



A Conflicts Forum Monograph

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE IDEOLOGICAL,
POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC CAUSES OF
IRAN'S COMMITMENT TO THE PALESTINIAN
CAUSE**

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July 2011**

Conflicts Forum: Beirut - London

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Iran's relationship with resistance movements in Palestine and Lebanon cannot be viewed through the same lens as its relations with other Arab state and non-state actors. This distinction not only owes itself to the "Resistance axis" which binds the Islamic Republic to Hizbullah and Hamas, as well as Syria, but more importantly, to the centrality of the Palestinian cause which underpins this strategic alliance and delineates the parameters of Iranian foreign policy in general.

In order to gain a more meaningful understanding of Iran's ties to the Arab world, it is therefore instructive to examine the nature and scope of its commitment to the Palestinian cause using the following causal variables: ideology, national security, strategic interests and "ontological security" (security of identity). In turn, these variables are conditioned by historical, religious, cultural and political determinants, which have served to consecrate the Islamic Republic's rejection of Israel and the sanctity of the Palestinian cause as ideological and strategic constants. Given that the Palestinian cause and by extension, hostility toward Israel, constitute the backbone of the organic relationship between the Islamic Republic and Hizbullah (which will also be discussed in the latter part of this paper), the aforementioned variables further explain the strong ties that bind Iran to the Lebanese resistance movement.

Ideological Roots of Iran's Commitment to Palestine

Historical Origins

The apotheosis of this cause is evinced by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent portrayal of Palestine as the "most important cause in our time, and the biggest injustice of history".¹ This sentiment was echoed earlier this year by Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani-- widely considered to have been a "shield" if not, architect, of the Reformist opposition 'Green Movement' -- in his meeting with Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader, Ramadan Abdullah Mohammad Shallah, in which he depicted the Palestinian issue as "Iran's main concern".² More significant than the actual sincerity

¹ Ahmadinejad, *Al-Alam* TV, 14 January 2009

² Rafsanjani, TEHRAN, Feb. 10 2010 (MNA)

of Rafsanjani's proclamation, is the fact that renowned foreign policy "pragmatists" and "moderates" like himself still feel compelled to pay homage to Palestine and to underline its paramountcy in Iranian political discourse in the Khomeinist tradition. Despite the numerous political differences between the two main camps, both sides lay claim to the '*Khatt al Imam*' (the path of Imam Khomeini) and the foreign policy principles he outlined, foremost among which, was the demonization of Israel and commensurate veneration of Palestine.

In fact, at least fifteen years before the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini had placed the Palestinian cause at the forefront of his concerns when he inaugurated his revolutionary campaign in the 1960s. As a rhetorical leitmotif before, during and after the Revolution, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyid Ali Khamenei has followed the Imam's path by granting Palestine the unmatched status of the "most important" problem for the Islamic world,³ and invoking it more frequently than any other issue in his two-decade long, discursive history.⁴ In the aftermath of the 'Gaza War' in January 2009, the Supreme Leader also deemed the Palestinian nation as one which "truly deserves to be named as the most resilient nation in history."⁵ More than this, Iran's current Supreme Leader considers the Palestinian issue as the "criterion" for measuring one's commitment to 'freedom and human rights' — a litmus test President Obama and his slogan for "change" apparently failed according to Khamenei, given that his administration continues to "blatantly lie on the issue of Palestine and other issues."⁶

The institutionalization of these two related discourses on Israel and Palestine as central pillars of Iranian foreign policy can be traced back to Iran's contemporary history which was marked by a legacy of foreign domination at the hands of the US and Israel—staunch backers of Shah Pahlavi's tyrannical regime. Decades before the outbreak of the Revolution, Khomeini and other *ulama* vehemently opposed the Shah's close relations with Israel. Among the "reasons why" Khomeini "opposed the Shah" was how the latter had transformed the Iranian economy into a market for the import of large amounts of Israeli goods while boosting Iran's oil exports to Israel in order to meet Israel's demands.⁷ Voices of dissent were crushed by the notorious repressive security

³ Khamenei speech, June 4 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5045990.stm

⁴ This was observed by Karim Sadjadpour in his study of Khamenei's speeches titled "Reading Khamenei: The World View of Iran's Most Powerful Leader," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2008. Cited in "Iran Supports Hamas, but Hamas is no Iranian 'Puppet'", www.cfr.org, January 8, 2009

⁵ Press TV, 27 February 2009

⁶ Press TV, 27 February, 2009

⁷ Imam's interview, 7 December 1978 (16 Azar 1357 AHS). *Sahifa-yi Nur*, Vol. 4, p. 30, quoted in http://www2.irib.ir/worldservice/imam/palestin_E/5.htm

apparatus, the *Savak*, which was founded and backed by the CIA and Mossad until the outbreak of the Revolution,⁸ leading Khomeini to once ponder whether “the Shah is an Israeli?”⁹

It was precisely these types of accusations against the “treacherous Shah’s” dependence on the US and Israel which resulted in Khomeini’s arrest on June 3, 1963 that then precipitated the popular uprising protesting his arrest, known as the “Movement of 15 *Khordad*”, eventually culminating in the [Islamic revolution of Iran](#) 15 years later.

In effect, the roots of the Islamic Revolution were in large part, a reaction to US hegemony and Israel’s infiltration in Iran’s economy and security. The revolution was therefore at one and the same time a revolt against the monarchy and a war of liberation against US “imperialism” and Israel’s heavy-handed intervention as embodied by its key catchphrase: “Independence, freedom, Islamic Republic” (*Esteqlāl, āzādī, jomhūrī-ye eslāmī*).

In parallel with Khomeini’s call for the liberation of Iran from imperialism, was his call for the liberation of Palestine from the Zionist regime which was encapsulated in the revolutionary slogan “Today Iran, Tomorrow Palestine”.¹⁰ To that effect, in October 1968, Khomeini issued a religious fatwa on the obligation for believers to set aside a portion of the *khoms* (religious alms tax) to help Palestinian fighters. The fatwa was of an unprecedented nature given that the Palestinian recipients of the *khoms* belonged to the non-Shi’ite and secular PLO.

