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Article 1.

The Washington Post

Egypt's scapegoat for the Sinai attack

David Ignatius

August 10 -- In firing Egypt's chief of intelligence for his alleged failings in Sinai, President Mohamed Morsi sacked a general who has won high marks from U.S., Israeli and European intelligence officials — and who, ironically, has been one of the Egyptians pushing for a crackdown on the growing militant presence in Sinai.

This week's shuffle is bound to raise concerns among U.S. and Israeli officials about the security policies of Morsi's government and its seemingly mutual self-protection pact with the Egyptian generals who still hold considerable power through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, or SCAF.

Morsi and the military appear to have concluded that the fired intelligence chief, Gen. Murad Muwafi, was a convenient scapegoat after the attack Sunday by terrorists in Sinai that left 16 Egyptian soldiers dead. After that attack, the Egyptian military launched an armored assault in Sinai to "restore stability and regain control" in the lawless desert that had become a haven for Islamist militants.

Ironically, it was Muwafi who had told a visitor two months ago that he favored an assault in Sinai by an Egyptian armored battalion that would include 30 tanks, eight helicopters and other equipment. Such a crackdown had also been urged by U.S. and Israeli officials, but the Egyptian military delayed major action until Wednesday, after the 16 soldiers were killed.

The statements that accompanied Muwafi's firing were surprising, given this background. The Egyptian media blamed him for ignoring an Israeli intelligence report about Sunday's attack. Muwafi confirmed in a statement that "we received a detailed intelligence warning" and said he said he passed it to the military to take action. "It is the responsibility of intelligence to collect information and it is the job of others to learn the operational lessons on the ground based on the intelligence information," Muwafi explained after his firing, according to a press report.

Muwafi looked the part of the traditional mukhabarat chief. He was tall and handsome, well-spoken in French and English, and ran the General Intelligence Service from a gleaming modern office set in a park in Cairo. U.S., Israeli and European intelligence officials saw him as one of the bright lights of the new government. This praise may have made more senior Egyptian generals jealous.

Muwafi had also been Egypt's main interlocutor with the Palestinians. He had been working in recent months to broker a unity pact between Hamas and Fatah. Muwafi understood that Egypt had much more leverage over Hamas after the extremist group had been forced to flee its base in Syria; working with the Israelis, Muwafi had negotiated what amounted to a de facto cease-fire with Hamas in Gaza.

The new Egyptian intelligence chief will be Gen. Mohammed Shehata. He is described as an experienced officer who "knows the Palestinian file well."

Because of Muwafi's growing reputation with Western governments, some worried that he might position himself as another Gen. Omar Suleiman, the charismatic intelligence chief who was the closest adviser to President Hosni Mubarak and ran some of the country's harshest counterterrorism programs. But the ruling Muslim Brotherhood didn't appear to have that fear — at least not until this week when Morsi and the military were looking for a fall guy for the Sinai debacle.

In June, a few days before the final presidential runoff that elected Morsi, I posed the Muwafi question to a leading Muslim Brotherhood strategist named Khairat el-Shater. He said that if

the Brotherhood won, it would keep Muwafi in his job because “we do not want collisions” over foreign policy.

He added that the Brotherhood recognized that certain key contacts, such as with Israel and America, had been handled largely through intelligence channels and that continuity was important. But that was then, apparently.

The Muwafi incident is just a blip on the broad radar of U.S.-Egyptian relations, and American officials generally think that the Morsi government is off to a good start. But the incident does show two things:

First, the situation in Sinai is dangerous and getting worse. U.S. intelligence believes that scores of jihadists have migrated into Sinai in recent months — some from the tribal areas of Pakistan, some from Libya and some from Egyptian prisons. Among them are people a U.S. official describes as “al-Qaeda wannabes.”

Second, the Egyptian military is preoccupied with buffing its image and fending off potential critics. In that exercise in self-preservation, the generals seem quite happy to work with Morsi and the Muslim Brothers — as in the firing of Muwafi.

Article 2.

TIME

As the Sinai Goes, So Too the Golan Heights?

Tony Karon

August 9, 2012-- Israeli Meir Elakry, looks towards Syria through binoculars next to a metal cut-out of a soldier, left, at an army post from the 1967 war at Mt. Bental in the Golan Heights, July 23, 2012. Mount Bental is a sought-out overlook these days, shared by boisterous tourists and anxious Israelis hoping to catch a glimpse of the conflict in Syria.

