

The Precipitous American Withdrawal from Syria Will Embolden Israel's Enemies

By Yaakov Lappin

jns.org

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Turkey and Iran can expand their influence.

The decision by U.S. President Donald Trump to pull back troops from northern Syria in the face of a likely Turkish offensive against Kurdish forces is a blow to American deterrent power in the Middle East. It is also a move that looks set to hasten the creation of a power vacuum, which a variety of Islamists will look forward to filling.

While it's too soon to know the full impact the move will have, it raises several potential scenarios, some of which would be deeply destructive for regional security.

The Pentagon was reportedly taken by surprise by the decision. Some of the fiercest criticism to Trump's sudden move came from the president's own Republican allies and those who had worked closely with him.

Sen. Lindsay Graham (R-S.C.) blasted the decision as shortsighted, impulsive and irresponsible in its treatment of the Kurds—a loyal U.S. ally—as well as wind up being a move that will prove beneficial to ISIS and Iran, the world's foremost state-backer of terrorism.

After receiving a rare rebuke from Republican allies, Trump responded with a tweet saying he would “obliterate” the Turkey economy if it does anything he considers to be “off limits.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been threatening to invade northern Syria in order to destroy Kurdish YPG forces, which are a central part of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The SDF has been a key U.S. partner on the ground in Syria, spearheading land operations against ISIS's caliphate, playing a key role in the caliphate's destruction and losing an estimated 11,000 fighters in the process.

Now, the SDF has been abandoned to the designs of an Islamist Turkey bent on starting a new war with the Kurds. Erdoğan wants his military to take over the SDF's area of operations—an area that includes the Al-Hawl refugee camp in northern Syria, which is crawling with ISIS loyalists, and which observers have warned would form the basis of an ISIS revival if the site stops being secured by the SDF.

Brett McGurk, a former presidential envoy who worked under Trump to help shape the campaign against ISIS in Syria, warned in a tweet on Monday that Turkey has “neither the intent, desire, nor capacity to manage 60k detainees” in Al-Hawl. “Believing otherwise is a reckless gamble with our national security,” he stated.

As a result, the first two potential beneficiaries of Trump's decision are Turkey and ISIS.

A resurgent ISIS would destabilize the region, and a

new Turkish-Kurdish conflict has the potential to create a new humanitarian disaster.

Countering the regional threat posed by Tehran

The Kurds in Syria, for their part, find themselves in the nightmare scenario of being fully abandoned to Turkey's whims and can be expected to make desperate efforts to find a new superpower friend. That can only be Russia, which has demonstrated full loyalty to its clients, already maintains a powerful military presence in Syria and whose regional credibility has surpassed that of the United States, which is seen to be turning inwards, disengaging from the region and even betraying allies.

This doesn't mean, however, that Russia welcomes the move, as Moscow hasn't signaled approval of a Turkish incursion into Syrian territory. Its interest is in preserving the regime sovereignty of Syrian President Bashar Assad and stabilizing the country. Turkey's plans would undermine those interests.

An additional beneficiary of the U.S. withdrawal is likely to be Iran. Iranian-backed militias are located to the south and east of Kurdish-controlled northern Syria, and these forces are likely to try to fill some of the vacuum left behind.

Iran is working to flood Syria with its proxy forces, and to build a continuous land corridor between Iraq and Syria. America's military presence in northern Syria—and the presence of pro-American Kurdish forces—helped block such efforts. Now that roadblock looks set to be lifted.

From a wider regional perspective, the Iranian regime has assessed that isolationism and adversity to risk-taking is driving Trump's agenda in the region, and it is this calculation that led the Iranians to dare strike Saudi Arabian oil facilities in September, using advanced cruise missiles and explosive drone swarms.

That attack, launched from Iranian territory according to U.S. intelligence sources, forms the most significant strike on Middle Eastern oil sites since the 1991 Gulf War and shook up the global oil market.

As the Iranians predicted, no military response followed.

These developments have the potential to embolden Iran to hasten violations of what remains of the 2015 nuclear deal and restart its nuclear program.

In light of the above, Israel's military independence and freedom of maneuver is essential. Israel must be prepared to engage an Iran that is growing in confidence, and that is increasingly willing to use its own military forces to attack Israel and Sunni Arab states.

Israel must work with pragmatic Sunni powers in the region to counter the Iranian threat, based on the assumption that Trump is interested in militarily disengaging from the Middle East.

The Israel Defense Forces is building itself up to be able to defeat any combination of enemies, with a combination of powerful offensive and defensive

capabilities. Israel is continuing to develop its multi-layered air defense system, and building up its air, sea, and land forces. As Iran continues to try and surround Israel with missile bases, terrorist staging areas and a variety of terror armies, Israel's ability to defend itself by itself may be put to the test in the not too distant future.

Israel's Political Instability Poses a Strategic Danger

By David M. Weinberg

israelhayom.com

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And if Netanyahu is out, hostile powers may try to test a new prime minister's mettle.

Israel's current political stalemate is debilitating in so many ways. Government decision making in matters of economy and infrastructure essentially has been frozen since last December, for example.

Worse still is the possibility that the political paralysis is diminishing perceptions of Israeli prowess and weakening Israel's deterrence posture.

Friend and foe alike may be beginning to wonder whether Israel has solid and far-sighted leadership capable of confidently asserting Israel's diplomatic and defense priorities.

When friends like US President Trump are frustrated by Israel's political instability and lose patience it's bad enough. When foes like Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps commander Qassem Soleimani mock Israel's military and diplomatic gumption, it's dangerous.

Understand: The main reason that Israel has been able to avoid significant, full-scale war over the past decade, despite the many security threats thrown at Israel by the crumbling Arab Middle East and the marching-marauding Iranians, has been the assessment in global capitals that Israel is skillfully and defiantly led by a strong leader.

