

XXVII. A Geopolitical Analysis of the Recent Lebanon Crisis and the Broader Implications (Summer 2006)

[Published first in: Rudolf Hecht (Hg.), *Sicherheit und Recht zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts-Terrorismus und Ethnizität*, Schriftenreihe der Landesverteidigungsakademie 8/2007, Wien: Institut für Strategie und Sicherheitspolitik, 2007, 149-84]

Part One: Geopolitical and Geostrategic Analysis of the Israel-Hezbollah War (July 12-August 11, 2006): Geopolitical Causes and Geostrategic Results¹

The Lebanon II war required the utmost attention, in foreign policy terms, from both Greece and Cyprus. This is because the recent hot conflict between Israel and Lebanon was pregnant with obvious dangers for the flaring up of all the national-state and ethnic actors in the region. These actors are satisfied with the developments in question. The actors in question are:

1. **Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah**, a graduate of the Seminary of the holy city of Rashid Ali, Najaf in Iraq, and “Sheikh” leader of Hezbollah since 1992 (on the basis of the order given to him on February 16 1992 in Tehran with Tehran’s Ayatollah Ali Khomeini), and of Syrian origin, who considered that it was time to:

a) settle matters with the pro-Western government of Fouad Signora and allow Hezbollah to assume governance of the country, based on the model of Hamas;

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.

b) relieve his organisation of the pressure that would be exercised by the UN International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIC), as requested by the Lebanese Prime Minister (on 12.12.2005) in order to investigate the assassinations, following the assassination attempt against Marwan Hamade, Telecommunications Minister of Lebanon, of the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (on 14.02.2005), of the leftwing anti-Syrian journalist Samir Kassir (on 02.06.2005), of the former Secretary General of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) George Haoui (on 21.06.2005) and of the journalist and Christian MP Gebran Tueni (on 12.12.2005), and the assassination attempts against the Lebanese Defence Minister Elias Murr on 12.07.2005) and against the anti-Syrian journalist May Shidyak (on 25.09.2005);

c) exploit the rallying of the Lebanese people against an attacking Israel, so that Hezbollah could be considered a national resistance force rather than a “militia” and, ultimately, to avoid disarmament imposed by both the Taif Treaty (23.10.1989) and Resolution 1559 or the UN Security Council (02.09.2004).

2. **Damascus**, which calculated that, in this way, it could become an indispensable part of the strong Islamic alliance in the Middle East, including Iran and the pockets of Shiite populations in the region (Iran, Iraq, Syria, S. Arabia, UAE), while also avoiding the pursuance of Detlev Mehli's investigation within the context of the UNIIC with regard to the above mentioned assassinations. This investigation might touch upon highly ranked Syrian officials and dangerously approach the immediate environs of President Assad. The provocative series of events leading to the crisis of July 12 is as follows:

a) Immediately after the adoption of Resolution 1559 of the UN Security Council on September 2, 2004, which provided for the withdrawal of Syrian troops and secret agencies from the Lebanon, Rafik Hariri, Prime Minister of Lebanon, was murdered on February 14, 2005, when explosives equivalent to around 1,000 kg of TNT were detonated in a booby-trapped car, as his motorcade drove past the St. George Hotel in the Lebanese capital. It is noteworthy that the former Prime Minister had accepted the Resolution. The extent of bombing leaves no margin for suspecting the size and whoever the supplier was;

b) On June 2 2005 using a booby-trapped car, Samir Kassir, found-

ing member of the Democratic Left Movement and journalist of Beirut's *An-Naihar* daily, was also murdered. He had repeatedly adopted an anti-Syrian stance;

c) On June 21 2005 using a booby-trapped car, George Haoui, former Secretary General of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), was murdered. His successor, Khaled Hadadah, has suggested that Syria was behind this assassination;

d) On July 12 2005 using a booby-trapped car, Elias Murr, Lebanon's Defence Minister, was seriously injured;

e) On August 30 2005 Detlev Mehlis, German public prosecutor, issued an arrest warrant for four pro-Syrian generals of the Lebanese Army, suspected for organising Hariri's assassination;

f) On September 25 2005 using a booby-trapped car, May Shidyak, a journalist at Lebanon's LBC television station, had her arms and legs seriously injured owing to her anti-Syrian stance, and later underwent amputation in hospital.