The air strikes by the Egyptian military against rebels based on Egyptian territory in Sinai overnight Wednesday will have alarmed Israeli security chieftains, confirming that Cairo has lost control of the desert territory over which the two countries fought three wars, and is now mounting a full-blown military campaign to reassert its authority. Egypt's military — which operates independently of its elected civilian government — was spurred into action after border posts were targeted in a series of attacks on Sunday and Tuesday by what are believed to be jihadist groups looking to stage attacks on Israel, and to undermine the authority of both the Egyptian military, the fledgling government of President Mohamed Morsy— a longtime Muslim Brotherhood leader— and of the Hamas administration that runs the adjacent Palestinian enclave of Gaza.

But this is hardly the only flashpoint in a region in flux. The spectacle of non-state actors exploiting the fraying of state authority to assert their own agendas will have given the guardians of Israel's security even more cause for alarm over events unfolding on their northern frontier, where the regime of

Syria's President Bashar Assad is losing control over vast swathes of territory, creating operating space for all manner of independent actors, including jihadists of various stripes, to assert themselves.

The latest Sinai confrontation began Sunday with a dramatic raid on an Egyptian army border post that left 16 soldiers dead. The attackers stole an armored personnel carrier and crashed through the border into Israel before being killed in an Israeli air strike. They were later found to have been wearing suicide bombers' explosive vests, signaling an intent to spread mayhem on the Israeli side of the border. Walking back an initial claim by its U.S. ambassador, Michael Oren, that Iran had been behind the attack, the Israeli military blamed al-Qaeda. Egypt's military appeared to reach a similar conclusion, but said the attackers were based both in Sinai and in the Palestinian territory of Gaza, where the control of Hamas — which enforces a cease-fire with Israel on more radical groups — is being challenged by al-Qaeda inspired militants, among others. Hamas and its allies in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood furiously condemned the attack, but in a throwback to the paranoid style of the Mubarak era, blamed it on the Israelis themselves, claiming a dark plot to sow discord between Cairo and Gaza.

The discrepancy between those statements obviously reflects competing political agendas. But it's certainly clear that the attacks were intended to further strain the already fragile relationship between Israel and the Egyptian military, disrupt the nascent post-Mubarak domestic political order in Egypt, provoke confrontation with Israel and challenge the authority of Hamas in Gaza, where there have been recent moves to ease Israel's six-year siege and blockade of the territory. After

Sunday's raid, the Egyptian military began closing the smuggling tunnels that have been Gaza's economic lifeline.

Sinai's Bedouin population have complained of decades of neglect by the Egyptian state, making it an economically depressed zone in which smuggling and criminality has thrived — as well as a more permissive environment for small jihadist groups. But the February 2011 uprising that dispatched Mubarak also saw a dramatic weakening of state authority in Sinai, and local militants have for months conducted a low-key insurgency that has included targeting gas pipelines and other facilities, and occasional cross-border attacks on Israel.

Although the latest attacks have sparked widespread outrage in Egypt and a groundswell of support for the military, it remains to be seen whether a military show of force, including air strikes on villages said to be bases of the rebels, will eliminate or exacerbate the problem. Nor will tightening the blockade on Gaza strengthen Hamas' ability to enforce its security edicts on rival organizations.

Despite the political discord in Cairo and the poor security situation in Sinai, Israel is aware of the tacit consensus between Egypt's military and its elected government on the need to keep and enforce the peace with Israel. However effective or otherwise its efforts may be, the Israelis are confident that Cairo is committed to restoring its authority in Sinai. But the security challenge Israel will soon face on its northern frontier, however, is altogether more daunting.

In Syria, the authority of the state itself has collapsed over vast swathes of territory, particularly along the borders as the regime

concentrates its forces to battle rebels in the main cities. And the situation in the Kurdish region of northeastern Syria demonstrates how effectively non-state actors with independent agendas have been able to exploit that situation. Syrian Kurdish groups, acting entirely independently of both the regime and the rebellion but assisted by their kin in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish province, have created militias that have taken direct control over their own turf, staking out a future autonomous Kurdish zone in Syria – much to the alarm of Turkey. Of course, Israel has nothing to fear from Kurdish self-determination in Syria, but developments in Kurdish Syria underscore the fundamental rupture in the architecture of state power there that has kept a hostile but stable peace with Israel for four decades. And the Kurds are not the only non-state actor with an agenda independent of the mainstream Syrian opposition, given the growing reports of the emergence on the battlefield of various al-Qaeda affiliated jihadist groups.

