
Subject: End Times

Posted by [Mark L](#) on Mon, 04 Aug 2008 16:15:21 GMT

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Not the usual end time stuff here. I get a news letter from the Stratfor institute every week about geopolitical issues and terrorism related issues. Sometimes it is very interesting. The latest one was about biological warfare. Their conclusion was there is not much to be concerned about. The geopolitical letter deals with issues from all over the world. Very very interesting. Stuff you never thought of. I don't always agree with their conclusion but it is always interesting. To me endtime issues are more than just spiritual. I'm sure you would all agree. The bible speaks of wars rumors of wars etc. I for one like to keep up with what is going on. I'd thought I would post the latest one here for all to read. If you're interested in signing up for their free newsletter you can do so here.

https://www.stratfor.com/campaign/get_free_intelligence_stratfor?source=email_120756_2008-07-30

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I'll put the newsletter in the reply below. BTW the reason it is a free newsletter is because they hope you will sign up for the premium stuff which does cost money. I never bother with that though.

Subject: Re: End Times

Posted by [Mark L](#) on Mon, 04 Aug 2008 16:17:08 GMT

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By Fred Burton and Scott Stewart

Dr. Jeffrey W. Runge, chief medical officer at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, told a congressional subcommittee on July 22 that the risk of a large-scale biological attack on the nation is significant and that the U.S. government knows its terrorist enemies have sought to use biological agents as instruments of warfare. Runge also said that the United States believes that capability is within the terrorists' reach.

Runge gave his testimony before a subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology that was holding a field hearing in Providence, R.I., to discuss the topic of "Emerging Biological Threats and Public Health Preparedness."

During his testimony, Runge specifically pointed to al Qaeda as the most significant threat and testified that the United States had determined that the terrorist organization is seeking to develop and use a biological weapon to cause mass casualties in an attack. According to Runge, U.S.

analysis indicates that anthrax is the most likely choice, and a successful single-city attack on an unprepared population could kill hundreds of thousands of citizens.

Later in his testimony, Runge remarked that many do not perceive the threat of bioterrorism to be as significant as that of a nuclear or conventional strike, even though such an attack could kill as many people as a nuclear detonation and have its own long-term environmental effects.

We must admit to being among those who do not perceive the threat of bioterrorism to be as significant as that posed by a nuclear strike. To be fair, it must be noted that we also do not see strikes using chemical or radiological weapons rising to the threshold of a true weapon of mass destruction either. The successful detonation of a nuclear weapon in an American city would be far more devastating than any of these other forms of attack.

In fact, based on the past history of nonstate actors conducting attacks using biological weapons, we remain skeptical that a nonstate actor could conduct a biological weapons strike capable of creating as many casualties as a large strike using conventional explosives – such as the October 2002 Bali bombings that resulted in 202 deaths or the March 2004 train bombings in Madrid that killed 191.

We do not disagree with Runge's statements that actors such as al Qaeda have demonstrated an interest in biological weapons. There is ample evidence that al Qaeda has a rudimentary biological weapons capability. However, there is a huge chasm of capability that separates intent and a rudimentary biological weapons program from a biological weapons program that is capable of killing hundreds of thousands of people.

Misconceptions About Biological Weapons

There are many misconceptions involving biological weapons. The three most common are that they are easy to obtain, that they are easy to deploy effectively, and that, when used, they always cause massive casualties.

While it is certainly true that there are many different types of actors who can easily gain access to rudimentary biological agents, there are far fewer actors who can actually isolate virulent strains of the agents, weaponize them and then effectively employ these agents in a manner that will realistically pose a significant threat of causing mass casualties. While organisms such as anthrax are present in the environment and are not difficult to obtain, more highly virulent strains of these tend to be far more difficult to locate, isolate and replicate. Such efforts require highly skilled individuals and sophisticated laboratory equipment.

Even incredibly deadly biological substances such as ricin and botulinum toxin are difficult to use in mass attacks. This difficulty arises when one attempts to take a rudimentary biological substance and then convert it into a weaponized form – a form that is potent enough to be deadly and yet readily dispersed. Even if this weaponization hurdle can be overcome, once

developed, the weaponized agent must then be integrated with a weapons system that can effectively take large quantities of the agent and evenly distribute it in lethal doses to the intended targets.

