



(U) Prognosis: 'More of the Same' for Middle East Strife

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(U) In parts one and two of this series, we looked at what caused the current crisis and what may happen in the near future. In conclusion, here are some thoughts on the longer term outlook in the Middle East...

(U) The **prognosis** for improvement in the future of Middle East conflict is poor. **"More of the same"** conducted with increasingly lethal weapons and tactics, is guaranteed as core issues go unaddressed amid the cycle of recurring pursuits of retaliation, superiority, and punishment.

(U) For example, the summer 2006 Israel-Hizballah/Lebanon and Israel-Palestinian Authority/HAMAS hostilities were ignited by Hizballah's and HAMAS' abducting of Israeli soldiers from within Israeli territory. Both organizations were motivated by a desire to effect a prisoner exchange with Israel. The traditional, regional response to "cross-border aggression" is retaliation, including immediate, disproportionate responses and punitive actions.

(U) In this case, Israel's overt objective was to enhance the chances for the hostages' safe return. Israel's longer-range goal of neutralizing the long-standing Hizballah military threat, or at the very minimum pushing it north at least 20 miles from the Israel-Lebanon border, will drive its military decisions in the current conflict. One press item from 20 July put it well: Israel will not stop its Lebanon offensive until Hizballah is pushed at least 20 miles to a river north of the border and its ability to fire deadly rockets into Israel is neutralized, officials say. Even more importantly, Israel wants to send a strong message to all its enemies, especially Iran, that the consequences of attacking the Jewish state will be unbearable.



(U) But this tactical engagement is not likely to evolve into a broad, regional conflict, accepting that nothing in the Middle East occurs in a localized vacuum. Regional dynamics, intense international diplomatic efforts, and Israel's satisfaction that its objectives have been achieved should serve to prevent the current conflict from spreading. Israel has expressed its desire to live in peace with Lebanon.

(U) Some Arab states secretly applaud Israel's striking a blow to Islamic extremists who represent a similar threat in their own back yards. Byzantine intrigues and deep-seated emotional issues form a complex stew of dynamics that are the core of revolving conflict within this rough neighborhood. Ethnic hatred (often omitted from analysts' discussion), and religious and political rivalries have fueled centuries-long disputes, literally since Abraham arrived in what is now commonly called "The Levant" from modern-day Iraq

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(U) Middle East Hostilities

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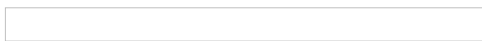
some six millennia ago.

(U) The basic conflict pits Jews against Arabs/Muslims and emanates from a fundamental birthright dispute. The descendants of Abraham's first born, Ishmael (popularly characterized as the progenitor of the "Sons of Allah"), have long held that Abraham's second son, Isaac (born according to God's promise to Abraham as the beginning of God's chosen people, and whose son Jacob was later renamed "Israel") stole Ishmael's birthright.

(U) All Middle East questions require nuance in treatment. A common scenario envisions the Arab states staging a joint operation against Israel in a great battle of cultures and people. However, this scenario pre-supposes that Arab cohesiveness exists at all -- an inaccurate assumption. Support for Hizballah, for instance, is not widespread behind Arab regimes' closed doors.

(U) The reality is that all Arab states are constrained to proclaim solidarity in supporting their brothers, both secular and Muslim, against Israeli aggression, portraying the façade of cohesiveness. Further, Arab states are not a monolith; each is a sovereign nation, dedicated to its own interests that do not routinely coincide with those of other Arab states.

(U) There are, to be sure, certain "pan-Arab" interests over which most Arab states share common ground. Most Arab regimes are disturbed by the spread and rise to prominence of extremist ideology, practice, and political engagement that has exploded since al-Qa'ida declared Jihad against the United States and international Jewry in the late 1990s. Additionally, Arab states generally agree on their disdain for traditional Western stereotypes of colonial attitudes and fickle friendships, which engender more distrust than outright hostility.



(U) US Marine Corps medic helps evacuate an American girl from Beirut (Reuters)

(S//SI) SIGINT and other intelligence has shown that many Arab states privately support, and even encourage, others (including Israel and the United States-led "Coalition of the Willing") to strike Islamic extremists wherever they represent a similar threat in their own back yards. These states, led by Saudi Arabia, have blamed Hizballah, overtly and in private, for sending the region into crisis. Egypt and Jordan work more quietly behind the scenes, belying their public rhetoric of relative neutrality, but driven by their respective Muslim Brotherhood presence's domestic threat.

(U) Others, notably led by Syria, will continue to pursue a policy of violent resistance to Israel's existence and will support armed factions as tools of that objective. Syria does support Hizballah and the rejectionist Palestinian organizations that carry the load for these states' agenda. Ironically though, Syria harbors similar concerns over extremist and fundamentalist Islamist elements' threat to regime stability. Syria's anti-Israel role is based on secular considerations, in line with the ruling Ba'th Party's ideology.

(U) Lebanon is trapped in this equation, having relatively little independent agenda with regard to Hizballah or the Palestinians. Historic Syrian dominance extends to Lebanese stances, with a mix of pro-Syria (and by extension, -Hizballah), anti-Hizballah, and nationalist Lebanese politicians vying for primacy in forming an independent, Lebanese domestic policy.

(U) However until root grievances are redressed -- unlikely in an emotionally charged atmosphere in which distinctly different cultures, albeit with common penchants for very long memories and revenge, contest core communal values and identities -- final resolution will remain elusive. The West's practical inability to understand such a subjective conflict, at variance with Western mindsets governing human and state relationships, renders successful intervention futile. In significant measure, the contestants find "outsiders" attempts at mediation clumsy, uninformed, and condescending.

(U//FOUO) This concludes the "Middle East Hostilities" series. Do you have a comment on the topic? Post your thoughts on the [SID today Blog](#) (PKI certificate required).

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