Once in power, one of the first acts of the revolutionary government was to close the Israeli embassy and replace it with the first Palestinian embassy in the region. In that same year, Khomeini also declared the last Friday of the month of Ramadan “*Al-Quds* [Jerusalem] Day” as an act of “international solidarity of Muslims in support of the legitimate rights of the Muslim people of Palestine,”¹¹ while also serving as a “day for the weak and oppressed to confront the arrogant powers.”¹² Support for Palestine was therefore predicated on moral as well as religious grounds as demonstrated by Khomeini’s “*Mustakbirin*” (oppressors) vs. “*Mustada’fin*” (oppressed) dichotomy: “We are on the side of the oppressed whichever pole they may be in. Palestinians are oppressed by the Israelis, therefore we side with them”.¹³

In a similar vein, the concomitant refusal to acknowledge Israel’s right to exist, is also informed by a secular, moral argument on the right to national self-determination. The Jewish state

⁸ Fardust, Hussein and Ali Akbar Dareini. *The Rise and Fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty: Memoirs of Former General Hussein*. Bangalore, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999, 217

⁹ 3 June 1963 (13 Khordad 1342 AHS). *Sahifa-yi Nur*, Vol. 1, p. 57.

¹⁰ http://www2.irib.ir/worldservice/imam/palestin_E/14.htm

¹¹ Imam’s message announcing Quds Day, dated 7 August 1979 . *Sahifa-yi Nur*, Vol. 8, p. 229.

¹² Ibid, 233-234

¹³ www.irma.com/occasion/ertehal/english/saying/P2CH5.html

is viewed as an illegitimate one that was founded at the expense of another's people's rights, which it "usurped" from them—hence the frequent addendum "usurper" to any mention of Israel. The Palestinian people were therefore entitled and even obligated to retrieve all of historic Palestine, with Khomeini seeing "no difference between the 1948 territories and the 1967 territories", since "all of Palestine is plundered". Accordingly, Khomeini and others following his path have rejected all forms of peace negotiations with Israel, regarding them as religiously unlawful: "Having relations with Israel or its agents, whether they are commercial or political, is forbidden and is contrary to Islam".¹⁴ Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, a leading reformist cleric (also supportive of the 'Green Movement') echoed this religious prohibition when he declared that "taking part in the Annapolis [peace] conference is unlawful from a religious point of view".¹⁵

Having said that, for Khomeini, the Palestinian issue was not merely a national issue confined to the Palestinian people, but one which concerned all Muslims considering that Jerusalem was their "first kiblah" and hence "belongs to them".¹⁶ As such, every Muslim had a religious and moral obligation to "arm himself against Israel"¹⁷ and to liberate Jerusalem. As an alien body which was "planted in the heart of the Islamic world" by "oppressive" superpowers,¹⁸ Israel represented an existential threat not only to Jerusalem and Palestine, but to the entire Arab and Islamic world as well. This "cancerous" "tumor" or "gland", or alternatively, "virus", as Khomeini infamously branded it, was an enemy to "the fundamentals of Islam" and to "humanity". It was therefore anathematized on religious and moral grounds as the "nucleus of evil" and the "den of corruption". Such demonization still resonates in official Iranian discourse, with continued religious references to Israel as the "little Satan", the "flag of Satan" and the "incarnation of Satan".

Destruction of the Zionist Regime and Liberation of Palestine

Given the anathematization of Israel and the centrality of the liberation of Jerusalem to Iran's political doctrine, it logically follows that as a precondition to its fulfillment, Israel's destruction as a state is a principal tenet of the Islamic Republic's position on Israel. In recent years, this notion

¹⁴ *Sahifa-yi Nur*, Vol 1, p.139

¹⁵ Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour: "The Arabs returned empty-handed" , Iran, 1 December 2007, translated by www.mideastwire

¹⁶ <http://irna.com/occasion/ertehal/english/saying/>

¹⁷ <http://irna.com/occasion/ertehal/english/saying/>

¹⁸ For some examples see <http://irna.com/occasion/ertehal/english/saying/>

has drawn much media and political attention due to Ahmadinejad's highly controversial revival of the slogan. The international furor that followed his infamous speech in October 2005, at a conference entitled "the World without Zionism" where he purportedly called for Israel to be "wiped off the map", sparked a semantic debate over the alleged phrase.¹⁹ Upon closer inspection however, it is clear that it is not the Jewish nation which the Islamic Republic aspires to eradicate, but rather, the Zionist regime that rules over it. Viewed in its full context, Ahmadinejad's speech reveals that he had called for the eradication of the "Zionist regime occupying Jerusalem" in relation to the collapse of other seemingly invincible regimes, such as the Shah's, Saddam's and the Soviet Union's, and thus merely anticipated that the Israeli regime would meet the same fate. As such, Iranian officials including the Foreign Minister, Mottaki, and Khamenei's consultant for political and security affairs, Rohallah Hosseinian, both made the argument that the President was calling for regime change in Israel rather than genocide against its Jewish inhabitants. Ahmadinejad admitted as much in June 2007 when he questioned "Why is the United States permitted to call for changing the regime in Iran and our leaders forbidden from calling for an end to the Zionist regime?"²⁰

Perhaps the most elaborate and lucid official clarification yet about Iran's intentions vis-à-vis Israel, is found in a November 2005 speech by Khamenei, where he presents the following argument: "We hold a fair and logical stand on the issue of Palestine. Several decades ago, Egyptian statesman Gamal Abdel Naser....stated in his slogans that Egyptians would throw Jewish usurpers of Palestine into the sea. Some years later, Saddam Hussein...said he would put half of the Palestinian land on fire. But we approve of neither of these two remarks. We believe according to our Islamic principles, that neither throwing the Jews into the sea nor putting the Palestinian land on fire is logical and reasonable."²¹

Khamenei's alternative, which was endorsed by other Iranian officials including Ahmadinejad, was to eradicate the Zionist regime by diplomatic means—a removal by referendum. Khamenei's proposal was to hold a referendum among "all native Palestinians, including Muslims, Jews and Christians" to decide on the type of government they want.²² The term "native" makes it clear that Israeli Jews would be excluded from the referendum, as does Khamenei's proposal that the government would "decide about the fate of those who have immigrated to Palestine from

¹⁹ See for example Jonathan Steele, Lost in Translation, *The Guardian*, 14 June 2006 and Ethan Bronner's response to that piece, Just How Far did they Go, those Words Against Israel?, *New York Times*, June 11 2006

²⁰ Dudi Cohen, Ahmadinejad doesn't want Jews annihilation, Ynet News, 22 June 2007, <http://www.ynet.co.il/english/articles/0.7340.L-3416197.00.html>

²¹ http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=73&Itemid=31

²² Ibid

various parts of the world”.²³ Though the parties to this social contract would consist of the original inhabitants of historic Palestine and the Palestinian Diaspora, Iran would consider any government that they choose “acceptable”, be it a “Muslim, Christian or Jewish government or a coalition government.”²⁴

Failing this “solution”, resistance to Israel was the only other acceptable means for the Palestinians to retrieve their land and reinstate historic Palestine. Given the unlikelihood of Israel ever agreeing to Khomeini’s referendum proposal, armed resistance was the only practical alternative for regaining Palestinian rights. As declared by Ahmadinejad: “there is no doubt that the new wave in Palestine will soon wipe off this disgraceful blot from the face of the Islamic world”.²⁵ From Iran’s perspective, the obligation of liberating Palestine primarily rests with Palestinian resistance groups. In the absence of a concerted Arab campaign to liberate Jerusalem, Iran’s strategy for toppling the Zionist regime remains confined to providing political, financial and military support to its Palestinian allies, in addition to Hizbullah .

