

**The Iran Debate Heats Up
Has Iran Finally
Chosen to Break Out
and What to Do About it?**



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Biden Must Stand with the Repressed People of Iran

by Ahmed Charai

President Joe Biden came to the White House promising to restore America's global role. He said he would take "immediate steps to renew our own democracy and alliances, protect our economic future, and once more place America at the head of the table, leading the world to address the most urgent global challenges."

Biden has always viewed the security of the United States as the paramount basis of foreign policy and has been prepared to reassess how to advance American interests in light of stubborn new conditions and realities. This pragmatic

realism may herald even more important changes in American foreign policy. Afghanistan, despite the setbacks caused by the rapid withdrawal of US forces, represents the most striking example of Biden's pragmatic, realistic streak.

Biden's views, however, have changed or evolved throughout his political journey. After the September 11 attacks, Biden voted to authorize the war in Afghanistan and, with some reservations, the war in Iraq.

Faced with the insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq, he became skeptical of the two American missions. In 2006, Biden presented his most distinctive foreign policy proposal to date: He advocated the division of Iraq into a federal system, paving the way for the withdrawal of the US military from the

country. Without wanting to gain an anti-war reputation, Biden sought an exit from Iraq. Biden also appears to have been a voice of caution within the Obama administration on other foreign policy debates. He opposed the bombing of Libya. He had publicly urged NATO allies to resume the US mission. “We cannot do everything,” Biden said, stressing that Libya was peripheral to “our strategic interest” in the region.

Under the Obama administration, Biden as vice president was attentive to Iranian politics, particularly the thorny negotiations leading up to the July 2015 nuclear deal and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

As president, Biden has told Israel’s Prime Minister Naftali Bennett that he was “trying diplomacy first” but that he would turn to “other options” if talks failed with Iran. What will his options be? Military strikes targeting nuclear enrichment sites? More sanctions? This vagueness dismays America’s allies and casts doubt on American strategy in the region, especially since the US is not the only player. China, Russia, and even Europe have interests that differ from those of the US.

To be sure, Iran may not pose an existential threat to the US, or even a direct significant conventional military challenge. However, Iranian aspirations for nuclear weapons, if pursued and decisively fulfilled, would pose a grave danger to America’s number one ally in the region, Israel; to the Middle East as a whole, and, possibly, to the US itself. It would also signal the collapse of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, with all that this entails

It should be noted that Iran’s nuclear aspirations are an integral part of a larger strategy of cultivating asymmetric and strategic anti-American forms of power; it is key to the ideology of the Iranian regime.

In the name of this ideology, Iranian authorities continue to suppress their own people. In November 2019, Iranian security forces used excessive and illegal lethal force against protesters. At least 304 people were

killed during these protests, according to Amnesty International. Its secretary general, Agnès Callamard, said after Ebrahim Raisi’s appointment as Iranian president, “In 2018, our organization documented how Ebrahim Raisi was a member of the ‘death commission’ which forcibly disappeared and extrajudicially executed in secret thousands of political dissidents in Evin and Gohardasht prisons near Tehran in 1988. The circumstances surrounding the fate of the victims and the location of their bodies are, to this day, systematically concealed by the Iranian authorities, amounting to permanent crimes against humanity.”

President Biden, who has shown an admirable commitment to combating authoritarianism throughout his political career, must take the plight of the Iranian people into account in the ongoing negotiations with the Iranian regime.

I know deep down that the US president, supported by his people and institutions, will not disappoint millions of Iranians who yearn for a better life. *

AHMED CHARAI

Publisher

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3 — Letter from the publisher Biden Must Stand with the Repressed People of Iran
by Ahmed Charai

6 — Editorial After the longest war: Lessons, focal points of conflict, new prospects for progress
by Eran Lerman

IRAN

8 — Is Iran Finally Breaking Out?
by Joab Rosenberg

14 — Biden Needs an Effective—and Coercive—Iran Strategy
by Mark Dubowitz

24 — Dealing With a (Still) Hostile Iran: Five Lessons to Be Learned and a Cornered Cat
by John Limbert

ESSAYS

30 — How Israel Should Navigate the New American Landscape
by Dennis Ross

38 — Biden's Afghanistan Mistake
by Annie Pforzheimer

48 — The United States and Pakistan— What Next After Afghanistan?
by Richard Olson

56 — Strategy the Perennial Need for the Use of Force
by Efraim Inbar

64 — Israel Diplomatic Innovation and the Role and Responsibility of Civil Society
by Koby Huberman

72 — Israel-US Relations The Abraham Accords and the Talking Stick
by James Foggo

COLUMNS

78 — Diplomatic Dispatches A Diplomatic Look Before We Leap
by Robert Silverman

82 — Window on Washington The Ten Big Mistakes
by Dov S. Zakheim

88 — Military Matters Same Mistakes for Israel in Lebanon, US in Afghanistan
by Pnina Shuker

96 — Inside Intelligence Know Thy Partner
by Amir Oren

104 — Personal Profiles The Lost Battle of Ahmad Jibril
by Ksenia Svetlova

110 — Literature Bad News—in Time: Secret Talks
by Eran Lerman



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AFTER THE LONGEST WAR:

Lessons, Focal Points of Conflict, New Prospects for Progress

by Eran Lerman

As the first issue of *The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune* was going to print, a long, dark shadow was falling fast upon the future of our region, of US policy, and of the international order. Events in Afghanistan—and the manner in which they were being portrayed and interpreted worldwide—made some of the question marks raised on our pages all the more powerful and poignant.

This, our second issue, thus took shape amidst the need to offer some reflections on what might be the meaning of the fall of Kabul. America's longest-ever war has come to a painful end. Well beyond what the US retreat would mean for the people (and particularly the women) of Afghanistan, and the degree to which it evokes the sad and dormant memories of 1975,

it also raises cogent questions about where our region is headed, as well as about basic aspects of military affairs, intelligence challenges, and effective diplomacy. For Israel, as Dennis Ross suggests in his essay, the combination of the changing US political landscape and the reluctance to revert to the use of force poses profound policy questions—but also implies closer affinity with her equally worried neighbors.

The outcome in Afghanistan is thus treated here from several angles. In an essay that was written as the final crisis unfolded, Annie Pforzheimer—who oversaw policy in Afghanistan in the previous administration—offers us her timely insight into the fate of a failed mission. So does Dov Zakheim in his retrospective column, reflecting on the tragedy as it was driven by decisions in Washington. Richard Olsen, who had served as special representative to Pakistan and Afghanistan and as US Ambassador in Islamabad, provides

a first-hand account of the complexities of the American-Pakistani relationship and explains why the bitter imprint of what happened in Afghanistan will not be easily overcome. Amir Oren, in his “Inside Intelligence” column, discusses the failure to assess the capabilities of friendly forces as a major lacuna of intelligence and decision making; and much the same point is central to Amos Gilead’s testimonial book, reviewed in our literature column. Pnina Shuker, in her column on military matters, draws useful (and painful) parallels with Israel’s own “longest war” in Lebanon, 1982-2000. And in a suggestion to decision makers in Washington, Robert Silverman’s column takes a cue from the inner workings of hospitals so as to ensure that reservations are heard before fateful decisions are taken.

The Koreans, I am told, have a saying congruent with their landscape: “Beyond the hills, more hills”. The long war is over: but will it be followed by more conflict? What will be the role of military force in the power equations that may now unfold? In a seminal essay, Professor Efraim Inbar—one of Israel’s most prominent scholars of international affairs—reminds us that war, for all its horrors, has been with us since the dawn of humanity, and may well remain a formative feature of our future. This is true not only for our troubled region but also in the context of great power competition and the rise of China (as expounded in our previous issue).

One obvious focal point for potential conflict is the ongoing quest by Iran for the possession of the bomb. The fundamental aspects of the debate are all here. In an alarming essay, Yoav Rosenberg—a leading analyst in Israel of Iran’s nuclear policy—warns that past assumptions may no longer hold, and Iran is now determined to press ahead: the time to stop the project is running out. In my own column on identity and grand strategy, I venture to explain what makes the present regime in Tehran so hostile to Israel’s very existence: and while Mark Dubowitz of FDD makes the case for a more robust set of pressures, John Limbert, an experienced

observer—and one of the hostages in the 1979-1981 crisis—warns against repeating the mistaken modes of action which have failed to sway Iran ever since the Islamic revolution.

At the same time, we are reminded that not all such challenges succeed. Ksenia Svetlova’s profile column portrays Ahmad Jibril of the PFLP-GC, whom she met as a journalist: his passing served to symbolize the end of an era: once a central figure in the campaign of terror against Israel, his organization ended up as a shadowy presence among the forces helping the Syrian regime repress its own people.

Terror does not (always) succeed, and there are real avenues for progress even in a world fraught with tensions. In continuation of the debate about peace on our first issue, Kobi Huberman walks us through the complex paces of mobilizing civil society in support of peace in the Middle East, writ large. Admiral Foggo tells the story of dialog with Israel from a naval officer’s perspective—and conjures the image of the Native American talking stick, which requires the speaker to argue the other side’s points. Reuven Ben-Shalom expands the discussion to encompass the case for military diplomacy; while Tom Goldberger explains how the MFA in Sinai helps sustain the peace.

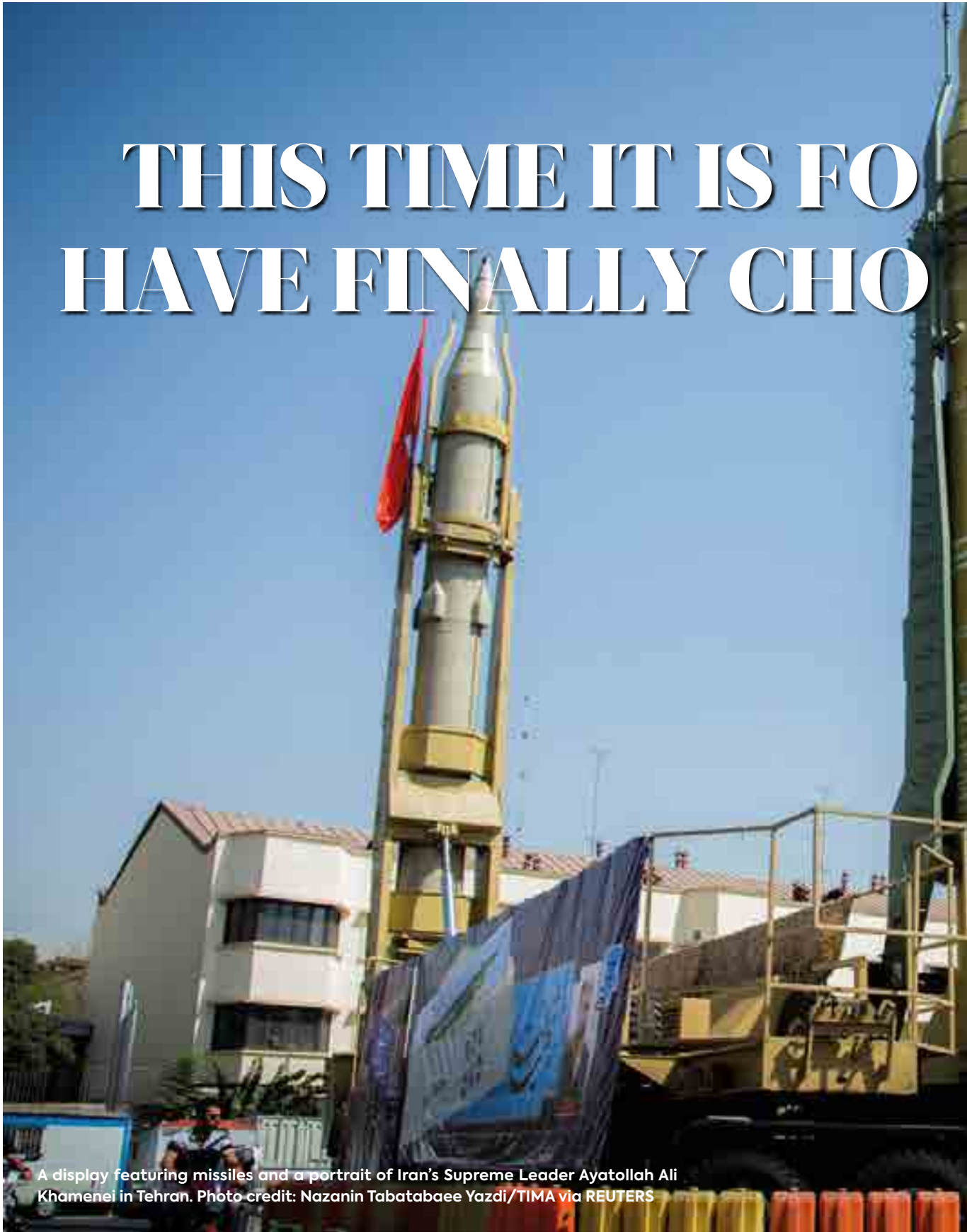
All this adds up to a fascinating mosaic of challenges, responses and attitudes: the debate intensifies, and there will be more and more in the coming issues. *

ERAN LERMAN

Editor-in-chief

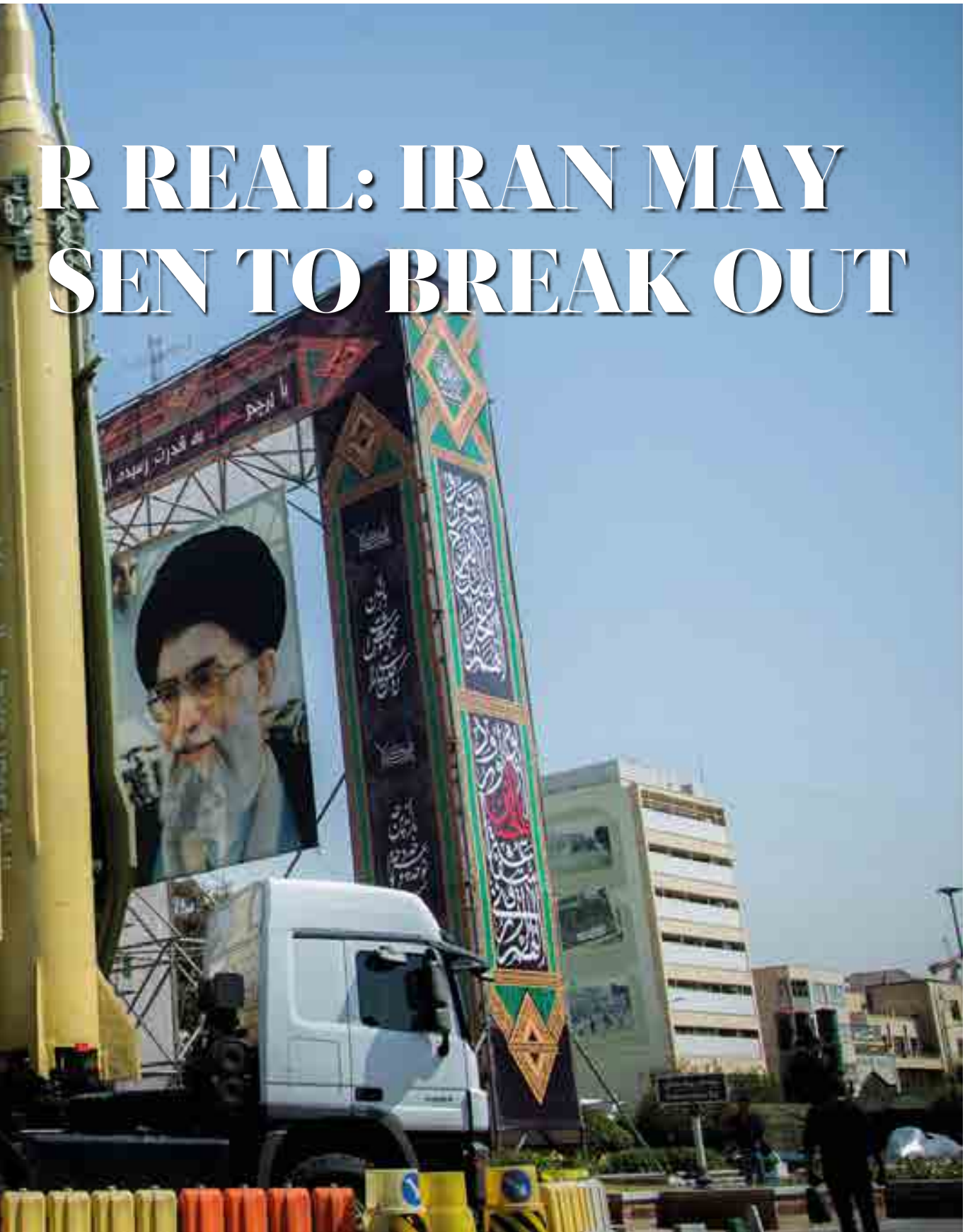
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THIS TIME IT IS FO HAVE FINALLY CHO



A display featuring missiles and a portrait of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran. Photo credit: Nazanin Tabatabaee Yazdi/TIMA via REUTERS

IRAN: REAL: IRAN MAY BE ABOUT TO BREAK OUT





by Joab Rosenberg

A question mark now hangs over Iran's willingness to return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Indeed, following the August 27 meeting between Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and US President Joe Biden, both referred in their public statements to the need to consider "other options" against Iran's nuclear program, should the diplomatic course fail.

Rather than seek to reassure the West, the blunt response from Tehran amounted to an open threat. Iran's secretary of the National Security Council, General (ret.) Ali Shamkhani, tweeted—including a version in Hebrew—a warning that this "illegal threat" against Iran gives his government the right to a "reciprocal response."

What could Shamkhani mean and what are Iran's options? More to the point, after all too many warnings that a breakout toward nuclear weapons may be around the corner—within weeks or a few months—is it finally for real now? I believe it is time to consider this option seriously, despite the willingness of Iran's new government to return to the diplomatic track.

The Biden administration came to office clearly determined to reinstate the JCPOA, after Trump unilaterally withdrew from it in 2018. Trump's decision was heartily welcomed at the time by Israel's former prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who had hoped it would curb Iran's ambitions; yet, since then, Iran has advanced its nuclear program in many dangerous ways.



US President Joe Biden shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, on August 27, 2021. Photo by Nicholas Kamm/AFP

First and foremost has been Iran's decision to enrich uranium to 60% and to build a conversion line into uranium metal—major steps that bring Iran closer than ever to the ability to acquire nuclear weapons or, at least, force the world to accept it as a threshold power (i.e., a nation that does not hold, let alone test, a nuclear weapon but is capable of it).

Despite the Biden administration's public pursuit of a new version of the deal, Iran's supreme leader declined to allow the former government, in the waning days of Rouhani's presidency, to sign the agreement. True, Iran is suffering from the sanctions imposed on it, but yet, they act as if they do not feel the pressure



Iranian Atomic Energy Agency Chief Mohammad Eslami and Iran's Ambassador to the IAEA Kazem Gharibabadi at the opening of the IAEA General Conference in Vienna, September 2021.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Leonhard Foeger

mounting nor will they let it force them back into the JCPOA or any other similar agreement. One could argue that the reason for this is Iran's famous bazaar culture of fierce negotiations, raising the opening bid to a higher level, or that the US is at fault, since they posited demands for changes in the agreement with which Iran could not comply. All too often in the recent past, such explanations had been put forward; this time, however, the option that Iran has, in fact, changed course and is now committed to a strategy of breaking through should seriously be considered.

To understand what makes this conclusion plausible, we should delve into a quick review of the history of Iran's nuclear program. Despite Iran's ongoing denials, it is very clear that it was running a broad-ranging nuclear weapons program in the 1990s and up until around 2004. Shamkhani, who now holds the position of secretary of the National Security

Council, was the defense minister from 1997–2005. He was responsible at the time for the AMAD organization, whose head was Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. AMAD (previously also known as the PHRC) was responsible for designing the nuclear weapon and mounting it onto a Shahab-3 warhead. This has been proven beyond a doubt by many original documents that were published internationally in open sources and more recently by the documents from the AMAD secret archive brought over from Tehran by the Israeli Mossad. Sadly, and for several different reasons, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) did not reach any clear conclusion in writing that Iran had a nuclear weapons program, in a blunt breach of its commitments under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

In 2003–2004, in a major shift, the leadership in Tehran changed the course of Iran's nuclear program. It froze the AMAD

project, keeping its personnel within the Defense Ministry while working on dual-use projects rather than on the direct development of nuclear weapons. In parallel, Iran's Atomic Energy Organization (AEOI) took the lead, advancing Iran's enrichment capabilities under the IAEA inspections and promoting Iran's efforts on nuclear reactors. It must be clear that this change of course had to reflect a decision by the supreme leader. It was driven by the impact of events of 9/11 and the US war in Afghanistan and Iraq; it was meant to deflect Iran's inclusion in the "axis of evil" by President Bush. Furthermore, at that same time, Iranian opposition exposed the Natanz enrichment facility, and the IAEA inspectors managed to find traces of enriched uranium in Iran. Put together, these elements endangered Iran's national security.

Negotiations between the IAEA and Iran ensued, as did on-and-off diplomatic contacts between the international community and Iran, in an attempt to achieve a peaceful resolution of the dispute. Iran's ongoing strategy was to deny any prior attempts or even intentions to acquire nuclear weapons and to insist (presumably based on a putative religious injunction, fatwa, by the supreme leader) that it is interested only in peaceful nuclear technology. Western diplomats had decided to adopt this convenient fiction, despite knowing that Iran was lying. They wanted to leverage this claim to convince Iran to agree to measures not included in the NPT, e.g., give up Iran's right to enrich uranium to levels above 3.5% and agree to export any quantity of enriched uranium above 300 kg. This could build confidence over time and then evidence could presumably be provided that Iran indeed was seeking only nuclear civilian capabilities.

The fact that the IAEA did not conclude that Iran did have a nuclear weapons program helped the negotiators to adopt their chosen course of action. It was successfully brought to an end in 2015 with the JCPOA, which put limitations on Iran's civilian nuclear program until 2030. It took a long time to convince the supreme leader to agree to approve the agreement, given his long-standing disbelief in US goodwill and his suspicion of evil intent—a "cultural invasion"—

behind any willingness to do business with the Islamic Revolution regime.

Three years later came Trump's decision to withdraw from the agreement—without any overt proof that Iran had violated its commitments under the JCPOA. The US actually ignored other options discussed in consultations with the other signatories, i.e., Germany, UK, France (in particular), Russia, and China. This, in turn, resulted in a fatal blow to the supreme leader's trust in any more deals with the US. The traditional hostility toward the US and other Western powers had come back to the fore, reinforcing the voices in Tehran calling to accelerate its nuclear efforts.

The new government in Tehran—led by Khamenei's hand-picked loyalists—is now setting a new course. In terms of its policy process, Iran is very different from dictatorships such as Saddam's Iraq or Assad's Syria. Iran's leader is listening carefully to his advisors, and there is always a lively discussion on strategic matters in Tehran. As mentioned above, Khamenei already changed his mind several times on the nuclear issue, responding to global and regional developments and following differing views around the decision-making table in Tehran. Since August 2021, there are now new conservative voices around the table, and the balance may have changed in favor of a confrontational approach.

The irony of history is again at full force: Iran's decision to postpone its nuclear weapons efforts in 2004 was a result of the US decision to go into Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2021 Iran has seen the US leave Afghanistan, and Washington may soon be withdrawing its forces from Iraq, with the goal of establishing a functional democracy very far from sight. Little is left of the neocons' once looming threat that led Tehran to wonder whether Iran may be next. It will be a fitting decision for the supreme leader in Iran to change his mind yet again regarding nuclear weapons—or at least a break to threshold status—at this sensitive time, when US presence in the region is in decline. Furthermore, the coronavirus pandemic is still prevalent and occupies the minds of all global powers. Khamenei can already judge that his major decisions—to allow enrichment to 60% and start

working on enriched uranium metal—did not lead to a firm response from the international community, other than empty declarations and statements by the IAEA and the EU three.

