

XXIX. The Geostrategic Lessons Learned from a Conflict: Israel-Hezbollah

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Abstract: This paper examines the lessons learned from the Israel-Hezbollah war at a political and military level. It demonstrates the political benefits for Israel in security terms, and its military weak points. It also unveils how Iran and Syria influence the Middle East geostrategic subsystem and the Lebanon case, and suggests that a US attack against Iran is not realistic. It draws on valid evidence and statements by political figures from all involved parties.¹

Keywords: Israel-Hezbollah, Iran, Syria, lessons learned from the Israel-Hezbollah war, CSTO, SCO.

The Israeli-Hezbollah War's aftermath

It is evident that Israel has once more put in place the fundamental principle of its flexible defence doctrine, “to place the conflict on enemy territory”. A number of mistakes have however been made at an operational level, the highlighting of which does not however fall within the scope of this text. An effort should be made hereby to decipher the new

1. N.B.: Opinions and views in the present article are those of the author alone. It does not necessarily reflect the views of other private or public bodies collaborating with him.

geostrategic balance in the region; this way, it will enable us to predict as accurately as possible the geostrategic behavior of all actors in the broader Middle East.

Israel itself committed important military, political and communication mistakes, but managed to destroy 40% of Hezbollah's underground tunnels (of Iranian know-how) in south Lebanon and exterminate about 500 fighters, some of whom were members of Hezbollah's hard operational core of some 1500 fighters, all third degree fighters and leaders of the organisation's operational groups. The rest of Hezbollah's fighters (around 5,000 men) are second and third degree fighters according to its organizational patterns (Fighters: Commando core leaders, Fellows: privates, pupils, performing logistics, rear-guard and networking tasks spreading the organisation's messages to Lebanese society).

Almost one third of Hezbollah's Katyusha rockets were used during this war. Materially assessed, this figure does not mean much. However, it demonstrates the extent of Syria's and Iran's uninterrupted provision of arms to Hezbollah, not only through the Syrian - Lebanese borders, but also the provision of Hezbollah with heavy arms, carried through Turkey, and stationed in Syria. Thus, this war unveils Turkey's dubious, to say the least, stance towards Israel, with which Turkey ought to have a more straightforward relationship because of the existing defence agreement between these two countries. It is important to note that this accusation was launched once the ceasefire has been put into effect (11 August 2006) by the Israeli secret services and forced the Israeli Ministry of the Interior to intervene in Ankara, as was broadcasted by the international press.² The mere fact of this Israeli intervention alone is weighed as significant for the Israeli-Turkish relationship. It also proves that Turkey is collaborating with Damascus and Syria due to the Kurdish danger, balancing on their head of the hard geopolitical reality, as accepted –and promoted for others- by Washington. The latter, on the other hand, controversial though it may be, also encourages the participation of Turkish soldiers in the Lebanon peace force, which must however ultimately be accepted by Tel Aviv as well.

2. See «*Kathimerini*», Friday 18 August, 2006, 3, «Israel: Arms to Hezbollah via Turkey».

Lebanon- Hezbollah

There are already certain voices within the Lebanon, like that of the Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and even the Shiite Sheikh of Tyre, endorsing the opinion that Hezbollah is responsible for dragging an entire nation into bloodshed and bringing destruction upon the infrastructures of the state.

Jumblatt called upon Hezbollah (17 August 2006) to respect the 1949 armistice agreement between Lebanon and Israel, stressing that Nasrallah has not yet explicitly declared his respect for the armistice, and that if no respect is to be paid to the Taif Accords (1989), by which Hezbollah established its political-economic presence in the Lebanon, “then the country will remain a theatre of conflicts among regional powers”. At the same press conference, Walid Jumblatt suggests –as well as this author– the incorporation of Hezbollah’s military branch into the Lebanese army. The author believes, on the one hand, that this movement allows implementation of resolution 1701 “on Hezbollah’s disarmament”, while, on the other hand, it dodges the feeling of “dishonour” caused to a fighter deprived unwillingly of his weapon; apart from the feeling of “defeat” stemming from such a procedure, which he is under any circumstances not to accept without a fight.

As regards Hezbollah’s disarmament, the leader of the Lebanese Christian Party “Kataeb”, Sheikh Pierre Gemayel, stated that “it is not convincing just to hide the Hezbollah arms and not for them simply to be carried in public by its fighters”, insisting on the full implementation of the UN Security Council’s Resolution 1701.

Moreover, according to (Democratic) former vice president of the C.I.A.’s National Intelligence Council and “Political Islam” author, Graham Fuller, “...leaders in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt have recently abandoned their firm stance in favour of “Arabian unity” and condemned Shiite Hezbollah for adventurism that brought war to Lebanon”.

Paving the way for Hezbollah redeployment due to strong reactions within Lebanese society, Sheik Nasrallah stated, August 27 that “the Hezbollah administration never thought for a moment that kidnapping Israeli soldiers could lead to such a war [...]. There won’t be a new round between Israel and Hezbollah”.

These statements make clear that, apart from Israel, Hezbollah itself has suffered material and moral damage of such importance within the political system of Lebanon, that it can be concluded that Israel has met a great part of its strategic expectations, that is to “neutralize” the Shiite organization’s military operations against it. Indeed, this form of “neutralisation” also covers also political-military actions, such as the “kidnappings” of Israeli military or political personnel.

The role of Syria in the Lebanon and its geostrategic intervention

The case of accusations by former Syrian Vice President ‘Abd Al-Halim Khaddam³ on the role of Damascus, is also very important.⁴

In his interview to Lebanon TV channel *Al-Mustaqbal*, on 28 August, 2006,⁵ former Syrian Vice President ‘Abd Al-Halim Khaddam (henceforth Khaddam), who currently lives in exile and is head of the Syrian opposition, accused senior officials of Syria of presenting –for

3. When 17 years old, Khaddam entered the Syrian Baath (1950) and dedicated him completely to politics after the Baath putsch in 1963. In 1967, he was appointed Governor of Damascus and in 1969 Minister of Finance and Foreign Trade of Syria. He has always been loyal to President Hafez Al-Assad during the whole period of clashes within Baath. In 1970, he assumed the posts of Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of the Syrian Government. From 1984 until the death of Hafez Al-Assad, he served as one of the three government’s Vice Presidents, responsible for Syrian-Lebanese policy. He is one of the principal architects of the 1989 Taif Accords that put an end to the civil war in the Lebanon, although Hafez Al-Assad took the Lebanese affairs portfolio away from Khaddam and assigned it to Bashar, whom he wanted to promote as his future heir in the country’s presidency. After Hafez Al-Assad’s death (June 10, 2000), he served as acting President of Syria. He was to ensure the ascension of Bashar Al-Assad to the Syrian Presidency, although he opposed it (not only on grounds of constitutional legitimacy, but also because he thought young Assad “inexperienced”). He always had close ties with Rafik Hariri but disagreed on key issues of Syrian-Lebanese relations with the current pro-Syrian President of the Lebanese Parliament, General Emili Lahoud. Since summer 2005, he has lived in self-exile in Paris.

