STRATEGIC ISSUES

Endless negotiations, deterrence and balance of fear

KHALED KHALEFEH

HE Israeli security doctrine is currently in a total deadlock. The last Israeli incursion into Gabalia, in the northern part of Gaza, failed to achieve its goals. The Israeli government has realized the ineffectiveness of using its arms capabilities in civilian areas. The limited Israeli penetration caused 130 Palestinian casualties of which two-thirds were civilians.

The military wing of Hamas, · Ez Eldin El Qassam, however, fought strongly against two Israeli special units, battalions of the Givati and Golani Brigades. As a result of this fighting, the Israeli army is convinced that it needs at least 40,000 soldiers from the best Israeli special units in order to reoccupy the Gaza Strip. Former Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, in an interview with Kol Yisrael (8 March 2008), recognized this basic military fact. In response to another question about the military options, which Israel has to consider, Mofaz confessed that the best option is to continue with the current situation of "tit for tat" with Hamas, and to constantly strike Hamas on a daily basis.

However, the Israeli doctrine of containing Hamas and destroying its regime in Gaza is continuing by all means. Israel interprets American and European sympathy as a green light for this policy. Israel also needs Abu Mazen in order to continue its containment policy against Hamas. Abu Mazen's condemnation of the Hamas doctrine is essential to the Israeli policy. The continuation of the dialogue with Abu Mazen

is very crucial to the Olmert policy, not in order to push things that were left from Annapolis but to give legitimacy to the Israeli containment doctrine towards Gaza and Hamas.

In that sense, Abu Mazen is a strategic actor who is helping Israel formulate and reshape its policy toward the Palestinians. Condoleeza Rice, the US Secretary of State, announced the restoration of the talks during her recent visit to Ramallah (5 March 2008, transcript of press conference between Condoleeza Rice and Tzipi Livni). The American Secretary of State did the Israeli policy a great favor by pressing Abu Mazen to rejoin the talks and to re-manipulate the American policy toward Egypt by reallocating \$100 million to Cairo in order to play a role against Hamas.

The Israeli side is backed by the American support of Ms. Rice, who came specially to bring Abu Mazen back to the talks, although he promised not to do so without a large-scale deal with Israel. Under the patronage of the US, the talks were restored on 14 March 2008. Barak did not participate in them, although PM Fiad did. Barak designated Lt. General Amos Gilad to represent him. General William Fraser represented the Americans.

There is a great misperception, however, that the Palestinians continue to believe that they can get something during the short time that remains for the Bush Administration. The Palestinian Authority argues that if it makes more concessions to the US and Israel it can reach the strategic goal of implementing the road map. The US policy is far beyond



that argument. It perceives the sooner or later. Circles surround-Palestinian issue as a security issue and not as a political one, which has to be solved in cooperation with the Israeli side.

generals representing it by carrying out and monitoring any agreement, or even any possible minor agreement. General William will be very difficult to publicly Fraser is the latest general to be continue with the negotiations if sent to the region by Ms. Rice. Before him was James Jones and Gaza again. before that, General Dayton, who military assistance with Mahamed Dahlan immediately

tegic agenda of the US and the Israeli government is to strengthen the Abu Mazen government by weakening the Hamas govern-US supports the Abu Mazen-Fiad Salam regime militarily and financially. Most of the assistance, however, goes to the high elite of the Mazen government without taking care of the many needs of the Palestinian people.

Both the American and Israeli doctrines coincide with Abu Mazen's strategy of striking the Hamas regime. Abu Mazen is giving the cover of negotiations to the US and Israel, while the Europeans are paying lip service by visiting him in Ramallah and treating him as a sovereign leader.

Analysts who are involved in the politics of the Palestinian Authority have revealed some resentment from the Israeli conduct toward the PA. They claim that the Hamas Movement is interested in making Abu Mazen political strength will decline might be according to Annapolis

ing him have leaked to the public that he might freeze negotiations with Israel after he starts to realize that he was used as a tool for The US already has had three Israeli and American conduct. It is not certain that he will continue in the dialogue with the Israelis. However, it is rather certain that it the Israeli army tries to occupy

Concerning Gaza, Israel has to was instructed to coordinate the consider Mahmoud Abbas abandoning the negotiations if it starts a ground campaign. Israel also after Hamas came into power in has to consider the eruption of another front in the northern part Nevertheless, the current stra- in Lebanon with Hezbollah, domestic unrest inside the West Bank and further harsh international reactions.