Whether they liked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or not, allies and adversaries knew that they faced formidable and determined Israeli leadership. Trump, Russian President Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, Jordanian King Abdullah, Turkish wannabe-sultan Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Palestinian and Iranian leaders, too – knew of Israel's strictly set-out security red lines and resolute diplomatic principles.

They knew that Israel was led by someone who knew how to maneuver creatively on the global playing to build new alliances for Israel, and who didn't flinch from confrontation when truly necessary. At the very least, this bought Israel grudging respect and considerable strategic flexibility. This has allowed Israel to conduct forceful "war between wars" against Iranian and Shi'ite militias in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq with relative impunity; again, without this erupting into comprehensive war.

In fact, important actors around the world have come to accept Netanyahu's central strategic platform: the assertion that the main game in the region is no longer Israel versus the Palestinians or Israel versus the Arabs.

Instead, the main basis for defense and diplomatic activity in the Middle East is an unofficial alliance between Israel and most of the Arabs (together with Western powers), against the Iranians and the jihadis. It's the forces of stability and moderation, against the forces of violent and radical Islamic revolution.

But this stance – what amounts to Israel's deterrence posture – requires constant care. Deterrence needs to be compellingly and consistently maintained or it loses its cogency. Like any agricultural field, it needs regular plowing, seeding, and especially weeding if it is going to yield harvest.

Israel will be hard-pressed to maintain this deterrent posture if the political stalemate lingers for too much longer. Israel's strategic situation doesn't brook inertia. Israel simply can't afford an endless leadership limbo. Prolonged political uncertainty poses two different dangers: that Israel's enemies will be tempted to take advantage of Israel's infirmity, and that Israel will be unable to take advantage of emerging diplomatic opportunities.

It's obvious that security tensions are bubbling very close to the surface, both versus Hamas in Gaza and Iranian forces in Lebanon and Syria. It is likely that the IDF soon will need to "mow the grass" in these areas to degrade enemy capabilities and rebuild the long-term deterrence equation. The hot situation in the Persian Gulf could erupt into regional war too, and Israel may be implicated. This reality requires stable government and probably a unity government.

Consider this too: A new Israeli government that does not include Netanyahu in some way may be forced to fight several fierce wars to re-prove Israel's mettle.

Equally concerning is that Israel risks missing strategic opportunities that are likely embedded in the Trump Mideast peace plan.

The Trump team clearly understands Israel's need to prevent runaway Palestinian statehood; the emergence of a radical state that prolongs and exacerbates conflict with Israel instead of ending it. As such, the US plan seems likely to dial-back from the "international consensus" whereby Israel is expected to broker full-fledged Palestinian states in the West Bank and Gaza.

And then, when the plan inevitably flounders on the shoals of Palestinian rejectionism (alas), it is very possible that the US could support Israel's long-term sovereign

needs in the broad Jerusalem envelope, Jordan Valley and settlement blocks. These are areas about which there is broad political consensus in Israel; sovereignty demands that the Likud and Blue and White parties both support. The Trump team already has intimated that it recognizes the inalienable right of Jews to live in Judea and Samaria as a matter of historical truth, international law and basic acknowledgment of reality.

Note that when just before last month's election Netanyahu promised to unilaterally annex the Jordan

Valley, US officials said that the idea doesn't necessarily contradict the Trump plan or prevent peace. There is an astounding shift in US policy being hinted at here, and Israel mustn't flub the opportunity to capitalize on this. Again, this requires a stable Israeli government and probably a unity government.

In sum, Israel's global standing is suffering, its security posture wobbling, and diplomatic gains being forfeited by internal political gridlock. How sad – and dangerous.

The Arab World Can't Blame All of Its Problems on the West

By Hussain Abdul-Hussain

asiatimes.com

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Edward Said and honor killings.

In August, Israa Ghayeb, a 21-year-old Palestinian woman, was beaten to death. Her family claimed she had fallen from a second-floor window, but three of her male relatives have since been charged with her murder. Her apparent "crime" in their eyes was to post a video of herself having dinner with her fiancé and his sister.

The death of a blameless young woman has provoked widespread outrage at the culture of so-called "honor killing" in Arab and Muslim societies. But it has also caused others to leap to the defense of those societies, arguing that misogyny and the violence that accompanies it is a global affliction and not restricted to Arabs and/or Muslims.

It was the late Palestinian-American academic Edward Said who first came up with the concept of "Orientalism," in 1979. Orientalism, Said argued, represents the collection of stereotypes through which the West purports to "understand" the Middle East. For anti-colonialists – close relatives of Orientalists – those stereotypes are proof that the colonial powers failed to understand the people they colonized. Honor killing is one of the stereotypes unjustly attributed to Muslims and Arabs, so the argument goes. But it is no stereotype. Nor is it an aspect of misogyny. It is, in fact, worse: it is a reality.

Though women are the main victims, honor killing falls under the Islamist concept of "promotion of virtue and prevention of vice." For many Arabs and Muslims, this involves the restoration of some long-ago, supposedly perfect society that exists only in their imagination. But the myth is used to justify killing adulterers (of both sexes) or homosexuals or men who are perceived as effeminate, such as the Iraqi teenager whose murder by stabbing was recorded by his killer. "Emos" (short for "emotional"), young people who follow a Western-derived trend, are another target, their tight clothes and body piercings regarded as deviant. In Lebanon, a non-Druze man who married a Druze woman had his penis cut off by relatives of the bride.

In the West, hate crimes are mostly racially motivated and at times homophobic in character. But almost no Western country has vigilantes who take it upon themselves to dictate what is acceptable sexual behavior or

what people should wear or drink, in the manner of some Arab and Muslim societies. This type of self-appointed "social policing" is a characteristic of Muslim societies and varies from the strict – as in Iran and regions controlled by the Taliban or ISIS – to the relaxed, as in Lebanon or Tunisia.

Honor killing is not part of the 'toxic masculinity' that Western Orientalists and anti-colonialists have ascribed to the Arab world. It is a flaw in Muslim society and it can be rectified only if that society is prepared to look inward at itself rather than blaming outsiders.