4. Special Dispatch Lebanon/Syria, September 1, 2006, Report no. 1280, MEMRI, <http://goo.gl/dkgLNp>.

5. Al-Mustaqbal TV Channel (Lebanon), 28 August 2006.

him- “ridiculous excuses for no- intervention in the recent Hezbollah - Israel war”. Khaddam argued that the Syrian regime’s refusal to mark the borders with the Lebanon is a pretext aimed at continuing the resistance in southern Lebanon, since, he said, these borders “can be marked on the map within an hour”. He also revealed information that, following Israel’s May 2000 withdrawal from southern Lebanon, while he was still serving as Vice President, Syria issued instructions to stage the liberation of the Shebaa Farms as an achievement in favor of the Lebanon – while such territorial sovereignty of the Lebanon has never existed in the past. Even the UN acknowledges this fact and claims that the Shebaa Farms belong to Syria.

The following is a translation of the Khaddam interview’s key points:

i) On the role of the Lebanese state

“The guarantee that there will be no second round [of the war] is the [establishment] of national Lebanese unity, and [when] all Lebanese elements will accept the state as the one that makes the decisions and has the responsibility. But if things remain as they are... then the problem will move to the intra-Lebanese arena...”

ii) On the role of Assad for preventing resistance in the Golan Heights

“In 1982, Israel invaded the Lebanon and the war became a direct [war] between us and Israel on Lebanese soil. We fought in the Beirut Mountains and stopped the Israeli advance between ‘Ayn Zhalta and Sultan Ya’aqoub in the western Beqaa region. Then came the decision for a cease-fire and afterwards Hafez Al-Assad decided to exhaust Israel in the Lebanon. [Even before that,] when Hafez Al-Assad decided that traditional war with Israel had become impossible because of what became clear during the 1973 October War he gave strict orders to the Syrian army and security apparatuses to prevent all resistance activity in the Golan Heights. This was because any response by Israel would have reached the internal Syrian arena...”

“Thus, in 1982, when the decision was made, we began to encourage the Lebanese parties to carry out resistance activities in the Lebanon...”

iii) On the role of Syrian officials for Syria’s Non-Intervention in the August 2006 War

“Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad is fearful and apprehensive about war crisis management on Syrian territory. As far as he is concerned, the war can be conducted in the Lebanon without Syria being forced to bear any military consequences. If you ask me about the value of the Syrian-Lebanese military agreement, which is part of the military contract between them, I will reply that it is just a piece of paper.”

Some of the senior officials close to Bashar Al-Assad have claimed to have an excuse: *“What prevents us from intervening in the war is the Separation of Forces Agreement between Syria and Israel in the Golan Heights”*. Yet Israel violated this agreement when it attacked at ‘Ayn Al-Saheb. Then, they said, *“If the Israeli forces approach Syria’s borders, we will intervene.”* Yet Israeli forces are indeed on Syrian lands. Bashar Al-Assad said in his speech on August 15, 2006: *“Israel has been defeated since the very first days”*. If indeed it was defeated in the first days, why was this defeat not exploited in order to liberate the Golan Heights?

iv) On the relations of Equals between Syria and Lebanon. Today there is no place for Syrian-Lebanese unity

“What is the difference between the Lebanon and any other Arab state? This is not the right time to establish unity between Syria and the Lebanon. The idea of such unity has never even crossed our minds. Syrian-Mauritanian unity will come before Syrian-Lebanese unity... In my experience with the intricacies of the Lebanese situation, I say that there must be relations of equality between Syria and the Lebanon, and this will serve the interests of both countries. Why shouldn’t there be diplomatic relations between Syria and the Lebanon?”

v) *On the Syrian objections to marking the border at Shebaa Farms. They are an excuse in order to continue the Hezbollah resistance*

“Marking the Syria-Lebanon border requires nothing more than diplomatic will... Even the borders between Saudi Arabia and Yemen are marked, despite the disputes that have continued for over a century. Why shouldn’t the Syrian-Lebanese border be marked? The occupation has nothing to do with this... They can be marked on the map within an hour”.

“Actually, Syria’s objecting to marking the border is a pretext aimed at justifying the continuation of the resistance movement in the South. Liberating the Shebaa Farms was not one of the aims of the resistance, especially of Hezbollah. No one spoke of the Shebaa Farms. They started talking about them only after the May 2000 Israeli withdrawal from the Lebanon. This was an order that came from Syria.”

vi) *On the role of Assad in the Lebanese-Israeli conflict after the assassination of Al-Hariri*

“It is clear that the Syrian regime has two aims: the first is to drag the Lebanon into civil war, so as to close the investigation of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri... The second aim of the Syrian regime is to bring about a situation in which matters in the Lebanon will blow up, and then Syria, assisted by its allies, i.e. Hezbollah, will manage to take over the Lebanon”.

vii) *On the role of Assad in the assassination of Hariri*

On the assassination of Rafiq Al-Hariri, Khaddam said: “Bashar Al-Assad knows what he’s doing. He knows how the decision to assassinate Al-Hariri was made, how the crime was carried out, and who took part

in it... No security operation could be executed in Syria without the decision of the president. How else could Rustum Ghazale have taken a ton of explosives from the army's warehouse? How else could the ambush be set? My answer to all these is this is a decision that came from the president..."

"I won't stop saying to Bashar Al-Assad that I am convinced that the investigation will reach him, and he knows this... The Syrian regime will fall... Its end is near and Bashar Al-Assad's speech on August 15, 2006 is his last one".

Those who are aware of what's going on inside the "Sarayi of Damascus" claim⁶ that "...everything Khaddam says is true, like everything said about him is true"! An approach extremely venomous but also enlightening...

