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Barack Obama has not announced an "Obama Doctrine," but one may well be emerging in his second term, judging by his appointments, the drawdown of US commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, and projected defense cuts. It calls for a lowered profile in world affairs, focused on responding militarily only to direct threats to national security – without resorting to ground troops apart from special forces – and otherwise for "strategic partnerships" with friendly states and "coercive diplomacy" toward hostile states. Challenges posed by Syria and Iran will test especially acutely whether and how the doctrine will be applied in the Middle East.

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A study published in 2012 by the Iran Project seeks to create the basis for an informed discussion regarding the option of a military strike against Iran. However, the tenor of the report, its structure, and its analytical lapses stress in the main the risks of the military option to American interests. This article agrees that a military attack on Iran must be the last option in an attempt to prevent Iran from going nuclear. A resolution through negotiations is the preferred solution. Nevertheless, there are several major flaws in the report – in how the subject is presented, the analysis, and consequently the conclusions. This article addresses these lapses and presents a more balanced assessment of the issue.

Leading from Behind:
The "Obama Doctrine" and US Policy in the Middle East

Sanford Lakoff

Under the United States constitution, Congress is empowered to make laws, raise revenue, declare war, and accept treaties. The president is authorized only to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed," conduct diplomacy, and serve as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. In the modern era, however, the chief executive has come to be expected to set the national agenda, especially in foreign policy, even to the extent that Congress's war-making power is honored more in the breach than the observance.[1] Some presidents have announced their policies by promulgating strategic "doctrines" − the precedent having been set by James Monroe in 1823 and revived in recent times by Truman, Eisenhower, Carter, Reagan, and George W. Bush.[2]

Barack Obama has yet to follow their example: no "Obama Doctrine" has been articulated by the President or authoritatively attributed to him. But something that could pass for one is now emerging early in his second term.[3] No longer hampered by fears of being attacked by Republicans for retreating from America's role of global leadership or of losing support from Democratic constituencies needed for his reelection (including Jewish voters and campaign contributors), he is freer now to put his own stamp on foreign policy, and his intentions are becoming clear. They portend a distinctly lowered posture for the United States in world affairs, except when its security is directly threatened, in contrast to the neo-conservative view of America as the global champion of freedom

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and democracy that embroiled the previous administration in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Instead of trying to impose a *pax Americana*, this administration is content to "lead from behind," as one advisor reportedly described the American role in NATO's Libyan intervention. The means with which this unstated doctrine is being implemented are twofold, combining formal or informal alliances referred to as "strategic partnerships" with "coercive diplomacy" toward hostile states.

The partnerships entail forward basing of military assets, economic and military assistance, joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and policy coordination. Military assistance includes the gift or sale of advanced weapons and unarmed drones and the deployment of several types of anti-ballistic missiles: the Patriot batteries provided openly to Turkey and secretly to Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain; the ship-based Aegis stationed in the Persian Gulf and adopted by Japan; and the ground-based Arrow developed jointly with Israel. Coercive diplomacy takes the form of economic sanctions coupled with offers to negotiate; promotion and support for Security Council resolutions (such as those adopted to constrain Iran and North Korea); logistical support for allies; and covert activities like cyber warfare.

When American security is deemed to require the use of force, or when humanitarian intervention is supported by international consensus, direct military engagement will be limited to the use of missiles and air warfare. Full scale military action with "boots on the ground" is to be avoided at virtually all cost, lest it lead to more quagmires like Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Direct combat missions will be undertaken against terrorists, but by drone attacks and special forces. Military resources no longer necessary to this change of strategy, such as nuclear weapons and launch platforms, large contingents of military manpower, domestic and overseas bases, and weapons designed for conventional naval and ground warfare, will be slated for reduced support.

While other regions will also feel the effects of this effort to follow a more consistent foreign policy – the administration's announced "pivot to Asia" will make it especially relevant there – the Middle East will be significantly affected, if only by being treated with "benign neglect." To be sure, Obama may yet discover, as have American presidents before him, that the best-laid plans of a global superpower are sometimes upset by the need to respond to unanticipated crises,[4] or that "mission creep" is

hard to avoid once even limited force is committed. But at least the new design is moving from the background of the first term to the foreground of the second.

From the First Term to the Second

The contrast between the mixed messages sent on foreign policy in Obama's first term and the more coherent approach now emerging is evident in the appointments the President has made to key positions. On taking office, Obama named Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, even though she had voted as a senator to authorize the use of force in Iraq that he had opposed. He retained Robert Gates, a holdover from the previous administration and another supporter of the Iraq wars, as Secretary of Defense, and drew John O. Brennan from the CIA to serve as his counterterrorism advisor. General David H. Petraeus, the architect of Bush's surge policy, was kept on in Iraq and then sent to Afghanistan in 2010 before being named director of the CIA. There may well have been political calculations behind several of these appointments – the nominees were sure to attract strong bi-partisan support in Congress and the Clinton appointment healed the wounded feelings of her primary supporters – but collectively they sent a strong signal of continuity.

With the second term underway, Clinton has been replaced in Foggy Bottom by John Kerry; Chuck Hagel heads the Pentagon; and Brennan has returned to the CIA as its director. Kerry and Hagel, who both served in Vietnam before becoming outspoken critics of that war, are well known for agreeing with Obama that military engagement should be avoided if at all possible. Hagel was nominated by Obama despite opposition aroused by his previous criticisms of Israel and the "Jewish lobby" and his objections to the "surge" in Iraq and sanctions on Iran. Brennan has championed the "light footprint" strategy of limiting America interventions wherever possible. These appointments show, as the *New York Times* Washington correspondent reported, that Obama "has sided, without quite saying so, with Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.'s view – argued, for the most part in the confines of the White House – that caution, covert action and a modest American military footprint around the world fit the geopolitical moment."[5]

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To a considerable extent, this change of perspective arises more out of the change in circumstances between the first term and the second than out of an evolution in Obama's thinking. During the first term, Obama gave voice to views that are now evident in his appointments, but proceeded much more cautiously in foreign policy than on the domestic front. He had taken office in 2009 with no experience in foreign relations or prior study of world affairs. He had taught constitutional law, worked as a community organizer, and served briefly in a state legislature and as a senator. He did not have an advisor on foreign policy to rely on comparable to Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, Henry Kissinger, or Zbigniew Brzezinski, or a school of foreign policy "wonks" like the neo-Conservative "Vulcans"[6] of the previous administration. In the primary campaign Hillary Clinton warned that in foreign policy he would have to learn on the job, and the first term was rife with chastening experience. Instead of redirecting American foreign policy, Obama usually found himself sustaining inherited commitments. In Iraq, he reluctantly agreed to maintain the counterinsurgency approach begun under his predecessor. In Afghanistan, he overrode the recommendation of Vice President Biden that American operations in Afghanistan be restricted to the border area with Pakistan where al-Qaeda was continuing to operate, accepting his generals' recommendation instead for another surge. While he ordered an end to "enhanced interrogation," a euphemism for the use of harsh measures including water-boarding, he broke a promise to close the detention facility at Guantanamo.

A major reason Obama opted for continuity in foreign policy is that he was compelled to deal with a domestic crisis. He came into office calling for a "politics of hope" – hope not only for a better domestic America but a more peaceful and cooperative world. But because he was confronted by a recession far more serious than anticipated, he had to stabilize the financial sector by injecting federal funds into the major banks, bail out two of the big three automobile manufacturers, and persuade Congress to pass an $800 billion stimulus bill. Unwilling to sacrifice his reform agenda, he pressed to obtain passage of the Affordable Care Act, and paid a high price as it dragged out in the legislature. In 2010 the voters blamed him for failing to reverse the recession and elected a Republican-dominated House that stymied his agenda for the next two years. He had to deal with two wars, one of which, in Iraq, he had opposed, and the other, in Afghanistan, he had approved of as a "war of choice" but which

had become a war for control of the country rather than only against al-Qaeda.

At the same time, he sought to define a new approach in foreign policy reflecting his own liberal outlook, emphasizing conciliation rather than confrontation. It was as if in foreign policy he was recapitulating his role as a community organizer in Chicago, now on a world stage. As the son of a Muslim father who bears his father's middle name of Hussein and attended a mainly Muslim primary school in Indonesia, he saw himself as uniquely qualified to improve America's relations with the Islamic world. Thus the 2009 Cairo speech in which he admitted that the United States had made mistakes in the region extended an "open hand" to Iran and acknowledged the plight of the Palestinians. He appointed an ambassador to Damascus – the first sent there since his predecessor was withdrawn in 2005 when Syria was accused of complicity in the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri – and followed through on a campaign pledge to reopen a dialogue with Bashar al-Assad.

He also sought to "push a reset button" on relations with Russia by withdrawing ABM deployments planned for central Europe in deference to President Vladimir Putin's claim that they would diminish the credibility of Russian deterrence. He made friendly overtures to China, resisting calls to criticize Beijing's repression of domestic dissent or to demand a crackdown on industrial espionage and piracy. During the 2008 campaign he criticized China for artificially depressing the value of its currency to boost exports at the expense of American jobs, but once in office he held back from formally branding the country a currency manipulator, so as not to have to endorse Congressional demands for retaliation. In exchange for China's continued purchase of American treasury notes, Obama maintained economic ties that made the United States the largest single market for Chinese exports. He launched an effort to address the problem of North Korea's nuclear proliferation and the export of nuclear and ballistic missile technology by enlisting Chinese cooperation, but when he found that Beijing would not risk causing the collapse of the Pyongyang regime by withholding aid critical to its survival, he chose not to threaten unilateral action but instead opted for "strategic patience."

Continuity was evident as well in his approach to the problem of terrorism, except for his order that no further reference be made to the "war on terror," George W. Bush's rubric.[7] Obama continued the

emphasis on Homeland Security, combining it with an effort to close the southern border to illegal immigration. He pursued efforts against the al-Qaeda leadership begun under the previous administration, initiating new measures to interfere with its fundraising and communications operations, and ordered the brilliantly planned and executed mission that killed Bin Laden in 2011. But the use of special forces and of drone aircraft for surveillance and targeted assassination was begun earlier and was only accelerated by Obama.

In the Middle East, the main focus of Obama's first term was on the unfinished business of Iraq. Once the surge seemed to succeed in blunting threats to the survival of Iraq's elected government, Obama pressed for disengagement, even to the extent of not pressuring the Iraqi government to accept the large residual force his field commanders thought would be needed to assure stability. Caution was also the watchword when the Arab Spring broke out. The White House took no moves to protect the regime in Tunisia or that of Husni Mubarak in Egypt, a close American ally, and expressed support for the protestors. When the call for reform spread to Bahrain, where the US Fifth Fleet is headquartered, the administration ignored requests for intervention. With respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Obama continued the policy begun under previous administrations of encouraging a two-state solution by appointing Senator George Mitchell as a mediator. He had previously come to believe in the need to assure security for Israel and statehood for the Palestinians. As his biographer David Remnick pointed out, "Obama's views are not mysterious. His political home is Hyde Park, on the South Side of Chicago, where he came to know liberal Zionists and Palestinian academics, and to understand both the necessity of a Jewish state after the Second World War and the tragedy and the depths of Palestinian suffering."[8]

Perhaps not surprisingly, the politics of hope suffered one rebuff after another virtually everywhere, most blatantly from Khamenei in Iran, but also from Mahmoud Abbas, Benjamin Netanyahu, Assad, Putin, the military in Pakistan, and the cartoonish dynasts of North Korea. Even the rebellious youth of the Arab Spring praised by Obama found fault with Washington for its previous support of

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the tyrants they were overthrowing. Apart from effects of the spectacular success of the killing of Bin Laden, none of the efforts to improve America's image or promote cooperation bore fruit. Most Muslims were less favorable toward the United States in the closing months of Obama's first term than they had been when he took office.[9] The Russians remained unwilling to cooperate in pressuring Iran to give up its effort to develop nuclear weapons or in imposing UN sanctions on the Assad regime in Syria. The North Koreans defied the United States by continuing to test missiles and nuclear explosives. The Chinese government, pandering to nationalist sentiment, has pressed territorial claims in the South China and East China Seas, much to the consternation of neighboring American allies, and is developing power-projection capabilities at sea and in space, provoking countermoves by the United States.

Obama made two striking departures from his policy of continuity. One came late in his first term when he decided to order intervention in Libya based upon a UN Security Council resolution. The effort was made in cooperation with NATO allies and friendly Arab states and stopped short of the use of ground troops. Compared to the estimated trillion-dollar cost of the war in Iraq and the $500 billion cost of Afghanistan, it cost comparatively little ($1.1 billion) as military spending goes. At the time, this initiative seemed as though it might be a harbinger of a new policy of humanitarian engagement, comparable to Bill Clinton's intervention to stop "ethnic cleansing" in Yugoslavia, and reflecting a similar willingness to use American force to prevent butchery by authoritarian regimes.

The other notable change was his decision to declare unambiguously that the United States would not allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons. This decision was implemented, in keeping with the reliance on coercive diplomacy, by a carrot and stick approach involving both an offer to negotiate and the imposition of stiff economic sanctions, along with covert operations. The administration took the lead in creating a coalition of nations willing to impose tight economic sanctions and reportedly cooperated with Israel in "Olympic Games," the cyber attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Although China, Russia, Turkey, and others were allowed to evade complete adherence to sanctions, the administration's efforts succeeded well enough to do considerable damage to the Iranian economy. This decision is in keeping with what may be emerging as the Obama Doctrine, because at the same time that it threatens the ultimate use of force – presumably in the form of surgical strikes at Iran's nuclear

installations -- it does not require invasion or a strategy calling for regime change and "nation-building" under occupation.

The Syrian Conundrum

Much to the consternation of both liberals and conservatives who have called for American intervention in Syria as a way of helping to bring down a brutal dictatorship, weaken Iran, and isolate Hizbollah, Libya has so far not proven to be a precedent for Syria. The initial rationale given by the administration for the decision not to engage in Syria was that this time there was no Security Council authorization, due to vetoes by Russia and China. Spokesmen added other considerations: The opposition was fragmented; some elements in it were al-Qaeda volunteers; even more were supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. The council formed to serve as a government in exile was highly fractious and had only tenuous links to the groups actually fighting against the regime. The Syrian military was a far more formidable force than Qaddafi's mercenaries. No "light footprint" or stealth campaign was possible, and Syria's air defenses would complicate any effort to impose no fly zones. And what would happen once the regime fell? Would an anti-Western Islamist regime come to power? Would the country become sharply divided among sectarian or ethnic enclaves? Would there be a bloodbath against the Alawites that would compel an occupation?

In view of these inhibiting factors, Obama opted to provide humanitarian aid and encourage the formation of a unified opposition, but has not taken any actions, apart from economic sanctions, to stop the slaughter. In response to Israeli intelligence reports showing that the regime was using chemical weapons, the United States and its allies, along with the Russians, warned Assad that any resort to chemical weapons would trigger intervention. But when the military chiefs and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, with the support of Secretary Clinton, proposed a plan for supplying arms to carefully vetted rebel forces, the White House demurred. The lesson of this failure to do more in Syria may well be that Libya was a kind of black swan – an unusual instance where humanitarian intervention could be accomplished by airpower in a multilateral effort with UN backing in which the United States could "lead from behind" and not become inextricably entangled.

Toward the New Strategy

The administration's most immediate concerns overseas involve accelerating the drawdown of troops from Afghanistan and pursuing the carrot and stick approach toward Iran. Longer term, the issue for the executive and Congress is how to cut the military budget to help address the national debt. Already large at $16 trillion, the projected debt increase is becoming a central preoccupation of American politics and government. Admiral Mike Mullen, the former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has called it the most serious national security problem the nation faces. In 2007 it was 36 percent of GDP; the Congressional Budget Office now projects that it will rise to at least 77 percent by 2023 – far more than the average of 39 percent experienced between 1973 and 2012.[10] The largest contributors to the projected rise are from welfare (or entitlement) programs, which are projected to rise with the aging of the population. But cutting "discretionary spending" on Social Security and Medicare is a highly unpopular option. In one poll, Americans opposed any cuts to Medicare by a margin of 70 percent to 25 percent. The defense budget is therefore a high value target, even though the savings now contemplated will not solve the debt problem. This budget, at its 2012 level of $700 billion, is "equivalent to the *combined spending* of the next twenty largest military powers."[11] Even apart from the draconian cuts that would ensue if the looming budgetary sequester is allowed to take effect, Obama is proposing to cut Pentagon spending by $350 billion over the next decade, reducing it to about $550 billion annually, or about 3-4 percent of GDP, well below Cold War peaks but close to recent levels. The size of the active-duty military would be cut from 1.5 million to 1.4 million. The plan would "defer, but not appreciably scale back, various procurement programs . . . eliminate some ships and airlifters; reduce Air Force combat aircraft units by roughly 10 percent; bring home two of the four Army brigades in Europe," and make modest changes in military pay and benefits. If Congress approves, there would be more rounds of base closures. The Congressional Budget Office has recently

> It remains to be seen whether and how a strategy of "leading from behind" can succeed against Iran, and whether, if all other means fail, Obama will carry out his pledge, either by ordering a surgical strike against Iran's nuclear facilities or giving the "green light" to an Israeli strike.

warned, however, that the Pentagon will need $500 billion more over the next decade than it estimates.[12]

Given the administration's stated objectives, the key personnel appointments, and the budgetary pressures, it seems predictable that Obama's second term will better express his original intention to reframe America's role in the world from neo-Wilsonian champion of liberty and democracy to superpower-of-last-resort. The days when American intervention in global hot spots could be either hoped for or feared may well be past. As the conservative columnist Ross Douthat has observed, "Like the once-hawkish Hagel, Obama has largely rejected Bush's strategic vision of America as the agent of a sweeping transformation of the Middle East, and retreated from the military commitments that this revolutionary vision required. And with this retreat has come a willingness to make substantial cuts in the Pentagon's budget – cuts that Hagel will be expected to oversee."[13]

Access to Middle Eastern oil remains a concern, but one that is diminishing in importance. The United States currently imports about 23 percent of its oil from the Arab Middle East (including 1.2 millions of barrels a day from Saudi Arabia in August 2012),[14] but is taking big strides to reduce oil dependency by exploiting domestic and other continental oil and natural gas resources. One aircraft carrier group will continue to be stationed in the Persian Gulf, down from the two that have been there for the past two years.

What the putative Obama Doctrine means for the Middle East (and by extension for Afghanistan and Pakistan) is that people in regions where instability is the rule will have to fend for themselves unless that instability poses a direct threat to the United States. Terrorists whose targets do not extend to the United States will not be directly engaged.[15] If Afghanistan's central government loses control of parts of the country once NATO forces are almost all withdrawn, the United States will not return in force, unless those uncontrolled areas should become sanctuaries for al-Qaeda. Military aid will be provided to Pakistan even if it does not act aggressively against its own Taliban. The United States would intervene directly only if Pakistan was threatened with loss of control of its nuclear weapons.

If Iraq breaks apart, Obama is hardly likely to want to return American forces to restore unity. If Syria disintegrates into a weakened state with sectarian enclaves like Iraq and Lebanon, American Marines will not

ride to the rescue, unless there is a risk that Syria's chemical weapons could fall into the wrong hands. In Yemen, the United States will rely on drone attacks against al-Qaeda forces but will not use military forces to reestablish the central government. Where, as in the case of French intervention in Mali this year, American allies are willing to send in troops to fight against Islamist terrorists, the United States will provide air support and either donate or sell war materiel. If Egypt, Libya, or Tunisia falters in making a transition from authoritarianism to incipient democracy, the United States will express concern but resist calls to intervene. Nor will Washington withdraw support from the cooperative authoritarian regimes threatened by the spread of the Arab Spring, lest they be replaced by anti-American governments or anarchic conditions that can allow anti-Western terrorists to find new havens.

Obama has strongly reiterated his call for a two-state solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, but if the parties cannot come to terms, the administration will likely adopt a fallback position aimed at preventing the current situation from deteriorating. The United States will continue to provide military aid to Israel and economic and humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. Secretary Hagel's earlier proposal that Hamas be engaged is unlikely to be taken seriously, inasmuch as the President has made very clear that he considers Hamas a terrorist group and holds it responsible for provoking armed conflicts with Israel. Any effort by Israel to annex territory on the West Bank will meet with strong disapproval, quite possibly with a refusal to veto a Security Council condemnation.

The largest unknown concerns Iran. In March of 2012 Obama stated flatly in a speech at the AIPAC conference that the United States would not permit Iran to develop a nuclear weapon and that he would be prepared to use force as a last resort: "As I've made clear time and time again during the course of my presidency, I will not hesitate to use force when it is necessary to defend the United States and its interests." Shimon Peres has expressed confidence that "in the end, if none of this works, then President Obama will use military power against Iran. I am sure of it."[16] But leading members of the American military and foreign policy establishment (including the new Defense Secretary) have expressed grave reservations about any use of American military force against Iran. It remains to be seen whether and how a strategy of "leading from behind" can succeed against an adversary capable of resisting non-

military pressures and whether, if all other means fail, Obama will carry out his pledge, either by ordering a surgical strike against Iran's nuclear facilities or giving the "green light" to an Israeli strike. If Iran can be persuaded by a combination of sanctions and diplomacy to step back from the nuclear bomb threshold and accept unimpeded inspections, Obama will gain considerable political capital among both Arabs and Israelis, which he could conceivably use to promote pacification and reform throughout the region.

With the potential exception of Iran, however, the "Obama Doctrine" calls for America to focus on nation-building at home rather than adventures abroad, the Middle East included. If major change is to come to the region, it will presumably have to come from within – unless internal turmoil is deemed to pose a grave and imminent threat to a vital American national interest. The challenges of civil war in Syria and Iran's nuclear ambitions will pose especially acute tests of whether and how the doctrine will be applied.

