

Middle East Quarterly

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Jordan Is Palestinian

by Mudar Zahran

Thus far the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has weathered the storm that has swept across the Middle East since the beginning of the year. But the relative calm in Amman is an illusion. The unspoken truth is that the Palestinians, the country's largest ethnic group, have developed a profound hatred of the regime and view the Hashemites as occupiers of eastern Palestine—intruders rather than legitimate rulers. This, in turn, makes a regime change in Jordan more likely than ever. Such a change, however, would not only be confined to the toppling of yet another Arab despot but would also open the door to the only viable peace solution—and one that has effectively existed for quite some time: a Palestinian state in Jordan.

ABDULLAH'S APARTHEID POLICIES

Despite having held a comprehensive national census in 2004, the Jordanian government would not divulge the exact percentage of Palestinians in the kingdom. Nonetheless, the secret that everyone seems to know but which is never openly admitted is that Palestinians make up the vast majority of the population.

In his 2011 book, *Our Last Best Chance*, King Abdullah claimed that the Palestinians make up a mere 43 percent. The U.S. State Department estimates that Palestinians make up “more than half” of Jordanians¹ while in a 2007 report, written in cooperation with several Jordanian government bodies, the London-based Oxford Business Group stated that at least two thirds of Jordan's population were of Palestinian origin.² Palestinians make up the majority of the population of Jordan's two largest cities, Amman and

Zarqa, which were small, rural towns before the influx of Palestinians arrived in 1967 after Jordan's defeat in the Six-Day War.

In most countries with a record of human rights violations, vulnerable minorities are the typical victims. This has not been the case in Jordan where a Palestinian majority has been discriminated against by the ruling Hashemite dynasty, propped up by a minority Bedouin population, from the moment it occupied Judea and Samaria during the 1948 war (these territories were annexed to Jordan in April 1950 to become the kingdom's West Bank).

As a result, the Palestinians of Jordan find themselves discriminated against in government and legislative positions as the number of Palestinian government ministers and parliamentarians decreases; there is not a single Palestinian serving as governor of any of Jordan's twelve governorships.³

Jordanian Palestinians are encumbered with tariffs of up to 200 percent for an average family

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1 “Jordan: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2001,” Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, Mar. 4, 2002.

2 “The Report: Emerging Jordan 2007,” Oxford Business Group, London, Apr. 2007.

3 “Jordan: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2001,” Mar. 4, 2002.

sedan, a fixed 16-percent sales tax, a high corporate tax, and an inescapable income tax. Most of their Bedouin fellow citizens, meanwhile, do not have to worry about most of these duties as they are servicemen or public servants who get a free pass. Servicemen or public employees even have their own government-subsidized stores, which sell food items and household goods at lower prices than what others have to pay,⁴ and the Military Consumer Corporation, which is a massive retailer restricted to Jordanian servicemen, has not increased prices despite inflation.⁵

Decades of such practices have left the Palestinians in Jordan with no political representation, no access to power, no competitive education, and restrictions in the only field in which they can excel: business.

According to Minority Rights Group International's *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples of 2008*, "Jordan still considers them [Palestinian-Jordanians] refugees with a right of return to Palestine."⁶ This by itself is confusing enough for the Palestin-

ian majority and possibly gives basis for state-sponsored discrimination against them; indeed, since 2008, the Jordanian government has adopted a policy of stripping some Palestinians of their citizenship.⁷ Thousands of families have borne the brunt of this action with tens of thousands more potentially affected. The

Jordanian government has officially justified its position: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Nayef Qadi told the London-based *al-Hayat* newspaper that "Jordan should

be thanked for standing up against Israeli ambitions of unloading the Palestinian land of its people," which he described as "the secret Israeli aim to impose a solution of Palestinian refugees at the expense of Jordan."⁸ According to a February 2010 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, some 2,700 Jordanian-Palestinians have had their citizenship revoked. As HRW obtained the figure from the Jordanian government, it is safe to assume that the actual figure is higher. To use the words of Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of the Middle East and North Africa division of HRW, "Jordan is playing politics with the basic rights of thousands of its citizens."⁹

But Abdullah does not really want the Palestinians out of his kingdom. For it is the Palestinians who drive the country's economy: They pay heavy taxes; they receive close to zero state benefits; they are almost completely shut out of government jobs, and they have very little, if any, political representation. He is merely using them as pawns in his game against Israel by threatening to make Jerusalem responsible for Jordanians of Palestinian descent in the name of the "right of return."

Despite systematic marginalization, Palestinians in Jordan seem well-settled and, indeed, do call Jordan home. Hundreds of thousands hold "yellow cards" and "green cards," residency permits allowing them to live and work in Israel while they maintain their Jordanian citizenship.¹⁰ In addition, tens of thousands of Palestinians—some even claim hundreds of thousands—hold Israeli residency permits, which allow them to live in Judea and Samaria. Many also hold a "Jerusalem Residency Card," which entitles them to state benefits from Israel.¹¹ Yet

Palestinians in Jordan have no political representation, no access to power, and no competitive education.

4 "Brief History," Civil Service Consumer Corporation, Government of Jordan, Amman, 2006.

5 Jordan News Agency (PETRA, Amman), Jan. 10, 2011.

6 "Jordan: Palestinians," *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*, Minority Rights Group International, 2008, accessed Sept. 20, 2011.

7 "Stateless Again," Human Rights Watch, New York, Feb. 1, 2010.

8 *The Arab Times* (Kuwait City), Jan. 13, 2011.

9 "Jordan: Stop Withdrawing Nationality from Palestinian-Origin Citizens," Human Rights Watch, Washington, D.C., Feb. 1, 2010.

10 "Jordan: Information on the right of abode of a Palestinian from the West Bank who holds a Jordanian passport which is valid for five years," Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Oct. 1, 1993, JOR15463.FE.

11 "Jordan's treatment of failed refugee claimants," Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Mar. 9, 2004, JOR42458.E.

they have remained in Jordan. Despite ill treatment by the Jordanian government, they still wish to live where most of their relatives and family members live and perhaps actually consider Jordan home.

PLAYING THE ISLAMIST CARD

The Hashemites' discriminatory policies against the Palestinians have been overlooked by the West, Washington in particular, for one main reason: the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was the beating heart of Palestinian politics, and thus, if the Palestinians were empowered, they might topple the Hashemites and transform Jordan into a springboard for terror attacks against Israel. This fear was not all that farfetched. The Palestinian National Charter, by which the PLO lives, considers Palestine with its original mandate borders (i.e., including the territory east of the Jordan River, or Transjordan) as the indivisible homeland of the Palestinian Arab people.¹² In the candid admission of Abu Dawoud, Yasser Arafat's strongman in the 1970s, "Abu Ammar [Arafat] was doing everything then to establish his power and authority in Jordan despite his public statements" in support of King Hussein.¹³ This tension led to the 1970 Black September civil war where the PLO was expelled from Jordan and thousands of Palestinians were slaughtered by Hussein's Bedouin army.

With the threat of Palestinian militants re-

King Abdullah may find himself swallowed up by the growing force of the Muslim Brotherhood within his kingdom. In Jordan, the Brotherhood is dominated by Bedouins, not Palestinians, and although Bedouins remain the minority in the kingdom, they form the foundation on which Abdullah's regime is built.

moved, the idea of having the Muslim Brotherhood entrenched in a Palestinian state with the longest border with Israel would naturally be of concern to Israel and its allies.

The only problem with this theory is that the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan is dominated by Bedouins, not Palestinians. The prominent, hawkish Muslim Brotherhood figure, Zaki Bani Rushiad, for example, is a native of Irbid in northern Jordan—not a Palestinian. Salem Falahat, another outspoken Brotherhood leader, and Abdul Latif Arabiat, a major tribal figure and godfather of the Brotherhood in Jordan, are also non-Palestinians. Upon President Obama's announcement of the death of Osama bin Laden, tribal Jordanians in the southern city of Ma'an mourned the terror leader's death and announced "a celebration of martyrdom."¹⁴ Other cities with predominantly Bedouin populations, such as Salt and Kerak, did the same. The latter, a stronghold of the Majali tribe (which has historically held prominent positions in the Hashemite state) produced Abu Qutaibah al-

¹² The Palestinian National Charter, Resolutions of the Palestine National Council, July 1-17, 1968.

¹³ *Al-Jazeera* (Riyadh), Oct. 1, 2005.

¹⁴ *Amman News*, May 2, 2011.



The majority Palestinian population of Jordan bristles at the advantages and benefits bestowed on the minority Bedouins. Advancement in the civil service, as well as in the military, is almost entirely a Bedouin prerogative with the added insult that Palestinians pay the lion's share of the country's taxes.

Majali, bin Laden's personal aide between 1986 and 1991, who recruited fellow Bedouin-Jordanian, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, head of al-Qaeda in Iraq who was killed in a 2006 U.S. raid.¹⁵

The Hashemite regime is keenly aware of U.S. and Israeli fears and has, therefore, striven to create a situation where the world would have to choose between the Hashemites and the Muslim Brotherhood as Jordan's rulers. To this end, it has supported the Muslim Brotherhood for decades, allowing it to operate freely, to run charitable organizations and youth movements, and to recruit members in Jordan.¹⁶ In 2008, the Jordanian government introduced a new law, retroactively banning any existing political party unless it had five hundred members and branches in five governorates (counties). Since such conditions could only be fulfilled by the Muslim Brotherhood, most politi-

its own supposed constituency.

THE BEDOUIN THREAT

Despite their lavish privileges, Jordanian Bedouins seem to insist relentlessly on a bigger piece of the cake, demanding more privileges from the king, and, in doing so, they have grown fearless about defying him. Since 2009, fully-armed tribal fights have become commonplace in Jordan.¹⁷ Increasingly, the Hashemite regime has less control than it would like over its only ruling foundation—the Bedouin minority—which makes up the army, the police forces, all the security agencies, and the Jordanian General Intelligence Department. The regime is, therefore, less likely to survive any serious confrontations with them and has no other choice but to keep kowtowing to their demands.

cal parties were dissolved de jure because they did not meet the new standards, leaving the Islamic Action Front as the strongest party in the kingdom.

Both Jerusalem and Washington are aware of the Jordanian status quo yet have chosen to accept the Hashemite regime as it is, seduced by the conventional wisdom of "the devil you know is better than the devil you don't." The facts on the ground, however, suggest that the devil they think they know is in deep trouble with

¹⁵ Ibid., May 2, 2011.

¹⁶ Awni Jadu al-Ubaydi, *Jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi al-Urdunn wa-Filastin, 1945-1970* (Amman: Safahat Ta'arikhiyya, 1991), pp. 38-41.

¹⁷ Samer Libdeh, "The Hashemite Kingdom of Apartheid?" *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 26, 2010.

What complicates the situation even further is that Bedouin tribes in Jordan do not maintain alliances only with the Hashemites; most shift their loyalties according to their current interests and the political season. Northern tribes, for example, have exhibited loyalty to the Syrian regime, and many of their members hold dual citizenship.¹⁸ In September 1970, when Syrian forces invaded Jordan in the midst of the civil war there, the tribes of the northern city of Ramtha raised the Syrian flag and declared themselves “independent” from the Hashemite rulers.

Likewise, Bedouin tribes of the south have habitually traded loyalty for privileges and handouts with whoever paid better, beginning with the Turks, then replacing them with the better-paying Britons, and finally the Hashemites. This pattern has expanded in the last twenty years as tribesmen exchanged their loyalties for cash; in fact this is how they got involved in the British-supported Arab revolt of World War I, in which the Bedouins demanded to be paid in gold in advance in order to participate in the fighting against the Ottomans despite their alignment with the Ottoman Empire before joining the revolt.¹⁹

This in turn means that the Jordanian regime is now detested not only by the Palestinians but also by the Bedouins, who have called for a constitutional monarchy in which the king hands his powers to them.²⁰ Should the tribes fail to achieve their goals, they will most likely expand their demonstrations of unrest—complete with tribal killings, blockades, armed fights, robberies, and attacks on police officers—which the Jordanian state finds itself having to confront weekly. In 2010, an average of five citizens



Ill feelings between the Palestinian and Bedouin citizens of Jordan took a turn for the worse in 2009 when riots broke out at a soccer match between the fans of the Palestinian favored al-Wihdat soccer club and those of the Bedouin favored al-Faisali team. Reports indicate that Jordanian police attacked Palestinian soccer fans without provocation soon thereafter.

was killed each week just as a result of tribal unrest.²¹

The Hashemite regime cannot afford to confront the tribesmen since they constitute the regime’s own servicemen and intelligence officers. In 2002, the Jordanian army besieged the southern Bedouin city of Ma’an in order to arrest a group of extremists, who were then pardoned a few years later.²² Similarly, Hammam Balaoui, a Jordanian intelligence double agent was arrested in 2006 for supporting al-Qaeda, only to be released shortly thereafter, eventually blowing himself up in Afghanistan in 2009 along with seven senior CIA officers and King Abdullah’s cousin.²³

18 CNN, Nov. 28, 2007.

19 Michael Korda, *Hero: The Life and Legend of Lawrence of Arabia* (New York: Harper, 2010), p. 19.

20 *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), Mar. 4, 2011.

21 Libdeh, “The Hashemite Kingdom of Apartheid?”

22 PETRA, Aug. 6, 2011.

23 “Profile: Jordanian Triple Agent Who Killed CIA Agents,” *The Telegraph* (London), Jan. 2010.

PALESTINIAN PAWNS

These open displays of animosity are of a piece with the Hashemite regime's use of its Palestinian citizens as pawns in its game of anti-Israel one-upmanship.

King Hussein—unlike his peace-loving image—made peace with Israel only because he could no longer afford to go to war against it. His son has been less shy about his hostility

and is not reluctant to bloody Israel in a cost-effective manner. For example, on August 3, 2004, he went on al-Arabiya television and slandered the Palestinian Authority for “its willingness to give up more Palestinian land in exchange for peace with Israel.”²⁴ He often unilat-

erally upped Palestinian demands on their behalf whenever the Palestinian Authority was about to make a concession, going as far as to threaten Israel with a war “unless all settlement activities cease.”²⁵

This hostility toward Israel was also evident when, in 2008, Abdullah started revoking the citizenship of Jordanian Palestinians. By turning the Palestinian majority in Jordan into “stateless refugees” and aggressively pushing the so-called “right of return,” the king hopes to strengthen his anti-Israel credentials with the increasingly Islamist Bedouins and to embarrass Jerusalem on the world stage. It is not inconceivable to envision a scenario where thousands of disenfranchised Palestinians find themselves stranded at the Israeli border, unable to enter or remain in Jordan. The international media—no friend of the Jewish state—would immediately jump into action, demonizing Israel and turning the scene into a fiasco meant to burden Jerusalem's conscience—and that of the West. The Hashemite

regime would thereby come out triumphant, turning its own problem—being rejected and hated by the Palestinians—into Israel's problem.

A POT BOILING OVER

The Jordanian government's mistreatment of its Palestinian citizenry has taken a significant toll. Today, the Palestinians are a ticking bomb waiting to explode, especially as they watch their fellow Arabs rebelling against autocrats such as Egypt's Mubarak, Libya's Qaddafi, or Syria's Assad.

The complex relationship between the Palestinian majority and the Hashemite minority seems to have become tenser since Abdullah ascended the throne in 1999 after King Hussein's death. Abdullah's thin knowledge of the Arabic language, the region, and internal affairs, made him dependent on the Bedouin-dominated Jordanian Intelligence Department standing firmly between the king and his people, of which the Palestinians are the majority.²⁶ A U.S. embassy cable, dated July 2009, reported “bullying” practiced by the fans of al-Faisali Soccer Club (predominantly Bedouin Jordanians) against the fans of al-Wihdat Soccer Club (predominantly Palestinians), with al-Faisali fans chanting anti-Palestinian slogans and going so far as to insult Queen Rania, who is of Palestinian descent.²⁷ Two days after the cable was released, Jordanian police mercilessly attacked Palestinian soccer fans without provocation, right under the eyes of the international media.²⁸

Palestinians in Jordan have also developed an intense hatred of the military as they are not allowed to join the army; they see Bedouin servicemen getting advantages in state education and health care, home taxes, and even tariff exemption on luxury vehicles.²⁹ In recent years,

With the largest percentage of Palestinians in the world, Jordan is a logical location for a Palestinian state.

24 Al-Arabiya TV (Dubai), Aug. 3, 2004.

25 *The Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 24, 2010.

26 *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 1, 2006.

27 *The Guardian* (London), Dec. 6, 2010.

28 *Qudosi Chronicles* (Long Beach, Calif.), Dec. 16, 2010.

29 “Assessment for Palestinians in Jordan,” *Minorities at Risk*, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, College Park, Md., Dec. 31, 2006.

the Jordanian military has consumed up to 20.2 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).³⁰

Government spending does not end with the army. Jordan has one of the largest security and intelligence apparatuses in the Middle East, perhaps the largest compared to the size of its population. Since intelligence and security officers are labeled as "military servicemen" by the Jordanian Ministry of Finance, and their expense is considered military expenditure, Jordanian Palestinians see their tax dollars going to support job creation for posts from which they themselves are banned. At the same time, the country has not engaged in any warfare since 1970, leading some to conclude that this military spending is designed to protect the regime and not the country—a conclusion underscored by the Black September events.

A PATH TO PEACE?

The desperate and destabilizing measures undertaken by the Hashemite regime to maintain its hold on power point to a need to revive the long-ignored solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict: the Jordanian option. With Jordan home to the largest percentage of Palestinians in the world, it is a more logical location for establishing Palestinian statehood than on an-



The storm of protests that have swept through the Middle East have left Jordan's King Abdullah on a shaky throne. Although not as violent as demonstrations in Egypt or Yemen, protesters have taken to the streets of Jordan calling for reforms.

other country's soil, i.e., Israel's.

There is, in fact, almost nothing un-Palestinian about Jordan except for the royal family. Despite decades of official imposition of a Bedouin image on the country, and even Bedouin accents on state television, the Palestinian identity is still the most dominant—to the point where the Jordanian capital, Amman, is the largest and most populated, Palestinian city anywhere. Palestinians view it as a symbol of their economic success and ability to excel. Moreover, empowering a Palestinian statehood for Jordan has a well-founded and legally accepted grounding: The minute the minimum level of democracy is applied to Jordan, the Palestinian majority would, by right, take over the political momentum.

For decades, however, regional players have entertained fears about empowering the Palestinians of Jordan. While there may be apprehension that Jordan as a Palestinian state would be hostile to Israel and would support terror attacks across their long border, such concerns, while legitimate, are puzzling. Israel has allowed the Palestinians to establish their own ruling entities as well as their own police and paramilitary forces on soil captured in the 1967 war, cheek by

³⁰ "Jordan Military Expenditures—Percent of GDP," *CIA World Factbook*, May 16, 2008.

jowl with major Israeli population centers. Would a Palestinian state on the other side of the Jordan River pose any greater security threat to Israel than one in Judea and Samaria?

Moreover, the Jordan Valley serves as a much more effective, natural barrier between Jordan and Israel than any fences or walls. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed the centrality of Israeli control over the western side of the Jordan Valley, which he said would never be relinquished.³¹ It is likely that

the area's tough terrain together with Israel's military prowess have prevented the Hashemite regime from even considering war with Israel for more than forty years.

It could be argued that should the Palestinians control Jordan, they

would downsize the military institutions, which are dominated by their Bedouin rivals. A Palestinian-ruled Amman might also seek to cut back on the current scale of military expenditures in the hope that the U.S. military presence in the region would protect the country from unwelcome encroachments by Damascus or Tehran. It could also greatly benefit from financial and economic incentives attending good-neighbor relations with Israel. Even if a Jordanian army under Palestinian commanders were to be kept at its current level, it would still be well below Israel's military and technological edge. After all, it is Israel's military superiority, rather than regional goodwill, that drove some Arab states to make peace with it.

The Palestinians in Jordan already depend on Israel for water³² and have enjoyed a thriving economic boom driven by the "Qualified Industrial Zones," which allow for Jordanian clothing factories to export apparel to the United States at preferred tariff rates if a minimum per-

centage of the raw material comes from Israel.³³

Hundreds of Palestinian factory owners have prospered because of these zones. Expanding such cooperation between a future Palestinian state in Jordan and Israel would give the Palestinians even more reasons to maintain a good relationship with their neighbor.

Both the United States and Israel should consider reevaluating the Jordan option. Given the unpopularity of the Hashemite regime among its subjects, regime change in Amman should not be that difficult to achieve though active external intervention would likely yield better results than the wait-and-see-who-comes-to-power approach followed during the Egyptian revolution. After twelve years on the throne, and \$7 billion dollars in U.S. aid, Abdullah is still running a leaky ship and creating obstacles to resolving the Palestinian issue.

Washington's leverage can come into play as well with the Jordanian armed forces which are, in theory, loyal to the king. With hundreds of troops undergoing training in the United States each year and almost \$350 million handed out in military aid, the U.S. establishment could potentially influence their choices.

Recent events in the Middle East should serve as guidelines for what ought to be pursued and avoided. U.S. diplomacy failed to nurse a moderate opposition to Egypt's Mubarak, which could have blocked Islamists and anti-Americans from coming to power. The current turmoil in Libya has shown that the later the international community acts, the more complicated the situation can get. An intervention in Jordan could be much softer than in Libya and with no need for major action. Abdullah is an outsider ruling a poor country with few resources; his only "backbone" is Washington's political and financial support. In exchange for a promise of immunity, the king could be convinced to let the Palestinian majority rule and become a figurehead, like Britain's Queen Elizabeth.

As further assurance of a future Palestinian

**Abdullah's only
"backbone" is
Washington's
political and
financial support.**

31 *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), Mar. 2, 2010.

32 Lilach Grunfeld, "Jordan River Dispute," *The Inventory of Conflict and Environment Case Studies*, American University, Washington, D.C., Spring 1997.

33 Mary Jane Bolle, Alfred B. Prados, and Jeremy M. Sharp, "Qualifying Industrial Zones in Jordan and Egypt," Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C., July 5, 2006.

Jordan's peaceful intentions, very strict antiterrorism laws must be implemented, barring anyone who has incited violence from running for office, thus ruling out the Islamists even before they had a chance to start. Such an act should be rewarded with economic aid that actually filters down to the average Jordanian as opposed to the current situation, in which U.S. aid money seems to support mainly the Hashemites' lavish lifestyle.

Alongside downsizing the military, a defense agreement with Washington could be put in place to help protect the country against potentially hostile neighbors. Those who argue that Jordan needs a strong military to counter threats from abroad need only look again at its history: In 1970, when Syria invaded northern Jordan, King Hussein asked for U.S. and Israeli protection and was eventually saved by the Israeli air force, which managed to scare the Syrian troops back across the border.³⁴ Again in 2003, when Washington toppled Saddam Hussein, Amman asked for U.S.-operated Patriot missile batteries and currently favors an extended U.S. presence in Iraq as a Jordanian security need.³⁵

Should the international community see an advantage to maintaining the military power of the new Palestinian state in Jordan as it is today, the inviolability of the peace treaty with Israel must be reasserted, indeed upgraded, extending into more practical and tangible economic and political arenas. A mutual defense and counterterrorism agreement with Israel should be struck, based on one simple concept—"good fences make good neighbors"—with the river Jordan as the fence.

CONCLUSION

Considering the Palestinian-Jordanian option for peace would not pose any discrimination against Palestinians living in the West Bank, nor would it compromise their human rights:

They would be welcome to move to Jordan or stay where they are if they so wished. Free will should be the determinant, not political pressure. Besides, there are indications that many would not mind living in Jordan.³⁶ Were the Palestinians to dominate Jordan, this tendency will be significantly strengthened. This possibility has also recently been confirmed by a released cable from the U.S. embassy in Amman in which Palestinian political and community representatives in Jordan made clear that they would not consider the "right of return" should they secure their civil rights in Jordan.³⁷

Empowering Palestinian control of Jordan and giving Palestinians all over the world a place they can call home, could not only defuse the population and demographic problem for Palestinians in Judea and Samaria but would also solve the much more complicated issue of the "right of return" for Pal-

estinians in other Arab countries. Approximately a million Palestinian refugees and their descendants live in Syria and Lebanon, with another 300,000 in Jordan whom the Hashemite government still refuses to accept as citizens. How much better could their future look if there were a welcoming Palestinian Jordan?

The Jordanian option seems the best possible and most viable solution to date. Decades of peace talks and billions of dollars invested by the international community have only brought more pain and suffering for both Palestinians and Israelis—alongside prosperity and wealth for the Hashemites and their cronies.

It is time for the international community to adopt a more logical and less costly solution rather than to persist in long discredited misconceptions. It is historically perplexing that the

There are indications that many West Bank Palestinians would not mind living in Jordan.

34 Mitchell Bard, "Modern Jordan," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed Aug. 11, 2011.

35 *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), Jan. 30, 2003.

36 *The Forward* (New York), Apr. 13, 2007.

37 "The Right of Return: What It Means in Jordan," U.S. Embassy, Amman, to Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., Feb. 6, 2008.

world should be reluctant to ask the Hashemites to leave Jordan, a country to which they are alien, while at the same time demanding that Israeli families be removed by force from decades-old communities in their ancestral homeland. Equally frustrating is the world's silence while Palestinians seeking refuge from fighting in Iraq are locked in desert camps in eastern Jordan because the regime refuses to settle them "unless foreign aid is provided."³⁸

The question that needs to be answered at this point is: Has the West ever attempted to establish any contacts with a pro-peace, Palestinian-Jordanian opposition? Palestinians today yearn for leaders. Washington is presented with a historical opportunity to support a potential Palestinian leadership that believes in a peace-based, two-state solution with the River Jordan as the separating border between the two countries. Such leadership does seem to exist. Last

September, for example, local leaders in Jordanian refugee camps stopped Palestinian youth from participating in mass protests against the Israeli Embassy in Amman;³⁹ as a result, barely 200 protesters showed up instead of thousands as in similar, previous protests.⁴⁰ As for East Jerusalem, under Israel's 44-year rule, Muslims, Christians, and members of all other religions have been able to visit and practice their faith freely, just as billions of people from all over the world visit the Vatican or Muslim pilgrims flock to Mecca. Yet under the Hashemite occupation of the city, this was not done. Without claiming citizenship, Jerusalem would remain an open city to all who come to visit.

The Jordanian option is an overdue solution: A moderate, peaceful, economically thriving, Palestinian home in Jordan would allow both Israelis and Palestinians to see a true and lasting peace.



38 "Non-Iraqi Refugees from Iraq in Jordan," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Feb. 20, 2007.

39 Mudar Zahran, "A Plan B for Jordan?" Hudson Institute, Washington, D.C., Sept. 16, 2011.

40 *The Washington Post*, Sept. 15, 2011.

Women Only on Shari'a-observant Railroad

From *Railway Magazine* (Aug. 2001): Women-Only Metro Opens. When King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia opened the Princess Nora Bint Abdul Rahman University campus in Riyadh on May 15, he rode on the driverless 11.5 km light metro that runs within the campus. A fleet of 22 two-car EMUs from Ansaldo Breda operate on the line, which has 14 stations with a main loop plus two branches.

As this is a women-only university, and because Saudi Arabia does not allow women to work as drivers or permit female students to contact male train staff, the metro has been built as a women-only system with full automatic operation. Travel is free, but tickets will be used to count ridership.

HaRakevet, Sept. 2011

What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy?

by Svante E. Cornell

Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) was reelected to a third term in June 2011. This remarkable achievement was mainly the result of the opposition's weakness and the rapid economic growth that has made Turkey the world's sixteenth largest economy. But Ankara's growing international profile also played a role in the continued public support for the conservative, Islamist party. Indeed, in a highly unusual fashion, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan began his victory speech by saluting "friendly and brotherly nations from Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, Amman, Cairo, Sarajevo, Baku, and Nicosia."¹ "The Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans have won as much as Turkey," he claimed, pledging to take on an even greater role in regional and international affairs. By 2023, the republic's centennial, the AKP has promised Turkey will be among the world's ten leading powers.

At the same time, Turkey's growing profile has been controversial. As Ankara developed increasingly warm ties with rogue states such as Iran, Syria, and Sudan while curtailing its once cordial relations with Israel and using stronger rhetoric against the United States and Europe, it generated often heated debates on whether it has distanced itself from the West. Turkey continues to function within the European security infrastructure although more uneasily than before, but has a rupture with the West already taken place, and if so, is it irreversible?

AKP CHANGES FOCUS FROM WEST TO EAST

The basic tenets that guided Turkey's foreign policy since the founding of the republic included caution and pragmatism—especially concerning the Middle East. An imperial hang-

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¹ *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), June 13, 2011.

over from the Ottoman era drove home the lesson that Ankara had little to gain and much to lose from interjecting itself into the acrimonious politics of the region. Notwithstanding occasional differences with the Western powers, Ankara concentrated on playing a role within Europe.

The AKP appeared to maintain this course during its first term (2002-07) as seen in its focus on EU harmonization as a means to join the union. But in its second term (2007-11) it departed significantly from this approach. Guided by the concept of “strategic depth” elaborated by Erdoğan’s long-term advisor-turned-foreign-minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Ankara increasingly focused on its neighborhood with the stated goal of becoming a dominant and stabilizing force, one that would function as an honest broker and project its economic clout throughout the region and beyond.²

The official slogan, which could be called the Davutoğlu doctrine, was “zero problems with neighbors.” Ankara rapidly developed relations

with the Syrian government to the level of a strategic partnership; Turkish officials also began cultivating closer economic and political ties with the Iranian and Russian governments, both large energy providers to the growing Turkish economy. It also reached

out to the Kurdish administration of northern Iraq, a previously unthinkable move. In another bold but ultimately failed move, the AKP leadership sought to mend fences with Armenia; its predecessors had never established diplomatic relations with Yerevan due to its occupation since the early 1990s of a sixth of Turkic Azerbaijan’s territory, including the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh.

These moves were generally welcomed in the West. Critics in Washington deplored Ankara’s overtures to Tehran and Damascus, but the in-

coming Obama administration went on to develop rather similar outreach policies of its own. The AKP argued that it could function as an interlocutor with these regimes on Turkey’s border with which Brussels and Washington had only limited ties and that a more active Turkey would also benefit the West. Ankara’s eagerness to mediate in regional conflicts also brought goodwill. The Turkish government offered its good offices in bridging differences between Syria and Israel, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and between the rival Palestinian factions of Fatah and Hamas. Western leaders generally gave the AKP the benefit of the doubt as it assured them that its outreach could help moderate rogues and bring them within the international system.

AN AXIS SHIFT

Yet Ankara’s actual course soon began to deviate substantially from its official narrative. Three issues in particular have generated concern about the AKP’s foreign policy intentions: Iran, Israel, and Sudan—and more recently, renewed belligerence on Cyprus.

Ankara’s policy of engagement with Tehran was welcomed as long as it was influencing the Iranians, rather than the other way around. But Erdoğan and his associates soon began to move away from the stated objective of acting as a mediator between Iran and the West, becoming increasingly outspoken defenders of Tehran’s nuclear program. In November 2008, Erdoğan urged nuclear weapons powers to abolish their own arsenals before meddling with Iran.³ Soon afterwards he termed Ahmadinejad a “friend”⁴ and was among the first to lend legitimacy to the Iranian president by congratulating him upon his fraudulent and bloodstained election in June 2009.⁵ Turkish leaders then began to publicly juxtapose the issue of Israel’s nuclear weapons with

Ankara became the chief castigator of Israel in international forums.

2 See, for example, Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

3 *Hürriyet*, Nov. 17, 2008; *The Economist* (London), Nov. 27, 2008.

4 *The Guardian* (London), Oct. 26, 2009; *Sofia* (Bulgaria) *Echo*, Oct. 26, 2009.

5 Svante E. Cornell, “Iranian Crisis Catches the Turkish Government off Guard,” *Turkey Analyst*, June 19, 2009; *Hürriyet*, Feb. 2, 2010.

Iran's covert program,⁶ and in November 2009, abstained from a sanctions resolution at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) against Tehran that both Moscow and Beijing supported.⁷ In May 2010, in a display of defiance, Erdoğan and Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva made a well-publicized appearance in Tehran on the eve of a U.N. Security Council vote on a new round of sanctions on Iran, holding hands with Ahmadinejad and announcing their alternative diplomatic proposal to handle the Iranian nuclear

issue.⁸ In the scope of two years, Ankara had become Tehran's most valuable international supporter.

The breakdown of Turkey's alliance with Israel is another cause of concern. The AKP at first sought to mediate between Syria and Israel as well as between the two Palestinian factions, Fatah and the Islamist Hamas.⁹ Yet in 2007, following Hamas's violent takeover in the Gaza Strip, Ankara broke the Western boycott of the movement when it invited Hamas leader Khaled Mesh'al to Ankara.¹⁰ Following Israel's offensive against Hamas in December 2008-January 2009, Ankara became the chief castigator of Israel in international forums.¹¹ In January 2009, Erdoğan famously walked out of an event at the Davos World Economic Forum after starting a shouting match with Israeli president Shimon Peres; Tur-



In a scene that would have been unimaginable a decade ago, the head-scarved wife of newly reelected Turkish prime minister Erdoğan greets well-wishers with her husband. Turkey's founder Kemal Atatürk saw such public displays of religiosity as a hindrance to the creation of the new, secular Turkish Republic.

key subsequently disinvited Israel from planned joint military exercises under the NATO aegis.¹² By the spring of 2010, a nongovernmental organization closely connected to the AKP, the Humanitarian Relief Foundation, designed and implemented the notorious Gaza flotilla¹³ aimed at putting Israel in an untenable position regarding its blockade of the Hamas-controlled territory. When eight Turkish citizens were killed in fierce clashes with Israeli commandos boarding the ship, Davutoğlu called the event "Turkey's 9/11,"¹⁴ and a series of Turkish leaders threatened to cut off diplomatic relations with Israel while Erdoğan stated in no uncertain terms that he did not consider Hamas a terrorist organization.¹⁵ Ankara later downgraded diplomatic relations with Israel to the level of second secretary.

More worrisome is Erdoğan's military posturing, including threats of confrontation with Israel. In September 2011, he argued that Turkey would have been justified in going to war with

6 *Middle East Online* (London), Mar. 17, 2010; *The Wall Street Journal*, Apr. 8, 2010.

7 Reuters, Nov. 27, 2009.

8 *The Economist*, May 17, 2010.

9 *The New York Times*, May 21, 2008; *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), June 30, 2009; Reuters, June 10, 2010.

10 *Khaleej Times* (Dubai), Feb. 19, 2006.

11 *Ha'aretz*, Jan. 13, 2009; *Eurasianet* (New York), Feb. 4, 2009; *The Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 13, 2009.

12 *Hürriyet*, Oct. 11, 2009.

13 *The Jerusalem Post*, June 24, 2011; Michael Weiss, "Ankara's Proxy," *Standpoint*, July/Aug. 2010.

