

[Editorial: No Sanctuary for Rashid Ghazi](#) Ali Behrooz['The driving force of global terror'](#)[Getting serious about Syria](#)[Mideast lessons from Northern Ireland](#)[Defusing the Israeli-Syrian PR war](#)**Editorial: No Sanctuary for Rashid Ghazi** Ali Behrooz

Looking back at the history of most countries, the Church and the Mosque have occasionally been used as a place for taking sanctuary from an oppressor or from the brutality of the governing authorities. Popular support for this tradition has given the Mosque a safe haven identity, for which its boundaries should be respected. During this decade, however, such a tradition has been ignored and disrespected by both ruling regimes and the radical Islamic forces. The Mosque and the religious Shrine have become instruments for flaring up the feelings of the masses, for stirring up a certain layer of the society, and for exploiting outrage, to arrive at some hidden objectives. The Islamic Republic of Iran's agents exploded bombs in Imam Reza's Shrine in the city of Mashad; the Israelis ignored the Palestinians' taking refuge in the holy church of Bethlehem; most of Iraq's holy shrines and mosques are either bombed by the multi-national forces, or destroyed by terrorists; and more recently we have had the Red Mosque incidents, in which the protection seekers themselves had little respect for the holy Shrine and the Mosque.

Let us be realistic; a mosque is a place for prayers and religious practice. In the 'Islamic' countries, this definition is considered simplistic and reactionary. Most Islamists have a more radical approach towards mosques. For them a mosque is a place to preach and mobilise prayers against the satanic rulers. I have no problem with this. In view of the dictatorial nature of most regimes in these countries, and in accordance with freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom to practise one's own religion, perhaps the traditional definition should be reformulated. What I have issues with is when the radical Islamists misuse mosques as a place to train and arm terrorists. Such a misuse gives a green light to the authorities not only for further suppression of every day prayers, but also for using this as an excuse to extend oppression throughout society, which in turn breeds more radicalism.

Today Rashid Ghazi saved President Mosharaf's political skin. General Mosharaf, by raiding the Red Mosque, once again confirmed that he belongs to the Western allies' camp, while sending a strong signal to the Pakistanis that he would not recognise any boundaries, holy or otherwise, when it comes to his political existence.

The followers of Rashid Ghazi are also content. Their martyred leader is now sitting next to the prophet Mohammed. Can one hope for a better end, ask the radical Islamists, of the vulnerable street boy.

Ali Behrooz

10 July 2007

Iran Crises

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Security and Defense: 'The driving force of global terror'

Yaakov Katz, THE JERUSALEM POST

Jul. 5, 2007

In 1992, as a freshman Labor Party MK, Ephraim Sneh says he "discovered" the Iranian nuclear threat. It was a year after the first Gulf War, when Israel's political and defense leaders believed that the ultimate regional bad guy was Iraqi president Saddam Hussein.

While he was a career officer in the IDF, retiring from service in 1987 as a brigadier-general after serving as commander of the security zone in southern Lebanon, Sneh says he did not discover the Iranian threat from top secret intelligence reports but rather from open sources, like the media and think-tank papers.

After just a few months in office, Sneh decided to submit the Iranian threat as an issue to be raised during debates in the plenum. Some weeks later, he was surprised to hear that prime minister Yitzhak Rabin himself had decided to respond to the junior MK's submission on behalf of the government. Sneh remembers the exact date - January 26, 1993 - when Rabin took to the Knesset podium and for the first time declared that Iran was a "strategic threat for the State of Israel."

Close to 15 years have passed since Rabin's declaration, and Sneh, who this week wrapped up his second stint as deputy defense minister, still does not sleep well at night. With Iran racing toward a nuclear bomb, Sneh - who, as deputy defense minister under Ehud Barak from 1999 until 2001, was in charge of the Iran dossier - charges the government with not allocating enough funding for defense projects that are vital for countering this threat.