Syria's borders with Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq have become increasingly porous — Sunni insurgents and jihadists once encouraged by the Assad regime to cross into Iraq from Syria are now crossing the other way, as are jihadists from Lebanon; Free Syrian Army fighters are crossing from Turkey into Syria, and PKK Kurdish separatists may be crossing the other way. Israel has good reason to be nervous about what to expect on the Golan Heights, the Syrian territory it has occupied since 1967. Israeli military intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Aviv Kochavi last month told the Knesset that unnamed 'global jihad' groups (Israeli code for al-Qaeda) had begun operating on the Syrian side of the Golan, from which the Assad regime had pulled thousands of troops for deployment against the rebellion. "The

Golan area is liable to become an arena of operations against Israel in much the same way the Sinai is today, and that's a result of the increasing entrenchment of Global Jihad in Syria," Kochavi told a Knesset committee, according to the AP.

Unlike the Sinai, which was returned to Egypt in 1980 under the Camp David peace agreement, the Golan Heights remains under occupation, and a more representative government that replaced President Assad would, if anything, be even more insistent on securing its return to Syrian control — the Syrian National Council, the mainstream exile opposition group backed by the West, has made clear its commitment to seek the return of the Golan through negotiations with Israel. But the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly indicated it has no intention of returning the Golan to Syria. The combination of the fraying of state authority as a result of the rebellion, and the broad legitimacy in Syrian society enjoyed by any effort to reclaim this contested territory, will likely create a more permissive environment for more radical elements to take root once the battles to dislodge Assad's regime are over.

Indeed, as Assad's power crumbles, the Israeli leadership may well find itself quietly experiencing an improbable nostalgia for its intractable — yet entirely predictable and effectively tame — foe in Damascus.

Article 3.

Foreign Policy

Jim Baker: Realists have been

successful stewards of foreign policy

Josh Rogin

August 9, 2012 -- The neoconservative wing of the Republican foreign policy establishment is up in arms about Mitt Romney's selection of realist Bob Zoellick to head his national security transition team, but the realists have been the Republicans who steered the ship of U.S. foreign policy the best, according to Zoellick's mentor, former Secretary of State James Baker.

"I know where I am; I think I know where Henry Kissinger and George Shultz are. I think we were all pretty darn successful secretaries of state," Baker said in a long interview Thursday with The Cable. "I also know something else: I know the American people are tired of paying the cost, in blood and treasure, of these wars that we get into that sometimes do not represent a direct national security threat to the United States."

Baker argued that the George H.W. Bush-led 1990-1991 Gulf War, which was prosecuted by an international coalition Baker himself played a key role in creating, was a more successful model than the wars that followed in Iraq and Afghanistan, wars that happen to have been urged and led by neoconservative officials in the George W. Bush administration.

"That was a textbook example of the way to go to war," Baker said of the Gulf War. "Look at the way [George H.W. Bush] ran that war. I mean, we not only did it, we said 'Here's what we're going to do,' we got the rest of the world behind us, including Arab states, and we got somebody else to pay for it. Now tell me

a better way, politically, diplomatically, and militarily, to fight a war."

Baker rejected, in detail, the four main criticisms neoconservatives both inside and outside the Romney campaign have made regarding Zoellick: that Zoellick is soft on China, insufficiently supportive of Israel, was weak on pressuring the Soviet Union toward the end of the Cold War, and that he didn't support the Gulf War.

Baker said the last charge was simply false. "He was never opposed to the Gulf War. In fact, he was one of my right-hand aides when we built that unprecedented international coalition to kick Iraq out of Kuwait," Baker said.

Regarding the end of the Cold War, Baker said Zoellick played a key role in the reunification of Germany and of Germany's subsequent admission into NATO.

"[Zoellick] wasn't the lead, but he was absolutely critical and instrumental in our getting German unification accomplished, and we did it over the objections of the Soviet Union," Baker said.

On China, Baker defended the George H.W. Bush administration's reaction to the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, which has been widely criticized.

"The fact of the matter is that, when Tiananmen Square broke, we ended up sanctioning China in many, many ways," he said. "We didn't fire up the 101st Airborne, but we did put political and diplomatic and economic sanctions on China. But we kept the relationship going. Now, Bob Zoellick was a part of all that --

he wasn't the lead on it or anything, but he sure is not, as far as I can tell, soft on China."

Regarding Israel, Baker said that the first Bush administration admittedly had a rocky relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, though it had a better relationship with his successor Yitzhak Rabin. But good progress was made during that period, he said, even though the Bush administration often took stances on issues that the Israeli leaders didn't like, such as whether U.S. funds could be used to build settlements.

When Baker was secretary of state, the United States convinced Arab nations to sit face to face with the Israelis, got the United Nations to repeal the resolution that equated Zionism with racism, and facilitated the emigration of Jewish émigrés from the Soviet Union, all by focusing on the U.S. interest in working with both sides toward peace, which has been a bipartisan and longstanding policy of many administrations over the years, he said.

