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Article 1.

NYT

U.S. War Game Sees Perils of Israeli Strike Against Iran

Mark Mazzetti and Thom Shanker

March 19, 2012 — A classified war simulation held this month to assess the repercussions of an Israeli attack on Iran forecasts that the strike would lead to a wider regional war, which could draw in the United States and leave hundreds of Americans

dead, according to American officials.

The officials said the so-called war game was not designed as a rehearsal for American military action — and they emphasized that the exercise's results were not the only possible outcome of a real-world conflict.

But the game has raised fears among top American planners that it may be impossible to preclude American involvement in any escalating confrontation with Iran, the officials said. In the debate among policy makers over the consequences of any Israeli attack, that reaction may give stronger voice to those in the White House, Pentagon and intelligence community who have warned that a strike could prove perilous for the United States.

The results of the war game were particularly troubling to Gen. James N. Mattis, who commands all American forces in the Middle East, Persian Gulf and Southwest Asia, according to officials who either participated in the Central Command exercise or who were briefed on the results and spoke on condition of anonymity because of its classified nature. When the exercise had concluded earlier this month, according to the officials, General Mattis told aides that an Israeli first strike would be likely to have dire consequences across the region and for United States forces there.

The two-week war game, called Internal Look, played out a narrative in which the United States found it was pulled into the conflict after Iranian missiles struck a Navy warship in the Persian Gulf, killing about 200 Americans, according to officials with knowledge of the exercise. The United States then

retaliated by carrying out its own strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.

The initial Israeli attack was assessed to have set back the Iranian nuclear program by roughly a year, and the subsequent American strikes did not slow the Iranian nuclear program by more than an additional two years. However, other Pentagon planners have said that America's arsenal of long-range bombers, refueling aircraft and precision missiles could do far more damage to the Iranian nuclear program — if President Obama were to decide on a full-scale retaliation.

The exercise was designed specifically to test internal military communications and coordination among battle staffs in the Pentagon, Tampa, Fla., where the headquarters of the Central Command is located, and in the Persian Gulf in the aftermath of an Israeli strike. But the exercise was written to assess a pressing, potential, real-world situation.

In the end, the war game reinforced to military officials the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of a strike by Israel, and a counterstrike by Iran, the officials said.

American and Israeli intelligence services broadly agree on the progress Iran has made to enrich uranium. But they disagree on how much time there would be to prevent Iran from building a weapon if leaders in Tehran decided to go ahead with one.

With the Israelis saying publicly that the window to prevent Iran from building a nuclear bomb is closing, American officials see an Israeli attack on Iran within the next year as a possibility. They have said privately that they believe that Israel would probably give the United States little or no warning should

Israeli officials make the decision to strike Iranian nuclear sites.

Officials said that, under the chain of events in the war game, Iran believed that Israel and the United States were partners in any strike against Iranian nuclear sites and therefore considered American military forces in the Persian Gulf as complicit in the attack. Iranian jets chased Israeli warplanes after the attack, and Iranians launched missiles at an American warship in the Persian Gulf, viewed as an act of war that allowed an American retaliation.

Internal Look has long been one of Central Command's most significant planning exercises, and is carried out about twice a year to assess how the headquarters, its staff and command posts in the region would respond to various real-world situations.

Over the years, it has been used to prepare for various wars in the Middle East. According to the defense Web site GlobalSecurity.org, military planners during the cold war used Internal Look to prepare for a move by the Soviet Union to seize Iranian oil fields. The American war plan at the time called for the Pentagon to march nearly six Army divisions north from the Persian Gulf to the Zagros Mountains of Iran to blunt a Soviet attack.

In December 2002, Gen. Tommy R. Franks, who was the top officer at Central Command, used Internal Look to test the readiness of his units for the coming invasion of Iraq.

Many experts have predicted that Iran would try to carefully manage the escalation after an Israeli first strike in order to avoid giving the United States a rationale for attacking with its far superior forces. Thus, it might use proxies to set off car

bombs in world capitals or funnel high explosives to insurgents in Afghanistan to attack American and NATO troops.

While using surrogates might, in the end, not be enough to hide Iran's instigation of these attacks, the government in Tehran could at least publicly deny all responsibility.

Some military specialists in the United States and in Israel who have assessed the potential ramifications of an Israeli attack believe that the last thing Iran would want is a full-scale war on its territory. Thus, they argue that Iran would not directly strike American military targets, whether warships in the Persian Gulf or bases in the region.