Iran and the Gaza War

While some in the Arab world and beyond criticized Iran for failing to translate its rhetoric on Palestine into action during Israel’s Gaza invasion in 2009, such accusations overlook the Islamic Republic’s harsh language towards Arab regimes both during and after the conflict. Tehran sabotaged its hard-won relations with Arab regimes by reverting to an inflammatory discourse reminiscent of the late 1980s when it was “exporting the revolution” to neighboring Arab countries. In so doing, Iran undermined two decades worth of diplomatic rapprochement initiated by then president Rafsanjani and continued through president Ahmadinejad whose engagement with the Arab world was aimed at countering the Bush administration’s campaign to rally its “moderate” Arab allies against Iran and fan Sunni-Shi’ite tensions. It is in this particular context that the Iranian leadership’s verbal and written barrages against Arab regimes must be viewed.

However, given the brazen support afforded by Arab regimes, especially Egypt’s, to Israel’s military adventure in Gaza, not to mention the Mubarak regime’s foreknowledge of the invasion — now officially corroborated by Wikileaks documents²⁶ -- public perception of the Arab role shifted from one of “complicity” and concealed “collaboration” with Israel as in the 2006 July War, to open

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ewen MacAskill and Chris McGreal, Israel should be ‘wiped off the map’ says Iran’s President, *The Guardian*, 27 October 2005

²⁶ See Cam McGrath, “WikiLeaks exposes Egypt’s duplicity in Gaza siege,” *The Electronic Intifada*, 1 December 2010 and Jared Malsin, “Gaza govt: WikiLeaks exposé confirms our claims,” *Ma’an News Agency*, 1 December 2010

“cooperation” and “partnership” with the Zionist state in its war against Gaza. In the face of such flagrant treason, Iran could no longer maintain its policy of self-restraint vis-à-vis its Arab interlocutors. Branding them “Arab traitors”²⁷, Khamenei decried the “encouraging silence” of Arab moderate states,²⁸ while Ahmadinejad cynically ascribed to them “smiles of satisfaction” at the “unprecedented genocide,”²⁹ claiming “they were with the enemy in all its goals.”³⁰

In another unprecedented step since its détente with the Arab world, Iran singled out Egypt for attack not only on account of its siege of Gaza, but also due to its “public embrace” of Israel as the Israeli newspaper Haaretz described it.³¹ In a radical departure from his customary *diplospeak*, former Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki denounced the “traitors of the Palestinian cause who told Palestinians a few days before the attack that the situation was calm,”³² in a thinly veiled reference to the Mubarak regime, and the false sense of security it had lulled into Hamas prior to the Israeli assault. Though less visibly culpable than the Egyptian government, the Saudi monarchy did not escape Iran’s opprobrium, as revealed by Ahmadinejad’s letter to the Saudi King, Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, in which he urged him to “break” his “silence” on the “massacre taking place in Gaza and take a clear stance on the murder of your children, who are dear to the Islamic Ummah.”³³

In castigating Arab regimes for their betrayal of Palestine, and jeopardizing their relations with them in the process, the Islamic Republic was simultaneously cementing its status as the defender of Palestinian rights and by implication, “the most active state sponsor of terrorism,” according to the US State Department’s list of “states sponsoring terrorism,”³⁴ which has featured Iran since 1984. As disclosed in the State Department’s ‘*Country Reports on Terrorism*’ for 2009, “Iran remained the principal supporter of groups that are implacably opposed to the Middle East Peace Process”, namely Hamas, other Palestinian groups and Hizbullah, whom it continued to provide with “financial, material, and logistic support.”³⁵ Viewed in the context of the US’ history of subversive activity in Iran--most recently evidenced by the 2009 election unrest which in large part,

²⁷ Khamenei letter to Haniyyeh, 17 January 2009

²⁸ Khamenei, 28/12/2008, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2008/12/mil-081228-khamenei01.htm>

²⁹ Quoted from Ahmadinejad’s letter to Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, Press TV, 15 January 2009

³⁰ Ahmadinejad interview, *Al-Alam*, Jan 14 2009

³¹ *Haaretz*, January 9 2009, cited in Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, “Will Hizbullah intervene in the Gaza conflict?” *The Electronic Intifada*, 11 January 2009

³² Manouchehr Mottaki, ISNA, 21 January 2009, Will Hizbullah intervene in the Gaza conflict?” *The Electronic Intifada*, 11 January 2009

³³ January 15 2009

³⁴ Country Reports on Terrorism 2009: State Sponsors of Terrorism, State Department <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2009/140889.htm>

³⁵ Country Reports on Terrorism 2009: State Sponsors of Terrorism, State Department <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2009/140889.htm>

was instigated by a US-Israeli scheme³⁶-- the Islamic Republic's close ties with resistance movements and rejection of the so-called "peace process" renders it vulnerable to Washington's and Tel Aviv's machinations. The "Grand Bargain" proposal put forward by liberal Washington insiders, [Flynt Leverett](#) and Hillary Mann Leverett, further demonstrates that support for the Palestinian cause threatens Iran's national security. As envisaged by the authors of this proposal, Tehran would agree to relinquish its commitment to the Palestinian cause and support for the Palestinian resistance movement, in addition to Hizbullah, among other concessions, in exchange for assurances that the US would refrain from regime change activity.³⁷

National Security and Strategic Interests as Determinants of Iran's Support for Palestine

Not only does Iran's dedication to the Palestinian cause pose a threat to its political stability, but it also compromises its strategic interests. Despite the US' fixation with Iran's nuclear program and its futile attempts to pummel it into submission with sanctions, it is more than likely that Washington would turn a blind eye to an Iranian nuclear weapons' program or even contribute to one as it has with its allies, (Germany, Belgium, Canada, Greece, Italy, Netherlands and Turkey) under the NATO nuclear weapons' sharing policy, were it not for Tehran's support for resistance movements in Palestine and Lebanon. This inference is laid bare by the Bush administration's almost constant association between Iran's alleged Weapons of Mass Destruction program and its alliance with "terrorist groups". This was illustrated by Bush's January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address in which he branded Iran as part of "an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world," with nuclear, chemical and biological weapons which it allegedly sought to provide to its "terrorist allies". Likewise, then National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice, asserted: "Iran's direct support of regional and global terrorism and its aggressive efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction, belie any good intentions it displayed in the days after the world's worst terrorist attacks in history."³⁸ Washington's problem, then, isn't Iran's alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons per se, but rather, that a state allied to Palestinian resistance groups is pursuing them.