Baker pointed to a [recent New York Times column](#) by Tom Friedman arguing that the most successful American leaders on the Middle East process were Kissinger, Jimmy Carter, and himself.

In any case, Baker said, Zoellick "wasn't involved extensively" in making policy toward Israel.

"He was not the lead guy. The lead guy there was Dennis Ross, and nobody ever accused Dennis Ross of being hard on Israel," Baker said.

Zoellick's outstanding qualifications for a leadership position in

the Romney campaign or a future administration are his experience and competence, Baker said.

"The fact of the matter is that if the Romney campaign and the Romney administration employ somebody like Bob Zoellick, they're going to get somebody who's been there, who's done that, who understands how to make things work, and who understands how to get things done. And that's what we need, above all, in our leadership," he said.

The realist view practiced by Zoellick, Baker, and the elder Bush, of a pragmatic foreign policy that understands the limits of U.S. power and eschews costly and lengthy interventions in countries that aren't crucial to American interests, is even more relevant today, he argued.

For example, Baker doesn't agree with prominent neoconservatives that the United States should do more in Syria.

"Well, my view is that sooner or later, Assad is going to go. I don't think he can survive, and I think we ought to do everything we can -- politically, diplomatically, and economically -- to make that happen. I believe we are doing that. I think we ought to be very careful about the slippery slope of military intervention of any sort," he said. "The Syrian threat's not a threat to us."

Baker said that the United States can't allow Iran to get a nuclear weapon, but argued that the military option should only be used as a last resort and that there is still time for diplomacy before military action would have to be considered.

"We ought to do everything we can, tighten these sanctions as

tight as we can get them -- they're showing some indication of beginning to work. We ought to see if we can't get them to work better, keep doing that. We're not at a critical point yet," he said.

"Our biggest threat today isn't Syria, or even Iran, or Russia or China. Our biggest threat today is our own economy, and we cannot continue to be strong diplomatically, politically, and militarily and be weak economically," he added.

Baker also responded to Romney's claim in stump speeches that Baker had once claimed that Ronald Reagan told him to hold no national security meetings in his first 100 days of his presidency. In fact, Reagan had national security briefings every day and intermittent National Security Council meetings, Baker said.

"I think it was misunderstood a little bit. What I said was that we focused, with laser-like efficiency, on the economy, because we knew ... you see, we came in under similar circumstances that Obama came in, but he didn't focus on the economy the way we did," Baker said.

"By the beginning of the third year of Ronald Reagan's term, we were coming out really good, creating jobs, big economic growth, because we put in place pro-growth economic policy," he said. "Well, a part of the reason we were able to do that is that in fact we in the administration focused with laser-like effectiveness on our economic program. We weren't going to let anything get in the way of that, including conflict in Central America, which some people were suggesting we ought to deal with, and that sort of thing."

The Washington Post

Ignoring foreign policy won't make it go away

Michael Gerson

August 10 -- President Obama has avoided the traditional Democratic reputation for foreign policy weakness by emulating his predecessor in one narrow but important respect. Obama has not only continued George W. Bush's global war on terrorism — whatever it is currently called — but has also expanded its scope and lethality. The legal and physical infrastructure of the conflict, from the Patriot Act to Guantanamo Bay, remains in place. The mommy party, in this instance, has become daddy with a drone and a hit list.

This has largely taken defense and foreign policy off the table in the current election. Team Romney is convinced, probably correctly, that each day devoted to national security is a day not spent talking about the economy. And criticizing the slayer of Osama bin Laden requires a more sophisticated critique than the presidential campaign — currently at the level of “Romney Hood” vs. “Obamaloney” — will bear.

But the war on terrorism does not exhaust America's risks or responsibilities. The risks are increasing, along with doubts

about our global role.

Syria's civil war is approaching genocide as the regime shells villages and conducts mass executions. Russia has used the crisis to reassert its diplomatic influence. The United States, in Duke professor Peter Feaver's description, has gone from "leading from behind" to "following from behind." A strategy of stern denunciations, U.N. initiatives and minimal covert support for regime opponents has succeeded only in extending a savage conflict. And this is likely to make eventual retribution by rebels (assuming they win) bloodier, while leaving them more hostile to the United States.

In Afghanistan, the United States conveys the impression of heading rapidly for the exits in 2014 — raising the serious possibility that the Afghan army will fracture, civil war will resume and the Taliban will return to power. Responsible administration officials do their best to dispute this notion.

"We are not even imagining abandoning Afghanistan," says Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. But it doesn't take much imagination for others: frightened shopkeepers and women in Kabul, hedging Pakistani security officials, determined Taliban warlords. They see the shipping containers packing and leaving. And they hear Obama, in his stump speech, taking credit for "winding down the war in Afghanistan" and refocusing the United States on nation-building at home.

