Alternative Futures for Iran: Implications for Regional Security

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In any attempt to determine the likely future course of Iranian foreign policy, it is obviously instructive to examine the conduct of foreign policy in the recent past. Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran's foreign policy has been characterized by what (for want of a better term) we may describe as a struggle between ideologues and pragmatists, radicals and moderates;* and by the sensitivity of foreign policy to the play of domestic politics and personalities. The seizure of the American embassy and of American hostages in Tehran in 1979, for example, was part of a successful effort by radicals to derail the policy of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan. He was striving at that time to curb the radical forces released by the revolution and to maintain a close working relationship with the US. The hostage affair, in fact, forced Bazargan to resign.

Iran's 1982 decision to carry the Iran-Iraq war into Iraqi territory, and to seek the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the installation of an Islamic government at Baghdad, came after a debate between the advocates of these more ambitious goals and those among Khomeini's lieutenants who believed Iran should stop at its own borders once it had expelled Iraqi troops from Iranian soil. When Khomeini enunciated his "open window" policy in October, 1984, and argued that normal relations with the world's nations did not violate Islamic principles and was in keeping with precedents established by the Prophet, this marked a victory for the pragmatic camp among his officials. On the other

hand, when Iranian pilgrims on the *hajj*, or pilgrimage, to Mecca in 1986, were found by Saudi officials to be carrying weapons and explosives, this was an indication that the radicals were trying to disrupt the hajj, dictate foreign policy, and to act on the principle, enunciated by Khomeini, that the hajj should be used to "disavow the infidel" and to mobilize Muslims against the US, reactionary Arab regimes and Israel. In February 1989, in another of those turnabouts which has come to characterize Iran's conduct of foreign policy, Khomeini wrecked several months of a careful fence-building effort by Rafsanjani with European states (an effort which Khomeini himself had permitted) by pronouncing a death sentence against the writer, Salman Rushdie.

The divisions between ideologues and pragmatists have not always been clear-cut. For example, Iran's first president, Abol-Hassan Bani-Sadr believed the conservative Arab states of the Persian Gulf deserved to be swept away by popular revolutions; he was also the architect of the sweeping nationalizations of the early revolutionary period. On the other hand, he opposed the taking of American hostages and sought their early release; and he lost his presidency in 1981 in part because of his efforts to curb the Revolutionary Courts, Revolutionary Guards and revolutionary komitehs. The current president of Iran, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, is most closely identified with the pragmatists. But following the PLO's implicit recognition in May, 1989, of Israel's right to exist, Rafsanjani called on Palestinians "to execute five Americans, or English, or French" for every martyred Palestinian.[1]

Nevertheless, broadly speaking, the two camps have clearly differed on a number of issues. In foreign policy, the radicals generally favored a confrontational attitude towards the West, exporting the revolution and providing propaganda and material support for Islamic and other opposition

movements in the region and further afield. The most radical among them also favored using strong-arm methods, terrorism and assassination to serve these ends, irrespective of the consequences for Iran's diplomatic relations. For example, when an Iranian consular official was arrested in Manchester, England in May 1987 on a shoplifting charge, the second-ranking British diplomat in Tehran was abducted by armed men and severely beaten. A month later, French authorities issued a warrant for the arrest of a member of the Iranian embassy staff in Paris in connection with a series of bombings in the French capital. Iranian refusal to surrender him eventually led to a break in diplomatic relations. Iranian officials, including the interior minister, were implicated when a hijacked Kuwaiti aircraft was given permission to land in Mashad, in northern Iran in August, 1987, and were implicated also in the sabotage of Kuwaiti oil installations earlier that year.

At home the radicals remained committed to state control of the economy, including foreign trade and domestic distribution of essential items and basic consumer goods, to radical land distribution, and to continuation of subsidies for basic necessities. They displayed a hostility to foreign and domestic private entrepreneurial capital. They also stressed an end to economic "dependence"--that is, reliance on foreign goods, services and financing--and often interpreted economic "independence" and "self-sufficiency" as a form of economic autarchy.

The pragmatists, on the other hand, sought to repair relations with Western European countries and the Arab states of both the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, to re integrate Iran into the international community, to reduce (but certainly not to eliminate) the state's role in the economy, and to encourage a greater role for the private sector. More technocratic in orientation, the pragmatists (whose policies are spelled out in greater detail

below) tended to prefer economic development to revolutionary purity.

Ascendancy of the Pragmatists

Rafsanjani emerged as the architect of the pragmatist's agenda. He is credited with finally persuading Khomeini to accept a cease fire in the Iran-Iraq war. In the period immediately following the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, when Khomeini was still alive, and following Khomeini's death in the following year, Rafsanjani, first as Speaker of the Majlis, then as president began to pursue the pragmatist agenda with increasing confidence and consistency to exercise increasing control over both domestic and foreign policy.

In the foreign field, even before the 1990-91 Kuwait crisis and Gulf War, he began to normalize Iran's relations with England and France. He used the cover of the Gulf War to resume diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. All these were highly controversial and politically risky measures. During the Gulf War, Iran, for all intents and purposes, aligned itself with the aims of the US-led alliance. Clearly it was in Iran's national interest to do so. Nevertheless, Rafsanjani did not succumb to the blandishments of the radical faction in the Majlis, or parliament, who were opposed to the American military presence in the Gulf, and one of whose members urged Iran ally itself with Iraq against the United States. Iran was steadfast in rejecting the annexation of Kuwait by Iraq--more steadfast, it should be pointed out, than a number of Arab governments. It made no move to break the UN imposed trade embargo against Iraq or to help Baghdad in any other way, despite Saddam Hussein's offer of a treaty formally ending the Iran-Iraq war on terms favorable to Iran.

Iran did provide support to the Shi'ite uprising that erupted in

southern Iraq at the end of the Gulf war. But given the powerful emotions aroused in Iran by the killing of Shi'ites and the attack of Saddam's troops on Shi'ite shrines, what is striking is how little rather on how much Iran did. Again, Tehran acted with restraint. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, Iran finally brought its leverage to bear in securing the release of American and other Western hostages in Beirut; and Roger Cooper, an Englishman who had been held for five years on charges of spying, was released. Iran worked assiduously in the postwar period to improve relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

At home, Rafsanjani displayed a similar ability to overcome the resistance of a radical faction within the ruling group to a whole range of his policies. The five-year development plan (1989-94) approved by parliament contained the dreaded "L word"--foreign loans--and provided for foreign borrowing of up to $27 billion. Foreign borrowing has been a taboo concept in the revolutionary lexicon. He gathered around him a team of economists and technocrats committed to the idea of privatization, rationalization of foreign exchange rates, a substantial role in the economy for the domestic and foreign private sectors, a gradual withdrawal of subsidies for all but the most essential items, reduced import controls and the like.