g) On October 20 2005 Detlev Mehlis submitted his report to the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, estimating the involvement of the Syrian and Lebanese secret services in Hariri's assassination as almost certain. The pro-Syrian president of Lebanon, Emile Jamil Lahoud, "strongly denies" any involvement of his government services in Hariri's assassination;

h) On November 11 2005 Syrian President Assad, in a speech given at the University of Damascus, accused the government of Fouad Signora or being "slave to the son or Hariri and the Americans, who were conspiring against Syria", and declared that Syria was now "at war". He also considered the stance of the German public prosecutor, Detlev Mehlis as "not unbiased" and stated that "the pressures to which Syria is subjected by his interrogation committee were not aimed at revealing the truth but, on the contrary, they (NB: The Americans) were taking revenge for our opposition to their occupation of Iraq and our support for the Palestinian cause and the Lebanese resistance". He continued: "We have two choices: resistance or chaos". What is this resistance actually? Lebanon had a democratically elected government and all sides participated in the government with ministers! It is obvious, that in this extract he is referring to Hezbollah, which must be seen as "resistance" and not as an "armed civil guard", so that it

would not be forced to disarm on the basis of the provisions of the Taif Treaty (1989) and UN Resolution 1559 (2004). When Mr. Assad's speech was introduced for deliberation in the Lebanese Parliament, on the initiative of Prime Minister Fouad Signora, all five Shiite ministers walked out immediately, on the pretext that the "subject matter was not on the Parliament's agenda", as if there were no out-of-agenda issues in parliaments worldwide, the presentation of which were, furthermore, not discussed beforehand. The Shiite ministers boycotted the Parliament for seven weeks and returned only on February 3 2006. When Signora stated that "the Resistance was and will never be named, if not by its true name, that is National Resistance", it was this "magic phrase" that brought the Shiite ministers back to the Parliament, because of its underlying meaning that Hezbollah would not be obliged to disarm, given its "national resistance" character. How could the Olmert government find peace, particularly during a period when attacks using "Katyusha" rockets from S. Lebanon to N. Israel never ceased? Finally, it may appear that Damascus has chosen "chaos".

i) Exactly one month later, on December 12 2005, Gebran Tueni, anti-Syrian journalist and Christian MP, editor and publisher of the *An-Nahar* daily newspaper, was murdered by means of a booby-trapped car. Three more people died with him.

j) On the same day, a few hours after the assassination, Prime Minister Fouad Signora ratified a decision during a cabinet meeting, to set up an International Court of Justice for the trial of the army generals arrested as suspects for Hariri's assassination and to extend the investigations, by means of an International Investigation Committee under UN auspices, to include all the above mentioned assassinations. All five Shiite ministers reacted immediately and resigned. Why?

Also, Damascus considered that it could equal the negotiation capacity of the US, in terms of peacemaking capacity in the region, and therefore enjoy the benefits of Bashar al-Assad retaining power in Syria, together with the Baath party. The involvement of Damascus is no more in doubt. On July 18 2006, at the convention of the Arab League, Mr. Assad had already threatened to vote against the proposal for an extraordinary meeting for the Lebanon, should the Arab governments fail to align with Hezbollah and Hamas. Damascus considered that, by aligning with Iran and Turkey, it could prevent the risk of a Kurdish

separation tendency on its territory. Furthermore, internationally available evidence on arms procurement from Syria and Iran bears witness to this assumption. In addition, last summer, Sheikh Nasrallah stated that Hezbollah had more than twelve thousand rockets available and ready to be used against Israel. This statement was predicated on the events that followed Rafik Harriri's assassination and the withdrawal of Syria's military force from Lebanon. About seven to eight thousands of these rockets belong to the "Katyusha" 107 and 122 mm family.

These rockets are technologically obsolete, militarily imprecise and suitable only for area targets (i.e. cities, troop concentrations etc.). There are two types of 107 mm rockets, launched from fixed or mobile units (HASEB type, of Iranian make), all with an effective range of 5 miles. The 122 mm rockets have a range of 20 miles and a 45 kg explosive head. There are 70 self-propelled launchers (Noor, Hadid and Awash). In 2000, with the consensus of Bashar al-Assad, new-generation rockets (of Iranian make and Chinese and North Korean know-how) were available to Hezbollah, transferred from Iran through Syria. In 2000, the Fajr-3 rocket model was made available to Hezbollah, followed by Fajr-5 in 2003. The delivery of the latter was completed in January 2006.

The rockets were transported, either through Syria or by sea, to Lebanon and delivered to Hezbollah. Their effective range is between 40 and 75 kilometers and it is exactly these rockets that hit Haifa. The mobile launchers are towed by Japanese-made trucks; Syria delivered also, in 2001, BM-27 self-propelled launchers, capable of launching 220 mm rockets at ranges of up to 70 kilometers, bearing a 100 kg explosive head. All this movement was with the knowledge of, or at least "deliberately ignored" by, both the Lebanese government and the UN.