The role of Syria in the Golan and its projected geostrategic intervention⁷

At the end of the war in the Lebanon, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad delivered a speech in praise of the resistance, calling it "essential, natural, and legitimate". He repeatedly said that resistance is not contradictory to peace, but rather necessary in order to achieve peace. In addition, he said in his speech that "the Golan will be liberated by Syrian hands," and in a number of interviews in the media he repeated this statement, adding that "the Syrian people is the one who will decide if there will be resistance in the Golan".⁸

Following his speech, the Syrian government press published a number of articles in the same tone that also stressed the same lessons from the war and in particular that "resistance and peace are one single axis." It should be noted that already in the course of the war, the Syrian press published numerous articles praising resistance and martyrdom, and

6. See «L'Express», 26 January 2006, Dominique Lagarde, «Syrie: Qu'est-ce qui fait courir Haddam?».

7. See <http://goo.gl/VRD0k8>, Special Dispatch to Syria, 7 September 2006, No. 1283.

8. <http://goo.gl/iEgMDM>, <http://goo.gl/UllvSF> and <http://goo.gl/2VdO3L>.

even threatening that Syria would adopt the path of resistance in the Golan Heights”.⁹

Since the end of the war, reports have appeared in the media concerning a new resistance organization for the liberation of the Golan, which warned that military operations may be undertaken in the Golan.¹⁰ Following that, a delegation of residents from the Golan Heights, among them several sheikhs, visited Syria, where members of the delegation spoke of the need for “initiating resistance activities against the Israeli occupation”. Concurrent with this visit, new reports appeared in the Syrian press on the resistance organization in the occupied Golan, warning that “the Hezbollah model will not be absent from our [minds]”.

The following are excerpts from press reports on the delegation’s visit and the new resistance organization:

i. Resistance Organization in the Golan threatens to adopt the Hezbollah model

The Syrian government daily *Teshreen* published a report on August 31, 2006, about a new resistance organization in the Golan Heights that is demanding the release of Syrian prisoners being held in Israel: “Concurrently with the visit to the homeland [i.e. Syria] of the delegation of residents of the occupied Golan, members of the national resistance in the occupied villages of the Golan issued a statement in which they demanded of the Israeli occupation authorities that they unconditionally release the prisoners from the Golan. The statement warned Israel that if it does not comply with this purely humanitarian demand, the necessary measures will be taken in order to free them. The statement added: ‘The Lebanese model - that of Hezbollah - will not be absent from our [minds] as a solution for the freeing of our prisoners’.”¹¹

9. <http://goo.gl/nbMdlb>, <http://goo.gl/F0dh5P>, <http://goo.gl/ex0zfw>.

10. <http://goo.gl/HNc6Ic>.

11. *Teshreen* (Syria), 31 August 2006.

ii. Golan Residents: “Victory and the Liberation of the Golan Will Come Soon under Assad’s Leadership, and the Syrian Flag Will Be Waved over the Golan”

In the last few days the Syrian press has published reports on a delegation of 550 Druze from the Golan Heights who arrived in Syria for family visits that will last four days. Over the course of the visit, the delegation visited the tomb of Hafez Al-Assad, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the October [1973] War Museum, and a number of religious sites in Syria. Members of the Golan delegation heaped scathing criticism on the inhuman actions being perpetrated against them by the Zionist occupation forces, and expressed hope that the Golan will soon be returned to Syria.¹²

One member of the delegation, Sheikh Muhammad Jamal Al-Maghribi, delivered a speech in the name of the delegation, saying: *“This visit comes to emphasize that the sons of the steadfast Golan carry the homeland [Syria] in their hearts, and refuse to give in to the decisions of the Zionist occupation, despite the hardship, tyranny, and torturing to which they are subjected at the hands of the Zionist occupation forces”.*

Al-Maghribi talked about the “pride the people of the occupied Golan, the heroic Lebanese national resistance and for Syria’s embracing our people in the Golan in the wake of the oppressing Israeli aggression...”

Another member of the delegation, Sheikh Sa’id Tawfiq, recited a poem on the topic of the glorious meaning of resistance, and martyrdom for the homeland.¹³

The head of the delegation, Sheikh Mahmud Hassan Al-Safadi, said: *“We came on this visit from the steadfast Golan while carrying with us love and longing for the people and for the motherland. We came in order to emphasize our firm attachment to our original identity and our belonging to the Syrian nation, and our determination to continue our struggle. We are all certain that victory and liberation [of the Golan] will come soon under the leadership of the nation’s hope, Bashar Al-Assad, and that the bloodstained flag of the homeland will be raised*

12. *As above.*

13. The Syrian-Arab News Agency (SANA), 31 August 2006.

and Al-Assad himself will wave it over the pure land of the Golan. The residents of the Golan asked to express their love and their support for our motherland, our great people, and for our beloved leader, who encourages and them and stands as a guiding light for all free and noble souls in this nation".¹⁴

Al-Safadi emphasized that "the people of the Golan - the youth and the elderly - reject Israeli identity, whatever the sacrifices that this will require". He blessed the motherland [Syria], the people, the army, and the wise leadership, and first and foremost President Bashar Al-Assad, who places the steadfast Golan and its people at the top of his agenda of national priorities.

The head of the Druze delegation called for the release of the Syrian prisoners from Israel's prisons: "*The occupation authorities are holding our children in their prisons. The prison terms of most of the prisoners have continued more than twenty two years. They are subjected to the most abject inhuman actions behind bars, while their health is consistently neglected...*"

*"Al-Safadi called on the Arab League to intervene and force Israel to release them. He spoke of the suffering of the residents of the Golan as being a result of 'the oppressive Zionist steps being taken against them' and complained that there are no hospitals or medical centers in the Golan, and therefore people's state of health in the villages is very severe."*¹⁵

iii. Members of the Delegation: "The Visit has Strengthened Our Determination to Initiate Resistance Activities against the Israeli Occupation"

The Syrian government daily *Al-Ba'th* reported that "*members of the delegation expressed their joy at the visit, which has strengthened their resolute decision and their determination to initiate resistance activities against the Israeli occupation and to hold fast to their Arab-*

14. As above.

15. *Teshreen* (Syria), 3 September 2006.

*Syrian identity, which they will not exchange for any other. They are certain that the occupation will taste defeat and that the Golan will once again gain its freedom and its honor under the leader of the homeland [Bashar Al-Assad]”.*¹⁶

Another member of the delegation, Sheikh Nasib Farhat, said: “*The suffering of the people of the occupied Arab Golan in the face of the inhuman actions of the Zionist occupation forces only reinforces the strength of resistance and the determination to continue their steadfast stand and to hold fast to their Arab-Syrian identity and to the return of their land to the bosom of the motherland. Everyone at the Golan experience day by day and hour by hour the bitterness of the afflictions, the isolation from their homeland and relatives, and the various shortages.*”

Sheikh Majed Ahmad Kamal Al-Din talked about “the importance of the visit in strengthening and supporting the steadfast stand of the people of the occupied Golan and their adherence to returning to homeland Syria.” He said that “there could be nothing more glorious and wonderful than the reunion of Syrian families with their loved ones from Golan”.¹⁷

Finally, as a coping stone indicative of the actual acceptance of the above, and the encouragement of national liberating tendencies of Golan Arabs, we cite Syrian Minister of Information Dr. Bilal’s statement: “Together with the people of the Golan we will liberate the Golan Heights”.