Their analysis, however, also includes the broad caveat that it is impossible to know the internal thinking of the senior Iranian leadership, and is informed by the awareness that even the most detailed war games cannot predict how nations and their leaders will react in the heat of conflict.

Yet these specialists continue their work, saying that any insight on how the Iranians will react to an attack will help determine whether the Israelis carry out a strike — and what the American position will be if they do.

Israeli intelligence estimates, backed by academic studies, have cast doubt on the widespread assumption that a military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities would set off a catastrophic set of events like a regional conflagration, widespread acts of terrorism and sky-high oil prices.

“A war is no picnic,” Defense Minister Ehud Barak told Israel Radio in November. But if Israel feels itself forced into action,

the retaliation would be bearable, he said. “There will not be 100,000 dead or 10,000 dead or 1,000 dead. The state of Israel will not be destroyed.”

Article 2.

The Washington Post

Playing for time through a strike on Iran

Richard Cohen

March 20 -- Nations have doctrines. The Soviet Union had the Brezh-nev Doctrine and the United States had the Monroe Doctrine, among others. Even little Israel has one. I call it the Maybe the Dog Will Talk Doctrine, and it is based on a folk tale of the rabbi who makes a preposterous deal with a tyrant: If the tyrant spares the lives of local Jews, the rabbi will teach the tyrant’s dog to talk. When the rabbi tells his wife what he has done, she calls him a fool. But, he says, “A year is a long time. In a year, the tyrant could die or I could die” — and here he gives her a sly, wise-rabbi smile — “or maybe the dog will talk.”

All sorts of people — defense intellectuals, military officers and even the president of the United States — either have not heard of the Maybe the Dog Will Talk Doctrine or do not recognize its

importance. (It was cited to me by an Israeli official.) Both Barack Obama and Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have characterized any Israeli attempt to disrupt Iran's nuclear program as a short-term affair. An Israeli raid "wouldn't achieve their long-term objectives," Dempsey said on CNN — and he is surely right.

But Israel also has a short-term objective — and that is to play for time. Israel notes that its 1981 bombing of a nuclear reactor in Iraq set back Saddam Hussein's program — and did not result in some sort of massive retaliation. Something similar happened with the 2007 bombing of a Syrian installation. Neither operation was conceived as a long-term solution, but both accomplished short-term goals. In a year or two, much could change in the Middle East. The region's in turmoil. Dogs are talking all over the place.

A note of exasperation can be detected in much of what is written about Israel: Why can't it just hang on? What's wrong with containment? It worked with the Soviet Union. It has worked with North Korea. Pakistan has bombs galore, but no one is taking shelter in the basement. How is Iran different?

Iran is different because it has explicitly threatened Israel. It is different because it supports Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, both terrorist groups with a penchant for lobbing the occasional rocket into Israel. Iran is different because it acts irresponsibly, plotting just recently to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States. This is just plain nuts — and very, very scary.

To understand Israel's predicament, the book to read is "Start-up

Nation” by Dan Senor and Saul Singer. Both are on the political right, but their book is not about politics or settlements and such. It is about economics. Israel has a humming economy with a marvelously vibrant high-tech sector. The statistics are astounding. Until recently, Israel, with fewer than 8 million people, was second only to America when it came to companies listed on the Nasdaq — ahead of India, South Korea and even China. Israel’s preeminent natural resource is brain power.

Talent, though, is fungible. It can get on an airplane and move. It can come to the United States where Israelis, as it happens, swarm all over Silicon Valley. Everyone has a different figure, but at least 250,000 Israelis live in the United States, an Israeli official tells me.. That’s a significant slice of the country’s population. These Israelis are in America for a variety of reasons — education, jobs, etc. — but some of them may like the fact that nowhere in America do rockets rain down or terrorists run amok. If Israel is to keep its talent, it must provide a safe and secure environment.

As long as Iran supports anti-Israel terrorist groups, Israel remains — to one degree or another — a dangerous place. An Iran with nuclear weapons becomes a more potent protector of its client terrorist groups — maybe bolder and more reckless as well. Life becomes less secure. Earlier this month, rockets hit cities in the south of Israel. Had this happened in the United States, we would be at war. Why Israel is expected to live under such conditions is beyond me.

