

The World
in Recession
Parag Khanna



Fragile Alliances in Lebanon
Interview with Amine Gemayel,
Former President of Lebanon



The US and Iran
in Afghanistan
Karim Sadjapour

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The Recession's EXIT

Will politicians
succeed where
economists fail



Stephen Glain





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EDITORIAL



Dear Reader,

It is with great pleasure and much excitement that we introduce to you The Majalla magazine in its new format.

Al Majalla has long been the leading Arabic magazine for political, economic and world affairs and we will use our best endeavours to continue in, and hopefully exceed, this tradition with The Majalla.

We have introduced many changes in our efforts to bring you the best possible ideas magazine that we can produce. Embracing the 21st Century way of life on "the Net", we have

changed the design and concept of the magazine, becoming an electronic "on-line" magazine, available in both Arabic and English languages.

Through our magazine website, www.majalla.com, we will be offering interactive services to our readers. These will include a video library of the most important political discussions as well as a link to social network sites.

Our aim at The Majalla is to explore and present in greater depth those issues at the forefront of Middle Eastern politics today. To this end, the on-line magazine has the advantage of enabling our readers to further explore "hot topics" featured, for example, in our Think Tank section through a link to the original full report published on the Internet.

We have been extremely fortunate to have acquired the writing skills of a number of prominent contributors to world news journalism, who have expressed their admiration for our forward thinking move and who are pleased to be on-board with us in our new venture. We look forward to publishing their articles in the weeks ahead.

The Majalla is, primarily, the readers' magazine and we sincerely hope that this will continue for many years to come. We would greatly welcome and value your input. Please contact our Editorial Team if there is an item of interest concerning Middle Eastern politics, economics or culture that you would like to see The Majalla investigate or report upon and we will do our very best to incorporate it in a future issue.

We are, after all, here for you the reader and we are proud to make your interests our first and foremost priority.

Sincerely,

Adel Al Toraifi
Editor-in-Chief



Contents

Iran & the US in Afghanistan-----	6	The Shiite Political Islam-----	22
Cover Story/The Depression's Exit-----	10	Will Israel Strike on Iran's Nuclear Facilities-----	30
The World in Recession-----	14	The Rise in Protectionism-----	34
Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty-----	18	Be Wary of the G20-----	37
Don't Rule Out the US-----	20	Interview with Amine Gemayel-----	45



IRAN AND THE US IN AFGHANISTAN

COMMON INTERESTS

LINGERING ENMITIES

We should applaud the Obama administration's commitment to stability and human rights in Afghanistan, a country that has endured immeasurable suffering as a result of a longstanding pattern of great power machinations followed by great power neglect. | **Karim Sadjapour**

The administration correctly understands that lasting security in Afghanistan is an enormous challenge that cannot be achieved without the collective efforts and cooperation of neighbouring countries. Pakistan, as President Obama recently said, is "inextricably linked" to Afghanistan's future. Likewise, given their deep historical links and cultural and linguistic affinities, neighbouring Iran stands to play a decisive role in Afghanistan's future. Effective U.S. diplomacy can help ensure that Iranian influence is decisively positive, rather than decisively negative. Despite 30 years of hostilities, the United States and Iran have important overlapping in Afghanistan. Given their shared 580-mile border, and having accommodated over two million Afghan refugees over the last three decades, Iran does not stand

to gain from continued instability and civil strife in Afghanistan. With one of the highest rates of drug addiction in the world, Iran has a strong interest in seeing narcotics production in Afghanistan eradicated. And given its violent history with the inherently anti-Shia Taliban (whom Iran has referred to in the past as "narco-terrorists"), Tehran has no interest in seeing their resurgence.

Yet Iranian activities in Afghanistan (and elsewhere) are often a by-product of its relationship with the United States. Tehran felt humiliated after being labelled by President Bush as part of an "axis of evil" in January 2002, believing its cooperation with the U.S. in helping to form the post-Taliban government had gone for naught.

Since then, efforts to undermine the United States has led Tehran to occasionally employ tactics that are gratuitously

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unhelpful-such as abruptly and forcefully repatriating Afghan refugees-and even inimical to its own strategic interests-such as providing arms to the Taliban. According to former U.S. officials with access to classified intelligence, Iranian aid to the Taliban was too insignificant to make a difference, but significant enough to send a signal to the United States not to take Iranian restraint for granted.

The Bush administration's decision to cast Iran as a source of the problem in Afghanistan, rather than a part of the solution, was met with chagrin by President Karzai and NATO allies. A senior European diplomat (and fluent Persian speaker) who spent several months in Afghanistan studying Iranian influence remarked to me upon his return that whereas Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan was about "20 percent positive, 80 percent negative", Iran's was more like "80 percent positive, 20 percent negative...and much of their negative activities are a reaction to punitive measures by us." In this context, focusing on Iran's support for the Taliban appears akin to focusing on Canadian illegal immigration to the United States.

Nonetheless, we should not exaggerate Iranian goodwill in Afghanistan. A government that is repressive and intolerant at home rarely seeks to export pluralism and Jeffersonian democracy abroad.

Tehran will certainly seek to assert its influence in Afghanistan by supporting Afghan actors who are sympathetic to its worldview and interests. For the foreseeable future, however, Afghanistan's immediate priorities will be far more rudimentary than the creation of a liberal democracy. No nation has the luxury of choosing its neighbours, and a country as decimated, destitute, and desperate as Afghanistan certainly does not have the luxury of shunning their assistance.

Despite Afghanistan's tremendous vulnerabilities, Iranian ambitions for hegemony in Afghanistan are tempered by historical experience and demographic realities. In contrast to Iraq, which is the cradle of Shiism-home to the faith's most important shrines and seminaries in Najaf and Karbala-and also the country's majority religion, the Shia in Afghanistan are a distinct minority, comprising less than 20 percent of the population. Moreover,

Tehran saw in the early 1990s that a Tehran-centric, minority-led government in Kabul was simply not sustainable and led to more unrest. Experience has taught Tehran that its interests are better served with a stable, friendly, majority-led government, rather than a minority-led government subservient to Tehran but inherently unstable.

Ultimately, U.S. engagement with Iran as a full partner and "responsible stakeholder" in Afghanistan has little cost and potentially enormous benefits. Though Tehran will express reluctance at working with Washington, and may couch its cooperation in critiques of U.S. policies, given its desire to be seen as the champions of the Muslim world's downtrodden, it cannot give the appearance that its enmity toward the United States trumps its empathy for the Afghan people.

While it's important to understand Iran's sizable influence on other issues of critical importance to the U.S.-Iraq, the Arab-Israeli conflict, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and energy-and the linkages between then, it's also important to disaggregate Iran policies.

While direct cooperation between U.S. and Iranian forces in Afghanistan may not be immediately realistic, Washington should support and encourage EU and NATO countries that have attempted to work together with Iran on myriad issues ranging from counter-narcotics, infrastructure and agricultural development, and using Iranian ports and roads as a supply route for aid and NATO troops. Iranian agricultural expertise, in particular, should be enlisted to help Afghan farmers in planting alternative crops to the poppy.

Critics of engagement cite the fact that the Bush administration's attempts to engage with Iran in Iraq did not bear any fruit. Despite several meetings between the U.S. and Iranian ambassadors in Baghdad, U.S. officials saw no improvement in Iranian policies in Iraq and in some cases even claimed that Tehran's support for militant groups opposed to the United States increased despite this engagement.

A fundamental shortcoming of the Bush administration's approach, however, was that it gave Tehran no indication it was interested in a broader strategic cooperation. It simply implored Iran to facilitate America's mission in Iraq because Iraqi stability was in Tehran's own interests. As one Iranian diplomat told me at the time, "The U.S. consistently threatens us militarily, encourages our population to rise up, and does its utmost to punish us economically and isolate us politically. And then we're expected to help them out in Iraq? We're not going to be good Samaritans for the sake of being good Samaritans."

The Obama administration should continue to make it clear to Tehran that it is not merely interested in tactical

or isolated engagement with Iran in Afghanistan, but is genuinely interested in overcoming the animosity of the last three decades and establishing a broad working relationship.

While it's important to understand Iran's sizable influence on other issues of critical importance to the U.S.-Iraq, the Arab-Israeli conflict, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and energy-and the linkages between then, it's also important to disaggregate Iran policies. In other words, while U.S.-Iran tension over Hezbollah or Hamas will not be resolved anytime soon, this should not preclude U.S.-Iran cooperation in Afghanistan.

Given that Tehran's policies in Afghanistan (as well as in Iraq and Lebanon) are executed not by the Iranian foreign ministry but rather the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), attempts by Congress to designate the IRGC a terrorist entity, if successful, would severely complicate any diplomatic initiatives with Iran. U.S. officials would effectively be prohibited from talking to the Iranian actors who matter most. To paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld, we have to deal with the Iranian leaders we've got, not

the ones we wish we had.

Ultimately, the underlying source of tension in the U.S.-Iran relationship is mistrust. Washington does not trust that Iran's nuclear intentions are peaceful, and does not believe that Iran can play a cooperative role in bringing peace and stability to the Middle East. Iran's leadership, on the other hand, believes that Washington's ultimate goal is not to change Iranian behaviour, but the regime itself.

For this reason, the Obama administration is wise to temper expectations of a diplomatic breakthrough with Tehran. Given three decades of compounded mistrust and ill will, the results of any engagement process will not be quick, and antagonism will not melt away after one, two, or perhaps even many meetings.

That said, we should be aware of the possibilities. Constructive discussions about Afghanistan could have a positive spillover effect on the nuclear dispute, which is a symptom of U.S.-Iranian mistrust, not the underlying cause of tension. If indeed Iran's nuclear ambitions reflect a sense of insecurity vis-à-vis the United States, building cooperation and goodwill in Afghanistan could set a new tone and context for the relationship, which could allay Tehran's threat perception and compel its leaders to reassess various aspects of their foreign policy, including their nuclear disposition.

A win-win-win is not often in international relations. U.S.-Iran cooperation in Afghanistan would be to the benefit of all three countries, just as U.S.-Iran antagonism the last several years has been to the detriment of all three.

■ “People often ask, ‘What did you learn from Iraq that might be transferable to Afghanistan? The first lesson, the first caution really, is that every situation like this is truly and absolutely unique, and has its own context and specifics and its own texture.’” **General Petraeus**



The Recession's EXIT

Will politicians succeed where economists fail?

Until six months ago, a popular refuge from the mushrooming recession was the idea that the global economy was reforming itself into regional blocks or corridors that would devolve economic power away from the United States and toward the emerging markets of Asia and the Persian Gulf. It was called "decoupling" and it was thought to represent a higher form of globalization, one in which the world economy could draw on one of several engines for momentum instead of a single, dominant one. All the politicians had to do was to stand back and let it happen.

Stephen Glain

Washington based journalist and author who covered Asia and the Middle East for the Wall Street Journal before returning to the US in 2001. He is currently writing a book about the militarization of US foreign policy.

The theory of decoupling was discredited last fall when China followed the rest of the world into the recession's abyss. But hold on. Writing in Newsweek magazine this week, Goldman Sachs chief economist Jim O'Neill argued that emerging-market economies – with China in the lead – are enduring the US-led global recession far better than the developed world due to rising consumption rates and low indebtedness. Far from arriving stillborn, Mr. O'Neill writes, decoupling is alive and well.

If recent data from Beijing is anything to go by, O'Neill may be right.

If recent data from Beijing is anything to go by, O'Neill may be right. According to a World Bank report, China's economic slowdown will bottom out by the summer and end the year with a respectable 6.5 percent growth rate – well below the 9 percent expansion it achieved in 2008 but above East Asia's regional average of 5.3 percent.

According to a World Bank report, China's economic slowdown will bottom out by the summer and end the year with a respectable 6.5 percent growth rate – well below the 9 percent expansion it achieved in 2008 but above East Asia's regional average of 5.3 percent. The report praised the 4 trillion renminbi (\$587 billion) economic stimulus Beijing administered in November as a timely and apparently successful attempt to keep Asia's economic engine from stalling.

That was two weeks ago. Since then, Beijing has announced a first-quarter growth estimate of 6.1 percent. Export revenues continued to fall in March but at a slower rate while industrial output grew to 8.3 percent, up from 3.8 percent in the first two months of the year. Significantly in an economy known for a high savings rate, China's consumers are exploiting a surge in bank lending enabled by the stimulus package. Auto sales in March rose 10 percent over year-ago levels and major urban property markets are showing signs of bottoming out. In contrast to rocky equity prices in the West, the Shanghai Composite Index has been rising steadily since November.

So liquid is the Chinese economy – the broad M2 measure of money supply rose to a record 25.5 percent last month – the central bank recently warned it might be forced to ration credit, despite the World Bank's estimate that consumer prices in China were likely to remain

low for the rest of 2009.

China is hardly out of the hole. It remains an export-led economy dependent on the appetites of consumers in the developed world – Americans first and foremost – at a time when global commerce is contracting and protectionism is on the rise. The country needs to manage at least 7 percent growth to keep people employed and off the streets. But the bullish indicators from Beijing suggests that the recession, far from retarding the process of decoupling, may end up accelerating it along with the equilibrium between debtor and creditor states considered vital for stable commerce.

Decoupling implies a shift from a unipolar global economy to a multipolar one and its attendant shifts in trade and capital flows.

As emerging markets evolve in wealth and sophistication they are as likely to trade with and invest in each other as they are with the developed world. This process is well underway in Asia, where intra-regional trade and investment is worth as least as much as the commerce it generates with the West. Eventually, as Asian states draw down their huge foreign exchange reserves to meet the growing demands of their own consumers, they will – gradually, it is hoped – unwind their large positions in US sovereign debt. That, in turn, will promote higher savings and more stable interest rates in the US. The payoff of decoupling comes when a healthy node in a decentralized and syncopated global economy can limit the impact of an ailing one.