What could be the Iranians' next step? Could they progress even more without publicly expelling the IAEA inspectors, a step that may cause a major crisis and even lead to a military strike on their nuclear facilities? Until recently, most pundits assumed that an Iranian decision to enrich uranium to a military level of 90% would definitely be considered a *casus belli*. Is this still true? The latest crisis between France and the US regarding the decision to sell nuclear-propelled submarines to Australia may actually give rise to a new excuse for the ultimate level of enrichment. Many of the nuclear-powered submarines have 90% enriched uranium as their fuel. Brazil had claimed a long time ago that they would enrich uranium to that level based on their need for nuclear-powered submarines. Australia is, of course, a non-nuclear state and does not seek nuclear weapons but has now decided it does need a nuclear-propelled submarine. The Australians will surely not enrich the uranium for their submarines' engines, but this is due to the fact they can acquire those from the US and the UK.

Iran had already publicly declared it is interested in building nuclear-propelled submarines, but this may well have been an excuse for enriching beyond the usual level for civilian usage. Iran had notified the IAEA back in 2018 it was planning to “construct naval nuclear propulsion in the future.” Clearly, now may be the time to pursue such an idea. Will the international response be blunt and unhesitating? Unfortunately, the answer is uncertain. For all the above-mentioned reasons, sadly, it may well be the case that the response will be well phrased but with no real intent to act beyond it. The previous logical step of 60% is already upon us, as noted, and has yet to evoke an effective response.

Trump's unilateral decision in 2018 weakened the international alliance and commitment, but the Biden administration's effort to revive the JCPOA has yet to produce the necessary unity once again. Iran may think it is free to move on and advance its program. Until

now Iran did not expel the IAEA inspectors and indeed renewed its interaction with the Agency and agreed to go back to the negotiation table, but it continues to limit the inspection capabilities. The course they are taking is different from what many think tanks had war-gamed in the last decade. It is not like the North Korean path.

But will Iran now agree after all to go back into an agreement that limits its nuclear capabilities or is it possible that the decision to change course has already been taken? The negotiations will certainly keep going. It is still possible to pray that good diplomatic skills will bring Iran back into the JCPOA, or a version thereof. But it is now just as probable that the Iranians are actually “breaking out,” as Secretary Blinken declared, despite the fact it is a different “break out” than any of the experts had predicted, acquiring military-grade fissile material while still avowing that they do not seek a weapon.

It is one thing for the Israeli government to avoid an open clash—unlike its predecessor—with the US administration over the prospect of a return to the JCPOA. It is another matter, however, when it comes to preventing the emergence of a breakout situation and a regional arms race. The time for stopping Iran may be running out as we speak. *

JOAB ROSENBERG

Col. (ret.) Joab Rosenberg is the former deputy head analyst at Israel's Military Intelligence.



Iran-made ballistic missile in Tehran's Azadi Square, during a rally to commemorate the 42nd anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. Photo credit: Morteza Nikoubazl via Reuters Connect

A photograph of an Iranian missile on a launch pad. The missile is white with black and red markings, including the number '530077' and the name 'فوالک زینر' (Foolak Zinir) in Persian. The Iranian flag is visible in the background, and the scene is set against a clear blue sky.

BIDEN NEEDS AN EFFECTIVE—AND COERCIVE—IRAN STRATEGY



by Mark Dubowitz

The Biden administration seems to be on the wrong track. No strategy against the Islamic Republic of Iran can be effective without sustained coercive pressure. Going back in time, the situation is reminiscent of Ronald Reagan's moment in history, when he came to believe that coercive measures would work to exploit Moscow's weaknesses and help hasten the Soviet regime's collapse. Similarly, the Biden administration should deploy a comprehensive set of coercive tools to combat the full range of Tehran's malign behavior, including its nuclear advances, regional aggression, human rights abuses, and global terrorist networks. The short term objective: to hold and deter the regime. In the longer term: a presidential commitment to use American power to rollback and crack the Islamist regime.

Given Iran's conduct, it is safe to assume that any US president would sooner or later need to make the same shift—turning away from reconciliation and adopting a more coercive posture toward the Islamic Republic. This policy shift is made even more urgent by the Islamist victory in Afghanistan. Minor sanctions, unarmed diplomacy, and ineffectual military strikes on Iran-backed militias that are known to have fired on US troops are the current hallmarks of Biden's Iran policy. This is occurring while Washington is signaling its intention to move military assets out of the Gulf region, withdraw US troops from Iraq, and allow the Taliban to take over Afghanistan. Such an approach cannot possibly contain the clerical

regime's regional and nuclear aspirations.

The Biden administration's announced desire to go back to the 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is weakening American deterrence, as Tehran seeks to squeeze more and more concessions in the Vienna negotiations. President Biden is loath to respond to Iranian acceleration of uranium separation, at levels unmistakably designed to approach military capacity, as well as to the escalation of attacks by proxy across the region. A pattern of dangerous Iranian adventurism has also unfolded, including the firing of dozens of rockets at US troops by Iran-backed proxies in Iraq; the attempted kidnapping in New York of an American citizen by Iranian intelligence officers; the targeting of US and international shipping in the Gulf; and the attacks by Iran-backed proxies like Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Houthis against US allies in the Middle East. None of this aggression, however, has produced a meaningful response from the Biden team, even after seven months of Iranian provocations.

The Biden strategy does not take into consideration the vast disquiet within Iran and the regular eruptions of anger toward the theocracy. In late 2017, nationwide protests began to consume the Islamic Republic, occurring regularly in the years since. In November 2019, an eruption of protests spurred the clerical regime to kill as many as 1,500 demonstrators, according to Reuters. In August 2021, protesters gathered to challenge the regime over severe water shortages, leading security forces to kill several people. Other protests since 2017 have challenged the full range of Iran's malign policies, including its poor economy, corruption, regional expansionism,



Sooner or later, the US will have to turn away from reconciliation. A staff member removes the Iranian flag after a group photo during the Iran nuclear talks in Vienna, 2015. Photo credit: REUTERS/Carlos Barria

and human rights abuses. These developments have increased the vulnerability of the Islamic Republic, making it more susceptible to collapse.

Opponents of the clerical regime could benefit from an American strategy that combines deterrence in the short term and coercion in the medium-to-long term. For now, the strategy should be to “hold and deter”—until the current US administration, or a new one, would actively adopt a “rollback and crack” strategy to intensify the existing weaknesses of the regime and support its dissolution. The Reagan “victory” strategy against the Soviet Union, a nuclear-armed superpower, shows the way.

HOLD AND DETER

It is not clear that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will even allow his new president, Ebrahim Raisi, a man after his own liking—and a mass executioner—to reenter the JCPOA. If it happens, it will be a very different agreement

than the one concluded in 2015. The Biden administration’s leading Iran envoy and chief negotiator, Robert Malley, already has conceded in the negotiations much greater sanctions relief than even former Secretary of State John Kerry and his chief negotiator Wendy Sherman agreed to in 2015. If the former Iranian foreign minister, Javad Zarif, is to be believed, by mid-July, the US had agreed to lift sanctions on over 1,000 designated entities, including all Iranian banks except for one. Malley had also agreed to remove sanctions on the supreme leader and his close associates and take the regime’s praetorians—the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)—off the list of foreign terrorist organizations. What will be left are minor, symbolic sanctions that will do little to interfere with the flow of billions of dollars to the clerical regime. And there could be more concessions to come as a new Iranian president and negotiating team squeeze Malley for more if negotiations resume.



No cap on heavy-water production. The nuclear reactor at Arak. Photo credit: WANA via REUTERS

On the nuclear side, Iran is enriching uranium at 60%, manufacturing uranium metal, accumulating large stockpiles of fissile material, testing more advanced centrifuges, and stonewalling the International Atomic Energy Agency’s inquiries about nuclear-related activities. Tehran is digging in its heels about maintaining its stockpile of advanced centrifuges, which are likely, at best, to be warehoused instead of destroyed. As JCPOA nuclear restrictions begin expiring in 2024, it is clear that Iran will have maintained pathways to nuclear weapons. By 2027, restrictions on the mass deployment of centrifuges, including

advanced models, will begin to sunset with remaining restrictions gone by 2029. By 2031, there will be no cap on enrichment purity levels, including on weapon-grade uranium, as well as on stockpiles; enrichment will be permitted at the buried-beneath-a-mountain Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant; new enrichment plants will be permitted; a plutonium reprocessing prohibition will be lifted; heavy water reactors will be allowed; and there will be no cap on heavy-water production or domestic stockpiling.

What is to be done? First, congressional voices on both sides of the aisle, US governors, private attorneys, as well as Israel and the Gulf



The Islamic Republic cannot be reformed. President Ebrahim Raisi.
Photo credit: Morteza Nikoubazl via Reuters Connect

states should use a combination of market and political deterrence to diminish the economic benefits from an American return to the JCPOA. Some congressional Republicans are already signaling to the market—through legislation, resolutions, and open or personal letters—that when they take back power they will reinstate sanctions and impose significant costs to anyone who has reentered the Iranian market. Companies may only enjoy a few years of business opportunities before sanctions are returned. US governors can reinforce this market deterrence by expanding state laws to divest public pension funds from companies

doing any business with the Islamic Republic. Private attorneys currently hold over \$50 billion in outstanding judgments against the clerical regime on behalf of victims of Iranian terrorism. They should seek to attach these judgments to transactions between international companies and Iranian entities.

Israel also needs to protect its companies against the risk that they might inadvertently do business with Iran-linked entities. Jerusalem should publish its own comprehensive list of hostile entities that are engaged in supporting terrorism, missile and weapons proliferation, and human rights abuses, or are connected

to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), its military, and other governmental entities. Given the Mossad's reputation for Iran-related intelligence, this will be a reliable list for the compliance departments of major international banks and companies looking to stay clear of problematic persons, corporations, and other entities.

The Biden administration has made clear that if it suspends measures on banks and companies currently subject to US terrorism and missile sanctions, it will do so on a political basis—not because the conduct underlying those sanctions has changed. These will be uncharted waters for foreign financial institutions and investors who rely on the US Treasury Department's sanctions list to protect them from business dealings with terror financiers and nuclear and missile proliferators. Hundreds of Iranian banks and companies will still be tied to terrorism, missiles, and the IRGC, despite the political decision to suspend sanctions—making the establishment of a new, internationally-respected terror and missile-finance watch list all the more important.

At the same time, Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain have market leverage they can deploy against companies doing business with the Islamic Republic. They can publish their own lists of malign persons and entities, duplicating or enhancing the Israeli list, and they can put companies to a choice between doing business with these Gulf countries or with the mullahs' regime. Together, they have market power through the size of their sovereign wealth funds, their energy market, and the large defense, construction, infrastructure, technology and other contracts they award to international companies. Israel and nongovernmental organizations can help by providing detailed information on pending contracts and discussions between international companies and Iranian entities.

Economic power is only part of the “hold and deter” strategy. With the Biden administration

signaling its intention to move military assets out of the Middle East and its unwillingness to impose significant military costs on Iran and its proxies, Israel will increasingly be the only serious Western power in the region. The Mossad and Unit 8200, Israel's signals intelligence and cyberwar division, have run circles around Iran's security establishment through a successful campaign of covert action against Iran-related nuclear, military, and other assets. These have damaged Tehran's atomic program, diminished Iranian regional capabilities in Syria, and have embarrassed the regime. The killing of Mohsen Fakhrazadeh, the chief of Iran's military-nuclear program, and covert strikes against advanced centrifuge facilities and the Natanz nuclear site have bought Israel (and the world) some much-needed time. The 2020 killing of Iran's most notorious military commander, Qasem Soleimani, in an American operation that relied on Israeli intelligence input, seriously undermined Iran's regional aspirations. Hundreds of Israeli airstrikes against Iran-linked positions in Syria have prevented Tehran from opening up a third border from which to attack Israeli civilians and infrastructure. Israel's intelligence agencies have also gone on the offensive against the regime's infrastructure inside Iran.

Despite these successes, covert action probably will not be sufficient to stop the Islamist regime's nuclear march. At some point, an Israeli government may decide that it has no choice but to launch military strikes. The biggest concern with this course of action is Jerusalem may well face a Biden administration ardently opposed to the use of force. And any suggestion from Jerusalem that it will only act with American consent implicates Washington if Jerusalem decides it must attack irrespective of past statements. This makes it more difficult for the Biden team to assert plausible deniability. The lasting anger in Washington, especially among Democrats, should not be underestimated.



Any new national security directive must indicate how to systemically dismantle Iranian power. The IRGC test ballistic missiles at the Great Salt Desert, in January. Photo credit: SalamPix/ABACA via Reuters Connect

In the meantime, the Biden administration is running a political-messaging campaign to deter Israeli action and to try and sideline JCPOA-skeptical Democrats like Senator Bob Menendez. The political campaign pivots on rhetoric about a “longer and stronger” nuclear deal that will correct the deficiencies of the original agreement. There is, of course, near-zero prospect for a better deal, as Tehran has made clear. But the rhetoric may be sufficient to neutralize some critical voices who do not want to have a big fight over America’s role in the Middle East. Republicans and Democrats in Congress will need to be clear-eyed about how unrealistic the administration’s rhetoric is about an improved deal.

ROLLBACK AND CRACK

“Hold and deter” is only a short-term strategy. To keep the threat at bay, the American administration would need to take a page from the playbook Ronald Reagan first used against the Soviet Union. The strategy should be designed to rollback and crack the clerical regime.

In the early 1980s, President Reagan seriously upgraded his predecessors’ containment strategy by pushing policies that tried to roll back Soviet expansionism. The cornerstone of his strategy was the recognition that the Soviet Union was an aggressive and revolutionary yet internally fragile state that Washington could defeat. Reagan’s policy was

outlined in 1983 in National Security Decision Directive 75, a comprehensive strategy that called for the use of all instruments of American overt and covert power. The plan included a massive defense buildup, economic warfare, support for anti-Soviet proxy forces and dissidents, and an all-out offensive against the regime's ideological legitimacy.

The Biden administration—or, by 2025, perhaps a new president—should call for a new version of NSDD-75 and go on the offensive against the Iranian regime. The administration would be wise to address every aspect of the Iranian menace, not merely the nuclear program. President Obama's narrow focus on disarmament paralyzed American policy. Obama's engagement with the Islamic Republic as an end in itself suffered from the same delusions that American presidents entertained about Communist China. Those delusions of engagement made China wealthy and more powerful but did not moderate China's rulers. The recent election of Raisi, a mass murdering cleric close to the supreme leader, who was elected by the lowest number of voters in Iran's history, may sober up Team Biden to the unmistakable conclusion: The Islamic Republic cannot be reformed.

President Biden also should avoid the arms control trap that paralyzed Obama's Iran policy. Under Obama's nuclear accord, Tehran does not need to cheat to reach threshold nuclear-weapons capabilities. Merely by waiting for key constraints to sunset, the regime can emerge over the next decade with an industrial-size enrichment program, a near-zero breakout time, an easier clandestine "sneak out" path to long-range, nuclear-armed ballistic missiles, much better conventional weaponry, regional dominance, and a more powerful economy, increasingly immunized against Western sanctions.

Any new national security directive must indicate how to systemically dismantle Iranian power. Washington should demolish the regime's terrorist networks and influence operations,

including their presence in Europe and the US. The American offensive was underway during the Trump administration but it ran out of time: Mike Pompeo, then director of the CIA, put the agency on an aggressive footing against these global networks with the development of a more muscular covert action program and the green-lighting of much closer cooperation with the Mossad.

Most of Washington's actions that could push back Tehran hinge on severely weakening the Islamic Republic's finances. The Trump administration (and even the Obama-era Treasury) ran a successful economic warfare campaign targeting the IRGC and other regime elements that devastated Iranian government finances, led to hyperinflation, spurred a collapse in oil exports and the Iranian currency, and precipitated multiple rounds of street protests. In 2019 Khamenei called the US sanctions "unprecedented." In the same year, the then Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, compared conditions in Iran to the country's devastating economic plight during the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988.

But Trump's pressure campaign lasted only two years (from the snapback of sanctions in November 2018 to the end of the Trump administration in January 2021). If the Biden administration restores the JCPOA, much of that economic pressure will be reversed, as hundreds of the most economically potent sanctions are lifted. These will need to be reinstated.

Last but not least, the American pressure campaign should seek to undermine Iran's rulers by strengthening the pro-democracy forces that erupted in Iran in 2009 and resurfaced from 2017 to 2021. It should target the regime's soft underbelly: its massive corruption and human rights abuses, especially against women. Conventional wisdom assumes that Iran has a stable government. In reality, as the selection of Raisi and the boycott of his election by over 50% of Iranians (and protest ballots by another 20%) demonstrated, the gap between the ruled

and their Islamist overlords is expanding. Many Iranians no longer believe that the “reformists” can change the Islamic Republic from within. After the 2009 uprisings, Khamenei alluded to his regime being “on the edge of a cliff.” A new Republican president should create the distinct impression that America will help to push it over that edge.

Other key voices in Iran have warned of the regime’s precariousness. In 2019 one Iranian lawmaker, Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi, compared the regime’s predicament to the Soviet Union’s. “When the Soviet Union collapsed,” he told the Iranian parliament, “it had 13,000 nuclear warheads and had influence in more than 20 countries and a space station, but it was torn apart on the streets of Moscow, losing its security and territorial integrity.” Mohammad Reza Tajik, a political adviser to former President Mohammad Khatami, likened Tehran to the “Titanic in turbulent waters.”

To be sure, collapsing a brutally repressive regime like the Islamic Republic will not be easy or predictable. It will require sustained US pressure, a willingness to withstand international opprobrium, and a steely determination—perhaps over a period of years—to target the full range of Iran’s malign conduct. Yet cracking the regime remains a solution that Washington should not abjure merely because it is difficult. Ultimately, it remains the best and only way to reduce instability in the region and advance US interests.

The nuclear issue likely will loom large in the immediate future and the years ahead. A willingness to negotiate arms-control agreements (as Reagan did with Moscow) must never come at the expense of continuing a relentless campaign of pressure. Any American administration should present Iran with the choice between a new and better agreement and an unrelenting American pressure campaign, which includes the credible use of force against an expanding nuclear program.

Washington does not need to have a public strategy to collapse the clerical regime; Reagan



did not have one for the USSR. Our political leaders should only talk about the inevitability of the fate of the Islamic Republic. An ideologically, politically, and economically bankrupt regime, it will end up on the “ash heap of history.” Reagan spoke that way about the Soviet Union in his famous 1981 Westminster speech. In 1983, he released NSDD-75. Only seven years later, the Soviet bloc collapsed. Washington should intensify the pressure on the mullahs as Reagan did on the communists. We would be far better off this time round, of course, not to have a dogged enemy armed with atomic weapons if we can possibly avoid it. *

— MARK DUBOWITZ

Mark Dubowitz is the chief executive of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. An expert on Iran’s nuclear program, he has advised several US administrations and published dozens of studies on economic sanctions.





DEALING WITH A (STILL) HOSTILE IRAN: FIVE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED AND A CORNERED CAT

A portrait of Ayatollah Khomeini on the wall of the former US Embassy in Tehran.
Photo credit: Eric Lafforgue / Hans Lucas via Reuters Connect



by John Limbert

During the summer of 1979, at least ten times a day someone in Tehran would ask, “When are THEY leaving? Next week? Next month?” “They,” of course, were the Iranian clerics who had installed themselves in power after the collapse of Mohammad Reza Shah’s government in February of that year. The questioners assumed some sort of terrible mistake had been made and that sooner or later (preferably sooner), sanity would prevail and everyone would realize that clerics cannot govern a country. Politicians rule. Generals rule. Clerics don’t rule.

Well, in this case “they” were not going anywhere. They are still here 42 years later, either the same people or their disciples. From the earliest days of the revolution, a circle of several dozen powerful clerics—whose ideas and sentiments were closest to those of Ayatollah Khomeini—formed a tight-knit network of Friday prayer leaders, revolutionary court judges, and “Imam’s representatives” that had survived assassinations and natural deaths of its members. In less than two years they had eliminated their rivals. First, with the help of leftists, they crushed the nationalists who, it turned out, had no stomach for street fighting and mob politics; next they turned on their erstwhile allies and eliminated the leftists in a vicious, violent campaign that left thousands dead. By 1981 they had made the elected president irrelevant and had gained total control of Iran’s security services, judicial system, media, and armed forces. In the intervening decades, presidents,

ministers, and parliaments have come and gone. The survivors of this group—and their proteges—have gone nowhere and continue to rule.

Not only have the mullahs not left, but neither has their creation, an Islamic republic that has defied all predictions of imminent collapse, and has survived assassinations, boycotts, sanctions, war, political isolation, emigration of the educated, economic mismanagement, and political ineptitude on a grand scale. Those who predicted that the Islamic Republic would either destroy itself or eventually recognize reality and moderate its extremist rhetoric and its hostility to much of the world have had to eat large portions of crow Thermidor. Iranian antagonism toward the US, Israel, and others has remained constant. As one Iranian official told a group of American students (in 2016), “The basis of our foreign policy is opposition to you.”

LESSON ONE: HAVE GOALS

In this reality the US has struggled in vain for over four decades to find an Iran policy that makes sense. One obstacle has been the lack of any defined goal that political leaders can use to measure a policy’s failure or success. For, as the Cheshire Cat famously told Alice, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.” Goals have remained elusive and a matter

**Chorus of Policemen:
We go, we go
Major General Stanley:
Yes, but you DON’T go
*Pirates of Penzance***



“Iranian Gandhi”? A reenactment of Khomeini’s arrival to Iran in 1979.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Mehr News Agency/Ruhollah Yazdani

of debate. Some argue that our goal should be the collapse of the Islamic Republic. Others argue that our goal should be that Iran become a “normal” state, whatever that is. Still others argue that the US should seek to engage the Islamic Republic in areas of mutual interest in order to end the dangerous exchanges of threats, accusations, and insults that have characterized the last 40 years.

Successive American administrations have insisted that policies variously called “smart sanctions,” “two track,” “dual containment,” and “maximum pressure” are succeeding. How did they know? Because they said so. They are grading their own exams and naturally give themselves the highest marks; but more important—succeeding at what?

The nuclear agreement of 2015–2016 (the JCPOA), however it affected Iran’s economy and nuclear program, was supposed to establish a different way for Iran to deal with other nations. Whatever else it did, it was to demonstrate that both sides could achieve something through

engagement and dialogue, instead of the shouting that had achieved nothing for 35 years. For their part, Iranians could realize sanctions and other economic relief; and Americans and their negotiating partners could achieve limitations on Iran’s disturbing nuclear program.

LESSON TWO: EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

That was the idea. However, as the Monty Python skit tells us, “No one expects the Spanish Inquisition.” In this case, no one expected the election of Donald Trump as US president in 2016, just after the JCPOA had gone into effect and appeared to be working as designed. Trump withdrew from the agreement, not because he disagreed with its contents—contents he had not read. He disliked it because he was obsessed with undoing, for better or worse, the work of his predecessor. He had built a persona as master dealmaker (“Only I can fix it”), so any agreement President Obama made had to be flawed. His new agreement would—because HE made it—be better.

Of course, the Iranians were having none of it. They used this opportunity to take a new position. They found themselves on diplomatic high ground while their opponents ranted and raved. A change of American administration in early 2021 has not led to a smooth return to the JCPOA. Suspicion and mistrust remain deep on both sides, and negotiators have reverted to their traditional view that “anything the other side proposes or agrees to must contain some sort of trick.”

The change of administration in Tehran after the presidential elections of June 2021 and its direction remain uncertain. Whenever talks on the nuclear issue resume, it is possible that they will feature the unproductive “positional bargaining” witnessed in 2010–2013, when gatherings were consumed by pointless arguments over the date and place of the next meeting, statements of inflexible positions extended by the need for translation, and the Iranian representative’s evasion of a direct meeting with his American counterpart.