A well-respected expert on defense and diplomatic affairs, Sneh basically ran the Defense Ministry when he served as deputy to Barak, who was also prime minister. Under former defense minister Amir Peretz, Sneh again played a dominant role in defense dynamics and took the lead on a number of projects, including Iran and preparing the Home Front Command for the challenges ahead.

In an exclusive interview with *The Jerusalem Post* this week, Sneh, who was replaced at the Defense Ministry by fellow Labor MK Matan Vilna'i, paints a gloomy picture of the future of the Middle East. He claims that, contrary to public thinking, Israel is not on a collision course with Iran; the two have already collided.

"We have to forecast more cycles of confrontation with those Iran is unleashing against Israel," Sneh says. "On our every front, we have an Iranian proxy - Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza and the West Bank, Hizbullah in Lebanon and Syria."

The international community he says, is making a mistake by putting all of its focus on Iran's nuclear program. "The world is ignoring the fact that Iran is the driving force behind global terror," he says.

LAST WEEK'S riots in Teheran against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's decision to ration fuel consumption strengthen Sneh's belief that an escalation in sanctions can force Iran to suspend the enrichment of uranium or even topple its regime. Iran, he explains, is one of the world's biggest oil producers, but sorely lacks refineries. This means that it has to import more than 50 percent of its gasoline.

"We have to concentrate on effective sanctions to stop the flow of refined oil to Iran," he says. "Sanctions are having an impact, but Iran continues, meanwhile, to defy United Nations resolutions and continues to enrich uranium."

Ahmadinejad's downfall, he believes, would open the door for peace between Israel and the Palestinians - who are financed by Iran - as well as with Syria, which as a pariah state has forged a strategic bond with Teheran.

In November, Sneh caused an international storm when he told the Post that Israel must be ready to stop Iran's nuclear ambitions "at all costs."

His comments drew a flurry of responses, and even prompted Iran to submit a complaint against Israel to the UN Security Council.

This week, Sneh stood by his controversial comment, and said that while he did not advocate the military option, "it is for me a last resort."

He plans to continue working behind the scenes to thwart Iran's nuclear program, though for now from the back benches of the Knesset, where he hopes to serve as a member of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. He adds that he would like to return to the Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv, but next time to the minister's office on the 14th floor.

AS SNEH left the Defense Ministry on Tuesday, senior defense officials were meeting with their Palestinian counterparts in an undisclosed location in the West Bank to begin talking about renewing the security cooperation which essentially stopped with in September 2000, at the beginning of the second intifada.

While IDF regional brigade commanders have been holding talks with their Palestinian counterparts over the past year - mostly to discuss local law-enforcement problems and to keep the line of communication open - Tuesday's talks were described by government officials as the highest level yet.

The talks closely followed Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's meetings last week in Sharm e-Sheikh, where it was decided to take practical steps to strengthen Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah party. Several plans are currently being discussed - the release of 250 Fatah prisoners; the transfer of weapons, ammunition and armored vehicles to PA security forces; a halt to IDF arrests of Fatah militiamen; and, ultimately, the transfer of security control over West Bank cities to the PA.

The first city that always comes to mind when talking about security control is Jericho, one of the quietest Palestinian towns in the West Bank. Nevertheless, Central Command sources are not enthusiastic about letting the PA take over the city.

Unlike terror capitals such as Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarm, Jericho is a city dependent on tourism, and is the stopover

for all Arab tourists visiting the West Bank. Israel lifted its roadblocks and transferred control over the city to the PA in March 2005 as part of a plan to restore conditions that existed before the outbreak of violence, but the plan ultimately failed, and Israel quickly retook its positions outside the city.

Since then, terror elements in Jericho have failed in their efforts to launch a quality attack due to the IDF's ability to raid the town at its discretion. Just last month, the elite Duvdevan unit arrested members of an Aksa Martyrs Brigades' cell who were planning to shoot at cars on the Jordan Valley road.