China is at the epicenter of this seismic shift, owing to its position as America's largest creditor – World Bank President Robert Zoellick has cannily referred to the Sino-American relationship as the “G-2” – and no small amount of good luck. Currency controls, the last of which Beijing lifted in mid 2007, spared Chinese investors exposure to the toxic financial derivatives that did in so much of the developed world. Despite a costly affair with private equity – its central bank shelled out \$3 billion for a stake in investment giant Blackstone at the top of the market in May 2007 – Beijing has parked most of its estimated \$2 trillion in foreign exchange reserves in US Treasuries. Yields may be at historically low levels, but China, cash rich a debt free, can easily afford another stimulus package if necessary. The same can be said about Japan and Germany, which run ample trade

surpluses and high savings rates.

Now consider what Washington and US President Barak Obama have to look forward to. It is still too early to expect measurable progress from the many trillions of dollars in government bail-outs, stimulus plans, and budget proposals the White House has thrown at an inert US economy. Inventories have declined in volume but remain high relative to sales. American consumers are silent – retail sales declined by 1.1 percent in March, defying expectations of a turnaround from the vertiginous declines of late 2008 – and retailers are sliding into bankruptcy. Even creditworthy borrowers are having a hard time getting bank loans, so anxious are lenders about adding

Given so much uncertainty, the US economy will likely still be struggling when East Asia, led by China, will be well into recovery. That would guarantee at least one source of demand for an economy that up until now has been synchronized in debility, the very condition decoupling would hopefully prevent. This assumes, however, that the world can avoid the perils of protectionism.

It was an indirect form of trade manipulation – China's policy of devaluing its currency by selling RMB for dollars – that kept US interest rates low and fueled American over-consumption. Now that the US bubble has burst, there is a race to the bottom among trading nations to protect local industry. Washington triggered this scramble

by inserting a "Buy American" provision in its stimulus package and other governments have followed suit. If the trend continues, it could undermine China's recovery while prolonging recession in the developed world.

Campaigning for president last year, Mr. Obama gave decidedly mixed signals on trade in an attempt to appease both fiscal conservatives and trade unions. He is now under great pressure to renegotiate commercial treaties like the North American Free Trade Agreement.

additional non-performing debt to their books.

To make matters worse, the supply of home mortgage delinquencies and foreclosures – the debris of a housing bubble that did so much to destabilize the US economy – is hovering at a staggering 12 percent. At least the depths of that crisis is known, however. The default rate on commercial properties is rising dramatically, and a growing number of economists and investors fear that sector will become the next bad-debt calamity. Some \$20 billion in commercial mortgages – on everything from hotels to shopping malls – is expected to fall due this year, with an even higher level projected through 2010 and 2011.

What's held the market up until now? Congress has eased accounting regulations that require banks to value their assets consistent with market prices and to capitalize accordingly. As a result, lenders would rather keep so-called "legacy loans" on their books while awaiting a turnaround. In doing so, they are arresting the painful but redemptive process that only comes through large-scale liquidation.

So concerned are investors about the US commercial property market that the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, perhaps the world's largest sovereign wealth fund with an estimated \$1 trillion in assets, is avoiding the sector for at least the next ten months, according to a Washington-based investment adviser.

Even before the credit crunch hit, China was subsidizing its steel and textile exporters with tax rebates, obliging its East Asian competitors to move in lockstep. France opened a fund to protect its companies from foreign takeovers and Indonesia imposed restrictions on imported products in the form of special licenses and fees. Germany offers its companies discounted loans through state-invested banks. Trade officials also note a disturbing rise in tit-for-tat "anti-dumping" measures, as governments accused of subsidizing domestic manufacturers are increasingly embracing the tactic as a retaliatory measure.

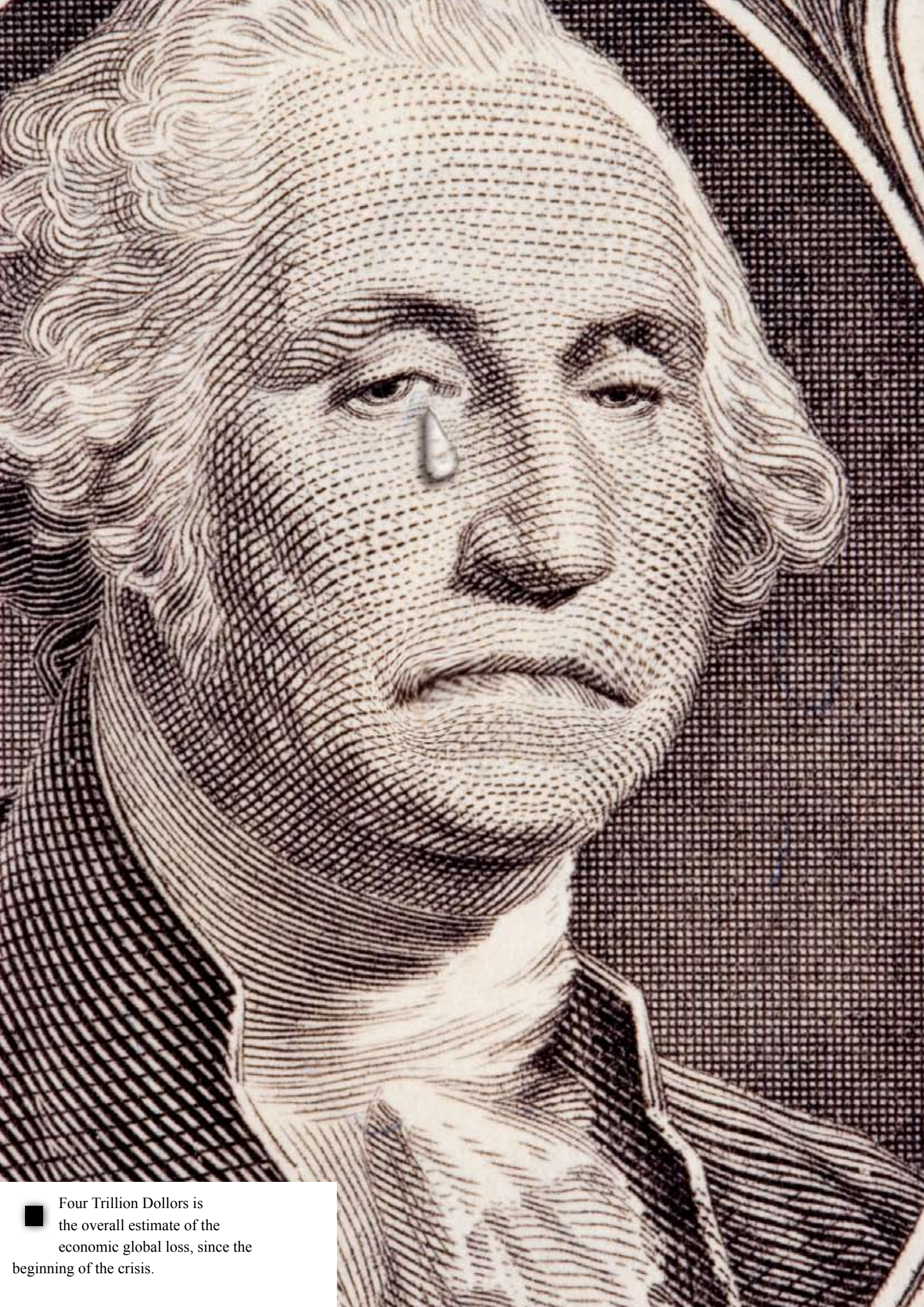
Campaigning for president last year, Mr. Obama gave decidedly mixed signals on trade in an attempt to appease both fiscal conservatives and trade unions. He is now under great pressure to renegotiate commercial treaties like the North American Free Trade Agreement. Last month, Beijing blocked Coca-Cola's \$2.4 billion bid for local drinks producer Huijuan Juice even as Chinese investors helped themselves to huge stakes in overseas companies like Australian mining giant Rio Tinto.

The world is paying a stiff price for a generation of American overindulgence. In crisis, however, there is opportunity, and the recession could well accelerate a process akin to cellular fission, in which the world economy's center of gravity multiplies. It would be a pity if global leaders allowed the rank impulse of protectionism to derail decoupling just as it was gaining momentum.

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■ Four Trillion Dollars is the overall estimate of the economic global loss, since the beginning of the crisis.

The World in Recession.

There is no such thing as foreign policy anymore,
only global policy.

The global financial crisis and economic slowdown proves that there is no such thing as foreign policy anymore, only global policy. Everything is everyone's problem. America no longer defines the global agenda, and our task is to identify which issues should be on the radar and what innovative mechanisms can be deployed to solve them. | Parag Khanna

First of all, this complex global order cannot be captured through trite phrases like “East replaces the West,” “Pacific replaces the Atlantic,” “China displaces America,” and other clichés. All of these powers and zones will be dynamically interactive. To understand geopolitical patterns we should think in terms of planets (the great powers), comets (the lesser powers), and constellations (regional and multilateral institutions), but also not neglect the cosmic dust (terrorists, pandemics, financial panics) which can cause serious atmospheric disturbances. Each problem we face has repercussions throughout the system, and requires unique but systemic responses. Cognitive inertia leads many of us to believe that Obama’s America can restore the country’s leadership role, but America’s diminished stature is structural,

not personality-driven. Our solar system no longer has a sun.

The most systemic of challenges remains the global financial crisis. With most Western economies in recession, America’s debt-exploding fiscal stimulus and the G-20s collective commitment to boost global credit availability through the IMF are meant as an antidote to America’s recent draining of global liquidity. Moving forward, the Chinese Central Bank, which now holds approximately \$2 trillion in foreign exchange reserves, has spoken out through its governor that the world must switch to a basket-oriented reserve currency of dollars, Euro, yen, and Sterling. This should be taken very seriously, not only for the health of those holding depreciating dollars, but also so that dozens of emerging markets will have expanded access to IMF credit lines in the future without the risk of mature markets siphoning off liquidity.

If the financial crisis hints at a new world order emerging,

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then it is important to think about who has first-mover advantage. At present, it is widely projected that Asian demand will recover more quickly than the U.S. or Euro-zone. China's massive stimulus package of almost \$600 billion (and much more in PPP terms) should not only insulate China from domestic upheaval, but since the Asian financial crisis a decade ago, it has so intimately networked itself with the region's economies such that it could buttress the recoveries of Korea and Southeast Asian nations as well. Once staunch American allies like Australia have been cushioned precisely because of China's massive demand for its natural gas and iron ore. We can well imagine the Asian monetary system and development banks accelerate their deepening regionalism in the aftermath of this crisis as well. An "Asia for Asians" is emerging both out of mistrust in the West but also confidence in their own solutions.



■ According to recent statistics, there is 5.1 million unemployed in the US

The financial crisis has most definitely underscored and accelerated the global strategic shift towards a geopolitical marketplace. China can more confidently pursue its mix of neo-mercantilist trade and investment policies in Central Asia and Africa, while oil and commodities exporters will welcome continued demand from China and India as Western consumers scale back. This will surely translate into growing Chinese leverage over the situations from the Korean peninsula to Russian power-plays for energy security to Iran.

Diplomatic resolutions continue to declare that a nuclear Iran is unacceptable to the West, yet Iran is not becoming any less nuclear. Chinese and Russian investments into Iran continue despite calls for more broad-based sanctions, and Obama's potential outreach to Iran might only validate the engagement strategy in which Europe and China already lead.

We can expect that in the coming year this alternative strategy of opening to Iran in the hopes of undermining the regime from within will gain steam—even if the

hardliners take the June elections in Tehran.

Iraq is part of the reason this will be necessary, particularly for America. Does the U.S. want no transparency into Iran's plans for Iraq, even as American forces accelerate their withdrawal? A key emerging element is the Saudi card: warning Iran that if its meddling in Iraq accelerates proportionate to America's drawdown, Iran will find a more aggressive Sunni adversary stepping up to contain it. Indeed, even the Bush administration's recent overtures to Iran promising recognition of its greater regional role rankles Saudis and other Arabs who already feel threatened by Iran's build-up of influence from Lebanon and through the Persian Gulf. Containing Iran in Iraq is a crucial lever to ensure that Iran doesn't automatically view itself as having the advantage of time on its side in the nuclear negotiations.

But rather than leap from crisis to crisis, the only region that lacks a security institution ought to gain one as soon as possible. Whether based on the OSCE or Asian Six-Party Framework, it

will require that the key regional players, namely Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, and Egypt, other Gulf and Levantine states, and also the U.S., EU, Russia, India and China form a standing organization to bring mutual transparency to their activities. If they do not build trust directly with each other, the region will become increasingly prone to Cold War-esque proxy skirmishes in the Straits of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, or Arabian Sea. Both Bahrain and Qatar have expressed support for such a body, and it should be a global priority to convene its first meeting this year. Its agenda must go beyond regional nuclear concerns to include Palestine and Iraq's rehabilitation as well.

On Iran's other border, in Afghanistan, the opportunities to engage Iran are better, though indeed very complicated. NATO countries have confirmed the current negotiations with Iran over transit routes from the Chabahar Port to Melak to reach the Indian-built Zaranj-Dilaram highway, which connects to Kandahar, NATO's headquarters for the anti-Taliban offensives planned for this Spring. In exchange for facilitating this access, Iran and India might want the U.S. to back off on blocking the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, which all parties are keen to implement within the next several years. So the arc of crisis stretching from Iraq to Pakistan also contains numerous opportunities, but taking advantage of them will require many micro-bargains and trade-offs between Western, Eastern, and the rising powers.

It remains a major debate today whether Russia's return is a tremor or an earthquake. As Russia acknowledges the Obama administration's new tone on thorny issues such as missile defense, Russia's actions last year—from gas cut-offs to Ukraine to the invasion of Georgia—have prompted an accelerated European dialogue on energy security. But establishing a common gas market and pursuing new pipelines from North Africa is not enough. Russia itself must be the focus of sustained European pressure on a vast array of fronts: its banking system is in disarray and in need of European standardization, and as oil prices come down, its domestic investment has faltered and its dependence on Europe has grown.