In Iran, a strategy of tightened sanctions and nuclear talks remains fruitless. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta recently repainted America's red line: "We will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon." Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

recently reaffirmed his objective: “Anyone who loves freedom and justice must strive for the annihilation of the Zionist regime.” The United States seems to be headed toward some kind of confrontation with Iran, without Obama making any apparent effort to prepare Americans. Unless it is all a disastrous, discrediting bluff.

Obama’s foreign policy team is sometimes praised for its pragmatism, realism, restraint and strategic modesty. Obama himself is said to transcend old ideological divisions. “He followed the same approach in foreign policy he often did elsewhere, which was to detach himself from two opposing camps or schools of thought, sympathize with each and insist the differences between them were less than believed,” James Mann writes in his book “The Obamians.”

But there is a point when ideological detachment becomes inconsistency and irresolution. When caution — elevated to ideology — becomes paralysis. When a foreign policy focused on avoiding errors of commission begins to make serious errors of omission. When inaction magnifies future risks and costs.

In many parts of the world, the Obama doctrine has become an exercise in kicking the can down the road, avoiding or playing down problems that will only grow more complex and dangerous with time. There have been some admirable exceptions — Libya is certainly one — but Fouad Ajami of the Hoover Institution describes the sum as a “foreign policy of strategic abdication.”

Ideology is partly responsible. Mann’s book describes an Obama foreign policy team that holds a “distinctly more modest and

downbeat outlook on America's role in the world." Its members seem deeply impressed by America's limitations — its fiscal constraints and challenged primacy. These beliefs tend to be self-fulfilling. They make a virtue of ceded leadership. And these convictions are reinforced by a political calculation: Who wants to make tough, perilous foreign policy choices in the middle of an election season?

But the result is relevant to the election. Obama's doctrine of deferred decisions will leave a series of risky endgames for whoever is elected in November, even if it is Obama himself.

Article 5.

The National Interest

Iran's Secret Weapon

Kevjn Lim

August 9, 2012 -- Major General Qassem Soleimani On July 18, hours following the assassination of three of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's top security grandees during a national-security headquarters meeting in Damascus, a suicide bomber in Bulgaria's Black Sea resort city of Burgas set himself off near an Israeli tourist bus, killing five Israelis and wounding scores of others.

The Damascus attack occurred on the fourth straight day of fighting in the capital, and responsibility has been claimed by both an increasingly plucky armed opposition and an obscure Islamist group calling itself the Islam Brigade (Liwa al-Islam).

The Israeli government has accused usual suspects Hezbollah and Iran for the Burgas bombing, all the more since it coincided with both the eighteenth anniversary of the AMIA Jewish center bombing in Buenos Aires and the sixth anniversary of the second Lebanon war.

As far as Damascus and Burgas were concerned, the timing was sheer coincidence.

The Syrian crisis is the most gripping of the wave of popular revolutions that have swept through the region since December 2010. Although Assad's Alawite-dominated regime has lost control over significant territory, its co-optation strategy so far has headed off the rapid internal atrophy that brought Qaddafi to his knees last October (although it has not stopped recent high-level defections). However, the Damascus blast that killed Assad's defense minister, an ex-defense minister as well as his own brother-in-law and former intelligence chief (a fourth, the incumbent head of national security, also died from his wounds later) may have marked a tipping point—regardless of who carried it out.

These events present complications for Iran, which is already facing harsh sanctions owing to its alleged nuclear ambitions. Syria under both Assads, father and son, has been Tehran's firmest state ally in the region and the logistical keystone in the edifice of resistance, which brings together the Lebanese

Hezbollah and a clutch of rejectionist Palestinian factions. If Hezbollah-dominated Lebanon is Iran's most successful revolutionary export, Syria could yet turn out to be its biggest fiasco.

With the prospects of Israeli or U.S.-led strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities increasing, Assad's gradual descent to perdition risks impelling Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei to up the ante rather than stand down. And when this happens, the targeting of soft targets as happened in Burgas—such as the spate of brazen but bungled attempts attributed to Iran that spilled out onto the streets of several foreign capitals earlier this year—is likely to multiply with greater assiduity and singularity of purpose.

Persian shadow theater

Given its relatively limited conventional armed forces, the Iranian regime has invested heavily in niche, asymmetric capabilities far beyond its shores, thanks to concerted action by a nexus assumed to include the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, and, to a lesser extent, the Foreign Ministry's diplomatic missions abroad: all are thought to be coordinated via two organs, the Supreme Council for National Security and the Special Operations Council.