LESSON THREE: DEAL WITH REALITY

A consistent feature of American and others’ dealings with Iran has been an obstinate refusal to recognize and deal with reality. In 1978, as the early disturbances became a serious threat to the Pahlavi monarchy, Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as the undisputed leader of the uprising. Opponents of all political stripes—Marxists, nationalists, religious modernists—marched under his banner. Whatever the marchers’ goals, few understood that Khomeini had clearly spelled out that his purpose was to recreate the seventh-century Medina city-state ruled by God’s inalterable laws and controlled by those knowledgeable in those laws (that is, the clerics).

In his vision—well understood by a few and ignored by most—there was no room for democracy, pluralism, secular laws, political parties, or a constitution to limit the power of rulers. Many Iranians opponents of the Shah—heirs to the secular nationalist movement of the 1950s—ignored the reactionary views in Khomeini’s 1971 lectures on Islamic government, and, when talking to each other and to their Western counterparts, they made him into an “Iranian Gandhi” who would leave governing to others. For clueless American officials, their view of the revolution

depended on which clueless Iranian they listened to. In his diary, President Carter noted that the ambassador to Iran, William Sullivan, believed that a Khomeini victory would bring democracy to Iran, and that General Robert Huyser, Brzezinski’s man in Tehran in early 1979, believed that a Khomeini victory would bring the communists to power. Of course, both were wrong, but they reflected the views of Iranians who either saw Khomeini as a tool of the communists or as the savior who would overthrow the Shah’s dictatorship, retire to his seminary, and deliver freedom to the long-suffering Iranian people.

When the monarchy finally collapsed in February 1979, those who best understood both Khomeini’s head and his heart, were ready. Powerful clerics, such as Motahhari, Beheshti, Mofatteh, Hashemi-Rafsanjani, and others, were determined this was THEIR revolution, not that of Mosaddegh’s heirs or members of Mehdi Bazargan’s Freedom Movement. If the latter wanted to be ministers, governors, heads of universities in the new system, that was fine. They could expound to western journalists to their heart’s content. The clerics would ensure that their network kept the power while the nationalists—unable to work together—kept meaningless titles, wrote penetrating articles, and exercised no authority beyond their office doors.

This ugly reality of who held power in revolutionary Iran finally mugged the American government on November 4, 1979, when a mob easily overran the US Embassy, despite the assurances of the nominal Iranian authorities that they would “do their best” to provide security. Three American diplomats at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs were told “If you leave this building we cannot guarantee your safety.” They camped out at the MFA until December 1980, when the embassy occupiers ignored the foreign ministry and removed the three prisoners to join the rest of the captives.

LESSON FOUR: KNOW THE OTHER SIDE’S GOALS

Knowing what the other side wants (as opposed to what they say they want) is basic to any negotiation. When Iranian negotiators are asked directly, they will often respond with “all we want

is justice” or “all we want are our rights.” Such responses, of course, befuddle American lawyers looking in vain for something specific.

But for Iran’s ruling elite—the people that count—the goal that overshadows all others is survival while staying in power. They see themselves under constant threat from domestic and foreign enemies: American forces in the Persian Gulf and Iraq; hostile Sunnis in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan; hostile Azeri, Baluch, and Kurdish irredentists to the north, southeast, and west respectively; and nuclear-armed Israel, India, and Pakistan. When the leaders hear “death by a thousand cuts,” “axis of evil,” “regime change,” “maximum pressure,” and “all options on the table” from foreign capitals, such language confirms what they already suspect: that enemies are determined to overthrow the Islamic Republic, with subversion if possible and by force if necessary.

Calls for the destruction of Israel fall into the same category. Isolated in a sea of Arabs, Turks, and Sunnis, the Islamic Republic must search for a passport to deal with its neighbors, especially the Arabs. Tehran seems to hardly realize the effects of such rhetoric when Israel feels its existence threatened and the US sees threats to an important regional ally. Such language and his association with Holocaust denial made Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–2013) so toxic that no one in Washington would listen to him, even when he occasionally made sense.

Under these conditions, the ruling clerics will do what they believe they must do to keep power. With survival at stake, they will waver between concession and brutality according to which serves their immediate purpose. For example, near the end of the Iran–Iraq War, in summer 1988, the clerics executed thousands of political prisoners—some of whom had already served their sentences—for reasons still unclear but whom they considered a threat. Although willing to sacrifice tens of thousands of their country’s young men in the swamps of Khuzestan and southern Iraq during the 1980–1988 war with Iraq, these same clerics were not ready to sacrifice themselves and their positions. Thus, in August 1988, they accepted a humiliating cease-fire—Khomeini’s proverbial “cup of poison”—when they realized continuing the war could bring them all down.

LESSON FIVE: BEWARE THE CORNERED CAT

In the US, much of what has passed for “Iran policy” for the last 40 years was not intended to achieve any goal beyond bashing the other side and feeling self-righteous. Did sanctions, threats, and accusations do anything to weaken the Islamic Republic and persuade it to treat its own people decently and moderate its hostile policies? There’s no evidence that they did. Nor is there any evidence that more of the same (super maximum pressure or death by ten thousand cuts?) will do so. After 40 years of the same ineffective policies, one suspects that no longer does anyone care about their effectiveness.

The mutual enmity—the endless repetition of insults and threats—is dangerous, especially when combined with an absence of communication. It risks a misunderstanding becoming an armed conflict destructive to all sides. For all parties, it reinforces the notion that “they” (Washington, Tehran, Tel Aviv) are incorrigibly hostile and will do anything against “us.” For the Islamic Republic—clearly the weaker party—the danger is always that it will lash out when it believes its very existence is threatened.

Eight centuries ago the astute Persian poet Sa’adi of Shiraz warned us:

***Have you not seen the cornered cat?
With its tiny claws, it can tear out
the eyes of a leopard.***

We should heed his wisdom today. *

— JOHN LIMBERT

John Limbert, retired US ambassador and former president of the American Foreign Service Association, received the Department of State’s Award for Valor in 1981 after 14 months as a hostage in Iran. Following his diplomatic career, he taught Middle Eastern studies at the US Naval Academy.



Prime Minister Ehud Barak chats October 27 with United States peace envoy Dennis Ross (R) as their meeting gets underway in Barak's Knesset (Parliament) offices. Reuters Photographer

HOW ISRAEL SHOULD THE NEW AMER



OULD NAVIGATE ICAN LANDSCAPE



by Dennis Ross

The political landscape in Washington has changed. Israel's outreach to the Democrats is vital—including to some progressives. Also required is an effort not to bury the prospects for a two-state solution. Israel and others in the region need to adjust to the reasons America is likely to be far more reluctant today than in the past to use force in the region. This, in turn, makes Israel's military strength and technological prowess all the more important for her Sunni Arab neighbors.

When progressives in the House of Representatives opposed the inclusion of money for funding Israel's Iron Dome in the broad budget bill, it received undo attention as if there had been a political earthquake and support for Israel was eroding. With funding for the Iron Dome pulled out of the budget bill and allowed to stand alone, it received a vote of 420–9 in favor. That seemed to arrest the alarm. In truth, the stand-alone vote should not have been a surprise; after all, the Iron Dome is a purely defensive system that allows Israel to defend its cities and towns against Hamas rockets. If

Israel had no such defense, it would have no choice but to send ground forces into Gaza to root out Hamas's ability to fire rockets against Israeli citizens, and the price of such a necessary onslaught would be extremely high—especially for Palestinians living in Gaza.

Overwhelming support for Israel's Iron Dome actually begs a question. Of course, gaining support for a purely defensive system for Israel is still a given. Would it be so for weapons seen as offensive like precision-guidance munitions or more advanced aircraft or more refueling tankers needed for long-range military strikes? Such a question would not have occurred to me, but was raised by a security establishment figure in Israel during my recent trip there. My answer was that these systems would still pass but would probably generate much more debate than in the past. Israel's support among mainstream Democratic members of Congress remains strong, but the progressive caucus has some weight in the party now and surely its members would challenge the sale.

Does that mean we have a whole new political landscape in America about Israel? It is certainly different. Israel used to be a strongly bipartisan issue; while support among Republicans remains strong, there clearly are fissures in the Democratic Party. Progressives are much more

critical of Israel, with some like Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar seemingly questioning Israel's right to defend itself. Even if—as the vote on Iron Dome indicate—they are clearly a minority, the one factor that cannot be dismissed is that Israel is far less of a bipartisan issue than it used to be. Some of that is clearly a response to Donald Trump, who tried to turn Israel into a political wedge issue. His embrace of Israel was likely to taint the Jewish State at a time when he alienated nearly all Democrats in the country, who tended to look at whatever he stood for as something they had to be against. Benjamin Netanyahu added to this dynamic by his close embrace of Trump. (As I once told Netanyahu and the Israeli Cabinet, no one questions whether any Israeli prime minister should have a good relationship with the American president. You must. But it is a mistake to “hug” this president and appear to support him so completely. Fairly or not, I said, he is a divisive, polarizing figure and such unmistakable support will come with a cost to Israel's future standing in the country.)

So is the answer for the new Israeli government to do outreach to Democrats at federal, state, and local levels? Yes. But this is not the whole story. There is something deeper going on in the country. True, progressive causes—and the effort by critics of Israel and supporters of the Palestinians to tap into movements like Black Lives Matter and associate Israeli treatment of Palestinians with it—have had an effect. And here again, Israel's government must focus on presenting a very different picture of Israel in its outreach. The fact that Israel now has a government with progressives in it must also be showcased. Merav Michaeli, Tamar Zandberg, Nitzan Horowitz, and others who represent the left-wing parties in Israel's governing coalition should come to America to meet their ministerial counterparts and hold meetings on Capitol Hill—they represent points of view in the Israeli government largely unknown to the members of progressive caucus and would represent a face of Israel that does not fit their caricature of the country.

As important as reaching out to Democrats, including some progressives, may be, there is also something deeper going on in America—and it needs to be understood. We are in another period of soul-searching about our role in the world. After World War I— what Woodrow Wilson called “the war to end all wars” —and his attempt to promote in its aftermath a new US role internationally, the Senate defeated our entry into the League of Nations. After Vietnam, there was basic questioning of our interventionism and our military and intelligence establishment. Today, after Iraq and Afghanistan—two wars that proved very costly yet resulted in Iran having major influence in Iraq and the Taliban regaining Afghanistan—it should come as no surprise that again our posture toward the world is being debated.

President Biden is an internationalist and deeply believes in the need for American leadership in the world. But how he exercises that leadership clearly needs to take account of the mood in the country. His emphasis on a foreign policy that meets the needs of the middle class and the American worker reflects that understanding. Yes, he understands that American support for free trade agreements and globalization failed to consider who would be the losers in a world that created more economic efficiency but also much greater inequalities. So he seeks to address that with altering supply chains and emphasizing more domestic production and taking a lead in the new industries that will foster renewable energy—and produce the rebuilding of the American infrastructure accordingly.

However, the deeper question is whether America can lead and preserve a liberal, rules-based international order at a time when we have real competitors and a diffusion of power. Can it do so without maintaining the significant ability to project power and back its diplomacy with force when necessary? After Vietnam, we still faced the Soviet Union and that tempered the impulse to simply retrench around the world—even if there was more questioning of our role

and efforts to limit the powers of the presidency. Today, we are dealing with a rising China on which there seems to be domestic consensus.

But there is not a consensus on how active we must be internationally and especially in the Middle East. It is a misreading of history to say that the US was isolationist. We were not isolationist; rather, we have a unilateralist legacy in our foreign policy tradition. In his farewell address as president, George Washington warned against “entangling alliances.” Our new country was weak at the time, and he did not want us sucked into the wars in Europe. But he was not arguing against acting unilaterally, including through intervention, when our interests, as we defined them, required it. We fought the Barbary pirates in North Africa at the beginning of the 19th century; we put forward the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, essentially to declare the Western Hemisphere off limits to the Europeans and make clear we would fight any effort to entrench themselves in it. We fought Mexico from 1846–1848. Commodore Matthew Perry led four ships into Tokyo harbor to force the opening of trade and commercial ties with Japan in 1853. We had skirmishes over the border with Canada, and we took our first colonies in the Spanish–American war at the end of the 19th century. We sent marines to China during the Boxer Rebellion at the beginning of the 20th century not just to rescue missionaries but to guarantee that there would be no discrimination against American commercial interests at the end of the conflict.

What Wilson was doing was altering the unilateralist nature of our foreign policy. While he did not succeed, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was able to do so after the World War II to produce not just American leadership but to shape the multilateral institutions of the postwar world. It would be Harry Truman who, with the Marshall Plan and the advent of NATO, produced an alliance system in which the US assumed broader responsibilities in the world.

While Barack Obama may have favored American retrenchment, he was an internationalist. But he saw folly in staying so





Progressives don't determine policy, but their collective attitudes cannot be wished away. Protesters against the war in Iraq participate in the "March on the Pentagon," in 2007. Photo credit: REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst

engaged in a Middle East that for him was beset by atavistic tribal and sectarian conflicts; hence his “pivot to Asia.” It was Donald Trump who spoke of the forever wars and presided over not a peace agreement in Afghanistan but a withdrawal agreement, even saying he bound the hands of his successor. It was also Donald Trump who questioned the value of NATO and all alliances because he did not want the US bound by obligations. When Abqaiq, the most important Saudi oil processing facility, was attacked in September 2019 by Iranian cruise missiles and drones launched from Iranian territory, President Trump said this was an attack on Saudi Arabia not the US. Thus, it required no American response.

Trump’s approach came out of the unilateralist legacy in US foreign policy. That legacy seemingly was reversed in the postwar world of the 1940s, but its roots clearly still remain, especially at a time when a strain of populist nationalism has been awakened in the US. While its various shades and the language of how it is expressed may be different on the right and the left, the implications for policy are much the same. For Bernie Sanders and for Rand Paul, the US needs to retrench; again the words may be different but they both want to pull US forces back from around the world. On the right and the left there is an argument that our military presence overseas is responsible for much of the conflict in the world. Read the reports of the Quincy Institute and you would conclude that Iran would not be a threat in the region if there was no US military presence. Pull US forces back and the world will become safer.

It is as if ideology, regional aims of achieving hegemony, or global powers with ambition don’t drive behaviors. Yet, we know they do and the best way to deter those ambitions or predatory ideology justifying expansion is with the certainty that we can impose a price on those who would engage in aggression—and they understand we will exercise our power to do so.

At this point, the left and the right, and the progressives more generally, don’t determine

policy. But their collective attitudes cannot be wished away. There is something authentic about them. No doubt the reason for that is that America’s wars in the greater Middle East went so badly. Violating a fundamental precept of good statecraft, there was never a matching of our objectives and our means. The objectives of remaking Iraq and nation-building in Afghanistan were probably never achievable, but they were certainly not achievable with the means we were prepared to employ. Neither necessarily discredits the use of force, in circumstances where the threats to the US are more immediate and convincing; but they certainly do raise the bar for military interventions. And, even among those in the foreign policy establishment who believe that American military force and commitments to allies and partners must be credible, there is an instinct to rebalance our policy tools.

It is now commonplace to say diplomacy is our first resort and force is only a last resort. But that is a slogan—no administration, even George W. Bush’s, ever made the case that force should be resorted to first. The slogan is understandable but also tends to reflect a genuine hesitancy now to even threaten the use of force in circumstances where its credibility may be the only way to head off its actual use. In making this case to a senior person in the Biden administration, and saying that the Iranian loss of fear was dangerous and actually made miscalculation and war more likely, I was told there is no stomach in the Congress or the body politic for making such threats.

This reality, the sense that America is retrenching, is certainly perceived in the Middle East. Ironically, it is one of the factors that has fostered Israel’s ties with Sunni Arab leaderships. The more the US has been seen to be pulling back in the Middle East—a perception that began under Obama and has continued through Trump and Biden—the more Sunni Arab leaders in a number of states have seen the security value of Israel as a bulwark against threats from Iran and its Shiite militias and ISIS, al-Qaida, and the radical Sunni

Islamists. As one senior Gulf official said to me, the US can withdraw but we know Israel is not going anywhere.

That said, any real US withdrawal threatens to create vacuums, and we have seen in Syria, Iraq, and Libya what happens when there is a vacuum. They always get filled and sooner or later make conflict and threats more likely.

Because of the way the Afghanistan withdrawal was carried out, the Biden administration is now unlikely to withdraw from the remainder of the Middle East for some time to come. There is sensitivity to not looking weak. Moreover, after President Biden touted our over-the-horizon capabilities to counter terrorism that might find fertile ground in Afghanistan, it is also far less tenable to think of withdrawing from our bases and presence in the region that provides us that over-the-horizon capability. But the appetite for using force, except in narrow, one-off kinds of operations is low—and reflects where the American public is.

Here is another irony. So long as we realize we have stakes in the Middle East—whether because of the need to fight terror, or manage a transition away from fossil fuels over the next few decades, or to prevent the area from becoming characterized by disorder and refugee flows—the US will depend on regional partners who can help in all these areas. Israel, as the foremost military power in the region—in addition to its tech-driven economy and its advances in water, food, health, and cybersecurity—make it an increasingly valued partner for the US and many of the Sunni state leaders.

In yet another irony, even as Arab states are doing more with Israel, there are progressives here who favor the BDS movement, who only see Israel as an occupier and Palestinians as victims. Israel cannot ignore the Palestinian issue for its own reasons—the Palestinians aren't going anywhere. But with an evolving political landscape in the US, Israel needs to show it is not deepening the occupation and is not acting in a way that makes a two-state outcome impossible

even as an option. Drifting toward a one-state outcome in which Palestinians will demand one person, one vote is certain to extend the influence of progressives far beyond where it stands today.

Thus, as important as it is to do outreach to Democrats and to present Israel's growing role in the region countering the forces of extremism and helping its neighbors with drought-related water and agricultural problems, Israel must also deal with the reality that how it approaches the Palestinians will affect how it is seen in the US. Israel cannot resolve the Palestinian conflict by itself, and Palestinians are divided and show neither the inclination nor the capability to adjust any of their positions. But Israel must still show it is doing its part to reduce friction, make life better, enhance movement, and preserve an outcome other than a single, binational state.

Israel has the means to manage in a world where the US is less consumed by the Middle East but still understands that basic stability there is in US interests. *



DENNIS ROSS

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BIDEN'S AFGHANISTAN MISTAKE AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS FOR US FOREIGN POLICY

An Afghan man looks at a US soldier in Logar province, in 2009.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Ahmad Masood





by Annie Pforzheimer

The full ramifications of the poorly managed US withdrawal from Afghanistan—and the subsequent rout of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, leading to the rapid Taliban takeover in Kabul—are just beginning to register. But it is not too early to assess lessons learned. We did not properly discuss nor communicate options other than all-out war or full withdrawal, such as a small-scale, long-term military support and monitoring role under a NATO lead. Another issue was the unresolved debate over a “moral” foreign policy. This essay explores those lessons and outlines a future approach to such conflicts that sets aside the rhetoric of both soaring goals and lost causes.

On April 14, President Joe Biden announced the swift and unconditional withdrawal of remaining US and international forces dependent on US support from Afghanistan. UN Special Representative to the Secretary General for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons, during an August 6 special session of the UN Security Council, said the situation there had become a war “reminiscent of Syria, recently, or Sarajevo,

in the not-so-distant past.” In the weeks since that statement was made, the Taliban have made their military conquest of the country complete.

The humanitarian picture is grim and getting worse. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission reported that civilian casualties had increased by 80% in the first six months of 2021 compared with the first six months of 2020. Substantiated reports of killings of civilians, especially those associated with the government, have been part of the Taliban’s campaign of terror. More than 300,000 internally displaced persons crowded into Kabul and other major cities, and many are now camped out at the airport or on the run toward the mostly-shuttered borders; the economy is collapsing as the Taliban choke off customs revenues. In the face of these events, an ongoing drought, and the raging COVID-19 pandemic, the government was triaging basic humanitarian relief and clearly failed to retain basic loyalties at the local level.

The indications are that Taliban rule will revert to the worst aspects of the pre-2001 era. Women and minorities, and those affiliated with the government or media, are already threatened with repression and marked for murder. Women’s ability to leave the house is restricted, schools and infrastructure have been



The tragedy in Afghanistan was accurately predicted, just not its speed. People trying to get inside the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, on August 16. Photo credit: REUTERS/Stringer

destroyed, and there are credible allegations of forced marriages of young girls. The US Embassy Twitter feed on August 4 said reports that the Taliban had kidnapped and killed Afghanistan special forces soldiers and then forced their widows to marry Taliban fighters “if true ... could constitute war crimes.” The Taliban have not let that stop them in the past.

Biden’s calculation appears to have been that a US withdrawal was better for American interests worldwide and would not necessarily lead to massive civil war—and that even if it

did, we would be well out of it and Americans would not care about the human costs. The ramifications for US foreign policy in the future are many and wholly negative. It is one more example of our lacking strategic patience to see a difficult project through to a sustainable conclusion; of building up and then disillusioning those who worked with us and believed in us; and of aiding our adversaries by leaving a volatile area of the world without US influence. The imprint on others, especially extremists, will endure.

A DECISION THAT CAME FROM THE TOP

Although President Biden inherited withdrawal strategies from his two immediate predecessors, he took this to a new extreme. President Obama successfully ended the US military's primary operational role in Afghanistan by 2015 but stopped short of pulling out forces. The Trump administration negotiated a 2020 deal with the Taliban that promised a full withdrawal of troops, but the agreement was conditional. Biden made this one of his first major foreign policy decisions, drawing on campaign promises to "end the forever wars," but going beyond some campaign statements that he would consider leaving some troops behind for counterterrorism purposes. His April 14 order included a deadline for full withdrawal and an explicit delinking from conditions on the Taliban. Furthermore, it was extended to all US contractors responsible for maintaining vital Afghan National Army capabilities, which few in the US military had foreseen.

This categorical approach appears to stem from a longstanding animus toward militarized nation-building in general, and the Afghan leadership in particular, and was a top-down order to the bureaucracy that only Biden could have adjusted or reversed. The approach went against the advice of military leaders and a non-partisan study group commissioned by the US Congress. The approach appeared to have particular disdain for the military's advice, which he believed was intended to trap civilian leaders in an indefinite morass—a lesson drawn from his time as vice president when Obama acceded to the military's 2009 insistence on a troop surge.

The American desire to end our war in Afghanistan is bipartisan, uniting otherwise disparate factions of the left and right who embrace nonintervention and reject morality as a basis of foreign policy. It was politically easy.

But what about the administration's conceptual theories of democracy, human rights, and rule of law, as well as working collaboratively with allies, elaborated in the





US Army soldiers in Kandahar province, in 2011. Photo credit: REUTERS/Baz Ratner

March 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance? The approach to Afghanistan certainly does not fit with the strategy of “defending our values around the world” by “working with our democratic partners.” The actual democracy in Afghanistan was relegated to moral equivalency with the insurgents as one faction among many when Biden asserted that “never has Afghanistan been a united country.”

WHY DID IT GO OFF THE RAILS SO QUICKLY?

The tragedy in Afghanistan was accurately predicted, just not its speed. American leaders failed to factor in the psychological dimension of their course of action and how morale failure would accelerate a decline once it started. An insurgent force gains headlines for successfully destroying infrastructure or killing a government official, and governments are blamed for all breaches. The insurgent advantage of ignoring rules of war and international humanitarian law allowed the Taliban to effectively spread fear, causing the flight or surrender of civilian and military authorities. This, in turn, facilitated the takeovers of government offices—a symbolic achievement—making the population more afraid and less likely to resist. The Taliban assassination campaign succeeded in silencing voices in the media who might have rallied others. Meanwhile, repeated US statements that Afghanistan is “on its own” contrasted with Pakistan’s open support of its Taliban clients, so those who supported US-style rights and freedoms became convinced that they had no champion.