In 1990, by a kind of clever constitutional jerry-mandering, he and his allies managed to exclude from the Assembly of Experts--the body that elects the faqih, or supreme leader--prominent figures of the radical faction. In parliamentary elections in 1992, Rafsanjani again displayed his dominance over the political process. Virtually all of the prominent clerics and figures identified with the radical faction were excluded from the new parliament. Rafsanjani also successfully pushed through a reorganization of the security forces, whose primary purpose was to bring two revolutionary organizations,

the Revolutionary Guards and the revolutionary committees, under greater central control. The revolutionary committees (komitehs) were merged with the national police and the gendarmerie forces into a single internal security organization. The Revolutionary Guards and the regular army, at least in principle, were brought under a joint command.

These developments were read by many as indications of a gradual but steady triumph of moderates over radicals, of pragmatists over ideologues. And rightly so. The evidence of more reasonable councils prevailing in Tehran was incontrovertible. This point needs to be stressed because the more radical rhetoric emanating from Tehran in recent months, evidence of more systematic support for radical Islamic movements abroad, and an unrelentingly hostile posture on issues of moment to the United States, has led some analysts to argue that there are no "moderates" among Iran's leaders; and that the perception of a more pragmatic trend prevailing in Tehran was itself flawed.[2]

But it remains the case that for some two years Rafsanjani pursued a policy of repairing relations with the international community consistently and successfully, in the face of considerable domestic considerable criticism. Nor has the move towards more pragmatic policies at home and abroad yet played itself out--but it is under considerable strain, and there is ample evidence of a reversion of the more radical, ideologically-based policies of the past.

Foreign Policy Incoherence and its Causes

In the past year, a degree of incoherence has characterized foreign (and domestic) policy: "incoherence" in the sense that Iran appears to be pursuing conflicting and incompatible ends. For example, Iran continues to seek foreign credits and investments and the participation of foreign firms in major industrial projects; it continues to work for better relations with the

Persian Gulf states and even to even to court opinion-makers in the United States.[3] To the World Bank and the IMF, Iran's Central Bank and its key economic officials have sought to project the image of a government firmly committed to privatization and to responsible fiscal policies. But at the same time, the government has engaged in rhetoric and a pattern of behavior that is causing concern in Europe and the US and among Arab states of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, exacerbating relations with individual states, and undermining long-term economic objectives.

Iran's assertion of rights in Abu Musa earlier this year was clumsy and counter-productive. There is a revival of anti-American rhetoric which, even in the troubled history of Iran US relations, is striking for its persistence, pervasiveness and vehemence. The commitment to radical Islamic causes, which seemed on the wane, once again shapes, and sometimes dominates, foreign policy. Thus Iran supports the largely isolated and radical Islamic regime in Sudan, despite the damage this does to Iran's relations with Egypt and its image elsewhere. The government has vehemently opposed the Arab-Israeli peace process. On the eve of the opening, Madrid round of the Arab-Israeli peace talks in October, 1991, Iran invited to a conference in Tehran 400 delegates from 45 countries, including representatives of radical, rejectionist Palestinian groups and terrorist organizations including Ahmad Jibril, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Dr. Fathi al-Shaqaqi, the secretary general of the Islamic Jihad, and Shaykh Sa'id Sha'ban, the leader of the Lebanese Islamic Unification Movement.[4] It has denounced in uncompromising terms the agreement signed in September, 1993, by PLO Chairman Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres.

The mindless assassination of Iranian dissidents abroad continues. The former Iranian prime minister, Shapour Bakhtiar, who posed no threat to the

regime, was assassinated in Paris in August, 1991, on the eve of a long-planned (and, for Iran, vitally important) visit to Tehran by French President Francois Mitterand, causing Mitterand to cancel his visit. On both domestic and foreign policy, the leadership is once again speaking in many--and often conflicting--voices.

True, far greater menace is read into Iranian policies and intentions--say into its conventional arms program or its support for the Islamic regime in Sudan--than is merited by the available evidence. But it remains the case that Iran has recently shown less subtlety and deftness in the handling of its foreign policy--and in quieting the sources of misgivings concerning its aims and intentions--than was the case, say, in 1990-1992. Particularly on "Islamic" issues, the Iranian posture is increasingly activist and confrontational.

This development is rooted in the Iranian domestic and the regional/international environment; and it reflects the influence of conflicting aims and considerations. In the Persian Gulf and others states bordering Iran, the Islamic Republic's foreign policy is dictated by traditional Iranian interests--Iran's desire to play a large role in Persian Gulf affairs and in Afghanistan, or to ensure the security of its borders is nothing new--and by a perception of regional and international threats to Iran or, at least, threats to regional stability. In Europe and Japan, Iran gives priority to enlisting the participation of these countries in its economic development plans. In the newly independent states of Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus, Iran seeks influence and markets, but appears actuated primarily by a desire to prevent disorder and ensure stability along Iran's northern frontier.

But, Iran's foreign policy is also shaped by attitudes generated by the

culture of the revolution itself and Iran's claim to leadership of the Islamic world against a hostile, exploitative, West; by the ideology of various domestic constituencies, who are not always in agreement with one another; by the fragmented nature of clerical leadership and bureaucratic authority; and by the narrow popular base of the regime. Pragmatism thus competes with revolutionary ideology; the desire for better relations with Persian Gulf neighbors, Middle East states and Europe competes with a search for influence abroad (in the Middle East, in Africa) which articulates itself in the language of revolutionary Islam. In shaping foreign policy, the government has to contend with influential clerics in and out of the government who do not hesitate to articulate views which may run counter, or complicate, official policy. In 1990-92, Rafsanjani seemed largely successful in shielding foreign policy from the influence of these various forces; but they seem once again on the ascendant.

Arms Acquisition

Iran's conventional armaments program has caused much adverse comment abroad. But Iran's estimate of its own security interests, and its perception of regional developments, offers a partial explanation for arms acquisition. Instability is endemic along Iran's borders in the former Soviet republics and in Soviet Central Asia, as well as along its eastern frontier in Afghanistan. The posture of Iraq, with which there is still no peace treaty, remains menacing; and from the Iranian perspective, there is no certainty that Iraq's offensive missile capability or its program for the production of weapons of mass destruction have been adequately neutralized. Even today, Iraqi weaponry is superior to Iran's. Again from the Iranian perspective, given Washington's inscrutable ways and the history of cooperation between Saddam Hussein and the

West, the rehabilitation of Saddam is always a possibility.