The transfer of the city to the PA has yet to come up in the cabinet, but Olmert will face opposition within the IDF. "There is no reason to believe that the Palestinians are better prepared than they were in 2005," a high-ranking officer said this week. "Easing restrictions is a good idea, but we should first wait to see if the Palestinians really mean business this time around."

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Getting serious about Syria

The Region: Getting serious about Syria

Barry Rubin, THE JERUSALEM POST

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"We must once again restore the Israeli army's deterrence, because there is no other way," explains Defense Minister Ehud Barak. Quite right. The place to start is Syria. Israel's strategic policy toward Syria should be based on two basic principles:

- Israel should make the Syrians believe it wants to see the current regime there overthrown even if it has no intention of making this happen, or even really wants that outcome.
- Israel should make clear that if there is a future Hezbollah attack leading to a war like last summer's, it is Syria, not Lebanon, that will be the main target of retaliation.

Let's review the issues and then discuss why this is the best policy. It is true that Israel does not seek the overthrow of President Bashar Assad's Ba'athist dictatorship, dominated by the Alawite minority. The reason is that the likely replacement would be an Islamist regime from the Sunni Arab majority. An alternative could be simply another Ba'athist regime under a different leader, but the risks of regime change are certainly real.

STRATEGY, however, is not just stating what you ultimately want, but also what you wish the other side to think you want. In Syria and throughout the Arab world, the idea is clearly held that Israel is not willing to strike so hard as to bring down the Assad regime. In turn, this emboldens that regime to strike hard at Israel, knowing it has little or nothing to fear. That security should be taken away from the Damascus regime. Clearly, Israel does not want war with Syria. Yet the whole concept of deterrence is to make clear to the Syrians that Israel is not afraid of war, and that Syrian support for terrorism against Israel will have real and costly consequences. Without this fear, there is no deterrence. And without deterrence, war - either directly with Syria or with Syria's clients in Lebanon - is far more likely.

The weakness of Syria should also be a factor in Israeli thinking. Despite the possibility of renewed Russian aircraft sales, Syria's military is badly outdated. A lot of the regime's threats and use of terrorism is a bluff, formulated precisely to distract from that fact. The Syrian regime has no great-power ally and cannot depend on a single Arab government. Of course, the one international asset Syria enjoys is its alliance with Iran. Yet especially in the period before Iran obtains nuclear weapons, Israel can and must press Syria hard - verbally and even covertly at regular intervals; materially if events require it.

THIS LEADS us to the second point. It could not be more obvious that the current Lebanese government is not really an enemy of Israel. While it might be incapable of making peace, it would prefer a quiet border and no conflict. The main enemy of the Lebanese government is not Israel, but Iran and Syria. Whether or not officials in Beirut say this openly, this is certainly what they think. The same goes for Hezbollah, which is the main threat to take over the government.

Given the fact that the vast majority of Christians, Druse and even Sunni Muslims do not want to participate actively in the Arab-Israeli conflict, their suffering in future clashes in that quarrel should be limited. Anything that weakens the Lebanese government and society is against Israel's interests.

Obviously, of course, this does not include direct strikes against Hezbollah, but there should be no such attacks against the Lebanese infrastructure, aside perhaps from roads being used as part of Hezbollah's military effort. To hold the

Lebanese government responsible for Hizbullah - when it would love to rein in that group but cannot do so - is sheer folly.

It is clear also that Hizbullah is not highly responsive to rational calculations of the strategic balance or to the infliction of material damage. Certainly, destroying its military equipment and killing its troops can be most effective. But material damage inflicted even on its supporters is welcomed by Hizbullah as a means of mobilizing them and even making them financially dependent on an organization well-funded by Damascus and Teheran.

If, therefore, Israel is going to force a state actor to pay the price in order to give it an incentive to rein in Hizbullah, the proper address is Syria.

