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

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The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)
40 Haim Levanon • POB 39950 • Tel Aviv 61398 • Israel
Tel: +972-3-640-0400 • Fax: +972-3-744-7590 • E-mail: info@inss.org.il

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Abstracts

A Nuclear Iran: The Spur to a Regional Arms Race? / Amos Yadlin and Avner Golov

Some analysts maintain that Iran's development of a nuclear bomb will not lead to a regional arms race, as Iran's three chief rivals in the region, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt, lack the economic and technological capabilities and the necessary motivation to develop nuclear weapons. This conclusion, however, is based on a problematic review of the relevant states and their drive to acquire nuclear weapons once Iran has obtained them. Rather, analysis of these states' strategic logic; their ability to bear the economic burden of a military nuclear program; the technological capability required for developing nuclear weapons; and the political constraints that would influence and perhaps dissuade them from acquiring nuclear weapons suggests that the possibility of a regional arms race is not at all low.

When Neorealism Meets the Middle East: Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons in (Regional) Context / Emily B. Landau

Challenging a recent article on Iran's nuclear ambitions by neorealist Kenneth Waltz, this essay explores the reasons underlying the attempts by regional states to develop nuclear weapons programs; how these states have related to Israel's nuclear policy over the years, including steps Israel has taken to stop other states from going nuclear; and the overall importance of focusing on the nature of interstate relations in the Middle East in any attempt to explain their strategic calculations, including with regard to nuclear weapons development. Against this backdrop, it will become clear why the particular case of Iran becoming a nuclear state defies simplistic neorealist prescripts, and that the operational conclusions derived from these prescripts are certainly not the best solution for this ongoing crisis.

Iraq and the Arabs following the American Withdrawal / Yoel Guzansky

Iraq's fundamental problems are for the most part not connected to the involvement of any external player, but its troubles make it more vulnerable to any type of foreign interference, particularly Iranian. Until recently, the presence of American forces to a certain extent neutralized foreign influence over Iraq. Now that the troops have been withdrawn, Iraq has once more become the locus of competition, even confrontation, between Iran, Turkey, and the Arab world, primarily Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. This essay seeks to demonstrate, however, that even with the limited new closeness between some of the Arab states and Iraq, old suspicions and grievances among the sides are still active, in part because of the nature of Iraq's leadership and its policies, which seem to be moving away from ethnic and political pluralism.

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The growing cooperation in recent years between the Turkish government and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) has been one of the notable transformations in Middle Eastern politics. This article attempts to sketch the motives behind this growing cooperation, outline its limits, and assess the regional implications of this relationship. It will address four main areas driving Turkish policies toward northern Iraq: domestic politics, economic rationales, the regional security impetus, and global considerations. While the article traces some of the longer term processes behind the transformation in Turkish-KRG relations, it highlights the period following the 2011 US withdrawal from Iraq, a period that has yet to be thoroughly examined by scholars.

Global Jihad: Approaching Israel's Borders? / Yoram Schweitzer

The relatively low number of operations by al-Qaeda and its affiliates against Israel and Jews relative to other fronts is not necessarily indicative of the organization's planning and posture. Rather, intelligence and security officials around the world were successful in thwarting al-Qaeda efforts, and the power of the organization and its affiliates was limited by a lack of resources. However, the turmoil in the Arab world in the past two years, including in several states bordering Israel, has created a different political-security environment for Israel, which is less stable

and more dangerous than what Israel experienced in the preceding three decades. This article draws a picture of the emerging threat on Israel's borders from al-Qaeda and its affiliates, examines whether the threat has fundamentally changed, and considers how Israel should prepare in face of this threat.

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The issue of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank has long been a bone of contention between Israel and the United States, and has often strained the relationship between the two allies. However, America's longstanding opposition to the settlement enterprise has clearly not achieved its objective. In practice, the project has continued and expanded, and seems to have created an irreversible territorial and demographic reality in the Middle East. This article discusses whether the US administration might therefore question if and to what extent maintaining American opposition is liable to damage the status and prestige of the United States in the international community. More concretely, has the time come for a change in US policy on the issue of Jewish settlements in the West Bank?

The Institutional Transformations of Hamas and Hizbollah / Anat Kurz, Benedetta Berti, and Marcel Konrad

Hamas and Hizbollah are complex and multidimensional groups, simultaneously military organizations, political parties, and social movements. Analyzed by Western analysts primarily for their terrorist and military infrastructures and operations, these groups have also developed intricate social, political, and cultural structures to complement their military power. This article analyzes the current role and status of Hamas and Hizbollah within their respective political environments, presenting both similarities and differences between their situational features and evolutionary trends. It explores the impact of the Arab awakening on these groups' evolutions. Finally, the essay discusses the security challenges these trends may pose to Israel and suggests how Israeli policies might respond to these trends most effectively.

A Nuclear Iran: The Spur to a Regional Arms Race?

Amos Yadlin and Avner Golov

One of the main arguments for stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, beyond the direct danger of its using them or transferring them to terrorist elements, is that Iran's possession of a nuclear military capability will undermine the nuclear nonproliferation regime and spur the nuclearization of other states in the Middle East. The Obama administration has voiced this argument to justify its opposition to Iran's nuclear program.[1] Other analysts, however, contend that Iran's development of a nuclear bomb will not lead to a regional arms race,[2] as Iran's three chief rivals in the region, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt, lack the economic and technological capabilities and the necessary motivation to develop nuclear weapons. This argument, which lessens the gravity of the Iranian threat to the region, implies that statements by senior Saudi, Turkish, and Egyptian officials, whereby an Iranian bomb would propel their governments to achieve a balance of power among the states, should be ignored.

In our assessment, the conclusion that a nuclear Iran would not lead to an arms race is based on an inadequate analysis of the relevant countries and their motivation and ability to acquire nuclear weapons once Iran has obtained them. This flawed analysis results from an approach suited to the old Middle East – before Iran acquired a nuclear bomb, before the rise of Sunni political Islam as a result of the upheaval in the Arab world, and before the United States lost some of its regional influence, a trend that will only intensify if Iran succeeds in acquiring military nuclear capabilities in spite of the US policy of prevention.

Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin is the Director of INSS. Avner Golov is the Director's research assistant.

An examination of Middle East states that are likely to develop a military nuclear program requires a look at four key factors: motivation and strategic rationale; the states' ability to bear the economic burden of a military nuclear program; the infrastructure and technological capability required for developing nuclear weapons; and the political constraints that would influence and perhaps dissuade them from acquiring military nuclear weapons – mainly relations with the United States and commitments to the nonproliferation regime. A look at these four factors with respect to three regional powers reveals that the possibility of a regional arms race is not low at all.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's leaders state openly and explicitly that a nuclear Iran will force them to act to maintain the balance of power. Turki al-Faisal, who served as head of Saudi intelligence and as Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington, claimed that "the Gulf states must acquire nuclear power if the efforts fail to persuade Iran to give up its nuclear program."[3] Dennis Ross, President Obama's former envoy to the Middle East, even quoted the threat he heard from the Saudi king during a meeting in April 2009: "If they get nuclear weapons, we will get nuclear weapons."[4] Documents published by WikiLeaks reinforce this statement.

Strategic Rationale

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran are based on rivalry and hatred that has existed for many years between the Shiites and the Sunnis and between the Arabs and the Persians. The suppression by the Saudi Wahhabi regime of the Shiite minority, which lives in the country's eastern oil region, is emblematic of relations between the Wahhabi stream of Islam and the Shiites.

This religious and ideological rivalry compounds the conflict of interests between the two states, which seek to expand their influence in the region and export their respective ideologies: the Shiite revolution for Iran, and Wahhabism for Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Iran has long threatened Arab aspirations to expand Arab control in the Middle East and south central Asia. Therefore, Saudi Arabia, which aspires to lead the Sunni Arab bloc, sees Shiite Iran as a major threat to its interests in the region. Iran's entry into the nuclear club will force the Saudi royal house to attain a strategic balance of power. Indeed, Saudi officials have

of late deviated from former practice and begun to work overtly to foil the Iranian nuclear program by pressuring Western countries to act against Iran and by increasing their oil output as an alternative to Iranian oil, in order to tighten the sanctions on Tehran.

Economics and Resources

Saudi Arabia is a regional and even world economic and financial power. It is the largest oil exporter in the world, it is third in the world in foreign currency reserves, and it has the largest economy of the Arab states. In April 2010, the Saudi king ordered establishment of a "nuclear city" at a cost of over $100 billion. The declared goal of the project is to examine all aspects of nuclear development.[5] The scope of this project illustrates that the economy of oil-rich Saudi Arabia would enable it to build a nuclear program if it wished. Furthermore, the resources that the royal house could allocate for such a venture, if deemed necessary, could greatly shorten the process of advancing the project.

Technological Infrastructure

Saudi Arabia's capabilities in the nuclear realm are not clear, and there are some hints that Saudi Arabia has attempted to develop an independent nuclear program for military purposes. After his defection to the United States, for example, the first secretary of the Saudi Arabian mission to the United Nations claimed that in the early 1970s, Saudi Arabia established a military nuclear program.[6] While Saudi Arabia cooperates with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it is not a signatory to the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which mandates rigorous and frequent testing of non-nuclear states or states whose nuclear activity is limited. In addition, Saudi Arabia has never relinquished its right to enrich uranium independently.

However, Saudi Arabia also has alternatives to its own technological capabilities. If the Saudi regime decides to achieve military nuclear capability, it can simply purchase it. The royal house's close connections with the regime in Pakistan have prompted a number of reports on Saudi involvement in funding Pakistan's nuclear program. Saudi Arabia can take advantage of these connections in order to purchase ready-made weapons.[7] Aharon Zeevi Farkash, former head of IDF Military Intelligence, addressed this possibility already in 2003 in the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee: "The Saudis are

conducting negotiations with Pakistan over buying nuclear warheads for their surface-to-surface missiles...They have decided that they will tip the balance of fear in light of Iran's armament, and intend to station the Pakistani warheads on Saudi soil."[8] That same year, the *Guardian* reported on an official Saudi document showing that the kingdom was considering acquiring nuclear weapons in order to deter threats from Iran.[9] The document likewise revealed a fear of dependence on the US nuclear umbrella. There are also reports that the issue arose in meetings between Saudi and Pakistani leaders.[10] Those who claim that Iranian nuclear weapons will not bring about an arms race do not address these considerations with the requisite seriousness.

In the early 1990s, unbeknownst to the United States, Saudi Arabia purchased 36 CSS2 surface-to-surface missiles from China, which are capable of carrying nuclear warheads up to 3,000 kilometers. Just as it purchased these missiles, Saudi Arabia can also acquire nuclear technologies in any of three ways: purchase of operational nuclear weapons; purchase of technological support that would significantly reduce the time required to produce a bomb; or purchase of services by the Pakistani military, which would deploy nuclear weapons in the kingdom for purposes of deterrence. Since Pakistan is a Muslim country, such a move would help deflect criticism leveled at the regime for its dependence on US support and criticism of the international pressure, and in turn could lead to a Saudi violation of the NPT.

Political Constraints

Iranian military nuclear capability would pose a dilemma for Saudi Arabia, namely, reconciling the Saudi interest in maintaining ties with Washington with the interest in maintaining a strategic balance of power with Tehran. The document revealed by the *Guardian* shows that the Saudis fear dependence on decisions by the White House. Indeed, a widely accepted theory assumes that extended deterrence by means of a third party significantly harms threat credibility.[11] Furthermore, any attempt to adopt models of extended deterrence for the Middle East will encounter two main problems: the guarantees lack credibility among the recipient countries, and there is a limited willingness on the part of the providers of the guarantees to realize the threat.[12]

In theory, two models of extended deterrence are relevant to the Saudi case: a bilateral US commitment to the Saudi regime and the

establishment of a Gulf security system. However, various analysts point out that a regional system is not relevant in the Saudi case because of the need for increased integration among Gulf states; at the same time, it is difficult to see how the bilateral model can offer a credible guarantee.[13] There is very little willingness on the part of the American people to go to war in order to defend an ally. US policy, with its declared focus on East Asia rather than the Middle East, also dilutes the guarantees that the United States can provide to the Saudi regime. American policy in connection with the so-called "Arab Spring," and in particular, President Obama's abandonment of Mubarak and Ben Ali and their pro-Western regimes, has further undermined the reliability of the American umbrella in Riyadh's eyes. In addition, there is much opposition in Saudi society to the regime's willingness to rely on Western forces when it comes to maintaining Saudi interests. These shortcomings indicate that even if Washington proposes expanding its bilateral nuclear umbrella, Riyadh is liable to limit its dependence on the United States. Unlike various analysts who propose an American umbrella as a solution to an Iranian nuclear bomb, Riyadh does not consider an American umbrella to be reliable.

An international failure to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb is likely to reduce American opposition to possession of nuclear weapons by US allies in the region. This does not mean that the United States will seek to promote such a move, but US opposition is likely to diminish, as is the price that the Saudi regime will be asked to pay for its policy. In any case, in the past Saudi Arabia has proven its determination to promote its interests even in the face of US pressure, for example toward operations against global terror, in its ties with China, and in suppressing the uprising in Bahrain. The Saudi regime reportedly made clear in private talks with US and British officials that it was prepared to harness all its economic, diplomatic, and security resources for an international campaign to confront Iranian regional aspirations, and if the campaign failed, for an independent effort.[14] Given the importance that the Saudis attribute to their regional interests, it

> If Iran succeeds in developing nuclear weapons, even though it is a party to the NPT, Riyadh is likely to consider the treaty superfluous. Saudi Arabia may contend that it has the right to attain a balance of power with Tehran, and it might consider itself no longer committed to the NPT.

would appear that the Western threat to Saudi Arabia is secondary in the kingdom's considerations.

If Iran succeeds in developing nuclear weapons, even though it is a party to the NPT, Riyadh is likely to consider the treaty superfluous. If Iran obtains nuclear weapons in spite of the international campaign against it, Saudi Arabia will contend that it has the right to maintain its security and a balance of power with Tehran and might no longer consider itself committed to the NPT. Saudi Arabia's sense of its legitimate right to purchase military nuclear capability would increase, and international deterrence of violations of the nonproliferation regime would ebb. Moreover, frustration with the international community and the erosion of the motivation and ability of Western states, headed by the United States, to stop such a move, are likely to enhance the Saudi drive to a nuclear weapon.[15]

Overall, then, the attempts to minimize the proliferation that might occur in connection with an Iranian military nuclear capability are not persuasive. There is no satisfactory explanation why the Saudis would act differently and against their declared interests in a scenario in which they face such a significant threat, precisely when the political constraints are of themselves shrinking: the American leverage for preventing regional proliferation of weapons is weaker, and the future of a weakened nonproliferation regime hangs in the balance. Saudi Arabia also has the resources to purchase the technology or the nuclear weapons themselves within a short time. Therefore, it appears that for the Saudis, a nuclear weapon in Tehran's hands would realize the scenario described by Mitchell Reiss, who warns that the nonproliferation regime in the Middle East might collapse as a result of a single state arming itself.[16]

Turkey

Strategic Rationale

Turkey, a rising state whose leadership openly aims to restore Turkey to a regional power with global influence, will likely be a principal rival of Iran for leadership, hegemony, and influence in the Middle East and the entire Muslim world. Seeking to disseminate the "Turkish model" as a framework that allows the "proper integration" of Western values and the values of moderate Islam, Turkey proposes a model of political Islam that brings East and West closer, thereby strengthening both its own stability and the stability of the region. Turkey's aspiration challenges the Iranian

drive to disseminate the "Shiite revolutionary model," which advocates the undermining of existing regimes in most Middle East states because of their secular or Sunni character; Iranian support for the rule of clerics; and opposition to Western values and influence in the Middle East. At a time when the so-called "Arab Spring" has demonstrated the failure of the existing models in the Middle East and undermined attitudes toward the West and its values, competition over which ideology will be the dominant successor has become more acute than in the past. Compounding this ideological clash are the rivalry between Sunna (Turkey) and Shia (Iran), and the conflict of interests between the states regarding energy markets and trade routes in the Middle East and the Caspian Sea basin. Differing attitudes toward the slaughter by Bashar Assad in Syria, and toward the governments of Iraq, Armenia, and Azerbaijan embody other conflicts of interests that fuel the rivalry between the two regional powers.

An Iranian nuclear bomb will likely both lead to Iranian strategic superiority and harm Turkish interests in the region. Predictably, therefore, Turkish government officials have publicly opposed the Iranian military nuclear program.[17] In December 2010 the Turkish Foreign Minister underscored that if Iran withdrew from its international commitments as set out in the NPT, Turkey would oppose it even before the United States would.[18] In private, some Turkish officials even threatened that Iranian nuclear weapons would force Turkey to launch its own military nuclear program: in 2009, a Turkish Foreign Ministry official claimed that once Iran acquires nuclear weapons, Turkey will be forced to arm itself with a nuclear bomb.[19] Although this was not an official statement by the Turkish government, it is consistent with the results of a survey by a Turkish research institute in late March 2012, which revealed that 54 percent of Turks believe that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, Turkey must develop them as well, rather than relying on NATO.[20] This sense in the government and on the Turkish "street" indicates that Iran's possession of nuclear weapons would force Turkey to consider developing its own capabilities.

Economics and Resources

The Turkish economy can undoubtedly shoulder the costs of a nuclear program, as have states in a much worse economic situation, such as Pakistan, North Korea, and Iraq. Turkey's economy is among the twenty strongest in the world, and the largest in the Middle East. It is expected

to continue to grow because of its large work force, which is cheap and young, relative to Europe, and because of its central location between Asia and Europe.[21]

Technological Infrastructure

While cooperation between NATO and the Turkish military has provided Turkey with nuclear weapons experience relating to storage, equipment, and military training, Turkey lacks nuclear experience and the necessary technological infrastructures to develop its own nuclear program. It launched a civilian nuclear program in 2010 after signing an agreement with Russia to construct a nuclear reactor in southern Turkey. Today the Turkish government is conducting negotiations to build its second nuclear reactor to produce electricity. After negotiations with South Korea and Japan were unsuccessful, the Turkish Minister of Energy announced at the April 2012 G-20 summit in Seoul that a Canadian company is interested in the project.[22] He added that Turkey is planning to promote nuclear energy cooperation with China. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has declared that Turkey will invest over $100 billion in the coming decade to build nuclear reactors (Turkey's GNP is over $1 trillion) in order to reduce the import of energy from Iran and Russia.

In recent years Turkey has also strengthened its ties with Pakistan. The two Islamic states maintained good relations when the Turkish army was the main political force in the country. Erdoğan's visit to Pakistan last month and the significant increase in trade between the countries in the past five years[23] are an indication of these close ties between Ankara and Islamabad, which could be used by Turkey if it seeks to take advantage of Pakistani knowhow or weapons in order to convert its civilian nuclear program into a military program.