This kind of leverage must be exploited. The EU can still purchase—literally—Russian maturation towards a European future, a crucial step towards preventing the Sino-Russian block the Bush administration did more to advance than splinter. Such a move has enormous implications for European energy security, as it would ensure a more predictable supply of oil and gas from Kazakhstan and via Ukraine, with less Russian interference in new pipeline options via Turkey and the Balkans.

New pipeline channels will become the pulsating veins which elevate these swing states into more stable partners.

All of these maneuverings form the backdrop for a variety of new multilateral processes such as the G20. If 2009 does not yield significant gains in voice for second world powers in matters of financial regulation, trade negotiations, and climate change, the present diplomatic disarray will surely become even messier. This would be a great shame, as the main global issue

It remains a major debate today whether Russia's return is a tremor or an earthquake. As Russia acknowledges the Obama administration's new tone on thorny issues such as missile defense, Russia's actions last year—from gas cut-offs to Ukraine to the invasion of Georgia—have prompted an accelerated European dialogue on energy security.

of climate change does require the developed and developing countries to come together. In December 2009 the Copenhagen Climate Conference will take place. It represents both the first major environmental summit where energy security, climate change, development, and alternative energy will all be on the table, but also the last hope for a global breakthrough before the key players lose hope and go their separate ways. Success at Copenhagen will only come through diligent negotiation which reaches beyond governments and to the private sector innovators from Silicon Valley to Spain who can work to reduce the costs of solar and wind power for Asian societies. Neither the World Bank's Clean Development Mechanism nor emissions trading schemes are nearly sufficient to confront rising CO2 outputs and heavily polluting and inefficient energy consumption at the level of the masses. It will fall to public-private agreements between governments and technology firms to reach deeper into India, China, Indonesia and other emerging giants to make tangible headway.

For all the caution being exercised by major powers with shaky foundations, the turbulence of global politics continues dangerously forward, more crisis management than strategic foresight. We cannot rely on the G20 alone to become the new diplomatic saviour, the end-all-be-all UN Security Council for the 21st century. Instead, ironically, we may see far more Bush-like "coalitions of the willing" forming around specific issues, competing to find solutions to deadlocks on global trade and reducing emissions.

Despite the Bush analogy, this is healthy competition—we should not jump immediately to a new model of global governance without bold, persistent experimentation. The new world order will be populated by far more actors like NGOs and multi-national corporations than the UN or any one power can manage, as yet we have no formula for success.

The 30th Anniversary of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty

In Egypt, public disappointment and indifference marked the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, underscoring the growing rift between official policy and popular national sentiment. | **Mona El-Naggar**

The historic image of late Egyptian president Anwar El Sadat fervently shaking hands on the lawn of the White House with then-Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin, controversial as it was in 1979, still held a promise for calm and prosperity after a gruelling series of wars that drained Egypt's resources and claimed tens of thousands of lives.

Thirty years later, Egyptians feel that neither prosperity nor tranquillity were achieved. "In the beginning there was enthusiasm about Sadat who will achieve peace and resolve Egypt's problems," said Osama Anwar Okasha, a leading Egyptian television script writer distinguished for his ability to depict and analyze Egyptian society. "But today you get the feeling that people are apathetic towards the issue and are asking if we can end the treaty. They do not feel that it has brought benefits," Mr. Okasha added.

Under the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, signed on March 26th 1979, Israel agreed to a complete withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, which it had occupied since 1967, and in return Egypt agreed to demilitarize the area and become the first Arab country to officially recognize and establish relations with the state of Israel.

This independent settlement, critics of the peace treaty argue, changed the overriding dynamic of the Arab-Israeli conflict by permanently ejecting Egypt from any potential armed struggle with Israel and splitting the Arab ranks into the pro-peace and pro-resistance camps.

"Egypt was the leading country, Egypt had the platform, but the treaty pulled it down to the ground," said Fahmy Howaidy, an Egyptian intellectual opposed to the peace treaty and to any subsequent

normalization of relations with Israel. "Because of the policies that were built on the treaty, Egypt has become weaker and isolated in the Arab world."

In a recent development, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was the only Arab leader to be absent from an Arab League summit held in Qatar last week, because of growing tensions between Egypt and Qatar, mainly over Qatar's handling of Egypt during the 3-week military offensive launched by Israel on Gaza last December, which left more than 1400 Palestinians dead and thousands more injured.

The Egyptian regime had kept the Rafah border crossing with Gaza sealed against a popular domestic and Arab demand to open it, and only allowed for the controlled passage of injured Palestinians and medical aid. Qatari-owned Arabic satellite channel Al Jazeera rallied Arab public opinion and aired images of dead children and voices of wailing mothers calling on Egypt to open its border in its around-the-clock coverage of the war.

The Egyptian regime defensively argued that it was bound by a security agreement with Israel and the Palestinian Authority which required the presence of EU observers to monitor movement across the border. EU observers had departed several days before Hamas seized control over the Gaza Strip in June 2007 and the border crossing between Egypt and Gaza has been closed since.

"The treaty created a severe fracture between the authority and society in Egypt," Mr. Howaidy said. "In the latest events, the government was besieging Gaza and the people were trying to aid and assist the Palestinians – what more do you want?"

Advocates of the peace treaty in Egypt blame this delicate situation on the



■ After 30 years, Israel believes that peace with Egypt is still “Cold”.

initial refusal of Arab countries in the region to support and come aboard Sadat’s peace initiative with Israel thirty years ago.

“It was said that when Sadat signed the agreement with Israel, he gave up on the Arabs and sold out the Palestinian cause, while it is the Arabs who gave up on Sadat and rendered his agreement with Israel an individual one,” argued Salah Montasser, a columnist in Egyptian daily state-owned newspaper Al Ahram.

Other voices put the blame less on the peace treaty than on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s failure to transform Egypt politically and economically over the last 28 years in which he has ruled in relative stability as a result of the cold peace Egypt forged and dutifully maintained with Israel.

Since the treaty was signed three decades ago, the Egyptian population has doubled and about 45% of the Egyptian people today live on less than \$2 a day.

“Egypt failed to win the peace war through economic renaissance and political reform,” wrote Amr El Shobaky, a researcher at Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, in a special supplement on the anniversary of the peace treaty in Egyptian independent daily newspaper Al Masry Al Youm.

“The real downfall is not in Sadat’s political school of thought or vision, but in the failure of his successors to transform this vision into success on the ground.” Mr. Shobaky wrote, cynically adding that Israel did not prevent Egypt from improving the literacy rate of its citizens or building a democratic and developed society.

Whenever Egyptians take to the streets to make their demands heard, such as the case during the last Israeli offensive on Gaza, Egyptian police forces

brutally surround, beat and disperse the crowd.

“If we will be humiliated in the name of agreements, then why should we accept this?” said Hashem Ahmed, a 31 year old public relations specialist. Mr. Ahmed was clear to say that he was not for war as an alternative to peace, but that he wanted to see officials in Egypt make resolute decisions which express the will of the Egyptian people. “I am not calling for war but why can’t we freeze relations, how can we continue to let them light their houses with Egyptian gas?” Mr. Ahmed said in reference to Egyptian exports of natural gas to Israel, which started last May under a 15-year contract to deliver a total of 1.7 billion cubic meters of gas.

The contract attracted wide public scrutiny after a former Egyptian diplomat filed a court case to stop Egypt from piping gas to Israel because it was believed that the gas was being sold below the market price. It was also part of the more general public aversion to fostering any relations with Israel.

Against this backdrop of regional tensions and popular disenchantment, Egyptian officials remained silent on the anniversary of the signing of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, who is normally outspoken about his advocacy for peace and stability in the region, received a phone call from Israeli President Shimon Perez on the anniversary of the treaty to congratulate him, but the phone call received no attention from any of the state-run news outlets in Egypt.

“Let the leaders at the top arrange things between themselves” said Mahmoud Mohamed a 21-year-old Egyptian man who stood guard in front of a building that belonged to the Ministry of Defense as part of his required military service. “As for me, I don’t count, I am lost.”



■ A direct result of the financial crisis and the low expectations of global economic activity in 2009, the Energy Information Agency (EIA) of the US Department of Energy increased its estimates regarding the decline in global crude oil demand for 2009 from the previous value of 0.1% to 0.8%.

Don't Rule Out the US

As the real magnitude of the financial crisis in the US and the Western World becomes clear, it is now a common place to argue one should look to Asia as the new source of global power. | **Manuel Almeida**

Indeed, this century is being proclaimed by many as the Asian Century. What is argued is that the most serious financial and economic crisis, and also political and ideological, in the West since the Great Depression marks a new global era and the shift from the West's and especially US' hegemony to emerging countries, namely China and India.

These suppositions are based on economic statistics and growth rates which hardly provide the whole picture of Chinese and Indian realities and, in particular, do not offer any hint of what it takes to be the world's leading nation. What is more, the consequences of the financial crisis in China and India are still not obvious, and it is natural that the crisis first reveals itself more serious in its origin, that is, in the West.

The Chinese government will do everything in its power to conceal the real magnitude of the financial crisis. Official figures indicate that at least 20 million Chinese people have already lost their jobs. The World Bank has cut Chinese growth predictions to 6.5%, still a much brighter figure than any Western state. However, as The Economist argues, these numbers feel like a recession to an economy used to double-digit growth rates. These huge growth rates diverted the attention away from the huge social and poverty related problems which China faces as both an emerging and developing country. In fact, the Chinese Communist Party undertook huge efforts to hide these problems from the World during the Olympic Games in Beijing. The increasing protests in a wide variety of sectors all over China are a sign of the growing unease about the current situation.

In India, almost every economic indicator shows that the country is and will further suffer from the crisis. A diving rupee, the huge withdrawal of foreign investment, and the awful plight of the Indian car industry are just a few examples. As with China, the huge growth rates have shifted attention away from the most profound social and poverty related problems which India has not been able to tackle. First and foremost, a booming population, probably already surpassing that of China, which is far from being an asset in a country where it is predicted that soon, about a third of the population will be living under the poverty line. And there are other major obstacles to India becoming a leading nation, such as its serious environmental problems, which will become more acute as global warming advances, its severe energetic shortage, and the threat of terrorism - of several kinds - it faces.

A nation does not become the World's leading one only due to material factors. Perhaps the most important aspect of American supremacy lies

not in its economic might, privileged off-shore geographical position, or its military supremacy, but on the ability to persuade other States that things will go well as long as America is in charge. The power of attraction of the US, what is usually named as "soft power", is something George W. Bush seriously endangered but was not able to permanently undermine.

The emphasis on diplomacy and what it can achieve to put America where Americans think it belongs is something that has been gravely underestimated by those who argue that Obama's foreign policy will not differ that much from Bush's. Words matter in politics. In fact, politics is very much about words, and Obama and State Secretary Hillary Clinton are revealing themselves to be masters in this domain.

Now that the Bush era is over and the main goal of the new Administration is to rebuild the image of the US as the essential nation, it is appropriate to ask the following question: which state is more attractive to others as a global leader? The US, which has already occupied that position with considerable success, or China, a repressive regime which, in spite of some improvements as a responsible member of the international community, still presents a dismal human rights record in Tibet and a devious behaviour in the UN Security Council in the dealings with the Sudanese backed genocide in Darfur and Iran's uranium enrichment programme.

The world we live in today is American centred especially in terms of ideas. Market capitalism, the global financial system and its institutions, even the lifestyle that many in the World aspire to have one day, those are all American driven features, and economic liberalism is far from dead, it only needs some adjustments. Moreover, innovation and ground breaking ideas are what really drive a nation forward, and the most important sources for those are universities. At the present time, most of the top world universities are still the in United States, and of the other few that make it to the top only a couple of them are located in Asia.

Conventional wisdom says we should now be looking East for the new source of global power. This article suggests that to look only in that direction is at the least extremely premature. Being the origin of the global financial crisis, which also reveals a lot about US world wide influence, is not the only reason why the spotlight is on the United States. The reason why the G20 London Summit was waiting anxiously for Obama is that what is naturally expected from the new US Administration is that it finds a solution for the current crisis, at home as well as globally.



THE SHIITE POLITICAL ISLAM

Shiism as a sect remained reconciled with the other Islamic sects for the past 14 centuries.

It co-existed with Sunni states which ruled most of the Islamic world for longer periods of time compared to Shiite states which ruled for about 400 years out of 1400 years, and it reigned over 30% of the Islamic world.

There are the Sunni states

which were dominant and co-existed with Shiism, despite their power, strength and collectivity, for the reason that they believed in sectarian diversity and recognized the right of belief for this sect.

The current period witnesses a debate that strains the minds of the political and religious elite while trying to understand the nature of Shiite expansion in the region. Some of these elite

see it as a natural extension of the people's identity and their love for the doctrine of Shiism.

Some others believe it is an effort to use the family of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) to impose national influence and to manipulate religion to serve political ends. Our writers try today to answer some questions concerning the spread of Shiism in the Arab region.

Iran is «Dangerous» Even to Itself

We should not allow any Iranian banner to be raised in our countries. El-Musawi Says.

Diya El-Musawi

The hard-line path in Iran found its golden lantern in the Shiite heritage that is decorated with the ornaments of the family of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). The hardliners aim to secure the minds of Shiite and Sunni youth in both the Arab and Islamic worlds. This happens particularly in the Arab world when it is witnessing an identity crisis and the loss of a solid cultural map.

The Arab and Islamic people are bewildered in the shadow of cultural defeat and the pile-up of political sufferings saturated with images of the leader as hero and the leader as a self-imposed autocrat.

The cultural defeat of any society leads it to search for mythology, delusion and superstition, even if it was the myth of Antara Ben Shadad. Thus we find Iran distributing its sorrow on Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq for its national interests. Iran finds warm welcome to its tears of sorrow. There are some people who woke up from the Iranian coma in southern Iraq. The evidence is the results of the latest governorate elections in Iraq.