Sanctions may cause Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program, if indeed that’s where it is now heading. But critics of Israel’s approach have to understand that Iran’s program looks

different from Tel Aviv than it does from Washington. In the long run, an Israeli attack on Iran will accomplish nothing. In the short run, it could accomplish quite a lot.

Article 3.

TIME

Five Tips For President Obama on Nuclear Negotiations With Iran

Tony Karon

March 20, 2012 -- President Barack Obama is rolling the dice again: He's desperate to avoid getting dragged into a war over Iran's nuclear program, and appears to have restrained Israel — at least for now — from starting one by promising he'd do it himself if Tehran tried to build a nuclear weapon. And that means he really needs to make a success of the renewed diplomatic process he and Western allies are about to undertake with Iran. That reason alone should place by the president's bedside, Trita Parsi's [A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's Diplomacy With Iran](#), even if its critique would make uncomfortable reading for a President who may genuinely believe he has tried serious diplomacy with Iran. Based on interviews with dozens of top decision makers in the U.S., Iran, Israel, and other stakeholder countries, Parsi concludes that the Obama Administration's efforts were fatally flawed due to the domestic political limitations and time constraints imposed on diplomacy, and Iran's domestic political turmoil. I asked

Parsi, who is also the president of the National Iranian American Council what five pointers he'd offer if asked by the White House for tips on improving the prospects for successful diplomacy with Iran. Herewith, Parsi's answers:

Lesson 1: Don't Allow the Domestic Politics to Define Your Strategy

The conflict between U.S. and the Islamic Republic of Iran is three decades old, and has been created, perpetuated and reinforced at different points by the domestic political dynamics on both sides. Today, rather than negotiating with Iran itself, much of the Obama Administration's Iran effort is actually negotiation with various power centers in Washington and abroad over how to deal with Iran. And that tends to anchor his strategy to the existing political landscape in ways that don't bode well for diplomatic success. The Iranians face a similar problem.

As I point out on in the book, one of President Obama's key mistakes was his failure to create political space for himself to engage with Iran. He didn't use the political capital generated by his election to broaden his room for maneuver on Iran issues, because he didn't want to make Iran a matter of domestic political debate in the way that we see it occurring now on the presidential campaign trail. But that meant that those negotiation efforts he did undertake were self limiting, in that the agenda was narrow — confined to the question of Iran's willingness to accept Western and U.N. demands on its nuclear program — and that the time-frame for such negotiations was deliberately limited, so as to avoid charges from more hawkish quarters that Iran was being allowed to play for time. Hence the "single roll

of the dice” of my title, which was a phrase that an Administration official had used to define the limited negotiation efforts pursued by the Obama White House.

A single roll of the diplomatic dice with Iran is unlikely to work any more effectively this time than it did in 2009. The best-case outcome is going to require a process that will take time and will require a willingness on both sides to make concessions in search of a solution that both can live with. And in order to achieve that, President Obama is going to have to create the political space for himself at home that sustains that process.

The same problem exists on the Iranian side, of course, where the system’s fratricidal political conflicts have long bedeviled attempts at engagement with the West. All the more reason for a sustained process rather than a single roll of the dice. And we’re not going to get anywhere if we allow the crippling domestic political environment to drive the process.

Lesson 2: Broaden the Agenda Beyond the Nuclear Program

The decades-old enmity and tensions with Iran are hard enough in themselves; to confine diplomatic engagement with Iran to a single variable — the nuclear issue — which also happens to be the most intractable issue between the different sides right now, doesn’t enhance the prospects for success. In 2009, the Obama Administration effectively made confidence-building measures on the nuclear front the precondition for any wider conversation; until they were ready to do what we asked on that front, we refused to talk to them about anything else — even Afghanistan, on which the Bush Administration had actually engaged fairly productively with Tehran for a time, or on the issue of human rights.

There's no way for the parties to avoid the nuclear question, of course, but that shouldn't preclude discussion on other issues on which the sides can more easily find common ground and cooperate. The advantage of a broader agenda is that it potentially creates a dynamic of cooperation that can possibly help to create a measure of good faith that helps overcome obstacles and unblock the impasse to finding a solution to the nuclear question.