14 *The Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 6, 2010.

15 *Radikal* (Istanbul), June 4, 2010; *The Jerusalem Post*, June 4, 2010.



Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (left) consults with long-term advisor-turned-foreign-minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Davutoğlu has written extensively about the conflict between Islam and the West, encouraging the emergence of Islamic states.

Israel following the Gaza flotilla incident.¹⁶ In addition, the Turkish navy was ordered to “ensure freedom of navigation” in the eastern Mediterranean, including supporting the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza—raising the danger of a direct confrontation with the Israeli navy upholding the blockade on Gaza, which a U.N. inquiry commission has deemed to be legal.¹⁷ Moreover, the Turkish air force has begun installing a new identification friend or foe (IFF) system on its F-16s, replacing the built-in system that automatically designated Israeli jets or ships as friendly thereby preventing armed clashes between the Turkish and Israeli forces. The new system produced by the Turkish company Aselsan does not automatically designate Israeli ships or jets as friendly and will supposedly be deployed across the Turkish armed forces.¹⁸

Ankara has repeatedly referred to Sudan as

its main “partner in Africa” though it is far from being Turkey’s largest trade partner on the continent.¹⁹ Ignoring the growing international outrage over crimes against humanity committed by Khartoum-aligned militia groups in Darfur, Erdoğan voiced support for President Omar Bashir during a 2006 visit, stating he saw no signs of a genocide.²⁰ The Sudanese president was invited twice to Turkey in 2008, and by 2009, Erdoğan publicly argued that Israel’s actions in Gaza were worse than whatever had happened in Darfur²¹—a mind-boggling assertion given that the Gaza fighting claimed about 1,200 lives, an estimated 700 of whom were Hamas terrorists²² while in Darfur over 300,000 people have perished. The progression of Turkish policies in all three cases suggests a move from an honest broker and regional peacemaker toward siding with one of the parties involved—the Arabs in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Hamas in the Hamas-Fatah relations,

and Iran and Sudan in their confrontations with the West.

Early in its tenure, the AKP proved willing to agree to far-reaching concessions on the Cyprus dispute—so much so that it provoked the ire of the Turkish general staff. But lately, Erdoğan has reacted harshly to the Cypriot government’s decision to develop natural gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean, threatening to send in the Turkish navy and air force to the area to “monitor developments.”²³ In so doing, Erdoğan seemed oblivious to the implications that a military dispute with an EU member would have on Turkey’s relations with Brussels.

The distancing from the West has led An-

16 *The Telegraph* (London), Sept. 13, 2011.

17 *The New York Times*, Sept. 1, 2011; *Today’s Zaman* (Istanbul), Sept. 12, 2011.

18 *Today’s Zaman*, Sept. 13, 2011.

19 *Eurasia Daily Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation, Washington, D.C.), Jan. 15, 2008.

20 *Milliyet* (Istanbul), Mar. 30, 2006.

21 *Today’s Zaman*, Nov. 9, 2009.

22 “The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre’s Response to the Goldstone Report,” Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre, Gelliot, Israel, Apr. 4, 2011.

23 *The New York Times*, Sept. 19, 2011.

kara closer to both Moscow and Beijing—culminating in Turkey’s joint military maneuvers with China in October 2010, the first such with any NATO country—in what has been described by AKP critics as an “axis shift.”

A CENTER OF WORLD POLITICS?

A number of factors have been cited to explain the shift in Turkish foreign policy. While Ankara has undergone tremendous domestic change in the past decade, an arguably more significant shift is Turkey’s emergence as an economic power. Since 1990, Turkey’s gross domestic product has quadrupled, exports have grown by a factor of five, foreign direct investment by a factor of 25, and the value of traded stocks by a factor of 40. While economists have increasingly begun to issue warning flags regarding Turkey’s current accounts deficit and risks of overheating, such concerns have yet to translate into the political field. It is only natural that Turkey’s newly found economic clout would translate into more self-confidence on the international scene. Ankara’s “rediscovery” of the Middle East is part and parcel of this: Turkish exports are looking for new markets, and hordes of businessmen regularly accompany Turkish leaders on their numerous visits to Middle Eastern states. Given the close ties between politics and business in the region, closer political ties provide Turkish businessmen with preferential treatment. In Kurdish-dominated northern Iraq, the dynamic is inverted: The growing presence of Turkish businesses there after 2003 helped open the way for a political rapprochement with the Kurdish Regional Government in Erbil.

Secondly, alleged Western mistakes are often viewed as an important factor in this transformation—including the view of former U.S. secretary of defense Robert Gates who blamed the EU’s cold shouldering of Turkey for the country’s “drift.”²⁴ While Ankara sided with

Western states in major foreign policy issues in the past, this relationship was based on perceived reciprocity. However, since Turkey began negotiating for EU accession in 2005, opposition to Turkish membership not only grew in Europe but became ever more clearly articulated in terms of Ankara’s cultural identity: Was Turkey in fact European at all? Overt calls by French and German politicians against Turkish accession had a profound impact in Ankara where politicians of all stripes denounced this stance. Most Turks now believe that Ankara will never join the EU, and internal support for membership has dwindled. Europe’s alienation from Turkey has clearly had foreign policy implications.

Meanwhile, ties with Washington suffered primarily as a result of differences over Iraq. Turkey’s involvement was crucial to the 1991 Kuwait war, but Ankara was left dissatisfied by the war’s outcome—chiefly due to the significant damage to Turkey’s economy that Washington did little to soften, and the emergence of a de facto independent Kurdish entity in northern Iraq. The events since 2003 saw a rapid deterioration of relations as the war in Iraq indirectly led to the resurgence of Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers’ Party, PKK) terrorism in Turkey. Until 2007, the U.S. administration failed either to exercise sufficient influence on its Kurdish allies in northern Iraq to rein in the PKK or to allow Turkey to raid PKK bases inside Iraq.²⁵ This generated substantial resentment across Turkey’s political spectrum.

To be sure, some of the differences that have arisen with the West may well be attributed to Ankara’s resurgent self-confidence, or what one observer termed “Turkish Gaullism”—a Turkey that is “more nationalist, self-confident and defi-

There is a growing tendency in Turkey’s policies to side with Islamist causes.

24 BBC News Europe, June 9, 2010.

25 Gareth Jenkins, *Turkey and Northern Iraq: An Overview* (Washington: Jamestown Foundation, 2008), pp. 15–20.

ant.”²⁶ The new self-confidence is explicit: Foreign Minister Davutoğlu often laments the trepidation and lack of self-confidence of previous governments, implying that a Turkey at ease with its identity and history can play a great role in the region and beyond—one that is not locked into the one-dimensional focus on Western alliances but rather appreciates the “strategic depth” that Turkey had in the former Ottoman lands. In a 2009 speech in Sarajevo, Davutoğlu laid out Ankara’s ambition: “We will reintegrate the Balkan region, Middle East and Caucasus ... together with Turkey as the center of world politics in the future.”²⁷

THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY

Much as the AKP rejects any definition of itself as “Islamist” because it rejects the term as such,²⁸ it equally opposes the idea that its foreign policy is ideologically grounded, or that it is distancing itself from the West at all. In a 2010

interview, for example, President Abdullah Gül rejected any notion that Ankara had turned its back on the West. Turkey “was now a big economic power that had embraced democracy, human rights, and the free market.” It had become a “source of inspiration” in the region, he said. “The U.S. and Europe should welcome its growing engagement in the Middle East be-

cause it [is] promoting Western values in a region largely governed by authoritarian regimes.”²⁹

The AKP’s consolidation of power has been followed by a growth of authoritarian tendencies and a distancing from the West.

Such assertions notwithstanding, the growing tendency of Turkey’s policies to go from mediating to taking sides—and to consistently side with Islamist causes—underscores the question of whether ideological factors are indeed at play.

The question is particularly relevant given the AKP’s roots in a strongly ideological milieu: the Turkish Islamism of the Milli Görüş school, dominated by the orthodox Naqshbandiyya order.³⁰ The Naqshbandiyya has been the hotbed of Islamist reaction to westernizing reforms since the mid-nineteenth century, thus predating the creation of the republic. The Milli Görüş movement was its political vehicle, which mushroomed at first in Germany among expatriate Turks before becoming a force in Turkish politics in the late 1960s. During a brief stint in power from 1996-97, leading figures in the Turkish Islamist movement had called for the introduction of Shari‘a and pursued a foreign policy that sought to distance Turkey from the “imperialist” West.³¹ The founders of the AKP publicly broke with that movement in 2001 in the aftermath of the military’s shutting down the main Islamist Fazilet party. The “young reformers” led by Gül and Erdoğan openly repudiated Islamism, emphasized their commitment to democracy, cultivated an alliance with the Turkish liberal elite, and sought to have the new party accepted as a mainstream conservative force by performing an 180-degree turn in embracing both the market economy and Turkey’s EU membership aspirations.³²

This ideological transformation was quite

30 See, for example, Birol Yesilada, “The Refah Party Phenomenon in Turkey,” in Birol Yesilada, ed., *Comparative Political Parties and Party Elites* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 123-50; Itzhak Weissmann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 152-6; Svante E. Cornell and Ingvar Svanberg, “Turkey,” in Dawid Westerlund and Ingvar Svanberg, eds., *Islam outside the Arab World* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), pp. 125-48.

31 Banu Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chap. 3; Birol Yesilada, “The Virtue Party,” in Barry M. Rubin and Metin Heper, eds., *Political Parties in Turkey* (London: Frank Cass, 2002); Gareth H. Jenkins, “Muslim Democrats in Turkey,” *Survival*, Spring 2003, pp. 45-66.

32 William Hale, “Christian Democracy and the AKP: Parallels and Contrasts,” *Turkish Studies*, June 2006, pp. 293-310; Sultan Tepe, “Turkey’s AKP: A Model ‘Muslim-Democratic’ Party?” *Journal of Democracy*, July 2005, pp. 69-82.

26 Ömer Taspınar, “The Rise of Turkish Gaullism: Getting Turkish-American Relations Right,” *Insight Turkey*, Jan.-Mar. 2011.

27 Gökhan Saz, “The Political Implications of the European Integration of Turkey: Political Scenarios and Major Stumbling Blocks,” *European Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 1, 2011.

28 Daniel Pipes, “Erdoğan: Turkey Is Not a Country Where Moderate Islam Prevails,” DanielPipes.org, updated Apr. 12, 2009.

29 *The Times* (London), July 3, 2010.

abrupt and top-down but while the AKP largely stayed true to such democratic rhetoric during its first term in office, it is striking to what extent its consolidation of power since 2007 has been followed by a growth of authoritarian tendencies at home and a distancing from the West in foreign policy.

Statements suggestive of reassertion of Islamist ideology are plentiful. Addressing a crowd of 16,000 Turks in the German city of Cologne in 2008, Erdoğan equated the assimilation of Turks, urged by German politicians, to “a crime against humanity.”³³ In reference to Sudanese leader Bashir, he stated in 2009 that “a Muslim cannot commit genocide.”³⁴ At the same time, the prime minister’s statements on Israel show not only a growing antipathy toward the Jewish state but are strikingly evocative of the anti-

Semitic tendencies pervading Islamist movements across the world. Thus, in 2009 he blamed “Jewish-backed media” for allegedly spreading lies about the Gaza war. Similarly, when the *Economist* endorsed the Turkish opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) in the June 2011 elections, Erdoğan accused it of working on behalf of Israeli interests, castigated the CHP’s leader for being an Israeli tool, and expressed regret over the fact that the CHP, under Turkey’s second president İsmet İnönü, had recognized the State of Israel,³⁵ alluding also to a growing perception “equating the star of Zion with the swastika.”³⁶

Many of Erdoğan’s most combative statements have occurred during electoral campaigns and could be interpreted as electoral populism. Nevertheless, given his dominance of the Turk-

Photo will not display.

Turkish protesters burn an Israeli flag. Erdoğan’s antipathy toward the Jewish state is strongly evocative of the anti-Semitic tendencies pervading Islamist movements across the world. In the June 2011 elections, he accused his chief opponent of being an Israeli tool and denounced Turkey’s recognition of the State of Israel, speaking of a growing perception “equating the star of Zion with the swastika.”

ish political scene, these stated views should not be dismissed out of hand. Indeed, the formulation and conduct of Turkish foreign policy has in the past several years been dominated by Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, who is widely considered the architect of the AKP’s foreign policy and a major influence on Erdoğan’s views. With a long academic career preceding his ascent to political fame, Davutoğlu has left a substantial trail of published work that provides ample insights into his worldview.

AKP’S ALTERNATIVE WORLDVIEW

While Davutoğlu’s best-known work is his 2000 book *Stratejik Derinlik*³⁷ (Strategic Depth), of equal interest are his earlier works: a doctoral dissertation published in 1993 as *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western*

33 *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg), Feb. 11, 2008.

34 *Hürriyet*, Nov. 9, 2009.

35 *Ha’aretz*, Jan. 13, 2009; Reuters, June 6, 2011; *Bugün* (Istanbul), June 4, 2011.

36 Sedat Ergin, “Can the Symbols of Nazism and Judaism Be Considered Equal?” *Hürriyet*, June 22, 2010.

37 Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001.

Ankara's growing criticism of Assad led to a deterioration in Turkish-Iranian ties.

Weltanschauungs on Political Theory,³⁸ and his 1994 volume *Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World*.³⁹ These works are dense, theoretical treatises, as are several lengthy articles published in the Turkish journal *Divan* in the late

1990s. While heavy going, the main thrust of Davutoğlu's work could not be clearer: It is dominated by a deep conviction in the incompatibility of the West and the Islamic world, and by resentment of the West for its attempt to impose its values and political sys-

tem on the rest of the world.

Davutoğlu argues that the "conflicts and contrasts between Western and Islamic political thought originate mainly from their philosophical, methodological, and theoretical backgrounds rather than from mere institutional and historical differences."⁴⁰ He focuses on the ontological difference between Islam and all other civilizations—particularly the West. While most of this work is almost two decades old, Davutoğlu has continued to reiterate the same views, showing their continued relevance to his thinking. In a 2010 interview, for example, he stressed:

All religions and civilizations before Islamic civilization had established a demigod category between god and man. In fact, civilizations except the Islamic civilization always regarded god, man, and nature on the same ontological level. I named this "ontological proximity."... Islam, on the other hand, rejects ontological proximity between god, nature and man and establishes an ontological hierarchy of Allah, man, and nature.⁴¹

Davutoğlu's problem with the Western "mod-

ernist paradigm" lies in its "peripherality of revelation," that is, the distinction drawn between reason and experience, on the one hand, and revelation on the other, resulting in an "acute crisis of Western civilization."⁴² By contrast, Davutoğlu underscores the Islamic concept of *Tawhid*, "the unity of truth and the unity of life which provides a strong internal consistency" by rejecting the misconceived secular division of matters belonging to church and state.⁴³ Such a view is neither merely theological nor theoretical, and its main implication is that the Western and Islamic worlds are essentially different and that Turkey's long-standing effort to become part of the West is both impossible and undesirable. It is impossible because it goes against the country's intrinsic nature: the "failure of the Westernization-oriented intelligentsia in the Muslim countries ... demonstrates the extensive characteristic of this civilizational confrontation."⁴⁴

As far as Turkey is concerned, Davutoğlu concludes that Atatürk's republican endeavor was "an ambitious and utopian project to achieve a total civilizational change which ignored the real cultural, historical, social, and political forces in the society." Thus, "the Turkish experience in this century proved that an imposed civilizational refusal, adaptation, and change ... cannot be successful."⁴⁵ Moreover, it is undesirable, because the West is in a state of crisis. As early as 1994, he argued that capitalism and socialism were "different forms of the same philosophical background" and that "the collapse of socialism is an indication for a comprehensive civilizational crisis and transformation rather than an ultimate victory of Western capitalism."⁴⁶ Thus, the downfall of communism was not a victory of the West but the first step to the end of European domination of the world to be followed by the collapse of Western capitalism.⁴⁷

38 Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993.

39 Kuala Lumpur: Mahir Publications, 1994.

40 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms: the Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993), p. 2.

41 Kerim Balci, "Philosophical Depth: A Scholarly Talk with the Turkish Foreign Minister," *Turkish Review*, Nov. 1, 2010.

42 Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms*, p. 195; idem, *Civilizational Transformation* (Kuala Lumpur: Mahir Publications, 1994), pp. 13-4.

43 Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms*, p. 196; Michael Koplow, "Hiding in Plain Sight," *Foreign Policy*, Dec. 2, 2010.

44 Davutoğlu, *Civilizational Transformation*, p. 64.

45 Ibid., pp. 107-8.

46 Ibid., p. 64.

Davutoğlu approvingly characterizes the emergence of the Islamic state as a response to the imposition of Western nation-states on the world but takes the argument one step further: Viewing globalization as a challenge to the nation-state system, he suggests that “the core issue for Islamic polity seems to be to reinterpret its political tradition and theory as an alternative world-system rather than merely as a program for the Islamization of nation-states.”⁴⁸

Indeed, Davutoğlu’s worldview has important consequences for how recent, key world events are interpreted in Ankara. For example, since the 2008 financial crisis has affected the West much more severely than emerging economies, it could easily be taken as evidence of the supposed “acute crisis of the West” that Davutoğlu wrote about twenty years ago, vindicating his view of Western civilization in decline.

Not only do Davutoğlu’s writings and Erdoğan’s statements dovetail, they also demonstrate the power of ideology that lies behind some of Turkey’s most controversial foreign policy stances. Indeed, the tendency of the AKP government to side increasingly with Islamist causes, its growing attention to non-Western powers combined with its increasing criticism of the West, can be fully understood only if the ideological background of Turkey’s top decision-makers is taken into account. This is not to say that the other factors previously cited are not useful in grasping changes in Turkish foreign policy. But it suggests that they are insufficient and that the ideological component must be factored in for a full understanding of Ankara’s evolving policies.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE ARAB UPHEAVALS

The Arab uprisings of 2011 have been challenging for Turkey, which has seemed to struggle with formulating its stance in the face of unfolding events.

Ankara was an early cheerleader for the Egyptian revolution: Erdoğan called on Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak to resign on February 2, 2011,⁴⁹ making him the first world leader to do so. This behavior was markedly different from Turkey’s reaction to the 2009 events in Iran, which otherwise bore great similarity to the Egyptian protests. In the Iranian case, far from urging Ahmadinejad to step down, Erdoğan was among the first to congratulate him on his fraudulent reelection.⁵⁰ Likewise, Davutoğlu repeatedly refused to discuss the validity of the Iranian presidential elections, promising “to respect the outcome of Iran’s political process”—in marked contrast to the decision to take sides in Egypt’s internal struggle.⁵¹ This ostensible inconsistency lay to a considerable extent in the ideological affinity of Turkish Islamism with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (and for that matter—with the Shiite Islamist regime in Tehran) and the pervasive hatred generated by the Mubarak regime within the global Islamist movement as a result of its repression of the Brotherhood and other Islamist groups.

If Ankara was unequivocal on Egypt, Libya proved more complicated. When violence in Libya escalated, the Turkish leadership refrained from taking a clear stance. In fact, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu initially opposed U.N. sanctions on the Qaddafi regime and rejected calls for a NATO operation in the developing civil war. Erdoğan, Gül, and Davutoğlu cast doubt on Western motives, referring to “hidden agendas” and the West’s thirst for oil resources.⁵² Ankara eventually relented when some of its reservations were

The AKP government may have grossly overestimated its influence in the Middle East.

49 Press TV (Tehran), Feb. 2, 2011.

50 Halil M. Karaveli and Svante E. Cornell, “Turkey and the Middle Eastern Revolts: Democracy or Islamism?” *Turkey Analyst*, Feb. 7, 2011.

51 Cornell, “Iranian Crisis Catches the Turkish Government off Guard.”

52 *World Bulletin* (Istanbul), Mar. 24, 2011.

47 Ibid., p. iii.

48 Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms*, p. 202.

Islamist movements across the Middle East have emulated the AKP's approach to gaining power through democratic means.

taken into account and later approved the NATO operation, calling for Qaddafi's resignation in April,⁵³ formally withdrawing its ambassador from Tripoli and recognizing the Transitional Council in early July.⁵⁴ Following the collapse of Qaddafi's regime, Turkey tried to maximize its influence in the country, and Erdoğan was received more warmly during his visit⁵⁵ than either French presi-

dent Nicolas Sarkozy or British prime minister David Cameron.⁵⁶

However, the deteriorating situation in Syria proved the most difficult for Ankara to handle. From a country with which Turkey almost went to war in 1998, Syria had become what one expert called "the model success story for [Turkey's] improved foreign policy."⁵⁷ A seemingly solid rapproche-

ment developed between the two countries, involving the lifting of visa regimes, economic integration, and deepened strategic relations. In particular, Erdoğan developed a close personal relationship with Bashar Assad. When Assad's violence against civilian protesters escalated over the spring and summer of 2011, Ankara took upon itself to caution the Syrian regime to exercise restraint. Despite repeated trips by Davutoğlu to Damascus, Turkish efforts appeared to yield no result. By June, Erdoğan was declaring that "we can't support Syria amidst all this,"⁵⁸ and in early August, Turkish leaders spoke of being unable to "remain indifferent to the violence" and demanded reform in Syria.⁵⁹ Later that month, Presi-

dent Gül stated that Turkey had lost confidence in Assad⁶⁰ but did not call for his resignation though it seemed only a matter of time before Ankara would be forced to take that step.

Ankara's response to the turmoil in the Middle East, thus, lends itself to several conclusions. First, it shook the policy of "zero problems with neighbors" to its core. The refugees pouring across the Turkish border, fleeing Assad's crackdown, triggered an inevitable test of the Davutoğlu doctrine. Ankara proved unable to use its clout with the Assad regime to affect any significant change. Moreover, its growing criticism of Assad led to a deterioration in Turkish-Iranian ties: Official Iranian media outlets have openly criticized Ankara's stance on Syria since June 2011, hinting that it was doing the West's bidding in the region.⁶¹ The Turkish government's decision in the fall of 2011 to accept the stationing of U.S. missile defense systems was very much linked to these new tensions with Tehran while also in all likelihood an attempt to ingratiate itself with Washington and reduce the impact of its increasingly harsh anti-Israeli policies.

Davutoğlu's "zero problem with neighbors" policy was always predicated on the unrealistic assumption that none of Turkey's neighbors had any interests or intentions that ran counter to those of Ankara while neglecting the difference between the regimes and peoples of Turkey's neighbors. Likewise, the alienation of Israel was based on the equally unrealistic assumption that Turkey would never need the friendship of either Israel or its allies in Washington. But mostly, perhaps, these policies have been based on the notion that the United States and the West need Turkey more than Turkey needs the West. This might make sense if Ankara is growing economically while the West is in the throes of crisis, but it might well prove a dangerous assumption given the risk that Turkey's economy could enter a crisis of its own in the not too distant future.

A second conclusion is that the AKP government had grossly overestimated its influence

53 Al-Arabiya (Dubai), May 3, 2011.

54 Al-Jazeera TV (Doha), July 3, 2011.

55 Bahrain News Agency, Sept. 14, 2011.

56 *The Guardian*, Sept. 15, 2011.

57 Henri J. Barkey, "Assad Stands Alone," *The National Interest*, June 14, 2011.

58 *Today's Zaman*, June 10, 2011.

59 *The Turkish Daily News* (Ankara), Aug. 1, 2011.

60 *The New York Times*, Aug. 28, 2011.

61 Sobh'eh Sadegh, quoted in Burak Bekdil, "Zero Problems, a Hundred Troubles," *Hürriyet*, Aug. 9, 2011.

in the Middle East. Erdoğan's hard line on Israel has indeed made him a darling of the Arab street, and the AKP government spent significant efforts building trade relations across the region. While Ankara peddled its clout in the Middle East as a key reason for the West to be supportive of its decisions, the events of 2011 suggest that at least for now its rhetoric has not been matched by actual influence. Erdoğan's visit to Egypt in September 2011, when the Muslim Brotherhood appeared unwilling to adopt his suggestion that they emulate Turkey's political system, is a case in point.⁶² This is not to say that Turkey is not a rising power, rather that the country's leadership has been unable to realistically gauge its true level of influence. Indeed, building regional influence of the type to which Turkey aspires is a process that takes place gradually and incrementally over decades and not as an immediate result of the hyperactivity of Davutoğlu's diplomacy.

Finally, Ankara's policies never squared the circle of the AKP's rhetorical embrace of democracy and human rights, on the one hand, and its focus on developing ties with the authoritarian regimes of the region on the other.⁶³ Indeed, a policy of "zero problems" essentially suggests the absence of principles or, for that matter, concrete and well-defined national interests. While some of the missteps in regard to Libya and Syria can be understood against the backdrop of Turkish overconfidence, the dramatic divergence in Ankara's attitude to the various countries in the region cannot be so easily explained. Indeed, the slack that Turkey's leadership was willing to cut Iran's Ahmadinejad or Syria's Assad, or even Libya's Qaddafi, stood in marked contrast to the vehemence with which it denounced Egypt's Mubarak.

In the fall of 2010, the author asked a former AKP minister and deputy chairman why Turkey was so much more assertive on the Gaza issue than the Arab countries. The answer was straightforward: One should not misconstrue the

Arab regimes with the Arab countries. These, he argued, are all monarchies that are doomed to collapse. When that happens, democratic forces sharing the AKP's views on these issues would seize power.⁶⁴ While the response was indeed prescient given the events that would follow, it betrayed a deep disdain for the pro-Western regimes of the Arab world as well as an expectation that Islamic movements would replace them and see Turkey as a leader or model.

Indeed, this senior official's perspective echoes Davutoğlu's worldview. It indicates an expectation of a fundamental remake of the Middle East with the demise of the pro-Western regimes. Thus far, the vision might not differ much from that of Western supporters of the wave of popular protests sweeping the Arab world. The question, of course, is what would succeed the regimes that had hitherto been safely ensconced in power for decades.

While in the early 1990s, Turkey was touted for its secularism and democracy as a model for the newly independent Muslim-majority states of the former Soviet Union, in the wake of the Egyptian revolution, Ankara was looked to as a model for a different reason: In the words of *The New York Times*, it was perceived as "a template that effectively integrates Islam, democracy, and vibrant economics."⁶⁵

Indeed, Islamist movements across the Middle East—primarily in North Africa—have emulated the AKP's approach to gaining power through democratic means. The question, however, is: Do these movements see a party that truly democratized its ideology and accepted underlying liberal democratic principles, or a party that successfully used the democratic system in

Turkey and the West will cooperate when their interests align rather than as a result of shared values.

62 *The Huffington Post*, Sept. 13, 2011.

63 M. K. Kaya and Halil M. Karaveli, "Vision or Illusion? Ahmet Davutoglu's State of Harmony in Regional Relations," *Turkey Analyst*, June 5, 2009.

64 Author interview with an AKP deputy chairman who requested anonymity, Ankara, Aug. 2010.

65 Landon Thomas, Jr., "In Turkey's Example, Some See Map for Egypt," *The New York Times*, Feb. 5, 2011.

order to achieve power without being committed to democratic values and ideals? The jury is still out on this question, but the developments in Egypt are indeed cause for concern given the Muslim Brotherhood's growing dominance over the country's political scene.

As the AKP's recent authoritarian tendencies have become increasingly acknowledged, its credibility as a force of true democratization in the Middle East has suffered concomitantly. More and more it appears that the AKP—and Turkey—has adopted a rather simplistic understanding of democracy as majority rule: In societies where the overwhelming majority are conservative Muslims, democracy will ensure that the political forces representing these conservative Muslims will be ushered into power.

CONCLUSIONS

While there is much to suggest that Turkey's role in the world is likely to grow, confidence appears to have turned into hubris. At the bureaucratic level, Turkey's state apparatus—especially the Foreign Ministry—is hardly equipped to handle the load of initiatives coming from Davutoğlu's office, and expanding the foreign policy machine can only happen gradually. Thus, many Turkish initiatives have been less than well prepared, suggesting a top-heavy approach rather than balanced and serious planning. This was true of the opening with Armenia, and similarly, Turkish leaders appeared truly surprised when the Turkish-Brazilian deal on Iran failed to prevent new sanctions against Tehran at the U.N. Security Council.

Nonetheless, Turkey is now an active and independent player in regional affairs whose clout is likely to continue to grow in coming

years. It is also a less predictable force than it used to be and one whose policies will occasionally clash with those of the West. This is, in part, a result of Turkey's economic growth, of the mistakes made by the West in alienating Ankara, and of Turkish overextension, which is in turn related to an inflated view of its newly found role in the world. But the role of ideological reflexes and grand ambitions, in particular those of Turkey's two foremost decision-makers, Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, must not be underestimated. These impulses are likely to continue to have policy consequences as Turkish leaders will interpret events from a distinctively different—and Islamically-tinged—viewpoint than their Western counterparts.

While a cause for concern, Ankara's changing foreign policy is not necessarily a cause for alarm. On many issues, Turkey is a power with which the West can work: As the Libyan operation showed, suspicions of Western motives notwithstanding, Ankara came around to join the undertaking. The reaction to the Syrian crisis and Turkish cooperation on missile defense are further examples of this possibility.

But significantly, whenever Turkey and the West will cooperate, it will be because their interests happen to align rather than as a result of shared values. Where the values of the Turkish leadership do not align with those of the West, most prominently concerning Cyprus and Israel, Turkish behavior will continue to diverge from the Ankara the West used to know. It is increasingly clear that the Turkish leadership does not consider itself Western, a worldview that will inevitably have far reaching implications for Turkey's role in the Euro-Atlantic community.



Changes in Turkey

Ankara's 'Economic Miracle' Collapses

by David P. Goldman

Turkey's high-flying economy, which expanded at a 10 percent annual rate of gross domestic product growth during the first half of 2011,¹ will crash-land in 2012. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's "economic miracle," to use the *Daily Telegraph*'s admiring words,² depended on a 40 percent annual rate of bank credit expansion, which in turn produced a balance of payments deficit as wide as that of southern Europe's crisis countries. Markets have already anticipated a sudden turnaround in the Turkish economy. The Turkish lira (TRY) fell by a quarter between November 2010 and September 2011, making it the world's worst performing emerging market currency.³ The stock market has fallen in dollar terms by 40 percent, making Turkey the worst performer after Egypt among all the markets in the MSCI Tradable Index during 2011. (See Graph 1 for Turkey vs. emerging markets, page 26.) And most analysts now expect that the cyclical slowdown will uncover deep deficiencies in Turkey's labor force and infrastructure, leading to a prolonged structural slump rather than a passing recession.

The suddenness and size of this economic setback will in most likelihood erode the ruling Justice and Development Party's (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) capacity to govern on the strength of pragmatic success rather than Islamist ideology; will undercut its ability to use economic incentives to defuse Kurdish separatism and contain domestic opposition; and will weaken Ankara's claim to a leading regional role.

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THE CREDIT BUBBLE

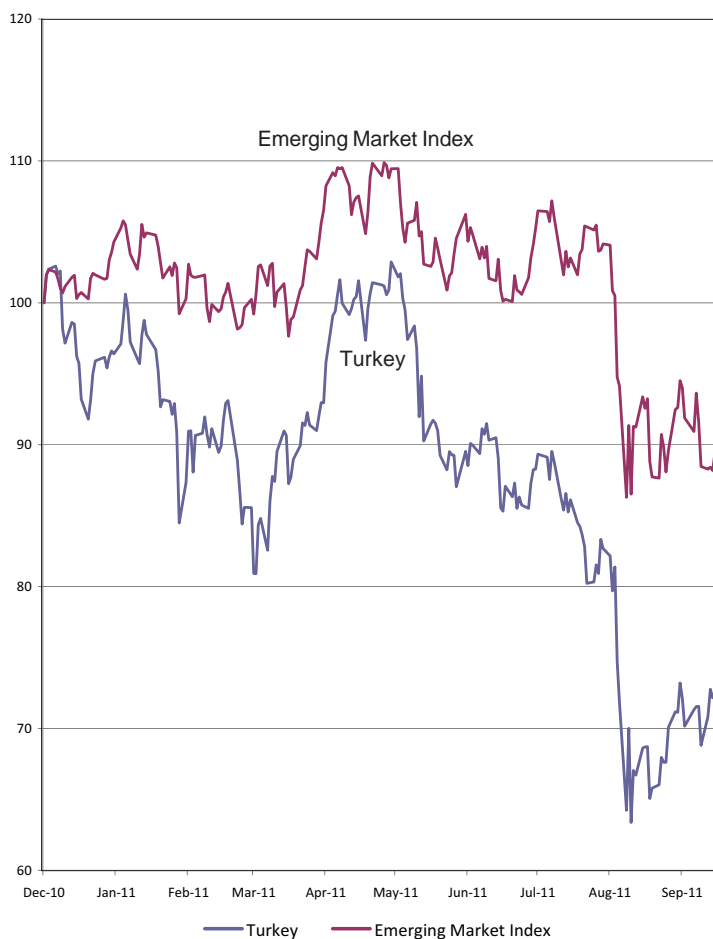
Turkey's predicament follows a well-known pattern of Third World economic crises driven by external imbalances. The impetus behind the country's recent economic growth has been a stunning rate of credit expansion, which reached 30 percent for households and 40 percent for business in 2011. By contrast, inflation-adjusted con-

1 *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 12, 2011.

2 *The Telegraph* (London), June 12, 2011.

3 *The Wall Street Journal*, June 30, 2011.

Graph 1: Turkish Stock Market vs. Emerging Market Index, Dec. 2010-Sept. 2011



Source: MSCI Indices

Bank's data base, compared to 36 percent for commercial banks. The Islamic banks have lent TRY 5 billion to consumers, about a quarter as much as the commercial banks.

In the past two years, the ratio of debt to disposable income in Turkish households rose from 35 percent to 45 percent.⁵ This growing demand was far in excess of what domestic output could satisfy. Graph 2 (see page 27) shows that the current account deficit widened accordingly as credit demand rose and the marginal dollar of consumer demand went to imports rather than domestic purchases.

As Graph 3 illustrates (see page 29), this import surge was dominated by consumer durables, which rose by 60 percent between 2003 and the middle of 2011. Imports of capital as well as intermediate goods for industry, by contrast, actually fell from the 2008 peak. Turkey, in

short, is running a current account deficit equal to 11 percent of GDP to promote a consumer buying spree while cutting imports of capital goods that would contribute to future productivity.

sumer credit growth in the United States from 1984 to 2008 peaked at just 12 percent in 1995.

The banks aligned with the AKP, that is the four Shari'a-compliant banks (or participation banks) have increased their consumer loans at a much faster rate than the conventional banks.⁴ In the year through September 16, 2011, consumer loans by the Islamic banks rose by 53 percent, according to the Central

Not only are the size and content of this current account deficit problematic, but it is shakily financed as well. Only 15 percent of it is funded by foreign direct investment. The rest comes from portfolio flows,⁶ which made their

4 One of these four banks, Bank Asya, is controlled by the Fethullah Gülen movement.

5 *Financial Times* (London), Sept. 11, 2011.

