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The Gulf: Shifting alliances in quest for supremacy

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The Shia Protocols: The Iranian project of Shiite proselytism

Marina Eleftheriadou

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Lately there has been a heated debate about Iranian efforts to spread Shiism to Sunni countries. Many Sunni religious and political figures have contributed to this latest addition of anti-Iranian rhetoric, exaggerating the actual extent of the phenomenon of Shia conversions. It seems that once again Iran's rising regional status challenges Sunni predominance in the region. However, although politically more prolific, religiously, the Iranian example, at least for now, flourishes only under very specific circumstances.



In September 2008 one of the most prominent Islamist scholars -perhaps the most creative of the Muslim Brotherhood trend- Yusuf al-Qaradawi, condemned the Shiite “attempts to invade the Sunni community... [through] missionary work”. From inside the Sunni front some more or less discreetly nodded their heads, while others in turn dismissed Qaradawi’s remarks in abhorrence usually attributed to someone still evaluating the situation. Qaradawi’s warning was the latest ring in a chain of similar statements starting from Jordan’s king Abdullah who

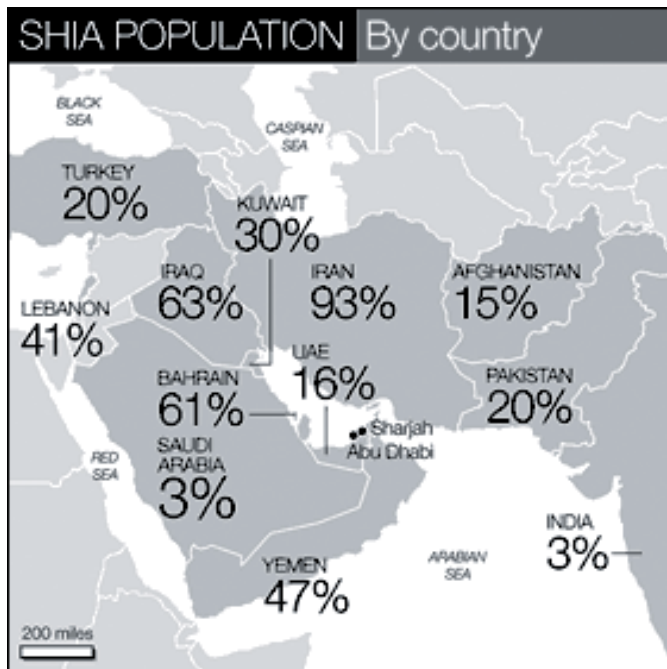
first spoke of the ‘Shia crescent’, followed by Hosni Mubarak, who in 2006 asserted that the Arab Shia were more loyal to Iran than to their own countries. Saudi king Abdullah said in this context that the Shia were trying to convert Sunnis, while assuring at the same time that “the dimensions of spreading Shiism” were under the close scrutiny of the Saudi regime. Furthermore, Qaradawi himself accused the Shia of trying to exploit Hezbollah’s victory against Israel in order to penetrate Sunni societies.

In the meantime newspapers and figures of lesser influence and with no real interest in the official political-correctness preserved the issue by adding drama to the debate. The editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* linked Iran's project of "spreading Shiism" to the desire to "revive the dreams of Safavid" (a Persian dynasty that in 16th century established Shiism as the official religion of the Persian Empire). Accordingly, the Jordanian newspaper, *Ad-Dustour*, identified that the project's plans were to expand Shiism from India to Egypt. However, nothing was more indicative of the Sunni community's low spirit than the moan of wounded pride in the article published in *Al-Siyassa* (Kuwait), written by its editor-in-chief Ahmad al-Jarallah. In his article, Jarallah pleaded the "leaders of all Arab countries [to] hold a summit to prevent Iran from stealing Arab issues".

The Middle East witnesses Iran's second 1979 and the Sunni regimes are alarmed by it, more so since the Sunni community perceives an ongoing transformation of this threat from a political into an existential one.

Iran's current rise might lack the revolutionary charm of 1979; however, quite contrary to the heydays of the Iranian Revolution it is now characterized by firmer foundations. The inexperienced leadership of 1979 entered Islamist and generally Middle Eastern affairs like a bull into a china shop, stirring up the whole region but in the end 'grabbing' more than it could hold. Nowadays, the Sunnis argue that Teheran takes one step at a time, sneaking into the former's open wounds and letting its defiance of regional and global norms of conduct attract followers. A message, which was proven inadequate in the post-1979 "shia expansion", has been 'surrounded' now by an entire -conspiracy- strategy in order to support its validity and consistency. In the past Iran merely managed briefly to mobilize the Gulf Shia: civil unrest in the oil-rich Shia-populated eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia erupted in December 1979 but soon died out although one has to say that its products remained active even after the revolution (e.g. the Saudi Arabian Hezbollah and its attack on the Khobar towers in 1996). The Iranian Revolution also inspired the creation of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and created its star product the Lebanese Hezbollah. Finally, it gave a note of militancy to the Sunni Islamists which however in their majority preferred to use the Iranian example without adopting its dogma. Soon the Sunni militants would either turn indifferent in the face of the new Islamic ideal in Afghanistan or applaud Saddam as he was bleeding out Iran. Briefly, Iran's final balance-sheet was far from positive.

Nonetheless, in 2008 as the Sunni regimes failed to cope with the mounting crises, they saw their cherished containment of Iran evaporate. On Iran's east, the Taliban-Pakistan-Saudi Arabia axis might remain strong and potent, however, it has been transformed while additionally the Pakistani and Saudi Arabian link have been highly volatile and therefore less manageable. On Iran's west the Iraqi bulwark disappeared into thin air, opening thus the gates of the Middle East. As the great force multiplier (nuclear power) is coming into being, Iran is scoring victories in Iraq, Lebanon (via the other Shia player, Hezbollah) and Palestine (through its direct or Syria-intermediate relations with Hamas and smaller rejectionist Palestinian groups, e.g. Islamic Jihad and PF-General Command).



In other words, Teheran is stealing the Arab issues while the Arab elites want to secure the Sunni soul. In 1979 Saudi Arabia battled Shia expansionism by highlighting Iran's Shia particularity as directly linked to Persian nationalism. Today, it is not anymore only about more assertive Shia communities inside Sunni-dominated states but also about losing followers to the Shia. What can seem more threatening compared to the image of scores of Shia converts in "Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and other non-Arab countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Senegal...even the Gulf States and Syria, but of course, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon have Shia communities and therefore, unlike countries where there was no Shia, conversion to the Shia sect does not stand out" (Yusuf al-Qaradawi). Actual figures which would allow estimations are lacking and Sunni alarmism blurs the picture even more. However, conversions, although far less common than asserted, seem to occur mostly in predominately Sunni regions, which share some kind of

acquaintance with Shia culture. On the contrary, in regions of mixed populations and Shia minority status (Arab Gulf) or in regions of increased Shia assertiveness and tensed Sunni-Shia relations (Iraq and Lebanon) the Sunni identity seems more solid and resistant. An exception to this pattern is Syria which due to the political leverage exerted by Iran and the peculiar sectarian nature of its regime forms the most interesting case. One could also add Jordan. However, Amman's increasing preoccupation with Shia converts is most probably connected with the social upheaval created by the arrival of thousands of well-off Iraqi Shia refugees.

In this context, conversions occur in North African countries, including Egypt, which acquired their religious folk familiarity with Shia practices from the time of the Fatimid rule. When Qaradawi highlighted the case of Egypt: "I left Egypt 47 years ago, it had not a single Shiite and now there are many... who took them to Shiism? Egypt is the cradle of Sunnism and the country of Al-Azhar". However, he overlooked that Al-Azhar was founded during the Fatimid era or as Qaddafi said: "Cairo cannot escape its Fatimid destiny". Although Shia in Egypt are said to represent less than 1% of the population (and any sporadic conversions can hardly change that), the authorities, in order to rally the people around the flag vis-a-vis Iran, look worried. So are the Algerians, the Sudanese and the Moroccans. Two years ago the Algerian Ministry of education suspended eleven teachers as they were accused of conducting Shia missionary work. While in Algeria primarily Shia expatriates from Iraq, Syria and Lebanon were held responsible, in Morocco the 'messengers' were Moroccans working in Europe

where they were approached by Iranian charitable organizations. In Sudan the accusations have been directed towards the Iranians themselves who allegedly took advantage of Khartoum's friendly disposition towards the Iranian revolution. According to the Sudanese "Supreme Council for Coordination among the Islamic Associations", through the proselytism of the Iranian Cultural Center in Khartoum, "whole villages have been converted to Shiism, and Shi'a mosques have proliferated in Khartoum".

