

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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local and international writings on the Middle East**

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Arab Spring: A blessing for Hamas

Khaled Abu Toameh, Gatestone Institute, 25 July 2012

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3196/arab-spring-hamas>

Hamas has good reason to be extremely happy with the "Arab Spring" that has been sweeping the Arab world for nearly two years: thanks to the "Arab Spring," Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal has, for the first time ever, entered the Presidential Palace in Cairo.

Until recently, Mashaal and other Hamas leaders were considered *personae non gratae* [unwelcome people] in both Jordan and Egypt.

Mashaal was ousted from Syria earlier this year because he refused to support Bashar Assad in his confrontation with the opposition, which is mostly dominated by Islamists. But Mashaal knows that it is only a matter of time before the "Arab Spring" sees Islamists take control over Syria, enabling him to become a welcome guest in the presidential palace in Damascus.

Last week, however, Mashaal was invited to a meeting with newly elected Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Mursi in the Palace of Ittihadiyah in the Egyptian capital.

Mashaal was the first Hamas representative ever to enter the palace. Prior to the downfall of Hosni Mubarak's regime, Mashaal and other Hamas leaders could only dream of the day when they would be received by an Egyptian president in his palace.

But the "Arab Spring," which had been hijacked by Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups in Tunisia and Egypt, has so far proven to be a blessing for Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, and now seeking to reap the fruits of the rise of Islamists to power in the Arab world.

Mashaal was invited to the Al-Ittihadiyah Palace one day after his rival, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, met with the new Egyptian president.

By meeting separately with Mashaal and Abbas, Mursi has created the impression that the Palestinians have two legitimate leaders. Even more, Mursi has put Mashaal on an equal footing with heads of state, thus granting legitimacy not only to the Hamas leader, but to his entire movement.

Also last week, the new Egyptian president surprised many Palestinians when he personally phoned a top Hamas official who had just been released from Israeli prison to offer his greetings.

Even the Hamas official, Abdel Aziz Dweik, expressed surprise at the phone call from the president of the largest Arab country.

According to Hamas sources, Mursi is also expected to meet soon with Hamas Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh, who has also been officially invited to the presidential palace in Cairo.

In a move that is expected to further embolden Hamas and tighten its grip on the Gaza Strip, Mursi is said to have promised the Islamist movement to ease travel restrictions imposed on residents of the Gaza Strip.

Another Arab leader who seems to be aware of the growing power of the Islamists in the Arab world is Jordan's King Abdullah.

Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood organization has already created enough trouble for the monarch. Exploiting demands for reform and democracy inspired by the "Arab Spring," some Muslim Brotherhood leaders and members are now working to undermine King Abdullah with the ultimate goal of turning the kingdom into an Islamist emirate.

The king is so worried that he recently invited Khaled Mashaal to his palace in Amman and asked him to use his good offices with Muslim Brotherhood to calm things down. King Abdullah is particularly concerned about calls by Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition groups to boycott parliamentary elections later this year.

The fact that the Jordanian king has to seek Hamas's help in restraining Muslim Brotherhood is a sign of the Islamist movement's increased influence in wake of the "Arab Spring."

While the "Arab Spring" has strengthened Hamas, it has at the same time dealt a severe blow to less radical Palestinians such as Mahmoud Abbas and Salam Fayyad.

Unless Abbas and Fayyad become members of Muslim Brotherhood or Hamas, the heroes of "Arab Spring" will continue to look at them as traitors and puppets in the hands of Israel and the US. The rising power of Hamas makes any talk about a peace process sound like a joke.

Red lines and deterrence

Yaakov Katz, Jerusalem Post, 24 July 2012

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=278665>

If Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak had a playbook, the strategy being used to prevent the proliferation of Syria's chemical weapons would be taken straight out of the chapter on Iran.

Even if Israel ultimately decides not to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, there is no question that Jerusalem's saber-rattling has played a critical role in getting the international community to crack down on the Islamic Republic with additional economic sanctions.