The Syrian-Arab News Agency reported on a speech given by the said Syrian Minister before the arrival of the delegation: “*Dr. Bilal stressed in his talk that the Golan is the heart of Syria and that the Syrian citizens wait the time when they may meet their brothers and their relatives in the occupied Golan. He said that Syria is an indivisible whole and that our people in the Golan strengthen this unity, and that we, together with them, will liberate the Golan and will recover it in its entirety, without giving up a single inch of land...*”

Bilal also added that “Syria - its leadership, government, and people - insist on recovering its occupied lands, and President Bashar Al-Assad stands right beside them”.

16. *Al-Ba’th* (Syria), 3 September 2006.

17. The Syrian-Arab News Agency (SANA), 31 August 2006.

Bilal also said that “*the visit confirmed for him that there is no power that can separate the people of the occupied Golan from their motherland, Syria, or extinguish the feelings of rejection for the occupation from their breasts*”.

“*The members of the delegation spontaneously expressed their ebullient feelings for the Syrian motherland, their dedication to their land, their steadfastness in the face of the occupation, and their readiness to sacrifice in the name of the struggle for a free and indivisible Syria...*”¹⁸

All the above quotes prove that Syria is intelligently trying to turn a quasi-taken decision on behalf of Tel Aviv, on the return in due time of the Golan under an international regime and certain preconditions, into a political triumph of the Assad government regarding the liberation of the Golan Heights. Moreover, as stated *expressis verbis* above, the Lebanese Hezbollah pattern of action in the recent conflict is an “export” model for Damascus in the case of the Golan as well.

It is however arguable to what extent such a solution will be “supported” by Tehran; the latter is in no case willing to lose the benefits of the chance, offered by the recent conflict, to become the future “leading power” in the oil-rich Arab Muslim world. It is also unknown if Tehran would be keen to see an almighty and triumphant Baath Syria.

Nonetheless, it is important to note the aspect of the creation of a new source for exercising pressure on Israel and the international community on the part of Damascus, as a means of negotiating the Hariri case and the other assassinations.

Analysis, Evaluations and Conclusions

Regarding the fulfillment of Israel’s political objective, it is highly important to understand the essence –in strategic terms- of the comment by Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Massimo d’Alema, who underlined that “the purpose of Unifil II is not to destroy Hezbollah but its evolution into a peaceful political movement”. This clearly demonstrates the international community’s intention to entirely eradicate the Hezbollah operational branch currently free of state control. But this

18. The Syrian-Arab News Agency (SANA), 2 September 2006.

is not all: the Italian Minister stressed, regarding the implementation of the UN Security Council's Resolution 1701 that "the UN Secretary General will ask for and get the 'assistance' of Damascus and Tehran". "Otherwise", he added, "those 7000 European soldiers¹⁹ of Unifil II will have to stay for a very long time in the region and will probably welcome Unifil III in ten years' time". Also, the Minister, in his interview for the French newspaper "*Le Monde*", said that "Italy would like to be in Lebanon together with and in the name of Europe, seeing itself by the side of France". Corroborating that, of Italian Prime Minister, Romano Prodi, to told the Italian *La Repubblica* that "...it's about two key players coming back, that the whole world has been waiting for: Europe as a powerful political entity, and the United Nations as a multinational Authority guaranteeing peace, with Italy again back on the international scene".

If one ignores the political "enthusiasm" of these statements, they show that Damascus and Tehran will be led to clarify their stance towards Hezbollah's paramilitary practices, and if they do not comply with the procedure imposed by the international community, they will be not only exposed irremediably, but also isolated from it. If in this negative scenario we add 1) the conclusions of the "Detlev Mehlis Commission" on the involvement of President Bashar Al-Assad's entourage in the Hariri assassination, but also on broadening investigations over the assassinations of other Lebanese politicians, and 2) the case of the Iranian nuclear programme, then it can be immediately understood how difficult the position of both countries would be vis-à-vis the international community.

Besides, despite the financial help from Iranian sources that Hezbollah is allocating to the affected civilians, damages surpass 2.5 billion USD that Iran may not be able to cover easily, especially given the probable UNSC-imposed financial embargo due to Iran's refusal to comply with interrupting its uranium enrichment programme, as recommended by the international community.

So we can conclude that Israel, despite its significant operational mistakes, gave no other choice to Hezbollah than to either put itself in the margin of the international community and the domestic political

19. Resolution 1701 provides for 15,000 UN troops in S. Lebanon.

system of the Lebanon, or to become a “political” entity and thus an “innocuous” opponent for Israel, in terms of an asymmetric threat. For this author, the countdown for politicising and institutionalising within the national state framework what was up to recently the “iron arm” of Iran and Syria in the Middle East has already begun. Also, President Chirac’s stance²⁰ that “UNSC Resolution 1701 offers the framework for a sustainable solution based on the security of Israel and the sovereignty of the Lebanon on its entire territory” definitively clarifies the loss of “Hezbollah’s unofficial warm power” over the domestic state of affairs in Lebanon. The extent of destruction and the recent blood-letting will not allow the Shiite organization to regain this power. As to this issue, we must say that Tel Aviv is formalising the achievement of its fundamental objective: exterminating the Iranian projection of power on its soil through Hezbollah.

A broader geostrategic aftermath

Developments in the intra-Lebanese arena have turned into a kind of “warm conflict” between forces attached to Moqtada al-Sadr, whose party supports the current Maliki government and has provided members of the cabinet, and both of the other Shiite parties, SCIRI/NDT and Al-Daw’a, which hold the governmental majority in the present Iraqi cabinet.

Intra-Shiite rupture, Kurdish issue and reassessment of several US think tanks

An ultimate breakdown between Sadr and the other two parties would probably have severe repercussions on the Maliki government and even cause the complete reversal of the process for political normalisation in

20. Jacques Chirac’s speech to French ambassadors in Paris, 28/12/06 (XIVème Conférence des Ambassadeurs, Paris 28-30 Août 2006). Excerpt: «Ce texte [1701] offre également le cadre d’une solution durable fondée sur la sécurité d’Israël et la souveraineté du Liban sur la totalité de son territoire».