Iran can reasonably argue that eight years of war with Iraq and lack of access to the international arms market have left it badly under armed; that Iran spends less, as a percentage of GNP, on weapons purchases than many other regional states, and that current Saudi and Kuwaiti weapons purchases are more extensive than Iran's. While the acquisition by Iran of longer-range missiles, long-range strike aircraft and submarines is of concern to other regional states, it is unreasonable to suggest that there is no legitimate level of conventional rearmament by Iran with which the US and the regional states can live. The Abu Musa incident (which appears to have been an ill-considered assertion of expanded rights rather than a territorial grab) aside, there is no persuasive evidence that Iran has territorial ambitions in the Gulf, let alone along its northern or eastern frontiers, or that it plans aggression against its neighbors.[5]

Iran feels beleaguered and vulnerable in other ways. The American posture appears particularly threatening. Washington, encouraged by Egypt, Algeria and Israel, blames Iran for radical Islamic movements in these two Arab states, on the West Bank and elsewhere in the Muslim world.[6] While the US welcomes and encourages Turkey's involvement in the newly independent Islamic republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia, Iranian involvement is treated as unwelcome and somehow ill-intentioned, although Iran shares a longer border and, in Central Asia, a longer history of interaction, with these regions. US officials, among them the former CIA director, Robert Gates, have claimed Iran is engaged in a clandestine program to develop nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and this (along with other patterns of Iranian behavior the US deems unacceptable) serves as the basis for US policies Iranian officials believe intended to isolate and damage Iran, even to

undermine and secure the overthrow of the regime.

The US has attempted to deny Iran access to international arms markets. It has also sought to persuade China, its European allies and Japan to deny Iran nuclear and "dual purpose" technology. It has opposed recent World Bank loans to Iran. In May, 1993, the director for the Middle East and South Asia on the National Security Council, Martin Indyk, described Iran as a state hostile to American interests and engaged in subverting governments friendly to the United States. He declared it the aim of the Clinton Administration to press for wider adherence by the international community to trade and weapons transfer sanctions against Iran and, lumping Iran and Iraq together, articulated a policy of "dual containment" towards the two countries. Indyk's statement suggested little prospect for accommodation and thus for negotiation between the two countries.[7] Under-Secretary of State Edward Djerijian subsequently modified this grim assessment of the nature of the regime in Tehran and US policy towards it. In testimony before the House foreign relations committee, Djerijian studiously avoided the term "dual containment" and emphasized that US policy towards Iran and Iraq was not identical. He stressed that the US harbored no hostility to Islam or to the Iranian regime as such; rather it objected to specific Iranian actions and policies, including its program to acquire weapons of mass destruction, its support for radical Islamic regimes bent on subverting the regional order and regional states, its opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process, its use of terrorism abroad against its own citizens, and its abuse of human rights at home. He said American policy was designed to encourage a change in Iranian behavior.[8] However, Djerijian's statement spelled no change in the US attempt to deny Iran arms, technology, trade and credits; and given the increasing US willingness to commit its forces abroad and the substantial US military

presence in the Persian Gulf, it is understandable that the Tehran regime is suspicious and apprehensive regarding US intentions. Harsh anti-US Iranian rhetoric and strenuous Iranian opposition to US policies in the region stems at least in part from the reading in Tehran that the US means Iran harm. In addition, from the Iranian perspective, nothing came of the promise to Iran in President Bush's 1989 inaugural address that "goodwill breeds goodwill." Iran feels that the US showed no reciprocity after Iran helped secure the release of American hostages in Lebanon. An Iranian initiative to ameliorate relations with the US now, Iranian officials argue, will not be reciprocated.

Iran has traditionally claimed for itself a large say and a leading role in Gulf affairs, whether under the Shah or the Islamic Republic, by virtue of its size, population and long coastline on the Gulf. Its most important resource, oil, lies in on-shore fields adjacent to the Gulf or offshore in the Persian Gulf itself. The Iran-Iraq war and the US re-flagging of Kuwaiti ships underlined that Iranian oil exports and Iranian shipping are both vulnerable to interdiction. Thus Iran's extreme sensitivity to exclusion, or any perception of an attempt at exclusion, from arrangements regarding Gulf security.

Nothing came of suggestions, following the second Gulf war, for collective security arrangements among the regional states. The Bush Administration, which half-heartedly promoted such ideas, did not put much effort into developing them; and there turned out to be little enthusiasm for collective security arrangements among the Arab states of the Gulf. Nevertheless, Iran believed there was a deliberate attempt, orchestrated by the US, to exclude it from these discussions. For obvious reasons, Iran also opposed the so-called Damascus accords (from which it was excluded and which have also proved abortive) that would have given Egypt and Syria a role in

guaranteeing Persian Gulf security. Iranian officials are no doubt aware that Iran benefits substantially from the military and trade sanctions imposed on Iraq by the US and its allies; but it cannot admit this publicly. Its insistence that the US should remove its forces from the Gulf and that Persian Gulf security should be left to the regional states is thus dictated partly by its desire to play to public opinion, partly by the belief that the US presence diminishes Iran's weight and limits its leverage with the Arab states in the Gulf, and partly by its suspicion of American intentions.

On the other hand, if Iran has no aggressive intentions or territorial ambitions and is rearming primarily for defensive purposes and for the "weight" in regional counsels that it can reasonably seek, then it has done a poor job of explaining itself. Iran has aroused unease or suspicion by conflicting and often threatening statements by officials; uncertainty about its ultimate objectives; a secretiveness that stems in part from an often self-imposed isolation; and its view of itself as the champion of revolutionary Islamic forces throughout the region and beyond.[9]

For example, Iranian officials have allowed extensive on-site inspections of nuclear energy and research centers by the International Atomic Energy Agency, and Iranian officials have repeatedly denied any intention to build nuclear weapons. But Iranian officials have also spoken ominously of the right of Muslim states to acquire the bomb; and there is mounting evidence that Iran is attempting to do so. Foreign Minister Ali-Akbar Velayati does substantial fence-building among regional and Arab states. But there continue to be spurts of harsh rhetoric by senior clerics and officials against these same countries. (Admittedly, there are spurts of anti-Iranian rhetoric on the other side as well). Relations with Egypt were resumed in 1990 after a ten-year hiatus; yet they have been allowed to deteriorate badly over the past

year, primarily because Iran appears to attach a higher priority to its budding relationship with the new Islamic regime in Sudan, irrespective of the concerns Sudan's policies generate in Cairo. (Again, Egypt too has contributed to the strain in Iranian-Egyptian relations).

The Claim to Islamic Leadership

The idea that Iran constitutes the vanguard, the model and pace-setter, in a world-wide Islamic awakening is bound up with the very culture of the revolution. Iran's leaders and propagandists claimed for Ayatollah Khomeini leadership not only of Iran's Shi'ites but of Shi'ites everywhere, not only of the world's Shi'ites but of all Muslims. "Hope of the world's disinherited" was one of the many titles by which Khomeini's followers referred to him. However, the inclination to act on the claim of leadership of the Islamic world seemed on the wane in the period of pragmatic ascendancy in 1990-92. Now, it is once again central to foreign policy considerations in a number of areas.