We place our bets on the moderate path of Khatemi in Iran. Iran sneaked upon the Moroccan youth based on the Fatimid culture during their rule in this region where the love of the family of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) is deeply rooted in the culture. Some Moroccans also suffer a state of emptiness, taken by the Iranian rhetoric. The reason behind that is the loss of direction on the part of religious sects and the confusion between the political and the sectarian. This aspect could even be lost on a renowned thinker like Idriss Hani. The love of the family of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) shines in every heart but fear comes from politicizing things.

The Moroccan youth, in particular those fearing modernization, are looking for an alternative and in the Iranian literature smuggled to minorities they find a path to fulfill that emptiness. What happened in Lebanon and the flaming blaze there is enough to mix the cards and to cause a loss of direction in societies that were originally based on national sympathy and political romanticism.

Iran is a Muslim neighbour and a powerful regional state in the region but the revolutionary instinct of Iran is posing a menace to Iran itself and the whole area.

The infiltration of revolutionism into the Huthists, the Sadrist, Gaza and Lebanon indicates fears surrounding modernization and the civilian state because ideologist states fall short of development and innovation. We must choose between the leadership authority and the modernization authority, between a strong religious leader and a solid democracy. We can not believe in modernization and at the same time envelope the ballot box with religious rites. Iran is advancing its national interests and it has a right to do so, but it is pragmatic when it is trying to benefit from the doctrine of love for the family of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) in order to elicit Islamic sympathy. The problem is mixing between the political and the religious, thus I call for the separation between religion and politics because religion is a pure existence that we should not be allowed to enter into the political bazaar.

Consider carefully Yemen and the crisis of Morocco and Bahrain with Iran. Consider Yemeni President's declarations about Iran and Iraqi declarations about Iran's intervention in this country.

Iranian expansion was an idea in the background and now Iran aims to geographically expand. This is our problem as Bahrainis with Iran when we found a revered Shaikh like Nateq Nouri, who is at bow's length from being elected as Iran's coming president versus Khatami, declaring that Bahrain is the 14th governorate of Iran.

There is a big difference between religious and political Shiism. Religious Shiism is limited to the mosque away from politics and this is what had been preached by the Family of the Prophet since they called for dealing with religious matters and affairs of the country and society, patriotically and wisely, disregarding politics when it exploits religion.

This aspect is viewed on the basis of Alawi and non-Alawi Shiism. Doctrines do not intervene in politics except through the intermediation of man. Politicians introduce religion into a party to turn it into partisan camps involved with religion in order to nurture their own interests. When religion enters the party's narrow jail, it turns into a supermarket. That's why we refuse to push the tolerant religion into lobbies of politics. For instance, there is no relationship between Islam and terrorist acts on 11th September. We should separate the Family of the prophet's thought from political thought exercised by Iran. There are historical omissions and History is misrepresented in order to achieve political benefits.

Iranian endeavours to expand in the region represent a national trend not a religious one. As evidence of this, Iran occupied three islands of the UAE and prominent Iranian figures rushed madly towards considering Bahrain a part of Iran, including Hussain Shariati and Daryoush to Nateq Nouri. Is this a religious expansion? Is this the Islamic unity? Where are sovereignty of countries and mutual cooperation?

We must immunize ourselves, our countries and our people, and deal with Iran as one of the important and respected Islamic States in the region, but at the same time we must not allow her to intervene in our national affairs or to mix our national cards with our religious ones.

We must not allow the hoisting of a picture of any Iranian figure under any pretext, because such an act is considered an encroachment on the sovereignty of the State, and a gap through which extremists might infiltrate to our children.

As patriotic and reasonable Shiites - and what a great number we are - we support our fatherlands and the sovereignty, history, present and future of our countries, therefore we must warn our nation and the Arab and Muslim youth against any interference or religious exploitation that might creep into them. We are capable of finding a kind of modern thinking which is different from the type of thinking that is locked inside the prison cells of ideology, for the benefit of our countries, and our tolerant religion, and the interests of our Governments.

Iran Resists Israel and Does not Interfere in Arab Affairs

The talk about Shiite infiltration is meant to scare Muslims and to bring division among them. Taskhiri says.

Mohammad Mehdi El-Taskhiri

Difference is a natural phenomenon that befits the human instinct and it is the reason behind cultural diversity and building human civilizations, without which no society can seek overall development.

Negative disagreement leads to ripping the nation apart, wasting its energy and leading it to slavery, confinement and loss of sovereignty. The current crisis was not born today but has deep historical, religious and polemicist roots. And what arises today goes back to political and religious reasons. People who have a minimum of historical knowledge know that governments after the Four Khalifs used these natural differences to achieve their goals whether they were Sunni or Shiite.

People who have the least knowledge about the history of Islam discover the most magnificent relations between leaders of Islamic sects, contrary to what we see between their followers today. Leaders of the different sects endured harm and torture from the rulers, because of their loyalty and love for the Prophet Muhammad's Family. So the crisis is mainly political and not religious. Religious affairs are subject to discussions in scientific academies and not in public media.

All the Muslims love Prophet Muhammad's Family and no special sect has the right to monopolize that love and accuse the others of behaving otherwise. We might see some people using the slogan of loving Prophet Muhammad's Family to attack another sect of Muslims and try to disseminate their ideas and projects. But for Iran, whose majority population is Shi'ite divided by "Twelver Shi'ites", it is natural that its people follow the same path of Prophet Muhammad's Family. That does not mean seeing the others as enemies or disrespecting them. Past historical events, regardless of their reasons and circumstances, should not be blamed on a group of people and a nation that does not accept responsibility for that history. We must also refer to a pivotal point which is that Islamic thinking does not call for imposing an idea or a belief by force and manipulation. All these means are a clear show of compulsion (No compulsion in religion). But every human being has



■ Shiites make up strong majorities in Iran (90 percent), Bahrain (75 percent), and Iraq (close to 60 percent); Lebanon, too, is primarily Shiite. Small but potentially powerful Shiite are found throughout the Gulf States, as well as in Pakistan (17 percent), Saudi Arabia (15 percent), and India (around 2 percent).

Arab and Iranian interests can not be separated because what hurts Arabs hurts us and vice versa. Some people may try to argue otherwise due to ignorance. Regrettably, U.S. interests in the region dictate the presence of American troops by the thousands in the region in addition to American military bases in Islamic states. That forces us to not discuss our Islamic affairs whether Arab or Persian.

I believe that influential Islamic leaders and states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran should co-operate together wisely to maintain the well being of the Islamic nation and to close all doors leading to instability. Everybody knows the negative effect of politics on fueling devastating differences. The positive side of politics can prevail and the nation can join forces together and reach unanimous agreement to succeed in the fields of development and modern technology. Thus it prepares for the emergence of a new Islamic civilization through its own means not according to imported Western means.

the right to his own beliefs, whether Sunni or Shi'ite, because at the end he is a Muslim. Whoever follows a sect whether Sunni or Shi'ite against his beliefs, contradicts his mind, heart and soul. To say that Shi'ite beliefs are gradually spreading across the Sunni world is the same as saying that Sunni beliefs are spreading across the Shi'ite world.

I believe that both claims are meant to scare and incite Muslims and no proof has been forwarded to support them. We should not forget that the colonizers did not wish well for our region. It is evident that planting Israel inside the region, territorial disputes, civil wars and wars between nations formed the basis for extremist and terrorist movements. If the aim was the geographic expansion of Iran we can find no witnesses to that, and if the aim was to support resistance movements against the Zionist entity we take pride in that. If the aim was to incite the people against their governments and to interfere in Arab affairs, there is no evidence to support that, in spite of contrary allegations. If Iran was defending the rights of Arab people on the international arena this is its natural right because our religious and cultural partnership imply that.

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Iran Succeeds in the Policy of Independence

Grady says Iran refuses to play the game of sectarian conflict in the region.

Shafiq Grady

When conflicts plague regions of this world, they don't reflect one reason that made them arise, but their admittance was one reason of their occurrence. Thus many conflicts that happened in history and which were labelled religious conflicts actually should not be classified narrow-mindedly. The same principle could be applied to what is happening today in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

When we talk about a conflict there should be at least two sides. So pointing out the Shiites as the problem is not scientifically sound let alone being biased. There are several faces to the crisis including the sectarian tendencies in general, using international politics to feed the interests of a single group and the evolving rigidity in ethnic minds. Ethnic minds tend to have a stereotypical view of another different sect, to the effect that renouncing God and adopting a pagan creed is better than following a different sect.

These beliefs do not concern Shiites or Sunnis but they run deep in tribal beliefs that follow political manipulation of the elites who manipulate the masses. Is Iran expanding its base of national or religious interests? This is a question that asserts an assumption rather than starts a research assumption. The question arises between two possibilities to explain the root of the Iranian influence in the region. The first possibility is the Iranian national interests, and the second possibility is the Iranian religious interests which run contrary to objective possibilities.

I personally believe that any country in the world which practices politics would consider their national interests. But the political ideology of Iran does not separate between the national and the religious interests. The

cultural identity of Iran goes along with its deep religious beliefs. But to tell the truth, the success of Iranian choices in the region goes back to some additional reasons such as:

First: Iran's emergence as a challenge to the existence of Israel at the same time when the Arab world is lenient with Israel in the region, adding to the popular support that Iran enjoys in the area.

Second: Iran's success in establishing an independent policy by securing scientific and economic self-sufficiency outside Western dominance. Iran sometimes maneuvers with the West as a main player.

Third: Iran's refusal to play the game of sectarian conflicts in the region and its adherence to tackling vital and pivotal issues and bridging the gulf between groups regardless of their religious, ethnic and intellectual views. So whoever wants to search for the secret of the Iranian influence in the area should search from the start for things that people in the area thrive for.

I would like here to assert the love held by every Muslim, whether male or female to Prophet Muhammed (Pbuh) and his family. No followers of any sect can argue on this issue with any other Islamic sect. If the love to Muhammed (Pbuh) and his family is the secret behind the spiritual unity among all Muslims, it should be an end that all Arab and Muslim leaders and kings seek. So we must be aware that love to the Family of Prophet Muhammed (Pbuh) should be broader than any sectarianism. We should also be aware that demonstrating the values and rules of any sect is a right that both Sunnis and Shiites should endorse and be proud of.

Iran forges an Alliance with U.S. to Share «the Arab Cake»

The Iranian project is more dangerous to us than the Israeli one, Al-Kebisi says.

Ayash El-Kebisi

Shiism is a belief founded on a certain religious basis that contradicts the mainstream of the Sunni people. At its very root this belief seeks to expand and spread on the expense of other beliefs, because its exponents believe that the others are wrong and misguided, and among the misguided are the Sunni followers. Shiites believe that the Sunni followers based their sect on the wrong basis, and for that reason they seek to spread true Islam by exporting revolutionary trends. Based on this thesis, the dream of Shiite expansion was connected to another dream which is the national dream of reestablishing the old Persian empire. Thus, some kind of marriage between the Shiite and Persian dreams emerged. Persian nationalists used religious Shiite slogans to promote Persian nationalism, and Shiite conservatives were using national principles to propagate the Shiite belief. So in reality we can not distinguish between the expansion of Shiite

belief and Persian imperial expansion.

Facing these plans of expansion that develop on Arab expense, we should have a double-sided view to counter that expansion in both its national and sectarian aspects. We believe that the path of the Sunni people is the right course. Targeting the Sunni people became no secret in Arab countries like Iraq, Egypt and Bahrain. So all religious clerics should be careful towards this forthcoming menace. It is true that the Zionist threat and that of westernization still hold, but the Shiite threat is a special one because it targets our identity and belief. It could also penetrate groups and some Arab clans. Despite their expansion and strength, Jewish movements could not convert a Muslim to their belief. But the Shiite plan is capable of penetrating and changing the Islamic identity. This is not a side issue but I believe that it is a strategic one that

should be handled carefully with no neglect.

It is to be regretted that we see Arab nationalists form an alliance with Iran and connive at its expansion plans, given that Iran occupies more parts of the Arab world than Israel does. Iran occupies Arabstan, located in Ahwaz and the three Arab Gulf islands, and it is strange that some people who promote Arab nationalism do not move a muscle.

There is a clear agreement between the Iranian and American plans for the region. The Americans handed Iraq over to the Iranians. No Arab leader could visit Baghdad, but Iranian President Ahmadi Nejad did, who came under American protection and could enter the Green Zone. So it is clear now that there is an alliance between the Iranian and American plans to share the Arab cake.

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Shiism and Politicization

Expanding the base of national reform and openness to critical review.
The Arab side contributes to inflaming sectarian conflict. Al-Hubail says.

Mihanna El-Habayl

The issue of severe sectarian intolerance in the Arab region did not jump to the fore with the emergence of Shiites in the Arab capitals in general or the Gulf region in particular.

This issue can be long traced back in history. In its demographic structure, sectarian intolerance did not come from abroad. The intellectual crisis inherent in the relationship between Shiism and Sunnism is a long-standing issue. However, it oscillates between the school of Shiite moderateness which deviates from the mainstream of defaming the first generation of the Islamic Mission, and the school of fanaticism and extremism with its retaliating discourse against the opposing school.

This tension had not been existent at such level before the Iranian Revolution since the main problematic was that the political system of the Iranian revolution that followed the reign of Shah in 1979 called for an extremist thought supported by the rule of Shah Ismail Al-Safawy in 1514. That was during his conflict with the Ottoman empire in which he inflamed the culture of retaliation on grounds of doctrines that reinforce traditions criticized by the moderate tide of Shiites which limited the rationale of deviation and confrontation with the Sunnis to what they considered the great injustice committed by the three righteous Caliphs. And thus the issue of confrontation was viewed as a necessity alongside the succession of such Sunni existence.