THERE IS another important factor here which suggests holding Syria, rather than Lebanon, to account. International diplomacy and public opinion has become an important force in shaping regional issues. This situation was central to the 2006 Israel-Hizbullah war, when there were tremendous demands and heavy pressures on Israel to stop operations in and against Lebanon. In the event of a Syrian-oriented response, however, such reaction and pressures would probably be much less. Unlike Lebanon, Syria would not be seen as an innocent victim able to muster sympathy. Attacks on Syrian government, military and even strategic facilities would be less likely to involve civilian casualties. And while Israel has something political to lose by alienating the Lebanese, there are no such considerations regarding Syria. Given the fact that peace with Syria is simply not a possibility - a fact that should be clear to anyone going beyond the most superficial level of solely English-language rhetoric from Damascus - there is nothing to lose on this front, either.

To rebuild Israeli deterrence requires a proper degree of credible threat against those inciting, planning, financing and equipping attacks on Israel. This should be directed against those forces that are both implacable enemies and that have to take material losses into account.

If deterrence must turn into implementation, the guns should be pointed in the right direction. Let the Syrian rulers tremble where now they swagger.

The writer is director of the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center, Interdisciplinary Center, and editor of the Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal. His latest book is The Truth About Syria.

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Mideast lessons from Northern Ireland

Commentary: Mideast lessons from Northern Ireland
Carlo Strenger

July 9, 2007

TEL AVIV -- Two dogmas have ruled Israeli policies for decades: "Always deal with only one Arab nation; avoid meeting together with all of them," and, "Never allow for a permanent international peace conference, because it might push us into corners from which we cannot escape." The result has been a "wait-and-see" strategy that assumes time is on our side.

But "wait-and-see" is no longer an option. Every year that goes by strengthens Islamic fundamentalists, as we have painfully seen with Hamas' 2006 election victory. Israel has never had less to lose and more to gain from experimenting with a fresh approach. And the fear of giving up some square kilometers of land is disproportionate to the danger of being faced with radical regimes, armed with rockets that can reach any Israeli city.

Our situation is well reflected in a story that Lord John Alderdice, originally from Belfast, told me in the context of his serving on a panel on terrorism in Sicily. Alderdice, a psychiatrist by training, received his peerage in honor of his crucial contribution to peacemaking in Northern Ireland, well before the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, while he was still leader of the Alliance Party, and before becoming the first speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

When he was a child, he remarked, he wondered how his community - the Protestants - could possibly protect themselves against Catholics. Then, his father had told him: "Imagine that our house is locked, and that you can't get out, and that there is a cage with a lion in it. In two weeks this cage will be opened, and there's nothing you can do about that. Don't you think it's a good idea to start talking to the lion?"

Of course, this advice is frightening; can you ever know for sure that the lion is not going to eat you? The one thing you know for certain is that it is there, and that it will eventually leave its cage. It was this insight that guided Alderdice through the arduous process of ultimately successful peacemaking, and he is currently applying this lesson in various parts of the world. In his view, therefore, Israel must start seeing Arabs as partners.

For this, two creative breakthroughs are needed: the first is to see moderate Arab states as true partners with a common interest in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. In other words, to break with decades-old Israeli doctrine that we should never meet the Arab world in its entirety. This policy is based on the denial of historical reality: the

Arab world, as a whole, needs to accept Israel's presence in the Middle East.

The Arabs should help us? Yes. Social psychology has shown time and again that the best way to create solidarity between feuding parties is to have them work on a common problem. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not just our problem: It is one concerning the entire Arab world, because it fuels Islamic fundamentalism, and destabilizes the region. No Palestinian leader can opt for compromise without looking for the legitimacy bestowed by all Arabs.

The second breakthrough we need is to rethink Israel's phobia of participating in permanent conferences that allow a process to evolve. This would have to be exactly the opposite of the 2000 Camp David summit situation, which was completely identified with former US president Bill Clinton, who was in the last phase of his term in office. The frantic pressure of having to strike a deal before he left the White House, with no one in sight who would shepherd the process to its conclusion, was a recipe for failure.