While these predominately Sunni countries are more susceptible to Shia proselytism, the Gulf countries on the other hand, which are home to large Shia communities (20% in Saudi Arabia, 30% in Kuwait, 70% however politically subordinated in Bahrain), are more vulnerable to the prospect of militant Shiism rather than proselytism as the Sunni community, threatened as it feels, is heavily entrenched behind its sectarian identity.

This is even more explicit in Lebanon and Iraq. Not only, as Nasrallah, said would it be cheaper simply to produce more children (as the Shia in Lebanon have been doing for the last decades), but also the possible candidates for conversion are more probable to turn to militant Sunnism to safeguard their political position rather than change camp.

Syria's Sunnis present a different situation. Not only have they been indoctrinated for years in a Ba'athist-Alawi regime and subjected to significant Iranian political and economic penetration, but they have also been deprived from a rallying point since the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is disputed whether conversions predominately affect the Alawi or the Sunni community (official statistics point to the former, while the Sunnis claim it is the latter under the regime's blessing). However, in any case, both of them are subjected to the same set of powers. Iran's and Hezbollah's achievements are multiplied via Iran's political, economic and cultural inroads into the country. Dozens of Shia shrines have been built or restored, hundreds of hawzas (Shia seminary) and cultural centers have been established and several hundreds of thousands religious Shia tourists (mostly Iranian) flood the country every year. At the same time, Iran's huge investments engulf the Syrian economy. If the state sector is earmarked for the close circle of Assad's Alawi loyalists, the private sector is not less cliental, but in this case it is the Iranians who occupy the HR positions. It is exactly the combination of Iranian political and economic involvement and the doctrinal-sectarian proximity of the two regimes that allowed Teheran to establish an enormous mechanism of cultural influence. This explains why for example in Palestine (Gaza), despite the defamatory "Shiites" increasingly attributed to Hamas by Fatah, there is no such phenomenon.

In the final analysis, as a Shiite cleric in Saudi Arabia said: "People in the region always complain about a Shiite crescent...That's just a crescent. What about the full Sunni moon?" The exact extent of the "Shia invasion" little matters. It is more interesting and important to see if the Sunni world and especially Saudi Arabia is capable to recuperate from 9/11 setbacks and put again in motion its extensive counter-Iranian mechanism that worked so effectively in the 1980s.

A neutral mediator? An overview of Qatar's diplomacy

Ilias Tasopoulos

Over the last few years, Qatar has been trying to assume an enhanced status in the region as the chief mediator for regional conflicts. Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, coming to power in 1996, is trying to take advantage of the benefits that the role of the peacemaker carries or implies.

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In May 2008 an agreement was brokered between the government and the main opposition in Lebanon, with the intervention of Qatar's ruler. Since 2006, Qatar has also been making a bid to mediate in the conflict between the warring factions in Sudan. Amongst others, Qatar has tried to act as a broker in several other regional conflicts, including a rebellion in Yemen and the civil strife in the Palestinian territories.

Emir Hamad al-Thani is able to pursue such a role for his country since Qatar is perhaps the only state of the region which is not a part of these conflicts and –even most importantly– it is trusted by all the regional powers. Additionally, the emir is willing to commit money and effort to guarantee the implementation of agreements.

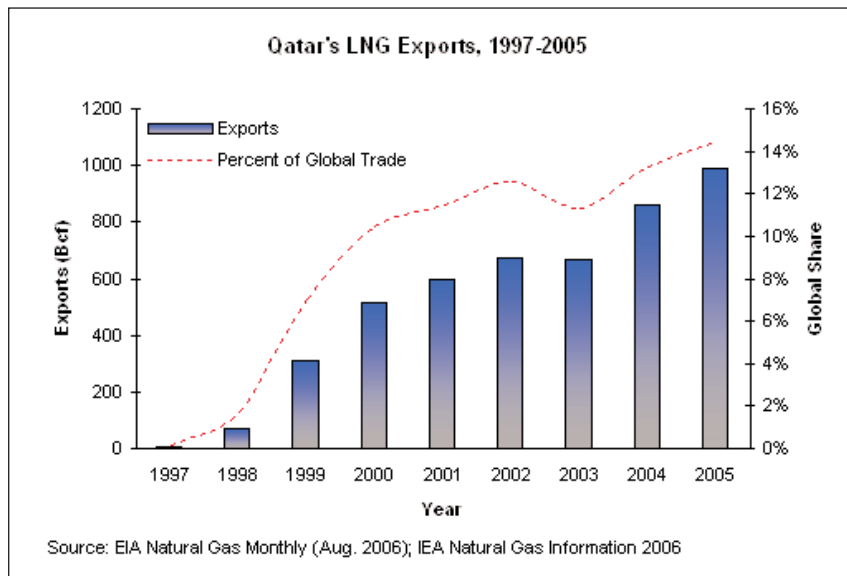
In all these cases, Qatar is believed to be using 'checkbook diplomacy' to gain influence. Qatar provided funds to the Palestinian Authority when the American-European-Israeli embargo against Hamas was implemented in 2006, while it has been a major investor in Sudan's impoverished economy. Regarding the Lebanon deal, Qatar has been able to provide confidence over the past two years between the two sides of the Lebanese divide by assisting in the

reconstruction of Lebanon. Under Qatar's \$300 million operation in Lebanon, Shia-majority towns were rebuilt, compensation cheques totaling more than US \$30 million were handed out, hospitals, schools, religious buildings –including the Grand Mosque at the heart of Bint Jbeil's Old City– were repaired. Having secured Hizbollah's reluctant acquiescence to assist Lebanese people in need, Qatar facilitated the Lebanese government's attempt to block the implementation of Iran's major reconstruction aid to Lebanon (an estimated budget of over US \$100 million), which would have upgraded Hizbollah's influence.

Rents from rich energy resources, abundant in Qatar, allow the emir to pursue his ambitious diplomacy. Apart from its large oil reserves, Qatar has the third largest natural gas reserves in the world, lagging only behind Russia and Iran. In the last few years, Qatar has become the largest liquefied natural gas exporter globally (destined mostly for Japan).

This tiny emirate with a very small population (900,000 inhabitants) has the largest head annual income in the world (almost \$40,000)

Following this kind of policy, Qatar has established working relations with all the states in the



region. Despite the tensions between the status-quo and the revisionist states, the emir has maintained a balance between both sides. For the last 12 years, an Israeli commercial interests office has been located in Doha, the capital of Qatar, staffed with two diplomats. Representatives of both countries meet regularly, however there are no official relations between Qatar and Israel. At the same time, Qatar holds tight financial and diplomatic relations with Iran -the two countries share the biggest natural gas field in the world- and Syria, where Qatar has invested heavily. The level of relations with the US is quite good as well.

A large US base is located in Qatar, which played a crucial role in the 2003 military operations against Iraq. The Al Udeid Air Base, hosting a hi-tech command centre for the American operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, is the biggest American military base in the world – excluding the bases in the NATO coun-

tries. Almost 5,000 American soldiers and personnel staff the base.

According to reports in mainstream British media, Qatar seems to have even established contacts with Islamic extremist organizations, such as al-Qaeda. The London Times reported that Qatar and al-Qaeda had closed a deal prior to the 2003 intervention in Iraq. The agreement involved millions of dollars channelled via spiritual leaders sympathetic to al- Qaeda, in order to prevent terrorist attacks against the emirate.

Qatar's relations with its neighbouring countries are not cordial as the emirate has been accused of exerting

influence on the -often provoking- Al Jazeera channel. Programs critical to the Arab governments broadcasted on *Al Jazeera* are directly connected to the regime's policy. Several analysts argue that although Qatar denies any liability for the programs of Al Jazeera, it has agreed to work on moderating the fierce rhetoric typical of *Al Jazeera* against the other Arab regimes, to secure Saudi Arabia's consent to pursue its ambitious diplomacy through the Arab League.

Being a mediator in regional crises allows Qatar to leverage against far more powerful states and perhaps even become their partner. Having the support of the great powers is highly important for Qatar, as its ultimate aim is to diversify its economy before its natural resources run out.

There are strong indications that Qatar is follow-



ing Dubai's example, attempting to enter the European money markets and to become the dominant financial centre of the Middle East. Recently, Qatar signed a billion dollars deal with NYSE Euronext to create a leading financial market in its capital Doha, while having a significant stake in the London Stock Exchange.

Simultaneously, the building program that the regime has implemented shows its desire to rival that of Dubai in order to become a tourist attraction as well. The nearly four million square meters luxurious artificial island that is being completed in Doha, Pearl-Qatar, will be the first place that will be available for freehold ownership by foreigners.