Political Constraints

The Turkish political dilemma regarding a nuclear program will mainly involve the question of relations with NATO in general and the United States in particular. According to assessments, there are some ninety US-NATO nuclear weapons stored today in Turkey.[24] Many claim that if the Turkish government proves to have a military nuclear program, Turkey will be deprived of this privilege. Therefore, Turkey will seek to avoid harming its relations with NATO, and especially the United States, and will choose not to develop a military nuclear program.[25] The Turkish

response will be closer relations with NATO and increasing the US commitment to the security of Turkish interests.[26]

However, development of independent Turkish nuclear capabilities would reduce the Turkish government's dependence on US policy in the region and prevent significant damage to Turkey's regional prestige if the US government decided to withdraw its weapons from the country. Such a decision is not expected to be made before Iran's military nuclearization. Nonetheless, a heated debate is underway on this issue in both Washington and Istanbul,[27] and there is liable to be a reversal in certain scenarios, especially if policy differences between Washington and Ankara are sharpened. Turkey is highly suspicious of the Western and NATO commitment; it has even criticized NATO's attitude to Turkish interests a number of times in the context of deployment of defensive systems for Turkey and Kurdish terrorist activity in the country. In a public opinion poll, only 8 percent claimed that NATO could be depended on if Iran acquired nuclear weapons. As in the Saudi case, suspicions among Turkey's decision makers, academics, military leaders, and the civilian populations are liable to constitute a significant obstacle to a US attempt to implement extended deterrence.

However, Turkey is a signatory to the NPT and the Additional Protocol. Its relations with the United States and Europe and its policy supporting the use of soft power will also be major considerations for the Turkish government when it confronts an Iranian nuclear bomb. In other words, this constraint will have greater significance in Turkey's case than in Saudi Arabia's, and any decision regarding nuclear ambitions will be shaped by the relationship between Turkey and the West, and in particular, the United States; by the deterrent power of the nonproliferation regime on the "day after" the Iranian bomb; and by Turkey's perception of its interests in the region.

> The competition with Iran for hegemony in the Middle East and the Muslim world, Turkey's impressive economic capabilities, its alienation from Europe, and its suspicion toward Washington's policy will likely spur Turkey to consider the strategic benefit of building a nuclear force against its adversary, Tehran.

Even so, in certain scenarios the Turkish aspiration to independence and regional hegemony would be a significant impetus to develop nuclear capabilities, while taking controlled risks. The competition with Iran for hegemony and influence in the Middle

East and the Muslim world, Turkey's impressive economic capabilities, its alienation from Europe, and its suspicion toward Washington's policy, along with the loss of the rationale of cooperation with NATO vs. the Soviet Union, will allow Turkey to overcome its lack of a nuclear infrastructure with relative ease and consider the strategic benefit of building a nuclear force against its adversary, Tehran.

Egypt

In 2010, the Egyptian foreign minister warned that a nuclear bomb would drag the Middle East into an arms race, and that Egypt would like to prevent Iran "from forcing the Arabs to engage in a [nuclear arms] race with it."[28]

The following analysis of the Egyptian case is based primarily on the Egyptian approach during the old regime, given that the military is still a central player in Egypt's strategic considerations and its national defense policy, and the new regime has not yet stabilized and formulated an updated policy on the issue. The Egyptian government is expected to deal mainly with domestic challenges, not foreign challenges. However, the caustic speech by Egyptian President Morsi at the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Tehran, and the clarification by his spokesman that Egypt does not intend to renew ties with Iran, which were cut in 1979,[29] indicate that relations between Cairo and Tehran cannot be expected to warm significantly in the near future, in spite of Egyptian declarations calling for renewed relations with Tehran. When required to confront the Iranian issue, the new regime will likely base its position on strategic assessments deeply ingrained in Egypt from past decades.

Strategic Rationale

In 1992, the Egyptian Defense Minister claimed that the Iranian nuclear threat was worse than the threat from Israel. In 2010, according to WikiLeaks, Egyptian Deputy Defense Minister Mohamed al-Assar stated that "Egypt views Iran as a threat to the region."[30] Why did Egypt under Mubarak consider the Iranian nuclear program to be a serious strategic threat? As in the Saudi and Turkish cases, the answer to this question involves a mix of diplomatic-political and ideological-historical considerations. First, the interests of Egypt, which considers itself a leading Sunni Arab country with regional influence, have not infrequently clashed with the interests of Shiite Iran, with is own

aspirations to regional hegemony. Like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, Egypt fears that nuclear weapons in Tehran's possession would mean the loss of its leadership position within the Arab world, the loss of seniority within the Muslim world, and a risk to Egyptian interests in the Middle East. The competition for regional hegemony between Egypt and Iran has resulted in a bad relationship between the two, to put it mildly.

Egypt was troubled not only by Iranian influence in the Arab world, but even more so by Iran's influence near Egypt's borders. In 2009, Abu al-Gheit, Mubarak's Foreign Minister, declared publicly that Egypt was disturbed by Iran's increased influence in the region.[31] For this reason, Egypt under Mubarak worked against Hizbollah and Hamas, which were seen as subversive Iranian proxies in a region under Egyptian influence, and even in Egypt itself. Likewise since the fall of the Mubarak regime, Egypt has not freed itself of its suspicions toward organizations financed and directed by Iran.

The rise of radical Islam after Mubarak's fall is not expected to improve relations between the two countries. On the contrary: the increased political power of the radical Islamic parties is expected to strengthen religious identity in Sunni Egypt. The hard line taken by some representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt against Tehran is a sign of this trend.[32] Therefore, the continued strengthening of religious identity in Egypt will further highlight the gaps between the Sunni character of the Egyptian government and Iranian ambitions to export the Shiite revolution. When asked in an interview about his position on the Iranian nuclear program, Egypt's President responded that the problem can be solved, and not through war.[33] In other words, Egypt under Morsi is still opposed to the Iranian nuclear program. Morsi's willingness to speak out publicly against Iranian policy in Syria on the podium in Tehran last month could be a sign of things to come in relations between Cairo and Tehran.

Economics and Resources

If Egypt's development of a military nuclear program depended on its economic situation, the prospects would seemingly be slim. Egypt's economy has experienced an ongoing crisis since the change in government, which has caused foreign investors to flee and led to large government expenditures. Unemployment in Egypt is currently over 25 percent (in a country in which 60 percent of the citizens are under the

age of 30), the tourism industry has been severely damaged by the events in the country, the national debt has skyrocketed, and foreign currency reserves are low.[34] Nonetheless, it was recently reported that President Morsi, in meetings with the Egyptian community in China, announced[35] his intention to revive the plan to build nuclear reactors in Egypt and even asked for Chinese assistance in building four reactors by 2025.[36] Indeed, in 2006 the Muslim Brotherhood spokesman stated that the Egyptian people are prepared to die of hunger in order to obtain nuclear weapons.[37] North Korea has proven that a regime that adheres to its goal and impoverishes an entire population can obtain nuclear weapons even if international sanctions are imposed on it.

Technological Infrastructure

The Egyptian nuclear program was launched in 1954 after President Gamal Abdel Nasser signed a cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union to build a number of reactors in the country. During the 1960s, Nasser invested significant resources in developing nuclear technological knowhow and attempted to build advanced infrastructures for a nuclear industry. Over these years, Egypt also developed ballistic capabilities for carrying weapons.

However, after its defeat in the 1967 Six Day War, Egypt began to promote a policy of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons, a policy that gained full expression in the early 1980s and continues to this day. As part of this policy, Egypt signed the NPT and reduced its investment in its existing infrastructures.[38] Anwar Sadat sought to promote a limited civilian nuclear program together with his new allies, the Americans, but he encountered many obstacles. Mubarak also failed to advance the Egyptian nuclear program, and after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, he froze the program entirely. As a result, advisors and nuclear experts left Egypt for Iraq and Canada. In 2004, the IAEA declared that after examining the nuclear research in Egypt, it concluded that Egypt had not carried out nuclear testing. In 2006, the Mubarak government announced that it wished to revive the nuclear program for peaceful purposes. However, the program did not progress,

The changes Egypt is currently undergoing are liable to undermine the three factors that have prevented it from choosing the nuclear path thus far: relations with the United States, the peace treaty with Israel, and its regional power.

in spite of declarations to that effect by Mubarak's son Gamal from the podium at the party conference.[39] Nevertheless, in 2007, Jordan's King Abdullah claimed that he feared a nuclear Iran would cause Egypt to develop its nuclear program.[40]

Of the three states discussed here, Egypt has the most advanced infrastructure for a civilian and military nuclear program. Egypt today has two research nuclear reactors and possesses considerable nuclear knowledge and experience. Experts believe that it is one of the most advanced countries in the region in its nuclear knowledge. For this reason, already a decade ago it was argued that "if Egypt were to make the political decision to go nuclear, it would find the means of overcoming these obstacles [technological and economic], as other proliferators have done."[41] Therefore, if Morsi does in fact revive the Egyptian nuclear program, as he declared he would last month, he will find a better infrastructure than in Saudi Arabia or Turkey.

Political Constraints

The changes Egypt is currently undergoing are liable to undermine the three factors that have prevented it from choosing the nuclear path thus far: relations with the United States, the peace treaty with Israel, and its power in the region. First, US pressure since the signing of the Camp David accords has served as an impetus for the Egyptian regime to abandon its nuclear ambitions. Leaders of the protest in Egypt opposed and continue to oppose not only the Mubarak regime, but also its allies and its pro-American policy. The negative attitude of the Egyptian "street" and the Islamist elites toward Washington is reflected in pictures of the American flag burned in Cairo and harsh statements by Egyptian members of parliament on the regime's relationship with Washington. A poll conducted in Egypt in late March 2012 revealed that 56 percent of the Egyptian public opposes improved relations with the United States.[42] The deterioration in bilateral relations was reflected in the temporary freeze on US aid to Egypt, and the United States fears that a continued deterioration in relations will lead to reduced US influence over Egyptian foreign policy. Limited US influence will harm the ability of the United States to prevent Egypt from engaging in an arms race if its Iranian adversary achieves superiority in this area.

Second, the rise of radical Islam has also damaged Egypt's relations with Israel, and those who advocate annulling the Egyptian-Israeli peace

treaty are gaining power. For decades, Egypt has coped with the strategic assumption that Israel possesses nuclear capabilities. However, the peace treaty and the responsible behavior of Israel, which maintains a non-threatening policy of ambiguity, allowed Egypt to avoid a nuclear arms race. If the peace treaty is annulled, or even if it is watered down and there is renewed hostility and suspicion between Cairo and Jerusalem, this could encourage the Egyptian government to work to acquire military nuclear capabilities in order to maintain a balance of power with Israel and with Iran, Egypt's main rivals in the region.

Ultimately, one of the main factors in Egyptian policy under the Mubarak regime was the fear of risks that would threaten Egypt's economy and its regional power. However, the events of the past year and a half have already led to serious damage to Egypt's economy, status, and power in the region. Analysts who claim that Egypt will not abandon its current nuclear policy argue that in light of this difficult situation, Egypt will not incur further risks by deciding to develop military nuclear weapons. However, it is precisely when the power of the Egyptian regime has been undermined both in Egypt and abroad, and its relations with its allies are unstable, that it is more likely than in the past to take risks because it currently has less to lose. Furthermore, military nuclear capability is likely to be seen as an element that could restore Egypt's prestige, as an Egyptian Foreign Ministry official suggested during the discussion of the need for Mubarak's nuclear initiative in 2006.[43] In other words, it is because of its weakness that Egypt is likely to see a nuclear Iran as an unprecedented threat that requires a decisive strategic move.

Those who seek to minimize the threat of an Iran with military nuclear capability are mistaken in their assessment that the nonproliferation regime in the region will likely not be undermined.

One expert on the history of the Egyptian nuclear program has pointed to the connection between the future of Egypt's nuclear program and the head of the government.[44] The argument reasons that just as it was mainly Mubarak's decision to adhere to the non-nuclear track that shaped Egypt's nuclear policy, the identity of Egypt's next leader will be a major factor in shaping Egyptian policy. Therefore, although it still appears unlikely that Egypt will decide to develop nuclear capabilities for military purposes, changes in the unstable Egyptian system that undermine the current military approach guiding Egypt's decision makers are liable to increase

the likelihood that this will occur in the short term, notwithstanding Egypt's difficult economic situation.

Conclusion

Daniel Pipes has argued that public statements by Arab leaders in the Middle East must be analyzed in order to predict their policies.[45] A similar approach is reflected in the analysis presented here, leading to conclusions shared by Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton[46] on the chances of a regional nuclear arms race (table 1). Thus the clear Saudi threats of an arms race in response to the development of Iranian nuclear weapons were found to be credible, with the most likely scenario being the purchase of outside nuclear technology. The Turkish opposition to Iran's military nuclear program is consistent with the conclusion that Turkey will face a strategic dilemma, that its decision will be influenced mainly by its relations with Washington, and that there is a reasonable threat that it will become a proliferator in the short term. Egypt's vacillation shows that there is a reasonable threat that it too will become a proliferator if the current trends continue: a regime weakened internally and regionally, undermined relations between Cairo and Washington, and increased hostility between Egypt and Israel. Since the situation in Egypt is still not stable, this threat can certainly not be dismissed.

Table 1. Key Factors in Developing a Military Nuclear Program

	Saudi Arabia	Turkey	Egypt
Motivation	Very high	Medium (subject to relations with the United States)	High (vis-à-vis Israel as well as Iran)
Resources	No problem	No problem	Problem
Technology	Apparently external	Under construction	Existing
Political Constraints	Little influence	Major influence on relations with United States	Erosion of inhibiting factors
Bottom Line	Immediate threat	Probable threat, subject to the nature of relations with the United States	Today, low level of threat, but significant threat if there is an extremist Islamic regime

Those who seek to minimize the threat of an Iran with military nuclear capability are mistaken in their assessment that the nonproliferation regime in the region will likely not be undermined. It would appear that they are hostage to the old approach − antedating a nuclear Iran, the upheavals in the Arab world, the tectonic changes that have occurred in the Middle East, and the weakened regional United States stature. The United States will be further weakened if its government fails to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, in spite of its public statements.

The race could also encourage other countries that were not discussed in this article but that have taken steps toward military nuclearization in the past to arm themselves, such as Iraq, Syria, and Libya. The ramifications of Iran's military nuclearization extend beyond the Middle East, increasing the likelihood that the global nonproliferation regime will be undermined and that an unplanned, uncontrolled, and uncontrollable nuclear confrontation will take place. The gravity of a regional arms race in response to Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons makes it necessary for the relevant decision makers to devote serious attention to the issue, even if there were little likelihood of its realization. However, as indicated by this analysis, it is not at all unlikely that this scenario will take place. Therefore, those who deal with confronting the Iranian military nuclear threat must include the grave consequences of a regional arms race in their considerations.

Notes

1 For example, the testimony of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton before the Senate on May 20, 2009. See "Clinton: Middle East May Start Arms Race if Iran Gets Nukes," Voice of America, May 20, 2009.

2 See for example Yair Evron, "They're Not Running to Acquire Nuclear Capabilities," *Haaretz*, August 22, 2012; Steve Chapman, "The Arms Race that Won't Happen: Iran and the Phony Proliferation Scare," *Chicago Tribune*, July 8, 2012; Steven A. Cook, "Don't Fear a Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East," *Foreign Policy*, April 2, 2012.

3 Ran Dagoni, "Saudi Arabia vs. Iran: We'll Use the Oil Weapon because of the Nuclear Program," *Globes*, June 22, 2012.

4 Chemi Shalev, "Dennis Ross: Saudi King Vowed to Obtain Nuclear Bomb after Iran," *Haaretz*, May 30, 2012, http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/dennis-ross-saudi-king-vowed-to-obtain-nuclear-bomb-after-iran-1.433294.

5 Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Country Profile, Saudi Arabia," http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/saudi-arabia/nuclear/.

6 Yoel Guzansky, "Nuclear Programs in the Gulf," in Uzi Rabi and Yoel Guzansky, eds., *The Gulf States: Between Iran and the West* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2012), p. 34.

7 Yoel Guzansky details the nature of relations between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, including the Pakistani commitment to assist Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in confronting the uprisings in their countries in the spring of 2011. See Yoel Guzansky, "Saudi Arabia's Nuclear Options," in Emily B. Landau and Anat Kurz, eds., *Arms Control Dilemmas: Focus on the Middle East*, Memorandum 122 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, September 2012), pp. 73–90, http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291346905935.pdf.

8 Ibid., p. 86.

9 Ewen MacAskill and Ian Traynor, "Saudis Consider Nuclear Bomb," *Guardian*, September 18, 2003, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/sep/18/nuclear.saudiarabia.

10 Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Country Profile, Saudi Arabia."

11 Various reserachers address the problem of extended deterrence credibility. See P. K. Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debate," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 25-48; Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 19; Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 35.

12 Carlo Masala, "Extended Deterrence in the Middle East: A Fuzzy Concept that Might Work?" *Strategic Assessment* 14, no. 4 (2012): 115-22, http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291329721373.pdf.

13 Masala, "Extended Deterrence," pp. 121-22; Zachary K. Goldman and Mira Rapp-Hooper, "Can a New 'NATO' Deter Iran?" *The Diplomat*, July 31, 2012.

14 Turki al-Faisal conveyed this message in private meetings with British and American military officials. See Dagoni, "Saudi Arabia vs. Iran."

15 Mustafa Alani, "How Iran Nuclear Standoff Looks from Saudi Arabia," *Bloomberg*, February 16, 2012, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-02-16/how-iran-nuclear-standoff-looks-from-saudi-arabia-mustafa-alani.html.

16 Reiss warns that there are scenarios in which a single state arming itself is liable to bring about the collapse of the nonproliferation regime in areas that are not stable, including the Middle East, as a result of technological development and the increased motivation of regimes in these areas to take risks in order to promote military nuclear programs. Mitchell B. Reiss, "The Nuclear Tipping Point: Prospects for a World of Many Nuclear Weapons States," in Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell B. Reiss, eds., *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider their Nuclear Choices* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2004), pp. 3–4.

17 While in most instances Turkish officials have Iran in mind in calling for a Middle East free of nuclear weapons, even though their declared focus is the threat from Israeli nuclear weapons, the Turks have also made clear their

opposition to Iranian nuclear weapons when asked to address the issue in detail.

18 Yoel Guzansky and Gallia Lindenstrauss, "Turkey and Iran: The Politics of Strange Bedfellows," in *Strategic Assessment* 14, no. 1 (2011): 95-108, p. 98, http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291304500911.pdf.

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21 An analysis by Goldman Sachs predicts that Turkey will be the fourteenth largest economy in the world in 2025.

22 Comments by the Turkish Foreign Minister as reported in *Hurriyet Daily News*. Anatolia News Agency, "Candu Also up for Nuclear Plant Deal," *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 21, 2012, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/candu-also-up-for-nuclear-plant-deal.aspx?pageID=238&nID=18921&NewsCatID=348.