On January 31 2006 the Lebanese government acknowledged for the first time that, in defiance of UN Resolution 1559 providing for the disarmament of the various paramilitary organisations by the country's government, it had officially allowed the transport of weapons from Syria to Hezbollah (truck convoy). On February 13 UN officially reported on this issue. The investigation by the organisation (headed by Special UN Envoy Terie Larsen) revealed that the Lebanese government had allowed the transportation, because it considered Nasrallah's organisation to be a "resistance force".

Based on existing evidence and Hezbollah's firing practice, the following Israeli cities are within the firing range of Hezbollah's rockets: Haifa (50km), Akko (30km), Nahariya (10 km) and Sfat. Haifa is the optimum target, because (i) it is the harbor base used by the Israeli navy; (ii) it is the country's second largest port; (iii) it has many chemical industries (indirect mass destruction blow); and (iv) it houses many high-tech industrial complexes vital for Israel's defence (the largest and most known being Rafael). The population of the areas within the rockets' range is approximately two million (out of a total Israeli population of seven million). A few months ago Dr. Ephraim Dvir, head of the Geography Department for Disaster Areas, stressed that if the region of Haifa were hit (especially the chemical sector), the disaster would be huge.

In January 2005, Shin Bet arrested a Muslim holding a Danish passport (Iyad ash-Shua, related with Hezbollah), who was photographing military installations in Haifa. Other agents were also arrested while photographing refineries and chemical industry complexes.

Rocket attacks are an asymmetrical response, given that their economic impact on Israel is much more significant than the value of the weapons. In 1996, about five hundred "Katyusha" rockets hit N. Israel causing damage of USD 100 million. The systems that Israel has developed to counter this threat (THEL and MTHEL laser systems) are not ready yet, and are not projected for operational readiness until 2008. Also, it is not certain if Hezbollah has access to the explosive heads developed by China and purchased by Iran, in order to use them on the 220 mm rockets. These heads are laser-guided during the final stage of their trajectory. In other words, their precision is significantly higher and allows for the capability to hit a target with a 30 m diameter from a 70 km distance (it there is of course an operator to "laser-point" on the target). In such a scenario, the oil and chemical tanks are the easiest of targets. Based on evidence so far, it may be that either Hezbollah does not have access to such rocket heads, or that it is preserving them for future escalation, at a time that it will deem politically opportune.

3. **Iran**, which estimates that it (a) has diminished the pressure from the so-called "international community" against its nuclear program; (b) could be transformed into the strongest negotiator of the US in the region, against the value of "nuclear" and political offsets;

and (c) would emerge as a leading force in the Islamic world and more specifically in the region, and strengthen its relations with Ankara, affect Iraq's domestic affairs, support Syria in its peripheral strategy and its hopes for re-acquiring Lebanon through Hezbollah, converge with Ankara and Damascus for eliminating the Kurdish issue and exercise strategic pressure on Tel-Aviv. It is also worth noting that Tehran was not at all embarrassed by the rise of international oil prices which had as a consequence the inflow of millions to its treasury without any increase of oil production on its part.

4. The **group of petroleum monarchies of the Gulf**, which considered that (a) a successful Israeli attack would eliminate their main opponent in the region, in other words the Shiite zealot movement, which they consider as Tehran's "long arm" in their domestic affairs, given the Shiite demographic pattern of oilfield workers; (b) it was time to get rid of the Baath regime of Syria; and, therefore (c) drastically increase the inflow of petrodollars into their treasuries.

5. **Russia**, simply because of the drastic increase of its foreign currency reserves and its net domestic product, without a corresponding increase of production or the expansion of its foreign customer base. Such an increase can satisfy a high development rate of seven percent annually. Besides, in September 2006, Russia's President Putin repaid Russia's debts in full to the Paris Club and, therefore, Moscow now confronts its future without any financial problems whatsoever.

6. The **European Union**, which considered that "at the expense of Israel", it would be forever relieved from the threat of an Islamist movement and the export of its terrorist activity into EU territory, benefiting also from a huge market, which is subject to full restructuring.

