

# Challenges to Peace in the Middle East

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In-Depth Reports

**D**uring the struggle to establish the State of Israel, David Ben Gurion once told his colleagues, "Five years are nothing next to eternity, but not all years in history are alike, and in the next five years the fate of our generation may be decided, if not the fate of generations." A year later, Ben Gurion confided in his diary, "There is no greater danger to political thought than inertia. The world is never static, and certainly history is not."

These messages are a fitting description not only for the tumultuous events surrounding the birth of Israel, but for the five years that began to unfold in 1989 with the peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe that led first to the end of the cold war, and then to the end of the Soviet Union itself.

The Cold War spawned its own vocabulary -- military containment, political rigidity, ideological competition. But although at times there were superpower conflicts by proxy, mercifully that war stayed cold. The Middle East has been, as all of us know, a different matter. Its vocabulary has been one of violence, terror, and wars which were anything but cold.

Partly as a consequence of the end of the Cold War, partly independently of it, revolutionary changes have left the ideological, military, and political roadmaps of the Middle East in tatters. In both the Cold War between East and West and the hot wars in the Middle East, conventional wisdom has been anything but conventional. We have said good riddance to the Cold War. We hope we are saying good riddance to much of the Arab-Israeli conflict. No longer is it naive or dangerous for us to speak of optimism, hope, and peace in the Middle East. Issues may have proven to be intractable for decades, but Ben Gurion was right. The world is never static.

The Role of the Intelligence Community Throughout the decades of American involvement in the Middle East, the intelligence community has been a silent partner with Israel, and subsequently others who joined in the struggle for peace and security. I stress the word "silent" because the nature of our work precludes us from publicizing our contributions. There are those who would dearly love to know our capabilities and missions, and tragically, there are those who paid dearly because such information was compromised.

There are five broad areas where the intelligence community continues to make a contribution. First, we support our negotiators who have worked for decades to help advance the peace process. Sometimes this entails providing policymakers with essential information and quick analysis. At other times it involves facilitating contacts between old foes. As President Clinton has said, "the United States has been proud to serve as a full partner in the search for peace -- not by imposing peace . . . but by facilitating negotiated compromise . . ." From the disengagement agreements of the mid-1970s to Camp David and from the Madrid peace conference to the historic signing ceremonies on the White House lawn, the intelligence community has worked hard, long, and in anonymity to help sustain the peace process.

Second, we have been monitoring existing agreements in the Sinai since 1973 and on the Golan Heights since 1974. If there is a settlement on the Golan, we will stand ready to do what we can to help monitor that agreement as well.

Third, we provide direct intelligence support to our military forces, as vividly demonstrated for Operation Desert

Storm when intelligence on Iraqi military capabilities and deployments proved indispensable to coalition forces who liberated Kuwait. Fourth, we provide long-term assessments of the military, political, economic, demographic, and social changes throughout the region.

Fifth, we help in the fight against terrorism. Although terrorism is not unique to the Middle East, it has been home to most of the highly dangerous terrorist groups, and to regimes who view terrorism as a legitimate means with which to defeat political opposition to their rule or to advance their foreign policy objectives.

The Threat From Political Islam This month marked the one-year anniversary of the handshake on the White House lawn between Israeli Prime Minister Rabin and PLO Chairman Arafat, an event repeated ten months later between the leaders of Israel and Jordan. Yet the dramatic, revolutionary steps toward peace in the Middle East do not reduce the need for intelligence. Whether in the Middle East or elsewhere, history does not end, it unfolds, and the worst assumption we can make in the intelligence business is to believe that peace will spread irrevocably and inevitably throughout the entire region.

Challenges come in many forms, each one capable of undermining or threatening our interests and those of our friends and allies throughout the region: political extremism hiding behind the mantle of Islamic religious fundamentalism, terrorism, and the policies and ambitions of two regimes in particular -- Iran and Iraq -- which have not abandoned their goals of dominating the region, threatening their neighbors, subverting peace, and acquiring or developing weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them.