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Weapons in Turkey." On the Turkish side, questions have been raised concerning how essential it is to have an independent foreign policy. See for example the comprehensive study by the Edam Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies in Istanbul, "The Turkish Model for Transition to Nuclear Power," 2011, http://www.edam.org.tr/edamnukleer/edamreport.pdf.

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When Neorealism Meets the Middle East:
Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons in (Regional) Context

Emily B. Landau

More than "another neorealist," Professor Kenneth Waltz is the father of neorealism, or structural realism, which he introduced to the world with the publication of his book *Theory of International Politics* in 1979.[1] Since then, this theory has figured prominently in much international relations research. Some of the tenets of this theory have become so deeply entrenched among researchers and experts in the field that they are often assumed to be universal truths.

But the recent publication of Waltz's article "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb" in *Foreign Affairs*[2] demonstrates that when strict neorealist theoretical prescripts and assumptions are employed in the analysis of the real world scenario of Iran's drive to develop a nuclear weapons capability, they can come up dangerously short. Waltz's concise article provides an opportunity to see how the application of neorealist assumptions can be a problematic guide for sifting through the complex interstate relations and rivalries in the Middle East, which often proceed at cross purposes, and even in direct contradiction to what might be assumed. "Security," "stability," and "balancing" − conceptual building blocks of neorealism − take on meanings in this region that can defy the attempts to apply the neat and parsimonious neorealist theory in a conceptually pure manner.[3]

In one respect at least, Waltz's assessment of the nature of Iran's nuclear program is grounded firmly in reality. He does not pay lip service to those who are banking on Iranian assurances that its nuclear intentions are indeed peaceful. Rather, he relates in a matter of fact manner to Iran's

Dr. Emily B. Landau is a senior research fellow at INSS.

"pursuit of a nuclear weapon." His assessment of Iran's nuclear activity is shared by a growing number of analysts and pundits who over the past year or two have joined those who have embraced this position for years. The unfortunate conclusion of many of the latecomers, however, is that there is no longer anything that can be done about Iran's advances, and the world must instead begin focusing on how it will live with a nuclear Iran.[4] Many of them subscribe to the notion that nuclear states can be successfully contained (through deterrence); they emphasize that it is possible to adjust to the new reality, in the same way that the world grew accustomed to nuclear China, Pakistan, and North Korea.[5]

Waltz agrees, and then takes issues a step further: not only does he view the scenario of a nuclear capable Iran as inevitable and deterrable, but in his view this scenario is actually the best possible outcome of the decade-long crisis with Iran over its nuclear activities, because it will restore balance and stability to the region. Coming from a leading and highly influential international relations scholar who is an authoritative voice in the field, this is not a conclusion to be taken lightly or simply brushed aside.

The following analysis challenges Waltz's thinking on his terms by highlighting the relevant history of nuclear development and interstate relations in the Middle East, which raises questions with regard to many of his assumptions. It dwells on the reasons underlying the attempts by regional states to develop nuclear weapons programs; how these states have related to Israel's nuclear policy over the years, including steps Israel has taken to stop other states from going nuclear; and the overall importance of focusing on the nature of interstate relations in the Middle East in any attempt to explain their strategic calculations, including with regard to nuclear weapons development. Against this backdrop, it will become clear why the particular case of Iran becoming a nuclear state defies simplistic neorealist prescripts, and that the conclusions derived are certainly not the best solution for this ongoing crisis.

Waltz's Argument

The linchpin of Waltz's argument is the imperative of international (and regional) stability, and the supporting notion of balancing. According to this line of thought, once Israel upset the balance in the Middle East – when it presumably became a nuclear state – it was only a matter of time before one of the other states in the region would pursue the same route,

in order to restore the balance. Restoring balance in his mind is essential for restoring regional stability, and stability serves regional security, which is the driving force of international politics. Indeed for Waltz, the true puzzle is why Israel's monopoly – viewed by him as a clear source of regional instability – lasted so long. In his words, "It is Israel's nuclear arsenal, not Iran's desire for one, that has contributed most to the current crisis. Power, after all, begs to be balanced."[6]

In supporting the central importance of balancing, Waltz predicts not only that a nuclear Iran will redress the instability caused by Israel, but that the stabilizing effect of the new deterrence will then prevail and no other state in the region will have an incentive to acquire a nuclear capability. This assumption implies that for Waltz, politics in the Middle East pits Israel against all the other states, that these states are unified in a common strategic interest that focuses on a sole enemy, Israel, and that to restore the balance with Israel only one of these states need acquire nuclear weapons.

A closer examination of some salient facts and developments in the history of Middle Eastern politics reveals the tenuousness of these assumptions.

Nuclear Weapons Pursuit in the Middle East

The reality of Middle Eastern politics is that states in this region do not sport identical, interchangeable strategic priorities, nor is the overriding regional dynamic a story of "Israel vs. all the others." Each state in the region has its own set of interests and threat perceptions; moreover, interstate understandings and alliances that have emerged over the years are not static, rather shift in line with regional political developments. A recent illustration of this well established regional pattern is Turkey and Iran. Two years ago it might have seemed that these states were embarking on a closer relationship – perhaps a new alliance – that would pose a new threat to Israel. But the two states are also strategic rivals, vying for regional influence. With the rivalry simmering just below the surface, it is not surprising that their opposing positions on the civil war in Syria have lately brought their differences to the fore in a quite visible manner.

Israel itself became much more aware of the complex set of intersecting interests that characterizes the Middle East in the early 1990s, with the regional forums that were set up under the auspices of the

Madrid peace process. In the framework of those multilateral meetings, Israeli participants witnessed the different interests and concerns that came into play for the different Arab states. The fact that the Israelis were not facing a unified and monolithic Arab bloc also opened their eyes to unexpected opportunities for cooperation.

Zeroing in on the nuclear realm reveals that the states in the region that have attempted to develop military nuclear capabilities (all in defiance of their NPT commitment to remain non-nuclear) have not been focused primarily, if at all, on a need to balance Israel strategically. Prestige and regional politics have played a prominent role in their thinking,[7] and when security issues have arisen, they have focused on other states as well. Iraq's nuclear program was driven by a combination of prestige, a desire to deter Iran, and a drive to create a balance with Israel. The Gulf-specific dynamic impacting on both Iran and Iraq became more pronounced when Iran restarted its military nuclear program in the 1980s in clear response to Iraq's program, and in the context of their eight-year war in the 1980s.

As for Libya, in the 1970s Qaddafi was driven to buy or develop a nuclear bomb mainly for reasons of prestige and regional standing in the Arab world. While the Israel issue was mentioned in this frame,

> the strategic dimension of going nuclear was not particularly thought-through and, arguably…concerns about prestige and political ambitions initially weighed more heavily than military concerns in the regime's motives for pursuing nuclear weapons. Indeed, the nuclear project was one of several Libyan technological acquisition efforts that seem to have been driven by a desire to be perceived as a country possessing cutting-edge military technology rather than pragmatic assessments of specific security problems and military needs.[8]

By the mid 1980s Israel was even less of a factor in Libya's thinking, as its attention turned to maintaining its security in the face of US attacks. And by the 1990s Libya was beginning to reassess whether the nuclear effort was worthwhile in light of its dubious effectiveness as a deterrent to attack.[9]

Syria's nuclear program is still very much a mystery, but as far as Israel is concerned, for years Syria seemed to regard its chemical weapons as a sufficient deterrent. It is not known what the motivation

behind the nuclear program was, beyond the fact that it was carried out with the assistance of North Korea. But in light of Assad's close relations with Iran and Iran's ongoing cooperation with North Korea in the non-conventional realm, it is likely that the North Korea-Iran-Syria triangle was more relevant to this decision than a Syrian interest in balancing Israel.

The regional state that had the strongest motivation to go down the nuclear route in direct response to Israel, and in fact considered the option in the early 1960s when it set to work on a crash ballistic missile program with German assistance, is Egypt. By the late 1960s, however, Egypt had abandoned this missile project, and ratification of the NPT in 1981 underscored Egypt's decision not to actively pursue a military nuclear program. Thereafter, its fervent campaign to have Israel join the NPT indicated its strong interest in neutralizing Israel's assumed nuclear capabilities, but through a diplomatic campaign. Moreover, the rationale was not a security concern vis-à-vis Israel per se, as evidenced by Egypt signing a peace treaty in 1979 without conditioning it on Israel joining the NPT. Rather Egypt had regional leadership concerns that it perceived were challenged by Israel's qualitative strategic edge. In the 1990s, rather than balancing Israel, Egypt hoped to "cut Israel down to size" so that it did not interfere with Egyptian efforts to reassert its leadership vis-à-vis the Arab states.[10]

Significantly, states in the Middle East have also not necessarily been on the same page with regard to nuclear issues, and certainly not as a unified group opposing Israel.[11] Not only did states in the region not view Syria's nuclear program as a collective balance to Israel; many did not want to see Syria acquire a military nuclear capability any more than Israel. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and others were silent after what was presumably an Israeli strike on the nuclear site in September 2007; while not openly supporting this move, their lack of condemnation of Israel was quite noteworthy. By now it is also well known that there is considerable opposition and fear regarding Iran's nuclear program among the Gulf states and beyond. Thus Iran becoming a nuclear weapons state is not deemed any kind of collective regional answer to Israel. Quite the opposite is the case –

Iran becoming a nuclear weapons state is not deemed any kind of collective regional answer to Israel. Quite the opposite is the case – it is viewed not only as a regional threat, but one that might require a response.

this is viewed not only as a regional threat, but one that might require a response, in a manner that has not proven to be the case with regard to Israel's nuclear option.

Israel's Nuclear Policy: Ambiguity and Deterrence of Existential Threats

Features of Israel's nuclear policy contributed to the ability of other states in the region not to feel pressure to create a balance against Israel's assumed capability, even though they were certainly not happy about Israel being a nuclear state. The most important of these is the fact that Israel (ambiguously) succeeded in communicating to them that its nuclear capability was designed solely as a deterrent against existential threats. Close examination of Israel's nuclear image until the early 1990s demonstrates that despite Israel's policy of ambiguity, the Arab states nevertheless came to an understanding of Israel's red lines in the nuclear realm. They learned that what Israel sought to deter was only a perceived challenge to its very existence.[12] The fact that Israel has been engaged in so many conventional conflicts since the time it is assumed to have crossed the nuclear threshold (late 1960s) is testimony to this.

Moreover, it could be argued that ambiguity itself − which is often attacked as a problematic lack of transparency on Israel's part − has actually served stability in the Middle East. Ambiguity did not interfere with the establishment over the years of rules of the game regarding Israel's nuclear deterrent, while at the same time it ensured that Israel maintained a very low profile in the nuclear realm and did not issue nuclear threats.[13] Transparency on Israel's part most likely would not have been interpreted as a confidence building measure, rather as a hostile move, raising regional tensions. But ambiguity enabled states to look the other way if they chose to, and as a result tensions ebbed surrounding the military implications of the nuclear issue. In the 1970s, Egypt's President Sadat said that if Israel issued a nuclear threat, it would force Egypt to respond. One can infer that if Israel remained low key, this would not force Egypt to go down the nuclear road itself. Egypt could live with it, or attempt to alter the situation by means of diplomatic pressures.[14]

"Made in Iran"

Finally, it is important to consider Iran's calculations. When neorealism replaced classic realism as the prevailing theory of international politics,

with it the concept of "security" (survival) overwhelmingly replaced Hans Morgenthau's concept of "power"[15] as the primary motivating factor for state behavior in the international sphere. But in contrast to the tendency today to assume that an essentially defensive security explanation is behind all moves in international politics, the story of Iran going nuclear is not primarily about the quest for security of a status quo state. Rather, Iran's quest for regional power and influence goes more to Morgenthau's earlier emphasis on power enhancement. Iran is a revisionist state with regional hegemonic ambitions in the Middle East, and nuclear weapons would significantly boost its ability to advance its regional aims without fear of a coercive response. No one will want to risk provoking a war with a nuclear Iran, at least not in a scenario that falls short of actual use of nuclear weapons by Iran. The danger in this regard is not that Iran might act irrationally, rather that precisely in a very rational and calculating approach Iran seeks nuclear weapons as a shield against attempts to counteract its hegemonic moves, which will necessarily come at the expense of other states in the region.

While Iran's rhetoric casts repeated aspersions on Israel, its nuclear advances have little if anything to do either with the fact that Israel is an assumed nuclear state or with an Iranian impulse specifically to balance it. What might look like an essentially Israel-Iran dynamic, especially in light of the current rhetoric on both sides, is not a bilateral nuclear balancing act. Each state is acting in accordance with its own agenda, but these agendas do not hinge in a symmetrical manner on each other.

What might look like an essentially Israel-Iran dynamic, especially in light of the current rhetoric on both sides, is not a bilateral nuclear balancing act. Each state is acting in accordance with its own agenda, but these agendas do not hinge in a symmetrical manner on each other.

In Iran's case, the source of its extreme antagonism toward Israel is grounded not in territorial claims or other historical grievances with Israel, rather in factors that Israel cannot affect: Islamic ideology and religious fervor that came to the fore with the revolution in 1979. It is not a function of the nuclear issue as such. For Israel's part, a nuclear Iran would bring neither balance nor stability. Israel fears Iran's nuclear intentions, and the fear is significantly exacerbated by the virulent rhetoric spouted regularly by the current regime. Israel's threats to use military force against Iran's nuclear installations result from that

fear. Amid extreme Iranian hostility and the significant differences in size between the two states (population and geography), the situation between Israel and a nuclear Iran would not be balanced. Moreover, in the absence of any lines of communication, the new reality would be anything but stable. Rather, it would be rife with risks of miscalculation and potentially devastating escalation.

Other states across the Middle East do not seem to subscribe any more than Israel to the prospect of a nuclear Iran bringing stability. If Iran goes nuclear, there is good reason to believe that a few additional states in the region will be strongly motivated to go down that route as well.[16] In contrast to their demonstrated lack of interest in balancing Israel, the threat perception from Iran is pronounced. During the Mubarak years, very clear statements were issued by Foreign Minister Abul-Gheit and Mubarak himself about the danger that Iran poses to the region with its tendency to meddle in the affairs of others, while working on a nuclear capability. The turmoil in Egypt over the past two years has introduced a more tempered tone regarding Iran, but Morsi too does not project a sense that he plans to rush into Iran's open arms. The basic rivalry between the two states over regional prominence is not likely to disappear. Similarly, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia was quoted in exposed Wikileaks cables several years ago urging the US to use military force against Iran's nuclear facilities in order to "cut off the head of the snake."[17]

Conclusion

Waltz's assumptions about nuclear development in the Middle East and the implications for balance and stability do not hold up to historical examination and analysis, nor do predictions about enhanced stability in the Middle East if Iran becomes a nuclear state. Israel's assumed nuclear capability, while opposed by its neighbors, has nevertheless not constituted a source of instability, nor is it the cause of the current crisis regarding Iran. Israel's low profile and policy of ambiguity in the nuclear realm, coupled with its message of existential red lines, has actually helped reduce tensions, and was generally more favorable than unfavorable to regional stability. The actual attempts to advance nuclear programs by other states in the region reflect and underscore that balancing Israel was not their top priority.

There is a lesson to be learned about applying theories of international relations to the actual strategic dilemmas that states face. Leaving

aside problems related to their predictive power – which is something that Waltz recognizes[18] – theories can also engender misinterpretation of current dynamics, particularly when they draw upon theoretical assumptions about past behavior without serious consideration of the relevant historical facts. Employing theories as analytical frameworks that help conceptualize reality is certainly important for the study of international relations. But strict adherence to parsimonious theories can be problematic. The assumption that nuclear weapons are acquired solely for security reasons and their appearance on the global or regional scene necessarily requires reciprocal action to balance the situation must be reassessed. These assumptions have led Waltz to unwarranted and unsubstantiated observations about the reason for Iran's nuclear drive in the Middle East and the significance of this development for states across the region.

There are some broader lessons to be learned with regard to WMD arms control in the Middle East as well. Indeed, the fact that Iran is not driven primarily by defensive security considerations in the nuclear realm has implications not only for thinking about Iran as such, but also in the context of the upcoming conference on a WMDFZ for the Middle East, scheduled to take place in Helsinki in late 2012. The previous multilateral arms control process in the region in the early 1990s – the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group – focused on regional security issues, especially the notion of Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs). These measures have a role to play when states have a mutual interest to cooperate on some common goal, but cannot realize the cooperation because of the level of tension, hostility, and distrust in their relationship. The prevailing assumption in regional arms control efforts is that states are equally threatened and defensively oriented with regard to WMD, and that their fears in this regard can be overcome if they are able to better communicate, clarify intentions, and reduce uncertainties. However, this assumption is challenged by the fact that Iran is driven primarily by its regional hegemonic ambitions, not concerns for its security per se. If Iran is offensively oriented, there is no real basis for efforts directed

> Israel's low profile and policy of ambiguity in the nuclear realm, coupled with its message of existential red lines, has actually helped reduce tensions, and was generally more favorable than unfavorable to regional stability.

to forging common ground among states on the basis of symmetrical security concerns.

The nature of Iran's nuclear ambitions may call into question many of the assumptions that have long prevailed with regard to WMD capabilities and their implications in the Middle East. A fresh approach to regional arms control efforts could well be warranted − and indeed may be sorely needed.[19]

Notes

1 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

2 Kenneth N. Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb: Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 4 (July/August 2012): 2-5. Shortly after the publication of his book on neorealism, Waltz made a controversial case for the slow spread of nuclear weapons. See Kenneth Waltz, "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better," *Adelphi Papers*, Number 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981).

3 In his theoretical writings, Waltz notes the gap between simple theories and complex realities − see Kenneth N. Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 4 (1997): 913 − but his point is that theories must be simple. It remains unclear why the attempt to explain a specific instance of complex reality through a simple theory, which can lead to problematic conclusions, is not addressed.

4 On this prospect see Robert D. Kaplan, "Living with a Nuclear Iran," *The Atlantic,* September 2010. For a discussion of the prospects for extended deterrence in this scenario (although the author has not resigned himself to the outcome of a nuclear Iran), see Carlo Masala, "Extended Deterrence in the Middle East: A Fuzzy Concept that Might Work?" *Strategic Assessment* 14, no. 4 (2012): 115−22.

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7 On the additional motivations beyond security for seeking nuclear weapons, see Scott Sagan, "Why do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1996/97): 54-86.

8 Maalfrid Braut-Hegghammer, "Libya's Nuclear Intentions: Ambition and Ambivalence," *Strategic Insight* VIII, issue 2, Center for Contemporary Conflict, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, April 2009.