Honor killing, therefore, is not part of the "toxic masculinity" that Western Orientalists and anti-colonialists have ascribed to the Arab world. It is a flaw in Muslim society and it can be rectified only if that society is prepared to look inward at itself rather than blaming outsiders.

Indeed, not even Said himself was immune to Orientalism. After all, he was trained in the West, he lived and worked in New York and his connections in the Middle East were limited to an elite circle. He was as guilty of stereotyping the Middle East as some of the people he criticized.

For example, Said advocated sovereignty for the Arabs of Palestine. But sovereignty is a European concept. Throughout their history, sovereignty for Arabs had been connected not to land but to a ruler, to whom they pledged allegiance. Like native Americans, Arabs considered territory to be a public utility, free and available for all. Arab tribes used to roam with the seasons in pursuit of water and greenery. When Britain and France refused to grant Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, the founder of Saudi Arabia, control over territory in western Jordan and eastern Syria populated by tribes loyal to him, the Saudi king got around the problem by issuing Saudi passports to the tribesmen.

Borders, sovereignty, citizenship – these are all Western constructs. Applying them to nations like Palestine was itself a form of Orientalism. The map of Palestine was drawn by foreign powers from three provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Palestine had never naturally evolved into a state, and it would not exist today

if it were not for the colonial powers that Said and his ilk despise.

However, globalization has given Orientalism a shake-up. Technology has spread information wholesale. And with almost every human now able to connect with another through social media, stereotypes have melted away. It is hard now for a Westerner, no matter how insular, to retain the old image that prevailed in the 1970s of Arabs living in tents and commuting by camel.

Globalization has also touched identity politics. Many Arabs and Muslims perceive US Representatives Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar as their representatives in Washington, a role both congresswomen are willing to play. The problem is that their Arabism and their Islamism are modified by their American experience; they are not like Arabs and Muslims born and raised in Arab or Muslim

In Yemen, Iran Is Testing Weapons and Tactics for Future Use against Israel

By Dr. Uzi Rubin

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The IDF must pay close attention.

The four-year-old war between the Saudi led coalition of Sunni states and the Iranian led Houthi regime in northern Yemen is drawing little attention in Israel, but its outcome will be decisive for the region and will impact significantly on Israel's security environment. The war is being exploited by Iran to test strategies, tactics and weapons in battle conditions. It stands to reason that the weapons and tactics employed in Yemen today will be used against Israel tomorrow. This article focuses on Houthi/Iranian use of rockets, missiles and UAVs, and suggests four major lessons for Israel.

A Forgotten War

“Out of sight, out of mind.” Nothing fits this folk wisdom more than the ongoing war in southern Arabia which involves the two rival governments of Yemen: the Saudi Kingdom and a coalition of Sunni Arab states, versus the Islamic Republic of Iran – through proxies. This is a veritable regional war of considerable scale that involves tens of thousands of troops, several air forces and navies, tribal militias, Islamic fundamentalists and foreign mercenaries. At stake is not just the fate of Yemen, but hegemony over the entire Middle East. The winner of this war will gain control not merely the resources of Yemen, modest as they are but also control of Bab El Mandeb, one of the seven maritime arteries of global maritime commerce that is also the key to the Suez Canal.

Yet other than the human suffering of the war victims, global audiences take little notice of this war. For Westerners, Yemen is like Timbuktu – an epitome of remoteness. The conflict is too complex to fathom and there are no identifiable heroes or villains. Yet for the Middle East at large, and for Israel in particular, the outcome of this war could be fateful.

Yemen is a remote country distinguished by its rugged highlands and blessed by yearly monsoons, which create a veritable oasis at the southeastern corner of the great Arabian desert. Dubbed “Arabia Felix” – Happy Arabia – by the ancient historians of the Roman Empire, it was

societies, which makes Tlaib and Omar rather Orientalist, too. Like many Arab-Americans and Muslim-Americans, their understanding of Arab and Muslim problems and how to solve them is as bad as the Orientalism that they detest.

But bashing colonialism and Orientalism won't solve the problems either. On the contrary, it will only conceal them behind global trends. The West might be able to offer the tools – academic and otherwise – to enable non-Westerners to fix the weaknesses in their societies and develop a self-governing method that may grow into democracy. But to eradicate an abomination such as honor killing, Arabs and Muslims must first acknowledge its existence and take ownership of it. Only then will their perception of their own society cease to be Orientalist.

largely left alone throughout its history. In ancient time, it was home of the Sabaeen civilization famous for its aromatic resins, the Myrrh and Frankincense of biblical lore and possibly was the source of the Queen of Sheba legend. Neither the Romans, nor the Byzantines managed to occupy it. Prior to the advent of Islam, Yemen was torn between rival Jewish and Christian kingdoms. The Sassanid Empire managed to annex it for a short while through local proxies. During the late Middle Ages it was briefly occupied by Egypt. By the 16th Century, the Ottoman Empire managed to secure a toehold in the lowlands near the Bab el Mandeb but was subsequently expelled by the British Empire's occupation of Aden. Not unlike Afghanistan, Yemen's rugged mountains populated by fiercely independent tribes discourage foreign occupation. Whoever controls the highlands of central Yemen can hardly be dislodged. Today, this natural fortress is controlled by the Ansar Allah group better known abroad as the Houthis.

The Houthis bear the name of their founder, Hussein Al Houthi, who established the movement in the 1990's. Like Hamas in Gaza and the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Houthi movement combine social welfare and military activism. The movement caters to the Shia Muslims of Yemen, who constitute about 45% of the population. It launched an insurrection against the central government in 2004, which was later subsumed in the civil uprising of 2011 (during the so called “The Arab Spring”) that toppled Yemen's than strongman Ali Saleh. In February 2015 the Houthis captured Sanaa, Yemen's capital, and proclaimed a national government of their own.