Israel seems to be using the same tactic in its efforts to prevent Hezbollah from getting its hands on Syria's chemical weapons. By threatening to take military action, Israel hopes it ultimately will not have to. The same has been the case with Iran.

This does not mean the threats are not real, and it seems Israel is prepared to use force to prevent Hezbollah from receiving advanced military capabilities. If this happens, however, it would constitute a dramatic shift in Israeli strategic thinking and in the metaphorical "red lines" that the country has abided by for 64 years.

Until now, Israel has been willing to go to war either when it anticipated that its enemies were on the verge of attacking – as in 1967 – or to prevent them from obtaining a nuclear capability, as it did when it attacked the reactors in Iraq in 1981 and Syria in 2007. In both of those cases, presumably the defense establishment was prepared for the possibility that the strikes would lead to a full-fledged war.

Thankfully, they did not.

This basically means that until now, Israel has been willing to tolerate a military buildup by its enemies, with a nuclear capability serving as the "red line." However, with the threats coming out of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv over the past week, it seems the line might be moving up to chemical weapons or even to advanced and conventional missile systems that Syria could transfer to Hezbollah.

Why would these systems make a difference for Israel? With chemical weapons, the answer seems obvious – Israel fears that Hezbollah, a terrorist group, would use these weapons of mass destruction against it.

On the other hand, why did Israel not try to stop Syria, a country that has always supported terrorism, from establishing the capability in the 1970s the way it later stopped Damascus's nuclear program? In this case, the answer might be that Syria, a state, is a rationale actor, one that can be deterred. The same, according to this line of thinking, would not apply to Hezbollah – a rogue, non-state actor.

This argument, however, might be flawed considering the past six years of quiet along Israel's border with Lebanon and the fact that senior IDF officers publicly declare that Hezbollah is being deterred from acting against Israel today.

Therefore, it might be the case that if Hezbollah obtains chemical weapons or advanced surface-to-air missiles, the opposite will happen – Israel will be the one deterred from taking action, losing the operational freedom it has today.

Take, for example, the following scenario – a soldier is abducted along the border with Lebanon and Israel wants to retaliate. Hezbollah warns that if the IDF invades it will launch chemical weapons into Israel. This has been one of Israel's traditional arguments against allowing Iran to obtain a nuclear capability. It is not a threat just because of the possibility that one day a long-range ballistic missile with a nuclear warhead will be fired into downtown Tel Aviv, but due to the nuclear arms race it will set off in the region and because it will impair and undermine Israel's operational freedom.

That argument is now being used regarding Syria and Hezbollah.

Israel and Hezbollah: Preparing for war?

Jonathan Doc Habany, Jewish Policy Centre, 19 July 2012

<http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/blog/2012/07/israel-and-hezbollah-preparing-for-war>

Following a long period of relative calm, the level of tension on Israel's northern border is now at its highest since the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Although the past six years in the region have been among the quietest since the 1970s, the IDF considers the current situation a worrying silence. According to Israeli military officials, this reality should not allow Israel to become complacent, and the army remains ready for every possible scenario including a new confrontation with Hezbollah. As Israeli Brigadier-General Hertzi Halevy said on July 5: "The IDF is preparing seriously and professionally for another Lebanon war, the response will need to be sharper, harder, and in some ways very violent".

Halevy's interview with the Israeli media was one of four given by a senior officer from the Northern Command in two weeks. The unusually high frequency of interviews given by such highly ranked officials suggests that the IDF is responding to developments over the border. These words are not only addressed to Israeli ears, but are particularly aimed at Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, warning him against provoking Israel. The officers' warnings come on the heels of threats sent recently to Israel by the organization in South Lebanon and Nasrallah himself. In May 2012, Nasrallah proclaimed that Hezbollah has the ability to strike anywhere in Israel, and in February 2012 he promised to murder Israeli officials to avenge Imad Mughniyah's assassination. Furthermore, a number of incidents committed by Hezbollah -- including a series of attempted terror attacks against Israeli targets around the world, most

recently in Cyprus, and continued reconnaissance activities on the Israeli-Lebanese border -- have raised tensions in northern Israel.