Iraq, and thus the collapse of American plans in the region. The Diwaniyah hot incident (28/08/06) between Sadr Shiites and government troops controlled by the said other two Shiite parties' presages similarly unpleasant developments that may end up in the afore-mentioned government overthrow. It is important to point out the Tehran intervention capabilities within the Shiite political scene of Iraq, because certain domestic scholars have been of late quick to undermine it. Andrew Cockburn²¹ reminds us that Jaish al-Mehdi (Sadr's militia) has turned into a mighty political and military pole since its formation in 2003. In fact, it was almost a year ago (November 2004) when it managed to cause serious problems to US Marines in Najaf. Also, Iran influences the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (S.C.I.R.I), the triumphant party in the last Iraqi elections and the prevalent one in the current Iraqi cabinet. SCIRI was originally founded and seated in Tehran. Its first leader was Ayatollah Mohammed Shahroodi, presently head of the Iranian judiciary. SCIRI's military arm, the Badr Army, fought on the Iranian side in the Iran-Iraq war, and was long regarded as the direct instrument of Iranian intelligence. Elsewhere, Iranian intelligence can look to such assets as Abu Mehdi al-Mohandis -"the engineer"- resident in Najaf with mentoring responsibilities for Sadr's militia there.

21. See Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, "*Bush's 130,000 hostages: Why the U.S. probably won't Attack Iran*", www.CounterPunch.com, Washington DC, January 16, 2006. Cockburn is the author of *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein*, see relevant book reviews: a) *New York Times Book Review*: "The picture of the last eight years that emerges is among the most coherent and accessible of any book on Iraq to date b) *Washington Post Book World*: "The most detailed look available at what has happened in post-Gulf War Iraq... Because of Patrick Cockburn's contacts in Baghdad, *Out of the Ashes* sheds light on a political system that most American writing leaves shrouded in darkness." c) *The Nation* "A clear, lively, well-researched narrative, which moves along at a brisk pace... Rich in information and atmosphere." [Andrew Cockburn has written many books on defence analysis and international relations. He has also written on Middle East issues for *The New Yorker* and co-produced a 1991 PBS documentary on Iraq entitled "The War We Left Behind." He lives in Washington, D.C. He has been Senior Middle East correspondent for the *Financial Times* and for the London-based *Independent* since 1979. He was among the few experienced reporters involved in Iraqi issues, who stayed in Bagdad during the Gulf War. He now resides in Jerusalem, working as a correspondent for the *Independent*.

According always to Cockburn, in the north, in and around Iraqi Kurdistan, Iranian intelligence has been providing support to Sunni insurgents, including the radical Islamic group Ansar al Islam. Indeed, at least ten senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) officials were killed in mid- December 2005 in an Iranian plane crash in Oroumie, among which was Mohammed Sulaimani, the key Guards official involved in Iraqi affairs. Oroumie, in northwest Iran, is the main base for Iranian covert operations in northern Iraq.

Besides, according to a personal source of Cockburn, a leading SCIRI official of the alleged “moderates” stated that: “If America attacks Iran, then all bets are off”.²²

However, if this is the case, then the American side will naturally switch to the solution of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, which –as we have mentioned previously in our previous papers- offers Washington the largest possible military and operational safety, the priceless Mosul and Kirkuk fields (4% of world reserves!) and huge military capabilities in the region. Lately, many US think tanks and political analysts have proposed immediate independence for Iraqi Kurdistan arguing for the above advantages of such an action (e.g.: Joshua Mouravchic, American Enterprise Institute, etc.). Moreover, one may not disregard the potential “domestic unrest” on Iranian and Syrian soil by a Kurdish separationist movement, backed by these developments, which will understandably enjoy Washington’s and Tel Aviv’s indulgence. Such a scenario causes a severe nuisance to Turkey, whose military regime is completely opposed to the Erdoğan government over sending Turkish troops to south Lebanon as Ankara’s contribution to the peace force.

In addition, nobody can easily resist the temptation to link the recent attacks (28/08/06) in Antalya, Marmaris and Istanbul etc. by Kurdish guerrillas, to the above-mentioned geostrategic prospects, and to commensurately assess the raising of the Kurdish flag over the whole of Iraqi Kurdistan on 5 September 2006, mandated by President Barzani.

22. A.N.: “If America attacks Iran, then all bets are off”. See above.

The rising regional role of Iran

By manipulating Hezbollah, Iran tried to show that it shares “common hot borders” with Israel and that it can easily hit Israel by proxy. This hit has been long planned and there is testimony for this, apart from the article by Raghida Dergham,²³ “like the one of Lebanese liberal intellectual Hazem Sagieh [A.N.: again] to “Al Hayat”, second largest circulation newspaper of the Arab world, who was day by day criticizing Israel and its policy in the Middle East. However, he has been for long proving by means of the proper sayings from Iranian and Syrian leaders that this war has been planned by them and served the interests of Hezbollah “managers”, say Damascus and Tehran, and at the same time he was accusing the European Left of undermining all resistance voices from within the Middle East chapters”.²⁴ One must also note the acute criticism by former Hezbollah Secretary General, Ayatollah Subhi Al-Tufeili, in an interview aired on Al-Arabiya TV on May 4, 2006, when he explicitly stated that:

“Hezbollah is committed to the Iranian policy. [...] I have said before that the Shiites in Lebanon serve as Iran’s “playing ground” in the following sense: The resistance has been dragged into things that are not resistance. Today, we have no resistance, I’m sad to say. [...] This is a tragedy. The weapons of the resistance have been transformed from weapons used to strike fear into the hearts of the enemy, into weapons we use to strike fear into the hearts of one another”. And then the elder Sheikh says: “Hezbollah definitely fosters its relations with the Syrians, but its real leadership is “the rule of the jurispudent” - in other words, Khamenei”.²⁵

As seen in the first part this study, it is not mere chance that the outbreak of the Israel-Hezbollah war was preceded by a series of as-

23. *Al-Hayat* (London), 6 January 2006, http://www.raghidadergham.com/archive/4rdpast1_06_06.html.

24. A.N.: It is important to say that the same line of arguments has been employed by Mr. Nikos Kotzias (former consultant of PA.SO.K. President Mr. G. Papandreou) in an article of his published in the weekly newspaper of the Ionian Islands «*Enimerosi*» on Sunday 27 August, 2006, 4. 4.

25. MEMRI, TV Monitor Project, Clip No. 11, 5/04/2006, <http://goo.gl/z0mMxR>.

sassinations of Lebanese intellectuals, journalists and political leaders, who had anti-Syrian, anti-Iranian and anti-Islamist feelings.

All that being said, we must however observe that currently Iran and Syria are becoming the chief guarantors of Hezbollah's disarmament, backed by European support, as shown by the statement of French President Chirac, sayings, whose troops (following certain orders) will have the Unifil operational command in southern Lebanon. The advantages for both governments are evident and have already been elaborated on earlier.

The issue, though, to be stressed is that Hezbollah's disarmament must not become an instrument of blackmail at the hands of no one. The Hezbollah military branch must surrender its armaments to the Lebanese army that is to the sovereign government of Lebanon and then integrate with the army forces of that government.