This triggered a military intervention by a Saudi led coalition of Arab countries aiming to restore the internationally recognized government. The initial Houthi offensive threatened to overrun Yemen's lowlands, including the major port city of Aden. Fierce fighting by the Coalition and local militias managed to throw the Houthis back to their highland fortress. The battle lines subsequently froze into their current positions, effectively

dividing Yemen between two rival governments – The insurgent Houthi government in Sanaa and the, internationally recognized government in Aden, legacy of the pre – Houthi era in Yemen's history.

The Houthi movement is virulently anti-Western and unabashedly anti-Semitic. Its flag lacks any figurative symbols, as befits devout Muslims. Instead, it sports a slogan in bold colorful letters: “God is Great; Death to America; Death to Israel; A Curse on the Jews; Victory for Islam.” Birds of feather flock together, and the Islamic Republic of Iran lost no time in recognizing the Houthi government and in pumping money, arms, advisers, technical experts and weapon production lines to its new ally's war machine. This entails a formidable logistical operation, carried out under the auspices of the “Al Qods” brigades, in charge of exporting the Iranian revolution to like-minded communities across the Middle East. While the Arab coalition maintains an air and maritime blockade on the Houthi controlled areas of Yemen, the demarcation lines remain porous, and it seems that Qods force commander General Suleimani has no difficulty in transferring people and equipment from Iran and Lebanon into the Houthi state.

While the war between the Houthi and the Saudi coalition features ground, sea and air operations, it has the characteristics of a typical war in the periphery which is essentially an asymmetric contest between traditional military doctrine of maneuvering field armies and the hybrid positional warfare doctrine of static but well equipped and well entrenched militias. Like other ongoing conflicts in the region (e.g. Gaza, northern Syria and Libya) it features the copious use of rockets, missiles and drones. Already, the four-year-old war in Yemen holds many lessons for Israel. This article will focus on one aspect of the war: How the Houthi/Iranian alliance is employing its rockets, missiles and drones against the Arab coalition in general, and against Saudi Arabia's hinterland in particular – and what Israel can learn from this.

Missile Warfare

The Houthis lost no time in launching missile and rockets against the Arab coalition forces. Initially, these came from the arsenals of the ousted legacy government. That arsenal dated from the time when Yemen was divided between the legacy highland kingdom, independent since 1911 (a.k.a “Northern Yemen”) and the newly created Republic of Southern Yemen, established in 1967 when the Britain quit its Aden protectorate with its adjacent lowlands. Both states acquired heavy rockets and ballistic missiles from the Soviet Union. Their unification in 1990 did not merge those arsenals, but a second unification following another round of civil war in 1994 did. The merged missile arsenal, stored near the capital city of Sana'a, was hit by Saudi air strikes in March 2015, shortly after the debut of the Saudi led intervention in Yemen. Despite Saudi claims that the arsenals had been completely destroyed, the Houthis promptly embarked on a missile

offensive against the Saudi led coalition forces deployed within Yemen as well as against nearby Saudi towns and military installations – using the selfsame types of missiles that had been allegedly destroyed. This perhaps is the first lesson from the conflict: That preemption by targeting missile storage facilities is not too effective. The history of missile preemptions from WWII to Israel's wars in Lebanon and Gaza teach a similar lesson.

The Houthi missile offensive has been going on ever since. The first recorded missile strike occurred in June 2015, when Saudi Arabia announced the interception of a Scud missile near its major Air Force base in the town of Hamis Mushaiet, about 100 km from the nearest Yemeni border. The Houthis have not limited their fire to Saudi Arabia proper, but used their more accurate Tochka missiles (Nato code name SS21), also legacy from the previous regime, to hit coalition forces inside Yemen. They scored their biggest success in September 2015 when they killed 60 coalition troops with a Tochka missile that hit an ammunition truck in a coalition camp near the town of Marib inside Yemen proper. The rate of the Houthi fire has been gradually increasing ever since, evidently facilitated by the increasing success of the Al Kuds brigades to smuggle in fresh supplies of rockets, missiles and missile fuels. The total number of missile attacks from the onset of the offensive is unclear. According to the Saudi government announcements, the total number of attacks from March 2015 to April 2019 was 150, with 2018 being the peak year during which 78 missile attacks were recorded. Some of these attacks included salvos of more than a single missile. It therefore stands to reason that the total number of missiles fired by the Houthis against targets in Yemen and Saudi Arabia's hinterland must have been approximately 200. However, other sources cite larger numbers of up to 300 missiles. This does not include short range artillery rockets fired against coalition field forces or against nearby Saudi towns adjacent to the Yemeni border – the “Yemen envelope” area which not unlike Israel's own “Gaza Envelope” suffers the most from cross border rocket harassment. This rather modest rate of fire is roughly comparable to the rate of Iraq's missile fire on Iran during the seven and a half years that preceded the four-month War of the Cities that concluded the Iran Iraq war.

This somewhat sparse yet persistent missile offensive reveals the Houthi/Iranian alliance's targeting policy that include force targets, value targets and population centers. Force targets include Saudi Air Force bases, concentrations of coalition forces within Yemen, coalition high ranking officials (“targeted killing”) and missile defense batteries – on this, more later. Value targets include airports, seaports, oil refineries, oil pumping stations and state symbols such as royal palaces. Targeted

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population centers included cities within the “Yemen envelope” as well as major cities such as Jeddah and Saudi Arabia’s capital city of Riyadh. This is the second lesson from this conflict: That in forthcoming wars, Israel should expect missile attacks against her military and civilian infrastructures such as oil refineries, power stations, gas networks’ seaports and airports. State symbols such as major government buildings may also be targeted. Attempts to hit specific high-ranking persons such as political and military leaders cannot be precluded.