During the past several decades in the era of modern terrorism, biological weapons have been used very infrequently and with very little success. This fact alone serves to highlight the gap between the biological warfare misconceptions and reality. Militant groups desperately want to kill people and are constantly seeking new innovations that will allow them to kill larger numbers of people. Certainly if biological weapons were as easily obtained, as easily weaponized and as effective at producing mass casualties as commonly portrayed, militant groups would have used them far more frequently than they have.

Militant groups are generally adaptive and responsive to failure. If something works, they will use it. If it does not, they will seek more effective means of achieving their deadly goals. A good example of this was the rise and fall of the use of chlorine in militant attacks in Iraq.

Anthrax

As noted by Runge, the spore-forming bacterium *Bacillus anthracis* is readily available in nature and can be deadly if inhaled, if ingested or if it comes into contact with a person's skin. What constitutes a deadly dose of inhalation anthrax has not been precisely quantified, but is estimated to be somewhere between 8,000 and 50,000 spores. One gram of weaponized anthrax, such as that contained in the letters mailed to U.S. Sens. Tom Daschle and Patrick Leahy in October 2001, can contain up to one trillion spores — enough to cause somewhere between 20 and 100 million deaths. The letters mailed to Daschle and Leahy reportedly contained about one gram each for a total estimated quantity of two grams of anthrax spores: enough to have theoretically killed between 40 and 200 million people. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the current population of the United States is 304.7 million. In a worst-case scenario, the letters mailed to Daschle and Leahy theoretically contained enough anthrax spores to kill nearly two-thirds of the U.S. population.

Yet, in spite of their incredibly deadly potential, those letters (along with an estimated five other anthrax letters mailed in a prior wave to media outlets such as the New York Post and the major television networks) killed only five people; another 22 victims were infected by the spores but recovered after receiving medical treatment. This difference between the theoretical number of fatal victims — hundreds of millions — and the actual number of victims — five — highlights the challenges in effectively distributing even a highly virulent and weaponized strain of an organism to a large number of potential victims.

To summarize: obtaining a biological agent is fairly simple. Isolating a virulent strain and then weaponizing that strain is somewhat more difficult. But the key to biological warfare — effectively distributing a weaponized agent to the intended target — is the really difficult part of the process. Anyone planning a biological attack against a large target such as a city needs to be concerned

about a host of factors such as dilution, wind velocity and direction, particle size and weight, the susceptibility of the disease to ultraviolet light, heat, dryness or even rain. Small-scale localized attacks such as the 2001 anthrax letters or the 1984 salmonella attack undertaken by the Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh cult are far easier to commit.

It is also important to remember that anthrax is not some sort of untreatable super disease. While anthrax does form hardy spores that can remain inert for a period of time, the disease is not easily transmitted from person to person, and therefore is unlikely to create an epidemic outside of the area targeted by the attack. Anthrax infections can be treated by the use of readily available antibiotics. The spores' incubation period also permits time for early treatment if the attack is noticed.

The deadliest known anthrax incident in recent years occurred in 1979 when an accidental release of aerosolized spores from a Soviet biological weapons facility in Sverdlovsk affected some 94 people – reportedly killing 68 of them. This facility was one of dozens of laboratories that were part of the Soviet Union's massive and well-funded biological weapons program, one that employed thousands of the country's brightest scientists. In fact, it was the largest biological weapons program in history.

Perhaps the largest attempt by a nonstate actor to cause mass casualties using anthrax was the series of attacks conducted in 1993 by the Japanese cult group Aum Shinrikyo in Tokyo.

In the late 1980s, Aum's team of trained scientists spent millions of dollars to develop a series of state-of-the-art biological weapons research and production laboratories. The group experimented with botulinum toxin, anthrax, cholera and Q fever and even tried to acquire the Ebola virus. The group hoped to produce enough biological agent to trigger a global Armageddon. Its first attempts at unleashing mega-death on the world involved the use of botulinum toxin. In April 1990, the group used a fleet of three trucks equipped with aerosol sprayers to release liquid botulinum toxin on targets that included the Imperial Palace, the National Diet of Japan, the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, two U.S. naval bases and the airport in Narita. In spite of the massive quantities of toxin released, there were no mass casualties, and, in fact, nobody outside of the cult was even aware the attacks had taken place.