6 Jonathan Wheatley, "Turkey blows it," *ibid.*, Aug. 4, 2011.

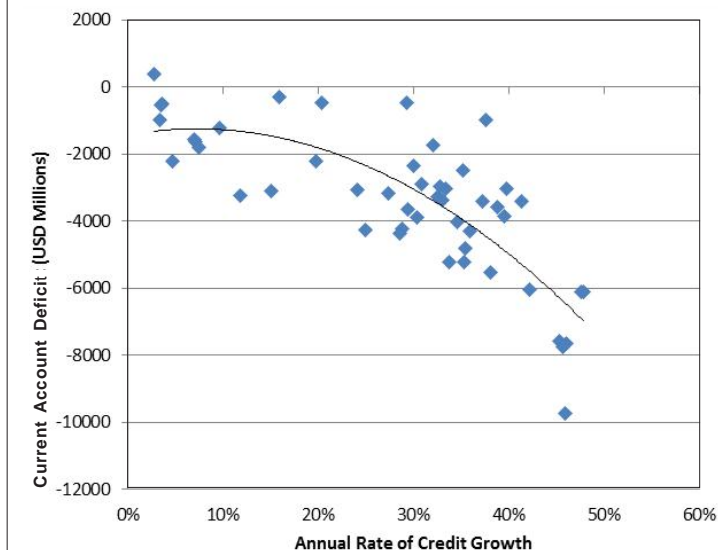
way to Turkey and other emerging markets in search of higher yields when recession hit Western economies in 2009. Short-term lira-denominated debt held by banks and hedge funds finances most of this enormous deficit. Until the end of 2010, high-yielding foreign deposits in the Turkish lira accounted for virtually all of the debt. As the country's currency began to depreciate, though, foreign investors reduced lira deposits, forcing Turkey to finance its current account deficit in dollars. The country's

overall debt levels remain low compared to the weaker European countries, but the growth rate is alarming. To correct it will require a severe retrenchment of domestic consumption. The market is worried about Italy, whose debt has an average maturity of seven years. Turkey's foreign debt has short maturities and has doubled in the last year and a half.

In some respects, Erdoğan's bubble recalls the experiences of Argentina in 2000 and Mexico in 1994 where surging external debt produced short-lived bubbles of prosperity, followed by currency devaluations and deep slumps. Both Latin American governments bought popularity by providing cheap consumer credit as did Erdoğan in the months leading up to the June 2011 national election. Argentina defaulted on its \$132 billion public debt, and its economy contracted by 10 percent in real terms in 2002. Mexico ran a current account deficit equal to 8 percent of GDP in 1993, framing the 1994 peso devaluation and a subsequent 10 percent decline in consumption.

At roughly 40 percent of GDP, Turkey's overall external debt is comparatively low—the

Graph 2: Total Credit Growth vs. Current Account Deficit, 2006 to Present



external debt of Greece stands at 137 percent of GDP while Portugal's is 217 percent of GDP—and it will have no foreseeable problems servicing it. Nevertheless, Turkey is ill prepared to recover from a major economic shock. It lacks the natural resources that have buoyed the exports of Argentina and other Latin American countries. It is a net importer of food.

Moreover, some of Turkey's most important export markets are in sharp decline. Between 2002 and 2010, the share of the country's exports taken by the Middle East and North Africa doubled to 26 percent from 13 percent. The economic decline associated with this year's instability in the Arab world will constrict Turkish exports. Although Turkey has reduced its trade dependence on Europe from 56 percent of total exports in 2005 to 46 percent in 2010, Europe's economic problems will still weigh heavily on Turkey's recovery. By contrast, Ankara exports very little to Asia or Latin America, the fastest-growing parts of the world economy.

Given its fragile export profile, Turkey's current account deficit can be forcibly narrowed only through economic contraction.⁷

A reduction of Turkey's current account deficit from 11 percent of GDP to a manageable 3 percent would require a reduction in imports equal to 8 percent of GDP. This, in turn, implies severe retrenchment of domestic consumption and, possibly, a deep recession. Turkey's central bank attempted to staunch the bleeding in the current account earlier this year by reducing interest rates.⁸ Lower interest rates depressed the Turkish lira by discouraging capital inflows. A weaker lira is intended to make Turkey's exports more competitive, but with imports running at nearly twice the level of exports, the effect is rather to force up the price of imports and increase domestic inflation as well as the current account deficit. Although the central bank raised reserve requirements with the aim of restraining credit growth, consumer credit was still expanding at a 35 percent annual rate during the three months through August 2011.

As economist Murat Üçer of Koç University recently wrote,

A serious and probably quite painful "adjustment" is inevitable in the short-term, in order to bring current account deficit to more "normal" levels. ... This can't happen with a weaker currency alone; growth will also have to slow visibly. Second, an excessive CAD level points to a structural weakness in the economy. It simply attests to our inability as a nation, to put forth enough of a presence in the global supply chain of goods and services. Put differently, it implies that our average dollar-based income—per capita as well as per worker, which runs around \$10,000 and \$30,000, respectively—is simply too high, compared to our average productivity levels. By this interpretation, the current account deficit represents nothing but a structural deficit in our skills and institutions.⁹

On October 3, 2011, Goldman Sachs equity analysts issued a sell recommendation on

Turkey's largest bank, Garanti Bakasi, warning that it is "exposed to deteriorating banking dynamics should Turkish economic growth turn to a recession, an outcome that Goldman economists are now assigning a relatively high probability."¹⁰

A DEEPER MALAISE

Turkey faces not only a sharp reversal of economic fortunes in the short term but also formidable obstacles to recovery in the medium term. The country has no natural resources with which to emulate Brazil or Russia and lacks the human capital to compete with emerging Asia. Although its universities train some excellent engineers and managers, the population as a whole is poorly educated in comparison with other middle-upper income countries. Only 26 percent of Turkish children graduate secondary school, compared to 44 percent in Mexico, 64 percent in Portugal, and 83 percent in Poland.¹¹ Low-value added products (textiles, apparel, furniture, appliances, autos) dominate its export profile. Turkish industry has never succeeded in any field of high technology.

Despite Anatolian success in medium-tech industries such as textiles and food processing, the deep backwardness of the Turkish hinterland remains a difficult hurdle. A fifth of Turkish marriages are consanguineous (to first or second cousins), about the same level as in Egypt. Traditional prejudice still prevents most Turkish women from working outside the home despite advancements in female education and a decline in fertility. Turkish women have lost ground in economic life: Only 22 percent sought employment in 2009, down from more than 34 percent in 1988. In contrast, 54 percent of South Korean women work. As smallholding agriculture shrinks, women who no longer can work on the family farm simply sit at home.¹² The col-

7 *Bloomberg Business News* (New York), Sept. 20, 2011.

8 *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 4, 2011.

9 Murat Üçer, "How Should We Read Turkey's Current Account Deficit?" Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), Istanbul, pp. 3-4.

10 *Bloomberg Business News*, Oct. 7, 2011.

11 "Education Attainment," *OECD Factbook 2010: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, May 25, 2010.

12 "Female Labor Participation in Turkey: Trends, determinants and policy framework," World Bank Report 48508-TR, 2009, Washington, D.C.

lapse in the female labor force participation rate is a striking gauge of the country's failure to modernize. Turkey's official unemployment rate stands at around 10 percent; adjusted for the underemployment of Turkish women, the unemployment rate would be above 25 percent. Roughly 43 percent of Turkish employment is off the books,¹³ compared to a developed-country average of 18 percent.¹⁴

Turkey's longer-term risks are even more daunting. A developing country cannot sustain a fertility rate that leads to a rapid increase in elderly dependents, yet the fertility rate of Turks for whom Turkish is a first language has been in steady decline over the past fifteen years, falling to only 1.5—equal to that of Europe—while its population is aging almost as fast as Iran's,¹⁵ leaving the country's social security system with a deficit of close to 5 percent of GDP. "If we continue the existing [fertility] trend, 2038 will mark disaster for us," Erdoğan warned in a May 2010 speech.¹⁶

13 *Today's Zaman* (Istanbul), May 25, 2010.

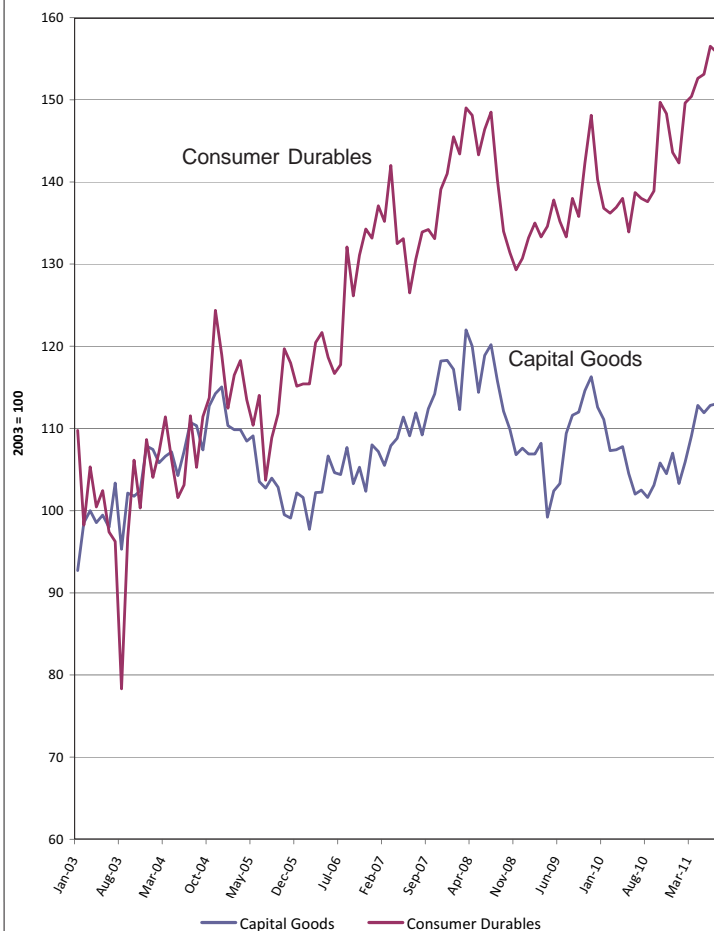
14 Abdullah Takim, "Effectiveness of the Informal Economy in Turkey," *European Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 2, 2011.

15 "Constant Fertility Scenario," *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, United Nations Population Prospects, New York, Aug. 25, 2011.

16 *Today's Zaman*, May 10, 2010.

Graph 3: Unit Value of Turkish Imports of Capital Goods and Consumer Durables

(Index 2003 = 100)



Source: Central Bank of Turkey

Erdoğan is right: Should the trend continue, the Turkish economy will collapse under the strain of caring for its dependent elderly while the country's young people will be concentrated in the Kurdish minority, fueling demands for independence from the hard hand of the Turkish state. But Erdoğan's predicament is, of course, far more immediate. His government's reluctance to encourage greater savings at home does not bode well for Turkey's future. "This heavy reliance on external savings exposes Turkey to shocks," notes Standard and Poor's, "either domestic (for example if Turkey's recent high domestic credit

Photo will not display.

The automotive sector took the largest share of Turkish exports in 2011, but some of Turkey's most important export markets are in sharp decline. Instability in the Arab world will constrict Turkish exports as will Europe's lingering economic problems. By contrast, Ankara exports very little to Asia or Latin America, the fastest-growing parts of the world economy.

growth resulted in future bad loans) or external (say, if rising risk aversion were to prompt foreign investors and bank credit officers to reduce exposure to Turkish entities).¹⁷ According to Murat Üçer, the question is whether “Turkey can manage a soft landing or whether there’ll be a correction because of external factors, which could be very ugly indeed.”¹⁸

If the prime minister and the AKP respond to the coming economic crisis by pushing Turkey further in the direction of Islamism, the consequences for the country’s economy could be grave in the extreme. According to Bilgi University professor Asaf Savas Akat, a Turkish television commentator and long-time official of the secular Social Democratic Party,

It’s important to keep in mind that Turkey is a resource-poor country ... We rely on the confidence of financial markets. ... If Turkey goes in the Iranian direction, the financial mar-

kets will shut us out. The middle class will ship their money overseas, and many of them will move overseas, like Iran’s middle class did after Khomeini’s revolution. The country will collapse.¹⁹

IMPLICATIONS

As Erdoğan’s economic miracle evaporates, his ability to govern will diminish. On the eve of the June 2011 national elections, Turks were “almost evenly divided about the current direction of their country” according to a Pew Research Center survey. Views about the economy were split down the middle with 49 percent saying that the economic situation was good and 48 percent saying that it was bad, a meager result after two quarters of blistering GDP growth. A sharp religious divide characterizes sentiment about the overall direction of the country:

67 percent of those who “pray rarely” are “dissatisfied” while 64 percent of those who pray five times a day are “satisfied.”²⁰ The country’s economic performance evidently tips the balance in favor of the AKP.

AKP Islamists face entrenched and embittered opposition after three years of mass arrests of political opponents, journalists, and military officers on flimsy charges of coup plotting. While the silent majority of Turks acquiesced in this abuse so long as the economy was booming, this is likely to change in the wake of a major economic reverse, which will in turn undercut Erdoğan’s efforts to project Turkish power abroad. “Turkey looks to punch above its weight,” the London *Financial Times* recently commented.²¹ The trouble is that it is also punching above its strength.



17 Reuters, Sept. 20, 2011.

18 Joe Parkinson, “Turkey’s Recovery on Shaky Ground?” *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 22, 2011.

19 Author interview, Istanbul, Feb. 2011.

20 “On Eve of Elections, a More Upbeat Mood in Turkey,” Pew Research Center, Global Attitudes Project, Washington, D.C., June 7, 2011.

21 Daniel Dombey, “Turkey looks to punch above its weight,” *Financial Times*, Sept. 27, 2011.

Iran's Nukes and Israel's Dilemma

by Yoaz Hendel

While the Obama administration has not reconciled itself to the futility of curbing Tehran's nuclear buildup through diplomatic means, most Israelis have given up hope that the international sanctions can dissuade the Islamic Republic from acquiring the means to murder by the millions. Israel's leadership faces a stark choice—either come to terms with a nuclear Iran or launch a preemptive military strike.

THE BEGIN DOCTRINE

When the Israeli Air Force (IAF) decimated Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor thirty years ago, drawing nearly universal condemnation, the government of prime minister Menachem Begin declared Israel's "determination to prevent confrontation states ... from gaining access to nuclear weapons." Then-defense minister Ariel Sharon explained, "Israel cannot afford the introduction of the nuclear weapon [to the Middle East]. For us, it is not a question of balance of terror but a question of survival. We shall, therefore, have to prevent such a threat at its inception"¹

This preventive counter-proliferation doctrine is rooted in both geostrategic logic and historical memory. A small country the size of New

Jersey, with most of its inhabitants concentrated in one central area, Israel is highly vulnerable to nuclear attack. Furthermore, the depth of hostility to Israel in the Muslim Middle East is such that its enemies have been highly disposed to brinkmanship and risk-taking. Given the Jewish people's long history of horrific mass victimization, most Israelis find it deeply unsettling to face the threat of annihilation again.

While the alleged 2007 bombing of Syria's al-Kibar reactor underscored Jerusalem's willingness to take military action in preventing its enemies from developing nuclear weapons, its counter-proliferation efforts have relied heavily on diplomacy and covert operations. The raid on Osirak came only after the failure of Israeli efforts to dissuade or prevent France from providing the necessary hardware. Likewise, the Israelis have reportedly been responsible for the assassinations of several Iranian nuclear scientists in recent years.² They reportedly helped create the

Yoaz Hendel, a military historian who has lectured at Bar Ilan University and written on strategic affairs for the newspaper *Yediot Aharonot*, now works in the Israeli prime minister's office. This article was written before his government service; views expressed herein are his alone.

1 Ariel Sharon, address, Government Press Office, Jerusalem, Dec. 15, 1981.

2 *The Sunday Times* (London), Feb. 4, 2007; *The Washington Post*, Nov. 29, 2010; *The Observer* (London), Dec. 5, 2010.

Stuxnet computer worm, dubbed by *The New York Times* “the most sophisticated cyber weapon ever deployed,” which caused major setbacks to Iran’s uranium enrichment program in 2009.³ However, such methods can only slow Tehran’s progress, not halt or reverse it.

THE IRANIAN THREAT

Tehran has already reached what Brig. Gen. (res.) Shlomo Brom has called the “point of irreversibility” at which time the proliferator “stops being dependent on external assistance” to produce the bomb.⁴ Most Israeli officials believe that no combination of likely external incentives or disincentives can persuade the Iranians to verifiably abandon the effort. The Iranian regime has every reason to persevere in its pursuit of the

ultimate weapon. While the world condemned North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons, it was unwilling to apply sufficient penalties to dissuade Pyongyang from building the bomb.

The regime has an impressive ballistic missile program for delivering weapons of mass destruction. The Iranians began equipping themselves with SCUD mis-

siles during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.⁵ Afterward, it turned to North Korea for both missiles and the technology to set up its own research and production facilities. Tehran has produced hundreds of Shahab-3 missiles, which have a range of nearly 1,000 miles and can carry a warhead weighing from 500 kilograms to one ton.⁶

Twenty-seven percent of Israelis said they would consider leaving the country if Tehran developed nuclear capabilities.

In 2009, Tehran successfully tested a new two-stage, solid propellant missile, the Sejil-2, which has a range of over 1,200 miles, placing parts of Europe within its reach.

There is some disagreement as to how long it will take Tehran to produce a nuclear weapon. While the government of Israel has claimed that Iran is within a year or two of this goal, in January 2011, outgoing Mossad director Meir Dagan alleged that Iran will be unable to attain it before 2015.⁷

IRANIAN INTENTIONS

Much of the debate in Israel is focused on the question of Iranian intentions. The fact that Tehran has poured staggering amounts of money, human capital, and industrial might into nuclear development—at the expense of its conventional military strength, which has many gaps, not to mention the wider Iranian economy—is by itself a troubling indicator of its priorities. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and many other leading Israeli political and security figures view the Islamic Republic as so unremittingly hostile that “everything else pales” before the threat posed by its pursuit of nuclear weapons.⁸

Proponents of this view draw upon repeated threats by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to wipe Israel off the map⁹ and Iranian support for radical Palestinian and Lebanese groups seeking its destruction. They also point to Ahmadinejad’s radical millenarian strand of Shiite Islamism.¹⁰ Shiites believe that the twelfth of a succession of imams directly descendant of the Prophet Muhammad went into hiding in the ninth century and will one day return to this world after a period of cataclysmic war to usher in an era of stability and peace.

Ahmadinejad appears to believe that this day will happen in his lifetime. In 2004, as mayor of

3 *The New York Times*, Jan. 16, 2011.

4 Shlomo Brom, “Is the Begin Doctrine Still a Viable Option for Israel?” in Henry Sokolski and Patrick Clawson, eds., *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran* (Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), p. 139.

5 Yiftah S. Shapir, “Iran’s Ballistic Missiles,” *Strategic Assessment INSS*, Aug. 2009.

6 Ibid.

7 *Ha’aretz* (Tel Aviv), Jan. 7, 2011.

8 Ibid., Nov. 14, 2006.

9 Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (Tehran), Oct. 27, 2005.

10 See Mohebat Ahdiyyih, “Ahmadinejad and the Mahdi,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2008, pp. 27-36.

Tehran, he ordered the construction of a grand avenue in the city center, supposedly to welcome the Mahdi on the day of his reappearance. As president, he allocated \$17 million for a mosque closely associated with the Mahdi in the city of Jamkaran.¹¹ Rather than seeking to reassure the world about Tehran's peaceful intentions during his 2007 address before the U.N. General Assembly, Ahmadinejad embarked on a wide-eyed discourse about the wonders of the Twelfth Imam: "There will come a time when justice will prevail across the globe ... under the rule of the perfect man, the last divine source on earth, the Mahdi."¹²

The fear in Israel is that someone who firmly believes an apocalyptic showdown between good and evil is inevitable and divinely ordained will not be easily deterred by the threat of a nuclear war. "There are new calls for the extermination of the Jewish State," Netanyahu warned during a January 2010 visit to Israel's Holocaust museum, Yad Vashem. "This is certainly our concern, but it is not only our concern."¹³ For Netanyahu, a nuclear Iran is a clear and present existential threat.

Those who dissent from this view point out that the Iranian people are not particularly hostile to Israelis; indeed, the two countries enjoyed close relations before the 1979 Iranian revolution. They argue that the Iranian regime's militant anti-Zionism is a vehicle for gaining influence in the predominantly Sunni Arab Middle East but not something that would drive its leaders to commit suicide. "I am not underestimating the significance of a nuclear Iran, but we should not give it Holocaust subtext like politicians try to do," said former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) chief of staff Dan Halutz, who commanded the Israeli military during the war in Lebanon in 2006.¹⁴

Photo will not display.

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (center) kisses the Qur'an during the inauguration of Iran's first nuclear-fuel manufacturing plant, located near Isfahan, April 9, 2009. Despite diplomatic efforts and an ever-growing sanctions regime, Iran's leadership continues to move forward in its nuclear arms program, working to ensure that both the processed materials and the delivery systems needed are developed.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak said in a widely circulated September 2009 interview that Iran was not an "existential" threat to Israel.¹⁵

The question of whether Iran is an existential danger is more rhetorical than substantive. Even if Iranian nuclear weapons are never fired, their mere existence would be a profound blow to most Israelis' sense of security. In one poll, 27 percent of Israelis said they would consider leaving the country if Tehran developed nuclear capabilities. Loss of investor confidence would damage the economy. This could spell the failure of Zionism's mission of providing a Jewish refuge as Jews will look to the Diaspora for safety.¹⁶ This is precisely why Israel's enemies salivate over the possibility of an Iranian bomb.

Even if the prospect of mutually assured destruction effectively rules out an Iranian first strike, Tehran's acquisition of nuclear weapons

11 Charles Krauthammer, "In Iran, Arming for Armageddon," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 16, 2005.

12 Islamic Republic News Agency, Sept. 26, 2007.

13 Benjamin Netanyahu, speech, Jerusalem, Jan. 25, 2010.

14 *The Jerusalem Post*, Oct. 15, 2010.

15 Reuters, Sept. 17, 2009.

16 Yossi Klein Halevi and Michael B. Oren, "Israel Cannot Live with a Nuclear Iran," *The New Republic*, Jan. 26, 2010.



The ruins of Iraq's Osirak reactor, destroyed by an Israeli air-raid in 1981, are visible reminders that led Iran's mullahs to develop a secretive, well-shielded, and diffused nuclear program in an attempt to avoid a repeat of Saddam Hussein's mistakes.

would still shift the balance of power greatly. Iran projects its power throughout the Middle East mainly by way of allies and proxies, such as Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi army in Iraq, Hamas in Gaza, the Assad regime in Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The Iranian nuclear umbrella will embolden them. The next time an Israeli soldier is abducted in a cross-border attack by Hezbollah or Hamas, Jerusalem will have to weigh the risks of a nuclear escalation before responding. There is also the possibility that Tehran could provide a nuclear device to one of its terrorist proxies.¹⁷

A successful Iranian bid to acquire the bomb will set off an unprecedented nuclear arms race throughout the region. Arab countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates will want to create their own nuclear insurance policies in the face of Tehran's belligerence and regional ambitions. Turkey has passed

a bill in its parliament paving the way for the construction of three nuclear reactors by 2020.¹⁸

Most of Israel's decision-makers believe that Israel cannot afford the risks of living with a nuclear Iran. Those who publicly differ with Netanyahu on this score seem mainly concerned that he is exploiting popular fears for political gain, but they are likely to fall in line with public opinion at the end of the day. The large majority of Israelis support a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities as a last resort, and a small majority (51 percent according to a 2009 poll) favor an immediate strike on Iran as a first resort.¹⁹

THE MILITARY OPTION

The general assessment is that the IDF has the ability to knock out some of Tehran's key nuclear facilities and set back its nuclear program by a couple of years but not completely destroy it—at least not in one strike.²⁰ Several factors make Iran's nuclear program much more difficult to incapacitate than that of Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Whereas most of Iraq's vital nuclear assets were concentrated at Osirak, "Iran's nuclear facilities are spread out," notes former IDF chief of staff Ya'alon,²¹ some of them in close proximity to population centers. The distance to targets in Iran would be considerably greater than to Osirak, and its facilities are better defended. Iran has mastered nuclear technology much more thoroughly than Iraq and can, therefore, repair much of the damage without external help.

Of the known Iranian nuclear sites, five main facilities are almost certain to be targeted in any preemptive strike. The first is the Bushehr light-water reactor, along the gulf coast of southwestern Iran. The second is the heavy-water plant

17 Chuck Freilich "The Armageddon Scenario: Israel and the Threat of Nuclear Terrorism," *BESA Center Perspectives Papers* (Ramat Gan), Apr. 8, 2010.

18 See Yoel Guzansky, "The Saudi Nuclear Option," *INSS Insight*, Institute for National Security Studies, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., Apr. 2010; John Bolton, "Get Ready for a Nuclear Iran," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 2, 2010.

19 *YNet News* (Tel Aviv), May 24, 2009.

20 Whitney Raas and Austin Long, "Osirak Redux? Assessing Israeli Capabilities to Destroy Iranian Nuclear Facilities," *International Security*, Spring 2007, pp. 7-33.

21 *Jane's Defence Weekly* (London), Mar. 10, 2006.

under construction near the town of Arak, which would be instrumental to production of plutonium. Next is the uranium conversion facility at Isfahan. Based on satellite imagery, the facility is above ground although some reports have suggested tunneling near the complex.²²

Fourth is the uranium enrichment facility at Qom, which the Iranians concealed from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) prior to September 2009 and well after major Western intelligence agencies knew about it. The facility, which can hold about 3,000 centrifuges, was built into a mountain, making it difficult to penetrate. Israeli defense minister Barak called it “immune to standard bombs.”²³

The fifth and most heavily fortified primary target is the main Iranian uranium enrichment facility in Natanz. The complex consists of two large halls, roughly 300,000 square feet each, dug somewhere between eight and twenty-three feet below ground and covered by several layers of concrete and metal. The walls of each hall are estimated to be approximately two feet thick. The facility is also surrounded by short-range, Russian-made TOR-M surface-to-air missiles.

Military planners may also feel compelled to attack Tehran’s centrifuge fabrication sites since their destruction would hamper the efforts to re-establish its nuclear program. However, it is believed that the Iranians have dispersed some centrifuges to underground sites not declared to the IAEA. It is by no means clear that Israeli intelligence has a full accounting of where they are.

The Israelis may also choose to bomb Iranian radar stations and air bases in order to knock out Tehran’s ability to defend its skies, particularly if multiple waves are required. Ya’alon estimates that Israel would need to attack a few dozen sites.²⁴

THE OPERATION

The Israeli Air Force is capable of striking the necessary targets with two to three full squad-

rons of fighter-bombers with escorts to shoot down enemy aircraft; however, most of the escorts will require refueling to strike the necessary targets in Iran.²⁵ In addition, the Israelis can make use of ballistic missiles and cruise missiles from their Dolphin-class submarines.

The IAF has carried out long-range missions in the past. In 1981, Israeli F-16s struck the Osirak reactor without midair refueling. Refueling tankers were activated for Israel’s longest-range air strike to date, the 1985 bombing of the Palestine Liberation Organization’s (PLO) headquarters in Tunis, 1,500 miles away. The IAF’s highly publicized 2009 flyover over Gibraltar was widely perceived as a dress rehearsal for a strike against Iran.²⁶ In 2009, the IAF instituted a new training regimen that included refueling planes as their engines were on and sitting on the runway with fuel nozzles disconnected seconds before takeoff.

The IAF has specialized munitions designed to penetrate fortified targets, including GBU-27 and GBU-28 laser-guided bunker buster bombs and various domestically produced ordnance. Israeli pilots are skilled at using successive missile strikes to penetrate fortifications. “Even if one bomb would not suffice to penetrate, we could guide other bombs directly to the hole created by the previous ones and eventually destroy any target,” explains former IAF commander Maj. Gen. Eitan Ben-Eliyahu, who participated in the strike on Osirak.²⁷

Israel’s advanced electronic-warfare systems are likely to be successful in suppressing Iran’s air defenses although these were significantly upgraded by Moscow during the 2000s.²⁸ Moreover, whereas thirty years ago, Israeli pilots

The majority of Israelis support a military strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities as a last resort.

22 *The New York Times*, Jan. 5, 2010.

23 *The Jerusalem Post*, Dec. 28, 2009.

24 *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, Mar. 10, 2006.

25 Raas and Long, “Osirak Redux?” pp. 7-34.

26 *Ynet News*, Mar. 5, 2009.

27 *Jane’s Defense Weekly*, Mar. 4, 2005.

28 Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Iran Attack Plan,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 25, 2009.

needed to fly directly over Osirak to drop their bombs, today they can fly at higher altitudes and launch satellite or laser-guided missiles from a safer distance. Nor are Tehran's roughly 160 operational combat aircraft, mostly antiquated U.S. and French planes, likely to pose a serious threat to Israeli pilots.

POSSIBLE ATTACK ROUTES

The main problem Jerusalem will encounter in attacking Iran's nuclear facilities results from the long distance to the main targets. Since greater

distance always means that more things can go wrong, Israeli losses and efficacy will likely depend on which of three possible routes they take to Iran.

The northern route runs along the Turkish-Syrian border into Iran

and is estimated to be about 1,300 miles. This route entails several risks and would need to take into account Syrian air defenses and Turkish opposition to violating its airspace. Israeli planes flew over Turkey when the IAF bombed al-Kibar in 2007 and even dropped fuel tanks in Turkish territory. However, the recent deterioration in relations between Ankara and Jerusalem makes it extremely unlikely that the Turkish government will allow such an intrusion.

The central route over Jordan and Iraq is the most direct, bringing the distance to Natanz from the IAF's Hatzirim air base down to about 1,000 miles, yet it entails serious diplomatic obstacles. Jerusalem would have to coordinate either with the Jordanians and the Americans or fly without forewarning. While Israel has a peace treaty with Jordan, Amman will not want to be perceived as cooperating with Israeli military action against Tehran and thus possibly face the brunt of an Iranian reprisal. Washington may not want to be involved either, as it needs Tehran's acquiescence to withdraw its forces from Iraq successfully. While Jerusalem could limit the risk of hostile fire

by notifying its two allies of the impending attack, there would be considerable diplomatic costs.

The southern route would take Israeli planes over Saudi Arabia and then into Iran. While this is longer than the central route, there have been reports that the Saudis have given Jerusalem permission to use their airspace for such an operation.²⁹

The difficulties also depend on the precise goal of the air strike. A short-term, financially costly degradation of Iran's nuclear program can be achieved in one wave of attacks, but Israeli defense analysts have estimated that a decisive blow could require hitting as many as sixty different targets with return sorties lasting up to two days.

Estimates in Israel vary regarding the losses the IAF might suffer in such an operation.³⁰ Some estimates claim that with their advanced, Russian-supplied air defense systems, the Iranians might be able to shoot down a small number of aircraft. But even just a few pilots shot down and captured by Iran would be a heart-wrenching tragedy for Israelis. To prepare for this, in 2009 the IAF began increasing mental training for its airmen with an emphasis on survival skills.

Many former, high-ranking generals and intelligence chiefs have cast doubt on whether Jerusalem can succeed in decisively setting back Tehran's nuclear program. Addressing an audience at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in May 2011, Meir Dagan said that the idea of attacking Iranian nuclear sites was "the stupidest thing" he had ever heard and that such an attempt would have a near-zero chance of success.³¹

THE FALLOUT

The strategic fallout from an Israeli attack will likely be significant. Hezbollah will probably initiate hostilities across the Lebanese-Israeli border. During the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, the Shiite Islamist group fired more than 4,000 rockets into Israel, causing extensive damage and killing forty-

Some argue that the best hope for countering the threat of Iranian nuclear weapons is regime change.

29 *The Sunday Times*, June 12, 2010.

30 Brom, "Is the Begin Doctrine Still a Viable Option for Israel?" pp. 148-9.

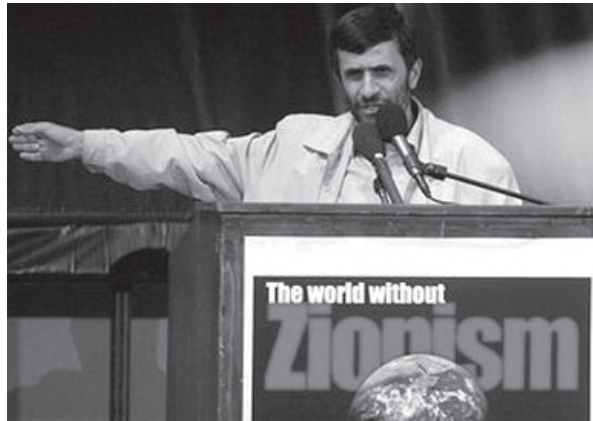
31 *Ha'aretz*, May 7, 2011; *The Jewish Daily Forward* (New York), May 20, 2011.

four civilians.³² Today, its arsenal is considerably larger and includes many more rockets capable of reaching Tel Aviv. Dagan estimates that the Iranians can fire missiles at Israel for a period of months, and that Hezbollah can fire tens of thousands of rockets.³³ Hamas may also attack Israel with rockets from Gaza. It is not inconceivable that Syrian president Bashar Assad would join the fight, if still in power, in hope of diverting public anger away from his regime.

Iran has also developed an extensive overseas terrorist network, cultivated in conjunction with Hezbollah. This network was responsible for two car bombings against the Jewish community in Argentina that left 114 people dead in the early 1990s.³⁴

Last year, Israel distributed gas masks to prepare for the possibility that Iran or Syria would deploy chemical or biological weapons³⁵ while the IDF's Home Front Command received an increased budget to prepare bomb shelters and teach the public what to do in case of emergency.³⁶ C4I systems were improved between early-warning missile detection systems and air sirens, including specially designed radars that can accurately predict the exact landing site of incoming missiles. Since no one is certain how accurate Iran's Shahab and Sajil missiles are, Jerusalem began strengthening defenses at its Dimona nuclear reactor in 2008.³⁷

Jerusalem will not sit back and allow its citizens to be bombed mercilessly. Since Lebanon will probably be the main platform of any major



Ahmadinejad delivers his "Wipe Israel from the map" speech at Tehran's The World without Zionism conference, October 26, 2005. Iran's genocidal intentions have been repeatedly spelled out by current and former leaders in Tehran, and it is wise for the Israeli leadership to take the rhetoric—combined as it is with the hard facts of Iran's nuclear subterfuge—seriously.

