

The Final Punch: Removing Iran from the New Middle East Equation

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The configuration of the New Middle East — as envisaged by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during the Israeli war against Lebanon in July-August 2006, most certainly has no place for more than one regional power broker, namely Israel.

Under such an arrangement — subservient Arabs and Iran governed by an all powerful Israel and supervised, even from afar by the seemingly philanthropic United States — would ensure Israel's 'security', which has for long served as a casus belli, and supposed American interests in the region; regardless of what one thinks of such logic, in Washington, it is still prevailing.

With the elimination of Iraq — not just Saddam Hussein and his Baath Party as some in the mainstream media tirelessly reiterate, but rather Iraq as a strong Arab nation with immense regional influence — the long sought pact is close at hand. Iran, however, remains the only menacing reality that stands between Israel and its powerful Washingtonian allies and this New Middle East.

This means that the war of words between Teheran and Washington is mostly inspired by this redoubtable strategic chasm: where Washington strives to knock the Iran factor out of the regional equation, and Teheran pushes with all of its might to keep itself pertinent, indeed equally relevant to the shaping of the region's future.

This conflict has been reduced, as required by rhetorical necessity, to that of Iran's alleged intent to manufacture nuclear weapons, a right that has been exclusively reserved for Israel, who possesses hundreds of nuclear heads and the technology to deliver them, even past the threshold of its intended targets, neighbouring Arab capitals.

Iran might in fact be aspiring to obtain nuclear technology to produce the lethal weapon, to assert itself regionally, to create an equilibrium of terror, and to — in this age of global unipolarity — shield itself from the troubling fate of its neighbour to the West.

The Iraq and Korea example are textbook illustrations of how small countries with or without deadly means of defence are treated with partiality in the global arena; Iraq, who possesses no weapons of mass destruction is experiencing prolonged genocide, while North Korea has admitted, even boasted about the possessing and testing of its nuclear capabilities and is now being rewarded with generous US aid packages and security guarantees. Chances are also great that Kim Jong Il will not meet the gallows, unlike Saddam and will die peacefully in his bed. (Professor Steven Weber's article in the January-February issue of Foreign Policy

Magazine: How Globalization Went Bad, offers a detailed elaboration on this topic.) It's also important to note that the Koreans pose no danger to Israel, a fact that must have relegated their threat level significantly.

Thus the escalating war of words between the US and Iran must be settled somehow in a manner that yields a favourable solution for both sides, or military confrontation is simply unavoidable.

The British Guardian revealed in a mid-February report, quoting US officials and analysts, that the Bush administration is in the "advanced stages" of preparing for a military strike, targeting Iran's nuclear sites. Though US deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East, Mark Kimmitt dismissed allegations that his country is seeking a military confrontation with Teheran, the US action — the intensification of its naval build up, seeking the elimination of Iranian 'agents' in Iraq, and so forth — suggests that the Guardian report is quite accurate in its estimation.

Iran is still unwavering, however. Iran's state television quoted the country's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on February 17, as he defended the country's pursuit for nuclear technology. "Oil and gas reserves won't last forever. If a nation doesn't think of producing its future energy needs, it will be dependent on domination-seeking powers," he was reported as saying. Again, regardless of the dialectics of Khamenei's rationale, the US understands this view as continuing 'defiance', an understanding that positions the military option, from the US viewpoint, as inevitable.

US Democrats are practically ruling out any serious challenge to Bush's war policies — House leader Nancy Pelosi dismissed from the outset any possibility to impeach the president despite his administration's unequalled indiscretions, to say the least, of dragging the country into a most destructive war under false and largely forged pretexts. At the US Senate and for the second time in a week, Republicans managed to block a 'debate' on a resolution that would simply 'rebuke' the president for his Iraq troop buildup. Even if the debate convened and a resolution was passed, it would remain pitifully lacking, for it is simply non-binding.

It is unlikely that Iran will back down; again the North Korea lesson is too fresh, too poignant to ignore. Moreover, the Islamic Republic has a formidable power base in Iraq and Lebanon: Shia militias and the Hezbollah resistance movement respectively; the former is capable of worsening the US army's plight in Iraq by several fold if decided to join the ongoing Sunni resistance, and the latter has proved an insurmountable foe to Israel in their latest military showdown last summer.

Naturally, the US — which is caught in an unwinnable war in Iraq, confined and blinded by its bizarre alliance with Israel, which is more of a liability to Washington than a strategic advantage and who is watching its own New World Order faltering under its feet, with Latin America going its separate ways, and China moving into what has been the unchallenged domains of the United States for decades — should be expected to avoid a military confrontation at any cost. Savvy US diplomat and former Secretary of State James Baker had many ominous warnings in his Iraq Study Group recommendations. A traditionalist and a pro-business politician, Baker knows well that without a quick exit from Iraq, chaos will befall the waning empire, which is ultimately bad for business. Baker also knows that without solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, the US regional woes will amplify beyond repair.

But as the voice of reason, from a traditionalist viewpoint, is being hushed or sidelined, the warmongers' hold on Washington is still as tight as ever, one of whom is Israel and its dedicated friends on Capitol Hill.

Evidently, Israel is a prime cheerleader for war, and most likely Israeli agents are working overtime to provide the needed case for war; at least we know, through news reports that Israeli agents are actively involved in Iraq and there is a possibility that they have penetrated the Iranian domain as well, through the northern Kurdish areas. Last November, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert appointed a major war advocate, Avigdor Lieberman, as the country's Minister of Strategic Affairs and also as Deputy Prime Minister. Lieberman's appointment was principally aimed at 'countering' the Iranian threat; championing the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, has recently visited Washington to largely discuss the Iranian threat and won standing ovations and endless praise of Democrats and Republicans alike.

Other Israeli politicians have been adamant in their efforts to convince Washington that a war against Iran will yield strategic dividends and will ease the US mission in reigning in occupied Iraq, and will provide Israel with the security it covets. Of course, Israel knows well the disastrous affect that a war on Iran will bring to the waning American empire (even if merely by observing the Iraqi situation) but it matters little in the end, as long as the Iranian threat is eliminated, or so goes the Israeli logic.

Ramzy Baroud's latest book, The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle (Pluto Press), is available at Amazon.com and also from the University of Michigan Press. He is the editor of PalestineChronicle.com; his website is www.ramzybaroud.net

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