Mass media of Iran did not highlight such declaration upon the outbreak of the revolution but it restricted itself to the program of religious leaders and institutions that re-export the Iranian Revolution. They thought that bringing such an issue to the spotlight is an important bridge to penetrate the followers of the sect in many countries and exploit them so as to become ultimately loyal to the doctrine that retaliation upon perpetrators of the great injustice had historic evidence and validity and attributing the condition of those suffering from grievances, injustices and marginalization in their original countries to this issue.

The Islamic Republic of Iran maintained such

discourse under the program of structural formation of its loyal movements to continue a friendly relationship with the Sunni world and gain support of many Sunni thinkers on the basis that Iran did not sustain a sectarian approach but a US dominance-resistant approach benefiting from the preoccupation of the Arab official system as a whole with the US program and the political dominance of such program over the Arabs decision and their formal stance in addition to Washington's continuous alliance with Israel and its battle against the Arab world.

It is surprising that one of the early preachers against this sectarian preoccupation of the revolution with the ideologically violent historical dilemma was professor Aly Sharitie, one of the revolution's thinkers who early warned against what he described as Safawy Shiitization that would threaten concepts of Islamic revolution in Iran and its civilized unionistic project. All what we mentioned emphasized the interference and dominant politicization of the Shiite discourse whether it is a theological discourse or one which tries to re-export the Shiite cause in general.

However, this intolerance was escalated by transferring such culture into a work plan and forming groups belonging to the theological exportation frameworks and utilizing the Injustice discourse on the international level, which ultimately culminated in the fall of Iraq.

Politicization did not end at this because the sectarian party continued its dominance over the political process by regaining extremist concepts on the issues of disagreement with the first Sadr and inflaming feelings of retaliation for the Great Injustice. Thus many media channels were introduced into Iraq after invasion with allegations of loyalty to the Family of the Prophet which is a basic doctrine adopted also by the Sunnis. However, this mobilization spontaneously turned the

loving tone in the new discourse into hostility against Caliphs and the other companions, which deepened the national and social crack. No doubt, Iran is greatly accountable for such result.

In all circumstances, this accountability of Iran for such dilemma did not free the Arab official side from blame, which participated in this sectarian inflammation in counter sectarian terms to contain an internal dilemma or justify its collaboration with USA its in strategic projects.

It is extremely important to stress that objective classification of such state does not justify transgression against the dignity of persons and moral status of the followers of the sect or depriving them of their national rights or disrespect of their diversity within the national state even if the right of Islamic legislation to remain in the hands of the Sunni School on the basis that they naturally belong to the country and constitute the majority of the people.

Some of the ways to cope with this increasing sectarian intolerance arising from the continuous Iranian pressures to politicize the sectarian status quo include making endeavours to expand the base of national reform regarding core issues and enhance respect for individuals and their political rights within the framework of a fair constitutional system for all citizens. This matter was taken into consideration earlier by the Islamic constitutional jurisprudence since it considers justice as the cornerstone of the relationship between the state and citizenship.

Another course of action to be taken into consideration is the openness of the national and official cultural arena to calls of review and corrective actions adopted by Shiite players and thinkers to reinforce values of communication and common thinking. This trend suffers from severe choking due to the Iranian influence rejecting views of Shiite moderateness.

The Battle of Nahr Al-Bared

"Nahr Al-Bared... 'Terrorists' Defeat and Lebanon's Lifeboat" is the distinctive early work of the Lebanese journalist Shanatal George Dagher. In her book, Dagher sheds light on the military battle launched by the Lebanese army in Nahr Al-Bared against the Fatah Al-Islam extremist movement. The battle took place between May and September 2007 in the north of Lebanon. The book explores the performance of Lebanese armed forces in the battle and traces the stages of operations and military plans to eradicate the "Fatah Al-Islam Movement". The book aims to provide accurate documentation of one of the most difficult confrontations experienced by the Lebanese army in a critical stage of Lebanon's contemporary history. Dagher interviews leaders and officers from the army leadership who supervised progress of operations in Nahr Al-Bared (the army leader Major General Michael Sulyman and Late General Francois Al-Hajj, the leader of Al-Bared Battlefront and Director of Operations, one week before being assassinated) in addition to officers and soldiers who took part in the attack and confrontation against terrorists of Fatah Al-Islam. The Lebanese side includes officers and soldiers from all squads and combating, engineering and logistics units of the Lebanese army, especially the "Commando Battalion" (Al-Maghaweer). Many civilians also played a vital role in the battle in parallel with the army in all stages of the fighting. In the book the commanding officers talk about their experience and their role during this battle and the circumstances they went through during

Published by: Dar Annahar

Author: Shanatal George Dagher, 2009

the battle of Nahr El-Bared. They also speak about their units, the soldiers' performance and the lessons they learned after this tough experience, in addition to some tools that were created to fit the nature of the field and the course of operations. Those creative tools are considered a rare achievement and formed a crucial element in ending the battle. The book shows the commitment of the military establishment and the international law in dealing with members of the "Fatah-Al-Islam" group. Members of the army also did not commit any revenge acts despite the fierceness of the battle and the number of sacrifices they made. They were also morally motivated and highly disciplined, which the military demonstrated in their handling of members of the "Fatah-Al-Islam" group who surrendered. The writer says "I wanted to write about this distinguished experience and to put 105 days of Nahr El-Bared battle, documented and printed in history to share with the readers this information because this event was not given its due depth and lessons. This battle should not be forgotten in history." The writer adds "The book is a record of appreciation for the Lebanese military people for all the sacrifices that they have offered. I wanted to shed light on the patriotic part of the battle and national and international support for it, and how the Lebanese army was united despite political conflicts between the Lebanese people."



Women's Education in Saudi

Dr. Abdullah Al-Washemi is a poet and researcher of a unique type. He is the deputy head of the Literary Club in Riyadh. The subject which the book explores has been considered a taboo during the last period. Through his research, contacts and resources, the author managed to write a book unique in its analysis and content.

The book is of medium size. The writer did his best to gather the biggest number of texts, documents and articles that haven't been published before. He intended to analyze the prevalent cultural discourse during this period which strongly opposed educating girls. This is considered the first book to analyze and monitor the movement of women's education and its subsequent cultural controversy during this period and different opinions of supporters and opponents in some areas of KSA. The era which the book covers and the subject that it discusses are very important for understanding the Saudi Community and its stages of development. The book is characterized by boldness, analytical insights and an inductive approach which makes you

Published by: Arab Cultural Center

Author: Dr. Abdullah Saleh Al-Washemi, 2009

realize through analogies made by the author, that having a strong will enables you to change patterns of thinking and life. These characteristics make you acknowledge the writer's inductive talent and his ability to make use of the information he gathered.

Many writers think of the book as exceptional in shedding light on a very important era that should have been dealt with long ago. No doubt it will provide the reader with useful insights and important information about the change of Saudi Community.



Religious Police in Islam

The leading orientalist, Michael Cook was greatly influenced by Imam Abou Hamid Al-Ghazali's book The Revival of Religious Sciences, in which he said that the injunction of good deeds and the admonition against evil deeds represents the true essence of Islam. Encouraged by the Imam's insights, Cook set out to investigate the whole matter as it is encountered in the written theological literature of Islam. Being a professor at the Near East Studies Department of Princeton University, he made an extensive study of the legacy of writings on these two Islamic maxims and the attitudes adopted by different Islamic groups and sects on both of them. The study has been recently published by the Arab Network of Publishing and Research. It was translated and the translation was revised and introduced by Dr. Redwan Al-Sayed, Dr. Abdedl Rahman Al-Salimy and Dr. Ammar Al-Galasy, respectively.

Cook's book is based on hundreds of printed resources and manuscripts which the author used as references. It provides a profound reading of the core spirit of Islam from the perspective of contemporary religious and moral problems and tackles aspects of culpability on the individual and state level in the current global context.

Published by: The Arab Company for Research and Publishing

Author: Michael Cook, 2009

Cook examined the Sharia texts and prophetic traditions which preach good deeds and admonish against evil deeds, prominent among which is the famous tradition on the three graded ways to eradicate evil. It runs as follows: "Let any of you who see a wrong deed eradicate it with thy hand, if that is possible, if not let it be with thy tongue and if that is not possible too, eradicate it in thy heart". This Hadith occupied a distinguished status among other religious sayings as it provides a solid basis for successive generations upon which classical theories of preaching and admonition were built. While Quran dictates direct commands in this regard, this prophetic tradition provides a graded methodology in encountering the perpetration of evil deeds, that is by actions, words or thought. Then Cook proceeds to analyze the Hanbalites position, then that of Mutazlites and Shiites on this topic. He finally alludes to the stance of the First, Second and Third Saudi States on the matter with special reference to the developments in both Sunni and Shiite theology in this connection.

WILL

Israel Strike on Iran's Nuclear Development Facilities?

Will Israel hit Iranian nuclear facilities? How? This is an everyday question we have been facing in Washington and the Arab world alike since the former president George Bush was in office. The answer to this question hinges on the ups and downs of fiery statements exchanged between leaders of the Iranian regime and their Israeli and American counterparts. This led many observers to talk about the date of such an Israeli military strike as if they have become completely certain that it is just a matter of "counting down" towards this inevitable attack. | **Anthony Zeitouni**

The Inauguration of Barak Obama as US President did not rule out the possibility of Israeli-Iranian confrontation, although the White House has adopted a different political approach towards Iran which is contrary to that of former President George Bush. When Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the extremist right-wing Likud party, was sworn in as prime minister, this made things worse with Tehran and Washington as well. Iranian presidential elections keep the scenes open to all likely possibilities, especially after Mohammad Khatami's decision to withdraw from the presidential marathon and, thus, the battle has become limited to conservative Iranians. Will Iranian conservatives, then, confront Israeli extremists and draw the region to the brink of war?

Research centres in Washington paid much attention to looking into the future of Israeli-Iranian relations, particularly the chances of Israel launching pre-emptive strike's against Iran's nuclear facilities and the implications of this attack to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf as a whole. The main focus of such centres was to determine whether Obama's Administration would allow Israel to use power against Iran or not. It is worth mentioning that Bush's Administration rejected such suggestion because of the serious consequences to US allies and interests in the Middle East and the whole world.

Dr. Abdullah Tawqan, former Jordanian Minister of Communications and associate researcher at the "Center for Political, International and Strategic Studies" in Washington DC examined such topic in a lengthy study furnished with illustrations, figures, graphs, detailed explanations and other military details. He made this study for the division of Strategic Studies in the above mentioned centre under the title: "A study of the Possibilities of Israel's Launching an air strike against Iranian Nuclear Facilities". It is a part of an extensive and all-inclusive study prepared by the Center and will be published in a special edition under supervision of Anthony Cordsman who holds the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at CSIS. It examines in detail the missile program of Iran and weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Tawqan probed the assumption that Israel would use long-range ballistic missiles to strike Iranian nuclear facilities instead of launching air strikes by warplanes which involve a high level of risk, according to

Tawqan. In addition there are the three main obstacles: lack of fuel, artillery and risks to the pilots' lives. But the question remains: "Does Israel have developed missiles that could reach Iran and hit specific targets there?"

Many strategic analysts including Tawqan think that Israel owns Jericho-III missiles which carry (non-nuclear) traditional warheads weighing 750 kg of high explosives that are planned to have a range of 4800 km to 6500 km which brings all of Iran and the GCC countries within range. These missiles are capable of hitting specific targets in Iran very precisely, with a very small margin of error that does not exceed tens of metres. Therefore, Jericho-III is a likely option if Israel decided to launch a pre-emptive attack against Iran's nuclear facilities. Tawqan added that 42 missiles would be sufficient for causing great damage to, or destruction of, the main nuclear sites of Iran in Natans, Asfahan and Arak. He concluded that if Jericho-III is so highly developed and extremely accurate, this scenario would be more plausible than using combat planes". But if Iran acquired the most complicated version of S-300 Russian surface-to-air defence system which is effective in fighting attacking planes and long-range missiles, the mission of Jericho-III will be much too difficult, to the extent that it would become useless.

Sam Gardner, a retired US air force colonel, believes that Tawqan's theory is surrounded by major obstacles. Gardner currently studies at the "National Institute of War" of the National Defense University in Washington. He doubts the benefits of using long-range missiles against Iran, given the strong and dense fortifications that Iran uses to protect its nuclear installations.

Gardner asserted that the success of any military strike like this requires the attackers to "dig" inside every target using several precise-guiding bombs. These bombs would be launched successively from fighter jets relatively close to the targets.

Gardner concludes that "the Americans conclude that the only way to reach enough depth will be adding another warhead in the crater caused by the first bomb".

Gardner, like many American strategist experts, believes that Iranian nuclear manufacturing sites are too far, scattered, and heavily fortified in a way that makes them impregnable against Israeli fighters alone.

Anthony Zeitouni is a Conflict-Solving researcher based in Washington.

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■ A proposal for Tehran to gradually open its nuclear program to IAEA inspections, as opposed to immediately shut down its nuclear facilities in the early phase of negotiations, is being prepared by the Obama administration and its European allies.

Thus only the American air force is capable of launching such a successful strike. The political decision to approve such an offensive would be very difficult with the Obama administration which favours diplomacy alone with Iran. The same administration would not give Israel the green light to launch any military attack against Iran because the result would be catastrophic to the US, Israel, and to the whole region as well.

Touqan explicitly expressed in his study his resentment towards the idea of a one-sided Israeli military move against Iran. He believes that an attack with "Jericho 3" missiles might propel a counter Iranian response with "Shehab" missiles. That will go along with other revenge scenarios such as suspending Iranian oil exports, blocking Arab Gulf exports of oil to the world, hitting US targets in the Arab Gulf and giving orders to attack Jewish targets in the world.

Israel, keeping a low profile on its traditional missile arsenal and assumed nuclear arsenal, plays down the threat of the Iranian "Shehab" missiles, despite Israeli intelligence reports which confirm that Iran has deployed 100 missiles of that type.