Iranian attack, Israeli retaliation there is sure to be swift and expansive. Should Syria offer up any form of direct participation in the war, it too may come under Israeli attack. The Israelis may go so far as to bomb Iran's oil fields and energy infrastructure. Since oil receipts provide at least 75 percent of the Iranian regime's income and at least 80 percent of export revenues, the political shock of losing this income could lead the regime to rethink its nuclear stance, as well as erode its public support and make it more difficult to finance the repair of damaged nuclear facilities.³⁸

On the other hand, Tehran may double down by sending its own ground troops to Lebanon or Syria to join the fight against Israel. This could draw in the Persian Gulf Arab monarchies, particularly if the Alawite-led Assad regime is still facing active opposition from its majority Sunni population.

How long such a war will last is impossible to predict. Israel's defense doctrine calls for short

32 *Fox News*, Mar. 27, 2008; *The Guardian* (London), Apr. 11, 2011.

33 *Ha'aretz*, May 7, 2011.

34 *BBC News*, Mar. 27, 2011.

35 *Ha'aretz*, May 1, 2010.

36 *Ha'aretz*, June 17, 2009; "Israeli Civilians Prepare for Life-Threatening Scenarios," Israel Defense Forces Spokesperson's Unit, June 22, 2011.

37 *Pakistan Daily* (Lahore), Oct. 3, 2008.

38 Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt, "The Last Resort," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., June 2008.

wars, so it will likely launch a diplomatic campaign with Western backing to end the war as soon as possible. However, the Iranians may hunker down for the long haul, much as they did during the 8-year Iran-Iraq war.³⁹

If a military solution cannot guarantee success at an acceptable price, some in Israel argue that the best hope for countering the threat posed by Iranian nuclear weapons is regime change. “The nuclear matter will resolve itself once there is a regime change,” says Uri Lubrani, Israel’s former ambassador to Iran and a senior advisor to the Israeli defense minister until last year. According to Lubrani, the highest priority for Israel and the West should be to strengthen the Iranian masses that rose up in protest following the fraudulent June 2009 elections.⁴⁰

“A military strike will at best delay Iran’s nuclear program, but what’s worse, it will rally the Iranian people to the defense of the regime,” says Lubrani. He argues that it is better to let sanctions eat away at the regime’s legitimacy even if they do not lead to a stand down on its nuclear program.⁴¹

However, it is not clear whether Lubrani is correct in his assessment that war will benefit the regime. While most Iranians are generally supportive of their country’s nuclear ambitions, devastating Israeli air strikes may drive home the folly of their government’s reckless provocations just as they did during the later stages of the Iran-Iraq war. It is unlikely that many are willing to sacrifice their country’s well-being in pursuit of the bomb.

Whether an Israeli attack will unite the public for or against President Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ali Khamene’i is anyone’s guess. Much will depend on whether the air strikes produce significant collateral damage. The Bushehr,

Isfahan, and Natanz facilities contain uranium hexafluoride (UF₆) and even some low-enriched uranium, the release of which into the environment would almost certainly raise public health concerns.

CONCLUSION

The Israelis will ultimately have to choose between launching an attack likely to spark a large-scale regional conflict and allowing Iran to go nuclear with dire long-term implications. Notwithstanding some disagreement about the immediacy of the threat and possible repercussions, the large majority of Israelis favor military action over living with the ubiquitous threat of nuclear annihilation.

With a U.N. vote on Palestinian statehood threatening to erode Israel’s international standing still further, attacking Iran could prove dangerously isolating for Israel even with Washington’s blessing—to proceed without it would be a step into the unknown. Much, therefore, depends on whether policymakers in Washington will stand by Jerusalem when push eventually comes to shove.

The American people have increasingly come to recognize the threat to world peace posed by Iran. Whereas 6 percent of Americans named Iran as the country that poses the greatest threat to the United States in 1990, in 2006, Iran led the field with 27 percent.⁴² However, though Washington’s official stance is that all options remain on the table, Obama is unlikely to undertake direct military action to stop Tehran from building the bomb and may prove reluctant to tacitly support Israeli action.

That is why the decision will ultimately be left to Israel, or rather to its prime minister, who will be faced with a Churchillian dilemma, unprecedented in the Jewish state’s history.



39 Moshe Vered, “Ending an Iranian-Israeli War,” *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, Sept. 2009.

40 David Horowitz, “Editor’s Notes: Playing Chess against Tehran,” interview with Uri Lubrani, Mar. 11, 2011; *The Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 13, 2010.

41 *The Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 13, 2010.

42 Associated Press, July 2, 2006.

The Arab Uprisings' Impact

by Efraim Inbar

Although the wave of mass protests spreading through the Arabic-speaking countries may have begun to recede, it has left a wide-ranging impact on the region. Three authoritarian regimes have collapsed, and the rest are experiencing varying degrees of duress.

This emerging political and strategic landscape has major implications for Israeli national security. Regional turmoil has effectively ruled out a major advance in Arab-Israeli diplomacy, enabled Ankara and Tehran to expand their influence, continued the decline of U.S. influence, and emboldened extremists.

A ROUGH NEIGHBORHOOD

Though economically and militarily strong for its size, Israel is a small state with modest resources, limited diplomatic clout, and few friends in its neighborhood. As such, it cannot hope to influence its environment in the Middle East. Unable to shape the world beyond its borders, Jerusalem must be prepared to meet all security threats that could potentially emerge from the surrounding Arab-Islamic world. It, therefore, fears political unrest, which brings a degree of uncertainty to the Middle East political and strategic landscape.

Israelis are no strangers to the fact that political upheaval in the Middle East can have major strategic implications. In particular, domestic changes led to sweeping foreign policy reorientation in two important regional powers that were

once Israel's allies. The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran replaced a pro-Western monarchy friendly to Israel with a militant Shiite theocracy. In Turkey, once a major strategic ally of Israel, successive electoral victories by the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002 have moved this pivotal state into the anti-Israel camp.

DANGEROUS OUTCOMES FOR ISRAEL

Arabic-speaking countries lag well behind the rest of the international community in civil liberties, political rights, education, gender equality, and economic productivity.¹ This deplorable state of affairs is the root cause of discontent and frustration fueling the recent wave of protests. Absent a liberal-democratic political culture, however, mass mobilization in pursuit of political change is unpredictable. Numerous outcomes are possible, few of which portend well for regional stability.

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1 *Arab Human Development* reports, U.N. Development Program, New York, accessed Oct. 7, 2011; R. Stephen Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire. The Middle East in a Troubled Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Arab regimes have strong incentives to divert public attention from domestic problems by confronting Israel.

The most feared outcome is an Islamist takeover. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has frequently warned of the danger that “Egypt will go in the direction of Iran.”² Radical Islamists are the most powerful and well-organized

opposition force in most Arab states (due in part to the protection afforded by mosques) and the most likely beneficiaries of regime change whether it comes peacefully or violently. Revolutionary regimes everywhere tend to display warlike behavior in the immediate years after taking power;³ in the

Middle East, they are almost certain to do so.

The process of democratization can also have unpredictable effects if secular, liberal political forces are weak or divided. Lebanon’s 2005 Cedar Revolution, led by pro-Western political forces, ended just four years later when the government was taken over by the Shiite Islamist group Hezbollah and its allies. The Muslim Brotherhood, whose commitment to democracy is dubious at best, is the most powerful opposition force in Egypt today. Even in the event that a freely elected government comes to power, the historical record shows that states undergoing a democratic transition are more war-prone than autocratic regimes.⁴

Political turmoil can lead to the collapse or severe weakening of the state. In a failed state, the government is unable to control security over all its territory and has difficulty meeting the basic needs of the population in terms of health, education, and other social services.⁵ The har-

bingers of such a scenario are in Libya and Yemen. As states lose their grip over their territory, and their borders become more porous, armed groups and terrorists have greater freedom of action. In addition, the enormous quantities of conventional (and non-conventional) arms typically stockpiled by autocratic regimes can fall into the wrong hands. Following the fall of Libyan leader Mu’ ammar Qaddafi, Libyan SA-7 anti-air missiles and antitank rocket-propelled grenades have reportedly reached Hamas terrorists in Gaza.⁶

Since many Arab countries have ethno-sectarian minorities with strong transnational ties to foreign powers (Lebanese Shiites and Iran, for example), the eruption of civil war can readily invite external intervention. Because of their diversity, Iraq and Syria carry the greatest potential for domestic conflicts in the Middle East to escalate into regional conflagrations.

Even those Arab regimes that manage to stave off serious unrest are likely to be preoccupied in the near future parrying domestic challenges. The foreign policy decisions of weakened autocrats (none have emerged stronger from the turmoil) can be nearly as difficult to predict reliably as those of newly democratic governments. Faced with growing internal challenges, both have strong incentives to divert public attention from domestic problems by confronting Israel.

DECLINING U.S. INFLUENCE

As pro-U.S. Arab regimes stumble and fall, Washington’s influence in the Middle East is on the decline. This is partly due to the Obama administration’s deliberate “multilateral retrenchment ... designed to curtail the United States’ overseas commitments, restore its standing in the world, and shift burdens onto global partners”⁷ and partly to its confused, contra-

2 *The Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 8, 2011.

3 Stephen M. Walt, “Revolution and War,” *World Politics*, Apr. 1992, pp. 321-68.

4 Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratization and the Danger of War,” *International Security*, Summer 1995, pp. 5-38.

5 For an analysis of this phenomenon, see Robert I. Rothberg, ed., *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

6 Reuters, Aug. 29, 2011.

7 Daniel W. Drezner, “Does Obama Have a Grand Strategy? Why We Need Doctrines in Uncertain Times,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug. 2011, p. 58.

dictory, and inconsistent response to unfolding events in the Middle East. The administration was far quicker to call for the resignation of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak—a staunch U.S. ally for three decades—than that of Syrian president Bashar Assad, whose role in fomenting terrorism against the United States and its allies is rivaled only by the Iranian regime. Washington's turn against Mubarak was viewed throughout the region (approvingly or not) as a betrayal of a loyal friend.⁸

The U.S. criticism of Riyadh's military intervention in support of the Sunni ruling al-Khalifa dynasty in Bahrain in March 2011 raised eyebrows in Arab capitals, which viewed the emirate's Shiites as Iranian proxies.⁹ Many in the region were also puzzled by the U.S. abandonment of Qaddafi, who had cooperated with the West by giving up his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in 2003. The lesson learned by Middle Eastern regimes—the Iranian mullahs in particular—is that it is better to hold on to WMD programs. Qaddafi's fate has become a cautionary tale for tyrants.

By contrast, the brutal suppression of the local opposition by the anti-U.S. regimes in Tehran and Damascus elicited only mild and very late expressions of criticism from the Obama administration. Washington's July 2011 decision to open a dialogue with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has further eroded its credibility as an astute political player and credible ally.

Alongside the U.S. retreat from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Obama administration's proclivity for betraying friends and appeasing en-



The Israeli public is well aware of what can happen when sweeping domestic change engulfs its neighbors. In 1979, a pro-Western and Israel-friendly shah was replaced by the hard-line, anti-Israel theocrats of the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

emies, such as Syria and Iran, strengthens the perception of a weak and confused U.S. government. Israelis ask whether Washington is capable of exercising sound strategic judgment. The animosity displayed by the Obama administration toward Israeli prime minister Netanyahu reinforces a growing consensus among U.S. friends and foes alike that "Obama does not get it."

INCREASING IRANIAN AND TURKISH INFLUENCE

The Arab upheavals have facilitated the expanding influence of non-Arab Iran and Turkey. The need to focus on domestic problems will likely reduce the ability of Arab states to project power beyond their borders and combat the growing Iranian and Turkish regional influence.

Both Tehran and Ankara, which are aligned with radical Islamist forces, have welcomed the Arab uprisings and have openly incited Egyptian demonstrators to topple Mubarak. An Egyptian government beleaguered with domestic problems has little energy to focus on countering Iranian and Turkish aspirations and influ-

⁸ Reuters, Jan. 31, 2011; Ari Shavit, "Obama's Betrayal: As Goes Mubarak, So Goes U.S. Might," *Ha'aretz*, Aug. 10, 2011.

⁹ *The New York Times*, Mar. 14, 2011.

ence. Both vie for regional hegemony and are interested in gaining popularity among the Arab states by vocally criticizing Israel. Moreover, growing influence by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt suits Tehran's and Ankara's ideological inclinations. Indeed, Egypt's interim military government quickly undertook a rapprochement with Iran.

Ankara also encourages Sunni Islamist opposition to the Alawite-dominated Assad regime in Syria,¹⁰ Tehran's main ally. The instability in Syria has renewed to some extent the historic Turkish-Persian rivalry, signaling once more the dilution of Arab power and decreased Western influence. Syria could potentially become a battleground for Turkish and Iranian proxies.

THE END OF THE "OSLO PROCESS"

Diminished U.S. influence in the region does not bode well for prospects of a diplomatic breakthrough between the Jewish state and its neighbors, who have only grudgingly come to accept Israel as a fait accompli that cannot be eradicated by force. Washington has historically played an important role in bringing Arab actors to the negotiating table, narrowing differences during negotiations, and reducing Israeli anxieties in taking risks for peace.

However, the Obama administration is demonstrably less willing and able than its predecessor to pressure Arab leaders into compromising with the Israelis and less willing to compensate Jerusalem for concessions that entail security risks. The U.S. financial crisis further limits the administration's capacity to provide

economic inducements to both sides.

While extremists have been emboldened by Washington's perceived departure from the region, pro-U.S. Arab leaders have come to conclude that U.S. support is ephemeral—hardly worth the political risks of recognizing Israel and alienating citizens who have been fed a steady diet of anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic propaganda since grade school. Democratization will not change this—on the contrary, newly elected leaders will prefer keeping Israel at arm's length so as to curry public favor. According to an April 2011 poll, 54 percent of Egyptians favor annulling their country's peace treaty with Israel.¹¹ Clearly, Israel's peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan are under great strain as the anti-Israel domestic forces become more influential and vocal.¹²

Whatever the outcome of the escalating conflict in Syria, no government in Damascus is likely to be strong enough politically to make peace with Israel. It is equally unlikely that the Palestinian Authority (PA) will do so. The Palestinian leadership is divided between Hamas, which took over Gaza in June 2007, and the PA leadership in the West Bank. Additionally, the PA has not reconciled itself to the idea of Jewish statehood as evidenced by recent statements by its leaders, notably Mahmoud Abbas's U.N. speech. With chances of bridging Israeli-Palestinian differences growing increasingly remote,¹³ the PA has defied U.S. calls to return to the negotiating table, opting instead to press its bid for statehood at the U.N.

As for the Israelis, many fear that they cannot necessarily rely upon the Obama administration's diplomatic, economic, or military support in the event that their country is attacked or finds it necessary to preemptively strike at imminent threats to their security. Not surprisingly, few are eager to make concessions

Nuclear weapons will embolden Tehran and its Palestinian and Lebanese proxies committed to Israel's destruction.

10 Ibid., May 4, 2011; *The Jerusalem Post*, May 8, 2011.

11 "Egyptians Embrace Revolt Leaders, Religious Parties, and Military, as Well," Pew Global Attitudes Project, Washington, D.C., Apr. 25, 2011.

12 *The Washington Times*, Feb. 3, 2011; *The Jerusalem Post*, Aug. 10, 2011.

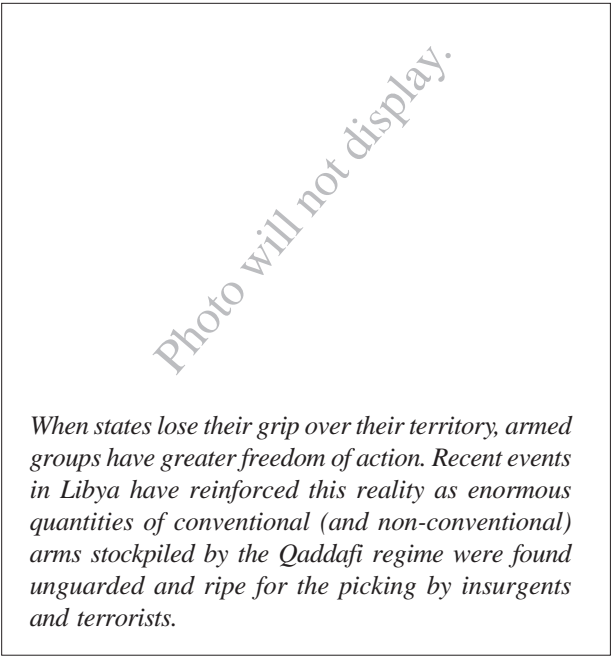
13 Efraim Inbar, "The Rise and Demise of the Two-State Paradigm," *Orbis*, Spring 2009, pp. 265-83.

that magnify those threats. As the region looks less receptive to peace overtures, Israelis must prepare for greater regional isolation.

TEHRAN'S NUCLEAR CHALLENGE

Arab political upheaval has deflected attention away from Israel's most daunting security threat—a nuclear Iran. Despite four rounds of modest economic sanctions by the U.N. Security Council and frequent diplomatic scolding, the regime continues to develop a nuclear weapons capability. The international community is unwilling to forcibly block the Islamic Republic from achieving this goal, which most experts expect to happen in an estimated two to three years. Unlike its predecessor, the Obama administration is unlikely to launch U.S. air strikes to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities and may be reluctant to support an Israeli military attack to eliminate the threat.

A nuclear Iran would have far reaching strategic and political implications for the region.¹⁴ Although opinions differ as to whether the country's ruling mullahs can be deterred by Israel's nuclear arsenal, few doubt that possession of nuclear weapons will embolden Tehran and its Palestinian and Lebanese proxies committed to Israel's destruction as well as Iranian-backed Shiite movements in Iraq and in the Persian Gulf states. Located along the oil-rich Persian Gulf and Caspian Basin, a nuclear Iran would be ideally poised to dominate this strategic energy sector,¹⁵ particularly if hitherto pro-U.S. Central Asian states gravitate toward Tehran. In addition, Iran's successful pursuit of nuclear



weapons is sure to encourage similar ambitions by its main regional rivals—Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. A multipolar nuclear Middle East would be a strategic nightmare.

MOUNTING SECURITY THREATS

While the U.S. decline in world affairs in general and in the Middle East in particular might prove temporary, it is very real for the near future. This in turn has had a negative impact on Israel's deterrence, which relies not only on its military power and ability to defeat its Arab neighbors but also on the perception that Washington will come to Jerusalem's aid should the need arise. The perceived closeness between Jerusalem and Washington is an important component of the Jewish state's deterrent posture, and the Obama administration has cast doubt on this long-standing foundation. Jerusalem can, of course, find some comfort in the fact that the Middle East upheavals have underscored yet again its position as Washington's most reliable regional ally, but the Obama administration has consistently courted U.S. enemies there at the

14 James M. Lindsay and Ray Takeyh, "After Iran Gets the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs*, Mar./Apr. 2010.
15 Geoffrey Kemp and Robert E. Harkavy, *Strategic Geography and the Changing Middle East* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1997), p. 113.



While struggling to remain in power, the Assad regime in Syria sought to divert public anger against it by busing thousands of ostensibly Palestinian protesters to the Israeli border, who then proceeded to try to cross into the Jewish state. Jerusalem will find it necessary to station larger forces along its frontiers to defend against an array of security threats arising from the turmoil in neighboring states.

expense of long-standing allies.

While the military forces of neighboring Arab states would be no match for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) should revolutionary upheaval somehow unite them in war against the Jewish state, political turmoil outside Israel's borders is already beginning to produce a variety of more intractable security threats.

Shortly after Mubarak's ouster, Egypt's interim military government declared its intention to honor the country's international commitments (i.e., the 1979 peace treaty with Israel), and most experts believe that an elected successor will do the same if only to preserve current levels of U.S. military and economic aid. However, the cold peace between Cairo and Jerusalem that existed under Mubarak is sure to become even chillier. In order to defuse nationwide protests, Egypt's military establishment formed an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, the only well-organized political force outside the ruling government. The Brotherhood's growing political power in post-Mubarak Egypt and greater international acceptance can only be of deep concern to Jerusalem.

Under pressure from the Brotherhood, Egypt's interim government has reduced restrictions on traffic to and from Gaza, circumventing the Israeli blockade of the Hamas-ruled enclave. This will strengthen Hamas, an offshoot of the Egyptian Brotherhood committed to Israel's eradication, and encourage it to adopt a more aggressive posture toward the Jewish state.

In September 2011, the authorities allowed an angry mob to lay siege to Israel's embassy in Cairo, forcing the evacuation of its ambassador. Equally disturbing is the Egyptian reluctance to maintain security in Sinai, which borders Israel and Gaza. Since the fall of Mubarak, the Egyptian-Israeli natural gas pipeline has

been sabotaged six times.¹⁶ This forced the Israelis to rely on more expensive diesel and fuel oil to generate electricity, costing the country an average of US\$2.7 million a day during July and August.¹⁷ As the Eilat attacks last August indicate, Sinai may well emerge as a major anti-Israel terrorist base.¹⁸

The Israeli military regards Jordan, with which Jerusalem signed a 1994 peace treaty, as providing strategic depth since the two country's long border remains comparatively secure.¹⁹ So far, King Abdullah has been successful in riding the regional political storm with minimal damage to his rule and without compromising his relations with Israel. However, if Iraq or Syria should fall victim to an Islamist takeover or a breakdown of the state, the Jordanians

16 *Al-Ahram Online* (Cairo), Oct. 3, 2011.

17 *Globes* (Rishon Le-Zion), Oct. 2, 2011.

18 *The Jerusalem Post*, Aug. 18, 2011.

19 Amos Gilad, director of policy and political-military affairs at Israel's Defense Ministry, CNN, Sept. 22, 2011.

may find it difficult to insulate themselves from the contagion. Should King Abdullah be deposed, hostile forces would be able to straddle the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem-Haifa triangle holding most of Israel's population and economic infrastructure as Jerusalem is only twenty miles from the Jordanian border.

In Syria, the Alawite-dominated Assad regime is struggling to suppress predominantly Sunni opposition forces. In May 2011, thousands of ostensibly Palestinian protesters bused in by the authorities on "Nakba Day"—the anniversary of Israel's founding—stormed into the Golan Heights, attacking IDF soldiers with stones. Four were killed and dozens wounded by Israeli fire. The Syrians are "intentionally attempting to divert international attention away from the brutal crackdown of their own citizens," said an Israeli military spokesman.²⁰ This action suggests that Assad is not averse to confronting Jerusalem as a means of redirecting public anger away from his regime.

The West Bank and Gaza have not yet experienced major domestic turmoil. While a renewed campaign of terror against Israel would be very costly for the Palestinians, the weak and illegitimate PA president Abbas (whose term of office expired in January 2009) is under increasing pressure from Hamas to up the ante in combating the Jewish state. A Palestinian strategic miscalculation leading to new round of violence is always a possibility that Jerusalem cannot ignore.

Political turmoil in the Arab world is a warning bell for Israel to bolster its defenses. Israelis will find it necessary to station larger forces along their borders to defend against the array of security threats that can arise from political turmoil in neighboring countries. Jerusalem must also update its war-fighting scenarios and expand the IDF to be able to deal with a variety of contingencies, including a large-scale war. Since force building is a lengthy process, appropriate decisions on force structure and budget alloca-

tions are required as soon as possible.

Jerusalem must insist on defensible borders in any future peace negotiations with the PA and Syria. Loose talk about technologies that favor Israel's defensive capabilities and the decreasing military value of territory and topographical assets ignores the fact that contemporary technological advantages are fleeting. Strategists and militaries around the world still confer great importance to the topographical characteristics of the battlefield. The history of warfare shows that technological superiority and better weapons are not enough to win a war.²¹

The increased threat of rocket and missile fire from "islands of insecurity" across their borders will require the Israelis to improve both passive protection and active defense. Passive protection refers to construction of shelters in homes, educational institutions, and centers of commerce and entertainment. Active defense systems prevent incoming rockets and missiles from hitting or destroying a target. Israel's mobile Iron Dome batteries can intercept short-range rockets while its David's Sling system under development can intercept longer-range rockets and missiles.²² Jerusalem is working to integrate these lower-tier missile defense systems with components of its upper-tier missile defense—the upgraded versions of Patriot Advanced Capability interceptors and the Arrow-2 and the Arrow-3 interceptors—into a single national command and control center.²³ Budgetary constraints and strategic shortsightedness have slowed development of this multilayered missile defense system.

**Political turmoil
in the Arab world
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defenses.**

20 *The Daily Mail* (London), May 16, 2011.

21 Martin Van Creveld, *Technology and War. From 2000 B.C. to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), pp. 311-20; Keir A. Lieber, *War and the Engineers. The Primacy of Politics over Technology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 155-8.

22 *The Washington Post*, May 12, 2011.

23 *Defense News* (Springfield, Va.), June 20, 2011.

CONCLUSION

Fortunately, Israel's flourishing economy can afford larger defense outlays to meet its national security challenges. The leadership should be courageous enough to explain to its people that changing circumstances require some austerity measures that might freeze the standard of living for a while. Israeli society has shown remarkable resilience and spirit in protracted conflict and might respond positively to a well-crafted call from the political leadership. Such an address must be accompanied by efforts to reduce the growing gaps between rich

and poor in Israeli society in order to maintain social cohesion.

Whether incumbent Arab regimes stick to power, collapse, are replaced by new dictatorships, or democratize, Israel's near abroad is likely to remain in political flux in the coming years with major strategic and security ramifications. With Washington's influence in decline and two rising regional powers—Iran and Turkey—eager to challenge Jerusalem, the new Middle East promises to be considerably more challenging to Israeli security than the old.



Just Can't Trust the Saudis

TEHRAN—The Jeddah Astronomy Society's mistake in sighting of the new moon in Saudi Arabia has angered many Muslim nations who followed suit and pronounced Tuesday as Eid al-Fitr wrongly. The society said that people actually saw the planet Saturn and not the crescent moon that marks the beginning of the Islamic month of Shawwal.

Various news agencies such as al-Arabiya and Al Jazeera have also reported that the planet Saturn has been mistaken for the Hilal (crescent moon), and this means that what was announced as the first day of Eid al-Fitr was supposed to be a day of fasting, rather than celebrations.

Saudi government officials have reportedly apologized to their nation and said that they would pay kaffarah (an amount of money paid as expiation for breaking the fast during the holy month of Ramadan) for the entire Saudi nation.

While a number of Muslim countries like Iran announce the new crescent only on the basis of frequent sightings by the people, astronomy societies, and clerics inside their borders, many others rely on the sightings done by Saudi Arabia and announcement of the Eid crescent by Riyadh.

Thus, those Muslim nations who have followed the Saudis and celebrated the last Tuesday as Eid al-Fitr are now angry with the Saudis as Eid al-Fitr is the biggest eve for the worldwide Muslim community.

Fourteen other countries—Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Kuwait, Palestin[ian territories], Qatar, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen—followed suit in compliance with Islamic teachings.

Fars News Agency, Sept. 3, 2011

The Two Faces of Al Jazeera

by Oren Kessler

One of the principal beneficiaries of the Arab uprisings has been Al Jazeera television. Viewers are praising the English and Arabic channels' comprehensive coverage of the revolts while the Obama administration continues to court the network as part of its signature foreign policy goal of improving ties with the Arab and Muslim worlds.

On August 1, 2011, Al Jazeera English (AJE) began broadcasting to two million cable subscribers in New York—the third major U.S. city to carry the station after Houston and Washington, D.C.¹ AJE's gutsy, driven reporting—one commentator aptly commended its "hustle"²—has won it friends in high places: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton lauded the channel as "real news,"³ and Sen. John McCain (Republican, Ariz.) said he was "very proud" of its handling of the so-called Arab Spring.⁴

Lost in the exuberance is the fact that a vast gulf still separates the channel's English iteration from the original Arabic, which fifteen years after its birth continues to inflame Arab resentments in its promotion of anti-Americanism, Sunni sectarianism and, in recent years, Islamism.

As AJE debuts in New York, many viewers who do not speak Arabic will presume the station to be a direct or approximate translation of its parent network in Qatar.⁵ But to appreciate what Al Jazeera English is, it is critical to remember just what it is not—even a remote likeness of its Arabic-speaking progenitor.

FANNING THE FLAMES

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Fouad Ajami traveled to Qatar to write a profile on Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA) for *The New York Times Magazine*. In the cover story "What the Muslim World Is Watching," he wrote, "Jazeera's reporters see themselves as 'anti-imperialists.' Convinced that the rulers of the Arab world have given in to American might, these are broadcasters who

play to an Arab gallery whose political bitterness they share—and feed."⁶

Virtually all of the channel's journalists, he found, were either leftist, pan-Arab nationalists, or Islamists. "Although Al Jazeera has sometimes been hailed in the West for being an autonomous,

1 *The New York Times*, Aug. 1, 2011.

2 Robert D. Kaplan, "Why I Love Al Jazeera," *The Atlantic*, Oct. 2009.

3 *The Huffington Post*, Mar. 18, 2011.

4 *Politico* (Arlington, Va.), May 17, 2011.

5 Judea Pearl, "A statement of observation concerning Al Jazeera," *USA America's Survival News* (Owings, Md.), Feb. 23, 2011.

6 Fouad Ajami, "What the Muslim World Is Watching," *The New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 18, 2001.

Oren Kessler is Middle East affairs correspondent for *The Jerusalem Post*.

Arabic news outlet, it would be a mistake to call it a fair or responsible one," he wrote. "Day in and day out, Al Jazeera deliberately fans the flames of Muslim outrage."⁷

It was in the days after the 2001 attacks that most Americans first encountered Al Jazeera Arabic (the English offshoot was still five years away) when the channel broadcast its first Osama

bin Laden tape, an admission of responsibility for the slaughter. The clip was the first of about ten audio and video statements AJA would broadcast of the al-Qaeda leader over the same number of years.⁸

In the wake of those attacks, Ajami discov-

ered, bin Laden was Al Jazeera's unchallenged star: "The channel's graphics assign him a lead role: There is bin Laden seated on a mat, his submachine gun on his lap; there is bin Laden on horseback in Afghanistan, the brave knight of the Arab world. A huge, glamorous poster of bin Laden's silhouette hangs in the background of the main studio set."⁹

In Afghanistan, Al Jazeera's narrative was roughly analogous to the Taliban's: ill-equipped, heroic Muslims overcoming the foreign invader through sheer courage and faith. Taliban-embedded reporters ended their broadcasts with the sign-off "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan"—the Islamist government's official name for the country—while the U.S. war on terror was denied the same treatment, identified instead as a campaign against "what it calls terror."¹⁰

Coverage in Iraq has been similar. Words like "terror" and "insurgency" are rarely mentioned with a straight face, usually replaced with "resistance" or "struggle." Suicide bombings against U.S. troops are "commando attacks" or sometimes

even "paradise operations" while "War in Iraq" is replaced by "War on Iraq."¹¹ Similarly, Israel's 2008-09 Gaza offensive was branded "War on Gaza" in both Arabic and English.¹²

In his 2004 state of the union address, President George W. Bush singled out Al Jazeera as a source of "hateful propaganda" in the Arab world, and then-defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld blasted its war coverage as "propaganda,"¹³ "inexcusably biased,"¹⁴ and "vicious."¹⁵

"REAL NEWS"

Al Jazeera's sympathetic coverage, in both Arabic and English, of the past year's Arab upheavals signaled to many that Americans may finally let the network in from the cold.¹⁶ It was a view the Obama administration—eager to drain the bad blood of the Bush era—readily encouraged.

"Al Jazeera has been the leader in that they are literally changing people's minds and attitudes. And like it or hate it, it is really effective," Secretary of State Clinton told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March. AJE, she said, is "must watch, real journalism."¹⁷ Dana Shell Smith—the first deputy assistant secretary of state for international media engagement and an Arabic speaker—described Al Jazeera Arabic as a "really important media entity" with which the administration has a "really great relationship."¹⁸

The thaw has been bipartisan with Republicans as wary as Democrats of slighting a network riding a worldwide wave of popularity—AJE now reaches a quarter of a billion people in 130 coun-

In Afghanistan, Al Jazeera's narrative was roughly analogous to the Taliban's.

7 Ibid.

8 "Timeline: Messages from bin Laden," Aljazeera.net, May 2, 2011.

9 Ajami, "What the Muslim World Is Watching."

10 Ibid.

11 Judea Pearl, "Another perspective, or jihad TV?" *The International Herald Tribune*, Jan. 17, 2007.

12 "War on Gaza," labs.aljazeera.net/warongaza, accessed Aug. 30, 2011.

13 "Al Jazeera's Global Gamble," Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, Washington, D.C., Aug. 22, 2006.

14 Associated Press, Feb. 6, 2004.

15 *The Sunday Times* (London), Nov. 27, 2005.

16 *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 7, 2011.

17 *The Huffington Post*, Mar. 18, 2011.

18 *Politico*, Apr. 17, 2011.

tries¹⁹—and perceived as siding with freedom and democracy against dictatorship.²⁰

“It’s like Rip Van Winkle—you wake up and, my God, it’s a different world,” said Tony Burman, at the time AJE’s chief strategic adviser for the Americas. “Hosni Mubarak did in eighteen days what I thought it would take two years to do.” Walking through the State Department, Burman said, he sees his station playing on virtually every computer and television screen.²¹

Judea Pearl is a celebrated University of California computer scientist and cofounder of the Daniel Pearl Dialogue for Muslim-Jewish Understanding, created to honor his son, the *Wall Street Journal* reporter kidnapped and beheaded in 2002 by al-Qaeda terrorists in Pakistan.²² Since 2007, Pearl has been a lonely voice on the left warning against Al Jazeera’s legitimization. “Their unconditional support of Hamas’s terror in Gaza, the Hezbollah takeover in Lebanon, and the Syrian and Iranian regimes betrays any illusion that democracy and human rights are on Al Jazeera’s agenda”—he wrote this year—“weakening the West is their first priority.”²³

March Lynch, a commentator on Arabic media, accurately noted, “There has been a switch on the perception of Al Jazeera Arabic, simply because right now, the U.S. and Al Jazeera Arabic are more aligned in backing the democracy movements ... It’s not like Al Jazeera or the U.S. have changed that much. The issues have changed.”²⁴

19 Aljazeera.net, Aug. 1, 2011.

20 *Politico*, Apr. 17, 2011.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Daniel Pearl Foundation, accessed Sept. 22, 2011.

23 Pearl, “A statement of observation concerning Al Jazeera.”

24 *Politico*, Apr. 17, 2011.



Al Jazeera’s coverage of U.S. involvement in Iraq betrays its Islamist sympathies, referring to suicide bombings against U.S. troops as “paradise operations” and replacing words such as “terror” and “insurgency” with “resistance” or “struggle.” It has also served as the mouthpiece for terrorists, here displaying kidnapped American contract worker Jeffrey Ake for propaganda purposes. Ake has never been found.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

In 2006, months before going on air, Al Jazeera English hired Dave Marash, a former anchor for *NBC Nightline*. But just as Marash’s arrival lent the yet-unborn channel an aura of credibility, his departure two years later cast doubt on whether AJE would be willing and able to distance itself from its predecessor’s worst practices.

