

Israel's Kennedy Doctrine on Damascus: The Syrian Missile Crisis

by Dr. Christina Y. Lin

*“And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars.
See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass,
but the end is not yet.” Matthew 24:6*

***Abstract.** Israel is facing a Syrian missile crisis with the recent revelation of long-range Scud-D transfers to Hezbollah. In response, Israel declared it now regards Hezbollah as a division of the Syrian army and any strikes will require retaliatory response against Damascus. This is reminiscent of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, when JFK invoked the Kennedy Doctrine and declared any strike from Soviet proxies in the Western Hemisphere against others in the region is deemed a direct Soviet attack on the U.S. Despite the passage of time and difference in region, there are some lessons learned from the Cuban missile crisis that may offer insights and course of action to address the current missile crisis from the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Axis. By multi-lateralising the response under provisions of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (i.e. the Rio Treaty), U.S. and Latin American countries led a successful naval quarantine campaign against Soviet arms build up of Cuba. Perhaps by bringing the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah nuclear missile crisis under the multi-lateral umbrella of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) between NATO, Gulf states and strategic partners such as Israel, the ICI can lead an effective campaign to stop arms to Hezbollah and refined-petroleum products to Iran in order to halt its nuclear programme.*

Rumours of War in the Middle East

“Syria warns: Next war will be ruinous”.¹ “Report: Israel threatens to send Syria back to Stone Age”.² “Syria threatens to send Israel back to ‘prehistoric times’”.³ “Jordan’s King Says Israel-Hezbollah-Lebanon War May be ‘Imminent’”.⁴ “Report: Assad due in Egypt to discuss fear of Israel-Syria war”.⁵ These are the latest news headlines as the winds of war begin to blow once again in the Middle East. Syrian transfer of long- range Scud D missiles to Hezbollah, which now drastically changed the strategic balance in the region, provoked the recent heightened tension. These missiles have the potential to reach the entire country of Israel and could carry chemical warheads, and possibly nuclear warheads. Back in 2007 Mossad Chief Meir Dagan had presented Olmert with evidence that Syria was actively seeking to acquire nuclear device from North Korea for its Scud missiles.⁶

As a response Israel made it clear that its policy “now regards Hezbollah as a division of the Syrian army and that reprisals against Syria will be fast and devastating.”⁷ This is reminiscent of what President John F Kennedy said in 1962 in face of the Cuban missile crisis: “It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union.”⁸ It seems Israel is now applying the Kennedy Doctrine towards Syria.⁹

¹ “Syria warns: Next war will be ruinous”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 20 February 2010.

² “Report: Israel threatens to send Syria back to Stone Age”, *Ynet News*, 18 April 2010.

³ “Syria threatens to send Israel back to ‘prehistoric times’”, *Ynet News*, 24 April 2010.

⁴ Steve Clemons, “Jordan’s King Says Israel-Hezbollah-Lebanon War May Be ‘Imminent’”, *The Washington Note*, 14 April 2010.

⁵ Zvi Bar’el, “Report: Assad due in Egypt to discuss fear of Israel-Syria War”, *Ha’aretz*, 21 April 2010.

⁶ Uzi Mahnaimi, “Israelis ‘blew apart Syrian nuclear cache’”, *Times Online*, 16 September 2007.

⁷ Uzi Mahnaimi, “Israel warns Syria over Hezbollah attacks”, *Times Online*, 18 April 2010.

⁸ Kennedy, John F (22 October 1962), speech on Cuban Missile Crisis.

⁹ <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/JFK+in+History/Cuban+Missile+Crisis.htm> .