Military approach of a potential US attack on Iran

Technically speaking, a US attack against Iran is not anticipated, as already mentioned for the following technical reasons: in return for a hit, Tehran could immediately launch its Shahab I and II missiles against the American "Green Zone" in Bagdad, the US Airbase in Qatar, the US Naval Base in Bahrein, Camp Doha in Kuwait, the Al Seeb airbase in Oman, the International Airport in Bagdad and the US Kandahar Base in Afghanistan. Also, Tehran would launch its long-range Shahab III missiles against the Israeli cities of Tel Aviv, Haifa, Beer Sheva, Eilat and the Dimona nuclear complex. Equally, Tehran would be quick to guide its missiles towards US vessels in the Arab-Persian Gulf, as well as towards the oil-rich regions of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

A political approach to a potential US attack against Iran

In political terms, such a US hit is discouraged by the following data:

1) Hits of this nature could lead to the political collapse of NATO, creating a huge political gap between the European Union and Washington.

2) Moreover, it would be natural for China to support Iran by military and financial means, since 17 per cent of its oil needs is covered by Iran and since all natural gas to be purchased by Turkmenistan is to pass through Iran in the near future. It is worth remembering that Iran holds 300 trillion ft³ (cubic feet) of proven natural gas reserves that is 17.7 per cent of proven natural gas reserves worldwide.²⁶ Iran's proven oil reserves are 89.7 billion barrels that is 8.5% of proven oil reserves worldwide.²⁷

3) On the Russian side, the infant Shanghai Cooperation Organization (S.C.O./Шанхайская организация сотрудничества (ШОС))²⁸ conducted military manoeuvres in August, 2005, with the participation of corps of the Russian and Chinese armed forces. Apart from China, India also took part in the manoeuvres that dealt with offensive US projections in Asia, including a potential US attack against Iran. Although Iran is not a member of CSTO/Collective Security Treaty Organisation,²⁹ it has observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), of which China is a member. The SCO has a close relationship to the CSTO. The structure of military alliances is crucial for each country. In case of an attack on Iran, Russia and its CSTO allies will not remain neutral, and will try to stop it. In April 2006, Iran was invited to become a full member of the SCO. So far no concrete timetable for Iran's accession to the SCO has been set. This enlargement of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which also includes observer status for India, Pakistan and Mongolia, counters US military and strategic objectives in the broader region. Moreover, China and Russia, which are partners in the SCO, have a longstanding bilateral military cooperation agreement.

4) Also, military manoeuvres held by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyr-

26. Source: *Oil and Gas Journal*, and *BP Amoco Statistical Preview of World Energy*, 1999, 20, edited by the author.

27. *As above*.

28. A.N.: Founded on 15 June 2001, it has 6 members: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

29. A.N.: CSTO regular members are the following: Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Armenia and Uzbekistan. Its present structure dates from 7 October 2002. Its previous form of CIS/CST was established on 15 June 1992. Its official language is Russian and its president is Nikolai Bardyuzha.

gyzstan and Tajikistan under the CSTO, resumed on 24 August 2006. These war games, officially described as part of a counter-terrorism programme, are perceived by Michel Chodussovsky³⁰ and other western analysts as a direct response to the US military threats in the region including the planned attacks against Iran. The Rubezh-2006 exercise is scheduled to take place from August 24-29 near the Kazak city of Aktau: *“It will be the first joint military exercise undertaken by CSTO countries, and will involve 2,500 members drawn from various armed services of member states, with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan the principal participants. Uzbekistan, which has recently rejoined the CSTO, will send observers, while the two other pact members, Belarus and Armenia, will not be taking part”*.³¹



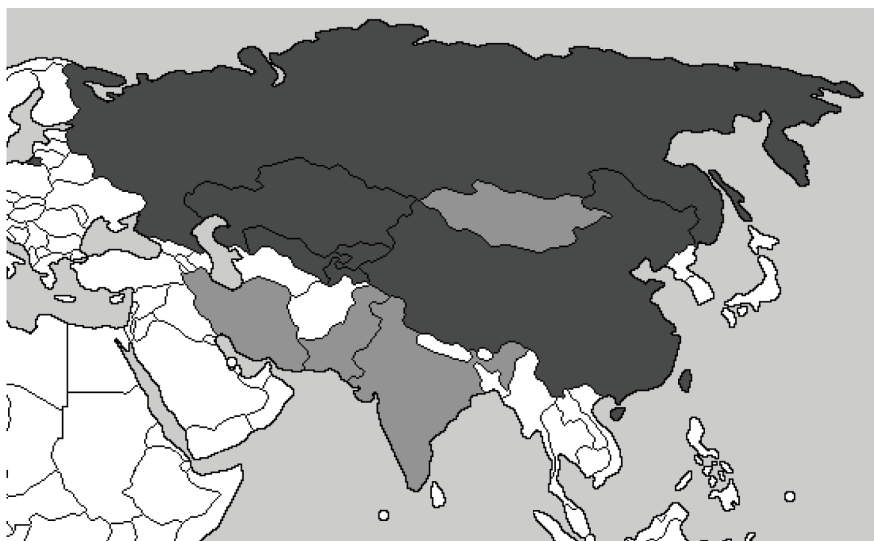
Picture 1: The SCO logo [Шанхайская организация сотрудничества (ШОС)]

Press reports from the region describe these war games as a response to the US military presence and ambitions in Central Asia: *“The growing militarisation is connected to mutual mistrust among countries in the region, say analysts. Iranian media have speculated that the United States is using Azerbaijan to create a military counterweight to Iran on the Caspian. It is possible that the exercise conducted by the CSTO – in which Russia is dominant – represents a response to concerns about*

30. M. Chodussovsky, “Russia and Central Asian Allies Conduct War Games in Response to US Threats”, 24 August 2006, <http://goo.gl/2Zq61b>.

31. IPWR *News Briefing Central Asia*, 24/08/2006.

United States involvement in developing Kazakhstan's navy. Observers say Russia is leaning more and more towards the Iranian view those countries from outside should be banned from having armed forces in the Caspian Sea”.



Map 2: SCO and its members; regular members in dark gray and “observers” in gray



Map 3: CSTO Its current members in gray

Experts say that the US is trying to step up the pressure on Iran, as well as to defend its own investments in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. It is also trying to guarantee the security of the strategically vital Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. According to M. Chodussovsky, a US military presence on the Caspian would still give the United States an opportunity to at least partially offset its weakening influence in Central Asia, as seen in the closure of its airbase in Uzbekistan, the increased rent it is having to pay for the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan, and the diplomatic scandal that resulted in the expulsion of two Americans from Kyrgyzstan.