7. The **US**, which considered the overall situation as particularly positive for the expansion of its influence in the Greater Middle East "at the expense of Israel", through the elimination of the last strongholds of Islamist reaction and terrorism, and, also, through the complete control over the oil reserves and transport routes in the region and the elimination of all possibilities of cooperation in the domains of energy and technology between Iran and Syria, on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other hand. The US also considered that the completion of this geo-strategic restructuring in the Greater Middle East, particularly during a period of change in

energy resources and related technologies, would allow for the preservation of the single-pole structure of international power, for decades to come. It is noteworthy that the emergence of strong allies in the region, through the so-called nation building processes, is another significant challenge that follows any positive trend for Washington's geostrategic aims. In the eyes of the US, future developments will be centered on Iran and the Moscow-Beijing-Tehran geostrategic triangle, as the cause of strong fears. In particular, these fears can be enunciated in the following;

a) Iran controls more than ten percent of international oil reserves and fifteen percent of international gas reserves. It is also a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), ensures more than thirteen percent of China's oil demand, is strongly related with Cuba in the fields of agriculture, biotechnology and industry and has developed close ties with Venezuela of Hugo Chavez.² In the eyes of W. Charara³ Iran is seen as the "last stronghold against the effort to continuously submit the Near & Middle East to the US" and as the only strategic ally of Syria and of paramilitary Palestinian organisations in the area. Based on such considerations, it could therefore concentrate Middle Eastern power and emerge as a hegemonic pole in this geopolitical subsystem.

b) Preventing a new era of American military intervention in the Middle East is considered by Washington to depend to a large extent on Tehran's isolation and, ultimately, submission. This is also the estimation of Beijing and the NAM, which have declared, *urbi et orbi*, that they will not allow such a development.

c) Also, a source of concern for Washington is Tehran's intention to create a particular Petroleum Exchange, where transactions will take place in Euros and which could therefore compete strongly with London's international Petroleum Exchange OIPEL and the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX), thus threatening the prevalence of the USD in the petroleum market between Iran and the EU countries, as well as the countries of the NAM, i.e. in more than half of the UN member-states, representing around two thirds of the world's GDP. Tehran's intention was to proclaim the establishment of this in March 2006. The system would be based on the Euro-based exchange mechanism. The Euro is a

2. See IRNA, 10 & 12 August 2005 (www.irna.ir).

3. See W. Charara, «Après Baghdâd, Téhéran», *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 1/2005.

stable currency and, therefore, disallows a type of international state levying by the US, by means of depreciation of the USD, caused by the Fed.

Without this “international”, as well as “obscure” taxation of national-state actors and of the international oil companies whose interests are not paralleled by Washington, the overall international hegemony of the US would be questioned and the international community would move towards multi-polar world of power, built on the foundation of “hard” economic criteria, of high technology production and know-how possession, that would not have to resort to, or rely upon, the “discriminatory taxation” of these actors through the centrally-controlled depreciations of the USD which in turn affect the national economies by forcing them to purchase the required quantities of hydrocarbons in USD, depreciated in the meantime, i.e. from the time that such foreign currency reserves are purchased until they are utilized for the purchase of the above mentioned quantities of crude oil or natural gas.

d) EU countries would be greatly relieved, both financially and politically, by negotiating their energy resource needs in their strong, domestic currency, rather than having to resort to the costly process of obtaining inflationary petrodollars.

e) As pertains to Russia, given their “European-Oriental trends” in the energy and armament sectors (cf. the Russia-Germany pipelines through the Baltic Sea, the Russia-Europe pipeline through Rumania and Hungary, the Blue Stream pipeline through Turkey, Greece and Italy, the purchase of four percent of EADS’s share capital etc.), transactions in Euro currency are God’s gift; alas, one entailing a new, harder blow to the financing of America’s economy. It must be recalled that all the countries of the former Warsaw Pact, including new EU member-states, cover 75 percent of their natural gas and 80 percent of their oil needs with imports from Russia. Even the UK did not manage to overcome the need to resort to Russian hydrocarbons: last June, President Putin announced the construction of a “North European pipeline” to transport Russian natural gas through an existing network of pipelines operated by Gazprom to the port of Wilborg in the Baltic Sea and from there to Germany and Britain, with quantities exceeding 55 billion m³ p.a. after 2010. Besides, Gazprom already covers 25 percent of Europe’s needs and the company’s strategic outlook is rapidly expanding

towards the Chinese and the American markets, given its control of 80 percent of Russia's production and of 20 percent of worldwide reserves of natural gas. The size of the blow to the US economy can easily be understood, were the USD to be replaced by the Euro transactions of such quantities of hydrocarbons. It should be remembered that the principal stakeholder of this energy giant is the Kremlin, which, by means of Rosneftgaz, controls 51 percent of its share capital.

f) Also China wants to be connected with Russia's energy. Beijing has already deposited 6 billion USD with Russia's Rosneft as down-payment in exchange for 48 million tons of crude oil to be supplied by 2010. This effort bears witness to Beijing's desire to rely less on its American oil suppliers, so as to be able to serve the country's swift development, currently of an average rate of 10.5 percent annually. Given Beijing's anxiety about US military control over the Strait of Hormouz in the Arab-Persian Gulf, as well as the US occupation of Iraq, it is clear that the country is accelerating its move towards Russia and Iran for resolving its energy problem, and is thus enhancing this triangular geostrategic relationship between Beijing, Moscow and Tehran. Beijing's policy is exemplified by its 70 billion USD agreement in 2005 with Tehran, for the procurement of 250 million tons of gas. This illustrates China's unwillingness to waive its interests for a second time (the first being Saddam's Iraq, after the Anglo-American invasion) by allowing any hegemonic actor to threaten Iran.