“[T]he channel that’s on now—while excellent, and I plan to be a lifetime viewer—is not the channel that I signed up to do,”²⁵ Marash said. He recalled that after he was moved from anchor to reporter, the channel’s roster included not a single presenter with an American accent—a choice Marash viewed as deliberate: “I took it particularly amiss ... that their standard for journalism on Al Jazeera in the United States didn’t

25 *The New York Times*, Mar. 28, 2009.

seem consistently to be as good as their standards elsewhere.”²⁶

Marash cited a series called *Poverty in America* to illustrate what he described as AJE’s underlying anti-Americanism. “The specifics of the plan were so stereotypical and shallow that the planning desk in Washington said that we think this is a very bad idea and recommend against it and won’t do it. And so the planning desk in Doha literally sneaked a production team into the United States,” he said. “This series reported nothing beyond the stereotype and the mere fact that there were homeless people living on the street in Baltimore ... It was enough for them to show poor people living in wretched conditions in a prosperous American city and decry it.”²⁷

Likewise, Marash said, an item on indigenous Mexicans in Chiapas State blamed their impoverishment solely on the North American Free Trade Agreement, papering over the knottier issues of race, class, and relations between state and federal governments in Mexico. “So again, it was really shoddy reporting,” he said.²⁸

An Israeli spokesman said that an Al Jazeera appearance closely resembles an interrogation.

“When you speak to presenters on CNN and BBC, you’re usually speaking to very serious people who know the issues,” an Israeli spokesperson with extensive experience with the channel told me. “When they ask you a tough question, you can presume it’s a tough

question that’s been thought about. On Al Jazeera English, they can ask some tough questions, but it often has the level of a campus debate.”²⁹

RIGHT HOOK TO THE JAW

Its failings notwithstanding, Al Jazeera English is leagues ahead of its Arabic analog in pro-

ducing news that meets the basic criteria of the journalistic craft. AJE representatives’ failure to convincingly explain that discrepancy—their clumsy attempts to simultaneously tout the two channels’ independence and their “shared vision”—is cause for concern.

“At the end of the day, we don’t share the same editorial policies,” Ayman Mohyeldin, then AJE’s Cairo correspondent, said in February. “What we do share is the editorial code of ethics and the same editorial vision as the network.”³⁰

“Anyone who works at Al Jazeera English is convinced that if you watch Al Jazeera English, and if you watch and understand Al Jazeera Arabic, you will be convinced that the journalism is professional, that the quality of work is very high,” said Mohyeldin, who left the network this summer for NBC News. “The only problem is that very few people in the United States understand Al Jazeera Arabic. They buy into a lot of the innuendos. Once they have that sense of fear, they use that brush to paint Al Jazeera Arabic and Al Jazeera English with it.”³¹

Abderrahim Foukara, the Arabic channel’s Washington bureau chief, told the Council on Foreign Relations,

The way the truth may be defined in the Arab world, and associate it with Al Jazeera, is not the way Americans, for example, would define the truth and associate it with, say, CNN or MSNBC or Fox. ... Al Jazeera Arabic, because it is so connected to a turbulent part of the world, the tone is different ... it’s much feistier ... The broad majority of Arabs identify with the channel, not only in terms of political coverage, but the nuances, the reading between the lines.³²

In truth, the bulk of AJA’s content has all the nuance of a right hook to the jaw. The non-Arabic speaker is immediately struck by the station’s

26 Brent Cunningham, “Dave Marash: Why I Quit,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, Apr. 4, 2008.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Author telephone interview, Sept. 7, 2011.

30 Nitasha Tiku, “Q&A with Ayman Mohyeldin, Al Jazeera English’s Correspondent in Cairo,” *New York Magazine*, Feb. 11, 2011.

31 Ibid.

32 “Al-Jazeera: The World through Arab Eyes,” Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., Feb. 17, 2011.

frenetic tone and imagery, and a viewer with even a moderate command of the language is likely to be all the more taken aback.

THE FREEST OF SPEECH

At its birth, Al Jazeera Arabic had an immediate and profound effect on Middle Eastern media, ushering in a new form of antiestablishment broadcasting in a region long dominated by state propaganda. But while AJA was unusual in reporting stories some regimes did not like, it also reported them in a way that reinforced rather than undermined the region's existing system of ideas.³³

The language of resistance and martyrdom remains Al Jazeera's mother tongue. In 2001, while the "second *intifada*" raged, Fouad Ajami wrote, "The channel's policy was firm: Palestinians who fell to Israeli gunfire were martyrs; Israelis killed by Palestinians were Israelis killed by Palestinians."³⁴ A decade on, little seems to have changed—civilians are generally classified as "martyrs" if killed in Iraq, Gaza, Afghanistan, or any other Arab or Muslim locale. Elsewhere, people killed are people killed.³⁵

Where Al Jazeera differs from state-run media is in its allowance for free speech. AJA markets itself as a forum for the very freest of expression, "inviting anybody to come on the air and say anything, often allowing perspectives that lacked factual basis to go unchallenged," according to a recent profile in the *American Journalism Review*.³⁶

Yet even at Al Jazeera, free speech has its red lines. In 1996, it was the first Arabic station to let Israelis appear as on-air guests, often speaking in Hebrew. Many viewers were stunned, having never before heard an Israeli speak—

much less in his or her native language.³⁷ Still, the scope given to Israeli guests to express themselves was, and is, extraordinarily limited. An Israeli spokesman who appears regularly on the channel said that a typical appearance more closely resembles an interrogation than an interview. "We're never invited to long interview shows but always short interviews of three and a half minutes," he said. "They're unwilling to engage in a real dialogue, and instead use Israelis as fig leaves."³⁸

American contributors often receive similar treatment. A 2007 episode of the flagship talk show *The Opposite Direction* featured as guests Adam Erel, State Department spokesman, and Mishan al-Jibouri, who was identified as "head of the Reconciliation and Liberation Bloc" in the Iraqi parliament. When host Faisal al-Qassem asked whether the United States had invaded Iraq to free its people or its oil, Jibouri responded unchallenged, "It's not just Iraqi oil; it's all Arab oil. They want to kill off indigenous people and control their wealth." When Erel begged to differ, the host cut him off: "The U.S. is the biggest supporter of dictatorships. Aren't you ashamed to repeat these lies? Are you against dictatorships? The U.S. created them with the CIA and all these other people, lying to the world."³⁹

Qassem neglected to mention that Jibouri was a cofounder of al-Zawraa, a now-defunct satellite station that specialized in gory segments of insurgent attacks on U.S.-led forces, accompanied by melodramatic musical scores and running commentary by camouflage-clad anchors vowing resistance until death.⁴⁰

**Al Jazeera's
sectarian
impulse has been
moving closer to
garden-variety
Sunni Islamism.**

33 Barry Rubin, *The Tragedy of the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 213.

34 Ajami, "What the Muslim World Is Watching."

35 See, for example, "Behind the Scenes with Al-Jazeera," Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, New York, Apr. 15, 2002.

36 Sherry Ricchiardi, "The Al Jazeera Effect," *American Journalism Review*, Mar./Apr. 2011.

37 Hugh Miles, *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel that Is Challenging the West* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), p. 37.

38 Author telephone interview, Sept. 4, 2011.

39 Kristen Gillespie, "The New Face of Al Jazeera," *The Nation*, Nov. 26, 2007.

40 *The Guardian* (London), Jan. 15, 2007.

FROM SECTARIANISM TO ISLAMISM

Al Jazeera's detractors have long dismissed the network as a vehicle for Doha's foreign policy, one driven by Sunni sectarianism and an overriding antagonism toward Iran.⁴¹ Voices critical of Qatar's government—the "worst in the region" in tracking terrorist financing, according to U.S. diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks⁴²—

**Former employees
described
Al Jazeera's
director general
as an Islamist.**

are nonexistent in English or Arabic.⁴³ In 2011, both channels provided only scant coverage of the uprising in neighboring Bahrain—where a downtrodden Shiite majority demanded greater rights in the Sunni-led kingdom⁴⁴—and were

slow to cede airtime to the rebellion in Syria—a leader of the "resistance bloc" against the United States and Israel even if it is allied with the Shiite hegemon in Tehran.⁴⁵

Over the past decade, however, Al Jazeera's sectarian impulse has been moving ever closer to garden-variety Sunni Islamism, a shift dramatic enough to catch the attention even of the liberal bulwark *The Nation*. In 2007, the weekly's Kristen Gillespie wrote that 9/11 "brought a new anti-imperialist and, many argue, a pro-Sunni Islamist bent to the network ... The field reports are overwhelmingly negative with violent footage played over and over, highlighting Arab defeat and humiliation. And there's a clear underlying message: that the way out of this spiral is political Islam."

"[I]t doesn't take much viewing of the channel to discern a dual message," Gillespie wrote. "Sunni religious figures are almost always treated deferentially as voices of authority on almost

any issue, and Arab governments as useless stooges of the United States and Israel."

In the words of Alberto Fernandez, then-director for press and public diplomacy in the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, "We see the unconditional support of Islamic movements, no matter where they are: Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan. ... How things are covered, the prominence of things, what words are used—sometimes you do see that very clear Islamist subtext."⁴⁶

In 2002, Al Jazeera Arabic promoted Wadah Khanfar—a reporter from the West Bank town of Jenin widely believed to have close Muslim Brotherhood ties⁴⁷—from Iraq bureau chief to managing director. Three years later Khanfar was promoted to director general of the overall Al Jazeera network, overseeing both language channels. On both occasions, he replaced relatively secular-minded journalists.

Gillespie spoke with nine active and former employees who described Khanfar as an Islamist. "Everyone is complaining about the new trend now—that the liberals, the secular types, the Arab nationalists are getting downsized, and the Islamic position is dominating the newsroom," said a former Baghdad correspondent. "From the first day of the Wadah Khanfar era, there was a dramatic change, especially because of him selecting assistants who are hard-line Islamists," added AJA's former Washington bureau chief Hafez al-Mirazi, who resigned a year after Khanfar's arrival to protest the station's "Islamist drift."⁴⁸

For his part, Khanfar has dismissed the idea that his perspective was in any way at odds with those of the channel's viewers. "Islam is more of a factor now in the influential political and social spheres of the Arab world, and the

41 Ricchiardi, "The Al Jazeera Effect"; *The New York Times*, Jan. 30, 2005.

42 *Financial Times* (London), Dec. 5, 2010.

43 *The New York Times*, Jan. 30, 2005.

44 *Time*, May 24, 2011.

45 Michael Young, "The shameful Arab silence on Syria," *The Daily Star* (Beirut), Apr. 7, 2011.

46 Gillespie, "The New Face of Al Jazeera."

47 Marc Lynch, "Al-Jazeera challenges: Pass the salt," *Abu Aardvark*, June 29, 2007. Lynch describes Khanfar as having "always been seen as pro-Islamist."

48 Gillespie, "The New Face of Al Jazeera"; Riadh Ferjani, "Religion and Television in the Arab World," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, no. 1, 2010, pp. 82-100. For more on Khanfar's alleged Muslim Brotherhood ties see "Analysis: Al Jazeera General Manager and His Muslim Brotherhood/Hamas Background," *The Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Report*, Jan. 15, 2009.

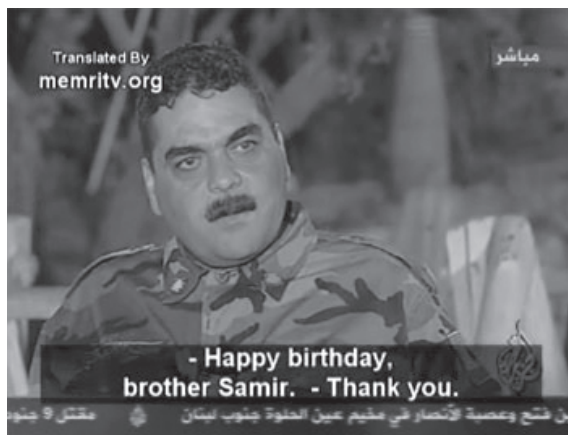
network's coverage reflects that," he said. "Maybe you have more Islamic voices [on AJA] because of the political reality on the ground."⁴⁹ Judea Pearl put the channel's agenda more plainly: "I have no doubt that, today, Al Jazeera is the most powerful voice of the Muslim Brotherhood."⁵⁰

The Obama State Department overturned the Bush administration's refusal to grant Khanfar a visa, and in 2009, he met with State, Pentagon, and White House officials before embarking on a speaking tour that included the New America Foundation, Council on Foreign Relations, and Middle East Institute.⁵¹

Khanfar resigned as director general in September of this year,⁵² following the release of WikiLeaks cables showing he had met with U.S. officials and agreed to tone down Iraq war coverage Washington deemed inflammatory.⁵³ The choice of Khanfar's replacement—an oil executive who belongs to the ruling al-Thani dynasty—is yet another sign that despite U.S. pressure to privatize,⁵⁴ Qatar intends to keep Al Jazeera a wholly-owned family business.

THE PALESTINIAN STREET

Given its Islamist sympathies, it is unsurprising that the network sides heavily with Hamas in its rivalry with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA). "In Arabic, it's unmistakable—Al Jazeera is not just pro-Palestinian, but



If there was any doubt about Al Jazeera's sympathies and lack of neutrality, it was effectively laid to rest with the channel's coverage of the release of Samir Kuntar. Kuntar had savagely murdered two Israelis in 1979, including a 4-year old girl, and had been jailed in Israel since then. On his 2008 release in an Israel-Hezbollah deal, Al Jazeera Arabic threw him a party: "Brother Samir, we wish to celebrate your birthday with you," crowed the station's Beirut bureau chief, hailing Kuntar as a "pan-Arab hero."

pro-Hamas," the Israeli spokesman said.⁵⁵ *The New York Times*—which has pushed for AJE's inclusion on U.S. cable⁵⁶—has conceded that there is "little doubt" the Arabic channel portrays Hamas more favorably than its rivals.⁵⁷

Polls show a remarkable 53 percent of Palestinians use Al Jazeera as their primary news source with Saudi-owned Al Arabiya a distant second at 13 percent. The way AJA covers any prospective Israeli-Palestinian agreement will fundamentally shape how such a deal is viewed—and whether it is accepted—by the Palestinian public.⁵⁸

When in 2009 Mahmoud Abbas agreed to defer a U.N. Human Rights Council discussion

49 Gillespie, "The New Face of Al Jazeera."

50 Pearl, "A statement of observation concerning Al Jazeera."

51 Steve Clemons, "Wadah Khanfar: Pushing Reset on America's Relationship with Al Jazeera and the Arab World," *Washington Note*, July 25, 2009.

52 *The New York Times*, Sept. 20, 2011.

53 "9/17 Meeting with Al Jazeera Managing Director," *WikiLeaks*, posted Aug. 30, 2011; "PAO Meeting with Al Jazeera Managing Director," *WikiLeaks*, posted Aug. 30, 2011.

54 *The Washington Post*, Jan. 31, 2005.

55 Author telephone interview, Sept. 4, 2011.

56 *The New York Times*, Feb. 1, 2011.

57 *Ibid.*, Jan. 28, 2011.

58 Noah Bonsey and Jeb Koogler, "Does the Path to Middle East Peace Stop in Doha?" *Columbia Journalism Review*, Feb. 16, 2010.

of the notorious Goldstone report on that year's Gaza offensive, Al Jazeera censured the PA president for his "capitulation" to Israeli and Western demands. The resulting public outcry nearly resulted in Abbas's resignation.⁵⁹

On Al Jazeera Arabic, anti-Israel sentiment bleeds indistinguishably into anti-Semitism.

Early this year, the network published the "Palestine Papers"—a leak of 1,700 files encompassing a decade's worth of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations—prompting commentators across the Arab world to denounce the PA leadership for supposedly agreeing to wide-ranging concessions toward Israel.

"The fact is that Al Jazeera has never done the same against Hamas, and that Hamas has never complained about Al Jazeera's coverage," the Israeli spokesman said. "It's always the Palestinian Authority that complains."⁶⁰

ANTI-SEMITIC, ANTI-ISRAEL

On Al Jazeera Arabic, anti-Israel sentiment tends to bleed indistinguishably into anti-Semitism. Erik Nisbet, a scholar of Arabic media at Ohio State University, said the channel's treatment of extremists would be roughly akin to a U.S. network giving airtime to the Ku Klux Klan. American channels, he said, "would report on them, but they are not going to do in-depth interviews or invite them to be on mainstream talk shows, and let them say anything they want, but Al Jazeera does." According to Nisbet, there is "no doubt" that anti-Semitism is woven into the very fabric of AJA's reporting.⁶¹

After 9/11, AJA presenters repeated, unchallenged, a report that Jews had been tipped off not to report to work at the World Trade Center that morning. Contributors running the clerical,

jihadi, and guerrilla gamut blamed Jews for the attacks and urged the United States to "get rid" of its own.⁶² The summer before, an episode of *The Opposite Direction* was dedicated to the question, "Is Zionism Worse than Nazism?" Of the 12,000 viewers who called in, 85 percent answered in the affirmative, 11 percent saw both as equally bad, and 2.7 percent ventured that Nazism was worse.⁶³

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, host of Al Jazeera's most popular program, *Shari'a and Life*, regularly froths about the insidious character of Shiites, Americans, and especially Jews.⁶⁴ "Oh Allah, take this oppressive, Jewish, Zionist band of people. Oh Allah, do not spare a single one of them. Oh Allah, count their numbers, and kill them, down to the very last one," he said on air in 2009.⁶⁵ Elsewhere, Qaradawi praised Hitler's treatment of the Jews ("even though they exaggerated the issue") but stressed the führer's regret at not finishing the job.⁶⁶

THE KUNTAR AFFAIR

If there was a single incident that exemplified the worst of Al Jazeera, it was the Samir Kuntar affair—an appalling low for the network in both languages.

In April 1979, a 16-year-old Kuntar left his native Lebanon with three Palestine Liberation Front comrades for a kidnap attempt in Nahariya, northern Israel. Arriving by boat, they killed a policeman before breaking into a randomly chosen home. Kuntar took 31-year-old Danny Haran and his 4-year-old daughter Einat hostage, then brought them to the seashore to take them to Leba-

62 "Requests to add Al Jazeera to the lists of eligible satellite services for distribution on a digital basis," Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, July 15, 2004.

63 "Zionism and Nazism: A Discussion on the TV Channel Al-Jazeera," Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), June 7, 2001, quoted in Rubin, *The Tragedy of the Middle East*, p. 213.

64 Lee Smith, *The Strong Horse: Power, Politics and the Clash of Arab Civilizations* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), p. 129.

65 "Sheikh Yousef Al-Qaradawi on Al-Jazeera Incites against Jews, Arab Regimes, and the U.S.," MEMRI, Jan. 12, 2009.

66 "Al-Qaradawi Praising Hitler's Anti-Semitism," MEMRI, on YouTube, Feb. 10, 2009.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ricchiardi, "The Al Jazeera Effect."

non. As a firefight erupted with Israeli troops and police, Kuntar shot Haran dead before his daughter's eyes (drowning him in the sea for good measure) before ending the girl's life by bashing her head against beach rocks, then smashing it with his rifle butt. An Israeli court also found Kuntar guilty of indirectly causing the death of Einat's 2-year-old sister Yael, who suffocated during the kidnap attempt as her mother, hiding in a bedroom crawlspace, desperately covered her mouth.⁶⁷

Sentenced to four life sentences, Kuntar never expressed remorse for his deeds, insisting for decades that he had urged Danny Haran to leave Einat at home, and that once at the beach, the girl died by Israeli fire (the first claim defies credulity; the second was refuted by photographs that later emerged and unanimous eyewitness testimony).⁶⁸

When in July 2008, four days before his forty-sixth birthday, Kuntar was released in an Israel-Hezbollah deal, Al Jazeera Arabic threw him a party. "Brother Samir, we wish to celebrate your birthday with you," said Ghassan Ben Jeddo, the station's Beirut bureau chief, playing master of ceremonies. "You deserve even more than this," he said, hailing Kuntar—pudgy and bemused in a mock military uniform—as a "pan-Arab hero."⁶⁹

While a live band tooted a martial medley, food servers rolled out a cake adorned with images of terrorist leaders including Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah. Handing Kuntar a scimitar to cut a piece, Ben Jeddo gushed, "This is the sword of the Arabs, Samir."⁷⁰

Israel threatened to boycott the channel unless it apologized, and AJA's director general penned a letter admitting "elements of the program violated Al Jazeera's code of ethics" and saying he had ordered steps be taken to ensure a similar incident was not repeated. AJA's deputy editor later clarified that the channel had not actually apologized.⁷¹

"The gentleman involved was fully reprimanded, and he no longer works for us," Al Jazeera English managing director Al Anstey said this summer. "Clearly, that was taken very seriously. That is not the channel I run. I would not have run that ... Action was taken immediately after the show was aired."⁷²

It is unclear which "gentleman" received the reprimand. Ben Jeddo stayed on as Beirut bureau chief until this year when he resigned to protest the network's hard-hitting if belated coverage of the Syrian crackdown. "The channel ended a dream of objectivity and professionalism after Al Jazeera stopped being a media source and became an operations room for incitement and mobilization," he wrote in his resignation letter with apparent seriousness.⁷³

In English, Al Jazeera's coverage of the event was only marginally better. In the lead-up to Kuntar's release, AJE aired a segment from his home village of Abieh in which reporter Zeina Khodr described Nahariya, a city within Israel's sovereign borders, as a "settlement." After introducing Kuntar by his full name, she named him seven times by his first name and not once by his last. Nowhere did she mention the brutality with which Kuntar's victims were murdered.⁷⁴

On Kuntar's release, Lebanon-based reporter Rula Amin effused that "in his hometown, Samir Kuntar is received as a freedom fighter, and he was received with a festive ceremony. A hero, even to those who were not even born when he went to prison." Amin apparently found it more remarkable that Kuntar's admirers included young

The AJA website featured a map of the Middle East and North Africa with every country marked except Israel.

67 *The Jerusalem Post*, June 16, 2008.

68 *The New York Times*, July 7, 2005.

69 "Al Jazeera Throws Party for Child Killer (Samir Kuntar)," MEMRI, on YouTube, Aug. 22, 2008.

70 *Ibid.*

71 "Al-Jazeera Deputy Editor: We Didn't Apologize for Kuntar Festivities," MEMRI, accessed Aug. 27, 2011.

72 *The Jewish Week* (New York), Aug. 9, 2011.

73 Ghassan ben Jeddo, Facebook page, accessed Sept. 22, 2011; "Why Did Ghassan Ben Jeddo Resign from Aljazeera?" *Beirut Spring blog*, Apr. 23, 2011.

74 "Samir Kantar's family awaits his return," Al Jazeera English, on YouTube, July 15, 2008.

people than that an entire village, country, and region should lionize a child murderer.

"A display of unity in Abieh," she concluded, "may be the start of reconciliation between Hezbollah and Walid Jumblatt," the Lebanese Druze leader. As Amin would have it, the crux of the story is not the inverted morals of Kuntar's reception but the prospect of that reception serving as a catalyst for Lebanese reconciliation.⁷⁵ Only one AJE segment—by Sky News veteran David Chater—included an explicit account of Kuntar's actions.⁷⁶

"Al Jazeera English has hired some very good people, but they've also got people who I don't think would be hired by other serious media outlets," said one Israeli spokesperson. "Some really try to be professional in a journalistic sense and tell the story fairly. Others are ultimately driven by an agenda, which is, of course, quite hostile to Israel."⁷⁷

Perhaps as a result of the Kuntar episode, or as part of its push into America, AJE appears lately to be showing more caution in its coverage of Israel. In July, its *Inside Story* series devoted a full half-hour episode to the country's cost-of-living protests⁷⁸ then did the same a week later with guests including government officials and a *Ha'aretz* columnist.⁷⁹ In August, its *Playlist* series rebroadcast an April segment on Middle Eastern heavy metal bands featuring acts from Iran, Dubai, Lebanon—and two from Israel.⁸⁰

Hours of watching AJA in July and August for this article produced not a single similar human-interest story on Israel in Arabic. Instead, during the months that the Arab revolutions raged, the AJA website featured a map of the Middle

East and North Africa with every country marked except Israel. The Green Line demarcating Israel and the West Bank appeared, but beside it was the single word "Palestine."⁸¹

HOPES DASHED, WINDOWS SMASHED

Four years ago, Judea Pearl expressed hope that Al Jazeera might "learn to harness its popularity in the service of humanity, progress, and moderation."⁸² At that time many analysts believed the network represented democracy in its infancy, and "you don't slap an infant on the wrist before it learns to stand on its feet."⁸³

"In 2007, I was still hoping that Al Jazeera will become a force for good," he recalled earlier this year. "Unfortunately, the opposite has happened. Al Jazeera's popularity and general acceptance in the West has emboldened its management to take an even harder anti-Western stance."⁸⁴

"Today, we have much deeper concerns with Al Jazeera—it is no longer a clash with journalistic standards but a clash with the norms of civilized society," Pearl wrote. "Our charming infant is smashing windows now and poisoning pets in the neighborhood—a slap on the wrist is perhaps way overdue."⁸⁵

As Al Jazeera English expands into the United States, it will need to choose one of three options. The first is to continue its present gambit of declaring a common "vision" with its parent channel while hoping the latter's indiscretions somehow do not reflect poorly on itself. The second is to pressure that same out-of-control kin to pull its act together, lest it once again cast doubt on the character of both. Failing that, Al Jazeera English will have but one alternative: to categorically and unequivocally cut its own cord.



75 "Samir Kuntar returns home," Al Jazeera English, on YouTube, July 17, 2008.

76 "Israel's deal with Hezbollah," Al Jazeera English, on YouTube, June 29, 2008.

77 Author telephone interview, Sept. 7, 2011.

78 "Has the Arab Spring arrived in Israel?" Al Jazeera English, Aug. 1, 2011.

79 "In Israel, 'It's the economy, stupid,'" Al Jazeera English, Aug. 8, 2011.

80 Rebroadcast of "Rocking the System," Al Jazeera English, Apr. 20, 2009 segment.

81 Aljazeera.net, accessed Aug. and Sept. 2011.

82 Pearl, "Another perspective, or jihad TV?"

83 Judea Pearl, "Al-Jazeera and the Glorification of Barbarity," *The Jewish Journal*, Aug. 20, 2008.

84 Pearl, "A statement of observation concerning Al Jazeera."

85 Pearl, "Al-Jazeera and the Glorification of Barbarity."

Rethinking U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan

by Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi

As U.S. military operations in Afghanistan drag on inconclusively, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the Taliban insurgency is gaining ground. In the first six months of 2010, for example, there was a 31 percent rise in civilian casualties while the Shari'a was implemented in areas hitherto inaccessible to the Taliban.¹ Insurgent attacks in the first quarter of 2011 grew by 51 percent compared with the previous year² while the Afghan security forces have been increasingly penetrated by the Taliban.³

It is hardly surprising therefore that President Hamid Karzai has reportedly held several meetings with the Taliban over the past three years in an attempt to strike a deal.⁴ In the meantime, Pakistan is being destabilized still further, especially with the rise of new militant groups such as the Punjabi Taliban, despite increased attacks against militant hide-outs in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas bordering Afghanistan.⁵

The emerging picture is very grim, indeed. How is it that, despite making Afghanistan the cornerstone of its struggle against militant extremism, the Obama administration's strategy is failing so miserably? Does the president's plan to withdraw 10,000 troops by the end of this year, and to remove all 33,000 troops originally added as part of the surge by the end of next summer, have a realistic chance of success?⁶ And are there any viable alternatives to this failing strategy?

THE "SURGE" AND THE AFGHAN ARMY

The clearest difference between the Bush and the Obama administrations' Afghan strategies is the more recent deployment of nearly 60,000 additional troops as part of a surge, mostly in the Pashtun areas of the south and east where the Taliban insurgency is strongest.⁷ However,

according to Matthew Hoh, former senior civilian U.S. representative in the southeastern province of Zabul, who resigned in protest over the

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1 U.N. News Center (New York), Aug. 10, 2010; *The Daily Telegraph* (London), Aug. 16, 2010.

2 "ANSO Quarterly Data Report, Q1 2011," The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, London, Apr. 2011.

3 *The New York Times*, May 22, 2011.

4 See, for example, *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 2, 2010.

5 Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Special Dispatch, no. 2979, May 26, 2010.

6 *The Huffington Post*, June 22, 2011.

7 *The Examiner* (Seattle), Aug. 24, 2010.

The coalition's presence in Pashtun lands is viewed as a foreign force that should be resisted.

current strategy, the “U.S. and NATO presence and operations in Pashtun valleys and villages, as well as Afghan army and police units that are led and composed of non-Pashtun soldiers and police, provide an occupation force” against which a Pashtun insurgency “composed of multiple, seemingly infinite, local groups” is justified.⁸

Hoh’s observations should not be that surprising. As noted in an International Crisis Group report, the disorganized and weak Afghan National Army (ANA), plagued by illiteracy and innumeracy, comprises a disproportionately large percentage of ethnic Tajiks who are often deployed to the Pashtun areas.⁹ Such a policy poses a major problem for the official counterinsurgency strategy objective of winning “the hearts and minds” of the Afghan population.

The lack of Pashtun soldiers in southern and eastern Afghanistan, together with the increase in the number of U.S. and other non-Afghan troops, means that the coalition’s presence in Pashtun lands is largely viewed as a foreign force that should be resisted, provoking a localized Pashtun nationalist insurgency, which, in Hoh’s words “is fed by what is perceived ... as a continued and sustained assault, going back centuries, on Pashtun land, culture, traditions, and religion by internal and external enemies.”¹⁰ Attitudes among Afghans as a whole were less intense, yet a January 2010 poll found that 31 percent opposed U.S. military presence while 37 percent opposed the presence of NATO forces or International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF).¹¹ Given that the Pashtuns comprise roughly 30 to 40 percent of Afghanistan’s

population, the intensification of a Pashtun insurgency is bound to allow the Taliban to make further advances.

THE KARZAI REGIME

The second major problem with the present strategy relates to the propping up of Karzai’s centralized regime in Kabul, which has cost the U.S. taxpayer almost \$300 billion in military and reconstruction (i.e., nation-building) efforts since the 2001 invasion.¹² Nonetheless, when an already corrupt regime is flooded with aid, it simply becomes more corrupt. In 2007, Afghanistan ranked 172nd of 179 countries in Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI),¹³ dropping to the 179th place out of 180 countries in the 2009 CPI,¹⁴ and finally leveling off at 176th of 178 countries in the 2010 CPI (joint second last with Myanmar).¹⁵ A report of flagrant corruption appeared in the German daily *Der Spiegel*, which stated that “billions of dollars are being secreted out of Kabul to help well-connected Afghans buy luxury villas in Dubai.”¹⁶ A similar trend toward corruption attending the influx of U.S. aid can be observed in Iraq, which ranked 113th of 133 countries in the 2003 CPI but 176th of 180 countries in the 2009 CPI after having received in excess of \$50 billion in U.S. reconstruction money.¹⁷

Nor should the failure of the present nation-building project in Afghanistan be surprising given the unhappy fate of similar efforts, notably the Helmand Valley Project, lavishly funded with U.S. aid from 1946 to 1979. According to foreign policy analyst Nick Cullather, incorporating “edu-

8 Matthew Hoh to Amb. Nancy Powell, letter of resignation, Sept. 10, 2009.

9 “A Force in Fragments: Restructuring the Afghan National Army,” International Crisis Group, Washington, D.C., May 12, 2010, p. 20.

10 Hoh to Amb. Powell.

11 Afghan poll, Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research, Kabul, Dec. 11-23, 2009.

12 *Der Spiegel* (Berlin), June 5, 2010.

13 Corruption Perceptions Index 2007, Transparency International, Berlin, accessed Aug. 8, 2011.

14 Corruption Perceptions Index 2009, Transparency International, Berlin, accessed Aug. 8, 2011.

15 Corruption Perceptions Index 2010, Transparency International, Berlin, accessed Aug. 8, 2011.

16 *Der Spiegel*, June 5, 2010.

17 Corruption Perceptions Index 2009.

cation, industry, agriculture, medicine, and marketing under a single controlling authority,” this project ultimately faltered as “the engines and dreams of modernization had run their full course, spooling out across the desert until they hit limits of physics, culture, and history ... [Yet] proponents of a fresh nation-building venture in Afghanistan, unaware of the results of the last one, have resurrected its imaginings.”¹⁸

The appalling lack of transparency aside, the Karzai regime’s standing as an unrepresentative and illegitimate government is illustrated by the fact that the 2009 presidential elections were marked by low voter turnout, ballot stuffing, intimidation of opponents, and widespread electoral fraud. After Karzai’s reelection, cabinet ministers were selected by the Afghan parliament largely on the basis of, in the words of one parliament member, “ethnicity or bribery or money.”¹⁹ The parliamentary elections in September 2010 were likewise marked by electoral fraud.²⁰

Other flaws of the Karzai regime include its disregard for the concepts of freedom and human rights and the presence of drug lords and war criminals in its ranks. As Freedom House’s 2010 Afghanistan assessment noted, while “blasphemy and apostasy by Muslims are considered capital crimes,” the Afghan supreme court is “composed of religious scholars who have little knowledge of civil jurisprudence.” Furthermore, prison conditions are extremely poor with many detainees held illegally and “in a prevailing climate of impunity, government ministers as well as warlords in some provinces sanction widespread abuses by the police, military, and intelligence



Current U.S. strategy in Afghanistan is heavily reliant on the whims and schemes of President Hamid Karzai (left), a feckless and inconsistent U.S. ally, seen here with then-presidential candidate Barack Obama, Kabul, July 21, 2008. The 2009 Afghan presidential elections were marked by low voter turnout, ballot stuffing, intimidation of opponents, and widespread electoral fraud.

forces under their command, including arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, extortion, and extrajudicial killings.”²¹

All these factors only distance the Afghan people from its government and drive them into the arms of the Taliban, in both Pashtun and non-Pashtun areas.

IGNORING STRATEGIC DEPTH

Despite the widespread publicity given to leaked documents detailing support for Taliban operations in Afghanistan by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI), the problem of the Pakistani army and the ISI’s expansionist policy of “strategic depth” has yet to be ad-

18 Nick Cullather, “From New Deal to New Frontier in Afghanistan: Modernization in a Buffer State,” *The Cold War as Global Conflict*, International Center for Advanced Studies, New York University, Working Paper, no. 6, Aug. 2002.

19 *BBC News*, Jan. 2, 2010.

20 “Freedom in the World 2011, Afghanistan,” Freedom House, Washington, D.C., accessed Aug. 8, 2011.