When the botulinum operations failed to produce results, Aum's scientists went back to the drawing board and retooled their biological weapons facilities to produce anthrax. By mid-1993, they were ready to launch attacks involving anthrax; between June and August of 1993, the group sprayed thousands of gallons of aerosolized liquid anthrax in Tokyo. This time, Aum not only employed its fleet of sprayer trucks but also used aerosol sprayers mounted on the roof of their headquarters to disperse a cloud of aerosolized anthrax over the city. Again, the attacks produced no results and were not even noticed. It was only after the group's successful 1995 subway attacks using sarin nerve agent that a Japanese government investigation discovered that the 1990 and 1993 biological attacks had occurred.

Biological Weapons Production

Aum Shinrikyo's team of highly trained scientists worked under ideal conditions in a first-world country with a virtually unlimited budget. They were able to travel the world in search of deadly organisms and even received technical advice from former Soviet scientists. The team worked in large, modern laboratory facilities to produce substantial quantities of biological weapons. They were able to operate these facilities inside industrial parks and openly order the large quantities of laboratory equipment they required. Yet, in spite of the millions of dollars the group spent on its biological weapons program and the lack of any meaningful interference from the Japanese government, Aum still experienced problems in creating virulent biological agents and also found it difficult to dispense those agents effectively.

Today, al Qaeda finds itself operating in a very different environment than that experienced by Aum Shinrikyo in 1993. At that time, nobody was looking for Aum or its biological and chemical weapons program. By contrast, since the Sept. 11 attacks, the United States and its allies have actively pursued al Qaeda leaders and sought to dismantle and defang the organization. The United States and its allies have focused a considerable amount of resources in tracking and disassembling al Qaeda's chemical and biological warfare efforts. The al Qaeda network has had millions of dollars of its assets seized in a number of countries, and it no longer has the safe haven of Afghanistan from which to operate. The chemical and biological facilities the group established in the 1990s in Afghanistan such as the Deronta training camp, where cyanide and other toxins were used to kill dogs, and a crude anthrax production facility in Kandahar have been found and destroyed by U.S. troops.

Operating in the badlands along the Pakistani-Afghan border, al Qaeda cannot easily build large modern factories capable of producing large quantities of agents or toxins. Such fixed facilities are expensive and consume a lot of resources. Even if al Qaeda had the spare capacity to invest in such facilities, the fixed nature of them means that they could be compromised and quickly destroyed by the United States.

If al Qaeda could somehow create and hide a fixed biological weapons facility in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas or North-West Frontier Province, it would still face the daunting task of transporting large quantities of biological agents from the Pakistani badlands to targets in the United States or Europe. Al Qaeda operatives certainly can create and transport small quantities of these compounds, but not enough to wreak the kind of massive damage it desires.

Al Qaeda's lead chemical and biological weapons expert, Midhat Mursi al-Sayid Umar, also known as Abu Khabab al-Masri, was reportedly killed on July 28, 2008, by a U.S. missile strike on his home in Pakistan. Al-Sayid, who had a \$5 million dollar bounty on his head, was initially reported to have been one of those killed in the January 2006 strike in Damadola. If he was indeed killed, his death should be another significant blow to the group's biological warfare

efforts.

Of course, we must recognize that the jihadist threat goes just beyond the al Qaeda core. As we have been writing for several years now, al Qaeda has undergone a metamorphosis from a smaller core group of professional operatives into an operational model that encourages independent grassroots jihadists to conduct attacks. The core al Qaeda group, through men like al-Sayid, has published manuals in hard copy and on the Internet that provide instructions on how to manufacture rudimentary biological weapons.

It is our belief that independent jihadist cells and lone-wolf jihadists will almost certainly attempt to brew up some of the recipes from the al Qaeda cookbook. There also exists a very real threat that a jihadist sympathizer could obtain a small quantity of deadly biological organisms by infiltrating a research facility.

This means that we likely will see some limited attempts at employing biological weapons. That does not mean, however, that such attacks will be large-scale or create mass casualties.