In conclusion, it can be said that such monetary and financial changes can have a very serious impact on the economic hegemony of the US and, naturally, can even cause spasmodic reactions by Washington's economic and political decision-makers.

8. **Israel** considered the war as an "opportunity" to deal with its pending issues with the Islamist movement in its conflict with the Palestinian Authority and of course Hamas, and to eliminate the Shiite Islamist movement and its supporters by aiming primarily at a wrongful move by Damascus that would involve the latter directly in Israel's hot conflict with Hezbollah and Hamas. Of course, if Iran chose to follow the track of Damascus, Tel Aviv would gain the support, not only of Washington, but also of the EU-US dipole, supported also by the axis between Jordan, Egypt, S. Arabia and UAE, in the ideological and political context of the "anti-terrorist front". In this way, it would minimize the reaction of

the so-called “international community”. The message of statements from Brussels, Riyadh, Amman and Cairo are all too obvious. Besides, the regimes of these Arab countries consider that there would be no benefits for them, compatible with the current governmental entities in Damascus and Tehran. None of these countries would ever want to see Lebanon being offered as a prey to Hezbollah and its allies, because such an eventuality would greatly strengthen Tehran’s theocratic regime and would, on the contrary, politically eliminate their regimes, as such.

9. **France**, given the possibility of imposing its geostrategic load on the Lebanon, after the complete elimination of Hezbollah’s military presence, and, thus of projecting power towards Syria and the greater Israeli-American geostrategic game of the M. East, by controlling part of the region’s energy routes. France was the last “mandatory power” in Lebanon and has never forgotten the “glorious” days, which Washington revitalised by assigning to Paris the responsibility for a “New Lebanon” after the “Cedar Revolution” in February, 2005.

10. There is only one actor, both dissatisfied and in a very difficult situation: **Turkey**. It would be the first country to suffer from a nation-building process. If Ankara failed to comply with its defence agreements with Tel-Aviv that are activated in the case of a Syrian attack against Israel, it would be very difficult to neutralise the consequences. This is not only because it would displease Israel. It would also greatly displease Washington for a second time. In other words, it would displease its strategic partners three times. And we have all known, since our early childhood, that committing the same mistake a third time can prove disastrous.

Part Two: The geostrategic lessons learned from a conflict: Israel - Hezbollah

A. 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 has 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 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.

A.1. **Israel** itself committed important military, political and communication mistakes, still managed to destroy 40 per cent of Hezbollah's underground tunnels (of Iranian know-how) in south Lebanon and exterminate fighters, some of whom were members of Hezbollah's hard operational core of 1,500 fighters, all first 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 "Katuyusha" 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 across 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 in 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.⁴ 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 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.

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

B. Lebanon-Hezbollah

There are already certain voices within Lebanon, such as that of the Druze leader Walid Jumblat 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.

Jumblat called upon Hezbollah (August 17, 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 given 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 Jumblat suggested –in accordance with 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 reeling of “dishonor” caused to a fighter deprived unwillingly of his weapon, apart from the feeling of “defeat” stemming from such a procedure, which he is not to accept under any circumstances 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 arms of Hezbollah and these not 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 CIA’s National Intelligence Council and *Political Islam* author, Graham Fuller, *“leaders in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt have recently abandoned their firm stance in favor of “Arabian unity” and condemned Shiite Hezbollah for adventurism that brought war to Lebanon”*.

Paving the way, for Hezbollah’s redeployment due to strong reactions within Lebanese society, Sheik Nasrallah stated on August 27: *“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 organisation’s military operations against it. Indeed, this form of “neutralization” also covers political-military actions, such as the kidnappings of Israeli military or political personnel.