Islamic fundamentalism has become an all-inclusive term -- sometimes interchangeable with "militant Islam" or "Islamic extremism." But the term is misleading. There is nothing simple nor monolithic about contemporary Islamic political aspirations or intellectual, religious, and philosophical debates about Islam's role within both modern society, and the international system.

In one of my first visits abroad as director of central intelligence, a major Middle Eastern Muslim leader told me that the threat is not fundamentalism, but extremism using the cover of Islamic fundamentalism for political purposes. He was right. Like scientists, intelligence analysts try to discern trends, but we must also be wary of making generalizations that simply do not hold true. Thus, we should not accept the notion that the "Red Menace" that dominated our lives for nearly a half a century is now being replaced by a "Green Menace" sweeping throughout the Arab world. The time of the Great Crusades belongs in the Middle Ages, not as we prepare to usher in the 21st century. The United States has no quarrel with Islam as such, and values its friendships with a number of Muslim nations and their leaders.

Indeed, the U.S. intelligence community has a long and distinguished history of close cooperation with many Islamic states and their intelligence services. It was only a few years ago that the United States worked closely with Pakistan and several other Muslim nations to evict the Soviet Army from Afghanistan. When then-General Secretary Gorbachev proclaimed Afghanistan a bleeding wound on the Soviet Union, he was signaling fatigue with the conflict and a desire to withdraw from it. That withdrawal foreshadowed the collapse of the Soviet empire itself. Similarly, we worked closely with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and many other Islamic nations to reverse Iraq's aggression in Kuwait. That cooperation not only shattered Saddam's forces which had overrun Kuwait, but the myth that such a coalition could never be mounted, sustained, or succeed in carrying out its mission.

It is our friends in the Islamic world, in fact, who are most at risk from the challenge of Islamic political extremism. Those in the Islamic community who advocate coexistence and cooperation with the West are those the extremists most desperately wish to defeat. These extremists are terrorists who use the cover of the religion of Islam to destabilize regimes and derail peace. They often exploit those who are disaffected or disillusioned, promising redemption through violence. Terrorism and violence against foreigners in Egypt, for example, is aimed at

undermining President Mubarak's rule and destabilizing that country.

The terrorist attacks last year in New York, and this past summer in Buenos Aires and London were carried out in Islam's name. These terrorists would have us believe that terror is the rightful handmaiden of Islam. We reject the notion that pious Moslems blew up the World Trade Center in New York, trying to murder hundreds of Americans for the sake of religion, just as Prime Minister Rabin rejected the notion that Baruch Goldstein spoke for pious Jews when he murdered innocents in Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs.

There is a growing pattern of cooperation among extremist groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, the Gamaat and others that increases each group's potential to cause havoc. Extremists in Egypt or Algeria, for example, may get their training in Sudan or Iran. Tactics learned in one environment can be transferred to another. Money laundering schemes have reached such degrees of sophistication that today they span three or four continents. Terrorists rely on the tolerance, hospitality, and in some cases outright support of some regimes.

**Iranian Arms Purchases and Support for Terrorism** It is difficult to discuss the threat from terrorism and extremism without focusing on the regime in Tehran. It has been over fifteen years since the Shah was toppled. The record since 1979 of Iranian behavior -- to its own people and abroad -- is appalling. At home, repression, violence, and terror. Abroad, efforts to undermine the states in the Persian Gulf, to derail the peace process, and to support Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations and groups operating today from Algeria to Tajikistan. Indeed, Iran is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. The Iranian government did not create the violence in Egypt, Algeria, or Lebanon, but it does everything in its power to strengthen the hand of extremist forces, to increase the carnage, and to upset any progress toward political reconciliation within these countries or peace between them and their neighbors.