In brief, Iran's leaders believe the Islamic revolution was the first genuine and effective blow by Muslims against Western imperialism, hegemony, economic exploitation and cultural domination. They see the Iranian revolution as an example to Muslims everywhere. The West, led by the United States, fears Iran and is determined to ensure that the Islamic revolution does not succeed precisely because it threatens western domination of the Islamic world. It is thus incumbent on Iran to stand firm and to speak for, encourage and support Islamic movements abroad.

At the same time, Iran's leaders view themselves as competing for the hearts and minds of Muslims against various claimant: the "corrupting" attractions of Western culture, secularists, leaders of Middle East states

who, whatever their pretensions, lack true dedication to Islam, and states such as Saudi Arabia that boast Islamic credentials and fund Islamic movements in many states in the region and outside it. However, from the Iranian perspective, Saudi Arabia is a conservative, status quo power allied to the West, while Iran speaks for forces of the future, the revolutionary, anti-status quo, anti-Western strain in the Islamic movement.

These ideas echo the views of both senior clerics and religious figures lower down in the clerical hierarchy; of elements in the revolutionary organizations, such as the Revolutionary Guards, the komitehs, and the paramilitary basij forces; and an important faction in the Majlis. The regime thus views its support for a variety of Islamic movements as contributing to its legitimacy among important constituencies both at home and abroad. Moreover, at a time when the regime feels isolated and beleaguered, it evidently feels support for radical Islamic movements has a nuisance value, can provide Iran with bargaining chips in dealing with the outside world. Past Iranian support for the Hizballah factions holding American and European hostages in Lebanon, for example, not only enhanced Iran's standing with Hizballah, it also gave Iran leverage with the countries whose nationals were held hostage--or so the Iranians assumed. Iran's "weight," its claim to be heard, is enhanced, its leaders calculate, precisely to the degree that it can deploy Hizballah in military excursions into the Israeli security zone in Lebanon, disrupt the Arab-Israeli peace process, or, directly or by extension, cause the US and its friends difficulties in, say, Sudan or Somalia.

But there is more. The alacrity with which Iran embraced the new government in Sudan suggests it continues to feel impelled to support regimes that label themselves Islamic, continues to look for opportunities to spread its influence far afield (in this case in Africa), and continues to see Islam

as the main vehicle through which it can accomplish this aim.

In Lebanon, Iran also backs the more radical forces. But in Lebanon, the Iranian position is more substantial. Historically, there have been scholarly and family links between Shi'ite clerical families in Iran and Lebanon. In addition to the presence in Lebanon of Iranian Revolutionary Guards and the support and training Iran provides to armed Hizballah factions, Iran has helped fund a substantial infrastructure of schools, clinics, day-care centers and religious seminaries in Lebanon. It has protégés among important Shi'ite clerics and preachers, who regularly visit Tehran. The Iranian investment in Lebanon has thus been substantial; and Iran has secured a position there that it is unlikely to give up easily. Iran may be willing, say, to pressure Hizballah to release American and European hostages in Lebanon or even, (as occurred in July 1993) to curb Hizballah military activity in the Israeli security zone in south Lebanon. But it will always be reluctant to push Hizballah so far as to risk its influence with the organization; and it will seek to protect the position it has built up for itself in Lebanon.

The Iranian presence in Lebanon was initially facilitated by Syria (Iranian official visitors, the rotation of Iranian Revolutionary Guards serving with Hizballah, and Iranian arms and material assistance to Shi'ite communities have had to pass through Damascus to get to Lebanon) and is still dependent to a degree on Syrian acquiescence; but it has now assumed a life of its own. Syria's President Hafez al-Asad helped facilitate the Iranian presence in Lebanon and Iranian support for Hizballah, because this serves Syria's purpose. Hizballah helps makes the Israeli position in southern Lebanon more difficult; and President Asad need not take responsibility for its actions or cross border raids.[10] But the Iranian and Syrian positions, particularly on peace talks with Israel and the Israeli-PLO Gaza/Jericho

agreement, has begun to diverge and will diverge further still, if there is a Syrian-Israeli (and a Lebanese-Israeli) peace agreement. If and when that day comes, Hizballah will have to be curbed, either by the Syrians, or by the Lebanese army, with Syria's blessings. It remains to be seen whether Iran will then be willing to be party to such an understanding; whether it can maintain its position in Lebanon, and its influence with Hizballah, without Syrian acquiescence; and whether it will risk a break with Syria in order to maintain its claim to leadership of the Islamic, rejectionist forces in Lebanon.

Iran has adopted a position of uncompromising hostility towards the Arab Israeli peace talks and the Israeli-PL0 accord.[11] Following the Israeli-PLO Agreement, Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamene'i, described Yasser Arafat as "that puny, ill-reputed, blackguard," the agreement itself as "illegitimate," and the acquiescence in the agreement by Arab leaders as "treachery" and "surrender." He declared the issue of Palestine "an Islamic matter," on which presumably all Muslims must have a say; and he asserted that the home of the Palestinian people, "usurped" 45 years ago, "must be returned to the Palestinian nation in toto and unconditionally."[12] Similarly harsh condemnations of the peace accords were made by President Rafsanjani, the Speaker of the Majlis, and other senior officials and clerics.[13]

In all this, Iran is motivated by a variety of considerations. Iran's leaders have long made support of the Palestinian cause, the return of Palestine to the Palestinians and of Jerusalem to Muslim control, and the eradication of the state of Israel a cornerstone of Iran's claim to speak for the entire Islamic world. They cannot appear to be ready to compromise on this crucial issue. The Iranian position may also reflect a personal commitment among some of Iran's leaders.[14] Iran has been funding Hamas on the West Bank. As in Lebanon, it now has assets and clients on the West Bank it is reluctant

to abandon. It sees an opportunity to become the leading spokesman for a new rejectionist front, to win new supporters among Islamic constituencies, and to enhance its revolutionary Islamic image.[15]

At the same time, not directly involved in the Arab-Israeli issue, geographically far from the Arab-Israeli confrontation, Iran (not unlike some Arab states at various times in the long history of the Arab-Israeli conflict) can afford to be totally uncompromising on the question of peace talks or recognition of Israel. Iran may also be concerned that peace between the Arabs and the Israelis may be detrimental to its own diplomatic, economic and military ambitions in the Persian Gulf and further afield in the Middle East. For example, an Israel free to trade and maintain diplomatic relations with the Persian Gulf states would compete with Iran in this region;[16] and Arab-Israeli peace, as already noted, is fraught with problems for Iran's position in Lebanon and its relations with Syria.