Initially, the Houthis used the legacy SCUDs and Tochka missile captured from the previous regime’s arsenals. With original stockpiles being exhausted, they switched to Iranian supplied short- and long-range missiles. Since arms transfers to the Houthis were prohibited by UN Security Council decision no. 2216 as of April 2015, the Iranian have been anxious to dissociate themselves from the missiles fired by Houthi forces. Those missiles are claimed to be indigenously developed and manufactured in Yemen, a country more famous for its Ghatt (a mildly narcotic weed) crops than for its military industries. The Iranian, however, are less successful (or less interested) in hiding their fingerprints. One of the “Indigenous Yemenite” missile dubbed “El Kairah” is a spitting image of an Iranian missile called “Tondar” – which by itself is a Chinese conversion of the venerable Soviet SA 2 from an air defense missile into a ground-to-ground missile. The first appearance of longer-range Scud type missiles in Houthi service was in 2016 when they unveiled several “Burkan” missiles, indistinguishable from the Shahab 2, an Iranian produced version of the North Korean Huasong 5 copy of the venerable soviet Scud B. A year later they unveiled an even longer-range version called “Burkan 2” with a front end that resembled an Iranian designed advanced version of the Scud dubbed “Quiam” but with a rear end sporting Scud like fins. Those missiles, with a range of about one thousand kilometers, were promptly employed to attack Riyadh, leaving enough debris strewn on Saudis soil to allow reconstruction and identification. It turned out that this was indeed a Iranian made Quiam, with its original Khaki color paint scheme overpainted blue and bearing the Houthi battle slogans. The Iranians did not even bother to erase the trademarks of its subcontractors punched into the various component. It turned out that for the sake of deniability, the Iranians added bogus fins to their “Indigenous Yemenite” Burkan/Quiam missiles to confuse observers. Once in use, the bogus fins were discarded from the rear of the missiles. Piecing together the “Burkans” from their debris revealed how the Iranian managed to smuggle such fairly large ballistic missiles into Houthi held territory. Poor quality weld lines indicated that the missiles have been chopped by the Iranians into short segments to ease transportation, probably by civilian truck. Once arriving in Houthi territory, the chopped segments were poorly welded back together into complete missiles by local mechanics in the

workshops of the Houthi main stronghold of Sad’ha. How the missile segments are smuggled from Iran to Sad’ha is not entirely clear. A UN panel report on the war in Yemen describes eight possible smuggling routes, of which the most likely is a land route from the eastern Yemeni port of Al Guydah – which is not controlled by the Saudi Coalition – to the inland city of Thamud and thence to Sa’dah. The chopped-up missiles could arrive at the Al Guydah seaport either directly from Iran aboard cargo ships or by road from nearby Oman. It stands to reason that the same routes are used to smuggle in other war materials, most noticeably machinery for manufacturing rocket fuels. Such machinery was captured by the Saudi coalition in the city of Ma’rib after the Houthi forces were expelled. The equipment included liquid fuel production facilities as well as a planetary mixer necessary for making solid propellants.

The most significant attack to date was carried out by a cruise rather than a ballistic missile. The Houthi forces announce in December 2017 that they had attacked the Barakah nuclear reactor, currently being constructed in the UAE, about 1200 Km from Houthi held territory. Moreover, the Houthis released a video clip showing the takeoff of the missile used for this attack. This was not a ballistic missile, but clearly a cruise missile that was a spitting image of Iran’s “Soumar” land attack cruise missile, itself a copy of an older Soviet design. Beyond the sheer audacity of launching a strategic weapon against a nuclear reactor, the incident indicates that Iran is using Yemen as a proving ground for its new designs. The UAE claimed that no missile ever arrived at their nuclear reactor. It stands to reason that the newly developed Iranian missile failed and crashed before reaching the UAE due to some teething trouble. This is typical for new any missile, and the Iranian designers actually could learn more from the failure than from a success.

Significantly, no more land attack cruise missiles have been observed in Yemen ever since. (The source and types of weapons used in the September 14 attacks on the Khurais and Abgulk oil installations are not yet precisely known.) Perhaps the logistics of moving large and complex missiles to remote Houthi areas was too difficult. Alternatively, the appearance of what could hardly pretend to be an “indigenous” Yemeni design risked Iran’s policy of deniability. In any case, the Iranians have since been carrying on long range strategic attacks by UAVs rather than dedicated land attack cruise missiles.

With remarkable persistence and ingenuity and in the face of a UN arms embargo enforced by a Saudi led blockade, Iran did manage to build an effective war machine for its Houthi ally. This is the third lesson that Israel should derive from the Yemen conflict: That arms blockades are porous, and that a determined enemy like Iran can always find a way to supply its allies. This is not to say that blockades are completely redundant: rather, their effectiveness is limited in scope and volatile in time. As

Israel has already learned from the buildup of the Hamas/Islamic Jihad war machine in Gaza: Blockades can slow the rate of arms transfers but cannot choke them off completely. As for Israel's ongoing effort to curb the development of a Hezbollah rocket production industry, time will tell whether Israel can succeed in this effort.

Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE deploy US made Patriot air/missile defense systems to defend their forces in Yemen and their own national territories. The Saudi government has claimed numerous successes in intercepting Houthi launched missile, but no official disclosure on their overall success rate has been made. Collating all Saudi announcements reported by a Washington think tank yields a total of 135 claimed interceptions as of June 2019. The reliability of those Saudi announcement is not clear. For example, on November 4 2017 the Saudis announced that they had successfully intercepted a Houthi ballistic missile that targeted Riyadh's international airport. This was contested by some US analysts. Indeed, in 2018 the Saudis conceded that the airport area was actually hit, although no damage was inflicted to its runways and buildings. The impact crater north east of the main terminal indicated that the Houthi missile managed to penetrate the Patriot defense shield.