9 Ibid.

10 Emily B. Landau, *Arms Control in the Middle East: Cooperative Security Dialogue and Regional Constraints* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), pp. 146-52.
11 At the time when Track II discussions relating to the Middle East Arms Control and Regional Security talks were taking place in the 1990s, there were even off-the-record hints that for a state like Jordan, Israel's nuclear capability perhaps had an umbrella effect that extended over them as well (private communication).
12 Ariel Levite and Emily Landau, *Israel's Nuclear Image: Arab Perceptions of Israel's Nuclear Posture* (Tel Aviv: Papyrus Publishing House, 1994).
13 Emily B. Landau, "Being Clear About Ambiguity," *Haaretz,* May 13, 2010.
14 Levite and Landau, *Israel's Nuclear Image,* pp. 77-78.
15 For Morgenthau's earlier theoretical thinking see Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 5th ed. (NY: Knopf, 1973). The book was originally published in 1948.
16 See Amos Yadlin and Avner Golov, "A Nuclear Iran: The Spur to a Regional Arms Race?" *Strategic Assessment* 15, no. 3 (2012): 7-26.
17 For a report on statements by Abul-Gheit about Iran's meddling in the affairs of Arab states, and Mubarak referring to new dangers emerging from the Gulf and threatening stability, see "Iran Should Keep Out of Affairs of Arab States: Egypt FM," *AFP,* November 26, 2010. On King Abdullah, see Ross Colvin, "'Cut Off Head of Snake' Saudis Told US on Iran," *Reuters,* November 29, 2010. The article also refers to cables that exposed similar concerns from Bahrain.
18 "Success in explaining, not in predicting, is the ultimate criterion of good theory," Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," p. 916.
19 On this last point see Emily B. Landau and Shimon Stein, "Israel and the WMD-free Zone: Has Israel Closed the Door?" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* September 27, 2012, http://www.thebulletin.org/web-edition/op-eds/israel-and-the-wmd-free-zone-has-israel-closed-the-door.

Iraq and the Arabs following the American Withdrawal

Yoel Guzansky

Iraq's fundamental problems are for the most part not connected to the involvement of any external player, but its troubles make it more vulnerable to any type of foreign interference, particularly Iranian. Until recently, the presence of American forces to a certain extent neutralized foreign influence over Iraq. Now that the troops have been withdrawn, Iraq has once more become the locus of competition, even confrontation, between Iran, Turkey, and the Arab world, primarily Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. This essay seeks to demonstrate, however, that even with the limited new closeness between some of the Arab states and Iraq, old suspicions and grievances among the sides are still active, in part because of the nature of Iraq's leadership and its policies, which seem to be moving away from ethnic and political pluralism.

Since 2003, all states bordering Iraq have tried to increase their influence there, none more so than Iran, which has sought to keep Iraq from again becoming a military, political, or ideological-religious threat. Iran's involvement in Iraq is motivated by Tehran's notion of its natural sphere of influence and is nourished by its understanding that Iraq is an important building block for its hegemonic aspirations. Iran also wants to preserve its not insignificant success (achieved courtesy of the United States) in weakening the Iraqi state and strengthening the Shiite component. It particularly seeks to bolster the Shiite stronghold in southern Iraq (thus diluting the Sunni identity), which controls the strategic access to the Gulf and about half of Iraq's oil reserves. Iran, which shares its longest border with Iraq, measuring some 1,500 km, is probably the foreign element with the greatest influence over Iraq. At the

Yoel Guzansky is a research fellow at INSS.

same time, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is also possible to limit Iranian involvement by means of other foreign forces with influence in Iraq.

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime made Iraq's neighbors worry about a domino effect that would result in more Iranian influence in the region, and apparently the fear of the Iranian/Shiite crescent has grown more pronounced since the last American soldiers left Iraq. Arab states fear Iran will fill the vacuum left by the United States, and they have therefore sought to strengthen Iraq's Sunnis and/or secular Shiites in the political and economic process as a counterweight to Iran's influence. In other words, far from oblivious to the ethnic and communal tensions that beset Iraq, the states bordering Iraq exploit these tensions in order both to counter Iran and to promote their own interests.

There was a time when Iraq's Arab neighbors treated the state as an alien entity and Iranian proxy, and as a center of terrorism to be ostracized. However, these same neighbors, which in recent years avoided strengthening their ties with Iraq because of its relations with Iran, have come to understand – now more than before – that the way to affect Iraq's orientation and contain Iran's influence is precisely by improving political and economic relations with Iraq. Indeed, an improvement in Iraq's relations with the Arab sphere embodies long term potential to help resolve some of Iraq's internal problems and attain stability, thanks to the ties between elements of power in Iraq and some of the neighboring states.

In tandem, and in contrast to its largely passive foreign policy over the past decade, Iraq itself now appears to seek a more central role in setting the inter-Arab and even the Arab-Iranian agenda. Since the withdrawal of the American troops in December 2011, Iraq has done much to forge relations with the Arab world and try to change its image as an Iranian puppet. Several steps intended to adjust the balance in Iraq's foreign relations were taken, as were attempts to revive old alliances and jumpstart diverse economic initiatives. Iraq hosted the Arab League summit in Baghdad in March 2012 and sought to mediate between Tehran and the international community on the nuclear issue, even hosting a round of talks on the topic in Baghdad in May 2012. Baghdad was also an important stop for UN special envoy Kofı Annan and the Arab League in their attempts to formulate agreements on resolving the Syrian situation. Thus while in recent years research has emphasized the extent of Iranian

influence on Iraq and its ramifications,[1] an examination of Iraq's relations with the Sunni sphere, and first and foremost with its Arab neighbors, is important for the attempt to understand where Iraq is heading.

Iraq and the Arabs

After they essentially abandoned Iraq to Iran's mercies, the Arab states were hesitant to upgrade their ties with Iraq because of their view of al-Maliki's government as Tehran's proxy. The general Arab sentiment was that because of the geographical proximity, historical ties, and ethnic similarity between Iran and Iraq's current leadership, Iran's influence over Iraq was a foregone conclusion. Therefore, there was no point in trying to develop relations. In addition, the Gulf states feared lest Iraq rebuild its armed forces and once again become a military threat, this time with advanced American weapons, including F-16 fighter jets and Abrams tanks. However, Iraq's Arab neighbors are no longer the passive spectators they once were. After the withdrawal of the American troops, Arab states became willing to invest more in relations with Iraq, thereby affording them a better vantage point to affect the state's development and especially to attempt to curb Iranian influence. For its part, Iraq would like greater cooperation with the Arab states as a way – it hopes – to wipe out old debts and renew investments, prevent negative (Arab) interference in its internal affairs, and serve as some leverage against Tehran.

By early 2012, Iraq seemed to have found its way back to the midst of the Arab world. Prime Minister al-Maliki agreed to extend flight and landing rights to Kuwait's national airline company and, more importantly, pay $300 million as partial compensation for the damages caused by Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. In return, Kuwait agreed to waive the $1 billion debt owed to the Kuwaiti national airline company.[2] Iraq signed a prisoner swap agreement with Saudi Arabia and promised to try to suspend the death sentence imposed on Saudi citizens held in Iraqi jails. Furthermore, and unlike with previous summits, al-Maliki did not invite non-Arab nations, such as Turkey and Iran, to the Arab League summit in Baghdad in March 2012.

What follows is an overview of current Arab positions on Iraq, with particular emphasis on its immediate neighbors.

Saudi Arabia

Since 2003, Saudi Arabia has avoided any overt political and military interference in Iraq, and has also avoided significant contact with the government in Baghdad. Saudi Arabia's key interests are preventing the Iraqi conflict from spilling over into its own area (it is focused on building a security barrier along the shared border and on increasing surveillance of people entering the country), guaranteeing Sunni interests, and above all attempting to curb Iran's growing influence over Iraq. Although in the short term increasing Iraqi oil exports makes up for the loss of some of the Iranian oil on the markets and moderates oil prices, which suits Saudi interests, in the long term Saudi Arabia fears that a rehabilitated Iraqi oil industry is liable to come at the expense of its own status as a leading exporter of oil. Indeed, Iraq's cooperation with Iran is increasing steadily, and it seems that the two are now coordinating their policies in order to challenge Saudi Arabia's dominance in OPEC.

The fear of Iran is evident in Saudi Arabia's policies in the entire region, and Iraq is no exception. Even before the American incursion into Iraq, Riyadh warned the United States that should Saddam Hussein be toppled Iran is liable to deepen its control and even increase its hold on the Shiite south. Saudi Arabia preferred that a Sunni force, even if repressive, take hold of the reins of government in Baghdad in order to prevent any Shiite expansion. The American incursion into Iraq, which according to the Saudis presented Iran with Iraq on a silver platter, forced Saudi Arabia to increase its aid to the Sunni minority in Iraq, which engaged in a bloody struggle with Shiite militias over the character of the Iraqi nation; in fact, many Saudis went to Iraq to fight both the Americans and the Shiites. Prime Minister al-Maliki even accused the former head of Saudi intelligence, Prince Muqrin, with establishing an armed Sunni force to operate against Shiite militias, exacerbating the country's civil war.[3]

Iraq opened an embassy in Riyadh as early as 2007, but Saudi Arabia has so far avoided sending a resident ambassador to Baghdad (even though it promised the United States to do so), a clear signal that it does not trust the Iraqi government. Saudi Arabia views Iraq and its Shiite leadership as Iranian pawns; since al-Maliki's election, King Abdullah has pointedly refused to meet with him. The denunciation by the Iraqi government of the entry of Saudi National Guardsmen into Bahrain in March 2011 exposed another thorn between Baghdad and Riyadh.[4]

Nonetheless, 2012 may have launched a certain change in the relations between the two nations. They conducted a prisoner exchange, and it was reported that Saudi Arabia was also considering opening the only shared border crossing, closed since 1991 (with the exception of granting passage to a few pilgrims). In early 2012, Saudi Arabia even announced that it was appointing – for the first time in two decades – its ambassador to Jordan to serve also as non-resident ambassador to Iraq.

Syria

The Iraqi government has attempted to maintain a balanced stance on events in Syria. It tried to temper the Arab League's decisions on Syria and declared its belief in the Syrian regime's ability to undertake reforms. Indeed, the fall of Assad would be problematic for Iraq's Shiite leaders, who fear Sunni dominance in a new Syria. Moreover, the Sunnis in Iraq are likely to draw encouragement from an improved status of their brethren in Syria and therefore seek to improve their standing in Iraq at the Shiites' expense, a situation rife with challenges for the al-Maliki government.

Relations between Syria and Iraq have undergone significant transformations in recent years. During the American occupation, Iraq accused Assad's regime of not doing enough to prevent the entry of terrorists (perhaps ironically, terrorist traffic is now flowing in the opposite direction, with Sunni Iraqis flocking to Syria to fight the Assad regime, and Shiite Iraqis enlisting with the regime). Although diplomatic relations between the two were renewed in 2006, the fact that the Syrian-Iraqi border was the main gate by which terrorists entered and exited Iraq strained the bilateral relations. As the result of a series of deadly terrorist attacks in Baghdad in August 2009, both nations recalled their ambassadors and needed Turkish mediation to overcome their disputes.

As Assad's regime grows more distant from the Arab nations because of the civil war in Syria, relations with al-Maliki have grown closer. The Iraqi leadership has refused to support the pressure exerted by the Arab League on Syria, tried to position itself as a mediator between the Syrian regime and the opposition, and reportedly helped Iran transfer materiel to the Syrian regime. In this context, it was reported that President Obama complained to al-Maliki about Iranian planes loaded with military equipment being allowed to fly through Iraqi airspace en route to Syria. Despite the American president's complaint, such flights resumed.[5]

Jordan

Jordan opposed the war in 2003 but extended covert military assistance to the United States. Many Jordanians, under the inspiration and leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, went to fight the Shiites in Iraq. While the Jordanian king was one of the few Arab leaders who visited Baghdad after 2003 and even appointed a Jordanian ambassador to Iraq, the Jordanians often criticize what they see as the ongoing marginalization of the Sunni community there. The first large scale terrorist attack after the American invasion took place at the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad (August 2003).

Jordan, Iraq's former ally and its only outlet to the outside world during the many years of war and the sanctions imposed by the West, is now hesitant about forging closer relations with Iraq, especially with the Shiite control of the government and the leadership identified with Iran. Any deterioration, particularly in Iraqi Sunni-Shiite relations, is liable to affect Jordan as well, as was the case in 2005 when a Jordanian suicide bomber killed 130 Iraqis – mostly Shiites – in Hila, south of Baghdad. A related concern is that ethnic tension could make Iraq once again into a regional locus for terrorism, as with the suicide attacks in Amman in November 2005.[6] The relative improvement in security has made many of the 500,000 Iraqis who sought refuge in Jordan return to Iraq. Jordan is also interested in varying its sources of energy, and oil and gas from Iraq can make up for the shortfall in the kingdom resulting from the difficulties in piping gas from Egypt. In all, however, and although there are cross border tribal connections between Jordan and Iraq, Jordan – unlike Iraq's other neighbors – has only limited influence on developments in Iraq.

Kuwait

In March 2012 the Emir of Kuwait made an historic visit to Baghdad. However, Kuwait remains reserved about forging closer relations with Iraq, and the resentment of the past to a large extent lends cause for hesitation. Kuwait still views Iraq as a potential future threat and is suspicious of Baghdad's Shiite government, seen by Kuwait as an Iranian puppet. As a result, its normalization process with Iraq is slow, and issues such as MIAs, border markings (and the oil fields along the border), and full compensation for war damages remain mostly unresolved. On several occasions in recent years Kuwait even put its military on high alert and deployed troops along its border with Iraq, especially after threats by Shiite militias, headed by Hizbollah Brigades; attempts to cross the

border; shots fired on the Kuwaiti embassy in Baghdad (as a result of which the Kuwaiti ambassador left Iraq temporarily); and even rocket fire from Iraq toward Kuwaiti territory.[7] In some ways Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations now seem reminiscent of the relations between the two nations prior to 2003. Iraqi politicians criticized Kuwait for building a naval port on the eastern part of Bobian Island: the Iraqis claimed the port would damage Iraq's economy because it would divert naval trade to Kuwait. Some Iraqi politicians have also raised new questions about the legality of the border between the nations.

Additional Elements

Iraq is seeking to forge closer inter-Arab relations not only with its closest neighbors. It provided a grant and sent advisors to Tunisia in order to support the elections process there, and likewise provided technical consultants to Libya, which renewed diplomatic relations with Iraq, to assist it in destroying the arsenal of chemical weapons stored by the Qaddafı regime.[8] It signed an agreement with Egypt to return money Iraq owes laborers in Egypt who worked in Iraq during Saddam Hussein's tenure and have still not received their salaries.

Regarding internal Iraqi politics, neighboring states have criticized al-Maliki's moves to concentrate more authority in his hands. Especially sensitive is his bypass of key Sunni figures and their exclusion from the decision making system, despite the growing protests by Sunni factions calling for economic and security autonomy of the al-Anbar, Diala, and Salah a-Din regions with a Sunni majority. Although the 2005 constitution allows provinces to manage their economic and security matters independently, al-Maliki has on several occasions declared he will not agree. Under current circumstances, it seems that al-Maliki's interests match those of Iran and that the Iraqi Prime Minister needs Iran's backing against his rivals at home more than ever.

The Balancing Act

In a speech in honor of Political Prisoner Day in June 2012, al-Maliki stressed the Iraqi government's desire for a clean slate with the Arab world and requested acknowledgement of Iraq's new and friendly foreign policy.[9] Indeed, transferring the Arab League presidency in 2012 to Iraq symbolized for many the start of Iraq's return to the Arab fold. At first, the Arab nations were reserved about holding the summit in Iraq because

of Iraq's stance on the Syrian crisis and the removal of Sunnis from Iraqi centers of power, and also because of deeper motives stemming from the extent of Iran's influence on Iraq's policy. Indeed, of 22 Arab leaders, only 10 came to the summit, and other than the Emir of Kuwait, no Gulf head of state attended. The tactical temporary change in tone of the Iraqi leadership towards Assad's regime in the spring of 2012 apparently led to a narrowing of the gap between its stance and that of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Iraq also supported the Arab League resolution, initiated by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, calling for the establishment of an Arab-international peacekeeping force and for providing political and material support to the Syrian opposition.[10] Nonetheless, the sides very quickly reverted to mutual suspicion and accusations, and Iraq continued to make every attempt to block any meaningful anti-Assad decision by the Arab League.

The Arab world is worried about the accelerating political process in Iraq, including al-Maliki's assumption of control of all political centers of power while erodng the still fragile democratic mechanisms.[11] In addition, it is also wary of his policies, deemed as pro-Iranian and pro-Syrian. The Arab daily newspaper *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, whose positions are close to those of the Saudi leadership, went so far as to call on the Arab states to boycott al-Maliki and impose economic sanctions on Iraq.[12] The upheavals of the Arab world since early 2011 have highlighted Sunni-Shiite tensions in the Middle East and are impacting negatively on relations between Iraq and the Sunni Arabs. Therefore, despite the measured closeness described above, Iraq's Arab neighbors remain suspicious of the Iraqi leadership.

Indeed, geographical, historical, and ethnic factors leave the Iraqi leadership very limited room for political maneuver between Iran on the one hand and the Arab-Sunni world on the other, and it is constantly forced to walk a tightrope. Iraq has a few options. It can enter Iran's zone of influence in practice and increase economic and security cooperation. Iraq would then enjoy a certain freedom to manage its internal affairs but any aspect of foreign relations would be dictated by Iran. Or, Iraq could reintegrate itself fully into the Arab world, embrace the Arab line on Israel, and even seek to attain positions of mediation and leadership that would emphasize its location, historical status, and growing weight on the oil market. At the same time, Iraq's integration into the Arab Middle East could also prove to be an Iranian interest by providing Iran with a foothold and greater influence there.

A third option would be for Iraq, because of its weakness, to focus on internal issues, such as uniting factions and rebuilding the economy, particularly while ethnic tensions continue to rise and violence remains a threat. In this case, Iraq would adopt a pragmatic foreign policy without significant involvement in foreign affairs. At most, it would try gradually to improve its relations with its neighbors and gradually restore balance to its policies. Iraq's increasing oil exports (as of August 2012 more than 2.5 million barrels a day, the highest rate in three decades,[13]) have already exceeded Iran's decreasing output (in July 2012, down to a 30-year low, under 1 million barrels a day),[14] which could help Iraq stand on its feet and insist on its right to formulate policy independently of Iran. This is of great importance in Iraq's ability to free itself of Iran's hold.