21 “Freedom in the World 2010, Afghanistan,” Freedom House, Washington, D.C., accessed Aug. 8, 2011.

Pakistan has signed a number of large arms deals with China.

dressed in a meaningful way. This policy, rooted primarily in Pakistanis' perception of their country's identity as an

Islamic state and pursued in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and parts of India, has been manifested in support for various Islamist militant groups for at least four decades as a means of projecting Pakistani influence abroad.

Pakistan itself is an artificial state composed of diverse ethnic groups that are united solely by religious affiliation. Hence, fear of Pashtun and Baloch (Pakistan's largest provinces geographically) desires for autonomy or independence, together with concern about India's influence, also provides a basis for pursuing Pakistani strategic depth. For example, to suppress Baloch nationalism, the Pakistani military and intelligence have engaged in human rights abuses including the arrest and disappearance of some 8,000 Baloch activists in secret prisons.²² They have also safeguarded the Taliban Shura, the council responsible for directing operations in Afghanistan under the leadership of Mullah Omar, which for its part has formed a close working relationship with the Haqqani terrorist network and other Islamist militants in Afghanistan.²³ At the same time, the Pakistani army and ISI are dependent on Western financial aid and, consequently, engage in limited cooperation with Washington and NATO by playing a double game with militants based in the Afghan-Pakistani border regions. This involves attacking them on occasion but often providing early warnings and escape routes during security operations against them.²⁴ That said, the military and intelligence do allow for U.S. drone attacks and are directly engaged in clashes with groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban in Waziristan, which are committed to overthrowing the Pakistani government.²⁵

The result has been the increasing destabili-

zation of Pakistan itself. A clear example is the rise of the Punjabi Taliban, the most likely culprit for the

bombing of a Sufi shrine in Lahore in July 2010, which killed at least forty people: Pakistani army and ISI coddling of Punjab-based Islamist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba has allowed for these organizations to provide safe havens in southwest Punjab for Taliban militants who have then set up Islamic seminaries to promote their ideology.²⁶

In addition, there is increasing cooperation between Islamabad and Beijing in opposition to what is viewed as a U.S.-Russian alliance in Afghanistan.²⁷ Most notably, some 11,000 Chinese troops have been stationed in the northernmost province of Gilgit-Baltistan, ostensibly to provide aid for flood-relief efforts,²⁸ where they have been reportedly "building infrastructure by investing billions of dollars."²⁹ The aim is to ensure control over a route leading to the port of Gwadar in Balochistan with relatively near access to the Persian Gulf and proximity to substantial copper reserves. This is another reason behind the Pakistani military and intelligence's safeguarding of the Taliban Shura and other Islamist militants in Balochistan; exploitation of the province's mineral wealth and Chinese investment have generally not benefitted the indigenous population, sparking discontent and adding fuel to the Baloch nationalist insurgency.³⁰

Pakistan has also signed a number of large arms deals with China. During Pakistani prime minister Yousuf Gilani's visit to Beijing on May 17-20, 2011, the Chinese agreed to provide Islamabad "immediately" with fifty new JF-17 Thunder multipurpose fighter jets,³¹ driving the Indian defense

22 *The Nation* (Islamabad), Oct. 24, 2009.

23 Tufail Ahmad and Y. Carmon, "The New U.S. Policy in Afghanistan: Evading the Root of the Problem," *Inquiry and Analysis Series Report*, no. 568, MEMRI, Dec. 2, 2009.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *The Long War Journal* (Washington, D.C.), Aug. 14, 2011.

26 Amjad Ayub Mirza, "The Warrior Seminaries of Punjab," *Daily Times* (Lahore), July 17, 2010.

27 *Inquiry and Analysis Series Report*, no. 691, MEMRI, May 26, 2011.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Special Dispatch*, no. 3772, MEMRI, Apr. 19, 2011.

30 *The Guardian* (London), July 18, 2010.

31 *Inquiry and Analysis Series Report*, no. 691, MEMRI, May 26, 2011.

minister to attack the deal as a “matter of serious concern” that would force New Delhi to upgrade its military “capability.”³²

In failing to address the problem of strategic depth in any meaningful way, U.S. strategy has also inadvertently swung the Indian government away from its formerly pro-Western orientation because New Delhi, like Tehran, has a vested interest in an independent Afghanistan, free of Taliban rule, so as to reduce Pakistan’s influence in that country. Thus, for example, in April 2010, Foreign Minister S. M. Krishna reiterated New Delhi’s official disagreement with Washington’s opposition to the Iranian nuclear program and welcomed Tehran’s plan to send low-enriched uranium to Turkey.³³ This policy shift was effectively a reversal of the Indian government’s November 2009 vote alongside Washington at the International Atomic Energy Agency to refer the Iranian nuclear program to the U.N. Security Council.³⁴

WHAT’S NEXT?

If the present flawed strategy is sustained, it is likely that the Obama administration, having eventually realized Afghanistan’s increasing destabilization, will not uphold the withdrawal timetable that began in July and will instead commit troops for many years to come. Indeed, senior military figures such as Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, already have in mind a much greater, long-term commitment to a large U.S. military presence.³⁵ Though a



A Chinese special forces commander gestures to a Pakistani soldier during a joint military drill near Karachi, Pakistan, March 8, 2009. The growing alliance between the People’s Republic of China and Pakistan further complicates U.S. policy options and exacerbates tensions in the area. Some 11,000 Chinese troops have been stationed in Pakistan’s northernmost province, and Beijing has promised Islamabad advanced fighter jets.

Taliban takeover of the country is highly unlikely, the ongoing war will prove at best a massive drain on U.S. resources and lives, possibly reaching a cost of up to \$100 billion a year, all for killing a few dozen al-Qaeda militants in a country whose annual gross domestic product is a mere \$13 billion.³⁶

Contrary to the official line of Western governments, the fear of Afghanistan becoming once again an al-Qaeda base for overseas terror attacks is not that well-grounded. Although al-Qaeda and allied groups are well established in Somalia, Yemen, and Pakistan, they have largely evolved beyond conventional bases with their primary recruiting tool being the Internet. Consequently, they are capable of devising and preparing terror attacks on Western soil such as the Madrid train

³² Ibid.

³³ Inquiry and Analysis Series Report, no. 568, MEMRI, Dec. 2, 2009.

³⁴ *Deccan Herald* (Bangalore), Nov. 27, 2009.

³⁵ Agence France-Press, June 15, 2011.

³⁶ “The Cost of the Afghanistan War,” Afghanistan Study Group, Washington, D.C., Aug. 16, 2010.

Many Afghans view the Taliban as a force intending to serve Pakistani interests.

bombing in March 2004 and the July 2005 London bombing. Do proponents of the present strategy to prevent al-Qaeda's resurgence in Afghanistan also recommend sending large forces to Somalia and Yemen? Indeed, in Somalia there is an African Union peacekeeping force, deeply resented by the local population, which is actually losing ground to Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen, an al-Qaeda-allied group.

It is also likely that the Pakistani military and intelligence, after securing their interests in Afghanistan, will focus their policy of strategic depth on India, Kashmir, and Bangladesh, destabilizing the whole of South Asia. Given aggravating factors such as growing tension between Pakistan and India, owing to the former's water crisis, an Indo-Pakistani regional war might well ensue. When Pakistan was able to focus its policy of "strategic depth" elsewhere, a military conflict with India occurred in 1999 following Pakistani incursions into Kashmir. This did not involve the use of nuclear weapons, but then-President Musharraf moved nuclear warheads toward the joint border.³⁷ One may also note the Indo-Pakistani military-standoff in 2001-02 over Kashmir that was only prevented from turning into an all-out war by intense international mediation.³⁸

Though there is no sign of militants seizing nuclear weapon stockpiles, a Pakistani refocus on strategic depth vis-à-vis the Indian subcontinent could well increase the chance of Pakistani or Indian nuclear weapons falling into the hands of Islamist militant groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban; this group is committed to attacking the United States and other Western countries unless they "accept Islam or pay *jizya* [a tax imposed on non-Muslims]."³⁹ Such a scenario should not be dismissed out of hand. After all, militants were able to launch a hard-hitting assault on a major naval base in Karachi on May 22, 2011, following

the failure of talks with al-Qaeda over the release of naval officers arrested on suspicion of links to the

terror group. At least ten people were killed and two U.S.-made P3-C Orion surveillance and anti-submarine aircraft worth \$36 million each were destroyed.⁴⁰ How, then, can it be taken for granted that Pakistan's nuclear stockpiles are so much more secure?

POSSIBLE STRATEGY CHANGES

In light of the failure of the current strategy, it is worthwhile to examine a number of proposed alternative approaches to the war in Afghanistan and weigh their pros and cons.

Pakistan Garrison. In his book *Operation Dark Heart* and elsewhere,⁴¹ Col. Anthony Shaffer suggests that Washington withdraw conventional forces as quickly as possible, leaving 20,000 special forces troops in Afghanistan and garrisoning forces in Pakistan for operations against al-Qaeda militants and their allies. Yet, as Matthew Hoh pointed out, while garrisoning troops in Pakistan may be conducive to fighting al-Qaeda, this scenario is unlikely to materialize as the Islamabad government would not risk the public and military outrage attending the permanent deployment of these troops.⁴²

Promote economic development in Afghanistan. This suggestion, put forward by the authors of the Afghanistan Study Group report, includes "giving Afghanistan preferential trading status with the U.S., Europe, Japan, and other leading global economies," together with "promoting 'special reconstruction zones' for foreign and domestic companies to produce export goods."⁴³

37 *The Nation* (Islamabad), July 6, 2006.

38 "2002-Kashmir Crisis," GlobalSecurity.org, accessed Aug. 8, 2011.

39 *BBC News*, Jan. 29, 2007.

40 *Asia Times* (Hong Kong), May 27, 2011.

41 Anthony Shaffer, *Operation Dark Heart* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company Ltd., 2011), pp. 278-81.

42 Hoh to Amb. Powell.

43 "The Way Forward: A Five Point-Approach," Afghanistan Study Group, Washington, D.C., Aug. 16, 2010.

**A U.S. strategy of
containment coupled
with broader regional
engagement is needed.**

This proposed policy is based on the belief that “endemic poverty has made some elements of the population susceptible to Taliban

overtures. Moreover, failed and destitute states frequently become incubators for terrorism, drug and human trafficking, and other illicit activities.”⁴⁴ It represents a common belief among counterinsurgency theorists: namely, that creating employment opportunities drives people away from militant groups. However, a 2010 study based on research in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the southern Philippines, showed that far from reducing violence, providing jobs actually led to increased violence.⁴⁵ A plausible explanation for this is that while government counterinsurgency programs may promote employment at the local level, fighting continues to disrupt the overall economy so that there is no substantial change in the military situation.⁴⁶ People may get jobs “cleaning streets, picking up trash, or manning a check-point,” but their pay is “probably still low,” and the business environment remains poor owing to instability.⁴⁷

Several further points come to mind. For one thing, given the U.S. domestic economic difficulties, one can readily doubt Washington’s ability to resolve Afghanistan’s economic woes. For another, the study group missed the fact that the biggest sources of support for Islamist terrorism are not failed states but donors from the wealthiest Arab Persian Gulf states such as Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, as recently leaked diplomatic cables reveal.⁴⁸ Indeed, the fact that militants tend to come from the more comfortable walks of society has also been documented by such scholars as Daniel Pipes.⁴⁹

Strike a deal with the Islamist militants. There is frequent talk of the need to negotiate a deal with the ideologically-driven insur-

gents. To this end, certain U.S. officials—such as special envoy Marc Grossman—seem eager to establish contact with Mullah Omar and have him “bless a political settlement on behalf of most Afghan insurgents.”⁵⁰

This approach, however, creates numerous problems. First, there is no indication that if a certain group agreed to a deal with the Western powers, it would be followed by other, let alone all, militant groups. Were a treaty of sorts to be struck with Mullah Omar, it does not follow that the Haqqani network, for example, would adhere to it. Concerning the Taliban itself, the events that unfolded after the “Shari’a for peace” deals in 2009 between the Pakistani security forces and the Taliban in the Swat Valley⁵¹ demonstrate the ways in which the Islamist militants could exploit an agreement as a prelude to expanding control into adjoining areas. The “Shari’a for peace” deals were initially struck in February 2009, but the spread of violence perpetrated by Taliban militants in Swat eventually led to an offensive in the area by the Pakistani security forces in May 2009. Further, it is unlikely that members of the various Islamist groups accept the basic ideals of pluralism, respect for the rule of law, and human rights. In addition, the 2010 debacle over Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour illustrates the fog surrounding any potential reconciliation process with the militants. Depicted as one of the most senior Taliban leaders in direct negotiations with the Karzai government, Mullah Mansour was actually a shopkeeper, based in Quetta, who concocted a web of lies about his Taliban credentials in order to receive hefty payments.⁵²

Indeed, the notion that the “ideological in-

44 Ibid.

45 Eli Berman, Joseph H. Felter, and Jacob N. Shapiro, “Constructive COIN,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 1, 2010.

46 Ibid, cited in Joel Wing, “Fighting Insurgents Isn’t the Same as Countering Terrorists,” *Musings on Iraq*, July 25, 2010.

47 Ibid.

48 *The Guardian*, Dec. 5, 2010.

49 Daniel Pipes, “The Causes of Terrorism: It’s Not about Money,” DanielPipes.org, June 24, 2002.

50 Michael Hughes, “Desperately Seeking out Mullah Omar,” *The Huffington Post*, May 31, 2011.

51 MEMRI, Dec. 15, 2010.

52 *The New York Times*, Nov. 22, 2010.

The Afghan president should be pressured to devolve power from Kabul.

surgents” enjoy a considerable degree of popular legitimacy among Afghans is totally misconceived, despite the Karzai regime’s lack of popularity. As foreign policy strategist Michael Hughes notes, a focus on negotiating an agreement for power sharing and peace between the central government and the Islamist insurgents amounts to little more than a “deal that enables” an “elite to monopolize power.”⁵³ For if polling data provide any indication, it would appear that many Afghans view the Taliban as a force intending to serve Pakistani interests and have unfavorable views about Pakistan’s role in the country.⁵⁴ Therefore, as Hughes points out, “many Afghans believe awarding the Taliban with any power would be tantamount to gifting Islamabad undue sway in Kabul.”⁵⁵ Any approach toward political reconciliation would surely require a broader representation of civil society in Afghanistan.⁵⁶

Nor does Osama bin Laden’s May 2011 killing by U.S. forces herald a dramatic change in the strategic situation, despite Obama’s buoyant assertion that in “Afghanistan, we have broken the Taliban’s momentum ... and after years of war against al-Qaeda and its affiliates, we have dealt al-Qaeda a huge blow by killing its leader—Osama bin Laden.”⁵⁷ In fact, al-Qaeda has been moving for quite some time away from conventional military bases and a centralized leadership primarily under the direction of one man to a decentralized mode of operations. The Middle East Media Research Institute, for example, has provided an in-depth report on how al-Qaeda cleric Anwar al-Awlaki made YouTube into a primary recruiting tool for aspiring jihadists: The radical cleric, recently killed by a U.S. air strike,⁵⁸ has more than 2,500 clips on YouTube—including

ing lectures, sermons, and compilation videos supporting his jihadist philosophy—and has attracted

well over three million views.⁵⁹

All this casts serious doubt on both Obama’s assessment of the implications of bin Laden’s death for the war on terror and his assertion that the present strategy has “broken the Taliban’s momentum” in the face of abundant evidence to the contrary.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The only way to salvage the decade-long U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and to prevent the country’s transformation into a regional and global hotbed is to adopt a new strategy of containment coupled with broader regional engagement.

In terms of containment, the first change that can be implemented on short notice is the substantial reduction of U.S. and NATO troop numbers in the Pashtun areas and their redeployment to anti-Taliban strongholds further north in Afghanistan or to bases far from populated areas. The next step would be to aim to either stick to the withdrawal timetable with 10,000 troops out by the end of the year and another 23,000 withdrawn by summer 2012 or follow Shaffer’s plan of commencing an immediate withdrawal of conventional forces, with a view to having them all out as soon as possible.

This should entail working to remove the “surge” troops by the end of this summer, leaving no more than 30,000 troops—including a residual force of special forces—by the end of 2012, combined with air support to contain the ideologically-driven Taliban militants bent on taking over Afghanistan. Meanwhile, and despite Karzai’s fraudulent electoral victory, it will be too

53 Hughes, “Desperately Seeking out Mullah Omar.”

54 *BBC News*, Feb. 5, 2009.

55 Hughes, “Desperately Seeking out Mullah Omar.”

56 Thomas Ruttig, Afghanistan Analysts Network, cited in *ibid*.

57 Text of President Obama’s speech, TMP LiveWire, May 19, 2011; *The Guardian*, May 19, 2011.

58 National Public Radio, Sept. 30, 2011.

59 Inquiry and Analysis Series Report, no. 632, MEMRI, Aug. 28, 2010. Awlaki’s infamous “44 Ways to Jihad” (published on Jan. 5, 2009) has been posted on dozens of YouTube pages and was cited in at least two major terrorism cases in the United States in the summer of last year.

difficult to end financial aid to his regime. Instead, the Afghan president should be pressured to devolve power from Kabul to facilitate efforts at political reconciliation, aimed at resolving the massive problem of resentment, particularly among rural Pashtuns, over what is viewed as the imposition of unrepresentative government. Here, the practical steps put forward by the Afghanistan Study Group make sense. For example, as an important start toward reconciliation, “the Afghan parliament should be given confirmation authority for major appointments, district councils should be elected, budgeting authority decentralized, and elected provincial representatives should be included in the national level council that determines the portion of funds distributed.”⁶⁰

What should decentralization entail at the local level? Pointing to Zahir Shah’s 40-year reign (1933-73), which was largely peaceful because of the king’s approach of “co-optation of and cooperation with village society,” David Katz has aptly proposed a decentralized system based on a string of local leaders endowed with certain federal assets, powers, and obligations, who would link Pashtun village society with the central government through a “densely layered” web of “constantly renegotiated, local and social solidarity networks.”⁶¹ Katz’s suggestion to fight the Taliban in their Pakistan sanctuaries through the use of semi-autonomous warlords is less plausible, both because the warlords might not be talked into such operations and because the only forces capable of acting decisively against these Taliban sanctuaries are the Pakistani military and intelligence, which have given the militants these sanctuaries in the first place.

60 “The Way Forward: A Five Point-Approach.”

61 David Katz, “Reforming the Village War: The Afghanistan Conflict,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2011, pp. 21-2.

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“Shari’a for peace” deals suggested by some have proven disastrous for all involved with the exception of the Islamist terrorist groups that exploit them. Attacks continued unabated as in this bombing by the Taliban of a school van in northwestern Pakistan, September 13, 2011. Pakistani troops were forced to go on the offensive against the Taliban in May 2009 having just signed a deal with them in February.

Coupled with a reduction in foreign troop presence in Pashtun areas, such measures can be highly instrumental in ending the Pashtun nationalist insurgency, which is often conflated with the ideologically driven Taliban. At the same time, the Afghan National Army needs to become more inclusive of Pashtuns. Encouraging the ANA to broaden its ethnic base is much more sound than supporting localized Pashtun militias and warlords opposed to the Taliban, as they themselves, in the words of Hoh, make a mockery of “our own rule of law and counter-narcotics efforts,”⁶² thus increasing the risk of driving Taliban recruitment. The latter policy would also be incredibly impractical to implement as it would require working with tribes on an individual level.

There may, however, be some merit in the recent policy of the Afghan Local Police Program, implemented in a few areas wrested from Taliban control after the departure of NATO

62 Hoh to Amb. Powell.

**Encouraging the Afghan army
to broaden its ethnic base is
preferable to supporting
Pashtun militias and warlords.**

forces.⁶³ This entails arming local tribesmen rather than warlords and is reminiscent of what the Afghan government once denoted the Afghan Militia Forces (AMF). The AMF had been largely disarmed and demobilized by 2005 in favor of a national army, yet there is no reason why a police program cannot coexist with and supplement a more ethnically representative army. Finally, it should be made clear to the Taliban that any future hosting of al-Qaeda militants or anti-Western aggression emanating from areas under their control would be met with severe counterterrorism retaliatory strikes.

On the other hand, a broader approach to regional negotiations is required, which can address the problem of the strategic depth policy of the Pakistani military and intelligence forces. Abandoning this policy will not only translate into ending support for Islamist militant groups but also into cracking down on them, particularly on the Taliban Shura in Quetta.

Above all, Washington should recognize that Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Iran, Russia, and China—though having a vested interest in preventing the Taliban from returning to power—are reluctant to legitimate a large, foreign military presence in Afghanistan. The Uzbeks, in particular, fear that a Taliban-dominated Afghanistan will offer support to their own Islamist movement. New Delhi is concerned with a more aggressive Pakistani pursuit of the strategic depth policy while the Iranian and Chinese governments are worried about potential Taliban support for Baloch and Uighur Islamist militants. However, Tehran, presently confident that the Taliban will not retake Kabul, is reportedly extending them support.⁶⁴ This is not so much a means of expanding Iranian influence in Afghanistan as it is a ploy to keep U.S. forces bogged down in an unwinnable counterinsurgency campaign, diverting attention from Tehran's nuclear program and preventing the possibility of a preemptive U.S. strike on

these facilities.

A multilateral agreement involving these countries, the United States, and other NATO members,

aimed at militarily neutralizing Afghanistan and incorporating Pakistan into this framework, should, therefore, be devised. The signatories should agree to respect Afghan independence and military neutrality.⁶⁵ This would mean, for example, that the Indian military could not operate out of Afghanistan, which could assuage Islamabad's fears of New Delhi's regional expansion that has partly fed the belief in the necessity of strategic depth. Likewise, Islamabad's chief ally Beijing, not having to fear the possibility of permanent U.S. bases in Afghanistan, could help pressure the Pakistanis to abandon strategic depth in return for economic cooperation on projects in Afghanistan like the Aynak copper mine, in which Beijing has invested \$3 billion.⁶⁶ Such an incentive could entice the Islamabad government to join the accord if one adds negotiated compromises over issues such as the British-imposed Durand border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which the former does not accept.⁶⁷ It is paramount that the consequences of strategic depth in terms of Pakistani stability be discussed openly in these regional negotiations. If the ISI and the Pakistani army were convinced of the security threat emanating from support for various militant groups, they would be much more likely to abandon their expansionist policy. To this end, Washington should also offer to end drone strikes in Pakistani territory, placing responsibility for tackling the militants in Pakistan in the hands of the country's own security forces.

Only by adopting this new approach can stability be achieved for U.S. security interests at both the Afghan and regional levels. Persisting in the present strategy, by contrast, is an assured recipe for disaster.



63 Fox News, Mar. 8, 2011.

64 See, for example, *The Long War Journal*, Aug. 6, 2010.

65 Selig Harrison, "How to Leave Afghanistan without Losing," *Foreign Policy*, Aug. 24, 2010.

66 Anatol Lieven, "China Is Key to America's Afghan Endgame," *The New York Times*, June 25, 2010.

67 Harrison, "How to Leave Afghanistan without Losing."

Riyadh Enters the Yemen-Huthi Fray

by Lucas Winter

On August 11, 2009, the Yemeni government launched “Operation Scorched Earth,” aimed at putting an end to the Huthi uprising that had destabilized the country’s northern province of Sa’da for more than five years. As fighting spread to the province’s border with Saudi Arabia, Huthi fighters attacked a Saudi border post in early November, killing one guard and injuring eleven. The Saudi government immediately declared that the rebels had crossed a red line and began bombing Huthi positions along the border. Yet what was apparently conceived as a quick operation to clear the region of “infiltrators” turned into a major operation involving ground troops and air power, which lasted slightly over three months and exacted more than a hundred Saudi casualties.¹

While the Yemeni government emphasized two major aspects of the conflict—the Huthis’ desire to reinstate the imamate that was overthrown in 1962, and their being an Iranian proxy that had no popular legitimacy²—the most recent round of fighting leading up to the Saudi intervention was in fact driven by local concerns: the fight between the Huthis and the Yemeni government for control over the main roads in Sa’da and Riyadh’s long-standing concern to secure its border with Yemen.

Given Riyadh’s worries about its own potentially restive Shiite population, on the one hand, and San’a’s inability to curb the influence of the Huthis’ Zaidi revivalism, on the other, the Saudi government will probably continue to amplify Tehran’s supposed involvement in the region as it has done on various occasions since 1979. Still, the Huthis’ subservience to Tehran has never been fully substantiated.

THE UPRISING

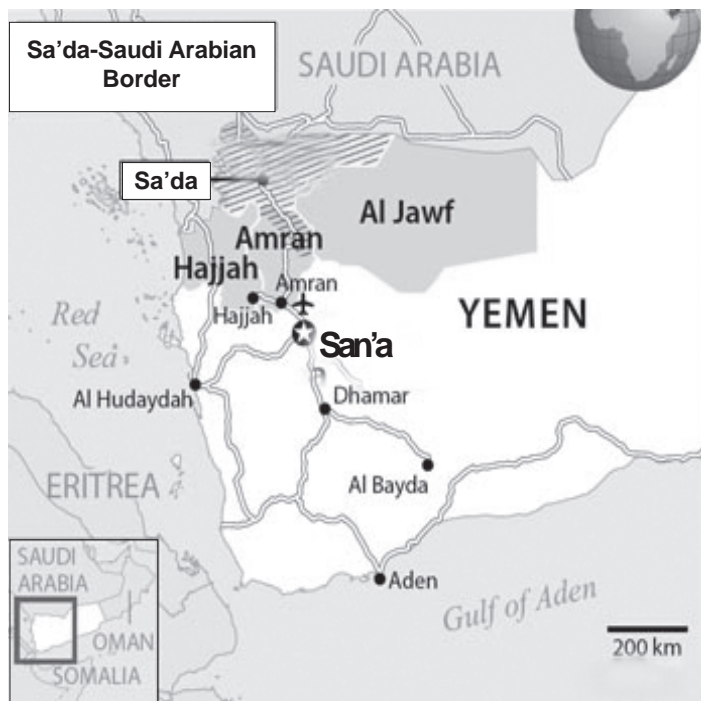
The rebels have been fighting the Yemeni government since 2004 and are followers of Hussein al-Huthi, a *sayyid* (descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through his grandchildren

Hussein and Hassan), who headed a network of education centers initially called the Believing Youth Club (BYC, *al-Shabab al-Mumin*). Founded in 1991 by a group of activists that in-

1 *The Guardian* (London), Nov. 23, 2009.

2 While Saudi and Yemeni charges of Tehran’s material support for the Huthis have never been proven, there is little doubt of Iran’s political support for the Huthis. Tehran’s condemnation of Saudi policy in Yemen via its Arabic-language news network al-Alam earned the channel a temporary suspension from the Saudi-owned satellite ArabSat, purportedly for contractual reasons. See, *Asharq al-Awsat* (London), Nov. 5, 2009.

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Map 1: Border area between Sa'da province, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia

volved in the BYC and led the group in an increasingly political direction. His sermons, which became the basis of the group's ideological and political platform, focused among other things on the weakness of the Arab nation and the need to confront Israel, the United States, and their regional "clients," an indirect indictment of the Yemeni government.⁴

The Yemeni authorities were accustomed to overseeing and monitoring the activities of non-governmental groups, and the BYC was no exception. Only in the early 2000s, though, did they begin expressing serious concern with some BYC activities,

cluded Hussein's brother Muhammad, the BYC aimed at providing education to the youth of Sa'da while reviving the influence of Zaidia, a Shiite branch endemic to Yemen, which had been in decline since the overthrow of the imamate.³

The group quickly expanded, opening centers throughout Sa'da province and the adjacent provinces of al-Jawf and Amran. By the middle of the decade, ideological differences and rapid growth led to an internal split within the group. The branch that took control of most centers fell under the influence of Hussein al-Huthi, who acquired a loyal following among group members. Elected to represent his home district of Haydan (Sa'da province) in parliament in 1993, Huthi quit politics four years later and went to Sudan to pursue a degree in Qur'anic studies. After returning to Yemen, he became more in-

particularly after the group adopted as its slogan "Allahu Akbar! Death to America! Death to Israel! Curse the Jews! Victory to Islam!" Unwilling to capitulate to government demands to stop using the slogan and otherwise cease defying the state, Huthi was declared persona non grata. When in June 2004 a large group of followers chanted the slogan outside the Great Mosque in San'a, security forces were sent to detain him at his mountain stronghold thus triggering the "Huthi uprising."⁵

The first round of fighting (June-September 2004) took place mostly around the Marran Mountains (in the western part of Sa'da province) where Huthi and a group of his followers evaded government forces for months and ended when Huthi

3 Al-Eshteraki (San'a), Sept. 7, 2007.

4 Abdullah Lux, "Yemen's Last Zaydi Imam: The *Shabab al-Mu'min*, the *Malazim*, and *hizb Allah* in the Thought of Husayn Badr al-Din al-Huthi," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Sept. 2009.

5 Mareb Press (San'a), Feb. 27, 2007.

was killed in September 2004.⁶ A second round of fighting broke out the following spring (March–April 2005), this time spearheaded by Hussein’s father Badr ad-Din al-Huthi, an elderly and highly influential Zaidi scholar considered the principal religious authority for the BYC.⁷ While the first round of fighting was specifically aimed at detaining or killing Huthi, the second focused on decapitating the movement by going after its various leaders.⁸ A short, third round of fighting took place at the end of the same year, expanding to new parts of Sa’dā. This time the rebels were under the leadership of Badr al-Din’s young son Abd al-Malik, who based himself in the remote northwest fringes of the province.⁹

Fighting escalated significantly in the fourth round (February 2007–January 2008). Much of Sa’dā province became engulfed in violence, with previously unengaged groups drawn into the hostilities. The conflict expanded into neighboring provinces, most notably Harf Sufian in Amran province (an early BYC stronghold), strategically located along the San’a–Sa’dā highway and along a major tribal fault line. The Huthis were able to seize and hold various government installations and military bases, allowing them to procure advanced weaponry and take the fight beyond their traditional strongholds. The nearly yearlong fighting ended only through Qatari mediation.¹⁰

Soon thereafter, though, the government and the Huthis engaged in mutual recriminations, resulting in a short fifth round of fighting (May–July 2008). For the first time, fighting broke out in an area near the capital San’a. Much of the violence was by now unrelated to the initial conflict of 2004 and instead involved people seeking revenge for the bloodshed of previous fighting as well as tribes seizing the opportunity to settle long-standing disputes and to benefit materially

from the fighting. Hostilities ended in the summer of 2008 when the government unexpectedly claimed a decisive victory and declared a unilateral ceasefire. The government’s decision to stop fighting was variously attributed to concerns that the situation could spiral out of control, domestic mediation efforts, or U.S. and EU concerns with the humanitarian situation.¹¹ Hussein al-Ahmar, a government critic with little sympathy for the Huthis, called the decision to end the fighting before the rebellion had been destroyed “a betrayal of the nation.”¹²

THE REGION

Located in Yemen’s northwest corner, mountainous Sa’dā province was Yemen’s political capital until the seventeenth century. (See Map 1, page 68) As the heartland of Zaidism—which provided the ideological underpinnings for Yemen’s imamate—the province has generally maintained a cautious relationship with the republican government that overthrew the imamate in 1962. The province is among Yemen’s poorest and least developed with limited public services and infrastructure. These factors, along with Huthi’s charisma, perceived integrity, and rhetorical power, allowed the BYC to incorporate marginalized, disaffected youth and tribal leaders from various parts of the province into the Huthi movement. The Huthis established a loyal following in Huthi’s native Marran, as well as in Dahyan (the center of Zaidi scholarship northwest of Sa’dā city), Harf Sufian in Amran province, parts of Sa’dā city, and various other locations.

While it may be reasonable to treat Sa’dā province as a coherent unit due to its historical,

Hussein al-Huthi’s political platform focused on the weakness of the Arab nation and the need to confront Israel.

6 Katherine Zimmerman and Chris Harnisch, “Profile: al-Houthi Movement,” *Critical Threats*, American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C., Jan. 28, 2010.

7 Ibid.

8 Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon* (Santa Monica: The RAND Corp., 2010), p. 136.

9 Zimmerman and Harnisch, “Profile: al-Houthi Movement.”

10 Al-Jazeera English (Doha), Feb. 1, 2008.

11 “Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb,” Crisis Group Middle East Report, no. 86, May 27, 2009, p. 4.

12 *Al-Eshteraki*, July 27, 2008.



Abd al-Malik, pictured, has taken up the mantle of the rebellion's leadership. He is the brother of the movement's founder, Hussein al-Huthi, and son of Badr ad-Din al-Huthi, an elderly and highly influential Zaidi scholar considered to be the principal religious authority for the rebel group.

geographical, and cultural particularities, the province exhibits a great deal of internal diversity. It can be divided into three main regions: the tall mountains and adjacent foothills in the west, the arid mountains and highlands in the center, and the desert to the east. While the sparsely populated eastern desert is mostly inhabited by tribes belonging to the Bakil, one of Yemen's two main tribal confederations, the western mountains are the main population center for the tribes of Khawlan bin Amr, Yemen's third and least politically influential tribal confederation. Some tribes of the Hashid confederation, whose members have largely dominated Yemen's post-imamate government, live in the Sa'da highlands alongside Bakil and Khawlan tribes although Hashid's prominence is greater in areas south of Sa'da.

BORDER DYNAMICS

Smuggling has flourished along the western border of Sa'da province due to various factors including the socioeconomic disparities between

Saudi Arabia and Yemen, the difficult terrain, minimal government presence, and the limited incorporation of the local population into the national fabric. The crossings along the west of Sa'da province's border into the Saudi province of Jazan are all informal, allowing for shared grazing rights along pastoral areas and low-level commerce. Human trafficking of refugees, workers, and women and children forced into labor, principally from Yemen and Somalia, is widespread in this area, as is the smuggling of weapons and qat (a mild stimulant widely cultivated and consumed in Yemen but forbidden in Saudi Arabia). Various food products, including sheep, milk, and produce, also cross from Yemen into Saudi Arabia. Flowing in the other direction are imported generic medicines, various industrial

and manufactured goods, and cash.

With one of their main strongholds, Marran, located in the center of the province's western mountains, the Huthis were able to build alliances with smugglers in the region who likewise resented government interference. Years of fighting and constant roadblocks along the few routes connecting the region to the provincial capital increased the prevalence of smuggling. While heavy fighting along the border areas did not break out until the sixth round in 2009, intermittent clashes between the Yemeni army and smugglers were common, and many smugglers sided with the Huthis for practical rather than ideological reasons.¹³

The vast and largely uncontrolled border between Saudi Arabia and Yemen has for some time been a source of tension between the two countries. In 1934, they agreed to a general demarcation line by signing the Taif agreement.¹⁴ Although a survey was begun some years later, the

¹³ *Yemen Times* (San'a), Sept. 6, 2007.