When it comes to the possibility of a future conflict, however, current regional crises will likely influence Hezbollah. In June 2012, the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center published a report emphasizing the generous support Hezbollah receives from the Iranian regime in cooperation with Syria. Currently, however, this 'holy' triangle -- with Iran at the head as the financial power, Syria as the logistical liaison, and Hezbollah as the operative player -- is weakening due to sanctions imposed by the West on Iran and Syria's escalating internal violence.

According to Yoram Schweitzer and Oz Gertner of the Israel-based Institute for National Security Studies, when the need arises Hezbollah may get a direct order from Tehran to engage in provocative actions against Israel, which could potentially escalate into war. In addition, a collapse of the Syrian regime might lead to transfers of game-changing weapons to Hezbollah from Syria -- a situation that would likely oblige the IDF to act. Since 2006, Hezbollah has focused on rebuilding its military capabilities and members lost during that summer's war. These developments, discussed in a July 2010 intelligence report published by the IDF spokesman, include an estimated unprecedented arsenal of 60,000 rockets and medium range missiles -- 10 times more the weaponry than the terror group possessed during the Second Lebanon War.

Hezbollah plays a dual role in Lebanon, as both a guerrilla organization and a strong national political player involved in government. As a terror organization, Hezbollah has used the past six years to focus on regaining its position as a regional military opponent to Israel, and currently maintains an independent military power which is comparable to a national army. All the while, Nasrallah's organization is active in Lebanese national politics, aspiring to raise its popularity among the people. However, this strategy could backfire as Hezbollah transforms away from its non-state actor status, with the attendant risk that another clash with Israel will provide Jerusalem with the legitimacy to consider Hezbollah as an integral part of the Lebanese system. Six years after the war, the Lebanese people still recall the destruction Hezbollah brought upon the country as the remaining physical scars testify to that fateful summer. Nevertheless, the extent to which Nasrallah is willing to drag Lebanon into another round of war remains an open question.

Combating Iran's cycle of denial, deception and delay

Irwin Cotler, Jerusalem Post, 19 July 2012

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?ID=278205&R=R1>

Next Tuesday, Iran and six major powers -- the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany (the P5+1) -- will hold yet another "technical" meeting in Turkey -- in the words of the leading EU negotiator -- also yet again -- to "look further at how existing gaps in positions could be narrowed and how the process could be moved forward."

These technical discussions follow three sets of "substantive negotiations" in Istanbul, Baghdad and Moscow, between Iran and the P5+1, all of which ended inconclusively.

While one may hope that the narrowed focus of these talks will somehow produce a dramatically different result than the previous sets of both substantive and technical negotiations, experience demonstrates that such negotiations benefit Iran alone and are part of a comprehensive Iranian strategy. Simply put, while negotiations continue, uranium enrichment is accelerated, the centrifuges spin, and Tehran approaches "breakthrough" capacity for nuclear weaponization -- the whole in line with an Iranian strategy of using negotiations as a means for advancing uranium enrichment and the nuclear weaponization program itself.

That this, in fact, may be Iranian strategy was revealed by the Iranians themselves on the eve of

the Baghdad negotiations on May 14, where Hamidreza Taraghi, an adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and close to the Iranian negotiating team, summed up the Tehran's "successes" during negotiations as follows: First, Western countries did not want Iran to have a nuclear power plant, but its Bushehr reactor was now connected to the national grid.

Second, the West had opposed Iran having heavy water facilities, but the country now has one in Arak.