To the extent that Iraq's coffers fill, it is destined to be under fewer external thumbs. Iraq and Iran may move towards a new equilibrium, which could help balance Iran's power in the region. However, this trend also depends on the nature of the Iraqi regime and its leader, who is currently busy consolidating authority, which is liable to strengthen Iran's ability to control Iraqi affairs. Similarly, developments in Syria and the future of Assad's regime are a highly relevant factor. The closeness – even if artificial – between the Alawite regime and the Shia and the possibility that if Assad falls the Sunni majority will take hold of the reins of government in Syria are liable to drive a wedge between Syria and Iraq. In this situation, Iran may well try to strengthen its hold on Iraq as a replacement for its ally, the Assad regime.[15]

In 2013, Baghdad for the first time will be crowned Culture Capital of the Arab Nations, a symbolic title expressing Iraq's ambition – after a two decade hiatus – to play a central regional role. The weakening of the traditional Arab centers because of the "Arab Spring," the relative improvement in Iraq's internal security situation, and the significant growth of its oil production are helping the Baghdad leadership play a more important role in setting the regional agenda. However, beyond al-Maliki's pro-Iranian policy, most of the Arab world is hard pressed to shed both the basic identities that define it – first and foremost the ethnic component – and the efforts to curb Iran's regional ambitions. These issues will continue to affect Iraq's regional position as well as its stability and territorial integrity.

Notes

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Turkey and Northern Iraq: Tightening Relations in a Volatile Environment

Gallia Lindenstrauss and Furkan Aksoy

For decades, the Kurdish question has stood at the core of Turkey's policies towards its neighbors in the Middle East. Bilateral relations with Iraq, for example, have long been occupied with issues related to terrorism and border violations by Turkey for the purposes of retaliation and hot pursuit of Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) militants seeking refuge in northern Iraq. In addition, the strengthening of the Kurds in Iraq was generally seen as embodying possible dangerous repercussions for Turkey's territorial integrity. However, the growing cooperation in recent years between the Turkish government and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) has been one of the notable transformations in Middle Eastern politics.

This article attempts to sketch the motives behind this growing cooperation, outline its limits, and assess the regional implications of this relationship. It will address four main areas driving Turkish policies toward northern Iraq: domestic politics, economic rationales, the regional security impetus, and global considerations. While the article will trace some of the longer term processes behind the transformation in Turkish-KRG relations, it will highlight the period following the 2011 US withdrawal from Iraq, a period that has yet to be thoroughly examined by scholars.

Background

Turkey's primary objective in the 1991 Gulf War was to stop the large refugee flow from northern Iraq from entering Turkey, prevent the

Dr. Gallia Lindenstrauss is a research fellow at INSS. Furkan Aksoy is a former intern at INSS.

establishment of any independent Kurdish entity, and secure the mountainous areas along the border to clear them of a terrorist presence. Once policies failed to achieve all these aims and violent terrorist acts continued, Turkish President Turgut Ozal hoped to drag the PKK into negotiations through the influence of the Kurdish Regional Government, established just then. He decided to provide Turkish diplomatic passports to Kurdish leaders Mesud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, who successfully extracted a short lived ceasefire deal from PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1993.[1] This strategy by Ozal to use the KRG was to be the initial step of a commonly applied strategy to search for a solution to Turkey's internal Kurdish question through external affairs, mainly via Iraq.

Following the enigmatic death of President Ozal, Turkey returned to the tough military approach towards the Kurdish question. During the period of Prime Minister Tansu Ciller in particular, and by way of the Special Units Operations, the denial of ethnic identity and the level of conflict deepened, resulting in thousands of unsolved murders and assassinations. Following the heavy pressure leveled on Syria to stop letting the PKK operate from its borders against Turkey and with the help of American and Israeli intelligence, PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was captured in Kenya in 1998, which prompted the PKK announcement of a ceasefire. This ceasefire lasted until the 2003 Iraq War.[2]

On June 1, 2004, fears of renewal of the violent phase in Turkish-Kurdish relations were proven correct and the PKK announced the end of the six year ceasefire.[3] The post-2007 period, however, and the consolidation of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) rule in Turkey gave greater opportunity for the AKP to act boldly and declare a "Kurdish opening" that included granting more individual and collective rights to Kurds, secret negotiations with the PKK, and increased dialogue with the KRG by way of a new consulate in Erbil, the KRG capital. In the framework of the "zero problems with neighbors"[4] and the "Kurdish opening" policies, Turkey inherited the Ozal legacy of attempting to forge political and economic cooperation with the KRG, but began to pursue this in a much tighter way (in terms of political cooperation) and on a grander scale (in terms of the economic relations) than in the past.

Domestic Political Concerns

The bold "Kurdish opening" policy adopted by the AKP after the 2007 elections did not last long. It was practically ruined with the Habur

incident of 2009: what was supposed to be a symbolic surrender of a few PKK activists and a way of preparing the general Turkish public to some concessions to the PKK turned into a PKK political show of strength. Another notable setback was the Silvan attack of July 2011, in which 13 Turkish soldiers were killed in an ambush in Diyarbakir. During the 2011 elections campaign, the AKP promised the creation of a more democratic and inclusive constitution that would meet the demands of Kurds. However, despite the AKP's decisive victory in the 2011 parliamentary elections with almost 50 percent of the vote, the prospects for a new and reformed constitution met with full disappointment. The AKP began diverting public attention from the new constitution to multi-billion dollar "fantastic projects" such as the Istanbul canal,[5] Fatih project,[6] and the third bridge on the Bosphorus. One of the reasons behind this policy of diversion of public attention was to gain time for resolution of the uncertainties generated by the "Arab Spring." The same uncertainties gave the PKK the incentive to avoid peace talks with the Turkish government and to wait for a post-Assad Syria with greater opportunities. Therefore, both the AKP and the PKK adopted a "wait and see" approach. Meanwhile, the AKP increased its cooperation with the KRG by hosting KRG President Mesud Barazani and KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani in Ankara in May 2012, a visit in which a contract to transfer some of the KRG's oil to Turkey's refineries was signed (without the consent of Iraq's central government) and common concerns over terrorism were expressed.[7]

While there is a growing understanding in Turkey that the PKK problem cannot be solved only by military means, these measures are nonetheless still heavily in use. In this respect, cooperation by the KRG with Turkey in intelligence sharing and employing some measures against the PKK (although not directly fighting them) is seen as useful and important. Even the fact that the Kurdish leaders have been willing to speak publicly against the PKK has been seen in Turkey as influential. For example, already in 2009 Iraqi President Jalal Talabani said that there were only two options for the PKK; either lay down their arms or leave Iraq. The KRG leaders followed with similar statements. One of the PKK leading figures said in response: "Talabani is trying to please Turkish generals and we do not believe anymore that Talabani can play a role in the solution of the Kurdish problem. Nobody can drive us from the Kandil Mountains."[8] Thus, as the talks with the PKK are not yet progressing

and the KRG, at least in public and official statements, is promising cooperation with Turkey, the Turkish side is motivated to continue its warm relations with the KRG.

Economic Considerations

In the economic sphere, as well as in regional calculations, the developments of the "Arab Spring" altered Turkey's plans. Turkey had aimed to increase regional cooperation and interdependence through its "zero problems with neighbors" policy, and thereby boost its economic development. At a conference in Beirut in November 2010, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed the necessity of a regional integration policy, a kind of "European Schengen area" in the Middle East.[9] Turkey took the first step toward a regional integration policy by cancelling reciprocal visa requirements for Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Libya. A few months later, in January 2011, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu reiterated the intention for a regional integration body right before the outbreak of the "Arab Spring," which caught Turkey, like other countries, by surprise.[10] For Turkey, the "Arab Spring" marked a new era in which Turkey suffered substantial economic losses in countries such as Libya and Syria, where Turkish companies had previously been engaged in major commercial activity. Along with growing relations with the Gulf states, the development of much closer cooperation with the KRG (although it can be viewed as a strategic paradigm shift in Turkey's regional policies) also made sense from a solely economic perspective.

Though Turkey's economic ties with the KRG date back long before the "Arab Spring," more comprehensive cooperation with the KRG was a natural outgrowth of the intensified Sunni-Shiite rivalry given the turmoil in Syria and the American withdrawal from Iraq.

Before the "Arab Spring," in addition to its activities in other parts of Iraq, Turkey was active in the energy sector in southern Iraq, through the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPOA), and in the construction sector through private companies, even in very sensitive Shiite areas such as Sadr City.[11] However, with the "Arab Spring" progressing, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, in his speech in April 2012, criticized Turkey's policies vis-à-vis the Shiites and referred to it as "a hostile state."[12] Consequently, the most plausible region in Iraq for Turkey to direct its economic activity seems to be oil-rich Iraqi

Kurdistan. Though Turkey's economic ties with the KRG date back long before "Arab Spring," more comprehensive cooperation with the KRG was a natural outgrowth of the intensified Sunni-Shiite rivalry given the turmoil in Syria and the American withdrawal from Iraq.

Iraq's economic importance for Turkey must be examined in order to fully understand Turkey's policy objectives. According to 2011 statistical data, Iraq is the second largest export destination for Turkish goods, and it is estimated that at least 50 percent of this trade is with northern Iraq. In the first half of 2012, compared to the same period of 2011, data indicates the increase of Turkey's export to Iraq by 37 percent and imports from Iraq by 13 percent. In the same period with respect to that of 2011, the rise of Iraq's share in Turkey's total exports is 20 percent, and in Turkey's total import is 58 percent.[13] Considering the regional instability and economic crisis, this extraordinary upward trend can be linked to the economic cooperation with the KRG. In late April 2012 in his visit to Turkey, KRG Minister of Trade and Industry Sinan Celebi pointed out that 25 new Turkish companies are launched every month in Iraqi Kurdistan. He stressed Turkish companies' stronghold in the construction and banking sectors in the region.[14] In their visits to Turkey in May 2012, Mesud and Nechirvan Barzani signaled growing cooperation in issues related to the economy and terrorism. On May 20, 2012, at an energy conference in Erbil, energy agreements were signed − without consent of the central Iraqi government − between Turkey's Minister of Energy, Taner Yildiz, and KRG Minister of Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami, whereby Iraqi Kurdistan's oil and gas will be directly transferred to Turkey, and later, some of the refined oil will be imported by the KRG. Explaining the details of the project, Hawrami announced that with the addition of the newly planned pipelines, it aims to transfer one million barrels of oil, four times the current production, to Turkey's refineries and ports.[15] Still, there are doubts about how feasible such a project would be since the PKK clearly demonstrated its resentment through attacks on the existing Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipelines in late August 2012.[16] The potential, however, is great, as the KRG needs Turkey as a route for export, and Turkey has both growing energy needs of its own and is interested to serve as an energy hub.[17]

Regional Considerations

AKP's rapprochement with the KRG and Barzani cannot be explained only as an "Ozalian" strategy to generate solutions for the Kurdish question through outside actors; it is much more than that. In two principal ways the KRG is seen as an ally of Turkey against several regional threats. First, the KRG is an ally that can possibly assist in shifting the internal balance of power in Iraq in favor of Turkey, which without the Kurds builds on some rather weak Turkmen and Sunni actors. This is especially important in light of Iran's growing influence in Iraq. As Sean Kane claims, Iraq "remains a regional playground rather than a regional player."[18] While Iran envisions the future of Iraq as a weak state ruled by the Shiite majority, Turkey would like to see a stronger unified state (partly as a counter-balance to Iran) with power sharing agreements among the major groups (Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds) that also guarantee the rights of the Turkmen minority. In addition, whereas Turkey is interested in the development of Iraq's hydrocarbons exports (both as a consumer and as a transit route), Iran is wary of Iraq as a growing hydrocarbons export competitor.[19] Not satisfied with their influence in their respective spheres (Iran in southern Iraq and Turkey in northern Iraq), both states try to exert their influence in other parts of Iraq.[20] One example of Iran's successful influence of Iraqi policies is the sympathy shown by al-Maliki to the Assad regime and his avowed belief in the regime's ability to make reforms. There is also concern among Iraq's neighbors that if the Assad regime falls in Syria, Iran will intensify its relations with Iraq further to compensate for the loss of its Syrian ally.[21]

The KRG is an ally that can assist in shifting the regional balance of power in favor of a Sunni alliance.

Moreover, the KRG is an ally that can assist in shifting the regional balance of power in favor of a Sunni alliance, which both Turkey and the KRG unwittingly find themselves embracing as a result of the "Arab Spring." This has already been an incentive for an improvement in relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Ironically, however, what was considered as one of Turkey's points of strength with regard to Iraq in recent years was its ability to transcend some of the sectarian divides.[22]

In addition, the KRG is seen as a possible ally that can help in containing the Democratic Union Party (PYD), PKK's extension in Syria, in a post-Assad era. In such a scenario, which in essence has already

begun, a Kurdish autonomy will be established in northern Syria. This will present Turkey with threats related to the Kurdish issue on at least three fronts – domestic, northern Iraq, and northern Syria. Coupled with the reemergence of the PKK threat from the Iranian border, this threat explains why Turkey will do its utmost to maintain its relations with the KRG. President Barzani has proven in the past his willingness and capabilities in mediating among the different Kurdish parties, and the Turks hope he will be able to convince the Syrian Kurds to join the Syrian National Council (SNC).

Global Perspective

Turkey's relations with the KRG are linked to US-Turkish relations. While Turkey objected to the 2003 Iraq War, at least until the beginning of the "Arab Spring" it was seen as one of the states that benefited most from the conflict, mainly because of the significant growth in trade relations with Iraq.[23] Turkey's resistance of the KRG's strengthening was a source of tension with the US, since the KRG had proven to be the most loyal ally of the US in the war. However, once Turkey changed in policy toward the KRG, the joint interests between Turkey, the US, and the KRG became more apparent.[24] When the US withdrew its forces from Iraq in 2011, it was clear that a certain power vacuum would emerge. As the US shares the Turkish concerns regarding the growing influence of Iran in Iraq, there is much incentive for the Americans to assist the KRG and the Turks in what is needed in order to counter-balance Iran. The US is thus eager for its two allies Turkey and the KRG to maintain cooperative relations. In this respect, one can expect that it will do its best to reduce the tensions between the two, should they resume.[25] In August 2012, US ambassador to Turkey Francis Ricciardone said that the US administration was not happy with the performance of the KRG in containing the activities of the PKK, a statement that reflected some of the Turkish worries.[26] While both the US and Turkey want Iraq's unity to remain intact, they are aware that the growing rift between Baghdad and Erbil may not be bridged, and place the blame mainly on al-Maliki.

If Turkey succeeds in preventing the fall of Iraq to an Iranian sphere of influence, this will prove again its crucial role as a US ally and a NATO member, one that in some cases is second only to the US in terms of its importance to the alliance. What was seen as Turkey's constructive role in Iraq was also acknowledged by the European Union in some of the EU

progress reports related to Turkey's candidacy for the EU. In this respect, successful Turkish policies with regard to Iraq are seen as an asset to Turkey in its relations with the EU.[27]

Conclusion

There are thus many significant motives driving the rapprochement between Turkey and the KRG. Still, there are several underlying tensions that threaten to hinder further development of this relationship. First, Turkey has not yet accepted the prospect of a fully independent Kurdistan, which for the Kurds in northern Iraq is more a question of "when" rather than "if."[28] Second, Turkish historic claims for control over Mosul and Kirkuk will become more vocal in case of Iraq's disintegration, and as the KRG de facto controls these areas, this will continue to be a source of tension.[29] Third, the recent rise in the PKK terror attacks in Turkey, as well as the prospect of the resurgence of the PKK threat from Syrian and Iranian territories, may result in increased repression in Turkey towards the Kurds, a development the Kurds in Iraq are likely to resent. Finally, Turkey may at some point resist the attempts of Iran and Saudi Arabia (as well as al-Maliki) to push it towards taking a decisive side in the sectarian divides in Iraq and the Middle East in general. Turkey, then, might push the Kurds to make further concessions in order to maintain Iraq's unity, attempts that they will resist or resent.

For many years, Israel has seen the Kurds as a possible ally in the Middle East, and Israel has an interest that the current trend of improved relations between Turkey and the KRG continue.

Israel has for many years seen the Kurds as a possible ally in the Middle East, as part of its peripheral policy.[30] In the past, the Turks have condemned Israel's relations with the Kurds and have raised several accusations with regard to its contribution to some of PKK successes. In this respect, Israel has an interest that the current trend of improved relations between Turkey and the KRG continue. And even if it will not serve as a point of convergence of interest between Israel and Turkey, there is much importance to Israel that Turkey serves as a counterweight to Iranian influence in Iraq.

Notes

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3 Ihsan Bal, "PKK Teror Orgutu Kronolojisi," http://www.usak.org.tr/dosyalar/dergi/z6UFq2LoFkdiuzBbZSt9qHMi7u4Ke2.pdf.
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5 The Istanbul canal is planned to be an artificial sea level waterway that will connect the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara and enable bypass of the Bosphorus strait.
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Global Jihad: Approaching Israel's Borders?

Yoram Schweitzer

Throughout the many years of its existence, al-Qaeda has considered Israel and the Jews, along with the United States, the main enemy of Islam, and a member of what it calls "the Jewish-Crusader alliance." However, despite the virulent, militant rhetoric that the organization and its affiliates have directed at Israel and Jews, which they perceive as one and the same, in practice they have carried out relatively few terrorist attacks against Israel and Jews. Osama Bin Laden chose to direct the operational strategy of his organization and that of its global jihad affiliates primarily against the United States – deemed the stronger party in the said alliance – with the goal of forcing it to withdraw from the Middle East. In this way, he believed, America's sponsorship and political, military, and economic support for its allies in the Middle East would cease, which in turn would bring about not only the end of the dictatorial Arab regimes that deviated from the path of Islam, but also the end of Israel, the main US protectorate in the Middle East.

However, the relatively low number of operations against Israel and Jews relative to other fronts is not necessarily indicative of the organization's planning and posture. In fact, while al-Qaeda and its affiliates have intensified their operations against the United States and its allies in the West in the past decade, they have also engaged in a not-insignificant number of plans and attempts – primarily unsuccessful – to attack Israeli and Jewish targets, particularly abroad. The impact on Israelis and Jews abroad was limited because intelligence and security officials around the world were successful in thwarting al-Qaeda efforts, and because the power of the organization and its affiliates was limited by

Yoram Schweitzer is a senior research fellow at INSS.

a lack of resources resulting from the large number of tasks and obstacles they confronted.

As such, plans by al-Qaeda and its global jihad affiliates to launch terror attacks against Israel along its borders were stopped by Egypt and Jordan, states with peace treaties with Israel. These governments considered al-Qaeda and its affiliates dangerous enemies that must be rebuffed. They dealt harshly with them, which in turn provided protection to Israeli targets within those countries, and at the same time they also blocked the organization from attacking Israel from their joint borders. Israel's enemies acted similarly: Syria prevented al-Qaeda from operating in its territory and channeled its activities towards Iraq; Lebanon and Hizbollah prevented global jihad activists from operating along Israel's northern border; and Hamas, the sovereign in Gaza, largely restrained most of the operations of Salafist jihadi organizations in the Gaza Strip, other than allowing periodic, sporadic mortar fire and Qassam rockets at southern Israel or channeling their activity towards the Sinai. This unnatural "defense belt" provided by Israel's enemies resulted primarily from their fear that terrorist activity against Israel would spark a harsh Israeli military response, which would be likely to escalate into an undesirable all-out military battle.