³⁶ See Seymour Hersh, "Preparing the Battlefield: The Bush Administration steps up its secret moves against Iran" July 7, 2008. See also Larisa Alexandrovna and Muriel Kane, "Leaked cable reveals US-Israeli strategy for regime change in Iran: Wiki-leak confirms reporting by veteran journalist Seymour Hersh," *The Raw Story*, 9 November 2010

³⁷ See [Flynt Leverett](#) and Hillary Mann Leverett, "Time for a U.S.-Iranian 'Grand Bargain'", [New America Foundation Policy Paper](#), October 7, 2008. Flynt Leverett was formerly Senior Director for Middle East Affairs at the National Security Council, a former counter-terrorism expert for the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff, and an ex- CIA Senior Analyst. Hillary Mann-Leverett was the former Director for Iran, Afghanistan and Persian Gulf Affairs at the National Security Council under Bush's presidency, Middle East expert on the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff, and Political Advisor for Middle East, Central Asian and African issues at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations among other positions.

³⁸ Quoted from PBS, Frontline, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/axis/map.html>

But although Iran's commitment to the liberation of historical Palestine exposes it to external security threats (as well as externally instigated domestic threats) in the medium- term and undermines some of its strategic interests in the short- term, the fulfilment of the Islamic Republic's ideological principles has reaped it longer-term dividends in both realms. In the first place, Israel's history of intervention in Iranian affairs which preceded the launch of the Islamic Revolution renders it a perpetual threat to Iran's independence and by extension, its political stability. Mohtashemi's affirmation that the liberation of Palestine safeguards the security of Iran's political system confirms this: "Naturally if the Palestinian nation restores its legitimate right, even the threats against the Islamic Republic of Iran, which come from abroad, will be reduced substantially."³⁹ This logic is echoed by Ahmad Khatami, a member of the Assembly of Experts, who is close to the Supreme Leader. In the midst of Israel's onslaught against Lebanon in 2006, he stated: "Today, we should defend Hezbollah. This is in fact defending your own security."⁴⁰ It is also evident in Velayati's assertion that "Israel will not be able to step out of line in the region as long as the Lebanese Hizbullah exists."⁴¹

Second, a quid pro quo with the Americans on Palestine is not viewed by Iran as either safeguarding its national security from domestic unrest or guaranteeing it the unfettered pursuit of its strategic objectives. Ideological principles such as sovereignty, independence, self-sufficiency and dignity, are not abstract values but strategic necessities which emerged from Iran's historical experience of foreign domination. The downfall of the US and Israel-backed Shah's regime taught Iranians that the politics of dependency practiced by pre-revolutionary Iran was a sure recipe for strategic weakness and domestic collapse. The perceived loss of national dignity and sovereignty would call into question the system's revolutionary and Islamic credentials as well as its nationalism, leading to a destabilization of the system.

This logic is articulated by Mottaki in his appeal to Arab and Muslim states to support Palestine as a means of serving their national security: "this support is not just expending but an investment for our countries' security."⁴² During the Gaza conflict, Khamenei elaborated on how a deeper commitment to the Palestinian cause could bolster the national security of Arab states in his tacit warning that governments who did not support the Palestinian resistance would unwittingly

³⁹ Bill Sami, "Iran: Intifada Conference in Tehran has Multiple Objectives," Radio Free Europe, 14 April 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/04/a6170638-c079-4af1-b441-75dbba236340.html>

⁴⁰ AFP, 28 July 2006

⁴¹ *Al-Alam*, 11 November 2006

⁴² Manouchehr Mottaki, ISNA, 21 January 2009

destabilize their own regimes from internal dissent,⁴³ given that “their nations have ‘awakened’ and now demand more support for Palestine.”⁴⁴

In light of such admonitions, Iran clearly perceives the prospect of a “Grand Bargain” on Palestine as conducive to a fate similar to that shared by the US’ Arab allies who hardly represent a success story worthy of emulation for the Islamic Republic. From Tehran’s perspective, the US uses the political and military assistance it offers these regimes as a tool with which to extract political concessions, making them beholden to it. Moreover, in betraying Palestine and depending on the US to shore up their regimes domestically, Arab states are viewed as having lost their nations’ sovereignty, independence, and regional power in the process, not to mention their popular legitimacy.

Viewed from this prism, upholding the Palestinian cause has turned into a strategic advantage for Iran insofar as it has enabled it to export its political culture of regional liberation, which in turn, has contributed to its status as a regional powerhouse. As Iran’s Majlis Speaker, Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel succinctly explains: “Iran is powerful and popular in the region because it defends the independence of nations and opposes the United States’ dominance in the region.”⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Commander of the Armed Forces, Seyyed Hassan Firuzabadi, was [quoted](#) as saying that support for the Palestinians is part of Iran’s national interest and strategy, and is a way of insuring increased support for the regime from across the Muslim world and guaranteeing Iran’s pre-eminence in the region.⁴⁶

By remaining independent of the West, Iran believes it cannot be “blackmailed” into anything, as is the case for the US’ regional allies. In light of their dependency on Washington, Arab moderate leaders have been compelled to surrender the Palestinian cause, and hence undermine their regimes’ popular legitimacy, in exchange for regime (as opposed to national) security, which is ultimately reducible to regime survival given the coercive measures required to maintain it.

The Islamic Republic therefore considers its foreign policy as a paradigm for Arab regimes to follow. In contrast to the Realist logic adopted by the likes of ousted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, for whom resistance had failed the “cost-benefit test”,⁴⁷ Iran is intent to demonstrate that

⁴³ Khamenei letter to Haniyyeh, 17 January 2009

⁴⁴ Press TV, 27 February 2009

⁴⁵ 15 January 2008, “Iran Powerful and Popular in the region,” <http://daily1world.com/english/Middle-East/Iran-powerful-and-popular-in-region.html>

⁴⁶ “Greening of *Al-Quds* Day” Kouross Esmali on September 17, 2009

⁴⁷ Mubarak rebukes Hamas over Gaza war, 4 February 2009, YnetNews

ideology and national interests are not mutually exclusive categories whereby the fulfillment of one comes at the expense of the other. In the Islamic Republic's epistemic formulation, political principles and values can be reconciled with strategic interests and can even be mutually reinforcing. By the same token, the security of the Islamic Republic's political identity can be coextensive with, and constitutive of, its national security.