The Taliban walked away from substantive negotiations in April and continued using the intra-Afghan Doha talks merely as a delaying tactic, while setting in motion the most explosive phase of their insurgency once they knew NATO would not stand in the way. Starting in May, their forces spread out throughout the country attacking military outposts, key highways, and then provincial capitals—and the Afghan forces grew increasingly fearful and exhausted. Afghan government failures of logistics and

leadership undermined their forces. At the same time, the yearslong campaign to disempower corrupt warlords meant that uprising forces that might have fought had less weight, and local players had questionable loyalty to the central government and quickly changed sides.

At crucial moments, US public messaging was incoherent and inconsistent on key issues regarding support to our Afghan allies, such as continuation of contractor support, airstrikes, and condemnation of Taliban atrocities. Starting in May, the attention given to Special Immigrant Visa processing issues and the addition of expanded refugee status for development and humanitarian workers took away State Department bandwidth for managing the wider human rights crisis and has become a self-fulfilling prophecy that the only alternative for Afghans is to flee.

HOW LONG DO WARS LAST?

“Ending the forever wars” is a drumbeat dating back to the 2008 presidential campaign. Unhelpfully, successive US presidents either spoke of “winning” the war or made pledges to end our military involvement as if that would not have any strategic consequences. Policymakers in the White House, Pentagon, or State Department who knew better, did not try hard enough to surmount this assumption and recast the narrative. What we should have been conveying was the reality of our nation as just one actor of many, within a larger multi-decade conflict that can only end through generational shifts and painfully-achieved power realignments. Although American service members were fighting, dying, and being wounded through 2014 in large numbers, and calling it anything other than a war would have been incorrect, we continued to use that terminology, despite the end of our combat role and the requirements of defining a long-term strategy.

The American political standard for our military’s engagement in certain international conflicts and what we are capable of sustaining and for how long are selectively applied. For



At crucial moments, US public messaging was incoherent and inconsistent.

A screen displays President Biden's remarks on the crisis in Afghanistan in Times Square in New York City. Photo credit: REUTERS/Jeenah Moon

example, President Biden stated that one reason to leave Afghanistan was because “the United States cannot afford to remain tethered to policies creating a response to a world as it was 20 years ago,” but he was a leading architect in the 1990s of the still ongoing “war on drugs” in Latin America, with its active military component.

Military hawks and even pro-troop diplomats like me did not effectively communicate options other than all-out war or full withdrawal, such as a small-scale, long-term support and monitoring function under a non-US NATO lead, or a kind of “overwatch” role akin to the French in West Africa or our counterterrorism bases in the Sahel. And with four years effectively

lost under the Trump administration to work collaboratively with NATO allies, coupled with a precedent of US dominance of the alliance agenda in Afghanistan, very few alternatives were fleshed out with our partners.

US POLICYMAKING AND WARS OF CHOICE

Democracy, human rights, and rule of law are functions of power relationships, and understanding the forces arrayed on both sides of a dispute makes all the difference between nice but useless declarations of solidarity and acts that give life and power to national advocates for freedom or peace. Although I

worked for the State Department through a difficult period post-9/11 when our military dominated National Security Council problem-solving debates, I still advocate for the military toolkit as a fundamental element of foreign policy. In the case of Afghanistan in particular, it should have remained at the core of our policy until a better balance of power exists between the constitutional order and the Taliban, other terror groups, and their international patrons.

Another controversial issue is that of a “moral” foreign policy, conflated with idealism, nation-building, and efforts to offer US-style solutions to thorny international problems. There is a middle ground between that approach and ignoring the question of morality. Michael Walzer, in his 2018 collection of essays entitled *A Foreign Policy for the Left*, argues for the “internationalization of agency” so that “the relief of global poverty and the repair of global injustice should aim at producing men and women capable of helping themselves and determining their own political future.” In other words, the US should protect moderate reformers and human rights defenders so they are in a position to guide their own nations away from disaster, rather than imagine we have the only blueprint for success.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM OUR AFGHANISTAN FAILURE?

There were other options open to the Biden administration, but they would have required not only a different mindset about war but also the courage to weigh the political cost of maintaining some US forces in Afghanistan against the human and strategic costs of abrupt withdrawal. As mandated by Congress, US policy actually requires this kind of thinking. The 2018 Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocity Prevention Act established a duty on the part of the US to identify, prevent, and respond to the risk of atrocities. Even before the US withdrawal and Taliban rampage, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Early Warning Project 2020 report listed Afghanistan as the country with the

second highest risk in the world for mass killings. Congress also passed in 2019 the Global Fragility Act, which calls for a coordinated cross-government approach to prevention, the promotion of peacebuilding, and addressing drivers of conflict. The way the withdrawal was executed did not reflect any of these laws. The maintenance of a small US troop presence under NATO could have signaled our intention to eventually leave, and it could have been the cornerstone of a more successful negotiating position of the Afghan government in Doha and with the rest of the region. While some argue this would have inflamed either the Taliban or Afghanistan’s neighbors, the facts of today show that argument as specious—they are doing whatever they want anyway. But it would have kept faith with Afghans who have risked their lives to promote values of free press and women’s education, and, by extension, showed reformers in other countries that they can depend on us.

We will pay the price for not considering the regional context. Our actions have unraveled the still-nascent South and Central Asia linkage that would have shored up Central Asian governments pushing back on international jihadi movements and the pressures of Russia, Iran, and China. Instead, in mid-August, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan completed joint military drills on the Afghan border in direct reaction to the escalating violence, overtly referring to lessons learned from Syria, while Iran and China are poised to take economic advantage of their weaker neighbor’s natural resources. A flow of refugees may further complicate power balances in Turkey and Europe.

A future approach in Afghanistan should set aside the rhetoric of both soaring goals and lost causes and instead should focus on an understanding that a long-term engagement, possibly including an international military role, is essential for regional stability. The goal could have been an Afghan government that controls its territory, respects the human rights of its citizens, and forms the center of a strong and growing economic network of energy and trade



US President Joe Biden speaks with members of the military transfer team after attending a dignified transfer of the 13 members of the US military killed in Afghanistan last week, at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, August, 29, 2021. Photo by SAUL LOEB/AFP

links knitting together the interests of Central and South Asia. This is what Afghans had worked for, under the 2004 constitution and its enshrinement of individual rights. They would have been natural future allies for US and Western governments—but at this moment they are angry at our perceived betrayal—and are reduced to running for their lives. *

The opinions and characterizations in this piece are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the US government.

— ANNIE PFORZHEIMER

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The border crossing into Afghanistan in Torkham, Pakistan. Photo credit: REUTERS/Alasdair Pal

THE UNITED STATES WHAT NEXT AFTER



ES AND PAKISTAN— ER AFGHANISTAN?



by Richard Olson

The usual metaphor for the US–Pakistan relationship is that it is a roller coaster ride: dramatic ups and downs and rarely a stable ascending run. For much of the past two decades, the driver of this topsy-turvy relationship has been Afghanistan, toward which the two countries have pursued fundamentally differing strategic objectives, while publicly attempting to cooperate. The two questions are whether the end of the US military involvement in Afghanistan means that relations will become more “normal” and whether the US will succeed in pulling Pakistan out of China’s orbit. Frankly, it is hard to see either happening.

HISTORY

The course of the US relationship was set immediately after the events of September 11, 2001. President George W. Bush’s “you’re with us or against us” posture was directed at Pakistan more than any other country. In a series of high-level engagements between the US government and General Musharraf, Pakistan agreed to break with the Taliban government—Islamabad along with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi being the only powers that had recognized the Taliban government of the 1990s—and cooperate with the US war on terror. Initially, Pakistan provided access to US forces en route to Afghanistan, principally the Kandahar-bound Marines under then Brigadier General James Mattis. Islamabad also allowed US logistics routes through its territory, the so-called Ground Lines of Communication (GLOC) and Air Line of

Communication (ALOC). The latter has proven essential even through the final withdrawal of US forces on August 31, 2021.

On the domestic front, Pakistan agreed to cooperate with the US in fighting al-Qaida within its territory—a position very much in Pakistan’s own interests. While much of this decades-long struggle took place in the dark shadows, some very visible results included the capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of 9/11 and probable executioner of Daniel Pearl, and the steady degradation of the core capacities which had supported al-Qaida’s global reach.

In return for this cooperation with some of the US demands, Pakistan received a variety of emoluments: relief from the nuclear-proliferation related sanctions of the 1990s, including restoration of security assistance programs; participation in the Coalition Support Fund (a program of reimbursements for expenditures related to supporting the US war in Afghanistan); the granting of major non-NATO ally (MNNA) status; and under the Obama administration, \$7.5 billion worth of civilian assistance under the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act.

But at some point—and fairly early on—Pakistan adopted a hedging strategy of publicly cooperating with the US while quietly countenancing and eventually supporting the reconstitution of the Taliban. This is a murky area in which decisions were made by extreme elements of the Pakistani deep state in a deniable, compartmentalized, and clandestine manner. Nonetheless, just as a theoretical physicist can detect the Higgs boson through its effects, a close observer of the Pakistani scene can see the impact of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) decision-making by its outcomes.



For much of the past two decades, the driver of this topsy-turvy relationship has been Afghanistan. George W. Bush, Afghanistan's Hamid Karzai, and Pakistan's Pervez Musharraf at the White House, in 2006. Photo credit: REUTERS/Jim Young

Islamabad, or more accurately Rawalpindi (where the Pakistani army is headquartered), apparently decided that the US was not fundamentally committed to stabilizing Afghanistan and that Pakistan needed to maintain ties with its traditional proxy, the Taliban. We can only speculate what prompted this decision, but it is easy to see that the early decisions by the Bush administration (a reluctance to do “nation building” resulting in inadequate civilian

funding to back its military investment; the exclusion of the Taliban at the Bonn Conference; and the outright rejection of peace feelers from the Taliban) caused uneasiness in Pakistan while the decision to invade Iraq sealed Afghanistan's fate. Always exquisitely attuned to the shifting moods in Washington, Pakistanis could see by 2003 that the US was not serious about Afghanistan and acted accordingly. It resumed backing the Taliban, who were now reconstituting.



Geoeconomics lives. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in Beijing, 2019. Photo credit: REUTERS/Thomas Peter

This contradictory policy of cooperation with the US and support for the Taliban continued through the Bush and Obama years, with American diplomats (the author among them) exhausting themselves by fruitlessly pressing

the Pakistanis to effect a strategic shift and abandon the Taliban as they had done in 2001. This impasse was relieved only in 2018 when the Trump administration definitively embraced negotiation with the Taliban as a means to end



The Afghan peace process failed, but the end result in Kabul is very much a mixed blessing for Pakistan.

the “forever war.” Finally, Pakistan could deliver on a talking point that Americans had been deploying since at least 2011: expel the Taliban or bring them to the negotiating table. Pakistan brought them to the table.

Pakistan’s aims in pursuing an Afghan peace process (which then Chief of Army Staff General Kayani had been promoting since at least 2009) were to generate an acceptable outcome in Afghanistan and create a degree of alignment with Washington. As we all know, the peace process failed, for reasons that go beyond the scope of this paper. But the end result in Kabul is very much a mixed blessing for Pakistan. Rawalpindi is comfortable enough with its proxy having decisively won the civil war; but recognizes— or should recognize soon enough—that having the war end in a humiliation for the US does not bode well for its future relationship with Washington.

THE DILEMMAS OF HAVING WON IN AFGHANISTAN

Islamabad has been planning for—perhaps fantasizing about—its post-Afghanistan relationship with the US for some time. On the assumption that a political settlement would generate a stable western neighbor, and one that was at least not outright hostile to Pakistan’s interests, the relationship with the US could be “normalized.” According to Pakistan’s way of thinking, the relationship would focus on the purely bilateral aspects between the two countries, rather than on external relations, as it historically has been; during the Cold War, the US and Pakistan aligned against the Soviet threat and since 2001—less successfully—on Afghanistan.

There are two problems with focusing purely on the bilateral relationship: First, from the American perspective, there is almost no content. While the US is Pakistan’s largest export market, the volume of trade is of negligible importance to the American economy. American education and culture are important to the Pakistani elite, but it is hard to imagine a country with less soft power impact in America. The bilateral relationship is, in other words, too asymmetrical to be

sustainable. The second and bigger impediment is China. Islamabad's relationship with Beijing is deep and long-standing. Arguably, Pakistan is a member of a very small club of countries (along with North Korea and Myanmar) that might be considered *de facto* allies of China—although Pakistanis are quick to point out that they have never concluded an alliance with the People's Republic. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), established in 2013, is the signature project of the Belt and Road Initiative and amounts to at least \$60 billion worth of investment in Pakistan. It is widely seen within Pakistan as having significantly alleviated the country's perpetual energy crisis, updated its infrastructure, and generally having provided a lifeline to the perennially floundering economy.

Under the Trump administration, the messaging on aligning with China was unambiguous. The State Department's senior official on South Asia, Ambassador Alice Wells, delivered a devastating critique of the CPEC, which drew considerable attention and criticism in Pakistan. The Biden administration's approach has been more nuanced, and has avoided presenting its partners in Asia with a binary choice of aligning with the US or with China, based on the realistic appreciation that most Asian countries do not want to make this choice. In the case of Pakistan, the dilemma hardly exists. China has largely supplanted the US as the primary foreign power providing military and development assistance. Pakistanis are clear that if a choice is to be made, they would feel compelled to choose China.

But despite Washington's more nuanced approach, it seems inevitable that strategic choices will present themselves—particularly if, as seems to be the case, countering China becomes the new predominant framing concept for US foreign policy. If nothing else, how Pakistan chooses to proceed on developing a 5G network, may embed itself irretrievably in the China camp. Moreover, for the US, the active pursuit of Indo–Pacific strategy and its attendant elevation of its security relationship with India

impose new costs to maintaining even a fairly modest relationship with Pakistan.

Pakistan's answer to these dilemmas (and it faces similar ones with other traditional partners, such as the Gulf states) has been to announce a policy of shifting from geopolitics to geoeconomics. In March of this year, the government of Pakistan made two significant announcements at a semi-official think tank conclave in Islamabad: What got the most attention was Chief of Army Staff General Bajwa calling for burying the hatchet with India; less noted was the announcement that “geoeconomics” would be the central element of Pakistan's national security policy. The Bajwa proclamation went nowhere, partly because of a lack of interest from New Delhi, but also because General Bajwa's own politicians could not see a way to bring about the inevitable renunciation of claims on Kashmir without losing their political heads.

Geoeconomics, however, lives. Although it is not entirely clear what is meant by the policy, it seems to be an effort to attract foreign investment, boost exports, and enhance regional interconnectivity. While these goals are far from extraordinary in an Asian context, their explicit enunciation recognizes that Pakistan has largely missed the past few decades of globalization because it was mired in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. From a narrower perspective, geoeconomics also seeks to present the CPEC as a regional common good (economic interconnectivity) and to present a friendly environment to boost foreign investment. Were this to occur, it would presumably mean that big investors like the US would actually be content in having and being stakeholders in a strengthened bilateral relationship.

Unfortunately, geoeconomics is at best a work in progress. While Pakistan has made some improvements in its business climate—it climbed up the World Bank's ease of doing business index—it still remains a challenging investment environment. Even though it has risen on the World Bank's scale, Pakistan is

still in the bottom half globally and the second lowest in South Asia. The Pakistani economy continues to suffer from serious structural challenges, including inadequate revenue generation, sporadic energy provision, corrupt and opaque governance, and many regulatory impediments to expanded investment. Even the CPEC, which, in theory offers special economic zones open to any and all investors, is sufficiently nontransparent that few non-Chinese firms seem to be interested. The best that can be said is that if the government remains solidly committed to reform, over time it can live up to the potential that Pakistan's market fundamentals (a youthful and growing population, an expanding middle class, and a well-educated elite) promise. But this would be a matter of decades, not years.

AFGHANISTAN REDUX

In the meantime, the challenges of Afghanistan remain. It does not appear that Washington has settled on a long-term strategy for Afghanistan. At the moment it is fully absorbed by three important but tactical considerations: How to conduct an over-the-horizon counterterrorism policy; how to evacuate our remaining citizens, partners, and vulnerable populations; and how to prepare for an already looming humanitarian catastrophe as the Taliban attempts to manage an entirely aid-dependent economy with no expertise and perhaps no aid.

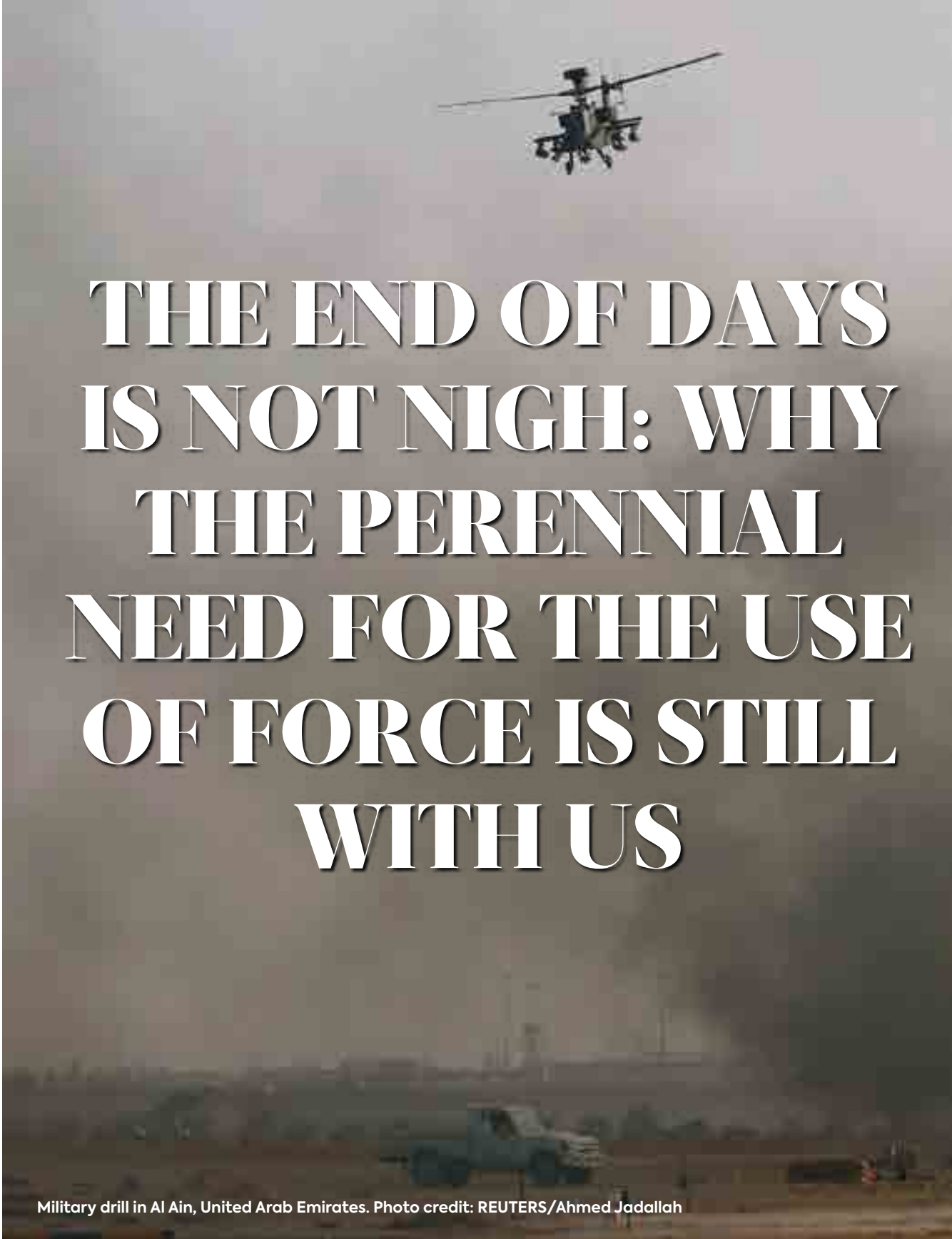
The Biden administration has identified its single vital national interest in the region as preventing a terrorist attack on the homeland emanating from Afghanistan. Despite the very public fulminations in Pakistan, the US has not asked Pakistan for basing rights and is unlikely to do so. What is more likely is that if a terror network again reemerges in Afghanistan, Washington will likely hold Pakistan accountable and expect Pakistan to solve the problem, at least in part because it was Pakistan's hedging strategy in Afghanistan that wound up triumphing. And few in Washington are inclined to woo Pakistan, despite its nuclear weapons and demographic

weight. The costs to Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy would likely be too great.

As for Pakistan, it faces possible refugee flows from Afghanistan that could force a choice between accepting more Afghans—in addition to the millions it already hosts—or refusing their entry, which will generate international outrage. Moreover, the triumph of the Taliban in Afghanistan may generate more pressure from Islamists within Pakistan, and there are already signs of this. At the geostrategic level, Islamabad has set its course of alignment with China but once again has hedged its bets by trying to fashion a new relationship with the US. But this time around, the hedging strategy is unlikely to triumph. *

RICHARD OLSON

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A military drone is shown in flight against a hazy, overcast sky. Below the drone, a blurred landscape suggests a military drill area with various structures and equipment.

THE END OF DAYS IS NOT NIGH: WHY THE PERENNIAL NEED FOR THE USE OF FORCE IS STILL WITH US

Military drill in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. Photo credit: REUTERS/Ahmed Jadallah





by Efraim Inbar

The biblical account of human history starkly documents fratricide at the very beginning—Cain kills Abel. Personal violence and collective warfare are omnipresent in its tales, reflecting the dark side of humanity. Yet recent decades have produced an impressive body of literature and of ambitious political promises, all too willing to read Isaiah’s description of the end of days, “they shall beat their swords into plowshares,” as a parable about the demise of war in contemporary society. These studies claim that the use of force has become less attractive, particularly for industrialized and/or democratic states because of a variety of moral, social, and economic reasons. It is argued that the costs and risks of the use of military force are rising, while its benefits are shrinking. The notion that war is less frequent and fashionable has been broadcast widely in the mainstream Western media.

Even if we ignore the methodological problems in measuring the incidence of war, we can concede that large-scale wars, those between great powers, seem indeed to be—at least for the time being—in decline. About two billion people on earth, however, still live in zones of armed conflict. According to Severine Auteserre’s calculation in *The Frontiers of Peace*, published this year, wars or the preparation thereof have cost the world in the last five years about 13% of the global GDP. Such figures should temper the optimism about the alleged progress in the quality of interactions among political actors in the international arena. Wars of various degrees

of intensity will continue to be a feature of world politics.

This essay discusses several aspects of contemporary life, indicating that the use of force remains a relevant policy choice for statecraft: a frame of mind as necessary for liberal political leaders as it is for more conservative or authoritarian souls.

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The basic nature of the international system has remained unchanged, despite attempts to establish a “rules-based order.” It is anarchic. There is no international authority capable of defending states from foreign aggression. Revisionist powers can still revert to military force to attain national goals. National security still involves complex efforts to build the military capability to defend the state. While borders have remained relatively stable in the last half-century, we have nevertheless seen the birth of new states and the reacquisition of old territories, through war or the unilateral use of force. Moreover, the final arbiter in international disputes is still the power differential between the protagonists, and when very important issues are at stake, it is brute military force.

The attempts to mitigate the consequences of the anarchic nature of the international arena have produced international institutions that try to regulate international relations and set norms of behavior. But these do not constitute a world government, and no such prospect is within sight. In contrast with states, whose role it is to enforce their laws within their territory by organs of force, there is no “global police” (and those who have aspired to that role do not do so anymore—as related elsewhere in this issue). In fact, carrying out the injunctions and the



Violent competition in an era of presumed plenty. Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam is seen as it undergoes construction work on the river Nile. Photo credit: REUTERS/Tiksa Negeri

decisions of the international bodies and treaties is left to the discretion of individual political actors. If determined or strong enough, they get away with breaking the rules.