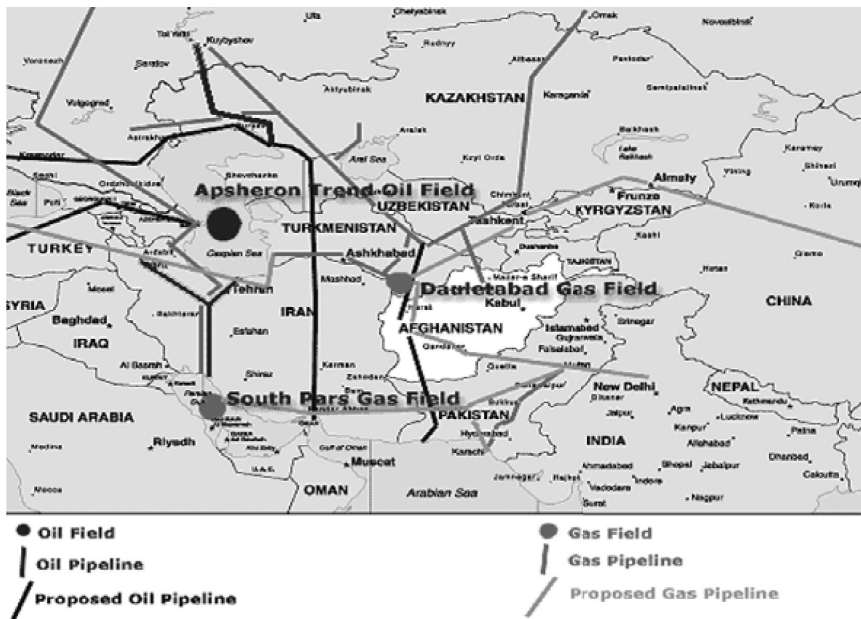
Map 4: Strategic Ellipse

[Source: Abbas Maliki, Iran and China: Dialogue on Energy, Research Seminar, Harvard University, 15 March 2006]

In order to understand exactly what this region represents in geopolitical and geostrategic terms, we annex the following map depicting the “Strategic Ellipse” which engulfs the “Broader Middle East”, the “Near Abroad” of the post-soviet area, the western CIS and the Eastern Balkans and holds 71 per cent of world conventional oil reserves and approximately 69% of world natural gas reserves (Map 4). The area’s particularity and energy features eloquently express the importance attributed to the area by the USA, Russia and China at a geopolitical level. Comparing the space occupied by the “Strategic Ellipse” (Map 4) with that of SCO (Map 2) and CSTO (Map 3) is quite a telling exercise.

It also demonstrates -in both a quantitative and geographical way- the field of past, present and future antagonisms and conflicts. Given all these, it is very easy to perceive what losing this area to the Euro would mean for the US dollar.

It is observed that Iranian military exercises coincide with those organized by the CSTO. These CSTO war games should be seen in relation to those launched a week earlier by Iran, in response to continued US military threats. These war games coincide with the US showdown at the UN Security Council and the negotiations between permanent members regarding a Security Council resolution on Iran’s nuclear program.



Map 5: Oil Fields and Pipelines in Central Asia [Source: As above]

The Iranian Armed Forces—the Regular Armed Forces and the Revolutionary Guards Corps—began the first stage of massive nationwide war games along border areas of the province of Sistan and Baluchistan, in the southeast of Iran bordering the Gulf of Oman, Pakistan, and NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan to the east on Saturday, 19 August 2006. These war games were to unfold over a five week period and possibly overlap into early October, 2006.

The conduct of the CSTO war games must be seen as a signal to Wash-

ington that an attack on Iran could lead to a much broader military conflict in which Russia and the member states of the CSTO could potentially be involved, siding with Iran and Syria.

Showing proposed and existent oil and natural gas pipes between Iran-China and Iran-India, as well as specific natural gas and oil fields, Map 7 decodes the “inner meaning” of those military exercises by Iran and the CSTO. Moreover, a useful conclusion can be drawn about the growing momentum of energy relations between Iran-Russia-China and India.³²

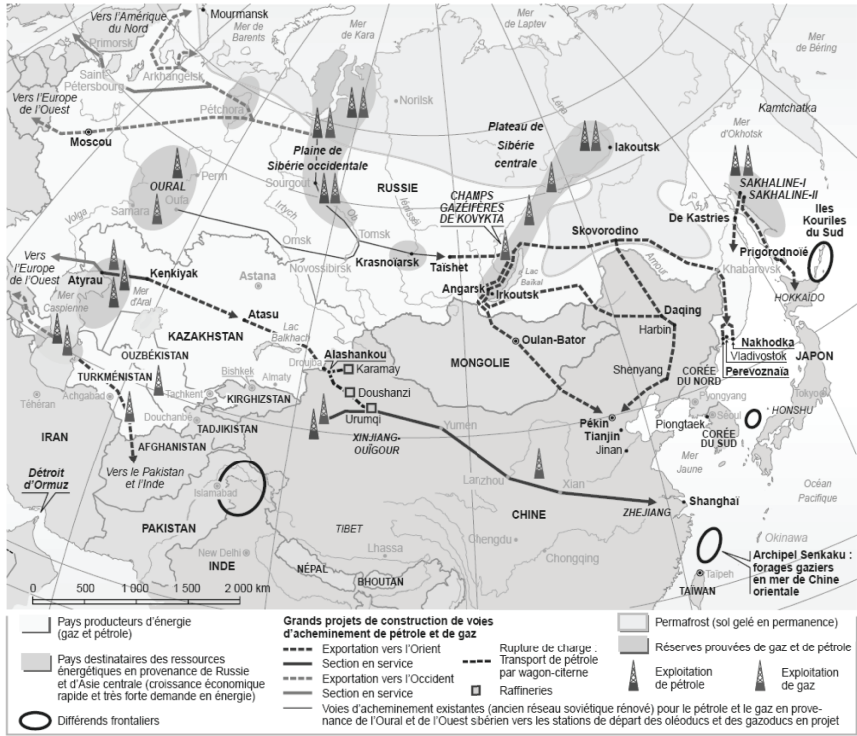


Map 6: Oil Fields and Pipelines in Central Asia [Source: As above]

The proposed link (light gray, Map 6) of the huge Tengiz field in Kazakhstan, through Turkmenistan, that ends at the Straits of Hormuz (Map 8) and crosses Iranian territories explains the strong geostrategic connection between Iran and Russia. This link (as shown in Map 6 in light gray) may use the existing network in combination with the Kenkiyak-Koumkoï part, so as to horizontally supply China from the gigantic South Pars (Iran) fields, Daulettabad (Iran) and Tengiz (Kazakhstan), which is member of SCO and CSTO.