Ontological Security

It is for this reason that the Islamic Republic would most likely reject not merely the content but the very logic underlying the Leverett's 'Grand Bargain' proposal, were it ever to be officially adopted by the Obama administration. The Leveretts' recommendation that policymakers make clear their intention to "not seek a change in the *nature* of the Iranian regime, but rather, changes in Iranian *policies* that Washington considers problematic," is self-contradictory and reductive for it ignores the reality that the nature of the Iranian political system is not merely defined by its Shi'ite Islamic theocracy and liturgy but is essentially shaped by its policies, particularly the ones deemed unsavory by the US. In fact, the very policies which Washington seeks to change comprise an essential part of Iran's self-understanding as an Islamic state. Accordingly, the Leverett proposal misidentifies Iran's national security policy with the *physical* security of the regime, or its mere survival as an institutional entity, rather than with the security of the regime's identity, or being as a "particular *kind of actor*"⁴⁸ -- its "ontological security".⁴⁹ Thus, when Washington demands policy changes of Iran while reassuring it that it would leave its Islamic form of government intact, in so doing, it is threatening Tehran's ontological security as a particular kind of Islamic actor.

The Islamic Republic derives its religio-political identity from Khomeini's interpretation of Islam which conceives of it as "the religion of militant individuals who are committed to truth and justice. It is the religion of those who desire freedom and independence. It is the school of those who struggle against imperialism."⁵⁰ This conception of Islam stands in sharp contradistinction to the apolitical "defective version" promulgated by "the servants of imperialism", who strip Islam of its inherent "revolutionary" potential reducing it to a religion with "a few ethical principles" and

⁴⁸ Jennifer Mitzen, "Anchoring Europe's Civilizing Identity: Habits, Capabilities and Ontological Security", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13: 2, 2006, p.272

⁴⁹ For a comprehensive exposition of the concept of "ontological security", see Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations* September 2006, vol. 12 no. 3, 341-370

⁵⁰ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, The Institute For The Compilation And Publication Of Imam Khomeini's Work, p.8

“nothing to say about human life in general and the ordering of society,”⁵¹ thereby denying its adherents the pursuit of “freedom”.⁵²

Since the policy changes the US requires of Iran would necessitate that it abandon its struggle against imperialism and injustice, relinquish its independence and freedom as a state and end support for resistance movements defending the rights of the oppressed, compliance with these demands would effectively transform “the nature of the regime” from a genuinely Islamic one according to Khomeinist criteria, to a “defective” and hence unauthentic Islam. The nature of the regime and its policies are therefore synonymous rather than mutually exclusive categories; any fundamental change in Iranian foreign policy would render the political system un-Islamic. What is more, any fundamental changes in Iran’s foreign policy objectives, in the absence of a corresponding shift in US Middle East policy, would essentially mean that the Iranian state would have overturned its founding principles and undermined its identity and hence, itself. If Iran were to become one of America’s moderate allies in the region, the Islamic Revolution would be rendered meaningless and the Islamic Republic would defy its own *raison d’être* in reverting to the pre-revolutionary identity ascribed to it by the Shah.

As social actors, states are threatened by the prospect of “insecurity” when their behavior clashes with expectations associated with their self-identification as a specific type of actor.⁵³ These expectations derive from stable routines and roles performed vis-à-vis other actors in the international arena, by means of which, “agents come to know who they are and therefore can act.”⁵⁴ States become “attached” to routines given their role in determining identities, which in turn, shape actors’ preferences and interests, thereby enabling actors to practice their valued sense of agency to “make choices”.⁵⁵ Although many of the policies chosen by states lead to outcomes which threaten their physical security, this remains secondary to the perceived stability of their self-identity and concomitant sense of agency. Thus, states can become routinized or “attached” to confrontational and dangerous routines as well as safe ones. Accordingly, ontological security is “perfectly compatible with physical insecurity”⁵⁶ as Iran’s foreign policy and allegiances indicate.

To the extent that the revolution was driven in part by a struggle for freedom and national independence, the very existence of the Islamic Republic was somewhat reactive and its identity

⁵¹ Ibid, pp.8-9

⁵² Ibid, p.8

⁵³ Brent Steele, “Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity: British Neutrality and the American Civil War” *Review of International Studies*, 31(3), 2005, p.525

⁵⁴ Mitzen, “Anchoring Europe’s...”, p.271.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Mitzen, “Ontological Security”, p. 347

defensive. Iran became a state preoccupied with protecting its newfound independence and dignity. So deeply ingrained in the political culture was the fear of foreign domination that constitutional safeguards were set up to protect the country from foreign control and to preserve its “meta-discourse” of independence or “hyper-independence” as one scholar terms it.⁵⁷ As outlined in Article 152 of the constitution: “ The foreign policy of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country...the defense of the rights all Muslims, non alignment with respect to the hegemonic superpowers.”

The Islamic Republic also institutionalized and constitutionalized its discourses on justice and resistance, emphasizing its “fraternal commitment to all Muslims and unsparing support for the oppressed of the world,” among other goals. As a constitutional and rhetorical leitmotif, “fighting oppression” is as central to the Iranian constitution and self-definition as are the principles of freedom and liberty in western democratic constitutions.⁵⁸ As described by Iran’s closest ally, Hizbullah leader, Seyyid Hassan Nasrallah: “Iran will never abandon the peoples of this region or the resistance movements in this region. For Iran and for its Supreme Leader, other leaders and people, the cause of Palestinian is in their prayers, in their fasting, in their nightly worship. It will remain their creed until Doomsday.”⁵⁹ In so far as the discourse of resistance is widely recognized by Iran’s friends and foes alike as a defining feature of its foreign policy, and a “behavioural expectation”,⁶⁰ the concept of resistance becomes further entrenched in the Islamic Republic’s political identity. The relationship between the expectations of others and identity can be explained by role theory, which stipulates that identities are anchored in the roles actors play and the consequent “shared understandings about what is expected” of the actor.⁶¹ The actor in question therefore internalizes both the role and the behavioural expectations associated with it, leading to the formation of a specific identity.⁶²

For all these reasons, it is highly unlikely that the Islamic Republic would strike a Grand Bargain with Washington, as it would lose its identity as an independent, justice-seeking and resistant nation in the process --an identity which is far more crucial to the survival of the Islamic

⁵⁷ See Homeira MOSHIRZADEH, “Discursive Foundations Of Iran’s Nuclear Policy,” *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 38(4): 521–543, 2007

⁵⁸ <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution-1.html>

⁵⁹ Nasrallah, Quds Day Speech, 18 September 2009, *Al-Manar TV*

⁶⁰ Brian Greenhill, “Recognition and Collective Identity Formation in International Politics,” *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 14(2), 2008, p.355

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid

Republic than its security as an organizational entity. Its security as an ideational entity is a strategic priority for an ideological actor like Iran considering that it cannot withstand a change in identity; even if it remained organizationally intact, a change in identity would effectively spell the demise of the Islamic Republic of Iran which would consequently become a different entity altogether .