B.1. The role of Syria in the Lebanon and its geostrategic interventions

The case of accusations by former Syrian Vice-President ‘Abd Al-Halim Khaddam⁵ on the role of Damascus is also very important.⁶ In his interview on Lebanon TV channel *Al-Mustaqbal* on August 28 2006,⁷ former Syrian Vice President Abd Al-Halim Khaddam (henceforth Khaddam), who currently lives in exile and is ahead of the Syrian opposition, accused senior officials of Syria of presenting –according to him – “*ridiculous excuses for*

5. When 17 years old (1950), Khaddam became a member of the Syrian Baath party and dedicated himself 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 governmental Vice-Presidents, in charge of Syrian-Lebanese policy. He is one of the principal architects of the 1989 Taif Accords that put an end to the civil war in 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 considered the young Assad to be “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 Emile Lahoud. Since the summer of 2005 he has been living in self-exile in Paris.

6. MEMRI Special Report on Lebanon and Syria, 1/9/2006, Memorandum 1280, <http://goo.gl/CbO8aO>.

7. *Al Mustaqbal* TV Channel (Lebanon), 28/8/2006.

non-intervention in the recent Israel-Hezbollah 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 withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000, while he was still serving as Vice-President, Syria issued instructions to stage the liberation of the Shebat Farms as an achievement in favor of Lebanon - while such territorial sovereignty of 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 Khaddam's interview's key points;

i) On the role of the Lebanese state:

"The guarantee that there will be no second round [of 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 Lebanon and the war became a direct clash between us and Israel on Lebanese soil. We fought in the Beirut Mountains and stopped the Israeli advance between 'Ayn Zhalta and Sultan Ya'aqub 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 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 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 Lebanon and any other Arab states? 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 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 remarked? 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 Lebanon. This was an order that came from Syria”.

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

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

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

On the assassination of Rafik Hariri Khaddam said: *“Bashar Al-Assad knows what he’s doing. He knows how the decision to assassinate 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 Rustom Ghazale have taken a ton of explosives from the army’s warehouse? How else could the ambush occur? 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” claim⁸ that “everything Khaddam says is true, like everything said about him is true”. An approach extremely venomous but also enlightening...

8. See *L’Express*, 26/1/2006, Dominique Lagarde, “Syrie: Qu’est-ce qui fait courir Haddam?”

B.2. The role of Syria in the Golan and its projected geostrategic intervention⁹

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 “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”.¹⁰

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 even threatening that Syria would adopt the path of resistance in the Golan Heights.¹¹

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.¹² Following that, a delegation of residents from the Golan Heights, among them several sheikhs, have 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

9. See MEMRI Special Dispatch to Syria No. 1283, 7/11/2006, <http://goo.gl/MKAjkh>

10. See <http://goo.gl/eoDZfv>.

11. See <http://goo.gl/3y5DV0>.

12. See <http://goo.gl/ITUddY>.

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 Golan issued a statement in which they demanded that the Israeli occupation authorities unconditionally release the prisoners from 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”.*”¹³

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

In the last few days the Syrian press has published reports on a delegation of 550 Druzes 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 Golan will soon be returned to Syria.¹⁴

One member of the delegation, Sheikh Muhammad Jamal Al-Maghribi, delivered a speech on behalf 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 of the people of the occupied Golan, the heroic Lebanese national resistance and Syria’s embracing our people in the Golan in the wake of the oppressive Israeli aggression”. Another member of the delegation, Sheikh Sa’id Tawfiq, recited

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

14. *As above*.

a poem on the topic of the glorious meaning of resistance, and martyrdom for the homeland.¹⁵

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 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 and Al-Assad himself will wave it over the pure land of Golan. The residents of Golan asked to express their love and their support for our motherland, our great people, and for our beloved leader, who encourages them and stands as their guiding light for all free and noble souls in this nation”*.¹⁶

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 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 centres in Golan and therefore people’s state of health in the villages is very severe”.¹⁷

iii. Members of the Delegation: “The Visit Has Strengthened Our

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

16. *As above*.

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

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-Syrian identity, which they will not exchange for any other. They are certain that the occupation will taste defeat and that Golan will once again gain its freedom and its honor under the leader of the homeland [Bashar Al-Assad]”.¹⁸

Another member of the delegation, Sheikh Nasib Farhat, said: “The suffering of the people of 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 Ahmaid Kamal Al-Din talked about “the importance of the visit in strengthening and supporting the steadfast stand of the people of 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”.¹⁹

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 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 Golan is the heart of Syria and that Syrian citizens wait the time when they may meet their brothers and their relatives in occupied Golan. He said that Syria is an indivisible whole and that our people in Golan strengthen this unity, and that we, together with them, will liberate Golan and will recover it in its entirety, without

18. *Al-Ba'th* (Syria), 3 September 2006.

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

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".