But Israeli military experts assert that "Arrow 2" interception missiles are ready to destroy the bulk of Iranian "Shehab" missiles in mid journey if they are launched against Israel. Despite that fact, some Israeli defence experts play down the importance of using long range missiles to launch traditional and non-nuclear attacks. They also assert that big armies use only combat fighter jets for those types of missions.

Is an Israeli air raid against Iran possible? In his study Touqan asserts that the air raid is possible, and the favoured route for Israeli fighters would be along the the line of the Syrian-Turkish border, then passing over a small strip of Iraq. From there the fighters will reach inside Iran, and they will use the same route to return home. Touqan notes that the quantity of required fighters, the refueling process in mid air during the

operation, and reaching the target, without the fighters being detected or blocked, will be complicated and extremely dangerous. It will also lack guarantees of a highly probable success for the whole operation. Touqan's analysis also includes examining problems that Israel could face in penetrating air defences of states in the region.

Politically speaking, Touqan believes that it is probable that Arab states will "play deaf" towards any Israeli air attack on Iran, because they believe that Iran poses a security threat to the whole region. But he asserts that an Israeli air raid on Iran will destabilize the area and will increase struggle and terrorism.

Touqan also believes that the more Israel threatens the existence of the Islamic rule in Iran the more Iran becomes resolved to acquire nuclear weapons. It might lead to the withdrawal of Iran from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), citing the need to own nuclear weapons to protect its sovereignty and to counter any possible Israeli or American attack against it.





FABIO INGHIRAMI

The Rise in Protectionism or the Battle for Jobs

In November 2006, the leaders of twenty of the world's largest economies gathered in Melbourne, Australia, to discuss building and sustaining prosperity." In November 2008, they came together in Washington to prevent the further spread of the financial crisis. And on 2 April 2009, they came together again, this time to "face the greatest challenge to the world economy in modern times." | **Abeer Allam**

Each meeting ended with the same basic prescription: avoiding protectionism and promoting free trade and investment, a message endorsed unflinchingly by King Abdullah even as he indicated the Kingdom's plans to spend \$400 billion in the next five years on infrastructure and education. Yet as global unemployment surges, the Arab Gulf States face the same pressure to protect local jobs as the rest of the world, albeit with a unique twist.

In January, Saudi Minister of Labour, Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, warned companies in the Kingdom against exploiting the financial crisis as a pretext to terminate Saudi nationals and instructed them to terminate foreign workers instead, echoing sentiments from other Gulf countries. Khaled Mohammad Al Khazraji, a former undersecretary of the UAE's Ministry of Labour, even suggested imposing heavy fines on companies that fail to employ nationals, making it even more costly to recruit foreigners.

But Gulf Governments' quest to protect jobs held by their own nationals in markets dominated by foreign labourers may be tricky. While such statements echo similar sentiments expressed in most other Western countries with respect to preventing foreigners

from taking jobs from the local population, they overlook a major distinction between Saudi Arabia and the employment picture in the rest of the world and even the rest of the GCC. From 2006 to 2007, during the height of the economic boom, unemployment in Saudi Arabia hovered between 9 and 11%. Official unemployment in the Kingdom remains at just over 11%, a modest increase when compared with the United States, which is now facing its highest unemployment rate in decades, and even China, where reports suggest as many as 20 million jobs may have been lost since the second half of 2008.

The most obvious explanation for the minimal changes in the unemployment rate of Saudi Arabia in comparison with the other G20 members involves foreign workers. All Arab Gulf states rely upon foreign workers to an extent far greater than the rest of the G20. During good times, this permits the Arab Gulf governments to bring in millions of foreign workers, who help achieve economic growth targets while limiting total inflation. During bad times, those foreign workers can be dismissed with less risk of disturbance than would occur if large numbers of nationals were fired.

Yet even though Saudi Arabia has a larger foreign population than other GCC states of nearly 6.5 million people, that still amounts to roughly 25% of the total population, a lower ratio than most

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neighbouring GCC states. This balance may account for the relative outperformance by the Kingdom over the last several months within the region. "There has been some firing here and there in the past 6 weeks, and some reallocations, but nothing like what is happening in Dubai," says John Sfakianakis, chief economist at SABB. "But the layoffs indicate that Saudi Arabia is not completely insulated from the global financial crisis."

Yet the limited number of layoffs is hardly a comfort to unemployed Saudis, particularly young Saudis who have recently graduated from university and are searching for a career. The Ministry of Labour reports that 46.3% of the unemployed Saudis are between the ages of 20 to 24. Government efforts to create jobs for these Saudis focus on two tactics: first, forcing private companies to employ a certain percentage of Saudi workers, and second, offering a variety of incentives and benefits for Saudi workers and companies that hire them, such as contributions to wages for private sector jobs and similar incentives.

Other Gulf Arab countries do not have it any easier, particularly Bahrain where unemployment threatens social and political stability.

Regulations are mainly administered by the Ministry of Labour. Under the terms of the new Labour Law of 2005, firms may not recruit foreign workers for certain professions which are reserved for Saudi nationals, and may not recruit foreigners for positions if there are qualified Saudi nationals who might fill those jobs. Further, the Labour Law sets a target of 75% Saudization at each company unless the amount is reduced by a resolution from the Ministry. In practice, the amounts vary from industry to industry and from company to company, from as low as 5% for certain government contractors working on key infrastructure projects, to around 30% for certain retailers and other companies.

However, many Saudi companies bypass the Saudization quota by replacing "employees" with "independent contractors," even when the contractors work at the same location as employees and are treated just like employees. The Ministry of Labour has begun on-

site inspections to review workplace infractions, and in a few cases, has frozen the right for companies to recruit foreign workers for a period of five years.

But Saudi Arabia, the biggest economy in the region, is facing an uphill battle to employ its growing young population. First, both Saudi companies and foreign investors can simply invest their money elsewhere to avoid the rules if they become too onerous. Second, many managers in Saudi Arabia prefer to hire foreigners

because if that worker ever demands a raise or promotion, or if the company falls on hard times, a manager can simply refuse to renew a worker's visa and end the employment. Such regular tricks are not possible when managers hire GCC nationals.

The better path seems to be job creation, but doing so in a manner that benefits Saudi nationals can be just as challenging. For example, even though Bahrain's private sector created some 27,000 new job openings in 2007, foreign nationals took 96 per cent of the positions. Likewise, many companies in Saudi Arabia find it easy to hire large pools of entry level foreign workers. Finally, even highly skilled Saudis with relatively good jobs who earn SR 12,000 might find that amount insufficient to pay rent, a car loan, household expenses, and additional expenses, such as a driver for one's wife or children. Yet even though the

options may be unappetizing for many, Saudis have begun filling jobs at McDonalds, hotels, cashiers, and similar positions that had previously been dominated by foreign workers.

But creating jobs is not only about fulfilling a government plan, the demographic is also an issue with growing unemployment among youngsters in a region still reeling from radical ideology that is ready to suck in frustrated youth.

Long-term, the World Bank has issued recommendations that fit with King Abdullah's priorities of investing in infrastructure and upgrading the quality of education. Upgrading the local workforce so that it offers the sorts of skills demanded by the private sector should go further than incentives or regulations could ever reach. Luckily, Saudi Arabia has accumulated a reserve of over a trillion Saudi riyals and has ample funding with which to stimulate the economy.



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Be Wary of the G20

Don't just talk the talk, walk the walk!

Daniel Capparelli

If the world learned anything from the 1930s economic crisis it is that uncoordinated, beggar-thy-neighbour policies only act to exacerbate an economic downturn.

■ The Action Plan resulting from the G20 London Summit includes a \$1.1 trillion boost to reverse the credit crunch, alongside a global fiscal stimulus worth \$5 trillion by the end of next year.

With the clear intention to prevent the reproduction of the last century's economic debacle, the leaders of the 20 richest world economies met in London on April 2, 2009 in order to lay down a coordinated plan of action. Although some encouraging steps were taken to tackle the crisis, the brunt of the work is still to be done. The present global economic situation is inarguably the worst since the 1930s. Forecasts of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) put growth rates for its 30 economies at -4.3 % for 2009, and unemployment at 36 million later this year. The World Bank has halved its forecasts for developing countries' growth from 4.4% to 2.1%. The 9% drop in world trade predicted by the World Trade Organization (the first contraction in 25 years) now seems over-optimistic when compared to the 13.9% slump forecasted by the OECD.

The solutions highlighted in the G20 Declaration are a positive step towards global economic recovery. The palliative measures to restore confidence, growth and jobs rightly address crucial issues such as restoring interbank lending, repairing the financial system by addressing regulatory shortfalls, strengthening the effectiveness of international financial organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank, reforming financial supervision and regulatory structures, and promoting global trade and investment by effectively rejecting protectionism. The annex of the declaration contains the makings of a "road map" to attain most of its objectives. This is not the case for trade, however. Despite the fact that the G20 declaration described trade and investment as the engine for economic growth, and therefore a fundamental pillar of economic recovery, the only significant trade-related measure in the declaration is a US\$250 billion fund for trade financing. While on the one hand this will be of substantial help to emerging and developing economies (itself an important pillar for the recovery of the trading system), on the other, the pledge to fight protectionism remains in the "best endeavours" realm and therefore falls short of having any significant consequence. In fact, the frailty of the trade-related measures stand in stark contrast to the stern warnings issued by the WTO, World Bank and IMF on the dire outcome of a rise in protectionism.

Protectionism has been on the rise for some time now. As governments faced slumping economic growth, rising unemployment and falling exports, they turned to policies that privileged national producers over efficiency in production. Economic nationalism, such as the "buy America" clause in the US stimulus package, or simply rise in tariff barriers and quotas, as in the case of Indonesia, India, Ecuador or Argentina, have been spreading fast around the world. Financial protectionism is also thriving; bailed-out banks, such as those in Germany, France or the UK are increasingly unable to grant loans to foreign companies or households as a result of government restrictions. The recent experience with the G20 declarations shows that, as far as trade is

concerned, best endeavours are not enough to stop or roll-back protectionism. Indeed, according to a recent World Bank study, only 3 out of the 20 member-countries of the G20 resisted a turn to protectionist policies following the November 2008 G20 meeting in New York (Saudi Arabia counting as one of them).

Change is needed. Politicians need to stop talking the talk, and start walking the walk of concluding the Doha Round of international trade negotiations. Relying on current WTO texts to fight protectionism is made particularly hard given the gap between applied and bound tariffs (i.e. the difference between the applied level and the maximum allowed tariff level). For developing countries, such as Brazil and Argentina, the average bound tariff level is around 30% while the average applied level is 13%. This means that developing countries can substantially raise their tariffs without breaking any international trade laws. This poses considerable problems for producers, whose production networks are spread across many countries. A tariff increase in any one country is likely to disrupt production in several other countries, which could in turn make the whole production system collapse. The only meaningful way to address these issues is to revive and conclude the Doha Round of negotiations, which have been on the verge of collapse and deadlock for the past 8 years. Furthermore, so much is already at stake. In services negotiations alone, for example, the encouraging July 2008 Signalling Offers risk being lost if a deal is not struck. Governments should take advantage of the fact that the financial crisis has broken vested interests in the status quo.

According to economic theory, economic crises motivate policy change since political space for policy innovation is created. Perhaps the current agriculture- NAMA (non-agricultural market access) deadlock could benefit from such policy innovation. Politicians and negotiators also need to learn from the past. Negotiations would indeed be greatly facilitated if an "outward looking" group of countries (such as the Café-au-Lait coalition present during the Uruguay Round) could step forward and broker a deal that would rescind the crippling North-South divide.

Given the high political costs of trade liberalization, best endeavours statements are bound to fail when the rolling-back of protectionism is concerned. The G20 and its soft norm approach to policymaking is therefore not fully equipped to deal with one of the most fundamental pillars of global economic recovery: international trade. Recent studies show that if free trade in services, agriculture and manufacturing was implemented today, global GDP would increase by US\$1.661 trillion, US\$53 billion and US\$700 billion, respectively. Although one cannot reasonably think that the Doha Round would bring gains of this nature (World Bank estimates of a deal put combined gains at US\$287 billion over time), concluding the round would at worst contribute to restoring badly-needed confidence in the global economy.

Egyptians Call It Shisha

Ahmed Nour

Egyptians call it Shisha, Lebanese refer to it as Nargile, in English it is Hookah. This ancient water pipe has been used for centuries by its smokers as they have a deep faith that it helps relaxing, to smoke away the day's stress with friends and family.

Shisha is a Middle-Eastern smoking tradition that began hundreds of years before the invasion of the big American cigarette companies and is one of the most common and interesting sites of the Arab World. There are numerous cafes where one can lie on long cushions and spend the time talking to your friends, sipping on strong tea, or coffee, and playing a game of backgammon or chess while enjoying smoking his Shisha. It is tobacco (Also called tabac, tombak, tumbak, gouza, guza, moassel, sheesha) mixed with molasses and fruit flavors and is smoked in a hookah. A pipe with a long, flexible stem, so arranged that the smoke is cooled by being made to pass through water. Throughout the article will know more about its origin, history, types, and how people in Middle East regard it.

Shisha Origin and History

There are several hypotheses on the birthplace of Shisha. Some theories stated that the original nargile came from India, but it was rather primitive as it was made out of coconut shell. Its popularity spread to Iran and then to the rest of the Arab world. They said that the origins of the Shisha come from the north western provinces of India along the border of Pakistan in Rajasthan and Gujarat. These devices were simple, primitive, and rugged in design, usually made from a coconut shell base and tube with a head attached.