The Kennedy Doctrine and Cuban Missile Crisis

On 14 October 1962, U.S. reconnaissance made a startling discovery—missile bases were being built in Cuba. Two days later JFK convened the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (EXCOMM) with 14 key officials and his brother Robert to discuss a response. The U.S. did not have a plan in place because U.S. intelligence assessed that Soviets would not install nuclear missiles in Cuba; nonetheless, the EXCOMM quickly came up with five possible courses of action:

1. Do nothing
2. Use diplomatic pressure to get USSR to remove missiles
3. Air attack on missiles
4. Full military invasion
5. Naval blockade of Cuba (subsequently redefined as a more selective quarantine)¹⁰

During the meeting, EXCOMM discussed the effects on the *strategic* balance, which Secretary of Defence McNamara assessed adding 40 strategic missiles to Soviet's existing 300 stockpile vis-à-vis U.S. 5,000 warheads made no difference.¹¹ But, on the *political* balance, taking no action would have a grave impact on U.S. credibility to allies. U.S. credibility would have been damaged had they allowed the Soviet Union to *appear* to redress the strategic balance by placing missiles in Cuba. JFK explained, "It would have politically changed the balance of power. It would have appeared to, and appearances contribute to reality."¹²

A full-scale invasion was not the first option, but something had to be done, and it fell on the option of a naval blockade. However, since a full naval *blockade* was by international law an act of war, it was redefined to a selective naval *quarantine* targeting only offensive weapons shipments—which is short of an act of war. After deciding on the option of a naval quarantine, which would take place on international waters, JFK obtained approval of Organization for American States (OAS) for military action under the hemispheric defence provisions of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (i.e., the Rio Treaty) and led a multilateral naval quarantine campaign in the region.

On 22 October JFK delivered a televised speech to the American people to inform them of the crisis and some of his course of action. They include quarantine on all offensive military shipment to Cuba, increased surveillance of Cuba and military build-up, OAS consultation, and most importantly declaring that U.S. policy now regards "any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western hemisphere as an attack by Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union." JFK understood the gravity of the situation and the shadow of a potential nuclear war, and exhorted the American public:

"let no one doubt that this is a difficult and dangerous effort on which we have set out. No one can see precisely what course it will take or what costs or casualties will be incurred. Many months of sacrifice and self-discipline lie ahead—months in which our patience and our will will be tested—months in which many threats and denunciations will keep us aware of our dangers. *But the greatest danger of all would be to do nothing.*"¹³

He warned: "The 1930s taught us a clear lesson: aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged ultimately leads to war."¹⁴

⁹ The Kennedy Doctrine was containment of Communism and reversal of Communist progress in Western Hemisphere. It viewed any actions by Soviet proxies as direct Soviet action.

¹⁰ Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision* (Pearson Education, 1999), pp. 111-116.

¹¹ J. Blight & D. Welch, *On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Noonday Press, 1990).

¹² John F Kennedy, "After Two Years: A conversation with the president", Television and radio interview, 17 December 1962. In *Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy, 1962* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963) pp.889-904.

¹³ John F Kennedy, "Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Soviet Arms Buildup in Cuba, October 22, 1962", transcript from John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum, <http://www.jfklibrary.org>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Thus the U.S. and ‘coalition of the willing’ Latin American countries joined together on a dual-track of pursuing military option (short of war) and continued diplomatic pressure. When the Soviets showed no sign of slowing down missile sites work, JFK responded by issuing Security Action Memorandum 199, authorising loading of nuclear weapons onto aircraft under the command of SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe), which has duty of carrying out the first air strikes on the Soviet Union. JFK actively took steps to prepare for war—positioned for nuclear strike on USSR if they attack, ordered a crash programme to institute a new civil government in Cuba if an invasion went ahead, and continue with both military and diplomatic pressure.¹⁵ When the Soviets saw the U.S. was serious about preparing for war, it finally backed down and asked for a diplomatic solution.