Lesson 3: Bring Mediators into the Conversation

The process the Administration is currently using for talks with Iran — negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group [the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China] is flawed, because there is no trust between the countries in the P5+1 and Iran. The Obama Administration has worked hard to make the P5+1 present a united front to Iran behind nuclear demands, and backed by limited U.N. sanctions. The reason for this strategy was to prevent Iran being able to play off different members of the P5+1 against one another. But bringing those countries closer to the U.S. position — albeit with major differences in their views on the nature of the nuclear issue in Iran, and how it may be resolved — has limited their ability to reach out to Tehran. So, these negotiations occur in an atmosphere of little trust. Prospects for progress will be greatly enhanced with help from countries that have relations of trust with both sides, such as Turkey and Brazil. The purpose of drawing them in would not be to replace the P5+1, but to complement its work by injecting more mutual confidence into the process. These are countries that don't have the same domestic political restraints on their negotiation abilities as does the U.S. and some of the other Western countries. And President Obama knows from

experience the role they can play in forging breakthroughs — in 2010, Brazil and Turkey managed to get Iran’s agreement to a fuel-swap deal, which was rejected by the U.S. as insufficient, even though Brazil and Turkey insist that it followed the terms laid down in a letter by Obama.

Lesson 4: Get Real on Uranium Enrichment in Iran

The cat is out of the bag when it comes to the question of Iran enriching uranium for its nuclear program, thanks in no small part to the efforts of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to force President Obama to declare his red lines. The Bush Administration had drawn a red line at Iran “mastering the technology of enrichment” — but Iran crossed that line six years ago, and once a technology is mastered, it can’t be unlearned. Still, Israel, France and many in Washington had insisted that Iran could not be allowed to enrich uranium on its own soil, even in a certifiably peaceful nuclear program, because that technology gives Iran the means to build a bomb. The Obama Administration had been more ambiguous on the issue, at some points signaling a zero-enrichment policy and at other points accepting that once Iran had taken the steps necessary to assure the international community of its peaceful intent, it could exercise all the rights of a signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty — which would include enriching uranium.

Netanyahu insisted that Obama draw his red line, and the President did so — at weaponization of nuclear material by Iran. The zero-enrichment demand was untenable to begin with; now President Obama needs to convince the French, and the Israelis and others at home that the best deal that can be achieved with Iran is one that verifiably contains Iran’s nuclear program within

verifiable limits that prevent weaponization. The advantage of pressing this goal now is that, as the Bush Administration learned, a solution that establishes confidence in Iran's intent remains elusive the more the West clings to the demand for Iran to abandon all enrichment, while Iran continues to make progress that creates irreversible facts on the ground.

Lesson 5: Sanctions Only Work If They Can Be Lifted

America's leverage in the standoff with Iran depends not only on its ability to impose sanctions, but on its ability to lift them. The confidence-building concessions that the Western powers are going to demand of Iran — most immediately, it seems, the suspension of enrichment of uranium to 20% and the removal of Tehran's stockpile of uranium enriched to that degree — can only realistically be achieved by offering Iran something that it needs. And Iran is very likely to demand steps towards lifting of sanctions, particularly those sanctions that most painfully effect Iran's economy, i.e. those that impede its ability to sell oil and use the international banking system to trade on world markets. There have been reports that what the Western powers will offer in exchange for ending 20% enrichment will be a promise of no new U.N. sanctions against Iran, but that's unlikely to impress Tehran: Right now, the U.S. is unable to win Russian and Chinese consent for new U.N. sanctions anyway, and those currently in force are of negligible effect on Iran's economy. The sanctions that hurt Iran are those unilaterally adopted and enforced on others by the U.S. and the Europeans. And if some easing of those sanctions is not on the table from the U.S. side because of an election-year domestic political environment militates against making concessions to Iran, then the U.S. will have to adjust its asks of Iran. Tehran is unlikely to be willing to

give up something substantial in exchange for something it might deem insubstantial.

Moreover, by dramatically escalating sanctions — for example, cutting Iran off from the SWIFT system for processing international banking transactions last weekend — at the very same moment that a new round of talks has been scheduled reinforces an impression in Tehran that the U.S. goal is regime change, and that no concessions by Iran would be likely to stop the momentum of sanctions.

The Western powers go into the coming talks needing to hear that Iran is willing to offer complete transparency in its nuclear work, submit to the Additional Protocols of the Non-Proliferation Treaty that allow for more intrusive inspections, and take verifiable steps that strengthen international confidence in the non-military nature of its nuclear program. But for Iran to embark on a process, it needs to hear acceptance of its bottom line of retaining a civilian nuclear program, including the enrichment of uranium, if it submits to stricter procedures to verify its intent; and also that if Iran makes concessions, it will expect concessions from the other side.