Assuming that about 200 missiles have been fired at Saudi targets, the 135 Saudi reported intercepts indicate a success rate of about 68% which is a relatively low figure. However, this could be misleading since there is no information about which of the targets attacked by those 200 missiles had Patriot deployed for their protection. In fact, judging by the number of civilians that died from rocket attacks – more than 110 to date – it can be deduced that many of the targeted population centers were not defended against missile strikes. From photos of missile debris in various Saudi locations it is hard to judge whether they resulted from interceptions or simply from shattering on impact. Videos of interceptions are rare, they all come from Smartphone wielding bystanders. Amateur videos from Riyadh provide a mixed impression. Some show spectacular failures of Patriot missiles – mid air explosions and erratic flights that end in ground impacts. However, one bystander's video, uploaded to YouTube on June 24, 2018 show what seems to be a perfect interception of an incoming warhead. Indirect evidence tends to confirm that the Patriot missile shield is effective, at least in Riyadh. With a population of 6.7 million spread over 400 sq.km of built up area, the city is a huge target that is hard to miss even by ballistic missiles of mediocre accuracy. Yet, in spite of being targeted at least five and possibly eight times, only one resident was ever killed – and this from a piece of debris that detached from an incoming missile (A similar incident occurred in Israel during the 1991 Gulf War, when a resident of a Tel Aviv suburb was injured by a piece of debris from an incoming Iraqi missile. The victim survived). Except in the case of the November 2017 attack on Riyadh's international airport, no warhead

impact was ever recorded in the city. Concealing a warhead induced destruction from the public anywhere within the built-up area of a modern city is neigh impossible in this era of smartphones. Hence, one way to explain the low number of casualties within Riyadh is the effectiveness of its missile shield.

UAV Warfare

Another hint of the effectiveness of Patriot defense are Houthi/Iranian alliance efforts both to suppress it and evade it. To elucidate this point, we need to refer to another aspect of the Houthi/Iranian war machine in Yemen: UAV warfare. UAVs are one of the main pillars of Iranian military doctrine. Together with other weapon shipments, Iran has been providing the Houthis with numerous types of UAVs, both of the larger types used for armed reconnaissance such as the Shahad 129 (roughly equivalent to Israel's Hermes 450) and smaller "suicide" UAVs (such as the Ababil, used by Hezbollah in 2006 for attacks deep within Israel, which for the sake of Iranian deniability has been renamed Kasef 2). The Houthi arsenal is augmented by the acquisition of mail order UAVs such as the Chinese "Skywalker" available online from Ali Baba. More remarkable, the Iranians have provided the Houthis with knowhow, production machinery and expertise to set up a UAV industry of their own in their stronghold of Sad'ha in northern Yemen. The Houthi UAV industry is now producing unique designs of long-range machines, some equipped with jet engines, obviously designed in Iran. Beyond the classic UAV roles of reconnaissance and light bombardment, the Houthi/Iranian alliance is using them for direct "suicide" attacks on Patriot batteries. Three incidents of direct attacks on Patriot batteries have been claimed: Two attacks were within Yemen, probably targeting UAE batteries in Mocha and Marib, and one attack on a Patriot battery defending the Saudi border city of Najran, with unknown results.

Even more significantly, the Houthi/Iranian alliance exploits the Patriot's system limitations in engaging low and slow threats in order to penetrate beneath the Saudi air/missile defense shield. In fact, UAVs are now being used by the Houthi's as ersatz land attack cruise missiles. With immunity against air and missile defense, and with much better accuracy than ordinary ballistic missiles, UAVs now seem to be the preferred weapons for imaginative and audacious strikes deep within Saudi territory. For example, the civilian airport of the Saudi town of Abha, about 120 km. from the Yemeni border, was attacked by Houthi suicide UAVs no less than three times during the month of June 2019, wounding 28 passengers and airport workers. In August 2019, the Houthis managed to strike the Shaybah oilfield deep within Saudi Arabia, almost 1200 Km from the Houthi stronghold in Sad'ha. The attack was carried out by no less than 10 UAVs and sparked a fire in gas storage tanks. Such a complex attack needs precise coordination and excellent navigation, which demonstrates the proficiency achieved

by Iran's UAV operators. While those strikes did not cause excessive damage – perhaps intentionally so – they were propaganda coups for the Houthis, providing them with solid achievements in the cognitive battlefield.

The fourth lesson for Israel is the growing military role of UAVs both for missile defense suppression and for evasion. UAVs were first used by Hezbollah for reconnaissance over Israel even prior to the 2006 Lebanon war. At the closing stage of that war, four suicide UAVs were launched by Hezbollah against Israeli targets (One suffered a failure and fell near the border, two were intercepted by Israeli jet fighters, and the fourth vanished). In the 2014 Gaza war Hamas tried to attack Tel Aviv with its own UAVs (Two, perhaps three UAVs were shot down by Patriot air defense batteries). This experience is not indicative of the future. The Yemen war demonstrates how UAVs will be employed in future wars in significant numbers to erode Israel's missile defense capabilities by attacking the Iron Dome, David Sling and Arrow batteries.

The Case of Omar Shakir Shows That Israel Needs to Improve Its Defenses against Lawfare

By Prof. Gerald M. Steinberg

besacenter.org

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Even if a BDS activist gets deported, Israel's enemies will win a propaganda victory.

Americans like to think of ourselves as being at the Both ostensibly and legally, the Omar Shakir case coming before the Israeli High Court on September 24 is not about Human Rights Watch (HRW) per se. The formal question is whether Shakir, the "Israel and Palestine Director" at HRW, violated both the terms of his visa and the law that mandates the exclusion from Israel of leaders of the BDS movement.

The government's case, reinforced by amicus briefs filed by Israeli watchdog groups (including NGO Monitor), includes overwhelming evidence of Shakir's BDS activity. HRW's legal team argues that the case is political, asserting that Israel is targeting HRW for alleged human rights work that is critical of Israel. The organization claims that Shakir's BDS work ended when he arrived in Israel in 2016.

The Jerusalem District Court was unimpressed by the HRW spin, and its ruling accepted the government's position. Shakir was nevertheless allowed to stay in the country pending the High Court appeal.

Although its language is narrowly legal and technical, this case reflects major issues not only for Israel but in the wider realms of lawfare, soft power, and public diplomacy. The arguments on human rights and nebulous aspects of international law are proxies for a multi-front war that has been escalating for 20 years around soft power delegitimacy. This 21st-century political, legal, and economic war seeks to demonize and thereby destroy Israel, much as the wars fought by armies and missiles attempted to defeat the Jewish state on the battlefield.