Iran's Commitment to the Palestinian Cause as the Basis of its Alliance with Hizbullah

Hizbullah's Ideological and Strategic Commitment to Palestine

In addition to examining the ideological, political and strategic causes of Iran's commitment to the Palestinian causes, a study of how this commitment constitutes the basis of the Iran-Hizbullah relationship—the closest of Iran's alliances-- serves to further reveal the precise nature and scope of Tehran's dedication to Palestine. The organic relationship between the two actors is based on its historical and cultural origins, shared religio-political ideology and strategic outlook, the backbone of which is the existential struggle against Israel. Not only does Hizbullah share Iran's demonization of Israel and its attendant sanctification of the Palestinian cause, it owes its *raison d'être* to its struggle against Israel, and as such, defines its political identity. Echoing Khomeini's call for every Muslim to "arm himself against Israel" Hizbullah also believes that it has a "religious legal duty" ("*al wajib al shari'i*") to resist Israel and an obligation to assist the Palestinians militarily.⁶³ Thus, over and above the resistance movement's own struggle against Israel in Lebanon, it deems the liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation as an obligation incumbent upon it, and as such, is ideologically committed to supporting the Palestinians achieve national liberation.

This commitment to the Palestinian cause and enmity towards Israel by each of the two allies is instrumental in cementing the ties between them. Each side praises the other for supporting the Palestinians and confronting Israel. Hizbullah views Iran as the vanguard of the resistance movement in the region, "the only voice standing against the Zionist project," as voiced by Nasrallah.⁶⁴ "Iran clearly states that it is proud to support, unconditionally, the resistance in Lebanon and Palestine, at a time when others are warned not to."⁶⁵

For the Islamic Republic, Hizbullah's resistance to Israel obligates it to provide support for the movement, as expressed by Khomeini's assurance "that the Iranian nation will not abandon

⁶³ Saad-Ghorayeb, pp.125-26

⁶⁴ Nasrallah, 20 May 2009, *Al-Manar* TV

⁶⁵ Ibid

you.”⁶⁶ Beyond its perseverance in resisting Israel, Hizbullah is also exalted for its demonstration effect on the Palestinians. In one such instance, Khamenei attributed the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000 — four months after Israel’s ignominious unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon --to Hizbullah’s military success in evicting the Jewish state from Lebanon.

⁶⁷ Again in 2009, in the aftermath of the Gaza War, Khamenei declared: “Lebanon has turned into the heart of the Middle East today; the victory of Gazans in the 22 day war was the fruit of Islamic resistance victory in Lebanon’s 33 Day War.”⁶⁸

While Hizbullah does not credit itself with the launching of the Palestinian Intifada or Hamas’ military performance, it does regard the fate of the two resistance movements in Lebanon and Palestine being strategically wedded to each other. As expressed by Nasrallah in 2008: “[the resistance] is one project and the resistance movement is one movement and has one course, one destiny, one goal, despite its different parties, factions, beliefs, sects and intellectual and political trends... Resistance movements in this region, especially in Lebanon and Palestine, complement one another and are contiguous groups...”⁶⁹ As such, Hizbullah considered the outcome of its war with Israel in 2006 as having a direct bearing on the Palestinian front: “...the results of this battle in Lebanon will be seen in Palestine. If our battle is victorious, they will be victorious too. However, if, heaven forbid, we are defeated, then our Palestinian brothers will face testing and tragic conditions.”⁷⁰

By the same token, the weakening of Palestinian resistance factions such as Hamas could have adverse effects on the Lebanese movement. Attesting to this point is Nasrallah’s declaration during Israel’s offensive against Gaza that “what is happening in Gaza will have repercussions not only for Gaza alone or Palestine, but for the entire umma. We must continue to work...we must exert every effort to defend our people”.⁷¹

In an earlier speech, Nasrallah described the *Intifada* as “our front line,” which effectively rendered support for it as “not only an obligation but also a necessity,” which Hizbullah vowed to assist “not only in words but in deeds.”⁷² In effect, Hizbullah’s military assistance to the Palestinian

⁶⁶ Khomeini, 4 August 1987, “Excerpts from Khomeini Speeches”, *New York Times*

⁶⁷ Khamenei cited in Jospheh al-Agha, “Hizbullah, Iran and the Intifada,” ISIM Newsletter, January 2002, p.35

⁶⁸ Khamenei quoted in IRNA, 4 March 2009

⁶⁹ Nasrallah speech, 16 July 2008, *Al-Manar* TV

⁷⁰ Nasrallah interview with Ghassan Ben Jeddou, 20 July 2006, *Al-Jazeera*

⁷¹ Nasrallah 28 December 2008, *Al-Manar* TV

⁷² Nasrallah, *Al-Manar* television, Feb. 1, 2002, quoted in Eyal Zisser, “The Return of Hizbullah”, *The Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2002, http://www.meforum.org/499/the-return-of-hizbullah#_ftnref18

resistance is in large part motivated by strategic considerations, as opposed to purely ideological and moral imperatives.

Military Support for the Palestinian Resistance

Though the resistance movement has never directly intervened militarily in Palestine, it has not ruled out the prospect of doing so in the future. In October 2001, a year after the launch of the Second Intifada, Nasrallah affirmed: “we are ready for direct military intervention in the Intifada when the benefit of the Palestinian resistance really dictates the recourse to this option”.⁷³ It was this rationale which prevented Hizbullah from intervening militarily in Israel’s onslaught against the Hamas-run enclave of Gaza in December-January 2008/2009. Armed action by Hizbullah at the time would not have benefitted Hamas whose status as a nationalist resistance movement, capable of defending its own people, would have been greatly undermined and its *raison d’être* called into question. Furthermore, since Hamas managed to sustain the Israeli onslaught on its own without suffering any significant damage to its organizational hierarchy or military infrastructure, Hizbullah did not regard an intervention on its part as an exigent need. Only if Hamas were left bleeding to death on the battlefield, either due to the decapitation of its leadership ranks or if its military infrastructure suffered a significant blow, drastically impairing its military performance and leading to its eventual collapse, would Hizbullah have stepped in.