Thus, Iran disregarded UN Security Council resolutions regarding its military nuclear project, while China rejected the Hague international tribunal's ruling in favor of the Philippines on a territorial dispute in the South China Sea. Russia's high-handed actions in the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine may have created irreversible realities. The impotence of international institutions has been demonstrated by their total disregard of the great human tragedies happening before us, such as the League of Nations' failure to prevent World War II, and the UN impotence in the face of the murderous civil war in Syria or the mass persecution of the Uyghurs in China.

SCARCITY OF RESOURCES

Another systemic feature is scarcity of resources, which could still lead to violent competition even in an era of presumed plenty. Territorial aggrandizement in order to gain control over desirable commodities is, in most cases, increasingly costly, particularly since the alternative of economic takeovers makes physical occupation superfluous; yet certain goods are not easily replaceable. Access to water, for example, has been a source of tension and a cause for war. The attempt to divert the Jordan River flowing into Israel was one of the factors leading to the 1967 War. Egypt is signaling its determination to employ its military, if Ethiopia fills up its Grand Renaissance Dam on the Nile without considering the concerns of the riparian states. True, water can be procured by desalinization and conservation, and serve as



A high-tech military is not assured of decisive victory. Rehearsal for the Russian Navy Day military parade. Photo credit: Valentin Yegorshin/TASS

a tool of diplomacy (as in the case of Israel and Jordan since 1994), but a challenge as dramatic as that posed to Egypt, whose very existence has always been intertwined with the Nile, cannot be easily resolved.

Additionally, securing foreign aid for meeting the food demands for its growing population has been a main thrust of Egypt's foreign policy. Difficulties in acquiring enough funds to pay for the subsidized food bills of Egypt's 100 million residents could increase the temptation to conquer or control neighboring Libya, a sparsely populated country with many oil wells. This was the rationale of Saddam Hussein in invading Kuwait in 1990—and he almost got away with it. The current civil war in Libya already provided

an excuse for the threat of an Egyptian military intervention that might acquire permanency. China is also lacking adequate arable land and water resources. Its aggressive behavior in the South China Sea could be channeled in other directions to alleviate shortage in arable land and water. Global warming, generating droughts, could become a threat multiplier for conflict over land use and food production. One third of the African population lives in drought-prone agrarian countries and almost all sub-Saharan countries are likely to suffer water stress. Famine is a strong incentive for taking radical measures. Hungry people are ready to kill for food.

Another issue adding to the potential for increased violence, albeit hardly or rarely

mentioned, is the greater opportunity for offspring selection (female infanticide or sex-selective abortions). In countries such as India and China, the most populous states in the world, this option has resulted in an excess proportion of young men. The cultural preference for male babies has created a shortage of eligible women for marriage (various estimations point to over 100 million missing females in Asia) with a potential for internal and external violence. A need for captive labor and wives helped drive Viking expansion in the eighth century. In medieval Portugal, a surplus of young males led to territorial expansion in the north of the African coast. Sociological studies clearly indicate that unmarried young men are more violent-prone and ready fodder for mass mobilization.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology affects the incidence of war. Improvements in defensive technologies make invasions more difficult and costly, reducing their chances of success. In contrast, upgraded military technology that enhances offensive capabilities provides incentives to recur to the use of force—using stand-off capabilities—for settling a dispute.

It takes time to understand the battlefield implications of a new technological breakthrough and its potential synergies with other weapon systems. Much is determined also by how it is integrated doctrinally in the training

Even democracies tolerate great losses if the goals of a military campaign are deemed sufficiently important for the nation and if success is likely.

of military formations. The tank appeared on the battlefield at the end of WWI, but only during WWII did the Blitzkrieg doctrine capitalize on the tank's potential as the key to swift maneuver warfare.

Moreover, the fluctuations in military technology favoring offense or defense are always temporary. The protected castles eventually surrendered to the gunpowder of artillery pieces, while the protective envelope of machine guns and barbed wire was easily penetrated by massed armored formations. Surface-to-air missiles (SAM) were perceived to put an end to airpower, only to see in 1982 the Israeli air force decimating a Syrian Russian-made SAM system (Operation Mole Cricket 19). Today there is competition between stealth and sensors that identify attackers.

The recent advances in military technology amount to acquiring targets at increased distances and with much greater accuracy. The payload on launching systems has also grown. All these characteristics made war more lethal. Historically, the lethality of wars has increased. Many have suggested that increased lethality and increased participation of the masses in the political process might discourage political leaders and public opinion from waging war. Clear evidence on such a trajectory in modern times is not (yet) available. In any case, even democracies tolerate great losses if the goals of a military campaign are deemed sufficiently important for the nation and if success is likely. Only when victory became elusive, and the moral case for the war eroded, did the US begin considering withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan.

While war can be much more destructive than in the past, warfare tends to be more discriminate. More precise munitions have the potential to limit collateral damage. The increased use of remote-operated weapon systems lowers the number of casualties. These technological trends, paradoxically, make war—or limited military campaigns—more palatable. A reinforcing phenomenon is the significant

decline in battle deaths due to protective equipment and progress in military medicine. Improvements in medical services on the battle ground, such as preventive care of soldiers, better equipment, and evacuation procedures, have reduced battle deaths.

Advanced technology requires a different type of personnel. Conscripts are usually less suitable for operating advanced technology. The need for technological skills and longer training for operating new weapons systems pushes militaries away from general conscription. It forces the military to compete in the market and build an all-volunteer force. One implication is that politicians have less constraints in employing such a military, whose members get paid for performing risky tasks.

The spread of technology facilitates the indigenous production of many types of weapons; nevertheless, high-tech weaponry is still expensive. Therefore, its possession is widening the power differential between rich, technologically advanced states and those with no means to procure the newest gadget. Superior military capability could tempt a state to exploit its advantage. Indeed, as already mentioned, Russia took Crimea in 2014 and carved a zone of influence in Eastern Ukraine. Baltic states, which have a significant Russian-speaking minority population, could be next in line. France decided to intervene militarily in Mali to support a friendly regime against a radical Islamist insurgency. The US might decide to emulate the 1915 John J. Pershing raids into Mexico if its neighbor becomes a failed state, run by the cartels. Yet, a high-tech military is not assured of decisive victory. The resolve and the interest balance could favor a weak opponent that recurs to an attrition strategy. Many weaker and persistent sides turned the superior military power of the stronger side irrelevant to the outcome of the confrontation. As history has shown, the US left Vietnam and Afghanistan defeated. Even the ruthless Russians withdrew eventually from Afghanistan. Moreover, low-tech weapons are often effective in attaining

political goals. A simple Qassam rocket with a five kilometers range costing no more than \$100 served Hamas to terrorize Israeli citizens living next to Gaza. It signaled the perpetuation of conflict against the strongest army in the Middle East—a powerful political message. Similarly, Sunni opponents to the American presence in Iraq employed effectively cheap improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to harass American troops and publicize their struggle.

THE NUCLEAR DIMENSION

After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it took some time to understand that there is a qualitative difference between nuclear weapons and other types of armaments. Fortunately, the nuclear taboo that emerged as the images of the two cities were manifested has yet to be crossed; but this, in turn, has led to the misconception that nuclear proliferation actually creates mutual deterrence and stability, by freezing conflicts in the shadow of MAD (mutual assured destruction). In fact, providing effective deterrence against a nuclear exchange is much more complicated than most academic analyses suggest, and nuclear weapons clearly do not provide deterrence at all levels. Two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, have already fought a limited conventional war in the Kargil district in Kashmir (1999). Nonnuclear Iran did not hesitate to attack US naval ships by proxies near Bab-el-Mandeb.

Yet, a nuclear arsenal has deterrence value. This is why nuclear states maintain and upgrade this type of weaponry. Moreover, it has domestic and external political uses. Attaining a nuclear status will entrench the Ayatollahs' regime in Iran. Moreover, it would instill fear among its neighbors who are not convinced that the rulers in Tehran have internalized the taboo against the use of nuclear weapons. A nuclear alert, such as the one called by the US in 1973 (which at the time signaled great determination and prevented further Soviet military involvement in the October War) may not quite work the same way next time. Some accounts suggest

that Israel's nuclear image was a factor in Arab recognition of Israel, while Syrian tanks stopped their advance into Israel fearing nuclear retaliation. It is true that the slow proliferation of nuclear weapons and several nuclear reversals indicate skepticism about the usefulness of nuclear weapons, but proliferation has not stopped.

HUMAN NATURE

According to Thucydides, the insightful historian of the Peloponnesian War, "fear, honor, and interest" are the immutable human motivations that have caused wars throughout history. Some philosophers propagate the idea of progress and the end of history. Yet, there is no reason to believe that human nature has changed over time. Slavery, for example, has not disappeared but has just changed form. We have modern gladiators, as in the days of Rome, engaging in extreme sports, while mercenaries are nowadays complementing national armies, as was common in the pre-nationalist era in Europe. It is doubtful whether humanity has adopted the sublimation of the use of force. Soccer, once an example of such a psychological phenomenon, caused a brief war between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969, while Palestinians committed an act of murder in the Munich Olympics in 1972. Nor has the spirit of the times put an end even to the worst abuses. As a matter of fact, genocide (the most extreme use of force) practiced by statist actors has continuously increased in the 20th century.

Rational utilitarian behavior directing us to increase our wealth and power is immanent, sometimes leading to war. Yet, irrational motivations are also prevalent in human behavior. For example, religion, nationalism, and ethnic solidarity are powerful motivations for collective violence. Even shame and desire for revenge are human and motivate political entities. Unfortunately, God in his infinite wisdom also created evil people, whose ambitions lead them to the helm of states. Hitler was not the only specimen.

CONCLUSION

Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky distinguished between zones of peace, where armed conflict is unlikely, and zones of turmoil, where the use of force is part and parcel of the rules of the game. Many in the zones of peace develop illusions about human nature and the way the international system works. Goodwill and pragmatism eventually leading to compromises is not a universal rule. Simply put, diplomacy does not always work and there are situations where only the use of force can bring a desired outcome. The way the people in the zones of turmoil behave is a good indication that the forecasts about obsolescence of the use of force are premature. Moreover, the borders between these regions are not rigid and the transition toward zones of peace is not deterministic. Europeans finally debate now whether they are prepared to parry an invasion from the East. Villas in a jungle need strong defense, in the words of former Israeli prime minister, Ehud Barak.

States will occasionally flex their military muscles to deter, keep their turf, and once in a while to make political and material gains. Building strong militaries in order to survive and prosper thus remains a permanent requirement for national security. The Hobbesian world where lives are poor, nasty, brutish, and short is still with us. Alas, neither his global Leviathan nor the monotheistic religions' Messiah has arrived yet. *

EFRAIM INBAR

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DIPLOMATIC IN THE ROLE AND OF CIVIL



The word "Peace" is seen on the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality building, after the signing of the Abraham Accords at the White House. Photo by JACK GUEZ / AFP

NOVATION AND RESPONSIBILITY SOCIETY





by Koby Huberman

In September 2006, a few weeks after the end of the Second Lebanon War, a small group of Israeli businesspeople, former politicians, former security and military experts, and former diplomats, met and joined forces to offer a new paradigm of peace building in the Middle East.

The basic idea of the group was that Israel was facing a new reality in the region, where it shared similar concerns and interests with several Arab states, in the Gulf and beyond, who did not hide their initial support for Israel's actions against Hezbollah. The latter could offer a new paradigm of negotiations through which Israel should respond to the Arab Peace Initiative and engage in an Israeli–Palestinian–Arab dialogue. In 2010, after several years of quiet efforts, the group was formally founded as “Yisrael Yozemet” (Hebrew for “Israel takes the initiative”) and launched its proposal for the “Israeli Peace Initiative”—the first ever Israeli response to the Arab Peace Initiative (API) from 2002. Following this step, the group embarked on a journey to promote a regional approach to solve the Israeli–Palestinian–Arab conflict.

One of the key guidelines for the group was to rethink and innovate new approaches that official state diplomats may not consider. This is an attempt to present these approaches and offer some of the lessons learned by the experience from a participant's perspective. The idea of civil society involvement in diplomacy is not new. Following the Oslo breakthrough model—generated by by Ron

Pundak and Yair Hirschfeld—several Israeli civil society efforts emerged immediately after the collapse of the Camp David peace process in 2000: the Ayalon–Nusseibeh initiative for two states, the popular campaign to promote the security fence, the public call for a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, and the Geneva Initiative of 2004. Thus, when we decided to launch our own project in late 2006, we had several case studies that inspired us and from which we could learn.

PHASE 1 (2006–2011): INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS

From its inception in 2006, the group founders, who came from high-tech business backgrounds and from the field of strategic planning, identified an opportunity to offer innovative approaches. The model of Israeli–Palestinian bilateral negotiations was repeatedly failing: Several efforts to “bring the parties to the negotiation table” have foundered, including the Annapolis process (2007–2008) and Kerry's initiative (2013–2014). Meanwhile, we had an opportunity to think afresh about the API. In several discussions with Arab interlocutors in 2006–2007, we sensed that perceptions in the Arab world were shifting. As Iran made progress in its nuclear program, shared Israeli–Arab interests emerged.

Thus, there was now openness to discuss the API as a platform for negotiations, rather than a “take it or leave it” dictate. To make this possible, our approach focused not on the quest for an abstract sense of justice: We believed that an honest view of Israeli interests, with regional security, stability, and long-term prosperity at its core, should drive the approach to resolving



Bill Clinton walks with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on the grounds of Camp David during peace talks in 2000. Photo credit: WM/RCS

the conflict. These observations challenged the concepts and characteristics that had previously dominated the approaches to Israeli–Palestinian conflict resolution.

We began by studying the benefits of a regional approach, reminiscent of the 1991 Madrid conference, in which Israel could leverage its shared interests with the Arab states and offer a model where its concessions to the Palestinians would be rewarded by Arab gestures and eventually by normalization, in the spirit of the API.

We thus looked for a way to bring the API into the equation. Since Israel could neither accept nor reject it “as is,” the government chose to vaguely ignore it, or settle for noncommittal words of appreciation. Our idea was to present the Israeli government with a mirror proposal, the Israeli Peace Initiative (IPI). Based on principles similar to those of the API, it was an

initiative that reflected Israeli interests and positions regarding the Israeli–Palestinian endgame parameters, as well as principles of regional cooperation as suggested by the API.

To give this weight, we wanted this proposal to be based on ongoing dialogue with Israelis and interlocutors from all over the Arab world. Therefore, we held two years of ongoing track-two meetings with more than 100 Arab interlocutors. We continuously tested Arab responses to these ideas. We learned what drove the positions and sensitivities of Palestinians, Egyptians, Jordanians, Saudis, and others. In parallel, we discussed the text of the IPI in Hebrew, English, and Arabic. It was an eye-opening exercise.

Following the official publication of the IPI in April 2011, the responses from the Arab world were encouraging. We quickly realized that the

legitimacy of our response was based on article 5 of the API, addressed to both the government and the people of Israel. Although we definitely never spoke on behalf of our government, as Israeli citizens we felt that it was our duty to raise our voices and send a message to the government of Israel, the Israeli public, and the Arab world that we respected the API as a historic move and saw it as a negotiable framework.

In May 2011, we visited the secretary-general of the Arab League, Dr. Nabil al-Arabi. This enhanced the sense that our role was to serve as a bridge between the Arab world and the Israeli government and the public. Our communication with our growing network of close to 1,000 contacts in the Arab world brought into focus the significant gaps in knowledge about Israel in the Arab world and the reciprocal lack of understanding about the Arab world in Israel.

PHASE 2 (2012–PRESENT): CONCEPTS AND RESEARCH

With that realization, we decided that we need to invest time and effort in advocacy efforts, both in Israel and the Arab world, and in identifying the strategic benefits of compromise and concessions, rather than just “preaching.” In doing so, we realized that we need to “reinvent” content, argumentation, and advocacy methods.

Our anchor is Israel’s national interest. We presented the idea of a “regional package deal for two states, in the spirit of the API and IPI,” and its practical benefits to Israel—regional security, economic growth, and diplomatic standing. This was analyzed as a preferred strategic Israeli choice, driven by Israeli interests and not by Palestinian demands for “historic justice.” Using this approach, we were able to present our rationale to pragmatic right-wing circles in Israel, who could see that it differed from traditional “left wing” arguments and narratives.

We also showed that each of the Israeli–Palestinians core issues (borders, Jerusalem, refugees, security) required the involvement of key Arab states and could not be agreed upon just by Israel and the PA. Thus, we claimed that

only an inclusive process with the relevant stakeholders at the tables, conducted in parallel, could produce a comprehensive agreement.

We started to seed the idea of a regional approach—as an alternative to bilateral negotiations—both in Israel and the international community, from Europe to the US, and with representatives from all over the Arab world. We were often astonished to see how little was known about the API, the IPI, and their benefits—especially in EU countries, which were locked into old and failing models of negotiation platforms, even when they repeatedly went nowhere.

Adding the economic dimension to advocacy, we formed a group of economic experts during 2014–2016, and later we created a track-two group composed of 25 regional experts who jointly produced “Regionomix”—a blueprint for regional economic development with a forecast of economic benefits. Both studies showed a quantifiable impact on the Israeli and regional economies, in terms of GDP growth, less unemployment, longevity, and a better quality of life.

We amplified “weak signals” from and to all the relevant parties. We used every such signal in our quiet advocacy efforts in Israel, the Arab world, and internationally. This included the article that HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal published in *Haaretz* in July 2014, coupled by the late President Shimon Peres’s declaration of willingness to consider the API as a platform for negotiations.

In late 2014, after the failure of the Kerry initiative and in the aftermath of Operation Protective Edge, we decided to offer a new negotiation approach. Together with regional participants, we drafted a regional framework agreement and a gradual negotiation process to slowly implement it. We did not try to reach an agreed-upon document but rather focused on “gap maps,” the gaps in understanding as seen by Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Saudi, Egyptian, and Emirati experts. We then had a clear idea of a solid “shared core” of agreed-upon elements that could become the baseline for a new process and for a new regional–Israeli–Palestinian framework.



Our role was to serve as a bridge between the Arab world and the Israeli government and the public.

Secretary-General Nabil al-Arabi at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo, in 2012.

Photo credit: REUTERS/Amr Abdallah Dalsh

This was done against the background of what we saw happening in Israel. In early 2013, we began addressing Israeli public opinion and identifying the prospects for change. We conducted public opinion surveys in Israel, mainly focused on one key concept: “What will be eventually acceptable to Israelis in the center-right pragmatic camp.” We knew that this segment was (and is) the game changer. Here we reached several conclusions and revalidated them every 6 to 12 months. We found out that this segment preferred a two-state solution as part of a regional package deal: They appreciated the Arab leaders more than their Palestinian counterparts. Moreover, when presented with

our regional package solution and asked “can you live with it,” different surveys showed that about 75% to 80% of all Israelis agreed.

MODUS OPERANDI—A QUIET IMPACT GROUP

Throughout the past 15 years, we thus developed, shaped, and constantly rebranded and adapted our modus operandi. In all fairness, when we started, we were hoping to see our ideas adopted more easily, yet over the years we acknowledged the need for patience and consistency. We did, however, commit ourselves to several principles, which were rather new and different from those prevailing in the traditional “left wing peace camp,” as it came to

be tagged in Israeli society:

- * We are *not* a “peace organization” but rather an organization that promotes our own understanding of Israel’s geostrategic interests through a regional approach. We see the pragmatic center-right wing as a game changer.

- * We do not intend to attack our government but rather seek to work with every Israeli government regardless of its political structure. We genuinely believe that what we proposed can transcend political camps in Israel. Clearly, the Abraham Accords and the cancellation of annexation present such an end-to-end acceptance.

- * We do not presume to speak or negotiate on behalf of the government of Israel. We seek to ensure that Israel’s government, political system, and the establishment are informed and enriched by what we hear from our Arab colleagues.

- * We do not have an ego, logo, or partnerships. We consider our ideas “open code” so they can be used by everyone without reference to us.

- * We realize that the current leaderships and personae in the different theaters are often unable or unwilling to change the status quo. Still, we decided that we should not try and compromise our ideas and change them to fit certain political scenarios. Instead, we felt that the ideas should be presented even if it would take a long time to accept them.

WHAT CAN OUR EXPERIENCE TEACH?

These ideas and efforts were not a result of a predefined “recipe.” Rather, they are the result of an evolutionary process and sometimes improvisational and experimental approach. In retrospect, however, we can offer some insights for future civil society activists:

- * Ask new questions and challenge traditional approaches (regional vs. bilateral);
- * Present a mirroring initiative, instead of a yes/no trap (in our case, regarding the Arab Peace Initiative);
- * Find a broader geostrategic context

to solving the conflict (shared Israeli–Arab interests);

- * Amplify strategic vision with tangible economic benefits (for Israel and “Regionomix”);

- * Offer new conceptual frameworks beyond traditional diplomatic processes (combining the concept of a long-range horizon and a practical roadmap toward implementation).

- * Create track-two channels that map and narrow the gaps, rather than trying to reach consensus;

- * In the Israeli context, focus on the pragmatic center-right as the key political constituency;

- * Empower political leaders and organizations by seeding the ideas as “open code”;

- * Find partners in the region through continuous engagement and ongoing dialogue;

- * Sustain full independence and resist any foreign imprint.

KEY NEW CONCEPTS

More specifically, the following key points describe the innovative landmarks we created between 2006–2021—some of which found their way onto international diplomatic platforms (the French initiative in early 2015, the Kerry effort in early 2016, and the Trump initiative in 2020)—let alone the Abraham Accords.

- * We are convinced that Israel should have responded to the Arab Peace Initiative with an Israeli one, which could have served as a platform for negotiations. It is not too late.

- * The two-state solution is viable only as part of a regional framework for a permanent status agreement, which would offer Israel strategic rewards for its concessions to the Palestinians and give the Palestinians the necessary support for their tough decisions.

- * The myth of bilateral negotiations should be finally buried. The current leaders are incapable of conducting them, and they have failed again and again by design.

- * Since there is no foreseeable possible

agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, the concept of a flowery and romantic win-win solution should be buried as well. Instead, it is time to look at lose-lose multilateral deals with equally painful concessions, so all parties can compare their own pain to others and separately calculate their own benefits.

* The two state-solution cannot be achieved in one step. It has to be achieved through a combination of an agreed “political horizon,” coupled with a gradual process to achieve it, based on transactional and quadruple reciprocity implemented between Israel, the Palestinian Authority, the Arab states, and the international community. Now, with the Abraham Accords, the process can be accelerated.

* Bottom-up state building and regional cooperation should be based on a commitment to regional economic development, as it is the fastest way to show “quick wins” and the benefits of peace building. Regionomix should become part and parcel of the process.

* An on-going effort is required to build breakthrough “attitudes.” These require continuous dialogue, especially as we experience a transition of leadership to new generations. The language and attitude should be continuously updated to meet the hearts and minds of younger generations and should be attuned to the social media that they consume.

Finally, going forward, there is a need to combine a wider vision of the regional order together with the specific Israeli–Palestinian–regional agreements. Only by having a different understanding of future shared threats to our collective national security interests (such as food, water, climate, economic, and healthcare), can the next generation of leaders work collectively toward different approaches of problem solving and creative diplomacy. We do not accept the notion of “hopeless and inevitable” deterioration as the only possible scenario. As complex as the situation may look like, we believe that creative diplomacy should be used.