During the period President Rafsanjani has held office, Iran and its surrogates have carried out more than thirty-five acts of terrorism, including assassinations of at least four members of the Mujihadin-e Khalq dissident group last year. These attacks were not acts of rogue elements. They were authorized at the highest levels of the Iranian regime. Iran has also strengthened its ties to radical Palestinian terrorists, providing support to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Iran did not hesitate to make its views known on the Rabin-Arafat handshake: late last year Iranian Vice President Habibi met with representatives of ten Palestinian groups opposed to the signing of the Gaza-Jericho accord and pledged them Iran's full support to undermine it.

Iran's most important client, Lebanese Hezbollah, has killed more Americans than any other terrorist group, and receives support, training, and arms from Tehran. In the last decade, Iran has provided Hezbollah with hundreds of millions of dollars in aid and weapons. Hezbollah itself has developed an elaborate international network that supports its terrorist operations. For example, Hezbollah weapons have been discovered not only in the Middle East, but in Europe and Africa as well.

Iranian threats are not limited to support for terrorism. They include Iran's multi-billion dollar military modernization program, its determination to develop weapons of mass destruction, and to attempt to import ballistic missiles. Iran has obtained MIG-29s, SU-24s and T-72 tanks, as well as two Kilo-class attack submarines from Russia. Their goal is not only to have a preponderance of military power against Iraq, but to intimidate or threaten their neighbors in the Gulf.

As threatening as this military program is, our biggest concern is in countering Iran's aggressive pursuit of development of weapons of mass destruction. Iran has turned to suppliers in both the East and West, using intermediaries to purchase technology clandestinely. We continue to pay close attention to Iranian efforts to purchase dual-use technology which increases the difficulty we have in uncovering Iran's ultimate intentions and

programs. In addition, Iran continues to manufacture and stockpile chemical weapons. We suspect that Iran is also hiding a biological weapons program as well.

We pay particular attention to Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear and missile technology from the West in order to enable it to build its own nuclear weapons, despite being a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We believe that Iran is eight to ten years away from building such weapons, and that help from the outside will be critical in reaching that timetable. Iran has been particularly active in trying to purchase nuclear materials or technology clandestinely from Russian sources. Iran is also looking to purchase fully-fabricated nuclear weapons in order to accelerate sharply its timetable.

Iran is further working to obtain delivery systems. Because of its inability to obtain missiles from the West, Iran has looked to Asia -- first to China for missiles and for nuclear-related technologies, and now also to North Korea for ballistic missiles. Containing Iranian ambitions will require perseverance persistence, determination, and patience. It will also require strong cooperation among our friends and allies, not only in the Middle East but beyond. As President Clinton has said, "We call upon all of our allies to recognize the true nature of Iranian intentions and to help us convince Tehran that we will not tolerate rogue behavior."

Post-Gulf War Iraq The picture in Baghdad is no less troublesome. Saddam's goals are clear. First, Saddam wants to re-establish authority over all of Iraq. To do so he is bent on eroding UN authority and inspections in his country, ending sanctions, eliminating the no-fly zones and weakening opposition to his rule from the north and south. In the north his regime continues to maintain the economic blockade of the Kurdish controlled areas. In addition, Saddam's forces continue to intimidate and attack UN and private relief workers. Iraqi agents have been infiltrated into northern Iraq to collect intelligence and to conduct operations against relief workers and coalition troops. In the south, the Iraqi government continues to suppress the Shi'a. As part of this effort, the regime has constructed giant canals -- clearly visible from space -- to drain the great marshes of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Tens of thousands of marsh Arabs have been evicted from their homes, in addition to the ecological disasters looming in an ecosystem that had remained unchanged for more than a millennium.

Second, Saddam wants to rebuild his armed forces, as well as his capability for developing weapons of mass destruction. Iraq has the largest pool of scientific and technical expertise in the Arab world -- over 7,000 nuclear scientists and engineers alone. Sanctions have clamped down on their freedom to develop such weapons capabilities. Yet even under these restrictions, and even with Saddam accepting UN Security Council Resolution 715 for permanent monitoring of his weapons of mass destruction programs, his regime is still hiding Scud missiles, chemical munitions, and its entire biological weapons warfare program. Moreover, in the aftermath of the effectiveness of precision guided weapons during the Gulf War, Iraq is accelerating construction of deep underground shelters and tunnels to produce and store weapons of mass destruction.