It is very important to underline certain planned routes of carbohydrates between Russia and China, like the pipeline array to transfer Russian natural gas from its Kovykta fields, northeast of Irkutsk, which will reach Beijing, Shenyang and Daping of northeast China.

32. See comparative examination of Maps 5 and 6.

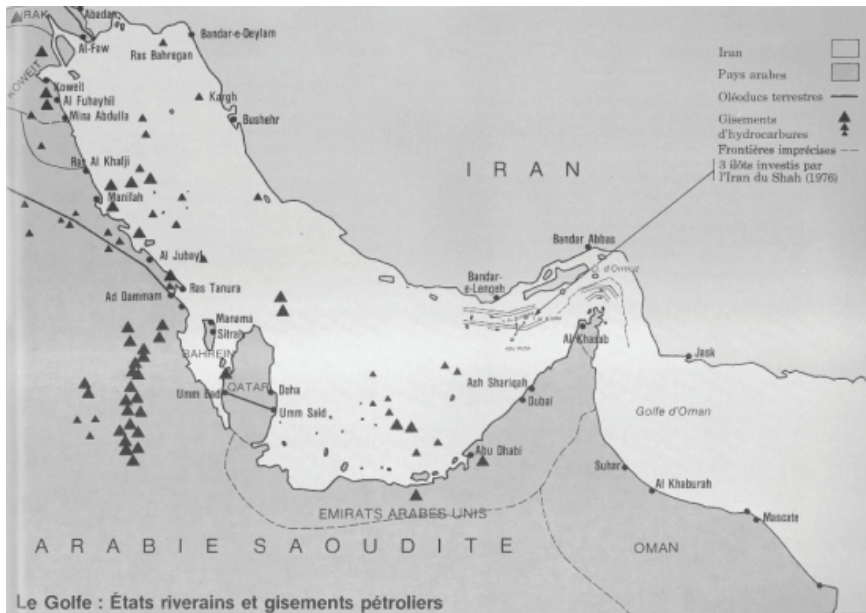


Map 5: Oil Fields and Pipelines in Central Asia [Source: As above]

It must be stressed, however, that the planned pipelines supplying China with Kazakh natural gas and oil will cross the Xinjiang area, where the approximately 22,000,000 Turkic-speaking Muslim Uyghurs have not escaped Turkey's attention for generating autonomy issues in the region. Such moves are likely to please certain centres of power in the West.

It also known that Iran wishes to construct a pipeline transferring natural gas from Tabriz (Iran) to China, through north Afghanistan soil, along the Uzbek-Afghan borders.

Therefore, what can be concluded is nothing like the scenario of China allowing a US attack against Iran. On the contrary, reservations come up regarding the final outcome of clashes between Taliban and NATO forces on Afghan soil, and Iran's negotiating capabilities about its nuclear programme and the reliability of its -apparent or not- alliances with Russia and China improve.



Map 9 [Source: As above]

5) Worth-mentioning is also the structure of alliances on bilateral military partnerships. Russia and China are the principal suppliers of advanced defence systems to Iran and Syria. Russia plans to build a naval base in Syria, on the Mediterranean coasts. On the other hand, the USA and Israel have signed military cooperation agreements with Azerbaijan and Georgia.

6) In August 2005, Iran conducted large-scale extended military exercises in Bandar Abbas, off the Persian Gulf.

7) The next point to be stressed is that the governments of Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia should not feel threatened and, clearly, their regimes are not to be shaken, because in that case the Middle East “Armageddon” and its blazing humanitarian and financial impact on the rest of the globe will appear more likely and may possibly lead to a nuclear holocaust.

8) Moreover, the repercussions of a US nuclear hit against Iran by conventional or tactical nuclear weapons would bring huge destruction due to nuclear residuals in China, India, Pakistan, Japan and Russia, as well as other Asian and Pacific countries that lie within range of winds in the region.

9) Analysts should also take into consideration that the overthrow of the Musharraf government in Pakistan is highly probable, not only because of the country's restless Shiite community, but also because of the domestic Islamist insurrection, ignited perfectly by a US hit against Iran that the pro-Western Musharraf government would not oppose. Certainly, what would follow such a scenario would be an Islamist government of Taliban type and essence, with the Pakistani nuclear power at its disposal and control. One can imagine the appalling perspectives not only for the Middle East, but also in finance, society and politics worldwide.

10) As things evolve further in Afghanistan, "the government under Hamid Karzai", as NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer admits,³³ "controls only the country's capital, Kabul". The Taliban's tactics have changed since early September onwards.

The Taliban have abandoned their "hit and run" tactic, and are instituting strong defence tactics inflicting heavy casualties on NATO troops; and they possess advanced heavy arms. After the said analysis, one can reasonably understand that the Taliban are not alone this time, but, in the absence of US bases in Uzbekistan and in view of the COS and CSTO role, Russia, China and Iran are actively involved in the region. We underline that Uzbekistan is a member of SCO, as well as CSTO.

Illustratively enough in Map 5, we can see once again the oil pipeline as proposed by western oil companies for connecting in the shortest way the oil-rich fields of Kazakhstan and the Indian Ocean, via western Afghanistan (Kandahar) and Pakistan. Let us not forget that Kandahar is the "hot spot" and centre of the Taliban, and the largest wound for NATO troops, which could soon begin to fester.

I consider that all the above mentioned reasons are enough to ensure that a potential US attack against Iran will be deeply are carefully discussed beforehand.

The Palestinian issue

As regards the Palestinian issue and more particularly that of the

33. International Press Agencies, 8 September 2006.

Gaza Strip, Israel must be encouraged to abandon its military intervention and executions of Palestinian Islamist leaders, and to peacefully contribute to the growing Hamas-Fatah understanding, and also to lift its objections to the West continuing its financial aid to the legal Hamas government. It is a political and strategic mistake of dramatic proportions, on the part of Israel, to insist on shaking and overthrowing a legally and democratically elected government because of Hamas participation. All its allies' arguments, as well as its own, on restoring democracy in the Middle East are being overturned and its credibility damaged. It is wrong to project violence as a means of solving the perennial and sanguinary Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Olmert government must understand that Hamas, especially if it establishes a certain base of cooperation with Fatah, will stop behaving as a "radical Islamist group" and become a responsible government of a soon-to-be state. Nothing but such a development on the Palestinian issue will put out the fires of conflict and set the conditions for lasting peace in this tormented region. Besides, settling the Palestinian issue will release progressive forces in Tehran and the rest of the Arab-Muslim world, all them desiring peace and modernisation.

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