The Bottom Line

While there has been much consternation and alarm-raising over the potential for widespread proliferation of biological weapons and the possible use of such weapons on a massive scale, there are significant constraints on such designs. The current dearth of substantial biological weapons programs and arsenals by governments worldwide, and the even smaller number of cases in which systems were actually used, seems to belie "or at least bring into question" the intense concern about such programs.

While we would like to believe that countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia have halted their biological warfare programs for some noble ideological or humanitarian reason, we simply can't. If biological weapons were in practice as effective as some would lead us to believe, these states would surely maintain stockpiles of them, just as they have maintained their nuclear weapons programs. Biological weapons programs were abandoned because they proved to be not as effective as advertised and because conventional munitions proved to provide more bang for the buck.

In some ways, the psychological fear of a "super weapon" undetectable, microscopic, easily delivered and extremely deadly shapes assessment of the threat, more so than an objective understanding of actual capability and intent (not to mention the extreme difficulties of ever creating some sort of a super bug). Conventional weapons systems, and unconventional tactics, continue to be the most cost-effective and proven methods of warfare, whether between state actors or between state and nonstate actors. Nuclear weapons have also been shown to have true weapons of mass destruction power.

To help keep the cost-benefit calculation of a biological warfare program in perspective, consider

that Seung-Hui Cho, the man who committed the shooting at Virginia Tech, killed 32 people “more than six times as many as were killed by the 2001 anthrax letters. John Mohammed, the so-called “D.C. Sniper,” was able to cause a considerable amount of panic and kill twice as many people (10) by simply purchasing and using one assault rifle. Compare Mohammed’s effort and expenses to that of the Aum Shinrikyo anthrax program that took years of work by a huge team and millions of dollars to develop but infected no one.

Now, just because biological weapons are not all they are cracked up to be does not mean that efforts to undermine the biological warfare plans and efforts of militant groups such as al Qaeda should not continue or that programs to detect such agents or develop more effective treatments and vaccines should be halted. Even though an anthrax attack probably will not kill huge numbers of people, as we saw in the case of the anthrax letters, such an attack can be quite disruptive. Cleaning up after such an attack is expensive and takes considerable time and effort. Like a dirty bomb, an anthrax attack will more likely serve as a weapon of mass disruption and not a weapon of mass destruction.

Due to the disruption and the potential for some deaths as a result of an anthrax attack, the threat against the United States does remain a significant concern. However, the threat it represents is not as great as that of conventional attacks using firearms and explosives against soft targets, and it certainly does not rise anywhere near the level of a threat posed by a terrorist attack using a nuclear weapon.

Homeland security resources are very limited and have been shrinking as we move further from 9/11 and as other items begin to take precedence in the federal budget. This means that an array of different programs is being forced to scramble for an ever-shrinking piece of the funding pie. In such an environment, it is often a temptation to overstate the threat. Such overstatements are harmful because they can sometimes prevent a rational distribution of resources and prevent resources from being allocated to where they are needed most

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Subject: Iran vs Israel

Posted by [Mark L](#) on Sat, 16 Aug 2008 01:31:40 GMT
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Here's a link by Eric Margolis about Iran's danger to Israel. I find his analysis about world events quite good. Other than his antipathy toward Israel of course.

http://www.ericmargolis.com/archives/2008/07/plain_facts_abo.php

Lots of rhetoric (sp?) in the news. I like to get good info.

Subject: Analysis Of Israel
Posted by [Mark L](#) on Mon, 15 Sep 2008 15:00:06 GMT
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This came from the Stratfor institute about a week ago. It deals with Israels actions in Georgia but has some interesting analysis on Israels relations with the world. Particularly Russia. I thought I would post it for those of you who didn't sign up for the newsletters.

Israeli Strategy After the Russo-Georgian War

September 8, 2008

By George Friedman

The Russo-Georgian war continues to resonate, and it is time to expand our view of it. The primary players in Georgia, apart from the Georgians, were the Russians and Americans. On the margins were the Europeans, providing advice and admonitions but carrying little weight. Another player, carrying out a murkier role, was Israel. Israeli advisers were present in Georgia alongside American advisers, and Israeli businessmen were doing business there. The Israelis had a degree of influence but were minor players compared to the Americans.