The Khamene'i Factor

Iran's commitment to radical Islamic causes outside Iran's borders has been reinforced, after a hiatus following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, by the positions adopted by his successor as faqih, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i. Even before assuming supreme leadership, Ayatollah Khamene'i held strong opinions on the US, Israel and the corrupting effects of western cultural influence. He also expressed a strong commitment to Islamic movements abroad. Since his election as faqih, he has articulated these positions with greater force and frequency.

He sees himself as the heir to Khomeini's mantle; he has claimed for himself, and his supporters have claimed for him, the same right to obedience as was enjoyed by Khomeini. His religious rulings, his supporters have claimed, must like Khomeini's decrees take precedence over the rulings of all

other clerics. Like Khomeini, Ayatollah Khamene'i feels it incumbent on himself to speak out on questions of import to Muslims.

This inclination is reinforced by the difficulty he has had--and as any successor would have faced--in filling Khomeini's shoes or exercising the immense authority Khomeini enjoyed. At the time of his election, moreover, Khamene'i did not fill all the requirements for the office of faqih, in terms of scholarly eminence and legal learning, specified under the constitution. The constitution had to be amended to make his succession possible. And his authority has been more vulnerable to challenge than was the case with Khomeini. Ayatollah Khamene'i has thus often taken the lead in articulating the Iranian position against Israel, against the US, against Western cultural influence and in support of Islamic movements, whether in Bosnia, the Sudan and elsewhere. He seeks, in this way, to bolster his position with domestic constituencies.

Khamene'i's hard-line position may also stem from his conviction that Iran should negotiate with the US only from a position of strength. Whatever the reasons, Ayatollah Khamene'i's hand in the shaping of foreign policy appears considerable and the position he has articulated makes difficult the kind of deliberate fence-building policy that the government pursued at the time of the second Gulf war. Again, it is important to emphasize the shift in Khamene'i's position and his new-found inclination to set the tone in foreign policy. At the time of the Gulf war, Khamene'i did not stand in the way of Rafsanjani's decision to resume diplomatic relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia or Jordan, nor his policy of implicit cooperation with the US-led alliance against Iraq. If in 1990, Iran's foreign policy appeared consistent and of one piece, and if it seemed possible to predict gradually improving relations with the outside world, today this seems a far less certain eventuality, and the

possibility of friction and collision between Iran and a number of states seems all the greater.

Domestic Discontent and Foreign Policy

Domestic politics and economic problems reinforce this more confrontational foreign policy line. In the 1992 parliamentary elections, as noted, President Rafsanjani succeeded in excluding from the new Majlis most of the prominent clerics and other figures associated with the radical faction. But he ended up with a Majlis in which social conservatives dominate. These deputies have generally taken a conservative, Islamic position on such issues as women's dress, greater permissiveness in film, theater, art and the press and the like. While their primary concern is not foreign policy, their discomfort with Western cultural influence in Iran, their suspiciousness of easy traffic with Europe, let alone the United states, complicates a policy of rapprochement with the West.

Even before his election as President, as we have seen, Rafsanjani became chief spokesman for an economic policy which emphasized economic over ideological goals, a larger share in the economy for both the domestic and the foreign private sector, and a deliberate effort to attract to Iran foreign capital and technology. He secured the endorsement of Ayatollah Khomeini for this policy; and it underlies the long-term projections of the first and second five-year development plans (1988-93, 1993-98). The attempt at normalizing Iran's relations with the international community that Rafsanjani initiated in 1988-89 and resumed in 1990 was fueled in large part by economic considerations.

Huge funds were required for reconstruction of the extensive damage to oil installations, ports, electric power plants, roads and other

infrastructure and to several cities as a result of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. The industries and enterprises seized by the state from private owners after the revolution (almost all large and medium-scale industry was taken over) were run inefficiently. Productivity was well-below pre-revolution levels. By the government's own admission, per-capita income in 1989 was around 50 per cent of its pre-revolution, 1978-79 level at fixed prices; and due to falling oil revenues, a growing population and the fall in the purchasing power of the dollar, per capita foreign exchange earnings from oil exports were about one-quarter their pre-revolution levels. Population was rising at three per cent annually, adding about two million persons a year. To feed, house, educate and eventually provide gainful employment to this population obviously would require tremendous effort and extensive capital investment, and this, the government concluded, required both foreign and private sector involvement.

The new economic program met with some success. According to the Central Bank, by 1992 Iran secured $15 billion in long-term loan commitments, and was able to utilize $6-$7 billion of this total. (How much of the remaining amount is firmly committed remains to be seen). Some foreign investment was secured for aluminum and petrochemical projects; and the government itself continued with investments in steel, petrochemicals, electric power generation and the like. Considerable rationalization of foreign exchange rates took place. Restrictions were removed on imports and government involvement in retail distribution was greatly restricted. The economy grew rapidly in 1989-91.

But things did not turned out as expected. Foreign and private sector investment has lagged well below plan targets and it is obvious many plan targets will not be met. Privatization has not proceeded very far. Inflation remains high. The gap in incomes between rich and poor, between a privileged

elite of importers, contractors and industrialists with government connections, some high government officials and clerics, those in the professions, and a somewhat larger group of shopkeepers, skilled or self-employed workers (plumbers, electricians, etc.), on the one hand, and white collar workers, civil servants, and the mass of the working population, remains substantial. Corruption is endemic and widespread. Moreover, excessive imports last year have led to a large, short-term foreign exchange debt, foreign exchange difficulties, and a squeeze on credit.

The reasons are not far to seek. Erratic foreign policies do not create an attractive climate for long-term foreign investment. Private property remains insecure, and this makes the domestic private sector cautious regarding long-term investment. Such investment as takes place is more likely to be directed at consumer goods imports than manufacture. The organizations, such as the Foundation for the Disinherited, that control the hundreds of confiscated, formerly private, industrial and business enterprises, have become huge, largely inefficient bureaucratic empires. They exercise considerable control over the economy; and they are not easily subject to central planning and control, and they resist meaningful privatization.

In addition, there is considerable gap between the government's economic claims and the reality most Iranians face in their daily lives; between the insistence by the state on outward social conformity in the matter of dress, relations between the sexes, and the music people may listen to and the life patterns of a huge urban middle and lower-middle class; between the official pretense to austerity and the public appetite for consumer goods. Public discontent with economic and general conditions led to serious riots in Mashad and other cities in the summer of 1992; and urban unrest could erupt again. A politically correct, hard-line foreign policy is in some ways compensation for

the inability of the state to make good on its promises at home. To suppress the riots the government was forced to rely on the basij paramilitary forces. This experience may have led the regime to conclude that its ultimate survival rests on the forces born out of the revolution itself; and that the loyalty of these security forces requires a hard-line foreign policy, rhetorically hostile to the US and the West and supportive of revolutionary Islamic causes.