The turmoil in the Arab world in the past two years, including in several states bordering Israel, has created a different political-security environment for Israel, which is less stable and more dangerous than what Israel experienced in the preceding three decades. The purpose of this article is to draw a picture of the emerging threat on Israel's borders from al-Qaeda and its affiliates, examine whether the threat has fundamentally changed, and consider how Israel should prepare in face of this threat.

The Threat from the South: Sinai and Gaza

The overthrow of the Mubarak regime in Egypt was a strategic target for al-Qaeda and a longstanding personal goal for a large number of its senior officials of Egyptian origin, especially the organization's current leader, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. The governmental vacuum created in Egypt between Mubarak's ouster and the establishment of the new government headed by President Mohamed Morsi allowed global jihad elements to take advantage of the new situation. The escape and release of their operatives from prison, where they were serving long terms for

past activity, allowed these organizations to fortify their ranks with loyal members with operational experience. Furthermore, the governmental vacuum in Sinai helped supporters of global jihad organize in an attempt to establish an autonomous entity under Islamic law, while exploiting the Egyptian government's lack of effective control over the region.

While as long ago as 2004-6 there were several terror attacks in Sinai against tourist targets in Taba, Ras al-Shitan, Nuweiba, and Sharm el-Sheikh carried out by operatives identified with the global jihad, the aggressive counter-terror activity by Egyptian security officials during the Mubarak regime suppressed the wave of terrorism for a number of years. However, in the past year, following the fall of the Mubarak regime, a number of groups have appeared that identify with al-Qaeda and global jihad, and have stepped up their operations in Sinai with the goal of enforcing their control in the region and challenging the Egyptian government.

One of these groups is Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, an organization whose ideology and rhetoric, and even its targets, are identified with those of al-Qaeda. Thus, for example, in taking responsibility for a number of attacks against the gas pipeline from Egypt to Israel, the group claimed that the attacks were designed to prevent the plundering of the natural resources that God gave to the Muslims, which have been sold at a loss to the enemies of Islam, and in particular, Israel. Indeed, videos in which the organization takes responsibility for attacks include segments with al-Zawahiri praising the repeated attacks on the gas pipeline and calling upon the new Egyptian government to annul the peace treaty with Israel and apply Islamic law in Egypt.[1] The organization promised to carry out such actions in the future as well.[2] In taking responsibility for Grad rockets fired at Eilat in August 2012, the organization promised that it would strike at the heart of Israeli cities and continue to fight the enemies of God to the bitter end.[3] It also took responsibility for the two deadliest attacks carried out on the Egyptian-Israeli border: the attack on August 18, 2011, on Highway 40 leading to Eilat, in which eight Israelis were killed, and the attack on August 5, 2012 on the Israeli-Egyptian border, in which sixteen Egyptian border guards were killed, and only the action of IDF soldiers, aided by a helicopter, led to the killing of the terrorist squad and prevented more casualties in Israel.

A second group, Ansar al-Jihad (which is apparently identical to the Salafist Front in the Sinai Peninsula), declared its establishment on

December 20, 2011, and swore allegiance to Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, the new leader of al-Qaeda, while promising to continue in the path of fallen al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden. In the organization's founding declaration, its members announced the targets of their operations, stating that they "swear by Allah the Great who raised the sky without pillars, that America nor those who live in America will ever enjoy security as long as we don't live it in reality in Palestine and before all the disbelieving armies get out of the Land of Muhammad."[4] Many organization activists are former Egyptian prisoners who belonged to Egyptian Islamic Jihad (al-Zawahiri's group in Egypt) and joined the new organization after their release from prison with the intention of promoting the vision they shared with al-Qaeda of establishing an Islamic caliphate in Egypt.

Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad in Sinai[5] is the oldest organization in Sinai, and it also identifies with al-Qaeda's world view. The organization was established by a Bedouin dentist from the al-Swarka tribe who lived in the el-Arish area in northern Sinai. He was killed in 2006 in an exchange of fire with Egyptian forces, following Egypt's charge that the organization was involved in terror attacks against tourists between 2004 and 2006. A declaration published recently on his behalf declared that "Egypt and Mount Sinai have entered a new stage in which, with Allah's help, they will be the center of a confrontation with the enemies of God: the Jews and their partners."

The Mujahidin Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem is one of the Gazan Palestinian organizations that have been most active in Sinai recently. It serves as an umbrella organization for a number of Palestinian Salafist organizations, most prominently al-Tawhid wal-Jihad,[6] along with a less known Gazan Salafist organization called Ansar al-Sunna.[7] The Mujahidin Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem took responsibility for the attack carried out in the Beer Milka area on June 18, which killed Said Fashfasha, an Israeli Arab employed in building the security fence on the border with Egypt.[8] The attack was carried out by a terrorist cell that had crossed the border from Egypt, buried an explosive device, and ambushed Israeli vehicles passing along the route. In a video released about a month after the event, the organization called the attack "a gift to our brethren in al-Qaeda and Sheikh Zawahiri" and a response to the killing of Bin Laden. During most of the video, the al-Qaeda flag was shown in the background, and one of the terrorists, who were of

Egyptian and Saudi origin, can be seen directly addressing al-Zawahiri and saying that the organization is continuing its commitment to and faith in the "path of jihad." The video also notes that the organization does not recognize the international border, rather, the "border of Allah." In a previously released video, the organization declared that it shares al-Qaeda's goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate.[9] It also took responsibility for rockets fired from Gaza at southern Israeli cities in the second week of September 2012, claiming that this was to avenge the death of six activists killed in Israeli aerial attacks in response to previous fire by the organization.[10]

In addition to these organizations, there are older Salafist groups in Gaza that operate directly against Israel. They too use the Sinai area for their operations in order to circumvent Israel's counter-terror operations, and to avoid involving Hamas and thereby invite an Israeli response in Gaza. Especially noteworthy among these organizations is Jaish al-Islam (the Army of Islam).[11] Established in 2006 by Mumtaz Dughmush after splitting off from the Popular Resistance Committees, the group is very active in rocket and other attacks against Israel, including involvement in the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit. The organization's operations have also extended beyond Sinai, and it has sent activists to fight in Syria; this was revealed publicly when one of its members was killed in the fighting. Another prominent organization is the Popular Resistance Committees, whose members are active on both sides of the border and are in close touch with global jihad elements in Sinai. The group has been directly linked to a number of terror attacks carried out on the Egyptian border, such as the August 18, 2011 attack and the August 2012 attack on the Egyptian border guards (which is also attributed to the Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis group and may thus indicate a close connection between the two groups). Evidence of these operations can be found in the demand by the Egyptians themselves that Hamas hand over senior officials of the organization suspected of involvement in the death of Egyptian soldiers.

The Threat from the North: Syria and Lebanon

In the years following the invasion of Iraq by the United States-led coalition, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad chose to assist al-Qaeda and its affiliates to reach Iraq in order to fight the coalition forces. Syria was the main location in which many hundreds of volunteers affiliated with the global jihad were instructed, trained, and sent to Iraq to participate in

the jihad declared by al-Qaeda against the foreign forces and their local allies. Although the Assad regime bore all the characteristics of an infidel regime as defined by al-Qaeda, which too was to be fought and replaced by a government under Islamic law, the organization cooperated with it and even enjoyed its aid and support. In this way, al-Qaeda postponed the inevitable confrontation with the Syrian Alawite regime until a more convenient time.

However, as the violent clashes between the Syrian regime and the rebel groups increased, al-Qaeda's policy towards the future of Syria changed. Al-Zawahiri, who has never hidden his belief in Syria's central role in his vision of the establishment of the Islamic caliphate in the Levant, expressed this view on a number of occasions. In a 2006 letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who fought in Iraq, Zawahiri likened the battle to impose Islam in the Arab Levant to a bird whose wings are Egypt and Syria, and whose heart is Palestine;[12] in July 2011, for the first time in his role as leader of al-Qaeda, Zawahiri spoke out in a video against the Syrian regime calling on the rebels to fight Assad because he cooperated with the Americans, served as "Israel's border guard," and "abandoned" the Golan Heights.[13] Zawahiri stated that the struggle to bring down Assad is part of the wider regional campaign against the United States and Israel.[14] In another video, released following the escalation of the conflict in Syria and titled "Onward, O Lions of al-Sham,"[15] Zawahiri declared Syria to be a main theater of jihad. He called upon Muslims throughout the world to go to Syria to aid the local mujahidin in the campaign to oust "the murderer of murderers" who slaughtered Muslims, until the regime was overthrown. He also called for the establishment of a state that would protect the other Muslim countries, strive to liberate the Golan Heights, and persist in jihad until the flag of victory flew over the hills of occupied Jerusalem.[16] Finally, on the eleventh anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States, Zawahiri released another video in which he reiterated his organization's support for "jihad in Syria to establish a Muslim state" as a "basic step towards Jerusalem." According to the video, the United States continues to give the secular Baathist regime a chance out of fear that the government that would be established in Syria would be a threat to Israel.[17]

In February 2012, in response to Zawahiri's rallying cry, activists acting under the organizational name of Jabhat al-Nusra, associated with al-Qaeda in Iraq, arrived in Syria, and they are now considered

among the strongest organization in the battle. These activists carry out operations based on the capabilities and military experience they gained during their years of fighting in Iraq, and it appears that they are responsible for most of the especially daring and deadly attacks in Syria in recent months, particularly suicide bombings. In addition, there are also sporadic and less organized operations carried out by global jihad elements from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Jordan, and Gaza who went to Syria independently without belonging to any group and joined the Free Syrian Army. According to various estimates, the number of fighters among the global jihad activists ranges from several hundred to several thousand.[18] The presence of global jihad activists in Syria has aroused fear among many in the country, including fighters from the Syrian opposition, that they will lose Western support and legitimacy for their struggle. Time will tell whether the current joint fighting will lead to cooperation in the future, or whether there will be tension and conflict between the parties if the regime falls.[19]

Global jihad activists have a presence in Lebanon too, but in recent years operations against Israel have been limited and have focused mainly on sporadic rocket fire at the northern border. However, over the past months, the events in Syria have caused outbreaks of violence between Salafist jihadi elements and the Shiites. The tension between the sides is manifested in shooting incidents and kidnappings. It appears that Hizbollah and blatant Iranian support for suppressing the Syrian opposition is fanning the rivalry between global jihad elements and the Shiite Hizbollah, which is considered the strongest element in Lebanon. The leader of the Abdullah Azzam Brigades in Lebanon, which went to fight in Syria, recently threatened to attack Hizbollah if it continued its operations in Syria.[20] This was a noteworthy manifestation of a trend that is liable to develop between the two camps in Lebanon if the fighting in Syria continues, and especially if the Assad regime falls. In the meantime, the Salafist jihadi groups in Lebanon are likely to devote part of their operations to heating up the border with Israel, both as a challenge to Israel and a challenge to Hizbollah's hegemony over political and military life in Lebanon.

A Potential Threat from the East: Salafist Elements in Jordan

In spite of the isolated attacks in Jordan against Israeli targets, since the signing of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty the kingdom has served as

an important player in neutralizing terrorist activity by al-Qaeda and its affiliates, especially Zarqawi, against Israeli targets in the country, and attacks from the Jordanian border aimed at Israel.

Since the ouster of Saddam Hussein, the Hashemite regime in Jordan has been forced to contend with the consequences of the campaign in Iraq, and in the past year and a half, with the shockwaves from the turmoil in Arab countries as well. Today, Jordan is beset by internal unrest in the kingdom. This is manifested in protests where the al-Qaeda flags are flown, leaflets are distributed detailing the Salafist jihadi demands of the government, calls are made to establish an Islamic caliphate and apply *sharia* as the law of the kingdom, and support is expressed for Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (one of the ideological fathers of global jihad and Zarqawi's spiritual leader). In the past, the regime had suppressed such demonstrations quickly and with an iron fist, and anyone who dared to express such sentiments publicly was immediately imprisoned. Because of the Arab spring, the increased power of opposition elements, and the boldness of the Islamic parties, the king is wary of taking hasty repressive measures and has been forced to implement political changes in his government and refrain from severe economic measures in order not to cause further tension. Thus far, King Abdullah has succeeded in maneuvering the opposition and preventing deterioration in the internal security situation. However, it is possible that if the Syrian regime falls, he will be forced to confront the consequences of this development within the kingdom as well, including violent activity by Salafist jihad opposition elements that are liable to try to direct their operations against Israel. At this point, security officials in Jordan will presumably continue to block attempts to attack Israel, but the challenge is expected to be greater than what they have dealt with successfully until now.

Conclusion

The strengthening of global jihad elements and Salafist jihadi terrorist organizations in Syria and Sinai, and perhaps Lebanon and Jordan in the future as well, confronts Israel with a serious threat of increased terrorism from the joint borders. This is not an existential threat, but it can present a complex political and security challenge for the country's leaders. This challenge does not stem from the exceptional military-terrorist capability of the adversaries. It is due rather to the large number of fronts and in particular, to the especially dramatic and brutal nature of

the operations of global jihad elements, which ignore the considerations that generally restrained organizations operating under the auspices of supporting states. This lack of restraint has the potential for friction and escalation in relations between Israel and its neighbors. The goal of these organizations, beyond harming Israel, is for relations to deteriorate and friction to escalate to the point of armed conflict between the sides. As a result, Israel must prepare for terrorist activity that is likely to include attacks by terror squads that aim to carry out mass killing through various means, such as missiles at civilian planes (mainly from the Sinai), rockets at hotels in Eilat or in the north of Israel, and infiltration of civilian towns.

In the eastern sector, there is no need for special acute preparations at this stage. However, the already unstable situation in the Hashemite kingdom makes it necessary to prepare for a future change in its stability, and of course, requires closer monitoring of events and closer security cooperation. This is not the situation in the southern and northern sectors. At this point, Egyptian President Morsi and Egyptian security forces are making efforts to restrain the global jihad elements in the Sinai. This can be seen in Operations Eagle and Sinai, which were a response to the August 2012 attack on the border guards, and included tanks and helicopters, as well as an attempt at dialogue with representatives of the Bedouins and the Salafist organizations. However, in spite of these efforts to stop the wave of terror in Sinai, the September 21, 2012 attack on a UN base 15 kilometers from the border with Israel by armed global jihad elements shows how weak government control is and how difficult it is to enforce Egyptian sovereignty there. It appears that treating the root problem of terrorism in Sinai requires that significant financial resources be invested in the long neglected Bedouin infrastructure and population. At the same time, an effective intelligence infrastructure must be built, and ongoing operational activity by trained special forces is needed to stop the momentum of the global jihad organizations operating in Sinai. Until such activity is carried out, it appears that Israel will be forced to contend with further attempted attacks and even escalation, in spite of the Egyptian activity.

Therefore, Israel must adopt a firm and decisive policy for stopping the activities of terrorist elements in Sinai and Gaza. It must make clear to Hamas and to Egypt that it will not tolerate continued terrorist activity from Sinai, and that it will act directly against those who plan it based on knowledge of their locations and their plans before the attacks are

carried out. It is essential that Israel make clear to Hamas that not only is it responsible for preventing terrorism from Gaza; Israel will also consider it responsible for all terror activity carried out by organizations from the Gaza Strip against Israel, even if launched through Sinai, and such actions will lead to a response in Gaza. At the same time, Israel must cooperate with Egypt and encourage it to act effectively against Egyptian and Gazan Salafist terror organizations operating in Sinai. In addition, Israel and Egypt share an interest vis-à-vis Hamas: to preserve Egyptian sovereignty and prevent escalation in the south, which could be expected to occur if direct terrorism from Gaza and indirect terrorism from Gaza by way of Sinai continue.

In the northern sector, there is still a lack of clarity concerning the manner in which the violent conflict in Syria will end. Will the current regime survive? What will be the identity of the next government? How much control will it have over the country? In addition, the impact of the events in Syria on Lebanon is unclear, as is the nature of the resulting power struggles in Lebanon between the main Shiite powers and Salafist jihadi elements, whose signs are already evident. However, it appears that in spite of the ambiguity, the danger of operations by global jihad elements located today in Syria and focused on the struggle to bring down the Assad regime against Israel already exists, and some of them are liable to try to exploit the absence of effective Syrian security forces that will restrain their operations against Israel. This situation may grow significantly worse if the Syrian regime falls or if there is an ongoing governmental vacuum in Syria. In that case, global jihad elements are likely to attempt to realize Zawahiri's vision and operate steadily against Israel from its northern border, without interference from the "traitor who sold the Golan Heights."

Israel must make clear to Hamas that not only is it responsible for preventing terrorism from Gaza; Israel will also consider it responsible for all terror activity carried out by organizations from the Gaza Strip against Israel, even if launched through Sinai.

A similar pattern may emerge in Lebanon, especially if the Assad regime falls. In that case, internal struggles are likely to develop in Lebanon between global jihad elements and Hizbollah, which will lose a major ally. Thus, the restraint Hizbollah has imposed on operations against Israel that are not its own or are not carried out with its permission and under its supervision is liable

to disappear, and global jihad elements are likely to operate against Israel more intensively than in the past. Such operations would be intended to hurt Israel in order to embroil Lebanon and Hizbollah and drag them into a conflict with Israel. Given this situation, Israel must prepare defensively in accordance with the danger brewing on the Syrian border, and possibly also in Lebanon. In Syria, a response to a targeted strike will be required against global jihad elements, along with a demand that the Syrian government exercise its sovereignty as long as it exists, while in Lebanon, a response should be addressed to the government and its components.

Today, it appears that what was once considered a dark and unlikely scenario of al-Qaeda and the global jihad turning into a direct threat to Israel on its borders is becoming a reality. The question whether this process will be accompanied by an official, public call by al-Qaeda leader Zawahiri to his followers to come and fight in Israel, and what the impact of such a move would be on the level of danger to Israel, depends to a large extent on the determination of Israel's neighbors to prevent Zawahiri's followers from operating against it.

Notes

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The United States and the Israeli Settlements: Time for a Change

Zaki Shalom

Introduction

The issue of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank has been a source of disagreement within Israel for over forty years. Some governments viewed them as a vital national interest, especially from a security standpoint. Others viewed the enterprise as the realization of an ideological and religious belief, and the historic right of the Jewish people to the land of its forefathers. Still others viewed the settlements as the price to pay for coalition constraints. But all Israeli governments have invested significantly in the project in various ways.

In parallel, the issue of the settlements has been a bone of contention between Israel and the United States since the end of the Six Day War. This issue has strained the relationship between the two allies perhaps more than any other topic.