Lessons Learned

The case of the Cuban missile crisis provides some important lessons that may be applicable to the current Iran-Syria-Hezbollah missile crisis:

1. *Attack by proxy is an attack by sponsor.* JFK declared an attack by Soviet proxy in Western Hemisphere is deemed as direct Soviet attack on the U.S. Israel recently declared an attack by Hezbollah is an attack by Syria.
 2. *Arms build up is a coordinated effort of the sponsor-proxy axis.* Just as the Cuban missile crisis is part of the Soviet-Cuba axis, the Syrian missile crisis is part and parcel of the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis. They are coordinating arms build up to prepare for war (See Figure 1).
 3. *Pursue combined military and diplomatic track.* After choosing the naval quarantine option, the U.S. pursued a simultaneous military (short of war) and diplomatic track. In the current Iran-Syria-Hezbollah case, since China (by providing petroleum and vast energy investments in Iran) is the loophole for enforcing any ‘coalition of the willing’ energy sanctions on Iran, and the international community is wary of a full-scale naval blockade (act of war) or military air strike, a selective quarantine of petroleum products may be effective.
- Because sanctions lack teeth for enforcement, quarantine is merely one step up on enforcing what would have been effective ‘crippling sanctions’. Quarantine is not a full naval blockade that would hurt the Iranian citizens, and it is short of an act of war. Quarantine could be applied to Iran crude exports and Chinese (and others such as Venezuela etc.) petroleum imports into Iran. It’s possible the Chinese may be persuaded to come onboard if the diplomatic tract is still on the table along with the quarantine; if not, the quarantine could still go forward by a ‘coalition of the willing’. Since the axis consists of Iran-Syria-Hezbollah, quarantine may also be placed on arms to Hezbollah in addition to energy goods to Iran.
4. *Multi-lateralise into ‘coalition of the willing’ for naval quarantine.* Since some Gulf states have urged immediate action (more than sanctions) or they’ll pursue their own nuclear options in a cascade of regional proliferation, perhaps they may be amenable to joining the quarantine campaign. NATO and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) already include Jordan and Israel, and other willing Gulf states with partnership agreement with NATO could be onboard to apply the quarantine. Israel alone cannot fight the multiple fronts of the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah-Hamas axis. But through cooperation with U.S., NATO and ICI, along with willing Gulf partners, perhaps a plan could be worked out.
 5. *Danger of doing nothing—emboldens the enemy.* An important lesson from the Cuban missile crisis was Soviet *perception* of U.S. weakness. The U.S. had been embarrassed by the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, launched by the CIA under JFK. After the operation, former President Eisenhower told Kennedy that, “the failure of the Bay of Pigs will embolden the Soviets to do something that they would otherwise not do.”¹⁶ The half-hearted invasion had given Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev and

¹⁵ Richard Helms (Deputy Director for Plans, CIA) , *Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence: Meeting with the Attorney General of the United States concerning Cuba*, 19 January 1962, George Washington University National Security Archives.

¹⁶ Kenneth Michael Absher, *Mind-Sets and Missiles: A First Hand Account of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2009, p.10.

his advisers the impression that JFK was indecisive and lacked confidence, and they deduced that JFK would avoid confrontation and accept the missiles as a *fait accompli*.¹⁷

However, when JFK responded decisively and forcefully to the missile crisis on the heels of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, the Soviet ultimately backed down from fear of an invasion on Cuba and imminent nuclear war with the U.S.

The Kennedy Doctrine and the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Axis Missile Crisis

Winds of War—Axis Arms Build up for Battle

Currently, the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Axis seems to be taking active steps for arms build up to prepare for war. Empirical evidence for this trajectory is found in the following timeline of events since September 2009.