However, its reputation for the very opposite of cosmopolitan living seems to destroy any such hopes. Doha has still not acquired Dubai's extended luxurious tourist infrastructure; an International Herald Tribune columnist characterized it as an "ugly and boring" city where businessmen dread their trips and, usually, lower-level staff of big companies are sent.

However, poor score in important cultural events in Doha lessens Qatar's possibilities to take part in the Western elites' discussions and thereby being able to lure rich and middle-class tourists to Doha. The attempt to host the 2016 Olympic Games and the construction of the world's first underground stadium could be a first step in hosting events that attract worldwide interest.

Iran's relations with the Gulf States: *The unwanted hegemon*

Anna Apostolidou

In order for Iran to acquire the status of a regional power, it has to accommodate the Gulf States. However, the nature of the Islamic Republic, its manifest regional hegemonic aspirations, the possibility of acquiring nuclear weapons and its hostility towards the West are sufficient reasons for its neighbours' discontent. In the lack of other footing, Tehran tries to gain acceptance via the economic route; and so far, it has achieved to maintain the balance.

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Iran could not contrast more with its Gulf neighbours. Persian, Shiite, revolutionary and anti-Western, it marks out of the Arab, Sunni, conservative and US-allied states of the Gulf. The cost of this incompatibility became evident during the first years of the Islamic Republic and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), when Tehran found itself with no allies in the Gulf, as its neighbours either supported Iraq financially (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar) or remained neutral or ambivalent (Oman, Bahrain). Additionally, the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), only a year after the outbreak of the war, was greeted by Iran, with great suspicion, as the promulgated objective for 'unity' could be interpreted as the formation of a common front against the remaining Gulf country, Iran.

Nowadays, Iran's ties with the Gulf States have been restored; nevertheless, their relations are not free of resentments or suspicions. First of all, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain have respectable numbers of Shi'ite populations; given past Iranian incitements to overthrow their rulers, as well as Tehran's role in the Iraqi Sunni-Shi'a conflict and its ties with Hizbollah, the perception of Iran as a threat to internal stability can be justified. Furthermore, Riyadh and Tehran are competing not only for the title of the vanguard state of Islam, but also for regional status. On the surface, the two countries have friendly relations; nevertheless, discrepancies between them are still palpable in regions away from the Gulf, as in Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, where they support opposing sides. Moreover, their interests are conflicting: Riyadh is the key ally of the U.S. in the region, while Tehran's strategy aims at diminishing the American influence there.

Iran faces more obvious problems with two other Gulf States: the UAE and Bahrain. Abu Dhabi accuses Iran of occupying illegally three islands of the Persian Gulf (Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunb); an article of the UAE newspaper Al-Ittihad, where Iran is equated with Israel since both of them occupy Arab soil, epitomises the discontent. On its part, Tehran, through the Majlis speaker Ali Larijani, has downgraded the issue characterising the territorial disputes as 'simple differences', which are fuelled by the U.S. in an attempt to

destabilise the region. Similarly, Manama is disquieted by unofficial Iranian claims that Bahrain is an Iranian province, illegally separated from the motherland during the Shah regime. Tehran has officially renounced this claim, which was quite popular during the first years of the Islamic Republic, however in 2007 a statement by Hussein Shari'atmadari, advisor of Khamenei, almost fuelled a diplomatic crisis between the two states.

The crisis was resolved. Nonetheless, one cannot be affirmative that Tehran has escaped new threats of isolation. For example, though the GCC has officially declared that every country, including Iran, has the right to develop nuclear power, most Gulf states feel insecure by this prospect and turn to the USA for support. In 2007, Washington discussed new arm deals, which would reach approximately \$20 billion, with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain. Furthermore, security analyst Richard Russell from the National Defence University in Washington does not rule out an informal cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel in order to contain a nuclear Iran. The two countries do not have diplomatic relations, but an altered balance of powers in the regional system, as a possible consequence of Iran acquiring nuclear capabilities, would menace both countries' security interests: Tel Aviv would face the possibility of a war and Riyadh would lose leverage in the region. Therefore Russell, invoking the saying 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend', deduces that Saudi-Israeli cooperation, probably under US mediation, is a possibility. However, it should be mentioned that so far there are no indications of such a development.

Likewise, it is argued that the Bahraini Foreign Minister's proposal for the establishment of a regional organisation that would include the Arab countries, Iran, Turkey, and Israel, aimed from the beginning at the exclusion of Iran. The Chief Editor of the Palestinian-owned newspaper *Al-Quds al-Arabi* expressed the opinion that the proposal was designed on Tehran's anticipated refusal to negotiate with Israel, which would clear the way for an Arab-Turkish-Israeli alliance against Iran. The proposal did not proceed, mainly because it provoked tensions within the Bahraini parliament. However, an examination of each party's (Arab world, Turkey, Israel and Iran) reaction to the Bahraini Foreign Minister's initiative demonstrates that the argument in question is not unreasonable. Arab League Secretary General Amr Mousa spoke favourably of the proposal; Ankara generally tries to cultivate stronger links to the Middle East (e.g. the recent Turkish-Bahraini declaration on cooperation in a variety of domains, such as security, politics and economics); Tel Aviv did not officially respond, probably because it considered the proposal to be unrealistic. Tehran, on the other hand, hastened to condemn the proposal as expected.

Realising that it has failed to dispel its neighbours' concerns over its regional aspirations, Tehran has chosen the economic path so as to forge stronger ties with them. The last 8 years, the volume of trade between Iran and the GCC countries has increased from \$1.7 (2000) to \$8.7 billion (2007). 12% of Iran's total imports come from the GCC countries. The reasons for improved economic relations are two-fold. Firstly, it was a choice of necessity, as Iran was subsumed to US-sponsored financial and economic sanctions. Secondly, there were reasons of expediency. Solid economic ties function as an inducement to the Gulf States to refrain from further economic sanctions and act as a counterweight to the US economic influence in the region. The rationale behind Tehran's strengthening economic ties with the Gulf may be that in case of a war involving Iran, its neighbours would be more hesitant to back the opposing country. In other words, since the historical experience has

demonstrated that it cannot capitalise on the common Islamic faith, it has turned into non-ideological adhesive mechanisms, such as economic cooperation, in order to escape the threat of isolation.



strengthen regional ties.

It appears that Iran has learned from the past. It has abandoned the flamboyant rhetoric regarding its neighbours' regimes, and has pragmatically put emphasis on economic cooperation instead. Probably it will never become essentially accepted as a member of the Gulf family; but at this point, avoiding isolation is an achievement by its own.

Strangely enough, Iran maintains excellent economic ties with the UAE, despite the territorial disputes. The overwhelming majority of imports comes from the Emirates, while Iran is a major contributor of private investment capital in Dubai. Apart from the UAE, Iran exports natural gas to Oman and is expected to reach a similar natural gas agreement with Kuwait, while it has already signed a joint Iranian-Bahraini gas project. In 2008, Iran, Qatar and Russia reached a consensus for the establishment of a 'natural gas OPEC', which would further consolidate Tehran's regional status. So far, Iran's manoeuvres have served the goals in question: the effects of the US sanctions may not have been neutralised, but certainly reduced, and the GCC governments are more reluctant to sever economic ties with the Islamic Republic. Though some financial institutions in Bahrain and the UAE cut off cooperation with Iranian banks after American pressures, the official position of the Gulf states remains that they will abstain from future sanctions on Iran.

The 2007 negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Iran and the Gulf states fall into the same strategy. Neither Iran nor the Gulf states, with the exception of the UAE, can gain essential economic benefits from a FTA, since every country in the region is an energy exporter and manufactured goods importer. The motives are rather political: for Tehran it is an attempt to create a regional framework with no American presence; for the Gulf countries with Shi'ite populations, the FTA can function as a political tool, so as to appease Iran. For the rest, participation in the Agreement is a relatively costless way to

Al Jazeera's role in the regional system: "All of this noise... from a tiny matchbox?"

A. Karal

Page 12 *No better phrase captures the controversy of Al Jazeera than that of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak during his visit to the Doha headquarters. From the offset, Al Jazeera rapidly gained Arab viewers owing to its independent coverage, analysis and presentation that offered an Arab perspective. It lent the small emirate of Qatar global fame, improving the position of its regional and international status. Its transborder leverage in shaping public opinion has raised concern among Arab regimes regarding their legitimacy in the interior and the maintenance of the regional balance of power.*

Al Jazeera owes its existence to Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al Thani, who seized power of Qatar from his father in 1995 after a bloodless coup. The establishment of the Arab satellite news network was the realization of his vision to lead his country towards democratization and to develop his own foreign policy agenda, rather than echoing Saudi policies. Aiming at freedom of press, he abolished the Minister of Information, inaugurating the end of governmental censorship on news reporting. Al Jazeera, launched in November 1996, was the very essence of the new era in the Arab media.