Based on the last 15 years of ongoing efforts and attempts, we are fully convinced that civil society should have the duty of enriching the discourse and strategic thinking of diplomacy and leadership through tactful and strategic innovation. The complexity that diplomatic challenges present to state leaders requires multidimensional thinking and experience. Such challenges may be better addressed through quiet cooperation between the state’s political, diplomatic, and security leadership, as well as civil society, think tanks, and business leaders. At the end of the day, diplomatic breakthroughs cannot be based just upon traditional “tool kits.” The quest for diplomatic innovation, with the involvement and commitment of civil society and the business community, should be the ultimate goal. *

KOBY HUBERMAN

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THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS AND THE TALKING STICK



by James Foggo



A worker carries Israeli and Emirati flags at Haifa's port. Photo credit: REUTERS/Amir Cohen

For much of the last decade, I served as the commander of the US Navy Sixth Fleet and Allied Joint Forces in the Mediterranean. This is thus written from the vantage point of my headquarters in Naples, Italy, the halfway point in this maritime domain. During my time of service there, I forged relationships with the navies of southern Europe, North Africa, and the Levant, including Israel. Such navy-to-

navy relationships are traditionally strong and largely impermeable to the changing nature of the political environment. We depend on one another in times of crisis, and when directed to defend our collective security interests by civilian authority, we are stronger together. It is this insight, bolstered—as it is, today, for many of those serving in US forces—by personal recollections and interactions, that I wish to bring to bear on the discussion of the US–Israeli relationship and its role in the region.

In this respect, I have always viewed naval forces as an extended arm of diplomacy. Our mission is, first and foremost, to deter aggression,



An Israeli military helicopter landing on the USS George H. W. Bush as it docks at Haifa port, in 2017. Photo credit: REUTERS/Ronen Zvulun

but in the final analysis, when called upon, we must win our nations' wars. In other words, we will fight to win, but we want to win without fighting. It is for this reason that I want to commend the spirit of the Abraham Accords. My journey as an advocate for both peace and cooperation, as well as for the special position of the US-Israeli relationship, began long before today.

A PORT OF CALL

On a clear blue day in the Eastern Mediterranean in 1994, the USS Narwhal made her way to Haifa, Israel. The boat had left its homeport of Charleston, South Carolina, a few months before and the crew had worked hard in support of US and NATO interests throughout the Mediterranean theater of operations. Now it was time for a "hot wash-up"⁽¹⁾ in Haifa. Sailors join the Navy to see the world, and the young crew of

USS Narwhal was no exception. All were excited to have a port visit in Israel for the first time.

As the executive officer, I was also the unofficial "morale officer" for the wardroom and crew. Not unlike their contemporaries, Narwhal sailors had an affinity for clubs and bars wherever we put to shore. While there is nothing wrong with getting a beer with your shipmates, I reminded everyone that time would pass quickly in Israel: go out and see the Holy Land for all of its glory, its beauty...and in some cases its history of violence, tragedy, and triumph. Our husbanding agent and the United Services Organization in Haifa enabled bus trips to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, Masada, and the Sea of Galilee. I was delighted that almost all of our crew signed up for one or more of these tours. Meanwhile, I headed out in the wee hours of the morning with the skipper



An Israeli tank speeds past a mosque that was damaged in the 1967 war, during an exercise in the Golan Heights, 1997. Photo credit: Reuters

and chief of the boat (our senior enlisted leader) on a small van tour that would take us to stops in the West Bank, the Golan Heights, the Sea of Galilee, and the border of Lebanon. We stopped in the Valley of Tears, where our guide regaled us with stories of one of the bloodiest battles of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973. We visited a kibbutz that still had a rusted and destroyed Syrian tank at the entrance gate and drove to areas where access was still restricted due to the prolific presence of uncharted landmines. We lunched in a Druze village in the Golan Heights and from up high, we looked down across the border into Syria. Each of us was struck by the contrast of lush green irrigated farmland on the Israeli side of the border and the arid and undeveloped land on the Syrian side. We stopped to talk with mounted soldiers from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) patrolling the Israeli side

of the Golan. Some of them were older reservists and they were happy to see American service members, particularly submariners, showing an interest in their share of the task. We came back with a better understanding of Israel's security challenges.

USS Narwhal's few days of liberty in Haifa went by quickly and when everyone returned safe and sound to the boat and conducted pre-underway checks, I had many members of the crew thank me for encouraging them to take advantage of a potentially once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to tour the Holy Land. The boat was abuzz for many days with talk of liberty in Israel. Every member of the crew recognized that Israelis were not just gracious hosts but that they lived in a pretty rough neighborhood—surrounded on all sides (including the seaside) by threats to their very existence. Likewise, it

was readily apparent that national security was not just left to professional soldiers as in the US case; in Israel, almost everyone served in the IDF and they understood that their service and sacrifice was for the greater good. In fact, many Americans could take a lesson from the Israeli example.

COOPERATION AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL

Such insights remained relevant and stayed with me more than a dozen years later, on my next visit to Israel in 2007. By then, having gone on to command my own submarine and then a squadron of submarines, I had been selected by Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to be his executive assistant. In this position, I was privileged to be with him on all his trips overseas. Although Admiral Mullen had been to Israel before, this was his first trip as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and there was much on the agenda. After landing in Tel Aviv, we were whisked to a downtown hotel and a reception attended by the Israeli chief of staff, Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi, and director of political-military affairs at the Israeli Defense Ministry, Major General (res.) Amos Gilead. I would meet both men again during my follow-on assignments in Europe. The next day, I accompanied Admiral Mullen in a call with the Israeli defense minister.

Capping off our tour, we boarded a Blackhawk helicopter with Ashkenazi's deputy chief of staff, then Major General Benny Gantz (later chief of staff and now defense minister), for an extensive tour of Israel by air. As we flew along the sea and then over the West Bank, Gantz⁽²⁾ chronicled his career and a series of events that had taken place during his lifetime. Reflecting the challenges and fragility of Israeli security, he included the infamous attack on Tel Aviv's Savoy Hotel, when armed militants stormed it from the sea in 1975. After flying north over the Golan Heights and along the tense border with Lebanon (familiar territory from my previous trip), we turned south and stopped near the border of the Gaza Strip for

lunch in the field with local IDF commanders. In a few short hours, the chairman was able to see the full extent of the Israeli security problem. It was compelling, and it remains a lesson learned as to the challenges that make US-Israeli cooperation so vital.

THE TALKING STICK

Still, the role of the US—and of its relationship with Israel—is also to create the conditions for progress in Israel's interactions with others in the region with whom the American administration, including the military, had established solid relations over the years. An image from my years with Admiral Mullen comes to mind. The chairman was a believer in Dr. Steven Covey and his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. One day, after a private meeting, Mullen showed me a small souvenir that Dr. Covey had left for him—it was a talking stick, and the admiral was eager to embrace the concept and test it in the conduct of his duties.

Covey writes about the talking stick—given to him by tribal chieftains of indigenous peoples in Canada—in his book, *The 8th Habit*. Having been an integral part of indigenous peoples' governance for centuries, it is used for enhancing communication between different parties and consequently for conflict resolution. Two simple rules apply: First, the person holding the stick has the floor and cannot be interrupted. Second, with a captive audience, the holder of the stick must present the views of the opposing party through the lens of their eyes. Hold that thought...

Since my introduction to the concept of the talking stick in 2007, much has happened in terms of conflict in the Middle East. Shortly afterward, Hamas rockets launched into Israel in 2008 precipitated a clash in Gaza, with over a thousand Palestinians and more than a dozen Israelis killed. Attempts by the Obama administration to negotiate a final status between Israel and the Palestinian Authority broke down in 2014. Political upheaval engulfed the region in 2011. Civil war broke out in Syria, drawing in external forces, with Russia using it to establish a permanent presence in the Eastern

Mediterranean. Throughout this period, malign Iranian influence continued to threaten the US and her allies, including Israel. In 2017, the Trump administration recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and later Israel's right to sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Trump's ideas created a rupture between the Palestinian Authority and the US, leading, among other things, to the closure of the PLO office in Washington, DC.

While this aspect of US policy came under fire in political and professional circles around the world, in 2020 an extraordinary turn of events made it possible for the US to broker the Abraham Accords, between the United Arab Emirates and Israel, putting both nations on a path toward normalizing their relationship. Even more encouraging, other nations—including Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco—followed suit. Israel, in turn, as a gesture of goodwill toward the UAE, agreed to drop all plans of unilaterally annexing some areas in the West Bank. Each side, to some extent, was willing to see things from the other's perspective.

Thus, applying the talking stick concept, the Abraham Accords were a breakthrough in Arab-Israeli relations that should have been celebrated more loudly. Not since the Camp David Accords in 1978 or Israel's peace with Jordan in 1994 has such an agreement been formalized; the Abraham Accords represent a landmark agreement that was unfortunately drowned out in the US by a particularly divisive presidential election and by the simultaneous loss of 600,000 American lives to COVID-19.

Nevertheless, it is worth evoking Covey: *This way, all of the parties involved take responsibility for one hundred percent of the communications, both speaking and listening. Once each of the parties feels understood, an amazing thing usually happens. Negative energy dissipates, contention evaporates, mutual respect grows and people become creative. New ideas emerge. Third alternatives appear.*

The Abraham Accords prove that it is possible for nations with long-standing

differences to find common ground and move forward, not backward. There are many more nations on the list that can contribute to peace in the Middle East, particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian question. Accordingly, I support the appointment of a US Special Envoy for the Middle East currently being discussed in the Biden administration, but it will take more than one person to resolve the current crisis. If appointed, my advice to the ambassador would be to put an indigenous peoples' talking stick in her or his briefcase when traveling, and use it to narrow the gaps of perception that still pervade. *

1. "Hot wash-up" is a debriefing conducted immediately after an exercise has ended. In the submarine force, it is a carryover from the World War II diesel boats, when after an approach and attack on a convoy of enemy ships, the fire control team would huddle in the boat's wardroom to review lessons learned and make necessary changes prior to the next engagement. This culture of continuous process improvement is widely embraced by the nuclear submarine navy of today.

2. I later returned to Israel as the Commander of the US Sixth Fleet and paid a courtesy call on Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, then chief of the IDF. I recall that, unlike most high ranking military officers, Benny Gantz's office was stark and functional. There was only one photo on his bookshelf—that of his mother, a Holocaust survivor. When I asked about the photo, he told me that it was his mother and he said she is the reason he does what he does... As an American and friend of Israel, I never forgot that.

JAMES FOGGO

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A DIPLOMATIC LOOK THE SURGICAL TI



No chief nurse to invoke a time-out. Biden and Harris briefed by the US national security team on Afghanistan, in late August. Photo credit: Adam Schultz/White House

BEFORE WE LEAP: ME-OUT MODEL



BY ROBERT SILVERMAN

Surgeons are the gods of the operating room. In American medical culture, surgeons are treated as uniquely knowledgeable and powerful beings with the ability to sometimes revive the dead and heal the sick. But as it turns out, treating surgeons as infallible gods isn't always an effective model. It can lead to preventable mistakes in operations, lawsuits, and massive monetary judgments against hospitals. So in 2003 the American medical profession instituted a final check in the operating room before a surgery, called a surgical time-out. It allows any member of the surgical team to stop the operation before it is carried out; the designated person to invoke it is usually the chief nurse. Once invoked, the time-out requires that a standard checklist be reviewed by the entire team, including the surgeon. The time-out provides a final reassurance that the planned procedure has met all of the standard criteria for a successful outcome.



The credible threat of force is a powerful motivator for those of our adversaries we seek to persuade.

President Obama and members of the national security team receive an update on the mission against Osama bin Laden in the Situation Room of the White House, on May 1, 2011.

Photo credit: Pete Souza/White House/Handout via REUTERS

Analogies are never perfect, but they can be insightful and sometimes are the best analytical tool available to diplomats. The decision making of a president on foreign policy involves more factors outside of one's control than that of a surgeon in the operating room. Nevertheless, there are parallels. The entire world has just witnessed a moment of clarity in the preventable disaster of the US evacuation from Afghanistan. Congress should act on this clarity through bipartisan legislation, instituting the equivalent of a surgical time-out for presidential national security decision making.

Presidents, like surgeons, have plenary decision-making powers in certain realms. One of these is national security. But Congress, through its oversight role, can and does legislate changes to national security operations. For instance, after

9/11, Congress convened a bipartisan commission and passed laws establishing the position of director of National Intelligence and mandating coordination and information sharing among the intelligence agencies. Now Congress has another opportunity, after the chaotic evacuation from Kabul, to improve the functioning of the national security apparatus.

Instituting a "time-out" on executive-level decision making goes against American political culture. In the words of President George W. Bush, "I am the decider." President Obama publicly averred that he was particularly good at making drone strike decisions. President Trump was, in his own words, a stable genius. It's clear from his public statements on Afghanistan that President Biden shares the heady feelings that being president often engenders. Perhaps

the kind of stress inherent in national security decisions, like surgeries, has the tendency to create gods.

A president can counteract this tendency by appointing to his national security team trusted individuals with the life experience and independent stature to question his decisions. With such a team, a president will sometimes review and reverse them. One thinks of Lincoln's Seward and Stanton and Bush senior's Scowcroft and Baker. More recently, Trump declared several times that the US was withdrawing all troops from Syria and Iraq, but his senior national security team pushed back and the announced withdrawals never happened.

A surgical time-out doesn't rely on a president appointing a Lincoln-esque team of rivals. It is a bureaucratic procedure that anyone on the team can invoke. Though not a failsafe against bad decision making (for instance, it likely would not have prevented a determined president from invading Iraq in 2003) and not a substitute for a team of rivals, it would, nevertheless, improve on the "I am the decider" model we currently have. What seems clear in the Afghanistan case is that Biden's appointees lack the independence or stature to effectively push back against the president's decisions that required the kind of reality check that a time-out would provide. There was no chief nurse in the situation room who could invoke a time-out.

Partisan noise from all sides may distract and squelch Congress's ability to focus on a constructive fix based on the lessons of the Afghanistan disaster. Unlike the post-9/11 changes, when an administration worked with Congress, it's hard to imagine an administration today collaborating on a measure that imposes an internal review on its national security decision making. But Congress could act on its own in this area, and that would not be unprecedented. Following revelations of government spying on US citizens, Democratic senator Frank Church and Republican senator John Tower passed a bill in 1975 that forever changed national security operations.

The media search for whom to blame for Afghanistan has identified "nation building" as one of the culprits. This unfortunately named

form of foreign aid (more accurately called "state-institution building") will be addressed in a later column. Another usual suspect is the US military, especially if the search is broadened from the recent evacuation to the whole Afghanistan experience of the past 20 years. That's somewhat understandable—the Twitter sphere is reminding us of the relentlessly positive briefings to Congress, replete with PowerPoint slides demonstrating the progress of our mission in Afghanistan, given over the years by the likes of Generals Petraeus and Lute. Suddenly now, years too late, they admit how little they really knew about the mosaic of peoples inhabiting Afghanistan, their cultures, and outlooks. At the time, such admissions would not have been career enhancing.

It's easy in light of Afghanistan to ridicule the military's can-do culture and seek to cut back its budget, which happened after Vietnam. But that would be dangerous. The military is the most powerful tool in the US diplomat's kit, especially when sheathed. The credible threat of force is a powerful motivator for those of our adversaries we seek to persuade; diminishing it damages US national interests. Its budget is probably underfunded given the array of new threats we now face after Afghanistan.

Instead of going after an easy but counterproductive target like the US military, we should instead ask our Congress to do something much harder—work together to improve the executive branch's decision-making process. A formal, internal pre-operation review imposed by the oversight board of the medical profession improved surgeries. A similar review would improve our national security. *

ROBERT SILVERMAN

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THE TEN BIG MISTAKES

BY DOV S. ZAKHEIM

America's chaotic exit from Afghanistan was merely the culmination of a series of major errors that began late in 2001, two months after the US launched Operation Enduring Freedom to destroy al-Qaida and remove its Taliban hosts from power. It was in mid-December of that year that Osama bin Laden, leader of al-Qaida and mastermind of the 9/11 attacks on New York's twin towers and the Pentagon, was able to escape Afghanistan and find refuge in Pakistan. As a 2009 report by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations put it:





The last American service member leaves Afghanistan, on August 30.
Photo credit: U.S. Army/Cover-Images.com

“Fewer than 100 American commandos were on the scene [at Tora Bora] with their Afghan allies, and calls for reinforcements to launch an assault were rejected. Requests were also turned down for U.S. troops to block the mountain paths leading to sanctuary a few miles away in Pakistan. The vast array of American military power... was kept on the sidelines. Instead, the U.S. command chose to rely on airstrikes and untrained Afghan militias to attack bin Laden and on Pakistan’s loosely organized Frontier Corps to seal his escape routes. On or around December 16 bin Laden and an entourage of bodyguards walked unmolested out of Tora Bora and disappeared into Pakistan’s unregulated tribal area.”

It took another 18 months after this study was written before bin Laden was finally located and eliminated on May 2, 2011. By then Washington had committed three additional grievous errors. The first was to shift its focus from Afghanistan to Iraq. As early as the first months of 2002, leading figures in the George W. Bush administration were pressing for an attack on Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. They pointed to his nuclear weapons program, which virtually all Western intelligence agencies agreed was ongoing. Some also sought to link him to al-Qaida. The latter assertion was completely erroneous, while the nuclear program was nonexistent. Even if Saddam had been attempting to build a nuclear bomb, the US had no reason to have attacked Iraq when it did, because there was no clear evidence as to how far the purported nuclear effort had advanced.

Certain administration officials were in a rush to attack Iraq, however, because they feared that if an attack was delayed it might never take place. After all, Bush had barely won the election in 2000, and it was not at all clear that he would be reelected in 2004; the attack had to be launched before then. Since it could not be undertaken in an election year, it had to take place in 2003, as in fact it did. Planning for such an attack began much earlier, in 2002. By then the Taliban was nowhere to be found; neither was al-Qaida. Two million Afghan emigres had returned home. Small businesses were beginning to reopen. The country

was on an upward trajectory. By focusing on Iraq, however, Washington left Afghanistan on the back burner, and the Taliban began to regroup.

Yet another error of the administration’s shifting focus to Iraq was its failure to provide careful and close oversight of contractors working in Afghanistan: the problem later extended, indeed, to governance in Iraq. The Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan, on which I served as a commissioner, reported in August 2011 that as much as \$60 billion had been wasted due to poor government oversight of contractors. The government had issued poorly drafted contracts. It far too frequently renewed contracts automatically. It had virtually no insight into the activities of local subcontractors.

Several of my fellow commissioners and I witnessed first hand the degree of government incompetence when we visited Afghanistan in 2010. One major and unfortunate result of this lack of government oversight was that those contractors whose job was to train and maintain the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and especially the Afghan Air Force, had no real incentive to enable the Afghans to operate and maintain their equipment on their own. As a result, even after 20 years, Afghan forces could not really function on their own, and when the contractors departed, the Air Force, in particular, which might have slowed the Taliban advance, was grounded for lack of maintenance capability.

Still another mistake was the Obama administration’s decision in 2011 to ignore the rampant bribery and corruption that was taking place throughout Afghanistan and instead to focus on nation-building. Sarah Chayes, who over the course of a decade’s residence in Afghanistan became one of the country’s most seasoned observers, pointed out at the time that this decision undermined the Kabul government’s authority and credibility. By 2021 embezzlement by senior leaders and officers at all levels caused the Afghan security forces to fight not only without pay but also to suffer from a shortfall in military supplies and even food. No wonder the Afghan army collapsed as quickly as it did.



Afghan soldiers outside the US Bagram air base, on the day the last of American troops vacated it.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Mohammad Ismail

There have been more errors since the war in Afghanistan reached its miserable denouement in 2016–2017. The first was the lopsided Doha Agreement of February 29, 2020. It was lopsided in favor of the Taliban, which was not even a state and was referred to in the agreement as “the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban.” As stated in the agreement, the US committed itself to withdrawing all its forces from Afghanistan and closing all Coalition bases in that country within 14 months; that is, by the

beginning of May 2021. It promised to reduce its forces in Afghanistan to 8,600 and, together with its allies, to withdraw from five military bases all by mid-June 2020. Finally, in what the agreement termed “a confidence building measure,” it provided that “up to five thousand (5,000) prisoners of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the US as a state and is known as the Taliban and up to one thousand (1,000) prisoners of the other side will be released by March 10, 2020, the first day of intra-Afghan negotiations.” And therein lay the problem. Many, if not most of

the released prisoners, rejoined the Taliban. Even more troubling, the so-called intra-Afghan negotiations were never serious. The Taliban had no incentive to cooperate with a government that it despised and had never recognized. The Ghani government was frozen out of both the negotiations and the agreement. Washington promised that it would be brought into the discussions sometime later, a humiliating arrangement if ever there was one. Afghans of all stripes could only conclude that whatever its formal position, Washington had de facto recognized the Taliban and at the same time had ignored what was meant to be its ally and the legitimate government in Kabul. The result was the Taliban's anticipation of victory and a demoralized Afghan military.

When the Biden administration took office, it need not have clung to the agreement negotiated by its predecessor. The Taliban was still attacking Afghan forces. It was not negotiating in good faith. Yet President Biden, who did not hesitate to rescind numerous executive orders that his predecessor had signed, chose not only to adhere to the Doha Agreement but also to retain its negotiator, Zalmay Khalilzad. That too was an error. Having negotiated the Doha Agreement, Khalilzad could not be expected neither to seek its modification nor to renounce it.

These were only the first two errors that the Biden administration committed. There were more to come, with awful results. When President Biden announced that he was extending the deadline for American withdrawal to September 11, in order to mark the end of a full 20 years of war, he failed to begin the process of speeding Americans and their Afghan allies and supporters out of the country. The president excused his failure to do so on the grounds that his Afghan counterpart, Ashraf Ghani, had pleaded with him not to publicize any evacuation, since it would undermine Kabul's credibility and authority. By then, however, Kabul had neither credibility nor much authority. Its forces were being soundly defeated

throughout the country. Its government was widely viewed as corrupt to the core. The government's jurisdiction barely extended beyond Kabul as provincial capitals began to fall. Yet Biden did not order a full-scale evacuation until the Taliban were at Kabul's gates.

What Biden did order early on was the evacuation of the sprawling American base at Bagram, yet another serious miscue. Unlike Hamid Karzai International Airport—the scene of the frantic and chaotic exit of Americans and Afghans—which only had one runway, Bagram had two. Moreover, contrary to later administration assertions, Bagram did not need considerably more protection than it already had. Knowing that Bagram would eventually also be emptied of Americans, the Taliban surely would have waited for their departure rather than risk retaliation by American and allied attack aircraft.

The administration also contended that it would have been difficult for Afghans in Kabul to reach the base. In fact, Bagram is only 58 kilometers (36 miles) from Kabul. Just as Afghans and Americans around the country were told to make their way to Kabul's international airport, so too might they have been told to get to Bagram. With American fighters flying overhead, the Taliban would have been chary of attacking cars or buses making their way to the base. In

Knowing that Bagram would eventually also be emptied of Americans, the Taliban surely would have waited for their departure rather than risk retaliation by American and allied attack aircraft.

the meantime, thousands more Afghans, as well as all Americans could have been evacuated in a far more orderly fashion than what happened in the final days of the Afghan war.

Finally, and of major import to Israel and her Arab friends, Washington gave its NATO allies—and others who had joined the coalition to fight the Taliban—little to no notice that it was withdrawing from the country two weeks before September 11. These countries were caught flat-footed and scrambled to get their people out of Afghanistan even as Kabul was falling. For Israel and the Gulf Arabs, America's reliability, already shaky due to Biden's determination to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—the Iran nuclear deal—took another serious hit.

The challenge Israel, the Arabs, and all America's friends face is that America is changing, and from their perspective, it is changing for the worse. It is noteworthy that the four remaining candidates in the 2016 presidential primary campaign, Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, and Bernie Sanders, all opposed expanding America's free trade policies, a sure sign that America was increasingly looking inward. Trump's isolationist impulses when he occupied the White House were thus an extreme expression of what Americans were beginning to feel.