More interesting, perhaps, was the decision, publicly announced by the Israelis, to end weapons sales to Georgia the week before the Georgians attacked South Ossetia. Clearly the Israelis knew what was coming and wanted no part of it. Afterward, unlike the Americans, the Israelis did everything they could to placate the Russians, including having Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert travel to Moscow to offer reassurances. Whatever the Israelis were doing in Georgia, they did not want a confrontation with the Russians.

It is impossible to explain the Israeli reasoning for being in Georgia outside the context of a careful

review of Israeli strategy in general. From that, we can begin to understand why the Israelis are involved in affairs far outside their immediate area of responsibility, and why they responded the way they did in Georgia.

We need to divide Israeli strategic interests into four separate but interacting pieces:

The Palestinians living inside Israel's post-1967 borders.

The so-called "confrontation states" that border Israel, including Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and especially Egypt.

The Muslim world beyond this region.

The great powers able to influence and project power into these first three regions.

The Palestinian Issue

The most important thing to understand about the first interest, the Palestinian issue, is that the Palestinians do not represent a strategic threat to the Israelis. Their ability to inflict casualties is an irritant to the Israelis (if a tragedy to the victims and their families), but they cannot threaten the existence of the Israeli state. The Palestinians can impose a level of irritation that can affect Israeli morale, inducing the Israelis to make concessions based on the realistic assessment that the Palestinians by themselves cannot in any conceivable time frame threaten Israel's core interests, regardless of political arrangements. At the same time, the argument goes, given that the Palestinians cannot threaten Israeli interests, what is the value of making concessions that will not change the threat of terrorist attacks? Given the structure of Israeli politics, this matter is both substrategic and gridlocked.

The matter is compounded by the fact that the Palestinians are deeply divided among themselves. For Israel, this is a benefit, as it creates a de facto civil war among Palestinians and reduces the threat from them. But it also reduces pressure and opportunities to negotiate. There is no one on the Palestinian side who speaks authoritatively for all Palestinians. Any agreement reached with the Palestinians would, from the Israeli point of view, have to include guarantees on the cessation of terrorism. No one has ever been in a position to guarantee that "and certainly Fatah does not today speak for Hamas. Therefore, a settlement on a Palestinian state remains gridlocked because it does not deliver any meaningful advantages to the Israelis.

The Confrontation States

The second area involves the confrontation states. Israel has formal peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. It has had informal understandings with Damascus on things like Lebanon, but Israel has no permanent understanding with Syria. The Lebanese are too deeply divided to allow state-to-state understandings, but Israel has had understandings with different Lebanese factions at different times (and particularly close relations with some of the Christian factions).

Jordan is effectively an ally of Israel. It has been hostile to the Palestinians at least since 1970, when the Palestine Liberation Organization attempted to overthrow the Hashemite regime, and the Jordanians regard the Israelis and Americans as guarantors of their national security.

Israel's relationship with Egypt is publicly cooler but quite cooperative. The only group that poses any serious challenge to the Egyptian state is The Muslim Brotherhood, and hence Cairo views Hamas as a derivative of that organization as a potential threat. The Egyptians and Israelis have maintained peaceful relations for more than 30 years, regardless of the state of Israeli-Palestinian relations. The Syrians by themselves cannot go to war with Israel and survive. Their primary interest lies in Lebanon, and when they work against Israel, they work with surrogates like Hezbollah. But their own view on an independent Palestinian state is murky, since they claim all of Palestine as part of a greater Syria a view not particularly relevant at the moment. Therefore, Israel's only threat on its border comes from Syria via surrogates in Lebanon and the possibility of Syria's acquiring weaponry that would threaten Israel, such as chemical or nuclear weapons.

The Wider Muslim World

As to the third area, Israel's position in the Muslim world beyond the confrontation states is much more secure than either it or its enemies would like to admit. Israel has close, formal strategic relations with Turkey as well as with Morocco. Turkey and Egypt are the giants of the region, and being aligned with them provides Israel with the foundations of regional security. But Israel also has excellent relations with countries where formal relations do not exist, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula.

The conservative monarchies of the region deeply distrust the Palestinians, particularly Fatah. As part of the Nasserite Pan-Arab socialist movement, Fatah on several occasions directly threatened these monarchies. Several times in the 1970s and 1980s, Israeli intelligence provided these monarchies with information that prevented assassinations or uprisings.