Instead we need to apply the model of the Northern Ireland process. In Alderdice's view, the major factor that made success there possible was the participation of the British and Irish governments, as well as the support and involvement of the American administration. All pledged to be present for as long as it took to reach an agreement.

Psychologically, it makes a huge difference to know that external support is there to stay. The idea of nominating former British prime minister Tony Blair as the Quartet's special envoy to the Middle East is a step in the right direction. Blair no longer depends on the political fortunes of any government or administration. He can be there to stay - never mind who governs the United States, Russia, or who is at the helm of the European Union.

Israel should, thus, push for the establishment of a semi-permanent peace conference involving moderate Arab countries and representatives of the Quartet. Blair's role should, by no means, be limited to Palestinian nation-building alone. Instead, he should become the symbol and guarantor that, this time, the West is committed to staying the course, until there is the proverbial white smoke, even though this will take years.

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Defusing the Israeli-Syrian PR war

Commentary: Defusing the Israeli-Syrian PR war
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR
Claude Salhani, Middle East Times
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-- Wars are always fought on two fronts. They are waged on the traditional fields of Mars - battlegrounds where soldiers face each other in combat, and on a virtual plain of hostilities, involving public relations.

The second arena is usually far removed from frontline action, but can be just as important to the overall success of the war effort. It's where the battles for the hearts and minds of the public are fought. And why is that so important? Why is it so vital to convince Joe Public that his government is fighting on the "right side?"

The uninitiated in the ways of war may well be tempted to ask why, in a full scale conflict, should the parties involved dedicate resources and personnel to promote their image when so much else is at stake. The answer is quite simple, really. How well one side fares in the public relations stages of the conflict can ultimately impact how that side later performs on the actual battlefield, itself.

Let me explain by offering a salient example: the Arab-Israeli conflict. This is a topic that has the ability to arouse deep emotions among people far removed from the battle zone.

Rumors have recently surfaced purporting that Israel is preparing for an eventual assault on Syrian positions on the Golan. So say the Syrians. Or, depending on which side you choose to believe, there are equal rumors fingering the Syrians as planning to launch guerrilla style attacks against Jewish settlements on the Golan, as reported by the *New York Sun*.

Israeli officials have been saying they are "concerned" by the cycle of a "defensive" build-up of Syrian forces on the Golan, leading to the countermeasures they feel obliged to implement as precautionary tactics.

The beating of war drums on the Golan's frontlines - which have remained quiet since an armistice negotiated by the US secretary of state Henry Kissinger at the close of the October 1973 war - coincides with alarm bells that some well-informed Washington sources are sounding about the dangers of an all-out war between Syria and Israel erupting sometime over the summer.

Rumors of war in the Middle East have been further strengthened by a number of recent statements and reports. Dennis Ross, a former senior US Middle East peace negotiator, told Israeli online news site YnetNews that he thinks "there is a risk of war" between Syria and Israel this summer. Ross added that "no one has made any decisions, but the Syrians are positioning themselves for war."

And herein lies part of the problem: the fact that "no one has made any decisions." This means that the conflict is taking on a life of its own, feeding on the frenzy being created by the turn of events.

What is currently happening on the Golan is a mini arms race that could easily spin out of control at any moment, engulfing the region in another vicious - and dangerous - cycle of violence. At this point, it no longer matters who started to arm first, or who thought it necessary to enforce a bunker, prompting the other side to do the same. It could build up from this point until reinforcements are called in, after which all it would take to ignite the flames of a true conflagration would be the barest spark.

And while the military prepares for the worst case scenario, the public relations war gets fully into gear, with each side vying for international support for their cause - support that may prove to be crucial if and when the PR conflict turns into open war. The time to preempt such tension degenerating into a disastrous war is now, before the public relations spin leads the protagonists past the point of no return.

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