A \$140 million subsidy granted by the Qatari Emir for the first five years of broadcasting was the vanguard of editorial independence and objective broad-



casting. Host to several talk shows and debates, Al Jazeera tackled issues previously considered taboo in Arab societies, such as the role of women, education, corruption, human rights and Islam, and gave dissidents from across the political spectrum a fair hearing.

Al Jazeera's popularity grew rapidly during the second Palestinian Intifada coverage in 2000. Exclusive live footage of Afghanistan's battlefield and Osama Bin Laden's interviews during the US invasion in 2001 rendered it "the CNN of the Arab World", while the Iraq war in 2003 gave it again a considerable boost. However, the war coverage bred high controversy over the objectiveness of its reporting. The US government argued the war coverage of 2001 and 2003 sup-

portive of the insurgents. The airing of war atrocities in Iraq in 2003 reduced the wrath of the Iraqi interim government. One year later, Al Jazeera's reporting from within the besieged city of Jenin in spring 2002, evoked Arab sentiment. Addressing the Palestinian fighters as 'martyrs' invited fierce Israeli criticism and accusations of being both biased and sympathetic towards the Palestinians and their cause. Yet with its objective reporting equally being questioned by Palestinians who referred to it as the 'bastion of Zionism' as Israeli officials were invited to comment on.

The Arab states have criticized the network for graphic and emotional news presentation, disseminating dreadful war images from within the theatre of military operations. However, it is the network's influence on its audience and its purported role as a tool in Qatar's foreign policy that has really rendered both Arab leaders and the US rather apprehensive. It has to be noted that the station has appeared at the TIME magazine as "one of 100 of the world's most influential people". Acerbic criticism against the Arab regimes and their political decisions has been a thorny issue between the Qatar leadership and the other Arab states. From the perspective of Arab states, such 'unrestrained' reporting could have a destabilizing effect or harm their regimes' legitimacy. Qatari diplomats have received over 400 official complaints about Al Jazeera's commentaries. Tunisia, Morocco and Libya have gone further and recalled their ambassadors as a direct consequence of Al Jazeera's broadcasting.

In May 2002, Bahrain prevented Al Jazeera from broadcasting by claiming that the channel was deliberately trying to harm the state and damage its relations. These accusations and actions resulted from the airing of images of Bahraini nationals protesting against the war in Afghanistan, which the government

considered insulting as it was and remains host to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet. Since the headquarters of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet are located there, the protests were considered insulting for the country. It was speculated that the inflammatory broadcast was prompted by Qatar due to the dispute with Bahrain over the control of the Hawar Islands, finally given to Manama.

Similarly, the relations between Doha and Jordan faced problems in 2002, when Al Jazeera aired a program that criticized what it saw as Jordan's weak Middle Eastern policy, especially towards Palestine and Iraq. As a response, the Jordanian press accused Qatar of facilitating the US attack against Iraq by conceding its air base, converting the mutual accusations into a matter of regional politics.

The station's emissions have further created serious tension between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The problem is traced back to the network's establishment as a successor of the BBC World Arabic Service. The latter, a joint venture with Saudi Arabia, was shut down due to a documentary that was found to be offensive by the Saudi regime, yet Al Jazeera maintained this critical editorial line regardless. In 2002, the bilateral relations became exceedingly aggravated beginning with the withdrawal of the Saudi Arabian ambassador from Qatar in September, owing to an earlier documentary that had questioned the Kingdoms policy on the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. In December, Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz abstained from the Gulf Cooperation Council meeting held in Qatar expressing its indignation with Al Jazeera's coverage. Moreover, Saudi Arabia had already used advertising boycott as a means of intercepting the station's liberal programs. By preventing Saudi companies buying airtime, Riyadh attempted to deprive the channel gaining revenue and maintain-

ing its editorial independency. In February 2003, Al Arabiya, the Saudi-controlled 24-hour news channel based in Dubai, was introduced as an antidote to Al Jazeera.

According to a station's employee, there is deliberately some flatness in Al Jazeera's coverage in relation to Saudi Arabia, since September 2007. The leading channel has purportedly eased its acerbic criticism when it comes to Saudi policies. The results of which became apparent in December 2007 through the reappointment of a Saudi Arabian ambassador to Qatar and Saudi Arabia's participation in the GCC Summit in Doha, both moves that signaled the normalization of relations. This rapprochement is largely attributed to Qatar's rethinking of regional security system in view of Iran's nuclear program, which can potentially pose a threat to Qatar.

Despite this reported reconciliation, in February 2008, another effort to halt turbulent satellite broadcasting was made during the meeting of the Arab Ministers of Information in Cairo, where they adopted a Code of Conduct for TV channels. According to the "Charter of Principle", Arab media should not level any attacks to political and religious leadership of the Arab world. However, Qatar and Lebanon were the two member states opposed to these rules.

Qatar itself has described Al Jazeera as a "perpetual headache", but it has refuted the allegations of shutting down the station. Qatari officials have stated that Al Jazeera is not a governmental channel and thus, it does not represent any of the state's decisions. Qatar runs a more moderate political direction. It hosts regional meetings and forums and tries to establish itself by acting as a mediator during regional crises. On the contrary, the renowned network has rather been a thorn in the Emirate's bilateral relations. Therefore, it is clear that it follows its own agenda -at

least to a large extent- while enjoying tolerance of the Qatari regime.

New York Times' Thomas Friedman proves to be right when claiming that "Al Jazeera is not only the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab World since the advent of television, it is also the biggest political phenomenon". On April 2008, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni visited Doha in an effort to convince the Arab moderate leaders of the necessity of cooperation with Israel in order to achieve regional peace. Despite having already stopped cooperation with Al Jazeera a month earlier, Livni now asked the TV station to lessen what she considers biased-reporting towards Israel, recognizing the influence it exerts on the Arab audiences.

Overall, Al Jazeera is a mixed blessing to Qatar. The worldwide reputation of the station has acted as a means of publicity for the Emirate, helping the promotion of its regional and international status. However, publicity has not always been positive as the Qatari government repeatedly receives other Arab leaders' complaints due to the station's behavior. Though Qatar may be found in a difficult position, this should not reduce the network's significance. On the contrary, its effectiveness should rather be evaluated within the context of its establishment, than in terms of regional politics.

Turkey and the Arab Gulf : Is Turkey looking eastwards?

Chrysoula Toufexi

Since the Iraqi invasion, the Middle East has experienced a new regional order. Iran and Saudi Arabia have emerged as the two powers competing for supremacy in the Middle East, while Turkey seems willing to adopt a mediating and balancing role between the state actors in the region. In the eve of the new millennium, Turkey and the Arab Gulf have been working closer together to foster economic ties and have been engaged in identifying commonalities in the challenges they face. Against this background, one has to consider if regional threats signal the beginning of a new era of a strategic partnership between Turkey and its Arab neighbors leading to a genuine turn in Turkish foreign policy from West towards East?

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In his interview with the Dubai newspaper *Khaleej Times*, in March 2008, Turkey's President Gul stressed the fact that the basis of the Turkish – GCC cooperation is founded on two principals: economic and security policy. Furthermore, he emphasized that, in relation to the Middle East, an alternative path of soft power should be developed instead of U.S. hard power projection. On the one hand, the Arab Gulf has shown a great interest for the emerging Turkish market, in order to invest its surplus revenues that have been created by the oil boom price since 2005. On the other hand, Turkey welcomes Arab investment that will boost an already flourishing business sector. Economic cooperation between Turkey and the GCC states has been developing in the past decade, both bilaterally and within the confines of the Arab organization.

On a bilateral level, three states of the Arab Gulf: the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait enjoy strong economic relations with Turkey in terms of private investments, while President Gul revealed in February 2008, during his visit to Qatar, his intension to enter into negotiations with Qatar's government about a natural gas agreement. In an effort to diversify its energy providers beyond Russia and Iran, Turkey is looking for ways to extend its energy agreements to the Arab Gulf. Among other states in the Gulf, the UAE have been investing steadily in the Turkish sectors of private business, real estate, banking and telecommunication, while they have increasingly opened their markets to Turkish exports. The two states estimate that bilateral trade should have reached up to \$10 billion by 2010. Additionally, trade volume with Saudi Arabia is assumed to have reached around \$3.3 billion by 2007, while the two states hope to

increase bilateral trade at a volume of \$7 billion within the next years. Talks with Saudi Arabia in 2006 revealed the country's intention to further investments in the privatized Turkish banks, an increase of Saudi textile imports, as well as the negotiation of trade and energy agreements. Moreover, the two governments agreed in 2007 to eliminate double taxation on the income of dual citizens, in order to facilitate ongoing foreign investments and labor.