Third, the West had said no to any enrichment, "But here we are, enriching as much as we need for our nuclear energy program," Taraghi said, referring to the thousands of cascades of centrifuges spinning for years in the half-underground facility in Natanz.

Fourth, since January, and on the eve of the resumed substantive negotiations in Istanbul in April, dozens more advanced centrifuges were installed in the Fordo mountain bunker complex, near Qum, built to withstand a heavy attack.

Fifth, Taraghi also said that in the Istanbul talks, Iran had managed to convince the West of the importance of a religious edict, or fatwa, against the possession of nuclear weapons.

In a word, Taraghi and other Iranian officials concluded that their policy "forced the United States to accept Iranian enrichment," and in effect, the related nuclear program.

Earlier this year, Iranian negotiator Hassan Rowhani elaborated on this strategy: "While we were talking with the Europeans in Tehran, we were installing equipment in parts of the facility in Isfahan."

Rowhani added, "In fact, by creating a calm environment, we were able to complete the work on Isfahan."

Indeed, just as with Isfahan, Iranians completed their work on the secret Fordo plant – uncovered by the West in 2009 – but where the groundwork for this facility was laid as early as 2006 according to the International Atomic Energy Agency – and at a time when Iran was offering to return to negotiations.

Moreover, statements this week from Iranian officials – such as Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the chairman of an Iranian foreign policy committee – that substantive talks will resume if sanctions against Tehran are lifted – itself an ongoing Iranian negotiating mantra – support the notion that not only are negotiations themselves a delaying tactic, but delaying the negotiations is itself a tactic – part and parcel of the comprehensive Iranian 3D strategy of denial, deception and delay: Denial of any nuclear weaponization program to begin with; deception as to the depth and breadth of that program; and delay, delay, delay! In addition, the focus on the P5+1 negotiations with Iran is itself receding from the international radar screen in the shadow of the dramatic developments in Egypt, Syria, Libya and the like, thereby advancing the Iranian 3D strategy.

Accordingly, one may well overlook the underlying intersecting dynamics that underpin the Iranian weaponization program and the overall toxic convergence of the Iranian four-fold threat: nuclear; statesanctioned incitement to genocide; statesponsorship of international terrorism – and indeed, Iranian footprints appear yet again in this week's attack on Israelis in Bulgaria – possibly through its proxy, Hezbollah; and massive domestic repression of human rights. Simply put, this four-fold threat constitutes a clear and present danger to international peace and security, to Middle East and regional stability, and increasingly, and alarmingly so, to the Iranian people themselves.

An understanding of the current negotiating context requires an appreciation of the underlying intersection dynamics, which include: First, there is the standing violation by Iran of international legal prohibitions respecting the development of a nuclear weaponization program. In particular, Tehran continues to violate a series of UN Security Council resolutions involving repeated

demands for complete and comprehensive suspension of its enrichment related, reprocessing and heavy water activities – as well as repeatedly violating its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by denying the IAEA permission to openly inspect their facilities.

Second, there is compelling evidence – particularly that which has emerged from the international nuclear monitor – the IAEA – that Tehran's nuclear program is, in fact, a nuclear weaponization program. As international expert Anthony Cordesman recently concluded after an examination of IAEA reports, "Anyone who concludes that Iran is not yet pursuing a nuclear weapons program is deluding themselves."

Third, while the comprehensive economic sanctions – themselves authorized by UN Security Council resolutions – are having an important effect – i.e. Iranian currency has lost half its value, inflation is above 25 percent, unemployment is approaching 35 percents, Iranian oil sits idle in Iranian tankers – the Iranian government is already finding ways to circumvent some of their more detrimental effects by procuring new super-tankers from China, disabling tracking devices in their ships, securing alternative methods of banking, and forging strong trading relationships with countries not in the pro-Western camp.

Fourth, even countries in the pro-Western camp are continuing their trade with Iran.

Indeed, The Jerusalem Post reported last week that "hundreds" of German and Iranian enterprises have a "flourishing trade relationship."