Notes

1 Congress last issued a Declaration of War in 1942. All subsequent American military engagements have been initiated by the president either with Congressional authorization in the form of resolutions or in pursuance of United Nations Security Council resolutions. The War Powers Resolution of 1973, passed by a supermajority in both Houses over a presidential veto, requires that the president notify Congress within 48 hours of any dispatch of American forces into action abroad, and that such forces be withdrawn within 60 days (with a further 30 days allowed for full withdrawal) unless their mission is authorized by a resolution or a declaration of war. In launching an air war against the Libyan regime in 2011 in cooperation with NATO allies, President Barack Obama relied on Security Council Resolution 1973 authorizing "all necessary measures" (short of the use of foreign ground troops) to end attacks on civilians in Libya, bypassing Congress to keep American air forces in action beyond the 60-day limit.

2 The functional virtues of such doctrines were well explained by Henry Kissinger: "In the American system of government, in which the president is the only nationally elected official, coherence in foreign policy emerges – if at all – from presidential pronouncements. These serve as the most effective directive to the sprawling and self-willed bureaucracy and supply the criteria for public or Congressional debates." Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 765.

3 "Perhaps the most striking feature of three and a half enormously consequential years in the redirection of American power has been the slow

emergence of an Obama Doctrine, a redefinition of the circumstances under which the United States will use diplomacy, coercion, and force to change the world around it." David E. Sanger, *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power* (New York: Crown, 2012), p. xiv.

4   The record is strewn with examples of diversions from strategic templates, from the outbreak of the Korean conflict in 1950 – a region famously declared outside the US "defense perimeter" – to the supposedly "peripheral" conflict in Vietnam and the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973 that drew the Cold War out of the European framework in which it was originally cast.

5   David E. Sanger, "Obama Nominees in Step on Light Footprint," *New York Times*, January 8, 2013.

6   See James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004).

7   At the outset of the new administration's term, instructions were issued to all government departments that they were not to refer to a "war on terror" or to "the long war" but to "overseas contingency operations." The new head of Homeland Security used another even shorter-lived euphemism: "man-caused disasters."

8   *The New Yorker,* March 21, 2011.

9   Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, May 17, 2011.

10 Commentary by Doug Elmendorf, Congressional Budget Office, February 6, 2013.

11 Sanger, *Confront and Conceal,* p. 418. Emphasis in the original.

12 Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Getting Real on Defense Cuts," *Politico,* July 22, 2012.

13 "The Obama Synthesis," *New York Times,* January 12, 2013.

14 Seth G. Jones, "The Mirage of the Arab Spring," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2013), p. 62.

15 The Obama administration's attitude reflects "a broad consensus in Western capitals," *Time* magazine reported, apropos the French intervention in Mali in 2013, about how terrorism should be fought around the world: "Assist, yes; pay, sure; send in drones, planes and even small amounts of troops if you have to. But over the long term, let the locals sort it out." Alex Perry/Bamako, "In and Out of Africa," February 4, 2013, p. 22.

16 Ronen Bergman, "A Conversation with Shimon Peres," *New York Times* magazine, January 13, 2013.

Eleven Years to the Arab Peace Initiative:
Time for an Israeli Regional Strategy

Ilai Alon and Gilead Sher

The Arab-Israeli conflict is, or must be, a high priority on the agenda of the new Israeli government. As such, the government must engage in a smart and ongoing process that includes negotiations for a permanent settlement, interim agreements, regional dialogue, and constructive unilateral steps that will lead to a reality of two states for two peoples. In such a process, which would be overseen by the United States and/or the Quartet, there would be a clear advantage to relying on existing official international frameworks: the Clinton parameters, the Roadmap, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Much has been written about the initiative since it was launched.[1] This article focuses on significant trends related to the initiative and considerations for and against an announcement by Israel that it is prepared to open a multilateral channel and use the initiative as a basis for negotiations. We contend that Israel should recognize the Arab Peace Initiative as a regional-international platform for multilateral dialogue with the Arab world and a basis for engagement with any of the Arab League member states, provided that this is in parallel with progress in the negotiations toward a political settlement with the Palestinians. Mere recognition of the initiative as a single, isolated step does nothing. In combination with negotiations for an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, however, it is a sound, realistic way to ensure Israel's national interests, first and foremost, outlining the borders of Israel as the secure, democratic state of the Jewish people.

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From both political and security perspectives, the status quo in the Arab-Israeli conflict is dangerous for Israel. The changes that have taken place in recent years in the nature of the armed conflict and the threats to the home front, as well as the military capabilities of the hostile non-state organizations, all require an ongoing assessment of the balance of qualitative and military supremacy in the region. Negotiations with the Palestinians and a comprehensive regional political process could help remove several of the most problematic actors from the circle of threats to Israel.

Israel's continued procrastination and avoidance of the initiative will limit even further the practical possibility of ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with an agreement on the basis of a two-state solution. It is precisely because of the developments in the region that Israel ought now to signal that it is prepared to engage in regional negotiations with the turbulent Arab world. Recognizing the initiative and launching a dialogue could make a contribution in several areas. First, it could contribute to improved stability in the Middle East by strengthening the standing of the United States in the region. Second, if the discourse based on the initiative is accompanied by progress on the Israeli-Palestinian channel, the danger of a bi-national state will be reduced. Third, it will help strengthen Israel and the moderate Western-Sunni axis against Iran and its proxies.

By recognizing the initiative Israel stands to benefit at the bilateral and multilateral negotiating tables. While this of course is not guaranteed, the likelihood that Israel and third parties such as the United States will receive some benefits will increase with progress toward an agreement with the Palestinians.

A Brief Historical Overview

The roots of the Arab Peace Initiative date back to Saudi King Fahd's peace initiative in 1981. The Fahd initiative demanded an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines, dismantling of settlements, freedom of worship for all religions, the Palestinians' right to determine their destiny, compensation for those refugees who did not wish to return to Israel, United Nations monitoring of the territories for a number of months, establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and international guarantees for implementation of the plan.

This version expired on the day that the Saudi initiative was adopted at the Arab League summit in Beirut in March 2002, at the initiative of Abdullah, who was later crowned Saudi king. With the determined intervention of Jordan through then-Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher, the following principles were affirmed:

a. A full Israeli withdrawal from the territories conquered in 1967.
b. A sovereign, independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.
c. A just and agreed-upon solution to the refugee problem that does not compel the Arab countries hosting them to absorb them. In other documents published by the Arab League summit meeting in 2002, the demand for the "right of return" of the Palestinian refugees was emphasized.
d. In exchange, Arab League members will consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, guarantee security for all countries in the region, and establish normal relations with Israel.

In 2002, then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon objected to the initiative, which was publicized at the time of the terrorist attack at the Park Hotel and Operation Defensive Shield that followed. Sharon had already claimed that the initiative annulled UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and thus the need for negotiations, and that it was tantamount to "all or nothing."[2] In 2006, reports surfaced of secret contacts between then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Saudi King Abdullah,[3] and later reports stated that in 2007, Olmert refused an invitation to address the Arab League in Hebrew.[4] In 2007, then-Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres spoke about this issue,[5] as did Benjamin Netanyahu; Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman commented on the subject in 2009. Peres[6] and Olmert[7] demanded changes in advance. In 2007, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman[8] joined the attempt to put out unofficial feelers on the possibility of changes, and former US National Security Advisors Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski did so as well in 2008.[9] Arab sources such as Jordan's King Abdullah[10] and the official website of the Palestinian Authority,[11] as well as European Union officials,[12] rejected the negative arguments made in Israel.

The "Against" in Israel

In the public debate in Israel, two sets of arguments arose against recognizing the initiative. The first consisted of principled objections, for

example: the initiative was an exercise in public relations connected to the involvement of Saudi subjects in the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. Therefore, it was not a genuine offer, and in fact, it had already failed. Alternatively, some identified it as part of the "phases plan," and since it was fundamentally opposed to Islamic faith and ideology, was necessarily only temporary.

It was also argued that the initiative is a diktat that makes what the Arabs give conditional on Israel's surrendering in advance to Palestinian and Syrian positions, rather than an invitation to negotiations with the Arab League as a whole. Even the few benefits that the initiative offers involve unjustified Israeli concessions, including on the refugee issue, worded so that it is nothing more than a cover for demanding the right of return and accepting the Arab position on the issue of Jerusalem. Israeli public opinion will not accept the demand to withdraw to the 1967 lines on all fronts. Finally, claim the critics, Israel's experience shows that concessions have only come to hurt Israel.

The second set includes circumstantial arguments, such as: a strong Israel must not change the favorable status quo by recognizing the initiative, which fundamentally fails to provide security. Arab leaders cannot stand behind their promises regarding the initiative. The Palestinian issue, which is at the heart of the initiative, is not now on the Arab agenda or the global agenda, and even if it were, the split between Hamas and Fatah does not present Israel with a responsible, legitimate, and stable leadership. The Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian world is in a state of instability that does not allow Israel to take risks. Historically, the negotiations with the Palestinians have reached an impasse not because of Israel but because of the Palestinians, and the Arab states have not worked hard enough to convince Israelis of the genuine nature of the initiative, for example, by having their leaders pay a visit to Israel.

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Trends

Over the years, more Palestinians than Israelis have expressed support for the Arab Peace Initiative.[13] In 2008, the figures were 67 percent and 39 percent, respectively.[14] The figure for Palestinians was similar in 2009,[15]

and in 2012 it rose to nearly 75 percent among the Palestinian[16] and 50 percent among the Israeli publics. Similarly, in spite of the political and religious upheavals rocking the Middle East, the Arab League has ratified the initiative almost every year in the past decade. At its summit meeting in Doha in March 2013, the Arab initiative was mentioned as one of the anchors of Arab League policy.[17] However, there is no guarantee that this will continue to be the case in the future.

Over the years, the conditions set by the Arab League states have softened. The main changes are as follows:

a. Refugees: from insistence on the right of return to wording that makes negotiations possible. Some interpret this as meaning Israeli veto rights. In contrast, at the summit meeting in Baghdad in 2012, a demand on the right of return returned in paragraph 12 of the Declaration of Baghdad, along with a repetition of the need for agreement among the sides on the issue. This demand, problematic from Israel's point of view, is not stated explicitly in the summit meeting's decisions.[18]

b. The Arab commitments: normalization, peace, and an end to the conflict.

c. The Arab demand for sovereignty over Jerusalem: from "Jerusalem" to "East Jerusalem."

Diverging from the statements of several Arab politicians,[19] we believe that the initiative is not a diktat but an invitation to negotiations on the basis of several principles.[20] In the announcement of the 2013 Doha summit, the Arab League issued a call to return to the negotiating table and did not make the peace process conditional on acceptance of the initiative as a diktat.[21] In earlier stages, in 2005, official and unofficial discussions were held in Algeria among the Arab League states as to the possibility that Israel would make changes to the wording of the initiative. This possibility was rejected, and the rejection was reiterated in comments by Arab statesmen such as Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem in 2009.[22] However, on the eve of the 2007 summit meeting, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal declared that Arab leaders must be prepared to make changes in the initiative.[23] There were reports of such attempts again two years later,[24] and during preparation of this article, a report was published to the effect that an Arab League delegation would go to the United States with a new version of the peace plan that does not rule out the possibility of changes.[25]

Arab Positions on the Initiative

The Arab Peace Initiative is an Arab interest, and therefore it can be assumed that the threats to remove it from the Middle East political agenda are empty. On the other hand, it is possible that public opinion, which is growing stronger in Arab states, identifies the interest as promoting only the regimes, and that it will call for the initiative to be annulled.

At this time, there are three main Arab positions concerning the initiative: a demand to remove it from the agenda, an ultimatum to Israel, and support for maintaining the initiative for a limited time.

The Demand to Withdraw or Reconsider the Initiative

There are three threats to the continued viability of the initiative. One comprises specific positions that oppose it. Kuwait is seeking to withdraw from the initiative because of the Turkish flotilla event,[26] as is Qatar,[27] and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb of al-Azhar University in Cairo called last year for an emergency meeting of Islamic states in Mecca in order to withdraw from the Arab Peace Initiative completely, which "was received very badly" by Israel.[28]

In April 2012, former Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmad Qurei (Abu Alaa) called for the Arab initiative to be reexamined on its

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tenth anniversary,[29] and Hamas, whose position was presented by Dr. Salah al-Bardawil, stated that reviving the peace initiative meant that the Arabs were avoiding resisting the occupation.[30] Marwan Muasher, one of the people behind the Arab initiative and the man who as Jordanian foreign minister made the final polishes, spoke in November 2011 of pressures from the Arab general public, which objects to continuation of the status quo on the Palestinian problem. Recently, Muasher stated that if the initiative failed, this would spell the end of the two-state solution.

The second threat is inherent in the trend toward a decline in the number of Arab states that are partners in the initiative, and the third threat is the aging of the engineer of the initiative, Saudi King Abdullah.[31]

An Ultimatum to Israel

Some Arabs have stressed that the initiative will not be on the table forever. Even Marwan Muasher has stated,[32] along with other Arab figures such as Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr al-Thani, chairman of the Arab League Follow-Up Committee (2012), that it must not be assumed that the initiative will be viable forever. Although such warnings have been heard in the past, the situation today may be fundamentally different, especially because autocratic rulers in the Arab world no longer have a monopoly on decision making, and the "Arab street" and the public play a role.

Support

At the same time, various Arab statesmen have supported the initiative publicly and maintained that it is still a viable option. In 2007, it was even claimed that Iran supported it, though not publicly or officially.[33] Iraqi President Nuri al-Maliki expressed support for the initiative in June 2009,[34] as did the Jordanian foreign minister.[35] In Doha in 2010, Mahmoud Abbas stated that he opposed withdrawing from the initiative.[36] Munib al-Masri, an influential Palestinian businessman, held a similar opinion,[37] and even Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir agreed.[38] At the summit meeting in Baghdad in 2012, Islamist Tunisia joined in, and this year, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Jordan's King Abdullah called upon the government of Israel to accept the initiative. Among his reasons was the fear that it would be easier for Israel to create facts on the ground if the Palestinian issue were no longer on the world's agenda.[39]

Possible Ramifications

The Palestinian Authority and Hamas

It can be assumed that the Palestinian Authority's interest in the Arab initiative has increased in light of the internal struggle between Fatah and Hamas, especially when Khaled Mashal hinted that he was prepared to reach an agreement and recognize Israel.[40] Beyond the political consequences of Israel's recognizing the initiative while advancing political negotiations, there could be political advantages for the Palestinian Authority, such as release of Palestinian prisoners from Fatah – a recurring issue that recently sparked renewed unrest in the West Bank.[41]

The Hamas response to the initiative has not been uniform. In 2006, Mashal and Mahmoud al-Zahar expressed lukewarm support for it, and when Hamas rejected the initiative, Arab states pressured the organization to accept it. Given that there have been changes in statements by some of Hamas's leaders who now favor reaching some kind of agreement with Israel, Israeli recognition of the initiative could encourage this trend.

The International Community

US Secretary of Sate John Kerry reportedly intends to place the Arab initiative on the negotiations agenda between Israel and the Palestinians.[42] It has been reported that he is aiming for a coalition of states, including Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, and the Gulf states that will support restarting the peace process, inter alia on the basis of the initiative, and that he is seeking to persuade Arab League states to take steps to normalize relations with Israel.[43]

During President Obama's first term, Special Middle East Envoy George Mitchell stated in closed forums immediately after his appointment that the Arab initiative would be one of the pillars of US policy in the region. A similarly positive attitude was expressed in 2009 in their previous positions by Kerry himself and by current Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel.

Other international players have supported the initiative from the outset and have not changed their positions (the Quartet in April 2003; the UN secretary general in 2007). The European Union has reiterated its support for the initiative (Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov).[44] In November 2012, foreign ministers of Arab League states and the EU published a joint declaration, and in December 2012, EU foreign ministers issued a statement of support for the initiative. In March, Russia reiterated its support for the plan, and even China expressed support for the peace process on the basis of various plans, including the Arab initiative.[45]

The US withdrawal from Iraq and the expected withdrawal from Afghanistan next year are interpreted as a victory for the extremists in the Muslim world, both Sunni and Shiite. Progressing to an agreement on the Israeli-Palestinian track, together with encouraging dialogue between Israel and the members of the Arab League on the basis of the Arab Peace

Initiative, could mitigate this perception and strengthen the position of the United States.

The Arab World

Polls conducted on the Arab street indicate that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict occupies a minimal amount of public attention. Domestic issues – social, and in particular, economic – take precedence.[46] Perhaps it is precisely such a situation that would allow an agreement to be reached with the Palestinians, Syria, and Lebanon at a lower cost than under other circumstances.

Furthermore, in addition to the nuclear issue, Israel shares an interest with most Arab states on the subject of Iranian activity in the region.[47] These states are challenged religiously and politically by Iranian Shiite aggression in Iraq (which is controlled by Shiites); in Lebanon, where Hizbollah, with military and economic autonomy, is a partner of the state leadership; in Saudi Arabia, where the Shiite minority in the oil regions of the eastern part of the kingdom constitutes a domestic threat; and in Yemen, where early this year, an Iranian ship that was attempting to deliver arms to the Shiite rebels was intercepted.[48] Finally, recognizing the initiative as a comprehensive regional political framework has a chance of minimizing the damage from Hizbollah and other such organizations.

Policy Recommendations

The advantages Israel could gain from conducting a multilateral channel for dialogue while recognizing the Arab Peace Initiative as a leading platform for tangible progress toward a political agreement with the Palestinians would be manifested on several levels. Israel's international standing could improve if it is positioned as a key influential player that has the ability to provide a weighty political benefit and bolster the image of the United States, which would help the US rehabilitate its standing in the Middle East and the Islamic and Arab worlds. A dialogue with leaders of Arab League member states, which has never wielded much influence, could bring the political discussion in the region back from the religious, where it has inclined since the onset of the Arab Spring, to the political. Another possible consequence is assistance in strengthening the Sunnis in their struggle against the Shiites and the weakening of the Palestinian card in the Iranian[49] and Hizbollah arsenal.

Therefore, Israel should initiate secret talks with several heads of states in the Arab League to prepare an official statement on Israeli willingness to recognize the initiative as a basis for negotiations. Among the items on the agenda are agreement on a comprehensive multilateral framework for negotiations; agreement on substantive steps and formative measures by Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians, and by Arab states toward Israel; agreement on the identity of a third party that will act as a mediator concerning the details; mutual assistance regarding public opinion; and agreement on a policy toward non-state organizations and toward various publics. In the second stage, Israel, in coordination with heads of Arab League member states, should conduct secret talks with these organizations in order to clarify their positions in the event that Israel recognizes the initiative.

In the text of the initiative itself, the only condition mentioned concerns Arab "compensation" for Israel's fulfillment of the Arab League's conditions, and not for reaching a preliminary agreement with the Palestinians. This is a position expressed by Amr Moussa, among others, at the political-economic Ambrosetti Forum in September 2010.[50]

When these phases are completed, non-governmental actors will launch a broad public relations campaign among the Israeli public while highlighting the increase in the number of supporters of the initiative. After this campaign, an official Israeli announcement can recognize the initiative as an opening for negotiations, and a proposal will be made concerning the time and place for such a dialogue. It may be advisable to include Turkey among the third party delegation, especially in light of the positions it has expressed in the past in favor of the initiative,[51] and after the thaw in Israeli-Turkish diplomatic relations.

In the framework of a smart, stable, and ongoing process, which includes concomitant negotiations for a permanent settlement, interim agreements, regional dialogue, and constructive unilateral steps, it is appropriate for Israel to recognize the Arab Peace Initiative as a regional and international platform for dialogue with the Arab world and as a basis for negotiations with Arab League states. The risks in such a policy are smaller than the gains that can be expected from its success – first and foremost, shaping of the borders of Israel as the secure, democratic state of the Jewish people.

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46

Country	Subject	Order of importance	Percentage who agree	Source
Lebanon	Foreign intervention	1	23.6	Sami Atallah, "Lebanon Country Report," September 2012, *Arab Barometer II*, http://www.arabbarometer.org/sites/default/files/countyreportlebanon2.pdf, p. 22.
	Palestinian issue	2	20.5	

Country	Subject	Order of importance	Percentage who agree	Source
Algeria	Corruption	1	22.4	http://www. arabbarometer.org/ sites/default/files/ countyreportyAlgeriaII. pdf, p. 24.
	Palestine	4	12.4	
Egypt	Economy	1	37	http://www. arabbarometer.org/ sites/default/files/ countyreportyegyptII. pdf, p. 21.
	Palestine	5	4	
Jordan	Economy	1	46	http://www. arabbarometer.org/ sites/default/files/ countyreportjordan2_0. pdf, p. 40.
	Palestine	2	21	
Saudi Arabia	Economy	1	49	http://www. arabbarometer.org/ sites/default/files/ countyreportysaudi2. pdf, p. 16.
	Palestine	3	12	

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48 Julian E. Barnes and Adam Entous, "Panetta: Iranian Threat Spreads," *Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2013, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127 887323926104578278231369164640.html.

49 For example, "Jerusalem Day," which was established to mark the demand for the rights of the Islamic nation in Palestine.

50 Avi Issacharoff, "Restarting Direct Negotiations: With Amr Moussa Optimistic, the Right Begins to Worry," *Haaretz*, September 5, 2010, http:// www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.1219953.

51 Abdul Rahman Shaheen, "Turkey Sees Arab Peace Plan Key to Solving Woes," *Gulfnews.com*, February 4, 2009, http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/ uae/general/turkey-sees-arab-peace-plan-key-to-solving-woes-1.50093. Following the visit by the Turkish president Saudi Arabia in February 2009, pundits assessed: "Turkey sees the Arab peace initiative, mooted by King Abdullah and endorsed by the Arab world, as a means of extricating the Middle East region from its predicament, as well as a panacea for the woes of the region in order to restore its stability and consolidating the pillars of just peace enabling peaceful coexistence of all people in the region." Erdogan even attended a meeting of the monitoring committee of the Arab foreign ministers on the subject of the initiative, a*l-Quds*, September 13, 2011.