Yet it has become a "known unknown" that the prime mover behind Iran's extraterritorial special operations is a secretive unit embedded within the powerful IRGC, if not necessarily answerable to it. The Qods (or "Jerusalem") Force appears to focus on exporting the Islamic revolution by, among other things, fostering militant movements, creating deterrence and

retaliatory networks, and destabilizing unfriendly regimes. Officially, it stands among the IRGC's five known branches alongside the ground forces, the navy, the air force (in parallel with the regular tri-services) and the brutish Basij street paramilitia.

According to a 2010 U.S. Department of Defense report, the Qods Force "clandestinely [exerts] military, political, and economic power to advance Iranian national interests abroad," making it the forward or outermost complement to Iran's mosaic homefront-defense doctrine. The Qods Force has been accused of masterminding or supporting some of the most prominent attacks against Western and Israeli targets over the past three decades, and it was instrumental in midwifing Hezbollah, the Shiite militant group that attained notoriety for standing up to Israel for thirty-three sultry days in the summer of 2006.

Little wonder, then, that international attention has in recent years focused on Major General Qassem Soleimani, the enigmatic persona who runs the "handpicked elite of an already elite ideological army," as Stanford University's Abbas Milani described the Qods force. Ali Alfoneh, an Iran scholar specializing in the IRGC at the American Enterprise Institute, wrote that although lacking formal qualifications, Soleimani rose through the ranks on account of his reputation for gutsiness during tough times: the traumatic eight-year war with Iraq, campaigns in Iran's restive Kurdish heartland and the persistently wayward drug country around Sistan va Baluchistan, and the 1990s' civil war in Afghanistan. In his current role, Soleimani replaced Ahmad Vahidi in the late 1990s, who went on to become Iran's current defense minister. Moreover, Alfoneh pointed out that Soleimani's relationship

with a mid-level cleric and student of Khamenei's in the late 1970s may have been the catalyst for his own proximity to the current supreme leader and his subsequent rise.

But Soleimani's already extraordinary personal influence reportedly has taken on mythical proportions, especially in Iraq, where he has been regarded as the man who calls the shots since 2003. The then U.S. commanding officer in the country needed little convincing when he received this famous message in 2008: "General [David] Petraeus, you should know that I, Qassem Soleimani, control the policy for Iran with respect to Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, and Afghanistan."

Iraq's centrality in the Iranian revolutionary narrative was, as Muhammad Sahimi wrote in Tehran Bureau, the reason that the Qods Force was established in the 1980s: to train Iraq's Kurds (and Shia) against Saddam. Interestingly, noted the same author, Soleimani and his generation of fellow IRGC commanders never got over the fact that the West (and indeed the world) supported Saddam during the war. This is highly significant because it colors the regimes national-security and foreign-policy thinking.

But Iraq is one piece of the puzzle, albeit a crucial one. As the Qods Force's Ramazan Corps, responsible for Iraq, fills in the vacuum created by the U.S. withdrawal last December, it continues to expand its theater of operations beyond the familiar near-abroad stretching from Lebanon and Syria to Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf.

The long arm of the Islamic revolution

Nearly two dozen incidents within the past eighteen months (including recent attempts in Azerbaijan, India, Georgia,

Thailand, Kenya and Cyprus) have fueled suspicions that Tehran and Hezbollah are trawling farther afield for soft targets. This appears to involve countries with noticeable Israeli civilian or commercial traffic, relatively relaxed security protocols and Iranian diplomatic presence.

Azerbaijan is a compelling case in point. Israel's relationship with the Shiite Muslim-majority country of almost ten million is sand in the eyes for Iran given what it sees as its own "deeply rooted and brotherly" ties with Baku based on history, geography, culture, religion and, to an extent, ethnicity. Then, as now, Iran's leaders reason, independent Azerbaijan should intuitively belong within the orbit of Persian exceptionalism. For the Qods Force, this is even greater cause for involvement.

According to media reports, Iranian spooks have been operating on Azeri soil as far back as the mid-1990s. In 1997, members of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan were tried for spying on behalf of Iran. In 2007, Said Dadasbeyli, an Azeri cleric and alleged leader of a group known as the "Northern Mahdi Army" was accused of receiving assistance from the Qods Force and plotting to overthrow the secular government. In exchange, the authorities believed he had provided Iran with sensitive intelligence on the American and Israeli embassies in Baku.

In October 2009, two Lebanese and four Azerbaijani citizens were charged with plotting to attack the same embassies. In January 2012, three men were accused of planning to assassinate a Chabad rabbi and a teacher working at a Baku Jewish school. In the following two months, just as the heat was being turned up on Iran's nuclear activities, the number of suspects detained and allegedly linked with Iran and Hezbollah increased

exponentially.