In particular, German engineering giant Herrenknecht AG reportedly delivered heavy tunnelling equipment to Iran – some of which is promoted as having the capability of "drilling down to depths of 6,000 meters," which could facilitate the building of an underground nuclear facility.

Providing such "dual-use" items to Iran – items that have civilian utility but could easily be used for prohibited military purposes – is in breach of the sanctions themselves, and runs directly contrary to the stated purposes, goals and objectives of the P5+1.

Equally troubling is the recent Swiss refusal to adopt and endorse EU sanctions barring energy and financial transactions with Tehran. Indeed, some fear this "loophole" may be exploited by oil companies, and it should be noted that Switzerland is one of the top centers for oil trading, and also hosts a branch of the National Iranian Oil Company NICO, although the country does not import oil from Iran.

Fifth, while the P5+1 has affirmed that an Iranian nuclear weapon is "unacceptable" – that the objective is preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon as distinct from containing a nuclear Iran – and that no option "is off the table," the protracted negotiations and the Iranian 3D strategy exploiting these negotiations – have undercut these declared positions of the P5+1.

Sixth, while there is increasing reference – and indeed indulgence – of the purported fatwa issued by Khamenei prohibiting a nuclear weaponization program as "sinful" and "contrary to Islam" – which some commentators have taken as conclusive in and of itself that Iran's intentions are peaceful and its nuclear program civil in intent and consequence – this ignores not only the findings of the "military dimensions" of Iran's nuclear program, as determined, inter alia, by the IAEA, but the permissibility within Islam itself to deceive the enemy where it serves a higher interest – including the specific authority in Islam for the supreme leader to do exactly that.

One should recall the report by the IAEA itself in 2009 to the effect that Khamenei as early as 1984 had endorsed a decision by the then-leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to launch a secret nuclear weapons program.

In the words of the IAEA report – and a chilling reminder of Iranian intent and consequence – "according to Khamenei, this was the only way to secure the very essence of the Islamic

Revolution from the schemes of its enemies... and to prepare it for the emergence of Imam Mahdi.”

Accordingly, the crucial question, then, is how to prevent what the P5+1 has deemed “unacceptable” – a nuclear Iran – given that the Iranian 3Ds have thus far prevailed? How do we ensure that these P5+1 negotiations succeed in halting the nuclear weaponization program rather than continuing their path of inconclusive results, leading to more weaponization?

There are a series of specific undertakings that Iran must be called upon to do, and be verified as doing, if it is to comply with its international legal obligations. Among these undertakings, which should serve as a benchmark for an effective negotiation, are the following:

1. Iran must undertake to abide by, and fully implement, its obligations under Security Council resolutions and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Iranian compliance should not be seen as a “concession” for which the West must necessarily reward Iran, but rather a set of obligations that Iran must independently adhere to and comply with. Simply put, there is no Iranian “right to enrich,” the most recent of the Iranian negotiating mantras.

2. Iran must – as a threshold requirement – verifiably suspend its uranium enrichment program, so as to counter the Iranian strategy of delay, or buying time for a nuclear breakthrough. Indeed, as US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta put it – and international experts have similarly made this point – if the Iranian enrichment program is not suspended, Iran will have a nuclear bomb by the end of 2012, with all the consequences relevant thereto.

3. Iran must ship its supply of enriched uranium out of the country where it can be reprocessed and made available to Iran, under appropriate inspection and monitoring, for use in its civil nuclear program.

4. Iran must verifiably close – and dismantle – its nuclear enrichment plant at Fordow, embedded in a mountain near Qom, which the Iranians had initially denied had even existed. Otherwise, Iranian enrichment at Fordow will enter the zone of impenetrability rendering it closed to inspection and immune from any military strike.