From its opening shots almost 20 years ago, HRW has been a leader in the attacks against Israel, and the Shakir case is an important milestone in this history. HRW brings

Hostile UAVs, in conjunction with precision rockets, may well be tasked to damage Israel's critical infrastructures such as desalination plants. Consequently, Israel needs to integrate air defense capabilities into its missile defense systems, and to provide its critical infrastructures with their own point defenses.

The current civil wars in the Middle East – especially in Syria and in Yemen – resemble the Spanish civil war of the 1930s inasmuch as they are exploited by outside powers to test new doctrines, weapons and tactics in realistic battle conditions. What the Axis powers (and to a lesser extent the USSR) did in Spain during the 1930s is being done today by Iran in Yemen.

It would be advisable for Israel's Ministry of Defense and the IDF to closely study the civil war in Yemen, particularly its rocket and drone warfare aspects. The weapons and tactics in use in Yemen today will be employed against Israel tomorrow.

an annual budget of \$92 million (\$641 million over the past decade) to the battlefield and provides a vast array of skilled social and mainstream media warriors. The image of a small group of volunteers sacrificing their spare time to promote universal human rights values is a façade. These are highly paid mercenaries waging propaganda wars with all the weapons money can buy.

HRW is a leader in antisemitic campaigns to demonize and single out Israel, with a particular emphasis on BDS. The organization's leadership is obsessed with Israel, and their resources badly outmatch the budget-starved Israeli Foreign Ministry. Far from the claim that Shakir was not doing BDS during his almost three years in Israel, the evidence clearly shows that this agenda constitutes the vast majority of his and HRW's activities on Israel – from the failed attempt to pressure Airbnb to join in the demonization to the international soccer federation campaign (another failure). Detailed analysis indicates that notwithstanding a few token reports criticizing Hamas that were designed to deflect criticism, HRW's target is unequivocally Israel.

All these factors, and the wider demonization, are at the core of the Shakir case. Politically, this case is about HRW and BDS warfare, and whether, after numerous defeats, the Israeli government has a viable counter-strategy. (Had the various officials and ministries involved had a coherent strategy in place in 2016, Shakir and HRW would never have received a work visa in the first place, and the court sessions, media focus, and accompanying human rights theater would have been avoided.)

The importance of this case and the worldwide stage it provides for HRW's anti-Israel campaign was highlighted in July, when Shakir's hearing was initially scheduled. The top five officials of HRW, led by Executive Director Kenneth Roth, arrived in Israel for a full-scale diplomatic

and media blitz (though at the last minute, the court postponed the hearing, short-circuiting their plans.) For them, the case is a win-win: if the judges overrule the lower court, this will be presented as a great victory for HRW over the hated and anti-democratic Israeli government. And if Shakir loses and is deported, HRW will declare a great victory in showing the world how “Israel oppresses brave human rights defenders.”

Shakir and HRW’s leaders have already waged a very successful campaign in the international media. They project an invented image of a politically neutral organization promoting the moral principles of human rights, and overcoming intense opposition by the “far right” Israeli government. Shakir has published opinion pieces in the mainstream media, including the Washington Post (“Israel wants to deport me for my human rights work,” April 18, 2019), in addition to numerous interviews (see for example, The New York Times, “Israel Invokes Anti-Boycott Law to Order Human Rights Worker Deported”, April 16, 2019). Ken Roth and other HRW officials have added to the propaganda campaign.

The same façade of “human rights defenders” (a politicized term used very loosely) was reinforced through highly publicized meetings with European diplomats, such as with the German ambassador to Israel, who proclaimed on Twitter: “Today I met with @KenRoth from Human Rights Watch, an organisation I have known for many years from previous work on Int’l Humanitarian Law. For Germany, @hrw remains an important partner in raising awareness & promoting Int’l Law and #HumanRights around the globe.” She provided no rationale as to why Roth and HRW would remain “an important partner,” and ignored their history of anti-Israel campaigning and antisemitism.

In the US, HRW generated a letter from 17 Democratic members of Congress to PM Netanyahu, asking him to “reconsider” the rejection of Shakir’s request for a visa renewal and repeating the standard PR on the importance of “the reports of Human Rights Watch for balanced accounts of human rights violations wherever they may occur.” The letter warned that deporting Shakir would “reinforce the impression that Israel is increasingly hostile to human rights defenders.”

In responding, the PM accused HRW of exploiting “the banner of justice and human rights ... to delegitimize the State of Israel and negate its very right to exist.” He accused HRW and Shakir of leading the BDS movement, with the goal of seeking to “isolate and ultimately destroy the State of Israel.” This is also the essence of the Israeli government’s claim in denying HRW’s “Israel/Palestinian director” his request to renew the work visa formally granted for promoting human rights.

Before Israeli audiences, Roth, Shakir, and their surrogates had a mixed impact during their July tour. Articles and interviews in Ha’aretz gave them celebrity status and repeated their claims. In sharp contrast, their radio interview with Israel’s public broadcaster (Kann,

Reshet Bet), highlighted Shakir’s record of promoting hate and BDS, and Roth’s deep anti-Israel obsession. In the face of repeated questions, Roth refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of Jewish national self-determination, regardless of borders. In the process, he revealed the core of HRW’s campaign against Israel and its façade of human rights. Their efforts to use the fig-leaf reports on Hamas as a defense were ignored.

For anyone who has followed HRW and its critics over the years, none of this is new nor surprising. HRW is well established as among the leaders of the campaign falsely accusing Israel of repeated violations of human rights and international law. These accusations are amplified through the media and international institutions, such as the UN Human Rights Council, as well as in the halls of European parliaments, foreign ministries, and elsewhere. In these venues, HRW’s claims to focus on research and documentation of rights violations are repeated without question, long after their failed methodologies, repetitive false claims, and ideological agendas have been exposed.