Bilal also said that *"the visit confirmed for him that there is no power that can separate the people of 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 themselves in the name of the struggle for a free and indivisible Syria".²⁰

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 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 Baathist 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, Evaluation 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 evolu-*

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

tion into a peaceful political movement". This clearly demonstrates the international community's intention to entirely eradicate the Hezbollah operational branch currently outside of state control. But this 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 soldiers²¹ 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 with 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, Italian Prime Minister, Romano Prodi, told the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* that "*it is 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 they will be isolated from it. If to this negative scenario we add 1) the conclusions of the Detlev Mehlis Commission on the involvement of President Bashar Al-Assad's environment in the Hariri assassination, but also on broadening investigations over the assassinations of other Lebanese politicians and 2) the case of the Iranian nuclear program, then it can be immediately understood how difficult the position of both countries would be vis-a-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. This is a sum 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 outer choice to Hezbollah but to either put itself in the

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

margin of the international community and the domestic political 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 politicizing and institutionalizing within the national state framework what was till recently the “iron arm” of Iran and Syria in the Middle East has already begun. Also, President Chirac’s stance²² that “*UNSC’s Resolution 1701 offers the framework for a sustainable solution based on the security of Israel and the sovereignty of 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 formalizing the achievement of its fundamental objective: exterminating the Iranian projection of power on its soil through Hezbollah.

C. A broader geostrategic aftermath

Developments in the intra-Lebanese arena have turned into a kind “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’aa, which hold the governmental majority in the present Iraqi cabinet.

C.1. 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

22. Jacques Chirac’s speech to French ambassadors in Paris, 28/8/2006 (Deuxième 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 de Liban sur la totalité de son territoire*”.

Iraq, and thus the collapse of American plans in the region. The Diwan-yah incident (28/08/2006) between Sadr Shiites and government troops controlled by the 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 Cockburn²³ reminds us that *Jaish al-Mehdi* (Sadr's militia) has turned into a mighty political and military pole in the time since its formation in 2003. In fact it was in 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 (SCIRI), 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-Mohaandis –“the engineer”- resident in Najaf with mentoring responsibilities for Sadr's militia there.

According 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, all bets are off”.²⁴

However, if this is the case, then the American side will naturally

23. See Andrew Cockburn, «Bush 130.000 Hostages: Why the US Probably Won't Attack Iran», www.counterpunch.com, Washington DC, 31/1/2006. Cockburn is the co-author of *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein*.

24. See above.

switch to the solution of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, which -as we have mentioned previously in our 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 separatist 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 establishment 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 (28/10/2006) 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 September 5, 2006, mandated by President Barzani.

C.2 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,²⁵ “*like the one from Lebanese liberal intellectual Hazem Sagieh [A.N. again] to ‘Al Hayat’, second largest circulation newspaper 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’, i.e. Damascus and Tehran, and at the same time he was accusing the European Left of undermining all resistance*

25. *Al-Hayat* (London), 5 January 2006.

voices within the Middle East chapter”.²⁶ 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 than 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 each other*”. And then the elder Sheikh says: “*Hezbollah definitely fosters its relations with the Syrians but its real leadership is the ‘rule of the jurisprudent’, in other words, Khamenei*”.²⁷

As seen in the first part of this study, it is not mere chance that the outbreak of the Israel-Hezbollah war was preceded by a series of assassinations of Lebanese intellectuals, journalists and political leaders, who had anti-Syrian, anti-Iranian and anti-Islamist feelings.

However, we can observe that currently Iran and Syria are becoming the chief guarantors of Hezbollah’s disarmament, backed by European support. This fact is shown by the statement of French President Chirac whose troops (following certain orders) will command the Unifil operations in southern Lebanon. The advantages for both governments are evident and have already been elaborated on earlier.

The issue, however to be stressed, is that Hezbollah’s disarmament must not become an instrument of blackmail at the hands of anyone. The Hezbollah military branch must surrender its armaments to the Lebanese forces, i.e. to the sovereign Lebanese government, and then integrate with the army forces of that government.

26. A.N.: It is important to note that the same line of arguments has been employed by Mr. Nikos Kotzias (former consultant of PASOK President George A. Papandreou) in an article published in the weekly newspaper of the Ionian Islands *Enimerosi* on Sunday 27 August 2006, 4.

27. See MEMRI TV Monitor Project, Clip No. 11, 5/4/2006, <http://goo.gl/nHi2Zk>.

C.3 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 Baghdad, the US Air-base in Qatar, US Naval Base in Bahrein, Camp Doha in Kuwait, the Al Seel air-base in Oman, the International Airport in Baghdad 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.

C.4 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 ft.³ (cubic feet) of proven natural gas; these reserves amount to 17.7 percent of proven natural gas reserves worldwide.²⁸ Iran's proven oil reserves are 89.7 billion barrels, that is 8, 5 percent of proven oil reserves worldwide.²⁹

3) On the Russian side, the infant Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)³⁰ conducted military manoeuvres in August 2005, with

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

29. *As above*, 4.