Almost every administration tended to define the position of the United States on the Jewish settlements on the basis of two parameters: one, that the settlements are not legal, and two, that the settlements are an obstacle to peace. Two Republican administrations were notable exceptions. Ronald Reagan declared that he did not accept the position that the settlements were not legal ("they're not illegal"[1]). At the same time, he criticized the manner and pace of establishing the settlements and saw them as a provocation. The other exception was the George W. Bush administration, which formulated a set of comprehensive understandings with Prime Ministers Sharon and Olmert over the

Prof. Zaki Shalom is a senior researcher at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism at Ben-Gurion Univeristy and a senior research fellow at INSS.

settlements. The meaning of these understandings was a limited, de facto recognition of the settlement enterprise, assuming, however, that any construction was based on a framework agreed upon by both Israel and the United States.

In hindsight, one may say that America's longstanding opposition to the settlement enterprise did not achieve its objective. In practice, the project continued and expanded, and seems to have created an irreversible territorial and demographic reality in the Middle East. Under these circumstances, perhaps the American administration might consider whether there is any value in continuing to express sweeping opposition to the settlement enterprise. Experience proves that international opposition in general and American opposition in particular to the settlement project, complemented by support among many circles in Israel, failed to stop this national venture. Therefore, the administration might question if and to what extent maintaining American opposition is liable to damage the status and prestige of the United States in the international community. More concretely, the inevitable question is: has the time come for a change in US policy on the issue of Jewish settlements in the West Bank?

Despite the awareness on the part of the US administration of its failure to stop the settlement project, it will almost certainly not condone or accept the enterprise outright. According to the outlook of all US administrations, the settlement project severely damages not only American interests but also the interests of the State of Israel − a position widely held among much of the Israeli public and political establishment The American opposition, based on moral, legal, and political considerations, is shared and supported by the international community, which takes an even more extreme position on the issue than the United States. Therefore, the administration cannot be expected to come to terms with the full expression of the settlement project.

On the other hand, given that the US policy on the settlements is in practice not implemented, the administration must necessarily consider whether maintaining sweeping opposition is liable to harm United States international status and prestige. Significantly, since 1967, US administrations have resisted the option of escalating the disagreement over the settlements to the point of a rupture in relations with Israel and even imposing sanctions against it. Moreover, while any such pressure would be met negatively by Israel, it is far from certain that stopping the

settlement project would advance an agreement with the Palestinians. Issues much more difficult to resolve are on the agenda, including the Palestinian Authority's insistence on the "right of return" – at least in part – of Palestinian refugees; the division of Jerusalem and recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state; and the future borders of the Palestinian state, which would require dismantlement of settlements.

In this situation, therefore, the most reasonable and effective option is an administration effort to formulate a document of understanding with Israel about the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Such a document would allow Israel to continue the project on the basis of an agreed-upon, limited outline. Its main points would likely mandate that Israel:

a. reiterate its acceptance of the land for peace formula, the Oslo accords, and the two-state vision;
b. make clear that the settlement enterprise will not impact on the delineation of the permanent border between Israel and a future Palestinian state;
c. refrain from establishing new settlements and expanding the territorial area of existing settlements;
d. focus its activities on the settlements located inside the large settlement blocs;
e. limit construction within existing settlements for the purposes of natural growth and maintenance of normal life; and
f. refrain from confiscating Palestinian land for the purpose of Jewish settlements and from providing incentives to Israelis to move into settlements.

The American administration would refrain from voicing opposition to Israeli construction throughout Jerusalem.

Such a formula for a document of understanding could be acceptable to both right and left wing Israeli governments. A largely similar document of understanding was in place between President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. There is no reason for the current American administration not to adopt it as well.

The United States and the Settlements: The Core Issues

Since the end of the Six Day War, every US administration has evinced negative positions on the settlement enterprise, emphasizing their questionable legality and their obstruction of peace efforts. Since 1981,

following President Reagan's assertion that he does not accept the illegality of the settlements, the administration focused primarily on the impact of the settlements on the peace process.[2]

Administration figures occasionally presented the settlement activity as representative of a tendency by both Israel and the Palestinians to act unilaterally; unilateral measures were deemed unacceptable. In a letter to the Palestinian leadership on the eve of the Madrid Conference (October 24, 1991), the administration linked its opposition to the settlements to an overarching opposition to unilateral conduct on both sides. Nonetheless, most of the cases of unilateral action mentioned by the administration were the settlements, without specific mention of unilateral action on the part of the Palestinians.[3]

Some statements by administration officials indicated that the administration's opposition to the settlements reflected not only American national interests but also vital Israeli national interests. Daniel C. Kurtzer, who served as US ambassador to Israel in 2001-2005, made the point very clearly (May 29, 2002). Relying to a great extent on accepted opinion among widespread circles on the Israeli left, he stressed that Israel's status and security would improve if and when it ended the settlement project: "Our opposition to the settlements is political. Washington feels that Israel would be better protected and more accepted inside borders where there are no settlements."[4]

President George W. Bush added another element to the administration's opposition to the settlements. In his opinion (May 24, 2006), the settlements created serious friction between Jews and Arabs and thereby contributed to an intensification of the hatred and violence in the region. President Bush's statement in this context was intended to justify his support of Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement plan and his fairly supportive position toward Prime Minister Olmert's convergence plan. He also stressed the importance of Israel working in agreement with the Palestinians and emphasized the dismantlement of settlements as a move capable of enhancing peace in the region.[5]

The political foundation for these and other positions on the settlements was laid a few months after the end of the Six Day War, when the settlement phenomenon was still in its infancy and its dimensions were limited. The Johnson administration made its position clear when it stated that the Israeli government must not operate in the territories it occupied during the war in a way that might prejudice peace efforts and

realization of the land for peace formula. Beyond this, the administration argued that such activity was in contravention of Paragraph 49 of the Geneva Convention, which states that an occupying force will not move its own population into the territory it occupies.[6]

Subsequent administration statements infused additional nuances. The Johnson administration, for example, tried on several occasions to draw a connection, albeit indirect, between the settlement issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict, specifically, Israel's sense that the Arab world aimed at Israel's destruction. Linking the settlements to the state of the conflict was almost certainly related to the decisions of the Khartoum conference (August 29-September 1, 1967), which expressed an extreme Arab position on reaching a political agreement with Israel, and the ongoing War of Attrition along the Suez Canal.[7] Against this background, it is possible to understand President Johnson's assertion that it was Israel's responsibility to persuade the Arab world that it had no policy of territorial expansion by means of the settlements in the West Bank. At the same time, he demanded that the Arab world persuade Israel that it had abandoned thoughts of Israel's destruction. This statement may have implied an idea held by other administrations as well, namely, an understanding of Israel's "right" to continue its settlement policy as long as the state of conflict with the Arab world prevails and as long as Israel has reason to suspect that the Arab world still aims to destroy it.[8]

Some of the statements on the settlements raised the issue of the status of Jerusalem in general and of East Jerusalem in particular. One June 27, 1967, the Knesset voted in favor of Amendment 11b to the Law and Administration Ordinance, whereby "the law, jurisdiction and administration of the State shall extend to any area of Eretz Israel designated by the Government by order."[9] This amendment allowed the government to apply Israeli law to East Jerusalem shortly thereafter. Concurrently, Israel started a process of accelerated construction in the eastern part of the city in order to give concrete expression to its sovereignty over the united capital.

The US administration had reservations about this activity, and stated repeatedly that East Jerusalem is part of the territory Israel occupied in the Six Day War and was to be treated no differently than any other area in terms of settlement. From the administration's perspective, all steps Israel takes in East Jerusalem, including at historic and religious sites, and the application of Israeli law to Jerusalem, are in contravention of

international law and harm the mutual interests of both Israel and the United States. In a speech on July 1, 1969, Charles W. Yost, United States ambassador to the United Nations under the Nixon administration, declared that "the administration regrets and deplores" the steps taken by Israel in East Jerusalem, since from the US perspective, East Jerusalem is part of the territory occupied during the Six Day War and all international laws regarding control of an occupied territory apply there too. The administration made it clear to Israel that such steps would not affect a decision on the city's status in any future agreement.[10]

Limited Power of Persuasion

At the same time, many of the references by administration officials to the settlements have tended to downplay their importance to discussions of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement and have questioned the level of intensity with which the United States ought to oppose the phenomenon. This tendency stemmed from several understandings. First, with Israel determined to continue the settlement enterprise, the international community in general and the American administration in particular lacked any real power to stop Israel from realizing its intention. Second, the settlement issue was only one disputed issue among many between Israel and the Palestinians, and there was no point in making this issue the focus of the conflict. Third, if and when a permanent Israeli-Palestinian agreement were reached, Israel would be prepared to dismantle settlements and relocate their residents to other areas.

The legal advisor of the State Department during President Nixon's term gave prominent expression to the sense of the administration's limited power with regard to construction in the settlements. In April 1973, he made it clear that the administration's position on the settlements was that Israel is obligated to act on the basis of the Geneva Convention in the territories. At the same time, he was quite candid in stating that Israel was in practice refusing to realize its obligations on the basis of that convention.[11]

President Jimmy Carter, one of the most blatant opponents of the settlement enterprise, provided another example of the administration's implied recognition of the limits of its power against Israel and the settlement project. On March 3, 1980, he said he was opposed to sharply worded anti-Israel formulations in resolutions by international organizations and their call to dismantle the settlements: "This call for

dismantling [settlements] was neither proper nor practical."[12] To a large degree this position may have stemmed from the fact that Israel was then headed by Menachem Begin, a right wing ideologue. The President likely assessed that even subject to intense pressure Begin would refuse to heed a directive to dismantle the settlements, and any such resolutions would remain on paper only, unfulfilled by the Begin government. Were that to happen, it would compromise the status of the United States and its authority as a superpower.

On another occasion, President Carter made it clear that the United States did not have to engage in extreme rhetoric against the settlement phenomenon or support extreme resolutions against Israel because the United States had accepted explicit Israeli commitments, both public and secret, that the settlements were not the expression of an Israeli policy of annexation and that Israel accepted the fact that the borders would be determined through negotiations and a political agreement. Thus, on August 23, 1977 Carter went so far as to make it clear in public that the United States was not going to go beyond an "open expression of our own concern" and opposition to Israel's moves on the settlements.[13] This formulation implied that the issue of the settlements should not be highlighted as an obstacle to an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, because if and when the sides arrive at an agreement on borders, Israel would be prepared to withdraw from the required settlements. In later years, especially in the initial stages of the dialogue with the Obama administration, the Israeli government made much use of this assertion to stress its opposition to the Palestinian rejection of negotiations with Israel as long as the settlement phenomenon continues.

Expressions of helplessness in face of the expanding phenomenon of the settlements were also prominent during the tenure of George W. Bush. On May 1, 2002 Secretary of State Colin Powell said: "Something has to be done about the problem of the settlements, the settlements continue to grow and continue to expand….It's not going to go away."[14] The statement was made during the height of the second Palestinian intifada, when suicide bombings were commonplace in Israel. The administration could seemingly have used this context to demand an end to the settlements in no uncertain terms, especially as the settlements were more than once portrayed as being a key reason for Palestinian violence. More than a year later, on September 21, 2003, Powell admitted that the United States had failed to stop the expansion of the settlements: "Settlement activity

must stop. And it has not stopped to our satisfaction."[15] On May 29, 2002 Ambassador Kurtzer expressed in a fairly extreme manner the impotence felt by the Bush administration in face of the settlement project: "It is a fact that we have opposed the settlements for decades and you continue to build them and we have done nothing untoward to you [in response]. If Israel wants, it can even expand to the borders promised in the Bible. The question is whether it is able to do so from a security and political standpoint."[16]

Some officials, including President George H. W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker, threatened Israel should it not put an end to the settlement enterprise, making loan guarantees to Israel conditional on an essential change in Israel's settlement policy. In his March 3, 1990 speech, the President made it clear that the administration's position opposed the establishment of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. He stressed that he intended to realize this position fully and would examine the extent to which "people" – i.e., Israel – "can comply with that policy."[17]

Secretary of State Baker too adopted a harsh stance on the settlements. On May 22, 1991 he complained that every time he came to visit Jerusalem he was met with announcements of the establishment of new settlements. He interpreted this – with a large degree of accuracy – as an attempt to embarrass him. He was afraid, and justifiably so, that the lack of a vehement reaction by the administration to these announcements would almost certainly be seen as a demonstration of the administration's weakness and fear of a conflict with the Israeli government. It would almost certainly have led Israel to accelerate the settlement project even more, to the chagrin of the American administration. In the end, he too found himself complaining about a reality he found difficult to change and spoke of "settlement activity that continues not only unabated but at an advanced pace."[18]

The increasing intensity of Palestinian violence, especially early in the second intifada, placed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the focus on the settlements, high on the global agenda. In examining the events that touched off the intifada in the fall of 2000, the report written by George Mitchell (April 30, 2001) stated that the settlements were a major source of Palestinian violence. It demanded a total freeze, including construction for the purposes of natural growth. According to the report, it would be very difficult to prevent a recurrence of Palestinian-Israeli violence unless the Israeli government stopped all settlement construction. The report

further determined explicitly that "the kind of security cooperation [with the United States] desired by the GOI [Government of Israel] cannot for long co-exist with settlement activity."[19]

Shifts in Outlook

The first dramatic change in position with regard to the settlements occurred under President Reagan. On February 2, 1980, shortly after assuming office, Reagan declared that he does not accept the common claim of the illegality of the settlements, or in his explicit comment, "they're not illegal." According to Reagan, the West Bank must be open to settlement by members of all religious faiths − Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Nonetheless, he criticized the way in which the settlement project was conducted, as he felt it was "unnecessarily provocative" and contrary to the Camp David peace agreements.[20]

The Reagan plan for the Middle East dating to early September 1982 contained additional hints of America's understanding of the improbability of stopping the settlement project entirely. Therefore, the plan spoke mostly about avoiding the "use of any additional land for the purpose of settlements," i.e., avoiding the establishment of new settlements or expanding the size of existing settlements. The implication is that it was acceptable to continue building within the limits of existing settlements. This principle subsequently served as the basis for the understanding between President George W. Bush and Prime Ministers Sharon and Olmert about the settlements. At the same time, the Reagan plan also perfunctorily recommended that Israel freeze settlement construction in order to create an easier atmosphere for negotiations and allow different sides to join the talks.[21]

A number of statements by recent administrations evinced some understanding for settlement activity on its own terms, with a concomitant attempt to delimit its proportions on the basis of a joint Israeli-American outline. A prominent expression of this came during President Clinton's tenure. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Edward Djerejian stated on March 9, 1993 that the United States understood the need for some settlement activity: "There is some allowance for, I wouldn't use the word 'expansion,' but certainly continuing some activity, construction activities in existing settlements. And that's basically...in terms of natural growth and basic, immediate needs in those settlements. I want to get away from the word 'expansion'

per se."[22] Nearly a decade later, on April 12, 2001, Djerejian − this time under the Bush administration − made his position even clearer. He stated: "Some of the major settlements could be consolidated, and these settlers could become more confident of their eventual status as part of Israel."[23]

The events of 9/11 and America's embarking on a war on radical Islam in Iraq and Afghanistan created a relatively convenient foundation for a more comfortable position on the settlements from the Israeli perspective. During the tenure of George W. Bush, detailed understandings with the Sharon government were reached about settlement construction: settlements would not be expanded and construction would be allowed only within the existing construction outlines. Israel committed itself not to establish any new settlements and not to confiscate Arab land for construction purposes.[24]

President Bush gave explicit expression to these understandings when in the press conference following a meeting with Sharon on April 14, 2004 he stated: "In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949." This assertion was restated in his April 14, 2004 letter to Sharon, approved by a large majority of the Congress. It clearly implies recognition of Israel's right to continue the settlement project according to an agreed-upon outline and on the basis of assumptions about regions that would in any case remain in Israeli hands even after a permanent agreement with the Palestinians.[25]

The Obama Experience

President Obama showed the most intensive opposition to the settlement project in Judea and Samaria early in his term in office. It was expressed in a number of rounds of talks with Israel on the issue, which at times assumed the nature of blunt confrontation. One memorable statement was made in President Obama's June 2009 Cairo speech, when he said that "the United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop."[26] The Netanyahu government refused to accept this demand. An intensive dialogue began between Israel and the US, primarily through the offices of Special Envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell, which

eventually led to a decision by the Israeli government to a partial, 10-month construction freeze in the settlements. The decision was unprecedented in its scope.

A second confrontation occurred after Vice President Biden's visit to Israel in March 2010. At its center was the administration's demand that Israel stop construction in Jerusalem. The Netanyahu government refused to accept the demand as it was stated, but seems to have expressed willingness in practice to slow down construction. A third confrontation took place after the 10-month freeze, when the administration demanded that Israel extend the freeze without receiving anything in return. This too was opposed by the Netanyahu government, and indeed, since the end of the freeze, there has been a construction drive in Judea and Samaria unprecedented in terms of its scope. From time to time, especially after the granting of construction permits, administration spokespeople reiterate that the phenomenon is an obstacle to peace.

Conclusion

Since the Six Day War, all American administrations have opposed the settlement project in the West Bank at one level of intensity or another, on political, legal, and moral grounds. In most administrations, the opposition was primarily verbal and did not carry with it real threats against the Israeli government should it fail to heed US administration demands. The administration of George H. W. Bush was different, in light of his threat to deny loan guarantees to Israel unless it froze construction in the territories.

After more than four decades, it is evident that widespread opposition to the settlement enterprise on the part of the international community in general and the American administration in particular, and within large circles in Israel itself, has not succeeded in shutting it down. Many – even among the most ardent opponents of the settlement project and even senior members of the Palestinian leadership – feel that the settlement project has created an irreversible territorial and demographic reality in the Middle East that affects a wide range of issues, especially prospects for the regional peace process.

As a rule, the foreign policy of the United States combines an ideological, moral approach with a practical, pragmatic one. Historical experience shows that in many cases, when the United States understood its opposition to certain moves was pointless, it changed its policy and

adapted it to the prevailing reality. The United States was vehemently opposed to moving Israeli government ministries and the Knesset to Jerusalem after the War of Independence. Eventually, it made its peace with the fact, if only partially. The United States was bitterly opposed to Israel developing a nuclear option, yet eventually arrived at understandings with Israel over this sensitive issue. For many years, the United States was opposed to recognizing China, but was finally forced to change its position in light of the prevailing reality.

Should the administration come to recognize the limits of its power to affect the settlement enterprise in a significant manner, the necessary conclusion is that it would be in America's national interests to arrive at understandings with Israel about the settlements on the basis of the outline described above. Continuing to embrace the routine formula opposing the settlements in a sweeping manner damages the status of the United States and its relations with Israel, and does not lead to an achievement that would serve the national interests of the United States.

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The Institutional Transformations of Hamas and Hizbollah

Anat Kurz, Benedetta Berti, and Marcel Konrad

Hamas and Hizbollah are complex and multidimensional groups, simultaneously military organizations, political parties, and social movements. Analyzed by Western analysts primarily for their terrorist and military infrastructures and operations, these groups have also developed intricate social, political, and cultural structures to complement their military power. Thus at the same time that the military strength reinforces the groups' political power and influence, the socio-political infrastructures serve as a force multiplier. Consequently, both organizations invest a significant portion of their financial resources and political capital in non-military activities, and these non-violent dimensions, particularly those directly related to garnering and reinforcing popular support, have become focal determinants of the groups' strategic and military-related operational choices.