¹⁴ Treaty of Taif, May 20, 1934.

agreement, which was to be periodically renewed, was left dormant for many years. Uncertainty over its status—first with the overthrow of the Saudi-backed imamate in 1962 and subsequently with Yemeni unification in 1990—came to the fore when a border dispute led to armed clashes in the early 1990s. This was resolved in a 1995 memorandum of understanding that renewed the terms of the Taif agreement. In 2000, the two countries signed the Jeddah treaty, which, in theory, demarcated the border definitively. Among other things, the treaty called for the creation of a demilitarized zone, with only mobile border guard stations allowed ten kilometers

from the border on each side, while also providing for shared grazing and fishing areas.¹⁵

As early as 2003, during the early stages of the Huthi conflict, Riyadh had begun building a barrier fence to mark the border clearly and prevent illegal crossings, mainly along the vast stretches of desert east of Sa'da province.¹⁶ The building of the barrier elicited strong opposition from both those tribes whose territories it cut across and from the San'a government, which claimed that it violated the free movement along the border stipulated in the 2000 Jeddah treaty. In 2004, it convinced the kingdom to halt construction with the two sides agreeing to increased coordination along the border.

With violence in Yemen increasing and many Saudi members of al-Qaeda having fled to Yemen, in the summer of 2009, Riyadh began extending a high-tech razor wire fence it had just built along its northern border with Iraq to all its borders, including the region on the western mountains of

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Huthi rebels are seen inside a court cage during their trial in San'a, October 17, 2009. Fighting has raged on and off between Yemeni government troops and Huthi rebels since 2004. The Huthis, centered in the mountainous Sa'da province bordering Saudi Arabia, are Shiite and suspected of being—or becoming—Iranian proxies.

Sa'da.¹⁷ Riyadh's prioritization of border security together with San'a's inability to control areas immediately across the border in Sa'da were in large part responsible for the Saudi willingness to directly intervene to control its borders.

THE FIGHTING RAGES

In the fall of 2008, shortly after the Yemeni government declared an end to the fifth round of fighting, returning Huthis killed a member of the powerful Walid Amr tribe in Ghamr district.¹⁸ As the tribe sought retribution, tensions began building between the two factions. In February 2009, Huthi supporters attempted to take over various government installations in the district after accusing the government of supporting the Walid Amr tribe in their dispute. Around the same time,

15 Treaty of Jeddah, June 12, 2000.

16 *Islam Daily* (Sindh Punjab Sarhad), Mar. 3, 2007.

17 In August 2009, a suicide bomber posing, as a repentant jihadist, nearly killed Saudi deputy interior minister Prince Muhammad bin Nayif in Jeddah. The planning of the attack was traced to Yemen. *Asharq al-Awsat* (London), Nov. 10, 2009.

18 Much of the information provided below was taken from the Huthi website Sadahonline. As of March 2011, the website has been taken offline. See, also, *Yemen Times*, Mar. 1, 2009.

clashes were also taking place in other districts which had been key flashpoints in previous rounds of fighting (Marran since 2004 and Harf Sufyan since 2007). Ghamr district, located along a road linking the western highlands and border towns to the Sa'da basin, had until then been relatively calm.

Huthi fighters soon took control of a mountain overlooking the district capital and about a month later had seized control of various government centers in the district. They proceeded to set up blockades along the road to Sa'da city in

an attempt to isolate Ali Zafir, sheikh of the Walid Amr tribe, and his fighters, as well as government troops. When reinforcements arrived in neighboring Razih district, the Huthis began attacking government positions there as well. The spark that began in Ghamr soon spread to neighboring

districts and then down the foothills along the border with Saudi Arabia.

While the villages along the western mountains are connected by various dirt roads and wadis (dry riverbeds), routes permitting military transport are limited and thus control of the few paved roads is crucial for any government campaign. Two intermittently paved roads connect Sa'da city to this area, one through the Marran Mountains (an important bastion of Huthi support) and the other cutting through Ghamr and Razih (See Map 2, page 73). Both roads eventually connect to the border town of al-Malahiz, home to an important Yemeni military base.

As fighting flared in Ghamr district, both sides attempted to isolate the other by setting up roadblocks and checkpoints along the Sa'da-Razih road, which made reaching the area from the provincial capital nearly impossible. In response, the government sent reinforcements along the Harad-Malahiz road and then up the mountains through Razih. With much of the western mountains cut off from the provincial capital, both the Huthis and area residents relied increasingly on smuggled goods from Saudi Arabia—

flour and gasoline were most in demand—making the situation along the border all the more volatile when government troops moved in.

By the end of July 2009, the fighting that began in Ghamr had spread to Razih and then down the mountains into Shada district. The Huthis had effectively isolated government troops and their tribal allies in Ghamr and were close to doing so in Razih. On August 4, one week before the government officially launched its campaign, the Huthis overran the 82nd Infantry Brigade's base in Shada district and seized large amounts of ammunition, mortars, rockets, tanks, and armored vehicles. Although fighting had already been going on for some months, this event was the catalyst for the launching of "Operation Scorched Earth." Units from Yemen's 15th Infantry Brigade were mobilized to regain Shada district, but one week later, on August 19, the Huthis announced the fall of the military base at Malahiz, forcing government troops to retreat west into Saudi Arabia.

It was inevitable that areas across the border would be affected by the heavy fighting, and as early as August, the Huthis had accused the Saudi military of firing on them and bombing their positions.¹⁹ In October, stray rockets fired by Yemeni troops had exploded within Saudi territory. With Yemeni forces unable to fully control Malahiz and surrounding villages, Saudi intervention—regardless of the provocation—was only a matter of time.

According to the Huthi narrative, on November 1, a Saudi border patrol allowed Yemeni troops to attack rebel positions from Jabal Dukhan, a mountain on the Saudi side of the border, which provides an important vantage point over the towns of Manzalah and Malahiz. On November 3, Huthi fighters opened fire on Saudi border guards stationed on the mountain, killing one and injuring nearly a dozen. Saudi troops returned fire, to which the rebels responded by overrunning the strategic area and seizing control of both sides of the mountain. Saudi bombing began the next day, with the Huthis claiming that Malahiz, Hussamah, lower Marran and various border villages had been hit. The Saudi government maintained that

The Huthis announced their support for the Yemeni protests and organized marches in Sa'da province.

¹⁹ *Middle East Online* (London), Oct. 19, 2009.

it was only bombing Huthi-held positions within its own territory.

After three months of heavy fighting, in February 2010, the Huthis agreed to abide by six ceasefire conditions laid out by the Yemeni government,²⁰ allegedly to spare the people of Sa'da from further death and destruction. The Saudi government declared its intervention a success, stating that its territory was now clear of "infiltrators." Yet despite its vast military superiority, Riyadh was only able to declare victory after months of fighting, significant combat casualties, and a mutual ceasefire. The Yemeni government, in turn, was unable to impose its control over the province, perhaps in part due to its focus on maintaining regime stability and cohesion while at the same time dealing with the threat of a growing southern secessionist movement. Lacking Saudi intervention, the outcome for the Yemeni government would likely have been even less favorable.

The sixth round of fighting saw the Huthis employ three main tactics: targeting prominent government figures or allies, preventing government forces from accessing areas of fighting, and attacking and occasionally overrunning military bases and checkpoints. By taking over military installations, the Huthis have been able to seize weapons of increasing sophistication, including NATO-class machine guns, mortars, and sniper rifles, as well as communications gear, armored personnel carriers, and other vehicles.²¹

The February 2010 truce seemed on the verge of collapse the following summer after fighting between Huthi loyalists and government-backed tribes resumed. After the Huthis overran a military base and captured hundreds of soldiers in July, a seventh round of fighting seemed imminent. The captives, however, were released a few days later, and Qatari mediation helped the two sides reach a more substantive



agreement in August. Despite lingering mistrust, a series of confidence-building measures followed in the second half of 2010, including the release of detainees and a Huthi hand-over of seized military equipment.

CONCLUSION

A further layer of complexity was added to the situation in November-December 2010 when al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, whose activities had been largely confined to other parts of Yemen, carried out two deadly suicide bombings against Huthi followers and subsequently declared war on the country's Shiites.²² The first bombing occurred during Id al-Ghadir, a Shiite celebration revived by the Huthis, which had in the past been a source of contention

20 *The New York Times*, Feb. 11, 2010.

21 On Huthi tactics and weapons, see Salmoni, et al, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen*, pp. 197-215.

22 *Yemen Times*, Dec. 6, 2010.

between them and Salafists in the area.²³

Toward the end of January 2011, inspired by the success of the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, young antigovernment protesters took to the streets of San'a calling for a change of regime. Demonstrations quickly grew and spread to Yemen's main urban centers. Shortly thereafter, the Huthis announced their full support for the protest movement²⁴ and helped organize peaceful marches in various parts of Sa'da province. On March 4, at one such demonstration held in Harf Sufian, two protesters died from gunshots alleged to have originated from a nearby military base.²⁵

Shortly before the popular protests overwhelmed the government, northern Sa'da appeared headed toward a new round of fighting. Echoing

the events that catalyzed the summer 2009 fighting, Huthi followers clashed in January 2011 with members of a government-backed tribe on the southwestern fringes of Sa'da city, an area that had largely remained under government control during the many years of fighting.

With the regime's resources increasingly diverted toward maintaining control over the capital, the Huthis eventually prevailed and in late March took control of the provincial capital.²⁶

With the Huthis in de facto control of most of Sa'da province, a struggle broke out in the neighboring province of al-Jawf, a dry and sparsely inhabited area east of Sa'da that had also fallen out of government hands in March. Paradoxically, the latter clashes pitted the Huthis against the Sunni opposition Islah party—perhaps the strongest and best-organized among the groups calling for the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, which will likely play a promi-

nent role in a post-Saleh state. As a Sunni-oriented group, it is a natural repository for Saudi influence-buying.

Fighting in al-Jawf, apparently for control of the government's military installations, intensified in July 2011, sparking fears that it could spill over into Saudi Arabia.²⁷ After a number of failed attempts, a truce was reached in mid-August 2011. A few days later, a suicide bomber, apparently targeting the Huthis, struck a provincial medical center.²⁸

Sa'da province, meanwhile, appears to be fairly stable. The new provincial governor, Fares Man'a, allegedly appointed by the Huthis, is a notorious international arms dealer and former mediator in the Sa'da conflict, who fell out with the Saleh government after being accused of helping arm the Huthis in 2009. By some accounts, Sa'da became safer than the capital in the early summer of 2011 as many refugees from the Huthi conflict returned home from San'a.²⁹

Events in al-Jawf, however, indicate that fighting could resume in the area. Saudi policy is unlikely to accommodate a stable and largely autonomous section of northern Yemen under Huthi control. Unlike the short-term elements that drew the Saudi military into Sa'da province in late 2009, the fear in this case is that Iran will in the medium term successfully establish a foothold in the region. On the heels of events in Bahrain and the region as a whole, Riyadh is operating under a heightened level of threat perception.

A protracted power vacuum in Yemen will pave the way for increased foreign meddling. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Saudis in particular will do whatever they can to avoid a collapsed or fragmented Yemeni state. One of their main policy tools in this regard consists of buying the favor of various tribal and Sunni groups that have clashed with the Huthis over the years. Thus the potential for a proxy war in northern Yemen will persist the longer the country's political impasse remains, making it more difficult for the state to reconstitute itself before it is too late.



23 Shelagh Weir, "A Clash of Fundamentalisms: Wahhabism in Yemen," *Middle East Report*, 204 (1997): 22-6.

24 *News Yemen* (San'a), Feb. 16, 2011.

25 "Yemen: Investigate Killing of Protesters," Human Rights Watch, Washington, D.C., Mar. 10, 2011.

26 *National Yemen* (San'a), Mar. 30, 2011.

27 Reuters, July 12, 2011.

28 *Yemen Post* (San'a), Aug. 16, 2011.

29 *Yemen Times*, May 3, 2011.

A protracted power vacuum in Yemen will pave the way for increased foreign meddling.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards Strike Oil

by Ali Alfoneh

In July 2011, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad appointed Maj. Gen. Rostam Qassemi of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) as oil minister,¹ bringing the number of former IRGC officers in his cabinet to twelve out of eighteen. Yet the IRGC's seizure of the Oil Ministry could have far reaching economic, political, and strategic implications.

In his decree, Ahmadinejad urged Qassemi to work for “the creatures of God” and the “material and spiritual progress” of Iran² but said little about the problems facing Iran's aging oil industry as a result of international sanctions, which have imposed crushing financial and technological restrictions on Tehran's ability to boost production in oil and gas fields, particularly those shared with neighboring countries. These problems are not only likely to affect Iran's economy but could increase tensions between Iran and its neighbors, which are free to extract ever greater amounts of oil and gas along their borders with the Islamic Republic.

These problems are likely to grow worse under Qassemi for whom the interests of the IRGC outweigh the interests of the Iranian state. Having won lucrative energy development contracts as a direct result of diminished foreign investment, the IRGC has little incentive to seek an escape from crippling economic sanctions by scaling back its nuclear ambitions.

WHO IS ROSTAM QASSEMI?

Qassemi was born in 1964 in Sargah village in Fars province and is believed to have a degree in civil engineering.³ He joined the IRGC in Kharg Island in 1979 and was appointed logistics chief in Bushehr province two years later.⁴ After Iran's

war with Iraq (1980-88), Qassemi directed the engineering activities of the IRGC in Bushehr.⁵ In 1996, he was appointed chief of the IRGC navy's Noh base.

In 2007, Qassemi was appointed chief of Khatam al-Anbia (seal of the prophets), the

1 “Hokm-e Reis-Jomhour Bara-ye Rostam-e Qassemi Be Onvan-e Vazir-e Naft,” *Paygah-e Ettela'e-Resani-ye Dowlat* (Tehran), Aug. 9, 2011.

2 Ibid.

3 *Mashregh News* (Tehran), July 27, 2011.

4 *Daneshjou News* (Tehran), July 29, 2011.

5 Ibid.

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The Iranian state cannot afford the necessary investments for boosting oil and gas production.

IRGC's main engineering firm and one of the country's largest development contractors.⁶ Khatam al-Anbia has built dams, highways, and pipelines for water, gas, and oil. Like other IRGC firms, it has reaped a windfall of no-bid contracts as foreign oil companies have withdrawn from Iran's oil and gas sector.⁷ In May 2010, Khatam al-Anbia was awarded several phases of the South Pars gas field. According to Ahmad Qal'ebani, then National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) director general, Khatam al-Anbia had signed \$25 billion worth of contracts with the NIOC as of July 2011.⁸ The firm's engineers are reportedly involved in the construction of intermediate-range missile launch pads in Venezuela.⁹

Khatam al-Anbia's growing penetration of the Iranian economy and alleged involvement in Tehran's nuclear program led to Qassemi being explicitly named in U.S.¹⁰ and European Union¹¹ sanctions.

MAN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS

There is some indication that Ahmadinejad's preferred candidate for the job was acting oil minister Mohammed Ali-Abadi,¹² whom he appointed as caretaker in early June 2011. Having no prior experience in the energy sector, however, Ali-Abadi faced withering parliamentary criticism. Hamid-Reza Katouzian, parliamentary Energy Committee chairman, called Ali-Abadi "the worst imaginable candidate" for the Oil Ministry.¹³ Ahmadinejad was forced to cast about for an alternative.

The IRGC lobbied hard for the candidacy of Qassemi. *Neda-ye Enqelab*, a media outlet close to the IRGC, disclosed that Qassemi

conditioned his acceptance of the cabinet position on a "purge of the forces close to the current of deviation [individuals close to Esfandiar Rahim-Mashaie, Ahmadinejad's chief of staff and close confidante] from the oil industry."¹⁴ This suggests that Qassemi was essentially imposed on the president.

Although Qassemi was overwhelmingly approved by parliament with a vote of 216 of the 246 deputies present,¹⁵ he faced criticism from those who fear the IRGC's growing involvement in Iran's economy. At the parliamentary session debating his appointment, Ali Mottahari politely objected:

Opposition to the appointment of Rostam Qassemi as oil minister is not opposition to his person ... I distinguish between his person and his legal position since his person is commendable ... The main issue ... is that the IRGC as a military force should not be connected with the political and economic power. In other words, the IRGC should not be [a part of the] cabinet ... The IRGC is the symbol of the unity of society, just like the clergy. The Guards belong to all classes of society ... Now, the IRGC is—rightly or wrongly—accused of seizing development projects in unequal competition with the private sector ... the great oil infrastructure being added to it will not do away with such accusations.¹⁶

Such views were in the minority, however. In his defense, Qassemi said that Khatam al-Anbia has "filled the vacuum" left by the withdrawal of Western companies from Iran's oil and gas sectors as a result of the international sanctions regime.¹⁷

6 Ibid.

7 *Abrar* (Tehran), Mar. 16, Apr. 19, 2010; *Poul* (Tehran), June 5, 2010.

8 *BBC Persian* (London), July 31, 2011.

9 *The Jerusalem Post*, May 17, 2011.

10 "Alphabetical Listing of Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons," United States Department of the Treasury, Washington, D.C., accessed Sept. 18, 2011.

11 *RTT News* (Williamsville, N.Y.), Aug. 3, 2011.

12 *Asr-e Iran* (Tehran), June 2, 2011.

13 *Fararu* (Tehran), June 3, 2011.

14 *Neda-ye Enqelab* (Tehran), July 27, 2011.

15 *Naft News* (Tehran), Aug. 3, 2011.

16 *Asr-e Iran*, Aug. 3, 2011.

17 Mehr News Agency (Tehran), Aug. 3, 2011.

Parliamentary speaker Ali Larijani, who is expected to run for president in 2013 and needs IRGC support for his candidacy, wholeheartedly defended Qassemi:

I arranged a meeting and invited representatives of the private sector. They all believed that the Khatam al-Anbia base is distributing work among them and that Mr. Qassemi, rather than competing with the private sector is supporting it.¹⁸

Larijani also said that Qassemi was appointed “as an individual of the Guards ... It would be wrong to interpret this as the Guards trying to seize political power.”¹⁹

DECLINING PRODUCTION AND SHARED FIELDS

Though the sanctions have not dissuaded the Islamic Republic from accelerating the development of its nuclear program, they have created severe problems for its oil industry. An August 2011 report issued by the U.S. Government Accountability Office concluded that foreign firms have “significantly decreased commercial activity in Iran’s oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors.”²⁰

Qassemi is well aware of the dire state of the Iranian oil industry. He has made it clear that boosting production in the twenty-eight oil and gas fields Iran shares with its neighbors²¹ is his highest priority.²² According to one report, 50



A powerful member of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, Rostam Qassemi (left, with IRGC chief Mohammad Ali Jafari) inherited Iran’s ailing Oil Ministry portfolio in July 2011. For Qassemi, the interests of the IRGC likely outweigh the interests of the Iranian state.

percent of Iran’s gas reserves are to be found in these shared fields.²³

Unencumbered by sanctions, Tehran’s neighbors extract oil and gas from shared fields at a far greater pace. While Iran extracts 210 million cubic meters per day from the South Pars gas field (the largest in the world) it shares with Qatar, the emirate extracts 360 million cubic meters of gas from it.²⁴

Iran’s production from shared oil fields experiences similar problems. Iraq extracts 295,000 barrels per day (b/d) from the twelve fields it shares with Iran while Iranian production from the same fields is 130,000 b/d.²⁵ In the four oil fields it shares with Saudi Arabia, Tehran produces 42,000 b/d while Saudi production is ten times that. The United Arab Emirates extracts 136,000 b/d from fields shared with Iran while Iran extracts 56,000 b/d.²⁶

At his inauguration ceremony, Qassemi called the development of shared fields his “top

¹⁸ *Asr-e Iran*, Aug. 3, 2011.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ “Firms Reported in Open Sources as Having Commercial Activity in Iran’s Oil, Gas, and Petrochemical Sectors,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, Washington, D.C., Aug. 3, 2011.

²¹ Mehr News Agency, July 18, 2011.

²² *Asr-e Iran*, July 13, 2011.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*



The South Pars gas field blazes at night. Though sanctions have not dissuaded Iran from pursuing its nuclear program, they have created problems for its oil industry. A 2011 U.S. government report concluded that foreign firms have “significantly decreased commercial activity in Iran’s oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors.”

priority.”²⁷ According to an unnamed Oil Ministry official, substantially boosting oil and gas production sharing from these fields will require \$67 billion in investment.²⁸ Qassemi maintains that only \$50 billion is needed,²⁹ but the Iranian state can afford neither amount. Qassemi is likely to find it difficult, if not impossible, to attract foreign direct investment in Iran’s oil and gas sector or persuade foreign companies to bring in much-needed technology. He has warned Chinese companies against further delays and suspensions of contracts signed with Iran, threatening to replace them with IRGC construction firms.³⁰ However, such attempts at attracting investments and technology have yet to produce results. The Oil Ministry’s efforts at releasing “participation bonds” to attract domestic investment in Iran’s oil and gas fields is

more a symbolic act than a serious attempt at raising capital.³¹

CONCLUSION

The IRGC, whose aggressive pursuit of nuclear weapons provokes foreign sanctions against the Islamic Republic, also benefits from the sanctions, which eliminate foreign competition. Khatam al-Anbia and other IRGC firms may prove incapable of living up to their contractual obligations, but in the meantime, the IRGC has achieved its main goal: access to Iran’s foreign exchange reserve. Once that tap is turned on, it is difficult for opponents of the IRGC to turn it off.

As Iranians watch their neighbors reap profits from shared oil and gas fields, disputes over resources and territorial boundaries can quickly escalate as was the case in 1999 when Iranian troops entered Iraqi territory following a disagreement over the shared al-Fakkah oil field.³² Should tensions rise concerning Iran’s shared oil and gas fields, the IRGC may play the nationalist card and mobilize the Iranian public against “Arabs” who “take Iran’s oil.”³³

The Islamic Republic has yet to learn that avoiding international sanctions and diplomatic isolation provides a more suitable pathway to becoming a responsible regional power than recklessly flexing military muscle. Time is running out for civilian leaders who seek to buy the IRGC’s political support by showering it with black gold. If anything, Qassemi’s appointment may indicate that it is too late for the civilian leadership to free itself from the IRGC’s claws.



27 SHANA (Tehran), Aug. 9, 2011.

28 Mehr News Agency, July 18, 2011.

29 Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA, Tehran), Aug. 25, 2011.

30 *Diplomasi-ye Irani* (Tehran), Aug. 14, 2011.

31 *Kayhan* (Tehran), Aug. 23, 2011.

32 *The Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 19, 2009.

33 Mehr News Agency, July 18, 2011.

The Pragmatics of Lebanon's Politics

by Hilal Khashan

Lebanese society has had a remarkable ability to overcome deep-rooted sectarian and religious divides that could readily have imploded less problematic countries. This has been largely due to its pragmatic political system, which avoids acting upon polarizing issues on principle, opting instead for pragmatic loopholes. Given their confessional political system, Lebanese are conditioned to think pragmatically even when the issue at hand is divisive and does not lend itself to resolution. In Lebanon, pragmatism is a necessity and not an option as failure to accommodate other sects might ruin the country's delicate fabric.

Three vivid illustrations of this dynamic can be seen in the handling of the issues preoccupying Lebanese decision-makers these days: Hezbollah's continued militarization, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), and the Syrian connection.

HEZBOLLAH'S MILITARIZATION

Most non-Shiite Lebanese find it difficult to accept Hezbollah's armament and have not missed an opportunity to express displeasure with the fact that, while the 1989 Ta'if agreement called for the demilitarization of all Lebanese militias, Hezbollah was exempted on the grounds that it was resisting Israel's presence in southern Lebanon. As much as they disapprove of Hezbollah's behavior, Lebanese find it politically correct to praise its "resistance." The proverb "kiss the hand you cannot bite" seems to fit the way many Lebanese view the militant Islamist group.

Against this backdrop, it is hardly surpris-

ing that Hezbollah's military buildup and its rivals' intensifying demand for its disarmament have been the most divisive issue since Israel's withdrawal from its security zone in south Lebanon in May 2000. This demand for disarmament gained considerable momentum after the July 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war as the eviction of Hezbollah from its bases south of the Litani River and the deployment of the Lebanese army in its place led critics to question the need for the group's continued militarization.

Thus, for example, the pro-Hariri member of parliament (MP) Ahmad Fatfat argued that Hezbollah's primary concern had shifted from confronting Israel to controlling Lebanon "and transforming it into a forward base on the Mediterranean for Iran."¹ His parliamentary peer Sami Jemayyil compared "Hezbollah's expansionist behavior in Lebanon" to that of the Zionists while

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1 *An-Nahar* (Beirut), Mar. 14, 2011.

Hezbollah's implication in the assassination of Rafiq Hariri is a moral blow to its image and prestige.

former Lebanese president Amin Jemayyil noted that "Hezbollah seems preoccupied these days with controlling the site of the Lebanese government in Beirut and the Special Tribunal's location in [the] Hague."² Addressing his supporters on the sixth anniversary of the March 14 coalition, former prime minister Saad Hariri criticized "the supremacy of [Hezbollah's] arms and the manner in which it is influencing the formation of the country's forthcoming cabinet [of Najib Miqati]."³

Even Nabih Berri, speaker of parliament and leader of the Shiite Amal movement—who showered Hezbollah with praise and defended its right to resist "the Israeli occupation" as "nonnegotiable"⁴—was paraphrased by a released Wikileaks cable as having privately said that "he supported Israeli military action against Hezbollah in 2006 as long as it did not backfire and create more public support for the party."⁵

It makes eminent sense for Berri to wish the demise of Hezbollah, whose rise to prominence among Lebanese Shiites came at Amal's expense. This does not seem to be the case with Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, who has perfected the shadowy art of doublespeak, rejecting Hezbollah's use of arms for domestic purposes while refusing "to expose Lebanon to Israeli aggression."⁶ Jumblatt won notoriety for continuously vacillating from one political camp to another. His ambivalent statement above suggests that he does not preclude the possibility of returning to the March 14 coalition should Hezbollah's fortunes wane.

But most surprising and perplexing was the change of heart of Bishara Boutros Rai since his appointment as Maronite patriarch in March 2011. In his previous capacity as archbishop of Byblos, he voiced deep concern over Hezbollah's arse-

nal.⁷ Once appointed to the top religious post, however, he expressed understanding of the group's reluctance to disarm: "The in-

ternational community has not pressured Israel to pull out of Lebanese territory. Hezbollah also wants to help armed Palestinians in Lebanon who want to be granted the right of return to their lands. ... When this happens, we will tell Hezbollah to disarm."⁸ Ibrahim Amin Said, head of Hezbollah's politburo, concurred: "The issue has nothing to do with the manner in which the resistance uses its arms as some would like to argue; the issue pertains to the justification of the very existence of the resistance, and whether Lebanon should have a defense force capable of deterring the Israeli enemy."⁹

SPECIAL TRIBUNAL FOR LEBANON

The issue of the U.N. Special Tribunal is even more divisive than Hezbollah's militarization. While Hezbollah takes pride in its weapons, presented as a deterrent to Israel, its implication in the 2005 assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri brings shame to the organization. It seems that Hezbollah is more concerned about the moral blow to its image and prestige attending an association with the assassination than the arrest of its indicted members and their surrender to the U.N. Special Tribunal. The tribunal for its part scaled down the scope of its investigation, choosing to indict individuals in Hezbollah rather than the organization itself.

Accommodation and pragmatism have been extended even to the pursuit of justice where a delicate balance was struck between law enforcement and public peace. At least in their public pronouncements, Hezbollah spokesmen were still dissatisfied with the tribunal, even in its reduced

2 Ibid., Sept. 2, 2011.

3 *Al-Liwa* (Beirut), Mar. 14, 2011.

4 *As-Safir* (Beirut), Sept. 3, 2011.

5 "No One Likes Them," *Now Lebanon* (Beirut), Sept. 15, 2011.

6 *Al-Hayat* (London), Mar. 28, 2011.

7 Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (Beirut), Feb. 9, 2010.

8 *As-Safir*, Sept. 9, 2011.

9 Al-Manar TV (Beirut), Mar. 21, 2011.

scope. In a press conference held by Muhammad Raad, head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, he described the tribunal as a "creation that serves international interests at the expense of the will and interests of the Lebanese people and their constitutional institutions" and called upon "all free, honorable, and nationalist Lebanese, regardless of their affiliations and positions, to boycott the tribunal's requests."¹⁰ Nabil Qawuq, deputy chair of Hezbollah's Executive Council, derided the indictment of Hezbollah personnel as "an effort by the U.S. to compensate for its political defeats in Lebanon and the rest of the region."¹¹

Hashim Safieddine, chair of the council, ridiculed the Special Tribunal as "a political and media farce totally divorced from the pursuit of justice."¹²

Despite the overwhelming evidence implicating Hezbollah in the assassination, Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah and his allies have never ceased to plead the group's innocence. As soon as the tribunal indicted four Hezbollah members in the assassination, Nasrallah described them as honorable men who resisted Israel's occupation and, instead, laid the blame on the Jewish state, which had allegedly plotted the indictments.¹³ When the tribunal revealed the names of these operatives shortly afterward and requested the Lebanese government to turn them in within thirty days to stand trial, Nasrallah responded disdainfully: "They cannot find them or arrest them in thirty days, or sixty days, or in a year, two years, thirty years, or three hundred years."¹⁴ Nasrallah advised the leaders of the March 14 opposition not to expect the government of Prime Minister



Demands to disarm Hezbollah have grown since its 2006 war with Israel from Sunni as well as from some Shiite politicians only to be countered by other leaders in the patchwork politics that is Lebanon.

Najib Miqati to do in connection with the tribunal "what the government of his predecessor Saad Hariri couldn't do."¹⁵

For his part, Miqati emphasized Beirut's commitment to fulfill its international commitments, which included "paying its share of \$32 million toward the cost of the STL operations,"¹⁶ yet refused to "talk about solutions now, because I want the government efforts to succeed."¹⁷ He also disregarded U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's concern about the Lebanese government's reaction to the deepening crisis in Syria, noting that he would not "endanger Lebanon by violating the rules of the international legitimacy."¹⁸

This did not escape Hezbollah's eye. Though repeatedly voicing his disapproval of financing the tribunal, Nasrallah and his colleagues were sympathetic to Miqati's predicament, claiming that the prime minister "must not be embarrassed by the reaction of the international community and his own constituency if he

10 *An-Nahar*, Mar. 5, 2011.

11 *Al-Jarida* (Beirut), Mar. 6, 2011.

12 *An-Nahar*, May 15, 2011.

13 *BBC World News*, July 3, 2011.

14 *Ibid.*, July 29, 2011.

15 *As-Safir*, July 4, 2011.

16 *As-Siyasa* (Kuwait), Sept. 6, 2011.

17 *The Daily Star* (Beirut), Sept. 12, 2011.

18 *An-Nahar*, Sept. 3, 2011.

Photo will not display.

Lebanese protesters show their solidarity with Syrians seeking the downfall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, July 8, 2011, in the northern city of Tripoli, Lebanon. Many Lebanese, especially Sunni Muslims, have expressed jubilation about the Syrian uprising.

reneges on Lebanon's commitments."¹⁹ They understand all too well that there is nothing they can do to stop the working of the tribunal. They can resent it and plead their innocence with their Shiite constituents—the main target audience of Hezbollah's rhetoric. As far as Hezbollah's leadership is concerned, what matters is how the Shiite community perceives them; the tribunal's activities are of far lesser concern as they seem to believe that its eventual impact will be minimal.

THE SYRIAN NEXUS

Lebanon's government finds itself in an unenviable position of having to accommodate Syrian interests and sensitivities, on the one hand, and the positions of its own divided communities vis-à-vis Syria, on the other. Ever since Lebanese independence, Damascus has been a constant political actor in its neighbor's affairs, forcing successive Lebanese governments to play a delicate game of appeasing everyone. Thus, for ex-

ample the Lebanese government has recently stated that it cannot support a U.N. Security Council resolution on Syria, but it will abide by international resolutions, irrespective of what it thought of them.²⁰

For their part, the Syrians have never reconciled themselves to Lebanon's creation on what they perceive as part of their territory. They also resented Beirut's development during the French Mandate from a slumbering provincial city into a business, medical, and educational hub, and it did not take long for relations to sour after the French departed in 1946. In 1950, the Syrian regime unilaterally dissolved the bilateral customs union and instigated the practice of closing down passenger and trade routes at will. Since then, bilateral relations have been characterized by envy, suspicion, resentment, and hate. It took the entry of the Syrian army into Lebanon in 1976 to finally give the Damascus regime a sense of vindication. Damascus's hegemony in Lebanon lasted until 2005 when the Syrian army pulled out shortly after Hariri's assassination.

Given their intense involvement in Lebanese affairs, the Syrians could always count on Lebanese allies. Certainly, any government in Beirut, irrespective of its relations with Damascus, understands the inherent mindset of the regime, which views the Lebanese as unappreciative of the selfless sacrifices of the Syrians on their behalf. Because Syrian officials seem to believe that retribution follows ingratitude, their Lebanese counterparts have been especially careful to avoid incurring their wrath. This has been particularly the case since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in mid-March 2011. The simultaneous inception of the Syrian protests with the decision of the March 14 coalition to boycott the Miqati cabinet gave ammunition to Damascus's official claim

19 Ukaz (Riyadh), Sept. 7, 2011.

20 *Ar-Rai* (Kuwait), Oct. 4, 2011.