The Emergence of the Sunni Axis in the Middle East

Yoel Guzansky and Gallia Lindenstrauss

Much focus in the Middle East in recent years has centered on the growing influence of Iran and the creation of a sphere of influence under its leadership stretching from Iran to Iraq, Syria, and Hizbollah in Lebanon. Terms such as "radical axis," "Shiite Crescent," and "resistance camp," which were designed to reflect this alliance, whether by emphasizing the political-strategic element or the ideological-sectarian element, have become part of the general lexicon. The upheavals that have gripped the Arab world since late 2010, however, have led to the formation of a new geopolitical landscape, with changes in the composition and cohesion of the radical axis. They have also sparked the formation of an Arab-Turkish/monarchial-republican Sunni axis, which constitutes a counterweight to Iran, and is challenging the power and influence of Iran and its proxies in the region. This increased Sunni activism began even before the so-called Arab Spring, which aggravated the sectarian tension between Sunnis and Shiites and between the Arabs and Iran, but peaked in the wake of the events. Classic balance of power considerations and inter-ethnic rivalries are intertwined in this activism, particularly on the part of the Arab Gulf states, whose goal is to form a Sunni front and obstruct Iran.

The Sunni perception of the Iranian threat stems from sectarian enmity and anxiety about Iran's rising influence in the region – a concern that grew with the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and the assumption of a leading role by the Shiite majority in Iraq.[1] Iran also tried to take credit for key developments such as the Israeli withdrawal from the security zone in Lebanon in 2000 and the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005.[2] In addition, there is the fear that future Iranian nuclear

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weapons capability will result in a profound geostrategic change in the Middle East, followed by the strengthening of the Iranian-led axis and the increasing sense of empowerment among its members. The radical axis plays a key role in Iran's security perception, and Iran serves as material and ideological strategic depth for its fellow axis members. Iran has an interest in portraying itself as a leader of the radical forces in order to enhance the sense of its power, and it regards the other members of the axis as a means of promoting its regional ambitions. However, the weakening of the Assad regime, the distancing of Hamas from the radical axis following the outbreak of civil war in Syria, and internal Lebanese restrictions on Hizbollah have made this axis less attractive and significantly weakened it. Its cohesion naturally also depends on the behavior of external actors that are able to affect the priorities of the axis members.

Against the background of an apparent weakening of the Iran-led axis, this article examines what presents as the emerging Sunni camp, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of this axis. Indeed, the weakness of the Arab regimes, particularly Egypt, the historical distrust between Turkey and the Arab countries, and the disunity and lack of a clear and unified strategy among the members of this axis impact negatively on the potential new power equations created by the Arab Spring. Beyond these issues, the question of what interests are common to the members of the Sunni axis and the US and Israel will also be considered: ostensibly, the axis and Israel and the West share some interests, at least in the short term. Yet while these regimes are considered pro-Western and more moderate toward Israel than Iran, they still largely represent and support an Islamic ideology, which in its extreme version vigorously opposes Israel. Finally, many believe that the strengthening of the Sunni axis is primarily due to the weakening of the Shiite axis, reflecting a zero-sum game. From this perspective, if it becomes clear that the weakening of the Shiite axis is temporary or partial, this will affect the strength of the opposing axis.

Is There a Sunni Alliance?

Iran's advancements in the nuclear sphere and the regional instability have caused significant movement among the Sunni countries and strengthened the realization that a more active policy is needed. Greater political and security cooperation between Turkey, Egypt, and the

Arab Gulf states, headed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, is perceived as increasingly urgent, especially given the Iranian threat and the Syrian civil war. More coordination on the strategy toward Iran on the part of some of these states and a more publicly assertive stance is already evident, and this positioning has invigorated the Sunni axis.

While the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) supported the no-fly zone over Libya, thereby paving the way to a Security Council resolution on the issue and the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime, Saudi Arabia regarded Mubarak's overthrow as a painful loss and an American betrayal of a loyal partner.[3] Following the fall of the Mubarak regime, Saudi Arabia responded firmly to the uprising in Bahrain, and in March 2011 sent forces (under the GCC flag) to put down the riots. The purpose was to deliver a message that Saudi Arabia would be willing to employ all available means – from diplomacy and economics to military measures – in its efforts to act as a counterweight against Iran (and would stand by what it regarded as its interests, even in opposition to the position of the US). Concern also existed about possible similar uprisings by the Shiite minority within Saudi Arabia, which over the previous two years had begun to foment potential unrest. Still another motive was preventing Iran from increasing its influence in Bahrain.[4]

To a large extent, the Syrian civil war was a watershed in all matters pertaining to the balance of power between the two axes. Before the conflict began in Syria (where events have since made it a theater of regional conflict), it appeared that the overthrow of the pseudo-republican regimes in North Africa was to the benefit of the Iranian-led radical camp, which would be able to exploit the chaos to heighten its influence in various arenas. The spread of protest to Syria, however, gave the Sunni countries a golden opportunity. They have turned their back on Assad and now await his downfall, if only because Iran would thereby lose a key ally. From their perspective, Assad's fall would restore Iran to its "natural size."

Hamas, which in the wake of the Syrian civil war distanced itself from its traditional benefactors of Iran and Syria and even publicly condemned the Assad regime, has begun to take shelter under the diplomatic and economic umbrella of the Sunni axis. Israel's Operation Pillar of Defense in the Gaza Strip in 2012 boosted the Sunni axis, because Sunni states helped bring about the ceasefire agreement. Iran was disturbed by the way that Egypt and its allies (Qatar and Turkey) led the mediation for a

ceasefire, with Cairo becoming the primary contact during the fighting. According to Iran, these states earning are becoming patrons of the Palestinian cause, and are earning political and public relations points while shunting Iran to the sidelines. They are depriving Iran of credit for the military aid it gave Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which enabled the latter to fight against Israel. When Iran's substantial diplomatic and economic isolation are added to the picture, it appears that momentum is on the side of the Sunni bloc states. The possibility that Assad's regime will give way to a regime controlled by the Sunni majority in Syria would constitute decisive confirmation of the revival of the Sunni axis, after a decade in which it was at a disadvantage, following the "loss" of Iraq to Iran.

The ongoing plunge in Iran's popularity in public opinion, as reflected in surveys conducted in Arab and Muslim countries in recent years, has likewise contributed to a rise in the popularity of the Sunni camp. In all the countries surveyed other than Lebanon and Iraq, Iran's role in Bahrain and Syria was perceived as more negative than positive. In addition, except for Lebanon and Libya, the number of respondents who thought that Iran was developing nuclear weapons was greater than the number who thought that Iran was pursuing peaceful nuclear development.[5] In contrast, despite some erosion in Turkey's popularity in the Middle East and North Africa, it remains the country in the region most positively perceived.[6]

The Key Members of the Emerging Axis

Saudi Arabia's effort to unite the monarchies out of concern about popular unrest against them, and to form a monarchial bloc as a counterweight against Iran, has thus far been unsuccessful. In December 2011, Saudi King Abdullah called on the six Arab Gulf states "to go beyond the stage of cooperation to the stage of union in one entity." However, despite expectations that a union – even if only partial – would be announced, the idea was suspended, ostensibly in order to give the members more time to assess the proposed framework and settle their disputes. At the same time, the regional unrest has to date not caused the downfall of any of the monarchies in the region. Moreover, even though significant disputes complicate relations among them, the Gulf states constitute the most unified and effective bloc in the Arab world.

In addition to its natural inclination to remain behind the scenes and focus on diplomatic mediation, Saudi Arabia faces significant challenges

at home, including a potential succession crisis, internal and external calls for political reform, and simmering unrest among the Shiites in the eastern district, problems that make it difficult for Saudi Arabia to assume a leading role. Yet Saudi Arabia, despite important structural weaknesses, is still determined to promote a new regional order. The kingdom, which supplies economic aid and advanced weaponry to the opposition in Syria,[7] wants to see Assad's regime fall, if only because Iran would thereby lose a key ally, the radical axis would be undermined, and Saudi Arabia would have the opportunity of joining the leadership of a larger and more unified Sunni camp. As long as it succeeds in managing the conflict through its "clients," the kingdom believes that with each passing day, even if it is not nearing victory, it benefits from the situation, because its enemies – Iran, the Assad regime, and Hizbollah – are suffering casualties and growing weaker.

Qatar's enormous economic power and readiness to use it for political purposes, combined with the weakness of several traditional power centers stemming from the upheaval in the Arab world, have highlighted the emirate's growing power and its particular brand of foreign policy. Qatar has been actively involved in most of the upheavals in the region, from Libya to Syria, where the emirate is so far the leading contributor to the rebels, with an estimate of $3 billion since the outbreak of the civil war.[8] The October 2012 visit to the Gaza Strip by the Emir of Qatar was the first visit there by a head of state since the Hamas takeover. Qatar's activity in the internal struggle between Fatah and Hamas in the Palestinian arena is not new, but it underscores the drive to fill the vacuum left by Egyptian weakness. The emirate's goal is to assume a place of honor alongside Egypt, which is preoccupied with internal problems, as a key sponsor in the efforts to mediate between the two Palestinian movements. In addition, the $8 billion in aid to Egypt by Qatar and its promise of future investment in the Egyptian economy,[9] even if it apparently comes without any official strings, will give it more influence over Egypt's policy than it enjoyed under the Mubarak regime, when relations between Cairo and Doha were strained.

What motivates the involvement of this gas-rich emirate in the regional revolutions? Probably it seeks to establish its leading role in the Middle East and perhaps also to avoid any uprising in its own territory. But Qatar's power is not unlimited; its activism, particularly its support for Islamic forces and Islamists in the region, is arousing opposition

among the other monarchies, which fear the strengthening of elements linked to the Muslim Brotherhood.

As a result of the Syrian crisis, Hamas has distanced itself from Iran and Syria − providers of economic assistance and advanced weaponry − while becoming closer to Egypt and Qatar, where several of its senior officials reside. Qatar's relations with Hamas in part led Israel in March 2011 to sever relations with Qatar and close its diplomatic delegation in Doha, ban holders of Qatari passports from visiting the West Bank, and halt cooperation between Qatar and Israel's defense industries. Israel was presumably not pleased by the Emir's visit to the Gaza Strip and the resulting gain for Hamas: even if the organization's dissociation from the radical axis is in itself positive, the new closeness had a negative impact on relations between Israel and Qatar.

Turkey, which is trying to balance its rediscovery of the Middle East in recent years with maintaining close relations with the West, constitutes an important link in the emerging Sunni axis. While some Arab countries remain ambivalent about Turkey's efforts to return to a position of leadership in the Middle East, its opposition to Israel and the option of alternative Sunni leadership to Iran are perceived positively in Arab capitals. On the other hand, Turkey's "return" to the Middle East is likely to be at the expense of some Arab countries' standing in the leadership of the Islamic world, and also in the Arab world. Negative memories of the Ottoman Empire are still fresh in some capitals, and the Turkish model threatens the conservative character of the Sunni monarchies.

The warm reception accorded Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on his September 2011 visit to Egypt[10] was accompanied by criticism from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Before his arrival in Egypt, he stated, "A secular country respects all religions. Don't be wary of secularism. I hope there will be a secular state in Egypt."[11] He stressed that people should have the right to choose whether or not to be religious, and cited himself as an example of a Muslim prime minister heading a secular country. In response, a Muslim Brotherhood spokesman said that Erdogan's remarks were interference in Egypt's internal affairs.[12] Since then, the Turkish leadership has shown more caution, and has emphasized that it does not intend to export the Turkish model, but only wishes to assist those who have asked for its help.[13]

Operation Pillar of Defense exposed the problems in Turkish policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Following the deterioration in

relations between Israel and Turkey and Turkey's unequivocal support for Hamas, Turkey was left with no actual ability to mediate and exert influence, beyond its statements condemning Israeli policy.[14] The campaign once again demonstrated the fact that Turkey had lost its status as the leading mediator in the region – a status it enjoyed before the Arab uprising as a result of the weakness of the Arab countries, particularly Egypt. At the same time, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's apology to Erdogan in March 2013, and the prospect of some thawing in Israeli-Turkish relations, could help bolster Turkish influence over developments between Israel and the Palestinians.

Egypt profited both regionally and internationally from its success as a mediator in Operation Pillar of Defense. The new Egyptian regime's ability to bring about a lull was a considerable achievement. Morsi did not want prolonged escalation because he feared that it would increase public criticism in general, especially from the Muslim Brotherhood, and fuel demands for extreme measures such as revoking the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, a move that could exact a heavy economic and political price from Egypt in the international arena. Egypt will likely play a key role in the future in moderating the conflict between Israel and Hamas, because Egypt remains an acceptable mediator to both parties. On the other hand, it is questionable whether Egypt can play a significant role in the regional arena at a time when it must cope with dramatic internal events. For example, Egyptian Minister of Defense General Abed al-Fatah al-Sisi warned in January 2013[15] that Egypt was in danger of disintegrating. Its shaky economic situation, reflected in its almost total lack of foreign currency reserves, a large budget deficit, and unemployment of nearly 25 percent among young people (while 60 percent of Egypt's population is below the age of 30),[16] forces Egypt to turn to new channels in a search for resources. In March 2013, in order to encourage the Egyptian tourism industry – and less likely as an overture to the regime in Tehran – Egypt even renewed its direct flights to and from Iran, after a 34-year break.[17]

Cohesion of the Sunni Axis

Notwithstanding what appears to be a strengthening of the Sunni camp, there is also a split within it. While Turkey, Qatar, and even Egypt under Muslim Brotherhood leadership are inclined to support organizations like Hamas and a considerable degree of change in the status quo, other Gulf states as well as Jordan are concerned about the rise in power of

political Islam and are trying to do their best to defend the status quo. Jordan's King Abdullah II even warned in this context that a new radical axis, the "Muslim Brotherhood Crescent" centered in Egypt and Turkey, was forming and threatening to change the character of the region.[18] Furthermore, Erdogan's aggressive line toward Israel in recent years is not shared by Saudi Arabia and several other Gulf states, which prefer quiet cooperation with Israel.[19]

Even with respect to the Syrian issue, where a greater convergence of interests among the Sunni axis members would be expected, disputes exist. The Saudis and the Qataris support different, at times competing, factions within the rebels groups; Qatar, for example, backs the more radical groups and works with the Muslim Brotherhood, which is anathema to Riyadh. Also, there is a fundamental difference between Turkey and Jordan on the one hand and Saudi Arabia on the other. As countries bordering Syria, Turkey and Jordan must deal with influences infiltrating from the Syrian civil war (refugees, a higher probability of terrorism), and this constitutes a key factor underlying their policies. Saudi Arabia is disappointed that Turkey's harsh rhetoric toward the Assad regime is not accompanied by physical measures.[20] The prolonged stalemate in Syria is largely to Saudi Arabia's benefit, because it weakens its enemies and requires relatively little investment on its part. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia fears that if and when Assad falls, the power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria will grow substantially, which in turn might affect the stability of certain Gulf states. Egypt and Qatar, however, the other leading partners in the axis, see matters quite differently. Moreover, in the absence of a clear decision in Syria, the split between the Sunni factions fighting in Syria and their respective backers is liable to widen.[21]

There are even visible gaps in perception between the Sunni axis members on the fundamental question that would presumably unite them – Iran. Together with Egypt, which is bolstering its economic and diplomatic ties with Iran, Turkey does not regard the threat from Iran in the same way as do some of the Gulf states. For example, while Turkey is proud of its mediation attempt in March 2010 with Brazil regarding the Iranian nuclear program, some of the Gulf states were less approving.[22] Furthermore, while these states agree that a Middle East free of nuclear weapons is a desirable goal, the fact that it will probably prove unachievable makes the discussion of other strategies urgent. Turkey

holds that the Gulf states are exaggerating the threat of Iranian nuclear capability, and claims that this question can only be solved through negotiations. In addition, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu argued that the P5+1, which is negotiating with Iran, should include Turkey and Saudi Arabia and become the P5+3.[23]

The internal weakness already existing in some Middle East and North African countries, and expectations that this trend will continue and gather momentum, may pose a significant challenge to the emerging Sunni axis, which will find it difficult to formulate a clear message of unity (on both the intra-Sunni and Sunni-Shiite fronts) that can convince the masses. The weakness of these regimes is hazardous for the Sunni axis for two main reasons. The first is that it can create additional hot spots of Shiite-Sunni conflict, thereby dragging the Sunni axis states into various levels of intervention in many places, including some near their borders, which could sap their strength. (Yemen is an example of a weak state in which Iran is stepping up its negative involvement, which is liable to push Saudi Arabia again into military intervention. The same can happen in Syria, which is in danger of splitting into cantons.) The second is that this weakness at the national level also affects Egypt, one of the main players in the Sunni axis's current lineup. Building an axis on such a shaky foundation guarantees trouble, and it is already apparent that Iran is looking for ways to improve its relations with Egypt given the latter's weakness, despite Saudi Arabia's efforts to block developments of this kind.

Conclusion

The advantage of a multi-polar system lies in its flexibility.[24] The question arises whether in the Middle East multi-polar flexibility is giving way to the creation of a more rigid bi-polar system. Such a development could restrain Iran on the one hand, but also escalate local conflicts and spark a general regional conflagration. The Sunni countries appear more willing than ever to harness their diplomatic, economic, and even military assets to the effort to obstruct Iran and its proxies. At the same time, they do not regard the Iranian threat with an identical degree of alarm, and this is therefore also a source of tension between these countries, joining their differing views of the role of political Islam, with an emphasis on the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter bone of contention between them detracts from the axis's ability to take joint action. Similarly, the outbreak

of the Syrian civil war brought together different elements that want to see Assad weakened, but no matter how this effort plays out, it will most probably intensify existing rifts.

Thus if the rise of the Sunni axis persists, there will likely be a paradigm shift in the Middle East dominated more by sectarian and ideological colors. Iran's power and influence may fade, but political Islam will become stronger in the Middle East, which is liable to make the region less tolerant toward Israel and the West. The Sunni Islamic movements are already experiencing a golden age, and play a major role in government in many of the states that have undergone a revolution.

For the Americans, the rise of the Sunni axis can potentially be a positive development, as a source of regional legitimacy in the struggle against the Iranian nuclear program. The three leading states in the Sunni axis – Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt – are states where the US has invested heavily in maintaining their Western orientation. Still, there are difficult tensions in the relations between each of these three states and the US. In particular, it appears that the challenges facing the US in preserving its relations with Egypt under the Morsi regime will be complex. Each of these three countries, however, has a strong incentive to maintain its relations with the US at their current level. On the other hand, where Syria is concerned, the active role of the Gulf states in financing and arming the rebels, and the fact that jihadist factions are exerting a growing influence on events in parts of that country, are likely to constitute a threat to the US and Israel.[25]

From Israel's perspective, greater regional firmness toward Iran is a positive development. Indeed, what Israel and the Sunni axis have shared in recent years was concern about Iran. This common interest has reportedly also led to cooperation in intelligence and coordination of positions with regard to Iran, at least between Israel and several of the Arab Gulf states. Israel and several of the monarchies also share another interest. To date, Israel and most of the monarchies have demonstrated their preference for preserving the status quo and halting the rise of political Islam, out of concern about the results of the upheaval in the region – another reason for deepening the tacit alliance between them.

The geopolitical change portrayed here offers an opportunity to further isolate Iran, limit its penetration of the Arab world, and complicate its efforts to support its proxies on Israel's borders.[26] Furthermore, as terrorist organizations like Hamas become closer to the Sunni axis, their

operations against Israel are likely to be considerably more restrained, even if Hamas wishes to continue receiving military support from Iran. On the other hand, this trend could hamper Israel's freedom of diplomatic and military action. If and when Israel and Hamas square off militarily again, Hamas will receive more diplomatic and economic support from the Sunni axis countries than in the past. Furthermore, although the Sunni countries are considered pro-Western with a more moderate policy toward Israel than Iran, they still largely support Islamic ideology, sometimes in an extreme version that vehemently opposes Israel.

Notes

1   Yoel Guzansky, "Iraq and the Arabs Following American Withdrawal," *Strategic Assessment* 15, no. 3 (2012): 42.
2   Ofra Bengio and Meir Litvak also add the Second Lebanese War (2006) to this list of "achievements." See Ofra Bengio and Meir Litvak, "Introduction," in *The Sunna and Shi'a in History: Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East*, eds. Ofra Bengio and Meir Litvak (New York: Palgrave, 2011), p. 9.
3   F. Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 695.
4   John R. Bradley, *After the Arab Spring: How the Islamists Hijacked the Middle East Revolts* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), p. 84.
5   Zogby Research Services, "Looking at Iran: How 20 Arab & Muslim Nations View Iran & Its Policies," March 5, 2013, http://www.aaiusa.org/page/-/Images/Polls/LookingAtIranPoll3_5_13.pdf.
6   In an August 2012 survey by TESEV, a Turkish research institute, 69 percent of those surveyed expressed positive views of Turkey, compared with 78 percent in 2011. Sixty-five percent of those surveyed in 2012 held positive views of Egypt, 62 percent approved of the United Arab Emirates, and 60 percent approved of Saudi Arabia, compared with 37 percent who expressed positive views of Iran. See also: Mensur Akgun and Sabiha Senyucel Gundogar, *The Perception of Turkey in the Middle East 2012* (Istanbul: TESEV, December 2012), p. 9.
7   C. J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, "Saudis Step up Help for Rebels in Syria with Croatian Arms," *New York Times*, February 25, 2013.
8   "Qatar and Syria: Emirate has Boosted Rebellion but Created Confusion, Too," *Financial Times*, May 19, 2013.
9   Zvi Barel, "The Egyptian Heart in Qatar's Pocket," *The Marker*, April 18, 2013.
10 Aviel Magnezi, "Erdogan: Israel Jeopardizing its Future," *Ynet News*, September 13, 2011, http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4121766,00.html.

11 "Egypt's Islamists criticize Erdogan over Calls for Secular State," *Ynet News*, September 14, 2011, http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4122413,00. html.

12 Ibid.

13 Gallia Lindenstrauss, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Embracing People's Power," *EuroMeSCo Papers* No. 14, March 2012, p. 13.

14 Uzi Rabi, "'Operation Pillar of Defense': A Window into the 'New' Middle East," *Tel Aviv Notes*, November 20, 2012.

15 "Egypt Army Chief warns of 'State Collapse," *al-Jazeera,* January 29, 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/20131299362752333. html.

16 "Egypt's Economic Crisis," *New York Times*, January 20, 2012; "Egypt's Economic Struggle," *New York Times*, September 4, 2012; Ben W. Heineman, Jr. "Egypt's Economic Winter," *The Atlantic*, December 18, 2012.