Beyond being hybrid organizations in their combining military, political, and social activism, Hamas and Hizbollah are also hybrid non-state armed groups that over time developed characteristics normally associated with state actors. Since 2007, Hamas has been widely perceived as accountable for the security and political situation in the Gaza Strip, while Hizbollah has long been involved with governing the Shiite areas under its control, from southern Lebanon to the Dayihe suburb of South Beirut.

This article analyzes the current role and status of Hamas and Hizbollah within their respective political environments, presenting

Dr. Anat Kurz is the Director of Research and a senior research fellow at INSS. Dr. Benedetta Berti is a research fellow at INSS, and Marcel Konrad is an intern at INSS.

both similarities and differences between their situational features and evolutionary trends. It explores the impact of the Arab awakening on these groups' evolutions. Finally, the essay discusses the security challenges these trends may pose to Israel and suggests how Israeli policies toward both organizations might respond to these trends most effectively

Hamas, Hizbollah, and their Political Environments

Hamas and Hizbollah are deeply entrenched in their societies. Although their evolutional trajectories differ, both movements have evolved from being marginal players to mainstream military and political organizations.

Hamas grew out of a mass-based movement, the Gaza branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The engagement of the MB in the Strip was initially focused on the *da'wa* and social work, with the objective of bringing an Islamic "cultural renaissance" to Gaza. In the early days of the first intifada, which erupted in the Palestinian territories in late 1987, the Gaza-based MB morphed itself into Hamas. The transformation, which was manifested by adding a military dimension to the popular infrastructure of the MB, was intended to advance two closely related goals: undermining the dominance of the Fatah-led PLO in the Palestinian arena, and leading a relentless struggle against Israel under the banner of Islam and nationalism as a solution to the grievances of the Palestinian people.

Hizbollah too emerged on the basis of a mass-based movement, although its organizational roots were not as strictly defined as those from which Hamas sprouted. It was established in the early 1980s by several Lebanese religious and political leaders and by Tehran, which sought to exploit the specific conditions in Lebanon at that time to export the Islamic Revolution. The creation of Hizbollah intensified the ongoing process of radicalization and social unrest among the Shiite community in Lebanon, spurred also by the frustration over the perceived inability of the mainstream Shiite movement Amal to secure the sectarian interests of this community, the lack of a strong central government in the country, and the effects of the Israeli invasion in 1982. With massive military backup from Iran, Hizbollah emerged with a very clear raison d'être: waging Islamic resistance against Israel.[1] Israel's military presence in Lebanon, which lasted until 2000, provided Hizbollah with an ongoing

and ever-growing reason for military entrenchment and activity, particularly in the southern area of the country, and a means to mobilize popular support for its self-appointed role as the defender of Lebanon against a foreign invader. Unlike the case of Hamas, Hizbollah's social-political infrastructure developed gradually over time, as the organization came to realize the need for popular backup for its military infrastructure and in accordance with its growing intra-Lebanese political ambitions.

Over the years, both groups built sophisticated military apparatuses, although Hizbollah's strength far exceeds that of Hamas. The Lebanese Shiite group is by far Lebanon's most formidable military organization, and its units are trained both to wage attacks against Israel as well as to maintain power in the areas it controls.

Hamas also has an impressive force, and the group now commands two parallel structures: its military wing (the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades), and the security sector in Gaza. In the aftermath of the 2007 armed expulsion of the Fatah forces from the Gaza Strip and the takeover of the area by Hamas, the military wing grew in size and capacity. At the same time, Hamas relied on the security sector to crack down on internal opposition and solidify its control of the Strip.

Politically, both groups have evolved in the past decades and now occupy an important place within their respective arenas. Hizbollah has participated in Lebanon's political system since becoming a political party in the early 1990s in the aftermath of Lebanon's civil war. Following the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, Hizbollah's political role institutionalized further, with the group first joining Lebanon's executive cabinet in 2005. This occurred while the organization was officially allowed, in accordance with the stipulations of the Ta'if Agreement, to maintain its independent military infrastructure, due to the Israeli presence in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese Shiite group's political role was further entrenched in the May 2008 Doha agreement, basically granting Hizbollah, together with its political allies, veto power within the cabinet. Since January 2011, Hizbollah is a member of the parliamentary majority under the government of Prime Minister Najib Mikati.

> Hamas has always invested in promoting its identity as nationalist as well as Islamist. Even since the 2007 takeover, despite the ongoing Islamization of Gaza, Hamas has adopted a cautious yet incremental approach with respect to imposing its Islamist vision.

Hamas also became an institutional player within Palestinian politics after it underwent a strategic shift and decided to participate in the official political process and the Palestinian political institutional sphere, by competing in the 2005 municipal elections and in the 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council. However, Hamas's position is more complex: the group is an "insider" in Gaza, where it serves as the government, while it is an "outsider" with respect to the political institutions of the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

In operating as political parties and de facto rulers, both groups can count on their existing welfare and charity infrastructures to boost their legitimacy and popularity. Historically both organizations have actively provided a vast array of social services, from health care, to education, to welfare services to combat poverty. For instance in Gaza, where according to the most recent data approximately 39 percent of the population lives below the poverty line,[2] Hamas, together with UNRWA, is the most important food donor in the Strip, and this in turn represents an important source of legitimacy for the group. Hizbollah is in absolute numbers an even bigger player when it comes to social welfare activities. An example of this well-organized infrastructure is Hizbollah's Construction Foundation Jihad al- Binaa. After the 2006 war with Israel, Hizbollah rebuilt 5000 homes in 82 villages and repaired roads and infrastructure. The movement also promised to pay compensation to people whose houses were destroyed, offering $12,000 for rent and furniture until homes were reconstructed, and spending approximately $300 million for compensation.[3]

Having grown to large military, political, and social organizations, Hamas and Hizbollah have both experienced the challenge of adjusting their ideological aspirations as well as their military activities to the shifting political environment and the need to maintain popularity and enhance legitimacy.

Domestically, they have in the past decades downplayed some radical elements of their ideology in order to appeal to a larger audience. Hamas has always invested in promoting its identity as nationalist as well as Islamist, and in its 2005 political program, it deliberately softened its earlier stated ambitions to impose *sharia* in Gaza. Even since its 2007 takeover, despite the ongoing Islamization of Gaza, Hamas has adopted a cautious yet incremental approach with respect to imposing its Islamist vision of society.

Hizbollah, since becoming a political party, has narrowed its original goal to create an Islamic state within Lebanon. In its 2009 "Manifesto," its revised ideological charter, the group omitted any reference to creating a state modeled after Iran, something that the group had clearly identified as a primary interest in its earlier charter, written in 1985. In addition, the group has invested in branding itself as both Arab and Lebanese, downplaying its strategic partnership with Iran.

With respect to their external relations in general and to Israel in particular, Hamas and Hizbollah have adopted two very different approaches. Outwardly, they both rely on similarly aggressive rhetoric towards Israel. However, over the years Hamas has adopted a more tempered discourse, for example by developing the concept of the *hudna* (a long term truce in return for a full withdrawal of Israel to the 1967 lines) and by discussing the de facto recognition of Israel,[4] whereas Hizbollah's discourse leaves no room for maneuver at all with Israel.

Regarding their terrorist and military courses of action, both Hamas and Hizbollah have placed emphasis on entrenching their military power and from time to time demonstrate their operational capacity so as not to lose credibility in their commitment to the struggle against Israel. However, both have also displayed awareness of red lines, conscious that crossing them would trigger strong counteractions by Israel. By and large this is the case, despite incidents of miscalculation. The abduction of Israeli soldiers that provoked the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and the escalation in the rocket fire from the Gaza Strip that precipitated Operation Cast Lead in Gaza (December 2008-January 2009) are cases in point. Notably, deterring against precisely such eventualities has been a major motivating factor underlying the military buildup.

> The "Arab Spring" has led both Hamas and Hizbollah to undertake a number of significant changes, even though the regional protests have not resulted in a direct challenge to the groups' institutional roles.

Finally, although both groups are deeply entrenched within their own society, they are not universally popular. In fact, the efforts of Hamas and Hizbollah to establish popularity do not convince the majority of their populations. The 2012 Pew Research Center polls show that support for Hizbollah is roughly at 40 percent, while being highly polarized (94 percent of the country's Shiites support the group against only 5 percent of the Sunni community).[5] Support for Hamas within the Palestinian

territories as of May 2011 was at 42 percent.[6] Even more significantly, in the June 2012 polls by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, roughly 27 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and 31 percent of Palestinians in Gaza affirmed they would vote for Hamas' Change and Reform list if new legislative elections were to take place.[7]

Hamas's political status is weakened by the unpopularity of its rift with Fatah, as well as its shaky record of governance since 2007. Hizbollah, on the other hand, is largely distrusted by the majority of the Lebanese Sunni (and to a lesser extent Christian) community, especially following its temporary armed takeover of West Beirut in May 2008.[8] Furthermore, as the next section discusses, recent events resulting from the Arab Spring have further challenged Hamas's and Hizbollah's standing in their domestic spheres and in the region.

Strategic Implications of the Arab Spring

The past two years have produced a new discourse throughout the region, focused on socio-political rights and freedoms, civil society, and large scale use of strategic non-violent struggle. It has also seen the ascent to power of non-violent groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

This trend has likewise been manifested in the reshuffling of the political cards in both the Palestinian territories and Lebanon. The "Arab Spring" has led both Hamas and Hizbollah to undertake a number of significant changes at the ideological, political, and strategic levels. This is the case even though the regional protests have not resulted in a direct challenge to the groups' institutional roles.

Hamas reacted to the emerging regional trends by rethinking its strategy and political discourse, for example by emphasizing its interest in pursuing non-violent struggle in parallel with armed "resistance."[9] The regional changes have also spurred an internal debate on the organization's readiness to consider adherence to public opinion in case of a breakthrough in the political process towards an agreement with Israel. Similarly, an older debate on the possibility of a de facto recognition of Israel has been revived within Hamas. Moreover, the Palestinian organization has gone back to its roots by stressing its own links with the Brotherhood, both in Egypt and internationally.[10]

Hizbollah has evinced less inclination for evolution and shown no substantial changes in its political discourse. In addition, the group has been perceived as ideologically inconsistent with respect to the

Arab awakening. Hizbollah first took the side of the "Arab street" and supported the revolutions where it suited its political strategy (as in the case of Egypt), but later switched sides and stood by the Assad regime and against the political opposition in Syria. Hizbollah's backing of Assad has led to widespread criticism against the group and its "hypocrisy," both at the regional and domestic levels.[11]

For Hamas, the regional awakening heightened the issue of Palestinian reconciliation. In 2011 Hamas very much feared that the regional turmoil might extend to the Gaza Strip, fueled by the domestic discontent over the longstanding rift between Fatah and Hamas. The strong desire (shared by both Fatah and Hamas) to diffuse a potential "demonstration effect" of the "Arab Spring" on the Palestinian territories pushed both parties to sign the May 2011 "reconciliation agreement" in Cairo and to commit (at least on paper) to move beyond divisions and polarizations. However, the Cairo agreement served more to institutionalize the balance of power between Hamas and Fatah and send a goodwill gesture to the temporary military council ruling Egypt than to truly end the rift between the parties.[12] Currently, the reconciliation process is in fact frozen, as both Fatah and Hamas are unwilling to do what it takes to establish power sharing.

The political impact of the "Arab Spring" on Hizbollah is equally significant and related to the group's alliance with Assad and his regime in Syria. Hizbollah's backing of Assad has contributed to the deterioration of the already sour relations with the March 14 movement. It has also led to an escalation in the political and sectarian divide between Hizbollah and the Shiite community on the one hand, and the Sunni community on the other, backing the Assad regime and the opposition forces, respectively. The tensions at times escalate into full fledged armed clashes,[13] resulting in more internal instability and threatening Hizbollah's domestic standing. In addition, Hizbollah appears to be losing some of its political clout with respect to its own political allies, largely diverging on the issue of Syria.

Strategically, the progressive escalation of the internal crisis in Syria has affected both Hamas and Hizbollah. Syria had traditionally been an important ally of both groups. In the case of Hamas, Syria has consistently backed the Palestinian group while also housing the headquarters of the Political Bureau. With respect to Hizbollah, Syria served as the connecting link between Iran and Lebanon, allowing the

flow of weapons and logistical support from Tehran to Hizbollah. Also, the Assad family was a strong political supporter of Hizbollah, and during the long decades of Syrian "tutelage" over Lebanon, Damascus protected the Lebanese-Shiite organization and its weapons.

However, despite both groups' ties with the Assad regime, Hizbollah and Hamas reacted very differently to the political protests in Syria.

On the one hand, Hamas had a strong political connection with Assad as well as sectarian and religious ties to the Sunni majority protesting against the Alawite-dominated regime. As such, openly siding with the Syrian regime the way Hizbollah or Iran did was not a viable option for Hamas. This explains the initial reluctance displayed by Hamas leaders to condemn the Syrian regime and take the side of the protesters, as it did immediately in the cases of Tunisia and Egypt,[14] as well as its attempts to keep a low profile on the Syrian crisis. As the crisis escalated, Hamas's policy of non-interference started to shift. The relationship with both Iran and the Assad regime quickly became lukewarm due to Hamas's lack of open support for the Syrian regime.[15] With the escalation of the crisis, Hamas also gradually started to distance itself from Damascus, first by reducing its presence in Syria, and then by quietly relocating its political bureau.[16] The severed relationship between Syria and Hamas has indeed been one of the most important consequences of the "Arab Spring" for the Palestinian group. It represents a window of opportunity for Hamas to redefine its regional alliances and move away from the "axis of resistance," leading the group closer to both Egypt and the Gulf countries. With these countries having a stronger impact on Hamas and its organizational outlook, the group's pragmatism is likely to be encouraged.

The severed relationship between Syria and Hamas represents a window of opportunity for Hamas to redefine its regional alliances and move away from the "axis of resistance," leading the group closer to both Egypt and the Gulf countries.

Unlike Hamas, Hizbollah cannot afford to dissociate itself from Assad. Its logistical dependence on Syria and its ideological and logistical ties with Iran are crucial sources of power for the organization within the Shiite community and therefore in Lebanon as a whole. In fact, Hizbollah appears to have no alternate effective supporter in the region, other than Syria and Iran. Even its relationships with the Syrian opposition forces are extremely antagonistic. As such, it is likely these

groups would choose to turn their backs on Hizbollah once Assad is gone and they are in power. Hence the turmoil in Syria and the threat to Assad's regime have placed Hizbollah in a very delicate position. The collapse of the Syrian regime would also reshuffle the political cards in Lebanon, giving strength and influence to Hizbollah's political opposition, backed by Saudi Arabia.

Thus although both Hamas and Hizbollah have been affected by the "Arab Spring" at the ideological, political, and strategic levels, Hamas's position seems substantially more promising than Hizbollah's. This is because the Palestinian group has been able to adapt to the shifting political environment – notwithstanding the obstacles to translating the readiness to reconcile with the PA into a real change in the Palestinian political framework, and the fact that Hamas's declared acceptance of a potential settlement with Israel has not yet been put to a test. In contrast, Hizbollah, with deeper strategic links to both Syrian and Iran, has been slower in responding to the regional changes.

Strategic Implications for Israel

Although Hamas and Hizbollah have undergone different institutional developments, with the former emerging from a larger social movement and the latter initially created as a military organization, nowadays both groups have reached a similar status as complex social, military, and political organizations. Both groups have also evolved into quasi-state actors. Both organizations continue to represent a significant challenge for Israel, being militarily capable of triggering an armed confrontation. They are equally significant from a political perspective, as the views of Hamas and Hizbollah with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict influence and constrain the position of their respective societies.

The rapid process of social and political change set in motion by the "Arab Spring" has had an impact on the organizational outlook and strategy of both Hamas as well as Hizbollah – even though the groups have largely been able to hold on to their respective power and status. Hamas is still in charge of Gaza, and the Fatah-led calls to launch a Palestinian Arab Spring in 2011 did not amount to any substantial challenge to the group.[17] Hizbollah has been part of the parliamentary majority since January 2011, and the Mikati government has so far weathered the storm of the regional revolutions.

Even so, the ongoing regional turmoil in general, and the war in Syria in particular, have challenged these groups at the ideological, political, and strategic levels. The different coping strategies implemented by Hamas and Hizbollah to adapt to the "Arab Spring" signal that these groups are now undergoing very different institutional processes, and as such, they should be approached differently.

With respect to Hamas, the group has shown itself more pragmatic and able to adapt to the changing regional circumstances. To be sure, its readiness to change alliance is not just an indication of ideological and strategic flexibility, but also the result of its being the representative of a religious-national, not a sectarian community, and of having much less to lose than Hizbollah from breaking away from the Syrian-Iranian axis. Thus, Hamas is likely to benefit from some of the changes created by the Arab Spring, including the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power in Egypt. As time passes, the isolation of Hamas seems an ever less realistic policy, which suggests that Israel might do well to consider adjusting its policy. Specifically, while pressurizing Hamas to bring its military buildup and activity to a halt, Israel should also take steps to engage with Hamas directly, as well as consider easing the economic restrictions on the Strip and stop obstructing the (notably half-hearted) intra-Palestinian reconciliation attempts. In turn, this could well enhance the chances of establishing a nationally legitimate and functioning authority in the Palestinian arena.

With respect to Hizbollah, the political calculation is quite different. The group has shown far less capacity to adapt, especially when compared to Hamas, and it is now in a much weaker position. In particular, the likely fall of Assad would inflict a hard, albeit not mortal, blow to the Lebanese Shiite organization. With this predicament in mind, Israel would do well not to initiate any hostility with respect to the group, as this might well reverse the process of domestic crisis and rally the Lebanese population behind the "Party of God."

Given the different positions of Hamas and Hizbollah, Israel should also expect them to have different reactions to a potential Israeli attack on Iran. Hamas can be expected to exercise caution and stay at the margins of a confrontation in order to avoid risking an Israeli counter-reaction that would inevitably jeopardize their institutional gains thus far. This is particularly true as Hamas is currently repositioning itself away from the Syrian-Iranian axis and closer to Egypt as well as the Gulf states. In

the case of Hizbollah, the group would be more likely than Hamas to get involved, although a direct and full fledged military involvement should not be taken for granted, given the group's current domestic constraints.

However, in light of their professed anti-Israeli credo, Israel should continue to endorse careful, calculated containment, so as to make it hard for both groups to dictate the rules of the game and to trigger repeated cycles of violence when such a development suits them and their aim to reinforce their domestic standing.

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