While it is unclear to what extent these charges were politically motivated, the statistics alone, in addition to Baku's clear interest in maintaining cordial relations with its powerful southern neighbor, belie Iranian skulduggery. Iran has reciprocated by accusing Azerbaijan of harboring individuals spying on behalf of Israel's Mossad and heckling its neighbor for depravity and ways discordant with "the interests of the Islamic countries and the Muslim world," as an Iranian committee spokesman put it. By most accounts, this has had the effect of further galvanizing the Azeris' resolve to chart their own course—away from Iran.

No Silver Lining

A late-year Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear infrastructure remains a matter of heated speculation, although the truth is known only to the Jewish state's poker-faced premier Benjamin Netanyahu and his defense minister Ehud Barak. Either way, Israel is unlikely to cease targeting human assets linked to Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile-development programs, while Iran and its affiliates are equally unlikely to desist from hurting Jewish interests and Israeli citizens worldwide, whom it regards as extensions of Israel's universally militarized society.

If the current pressures persist, and so long as stalwart resistance to and the ultimate "removal" of the "cancerous Zionist regime" continue to underlie Iran's strategic calculus, this promises to be one long, hard war ahead for both governments and, unfortunately, for both peoples as well.

Article 6.

Guardian

Israel and the US would come to deeply regret air strikes against Iran

Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv

9 August 2012 -- Binyamin Netanyahu, usually an exemplar of self-restraint, lost his temper last week. In a closed-door meeting discussing the military and intelligence chiefs who oppose an air strike against Iran, the Israeli prime minister snapped, "I'm responsible, and if there's a commission of inquiry later it's on me," according to well-orchestrated leaks by his aides.

Netanyahu seems to feel a historic – almost messianic – calling to stop Iran's nuclear programme. Even if retaliation by Iran and its allies in Hamas and Hezbollah takes the form of a lethal rain of rockets on Israel, he is adamant that a nuclear-armed Iran would be far worse.

His latest set of outgoing signals seemed to suggest that an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities may be likely before America's presidential election in November. It is unclear if that is a coincidence, because of assessments that Iranian progress in uranium enrichment and bomb design will have reached a highly dangerous point by then; or maybe it is based on Netanyahu's calculation that President Barack Obama will be more supportive of Israel prior to election day – and perhaps not at all after he wins or loses on 6 November.

Some of Israel's security chiefs, who do not hide their opposition to bombing Iran, say privately that they cannot discern if their PM is bluffing. Netanyahu may be creating the impression that an attack is imminent so as to goad the US into a firm promise to obliterate Iran's nuclear plants. He is certainly sincere in his concern about Iran's radical Islamists, who time and again call for the liquidation of the Jewish state. In this sense Netanyahu walks in the footsteps of Menachem Begin, prime minister from 1977 to 1983, who had a doctrine named after him: the absolute Israeli determination that no other nation in the Middle East will have nuclear weapons.

The Begin doctrine was successfully implemented twice: by Begin himself in June 1981, when Israel's air force destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor; and in September 2007, when PM Ehud Olmert sent Israeli warplanes to flatten a Syrian nuclear reactor. Olmert's decision was even bolder than Begin's: President George Bush had refused to order an American air raid, but Israel went ahead anyway. And, unlike Iraq, Syria is an immediate neighbour and had thousands of missiles that could hit every conceivable installation in Israel.

Netanyahu may well be encouraged by the world's reaction. In 1981, even the pro-Israel president Ronald Reagan denounced the bombing of the Baghdad reactor; but a decade later, during Desert Storm, the US was thanking Israel for having ensured Saddam had no nuclear arms.

In 2007 the initial reaction was less harsh, because the air raid on Syria was never acknowledged by the attackers in Jerusalem. But Israeli leaders justifiably feel that the international community might now be grateful to them again. There is concern in the US and Israel that Syria's chemical weapons might fall into the hands of al-Qaida or Hezbollah. Just imagine if the danger now involved what proliferation experts call "loose nukes".

The unspoken motivation of both attacks was to preserve Israel's nuclear monopoly in the Middle East. While the Israeli arsenal is not confirmed officially, it is taken as a regional fact of life, even as Israel cannot countenance other nations in the region having the same weapons. For reasons both overt and covert, then, it should come as no surprise that Netanyahu may be feeling that a third time – in Iran – could be another attractive option. Hopefully it is not too late to prescribe an important dose of caution. Netanyahu and his few cabinet supporters – with defence minister Ehud Barak lately swinging back and forth between anti- and pro-attack positions – ought to know that the situation is different from 1981 or 2007.