Biden is an internationalist and is genuinely committed to supporting America's allies and friends; but he is also all too sensitive to American public opinion and, for that matter, to the increasingly powerful left wing of his party, which is focused on what Obama once termed "nation building at home." Moreover, the so-called "progressive" Democrats are openly hostile to Israel. They can point to a recent Chicago Council on Foreign Relations poll that showed that only 37% of respondents consider Israel as an ally. Progressives also are encountering less opposition from an American Jewish community, particularly its younger element, that is increasingly indifferent to Israeli concerns. While the new Bennett government is doing its best to heal relations

with Washington that Benjamin Netanyahu drove to a new low, the trends inside the US, as well as Washington's abandonment of its Afghan allies, are surely a cause for worry.

If Israel were to encounter a major threat from Iran, would Washington jump to its aid? Perhaps. But it should be recalled, as Dennis Ross has recounted in his history of American-Israeli relations from Truman to Obama, that Defense Secretary James Schlesinger and the Pentagon opposed aiding Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Only when Henry Kissinger was able to convince both the Department of Defense and President Nixon that aiding Israel would enable Washington to influence and possibly dominate the post-war Middle East, while also preventing the perception that a Soviet-armed country could defeat one armed by the US, did Nixon authorize a massive American airlift to the Jewish state.

Next time, however, when Israel faces a major threat, there will be no Kissinger. In the face of progressive opposition and growing American Jewish apathy, would a Biden administration be prepared to support Israel to the same extent that Washington did in 1973? It might. Yet it might not. The lesson of Afghanistan is that Israel, the Gulf states, and other American friends such as Taiwan can no longer take that support for granted. *

— DOV S. ZAKHEIM

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The last column of Israeli armor leaving southern Lebanon, May 24, 2000. Photo credit: Reuters



**ISRAEL IN LEBANON AND
THE UNITED STATES IN
AFGHANISTAN:
DIFFERENT
MILITARY
STORIES,
SIMILAR
CONCLUSIONS**

BY PNINA SHUKER

US forces completed their withdrawal from Afghanistan just 11 days before the 20th anniversary of 9/11, ending the longest war in US history. The analogy, at least for the American public, is the US withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975. But for many Israelis, the recent images from Kabul revive memories of the Israeli experience in Southern Lebanon between 1982–2000. Only about six months ago, the Israeli government approved a service stripe for those who had served in the IDF at the time, finally recognizing the Israeli presence in the security zone as a war—by far the longest war in which Israel has ever been engaged. In this column I will review five similarities between the Israeli experience in Southern Lebanon and that of the US in Afghanistan. Keeping in mind the obvious differences between the two cases, there is still a broad basis for comparison from which meanings can be deduced, regarding future wars and specifically American interventions in the coming decades.

TURNING “WARS OF CHOICE” INTO “JUST WARS”

Launched in June 1982, Operation Peace for Galilee, which led to the Israeli presence in Southern Lebanon, was, in fact, the first war of choice that Israel had initiated. (The circumstances of the Sinai campaign in 1956 are more complex in nature and place it in the category of a preventive war.) The Israeli prime minister at the time, Menachem Begin, realized this problematic framing of the war and its

impact on public opinion and therefore tried to legitimize it by presenting it on numerous occasions as a legitimate “war of choice.” Generally, Begin’s rise to power had changed the Israeli security perception, as well as the attitude toward the question “Why are we fighting?” Israel’s previous security perception was that Israel had to go to war when it felt threatened or insecure about its ability to defeat its rivals. However, Begin developed an offensive approach, according to which Israel goes to war when its military power is at a high point, which could effectively be used to change regional conditions.

Accordingly—and contrary to the common belief that he was misled by the defense minister at the time, Ariel Sharon, into a far-reaching adventure—Begin had a significant responsibility for expanding Operation Peace for Galilee far beyond the 40 kilometers approved by the cabinet. In fact, from the moment Begin came to power in 1977, Israel began a countdown for an extensive and comprehensive operation in Lebanon, with the actions, decisions, and declarations of Begin and his government in the years before the war paving the way. Operation Litani, which was carried out in March 1978, in response to a particularly grievous Palestinian terror attack, was the first indication of Begin’s intentions. The assassination attempt of Israel’s ambassador in Britain, Shlomo Argov, (by a rogue group not subject to PLO authority) merely served as a trigger for a preplanned intervention, launched two days later and eventually extending Israel’s stay on Lebanese soil to 18 years.

Similarly, without questioning the deep shock that the terror attacks of 9/11 inflicted on every American citizen and the subsequent public



The rapid takeover emboldens jihadist groups. Taliban fighters in front of the former US Embassy in Kabul. Photo credit: Zerah Oriane/ABACA via Reuters Connect

pressure to act against terror strongholds, the Bush administration had aspired to operate in the Middle East long before the terror attacks took place. As early as 1998, neoconservative thinkers had put forward their vision for a new American foreign policy in the Middle East and warned publicly that the threat posed by Saddam Hussein required decisive action or else, as one

Von Clausewitz claimed that there is no logic in extending wars beyond the minimum that is required, but both the US and Israel didn't get the memo.

of them titled his book, America would become “Tyranny’s Ally.” Upon George W. Bush’s entry into the White House, a forceful group of high-level officials, including Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz, brought these perspectives into focus, with Powell and Armitage taking a more realist view and Rice walking a complex middle path. Collectively known as the “Vulcans,” those appointed to key positions in the Bush administration had a profound influence on the president’s stances toward foreign policy issues; in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the balance tilted irrevocably toward an interventionist and wide-ranging project of transformation. Bush decided to focus on al-Qaida first, largely due to public expectations, and came to believe that if the mission in Afghanistan would be perceived as successful, it would make it easier to mobilize public support for military operations in other arenas, including Iraq. And indeed, less than two



It was clear that Afghan government forces alone would not be able to resist the heavily armed Taliban. An Afghan security forces member keeps watch in Bagram air base, after American troops vacated it. Photo credit: REUTERS/Mohammad Ismail

months afterward, Bush ordered the Department of Defense to commence extensive planning to overthrow Saddam Hussein, although no new evidence has emerged linking Saddam to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Nowadays, it is widely agreed that the threat assessments, which the Bush administration used for justifying the war against Iraq, were excessive and, to some extent, based on faulty intelligence. In much the same way as Israel extended a war against a terrorist enemy, the PLO, into an attempt to reshape Lebanese politics and identity, the US extended the logic of a justified war against al-Qaida into launching an effort to transform the entire region—beginning with Iraq—under the banner of destroying tyranny. In retrospect, questions persist as to the legitimacy of this undertaking, which cost the US taxpayers over two trillion dollars and claimed the lives of 4,497 Americans.

CONTROVERSIAL WARS

Wars of choice are controversial by nature. For the first time in Israel's history, domestic protests against Operation Peace for Galilee broke out before the fighting had subsided. The scope of the public protest was illustrated by a demonstration of 400,000 people in September 1982 (the actual number may have been lower), following the massacre perpetrated by Israel's local allies in the Sabra and Shatila camps. Also, a few protest movements were established, such as "Parents Against Silence," which sought to express the pointlessness in continuing the war and to protest the rising death toll among the IDF soldiers. Other movements, such as "Yesh Gvul," encouraged IDF soldiers to refuse to serve in the Lebanese front. To a large extent, the Israeli withdrawal to the "security zone" in 1985 manifested a growing

recognition of the centrality of social and political constraints and their impact on the IDF's military strategy, as well as the futility of the broader plan of intervention following Bashir Gemayel's assassination by Syrian agents. After the IDF's withdrawal to the security zone, as long as the number of casualties among IDF soldiers was tolerable, Israel's presence in Southern Lebanon—and the conflict with Hezbollah—gained support among the Israeli public. Therefore, between 1985–1995 there was no real pressure to withdraw from the security zone. However, from 1995 onward, the average death toll began to rise and reached its peak during 1997. The mounting casualties led to the establishment of the “Four Mothers” organization, which increased the public pressure for a unilateral withdrawal.

In a similar fashion, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan received overwhelming bipartisan support from both national leaders and the American public for as long as it seemed to achieve a purpose. In 2002 the popularity of the war reached its peak, given the military successes of the coalition forces against the Taliban. However, the beginning of the nation-building phase marked the start of the declining public support for the war.

As a matter of fact, until 2009, most of the American public's attention was focused on the war in Iraq, in which greater resources were invested. As the gradual US withdrawal from

Iraq progressed, the American public once again turned its focus to Afghanistan. Following the two deadliest months for US troops, opposition to the war in Afghanistan grew steadily, with most of the American public opposing it by August 2009. Following the killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011, most Americans (64%) believed that the war was no longer worth fighting. Ten year later, 70% supported President Biden's decision to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan.

SINKING IN THE SWAMPS

Von Clausewitz claimed that there is no logic in extending wars beyond the minimum that is required, but both the US and Israel didn't get the memo. In the Israeli case, the stay in the security zone was intended to protect the towns and villages in Northern Israel against terrorist attacks from Southern Lebanon, so it can be perceived, at least during its first years, as serving a vital interest. But during the mid-1990s, the IDF activity in the security zone became mainly defensive, and soldiers were killed while passively manning fortified outposts. Ironically, the unofficial mission of the forces was to protect themselves and avoid being killed. This, together with the mounting casualties during operational accidents, led to a public sense of sinking in the “Lebanese swamp” and intensified the pressure—supported by senior IDF officials—to withdraw from Lebanon.

As for the American case, by the end of November 2001, the Taliban had been defeated and driven from power. The US could have withdrawn its forces from Afghanistan immediately afterward and let local forces take charge. Doing so would have enabled the US to avoid any nation-building effort that ultimately meant its sinking again into a bloody Vietnam-style swamp, for the sake of a purpose whose viability was questionable. Another possible successful exit point from the war was May 2, 2011, after the killing of bin Laden; that opportunity, however, was also set aside in hopes of stabilizing Afghanistan.

As the gradual US withdrawal from Iraq progressed, the American public once again turned its focus to Afghanistan.

THE BUILDING AND COLLAPSE OF LOCAL ARMIES

Following its 1985 partial withdrawal from Lebanon, Israel established the South Lebanon Army (SLA) in the security zone. An allied militia of 2,500 members, it was composed of local Lebanese, mainly former members of the “Free Lebanon” forces, largely from Shiite communities who had been long abused by the Palestinians during their years of control in the south. Israel was responsible for equipping the SLA, which bore a large share of the fighting against Hezbollah and, to a lesser extent, against Amal. At the same time, Israel was pouring in aid for the development of Southern Lebanon, and Lebanese—mostly relatives of the SLA members—crossed the border daily into Israel for work.

In 1999, given the growing public pressure, the newly elected Israeli prime minister, Ehud Barak, announced that the IDF would retreat from the security zone within a year. Upon learning of the impending withdrawal planned for July 2000, Hezbollah organized civilian processions toward SLA outposts as early as May 2000. The SLA members began to abandon their positions, escaping with their families to Israel in order to obtain asylum. Soon the entire organization collapsed, without a single shot being fired. During the years to follow, many criticisms were heard, both among SLA members and in the IDF, according to which Israel provided shelter only to senior commanders of the SLA, although, as a matter of fact, a few thousand members and their families had settled in Israel.

As for the Afghan parallel, after ending the main combat operations, the coalition forces started focusing on the nation-building mission. According to the new counterinsurgency approach, the various administrations had invested 131.3 billion dollars in reconstruction activities in Afghanistan, in order to win the hearts and minds of the local population. Additionally, the US had invested 80 billion dollars in building and equipping the Afghan

National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF).

Despite the massive investment, the fact that the corrupt and polarized Afghan government, as well as the poorly motivated Afghan forces, constituted a broken barrel was well known to different administrations; the flow of aid continued, however. President Bush, as well as President Obama, expressed their disappointment with the ANDSF’s ability to deal effectively with the remaining terrorist strongholds. The Afghan government proved incapable of extending its control over large parts of the country, enabling the Taliban to regroup and begin a guerilla insurgency that grew increasingly effective. Moreover, it was clear that the Afghan government alone would not be able to bear the costs of making the ANDSF strong enough to resist the heavily armed Taliban. As early as October 2020, when it was officially announced that the US would withdraw from Afghanistan, many Afghans, especially those who served as interpreters and liaisons in the Afghan and American armies, sought to find any way of leaving the country. Many of those who cooperated with the US military worked for months to obtain asylum in the US, but the Biden administration was slow to recognize the urgent need to help them, hence the chaotic (and ultimately heroic) scenes at Kabul Airport in August 2021.

HASTY WITHDRAWALS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

In light of the quick collapse of the SLA, Prime Minister Barak decided to advance the withdrawal in order to minimize the risk for the IDF troops. With a 24-hour notice, the withdrawal took place on the night of May 24, 2000 and was carried out in total chaos. Although many sided with it in principle, the way the withdrawal was accomplished left a bitter taste among the Israeli public. Although the IDF conducted controlled explosions of some of its outposts, some of them remained unharmed and during the hasty retreat, heavy weaponry, as well as secret documents, were left

behind. Hezbollah and other organizations that moved into the former security zone captured the abandoned arsenal, which included D-9s bulldozers, trucks, communication equipment, some mortars, tons of ammunition, fuel and other items, as well as all SLA weapons and tanks.

One can claim that the Palestinians had interpreted the Israeli withdrawal as a surrender to stubborn military pressure, and therefore had inspired the Second Intifada (in essence, a campaign of terror directed from above), which broke out only four months later. Many Palestinian leaders, such as Yasser Arafat, as well as Hamas leaders, such as Ahmad Yasin, claimed that the IDF withdrawal from South Lebanon “proved” that the Israelis understood only the language of force.

A similar sequence occurred with the dramatic nighttime abandonment of the US air base at Bagram on July 5, 2021. It set in motion a collapse not unlike that of the SLA in 2000. Contrary to American intelligence estimates, the Taliban rapidly took over the cities from which American forces withdrew. After the fall of Kabul on August 15, President Biden decided to complete the withdrawal by August 31, almost two weeks earlier than planned. The images of thousands of Afghans, including women and children, flocking to the Karzai International Airport and hanging desperately onto Western aircraft, as well as of US military equipment captured by the Taliban, have shocked the international community and deepened the sense of purposelessness as the ultimate outcome of the 22-year long American stay in the country.

Although the US forces destroyed dozens of vehicles and aircraft during the withdrawal, the Taliban still seized valuable military equipment, such as Black Hawk helicopters, drones, and light aircraft. Additionally, the Afghan Security Forces abandoned their weapons, and many soldiers were captured by the Taliban. It already appears that the rapid takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban is strengthening the motivation

of Islamic jihadist organizations, such as the Islamic State (Da’esh), to boost their activities, as exemplified by the attack on the Karzai Airport in the midst of the retreat.

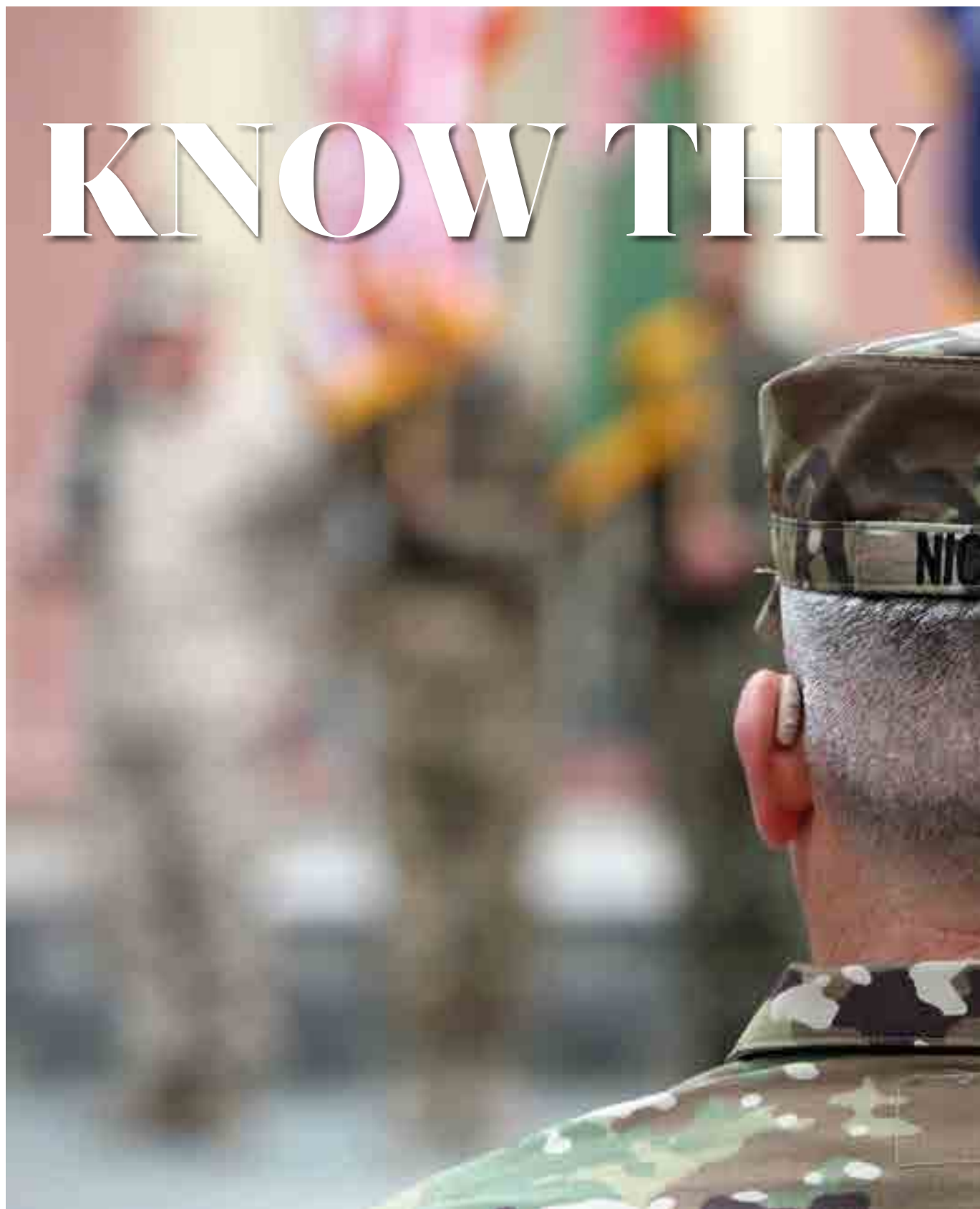
CONCLUSION

The US, as well as Israel, paid a heavy price in blood, treasure, and perceived deterrence during their stays on foreign soil. Despite the obvious differences in their goals and in the character of the conflicts described above, the similarities stand out and demand close attention, in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes. The unachievable aims, the reluctance to withdraw, the postponement of the decision even in the face of the loss of purpose, and ultimately the disorderly manner in which these withdrawals were finally carried out left their rivals stronger, both militarily and morally. It can be assumed that at least in the coming decades, the Afghanistan Syndrome will shape American foreign policy, similar to the way that the Lebanon Syndrome has shaped Israeli foreign policy during the aftermath of the withdrawal, generating a reluctance to take and hold enemy areas, which was felt keenly during the Second Lebanon War in 2006, and is still coloring the planning and policy choices in Gaza even today. *

PNINA SHUKER

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KNOW THY



PARTNER



Commander of US forces in Afghanistan, Army General John Nicholson, attends a change of command ceremony in Kabul, 2016. Photo credit: REUTERS/Rahmat Gul

BY AMIR OREN

Sun Tzu summed it up neatly when he spoke about knowing oneself and knowing one's enemy. Like most truisms, this one is less complex than reality. The landscapes of war and conflict are also populated by partners, and a failure to know what they need can be costly. Israel found this out, to its chagrin, in Lebanon and elsewhere. Most recently, the lesson was learned—not for the first time—by the US in Afghanistan. At issue—in terms of the work of intelligence services—is a version of an ancient question, this time a Roman warning: Who is assessing the assessors—and what happens when one is too close to the subject of the assessment.

As it happens, military staff assessment of partners tends to fall into a historical crack. The classic division of labor in military staffs, from the 19th century onward, has emphasized staff officers' duty to help their chief, the commander, by being his extensions. The commander cannot be everywhere constantly. He should not be deluged by minor details, and he should be both up-to-date and free to concentrate on strategic issues. In the Western model now common, at all levels—from field units to high command—a traditional order holds. 1 is for Personnel, which used to be called manpower when there were mostly men in uniform. 2 is for Intelligence, hence G-2 and the Deuxieme Bureau. 3 is for Operations, and 4 is for Logistics or Materiel.

Operations—3—had been and may still be the most senior branch: The essence of any military formation is the action it produces per the commander's order. Personnel and logistics

are resources to be generated, maintained, and adapted to the relevant missions. Data about these must be collated and presented to the decision makers, lest they err and either think they do not have enough or overextend themselves without the reserves they were led to believe they had; hence the first part of Sun Tzu's dictum.

The consequences of failure in this respect can be strategic. In the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel—based on its lightning success in 1967—complacently stocked up for less than a week's worth of fighting. When it turned out that the war would be much longer, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was desperate for reinforcements, begging Washington for F-4 Phantom fighter bombers (by the war's end, it had some 100 fighter bombers, but only 70 aircrew to fly them), tanks, and artillery shells. As for the latter, however, the IDF failed to realize there were enough of them between storage facilities and the front: The false impression led to panic and diplomatic disadvantage. "Know thyself" failed in a relatively simple, quantitative measure, in addition to the difficult qualitative ones.

"Know thy enemy" used to be a secondary mission, and therein lies a sad lesson. In the British model, emulated by the IDF in 1948, G-3 was the leading branch, whose chief was the de facto number 2 after the chief of general staff and who filled in for him during any long absences for health reasons. Intelligence was a mere department within the Operations branch, coequal with Planning and Training.

It was Moshe Dayan—the IDF's fourth chief of staff, an unconventional commander and thinker charged by Prime Minister (and Defense Minister) Ben-Gurion with the mission of transforming it into a more effective force—who



It is surely not a coincidence that a cable warning of a fast collapse of the Afghan government came from State Department diplomats and not military officers.

Canadian soldiers during patrol in southern Afghanistan, 2009. Photo credit: REUTERS/Stefano Rellandini

plucked Intelligence out of its third-tier status as a department and elevated it into a coequal branch of the general staff. He did so for two main reasons.

Firstly, early warning was a crucial component in Israel's defense doctrine. With a skeletal group of career officers and a small compulsory service standing force, the IDF was to be beefed up in wartime by reserves taken out of the country's civilian workforce (who needed to return to work as soon as possible, serving as an incentive to wage short and decisive campaigns). The national leadership would therefore have to be forewarned just in time that Arab armies were converging around the small, narrow territory of the Jewish state. The key was "just in time," rather than the wasteful "just in case" full-scale

regular army, which would have been beyond Israel's meagre means. Israel therefore expected its watchstanders to alert it neither too soon nor too late. A false alarm, often repeated, would be almost as harmful as a missed one. It became imperative to invest in intelligence disproportionately, by putting the best talents and tools there, to collect raw information and supply higher authorities with distilled assessments.

Secondly, although intelligence may have been divorced from operations writ large, successful collection required an operational system of its own. Whether this meant contacts by case officers recruiting spies, or deep penetration behind enemy lines to plant listening and transmitting devices, these were operational efforts no less than manoeuvring an armor battalion into

position. To initiate, manage, and supervise them, operations-oriented officers, not only academically-inclined ones, were needed at the new Directorate of Military Intelligence.

In the competitive climate of the military, this meant—in turn—that an esprit de corps emerged in various disciplines within Intelligence. One of these was Liaison, clandestine contacts with a wide range of partners—including groups, movements, and militias in countries of concern to Israel—with the potential to distract enemy regimes from sending expeditionary forces to fight it. This was the rationale, for example, behind helping the Kurds to fight Iraqi oppressors over what was then a friendly Iranian border. Elsewhere, there was hope of secretly grooming moderates to take over and put an end to hostilities.