No one can be sure of a decisive ment in Gaza. For this reason, the victory in a ground battle. Israel can start such a battle but it cannot assure the desired outcome. Furthermore, the launching of rockets may not be stopped. In addition, squeezing an entire civilian population to the corner might not be achievable in such an operation.

Concerning Gaza and the Hamas regime, Israel does not recognize this regime and does not want to change the status quo of the Hamas Movement living under siege and under daily military attacks, all with the support of the world community. Israel diverts all the countries that want to support the Palestinians to the regime of Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah. Israel actually wants to strike in Gaza and at the same time, continue talks on an endless track with the Palestinian irrelevant. With only minimum Authority under an international criticism, they believe that his framework. This framework

or the Tony Blair Quartet or now according to the Angela Merkel proposal to hold an international conference in Berlin which will strengthen the role of Germany.

Rationally, the current situation is strategically good for Israel, Israel is exerting pressure to maintain the current situation in Gaza of keeping the Hamas leadership under siege while continuing the dialogue with the Palestinian Authority, and at the same time presenting the problem of the Palestinians as an international problem that is related to Iran and Muslim extremists and not a nation who has equal rights in this

Defense Minister Barak and the military establishment will not agree to this situation continuing indefinitely. They will exert pressure to change the status quo. Barak would like to maintain a positive balance of fear that will be favorable to Israel. That means that he will continue to strike both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in order to provide a pretext to react strongly against Hamas and its infrastructure.

Nevertheless, as I previously explained, the choices are very difficult and the Palestinians will not agree to sit quietly forever. They want to change their standard of living and their prospects for the future.

Consequently, Barak will continue to believe in deterrence on all fronts, in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. It is not certain whether the deterrence policy will continue to work in his favor or whether an escalation will occur on all fronts sometime soon.

The author is a journalist and member of The Arab Council for Foreign Relations.

Iraq war: Victims and villains

MUMTAZ IQBAL

OST wars have heroes, victims and villains. Not the Iraq War. It has no heroes, only victims and villains. The war's fifth anniversary on 19 March 2008 is a good time to examine who these are.

VICTIMS

They are numerous and of all shades.

The foremost are Iraqis. Estimates of Iraqi dead vary from 89,000 (Iraq Body Count), to 151,000 by Iraq's health ministry/WHO (from March 2003 to June 2006) and to 654,000 by UK medical journal Lancet.

About 4.5 million are displaced from their homes including 2 million refugees

outside Iraq mainly in Jordan Muslims.

About the terrible intangible

costs, Baghdad University

Professor Nabil Younis writes

the war destroyed Iraq's

...valuable military and eco-

nomic asset, institutions and

traditional, social and spiritual

heritage." (The Times, 18

demolished to satisfy US lust

for hegemonism. A poor bar-

gain for getting rid of tyrant

dead for each American killed

About 4,000 GIs, or 163 Iraqi

Iraqi society and state was

and Syria.

March).

Saddam!

(using Lancet figure), died for this dubious achievement. Add to that 60,000 wounded, and many American families had their lives uprooted.

US casualties are directly traceable to the Bushies' failure in conceptualizing, planning and executing this illegal conflict. Iraq has strained the US military. It has a lot to be ashamed about (Abu Ghraib; Guantanamo; Bagram).

This exercise in cruelty is not new for the Pentagon. Look at the Vietnam War (three million Vietnamese dead); defoliation of forests (Agent Orange) and prolonged secret B52 bombing of Cambodia. By these standards, US brutality in Iraq is mild! Nonetheless, anti-Americanism has exploded worldwide especially amongst

The US taxpayer is another

victim. Against Rumsfeld's

estimate of the war's total cost

at \$50-60 billion, the current

monthly cost is \$12 billion or

\$5,000 per second. The

Congressional Budget Office

estimates the war cost \$431

But Nobel Prize winning

economist Joseph Stiglitz in his

book The Three Trillion Dollar

War estimates that the true

costincluding disability com-

pensation and benefits-- of the

war on terror in Iraq and

Afghanistan to be \$3 trillion

billion as of last September.

(1000 billion=1 trillion)!

underly representations is

Borrowing financed the war. "This is the first major war in American history where all the additional cost was paid for by borrowing," notes Goldman Sachs Vice Chairman Bob Hormats. The budget surplus Bush inherited in 2000 is in deficit, with 40% of the increased debt held by PRC and other foreigners.