And looking at Washington, right now, you have to wonder whether President Obama can actually ease or lift sanctions, many of which — the SWIFT system cutoff would be the latest example — are acts of a far more hawkish Congress rather than executive orders by a President looking to use sanctions pressure to improve prospects for a deal. In Tehran's view, Washington has a credibility when it comes to its carrots, not its sticks. The balance between pressure and engagement during the Obama presidency has been radically tilted in favor of pressure —

diplomacy has been given all of three weeks, sanctions three years. Sanctions pressure, of course, may seem the politically least-costly option, but it's not necessary the most effective one. To get a concession at the talks, and to get a process going, it is necessary to both demonstrate the willingness and ability to lift sanctions, granted that the Iranian accept significant limitations to their nuclear work.

Article 4.

Bloomberg

Israelis Grow Confident Strike on Iran's Nukes Can Work

Jeffrey Goldberg

Mar 19, 2012 -- In 2005, Benjamin Netanyahu, who was then Israel's finance minister, made an official visit to Uganda.

For Netanyahu, visits to Uganda are weighted with sadness. It was at the airport in Entebbe that his older brother, Yonatan Netanyahu, was shot dead by a Ugandan soldier. Yonatan was the leader of an Israeli commando team dispatched by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in July 1976 to rescue Jewish hostages held by pro-Palestinian terrorists. The terrorists had diverted an Air France flight to Uganda, where the then-dictator, the infamous Idi Amin, gave them refuge.

The raid was a near-total success. The hijackers were all killed,

along with dozens of Ugandan soldiers posted to the airport by Amin to protect the terrorists. Only three hostages died; 102 were rescued. (A fourth was later murdered in a Ugandan hospital.) Yonatan was the only Israeli soldier killed.

In his 2005 visit, Benjamin Netanyahu was welcomed by the current president of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, who was an anti-Amin guerilla leader at the time of the Entebbe raid. Museveni accompanied Netanyahu to the airport, and unveiled a plaque in his brother's memory. The Ugandan president told him that the Israeli raid on Entebbe was a turning point in the struggle against Amin. It bolstered the opposition's spirits and proved to them that Amin was vulnerable. Amin's government would fall some two and half years later.

Unclothe the Emperor

A widely held assumption about a pre-emptive strike on Iran's nuclear facilities is that it would spur Iranian citizens -- many of whom appear to despise their rulers -- to rally around the regime. But Netanyahu, I'm told, believes a successful raid could unclothe the emperor, emboldening Iran's citizens to overthrow the regime (as they tried to do, unsuccessfully, in 2009).

You might call this the Museveni Paradigm. It's one of several arguments I've heard in the past week, as I've shuttled between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, that have convinced me that Israeli national-security officials are considering a pre-emptive strike in the near future.

Last week, I argued that Netanyahu's campaign to convince the West that Iran's nuclear program represents a threat -- not only

to his country but also to the entire Middle East and beyond -- has worked so well that it could represent the perfect bluff. After all, on his recent visit to Washington, Netanyahu managed to avoid discussing the Palestinian issue with President Barack Obama, and he heard Obama vow that the U.S. wouldn't be content to merely contain a nuclear Iran.

After interviewing many people with direct knowledge of internal government thinking, however, I'm highly confident that Netanyahu isn't bluffing -- that he is in fact counting down to the day when he will authorize a strike against a half-dozen or more Iranian nuclear sites.

One reason I'm now more convinced is that Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak are working hard to convince other members of the Israeli cabinet that a strike might soon be necessary.

But I also heard from Israeli national-security officials a number of best-case scenarios about the consequences of an attack, which suggested to me that they believe they have thought through all the risks -- and that they keep coming to the same conclusions.

All-out War

One conclusion key officials have reached is that a strike on six or eight Iranian facilities will not lead, as is generally assumed, to all-out war. This argument holds that the Iranians might choose to cover up an attack, in the manner of the Syrian government when its nuclear facility was destroyed by the Israeli air force in 2007. An Israeli strike wouldn't focus on densely populated cities, so the Iranian government might be able to

control, to some degree, the flow of information about it.