The more pragmatic, more moderate foreign policy Rafsanjani tried to fashion following Khomeini's death has been hampered not only by the pressures of such constituencies but also the somewhat fragmented nature of clerical leadership. As noted, within the revolutionary organizations, such as the Revolutionary Guards and committees and the basij forces, in the Majlis, among members of the clerical community (some of high rank, some from among the rank and file provincial clergy, there is resistance to normalization of relations with the West, to measures that are seen as abandonment of revolutionary principles. In the press, in newspapers such as Salaam and Kayhan, among present and former members of the Majlis, among the clergy, there are voices all too ready to charge the government with violating Khomeini's heritage.

Rafsanjani had to face harsh criticism when he resumed diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. His attempts to explain Khomeini's "death sentence" decree against Salman Rushdie in a way that would minimize friction with European states were quickly shot down.[17] Suggestions by various officials or advisers to Rafsanjani over the last three years that a dialogue with the US might be desirable have invariably been drowned out in a wave of press protest. Rafsanjani summoned the foreign press to a special press conference early in 1993 to better explain Iran's position on various controversial issues to the international community. But he clearly had to be

cautious and circumspect in setting out his position.

However, it is also the case that the government is to a large degree the prisoner of its own rhetoric. The demonizing of the US (and of the West in general) is largely the government's own doing. The government is sensitive to the opinion of its various constituencies within the revolutionary organizations--opinion which, admittedly, can be easily mobilized by clerics and leaders within the ruling group. But this constituency is narrow. A very small percentage of the population is actually involved in the political process.

It is obviously difficult to judge the state of public opinion, in the wider sense, on foreign policy issues. But when the US remains the country of the first choice for Iranians who wish to study abroad and is the country of residence of several hundred thousand Iranians, many with relatives at in Iran, when Western goods and lifestyles are so much part of the way of life of the very substantial Iranian middle class (middle class in the broadest sense), it is difficult to believe that the population as a whole shares the anti-American, or anti-Western rhetoric of the state. Again, given the shortages of housing, urban crowding and similar problems, it is difficult to believe that the bulk of politically aware Iranians prefer their government to expend resources, and attention, on foreign involvements--say in the Sudan or even the West Bank--rather than on domestic issues; or that the bulk of the politically aware population supports policies which seem to imply Iran must be forever in confrontation with the rest of the world.

These questions, in any case, are not openly debated; and in the absence of such debate, one could argue that the foreign policy priorities of the regime reflect the priorities of the inner ruling group and its various, fairly limited constituencies; and that the more moderate, more pragmatic

foreign policy that President Rafsanjani appeared to be pursuing only recently depends for its success not only on the resolution of conflicting agendas within the ruling group but also on the broadening, rather than the narrowing the regime's political base.

'Selective' Radicalism

Iran's foreign policy posture--even on the question of Islam and Palestine--is not consistent. The revival of an activist, interventionist, confrontational style in foreign policy, it turns out on closer examination, is selective, applies to some areas or countries, and to some issues, and not to others. A striking example of this is Iranian policy towards the newly independent states in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Iranian policy in these areas has been marked by restraint. There is no evidence that Iran has tried to stir up radical Islamic sentiments. It has been careful not to allow relations with Turkey to be exacerbated in a competition for influence in the newly-independent republics. It has sought, rather, to mediate differences between Armenia and Soviet Azerbaijan and, for a while, was more supportive of the Armenian than the Azeris, who should presumably be seen as Islamic Iran's 'natural' constituency. In contrast to Iran's strident protests over the treatment of Muslims in Bosnia and Somalia, the government has been relatively silent over the treatment by Russian troops of Persian speakers on the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border. And Iran has generally acquiesced in the setbacks suffered in Tajikistan by the Persian-speaking Tajiks (who culturally identify with Iran) at the hands of Uzbeks and their allies. Iran sought to exploit opportunities for expanded trade; but it has attached a priority to order and stability in the region.

This is not altogether surprising. Throughout the Iran-Iraq war Iran

maintained good relations with the UAE and (except for brief periods) with Kuwait, although these states were openly assisting the Iraqi war effort. Its harsh condemnation of the Arab-Israeli peace proposal notwithstanding, Iran has continued to repair its relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states who, after all, support this "treasonous" policy. Although in the mid-1980s relations with both France and England were badly disrupted, Iran more recently has not allowed its conflicts with the US and its general fulmination's against the West to affect its trade relations with western Europe.

There are some ready explanations. In Europe (and now also in the Persian Gulf), pragmatism and economic interests prevail over ideology. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, again, the importance of secure border areas and good relations with Russia prevail over "Islamic" issues. Key individuals care more intensely about certain regions of the world or certain issues than they do about others. Thus, for example, it could be argued that Khamene'i is greatly exercised over the fate of Palestine but far less so over the fate of Tajikistan.

To state the obvious, Iran's foreign policy, whether in its ideological or pragmatic variety is not of one piece. The success of the pragmatists lies precisely in their success in immunizing certain areas of foreign policy against the ideological or radical impulse. It has been a source of both strength and weakness for the regime that it has been able to sustain both radical and pragmatic foreign policies simultaneously.

Conclusion

What direction might Iran's foreign policy take in the near future? Three alternatives seem possible.

First, the more pragmatic policies of the 1989-92 period may once again dominate and truly shape foreign policy. At the moment, this does not appear likely. The reasons are implicit in the preceding analysis.

The perception of Iran as leader of a worldwide, revolutionary Islamic movement, and the belief that maintaining this role should assume a high foreign policy priority, has once again become dominant within the ruling group; or, to put it another way, those in the leadership committed to such a role for Iran have come to play a much greater role in shaping foreign policy. At the same time, the supreme leader, Khamene'i, has concluded that his legitimacy derives in large degree from a successful assertion of his claim to leadership of the Islamic world and that this requires him to champion the cause of Islamic movements that, generally, take a hostile attitude to the West or are attempting to transform the existing order. Moreover, Palestine has been defined by Iran as a "core" issue on which no compromise is permissible. The possibilities for friction between Iran and its Persian Gulf neighbors, other Middle Eastern countries, the US, and west European states are therefore considerable.

With the US particularly, the prospects for accommodation appear dim and the grounds for further acrimony extensive. The US demands a modification of Iranian behavior on what, to Iran, are "core issues" (such as Palestine or Iran's support for Islamic movements), or on issues of national interest, such as weapons acquisition and rearmament. The regime's fear it is being isolated by the US, targeted for some dire retribution, its sense of being beleaguered, only reinforce its inclination to adopt a confrontational posture. Domestically (largely due to conditions of its own making) the government would find it difficult to admit it was negotiating seeking an accommodation with the US.