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

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, it has observer status in SCO, of which China is a member. The SCO has a close relationship with the CSTO. The structure of military alliances is crucial for each country. In the 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 been concluding a longstanding bilateral military cooperation agreement.

4) Also, military manoeuvres held by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan under the CSTO, resumed on August 24 2006. These war games, officially described as part of a counter-terrorism programme, are perceived by Michel Chodussovsky³¹ 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 was scheduled to take place from August 24-29, 2006 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".³²

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*

31. M. Chodussovsky, «Russia and Central Asian Allies Conduct War Games in Response to US Threats», 24/8/2006, <http://goo.gl/t1uTDF>.

32. IPWR News Briefing Central Asia, 24/8/2006.

their region, say analysts. Iranian media have speculated that the United States is using Azerbaijan to create a military counterweight to Iran in the Caspian. It is possible that the exercise conducted by the CSTO -in which Russia is dominant- represents a response to concerns about United States' involvement in developing Kazakhstan's navy. Observers say Russia is leaning more and more towards the Iranian view that external countries should be banned from having armed forces in the Caspian Sea".

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. The US is also trying to guarantee the security of the strategically vital Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. According to M. Chodussovsky, a US military presence in 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.

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,

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, August 19, 2006. These war games took place in a seven week period into early October 2006.

The conduct of the CSTO war games must be seen as a signal to Washington that an attack on Iran could lead to a much broader military conflict in which Russia and the member states or the CSTO could potentially be involved, siding with Iran and Syria.

The proposed link of the huge Tengiz field in Kazakhstan through

Turkmenistan that ends at the Straits of Hormuz and crosses Iranian territories, explains the strong geostrategic connection between Iran and Russia. This link may use the existing network in combination with the Kenkiyak-Koumkoi part, so as to horizontally supply China from the gigantic South Pars (Iran) fields, Daulettabad (Iran) and Tengiz (Kazakhstan, member of SCO and CSTO).

It is very important to underline certain planned routes of hydrocarbons 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 Daqing of northeast China. It must be stressed, however, that the planned pipelines supplying China with Kazakh natural gas and oil will cross the Xinjiang area. The 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 is also known that Iran wishes to construct a pipeline transferring natural gas from Tabriz (Iran) to China, through north Afghanistan 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.

5) Worth mentioning is also the structure of alliances on bilateral military partnerships. Russia and China are the principal suppliers or advanced defence systems to Iran and Syria. Russia plans to build a naval base in Syria, on the Mediterranean coast. 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 repercussion 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 under its 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 Jaup de Hoop Scheffer admits,³³ "controls only the country's capital, Kabul". Taliban tactics have changed since early September onwards.

The Taliban have abandoned their "hit and run" tactic, for one instituting strong defence tactics inflicting heavy casualties on NATO troops. 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 SCO 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 of CSTO.

The oil pipeline proposed by Western oil companies for connecting in the shortest way the oil-rich fields of Kazakhstan and the Indian Ocean goes 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 think that all the above mentioned reasons are enough to assure us that a potential US attack against Iran will be deeply and carefully discussed beforehand.

33. International Press Agencies, 8/9/2006.

C.5 The Palestinian issue

As regards the Palestinian issue and more particularly that of the Gaza Strip, Israel must be encouraged to abandon its military intervention and executions of Palestinian Islamist leaders, 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 the 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 create the conditions for a 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 of them desiring peace and modernisation.

Bibliography

- Charara, W., «Après Baghdâd, Téhéran», *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 1/2005
- Cockburn, Andrew, «Bush 130.000 Hostages: Why the US Probably Won't Attack Iran», www.counterpunch.com, Washington DC, 31/1/2006
- Lagarde, Dominique, «Syrie: Qu'est-ce qui fait courir Haddam?» *L'Express*, 26/1/2006
- MEMRI Special Report on Lebanon and Syria, 1/9/2006, Memorandum 1280, <http://goo.gl/CbO8aO>
- MEMRI TV Monitor Project, Clip No. 11, 5/4/2006, <http://goo.gl/nHi2Zk>

MEMRI Special Dispatch to Syria No. 1283, 7/11/2006, <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?page=archives&area=sd&ID=sp128306>

Oil and Gas Journal and *BP Amoco Statistical Preview of World Energy*, 1999, 20

Chodussovsky, M., «Russia and Central Asian Allies Conduct War Games in Response to US Threats», 24/8/2006, <http://goo.gl/t1u-TDF>