Figure 1: Timeline of Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Arms Build up

Date	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 September 2009 • October 2009 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syrian sent 10,000 troops along Lebanon border¹⁸ • Increased Syrian troops and positioning tanks on border facing Lebanon’s Bekka Valley; Lebanese President Suleiman enquired with Bashar al-Assad, who said it was for fighting smugglers and crime along the border [instead of using police]¹⁹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 2009 • December 2009 • January 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syria and Iran upgrade 2005 defence pact • Iran-Oman hold joint drill in Persian Gulf²⁰ • Entire 4th division of Syrian army under Maher al-Assad deployed to area known as Shatt el-Arab on northern coastal strip²¹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lebanon Syria border prepare for Syrian tanks; sounds of explosion heard along border caused by blasting big rocks in area to make parking lot for Syrian army tanks. Kuwait’s <i>Al Siyasa</i> cited a Lebanese army source saying the blasts were conducted by terrorist Ahmed Jibril Rajoub’s pro-Syrian Popular Front terror organisation. Tanks expected to arrive in area soon to protect Lebanon for fear of an Israeli attack.²²
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 February 2010 • 26 February 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran signs defence cooperation agreement with Qatar²³ • Al-Assad hosts dinner with Ahmadinejad and Nasarallah. According to account of Hezbollah’s online magazine <i>Al intiqad</i>, meeting was about ‘the escalating strategic response of the axis of the confrontationist, rejectionist, and resistance states to the US-Israel threat’ and suggested war with Israel was imminent.²⁴
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 March 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran signs regional security deals with three Gulf states: Oman, Qatar and Kuwait²⁵
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 April 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western intelligence sources said Iran ready to attack U.S. interests and Ahmadinejad urged Assad to transfer scuds to Hezbollah ASAP to prepare for all eventualities²⁶
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 April 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kuwaiti paper <i>Al Rai</i> published Syrian intention for 2 front war against Israel

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.1.

¹⁸ Press TV, “Syrian Troops Buildup Along Lebanon Border”, 21 January 2010.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ ‘Iran-Oman joint drill in Persian Gulf successful: report’, *People’s Daily Online*, 25 December 2009; ‘Iran, Oman Hold Meeting on Defense Cooperation’, *Fars News Agency*, 20 December 2009

²¹ *Al Markazai* news agency, 20 January 2010.

²² *Al Siyasa*; Israel National News, 19 February 2010.

²³ VOA, ‘Iran Signs Cooperation Pact with Gulf Neighbor Qatar’, 24 February 2010.

²⁴ *Al Hayat*, Feb 26, 2010.

²⁵ Gerson Lehrman Group, “Iran Divides Gulf States by Signing Regional Security Deals”, 7 March 2010; Habib Toumi, “Iran signs security deals with three Gulf states”, *Gulf News*, 7 March 2010. Iran defence minister Ahmad Vahidi told *Al Jazeera* that Iran signed security agreements with Oman, Kuwait and Qatar not to allow their territories to be used for attacks against either Iran or any of the other signatories.

²⁶ ‘Syria sends Hizballah Scud in disassembled batches’, *DEBKAfile*, 23 April 2010.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23-25 April 2010 • 23 April 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran War Games April 2010 • <i>Al Hataf</i> reported Russian source mentioned Medvedev to visit Syria 11 May to discuss military cooperation; in accordance with contracts signed, Russia has supplied Syria with S-300 and Iskander missile defence system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27 April 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egyptian FM called Israel “Enemy state” and will support Lebanon and Hezbollah in any war²⁷
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 May 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qatar PM met Hezbollah Nasrallah about Arab response to Israeli threat²⁸
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 May 2010 • 5 May 2010 • May 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lebanon takes over UNSC presidency in May²⁹ • Iran starts another 8-day war games³⁰ • Al-Assad to meet Egyptian president regarding war with Israel

The Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Axis appears to be taking a two-pronged strategy of (1) “divide and conquer” GCC solidarity against the Persian bomb and (2) “distract and deflect” Arab focus on the Persian Bomb to an Arab-Israeli conflict.