5. Iran must suspend its heavy water production facilities at Arak. It is sometimes forgotten that heavy water is an essential component for producing plutonium, which is the nuclear component North Korea used to build its own nuclear weapon. Simply put, the path to nuclear weaponization need not be traveled by uranium enrichment alone – and the suspending of uranium enrichment, however necessary, will not alone result in Iran verifiably abandoning its nuclear weaponization program.

6. Iran must allow IAEA inspectors immediate and unfettered access to any suspected nuclear sites. Indeed, as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran is bound by its obligations not to pursue nuclear weapons and to open its nuclear sites and installation.

7. It should not be forgotten that Iranian authorities had announced – even boasted – in 2009 and 2010 of their intention to build 10 additional uranium enrichment facilities. The IAEA still has not received any substantive response to its request for information about this nuclear archipelago of additional uranium facilities.

8. Again, one should not ignore that Iran’s nuclear weaponization program continued to advance against the backdrop of the 3Ds of denial, deception, and delay. For example, in 2007 and 2010 Iran continued to conceal its nuclear activities by not informing the IAEA of its decision to build a new nuclear plant at Denkhovia, or the additional enrichment facility – the aforementioned Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant. Therefore, the need for inspection – and verification – is crucial,

and must include the Iranian authorities providing the IAEA the requisite access, as the IAEA has called for, to the necessary documentation, personnel, sites etc. that Iran is concealing.

9. Iranian authorities need to grant the IAEA access to the Parchin military complex near Tehran. As the IAEA has reported, Iran has conducted high explosive testing – possibly in conjunction with nuclear materials – at the complex. As Anthony Cordesman has reported, these are “strong indicators of possible weapons development.”

Yet Iranian authorities have repeatedly denied such access to the IAEA – including refusing such visits in January and February 2012, while at the same time dismissing the IAEA information as a set of “forgeries.” Moreover, Yukiya Amano, the IAEA chief, has called access to Parchin a “priority,” citing also the sanitization of the site – and possible removal of incriminating evidence of weaponization – this past March.

This might explain information that emerged to the effect that the Iranians were prepared to grant access to Parchin.

Interestingly enough, Iran is already being credited for this “concession,” which its alleged sanitization – and cover-up of the evidence – would have made such access less meaningful in any case, and where access to Parchin alone is but a minuscule part of the undertakings to which Iran must adhere.

10. Iran needs to allow the IAEA to install devices on centrifuges for the monitoring of uranium enrichment levels. Simply put, Iran could move to weapons grade uranium even if it is using only low enriched uranium, by increasing both the number and the speed of the centrifuges.

11. As Senators Joe Lieberman, John McCain and Lindsey Graham put it in their recent Wall Street Journal article, there needs to be an additional agreement respecting “intrusive inspections based on the Additional Protocol under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to ensure the Iranians aren’t lying or cheating about the full scope of their program, as they have in the past.”

12. Negotiations should not ignore, marginalize or be allowed to sanitize Iran’s massive domestic repression, or provide cover for their continuance.

When the US negotiated an arms control agreement with the Soviet Union, it did not turn a blind eye to the USSR’s human rights abuses. Indeed, the Helsinki Final Act linked the security, economic and human rights baskets. Negotiations with Iran should do no less.

13. Nor should the negotiators ignore Iran’s ongoing state-sanctioned incitement to hate and genocide, a standing violation of the Genocide Convention. Simply put, Iran has already committed the crime of incitement to genocide prohibited under international law and should be called to account to cease and desist from such incitement, and its perpetrators called to account.

In summary, given the Iranian 3D pattern of denial, deception and delay, the whole while uranium continues to be enriched and centrifuges continue to spin – and while the nuclear weaponization program is on the verge of a “breakthrough” – only a verifiable abandonment by Iran of its nuclear weapons pursuits will suffice.

For that objective to be secured, negotiations must not be a cover for the 3Ds, but a password to full Iranian compliance with their international obligations, and a benchmark for international peace and security.

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF

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