Some Israeli officials believe that Iran's leaders might choose to play down the insult of a raid and launch a handful of rockets at Tel Aviv as an angry gesture, rather than declare all-out war. I'm not endorsing this view, but I was struck by its optimism. (A war game held by the U.S. military this month came to the opposite conclusion, according to the New York Times: A strike would likely lead to a wider war that could include the U.S.)

Another theory making the rounds was that Obama has so deeply internalized the argument that Israel has the sovereign right to defend itself against a threat to its existence that an Israeli attack, even one launched against U.S. wishes, wouldn't anger him. In this scenario, Obama would move immediately to help buttress Israel's defenses against an Iranian counterstrike.

Some Israeli security officials also believe that Iran won't target American ships or installations in the Middle East in retaliation for a strike, as many American officials fear, because the leadership in Tehran understands that American retaliation for an Iranian attack could be so severe as to threaten the regime itself.

This contradicts Netanyahu's assertion, first made to me three years ago, that Iran's rulers are members of a "messianic, apocalyptic cult," unmoved by the calculations of rational self-interest. It also contradicts the results of the U.S. war game. But it does make sense if you believe that regime survival is an important goal of the ayatollahs.

Finally, and even more disquieting, was the contention I heard repeatedly that an Israeli strike in the next six months - -

conducted before Iran can further harden its nuclear sites, or make them redundant -- will set back the ayatollahs' atomic ambitions at least five years. American military planners tend to think that Israel could do only a year or two worth of damage.

The arguments I've outlined here -- and those I'll describe in my next column -- all lead to a single conclusion: The Israeli political leadership increasingly believes that an attack on Iran will not be the disaster many American officials, and some ex-Israeli security officials, fear it will be.

These were vertigo-inducing conversations, to say the least. Next week, I'll discuss why, from Netanyahu's perspective, a strike on Iran, even if only marginally successful, might be worth the risk -- and may be historically inevitable.

Jeffrey Goldberg is a Bloomberg View columnist and a national correspondent for the Atlantic.

Article 5.

The Moscow Times

Beautiful Friendships

Richard Lourie

19 March 2012 -- The mounting tension over Iran's nuclear program is also highlighting increased Israeli and U.S. involvement in the Caucasus. Apart from everything else, this has to feed President-elect Vladimir Putin's paranoia about U.S. efforts to become an active player in what Russia considers its own backyard. But, of course, it's the Iranians who are the most upset and who in the short run have the most to lose. Tehran believes that Mossad has established a base in neighboring Azerbaijan from which the largely successful plots to assassinate Iranian nuclear physicists were initiated. The border between Azerbaijan and Iran is quite permeable. The 16 percent of Iranians born in Azerbaijan can travel visa-free between the two countries. Not only has Tehran accused Baku of allowing Israeli intelligence to operate freely in Azerbaijan, it has launched counterstrikes such as the recent, unsuccessful assassination plot against the Israeli ambassador to Baku, Michael Lotem. Upping the ante considerably, in late February Azerbaijan agreed to buy \$1.6 billion in advanced weaponry from Israel, including drones and anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems. The official Azeri defense budget for 2012 is \$1.7 billion. The sale will be spread out over several years. Arms sales, both those made and those cancelled, have played a pivotal role in the development of events connected to Iran. Russia deserves thanks for not selling the formidable S-300 anti-missile and anti-aircraft system to Iran even though it had contracted to in 2007 in a sale worth close to \$1 billion. Needless to say, Russia extracted concessions from that cancelled sale, including the United States not rearming Georgia after the Russia-Georgia war of 2008. If the Iranians had already taken delivery of the S-300s, it would probably be too late for the Israelis to attack without significant U.S. help. And if

the Iranians were currently awaiting delivery of the S-300s, Israel would be in countdown, its window of opportunity shrinking by the hour. Unless otherwise persuaded by the United States, Israel would feel compelled to strike. As for Israeli arms sales, Stratfor wrote in a recent report: "It is difficult to believe that the United States and Israel are not coordinating their activities in the Caucasus. ... It can be assumed that the United States has approved the initiatives." Directly or indirectly, Russia and the United States have been bumping up against each other in the Caucasus region where Russia is resurgent. Moscow got its lease on military facilities in Armenia extended to 2044, and its lease in the breakaway formerly Georgian republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by 49 years. Russia's \$22 million-a-year lease on the Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan that can track Iranian missiles runs out in December. Azerbaijan, which also provides routes for gas and oil that compete with Russia's, is the one place in the former Soviet Caucasian territories where Russia has problems exerting its will. Partially that is because of U.S. influence and presence, with U.S. medical evacuations from Afghanistan operating out of Azerbaijan. U.S. aid to Azerbaijan is now exactly equal to that given to its arch foe Armenia (\$2.7 million), despite the fact that the Armenian lobby is strong in the United States, while the Azeri lobby is nearly nonexistent. All these complex tensions will lessen only when the Iranian crisis is resolved one way or another. A former Azeri counterintelligence officer has likened today's Baku teeming with spies, arms dealers and assassins to "Casablanca during World War II." Let's at least hope it has a Rick's Place.