The benefits of such liaison, however, come with a cost. Those who build these bridges are often keen to state, or overstate, their value. In a bureaucracy, it is natural for each component to protect its power and prestige, emanating from its hold over a certain specialty. The punchline in an old Israeli comedy routine has three lakeside idling anglers asking themselves, “does a fisherman love fish?” Well, it’s complicated. Whoever is fishing for intelligence develops a certain bond with his prey, like the proverbial Rommel’s picture on Montgomery’s wall. In liaising with outside groups, whether done through attaches, foreign area officers, or diplomats, the affliction known as “localitis”—an inflammation of sympathy for the local client—can overcome the most hardened immune systems. Chaperones become champions. The fish catch the fishermen.

This leaves a gap: Being external to the force, partners are not assessed by the operational side nor are they subject to an honest intelligence-based net assessment. Policymakers do not encourage staffers to bring them inconvenient truths, and oftentimes, at the working level, they are not considered truths. When this reality is not two-dimensional (American–Soviet, Israel–Egypt) but must factor in partners and proxies, the cold calculus is thrown even more out of sync.





The skeptics were proven right on all counts.

Bashir Gemayel (left) and Ariel Sharon (2nd right) in 1982. Photo credit: IDF Spokesperson's Unit

A case in point is Israel's Lebanon policy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Begin government threw in its lot with Lebanese Christians, including the Maronites and especially with one of the competing militias, the Phalange Lebanese Forces under Bashir Gemayel. He, his lieutenants, and his troops were met on both sides of the border and hosted in Israeli training ranges, where they had long philosophical talks with their mentors, impressing them as urbane and sophisticated, yet determined to free Beirut of Syrian rule and Palestinian interference. Gemayel and his associates were so convincing that an entire war plan was created around them. Named "Spark," it had the IDF invading South Lebanon in response to Palestinian shelling of Israeli towns—pretext to be supplied—and within a week or so of heavy lifting suitable to a military machine, the Lebanese Forces linked up with the Israelis, fighting on and liberating their capital, with Gemayel then elected president and presumably signing peace with Israel.

This time around, the advocates came from the Mossad, which had been in charge of the daily interaction with the Maronites. Its operatives wholeheartedly vouched for Gemayel and his associates. When the head of the Intelligence branch disputed the rosy assessment, he was waved off as jealous of Mossad privileges and was bypassed by his deputy, who sought to curry favor with the IDF's chief of staff (who, in turn, firmly believed in the utility of the intervention in Lebanon, in line with the political echelon, particularly Defense Minister Ariel Sharon).

His skeptics were proven right on all counts. The Lebanese Forces, whose fighting was supposed to limit Israeli casualties and preserve public support of this avoidable war, did not translate their bravado into bravery. They had many explanations but not a lot of fighting spirit. Reports of massacres committed by them and ordered by their leaders became more frequent. When Gemayel was elected, he shocked Begin by telling him that circumstances had changed, and he would not sign the coveted peace treaty.

This did not prevent the Syrians from ordering his assassination: His followers then went on a rampage in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, killing hundreds of Palestinians and destroying whatever hope Begin had of salvaging his war and his power.

The Lebanon War was planned long in advance, in several iterations. Planners considered Syrian moves, Palestinian reactions, American views under Carter and then Reagan, and Egyptian resentment after Sadat's assassination. These were major factors, mostly outside Israel's control. Gemayel's political movement and barbaric militia were seemingly best understood and predicted; but they were not, because many of the very intelligence officers who were supposed to assess their capabilities and intentions could not detach themselves enough for an objective opinion.

Apparently, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces felt abandoned by their American trainers and advisors. It may run against human nature and professional pride to admit that your life's work is worthless, that when push (or Pashtun) comes to shove, your comrades-at-arms will disintegrate much like the French Army of 1940, Hitler's allies in Stalingrad, the ARVN of South Vietnam in 1975, and the Iraqi Army of 2003 and 2014.

It is surely not a coincidence that a cable warning of a fast collapse of the Afghan government came from State Department diplomats and not military officers, and that the only constant critic of the effectiveness of the entire Afghan effort has been SIGAR, the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction. They were not in the chain of command, had no axe (or ex) to grind, and no emotional attachment to the projects they were supposed to assess. Such attachment is definitely in order when saving Afghan friends and collaborators, hiding them and spiriting them to safety, but not when evaluating their performance.

Much like third-party insurance, third-party intelligence should be reviewed and acquired by those who do not have a vested interest in such



Taliban fighters stand guard near the Sardar Mohammad Dawood Khan military hospital in Kabul on November 2, 2021. Photo by Wakil Kohsar/AFP

partners. The Afghan lesson need not be lost; after all, it began with a successful, limited, and focused hook-up with the Northern Alliance. Nation-propping illusions set in later.

Israel, too, has recovered from its unrealistic hopes that the Palestinian Authority's security forces could be adequate in fighting common enemies, such as Hamas. In 2007, Fatah movement members, the backbone of the PA's forces, quickly crumbled under the onslaught of a smaller but more cohesive Hamas force in Gaza. Some Israeli analysts warned, a year earlier, that Hamas could win an election. Practically none had seen this Fatah debacle coming. In this, as in the Afghan case, the inescapable conclusion is that getting it right in two out of three (know the enemy, know yourself—but not thy partner) isn't bad—it's often catastrophic. *

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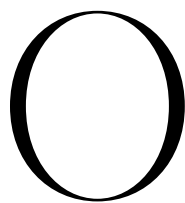
PFLP-GC members in front of their flag during a rally in Shatila, Beirut. Photo credit: Karine Pierre / Hans Lucas via Reuters Connect

THE LOST AHMAD



BATTLE OF JIBRIL

BY KSENIA SVETLOVA



On July 7, 2021, a few hundred Palestinians gathered to attend a funeral at Yarmouk refugee camp cemetery, on the outskirts of Damascus. They came to say their farewells to Ahmad Jibril, the notorious secretary general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, a man who embodied throughout his life a fruitless effort of Palestinian terrorist organizations to break or weaken Israel. In a symbolic fashion, his passing marked the end of an era.

Jibril opposed the very existence of Israel. He rejected the idea of negotiating with Israel and never accepted the idea of recognizing Israel. During two decades—the '70s and '80s—he planned and orchestrated multiple plane hijackings and attacks on Israeli civilians, which he described as “heroic.” Years before Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad were established, Jibril was the innovator and trendsetter among other terrorist organizations. His PFLP-GC was the first to use “living bombs” and to find a justification for suicide bombings in Muslim jurisprudence. In 1982 his organization demanded the release of 1,182 Palestinian and international prisoners in exchange for captured Israelis, setting a precedent that came to haunt Israel more than once since then. Who was this man who had dedicated his life to Israel’s extermination but ended up with the shadowy remnants of his once-proud organization fighting with Bashar Assad’s army against other Palestinians in Yarmouk camp and dying an old

man—of natural reasons, not in battle—with his purpose being as unattainable as ever?

LIVING IN THE PAST

At the end of June 2006, I was sitting in a deep leather armchair in a small office based in Yarmouk refugee camp, waiting for an interview with Ahmad Jibril. The emblems of the PFLP-GC and its flag—a green patch of land that included Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza with rifles and the words “struggle, return, liberation” on its sides—were everywhere. A man with white hair and a moustache had entered the room. No bodyguards were present, even though this man had long starred on the list of most wanted terrorists of both Israel and US (Israel once intercepted a Syrian executive plane hoping to capture Jibril, but it turned out to be an embarrassing case of mistaken identity). A few years later a high-ranking Israeli military official told me that there were times when Israel sought Jibril’s photo in order to develop his full profile and couldn’t get it. By 2006 Jibril was feeling safe enough (or irrelevant enough) to receive foreign journalists in his office. Not that many of them came here; since the days of the Oslo Accords, Jibril’s organization was mostly popular in Palestinian refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon, while Fatah and Hamas came to dominate the PA areas. Still, the general secretary of the PFLP-GC was happy to talk about the “good old days,” when the name of his organization evoked fear and anxiety in Israel and around the globe.

He was born in the town of Yazur (today Israel’s Azur) in 1938 (according to other sources he was born in Ramle in 1935) to a Palestinian mother and Syrian father. When the war of 1948 began, his family moved to Syria, where he was raised in Homs and served in the Syrian army,



The Palestinian public chooses not to play into the hands of their Iranian sponsors.
Ahmad Jibril at a meeting of Palestinian factions in Tehran, 2010. Photo credit: REUTERS/Morteza Nikoubazi

until he got expelled for sympathizing with the Communists. He later abandoned Marxist ideologies and broke with the Palestinian left doctrinaire for the sake of militant Palestinian nationalism.

After a decade of involvement with the PFLP and playing a role in Arafat's takeover of the PLO, in 1968 Jibril splintered off and formed a radical pro-Syrian faction, the PFLP-GC. During the 1970s, when Palestinian terrorist organizations were operating freely from South Lebanon, Jibril's organization—believing that the PLO leadership was “too soft”—had committed several massacres, notably the Avivim school bus massacre in 1970 and the Kiryat Shmona massacre in 1974. During that interview in Damascus in 2006, Jibril's eyes practically lit

when he spoke of the Kiryat Shmona “operation” (the terrorists who arrived from South Lebanon had entered a residential building and massacred 18 men, women, and children).

“Resistance is the natural right of our people against the cruel occupier. At one point we decided in the organization that during the ‘operations,’ it is forbidden to waste time on planning escape routes to save our people, but we do not call it suicide, because it is not suicide but rather a sacrifice. There were those who criticized us, because in Islam suicide is forbidden—but we found a reference to the fact that heroic actions, such as the action our heroes performed in Kiryat Shmona, are not considered suicide but *istishad* (self-sacrifice for the sake of Allah). Our heroes are martyrs and not suicides.



“The good old days” for Jibril’s PFLP-GC. The Avvim school bus massacre in 1970.
Photo credit: Moshe Milner/GPO

Then other organizations adopted our path as well,” Jibril said proudly, and I felt a freezing chill despite the choking summer heat.

There was no need, nor any chance to pose another question, as this angry old man continued to talk vigorously about the past, attacking Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas for abandoning the path of armed resistance, and praising his own heroism and determination. He was looking at me, but it seemed as if in his imagination he had returned to the past, when he was young, powerful, and dangerous.

JIBRIL’S CUL-DE-SAC

Even when Ahmad Jibril’s organization was at its prime, it had always remained a more violent and militant opposition to mainstream Palestinian politics. “The rebellious youth in the Gaza Strip and in all cities of the West Bank and occupied Jerusalem, will continue all forms of popular resistance until the occupation responds to the

demands of the Palestinian people,” Khaled al-Batsh, a member of the Political Bureau of the Islamic Jihad movement said, eulogizing Ahmad Jibril. The common denominator between al-Batsh, one of the leaders of Islamic Jihad, and Jibril’s PFLP-GC is that Iran has supported and financed both organizations. This close affiliation with Tehran and Damascus was never accepted and understood by the Palestinian street, even by those who believed that armed resistance is the only path to freedom. “We, the Palestinians, are alone in this world. So if Syria and Iran want to help us—we will tell them ‘ahlan wa sahlan,’ you are welcome,” he told me back then in 2006.

As Jibril was fantasizing about “Iranian soldiers marching all the way to Jerusalem” (in an interview to the Lebanese TV station Al Mayadeen in 2017), he clearly separated himself from the vast majority of the Palestinians who never expressed any interest in Iran’s help or support for their cause and resented the

idea of being marionettes for someone else's struggle. "A sworn enemy of Israel and of the Syrian revolution," is how the Qatari Al Jazeera described the leader of PFLP-GC in its obituary piece. Looking for sponsors and supporters, Palestinian organizations often became a tool for foreign states and intelligence organizations, at times fighting for foreign causes and against fellow Palestinians. The USSR, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt, and Iran all exploited the Palestinian cause for their own benefit and played the Palestinian card against other states in the grand geopolitical game. However, in recent years, it was Ahmad Jibril who completely aligned himself with Assad's regime, which was slaughtering fellow Palestinians at Yarmouk camp, and who praised the controversial Iranian involvement in Palestinian affairs.

Spending his whole life away from Palestine and fighting on behalf of other people (although he had a chance to go back after the Oslo agreements as Arafat and his comrades did), Jibril no longer was receptive to the actual hopes and aspirations of Palestinian people, who were dreaming of freedom but also of normal life and prosperity. During the last 25 years, despite the disappointment of Oslo and the distrust of the other side, the majority of Palestinians still express significant support for a two-state solution, although the numbers are gradually diminishing due to the political impasse and dissatisfaction with the PA.

Despite the many attempts of Hamas and Islamic Jihad to ignite a new intifada in the West Bank, the Palestinian public—time and again—chooses not to play into the hands of their Iranian sponsors, who are only interested in creating another hotspot in the Middle East and in projecting their influence.

While listening to Jibril's bragging about his organization's "innovations," such as the suicide bombers or use of gliders (in 1987 PFLP-GC terrorists used gliders to cross the border from Lebanon), I was thinking that this old man, who had dedicated his life and the lives of his many supporters to death and killing, had miserably lost the battle. While he was busy producing advanced terror techniques and

sending the bill to the Syrian regime, Israel was busy generating real innovations, in medicine, science, and high tech. His political and military career had reached a cul-de-sac as his violent operations—terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens and plane hijackings—never gained him massive support even among the Palestinian public and did not promote the Palestinian cause of liberation and the establishment of an independent state even by one inch. His violent activity did not weaken Israel, and today the Jewish state is much more powerful—and accepted by much of the Arab world—than it was a few decades ago, when the PFLP-GC committed massacres. Jibril died in Damascus, forgotten by the majority of the Palestinian public, who was put off by his cooperation with Iran and Assad's regime and by his legacy, which was nothing but blood and suffering.

Ahmad Jibril's radical variant of secular nationalist violence died or withered well before him. Other offshoots of George Habash's original PFLP are now small and marginal as well, although they are still capable of occasional acts of terror. It is today Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which took up a different, essentially religious justification for terrorism, who promote the values of "fighting till doomsday" and maintain the bulk of violent activities. All opinion polls show, however, that support for the groups drops when there is a hope for a political settlement for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Ahmad Jibril bet on violence. It's up to Israel, the Palestinian leadership, the moderate Arab countries, and the US to promote the other way through diplomacy and offer the Palestinians the prospect of a better life. *

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LITERATURE REVIEW: BAD NEWS—IN TIME

BY ERAN LERMAN

*Warning Lights, Secret Talks with Amos Gilead,*¹
by Shimon Shiffer. Yedioth Ahronoth, 2019.

It has been 20 years now since I left military service, having served several years as General Amos Gilead’s “assistant for assessments” (i.e., his deputy for political and strategic analysis). One pithy dictum that we hung on the walls in some of our offices still lingers in my mind. “Soldiers of the Directorate of Military Intelligence, the people of Israel expect from you good news soon. And bad news—in time.”

No one represents the verity of this need for early warning (*hatra’ah*, in Hebrew), in the full sense of the word, better than Amos Gilead, who served in the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) until 2001. He went on to become the head of the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories and then the highly influential director of the politico-military wing of the Ministry of Defense, the counterpart of the US Defense Department’s undersecretary for policy. This is a book of conversations with him, each one recorded and prefaced with some comments by one of Israel’s best known journalists, Shimon Shiffer. It delves into some of the most profound—and troubling—issues



Amos Gilead (center) during a meeting with Ehud Barak and US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, in 2009. Photo credit: Molly A. Burgess/U.S. Navy via Wikimedia Commons)

in modern Israeli history through the personal perspective of a man who was in the room where decisions were made again and again. He came armed with an intelligence officer's powers of observation and analysis, and with an unwavering moral compass; Shiffer, a friend, lends him a sympathetic ear. Currently unavailable in English, this is a key primary source for any attempt to understand Israeli policy in the last 40 years. Many of the themes that emerge are closely related to the questions and challenges discussed in other essays and columns in the present issue of *The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*; but Gilead's historical perspective adds punch and poignance to the message.

To begin with—although the book starts with Israel's Lebanese tragedy 14 years earlier—Gilead takes credit, justifiably so, for the annual national intelligence assessment of 1996, rewritten in his own emphatic style within days after he took over as head of the Research Division from General Yaakov Amidror. For the first time, and amidst many other challenges, this document forcefully stated that the Islamist revolutionary regime in Iran had positioned itself as Israel's most significant enemy. The young, newly elected prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, asked Gilead to see him soon afterward and informed him that he had endorsed and internalized the implications of this analysis. This set in motion, in turn, a



This was no intifada—uprising from below—but a terror campaign directed from above.
Fatah supporters rally in Gaza, December 2000. Photo credit: Reuters

course of action—both diplomatic and covert—that has remained central to Israeli policy for a full generation since then, as evidenced most recently by Prime Minister Bennett’s September 2021 speech at the UN General Assembly.

Gilead’s existential dread regarding Iran reflects a broader fear of radical ideologies, particularly those that ignite and feed upon religious fervor and leave no room for real compromises (as distinct from short-term tactical withdrawals). He is bluntly dismissive of those in Israel and in the West, who somehow have persuaded themselves that such people and movements really want a good normal life like all of us: No, they do not. To him, it is a travesty to try and dismiss the commitment of the present Iranian regime to the obliteration of Israel, or the danger inherent in the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in a key country such as Egypt. Hence his severe criticism of aspects

of President Barack Obama’s policies—albeit tempered with an equally angry attack on those in Israel who made their noisy quarrel with the US administration a matter of public record.

Gilead is not infallible, nor does he claim to be. The one point on which Shiffer challenges him is his public assessment in early 2003—prior to the American invasion of Iraq—that Saddam Hussein did hide immense and dangerous capabilities, which the fall of his regime would reveal. His response is that he was no longer an intelligence officer, and his predictions rested upon the assessment of practically every intelligence service in the West: We now know that Saddam was busy hiding the fact that he no longer had anything to hide.

Closer to our day—the book was published in 2019—Gilead at several points casts doubts about the prospect of any Arab countries beyond Egypt and Jordan crossing the threshold of

peace with Israel without a prior breakthrough with the Palestinians, which is what happened a year later with the Abraham Accords, contrary to his expectations. As he points out more than once, intelligence assessments, and any attempt to read the developments in a region as complex and dynamic as ours, need to be constantly reevaluated: Being right repeatedly can make you blind to your own mistakes, as happened to some of the key analysts of the Israeli Defense Ministry in looking at Egypt's actions in the run-up to the 1973 war.

Still, a combination of firm principles, a keen reading of the evidence, and powerful personal intuitions—and the book is replete with illustrations of all three, particularly the latter—can lead to the right assessments and the right decisions. Gilead is a firm, unwavering supporter of the “Begin Doctrine,” announced in 1981 as an explanation of the raid of the Israeli Air Force on the Iraqi nuclear facility, OSIRAK. He was intimately involved in aspects of the decision in 2007 to destroy the North Korean-built nuclear facility in Syria (and then, equally wisely to keep officially silent about it for years until the exposure in 2018, which he thinks was a mistake). He offers criticism of the almost-open dispute between Netanyahu and the defense establishment over the military option in Iran in 2010, and he clearly believes—as do others in this issue of the *JST*—that far-reaching measures are necessary to stop Iran in its present nuclear tracks.

On the matter of frankly assessing the capabilities and intentions of one's allies, the book offers a stark story regarding Israel's Maronite partners in Lebanon in 1982. Gilead, working closely with them, came to dislike them

We now know that Saddam was busy hiding the fact that he no longer had anything to hide.

intensely and to doubt their every word (and even more so, their claimed strength). Later, his blunt and bitter warning against letting them into the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, after the assassination of Bashir Gemayel in September 1982 made him both the star witness of the national commission of inquiry that investigated the massacre there as well as the enemy of powerful people in the defense establishment, who sought to destroy his credibility and his career. This chapter, which opens the book, is not a pleasant read, but it provides striking insight into the dynamics of delusion leading to outcomes such as that experienced by Israel in Lebanon (and the US in Afghanistan and Iraq).

Personal intuitions, gut likes, and dislikes are ultimately part of this story no less than the careful reading of the immense piles of incoming traffic from the collection agencies. Twice—in 1983, and even more dramatically in 1996—Gilead saved Israel from an unnecessary war due to his innate sense of the thinking of Hafez al-Asad—the risk-averse father, and not his reckless son who now rules and ruins Syria. In the latter case, this led to the incredible exposure of one of the Mossad's key agent runners—Yehuda Gil—as a total fraud, who invented detailed reports of an impending offensive presumably obtained from a Syrian general, whom he had never actually recruited (Gil consequently admitted and was sentenced to several years in jail).

A similar combination of careful analysis and moral revulsion (acutely aware of the Jewish people's tragic history, Gilead fiercely resents unrepentant terrorist murderers) led him to doubt Yasser Arafat's intentions, even in the heyday of the Oslo process. In 2000, both he and I warned that Arafat would seek a violent confrontation, which became all the more likely after the failure of the Camp David summit. As the violence indeed unfolded in the autumn of 2000, Gilead was convinced, confirmed by the evidence, that this was no intifada—uprising from below—but a terror campaign directed from above.

This distrust and dislike of Arafat does not translate, however, into a rejection of the two-state solution, which Gilead still sees as vital to Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic nation nor into a breach with other Palestinian leaders. With President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), Gilead built a cordial relationship, after he intervened as head of the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories to ensure that Abu Mazen's son, who died of natural causes in the Gulf, could be brought to burial in Ramallah. In the debate on these pages as to the prospects for a diplomatic solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Gilead would probably side with General Jones on the urgent need for it and with Dan Schueftan on the utter unlikelihood of a breakthrough.

Meanwhile, as he forcefully argues, it is absolutely vital to sustain good relations with both Egypt and Jordan. It has been a persistent aspect of Israel's policy in the region that day-to-day relations with both Cairo and Amman are largely managed—to the occasional dismay of both the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office—through Ministry of Defense channels. In practice, this made Gilead (and Zohar Palti, his successor in the policy wing of the Ministry of Defense) into one of Israel's most important diplomatic agents. He recounts the manner in which relations were built over the years with commanders and leaders in both countries, including Egypt's current president, Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi; no friend of Israel in his early years, al-Sisi learned to appreciate (as recently demonstrated) how important this relationship can be for the future of his country. Not surprisingly, Gilead quite bluntly argues that such leadership in the Arab world is preferable to a democratic experimentation that would merely pave the way—as with Hamas in 2006—to dominance by Islamist radicals who are not democrats at all.

One of the poignant moments of the book is his recollection of a lunch with an old but formidable Jordanian general—“91, but looking 50”—over kebabs in Tel Aviv, as they set down

to discuss the desperate and bloody fight for Jerusalem in 1948 (when his interlocutor commanded the artillery that shelled the city) and all that has happened since. Gilead, not a religious man, still admits a sense of the miraculous to such moments. I can personally attest to that. My late father, Israel Lerman, had been among the fighters in the Old City of Jerusalem and later a PoW in Jordan for nine months. Seeing him sit for a conversation with my personal friend, the Jordanian ambassador to Israel, at my daughter's wedding in 2014 conveyed much the same sense of elation.

Strangely, the book concludes with an unrelated document by another prominent Israeli, the late Major General Avraham (Abrasha) Tamir, who, as director general of the Foreign Ministry, was secretly sent by Shimon Peres in 1987 to meet first Arafat in Maputo, Mozambique, and then King Hussein of Jordan in a mountain chalet in Switzerland. Neither mission produced a breakthrough, but perhaps Shiffer saw fit to bring Tamir's overly optimistic text, verbatim, so as to counterbalance Gilead's pessimism about peace. This artificial adjunct detracts from the main theme of an otherwise excellent read, about the impact that a perspicacious intelligence officer had on his country's fortunes in peace and war. *

1. *Ha-Matri'ah: Sihat im ha-Aluf (bemil.)* Amos Gilead. The publisher offers as an English title “Warning Lights: Secret Talks with Amos Gilead,” but this does not capture the personal import of the term *ha-Matri'a*, “the forewarner.”

ERAN LERMAN

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