PRC's current US dollar holdings exceed a trillion! No wonder Bush's circumspect on what's happening in Tibet and elsewhere in PRC. A debtor, even with nuclear missiles, has limited leverage against his biggest creditor.

Opinion differs on the war's impact on US economy.

much related to the Iraq war."

didn't stimulate the domes-

tic economy much, prompting

the Fed to loosen liquidity that

led to the housing and con-

sumption boom and subse-

the war to be a "...significant

cause of the present downturn"

but concedes the opportunity

costto strengthen the US econ-

The war battered interna-

tional law. Writing in The

Guardian, former chief weap-

ons inspector Hans Blix

Hormats doesn't consider

Warspending

quent bubble.

omy-- to be great.

Iraq, for the US, for the UN, for Defence Secretaries, are truth and human dignity" and a Gordon Brown's Lord "setback in the world's efforts Chancellor and Chief Whip, to develop legal restraints on respectively. Politicians are the use of armed force between great at comebacks. We

An unintended victim was ex-Secretary of State Colin Powell, described by fellow Jamaican Calypso King Harry Belafonte as the Bush house boy. His UN speech of 6 February 2003 was a pack of lies that ruined his gilt-edged reputation. He spends his time with tinkering with Volvos, his hobby, rather than making big bucks on the talk circuit!

VILLAINS

It's not rocket science to figure Stiglitz considers the current out the two biggest villains. Blix US economic mess "...very provides a clue. Iraq in 2003

"was not a real or imminent

threat to anybody," he wrote

and that responsibility for the

war "must lie with those who

ignored the facts five years

dynamic duo of Bush and Blair

who fabricated facts and know-

ingly exaggerated Saddam's

menace.

This can only refer to the

Blair like Saddam has gone,

leaving office in disgrace. He's

turned his talents to addressing

the Israeli-Palestinian prob-

lem. Good luck to him. Some

colleagues survived the ship-

wreck. Jack Straw and Geoffrey

slammed it as "a tragedy for Hoon, Blair's Foreign and Bangladeshis are finding this

> Bush's legacy is in ashes because of poor performance: spectacularly unsuccessful (Iraq), insipid (Katrina), lackluster (seniors' health-care) and stillborn (social security reform). A fiscal conservative, he drove the US treasury into massive deficit with tax cuts and war financing. He sanctioned torture, upheld renditions, curtailed civil rights (Patriot Act), authorized illegal wiretapping and undermined America's moral and material standing domestically and internationally.

There's lively debate amongst US historians whether or not Bush is the worst of all US presidents, eclipsing Grant, Harding, Hoover, Nixon et al. There's no such uncertainty in the rest of the world. It thinks Bush stinks. Bush destroyed US's good image.

The ideological villain behind Bush's strident unilateralism is neoconservatism, as embodied in the American Enterprise Institute's Project for a New America Century (PNAC). This was a blueprint for US world domination based on unbridled free market capitalism backed by the unchallenged primacy of US arms after USSR's collapse in 1991.

The failure of Washington's Iraq adventure has discredited this ideology and the neocons' are reduced to whimpering. But US hubris resides in Bush's Machiavellian hawk VP Dick Cheney. He's doing his best to foment a war with Iran.

While neoconservatism may be down, it's not out. Republican presidential nominee John McCain may be an able devotee, with his talk of a 100 years US presence in Iraq and his public jingle of Bomb Iran Bomb.

We'll know in November 2008 if the US public has learned its lesson from Iraq by the President it elects.

The author is a freelancer.

Japan voices concern over China space program

TOKYO - A Japanese defense ministry think-tank has warned that China's space program could pose a military threat to other countries.

The review, released March 26, also said China is likely to continue its space development program "as a vital means of achieving military competitiveness against the United States."

development have strong ties to the People's Liberation Army and a considerable number of its satellites are presumably intended for military purposes," the National Institute for Defense Studies said in an annual strategic review of East

China launched a space probe in October as part of an ambitious exploration program that has included successes with man-made satellites and manned space flights. The think-tank said the program had the "effect of raising national pres-

It added that China's test in January last year to shoot down an object in space - its own weather satellite - had fueled military concerns.

"Missiles can destroy not only U.S. artificial satellites but also Japanese intelligence-gathering satellites," the review said.

"The possibility has emerged that the cluster of satellites will come under a great threat when international tension heightens.