17 "First Iranian Tourists Arrive in Egypt Amid Tight Security," *al-Ahram*, April 1, 2013.

18 Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Modern King in the Arab Spring," *The Atlantic*, March 18, 2013.

19 Saban Kardas, "Turkey and the Gulf Dialogue in the Middle East," *TESEV Foreign Policy Programme*, November 2012, p. 5, http://www.tesev.org.tr/ Upload/Publication/efe57ebc-ca34-4e94-a7e0-04b6b721e3bb/Turkey%20 and%20Gulf%20Dialogue_Saban%20Kardas.pdf; see also Yoel Guzansky, "Israel's Relations with the Arab Gulf States: Between Iran and the Arab Spring," *Politique Etrangere* (winter 2012-2013), http://politique-etrangere. com/2013/03/11/israel-and-the-gulf-states-between-iran-and-the-arab-spring.

20 Kardas, "Turkey and the Gulf Dialogue in the Middle East," p. 5.

21 Katrina Dalacoura, "The Arab Uprisings Two Years On: Ideology, Sectarianism and the Changing Balance of Power," *Insight Turkey* 15, no. 1 (2013): 86.

22 Yoel Guzansky and Gallia Lindenstrauss, "Toward a Nuclear Middle East?" in *Strategic Survey for Israel 2012-2013,* eds. Anat Kurz and Shlomo Brom (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2013), p. 61; Kardas, "Turkey and the Gulf Dialogue in the Middle East," pp. 5-6.

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Islam and Democracy: Can the Two Walk Together?

Yoav Rosenberg

An analysis of the events in the Middle East over the past two years requires a close examination of the foundations of political philosophy, using basic concepts in philosophy connected to enlightenment, freedom, and the sovereignty of man and God. In many ways, the events now taking place in the Middle East are somewhat reminiscent of what happened in Europe some two hundred years ago with the rise of the ideas of enlightenment and nationalism. To be sure, the events in the Middle East of the twenty-first century are unique to this time and place, and cannot even be imagined as eighteenth or nineteenth century events. Much has been written, for example, about the contemporary use of the internet and social networking sites to circumvent and make a mockery of the apparatuses used by the authoritarian regimes against would-be protesters. Neither these technologies nor other mass media that document events in real time were available two hundred years ago. However, a thorough understanding of the idea of the Enlightenment and of the political systems it spawned makes it possible to better examine the significance of the rise to power of the Islamic parties in many Arab countries and to better define the chances that democratic governments will arise in those countries.

The primary claim of this article is that it is not yet possible to decide whether democratic governments will spring up in Arab countries. An attempt to assess the likelihood of these developments is no simpler than was an attempt to predict the stability of the regimes of Mubarak, Assad, Qaddafi, and others. What is clear, however, is that the fundamental

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philosophical terms that underlie intelligence and cultural assessments, and as such, predictions as to how the events in the Arab world will play out, are grounded directly or indirectly in basic ideological and cultural assumptions.

Many of the analyses published thus far, especially in Israel, have been written by Middle East experts. For years, the academic discipline of Middle East studies has assumed that the societies and countries in the geographic region called the Middle East are distinct from other global geopolitical phenomena. It is clear that scholars of the Middle East are not ignoring global phenomena (such as the internet and economic globalization), but they maintain that discussion of movements and societies in the Middle East requires singular expertise. They depict a sort of unique quality of people in the region and political forms common in the Middle East. In fact, however, an understanding of the processes currently underway in the Middle East requires that these processes be fundamentally linked to phenomena that have taken place over the past few hundred years in Europe and the United States. The depiction of the Islamic current of thought that has recently scored several impressive victories in free elections in the region as rejecting "Western values" is flawed and does not provide a good description of the "West" and its "values."

> The very fact that a particular government imposes restrictions on its citizens, whether they are restrictions in religious law or others, does not in and of itself preclude the establishment of democracy in the basic sense of regular elections and basic rights and equality.

The article below first briefly surveys the Enlightenment movement, whose most prominent figure was eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, and then reviews the currents of thought that subsequently opposed the Enlightenment from that time till today. Careful study reveals that a considerable number of the Islamic movements in the region draw ideologically from the Western anti-Enlightenment movement, even if their basis is Islamic religious faith. Therefore, a solid analysis of the chances that an Islamic democracy will develop is impossible without a thorough understanding of the concept of democracy, both in its Western meaning and in the new meanings it might assume in the current Middle East context. The decision whether to recognize particular characteristics as unique to the Middle East or identify them as global

characteristics of humanity is mainly an ideological decision and cannot be justified by historical or cultural research. This article prefers to look at current events in the Middle East through a Western and global prism that touches on the question of human sovereignty and freedom. While the ideas on these issues were developed in what is called the "West," as philosophical ideas, they are relevant throughout the globe – even if some people think otherwise.

What is Enlightenment?

In his 1784 essay "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" Kant in effect determined how enlightenment would be discussed for generations to come. Kant writes that regarding an individual, "*enlightenment is mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another . . . Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your *own* understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment."[1] In the social context, he states, "that a public [*publikum*] should enlighten itself is more likely; indeed, it is nearly inevitable, if only it is granted freedom . . . the *public* use of reason must at all times be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men."[2] Kant is very clear in his approach to the Church and the clergy's ability to enforce timeless conventions that are not based on human reason: "But it is absolutely forbidden to unite, even for the lifetime of a single man, in a permanent religious constitution that no one may publicly doubt, and thereby to negate a period of progress of mankind toward improvement and thus make it fruitless and even detrimental for posterity."[3] Kant thereby challenges the clergy, and later in the essay political rulers as well, whom he would restrict in their power to harm the freedom of thought and freedom of expression of their citizens and subjects. Enlightenment is thus inextricably linked with political liberalism in the sense of giving basic rights to citizens, and in particular, public freedom of expression. However, Kant does not call for political anarchism, in which every person can decide by the strength of his intellect whether he wishes to pay taxes, be drafted into the army, or obey the country's laws. Rather, Kant allows for full civil obedience, based on the rational freedom of every citizen. The public space is the place where reason dominates, while in the space where a citizen plays a particular private role (e.g., soldier, government official, or worker), he

must obey in order to preserve civil order. This is also closely connected to Kant's moral concept, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

The Enlightenment, therefore, was initially a revolutionary movement that callled for human beings to rely on their intellect in exploring natural reality as well as human moral values. The Enlightenment is also a natural successor to the Reformation of the sixteenth century, which called upon Christians to understand their holy books by themselves and to dissociate themselves from the authority of the Church and the monopoly on interpretation of holy writ that Catholic priests had assumed. Another influence is that of the scientific revolution, which led to impressive achievements in the power of the human intellect and its objective observation of nature. Essentially, enlightenment does not recognize religious, divine, ecclesiastical, or political authority, and it places man's freedom and his sovereignty over his body and his mind at the center of its political thought. To many people in Israel today, this sentence sounds almost trivial. However, we do not need to go back many years in order to be reminded that for most of human history, human beings were not sovereign entities, and they did not have freedom and basic rights. Human beings were subject to patriarchal authority, to feudalism, to the Church, and to many other systems that determined what they would think, how they would dress, what work they would do, whom they would marry, and numerous other practices that today are anchored in basic laws that grant human beings the right to decide these issues by themselves.

The idea of enlightment was revived under the Republican administration of George W. Bush. An example of the arguments made against the idea of enlightenment that was promoted by Bush early in the first decade of the twenty-first century in his war against Saddam Hussein can be found in "American Optimism and Middle Eastern Pessimism," an article published in 2004 in the IDF journal *Maarachot*. The article is litle more than a challenge to the Bush administration policy of exporting democracy. Thus, refuting statements by the Bush administration, the authors argue that "presenting precedents from a different political, social, and cultural world from that of the Middle East is largely misleading"[4] (referring to the administration spokespersons who based themselves on the political changes that had taken place in Eastern Europe and South America to support the idea that a similar political change could be made in the Middle East as well). The authors

justify the distinct approach to the Middle East populace on the basis of a culture that ostensibly separates them qualitatively from other citizens of the world.

The authors, Middle East experts, characterize Middle East society as having a "deeply entrenched belief in the dominant role of fate, which is dictated in advance in the life of the individual and the collective, and for this reason, it also adheres to the assumption that there is a deterministic historical need (which often leads to a tendency to passivity and to rejecting pursuit of change in a situation by depending on *sabr*, the well-known Middle Eastern patience). Moreover, societies in the Islamic world attribute clear importance to a preference for the collective over the idea of individualism common in the West."[5] Two claims are made here. One is about the ostensible passivity of the Arab public, which does not take action against corrupt regimes because of some faith in "the dominant role of fate." The second claim, which has no necessary or causal connection to the first, maintains that Middle East societies prefer the collective to the individual. Yet even if the collective is preferred to the individual, it is of course still possible to actively protest against a corrupt dictatorial regime, as in fact happened recently in a number of Arab states. The two claims made by the authors are not necessarily connected.

In their conclusion, the authors argue:

> There is increasing recognition that the United States and the entire West are worried about the problems in the Middle East and are prepared to deal with them more vigorously than those who live in the region itself. The lack of democracy, the extremism and terror, the weakness of civil society, the weak connection to the nation-state, poverty and ignorance, the inferior status of women – all these emerge as problems that are much more troubling to the West (and in fact, threaten its tranquility) than to most people in the Middle East. Not only do most people in the Middle East not view these problems with the same degree of seriousness as the West, but it would appear that sometimes, they do not even perceive them as problems.[6]

However, reading these lines in 2013 leaves no room for doubt: Middle East society has had its say. Most of the publics in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and other countries see the problems of poverty, corruption, the status of women, and others as fundamental problems for which they took to the streets and risked their lives. It may be that they prefer the collective

to the individual, but there is no connection whatsoever between this preference and accepting fate.

Anti-Enlightenment: A Movement as Old as the Enlightenment

To people who grow up in secular, liberal democratic countries like Israel, the description of the Enlightenment above is clear, if not obvious. Individual rights, freedom of expression, liberalism, and democracy are givens. In Hebrew, the concept of enlightenment has a fully positive connotation, and there are very few people who would proudly describe themselves as unenlightened. However, the Enlightenment movement has had many opponents over the years, from its beginning to this day. Most of its opponents were part of Western culture and developed in Western countries. One key cultural movement that reacted against the enlightenment was Romanticism, with its emphasis on subjective human perception and emotion superseding a comprehensive belief in human reason as a means to reveal the secrets of nature and arrive at universal moral norms. Many religious movements also opposed the idea of enlightenment on the basis of divine sovereignty in the world and the claim that human beings, subject to the divine, are themselves limited.

An important current of thought that opposed enlightenment and liberalism and continues to have an impact on political thought in Europe and the United States today is known as the Frankfurt School. Its proponents were a group of neo-Marxist thinkers who began their activity before the Second World War in Frankfurt; most of its members left Germany during the war, immigrating mainly to the United States. The pessimism characteristic of their approach stems from its Marxist origins and thereafter from the historical experience of the Holocaust, the industrial killing of the Jews, and the use of atomic weapons against the civilian population in Japan. The leaders of the group, which engaged in a deep social analysis of the problems of contemporary Western society, were Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno.

Horkheimer begins his essay "The Concept of Enlightenment" thus: "In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant."[7] Horkheimer thus points to the main problem faced by members of the Frankfurt School: the Enlightenment that conquered the Western world and which, according to Kant, was supposed to lead it to a more just place,

led to dictatorial regimes and world wars that ended with a Holocaust in which technology, achieved by the power of the human mind, was used to kill millions of innocent civilians as part of the worst murder in human history. Enlightenment, according to Horkheimer, turned technology into a tool man uses to take over the world, and the Industrial Revolution turned science into a functional tool only that is divorced from its original aspiration to investigate the truth. The instrumentality of science and technology made it possible to alienate them from the world of morals and thereby allowed them to be exploited for purposes of mass killing. Control over nature also immediately brings with it man's alienation from reality, a basic concept in Marxist and Freudian thinking. Alienation prevents man from being happy, in contrast to the Kantian vision. Horkheimer concludes his article by stating, "But in the face of such a possibility, and in the service of the present age, enlightenment becomes wholesale deception of the masses."[8]

The Arab Spring: Is There Still Room for Optimism?

Undoubtedly the Muslim Brotherhood, like other religious movements (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim) believes that man is not lord of himself and that divine authority and sacred writings are binding on man and impose limits on his way of life. Theology, in its interpretation of sacred writings, reveals hidden layers of reality, which human intelligence, science, and technology will never manage to reveal, in contrast to the Kantian ideas on the possibility of conquering happiness on the basis of human reason alone. According to the Muslim Brotherhood, the moral world and the desire to establish justice on earth require reliance on religious law and sacred writings, and they are to be preferred over human laws. In these senses, the Muslim Brotherhood is close to the Western anti-liberal movements, and the profound influence of such Western thinkers is recognizable on the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as on Shiite thought in the Islamic Revolution in Iran. (Some of the leading Shiite religious seminaries in Iran teach the writings of German philosopher Martin Heidigger, the most prominent philosopher of the critics of enlightenment in the twentieth century, and Iranian President Ahmadinejad reportedly met his ideological mentor Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi in a course he gave on Heidigger in one of the religious seminaries in Qom.[9])

That being the case, it is important to understand what we can expect of the Islamic movement and what we cannot. The Western concept of liberalism and enlightenment, to the extent that it highlights man's sovereignty and freedom, must be rejected by a movement that advocates the values of Islam and *sharia*. To be sure, founders of the Muslim Brotherhood drew much support from the rise of the fascist movement in the early twentieth century. However, over the years the movement has evolved, and contemporary leaders are grappling with different challenges. For example, the concept of democracy, in the sense of accepting the people's decision, or in the simple test of holding elections every few years, does not necessarily contradict the values of religion embraced by some Muslim Brotherhood leaders, among them Egyptian President Morsi. In this sense, and against the backdrop of the ways in which the Arab public has expressed its positions in the town square over the past two years, we can discern in the Muslim Brotherhood a profound engagement with how it will be possible to adopt democratic concepts under the basic assumptions of a religious movement. It is certainly appropriate to establish social justice according to the movement. Even before the movement came to power, this goal guided its members in their varied *dawa* activity. This is also what brought them public sympathy, particularly given the failures of the previous authoritarian governments and their profound corruption. The very fact that a particular government imposes restrictions on its citizens, whether they are restrictions in religious law or others, does not in and of itself preclude the establishment of democracy in the basic sense of regular elections and basic rights and equality. Even Kant applies restrictions on the liberty of the German citizen and requires him to obey the country's laws (though in the late eighteenth century, parliamentary democracy had not yet been established in any country in the world).

After Islamic parties came to power in some Arab countries, most Israeli commentators hastened to eulogize the potential of the Arab spring. These commentators tend to deny the chances of realizing a democratic society and government in Arab states after (and in some of the countries, before) the governmental revolutions that removed the authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. Thus, a 2012 *Maarachot* article by "Michael," author of the 2004 article cited above, repeats the basic claim that Middle East society is different from other societies in the world. Once again, the author attacks the optimists who describe the "new"

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Middle East as a "region that is being led and shaped by modern young people who yearn for Western culture, are driven by the force of liberal, democratic ideas, and who operate through social networking sites."[10] The author here identifies yearning for Western culture in its liberal sense with a positive vision of the Middle East. In any case, Islamic forces that do not yearn for Western culture cannot lead to democratic ideas. However, the author gives a good description of the dilemmas the Islamic movements face in shaping a new political order and in confronting the demands of the "street" for basic rights and freedom. He correctly describes the possibility of creating "a democratic, but not liberal order"[11] in the sense that the authority of a decision by the people will be accepted, but individual freedoms that contradict Islamic law will not necessarily be allowed.

However, it is not possible to claim categorically that the Muslim Brotherhood cannot serve in the government and at the same time adopt democratic methods, and in particular, allow free elections that could also lead to its losing the elections and handing the reins of power to other political movements (for example, secular liberal ones). We cannot expect the Muslim Brotherhood to adopt a secular, liberal policy in the profound sense of the Enlightenment as described above. The Islamic movement does not believe in the sovereignty of man and in achieving justice and progress in the Kantian fashion, which encourages activity by man through the power of his intellect only. "The deep revulsion with the West," which "Michael" in his conclusion ascribes to the Islamic movements, is revulsion with the enlightened, secular liberal West. However, for hundreds of years, there have been many and varied movements in the West itself that are disgusted by the concept of enlightenment in its simple, Kantian sense. Some have become dictatorial movements that were repulsed by the ideas of Western democracy (such as the fascist movements of the early twentieth century), but over the years some have put the democratic idea into action (thus, for example, most social-democratic movements prefer the values of collective mutual responsibility to the values of undisputed individual freedom given to every citizen according to the liberal and capitalist systems).

> The Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood is contrary to the concept of enlightenment, but not necessarily democracy.

While the Iranian attempt to realize a democratic Islam appears dismal (although here too there is an ongoing debate about the connection between democracy and Islamic law), elsewhere there are also better attempts in terms of government conduct (such as Turkey). The rise of a middle class and the ability of public expression that has appeared in the public squares of Arab states over the past two years is also likely to force the Islamic movements to adopt democratic behavior in the context of domestic policy, even if this behavior is not "enlightened" and liberal in the senses defined in this article. The fall of the regime in Tunisia following the murder of the opposition leader is one example, and Morsi's retreat from attempts to advance certain reforms due to public and judicial pressure is a second example.

A similar opinion to the 2012 article by "Michael" appears in an article by Professor Asher Susser, who also points to the fact that "Middle East societies are for the most part not secular. These are societies in which the public ascribes great importance to belief, religious ritual, and religion."[12] He rejects an effort to extrapolate from the attempt at a Spring of Nations in nineteenth century Europe to the contemporary Arab Spring, and he is careful to maintain the cultural distinction between West and East. Susser points to an ostensible gap "between outsiders' expectations… establishment of liberal/secular governments on the ruins of the old regimes − and the Islamist reality that ultimately emerged."[13] Susser laments post-modernist currents in the West, which have sought to challenge "the underpinnings of rational thought of the modern enlightenment."[14] Thus, already from the outset of his article Susser by choice becomes a representative of the enlightened position, which favors the rule of human intellect over any other source of knowledge (divine or collective, for example).

Susser confuses the question of democracy in Arab countries with whether the new regimes are liberal and enlightened. He makes an implicit assumption, identical to that of "Michael," that once the Islamic movements do not accept the "burden" of liberal enlightenment, they cannot support the establishment of democracies on the ruins of the authoritarian regimes. He describes a debate that developed on the Arab Spring between those "who maintained that the Middle East was on the verge of an Islamic tidal wave" and those who "argued that a new Middle Eastern democracy was taking shape here and now."[15] Thus, Susser assumes, though without defending this assumption, that the Islamic

tidal wave is fundamentally opposed to democracy. This is in contrast to the correct distinction, which is that the Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood is contrary to the concept of enlightenment, but not necessarily democracy. Susser laments the death of the process of secularization in the Middle East, without which, he assumes, Middle Eastern democracy will be impossible, though again, he does not prove it. For Susser too, the "West" is only the liberal, secular West, and he does not consider all the movements that opposed Kantian enlightenment for profound reasons to be "Western."

Although Susser mentions the currents of thought that oppose enlightenment in the West, he seems unable to break free of an identification of democracy with an enlightened, secular government on the model of the French Revolution. Susser, who is careful to emphasize the uniqueness of the Middle East, does not succeed in seriously considering the possibility of democratic development that is based on religious principles and that does not advocate the sovereignty of the individual. How would such a democracy look? One possibility is an Islamic democracy that draws from *sharia* and restricts some of the individual rights accepted in liberal democracies (e.g., on matters of modesty or separation of the sexes), but still allows free elections and maintains the separation of powers, freedom of expression, and minority rights. It is precisely such a connection between the desire of the masses for freedom and democracy and traditional societies based on the foundations of Islam that is likely to bear fruit, both in a slow reform of Islam (not toward secularism, but toward greater tolerance for minorities and freedom of expression, for example), and in creating a democracy that is more suited to people and cultures in the Middle East.

It appears that a correct look at the roots of democracy and the Enlightenment and a close examination of the various kinds of Western political philosophy would allow commentators to raise richer possibilities about possible future developments in a Middle East that is taking shape. More than ever, the current period requires that we exercise caution in assessing the fate of the historic revolutions shaking up the Middle East. Political Islam does not necessarily mean the loss of a chance for democracies in the region. Thus the point of this article was not to determine how the future of the Middle East will look, rather to caution commentators against judging too quickly and sealing the fate

of the region without examining new possibilities such as the creation of Islamic democracies in a range of colors.

Notes

1   All quotations of Kant are from "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" in *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. 58.

2   Ibid., p. 59.

3   Ibid., p. 61.

4   Major Michael and Major Alon, "American Optimism and Middle Eastern Pessimism," *Maarachot* 393 (2004): 3-11; quoted sentence is from page 5.

5   Ibid.

6   Ibid, p. 11.

7   All quotations of Horkheimer are from "The Concept of Enlightenment" in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London and New York: Verso, 1997); quoted sentence is from p. 3.

8   Ibid., p. 42.

9   Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott Clark,. "War Games," *The Gaurdian*, December 8, 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/dec/08/iran. cathyscottclark.

10 Colonel Michael, "The Rise of the 'Green Wave': The Strengthening of the Islamic Current in the Shadow of the Regional Upheavals, and Implications for Israel," *Maarachot* (2012): 12-17; quoted sentence is from p. 13.

11 Ibid., p. 15.

12 Asher Susser, "Tradition and Modernity in the 'Arab Spring,'" *Strategic Assessment* 15, no. 1 (2012): 29-41; quoted sentence is from p. 30.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., p. 31.

15 Ibid., p. 34.

The US and Israel on Iran:
Whither the (Dis)Agreement?

Ephraim Kam

The Iranian nuclear program has been a principal issue in discussions between the American and Israeli governments in recent years. The intensive contacts and American statements indicate that there are differences of approach between the two sides. This article examines where the two governments agree and where they diverge in how they define objectives concerning Iran, and how they would design an answer to the threat.