On a multilateral level, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the GCC and Turkey in September 2008, in Jeddah, has been considered to lead to a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by 2010, while negotiations have been taking place since 2005.

Furthermore, closer cooperation is precipitated through common regional security challenges and a continuous U.S. neglect of Ankara's national interests in the Middle East. Security concerns in the Middle East have brought Turkey closer to the GCC states, which share for different reasons a mutual interest in Iraq's territorial integrity. In other words, Turkey attempts to form strategic alliances with the GCC states in order to face the ongoing challenges which have emerged after the Iraqi invasion. Turkey's denial to facilitate the U.S. invasion in Iraq in March 2003, by using its northern part as a base, might have temporarily undermined its relationship with its U.S. ally. However, it has improved its image in the Middle Eastern world.

On the one hand, Turkey favors a unified Iraq as it attempts to prevent the Kurds from declaring autonomy in the northern Iraqi front. However, the ongoing Kurdish separatism has been supported by its western allies, particularly the U.S. and Israel, as a counterweight to the 'ambitions' of the Sunni and Shia Iraqis, while ignoring Turkish concerns of PKK terrorist attacks from Northern Iraq to its soil. The turn in Turkey's rapprochement of the Arab Gulf states became obvious in the deterioration of its relations with Israel, when the latter was implicated in covert military operations in

North Iraq. According to a report of the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* in 2005, Kurdish fighters in Northern Iraq were receiving counter-terrorism training and intelligence support from former Israeli intelligence members, while it is further stated that Israel has been cooperating with the Kurds since 2003 in an effort to improve surveillance and intelligence access in Iran and Syria. Turkey seems to have realized that it needs to rely less on its western allies and diversify its alliances among the Middle Eastern world, in order to promote its security interests in Iraq.

On the other hand, the GCC states fear that a possible U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in the future will lead to sectarian divisions between the Shiites and Sunnis of the country. Iranian nuclear ambitions and Teheran's regional hegemonic aspirations reinforce Arab regime insecurity towards the prospect of a "Shiia crescent" that could trigger popular uprisings of Shiia populations among the Arab Sunni states of the Gulf.

In this spirit the Saudi King Abdullah paid a historic visit to Turkey in August 2006 which was characterized by the media as the offset of closer cooperation between Ankara and Riyadh. Talks involved, among other matters, the ongoing Israeli bombing of Lebanon that was strengthening



popular sentiments in favor of Hezbollah. As R. Olson notes in his paper published in the *Mediterranean Quarterly* (2008, 19:3), King Abdullah was interested in ensuring the Turkish support of the effort to contain a Shiia strengthening in Iraq and Lebanon via Hezbollah and Syria. In his interview with the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet* during his visit, the Saudi King foresaw the beginning of a strategic partnership, emphasizing Turkey's role in promoting the Middle Eastern security dilemmas towards its western allies.

His second visit to Turkey took place one year later in November 2007. During that time a Turkish military strike against Kurdish fighters in Iraq was a sensitive issue of the government's foreign policy agenda. A few days after the visit of the Saudi King, the Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas and the Israeli President Shimon Peres were about to arrive in Ankara in order to sign an agreement for the construction of a joint industrial zone in the southern West Bank on the borders with Israel, aiming at the economic development of the region. It has to be noted though, that a similar project in Erez between Gaza and Israel was abandoned. Thus, it seems as if this project will have a similar fate, unless a genuine peace process initiative takes place to end hostilities on both sides.

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For Mustafa Kibaroglu, foreign affairs analysts at Bilkent University, Turkey's Middle Eastern policies go as far as to constitute "public diplomacy", unless it develops a more comprehensive foreign policy, especially regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Iranian nuclear issue. Turkey and the Arab Gulf do not form a united front with their U.S. ally to confront Teheran. They reject in this matter a possible U.S. scenario for military action towards Iran and are more willing to rely on soft power, in order to prevent Iranian nuclear build-up. Moreover, they do not oppose, contrary to Israeli and U.S. diplomacy, Teheran's desire to acquire nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

However, in contrast to Kibaroglu's analysis, the importance attached to Turkey for the stability of the region by the Arab Gulf, is illustrated in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) declaration, which was signed in 2004 and was adopted by Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE two years later. A significant aspect of the declaration is the role of the NATO in the Middle Eastern regional security and the emerging cooperation between the organization and the Arab Gulf states. GCC countries acknowledge that Turkey is a fundamental constituent of this relationship, as it is perceived as the West's Muslim wing.

Indicative of the necessity attached to a security framework between Turkey and the Arab Gulf was the GCC ministerial meeting held in Jeddah, in September 2008, where a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the foreign ministers of the GCC states and their Turkish counterpart Ali Babacan. In the meeting the foreign ministers acknowledged the emergence of a strategic partnership between Turkey and the Gulf, expressing their desire to build mechanisms in order to facilitate the institutionalization of their annual cooperation in economy and security.

Common regional challenges combined with a lack of U.S. sensitivity towards Turkish and Arab national security interests might precipitate a security alliance framework, which would rely according to Gul's prognosis on two dimensions of soft power: economic cooperation and strategic dialogue between Turkey and the GCC members. Nevertheless, analysts have to ask themselves whether Ankara's steps towards the Middle East constitute genuine acts of engagement in regional security, indicating the start of a new Turkish foreign policy, more sensitive to its Middle Eastern neighbors, or if these diplomatic steps are just mere acts of impression? If negotiations for a strategic framework prove fruitful, Turkey's initiatives might be transformed from acts of public diplomacy into acts of active engagement in power balance and mediation, signaling the end of Ankara's neglect towards the Middle East.

The role of the Arab Gulf States in the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process

Nada Ghandour-Demiri

Recently, the Arab Gulf States are taking a more active role in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, with Saudi Arabia and Qatar now acting as mediators between the Palestinian factions by hosting talks and facilitating agreements. However, to view such developments as an act of benevolence on behalf of these countries would be misleading, and rather interests in recalibrating the regional balance of power would more accurately appear to be the driving force behind these efforts.

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Most conflicts are often far more complex than they appear on the surface and involve multiple actors rather than simply two warring sides; the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not an exception. Numerous Arab countries, whether actively or not, play a major role in the persistence of this conflict as do many foreign powers, in particular the United States. This multilateral involvement is predominantly due to individual interests to secure stakes in energy resources and issues concerning regional security.

The Palestinian question is arguably the Middle East's most pressing issue in need of resolution, and it has long been argued that the continuation of this crisis underpins the region's inability to achieve stability. Therefore, it is imperative that a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict should constitute a fundamental part of neighboring states' regional policy. Among these neighboring countries, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf increasingly play an important role in the peace process.

The relationship between the Arab Gulf States and the Palestinians dates back to the Nakba, when the creation of the state of Israel marked the beginning of the Palestinian exodus. Many of the Palestinians who found refuge in the Gulf States were highly educated and worked in the domain of education, medicine, engineering and administration. Rather than being completely

marginalized from society, as was and largely remains the case in Lebanon, they contributed to the development of the Gulf.



The independence of many Gulf States (1960s-1970s) coincided with the beginning of the Palestinian liberation movement, while shared objectives encouraged the development of transnational solidarity. Sympathetic to the Palestinian struggle, the Gulf states provided substantial economic support to the territories' governing parties, which increased significantly post the 1973 oil embargo crisis.

Yet, the relations between the Gulf States and the Palestinians deteriorated during the 1990 Iraq-Kuwait War, in which Yasser Arafat, influenced by the Palestinian guerillas, did not oppose Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. As a consequence, the Gulf States stopped supporting the Palestinian Liberation Organization both economically and politically, which led to a severe economic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Nevertheless, since the 1993 Oslo Accords, relations between the Palestinian authority and the Gulf states have ameliorated and the last few years in particular have seen individual states or collectively, through the Gulf Cooperation Council, increasingly active in promoting peace initiatives. Complementing its increased involvement, the GCC has become more vocal and no longer sits on the fence as it openly condemns the Israeli occupation and transgressions of Palestinian human rights, and holds that Israel should withdraw to the pre-1967 borders.