What matters to Hezbollah's leadership is how the Shiite community perceives them.

that "the security of the two countries is inseparable."²¹ The Bashar al-Assad regime immediately accused the Fu-

ture Trend party of providing material support for anti-regime elements. The secretariat general of the March 14 coalition responded by issuing a denouncement of the Baath regime's "baseless accusations of intervention in Syrian affairs, including support for saboteur networks."²²

There is no denying that many Lebanese, especially Sunni Muslims, have expressed jubilation about the Syrian uprising, criticizing the Miqati government's decision to refrain from providing relief for the thousands of refugees fleeing Syrian army reprisals. Tripoli MP Muhammad Kabbara urged the Lebanese people to take the side of the Syrian people: "I hurt because the brotherly Syrian people are subjected to a systematic massacre, and I am ashamed because we are letting them down. We are under history's watchful eye. We must take political, moral, and humanitarian action to lend support to the Syrian people."²³ As in most protest organizing in Arab countries, the mosques played a key role in galvanizing Lebanese support for the anti-Assad movement. One hundred Sunni clerics convened in a Tripoli mosque to "express solidarity with the glorious popular uprising in Syria and to condemn the brutality of the Assad regime against unarmed protesters." They took issue with the regime's "labeling of demonstrators as foreign lackeys."²⁴

In response to a call by the militant Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Liberation Party)²⁵ for a pro-rebel demonstration in downtown Beirut, Lebanon's Arab Youth Party (a Syrian intelligence creation with no active membership) organized a counter rally in support of Assad. Party head

Nadim Shimali condemned the anti-Assad rally as a violation of the 1989 Ta'if agreement, which stipu-

lated that Lebanon would not allow itself to provide a base for any force, state, or organization seeking to undermine Syria's security. He urged the Lebanese authorities to crack down on anti-Syrian activities, threatening that otherwise his party would be forced to take matters into its own hands.²⁶ "The security forces complied with Shimali's warning and ensured that no activity would take place in Beirut or Tripoli to support the Syrian protest movement," lamented a communiqué issued by Hizb al-Tahrir. "They threatened to prevent any show of support outside mosques. In contrast, the [Lebanese] authorities allowed a handful of the Syrian regime's gangsters to demonstrate."²⁷

However, this complaint was not entirely true. The government tried to strike a middle-of-the-road approach to the Lebanese divide vis-à-vis the Syrian upheavals. Lebanon's open political system did not interfere with the free expression of opinion on the Syrian situation. The Phalange Party, for example, announced that its branches in northern Lebanon were providing humanitarian and social aid "to Syrian families seeking refuge there."²⁸ The Future Trend party and Islamist groups threw themselves into providing humanitarian aid to several thousand Syrian refugees despite protests by the Syrian government and Hezbollah on the grounds that the refugees included subversive elements. The Lebanese military simply pulled out from the border area and allowed the Syrian army to chase defectors while, at the same time, it did not attempt to prevent sympathetic Lebanese groups from providing them with shelter. The Beirut government did all within its power to minimize the damage to its relations with Damascus as a result of the strong support among most Lebanese for the Syrian uprising. Foreign Minister Adnan Mansur made it

21 *Al-Jarida*, May 28, 2011.

22 *An-Nahar*, Apr. 21, 2011.

23 *Ibid.*, May 17, 2011.

24 *Al-Akhbar* (Cairo), May 9, 2011.

25 Committed to the reintroduction of the worldwide caliphate, this party rejects the existing order in all Arab and Islamic states and advocates its violent overthrow.

26 *The Daily Star*, June 4, 2011.

27 *An-Nahar*, June 4, 2011.

28 *Al-Anwar*, May 27, 2011.



Repercussions from the car bombing that took the life of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri still inflame Lebanon's political landscape. The U.N. Special Tribunal's indictments of Hezbollah personnel continue to divide the country.

clear that Beirut would not vote in favor of a Security Council resolution condemning Damascus.²⁹ This position was hardly defensible or consistent given that Lebanon's ambassador to the U.N. had proposed that the Security Council implement a no-fly zone over Libya to protect its people from the excesses of the Qaddafi regime.

The spread of protests inside Syria coincided with the deterioration of the security situation in Lebanon, including several attacks against the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the south of the country. According to Fares Said, coordinator of the secretariat of the March 14 coalition, the surge of violence in Lebanon appears to be tied to statements from Damascus. Said was specifically alluding to the attacks on the French and Italian contingents in UNIFIL, the abduction of seven Estonians in the Bekaa Valley, and the Marun al-Ras incident where the Israelis opened fire on demon-

strators who attempted to climb the border fence.³⁰ Indeed, Assad's cousin Rami Makhluf had warned that Israelis could not expect to live in peace while Syrians suffered from turmoil whereas Syrian foreign minister Walid Muallem threatened that EU sanctions against Damascus were bound to have an adverse impact on Europe's security.³¹

Small wonder that the Assad regime exhibited anger at expressions of solidarity with the protesters, especially by the Lebanese armed forces and the Phalange. Phalange MP Nadim Jemayyil made a statement that particularly infuriated the Syrian regime: "We cannot but side with the Syrian people in their confrontation of the repressive and dictatorial regime. We are willing to open a new chapter with the Syrian

people and join hands to build a new Middle East founded on freedom and democracy."³² Assad's people expected nothing less than such statements as Hezbollah MP Hassan Fadlallah asserted that Washington was punishing Damascus by promoting the Syrian protest movement "in order to settle historical scores with the country that has always stood on the side of the forces of opposition to Israeli and American occupation."³³

President Assad seemed in no mood for advice, certainly not from mercurial Druze chief Jumblatt who exhorted him "to think differently and recognize his people's legitimate demands in order to prevent Syria from slipping into chaos." Speaking carefully to avoid triggering a defensive reaction, Jumblatt explained that "the best advice he could give to the Syrian president had to be motivated by truthfulness, and not flat-

30 *An-Nahar*, May 29, 2011.

31 *Ibid.*; *al-Akhbar*, Apr. 11, 2011.

32 *Al-Liwa*, May 31, 2011.

33 *An-Nahar*, May 9, 2011.

29 *As-Siyasa*, Sept. 18, 2011.

tery.”³⁴ When the Druze leader would not cease his repeated calls on Assad to reform, the Syrian authorities finally informed him that he was unwelcome in Damascus.³⁵ For Assad, his late father’s brutally repressive practices of the 1970s and 1980s appeared fully appropriate in the second decade of the twenty-first century. He may have believed that his Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts fell too soon because they did not use sufficient force to suppress the opposition. Among his many repressive measures, Assad instructed his Beirut ambassador Ali Abdulkarim to chase and apprehend Syrian enemies of the regime in Lebanon. Indeed, Abdulkarim was singled out for U.S. and EU sanctions for his role in abducting opposition members in collusion with Lebanese authorities.³⁶

The Lebanese government clamped down on Syrian opposition in Lebanon because of heavy pressure by the Assad regime to do so. Yet it showed leniency in dealing with the anti-Assad

Lebanese protesters. Members of the Syrian opposition in Lebanon are not part of the country’s political process and can be readily controlled. Dealing with the Lebanese groups and sects, by contrast, is a different matter altogether as they have a veto power and can bring the country’s political system to a standstill.

RATIONAL POLEMICS

Lebanon is not a failed state. Though its self-steering capability is grossly wanting, it is perfectly capable of making waves. Its political system may be akin to a person paralyzed below the waist but with functioning arms and intact vocal abilities. The creation of Greater Lebanon may not have been an entirely happy historical accident, yet it appears to be quite capable of dealing with its disabilities. It cannot make its own sovereign decisions, but it can almost always modify them to fit the exigencies of its unique political formula. For some countries, controversy can be politically debilitating; in Lebanon, it is a means of survival.

34 Ibid., May 24, 2011.

35 *Al-Anba* (Fallujah), Sept. 24, 2011.

36 *Ukaz*, Sept. 7, 2011.

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Muhammad Mustafa, Palestinian investment fund director and economic advisor to Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas, announced during a visit to Gaza that a \$1 billion fund was being established with the aim of rebuilding Gaza and building its economy as part of the economy of the future Palestinian state. Mustafa was heading a group of businessmen from the West Bank.

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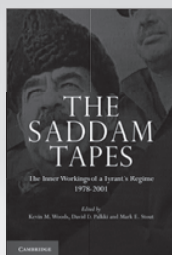
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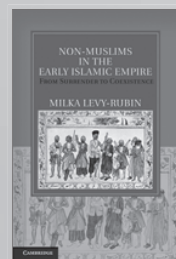
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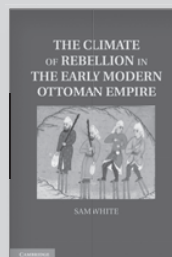
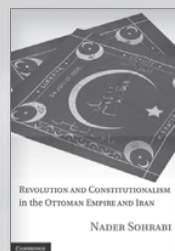
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Is Morocco Immune to Upheaval?

by Bruce Maddy-Weitzman

The uprisings that swept across the Middle East and North Africa during 2011 have largely bypassed Morocco. The absence of tumult and the loudly trumpeted package of constitutional reform measures endorsed in a July 2011 national referendum¹ further strengthened Morocco's favorable image in the West as a country that has mixed tradition with modernity and an openness to foreign cultures, and which is both politically stable and steadily evolving toward greater pluralism.

Morocco's success in having thus far dodged upheaval warrants explanation, for the country suffers from many of the same underlying ills that have driven the protests elsewhere—corruption, poverty, and unemployment; the overwhelming concentration of wealth in the hands of a small stratum of elite families intertwined with the authorities;² the absence of real democracy; and closed horizons for its large, youthful population, suffering from disproportionately high rates of unemployment and underemployment. But Morocco's starting point, in terms of its political institutions and political culture, is different in ways that provide some comparative advantages. Moreover, unlike other Middle East, autocratic regimes during this tumultuous year of popular *intifadas*,³ the Moroccan authorities, led by King Mohammed VI, have been sufficiently proactive in their responses to the rumblings from below so as to render them manageable, at least for the time being.

MOROCCAN EXCEPTIONALISM

A closer look at state-society dynamics in Morocco during 2011, against the backdrop of

the country's deeper currents, reveals the extent and limits of Moroccan exceptionalism. The country possesses considerable assets: a political and societal center within a distinct geographical core stretching back more than 1,200 years; a ruling dynasty more than 350 years old whose legitimacy is based on claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad; religious homogeneity of

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1 National Public Radio, July 1, 2011; *Al-Ahram Weekly* (Cairo), July 7-13, 2011.

2 Aboubakr Jamaï, "Morocco: After the 'Benalization,' the 'Tunisianization?'" *bitterlemons-international*, Jan. 27, 2011.

3 *Intifada* (shaking off) is the term widely used in the Arab world for "uprising."

Some view Middle East monarchies as resilient institutions that function as social and political anchors.

98 percent Sunni Islam; and a particular material and popular culture, modes of religious practice, and linguistic configuration, much

of which stems from Morocco's large Berber population (approximately 40 percent of the total) and heritage. Of course, these factors alone cannot be said to provide immunity to social and political upheaval. If anything, Tunisia and Egypt both possess an even greater degree of social and political cohesion, which did not prevent the latest revolutions there.

Is it the legitimacy provided by Morocco's monarchical institution that explains the lack of a massive, popular uprising thus far? To even suggest so would have been ridiculed a generation ago. Morocco in the 1960s and 1970s was wracked by political instability and attempted coups d'état. But by the 1990s, Middle East monarchies began to be viewed in a more favorable light as resilient institutions that often functioned as vital social and political anchors in times of rapid change.⁴ Moreover, the last years of Morocco's late King Hassan's 38-year reign (d. 1999) were marked by what he liked to call "homeopathic democracy," namely, measured, incremental steps toward political liberalization. However numbingly slow, it eventually resulted in the ending of some of Morocco's most notorious human rights abuses, an expansion of the space for civil society organizations, and an agreement by opposition political parties to re-enter the political game.

Liberal circles hoped that Hassan's son and successor, Mohammed VI, would move toward establishing a Spanish-style constitutional monarchy, à la King Juan Carlos. Although this did not occur, the new king moved quickly to make

Morocco a significantly more relaxed place, politically, socially, and culturally by combining economic modernization, political lib-

eralization, expanded social welfare, and a tolerant Islam that employed the tools of reason sanctioned by Islamic law on behalf of the general good. These measures stood in sharp contrast to the political stagnation and retrogression that marked the Tunisian and Egyptian political landscapes and, thus, set the stage for their 2011 revolutions.

Part of Mohammed VI's ruling formula was to allow a certain degree of Islamist political activity. The Party for Justice and Development, an Islamist party that was first brought onto the scene by his father in 1997, was allowed to grow into one of the leading political parties in Morocco's fragmented political system (no party holds more than 14 percent of the seats in parliament, rendering them malleable for co-option into coalition governments dominated by the palace). Another part of the new king's strategy was to balance Islamist and conservative forces by strengthening the country's liberal current. The centerpiece of his approach was the scrapping of the country's long-standing, Islamic-based Personal Status Code in favor of a new family law in 2003-04, which brought women significantly closer to legal equality with men.⁵ Liberalizing public life also included the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission, an unprecedented act in the region, which enabled public acknowledgment of the abuses committed by his father's minions.⁶ In addition, the palace embraced and legitimized the increasingly visible Amazigh (Berber) culture movement as an integral part of the Moroccan fabric.

Real power in the kingdom, however, stayed in the hands of the palace and its affiliate circles

4 Joseph Kostiner, "Introduction," in idem, ed., *Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp. 1-12; Lisa Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly*, no. 1, 1991, pp. 1-25; Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 1-18; Owen H. Kirby, "Want Democracy? Get a King," *Middle East Quarterly*, Dec. 2000, pp. 3-12.

5 *The Guardian* (London), Oct. 12, 2003.

6 For an account and critique of the process, see Susan Slymowicz, *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

while parliament remained emasculated and political parties mainly competed for the patronage the king was willing to bestow. Moreover, the security forces' response to the 2003 Casablanca suicide bombings and subsequent smaller incidents of home-grown terror called the regime's professed commitment to human rights into question as did the incarceration of Sahrawi (Saharan) activists challenging Morocco's control of the Western Sahara.⁷ In addition, the country regressed in terms of press freedom and human rights. Finally, by the end of the decade, a new political party, Authenticity and Modernity (PAM), headed by one of the king's close associates, Fouad Ali Himma, appeared on the scene, apparently being groomed for power and thus rendering empty the promise of genuine political liberalization. Alongside this, economic growth failed to reduce the high rate of unemployment while the illiteracy rate remained over 40 percent.⁸



Many hoped that Morocco's King Mohammed VI, here with his wife Princess Lalla Salma, would move toward establishing a Spanish-style constitutional monarchy. Although the ruler has been open to reforms, those undertaken have been put into effect at a leisurely pace. Recent events in other North African states have given him a more urgent impetus to address his country's many problems.

THE CHALLENGE ...

The events in Tunisia and Egypt at the beginning of 2011 were keenly watched in Morocco. Like-minded Facebook protest groups quickly sprang up among Morocco's Internet-savvy, mostly politically unaffiliated twenty-something generation. Unlike their counterparts to the east, their target was not the "regime," i.e., the monarch, but the corrupt elites who benefited from the existing state of affairs. A more poignant type of emulation came in the form of a number of self-immolations, following the lead of 26-year old Mohamed Bouazizi, whose ultimately fatal act triggered the overthrow of Tunisia's presi-

dent. At least two of these Moroccans died from their burns. Fadwa Laroui, a poverty-stricken, single mother of two who lost her shantytown home to builders, was unable to acquire government allocated land because as a single mother she was not "the head" of a household. She set herself on fire after repeated complaints to local officials proved useless and recorded her last words on a cell phone camera, which were later uploaded to YouTube. Would her sacrifice, she wondered, inspire people to "take a stand against injustice, corruption, and tyranny?"⁹

By mid-February, the atmosphere became increasingly charged, and the Moroccan protest movement gained a bit more form with the establishment of the "February 20th Movement," a cross-section of young activists running the

⁷ See, for example, "Morocco/Western Sahara," Amnesty International, London, accessed Oct. 6, 2011.

⁸ See Paul Rivlin, "Morocco's Economy under Mohammed VI," in Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine, eds., *Contemporary Morocco: State, Politics and Society under Mohammed VI* (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2011).

⁹ Rachel Newcomb, "One Moroccan Woman's Fiery Protest," *The Huffington Post*, Feb. 28, 2011.

**Under the new constitution,
the preponderant power
remains in the hands of
the king.**

gamut from previously unaffiliated Facebook users, members of Amazigh associations and various leftist groups, to members of the officially banned but reluctantly tolerated Islamist movement, al-Adl wa'l-Ihsan (Justice and Benevolence). Its inaugural February 20 protests sent tens of thousands of demonstrators into the streets across the country¹⁰ and were followed by smaller, ongoing, weekly protests. The atmosphere on that day was mostly festive as participants called for bringing the country's political and moneyed elite to account: Prime Minister Abba al-Fassi, PAM's Himma, and Mounir Majidi, the king's private secretary, who oversees royal business interests, were particularly targeted with corruption allegations.¹¹ Amazigh activists, for their part, prominently displayed their movement's flag and advocated full linguistic and cultural recognition within a genuinely democratic state. The most delicate subject, of course, was the king's status; slogans calling for a "parliamentary monarchy" indicated that the protesters sought a clearer, more limited definition of the king's sweeping powers in favor of their elected representatives.

... AND RESPONSE

While mild compared to upheavals in the rest of the region, the February protests raised the specter of Morocco going down the same road as so many other Arab states and unnerved the authorities. From the beginning, and right through the first half of 2011, the government adopted a multi-pronged strategy: proactive measures designed to appease popular frustration with economic conditions (e.g., increasing state subsidies on basic goods, raising salaries for civil servants, promising government

jobs for recent university graduates); proclaiming the right of peaceful protests to go forward while simultaneously working to discredit the protesters; and

using occasional police violence to intimidate demonstrators.¹²

Most importantly, though, was Mohammed VI's very public promise of sweeping reforms in an effort to quell the protests. Speaking to the nation on March 9, the king outlined what he called "a package of comprehensive constitutional amendments," centering on the strengthening of the powers of the government and the parliament.¹³ Details were to be worked out over the following three months by a blue-ribbon commission headed by 67-year old Abdellatif Mennouni, a constitutional law expert and veteran of Moroccan public affairs, with the changes to be submitted to the public for approval by referendum. In so doing, the palace gained control of the public discourse of reform, enabling it to manage it better and to contain the currents of unrest. Ironically, but not surprisingly, even as the proposed reform package trumpeted the strengthening of political institutions and the implied devolution of some powers by the monarchy, the political parties themselves were, as usual, relegated to secondary status: Their assigned role was essentially to endorse the final text after a brief consultation with the king's advisers and then to offer revisions to the commission's recommendations.

An analysis of the new constitution reveals that while the powers of the prime minister and parliament were somewhat enhanced—the prime minister would henceforth be called the president of the government and chosen from the party that won the greatest number of seats in parliament—preponderant power remained in

10 *BBC News*, Feb. 20, 2011.

11 *The Economist* (London), Feb. 24, 2011.

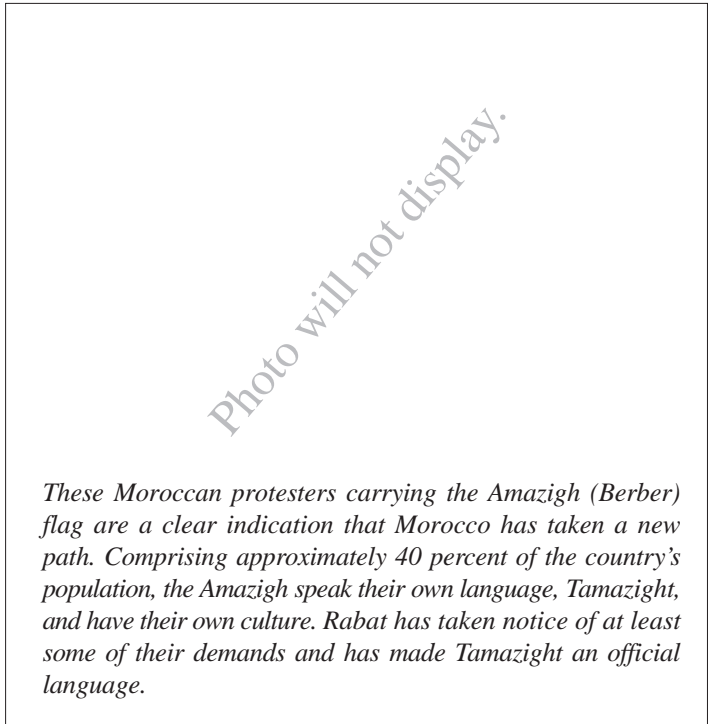
12 *Al-Arabiya News* (Dubai) May 16, 2011; "A Brave Feb. 20 Young Woman Featuring Selma Maarouf," *Moroccans for Change*, May 16, 2011.

13 *The New York Times*, July 20, 2011.

the hands of the king. While no longer defined as “sacred,” he remained the *amir al-mu'minin* (commander of the faithful), both the religious and political head of the state, the symbol of the nation’s unity, guarantor of the state’s existence, supreme arbiter between institutions, and personally beyond reproach.

A comparison between the commission’s draft text¹⁴ and the final version illustrates the thinking of those who want to transform Morocco into a more genuine constitutional monarchy with liberal democratic underpinnings and the obstacles they face. To be sure, the final version contained specific language emphasizing a commitment to an independent judiciary, the protection of human rights, and the ensuring of equality between women and men. Nonetheless, the commission’s draft was considerably more explicit in emphasizing liberal, universal values as underpinnings of the Moroccan state while downplaying the state’s Islamic and Arab components.

These initial, more liberal formulations were altered in the final version. For example, clause two of the draft preamble declared Morocco to be a “unitary sovereign state”; the final version¹⁵ replaced “unitary” with “Muslim,” and the country’s Arab-Islamic heritage was now referred to explicitly. In the same vein, the final version of clause three now included the goal of “deepening the sense of belonging to the Arab-Islamic *umma* [nation].” Article three of both the



draft and final versions declared that Islam is the religion of the state but the draft version included stronger language guaranteeing the protection of religious freedom for all faiths. Clause two of article 25 in the draft constitution that guaranteed the “freedom of conscience” was dropped entirely.

Similarly, with regard to the king’s powers and prerogatives, the draft text implied certain limitations that were removed or substantially altered in the final version. For example, the final version added an additional article at the very beginning of the section treating the king’s status, which restored the traditional emphasis on his being the religious as well as the political head of the community. As “commander of the faithful,” he remained in charge of ensuring respect for Islam and would preside over the Higher Council of Ulema (religious jurists), responsible for all religious rulings (*fatwas*). The king’s explicit right to dismiss government ministers, inserted in previous constitutions but not in the draft text of the new version, was also

¹⁴ The text has not been published; the author obtained a copy from a commission member.

¹⁵ For the French-language text of the new constitution, see Sidi Slimane City.com, Morocco, June 19, 2011.



Following the February protests, the king outlined “a package of comprehensive constitutional amendments” to be worked out by a blue-ribbon commission. A new constitution, containing some significant reforms, was composed and voted on in a national referendum on July 1, 2011, only three weeks after its publication.

restored. Overall, the king would continue to be the supreme authority on just about everything of significance: defense, religion, government (he is officially the chairman of the Council of Ministers, with the prime minister filling that role only in his absence), justice (chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council) and security (president of a newly created National Security Council).¹⁶

Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of the new Moroccan constitution was its explicit recognition of Tamazight, the language of the country’s Berber-speaking populations, as an official language. Moreover, it required the passage of an “organic law” to translate that status into reality in education and other spheres of public life. It further emphasized that the Amazigh people and culture constituted an integral component of Moroccan identity, which had been forged over the course of history

alongside the Arab-Islamic and Saharan-Hassanian components and enriched along the way by African, Andalusian, Hebraic, and Mediterranean currents.¹⁷

To be sure, some Amazigh activists failed to be excited by the new constitution. The language equalizing the status of Tamazight and Arabic had been more forceful in the commission’s draft text. This confirmed their deeply-ingrained cynicism regarding the authorities’ true intentions. For these activists, the constitutional upgrade was just the latest in a series of the state’s pseudo-embrace of the Amazigh movement in order to co-opt and neutralize it.¹⁸ Nonetheless, from a broader perspective, the institutionalization of Tamazight, along with the explicit recognition of Amazigh identity as central to the Moroccan

historical and social fabric, was nothing short of historic. The demand for official recognition has been the central tenet of their movement for decades, ever since its inception.¹⁹ Morocco would become the only North African state, and the only core Arab League member state, in which Arabic was not the sole official language.²⁰

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Having been disseminated, the adoption of the new constitution was now fast-tracked to adoption via a nationwide referendum on July 1,

16 Ali Mrabat, “La nouvelle constitution octroie de nouveaux pouvoirs au roi,” *Demain online*, Oct. 7, 2011.

17 Jewish Telegraphic Agency (New York), July 6, 2011; *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment, Washington, D.C., July 6, 2011.

18 Interviews with various Moroccan Amazigh activists, Rabat, al-Hoceima, Nador, Sept. 2011.

19 Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, “Morocco’s Berbers and Israel,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2011, pp. 79-85.

20 Non-Arab Somalia and ethnically-divided Sudan (which has just seen a part of its territory secede), Djibouti, and the Comoros Islands are excluded from the notion of “core” Arab states but are, nevertheless, Arab League members.

**The referendum showed
that the authorities
had gained control over
the pace and manner
of political change.**

2011, just three weeks after its publication. The state mobilized considerable resources in its public campaign for a “Yes” vote and allowed almost no space, physical or in the media, for opponents of the new constitution. Not surprisingly, 98.5 percent of Moroccan voters (73 percent of those eligible) voted “Yes” according to official figures.²¹ While these numbers were most likely inflated, they, nonetheless, indicate that the Moroccan authorities had for the time being gained control over the pace and manner of political change.

To conclude the process, nationwide parliamentary elections, originally scheduled for fall 2012, were moved up to November 25, 2011. Voter turnout in the last general election in 2007 had been only 37 percent, indicating a general apathy with the process. Whether or not this year’s election will produce more interest remains to be seen. As for the likely results, expectations are widespread that the elections will produce a coalition government led by a member of one of the parties traditionally close to the palace, such as the National Rally of Independents (RNI). Of course, under the new constitution, the RNI would first have to win the most votes in the election, but few observers expect the authorities to abjure traditional practices of influencing the vote-counting.

Despite these apparent moves toward re-

form, the February 20th Movement sought to reenergize itself with a new round of protests beginning in mid-September. It had, however, clearly lost

steam. Internally, divisions between secular activists and the increasingly visible and assertive members of the Islamist al-Adl wa’l-Ihsan were taking their toll, affecting the capacity to mobilize. More generally, Moroccan society, with an eye on the upheavals elsewhere in the region and with the Algerian horrors of the 1990s still fresh in its mind, appeared reluctant to rock the boat too hard. The bombing of a popular café in Marrakesh in mid-April by Islamist terrorists²² was, for many, a chilling reminder of the consequences of disorder and instability.

Overall, then, Morocco’s new constitution reflects the country’s dual and often contradictory nature—a hereditary, Islamic-based, absolute monarchy, ruling over a modernizing, multicultural, and politically pluralist social and political order. Mohammed VI has bought more time with his latest measures. But staying ahead of the rising curve of demands for more meaningful reform, which is likely to be based on some of the more potentially innovative language of the new constitution, will demand much skill and wisdom from the country’s political elite, beginning with the king himself.



21 *Al-Arabiya News*, July 2, 2011.

22 *The Guardian*, Apr. 28, 2011.

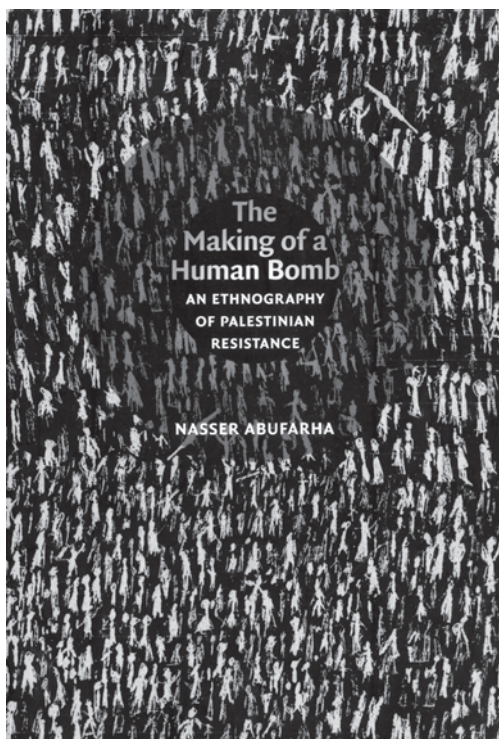
Brief Reviews

The Making of a Human Bomb: An Ethnography of Palestinian Resistance (The Culture and Practice of Violence). By Nasser Abufarha. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. 277 pp. \$84.95 (\$23.95, paper).

The Making of a Human Bomb looks at suicide terrorism from the perspective of the perpetrator and the society from which the phenomenon emerges. The intersection of culture and violence is a significant marker of Palestinian society as evidenced by the brutal Fatah-Hamas rivalry, the long tradition of blood feuds, and “honor killings” of women; an analysis of that society would make for a compelling and valuable contribution to the literature. As a product of Palestinian society, Abufarha could have brought a unique viewpoint to the table with an ability to offer an insider’s view of a group of people so often discussed but so little studied.

Such hopes are misplaced: Abufarha has wasted this potential by normalizing violence in Palestinian society and repeating tired tropes about colonialist victimization to rationalize acts of mayhem. Despite his cultural, religious, territorial, and social accessibility to the region of Jenin, home of many a suicide bomber, the genuine insight of an academic is absent from the book. Whatever ethnographic research is present, it is filtered through a deeply subjective and selective outlook, riddled with holes and resulting in a series of historical and scientific inaccuracies that conform to a political agenda and create problems with validity and reliability.

Thus he can write, “Killing celebrated by individuals, groups, and communities does not represent a psychological pathology, but rather a cultural expression.” He refers to Israelis as “Zionists targets” or “immigrants” and to Israel as a “colonial” and “expansionist” state and portrays the Palestinian *fellaheen* (farmers) as fighting against “colonialist Israel.” This, in turn, allows him to portray the indiscriminate



killing of Israeli civilians as justified behavior: “Palestinian groups developed Palestinian martyrdom operations as a means of resisting state expansion and asserting Palestinian identity and rootedness.”

It is unfortunate that the author’s deep emotional involvement and identification with one side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has caused him to abandon his role as a researcher of the Palestinian suicide attack phenomenon and instead present his research as a moral justification of this form of terrorism. Beyond the Israeli victims, it is the Palestinian children who are harmed by such socialization and indoctrination, preparing them to become *shaheeds* (martyrs), leading them and their society to a literal dead end.

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Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya
and George Washington University

The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey. By Banu Eligür. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 317 pp. \$85.

In an era when an overwhelming majority of articles and books published on Islamism are apologetic in nature and often fall short in terms of academic and scholarly integrity, Eligür's study constitutes a shift in research design, data, analytical strength, and discursive qualities.

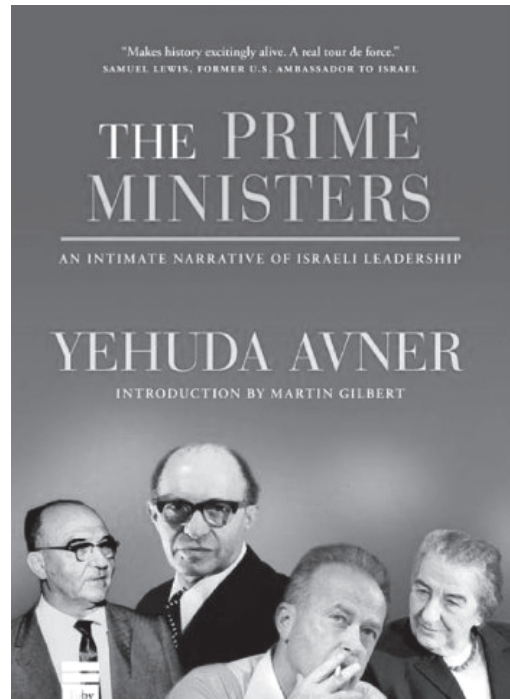
Eligür of Brandeis University's Crown Center for Middle East Studies utilizes a wide range of primary and secondary sources as well as interviews to write what is perhaps the most successful scholarly attempt to explain the rise of political Islam in Turkey.

The author argues that "grievance-based" cultural approaches are inherently flawed explanations for the Islamist mobilization in Turkey since the 1970s. Those who "regard political Islam as a protest movement against modernity and Western colonial domination" have failed in understanding the situation in Turkey. As Eligür argues, "Turkey was never subjected to Western colonial domination. The Turkish revolution, which introduced a secular state, was a successful struggle to forestall Western imperialism and domination." Eligür's theoretical approach combines a number of crucial themes in a powerful framework: social movements' mobilization, dynamics of organizations, and the use of political opportunity structures thereof.

It is in this triangle that she locates Turkish Islamism's success especially after the 1980 military coup. By eradicating the "Turkish leftist danger," the coup leaders invested in a "Turkish-Islam synthesis" and planted the seeds of radical and neo-liberal Islamism, a blend of neo-capitalism and soft Islamism, in Turkey.

The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey is a remarkable book, providing the best work on the rise and development of Islamism in Turkey, offering significant insights into the major political actors of the modern Turkish Islamist *da'wa* (proselytism), from Erbakan to Erdoğan.

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The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative of Israeli Leadership. By Yehuda Avner. New Milford, Conn. and Jerusalem: The Toby Press, LLC 1, 2010. 715 pp. \$29.95.

Former Israeli ambassador Avner offers a literary, distinctive, and colorful look into the inner sanctums of diplomacy and politics of the Jewish state. As speech writer and secretary to prime ministers Eshkol and Meir, adviser to prime ministers Rabin, Begin, and Peres, and ambassador to the court of St. James, Avner is uniquely positioned to bring to light the qualities and the temperaments of these leaders, so influential in laying the foundations of the state of Israel.

Most significantly, Avner shows through firsthand accounts that Israeli prime ministers on the left and the right worked diligently toward peace against seemingly insurmountable odds. His distinctive contribution is to disclose the brainstorming that took place behind closed doors before and after difficult decisions were made public.

The Prime Ministers illustrates how Israeli



statesmen have dealt with and represented the Jewish state to the global community, highlighting the quandaries in which civil servants often find themselves. Israeli ambassadors to the United States, for example, are required to negotiate the political Beltway—as well as the American Jewish community at large—as representatives of the State of Israel, not as commanders or even policymakers. Yitzhak Rabin, for example, was revered as the Israel Defense Forces chief of staff and later the prime minister who dared to embark on the Oslo peace process. But although Rabin understood the need to make a case for Israel in the U.S. political system, as ambassador to the United States in 1968, he was not savvy enough to know what methods might actually backfire. In the eyes of polished diplomats like Abba Eban, Rabin did not seem suited for the role; Eban often complained to Begin and other members of the Israeli parliament about Rabin's vocal support for Richard Nixon, jumping into what Eban argued should be a non-issue in U.S.-Israeli relations. By 1992, when Rabin was elected prime minister for the second time, it was clear he had

learned from the past. Managing to find just the right combination of toughness and flexibility, he charmed Washington and specifically then-president Bill Clinton, who considered him a seasoned diplomat and warrior.

Avner also offers valuable insight to those of his countrymen who would pursue a diplomatic career: “[I]t is not enough for an Israeli ambassador here to simply say ‘I’m pursuing my country’s best interests according to the book.’ ... An Israeli ambassador who is ... unwilling to maneuver his way through the complex American political landscape to promote Israel’s strategic interests would do well to pack his bags and go home.”

This historical account gives the reader special insights into the internal, as well as personal, workings of the Jewish state and is of particular value for understanding the nature and complexity of the U.S.-Israeli alliance.

Asaf Romirowsky
Middle East Forum



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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Signed, Judy Goodrobb, Managing Editor.