While the American and Israeli governments are quite close in their perceptions of the Iranian nuclear threat and have shared objectives in this regard, a concrete dispute between them has developed as to how to meet the threat, particularly concerning a military operation in Iran. The US is considering the military option, but unlike Israel, opposes it in the current circumstances, owing to a different understanding of its ramifications. Assuming that Israel does not change its position that military action against Iran is necessary in the not too distant future if it becomes apparent that the diplomatic process has reached a dead end, the dispute will be decided primarily by Iran's behavior and the attitude of the US administration. If the administration agrees to a deal with Iran with loopholes that Israel finds difficult to accept, or if it decides to switch from a strategy of denying Iran nuclear weapons to one of containment, the gap between Israel and the US will widen. If the administration concludes that an attack in Iran is unavoidable, the gap will narrow.

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Perception of the Iranian Threat

Perception of a threat from Iran began to emerge in the US and Israel following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, when both countries saw that the change of regime in Tehran turned a former ally into a rival and enemy. The Iranian threat became especially significant to both countries in the early 1990s when Iran, no longer occupied by the war with Iraq, began a military buildup and accelerated its nuclear and missile programs.

Perceptions of the Iranian nuclear threat by the US and Israel have converged over the years. Since 1993, every Israeli prime minister has cited Iran as the gravest strategic threat to Israel and to Middle East stability. The understanding was that the Iranian threat stemmed from the combination of a fundamentalist Islamic regime dedicated to destroying Israel and to attaining a capability to deal Israel a severe blow. The US has demonstrated understanding of Israel's perception of the Iranian threat, agreeing that Iran potentially poses an existential threat to Israel.[1] This understanding constitutes a key consideration in the American administration's decision to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the US regards a nuclear Iran as a threat to its most important interests in the Middle East, namely, the security of its allies in the region, US influence in the region, the supply of energy, and the Arab-Israeli peace process.

The American and Israeli perceptions of the regional consequences of a nuclear Iran are close, although it is clear that the US has broader considerations on the matter. Both countries believe that a nuclear Iran will increase instability in the Middle East, deal a critical blow to the arms control regime, and spark a nuclear arms race in the region. Both believe that possession of nuclear weapons by Iran will make it more aggressive vis-à-vis its neighbors, the American presence in the region, and Israel; reinforce its status as the cornerstone of the radical camp; increase the pressure on the moderate countries in the area to fall in line with Iranian policy; and motivate its allies to exhibit a more brazen stance against Israel.

While the US and Israel share similar perceptions of the Iranian nuclear threat, there are differences between their intelligence assessments concerning the development of the nuclear program. There is a broad consensus in both Israel and the US – although this consensus is not undisputed in the US – that years ago Iran made a strategic decision to obtain nuclear weapons. The intelligence assessments on the timetable

for Iran to become technically capable of attaining nuclear capability are not substantially different: in the early 1990s, the intelligence communities in both countries estimated that Iran would be able to reach nuclear capability within 5-8 years. This estimate proved questionable, because it is now clear that Iran was unable to produce fissile material in the 1990s. Furthermore, this estimate was based on a worst case scenario, predicated on a misunderstanding of Iran's cautious strategy. Ultimately it became clear that Iran prefers development of a range of advanced nuclear capabilities, and is in no hurry to break out to nuclear weapons. Its reasons are twofold: Iran wishes to wait and find the optimal timing for a breakout in order to limit the price it will have to pay the international arena, and it is important for Iran to develop capabilities that will enable it to build a nuclear weapons arsenal, not merely a single bomb.

According to the 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), Iran evinced the technical capability that would allow it to produce nuclear weapons in 2010-2015. While Israeli intelligence estimated that Iran was capable of producing nuclear weapons on much shorter notice, the difference between the estimates was not significant. The dispute between the US and Israel intelligence communities centered on a different element of the American assessment: that Iran had a weapons program until 2003 that was discontinued, and there was no factual basis for concluding that it had been renewed. Israel, on the other hand, held that Iran's nuclear weapons program was indeed discontinued in 2003, but was later renewed. The 2007 American assessment was also criticized for not sufficiently recognizing the significance of Iran's acceleration of its uranium enrichment program, which could indicate not only its improved ability to attain nuclear weapons capability, but also its intention of doing so.[2]

The US intelligence assessment in 2012 went a step beyond the 2007 assessment. This assessment was not made public, but its main points were leaked to the media, and a summary appeared in a report by the US Director of National Intelligence published in March 2013. This assessment indicates that the US and Israel both agree that Iran is building a nuclear infrastructure and enriching uranium in order to reserve the option of obtaining nuclear weapons, that Iran is conducting basic research related to its nuclear weapons program, and that it has the scientific, technical, and industrial capability to produce nuclear weapons, subject to a political decision. The US agrees that Iran advanced

in 2012 to a situation enabling it to enrich uranium to a military level, should it decide to do so. The US and Israel also agree that thus far there is no solid evidence that Iran has already decided on a breakout to nuclear weapons, but is liable to do so in the future. Nevertheless, press reports say that the American intelligence community believes that Iran has not yet decided to go ahead with a nuclear weapons program like the one that was discontinued in 2003. Israel disagrees with this assessment, asserting that Iran has already made great progress in uranium enrichment, the most difficult step on the way to nuclear weapons, such that the path to building a nuclear weapon itself is relatively short.[3]

It therefore appears that the points of agreement between the US and Israeli intelligence assessments are greater than the differences between them. This was the sense of the remarks of former Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who said that the US President had received new information that Iran had made significant and surprising progress in its nuclear program that was bringing it close to achieving nuclear weapons capability. He added that this information was changing previous US intelligence assessments, which were now very close to those of Israeli intelligence.[4]

Objectives Concerning Iran

United States objectives vis-à-vis Iran are more extensive than Israel's, because as a superpower the circle of US interests is wider and its ability to achieve those objectives is superior. The administration wishes to rein in Iran's ability to achieve regional hegemony, halt its military buildup and involvement in terrorism, strengthen the confidence of American allies threatened by Iran, and promote human rights in Iran. Iran believes that though Washington does not admit it, the US aspires above all to overthrow the Islamic regime. Achievement of these American objectives is also important for Israel, whose ability to help realize them is limited.

The most important objective for both Israel and the US is preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. President Obama made this objective a US commitment in March 2012, when he said that his policy was not to contain but to deny Iran a nuclear weapons capability, because a nuclear Iran could not be contained. In other words, the US administration is unwilling to accept the scenario of a nuclear Iran and then have to use all means to deter it from using these weapons to promote Iranian interests. Nonetheless, an important question is whether the US administration will change its position by switching from a policy of

prevention to one of containment if it reaches the conclusion that only an attack will stop Iran on its road to nuclear weapons, and it is unwilling to risk such an attack.

Responding to the Iranian Nuclear Threat

While the US and Israeli governments share similar perceptions of the Iranian threat, they disagree on the response. Both countries agree that in principle, the best way to deal with the Iranian nuclear program is through diplomacy, whereby if Iran is persuaded through negotiations to halt its nuclear program, the serious risks incurred by a military strike will be avoided. After a decade of fruitless negotiations, however, the chances of persuading Iran to forego its ambition to obtain a nuclear military capability are slim. Israel in particular is pessimistic about the chances of stopping Iran's nuclear program through diplomacy and points to two inherent risks. The first is that the Iranians will continue their efforts to gain time through negotiations in order to make progress in their nuclear activity until it is too late to stop them through a military strike. The second is that the six governments negotiating with Iran will reach a settlement that does not eliminate the possibility of Iran producing nuclear weapons. For these reasons, Israel expects the American administration to set a timetable that will prevent Iran from prolonging negotiations indefinitely, and demonstrate that military action is a viable option.

The military option is the focus of the controversy between the US and Israel. In principle, their positions are similar: they are the only two governments that have stated publicly that all options, including the military option, are on the table. In practice, however, their positions diverge: while Israel wants to give the military option credibility, it contends that the US is undermining this option's credibility by emphasizing repeatedly that conditions are still not ripe for a military strike, that Israel's capabilities are inadequate for an effective independent military strike, and that it demands that Israel not surprise the US with independent military action. Israel fears, probably rightly, that this attitude eases the pressure on Iran, and is liable to convince it that the United States does not actually intend to attack.

Why does the US object to military action under current conditions? Senior administration officials give two main reasons. The first is their assessment that a military strike will only delay the Iranian nuclear

program for a limited period, not stop it, and that Israel's ability to damage the Iranian nuclear sites is limited. Former US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said that an attack would delay the Iranian nuclear program for only one year or two.[5] The second reason is that Iran's response to a military attack could drag the Middle East into a broad military conflict and lead to chaos. Panetta alleged that such an attack could potentially cause severe security and economic damage in the Middle East and throughout the world. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen also believes that an Israeli attack would lead to escalation, upset stability in the Middle East, and endanger the lives of American soldiers in the Persian Gulf. General Martin Dempsey, who succeeded Mullen as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, held that an attack on Iran would harm regional stability "to an unbelievable degree" and would constitute a very big problem, and added that if Israel attacks, he would not want to be a part of it.[6] Other sources in the US argue that an attack is liable to prompt Iran to accelerate its nuclear program and actually break out to nuclear weapons while taking advantage of an attack to force the lifting of the sanctions, and that an attack is liable to strengthen Iranian popular support for the regime.

The administration has not clarified its predictions of escalation following an attack on Iran. It probably fears, however, that the Iranian response to an attack will not be confined to missile and rocket attacks at Israel, but will lead to an attack against American targets in the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan and against US allies in the Persian Gulf. Such a measure would force the US to respond to Iran, and would be liable to ignite an oil crisis and anti-American unrest in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Israel's view is different. Israel's assessment is that a successful attack against Iran will cause a longer delay in the Iranian nuclear program than the US believes – possibly three to five years.[7] Furthermore, according to Israel's assessment the US possesses superior capabilities for a military operation, particularly in a series of attacks against the Iranian nuclear sites that could halt Iran's nuclear program for a long period and even result in its cancellation, if Iran realizes that the US is determined to continue attacking until the program is completely stopped. Under this scenario, the US could decide to extend its attacks to other targets beyond the nuclear sites, and possibly attempt to paralyze the entire Iranian response system in advance. A scenario of general escalation in

the Middle East is also unlikely according to these assessments, because it ignores constraining factors: Iran's response capability is limited, and it is likely to shrink from an all-out confrontation with the US. Iran may therefore confine itself to a symbolic response, and the conflict will eventually be limited to a small number of players. In addition, proper use of a successful attack would prevent the Iranians from renewing their nuclear program and breaking out to nuclear weapons. Israel believes that in all, a military attack will have negative consequences but will not cause a dramatic change in the Middle East, and the consequences can be dealt with.

The attitudes of the Israeli and US governments to a military attack on Iran are also influenced by their differing assessments of the deadline for carrying it out. From an operational standpoint, the US has a longer timetable than Israel because its military capabilities enable it to attack at a later date, even at a stage when Israel would have difficulty attacking. Furthermore, the two countries define the red line, beyond which a military option will be considered, in different ways. The US has not actually defined a clear red line for military action, but various statements suggest that its red line will be crossed when there are signs of an Iranian breakout to nuclear weapons − for example, if Iran starts enriching uranium at a military level, expels the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors, and/or revokes its signature on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. For the US, therefore, Iran has not yet neared the "zone of immunity." For Israel, the red line will be crossed when Iran enters the zone of immunity. It will then lose its ability to conduct an independent nuclear strike, and will be dependent on the willingness of the US to take such a measure. Where Israel is concerned, Iran's entry into the zone of immunity will occur when the defense of its nuclear sites, especially in Fordow, reaches a stage so that it would be difficult to ensure the success of an attack. An entry into the zone of immunity can also occur when Iran is so close to producing fissile material that the process can no longer be stopped. In other words, the US will consider an attack to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons when Iran breaks out to nuclear weapons, while Israel believes that it will have to attack earlier to render Iran unable to break out. In August 2012, then-Minister of Defense Ehud Barak said that Iran was liable to enter the zone of immunity very soon, i.e., it had not yet done so. Some in Israel, however, believe that

Iran entered the zone of immunity already in the fall of 2012, and that this concept therefore no longer has any meaning.[8]

Questions for the Future: Agreement and Discord

Can the United States and Israel reach an understanding in the future about the diplomatic and/or military solution to the Iranian threat? This question is especially important because the three main actors are likely to reach a fateful crossroads in a year or two. Iran will have to decide whether to make real concessions that will enable it to conclude a deal limiting its nuclear program for the sake of easing the stringent sanctions against it. The American administration will have to decide whether to agree to real concessions in negotiations with Iran in order to conclude a deal, initiate military action − American or Israeli − against the nuclear sites in Iran, or switch from a policy of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons to a strategy of containing Iran, which means accepting its possession of nuclear weapons. Israel will have to decide whether to embark on military action, if no other way is found to stop Iran.

Can the US and Israel reach an understanding on a deal with Iran that will include significant restrictions on its nuclear program, and delay that plan's completion for a significant period of time? Presumably the administration is also aware that Iran will not voluntarily forego its ambition to produce nuclear weapons, or at least build a capability of producing such weapons on short notice, and that Iran is likely to persist in the policy of deception and concealment that it has pursued in the nuclear realm. This assumption can be used as a basis for a rudimentary understanding between the US and Israeli governments on how to handle the Iranian nuclear program diplomatically. From Israel's standpoint, such an understanding can include various elements, such as:

a. Continued American commitment to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, and no switch to a containment policy.

b. A common definition of red lines concerning progress in the Iranian nuclear program, and an understanding that the US will consider military action if diplomacy fails. This definition must also clarify what will be considered failure in the negotiations with Iran.

c. Basic terms for an agreement with Iran, such as removing all uranium at an enrichment level of 20 percent or higher from Iran, and removing most of the uranium that has been enriched to a lower level, in order to prevent an Iranian breakout to a bomb and its development within

a short span of time, and closing the enrichment facility at Fordow, or at least suspending its activity. These terms mean stopping the ticking Iranian clock and winding it back by several years at least.

d. Stepped up supervision of the nuclear sites in Iran in accordance with the Additional Protocol.

e. Retention of most of the painful sanctions until a satisfactory agreement with Iran is achieved.

f. Coordination mechanisms between the US and Israel for formulation of a joint strategy on the Iranian nuclear question.

In practice, an understanding of this type between the US and Israel is possible, because at least some of these terms are acceptable to the American administration. However, the two countries have diverging attitudes regarding the diplomatic option. Israel believes that there is only a slight chance for the negotiations to succeed, while the US believes that there is enough time to test whether the painful sanctions in force against Iran will prove effective. The administration wants to pursue every possibility for the diplomatic option, even if the prospects appear poor. This will postpone military action as long as possible, and may somehow achieve results; and if the administration decides to attack Iran, important legitimacy for an attack will be achieved by waiting until all diplomatic possibilities have been exhausted.

The administration's fear of a military strike against Iran suggests that it may ultimately relax its stance towards Iran. The US may even be willing, despite Israel's objections, to conclude an agreement that will leave loopholes enabling Iran to achieve nuclear weapons capability. The fact that the administration has softened its position in talks with Iran suggests as much. The US no longer demands the suspension of Iran's uranium enrichment program; it expressed willingness in principle to recognize Iran's right to enrich uranium under certain conditions. In 2012, the US administration demanded that Iran shut down the Fordow site. Today, reports say that it is willing to accept a suspension of enrichment in this facility under restrictions that will make it difficult to resume enrichment quickly. According to these reports, the American administration is also willing to allow Iran to continue producing and maintaining a small store of uranium at a 20 percent enrichment level, and it is not clear whether it will demand that Iran give up most of the uranium that has been enriched to a level below 20 percent.[9] These concessions imply that the administration is liable to accept a deal even if

it has loopholes, and even if it is unacceptable to Israel – if it believes that the prospective deal will prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. The administration's consent to such a deal is also likely due to its assessment that if Iran possibly tries to take advantage of the loopholes in the agreement to move towards nuclear weapons capability, the option of a military strike will remain open.

Will the US administration be willing to attack Iran, or alternatively, give Israel a green light to carry out such an attack? The administration has stated unequivocally that it will prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, and that all the options to this end are open. President Obama and other administration senior officials – the Vice President and the new Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State – affirmed this position in early 2013.[10]

Given the administration's commitment to a strategy of preventing Iranian nuclear weapons capability, the US will find it difficult to abandon this position without severe damage to its credibility, not only as perceived by Israel, but in the eyes of its other allies and the eyes of Iran as well. Therefore, it will presumably adhere to its prevention strategy, unless exceptional circumstances justify otherwise. A commitment to prevention, however, does not necessarily mean commitment to a military strike, however, and it is obvious that the US currently prefers diplomacy. In these circumstances, Israel will be forced to weigh whether it judges the administration willing, now or in the future, to commit itself to attacking Iran if diplomacy reaches a dead end. Will Israel be able to rely on the US to attack Iran, if it waits until its own attack capability is lost?

Several considerations are likely to influence the American administration's decision on whether to attack Iran. The administration states that current conditions are not yet ripe for an attack on Iran, but it does not say what constitutes ripe conditions. At the same time, its reasons for objecting to military action are not likely to change in the near future. For this reason, it appears that the administration will be in no hurry to attack Iran, unless it is convinced that the consequences of an attack will be less severe than it currently believes.

As long as the administration believes that there is chance of a reasonable arrangement with Iran, it will refrain from military action. This assumption poses a twofold problem: first, it is difficult to say when the diplomatic possibilities have been exhausted and there is no chance

of an agreement, because it can always be claimed that sanctions require more time to take effect, or that additional sanctions should be imposed, and that the diplomatic alternative has therefore not been exhausted. Second, the administration is liable to continue softening its position on Iran in order to achieve an agreement with it, under the assumption that it will also be able to manage a poorer agreement.

There is currently no international support for an attack on Iran, and the degree of internal support in the US for such a measure is unclear. In order to embark on an attack, the administration will need to prepare the groundwork on two fronts and gain a minimum level of support. The administration will want to obtain legitimacy for an attack from the UN Security Council. Since it will be difficult to obtain this legitimacy, however, it may forego such support in advance if and when it decides to attack.

The bottom line is therefore that the administration is likely to consider military action in Iran if it reaches the conclusion that Iran is breaking out to nuclear weapons. The likelihood of American military action could grow in two situations: if Iran takes an obvious step, such as a nuclear test à la North Korea, or if an agreement is reached with Iran, which then proceeds to violate significant parts of it.

If the American administration concludes that military action is unavoidable, it will likely prefer an American attack to an Israeli one. An Israeli attack will enable the administration to claim that it is not a partner in it, thereby avoiding both internal and international criticism, and perhaps cause Iran to limit its response against the US and its allies. The US believes, however, that an Israeli attack also has disadvantages: as Panetta said, Israel's military capabilities are inferior to those of the US, and the chances that an Israeli military strike will be successful are therefore poorer.[11] American deterrence against Iran is stronger than Israeli deterrence, and the US administration will wish to control developments as much as possible, without depending on Israel's behavior. Furthermore, Iran will likely regard the US as a partner in any Israeli strike. It is therefore also likely that if the administration decides to attack Iran, it will prefer not to include Israel in the action, aside from intelligence cooperation, which is secret by nature. Israel's participation will not contribute much from an operational standpoint, and is liable to aggravate criticism of the US, especially in the Muslim world, where an American-Israeli conspiracy will be alleged.

Will the American administration give Israel a green light for an independent military strike against Iran? The answer at this stage is negative, first and foremost because the administration still objects to the idea of military action. Its position on a green light will probably not change as long as it objects to the idea of an attack. If and when the American position changes and it concludes that an attack is essential, it will likely notify Israel that it is assuming responsibility for dealing militarily with Iran.[12] Alternatively, if Israel makes it clear to the US administration that it intends to attack Iran, a more likely scenario – as indicated by its public stance – is that the US will tell Israel to act as it sees fit, and that the decision about its security is in its own hands, but this does not mean that the US is giving Israel a green light to act.

Finally, can Israel attack Iran without a green light, or at least a yellow light, from the US? In other words, in a matter so critical for Israel, should the decision be in its hands, even if negative consequences ensue for its relations with its main ally? Or can Israel not afford to act contrary to the American administration's position in a matter so important to its interests? A scenario in which an Israeli attack without a green light is likely to be accepted by the US could occur if Iran commits an obvious act that shows its intention to achieve a nuclear breakout, without this measure leading to an American attack. In any other situation, Israel will need a green light. The reason is not only that an attack without an advance understanding from the American administration will do serious harm to its relations with Israel; a no less important reason concerns follow-up actions on the Iranian nuclear question after the attack. A military attack on Iran cannot be the end of a process; it is the beginning. Israel will need substantial American aid to cope with the results of the action: preventing Iran from rebuilding the sites that have been hit, preventing it from taking advantage of an attack to achieve a nuclear weapons breakout when it is ready, defeating an Iranian effort to have the sanctions against it removed, trying to deter Iran from a broad response against Israel and other targets in the region, helping Israel deal with international criticism following an attack and perhaps efforts to impose sanctions against it, preventing a negative response in the Arab world against Israel, especially if Arab countries threaten to disrupt peaceful relations with it, and finally, helping Israel cope with the failure of an attack, if such failure occurs.

Notes

My thanks to the INSS Director Amos Yadlin for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.

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3   David Albright and Paul Brennan, "US Intelligence Estimates and the Iranian Nuclear Program," Institute for Science and International Security, April 9, 2012; James Risen and Mark Mazzetti, "U.S. Agencies See No Move by Iran to Build a Bomb," *New York Times*, February 24, 2012; James Clapper, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community," Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, March 12, 2013.

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8   Ari Shavit, "The Decision Maker Warns: You Can't Rely on the US to Attack Iran," *Haaretz*, August 10, 2012; see remarks by General (ret.) Amos Yadlin, "Amos Yadlin: 'Iran Has Crossed Already the Red Line,'" *Maariv*, April 25, 2013.

9   "Another Try at Nuclear Talks," *New York Times*, March 1, 2013.