While Hizbullah stopped short of military intervention during the Gaza conflict, it did intervene politically as Iran did, by engaging in an open political confrontation against the Mubarak regime. Nasrallah called on the Egyptian people and military elites to exert pressure on the Egyptian government to open its borders to Gaza. Moreover, the Hizbullah leader warned that although the movement did not make enemies of those who had betrayed it during the July war, “we will make those who collaborate against Gaza and its people our enemies.”⁷⁴ In fact, when Arab complicity with Israel was at its peak in the 2006 war, Nasrallah refrained from calling on the Arab masses to exert pressure on their governments. Nor did Hizbullah’s relations with those regimes take a turn for the worse thereafter, as they did between Egypt and the party both during and after the Gaza conflict. While Hizbullah was constrained during the July war by fears of souring its relations with Arab regimes and a reluctance to provide them with ammunition to invoke the Shi’ite scarecrow and stoke Sunni-Shi’ite tensions, these constraints did not hold in January 2009.

⁷³ *Intiqad*, 5 November 2001

⁷⁴ See Nasrallah speech, 7 January 2007, *Al-Manar* TV

Aside from such political support, Hizbullah has also afforded the Palestinians with military assistance by providing resistance factions with training and weapons. As demonstrated during the Gaza War, Hamas' fighting style bore the hallmarks of the military tactics Hizbullah used during the July War such as its use of underground bunkers and tunnel networks, as well as adopting similar rocket tactics, all of which suggest Hizbullah's extensive training of Hamas' military forces. Nasrallah came close to admitting as much when he claimed that "the resistance in Gaza benefitted more from these lessons [from the July War] than the Israelis".⁷⁵ More than simply receiving military training, Hamas's recent military strategy appears to conform to the "new school of warfare" founded by Hizbullah's assassinated military leader, Imad Mughnieh (himself rumored to have personally trained and equipped several Palestinian groups over the years), which combines conventional and unconventional, guerilla warfare that functions not only to liberate occupied territory, but to defend it from aggression.

Over and above this, Hizbullah has openly furnished Palestinian resistance groups with weapons and other military aid. The most recent example of this assistance was in April 2009 when Egyptian authorities publicly announced that they had clamped down on an alleged Hizbullah "terrorist cell" which was purportedly plotting attacks against Israeli and Egyptian targets on Egyptian soil. In response to those accusations, Nasrallah admitted that one of the lead suspects in the case, Sami Chehab, was in fact a party member who was assisting the Palestinian resistance: "what he was doing on the Egyptian Palestinian border is a logistic action to help the Palestinian brethren in transferring equipment and members to back the resistance in Palestine." Nasrallah continued: "if assisting the Palestinians is a crime, I officially admit to committing this crime ... if it was an accusation we are proud of it. It is well known, that this is not the first time in which brethren from Hizbullah are arrested while trying to convey arms to the Palestinians in occupied Palestine."⁷⁶ True enough, Nasrallah had revealed in March 2002 that the 3 Hizbullah officials whom Jordan had captured as they were trying to smuggle weapons into the West Bank, did in fact belong to the movement. Using similar terminology as his pronouncement in April 2009, Nasrallah then declared that "to supply arms to the Palestinians is a duty...it is shameful to consider such an act as a crime."⁷⁷

Naturalizing a Discourse of Israel's Destruction and the Creation of a New Arab Awareness

⁷⁵ Nasrallah, 31 December 2008, *Al-Manar* TV

⁷⁶ Nasrallah speech, 10 April 2009, *Al-Manar* TV

⁷⁷ Nasrallah, March 2002, quoted in Laleh Khalili, "Standing with My Brother: Hizbullah, Palestinians, and the Limits of Solidarity," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49 (2), 2007, pp.289-290

Over and above Hizbullah's ideological and strategic commitment to the Palestinian cause and the military support it has lent the Palestinian resistance, is its primary role in naturalizing a discourse on Israel's imminent destruction among the Arab public. The notion of Israel's eradication that was propagated by Khomeini and which found a strong resonance with Ahmadinejad, has also found its way back into Hizbullah's public discourse, specifically, after Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 and even more pronouncedly, after the July 2006 War. In the interregnum between the slogan's popularity in the early 1980s and the period after 2005 when Ahmadinejad assumed power, the idea of eradication from without gave way to a more pacifistic, though implausible notion of eradication from within, in other words, a democratically attained internal dissolution—the "removal by referendum" proposal discussed earlier. However, with the advent of Ahmadinejad in 2005, the discourse on Israel's destruction reverted to type, albeit, as a regime rather than as a nation-state.

As an exercise in deconstructing, re-conceptualizing and re-branding Israel, and by implication, the resistance project, a new vocabulary and understanding of Israel was normalized which served to demystify the Zionist state and shatter the myth of its invincibility. Dubbed the "new Israel" discourse by Laura Khoury and Seif Dana,⁷⁸ the reconceptualization of Israel was inspired by Nasrallah's well-known depiction of Israel in May 2000 as "weaker than a spider's web."⁷⁹ Given that Israel's humiliating withdrawal provided the context of this portrayal of Israel, Nasrallah was clearly seeking to expunge the notion of an undefeatable Israel from the Arab collective consciousness and instil a new awareness in its place.⁸⁰ This "battle of awareness" as Nasrallah calls it⁸¹, aims not merely at proving that Israel can be militarily defeated as its withdrawal in 2000 and its defeat in 2006 illustrate for Hizbullah, but more significantly, at its ultimate destructibility. In Nasrallah's words: "In the aftermath of the 2000 withdrawal, the question was no longer: Can we fight the Israeli army? Can we defeat the Israeli army? These questions have ended. The only remaining question was: Can this entity cease to exist? Could Israel be wiped out of existence? Yes, and a thousand times yes, Israel can be wiped out of existence."⁸²

Thus, the notion of Israel's removal from the region was as much an apparently rational prediction deduced from recent experiences of Israeli defeat, as it was an emotional prescription. As