Richard Lourie is the author of "The Autobiography of Joseph Stalin" and "Sakharov:

A Biography."

Article 6.

NOW Lebanon

Adieu, Hezbollah

Hanin Ghaddar

March 19, 2012 -- Since its inception, Hezbollah has probably not experienced such a nightmare. Of course, the Syrian regime is crumbling, and that is the core of Hezbollah's trouble, but locally, its aura seems to be fading as well. Without that appeal, the party cannot hold up. Is the end near? There is no good reason why Hezbollah leaders should not be panicking. The winds of change coming from the northern borders are going to turn everything upside down for the Party of God. Its friends are either losing credibility or just moving away from the party of double standards. Meanwhile, the ludicrous stances and hasty behavior of its leaders are costing the party its main support base: the Lebanese Shia community. Let's take a closer look. In his many redundant speeches, Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah has been adamant about supporting the Assad regime of Syria. A few years ago, when Nasrallah made a speech, almost everyone in Lebanon would leave whatever they were doing to listen to what he had to say. His words made headlines and caused serious transformations on the Lebanese political scene. Today, we stopped bothering for two reasons. One, he says almost nothing new; and two, he does not seem capable of understanding the real transformations taking place in the

region. On a more crucial level, reports of Hezbollah fighters' bodies being returned from doing battle in Syria over the past few months, although not technically verified till now, have caused a feeling of bitterness among the supporters of the "Resistance." Resisting Israel is one thing, but killing innocent Syrian women and children is something else. But that's not all. As the Syrian revolution unfolds, Hezbollah's main support base, the Shia community, keeps being reminded by the party that it is the most virtuous, most spotless and most righteous in the region.

The Party of God supports a dictator and his band of murderers. And recently, according to a number of emails revealed by the Guardian newspaper, Assad and his gang have outed themselves as stupid, corrupt and drowning in vanity. Assad, a "supporter of the resistance," as Hezbollah constantly describes him to justify its backing of the regime, is spending his time shopping for extravagant stuff and looking at naked photos online. Hezbollah members and their families are similarly being accused of corruption and abusing their power to get richer. Recently, Hesham and Jihad al-Moussawi – brothers of Hezbollah MP Hussein Moussawi – went into hiding after they were accused of producing and distributing drugs, according to Lebanese channel MTV. At the same time, in South Lebanon, people started referring to Hezbollah as the Taliban after it banned the sale of alcohol in many southern towns and cities. On the political level, when the current cabinet was formed, everyone perceived it as Hezbollah-controlled. It was thought that the party controlled the PM and all ministers. Today, Prime Minister Najib Mikati cannot be considered completely under Hezbollah's control.

Mikati's under-the-table support for Syrian refugees in Tripoli and his recent stances in support of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon gave him a rather autonomous image, whether or not it is accurate.

As for Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, it is needless to say that his recent stances vis-à-vis the Syrian regime have gained him more credibility among the Syrian and Lebanese who are against both Assad and Hezbollah. Jumblatt has certainly made a slow but complete turn against the Syrian regime, which means that, as one of the main politicians who determines the political majority in Lebanon, he is stepping outside the orbit of Hezbollah. On the anniversary of his father's death on Friday, Jumblatt made a move that won him a surge of support inside Syria and Lebanon. The act of placing the Syrian Revolution's flag on the grave of his father, "who was assassinated by the Syrian regime... [relieved my] conscience," Jumblatt told Al-Arabiya television station on Sunday. "The [Syrian] regime has come to an end," he added.

The recent statement by the al-Qaeda-linked Abdullah al-Azzam brigade about Jumblatt also does not bode well for Hezbollah. Azzam said that the brigade, which the government has accused of forming a terrorist cell within the Lebanese Armed Forces to carry out attacks against the army, had received an offer by Hezbollah and the Syrian regime to "assassinate Druze leader MP Walid Jumblatt in return for the release of a number of jihadists in Syrian jails."