Those who say that the Scuds launched by Iraq in 1991 were militarily ineffective miss the point. They were used as weapons of terror. And, if given another opportunity, Iraq will try to ensure that this time they will be effective. Their intent is to build up this capability, for intimidation -- and use. We can ill afford to allow him to possess such weapons.

Saddam's third goal is to make Iraq the dominant power in the region. His actions and statements in the aftermath of the disastrous military defeat he suffered make Saddam anything but repentant. His forces continue to harass UN observers along the Iraqi-Kuwait border. In fact Saddam still refuses to recognize not only the borders, but even the sovereignty of Kuwait.

Nor is Saddam content to limit his efforts to Kuwait and the immediate Persian Gulf area. During this past spring's civil war in Yemen, Baghdad radio urged continuation of the fighting -- even while others sought negotiations -- and

the Iraqi regime repeatedly called for an Iraqi-Yemeni axis to encircle Saudi Arabia. Iraq followed up with offers of free military expertise to help rebuild the Yemeni armed forces.

Just as Saddam has not changed his ambitions, so too there is no sign of his regime easing its repression against the Iraqi people. They are victims of their own regime's brutality -- arrests, torture, and summary executions. Earlier this year, the Iraqi opposition published an indictment of the leading figures in Saddam's regime, listing their multiple crimes against the Iraqi people. Saddam responded by ordering a live television show in which those who were accused took credit for their crimes and how well they were serving him. Because of Iraq's ambitions, policies, and behavior, the president has made clear his stance: we seek full Iraqi compliance with all UN Security Council resolutions.

**Conclusions** The fact that Iran and Iraq fought a long and bitter war, and that they are both competing for power and influence in the Persian Gulf is cold comfort. These two regimes are united in their opposition to the peace process, in their willingness to use terrorism, in their efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction, and in their desire to eliminate any outside powers which could thwart their ambitions. The world cannot afford to let its guard down against these regimes.

These then are the threats to peace and security in the Middle East. These are the regimes, the terrorist leaders and their followers, the ones who answer the call for compromise and conciliation with the policies of confrontation and conquest.

The Middle East peace process is not an easy road -- but then building peace is never easy. Israelis know this too well; more Israelis have been killed since the Oslo talks began than during the previous year. Israel's partners know of the risks and dangers as well, facing the rhetoric of rejection and hate, and the threats of retaliation. Yet the participants in the peace process continue because they believe that what King Hussein called the "unnatural" state of hostility and fear which has dominated the Middle East for half a century must come to an end. Hostility and fear are the deadly allies of those who reject peace. They must go.

I began by quoting Ben Gurion's admonition that history is not static. This past July, an unprecedented event occurred in Washington. For the first time ever, two foreign leaders together addressed a joint session of Congress. And in their words, Prime Minister Rabin and King Hussein spoke not of watching history unfold, but of molding the future. Prime Minister Rabin made clear that everyone must participate in building peace, by saying that "We all shape the forces of history." King Hussein echoed that belief when he spoke of his determination, in his words, "to build a better future under peace, to change the pattern of life for our people from despair and hopelessness to honor and dignity."

The president has reaffirmed the American commitment to help build and nurture peace in the Middle East. We in the intelligence community will continue to serve as silent partners, to help support not only the peace process but the realization of peace itself.

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Farzin Nadimi

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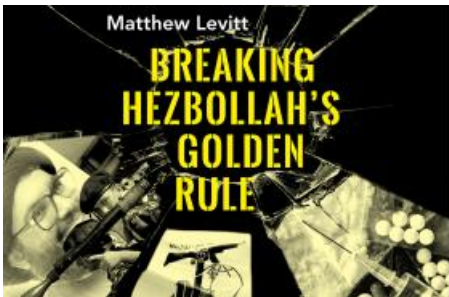
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