Source: defensenews.com

Changed scenario in Pakistan and Kashmir

The events of 9/11 and the subsequent American "war on terror" brought a perceptible shift in the course of Pakistan's foreign policy, evident from its volte face, particularly in its relations with its immediate neighbourhood. President Gen. Pervaiz Mushharaf is credited as the doyen of the gradual change in Pakistan's traditional Kashmir policy. He has always talked about finding an "out of the box solution", besides meeting India "half-way" in order to carve out a solution to this chronic problem. Accordingly he drew up a "four-point formula" which created a stir in the valley and bisected the separatist camp - one supporting it and the other opposing it.

to mention here that during the election campaign, the Kashmir issue did not grab the headlines of daily papers. The elections were fought ship (both separatist and mainstream) to recalmost wholly on domestic issues and major oncile itself with this reality. They should iron parties including PML (Q) and Jamaati Islami out their differences in the larger interest of the paid marginal attention to issues like Kashmir Kashmiri people. It is high time the and India. All major parties, contrary to the past, Government of India (GOI) initiated a meanmentioned Kashmir only in the concluding para- ingful and constructive dialogue with the leadgraphs of their election manifestos. There was no ership in Jammu and Kashmir to address the sloganeering about grabbing Kashmir or India- internal dimension of the dispute. This is also bashing. The fact that during electioneering, the an opportune moment for the GOI to start 5th February "Kashmir Solidarity day" passed off people-oriented and trust-building measures uneventfully, speaks volumes. Besides hailing the in Kashmir, which in turn would minimize their China-India model of conflict-management, the PPP in its manifesto also stated that it would not mount requirement is to make the armed forces allow lack of progress on one issue, namely Kashmir, to impede progress in other areas of during encounters with militants. common concern with India.

The PPP which emerged as the largest party after the elections, has concluded an agreement with PML (N) to form the next government. The new coalition will be confronted with the gigantic tasks of extending the control of the central gov-

THE BEET'S FORCE OF PASS (EDITION OF LARLY WILLIAMS SALE Province (NWFP) as well as containing rising extremist and ultra-fundamentalist tendencies. Insurgency and internal unrest has reached critical levels which if not contained, may turn Pakistan into a failed state sooner than later.

Additionally, Pakistan has deployed more than one lakh troops along its border with Afghanistan and in NWFP. More than a thousand Pakistani soldiers have been killed and hundreds abducted by the Pakistani Taliban. Therefore, Pakistan cannot afford to continue its belligerence with India "The organizations engaged in China's space and has hence decided to change course. The changed position seems to have both short and mid-term underlying interests. While its immediate aim is to relieve Pakistan from the Kashmir front and divert more attention and resources to the restive NWFP, besides strengthening internal security; its medium-term goal seems to be to catch up with the fast-growing economies of the world and seek more and more foreign direct

> It is against this backdrop that the PPP Co-Chairman Zardari has realistically affirmed that lack of progress on Kashmir should not hinder forward movement on other issues with India. He averred that trade and other bilateral issues must be treated as salient, while leaving Kashmir for future generations to resolve, when the atmosphere is cordial. Keeping in view the role of Zardari in the impending dispensation, his statement seems to have set the framework for Pakistan???s Kashmir policy. He reiterated his point while addressing the newly-elected parliamentarians, emphasizing the need to give precedence to trade and cooperation with India, over Kashmir. This forces one to think whether Pakistan has become wary of its traditional Kashmir policy? Certainly, since it is so deeply involved in domestic issues, Kashmir will no longer constitute a priority or core issue for Pakistan.

This indicates that the new incumbent wants dialogue, reconciliation, and normalization of relations with India. The Pakistani establishment is preparing to get rid of the Kashmir problem. Furthermore, it also reflects that the new leadership in Pakistan would like to jettison the past baggage and work towards building a South Asian

Although no Pakistani government can completely wash its hands off Kashmir, since there is a strong military cum bureaucratic constituency which still wants to use Kashmir as a bargaining tool with India; the perspective and insights cited The 18 February elections in Pakistan were above nonetheless provide credibility to the belief relatively fair, owing largely to the presence of that Pakistan and India are inching forward while more than 4000 foreign observers. It is pertinent sidelining the bleeding Kashmir problem to arrive at a compromise.

This is the right time for the Kashmiri leaderalienation from the Indian State. The paramore humane, and avoid collateral damage

There is an urgent need for both countries to take steps to reduce the trust deficit. No doubt the dynamics have changed, but to freeze the resolution process will not help. It will be tantamount to leaving a festering wound unattended.

ernment to the restive North Western Frontier Byarrangement with IPCS, New Delhi