The Middle East and Iran

Presentation to The Kingston Conference on International Security

“CBRNe: The Ongoing Challenge”

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The Middle East state system

• A creation of the European colonial powers, post World War 1.
• Does not respect traditional/tribal lines.
• Result of many conflicting promises (and lies) on many sides.
• Rulers, elites and nation states may have made sense (to Europeans) then; do they make sense now?
Lines in the Sand
(Vanity Fair, Jan 2008)
Structure of Middle East Security

• Multiple, overlapping security issues confront the region.

• NOT just the Arab-Israeli dispute:
  – Arab-Arab disputes;
  – Arab-Persian;
  – Shi’ite-Sunni.

• Non-traditional security issues are growing in importance.
The Sub-regional Middle East
Traditional Security: Costs of Regional Conflicts

• There is a perception that the Arab-Israeli dispute is the region’s most significant and deadly conflict. This is simply not true:
  – Arab-Israeli dispute: 92,000 lives (74,000 military and 18,000 civilian from 1945 to 1995). *Barry Buzan, Regions and Powers, 2003.*
  – North Yemen Civil War (1960s): 200,000+/-
  – Iran-Iraq War: 1 million+ soldiers killed, 100,000+ civilians killed;
  – Algerian civil war: 200,000+/-;
  – Darfur: 450,000+/-
  – Iraq Wars: 150,000 +/-
WMD in the region

• There is also a perception that Israel is the key to the region’s WMD problem. Again, not true: WMD have never been used in the Arab-Israeli context (Yemen; Iran-Iraq; Iraq).

• Rumoured holdings and projects:
  – Egypt – previous CW activity and use;
  – Libya – previous nuclear and CW activity;
  – Iran – nuclear weapons research;
  – Iraq – previous extensive nuclear, chemical and biological activity (and CW use);
  – Israel – rumoured to have 200+/- nuclear weapons;
  – Saudi Arabia – rumoured nuclear links to Pakistan;
  – Syria – extensive CW capability; nuclear research.
Ancient Persia
Pre-Islamic Persia: Religious Themes

• Enduring power of the idea of religion, and life, as a righteous battle between the forces of good and evil:
  – Zoroastrianism – dualistic struggle between a good deity and an evil power;
  – Manichaeism – dualistic struggle between material things (evil) and the spiritual (good)
The Iran-Iraq War

• One of the longest and bloodiest of the 20th Century
  – (Sept 80 – Aug 88; +/- 1.25m killed);
• Saddam encouraged and aided by other Gulf Countries and the West.
• Iraq uses CW, and no-one really criticises it, or comes to Iran’s aid (despite international agreements to do so).
• Iran re-starts the nuclear programme.
The Nuclear Programme

GUESS WHO’S BUILDING NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS.

The Shah of Iran is sitting on top of one of the largest reservoirs of oil in the world.

Yet he’s building two nuclear plants and planning two more to provide electricity for his country.

He knows the oil is running out—and time with it.

But he wouldn’t build the plants now if he doubted their safety. He’d wait. As many Americans want to do.

The Shah knows that nuclear energy is not only economical, it has enjoyed a remarkable 50-year safety record. A record that was good enough for the citizens of Plymouth, Massachusetts, too. They’ve approved their second nuclear plant by a vote of almost 4 to 1. Which shows you don’t have to go as far as Iran for an endorsement of nuclear power.
Why Nuclear Power?

• Why is Iran, a country with vast energy reserves, investing in nuclear power?
• There is an economic rationale, even if many do not accept it (Shah poster).
• But the Iranian nuclear programme is not really structured as a purely civilian programme (enrichment and other technologies being investigated).
• The IAEA cannot verify that Iran is in full compliance with its obligations.
The Nuclear Option

• Are they building a bomb, or do they want the option? US intelligence community view is the latter, but what does that actually mean?
• Can the world live with an Iran close to a nuclear weapon?
• Will sanctions/negotiations work, or will an attack be necessary (and what would the consequences be)?
Deterrence or Aggression?

• Why are they doing this – religious objectives, or realist deterrence?
  – Iraq war experience with CW.
• Would Iran “use” the bomb? How, against who, for what purpose?
• Would they transfer it to terrorists?
• Would Iran feel emboldened if it had nuclear weapons (or a nuclear weapons capability)?
• A regional ‘Proliferation cascade’?
The Nuclear Talks

• New Iranian President and new team – pragmatic and results oriented.
• Phased and reciprocal deal sought which would leave Iran with a residual capability, but far (how far?) from the bomb (breakout capability) and under strict verification, in return for sanctions relief.
• Will the Supreme Leader go for this?
• Can Obama get it past Congress and allies (Israel, Saudi Arabia)?