⁷⁸ Laura Khoury and Seif Dana, "Hezbollah's War of Position: The Arab-Islamic Revolutionary Praxis," *The Arab World Geographer*, Vol 12, No 3-4 (2009), p.137

⁷⁹ Nasrallah, 25 May 2000, Bint Jubayl, *Al-Manar* TV

⁸⁰ Khoury and Dana reach the same conclusion as this author on p.137

⁸¹ Nasrallah, 24 March 2008, 40 day Commemoration of Mughnieh assassination, *Al-Manar* TV

⁸² Ibid

foreseen by Nasrallah, Israel's imminent demise was "definite" and likely to occur "in the coming few years", on the basis of "a historical and divine law from which there is no escape."⁸³ This prediction is based on Hizbullah's understanding of the nature of the Israeli state as being subordinate to its military, which defines the very nature, identity, and foundation of the state. Once the military is given its first taste of defeat, the foundations of the state will be shaken and Israel will begin to unravel as its inhabitants and all those surrounding it became aware of its fundamental fragility. It is in this connection that Nasrallah vowed to treat the "threat" of an Israeli war on Lebanon as "an opportunity" to liberate Palestine. Nasrallah further explained: "If we could destroy this army and we will destroy it God willing; if we could crush this army and we will crush it God willing.... what future will remain for Israel?... If the Israeli army was crushed in Lebanon, it is not unlikely that Allah would bless us to reach in buses and vans Al Aqsa Mosque."⁸⁴

As evinced by the above exposition, Hizbullah's "New Israel" discourse shifted from a prescription to a prediction to a promise-- Hizbullah would facilitate the removal of the Zionist regime by defeating the Israeli army in Lebanon. In effect, although liberating Palestine is considered first and foremost a Palestinian duty, Iran views Hizbullah as an indispensable force in bringing about the eradication of Israel. This perception is expressed by Ahmadinejad, who asserted that "everyone knows the result if they face Hezbollah and the countries of the region. This is a sign of the loss of the Zionist entity and those defending it".⁸⁵ Moreover, in reaction to Nasrallah's asseveration that Israel's alleged assassination of its leading military commander, Imad Mughnieyh, marked the "end of their [Israel's] existence", and his pledge to respond to it with an "open war" against the Zionist state, the head of the Revolutionary Guards, Mohammad Ali Jafari, predicted: "In the near future, we will witness the destruction of this cancerous microbe Israel the aggressor, at the able hands of the soldiers of the community of Hezbollah."⁸⁶

Hizbullah's success in normalizing a discourse about Israel's strategic weakness and unviability can also be gauged by the accounts of Israeli officials, media and academia. The Winograd Commission's acknowledgement that a "semi-military organization of a few thousand men resisted, for a few weeks, the strongest army in the Middle East,"⁸⁷ was tantamount to an admission that Hizbullah had shattered the myth of Israel's military invincibility. Furthermore, in an

⁸³ Nasrallah, 22 February 2008, *Al-Manar* TV

⁸⁴ Nasrallah, 18 September 2009, *Al-Manar* TV

⁸⁵ Ahmadinejad interview, 14 January 2010, *Al-Manar* TV

⁸⁶ AFP, "Iran predicts Hizbullah will destroy Israel", 18 February 2008

⁸⁷ http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2008/Winograd%20Committee%20submits%20final%20report%2030-Jan-2008

apparent corroboration of Nasrallah's depiction of the conflict as one whose results would reverberate across the entire region, the Winograd report also acknowledged that Israel's failure in the war would have "far-reaching implications for us, as well as for our enemies."⁸⁸ Foremost among these implications is that Nasrallah's line of reasoning appears to have been internalized by many Arabs as evidenced in one of Shibley Telhami's highly respected "Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey" series, conducted in 2006 after the July war. The poll uncovered that 46% of respondents across 6 Arab countries believed that Israel was "weaker than it looks" and that it was "only a matter of time before it is defeated."⁸⁹ By extension, Hizbullah's military prowess disabused many people in the region of the notion that military superiority could be assessed by firepower and technology alone. This conclusion was echoed by the Reut Institute, an influential Israeli think tank which caters exclusively to the Israeli government: "Military superiority does not mean strategic superiority."⁹⁰ The Institute goes on to lament "the Resistance Network's ability to 'survive' against Israeli retaliation erodes Israel's deterrence capability and military image."⁹¹

Over and above this, the Reut Institute testifies - in a series of papers published by its National Security program - to the success of Hizbullah's discourse on the inevitable destruction of the Zionist regime. The papers adopt a number of concepts developed by the program, including "Permanent Resistance", "the Resistance Network" (which alludes to Hizbullah, in addition to Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Iran), "the Logic of Implosion", "De-Legitimization of Israel", and "Promotion of One-State Solution"⁹². Many of the papers in the series refer to Nasrallah's speeches as evidence of the "existential" threat posed by these concepts. The following excerpt summarizes the main thesis guiding the series of papers:

"The Resistance Network conducts itself against Israel according to a political logic that is based on a theory of "Implosion", whereby Israel will not be overthrown militarily, but rather will be pressured on a number of fronts that will ultimately lead to its internal

⁸⁸http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2008/Winograd%20Committee%20submits%20final%20report%2030-Jan-2008

⁸⁹ These polls are conducted by Shibley Telhami in collaboration with Zogby. They include samples from the following countries: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and United Arab Emirates (UAE). See <http://sadat.umd.edu/surveys/index.htm>

⁹⁰ The Reut Institute, "Israel's National Security Concept is Irrelevant", 15 January 2007, Tel Aviv, p.7

⁹¹ The Reut Institute, "The Logic of Implosion: The Resistance Network's Political Rationale", *ReViews*, no.9, 26 December 2006, Tel Aviv

⁹² See <http://reut-institute.org>

implosion as a state. This logic promotes the establishment of one Palestinian / Arab / Islamist state in place of Israel.”⁹³

In a similar vein was the IDF’s Chief of General Staff, Gabi Ashkenazi’s warning that “there are dangers to our survival on the horizon.”⁹⁴ Interestingly, Ashkenazi’s admonition was made almost a week after Nasrallah had declared that “Israel has lost the first war ... it is doomed to collapse and will collapse,” which suggested that the Hizbullah leader’s prediction was not mere bombast but grounded in some reality.

The opinions in this paper are the author’s own and do not necessarily represent those of Conflicts Forum.

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⁹³ The Reut Institute, “The Logic of Implosion: The Resistance Network’s Political Rationale”, *ReViews*, no.9, 26 December 2006, p.1.

⁹⁴ *Jerusalem Post*, 20 February 2008