Axis ‘Divide and Conquer’ Strategy

Iran appears to be applying a strategy of dividing GCC solidarity against the Persian bomb by signing security pacts with three Gulf states—Oman, Kuwait and Qatar.³¹ The agreement stipulates these states will not allow their territories to be used for attacks against either Iran or other signatories. This creates a seam between these countries and the other three GCC countries with particularly strong relationship with the U.S.—Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE—which has territorial disputes with Iran over three islands.³²

Abdullah Al Shayji, Professor at Kuwait University, is aware of Iran’s strategy and argues for a more confrontational approach by GCC.³³ He concedes that Iran for a long time has bet on GCC’s lack of a coherent and unified strategy against it, because this is the bet that pays off. He argues that GCC states, bilaterally and collectively, pursue cordial relations with Iran in hopes that this would prevent it from menacing them. However, this strategy lacks strategic depth, as Iran has responded to GCC’s non-committal approach by “spouting bellicose, arrogant rhetoric, meddling in Yemen, lecturing the Saudis and threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz.”³⁴

The Gulf states are particularly wary³⁵ of a Persian bomb and a fourth Gulf War³⁵, and in fact some Gulf Arab leaders have in the past told influential U.S. visitors that U.S. attacks on Iranian nuclear facility sooner rather than later would be welcome.³⁶ “We have a shared interest in preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear power...and we don’t recognise economic sanctions are going to change the Iranians’ mind,” said Mustafa Alani, research director at the Gulf Research Centre, a Dubai think-tank.³⁷ During Secretary Clinton’s visit to Riyadh on 15 February, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal criticised sanctions as too slow: “Sanctions are a long term solution...we see the issue in the shorter term because we are closer to the threat...We need an immediate resolution.”³⁸ In fact German magazine *Der Spiegel* in March reported that Saudi Arabia is hoping Israel will strike Iran’s nuclear facilities and allow Israeli use of airspace to do so.³⁹ Reports of this first surfaced in 2009 in

²⁷ Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) Special Dispatch No. 2926, „Egyptian Foreign Minister in Al-Ahram Names Israel as ‚the Enemy,‘ Praises Ties with Syria; Al-Ahram Editorial: ‚What We Need Now is to Increase Israel’s Isolation,‘ 27 April 2010.

²⁸ „Nasrallah, Qatari PM Discuss Israeli THreats against Lebanon, Syria“, *Naharnet*, 1 May 2010.

²⁹ „Lebanon to Head UN Security Council throughout May“, *Naharnet*, 1 May 2010.

³⁰ „Iran says plans new war games, photographed U.S. ship“, *Reuters*, 4 May 2010.

³¹ Habib Toumi, „Iran signs security deals with three Gulf states“, *Gulf News*, 7 March 2010; „Iran Divides Gulf States by Signing Regional Security Deals“, *Gerson Lehman Group*, 7 March 2010.

³² *Ibid.* „Iran rejects GCC claim over 3 Persian Gulf islands“, *Press TV*, 11 March 2010.

³³ Abdullah Al Shayji, „GCC needs new Iran strategy“, *Gulf News*, 1 February 2010.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Arguably the first Gulf War began with Iran-Iraq in 1980; the second in 1990-91; and the third in 2003. Dr. Neil Patrick, „The Gulf States and a fourth Gulf War.“, RUSI Analysis, 2 September 2009.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ „Gulf states wary of both Iran’s nukes and punitive sanctions“, *Associated Foreign Press*, 11 March 2010.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Bernhard Zand, „Netanyahu Against the Rest of the World“, *Der Spiegel*, 16 March 2010; „Maayana Miskin, „Report: Saudi Arabia Seeks Strike on Iran“, *Arutz Sheva*, 19 March 2010; Uzi Mahnaimi, „Saudis give nod to Israeli raid on Iran“, *Times Online*, 5 July 2009; Jason Ditz, „M16: Saudi Will Let Israel Bomb Iran Nuclear Site“, *Antiwar*, 27 September 2009.

London's *Daily Express*, citing a meeting between MI6 chief Sir John Scarlett and Mossad chief Meir Dagan, claiming that Saudi Arabia is ready to allow Israel to bomb Iran's new nuclear site.⁴⁰ This came on the heels of British intelligence officers discovering the new nuclear site at Qom.