Saudi Arabia, for one, has never engaged in anti-Israeli activities beyond rhetoric. In the aftermath of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, Saudi Arabia and Israel forged close behind-the-scenes relations, especially because of an assertive Iran a common foe of both the Saudis and the Israelis. Saudi Arabia has close relations with Hamas, but these have as much to do with maintaining a defensive position as keeping Hamas and its Saudi backers off Riyadh's back as they do with government policy. The Saudis are cautious regarding Hamas, and the other monarchies are even more so.

More to the point, Israel does extensive business with these regimes, particularly in the defense area. Israeli companies, working formally through American or European subsidiaries, carry out extensive business throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The nature of these subsidiaries is well-known on all sides, though no one is eager to trumpet this. The governments of both Israel and the Arabian Peninsula would have internal political problems if they publicized it, but a visit to Dubai, the business capital of the region, would find many Israelis doing extensive business under third-party passports. Add to this that the states of the Arabian Peninsula are afraid of Iran, and the relationship becomes even more important to all sides.

There is an interesting idea that if Israel were to withdraw from the occupied territories and create an independent Palestinian state, then perceptions of Israel in the Islamic world would shift. This is a commonplace view in Europe. The fact is that we can divide the Muslim world into three groups.

First, there are those countries that already have formal ties to Israel. Second are those that have close working relations with Israel and where formal ties would complicate rather than deepen relations. Pakistan and Indonesia, among others, fit into this class. Third are those that are absolutely hostile to Israel, such as Iran. It is very difficult to identify a state that has no informal or formal relations with Israel but would adopt these relations if there were a Palestinian state. Those states that are hostile to Israel would remain hostile after a withdrawal from the Palestinian territories, since their issue is with the existence of Israel, not its borders.

The point of all this is that Israeli security is much better than it might appear if one listened only to the rhetoric. The Palestinians are divided and at war with each other. Under the best of circumstances, they cannot threaten Israel's survival. The only bordering countries with which the Israelis have no formal agreements are Syria and Lebanon, and neither can threaten Israel's security. Israel has close ties to Turkey, the most powerful Muslim country in the region. It also has much closer commercial and intelligence ties with the Arabian Peninsula than is generally acknowledged, although the degree of cooperation is well-known in the region. From a security standpoint, Israel is doing well.

The Broader World

Israel is also doing extremely well in the broader world, the fourth and final area. Israel always has needed a foreign source of weapons and technology, since its national security needs outstrip its domestic industrial capacity. Its first patron was the Soviet Union, which hoped to gain a foothold in the Middle East. This was quickly followed by France, which saw Israel as an ally in Algeria and against Egypt. Finally, after 1967, the United States came to support Israel. Washington saw Israel as a threat to Syria, which could threaten Turkey from the rear at a time when the Soviets were threatening Turkey from the north. Turkey was the doorway to the Mediterranean, and Syria was a threat to Turkey. Egypt was also aligned with the Soviets from 1956 onward, long before the United States had developed a close working relationship with Israel.

That relationship has declined in importance for the Israelis. Over the years the amount of U.S. aid — roughly \$2.5 billion annually — has remained relatively constant. It was never adjusted upward for inflation, and so shrunk as a percentage of Israeli gross domestic product from roughly 20 percent in 1974 to under 2 percent today. Israel's dependence on the United States has plummeted. The dependence that once existed has become a marginal convenience. Israel holds onto the aid less for economic reasons than to maintain the concept in the United States of Israeli dependence and U.S. responsibility for Israeli security. In other words, it is more psychological and political from Israel's point of view than an economic or security requirement.

Israel therefore has no threats or serious dependencies, save two. The first is the acquisition of nuclear weapons by a power that cannot be deterred – in other words, a nation prepared to commit suicide to destroy Israel. Given Iranian rhetoric, Iran would appear at times to be such a nation. But given that the Iranians are far from having a deliverable weapon, and that in the Middle East no one's rhetoric should be taken all that seriously, the Iranian threat is not one the Israelis are compelled to deal with right now.

The second threat would come from the emergence of a major power prepared to intervene overtly or covertly in the region for its own interests, and in the course of doing so, redefine the regional threat to Israel. The major candidate for this role is Russia.