Among the GCC member states, Qatar and Saudi Arabia in particular have invested more energy than others have, in shaping the peace process. Over the last six years, Saudi Arabia in particular has been at the forefront of many of the peace initiatives. Consistently stressing the importance of a peace accord during Arab League summits, Saudi Arabia was willing to normalize the diplomatic relations of the Arab League with Israel on agreement that Israel withdraw from all occupied territories and accept the creation of a viable Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. More recently, in February 2007, the Saudi King Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz hosted and facilitated the Mecca Agreement between Hamas and Fatah. Although this agreement was the catalyst for the formation of a Palestinian national-unity government, its significance is to be found in the regional balance of power. However, as stated previously, benevolence is rare and interests more often account for involvement; thus a more critical examination of Saudi Arabia's Mecca Agreement would reveal the kingdoms lack of concern with the pact's content, and rather its underlying interest to counter Iran's regional growing power, through securing a primary role in the Palestinian question.

The past year has also seen a notable increase in Qatar's desire to play a key role in the negotiations for a peace process and maintain a critical stance regarding the Israeli occupation at the risk of damaging relations with the U.S. and Israel. The first important and older contribution by Qatar to the Palestinian question is Al Jazeera channel, which was an innovation in the Arab media world. Al Jazeera is supporting the Palestinian struggle and disseminates a lot of 'untold stories' about it. More recently, the Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani has increased financial support to the Palestinians. For example, the government-owned Qatar Diar Real Estate Investment Company is going to build a new village of 5000 houses in the West Bank. Yet, here again the motivations behind Qatari aid are not merely philanthropic as they stand for the competition between influential powers, such as Iran.

In October, Qatar tried to be a mediator between Hamas and Fatah, unfortunately without success. Until now, no mediation efforts by Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been successful. Nevertheless, those efforts should continue in order to foster the peace process. Moreover, financial support by the Gulf states is very crucial for the highly damaged Palestinian economy due to the occupation.

The synthesis of players in this conflict is far from simple. There are many conflicting interests and opinions between a dozen of players, starting from Palestinians (Hamas versus Fatah) and Israelis to Americans and other regional players (e.g. Iran). We are faced with a highly complex matrix of overlapping interests. Moreover, the next couple of months will be difficult for any peace initiative given that the political setting is changing; Barack Obama has been elected president of the U.S., there is going to be a new Israeli prime minister and possibly new Palestinian and Iranian presidents. It seems though that the G.C.C. and Egypt will try to make sure that Mahmoud Abbas remains president in order to maintain a certain order, until the political setting becomes more fertile -for instance, once President Obama's agenda for the Middle East has been presented- for negotiations.

Special report

Somali piracy and the Arabian Peninsula

Styliani Saliari

All in a sudden, Somali piracy has become one of the major topics in the news while having stunned the international community. The reason for this sensation is the threat to global sea-ward systems while the inhuman living conditions of Somalis are not desirable to be disclosed to the external public. However, it is necessary to understand that the increase in piracy and the appalling situation in Somalia itself are inextricably linked to each other.

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On November 15 Somali Pirates hijacked the Saudi supertanker *Sirius Star* – carrying \$100 million worth of oil – and took it to Harardhere, 300 kilometers north of lawless Somalia’s capital Mogadishu. This event marks the biggest act of piracy yet and has focused world attention on untamed piracy off the Horn of Africa country. The international community is bewildered, the Saudi foreign minister called piracy a ‘disease’ and equated it with terrorism, while the pirates have claimed that any attack would have ‘disastrous’ consequences. It seems as if lawless

and atavistic people are fighting against the ‘modern (Arab) world’ symbolized by an oil tanker which was on its way to the West. However, it would be lopsided to conceive piracy -a phenomenon that has gained sizeable visibility over the last three years- as an act carried out by irrational, uncompromising actors. Pirates are an organized network and do not hijack in an unplanned manner while being embedded in a political context which influences their proceeding. Hence, in order to find a positive solution to the problem of piracy and to grasp its dynamics it has to be put into a larger context.

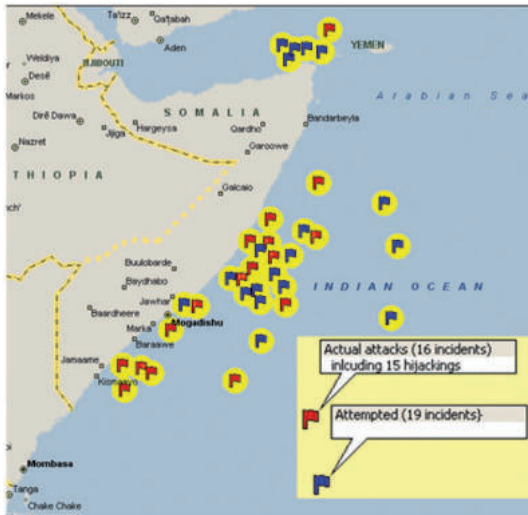
While most experts and politicians call for greater security cooperation in order to improve the situation (a means which should not be dismissed), they do not understand that it will be idle in the long term. According to Jason Alder-

wick, a maritime defence analyst at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, “maritime security operations in that area are really only a sticking plaster, they are addressing the symptoms not the causes”. Thus, it is not only about combating the pirates but about fighting the root cause which led to the emergence of piracy in the first place.

Since the end of 2007, pirates have relocated their operations away from the Mogadishu port area and into the Gulf of Aden which is passed by nearly 20,000 ships every year, since it constitutes the most important trade route for dry and manufactured goods between Asia, Europe and the Americas. Moreover, according to Lloyd’s Maritime Intelligence Unit seven per cent of the world’s oil production passes through the area. Thus, one of the main trade routes is suddenly threatened by the long-standing instability of Somalia which is experiencing an Islamic insurgency and has not had an efficient government since the 1991 misappropriation of President Mohammad Siad Barre. During his mandate, Barre strengthened particular tribal factions while provoking tensions between others, which led to a division of society into various factions and sub-factions. Hence, after Barre’s ouster, Somalia’s population was full of hatred which resulted in the tragic civil war. Even now, fighting between various clans, Islamist groups, Ethiopian troops and Somali interim government forces is a daily occurrence, while pirates are taking part in this since they are basically fighters for Somalia’s several warlord factions. The pirates share a part of the ransom with warlords while the latter keep themselves in the background. Experts assume that the ransom is being used for arm purchase. In other words, the statehood of Somalia has been a grim and failed issue since 1991 with 8 million of its population being dispersed among five different countries and territories. Merely, during the six months of rule by the Islamic Courts Union in the second half of 2006 piracy almost disappeared. However, after the courts had been removed piracy recurred. Therefore, it seems as if the transitional federal government (TFG) is not able to fulfil its state responsibilities in order to sustain the intactness of its own territorial waters since it has no real authority outside Mogadishu.

According to Roger Middleton, a consultant researcher for the London-based think-tank Chatham House, Somalia represents the ideal environment for the thriving of piracy due to its hardly functioning government, long and isolated beaches and a population which is not only desperate, but additionally used to war. Related to this observation, is the fact that the widely lawless coasts of Somalia and its semi-autonomous region of Puntland in the north-east of Somalia embody the base for the majority of pirates. This region is characterized by extreme poverty which facilitates the recruitment of pirates since piracy is linked to financial improvement. The rewards the pirates obtain are rich in a country with no real job opportunities and nearly half of the population dependent on food aid after 17 years of ongoing conflict. Suddenly, villas have been built along the coast and new vehicles can be seen in the streets, enabled through the payment of ransoms which have improved the economy at a time when public institutions have crumbled. Moreover, the pirates themselves justify their actions by stating that foreign fishing trawlers are plundering their waters. Precisely, a man calling himself Daybad said: “Our fish were all eradicated so we can’t fish now so we’re going to fish whatever passes through our sea because we need to eat”.

According to Dr. Tawfic Sayf, a regular columnist for Saudi Arabia’s pro-government newspaper *Okaz*, the Arab countries could play a major role in stabilizing the situation in Somalia instead of waiting for the U. S. to fill the vacuum. Precisely, it should be in the Arabs’ interest to do so, since piracy is threatening their national security and economy. Actually, there have been reports of Arab nations which express the will to find an ‘Arabian solution’ since the elevated presence of foreign naval forces near their coasts without political, legal and security cooperation and coordination is



not appreciated anymore. For instance, during the meeting of the Arab Peace and Security Council (APSC) in mid-October, possible ways to combat Somali piracy were discussed. The APSC emphasized that the protection of the Arab Sea was the responsibility of the Arabs and hence should not be internationalized. The formation of a pan-Arab peacekeeping naval force was one of the different suggestions discussed at the meeting.