10 Devin Dwyer, "Obama: Iran a Year Away from Nuclear Weapons," *ABC News*, March 15, 2013, http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/03/obama-iran-a-year-away-from-nuclear-weapon; "Kerry: 'Do What We Must' To Stop Iran," *Yahoo News*, January 24, 2013; "Chuck Hagel on Iran at Senate Hearing," *The Iran Primer*, US Institute of Peace, February 4, 2013.

11 Interview with Secretary Panetta, *National Journal*, March 8, 2012.

12 For more discussion of the question of a green light and American considerations, see Ephraim Kam, "A Green Light on Iran?" *Strategic Assessment* 14, no. 4 (2011): 39-50.

Walking a Fine Line:
Israel, India, and Iran

Yiftah S. Shapir

Introduction

Since Israel and India established formal diplomatic relations in 1992, bilateral economic ties and security relations have grown stronger. India is the Israeli defense industry's largest customer, and Israel is India's second most important supplier of weapon systems. However, Israel has not succeeded in reaching the degree of closeness that perhaps might have been expected with as important a partner as India.

India also maintains close ties with Iran. Although the relationship has undergone upheaval and change over the years, vacillating between close and distant, it is built on a solid foundation comprising many elements, including historical, cultural, economic, and even security aspects. As such, Israel and India do not see eye to eye on the issue of Iranian nuclearization, and Iran's relations with India are one of the prominent obstacles to enhanced relations between Israel and India.

This article will analyze the relationship between India and Iran and will attempt to examine its ramifications for India's future ties with Israel.

Historic Ties between India and Iran

India and Iran have a tradition of ties dating back thousands of years.[1] As early as the sixth century BCE, Darius I conquered the Indus Valley. After the Islamic conquests, Islamic religion and culture became a new connecting link.

During the Cold War, relations between the two countries were distant at best. Iran enjoyed warm relations with the United States, while India adopted a non-aligned policy that included a socialist world

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view that brought it closer to the Soviet Union. Iran supported Pakistan, manifested in political and material aid during the violent outbreaks between India and Pakistan and in adoption of a firm stand against India on the issue of Kashmir. At the same time, relations between Iran and India were not characterized by fierce hostility. Over the years, there were reciprocal visits by senior officials, and Iran even gave India its political support during India's war with China in 1962.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran changed the relationship entirely, although in the first decade of the Islamic Republic, relations between the two countries were still cold. While Iran abandoned its pro-American orientation and became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, India was suspicious of Iran's efforts to export the revolution throughout the Muslim world. Iran also continued covert cooperation with Pakistan in aiding the mujahidin in Afghanistan.

The turning point in relations between the two countries occurred shortly after the end of the Cold War. The most notable change was the September 1993 visit to Tehran by India's then-prime minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao, which was followed by other high level visits. Since then, relations have fluctuated between warm and chilly, mutual condemnations, and the freezing of various ventures. Thus, the relationship between India and Iran went from high points, with cooperation documents (the Tehran Declaration of April 2001 and the Delhi Declaration of January 2003), to low points after India grew closer to the United States and voted against Iran regarding its nuclear program at the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2005 and 2006. Relations improved in 2007 and 2008, but today, especially because of the sanctions regime tightening around Iran, relations are again distant.

> India is under heavy political pressure to stop oil imports from Iran entirely, but it would be hard pressed to find alternative sources of crude oil, in terms of both quality and shipping costs.

The underlying reason for the fluctuation is that the relationship is multifaceted. A large number of subjects lie at the core of the relationship, and interests alternately clash and converge. The relationship also depends on a large number of actors that have complex relations with the two parties, and developments in one relationship affect the other relationships as well.

Iran's Strategic Importance for India

Iran's main importance is its hydrocarbon resources, as it holds some 10 percent of the world's proven crude oil reserves[2] and some 15 percent of the world's proven natural gas reserves. Its location on the Persian Gulf coast allows it to control the Strait of Hormuz and to threaten to block maritime traffic in the strait. Iran also has one of the largest armed forces in the region, with significant maritime capabilities and ballistic missile capabilities unique in the region. Another factor that greatly affects bilateral relations is Iran's importance for India as a Muslim state, as India has a population of some 160 million Muslims.[3] Indeed, India is apparently the country with the second largest Shiite population in the world.[4]

Energy

Imports of oil from Iran are often cited as the most important factor behind India's need for good relations with the Islamic Republic. India has been undergoing rapid growth for two decades and is thirsty for energy.[5] Some 600 million Indians lack access to electricity. Indian officials believe that in order for their country to gain what they see as its rightful place in the global economy, it will have to triple or quadruple its supply of energy and will need a six-fold increase in its supply of electricity.

India is also under international pressure to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore it seeks sources of cleaner energy such as gas. This was the reason for initiation of the IPI oil pipeline project, which was designed to bring gas from the South Pars gas field in the Gulf to India, through Pakistan. Today, the project is frozen (in recent months an agreement was signed between Iran and Pakistan to build the Iranian-Pakistani part of the pipeline). In the meantime, India has begun to express interest in alternative proposals.

In recent years, India has imported from Iran some 12 percent of its crude oil consumption. For its part, Iran has very few remaining oil customers (mainly China, South Korea, India, and Japan). Moreover, the sanctions imposed on Iran have led to a gradual decline in its production capacity, and there is a serious lack of refining capacity. Thus while India has imported crude oil from Iran, it has exported refined oil products to Iran and in particular, benzene for vehicles. Iran has almost none of the technology for exploiting natural gas, nor the facilities necessary to produce liquefied natural gas.

In the past two years, it has become harder for India to import oil from Iran. In December 2010, India acceded to requests from the United States, and the Reserve Bank of India (RBC) banned Indian companies from paying for the purchase of crude oil through the Asian Clearing Union (ACU),[6] which blocked the main route for payments for imports of crude oil from Iran.[7] The sanctions have forced Indian importers to seek other routes for payment. Today, the Iranians receive some of their payments in rupees, which is not an international currency. In addition, the trade relationship between India and Iran is far from balanced: while annual Indian imports from Iran total about $11 billion, Indian exports to Iran are only about $1 billion.

Today's energy ties between India and Iran are on the brink of a crisis. While India is under heavy political pressure to stop the imports entirely, it would be hard pressed to find alternative sources of crude oil, in terms of both quality and shipping costs.

Geostrategy

For India, Iran serves as a land bridge both to countries in the Caucasus and to the nations of Central Asia, and through them, to North and Central Africa.[8] Since the subcontinent was divided between India and Pakistan, India has been blocked from direct access not only to Central Asia, but also to Afghanistan. Iran is the only bridge that allows India access to Afghanistan, whether for economic or security purposes.

Several large projects have been designed that were intended to respond to this Indian need. The most important of them are the Chabahar port and the North-South corridor. The Chabahar port is in southwest Iran, along the Indian Ocean coast, some seventy kilometers from the Iran-Pakistan border. It is intended for use as a port of transit for goods destined for Afghanistan, and through it, the countries of Central Asia. From India's point of view, it has tremendous importance, and together with Iran, India has initiated a number of joint projects concerning development of the port and ground transport routes to it.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is based on a multilateral agreement for developing traffic in a land corridor that runs the length of Iran and continues into Russia, both through the Caspian Sea on a maritime route, and along the coast of the Caspian Sea on a land route, and there is another route in the direction of the Caucasus. Today, there are eleven signatories to the agreement.

Nonetheless, the full potential of the two programs is far from realized, both for security reasons and because of Tehran's fears concerning India's true position toward Iran.

India-Iran: Issues in Bilateral Relations

Pakistan

Since Pakistan received its independence in 1947 and the Indian subcontinent was divided, India's foreign relations have been dictated by its relationship with Pakistan. The hostility between the two countries has led to three rounds of armed conflict, countless incidents and terrorist attacks attributed to Pakistan, and an ongoing serious territorial dispute over Kashmir.

During the Cold War, Iran clearly sided with Pakistan: both are Muslim countries and both were allies of the United States. Therefore, Iran provided Pakistan with political and material support during its armed conflicts with India, and it consistently supported the Pakistani position on the issue of Kashmir.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran exposed clear differences between Iran and Pakistan, which continued its relationship with the United States and maintained cooperation and a close relationship with Saudi Arabia. Here for the first time the fault lines between Shiite Iran and Sunni Pakistan (and Saudi Arabia) began to appear. At the same time, as an Islamic republic, Iran continued to support Pakistan's positions on Kashmir, and even supported Hizbllah in Kashmir (not to be confused with the Lebanese organization of the same name).

When relations between Iran and India improved after 1993, Iran attempted to walk a fine line of maintaining its interests with respect to India while continuing its opposition in principle to India's positions on Kashmir.

Afghanistan

Iran has found itself in intense competition with Pakistan over spheres of influence in Afghanistan. This multi-ethnic country has Persian-speaking regions and a not-insignificant Shiite population. In the beginning, Iran attempted to cooperate with Pakistan, but Iran and India soon found themselves cooperating in aiding the alliance of organizations in northern Afghanistan (Tajik and Persian speakers) against the Pashtun Taliban, supported by Pakistan. When the Taliban government grew

stronger, this created a background for closer relations between Iran and India. These ties grew even warmer, including in the area of security assistance, after US forces entered Afghanistan in 2001 and toppled the Taliban government.

Today Iranian and Indian interests are again converging with the preparations for the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014. India has significant interests in Afghanistan and is investing hundreds of millions of dollars in economic projects there. Similarly, Iran too fears that the Taliban's power will increase after the United States leaves.

United States
India's cold relations with the United States thawed in the early 1990s, at a time that its relations with Israel and Iran also changed.

India and the United States are in agreement on many issues, and there are shared interests on numerous issues. Like the United States, India is a democracy, with a strong interest in maintaining a world with open borders for goods and people. The two countries have a similar interest in preserving the security of shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean and access to the Persian Gulf, as well as in fighting international terrorism. Both countries are also concerned about China's growing power. Both are eager to maintain a stable relationship with China and are careful not to anger China, but they have adopted a policy of hedging toward it.

> India has attempted to isolate relationships from one another and maintain a relationship with Iran as if it had no ties with the United States, and a relationship with the United States as if its ties with Iran did not exist.

Therefore, it was to be expected that the two countries would develop close strategic ties. And in fact, since the end of the Cold War, they have grown closer, trade has grown by hundreds of percent, and there is an effort to cooperate in military matters – particularly naval – as well.

The most prominent step taken by the United States toward India was the agreement on cooperation in the field of nuclear energy, which was signed in August 2008. This agreement is an exception; it sharply contradicts US policy, because since 1998 India is a declared nuclear state and is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). As part of the agreement, India hoped to purchase from the United States a nuclear power production

capacity up to 25,000 megawatts by 2020. However, nearly five years after the agreement was signed, specific contracts to build nuclear power plants have not yet been concluded, and some in the United States doubt the benefit of the nuclear agreement. In the field of security too, cooperation has not progressed as the United States had hoped. While India has acquired US military equipment, large scale weapons deals that American companies had hoped to achieve have not taken place.

The issue of Iran is one of the painful subjects in relations between India and the United States, which expected India to be fully aligned with US policy in its attempt to isolate Iran as much as possible. The United States has not hesitated to use fairly explicit threats.[9]

For its part, India has attempted to isolate the two relationships from one another and maintain a relationship with Iran as if it had no ties with the United States, and a relationship with the United States as if its ties with Iran did not exist. This policy was not particularly successful and pressures from the United States have had much impact on India's relations with Iran, but they have continued to zigzag. On the one hand, India voted against Iran in the IAEA Board of Governors in September 2005 and again in February 2006, which caused its relations with Iran to deteriorate. On the other hand, India has not hesitated to signal to the United States that it intends to conduct an independent policy vis-à-vis Iran. A notable instance was the visit of two Iranian navy ships to an Indian port during the visit by US President George W. Bush in March 2006, which was seen as a slap in the face to the United States.

India has embraced the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council. While in principle it opposed the unilateral sanctions imposed on Iran by the United States and the European Union, India ultimately acceded to requests from the United States and also imposed its own unilateral sanctions, including those that hurt Indian companies (for example, the RBI ban on transferring payments through the ACU).

Iran's Nuclear Program

The rise of the Iranian nuclear program on the international agenda in 2003 created a difficult problem for India. India is not interested in another nuclear neighbor. However, as a country that is itself nuclear, India has a hard time preaching to a state that aspires to nuclear status. From a political point of view, India also has no interest in clashing with Iran on the nuclear issue.

On the declarative level, India emphasized its support for all Iranian nuclear development activity, along with a demand that Iran honor its treaty commitments to the international community (i.e., a demand to honor its commitments to the NPT and open all its facilities to inspection). And while the Indian government aspired to isolate its bilateral relationships, as if Indian-Iranian relations had no connection to India's ties to the United States or to Israel, reality dictated otherwise. The worse the international crisis over Iran's nuclear program became, the greater were the pressures from the United States. Ultimately, India changed its policy, and was forced to vote for the IAEA resolution against Iran.

India-Israel Relations

Like India's relations with Iran and with the United States, ties with Israel also began to develop only after 1992, and since then, they have grown stronger in many economic areas. In 2012, the volume of bilateral trade between Israel and India (not including diamonds) totaled some $2.15 billion (since 2010, trade has decreased because of the global economic crisis).[10]

Security cooperation, which includes purchases of advanced weapon systems, transfer of military technology, and joint development of weapon systems, is especially noteworthy. Today, Israel and India are discussing a deal for the purchase of additional early warning aircraft and joint development of various ground-to-air missile systems. Israel has become the second most important weapons supplier of the Indian army, while India has become the largest customer of the Israeli defense industry. However, to this day the ties between Israel and India have not developed into strategic cooperation. In fact, from the point of view of international politics as well, it is difficult to speak about cooperation.

The subject of Iran has been on the Israel-India bilateral agenda from the beginning. Israel has repeatedly expressed its dissatisfaction with India's bilateral relations with Iran, and in particular, security relations (including joint naval maneuvers). It has also expressed to India its fears that Israeli technology may fall into Iranian hands. In contrast, Iran has generally not expressed reservations about India's ties with Israel, preferring to ignore the subject. A noteworthy exception was in January 2008, when India launched the Israeli TecSAR satellite. While India presented the launch deal as a commercial transaction and preferred

to play down the event, Israeli publications emphasized that it was a "spy" satellite intended to monitor Iran. In this case, Iran responded by expressing its concern to the Indian government without mentioning Israel specifically.

Conclusion

The end of the Cold War was a turning point in India's relations with the world. It was not by accident that during those years, India changed direction in its approach to the United States, Iran, and Israel. Since then, India has been conducting foreign policy relationships that involve walking a fine line. India's attempt throughout those years to isolate its bilateral relationships one from the other was not successful, but it appears that it has still not abandoned this effort.

Its relationship with Iran, on the other hand, has undergone upheavals, including periods of closer and more distant ties. This has generally been because of pressures on the bilateral relationship from outside parties, and in particular, pressures stemming from its relationship with the United States and pressures resulting from the international system in general, such as Security Council resolutions. Today, India's relations with Iran are at a new low. Oil imports are being reduced because of the sanctions, and India is falling into line with the international community on isolating Iran on the nuclear issue.

However, the deep geopolitical and geostrategic issues, which are the basis of India's relations with Iran, still remain. While Iran today has difficulty producing oil and gas and output is shrinking, its large reserves will remain for a long time to come. India, on the other hand, is energy thirsty, and the demand will only grow. Therefore, ultimately Iran and India will likely restore their energy ties.

Similarly, the geostrategic considerations will remain. India has interests in Afghanistan, and as long as a hostile Pakistan separates India from Afghanistan, Iran will remain the only route. Iran will also continue to control the Strait of Hormuz, and thus freedom of shipping in the strait will remain in Iranian hands. For India, Iran will continue to offer access to the countries of Central Asia, both markets for Indian products and an additional source of energy. It may also offer a possible overland route to

> Israel-India cooperation has remained in the realm of economics. India's interest in regard to Israel is technological, and not strategic or political.

North Africa. Today, travel on this route is difficult and not always safe, but it will continue to be the only route available.

In its relations with Israel, India has actually succeeded in drawing the line between relationships. In spite of its ties with Iran, its relations with Israel have been stable in the past decade. Arms deals have expanded and grown in scope and extent of technological cooperation. However, cooperation has remained in the realm of economics. India's interest in regard to Israel is technological, and not strategic or political.

A look at the relationship between India and Iran, and in particular, its history, culture, energy, and geography, underscores that India's relations with Iran were, and will continue to be, more important to it than its relations with Israel. The fact that relations with Iran are today at a low point is a temporary situation, and Israel must understand that. For their part, Israel-India relations will continue to be dependent on India's ability to walk a fine line among its different relationships. If Israel wishes to maintain good relations with India, it must also be careful to walk a fine line: to continue to strengthen relations with India and emerge unscathed from this relationship, and at the same time, not to damage it by pressuring India on painful issues.

Notes

1 Mushtaq Hussain, "Indo-Iranian Relations during the Cold War," *Strategic Analysis* 36, no. 6 (2012): 859-70; Gulshan Dietl, "India's Iran Policy in the Post-Cold War Period," *Strategic Analysis* 36, no. 6 (2012): 871-81.

2 According to the Central Intelligence Agency's *World Factbook*, Iran's crude oil reserves are estimated, as of January 2013, at 151.2 billion BBL, out of an estimated world reserve of 1.532 trillion BBL. Iran is fourth in the world, after Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and Canada. As of January 2012, Iran's proven natural gas reserves are estimated at 33.07 trillion cubic meters, with proven world reserves estimated at 208.4 trillion cubic meters as of January 2011. Iran is second in the world, after Russia, in proven natural gas reserves. For the sake of comparison, in January 2012 Israel's proven natural gas reserves were estimated at 207.7 billion cubic meters, some 1 percent of world reserves. See http://1.usa.gov/5gIm, accessed April 21, 2013.

3 Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook*, http://1.usa.gov/9doDpD.

4 The number of Shiites in India is not known, since no census has been conducted on this issue. The various estimates of the percentage of Shiites among India's Muslims range from 10 to 30 percent, which means between 16 million and 48 million Shiite Muslims.

5 India today produces 880 billion kilowatt hours a year (733 per capita per annum, as compared to some 13,000 kilowatt hours per capita in the United

States). See Shebonti Ray Dadwal, "India–Iran Energy Ties: A Balancing Act," *Strategic Analysis* 36, no. 6 (2012): 930-40.

6   The ACU is a clearing house for the central banks of nine South Asian nations, and is used for conducting financial transactions and clearing payments. It is located in Tehran, and its members are Iran, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the Maldive Islands. The acronym ACU is also used for the unit of calculation in the Asian Clearing Union, the Asian Currency Unit.

7   Shebonti Ray Dadwal, "India Struggling to Cope with Sanctions on Iran," IDSA, *Issue Brief,* June 26, 2012, http://bit.ly/MpcEUq.

8   Meena Singh Roy, "Iran: India's Gateway to Central Asia," *Strategic Analysis* 36, no. 6 (2012): 957-75.

9   The Henry J. Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act of 2006, which is an amendment to the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 and which made possible the nuclear agreement, states that US policy is, among other things, to "secure India's full and active participation in United States efforts to dissuade, isolate, and, if necessary, sanction and contain Iran for its efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction, including a nuclear weapons capability and the capability to enrich uranium or reprocess nuclear fuel, and the means to deliver weapons of mass destruction." See the full text of the law at http://bit.ly/11yQFN9.

10 According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the bilateral trade figures were as follows: In 2012, the volume of bilateral trade, not including diamonds, was some $2.15 billion, about 7 percent less than the previous year (adjusting for the diamond trade, trade totaled $4.4 billion, vs. $5.1 billion in 2011). Israeli exports to India in that year, excluding diamonds, totaled $1.33 billion, vs. $1.48 billion in 2011, a decline of 11 percent. The main products exported were chemicals and electrical equipment. Imports in that year, excluding diamonds, totaled $821 million, as opposed to $798 million in 2011, an increase of about 3 percent. The main products imported were chemicals and plastic products. See Central Bureau of Statistics press release, "India Interested in Israeli Water Technologies," March 10, 2013, http://bit.ly/Za9d5N.

Response Essay

Civilian Casualties of a Military Strike in Iran

Ephraim Asculai

Introduction

The Iranian nuclear issue, including how the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran would affect the region and the world, and how this challenge might best be confronted, has been widely discussed and debated. Three main possibilities for resolving this issue, with numerous potential variations, have been identified: the diplomatic solution (i.e., engagement), including sanctions; a regime change in Iran; and the military option, i.e., destruction of or severe damage to Iran's nuclear weapons development capabilities. The diplomatic solution has been and still is the focus of major international efforts, though as yet is unsuccessful.[1] The "biting" sanctions have hurt Iran, but have yet to become a game changer. Covert operations, hostile measures short of an outright military strike, have been effective in slowing down the Iranian program, but not in bringing it to a halt. The timing of a regime change in Iran is difficult to predict, and there is no assurance that the new regime will adopt an anti-nuclear weapons policy. The last resort, which is the military option, is fraught with dangers. The pros and cons of a military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities and its local, regional, and global effects are the subject of heated discussions.

While estimating political effects of a military strike is much a matter for analytical speculation, the direct physical effects of a military attack, including the assessment of the number of civilian casualties resulting from this action, are somewhat easier to estimate, depending mainly

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on technical models and data. This is the main topic of the following essay, which seeks to address a lengthy and detailed report by Khosrow B. Semnani, *The Ayatollah's Nuclear Gamble: The Human Cost of Military Strikes against Iran's Nuclear Facilities* (hereafter "the report").[2]

The purpose of the report is announced in the opening paragraph of the introduction:

> The goal of this study is to protect the Iranian people and to educate policymakers by providing an objective basis for evaluating the impact of military strikes on Iranian civilians and soldiers. Nevertheless, we do not defend a policy of engagement premised on building confidence in the peaceful intentions of a theocracy whose Supreme Leader is responsible for the death of thousands of Iranians and whose president dismisses the people as "dust and dirt."

Late in the report the author concludes that the preferred, and probably the only feasible, solution is to wait for a regime change in Iran. This option will be discussed below, but suffice it here to say that this could be a very long wait, without the certainty of resolving the nuclear issue.