The popular base of the regime is narrow. It rests, or so the regime appears to have concluded, on socially conservative forces and those elements that the regime rightly or wrongly assumes to be committed to Islamic issues, to anti-Americanism, and to a confrontational posture in foreign policy. At the same time, the regime (again rightly or wrongly) imagines that these policies appeal to the inchoate, unorganized mass in society. Rafsanjani might attempt to develop a base of support within the broad middle class. But such an attempt involves considerable political risk. Rafsanjani is unlikely to secure the support of other key members of the leadership to attempt it; and it will require concessions to the middle class--on civil rights and freedoms, traffic with the West, an end to privileged access to civil service jobs and universities now reserved for those with "revolutionary credentials," a curb on official corruption--that the government is unprepared to make.

A second possibility is that the government will revert to an all round "revolutionary" stance in foreign policy and accept the cost of such a policy in terms of further isolation and exacerbated relations with the West, the Persian Gulf states and Arab countries. This too seems unlikely. Iran's economic development and industrialization programs, access to suppliers of basic necessities (food and pharmaceuticals, some spare parts and raw materials) require good working relations with the West and Japan. The government, it is true, is not overly sensitive to or constrained by public opinion. Nevertheless, the government has itself made economic performance a yardstick by which it must be measured; and it must always take care that economic discontent does not articulate itself in political unrest.

The Islamic government has generally continued the policy of the previous regime of seeking to maintain working relations with Iran's immediate neighbors (Iraq, the Persian Gulf states, Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan,

the Soviet Union and now its successor states). Iraq aside, with all these states (and especially with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and to a lesser extent with Turkey) there have been periods of tension. But Iran had consistently sought to avoid a serious deterioration in relations and to maintain stability on its borders.

The technocracy does not make policy but is in a position to shape it. And insofar as the government's technocrats draw up plans and focus attention on economic development, refineries, steel mills, construction, borrowing and securing credit from international financial institutions, the IMF and the World Bank, and so forth, they keep Iran engaged and entangled with the international community. In brief, there are numerous factors which make it unlikely Iran will revert to a posture where radical ideology will dominate foreign policy to the exclusion of more pragmatic considerations.

The third, and most likely possibility, is that Iranian foreign policy will continue to be characterized by conflicting aims and purposes, by both ideology and pragmatism, both moderation and radicalism, both accommodation to and confrontation with the outside world.

It may appear that I have merely (and artificially) posited two extreme scenarios in order conveniently to opt for the "centrist" resolution. In fact, there are scholars and analysts of Iran who define the Islamic Republic precisely in terms of these two "extremes." Some analysts argue that the commitment to radical ideology in foreign policy is an expression of the very nature of the regime, that the Islamic Republic cannot abandon this policy and retain its essential character and that, short of a major internal upheaval, there are few prospects for the emergence of a moderate, pragmatic Iran. There are also analysts who argue that the radical streak in Iranian foreign policy is a remnant of early revolutionary zeal, and that the regime is evolving,

with some backsliding, into a state like other, "normal" states in the international community.

But there are compelling reasons why the regime's foreign policy behavior is likely to continue to reflect both these characteristics, and for some time to come.

First, a foreign policy of competing and conflicting purposes reflects accurately divisions within the leadership itself and among the politically significant constituencies from which the leadership draws its support.

Second, such a foreign policy would be consistent with the patterns of the past. Since the revolution in 1979, periods of pragmatism and moderation in foreign policy have alternated with more radical, ideologically driven periods; repeatedly, a domestic or international incident has caused significant turnabouts in the rhetoric and substance of foreign policy; or the regime has appeared moderate and reasonable on some issues, or in relation to certain regions or countries of the world, and radical and ideologically driven on others.

Third, the regime, or its foreign affairs practitioners, have shown an ability to maintain and manipulate a foreign policy of conflicting purposes without sustaining (in the regime's calculations) unacceptable levels of damage to the national interest. Iran has learned that the international community will tolerate inconsistency and contradiction in Iran's international behavior.

As we have noted, Iran has maintained tolerable relations with America's west European allies and Japan even as relations with the US remained strained or deteriorated; and Washington has succeeded only to a very limited extent in persuading Japan and governments in Europe to curtail their trade, technical and financial exchanges with Iran. American intercession notwithstanding,

China has not stopped arms sales to the Iranians. The assassination of Iranian dissidents on French, Austrian and Swiss soil did not materially affect the relations of these countries with Iran. Japan and members of the EC recently urged Iran to moderate its opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process, then apparently accepted without strenuous objection the assurances of Iranian diplomats that Iran will do nothing to oppose the process and that the fierce denunciations in Tehran of the negotiations are intended only for home consumption.

Finally, it is obvious that foreign policy radicalism is costly to the regime: access to technology is more difficult, World Bank loans are harder to secure, boycotts must be tolerated, arms must be obtained from new suppliers, industrial projects suffer delays, a climate is generated in which serious large scale foreign and domestic investment is discouraged. Moreover, even if Iran's contributions to Islamic movements abroad--to Hizballah in Lebanon, Hamas on the West Bank, the new Islamic regime in Sudan--are limited, nevertheless these involvement's drain financial resources and the time and attention of officials that could be directed at dealing with domestic problems. But oil revenues are still adequate (although increasingly less so) to meet the governments basic requirements. The economic costs of foreign policy radicalism are not sufficiently high to cause the regime to tack its sails consistently and determinedly to a different course--at least, not yet.

ENDNOTES

* "Ideologue" and "pragmatist," "radical" and "moderate," if lacking precision, are nevertheless useful terms for the purposes of this paper; a more exact sense in which the terms are used here will, I hope, emerge in the course of the paper.

[1] Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia, (henceforth FBIS/NESA) 8 May, 1989, p.60. Rafsanjani later claimed he had been misunderstood. See FBIS/NESA, 11 May 1989, pp. 45-46.)

[2] See especially the May 18, 1993 speech by Martin Indyk, senior director for Near East and South Asia, National Security Council, at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Exerpts from the speech appear in the Institute's bulletin, Policywatch , of 21 May, 1993. The depiction of Iran as a state pursuing policies inimical to US interests is more fully developed in a study done for the Institute by Patrick Clawson, Iran's Challenge to the West, How, When, and Why, vol. 33, 1993, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. See also reports on the Indyk speech and US policy makers' view of Iran as cited in the following: "White House to Step Up Plans to Isolate Iran, Iraq, " the Washington Post, 23 May, 1993, p. A26 and "Fearing More Hostility from Iran, US. Considers Moves to Isolate It," the New York Times, 26, May 1993, p. A1.