Iran is not Iraq or Syria. The Iranians have drawn lessons from those two events. They dispersed their nuclear facilities and buried them underground, making them more difficult to reach and destroy. Success is thus less assured. Instead of a quick,

surgical strike, Israel will likely find itself in a long war of attrition against Iran and Shia Muslims everywhere. In the name of national pride and defending its Islamic revolution, Iran was willing to lose millions of people in a long war against Iraq through the 80s.

Above all, perhaps, Israeli leaders must consider that striking Iran could drag the US into a war against its wishes. This would be bad for one of Israel's core survival strategies: the defence and intelligence alliance with America. It would be far wiser for Netanyahu and Barak – Israel's two prime decision makers – to focus their efforts on helping the international community – with America in the lead – do everything possible to eliminate the Iranian threat. They have to guard against talking themselves into a simple but bloody bilateral conflict that Israelis could well come to regret.

Netanyahu has already achieved a lot with his innovative campaign to garner global attention. He can be satisfied his sabre-rattling has persuaded the world that Iran cannot be allowed to procure nuclear weapons. One can understand his fears that the world will let down Israel, a nation that prides itself on taking care of its own defence. Yet the wiser course now would be to tighten the alliance with the US and stand together against a common enemy.

Article 7.

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Ties with Iran sour over Syria

Semih Idiz

August/10/2012 -- Syria has made a mockery of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's "zero problems with neighbors" policy. Just two years ago Ankara was going out of its way to court Bashar al-Assad, in apparent defiance of the West. It was also courting Iran in a similar fashion at the time.

At that time, Turkey and Brazil — as non-permanent members of the Security Council — even produced a "fuel swap" formula that was designed to reduce international pressure on Tehran due to its nuclear program. Turkey also voted against sanctions for Iran at the Security Council, a move that further annoyed its Western allies.

But times have changed and the two countries are at loggerheads because of their fundamentally different positions on Syria. As developments in that country continue to unfold Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his overambitious foreign minister are discovering that Turkey cannot have it every way.

Iran's displeasure with Turkey really began when Ankara allowed the United States to deploy radar facilities on Turkish soil for NATO's "defense shield" project. Erdoğan and Davutoğlu still insist these facilities are not against Iran, but this is a claim no one, least of all Tehran, is buying.

Matters between the two countries have come to a head now after Iran's top general, Hassan Firozabadi, blamed Turkey a few days ago for the bloodshed in Syria and accused Ankara, alongside Saudi Arabia and Qatar, of helping the "war-raging goals of America."

Ankara was further annoyed over Firozabadi's claim that Turkey could see turmoil in Syria spread across the border as a result of

Al-Qaida activity. The Foreign Ministry in Ankara was quick to respond angrily with an official statement.

Turkey “strongly condemns statements full of false accusations regarding our country and extremely inappropriate threats made by some Iranian officials, particularly the statement of Hassan Firozabadi, chief of staff of the Iranian Armed Forces” it said. Appearing to suggest Tehran was ungrateful, the statement also recalled “Turkey’s principled attitude regarding the Iranian nuclear program adopted during the voting in the UN Security Council.”

Foreign Minister Davutoğlu told reporters on Wednesday that statements such as Firozabadi’s “could also harm Iran,” and added that Turkey expected Iranian officials “to think a few times before making such comments.”

Davutoğlu’s statement came a day after he held talks with his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Salehi, who paid a surprise visit to Ankara to discuss Syria and seek Turkish help for the release of 48 Iranians abducted by members of the Free Syrian Army on Saturday.

Davutoğlu said he had explained all of this to Salehi in a “frank and friendly manner.”

A visibly irked Erdoğan also had harsh words for Iran. While pointing out that “Turkey had always stood by Iran” in the past the prime minister indicated, in so many words, that Iranians should not forget this.

The two sides will try and limit the damage done to their diplomatic ties due to the vast economic interests they share. There is also the fact that neither country needs fresh diplomatic tensions at a time given the fact that developments in the Middle East are not exactly progressing as they’d like.

The “magic” that existed in Turkish-Iranian relations a mere two

years ago is nevertheless gone. Both countries today appear to be more like regional rivals than friends sharing common concerns and ideals. Fresh tensions could develop between them later on down the road.

The situation with Iran is only the latest reminder to Turkey that it is not the “prime force” determining the course of events in the region, despite what Davutoğlu’s self-declared ambitions may be.

Having started with the aim of having no problems with neighbors, Turkey has ended up with serious problems with almost every neighbor. This hardly counts as a success story as far as Davutoğlu’s grand vision of a foreign policy based on “strategic depth” is concerned.