Related to this development, is the emergency Arab League anti-piracy summit in Cairo on November 20, attended by representatives from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Sudan and Somalia to discuss the escalating problem. The meeting aimed at forging a strategy to fight piracy in the Red Sea, while various options such as the establishment of joint operations by Arab navies and the introduction of a piracy monitoring center and warning systems for ships were discussed. Yemeni officials stated that an Arab mechanism for

action and coordination is absolutely necessary, while Saudi Arabia said that its country is ready to join an international effort on piracy. Additionally, Egypt expressed fears as piracy might lead to a downturn in revenues from the waterway. The participants agreed to form committees to study the situation and meet again in January. According to experts this conference had been past-due, since the 2.5 million square miles of water cannot effectively be controlled without the cooperation and participation of these states.

Probably, meetings like this might be a first step into the right direction and therefore absolutely justified. Nonetheless, it is disputable if the international community and particularly the Arabs have realized that a holistic approach, which includes improvement within Somalia and not only the allocation of naval forces, is required here since everything else would merely be a 'quick fix'. This doubt is further underlined in statements like the one by the Saudi foreign minister mentioned above and the one made by Ali Taheri, Iran's deputy transport minister, after the hijack of an Iranian-chartered ship in the mid of November, where he stated that "Iran's view is that such issues should be confronted strongly". Hence, if the Arabs are genuinely interested in finding a permanent 'Arabian solution' to the problem of piracy they have to find means which improve the anarchical situation in Somalia. For instance, states of the Arabian Peninsula could start helping Yemen to destroy the illegal arms trade and human trafficking which takes place between Yemen and Somalia. Yemen is struggling with internal problems that are considered by various analysts as a further potential threat to security in the region, while it is unable due to ill-equipment to patrol its waters. Moreover, the so-called 'criminal networks' which are mainly based in the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kenya and circulate information about ships that represent a possible target for the pirates, should be identified and eliminated.

All in all, it has become clear that as long as Somalia continues to be a state with no powerful government recognized as legitimate by its population, piracy will be fostered. "Piracy is a symptom of the real crisis, which is the disintegration of Somalia since 1991" said Aymen Abdelaziz Salaama, professor of international law at Cairo University. "The solution isn't to send foreign navies to combat piracy, but to end the long-standing civil war in that country".

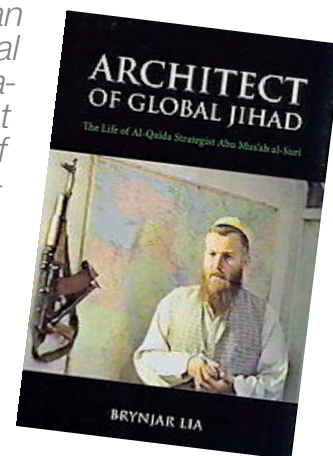
BOOK
REVIEWBrynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*,
New York: Columbia University Press, 2008

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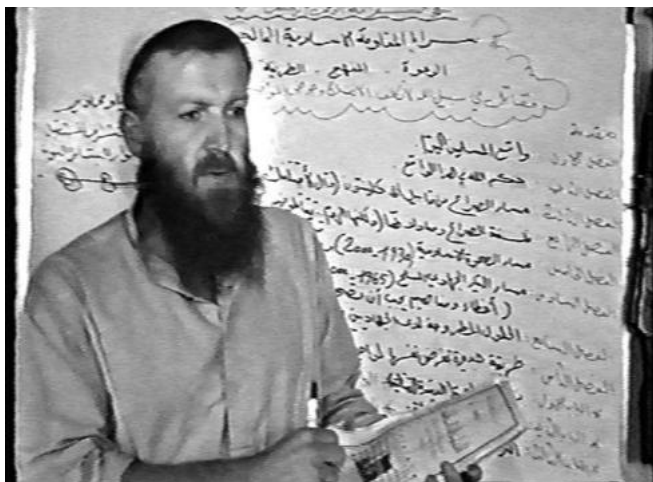
Under different circumstances Abu Mus'ab al-Suri could have been an established academic as he is characterized by strict methodological adherence, intellectual arrogance, inclination to self-citation, strained relations with colleagues and thirst for recognition. Nevertheless, the current international situation renders his candidacy for a university chair out of question. Hence, he rightfully occupies a position in the unofficial intelligencia of militant jihadi Islamism and he holds the undisputed chairmanship in the 'department of strategics. However, more than that and besides his intellectualism, he is an 'adept' heir of the tradition of field guerrilla warfare theoreticians. If unconventional warfare is doomed to irrelevance in the face of superior technology, organization and intelligence of the modern armies, Suri appears to give it a new breath.

Suri's centrality in the jihadi movement and his importance as a guerrilla theoretician is acknowledged by Brynjar Lia who does not hesitate to call him the "architect of global jihad". In his book the *Architect of Global Jihad* he embarks on a thorough research in order "to find the man behind the writings". In doing so, he presents an extended well-documented account of Suri's life from his days in the 1980's Islamist insurrection against the Syrian regime, through his disenchantment with the Muslim Brotherhood, his experience as an Arab-Afghan and his nomad adventures in Europe until his

return to Afghanistan and finally his alleged arrest in Pakistan in 2005. While going through Suri's rich biography, Lia sheds light on the process and dynamics of the formation and evolvement of the jihadi current including its rifts, false starts and shortcomings. The reader, having become familiar with the general context of the jihadi current inside the Islamist movement and any possible subjective admixtures as part of Suri's personality, is in a position to assess al-Suri as a writer through the key excerpts of his magnum opus "The Global Islamic Resistance Call" available in the last chapter of the book.



Suri's theoretical formation and personal idiosyncrasy as a "strategist, pragmatist and born critic" is a direct product of his experience in the realms of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, where as a member of the Combatant Vanguard he had the opportunity to witness the rise and the fall of the Islamists and their failure in toppling the Syrian regime. This negative outcome led to his inquiry about the possibility of a different approach. As he wrote later, the achievements of the secret, hierarchical, military organizations (tanzimat), such as the Muslim Brotherhood, were a complete disappointment. Defeat on the military sphere, defeat in terms of security, defeat in regards to the agitation provoked, defeat on the level of educating current or prospective members and defeat in political goals. However, the Islamist circles failed to draw lessons from those experiences and carried on organizing in this pattern. Several failures followed with almost identical course of events. The only difference between older similar (hierarchical) organizations and the more recent ones rested on the life span of the struggle before the final collapse. Earlier it could have lasted a decade, while later, after the arrival of the new world order (placed somewhere in the middle of the 1990's), at a time with narrowing security margins, it might have been just a matter of days.



Suri's involvement in Muslim Brotherhood's politics did not only render him disillusioned with the organization's model of action but also its general strategy. Through his stays in Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia he might have gained a first-class training from the movement's respective security services. However, what he lost was far greater. It was his confidence in the accommodationist Muslim Brotherhood since the organization was eager to play the game of the regional rivalries. Abhorred, as Lia quotes, by "how other Arab states, which initially provided assistance and training to the insurgency, had stood idly by as Syrian fighter jets and artillery bombarded [Hama, which signaled the end of Islamist insurgency in Syria]" and not being able to "endure the suffocating atmosphere and harassment [from loyalists MBs] in Saudi Arabia [where he went with the intention to follow his studies]" he opted for a voluntary exile in Europe. There he dedicated himself to studying and writing until his desire for field experience brought him in 1987 to the then bustling Afghanistan. Having completed his first book on the "Syrian Experience", where he already outlined his methodological approach of "learning from past experiences in order to formulate new practical theories", he had the chance to experience the waging of jihad in what he later called 'Open Fronts' – places where overt confrontation linked to permanent bases occurs. This experience had a deep impact on his thought. On the one hand, his time as a military instructor and lecturer made him notice great politico-ideological shortcomings in the cadres and recruits he dealt with. This made him realize the need for an integrated theory of jihad to include political, organizational and military aspects of struggle. On the other hand, he witnessed the transformation within the Islamist circles and he came close to the jihadi current represented by the Egyptian Islamic Jihad cadres and prominently Ayman al-Zawahiri. As Lia argues, "this period was the time when the global character of the duty of jihad ... became apparent to him in earnest". It should be noted that at that time - although the US had been identified as



the ‘great Satan’ or in other words the so-called ‘other’ - the emphasis was on the struggle against the near enemy (the local regimes) that had subjected to the wishes of the former, or the invading or occupying forces inside the dar al-Islam.