This view seems to be shared by Kuwait, as Sami al-Faraj, former Kuwaiti government adviser and head of Kuwait Centre for Strategy Studies, said that military air strike by Israel would be welcome. When asked in an interview with the daily *Al-Siyassah* about consequences of an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear reactors, al Faraj concedes, "honestly speaking, they would be achieving something of great strategic value for the GCC by stopping Iran's tendency for hegemony over the area". He added that 'nipping it in the bud by Israeli hands would be less embarrassing for us' than if the Americans did it.⁴¹

Absent a coherent GCC strategy towards Iran and given security agreements with Iran limiting U.S. military freedom of action in the region, the burden of stopping Iran's Persian bomb seems to fall heavily on the shoulders of Israel. However, this appears to be where the second prong of Iran's strategy comes in to deflect focus from Iran and bog down Israel in a possible war with Syria and Lebanon/Hezbollah.

Axis Distraction and Deflection Strategy

While Iran diffuse GCC solidarity on the Persian bomb, its axis partners Syria and Hezbollah are deflecting Arab focus from Iran onto an impending Syria/Lebanon-Israel war. Rumours of a summer war is now energising Arab states to rally around the Arab vs. Israeli conflict instead of the Arabs vs. Persian bomb conflict. Persian Iran seems to be getting Arab Syria to court fellow Arab states such as Egypt and Lebanon to form a united Arab front against Israel.

In April Syrian president Bashar al-Assad visited Egypt regarding fear of a Syria-Israel war. Syria seems to be once again evoking pan-Arabism and its historical ties with Egypt as the former United Arab Republic to stand against Israel. After the al-Assad's visit, Egyptian PM called Israel the "enemy state" and declared Egypt will stand with Lebanon/Hezbollah in any Arab-Israeli conflict.⁴² Syria and Egypt were partners in three wars against Israel--1948 War of Independence; 1967 Six Day War; 1973 Yom Kippur War. As Kissinger once quipped, in the Middle East "there is no war without Egypt, no peace without Syria."

During the Yom Kippur War, Egypt conducted war games early in the year and had Israeli military on high alert. After several false alarms and the Israelis became more relaxed, Egypt used its October military exercise as a cover to attack Israel, along with Syria in the northern front. Despite warnings from King Hussein of Jordan on 25 September to Golda Meir about an impending Syrian attack, it fell on deaf ears.

Currently Syria is rallying Egypt, Lebanon/Hezbollah to fend against an Israeli attack, while Iran is continuing unabated on its nuclear weapons programme and conducting a series of military exercises. A Jordanian King is once again issuing warning about an imminent summer war in the region. While there are rumours of war and any correlation between events leading to the Yom Kippur War and the current situation may be spurious, it is important nonetheless to pay heed and prepare for all possible contingencies during times of high volatility and tension.

Allied Policy Options

Former UN Ambassador John Bolton recently penned an article in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "Get Ready for a Nuclear Iran", arguing the further pursuit of sanctions is tantamount to doing nothing, for it provides a cover for Iran's continued nuclear progress and gives the illusion of "doing something".⁴³ The Saudis, Kuwaitis and UAE share his sentiment on the need for action that is

⁴⁰ Gordon Thomas and Camilla Tominey, "Saudis will let Israel bomb Iran nuclear site", *Daily Express*, 27 September 2009.

⁴¹ "Kuwaiti strategist: Israel should strike Iran", *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 Marh 2010.

⁴² *Al-Mustaqbal* (Lebanon), *Al-Ahram* (Egypt), *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (London), 25 April 2010.

⁴³ John Bolton, "Get Ready for a Nuclear Iran", *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 May 2010.

stronger than sanction, having witnessed how the Six Party Talk and several rounds of toothless UNSC sanctions provided cover for DPRK to buy time until it became a nuclear power.