They were designed to smoke opium and hashish. The shisha made its way through the Persian Kingdom, which also included Pakistan, Afghanistan, much of Middle Asia and Arab parts of Northern Africa. When shisha made its way into Turkey about 500 years ago, it endured a surge of popularity among the upper class and intellectuals and thus changing in design. The hookah grew in size and complexity and became similar to designs that we are more familiar with today. Brass and glass were added to the design and less wood was used. Intricate paintings and mosaics were added for beauty and elegance. The popularity grew into hookah coffee shops in Turkish society around three centuries ago. A hookah bar waiter

was treated similar to a chef because of the preparation for hookah smoking. The packing and moisture was a skill, and it was considered rude to touch the coals. The Hookah smoking migrated south into the Arab world from Turkey to Lebanon and Syria where it got the name nargile. It then spread into Egypt and Morocco, where it is known as shisha. It is also known as the hubble bubble in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Today, hookah bars are social places where many people get together to discuss politics and local events.

Others tried hard to write the official history of tobacco mentioning an American origin for it. Such an argument states that the Europeans would

have taught Asian and African peoples how to smoke, particularly through the pipe. In modern times, Egypt is interpreted as the shisha capital of the world. With the majority of shisha pipes being made there, and it was where the shisha started to escalate into so many levels, and appealed to so many people. Walking around Egypt today, you cannot walk for more than 15 minutes without meeting a shisha café. The shisha world has grown rapidly in Egypt amongst other places, and is now starting to spread today in Western society.

Shisha types

The tobacco that is used for smoking hookah pipes is different than the type of

tobacco used in cigarettes. It is also called shisha and in the past came in a damp-blend of freshly picked tobacco leaves that were dipped in molasses or honey. The Turkish-blend of shisha tobacco was one of the more popular choices.

The present times, however, have a variety of different flavors as the shisha tobacco is often mixed with fruit extracts and other flavorings and there is now a wide variety of different flavors and aromas to choose from.

The shisha tobacco that you purchase is only about 30 per cent tobacco and the rest is the fruit flavorings, along with the molasses or honey that it is mixed with. Many types of shisha tobacco contain no tar and many



only have 0.5 per cent nicotine in them.

What makes the hookah tobacco so popular, however, is the variety of aromas and tastes you can choose from.

With this type of smoking gaining popularity in night spots everywhere, more and more shisha flavored tobaccos have been created.

In addition to the traditional fruit flavored tobaccos, like apple, melon, orange, mango, strawberry, grape and peach, you can now find shisha tobacco that tastes like your favorite soda or alcohol. Pina Colada, Cognac, Margarita, Cola and Cherry Cola are just a small sampling of the flavored tobaccos you can find. Other flavored hookah tobaccos you can find easily are vanilla, mint, coffee, pistachio, and coconut.

The nargile itself consists of four pieces which are as follows: Agizlik (mouthpiece), Lüle (the top of the nargile), Marpuç (the tube) and the Gövde (the body of the pipe which is filled with water).

Shisha in Art and Sypoilism

Beyond the simple aesthetic made of it, which leads writers or poets to use the word "shisha" or "narghile" in the very title of their works, one may wonder how this artefact calls upon the imagination sphere called "inspiration".

Indeed, from a purely physiological point of view, the shisha excites the five human senses: the vision as a craft object, the touch through the manipulation of its numerous elements, the taste and the smell through the absorption of its flavored smoke and the hearing by the gurgle of water inside the vase.

Shisha in Society

The most important thing one must remember about the shisha is that it is a means of socializing with friends, somewhat similar to the Native American peace pipe, an activity that shows a level of respect. While shisha sharing can differ from one culture to another, it remains a social activity that brings people together.

There are many stories of visitors coming to Egypt, trying the shisha and getting hooked to its soothing and flavorful aroma. Many tourists are scrambling frantically hours before their flight, trying to buy a shisha.

So in case this happens to you, rest assured that all hotels, resorts and markets will have plenty of shops that sell all types and varieties of shisha. All you need to do is only choose the one you like, agree on a price and carry it away.



The Micro-Bus

Want a fantastic tour?

Ahmed Nour

Need an experience you will never forget? An experience more exciting than visiting the Pyramids of Giza or seeing the ancient temples in Luxor? If you want all of this then you should ride a microbus in Cairo!!

Now, the microbuses are considered as one of the main milestones of Cairo. Tourists or Cairo visitors will be stunned by its large numbers around Cairo. There are 8,880 microbuses in Cairo, and around 20,000 in Greater Cairo which includes parts of Giza and Qalyoubiya Governorates adjacent to Cairo. Two million Cairo residents use microbuses daily, compared with 4.5 million who use public buses and mini-buses, and two million who use the Cairo metro or underground, according to Public Transport Authority statistics.

The large numbers of microbuses link all the districts of Cairo with each other. The passenger can transfer from Al Harm (city at west of Cairo) and Nasr City (city at the east side of Cairo) using microbuses as his means of transportation.

The microbuses are considered a cheap means of public transportation for the Egyptians. Most of them cannot afford to own a car or to use taxis as his ordinary means of transportation. As a result he is stuck with using the microbuses for his journeys around Cairo.

The microbuses in Cairo have two types. The first and larger type is expected to carry about twenty-five passengers; the smaller one carries about fourteen passengers. Each microbus has a driver and what we can call a "navigator". The navigator's task is to collect the fares from the passengers and coordinate between the driver and passengers about their stops.

Let us take a tour on a microbus in Cairo assuming it will start from Ramsis to Nasr City. First, you will hear the "navigator" screaming "Abbas - Abbas" (Abbas El Akad Street is the main street in Nasr City), then you will hop on the microbus with the other passengers.

You will notice that the microbuses' boarders are from various walks of Egyptian society and include labourers, employees and students. All of them found it the transport solution to their tough financial conditions.

Also, there are different types of drivers. There are some drivers who have a sense of humour, who always look to ease the burdens of every day life by making fun of the tough conditions. Others are always silent - seemingly busy thinking of tragic disasters they perhaps face in their life. Another type - which is odious - the aggressive driver. He always fights the others, with or without a reason.

During the journey, every one has something different to help kill the time. Someone will read the newspaper, in which nothing will make him happy except Al Ahly soccer team news!

Others will sleep (especially the labourers, who sleep only in the microbus, because they have nowhere else to catch their breath). However, the main and basic activity on the microbus is fighting. Fights between the driver and the passengers on one hand, and inter-passenger conflict on the other.

Clashes between drivers and passengers revolve around two main issues; the fees and the stops. Microbus drivers are accused of recklessness and commuters' exploitation whilst the passengers are accused of being spoiled and uncooperative.

Between themselves, the passengers fight over the seats - everyone has a right to sit down! and the windows - should they be open or closed? - someone may catch a cold while another cannot breath.

You will hear various points of view representing different cultures. Speaking to some passengers of different

categories, Ahmed Mostafa, an employee, said "I used to go to my university by microbus and now I use it to go to my work. I cannot afford a car or to take a taxi".

"It is an easy and fast means of transportation. Its large numbers make it available all the time," Salah El Sayeed, a carpenter, said.

As for the students, Nesren Ibrahim said that she may face some problems when dealing with the drivers, as they are "Rude".

On the other side, the drivers have things to tell, Shehata Abdel Fatah told us that he is just working on the vehicle which is owned by another person. He works from 6 am till 11 pm. His wage is 30 LE a day. "It is tiring work, but I have no other way to earn my living," he added.

Ahmed Galal, another driver, said that many passengers are uncooperative and "treat us like sub-humans".

When we reach the terminal you may well feel like you have just stepped out of a novel by Naguib Mahfouz or Youssef Edris, with their universal themes representing different kinds of lives and different social stories. You will not fail to notice the ordinary Egyptian native who is struggling to find a seat, not just in the microbus but in life itself.



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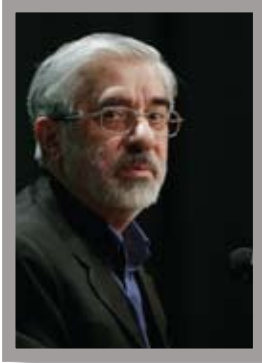
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Mir Hossein Mousavi

former Iranian Prime Minister

Mustapha Fahs

Mir Hossein Mousavi, whose absence has long puzzled the Iranian intelligencia, has emerged into the spotlight again. The decision to run for presidential elections and the withdrawal of Khatami from the election race in the former's favour all drove the political scene in Iran into a real mess. Furthermore, it raised further speculations about the current situation and rendered any attempt at predicting possible consequences even more difficult.

Heartened by his former experience in government, Mousavi enters the presidential marathon with a meticulous eye on the internal and regional developments surrounding Iran and the economic and security challenges whose foreseeable repercussions pose a menace to the state.

Those close to Mousavi, who discussed with him the comeback decision, say that Mousavi is no prophet on whom hopes are pinned to redeem Iran out of its current stalemate. For this stalemate is a legacy of decades of accumulating problems, of which the recent four years are just a striking manifestation. Even Mousavi does not see himself as one who can change the course of history since he knows well the chances and limitations of change in Iran.

Being a member of the revolutionary elite and a strong supporter of the regime, he is a loyalist champion of the established institutions of the state, particularly its basic paradigm of the Leadership Authority, regardless of differences over a particular Supreme Leader persona. Consequently, he craves achieving the best possible reforms especially in the economic field, which requires a re-setting of national priorities and a more open-minded worldview based on sympathetic understanding. It also requires daring to confront the ruling, decision-taking elite with the danger spots left behind by the Ahmadi Nijad regime.

Mousavi has kept himself away from the political scene in Iran immediately after the constitutional abrogation in 1989 of the prime minister office and the concentration of the premier executive powers into the hands of the president of the state. This was accompanied by the election of Hashimi Rafsanjani as head of state, having been formerly chosen by the expert council to succeed Ayatullah Al-Khumaini as Supreme Leader following the latter's decease.

A man whose stepping back from public life lasted for 15 years during which he shrank from any public political activity, Mousavi preferred to keep a low media profile, playing only the role of arbitrator in his capacity as a member of the Expediency Discernment Council of the System. He added to this role an advisory one, which he served under President Rafsanjani and Khatami over 18 years. He now holds the post of President of the Iranian Academy of Arts.

At every turning point in Iranian politics, the name of Mousavi jumps to the fore. For example, political circles in Iran saw him in 1997 as the best successor of the grand imam Rafsanjani. However, his candidacy was blocked, obviously due to a direct intervention by the Supreme Leader Ali Khameni, whose relationship with Mousavi has gone through constant tensions since the latter's nomination by the parliament to the prime minister's office against Dr. Ali Welaati, Khameni's favoured candidate.

He drew attention again in 2005, when the second constitutional period of Khatami ended and many supporters of reforms called for his return to the political life and asked for him to be named as a candidate for leading the reform process initiated by Khatami. However, Mousavi's absolute refusal to get into the experience and his preference not to intervene but only to observe from a distance, led the currents of the reform movement into the trap of choosing the person around whom different segments of the society aspiring to change gather, causing defeat before Mahmoud Ahmadi Nijad, the candidate of the conservative current in 2005.

Mousavi was born in 1942 in the city of Khamnah, located in north-eastern Iran (southern Azerbaijan). It is also the home town of revolution Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei which adds more sensitivity to the broken ties between the two men. You can imagine what will happen if Mousavi wins the elections in Khamnah, close to the region's capital Tabriz against the conservatives' candidate, who is automatically supported by the supreme leader.

It would be a repeated scenario of what happened in 1997 when Khatami won more than 80% of the vote, the same vote which former Iranian leader Ayatullah Al-Khumaini, Ali Khameni and top political leaders did not miss. The country's leaders were presumed to vote in favour of Ali Nateq Nouri, backed by the supreme leader against Khatami, a former culture minister at the time.

A powerful electoral block could be formed in favour of Mousavi from Khamnah to Tabriz and all parts of northern Iran against Ahmadi Najad, whose economic and service policies have led to deprive those cold regions from gas during winter in 2007/2008.

The population there had to use wood for heating, which indicates wide public resentment in those areas against service failure of Najad's

government. In addition to that, regional separatist movements became active in the area, calling for reuniting the two sides of Azerbaijan.

Mousavi arrived in Tehran in the first half of the 1960s, joining the Department of Architectural Engineering and City Building at Tehran University. He graduated in 1970 as an architectural engineer. Mousavi started his first political and revolutionary activities at university against the reign of Shah, leading to his arrest in 1974. During his time in Tehran, student movements and campus activities founded direct political work for Mir Hassan Mousavi. It culminated when he established the Iranian Islamist Movement in the second half of the 1970s. He was a regular visitor to Hassania Ershad and was affected by lectures of Muthari and Shareati, thus becoming very close to the ideas and thesis of Ayatollah Al-Khumaini and his calls to overthrow the rule of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

With the revolution emerging victorious in 1979, Mousavi joined the Islamic Republican Party under the leadership of Ayatollah Bahashti, one of the senior leaders of the revolution. Bahashti made him editor-in-chief of the party's newspaper "The Republican Islamic". After that he became head of the political office of the Republican Islamic Party in the same year, to become one of the senior figures in the revolution leadership and state construction.

The year 1980 witnessed the most conspicuous transition in the political life of Mousavi. In this year, Mohammed Ali Rajae, the prime minister under the reign of Abi Al-Hassan Beni Sader, the first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, selected Mousavi as a foreign minister. After Rajae had been inaugurated as President of Iran, Mohammed Jawad Bahunar, the prime minister retained Mousavi in his office as a foreign minister. He continued assuming

this office until the inauguration of Ali Khamenae as President of Iran who nominated Mousavi as the prime minister on 31/10/1981. Mousavi remained in this office for eight years when the office was nullified. Having been nominated as the prime minister, Mir Hossein Mousavi became a main partner in decision making. The powers he commanded upon assuming his new office enabled him to control the executive system and turned him from a representative of the President of Iran before the government into a real head responsible for managing the governmental work. These powers introduced him as a strong and strict manager who proved competent and efficient in running the state executive system in the most difficult stage in history of Iran during the eight years of war. Thanks to Mousavi, as a lot of Iranians think, many economic crises and financial collapses were avoided under the circumstances of war, pressures of sanctions and international siege.