The net product of the changing realities in Afghanistan (where the infighting between the various warlords began) and the international system was Suri’s first version of the “Global Islamic Resistance Call” where he outlined his new idea of creating a “phantom organization” to inspire and supervise from a particular distance the spread of “individual action” through the creation of autonomous jihadi cells operating under the banner of this organization. Suri sustained that the Islamist struggle would be pointless unless they sketched out a grand strategy which would include the aspects of financing and propaganda and not merely a military strategy. Moreover, as long as the various jihadi groups share a common final goal -no matter who their immediate enemies are- there should be a network which, although it would not have a direct role in the operational matters (of these groups) due to security risks, it would support the particular groups through media work and financing. Suri’s return to Europe in 1992 preoccupied him with spreading the word of the ‘jihadi tide’ by doing media work and promoting his ideas in order to support the jihadi cause. He wanted to build a network of contacts with the ‘caravan of the nomads of the Afghanistan jihad’ and young people interested in jihad. His main interest was Algeria (until his disillusionment with the atrocities committed by GIA).

However, as Lia highlights, “[these] concepts and ideas were [only] later espoused by al-Qaeda leadership”. In the meantime, the years Suri spent in Europe proved to be a disappointment for him. Islamist insurgencies were crushed one after the other, while his efforts to create a media center to unite the media efforts of all jihadi groups ended in a failure as the latter preferred to manage their media profile by themselves. Additionally, he failed to compete with the gifted preachers of Islam,

such as Abu Qutadah al-Filastini, who had gathered in ‘Londonistan’ at that time. Thus, he did not manage to create a circle of followers matching his ambitions while quite to the contrary; his highly critical attitude brought him more enemies than supporters. As Lia notes, “his style was not that of a firebrand preacher...even though he was a good classroom teacher, he did not reach out to his listeners emotionally”. Disappointed by these outcomes, especially the Algerian struggle in which he put so much hope and the increased harassment by the British security services, Suri saw a last glimmer of hope in the developments in Afghanistan where Taliban managed to establish an Islamic Emirate in most of the country. Moreover, al-Qaeda leadership, which (much to Suri’s liking) already showed the first signs of directing the struggle against the far enemy, decided to relocate there from Sudan. After visiting Afghanistan in mid-1997 he decided to move there permanently in 1998 where he stayed until the fall of the Taliban at the end of 2001.

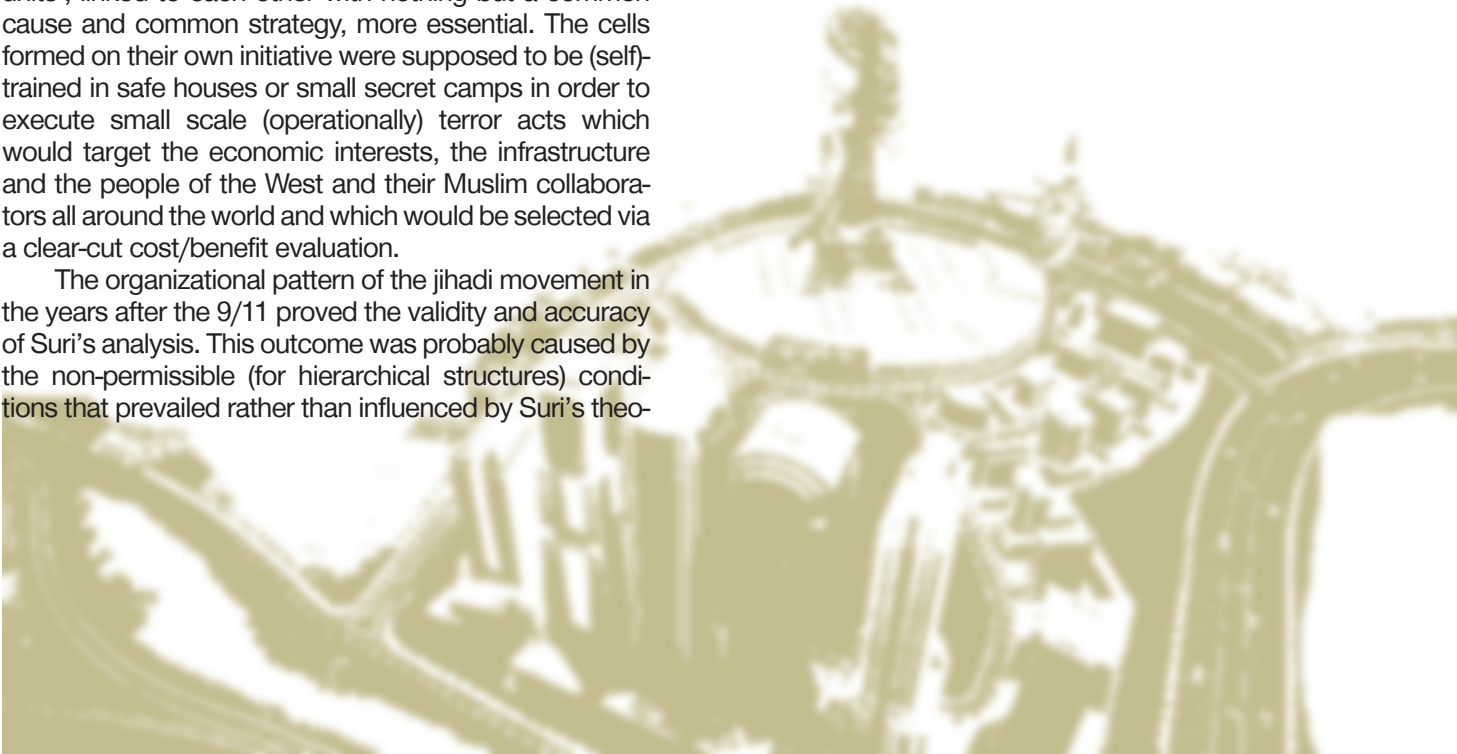
In Afghanistan, his tendency for criticism turned the older sporadic disagreements with al-Qaeda and bin-Laden into direct conflict. The underlying cause was the pharaonic attitude of Al-Qaeda’s leadership towards the multifaceted mosaic of Islamists situated at that time in Afghanistan. At this point Lia offers a rare insight into the poorly-documented, often misunderstood and tense relations among Islamists in Taliban’s Afghanistan. According to Suri, bin Laden’s complete disregard of the pressure put on the Taliban due to Bin Laden’s high profile media campaign, which already led to the US bombardment in 1998, was detrimental to their general cause and it jeopardized the fundamental prerequisite for every guerrilla, that is to preserve a sanctuary. While most of the Afghan-Arabs regarded the Taliban as inferior in cultural and Islamic terms, Suri as a pragmatist and far from being a dogmatic Salafi thought that their rule, although not perfect was a legitimate Islamic Emirate which for ideological and utilitarian reasons had to be preserved.

The cataclysm of 9/11, the subsequent US invasion in Afghanistan and the ‘international war against terror-

ism' confronted Suri directly with the implications of the New World Order, strengthening thus his conviction that the great imbalance of capabilities between, on the one hand the US and their allies, and the jihadi forces on the other, made the latter's only chance for survival and victory dependant on their ability to turn into an elusive target. Particularly, it meant that fighting in 'Open Fronts' should be postponed for better days. Even in places like Afghanistan or Iraq, where there were plenty opportunities for traditional guerrilla war, the fighting method was to be detached from semi-regular to more terrorist-like. Fixed positions were a certain recipe for defeat. Moreover, this dictum was supposed to apply to training and organization. Being a 'sitting duck' had to be avoided in favor of more flexible, security-conscious models. Never before was the creation of "global Islamic resistance units", linked to each other with nothing but a common cause and common strategy, more essential. The cells formed on their own initiative were supposed to be (self)-trained in safe houses or small secret camps in order to execute small scale (operationally) terror acts which would target the economic interests, the infrastructure and the people of the West and their Muslim collaborators all around the world and which would be selected via a clear-cut cost/benefit evaluation.

The organizational pattern of the jihadi movement in the years after the 9/11 proved the validity and accuracy of Suri's analysis. This outcome was probably caused by the non-permissible (for hierarchical structures) conditions that prevailed rather than influenced by Suri's theo-

ries as only few, mostly among the elite as Lia notes, were familiar with them. However, this was to change after the US put a \$5 million bounty on Suri. If the enemy priced him so high it meant that he was important. Wanted and later arrested by the US, Suri finally got his long-awaited recognition. The "Global Islamic Resistance Call" as well as older booklets and audiotapes of his lectures are widely distributed and can be downloaded at Islamist websites, while western analysts and intelligence-related officials pay increasing attention to his writings (for more on that see p. 10-26). Lia's exceptional book, the first fully dedicated to the analysis of this persona, definitely is going to stir further interest. It came too late, but at least it offers Suri some comfort in the tedious and humiliating life at a CIA detention center.





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