Bolton observed that Obama administration's resignation to a containment/deterrence policy is dangerous. He pointed out "facile analogies to Cold War deterrence rest on dubious, unproven belief that Iran's nuclear calculus will approximate the Soviet Union. Iran's apocalyptic theocratic regime and the high value placed on life in the hereafter makes this an exceedingly dangerous assumption."⁴⁴

Moreover, a deterrence strategy featuring security assurances to neighbouring countries and promises of American retaliation if Iran uses nuclear weapons is already losing credibility with U.S. allies. U.S. had promised to use military option to stop a nuclear Iran (and nuclear DPRK), but now it appears to be back peddling and defaulting to using its nuclear umbrella to fend off future Iranian nuclear missiles. U.S. allies' perception of a weak presidency and eroding confidence in U.S. security guarantee are already manifesting in arms build up in the Middle East and East Asia.⁴⁵

In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is most likely to go nuclear, and has already taken steps to prepare for an Arab bomb to counter the Persian bomb. The Saudi king recently authorised the establishment of King Abdullah Nuclear and Renewable Energy City in Riyadh, and in an article in *Gulf News*, Dr. Joseph Kechichian, a Lebanese scholar at the Middle East Institute, warned that GCC will fall on a two-pronged strategy in face of a nuclear Iran: (1) seek temporary shelter under the American nuclear umbrella and (2) over the long run, equip themselves with wherewithal to protect themselves from their hegemonic neighbour.⁴⁶

In East Asia, Japan is most likely to go nuclear, and has studied its nuclear option three times since 1960 when it lost trust in U.S. security guarantee.⁴⁷ Currently, U.S.-Japan alliance is at an all time low with threats of kicking out U.S. forces from Okinawa. Japan is also embarking on a remilitarisation programme, and its Japan Maritime Self Defence Force is recently setting up its first naval base in Djibouti and upgrading ties with NATO.⁴⁸

In face of a cascade of nuclear proliferation in East Asia, Middle East, and the end of the NPT regime, coupled with decreasing utility of economic sanctions, what are the policy options of the international community?

Step One: Naval Quarantine and Diplomacy

As stated earlier in lessons learned from the Cuban missile crisis, perhaps given the remaining window of time, a U.S.-led alliance of "coalition of the willing" could enforce 'crippling sanctions' in the form of a selective naval quarantine campaign. Given (1) China's reluctance in UNSC to back a fourth round of sanctions, and (2) the inability of any 'coalition of the willing' (without China) to enforce energy sanctions (since China is a loophole that continues to provide refined petroleum products as well as mass investment in Iran's energy sector), a naval quarantine would fill the loophole and stop Chinese, Venezuelan and others exports of petroleum products to Iran. It would also stop Iranian crude

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ See Christina Y. Lin, „The Writing on the Wall: China-Russia-Iran Axis in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Nuclear Tipping Points in Middle East and East Asia“, *Institut für Strategie- Politik- Sicherheits- und Wirtschaftsberatung (ISPSW)/ ETH Zurich*, 26 January 2010; IISS Strategic Dossier, *Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East in the Shadow of Iran* (London: IISS, 2008).

⁴⁶ Joseph A. Kechichian, „Iran needs to strike a softer tone“, *Gulf News*, 22 April 2010.

⁴⁷ Christina Y. Lin, „The Writing on the Wall“; Kurt Campbell and Tsuyosi Sunohara, „Japan: Thinking the Unthinkable“ in Campbell, Robert J Einhorn, and Mitchell B Reiss, eds, *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); Hugh White, „Why Japan Might have to go nuclear“, *The Interpreter* (Weblog of the Lowy Institute for International Policy), 16 July 2008.