The exceptional circumstances provided him with the chance to prove himself, he introduced himself as an excellent statesman. Years of war were the real gauge for him. He managed to win support from the poor people, the middle class and the army leaders who considered him the safety valve of continued support for the fighting front. In this way he became much closer to Ayatollah Al-Khumaini, the late revolution leader who directly intervened in 1985 to re-nominate Mousavi as prime minister in the second round of Ali Khameni's presidency, who tried at the time to avoid re-nomination of Mousavi who controlled the state whole executive system with his strong and strict character and through his solid will. This led President Ali Khameni to marginalize him causing a tense relationship between the two men up till

now.

This also poses direct questions about how the two men – Mir Hossein Mousavi and Ali Khameni – could live in peace with each other – in case the former is nominated as President of Iran. In a lecture given by him in Tehran University before thousands of students, referring to the opinion gap between Khameni and Mousavi especially on foreign affairs, Mousavi criticized the way in which Iran handles its foreign affairs at the expense of the national benefit of the country. Mousavi openly criticized the way in which Iran handles issues of Lebanon and Palestine. He said, "We are allowed to care about the pride of Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and prevented from caring about our people's dignity and pride. This leads us, Iranians, to feel a kind of contrast between our country's pride and Palestine and Lebanon's pride".

According to individuals close to Mir Hossein Mousavi, who attended the meeting which brought him together with supreme leader Ali Khameni, Mousavi refused the supreme leader's request that Mousavi withdraw his own nomination in favor of Ahmadi Nejad, attributing his refusal to the failed internal policies of Ahmadi Nejad and his executive team, and to

the intransigent foreign policies which has led to the seclusion of Iran. Some see this as evidence of a difficulty in mutual understanding between two people in a position of responsibility.

However, some find that co-existence between the two is possible, given the pragmatic and larger-than-life personality of the supreme leader, and his willingness to accept the status quo in response to the people's choice.

As for the adamant Mousavi, he has the ability to overcome the personal crisis between him and



According to polls, Mousavi has a big chance of winning the elections

Mr. Khameni, due to the constitutional position of Mr. Khameni, and the ethical commitment of Mousavi and his respect of the constitution and the revolutionary principles. He deals with Mr. Khameni from his own position, unwilling to go into a confrontation which might distract him from achieving his goals, and might increase the volume of obstacles which will probably be thrown in his way, if he should win, by the financial and political decision-making centres. These bodies will try to hang on to their privileges, especially the economic ones, and to defend them at any price. In general, observers of the Iranian affair tend to believe that the fact that Mir Hossein Mousavi changed his position from reluctance to run for elections, at a time when he was under pressure by Khatami and the reformists to nominate himself instead of Khatami himself, to a new stance where he is now keen to run for elections, shrouds the whole affair in mystery.

This is particularly so given that Mousavi answered in the negative to a question from some reformists who asked him about his intention to enter the battle, to his insistence and his refusal of Khameni's request for him to withdraw. Is he penetrating the conservative line, or the reformist line, as some conservatives say?

At any rate, the forthcoming events will answer this question, and put us in front of potential changes in Iran, whether the supposedly successful Mousavi is in the middle or closer to this or that side. But if he doesn't win, the conservative tide will assume deeper roots in the regional, economic, and developmental soil, accompanied by limited changes in form and content that go hand in hand with the changes in the Obama discourse towards Tehran, and the rather flexible and mysterious responses of Tehran.

with Amine Gemayel former President of Lebanon

Lebanese voters seek elections that will defuse political tensions in the country and gather all parties around similar national aspirations, with the controversy over selecting the president still fresh in their minds.

The Lebanese elections will be held in early June 2009. Many people feel lack of clarity concerning the lists of electoral candidates and the selection of candidates. In an interview with him, Amine Gemayel refused to describe the current stage as vague. He said that the 14 March alliance represents a complete commitment to the major options of sovereignty and independence of Lebanon. He refuted allegations that there is a conflict between the parties. He added that he had no objection to the rise of independent or centrist blocks.

Q: What are the reasons for so much vagueness that preceded the formation of the electoral lists of candidates of the March 14 forces?

A: It is logical for the formation of the lists of electoral candidates to be preceded by a stage of discussion and negotiation among the forces that form 14 March alliance. These discussions revolve around selection of candidates and formation of the lists. It is not right to describe such a stage as vague. Discussions are publicly made. We acknowledge that the formation process is not an easy job and there are always collateral difficulties for countless reasons and these difficulties need to be surmounted. Anyway, the date of elections is still a long way ahead and we still have plenty of time before announcing the list of electoral candidates.

Q: Are 14 March forces unified or is there any struggle between them for gains or influence? If firmly unified, why did Representative, Waleed Jumblat say that he unwillingly accepted candidates' names?

A: We should not forget that 14 March are an extensive alliance including parties and independent personalities. We would be making a mistake if we were to think of such an alliance as a single political organization. In this case, cohesiveness of its parties would be relative. Most importantly, this alliance represents a complete commitment to the major options related to sovereignty, independence and the project of complete sovereignty of Lebanon over all its lands as well as its residents. The alliance stresses that legitimacy is the only weapon in the hands of the Lebanese army and it is only within its confines that the decision of war or peace can be made. Those who talk about a conflict between parties of 14 March for gains and influence are exaggerating. If they have doubts, why don't they consider mutual concessions that have to be made for the sake of the completion of the lists of electoral candidates? In fact, these concessions are not limited to the one made by Representative Waleed Jumblat. We also made similar difficult concessions. Our alliance imposes certain obligations upon us.

Q: How do you think of the power of your opponent, General Michael Aoun? Do you have an alternative discourse that would persuade Christian voters with your project and alienate them from Aoun?

A: I am not the person to evaluate General Aoun's potentials. This matter is up to the voters to decide and for this purpose, elections are held. In my opinion, there is no hostility between Aoun and us. It is just a difference of opinion concerning the national cause. That cause can not stand any delay with regard to the renaissance of a state which has sovereignty over all its lands. In this regard, our discourse addressed to Christians and all the Lebanese is clear and direct.

It may be the best discourse to express Christians' opinion because they have historically called for a sovereignty that enables the country to be responsible

for their presence, security and freedom not under protection of any other side, whether internal or external.

Q: To what extent do you hope for the success of the Independent or the Centrist Block? What is the role they would play if they were to win a considerable number of seats?

A: In principle, we have no objections to the rise of an independent or a centrist block. In any election, there is always a segment of voters who take their time before making their choice or prefer to vote for a centrist block. Therefore, those voters should be given the chance to express their opinion as long as elections are meant in the first place to express public opinion, including all segments of Lebanese people. The law of elections plays a vital role in this regard and it would be necessary later to reconsider such a matter whether for the purpose of dividing constituencies or for choosing between the absolute majority and the proportionate representation system or combining between them as stated in the project prepared by the National Authority of Parliamentary Electoral Law.

Q: Would the tensions between General Michael Aoun and Nabeeh Berri President of the Lebanese Parliament in 8 March forces escalate the situation and lead to separation? To what extent would this influence the relationship between Berri and Waleed Jumblat, Leader of the Progressive Socialist Party.

A: First of all, I hope that there will be no clashes in any parties. Tensions between Aoun and Berri do not concern me as long as they enhance the level of internal stability and do not impact good relations between Nabeeh Berri and Waleed Jumblat.

Q: To what extent would you hope for the stability of the current internal alliances within 14 March on the one hand and 8 March on the other?

A: Let's agree that differences around main options lead to the rise of such alliances. These options include national sovereignty and the state's borders and decisions of war and peace which are solely a state's affair, let alone deployment of weapons, rule of the law and the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and other options. We hope that these differences will not be everlasting but we hope they will be curtailed by dialog and diplomacy. Seeking a decision from the public opinion through these elections is the best way to eliminate such differences.

Q: What do you think Na'eem Kasem, Deputy Secretary-General of Hezbollah intended to imply when he said that after-election alliances would be different from the previous ones? Did he indirectly suggest any coming transitions?

A: Perhaps his wishes are similar to ours. Or he might be promising us with a change in Hezbollah's stances on the aforementioned options. He is fully aware that sovereignty of Lebanon is integral. He also knows that there is no alternative to the state and the rule of law and realizes that decisions of war and peace are solely state affairs. It is not reasonable that the country should continue to be governed forever in a way that contradicts the constitution and legislative conventions.



■ Lebanon's general elections set for June 2009. Parties play their cards to woo voters.

Egypt...

The fading regional role

Dr. Mohamad Abdul-Salam

Not too many Egyptians have read the huge book of "The personality of Egypt" by Dr. Gamal Hemdan, but most of the Egyptian elite have heard about it, and maybe read about it. They usually utter ideas included in the book, and some of the ideas say that Egypt faced tough choices, ie whether to be an empire or to be a colony. Such ideas have contributed to forming the Egyptian role culture. Egypt is one of the most sensitive countries in the region to surrounding developments, given its location and resources. Thus many Egyptian interests are determined outside it and away from its borders. If Egypt does not bother about her role in the region, the region will certainly bother. Regardless of how realistic these ideas are, the idea of Egypt's role seems unavoidable.

The problem arose as Egypt's role became a complicated issue. Egypt is an ancient country, with multi-phase history. This fact made it, at least during the Pharaonic period, one of the few states best known to the rest of the earth's population. Egypt has practiced that role forcefully in the political, cultural and military arenas in different periods of time, in a manner that shaped the region's map sometimes. Some Egyptians have also taken some very distinguished international posts, turning Egypt's role into part of its character. In this manner, playing a certain role became essential to Egypt's interests and represents a priority that stirs sensitivities. Sometimes it brings Egypt under threat and never lets it be capable of keeping a low profile on the international level. Moreover, Egypt's external role has always represented a practical importance, as it contributed to bolstering Egypt's ability to maintain its national security and economic growth, or minimize the negative effects that could threaten them.

Egypt's ability to influence the region represented an element of power or leverage in running its affairs with international powers. Egypt's role was also an element crucial to supporting the legitimacy of the political regimes inside. Although this element constituted a source of strength for Egypt, it sometimes led to external hazards, confusing behaviour or "free attitudes" and public relations. The role also carried an exaggeration of viewing the effects of international developments on Egypt.

Nevertheless, it remained an extremely serious issue for Egypt.

But during the past few years, talk never stopped about Egypt's receding regional role, maintaining that other countries in the region have surpassed the Egyptian role such as Iraq before 1991, Saudi Arabia after 2001, Iran after 2004, or Turkey after 2007. Comparisons have even been made between Egypt and Qatar, especially in the media field. Usually some people referred back to Egypt's role in the region during Nasser's rule in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite a firm conviction inside Egypt that its role in the 1960s is now history, something impossible and sometimes undesirable, there have been "unrealistic expectations" about what Egypt should do all the time, despite the fact that everything has changed in the area.

Egypt provided explanations for this issue, as regional balances have changed completely towards a "multi-polar" system. There is a group of big nations which react within certain rules of engagement in the region. In that system, Egypt represents one of the main influential powers, especially when its higher national interests are affected. Despite Egypt's inability sometimes to achieve

what it wants, but it is able to prevent what it does not want, as it always has done. But this view did not give a convincing answer to anyone, especially when some countries in the region like Iran have started to play the role of a big regional power, which Egypt deems not possible.

This issue has been discussed on a broad base inside Egypt, and other explanations have been offered based on what Gamal Hemdan has also said about "the Egyptian nationalism" which surfaces sometimes, as is the case with what happened during the late 1970s.

Two observations were made. First, that the dominance of a trend that asserts the priority of internal affairs in Egypt, in the presence of different political and social problems. The trend asserts that a strong domestic bloc (especially economically) will lead to a stronger external role in the end, noting that the "political mainstream" among the masses cares about what the talk show programs stir. This fact goes contrary to what city intellectuals used to think, as Gaza war demonstrated.

Second, the idea of "direct interest circle" surfaced, as no one cares about the role of the 1960s, realizing that controlling Middle East reactions became complex, even for the United States itself. So certain circles have been marked as containing real Egyptian interests, drawing red lines so that moves would be initiated if these lines are crossed. This procedure was followed when Iran came close to the Egyptian borders. In the light of all this, the files of the Egyptian policy are not that many, but they are highly influential on the Palestinian-Israeli arena. Egypt seeks to maintain Sudan's integrity and to limit Iran's regional influence. Egypt has also connections with the Arab Gulf area, a vision towards the Syrian issue, wide interests in the Mediterranean region, a role in handling regional security problems like terrorism or nuclear proliferation. Egypt also has an influence inside multi-party international groups. Egypt does not care about what the national consensus does not see as a direct threat or a real opportunity. But this situation is still unsatisfactory to most Egyptians.

With the explosion of every regional crisis, or the emergence of a revolutionary state, or an ambitious country, or even the occurrence of unusual positive developments, debate spreads across Egypt on its regional role. Trends of "Egyptian nationalism" surface and there emerges a call for active engagement in the region, using money diplomacy, intelligence activity, the media, and revitalizing strategic programs. There are other realistic trends which assert the necessity to maintain current options, and to ease sensitivity towards other roles, as long as Egyptian national interests have not been touched.

But the Gaza war was a decisive point as Egypt faced a very complicated situation which led to an estimation expressed by Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmad Abul Gheit when he said "There is a fierce war against Egypt launched by regional powers." This statement led to questions whether Egypt should think differently in running its affairs with Iran and some Arab states and the way Egypt is running this crisis through the media and diplomatically or through other tools.

There is a question also about whether Egypt should wait until the threats arrive to its borders in other times, or should it broaden slightly the scope of its national security.

Egypt has already started to show some teeth towards different parties and managed to control the course of the crisis. It also appears clearly that Iran has lost the confrontation with Egypt. But it is not clear whether Egypt will change its current attitudes concerning its regional role in the near future.

Dr. Mohamad Abdul-Salam is the Head of the Regional Security Program at Al-Ahram Center, Cairo, Egypt.

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