The report received widespread attention, and its conclusions were widely quoted and taken as basic truisms.[3] The problem is that similar to other scientific related issues, conclusions that are erroneous or based on incorrect or partial information could be very misleading, and serve as the basis for misplaced decisions.

Environmental Effects of an Attack on Nuclear Installations

Estimating the environmental impact of civilian industry on the civilian population has long been an exercise in which industries tend to minimize the possible effects of both regular operations and accidents on their workers in particular and the greater population in general. On the other hand, environmentalists and many neighboring populations tend to present doomsday scenarios that maximize the environmental effects of both routine operations and emergency situations over which they have no control. There is no standard resolution of this conflict, and the middle of the road does not always offer a reasonable outlet for solving the problems. Therefore, each problem must be resolved on its own, by agreeing on the methodology to be used in an assessment, taking the best scientific data available, and arriving at an agreed solution.

This becomes very difficult when considering the specific issue of a possible attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Many factors come into play here, some technical, some humanitarian, some economical, some political. Some are not quantifiable, and as such cannot serve as a basis for comparisons and evaluations. However, the technical issues, as they are quantifiable, are the first that should be considered, and when not manipulated can be used to evaluate the effects of a military attack on Iran's nuclear installations.

In general, industrial accidents, i.e., accidents that involve industrial facilities, can have serious environmental consequences if they involve the release of toxic materials into the atmosphere or the aquatic environment, or materials that could render the environment inaccessible for future development and thus cause serious economic consequences, even if they are not that harmful in their immediate effects. Nuclear industry accidents could also involve the release of radioactive materials that are by themselves harmful – radiotoxic materials – though not all radioactive materials are harmful. Radioactivity is omnipresent in the environment, albeit in rather low concentrations in most places. The main radiotoxic materials in Iranian nuclear industrial complexes would be present in operational nuclear reactors and their byproducts in high and potentially lethal concentrations.[4] Although the uranium industry involves the use of highly toxic materials, the uranium contents alone are of rather low toxicity (on the same level as lead, for example). The main toxicity of the uranium industry in Iran would come from the fluorine contents of the uranium compounds, because of their extreme corrosive properties. Releases of considerable quantities of these to the atmosphere could cause grave health problems if inhaled or if they come into contact with the human skin. The economic consequences would be overshadowed by the human consequences.

It is because of the fear of the consequences of accidents in the nuclear industries that many protective actions are taken. The imposition of exclusion zones around nuclear complexes, built-in protective measures, and extensive emergency planning and preparedness programs are all intended to reduce the environmental consequences of nuclear accidents caused by any source, including military aggression.

Bushehr is not a Target

Returning to the report's introduction, some of its statements lead one to question whether this will in fact be the "objective basis" on which to base future policy decisions: "In terms of power and precision, military strikes against nuclear plants could result in damage similar, if not worse than, the damage caused by nuclear accidents, whether the result of human error, design flaws, or natural disasters." And:

> "No matter what safety and defensive measures are in place, there would be no time for intervention or evacuation: no way to shut down the plants, cool down the reactors in Bushehr, reinforce containment structures, save plant personnel, evacuate local residents, or bring in rescue workers. The subsequent contamination of air, water, and soil from the chemical and thermal impact of strikes on nuclear plants would be immediate, vast and, for the most part, irreversible."

However, labeling the Bushehr reactor as a main target for a strike is pure demagoguery, as no one in his right mind would consider striking an operating nuclear power reactor. First, the environmental consequences could be horrendous. Second, the utilization of this reactor for military purposes is not straightforward, while the subsequent stages for fissile materials production are also vulnerable and carry less potential for environmental consequences. Third, Iran is contractually obligated to return the irradiated fuel to Russia, so why attack this installation?

The author goes one step further, and in the discussion of the consequences of an attack on Bushehr uses the Chernobyl accident as an historical model for the situation that could arise in Bushehr. In addition, the Fukushima accident strengthens his stance that these consequences are unacceptable for Iran. Yet while for the reasons stated above this model cannot and should not be used here, the seed is sown, and the populist comparisons are inevitable.

Targeting the Uranium Compounds Inventories

Leaving aside the non-issue of attacking operating nuclear reactors, we arrive at the more important possible targets of a military attack: the uranium enrichment facilities. The first link in this chain is the Uranium Conversion Facility (UCF) where the uranium ore is converted into uranium hexafluoride (UF_6), which is the feed material for the uranium

enrichment facilities, located both at Natanz and at Fordow, near the city of Qom. At normal room temperature and pressure, UF_6 is a solid. At around 56°C it vaporizes, turning into a (highly toxic) gas.[5] It is stored in containers that are usually filled, under some pressure, with liquid UF_6, which later, after a period of cooling, solidifies, leaving a small quantity of the gas at the top of the container. Under normal conditions, if the container is ruptured, very small quantities of gas will escape to the environment and can cause injuries or even death to the workers at hand, but not to anyone beyond an immediate, circumscribed distance from the source.

There can be little doubt that the UF_6 produced at the UCF, near Isfahan, is stored underground. In May 2010, the IAEA reported that Iran declared that it was installing an underground analytical laboratory at the site "to meet security measures."[6] This laboratory, Iran indicated, "would be installed in an underground location in one of the UCF storage areas." Therefore, even if there is a direct hit on a container, it is doubtful that a significant part of its inventory would leak to the outside atmosphere, because of the heat that has to be supplied to the container in order to vaporize its contents, and because of the tortuous path the vapor would have to take, interacting with the contained environment and turning again into a non-gaseous compound before escaping, in very small quantities, if any, into the free atmosphere. As mentioned, after a period of cooling, the contents of the containers solidify. Since the vast majority of the UF_6 inventory is already years old, and with the exception of very small quantities in gaseous form is in the solid state, the possibility of release is reduced, even if container integrity is compromised.

Although it is not possible to foresee the consequences of direct hits on Iranian underground facilities, it is reasonable to assess that either the underground facilities will be penetrated and exploded from within, or hit and collapse into the inner cavities and turn into piles of rubble, or with their innards at least gravely harmed. These piles of rubble would act as filters, with their greater surface areas holding on to or reacting with the materials released within, and thus preventing the major contents from escaping to the atmosphere and causing grave environmental harm.

The report unrealistically assumes a release rate of up to 50 percent of the inventory, a figure that is patently absurd.[7] With the assumed source-term (the characteristics of the release) for the calculations being in the range of hundreds of tons UF_6 released into the atmosphere, the ensuing

result of 70,000 casualties is of course achievable. What the report fails to state explicitly is that the source-term for its calculations assumes a ground level, unprotected source, with the entire inventory in the liquid state. This certainly is beyond a worst case scenario.

The case for the UF_6 inventories at both the next links in the uranium enrichment chain, Natanz and Fordow, is not different from that of Isfahan. Both are underground installations and as such are well protected, and perhaps while not all that immune to military damage, would still be rather immune to significant atmospheric releases.[8] There would of course be some inventories of UF_6 in several above ground areas, and these could be sources of releases. The vulnerable inventories are all controlled by the local operators, and it is in their power and their duty to minimize these. It is not only a matter of preparing for a military strike. It is part of nuclear good practices, essential for all nuclear operations. The same argument should be made for the case of industrial toxic gases, which should be normally protected against accidents whose occurrence could cause damage and casualties to the workers and to the environment.

The question then arises as to whether the Iranians apply good safety practices in their industrial activities. Although there is much evidence that they pay serious attention to the issue of industrial safety, there is no way to judge the efficacy of the safety measures that are applied in the industrial sector. Presumably the Iranians would not embrace atypical standards in this field, but would apply a reasonable standard of operational safety. Without this their activities would have been in a much worse shape than they are in today.

Is Regime Change the Solution?

What then is to be done? The report states clearly that rather than carrying out a military attack that can be devastating for Iran, "it is time to recognize that the Iranian people pose a far greater threat to the Islamic Republic than the U.S. or Israeli military power." In other words, the best solution for the Iranian nuclear issue is an Iranian regime change. There are two major problems with this solution. First, the policy of the new regime is uncertain and could possibly opt to retain its nuclear capabilities. Only a comprehensive regime change, which would install in Iran a democratic secular government that would have a deep respect for human rights, for the international community, and for international

treaty obligations could inspire hope that Iran genuinely seeks to be an equal member of the region and not a hegemonic one. Such a state would be relied on to make decisions that would benefit its people, and not lead them into a disastrous situation from which it would be difficult to recover. Only such a regime would stand a chance of convincing the IAEA, the Security Council, and the world at large of the "exclusively peaceful purpose" of its nuclear program.

However, the acquisition of a military nuclear capability will probably prolong the life of the present regime in Iran, with all the added regional stability and proliferation issues. Hence the second problem in considering the regime change solution is the timetable for such a change. Not only could there be no guarantee of this change, but it could also be so delayed that it would give the present Iranian regime time to produce nuclear weapons that would be a game changer for all concerned. It is also not inconceivable that the present Iranian regime would resort to the actual use of nuclear weapons, should it consider it beneficial to do so.

Notes

1 As expected, the April 2013 Almaty talks between the P5+1 and Iran ended in failure, giving Iran more time to develop its nuclear weapons project.

2 Published by the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah, September 2012. See http://nucleargamble.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Ayatollahs-Nuclear-Gamble-Full.pdf.

3 See, e.g., David Isenberg, "The Myth of 'Surgical Strikes' on Iran," *Time*, October 18, 2012, http://nation.time.com/2012/10/18/the-myth-of-surgical-strikes-on-iran/; and "Situation Report: What 371 Metric Tons of Uranium Hexaflouride Could mean to Iranians," *Foreign Policy*, September 27, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/09/27/what_371_metric_tons_of_uranium_hexafluoride_could_mean_to_iranians.

4 At present, there are three nuclear reactors in Iran: the operational power reactor in Bushehr, the relatively small research reactor in Tehran, and the heavy water reactor at Arak, which is still under construction.

5 "Interim Guidance on the Safe Transport of Uranium Hexafluoride, Appendix II: Properties of UF6 and Its Reaction Products," Vienna: IAEA, 1991, IAEA-TECDOC-608, http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/te_608_prn.pdf.

6 Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008), and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Report by the [IAEA] Director General,* GOV/2010/28, May 31, 2010, http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2010/gov2010-28.pdf.

7   See chapter II in the report: "Methodology and Assumptions - A. Inventories, Storage and Location, and B. Release."

8   In order to render these enrichment facilities damaged beyond repair, one does not have to blow them out. Destruction can be contained within, when the enrichment machines and pipings are damaged beyond repair, but the damage would be mainly contained inside the facilities.

Response Essay

If it Comes to Force:
A Credible Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Military Option against Iran

Amos Yadlin, Emily B. Landau, and Avner Golov

Introduction

A study published in 2012 by the Iran Project[1] seeks to create the basis for an informed discussion regarding the option of a military strike against Iran. In the prefatory remarks and the introduction to the study, the authors emphasize that they intend to provide figures and assessments as a basis for their balanced cost-benefit evaluation of a US military attack, but will refrain from presenting their own positions on the issue. The document is signed by some thirty former US government officials, Democrats and Republicans alike, including the current US Secretary of Defense, former senator Chuck Hagel.

The authors of the report assume that the United States will succeed in identifying an Iranian decision to cross the nuclear threshold and break out to nuclear weapons, and that the administration will have a month to respond before Iran is in possession of at least one nuclear weapon. Although it is problematic and highly risky to rely on such assumptions – something the writers themselves caution against[2] – the report proposes three main models for the implementation of a military option in Iran: an attack that is relatively limited in scope, intended to delay the Iranian military nuclear program for up to four years; a medium scale attack,

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intended to completely deny the possibility that Iran will develop nuclear weapons; and a broader scale attack in order to promote more ambitious goals, such as toppling the Iranian regime, causing serious damage to Iran's military and economy, and/or forcibly promoting US interests in the region.[3] The authors then skim over the benefits of the limited scale military option very briefly, while presenting at length both the direct and indirect costs of this option. The two other models are not dealt with.

References to the report in the global media following its publication tended to focus on two ominous messages: one, an American attack on Iran could lead to an all-out war in the Middle East, and two, the military option for Iran would cost more than the combined cost of ten years of American fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq.[4] True, these are not the main conclusions of the report, and in any case the authors purport to enhance "dispassionate policymaking," while avoiding "an advocacy document."[5] However, the tenor of the report, its structure, and its analytical lapses do stress in the main the risks of the military option and present it as damaging to American interests, and as such it is not surprising that these are the messages that were picked up by the media. Significantly, the Iran Project has recently issued another report where they clearly and directly object to the threat of military force in the context of pressure on Iran.[6]

We agree with the report that a military attack on Iran must be the last option in an attempt to prevent Iran from going nuclear. A resolution through negotiations is the preferred solution. Nevertheless, there are several major flaws in the report – both in how the subject is presented and in the analysis – that undermine the authors' stated goal: namely, to present the basis for an informed discussion of the issue.

> A credible threat to employ military force and diplomatic efforts do not contradict each other; rather, they complement and reinforce one another.

The first flaw is that the authors ignore the fact that a credible military threat is of decisive importance, first and foremost in the context of negotiations. A credible threat of military consequences (if Iran does not cooperate) plays an important deterrent role that is intended to help convince Iran to come to the negotiating table for the purpose of actually negotiating a deal.

A second flaw is that the analysis is biased in its description of the costs of an attack on Iran. This bias is due to the choice of incorrect

military models for stopping Iran from acquiring a military nuclear capability, rather than what would be a correct focus on a pinpoint, surgical strike if the diplomatic options do not succeed. In addition, the analysis exaggerates the negative consequences of an attack on Iran and includes grave statements regarding some ramifications of a limited strike that lack sufficient foundation.

The third flaw is that the authors miss the essential comparison that needs to be drawn when assessing the costs of a military strike, after non-violent options have failed. The correct comparison is not between the cost and benefit of an attack in the context of current international efforts to stop Iran, rather, between the cost of a military option and the cost of Iran's acquisition of a military nuclear capability, and the threat that it would then pose to the Middle East and world order.

These flaws undermine the value and validity of the report. Had the authors considered these issues, their analysis might well have pointed to the option of a surgical strike as preferable to an Iran in possession of a nuclear bomb. This in turn would have changed the tone of the report, which presents a strike as having a predominantly negative impact.

In choosing among the available options for stopping Iran from acquiring a military nuclear capability, the United States is acting, as President Obama has made clear, first and foremost out of concern for its own interests – and not in order to help Israel or other allies in the region. As such, our analysis – which fleshes out each of the three flaws we have identified in the Iran Project report – also focuses on the US angle and American interests.

A Credible Military Threat in the Context of Negotiations Strategy

In its discussion of the military option, the report, curiously enough, ignores the need to distinguish between a credible threat to use military power and an actual attack. Indeed, both the *threat* and the *attack itself* focus on the question of the use of military force, but they play totally different roles in the framework of the overall dynamic of confronting Iran on the nuclear issue. A credible threat is essential as a means of exerting pressure during negotiations, while an actual attack would enter the picture only when the (current) negotiations are deemed to have failed.

As such, a credible threat to employ military force and diplomatic efforts do not contradict each other; rather, they complement and reinforce one another. A credible military threat is a necessary means of exerting pressure on Iran precisely in the context of a strategy that seeks to resolve the crisis through negotiations. Iran has not yet shown any willingness to compromise on the nuclear issue, despite international sanctions that are causing significant damage to its economy and its international stature. In this situation, a credible threat to use the military option, beyond tightening the sanctions, is a necessary additional lever for pressure in order to change the cost-benefit calculations of the regime in Tehran and persuade it to become a more serious partner for negotiations on its military nuclear program, especially after Iran has invested considerable national resources in developing its nuclear program, and successful negotiations would ultimately require it to give up its military nuclear aspirations. But when the heavy costs involved in the military option are emphasized in the public debate, this serves to weaken the effectiveness of the threat and this potential lever of pressure on Iran, and inadvertently even strengthens Iran's deterrence. As such, the authors, by underscoring severe dangers of an attack, even if this was not their intention, actually undermine the chances of success in the negotiations.

It has already been proven in connection with the sanctions on Iran that levers of pressure can be used without generating a rise in the price of oil and harming the economies of states participating in sanctions. The effects of the "biting" sanctions imposed during 2012 on the oil industry and the financial system in Iran have proven that the threats and the fears before they took effect – about a rise in the price of oil and the possibility of escalation in the conflict between Iran and the West, even up to a military confrontation – were unfounded.[7] Rather, the Iranian leadership responded cautiously, and actually sought to avoid escalation in relations with the West in general, and with the United States in particular. Moreover, Iran moderated its position, albeit insufficiently, in the talks with the P5+1, and there were also moderates in Tehran who sought to be more flexible and, in contrast with the blanket opposition of the past, hold direct talks with the United States. The Obama administration prepared the sanctions effort well, and in coordination with the Saudi regime, provided a response to the global demand for oil that resulted from the reduction in output of Iranian oil. Clearly, correct planning can

significantly reduce the cost of escalation in the diplomatic campaign against Iran.

This observation indicates that American coordination with allies who share both its concern about the Iranian nuclear program and the aspiration to resolve the issue by diplomatic means is a central part of the solution to the concerns in the report about the threat of a military strike. As part of this careful planning, the question of which military threat strengthens the diplomatic efforts and deals with these concerns in the most effective manner should be examined.

Exaggerated Costs of the Military Option

The report presents a biased analysis of the costs of attacking Iran – the result of a mistaken choice of model for an attack on Iran's military nuclear facilities and an overestimate of the cost to the United States. The methodological flaw underlying the bias is the authors' assumption that the United States must choose among three options: first, a military option of limited scope that would delay the program by two to four years. This would include deployment of air power, unmanned aerial vehicles, and sea-launched missiles, and the possible use of special forces and cyber attacks over several weeks in order to damage "hundreds of targets."[8] The second is a medium scale option, designed to ensure that Iran will not have nuclear weapons. It would require a wider deployment of US air and naval power over years. The third is a large scale military option (the Iraqi model), which would involve a ground invasion of Iran, occupation of the country, and a change in government.

We agree with the report that the model of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, whose purpose was regime change, is not the correct model for handling the Iranian nuclear issue. However, this incorrect model must not dictate dogmatic thinking about the other options for Iran. What is required is military thinking that examines effective alternatives for achieving the limited goal of causing serious harm to Iran's ability to produce a nuclear weapon. Therefore, even the limited model suggested by the report is too broad, and consequently, misguided and too costly. The US air force has sufficient capabilities to carry out a surgical strike,

> A balanced analysis of the consequences of a surgical strike, which is focused on achieving American goals and which limits the cost of an attack, indicates that the price of this option is not high.

over several days, on Iranian nuclear facilities and sites that support this industry. This limited strike could set back the Iranian nuclear program by several years, depending on how successful it is.[9] The option of a surgical aerial strike makes it possible to carry out an additional attack several years later if Iran seeks to rehabilitate its military nuclear capabilities. Consequently, this model preempts the authors' claim that it will be necessary to station additional air and naval forces for a prolonged period in order to ensure that the achievements of an attack are maintained. It also renders irrelevant the high cost of the options proposed.

A surgical strike by the United States would demonstrate the seriousness of its intention to stop Iran's military nuclear program if Iran fails to adopt a serious approach to the diplomatic track. Interestingly, a surgical strike that does not harm widespread Iranian military and economic assets could encourage a positive Iranian response to negotiations, and the fact that many assets remain in Iran's possession that stand to be harmed in the event of escalation could moderate Iran's response and keep it measured and limited.[10] A surgical strike on Iranian nuclear facilities could thus reduce the risks of becoming engulfed in a regional war, and ultimately even enable a return to the negotiations table.

Since the authors indicate their concern about the consequences of a regional war, it is not clear why they even consider scenarios of a broad attack that increase the risks that this threat will be realized, compared to the limited scenario of a surgical strike.

The authors of the report describe in cursory fashion the direct, short term benefit of a limited American attack but detail at length the medium term and long term costs. Thus the cost-benefit analysis is in itself imbalanced, even as the authors warn that it is difficult to assess these said costs and that the costs they are suggesting are actually based on "speculation."[11] They skew the assessment with speculation that exceeds the direct cost of the limited model and is more relevant to an expansion of the crisis, and as a consequence, an expanded US response, without making this clear. Accordingly, they fail to remain faithful to the outline of an attack that they themselves have chosen and instead present the costs of more extensive fighting, including an escalated crisis to the point where Iran closes the Strait of Hormuz and the region is mired in an all-out war.

Yet even if the gravest assessments are realized, namely, that the Iranian response will be powerful and will require an American response, the aerial model of Kosovo in 1999 and Libya in 2011 offers a more effective option than a large scale ground attack that includes an invasion and occupation of Iranian territory. Indeed, we agree that the model of a ground invasion is neither appropriate nor correct as a solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. Nevertheless, an air strike by NATO forces in Serbia led to the Serbian army withdrawing from Kosovo, an end to the bloodshed, and a change in government one year later. NATO's air strikes in Libya aided the rebel forces and led to the fall of the Qaddafi regime within seven months. The cost of these two operations was limited, both from a monetary point of view and from the perspective of harm to NATO forces.[12]

Therefore, even if the United States were forced to increase the intensity of its operations in Iran, it would not have to choose the model of a broad attack proposed by the report, and it would not necessarily be forced to pay an economic price that is higher than the price of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined, as warned.[13] In other words, a change in the model of attack could significantly reduce the cost of an attack on Iran without impeding the ability of the United States to damage Iran's military nuclear program or provide a response to dramatic escalation – even if according to the authors the probability of this scenario is slim.