A spate of articles appeared in the American press in 1992-93 calling attention to the allegedly threatening Iranian rearmament program, Iran' support for radical Islamic movements in the Sudan and elsewhere and its sponsorship of terrorism. See, for example, Evans and Novak, "Ignoring Iran's Threat," Washington Post, 2 March, 1992, p. A31; and "Iran's New Satellite," Washington Post, 19 August, 1993, p. A29, in which the two columnists argue that Sudan has been turned into a "satellite" of the Islamic Republic. Charles Krauthammer, in "Iran: Orchestrator of Disorder," Washington Post, 1 January, 1993, p. A19, argued that Iran has become "the center of the World's new Comintern...The new threat is as evil as the old evil empire."

[3] One interesting example of the Iranian courting of American opinion-makers is the recently established forum on American-Iranian Relations (FAIR), which, as the name implies, is committed to improving relations between the two countries. Its publications, US-Iran Review (Washington, D.C.), provides useful information on the Iranian economy, and also stresses the Iranian perspective on US policies affecting Iran and depict Iran as offering attractive opportunities for foreign trade and investment. Another publication along similar lines, is Iran Business Monitor, published in New York by the Center for Iranian Trade and Development.

[4] FBIS/NESA, 21 October, 1991, p.55.

[5] This is the conclusion reached in a soon-to-be published study for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace by Shahram Chubin, entitled Iran's

National Security Policy: Capabilities, Intentions, and Impact. Chubin argues that while Iran seeks a regional role and regional influence, it does not appear to harbor territorial ambitions. Chubin also concludes that Iran's current conventional arms acquisition program does not appear unreasonable, given Iran's size, needs and regional security conditions. On the other hand, he notes, that while not conclusive, there is some evidence of an Iranian program to acquire nuclear weapons.

[6] See , for example , "Egypt Warns The C.I.A. Chief on Iran-Backed Terror," The New York Times, 18 April, 1993, p. A8; and "Israel Seeking to Convince U.S. that West is Threatened by Iran," The Washington Post, 13 March, 1993, p. A14.

[7] See Indyk's speech to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, cited in note #2 above.

[8] Reuters transcript of testimony by Djerijian, House Foreign Affairs Committee, 27 July, 1993.

[9] For an excellent discussion of the studied ambiguity Iran cultivates regarding its conventional and non-conventional armaments program and its foreign policy aims and intentions, see the forthcoming Carnegie Foundation study by Chubin, Iran's National Security Policy: Capabilities, Intentions, and Prospects, cited in footnote #4 above.

[10] An interesting instance of this policy and its ramifications occurred in July, 1993, when Hizballah used anti-tank rockets and other heavy weapons against the Israelis, inviting massive Israeli retaliation, in the worst outbreak of violence between the two adversaries in southern Lebanon in a decade. US Congressman Tom Lantos subsequently disclosed that just days before the Hizballah incursions, an Iran Air 747, guarded by Syrian troops, unloaded anti-tank rockets and other weapons at Damascus Airport. The weapons were trucked off to Lebanon under military escort. (See "Iranian Arms sent by Syria, US Says," the New York Times, 29 July, 1993.) The Hizballah raids ended, and Israeli troops withdrew, after a visit to Damascus by the Iranian foreign minister, and apparently joint Syrian-Iranian pressure on the Hizballah; President Clinton subsequently praised Syrian "restraint" during the hostilities. The incident suggests the following conclusions: 1) that Iran is willing to go so far as to supply heavy weapons to Hizballah for its anti-Israeli campaign, knowing full well that detection is possible; 2) that President Asad, using the thin cover of deniability, was willing to permit this at a time when Syrian-Israeli talks over Israeli withdrawal from the Golan seemed stalled (the size and intensity of Israel's retaliation against Hizballah is probably to be explained by this evidence of large Iranian arms transfers and Syrian complicity); and 3) that Syria and Iran are capable of preventing serious Hizballah armed activity if persuaded the price to be paid is too high. On this occasion, it appears that Asad, having made his point, was able to enlist the Iranians in getting Hizballah to put a stop to their operations.

[11] The chairman of the Majlis foreign relations committee, Hassan Ruhani, told the Austrian press agency on September 22 that while Iran opposes the Israeli-PLO accord, it will not take any action against the PLO or attempt to obstruct the peace process. His statement, attacked in the Iranian press, was

withdrawn. It appears to have been intended for European consumption and can hardly be construed as representing the official Iranian position on the peace talks, given the statements by Khamene'i, Rafsanjani, and other leading Iranian officials.

[12] FBIS/NESA, 17, September, 1993, pp. 48-50.

[13] See commentary by Majlis Speaker Nateq-Nuri; Ahmad Khomeini; and Ayatollah Mohammad Emami-Kashani, cited in FBIS/NESA, 17 September, 1993, pp. 50-51; by the chief of the judiciary, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, in FBIS/NESA, 2 August, 1993, p.77; and by Rafsanjani cited in the Mideast Mirror, 14 September, 1993, p.35.

[14] Khamene'i, for example, has over many years given prominence in public statements to the need to "liberate" Palestine and he has been a consistently harsh critic of Israel. Rafsanjani has a reputation for readiness to make a deal on most issues. But he may also harbor strong feelings on the matter of Palestine and Israel. See, for example, his 1989 sermon, reported in FBIS/NESA, 8 May, 1989, pp. 58-63.

[15] For example, Iran's ambassador to Germany explained in an interview that Iran's position on Palestine would strengthen Iran's standing in the Islamic world because this was the position of one billion Muslims. See remarks by the Iranian Amabassador to Germany, Hosain Musavian, in FBIS/NESA, 21 September, 1993, p.61.

[16] Iranian newspapers, for example, have referred to the access to lucrative Arab markets that Israel hopes to secure through a peace agreement. See for example, the columns by H. Fathi and F. Assef in the Tehran daily, Abrar, cited in Mideast Mirror, 6 September, 1993, p. 13, and by M. J. Larijani in Ettelaat, cited in Mideast Mirror, 17 September 1993, p. 6.

[17] Rafsanjani attempted in 1990 to suggest that Khomeini's fatwa (religious opinion) pronouncing a death sentence against Rushdie was the judgment of a single jurist and (by implication) that other jurists might have other, contrary opinions. (See FBIS/NESA, 16 February, 1990, p. 49 and Rafsanjani's attempt to respond to criticism by somewhat modifying this view in FBIS/NESA, 20 February, 1990, p. 67). For numerous statements that rejected the Rafsanjani view, see the opinion expressed by Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani, who called Khomeini's decree "irrevocable" and said Rushdie should be killed (FBIS/NESA, 27 February, 1990, p. 39-40) and by Chief Justice Mohammad Yazdi who stated all Muslims have a duty to carry out Khomeini's decree (FBIS/NESA, 28 February, 1990, p. 58.