The most potent case against HRW was made by its late founder, Robert Bernstein, who denounced Roth and the organization in an opinion column in The New York Times. He accused them of using their resources and influence to lead the campaign to “turn Israel into a pariah state.” In speeches at the University of Nebraska (2010) and Hebrew Union College in New York (2013), he detailed this criticism, accusing Roth and others of abusing their position.

There are also major questions regarding HRW’s donors and enablers. Following Bernstein’s denunciation, several original funders also pulled out. George Soros, a major critic of Israel, stepped in to save the NGO, along with other unknown benefactors. HRW stopped publishing the names of donors, raising numerous questions. At the time, HRW officials made overtures to Saudi Arabia and Libya, which was then ruled by Qaddafi. These actions and the lack of transparency regarding donors, which began at the same time, led to speculation about secret funding from Middle East dictatorships, which would reinforce an already strongly anti-Israel agenda.

Taken together, the issues of antisemitism, demonization, methodological failures, and funding secrecy should be sufficient grounds for branding HRW and its officials, including Roth and Shakir, as propagandists and worse, and to strip away the façade of “human rights defenders.” There is no need for Israel’s anti-BDS laws – indeed, this legislation and its application in the Shakir visa case are distractions from the core issues. The ability of HRW to use court cases and appeals to successfully promote its agenda is clear evidence that the government has failed.

No matter what the High Court’s ruling on the Shakir case may be, HRW’s war against Israel will continue. If the court upholds the government’s position and Shakir is

required to depart, he and HRW will accelerate their condemnations of Israel and other forms of demonization around the world.

Therefore, in the confrontation between HRW, as an NGO superpower working under a façade of human rights, and Israel, which seeks to counter and defeat multiple campaigns of demonization and de-legitimization, this case should be recognized as a policy failure.

Instead, a broader and more strategic approach is necessary, though it may be beyond the government's

A Home Smart System That Helps With Religious Observances

By Cecilie Rohwedder

wsj.com

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The Hofstatter home in Boca Raton, Fla., has a \$250,000 smart system that turns lights off and on, unlocks doors for the Orthodox Jewish family.

Every Friday night, as Shabbat starts in Jay and Lauren Hofstatter's home in Boca Raton, Fla., all televisions automatically shut down, ground-floor lights come on and bedroom lights switch off. A cozy home theater, closed off during the week, is programmed to unlock—not for watching television but for family time after the evening meal.

The system will respond when Yom Kippur, the highest Jewish holiday, begins on the evening of Oct. 8. Linked to a cloud-based Hebrew calendar, it will set lighting and electronics to a “no touch” mode, because Orthodox Judaism bans handling lights and electronics on religious holidays and Shabbat.

“I love technology,” says Mr. Hofstatter, 34 years old and president of online retailer Daily Sale, based in Pompano Beach, Fla. “When we decided to go with a home-automation system, we knew there had to be something out there that adapts to the Jewish lifestyle.”

Much of the Hofstatters' 2-year-old home has been designed for their Orthodox Jewish life: With eight bedrooms and seven baths, the 8,800-square-foot house is big enough for the couple's eight children. It is a short walk from the synagogue to prevent long treks in the Florida heat on Shabbat, when driving is prohibited. And its home-automation system is so advanced that the motion detectors turn off on Shabbat to prevent the system from responding to different movements by family members that would activate the network.

Use of technology fine-tuned to support highly specialized needs reflects the growing sophistication in home systems. So-called smart homes—with easy, electronic control of lighting, temperature, shades and security—are becoming complex bespoke systems that fit homeowners' individual habits and lifestyles.

Chowmain Software & Apps, an Australia-based software developer that built the software connecting the Hofstatters' system to the Hebrew calendar, also offers a version for Muslim homeowners who want to program their homes to notify them of the call to prayer five times a

capability, particularly as a lead actor. HRW, despite its enormous war chest and capabilities in the realm of public relations and in waging soft-power warfare, is an NGO. Leadership in countering their attacks might be more effective if it came from other NGOs and not directly from the Israeli government, or from political officials who are poorly equipped to lead such a confrontation.

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day.

Jay and Lauren Hofstatter—she is now 33—moved to Boca Raton in January 2007 from Brooklyn, N.Y. Newly married and pregnant with their oldest daughter, Deena, they initially chose a rental house near the Boca Raton synagogue but, as their family grew, moved three more times before deciding to build.

In July 2010, they bought a one-third acre lot for \$440,000, according to real-estate website Zillow, razed the dated house on it and started a 13-month construction project, briefly interrupted by a hurricane. Smart-home wiring began when the house was little more than a shell of concrete-block walls. Juan Apraez, chief technology officer at All Digital, a home-automation company in Weston, Fla., spent hours with Mr. Hofstatter to grasp the family's numerous specific needs before researching and installing the \$250,000 system.

“We have to have a very intimate connection with the client to understand how they live and what they want,” says marketing director Maria Eraso Taylor, who is married to Mr. Apraez and owns the business with him. “This is not like someone laying a new floor.”

When the \$2.5 million Mediterranean-style house was finished in 2017, with different colors, themes and hand-painted ceilings in each of the kids' rooms, the home-automation system was set to a tight schedule.

As Shabbat and holidays begin at sunset and ground-floor lights switch on, those in the master bedroom—also on the ground floor—go off. One exception: a reading lamp that goes on and then is shut off at midnight when the parents go to sleep. Upstairs bedrooms enter a “good-night mode” that turns bedroom lights off and bathroom lights on.

Now, Mr. Hofstatter is planning another tweak to the system: programming speakers throughout the house to alert the family before the customary candle lighting at the start of Shabbat. Mr. Hofstatter got the idea from his hometown of Brooklyn, where sirens go off in Jewish neighborhoods, one 15 minutes before Shabbat and one immediately before. He is still deciding whether his should be an announcement or a musical chime.

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If you see something, send something” –editor