In addition to flaws connected to the choice of attack model, the authors also overestimate the costs of an attack on Iran. This distortion is expressed on five principal levels:

a. *The economic cost*: The report warns that an attack on Iran is liable to lead to an increase in global oil prices and to a price spike in the event of escalation into regional war.[14] But the United States could moderate the rise in oil prices with the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which could supply American oil demand for more than a month and maintain the stability of world oil prices for a short period of time.[15] Even analyses that anticipate an increase do not necessarily expect a dramatic rise such as that suggested in the report, and certainly not as a result of a surgical strike on Iran.[16] Furthermore, the surgical strike model reduces the risk of deterioration into regional conflict and an increase in oil prices over time as a result of a decision by Iran to exert pressure on its adversaries.

b. *The political cost.* The authors claim that an American attack on Iran would strengthen the perception that the United States tends to solve its problems through the use of force, thus enabling terrorist organizations and radicals in Muslim countries who oppose the United States to grow stronger at the expense of the forces of moderation.[17] However, an attack on Iran would not necessarily weaken US allies in the region and would perhaps even strengthen them. Indeed, Iran is not very popular in the Arab world in general, and in the Sunni Muslim world in particular.[18] Certainly those who oppose the United States will make themselves heard after the attack, but why would they be able to convert moderates who do not support Iran's radical ideology and provocative policy, precisely when Iran has suffered a severe blow?

An American attack on Iran would not necessarily cause serious harm to the position of the United States in the Arab world and/or weaken the moderate elements. Perhaps it would have the opposite effect: the Sunnis who fear Iran would see that the United States acts decisively in the face of the threat of the "Shiite bomb," and would feel that they have an opportunity to promote their interests in the region at the expense of Iranian hegemony. Such a response could reduce Iranian influence in the region. Iran is the main supporter of the Assad regime, which is slaughtering its own people; of Shiite groups that are working against the regimes in Saudi Arabia and in Bahrain; of terrorist organizations in Iraq working against US forces and continuing to do so following the US withdrawal; and of Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip that oppose Israel. The weakening of Tehran's allies would serve American interests and increase stability in the region, and thus the argument that an attack on Iran would necessarily harm US interests in the region is without foundation. In fact, an attack would be more likely to serve American interests.

c. *The regional cost.* The report warns that a regional war resulting from an American attack[19] could elicit an Iranian response against US bases in the region and strategic targets in the Gulf, along with pressure by Iran on its regional allies to attack US allies and make them pay for the attack. Such a response could lead to escalation and to regional war between Iran and its adversaries in the region, and in particular, Israel.

Yet given this scenario of all-out war, it is not at all clear that the Iranian regime would wish for regional escalation against the United States, or even against Israel. With Iran's standing and economy already hurt, it would certainly not seek to respond in a manner that requires the US military to act forcefully against Iranian strategic assets. Iran's fear of increased tensions with the Sunni Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, and with Turkey, which seek to limit Iranian influence in the region, is likewise a factor. Indeed, the Iranian regime would probably be prepared to pay a certain price by responding in order to save face, as long as it estimated that the cost of its response would be tolerable and not too high. But when considering a third step in the crisis (after it was attacked and it responded), it would most likely have little motivation to risk escalation and further harm to Iranian interests; its motivation would remain low as long as the regime itself was not threatened. Therefore, it can be expected that the Iranian response will be measured and cautious, rather than comprehensive.

The regime's limited motivation to act against Israel is matched by its limited capabilities.[20] Iran has very limited weapon systems, especially surface-to-surface missiles that can hit targets in Israel. Iranian missiles would have to contend with Israeli anti-missile defense systems: the Arrow, the Patriot, and in the future, other systems as well. Therefore, Iran would likely turn to its proxies in the region and have them act on its behalf. However, the Iranian regime's allies in the region are in a sensitive position. The Assad regime, which is fighting for its survival and allocating all its resources to the domestic arena, lacks genuine motivation and ability to act against Israel today. The rifts in Syria increase the sectarian tension in Lebanon and threaten Hizbollah's goal to become a Lebanese organization that enjoys broad support from the local populace. Hizbollah is contending with increasing criticism from Sunnis and Christians, who accuse it of promoting Shiite and Iranian objectives at the expense of Lebanon's national interests. Opening a front against Israel in order to preserve the alliance with its Iranian patron could aggravate the organization's already shaky domestic standing in Lebanon. The Palestinian organizations in the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip will also face a far from simple dilemma after suffering heavy

casualties in the last round of fighting and in light of their change in orientation from Iran and Syria to Egypt and Qatar.

Iran's sense of honor will probably not allow the regime to refrain entirely from responding, but it is not at all clear that Iran would prefer a broad response and the risk that the entire region "go up in flames" with its interests jeopardized, as suggested by the report. In our assessment, there would be an Iranian response, but it would be moderate, measured, and calculated.

d. *The nuclear cost*. The report warns that an attack on the nuclear facilities would increase motivation to produce a nuclear bomb, and therefore would miss its target.[21] However, the regime in Tehran has already made a strategic decision to achieve military nuclear capabilities. A tactical decision to break out will be made at the time that is most appropriate and prudent from the regime's point of view – and when the chances of stopping it are slim. Indeed, already today Iran has evinced much determination to develop nuclear weapons. The Iranian regime, which during 2012 confronted "biting" sanctions for the first time, has not ceased its progress toward a military nuclear capability. Its adherence to the goal, particularly in the face of unprecedented international sanctions and regional and international isolation, indicates that Iran's motivation to produce a bomb is already very strong, and therefore it will not significantly increase as a result of an American attack.

Furthermore, motivation is not a sufficient condition for developing nuclear weapons; it is also necessary to have actual implementation capability. It appears that for Iran, the capability component is the most vulnerable to an attack at this time, which explains why the argument about increased Iranian motivation is problematic and why instead there is a need for an international campaign to prevent Iran from developing the ability to break out to a bomb. The Iraqi test case, which started in 1981 with a pinpoint Israeli strike and continued with a system of international sanctions and a US attack on Iraqi nuclear facilities in 1991, is an excellent model for stopping the Iranian military nuclear program.[22]

e. *The internal Iranian cost*. The report's assertion that the Iranian populace will unite around the regime in the event of an attack[23] is far from self-evident and lacks empirical proof. Eli Jacobs of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, for example, argues that the "rally

round the flag effect" was not proven to result in "across-the-board support" in Iraq in 1991 and in Libya in 2012.[24] According to Jacobs, the theory is not suited to the dynamic that exists within Iran and to the relationship between the people and their government. Former State Department official Aaron David Miller even claims that a successful American attack could challenge the stability of the regime because pragmatic elements in the regime and secular elements in Iranian society aspire to bring about a change in government in Iran.[25]

The claim that the people will fall into line behind the government was also made before economic sanctions were imposed on Iran, and this prediction was not borne out. The serious damage to the Iranian economy has actually increased the pressure on the regime, which fears anti-government protests, and has increased the tension between President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his supporters and followers of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. A limited, surgical strike further reduces the chances that the authors' prediction – that an attack would necessarily lead to broad public support for the regime – would be proven correct.

The report's flawed estimate of the cost of an attack on Iran, along with a flawed choice of a desirable model for an attack, generates a skewed analysis that exaggerates the cost of the military option. The choice of the surgical strike model, which is focused on achieving American goals and which limits the cost of an attack, along with a balanced analysis of the consequences of an attack, indicates that the price of this option is not high. This is particularly the case when considering that even this cost should not be examined on its own, but should be compared with the relevant alternatives, as will be explained below.

The Correct Price Comparison: Military Force vs. Nuclear Iran

The authors of the report argue that they have chosen to focus on the costs and benefits of the military option and have intentionally refrained from addressing the possibility that Iran will reach military nuclear capability.[26] They have thus consciously decided to address only the cost of a military strike and to avoid the necessary analysis, namely, a comparison of this cost with the cost of accepting a nuclear Iran if all other options fail. In our opinion, this choice is misguided and unacceptable. If the diplomatic option fails, the United States president will need to choose between

two difficult, risk-filled options – and therefore, the cost of each option should be studied against the price that the United States will be required to pay for the other option, and not against the situation today, when Iran does not yet have a military nuclear capability. The situation today is temporary and far less complicated than the two options that will be relevant in the future.

This narrow analysis in the Iran Project's report ignores three points that are critical to American interests. The first is that a nuclear Iran will undermine the nuclear nonproliferation regime and encourage a regional arms race. As part of a concise presentation of the benefits of the military option, the report acknowledges in cursory fashion that an attack on Iran would help maintain the nuclear nonproliferation regime.[27] However, the threat of an arms race in the Middle East is tangible and dangerous, and therefore should be part of a comparison of the option of a strike against the option of containment (accepting the inevitability of a nuclear Iran). In recent years, the Saudi regime has warned the US administration in closed talks that if Shiite Iran, the largest adversary of Sunni Saudi Arabia, attains nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia will need to acquire similar capability. The Turks and the Egyptians have also expressed opposition to the Iranian military nuclear plan, and their rivalry with Tehran could pose a difficult dilemma for them: should they respond by entering the nuclear arms race if Iran obtains nuclear weapons? The Obama administration, which seeks to reduce its involvement in the Middle East and hopes to focus more on Asia, would increase the pressure on these Sunni states to find a solution in which they are not dependent on US policy. Thus countries in the region that feel threatened by the regime in Tehran, such as the Gulf states, Turkey, Egypt, and even Iraq, could decide to enter a regional arms race if Iran passes the military nuclear threshold. Therefore, it is clear that acceptance of a nuclear Iran would constitute a difficult challenge to the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

> If the diplomatic option fails, the United States will need to choose between two difficult, risk-filled options: the cost of a military strike vs. the cost of accepting a nuclear Iran.

An attack on Iran could prevent this scenario, and further strengthen the nonproliferation regime by demonstrating American willingness to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons to other states in the region. Since the nonproliferation regime helps ease

the charged atmosphere in this tense region and avert catastrophic escalation in the event of conflict between states in possession of weapons of mass destruction, nonproliferation is defined as a vital US interest. In light of President Obama's vision of a global effort to reduce nuclear stockpiles, this interest has become even more crucial for the current US administration. In order to understand the price that the United States would have to pay if it accepted an Iranian nuclear bomb, the authors should have compared the price of the containment option to the benefit of the option of a strike against Iran. Such an analysis clearly reveals that the military option serves American interests, while the containment option significantly harms them.

The second point absent from the report is that Iranian hegemony and the power of the radicals in the region will increase if Iran goes nuclear. The report warns that American military intervention in Iran would strengthen the forces that oppose the United States and American intervention in the region and would empower the radicals, particularly Iran, at the expense of the moderates that are US allies.[28] This argument ignores the fact that those same moderates would be even more threatened by a boost to Iranian hegemony. For this reason, the Saudi regime is working to stop the Iranian nuclear program, and in the past year, it has increased its output of oil in order to allow harsh sanctions to be imposed on the Iranian oil industry.[29] The Sunni regimes in Egypt, Bahrain, Qatar, and Turkey also fear the expansion of Iranian influence in the region, which threatens their interests, and especially the possibility that Iran will acquire a military nuclear capability. This capability would turn Iran into a regional power, bolstering its ability to undermine the stability of the Sunni regimes in the Gulf and enabling it to expand its Shiite revolutionary ideological influence in the region as well as its support for terrorist activity against US targets. In other words, if Iran possessed a nuclear weapon, it would have much greater power against its regional rivals, which are allies of the United States, than if the United States bombed Iran.

Relations between the United States and its regional allies are based on US willingness and ability to help promote the interests of the Arab regimes. With the Iranian threat, it is America's deterrent capability and credibility in the eyes of the moderate regimes that will determine its ability to prevent a regional war and ensure that the power of moderate forces in the region is maintained. The credibility of the United States

as an ally has been damaged in the past two years because of both the Obama administration's abandonment of Egyptian president Husni Mubarak and Iran's ability to progress toward nuclear weapons despite the international campaign against it. Acceptance of a nuclear Iran could result in the collapse of American deterrence in the region and an almost total reduction in the ability of the United States to maintain the strength of the moderates against the Iranian superpower and prevent deterioration into regional war. We agree with the report that these two consequences would be devastating for US policy in the region, but we differ in contending that these risks would be more tangible if the Iranian regime were in possession of a bomb than if the United States attacked Iran.

Accepting a nuclear Iran after President Obama has stated that he would prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons[30] would damage the credibility of American deterrence. This damage could spill over beyond the boundaries of the Middle East and also harm American deterrence in Asia and other regions. A credible threat of a strike against Iran and its execution when all other options have been exhausted could be an opportunity to strengthen the position of the United States as a superpower and increase the credibility of American deterrence in the region and support for US allies, including Israel and the Gulf states.

The third point is the faulty assessment that global oil prices will increase further if Iran goes nuclear. The report warns that a strike against Iran is liable to lead to an increase in oil prices if Iran attempts to interfere with the supply of oil or harm oil facilities in the Gulf in order to hurt its rivals.[31] Although this is an extreme and unlikely scenario, the logic behind it illustrates that the cost of an Iran with a nuclear bomb would actually be higher than the cost of striking Iran. An Iranian bomb would curtail the ability of the West to prevent Iran from raising the price of oil and would allow the regime in Tehran to increase prices permanently. The Bipartisan Policy Center estimates that a nuclear Iran would lead to an increase of 10 to 20 percent in the price of oil in the first year (an additional $11-27 per barrel), and between 30 and 50 percent by the third year ($30-55 per barrel).[32] Other analyses of the economic consequences expected to undermine stability in the Middle East as a result of Iran's acquisition of a nuclear bomb present even higher figures, depending on the scope of the conflict.[33] These studies indicate unequivocally that an Iran with a nuclear bomb will hurt American interests over time much

more than a temporary price increase suggested in the report. Therefore, even the most extreme scenario could be preferable in the long term to Iran's possessing a nuclear bomb.

These three points illustrate how critical it is to draw the comparison between the anticipated results of a strike against Iran and the expected consequences of Iran going nuclear and a policy of containment. Since both are bad options, we do not recommend an attack at this point. However, if negotiations fail, no agreement is reached, the covert campaign does not achieve its goal, and a time of decision is reached, analysis indicates that the option of bombing Iran as a last resort is preferable to the option of living with an Iranian bomb.

Conclusion

The Iranian Project report on the costs and benefits of the military option on the Iranian issue claims to focus on facts and shun specific policy recommendations. However, the spirit of the report, its structure, and its methodological lapses highlight the negative consequences of the military option for American interests. This was the sentiment reflected in the discussion of the report in the global media. It appears that in the guise of an objective report that "draws no final conclusions and offers no recommendations,"[34] the authors have in fact produced a subjective report with clear recommendations, even if they are not written as such. The current article has aimed to balance the picture.

We agree with the report that escalation in the conflict with Iran, a rise in the price of oil, and the weakening of pragmatic elements in the Middle East harm American interests. We also agree that if the negotiations between Iran and the West fail, the United States will need to choose between a policy that makes its peace with a nuclear bomb and a strike against Iran, and that only in this situation should the use of military force be considered. Nonetheless, methodologically the report is flawed. The threat of military force and the diplomatic campaign complement rather than contradict one another, and when it comes to an effort to persuade a regime to give up its nuclear ambitions after it has invested enormous resources in its military nuclear program, the importance of the military threat grows stronger. Ironically, damaging the credibility of the military option could lead to its being the only option to prevent the regime of the ayatollahs in Tehran from possessing a nuclear bomb.

The report also errs in its mistaken choice of a model for a military option, and hence its overestimation of the ensuing military costs, and its failure to consider the cost of failed negotiations and a policy of containment that reconciles itself to a nuclear Iran. We contend that the option of bombing Iran to prevent its military nuclearization is preferable to the option of an Iranian nuclear bomb, and the surgical strike model is preferable to the three models presented in the report. In our opinion, these insights balance – if not offset – the risks presented by the report.

Our analysis seeks to broaden the perspective to an examination of the best option for American interests. It stresses that even if it is desirable to conduct a discussion on this subject, the credibility of the military threat must be maintained in order for this discussion to remain relevant.

Notes

1   The Iran Project, *Weighing Benefits and Costs of Military Action against Iran,* 2012 (hereafter Iran Project report), http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/IranReport_091112_FINAL.pdf. The purpose of the Iran Project is made clear on the project's official website, which states that it is "dedicated to improving the relationship between the U.S. and Iranian governments." In other words, the goal of the project is not to stop Iran from military nuclearization. The goal of the Project, which underlies the report, is not mentioned in the report itself.

2   Ibid., pp. 21-22. In spite of their assessment, the report warns that "no monitoring and detection system is failure-proof." It fails to take into account the use of modern centrifuges that could allow Iran in the future to produce a bomb in less than a month after a decision is made by the regime.

3   Ibid., p. 24.

4   For example, see the AP report published in the United States, Britain, and Israel, which also stresses the cost of the broad attack model without noting that there are intermediate models: Associated Press, "U.S. Strikes on Iran Would Risk All-Out Middle East War: Experts," *CBS New*s, September 13, 2012; Associated Press, "U.S. Strikes on Iran Would Risk Major War: Report," *The Daily Sta*r, September 13, 2012; Associated Press, "U.S. Strikes on Iran Could Lead to All-Out Mideast War, Experts Say," *Haaretz*, September 13, 2012. This is in the spirit of comments by Thomas Pickering, one of the authors of the report, at a panel discussion at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy on February 12, 2013. See James F. Jeffrey and Thomas Pickering, "Year of Decision: U.S. Policy toward Iran in 2013," *PolicyWatch 2036*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/year-of-decision-u.s.-policy-toward-iran-in-2013.

5   See the Introduction to the report.

6 The Iran Project, *Strategic Options for Iran: Balancing Pressure with Diplomacy*, 2013, http://www.cfr.org/iran/iran-project-strategic-options-iran-balancing-pressure-diplomacy/p30487.

7 See, for example, John R. Bolton, "Don't Let Iran Benefit from EU Financial Crisis," *Bloomberg*, January 26, 2012; Fareed Zakaria, "To Deal with Iran's Nuclear Future, Go Back to 2008," *Washington Post*, January 26, 2012.

8 Iran Project report, p. 10. The report is not consistent in addressing the limited scenario. For example, on p. 23, a broader attack is described that is intended to achieve the same goal, delaying Iran's military nuclear plan by up to four years: "We believe that extended military strikes by the U.S. alone or in concert with Israel could delay Iran's ability to build a bomb by up to four years—if the military operation is carried out to near perfection, with all aircraft, missiles, and bombs working to maximum effect." On p. 24, the authors describe the attack again in a different manner: "We are assuming that the U.S. would deploy a full array of aircraft and conventional weapons against Iran, in standoff strikes that could last for several days or weeks, or longer."

9 In our assessment, in a successful operation the United States could set the Iranian military nuclear program back by up to four years, as the writers of the report suggest. Ibid., p. 12.

10 In the assessment of the authors themselves, the Iranian response would be cautious and would seek to avoid an all-out conflict with the United States. Ibid., pp. 34-35.

11 Ibid., p. 33.

12 In Kosovo, two NATO soldiers were killed as the result of the crash of an American Apache helicopter during training carried out in Albania, and during fighting by NATO in Libya, one British soldier was killed as a result of an accident connected to a logistical operation. BBC, "Two Die in Apache Crash," May 5, 1999; "UK Airman Dies in Italy Road Accident," *Time*, Associated Press, July 21, 2011.

13 Iran Project report, p. 24.

14 Ibid., p. 35. This analysis, like similar analyses that reach the same conclusion, is based on the model of a broad and prolonged attack, such as the 1991 Gulf War. The relevance of these broad and prolonged crises is limited in a discussion of the surgical strike model and an operation lasting several days. See Bob McNally, "Unconventional Gas/LNP," Presentation of the Rapidan Group, March 2012.

15 Greg E. Sharenow, "Playing 'What If?' with Oil Prices and a Potential Strike on Iranian Nuclear Facilities," PIMCO, November 2011, http://www.pimco.com/EN/Insights/Pages/Playing-What-If-with-Oil-Prices-and-a-Potential-Strike-on-Iranian-Nuclear-Facilities-.aspx; Jay Maroo, "The Uncertain Impact of an SPR Release," *Energy Risk*, November 13, 2012, http://www.risk.net/energy-risk/feature/2221778/the-uncertain-impact-of-an-spr-release; Securing America's Future Energy, "Decision Point: A Well-Supplied Global

Oil Market Will Make 2013 the Year to Deal with Iran," *Issue Brief*, March 13, 2013, http://secureenergy.org/sites/default/files/SAFE_Decision_Point_Iran_Issue_Brief_March_2013.pdf.

16 Matthew Kroenig and Robert McNally, "Iranian Nukes and Global Oil," *American Interest* 8, no. 4 (March/April 2013), http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1386.

17 Iran Project report, pp. 40-41.

18 James Zogby, "Looking at Iran: How 20 Arab & Muslim Nations View Iran & Its Policies," March 2013, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/iranpollfindingspresenation.pdf.

19 Iran Project report, pp. 35-37.

20 For more information on Iran's missile capabilities, see Michael Elleman, "Everything You Wanted to Know About Iran's Air Force," *RCP*, March 12, 2013.

21 Iran Project report, pp. 38-39.

22 This example should not be understood as a recommendation for an initial Israeli attack, rather as an illustration of the utility of the surgical strike option, backed by international sanctions, as a means of delaying a military nuclear option over time.

23 Iran Project report, p. 41.

24 Eli Jacobs, "Considering the 'Rally Round the Flag Effect' in Iran," CSIS, January 20, 2012, http://csis.org/blog/considering-rally-round-flag-effect-iran.

25 Aaron David Miller, "Everyone Calm Down: Israel is Not Going to Bomb Iran. Well, At Least Not in 2012," *Foreign Policy*, August 20, 2012.

26 The report's authors claim that they will publish a paper on the subject in the future, without noting which options they are referring to. Iran Project report, *Weighing Benefits and Costs of Military Action Against Iran*, p. 16. Up to the time of writing, the Iran Project had not published a paper examining the cost of the option of containment and accepting a nuclear Iran.

27 Ibid., p. 30.

28 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

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

30 Since the speech by President Obama at the AIPAC conference in March 2012, he has stated on a number of occasions that his policy toward Iran is prevention, not containment of a nuclear Iran.

31 Iran Project report, p. 35.

32 Charles S. Robb and Charles Wald, "The Price of Inaction: Analysis of Energy and Economic Effects of a Nuclear Iran," National Security Program, Bipartisan Policy Center, October 2012.

33 Kroenig and McNally, "Iranian Nukes and Global Oil."

34 See the report's prefatory remarks.

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