So there goes Jumblatt, Hezbollah's most precious win since the May events of 2008. In terms of the upcoming parliamentary elections of 2013, the future looks grim for the Party of God.

Hezbollah is less popular today, locally and regionally, than it was a year ago. It is corrupt and supports a dictator, and its leader is not as charismatic as he used to be. It is losing its allies and becoming the subject of jokes by its enemies. No one in their right mind wants to be close to Hezbollah now; it is like the bully at school who no one likes but fears. But eventually, the bully loses his aura and we move on.

Although Hezbollah's own crumbling is going to take some time, due to its possession of arms and power over state institutions, there are undoubtedly a number of serious threats to its power.

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Article 7.

The New Republic

What Are Our Military Options in Syria?

Michael O'Hanlon

March 19, 2012 -- As the violence worsens in Syria, there are no great options for how to respond. The various Syrian factions and sectarian groups are far too intermingled for a Libya-like operation to work. Assad and his army are still too strong for a

simple and small peacekeeping mission to succeed. And if we did invade, the specter of an Iraq-style imbroglio would loom, given Syria's size and the multitude of nefarious actors there.

It's important, though, to think through the available military options. (Though I do not favor any just yet, and we should only consider them in the event of strong Arab League and NATO support and participation.) These are three possible types:

A punitive naval or air operation to encourage a coup against Assad. These measures would reinforce existing economic sanctions. The two most viable tactics would be a naval blockade, to prevent Syria from exporting oil or importing a number of goods, and a limited air campaign to deprive the regime of assets that it values (like palaces). The hope would be that Assad's cronies could be persuaded to depose him and then forge a power-sharing deal with the opposition, as a precondition for ending sanctions and ending the associated punitive military campaign.

A broader Balkans-like campaign to help depose Assad. In this option, air strikes would also target the heavy weapons that the Syrian army is using to shell cities; this could be combined with the creation of a no-fly zone for Syrian military helicopters and other aircraft over much or even all of the country, which could require up to a couple hundred aircraft operating in various bases on land and at sea in the region. This approach could also involve arming the Syrian opposition—though that would likely increase, rather than decrease, violence in the short

term.

Creation of a safe zone for Syrian civilians. Safe zones are easier to declare than to enforce—and the Syrian army would surely contest any effort to establish one or more. But they might be accomplished using airpower and some modest number of outside ground troops. They could be partly modeled on the protection we afforded Kurds in Iraq throughout the 1990s, even while Saddam was still in power. Alas, this task would be harder here. There is no natural geographic or demographic logic to any particular possible safe zone in Syria. Populations are too interspersed, and the killing is happening largely in central cities, where it would likely be impractical to create such zones given the size and cohesion and capability of nearby Syrian army forces. Creating a safe zone in the northeast, near the Turkish border, would be more practical, but less helpful for the threatened populations, who predominantly reside in the western part of the country. This kind of mission would therefore have only a limited ability to protect innocents. But depending on how the situation unfolded, it could perhaps be combined with the above options to create the nucleus of a stronger resistance that could ultimately challenge Assad’s rule using the safe area as a staging base and sanctuary.

To be sure, all three of these approaches are limited in scale and scope, and all promise only mediocre results. None of these ideas look decisive, and all are risky; as such, they should only be considered if and when things get worse.

But the alternatives are not pretty. Alas, perhaps the most likely outcome is that Assad will brutally reestablish control over the country, in a way that might end the war, or at least prevent it from becoming an all-out conflagration. But it is also quite possible that things will continue to get more chaotic on the battlefield. Meanwhile, some Sunni Arab states are probably considering arming the opposition themselves—this would likely not be enough to overturn Assad, but just enough to stoke the conflict further.

As the death toll from the year-old conflict rapidly approaches 10,000, it may not be too early to raise these types of military possibilities in public—if for no other reason than to signal the murderous Syrian regime that we do have options besides just hoping that Assad will fall of his own weight. Ideally, down the line the credible possibility of their implementation will persuade Assad’s cronies to demand that he go into exile. Perhaps it could even convince them to form a new power-sharing government with the opposition. That may not be a utopian solution, but, under the current circumstances, it may be the best we can hope for—even if it requires uncomfortable talk of military intervention.

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