During the Cold War, the Soviets pursued a strategy to undermine American interests in the region. In the course of this, the Soviets activated states and groups that could directly threaten Israel. There is no significant conventional military threat to Israel on its borders unless Egypt is willing and well-armed. Since the mid-1970s, Egypt has been neither. Even if Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak were to die and be replaced by a regime hostile to Israel, Cairo could do nothing unless it had a patron capable of training and arming its military. The same is true of Syria and Iran to a great extent. Without access to outside military technology, Iran is a nation merely of frightening press conferences. With access, the entire regional equation shifts.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, no one was prepared to intervene in the Middle East the way the Soviets had. The Chinese have absolutely no interest in struggling with the United States in the Middle East, which accounts for a similar percentage of Chinese and U.S. oil consumption. It is far cheaper to buy oil in the Middle East than to engage in a geopolitical struggle with China's major trade partner, the United States. Even if there was interest, no European powers can play this role given their individual military weakness, and Europe as a whole is a geopolitical myth. The only country that can threaten the balance of power in the Israeli geopolitical firmament is Russia.

Israel fears that if Russia gets involved in a struggle with the United States, Moscow will aid Middle Eastern regimes that are hostile to the United States as one of its levers, beginning with Syria and Iran. Far more frightening to the Israelis is the idea of the Russians once again playing a covert role in Egypt, toppling the tired Mubarak regime, installing one friendlier to their own interests, and arming it. Israel's fundamental fear is not Iran. It is a rearmed, motivated and hostile Egypt backed by a great power.

The Russians are not after Israel, which is a sideshow for them. But in the course of finding ways to threaten American interests in the Middle East – seeking to force the Americans out of their desired sphere of influence in the former Soviet region – the Russians could undermine what at the moment is a quite secure position in the Middle East for the United States.

This brings us back to what the Israelis were doing in Georgia. They were not trying to acquire

airbases from which to bomb Iran. That would take thousands of Israeli personnel in Georgia for maintenance, munitions management, air traffic control and so on. And it would take Ankara allowing the use of Turkish airspace, which isn't very likely. Plus, if that were the plan, then stopping the Georgians from attacking South Ossetia would have been a logical move.

The Israelis were in Georgia in an attempt, in parallel with the United States, to prevent Russia's re-emergence as a great power. The nuts and bolts of that effort involves shoring up states in the former Soviet region that are hostile to Russia, as well as supporting individuals in Russia who oppose Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's direction. The Israeli presence in Georgia, like the American one, was designed to block the re-emergence of Russia.

As soon as the Israelis got wind of a coming clash in South Ossetia, they "unlike the United States" switched policies dramatically. Where the United States increased its hostility toward Russia, the Israelis ended weapons sales to Georgia before the war. After the war, the Israelis initiated diplomacy designed to calm Russian fears. Indeed, at the moment the Israelis have a greater interest in keeping the Russians from seeing Israel as an enemy than they have in keeping the Americans happy. U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney may be uttering vague threats to the Russians. But Olmert was reassuring Moscow it has nothing to fear from Israel, and therefore should not sell weapons to Syria, Iran, Hezbollah or anyone else hostile to Israel.

Interestingly, the Americans have started pumping out information that the Russians are selling weapons to Hezbollah and Syria. The Israelis have avoided that issue carefully. They can live with some weapons in Hezbollah's hands a lot more easily than they can live with a coup in Egypt followed by the introduction of Russian military advisers. One is a nuisance; the other is an existential threat. Russia may not be in a position to act yet, but the Israelis aren't waiting for the situation to get out of hand.

Israel is in control of the Palestinian situation and relations with the countries along its borders. Its position in the wider Muslim world is much better than it might appear. Its only enemy there is Iran, and that threat is much less clear than the Israelis say publicly. But the threat of Russia intervening in the Muslim world "particularly in Syria and Egypt" is terrifying to the Israelis. It is a risk they won't live with if they don't have to. So the Israelis switched their policy in Georgia with lightning speed. This could create frictions with the United States, but the Israeli-American relationship isn't what it used to be.

Subject: Re: Analysis Of Israel
Posted by [william](#) on Wed, 17 Sep 2008 03:24:17 GMT
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Thanks for the info, Hardbones.

Blessings,
William
