating political moves in Lebanon. The removal of Hizbullah missiles from the Syrian interior and their recent transfer to the Bekaa Valley provides the most tangible sign that Hizbullah is apprehensive about the Assad regime's future.

At the same time, Hizbullah is being forced to contend with the demands of the International Tribunal at The Hague (STL) to extradite the murderers of Prime Minister Hariri, a demand that enjoys the support of the international community.

Nasrallah's blatant refusal to extradite the "patriotic mujahedin," "neither in 30 days nor in 30 years," carries with it the potential of touching off an internal Lebanese conflagration. Powerful parties in Lebanon are just itching for Hizbullah to weaken as a result of the Assad regime's fall in Syria and intensified international pressures on Nasrallah in order to erode Hizbullah's political standing and subsequently Hizbullah's military power as well.

The first signs of Hizbullah's weakened position have recently appeared:

- In internal meetings that Nasrallah held with Hizbullah activists, he spoke frankly about the difficult circumstances in which Hizbullah finds itself - the most serious that the movement has experienced since the 1990s. Its main problems include the public revelation of an espionage network run by the CIA of people in important positions within the movement, including Mahmoud al-Haj ("Abu Turab"), the man responsible for training Hizbullah's military forces, and Mohammed Atwe, responsible for supervision and inspection of the armed forces. Likewise, an additional person, who only had his initials A.B. publicized, turns out to be none other than Ahmed Badr al-Din, who holds no official Hizbullah position but is related to Mustafa Badr al-Din and served as a money-launderer for Hizbullah.(3)
- In Nabatiye, Hizbullah's capital in southern Lebanon, the total prohibition imposed by Hizbullah on the sale of alcoholic beverages is being violated and one can find alcoholic beverages on sale. Previously, Hizbullah hastened to forcibly shut down any store that violated this prohibition, but now it is hesitating to act. Hizbullah vented its humiliation and anger on the village of Houla in south Lebanon, where Hizbullah activists attacked a store selling alcohol. However, for the first time, they encountered opposition by leftist elements and members of the Communist Party who defended the sale of alcohol – an incident that is a most definite rarity in recent decades and ever since the beginning of the 1980s.(4)
- An additional event that could cloud Hizbullah's prospects is the attempt by the Lebanese government to appoint a security chief with the rank of Brigadier General for Beirut International Airport from within the Maronite Christian community, contrary to Hizbullah's wishes. It may be recalled that in 2008 Hizbullah set Beirut ablaze and took over regions that it had not previously controlled in response to the attempted removal of a Shiite officer loyal to Hizbullah from the same position.(5)

In light of all this, it would appear that Nasrallah is looking for a new pretext to confront Israel in order to make it clear that *jihad* – the movement's *raison d'être* – is alive and well and that Hizbullah constitutes the spearhead of the struggle against Israel. The pretext this time is the gas fields that Israel has discovered and is developing in the framework of its maritime economic zone. Nasrallah is threatening a renewed conflagration and believes that his threats will distract attention from the decline in Hizbullah's status and the international accusations that it currently faces. Nasrallah has already argued in the past that had he

anticipated the Israeli response, he would have refrained from kidnapping the Israeli soldiers in 2006, the event that triggered the Second Lebanese War. One can only hope that five years after this war, Nasrallah still remembers his grievous mistake.

Notes

1. Moqawama.org, July 26, 2011.
2. Ibid.
3. *Majalat Aleman*, July 16, 2011; *al-Shiraa*, July 15, 2011.
4. Hanin Ghaddar, "Hizbollah Is Bleeding Alone," *Now Lebanon*, July 25, 2011.
5. Naharnet.com, July 25, 2011.

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Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism – a monthly publication examining anti-Semitism after the Holocaust.

Jewish Political Studies Review – a scholarly journal founded in 1989.

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