⁴⁸ „Piracy prompts Japan to open naval base in Djibouti“, *Defence Web*, 29 April 2010; Emmanuel Goujon, „Piracy rattles Japan to open first foreign military base“, *Agence France Press*, 23 April 2010. On 4 May Japanese PM Hatoyama reversed his campaign pledge and conceded it will probably be impossible to completely move the U.S. marine base Futenma off Okinawa, and has set a deadline of 31 May to resolve the issue. His new proposal is to relocate the air base to coastal regions of Camp Schwab in Okinawa, building a runway on a quick-installation platform in which metal nylons are driven into the sea bottom. It intends to shift some troops from Futenma or their training site to Tokunoshima Island in Kagoshima Prefecture. However, other islanders that would absorb the troops from Okinawa are strongly resisting. Despite conceding that U.S. troop presence serves as a deterrent in a region that is faced with a nuclear armed North Korea and aggressive military buildup of China, this announcement will likely cost him politically in the July elections for the upper house in parliament. Kurt Achin, „Japanese PM's Reversal on US Base May have Political Cost“, *Voice of America*, 5 May 2010; „Futenma farce“, *The Economist*, 6 May 2010; „Hatoyama decides on framework for Futenma relocation“, *Mainichi Daily News*, 11 May 2010.

exports, from which Iran receives more than 80% of their export earning and the Iranian government derive 40-50% of their revenues.

To reiterate, since sanctions lack teeth for enforcement, quarantine is just a means of sanctions enforcement—similar to law enforcement. It is one thing to issue a law (UNSCR on sanctions), but it is another to enforce the law with an effective police force (quarantine). Quarantine is not a full naval blockade (short of act of war) that would stop food and other supplies to hurt the Iranian citizens, but is merely targeted on the energy sector and the Iranian leadership.

At the same time, diplomacy should still be on the table, so that the door is open for the Chinese to come onboard in the UNSC and pressure Iran. The quarantine can also extend to arms transfers to Iran's proxy Hezbollah.

Moreover, because some Gulf states want forceful actions that are more than the previous three rounds of failed economic sanctions, yet are wary of a war in the region because they're on the front line, GCC may perhaps cooperate in an U.S.-led quarantine campaign under the auspices of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. To that end, it is important to keep GCC solidarity against Iran's nuclear ambitions and using its proxies to stir up strife via a Syria/Lebanon-Israeli conflict.

Step Two: Prepare for War

In the event Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Axis is not deterred and reacts militarily, the Allied powers must be prepared for war. Similar to JFK applying a dual track of naval quarantine and diplomacy as a prelude to full-scale invasion and nuclear war if necessary, the Soviets finally relented and backed down for a diplomatic solution. It was the failure of Bay of Pigs and perception of JFK's weakness that emboldened Soviet aggression; and it was the decisive and forceful action of a naval quarantine and active war planning that changed Soviet perception to a strong JFK that led them to back down.

Conclusion

As the war drums beat louder in the Middle East with each passing day, it is important for the international community to come together to address Iran's nuclear threat and using its Syrian and Hezbollah proxies to stir up strife in the region. It is also important to stand with Israel and assert U.S. credibility as a dependable ally while other allies in the Middle East and East Asia are watching. If Israel feels cornered and isolated, the U.S. and the international community would drive it to use its nuclear Samson Option to defend itself. Below is a chart of Israeli option to strike Iran with Jericho III missies tipped with nuclear warheads, if it is forced to confront Iran by itself.

Figure 2: How Israel can Strike Iran



Source: Reproduced from "Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan: an unwinnable gamble?", *Heartland: Eurasian Review of Geopolitics*, February 2009.

As for Syria threatening Israel that “next war will be ruinous” and transferring scuds and M-600 missiles to Hezbollah, the international community should try to energise Russian President Medvedev in his upcoming 11 May meeting with Syrian president al-Assad to diffuse the tension. Given Israel’s new Kennedy Doctrine, any attack by Hezbollah may find Israel turning its Jericho III missiles to Syria and its illicit nuclear sites by Damascus to fulfil Isaiah 17:1 “Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap.”



Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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