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Interpreting taqiyya

KEY POINTS

- Islam does not have a central canon, a pope, or a single body that can set doctrine.
- It is extremely difficult, therefore, to generalise about issues such as taqiyya.

The recent article by Raymond Ibrahim is in this author's opinion well-researched, factual in places but whose interpretation of taqiyya is ultimately misleading. It focuses on a very narrow use of the term taqiyya, which is sometimes used to refer to dissimulation allowed to Shias to preserve their own lives and the lives of others. It appears to be a polemical piece interspersed with cherry-picked citations from the Quran, the sayings of the Prophet and secondary works.

Islam is a universal religion that spans millennia of history and covers much of the earth's population. Islam, however, does not have a central canon, a pope, or a single body that can set doctrine. So, it is extremely difficult to generalise about what Islam

In response to *Islam's doctrine of deception* published in the last issue of *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, Michael Ryan argues an alternative interpretation of the doctrine of taqiyya

'If we fail to make the distinction between radical Islamists and valid, thoughtful and authoritative views of expert Muslim jurists, we risk undermining one of the most promising tools to defeat radical thought'

as a religion believes except in its core beliefs. One can always find Muslim jurists who offer opinions about matters of doctrine such as taqiyya, but it

is also possible to find other respected jurists who disagree. So any assertion about doctrine needs to be carefully circumscribed.

The term taqiyya, for example, is derived from the Arabic trilateral root w-q-y and means "fear, caution, prudence" and by extension "dissimulation of one's religion under duress. The term, itself, never appears in the Quran. The root in other forms appears in various contexts, but it never means "dissimulation". The most common use of the root word in the Quran is in the sense of "to fear" or "have reverence" for God.

The author also cites the Quranic verse 4:29 (the fourth chapter or Sura, 29th verse) without providing the translation for the reader to judge. The

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relevant part of the verse as translated by Majid Fakhry is: "...and do not kill yourselves. Allah is indeed Merciful to you!"

One common Arabic commentary consulted by this author simply explains that Allah is merciful by forbidding men to kill themselves. Clearly, someone might interpret this verse to imply that one does not have to kill oneself by admitting for example to extremist Taliban along the Pakistani-Afghan border that one is Shia when one knows that such an admission may well mean that you and your family will be harmed. This interpretation might be debated, but if such a meaning is accepted, it is clearly a humane saying. It is unreasonable, in this author's opinion, to conclude that Islam therefore sanctions lying in a general sense. It would be more straightforward to interpret this verse to forbid suicide bombings.

At this point, one might question the author's statement that Islam is "legalistic" and has no use for "common sense" or general opinion. The verse just cited seems to do just that. The article also does not refer to the well-known principle of *maslaha* or acting for the greater good of the people in allowing or forbidding something. Neither does the article inform the reader about *ijma*, which signifies consensus in doctrinal matters that is one of the four principles (*usul*) in Islamic law for many Sunni jurists.

The article cites the Sura Al Imran, verse 28 (3:28) as the primary verse "sanctioning deception". Again using the Majid Fakhry translation: "Let not the believers take the unbelievers for friends, rather than the believers. Whoever does that has nothing to do with Allah, unless you guard against them fully!" The English "guard against" is a translation of a verb that is taken from the same root as the word *taqiyya* but it has nothing to do

linguistically with lying or deception. The verse seems to direct the Muslim not to prefer non-Muslims to Muslims. Then, the Muslim is given an out if he needs to protect himself from an unbeliever. The Arabic word here for unbeliever is the plural of *kafir*, which may be translated as irreligious, unbeliever, infidel or atheist. In this context it seems to refer to those who do not believe in Allah, which would not normally refer to Christians and Jews. In the hands of extremists, the term may be expanded to include Christians and Jews or even Muslims who do not follow a jihadist line. But this expansion

'It would be incorrect to suggest that the strained position of Osama bin Laden somehow grew out of normal or mainstream Muslim thought'

is not the normal usage and to easily pass on from this verse to sleeper cells seems more than a stretch for the ordinary Muslim.

Some of the other verses cited as further proof of the nature of deception within Islam are puzzling because they do not seem to support the case. Because of space, this author will provide the Fakhry translation of only the next citation (2: 173) and invite the reader to check the others, which include 2:185; 4:29; 22:78; and 40:28.

"He has only forbidden you [to eat] carrion, blood, pork and that over which any name other than of Allah is invoked. But he who is constrained, without intending to disobey or transgress will commit no sin. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."

For Christians, this may evoke the questions posed to St Paul about whether Christians could eat meat that was sold in the market but had been slaughtered in pagan temples. Rather than being another example about how Muslims are told to be deceptive, the verse clearly is telling Muslims that if they cannot avoid certain forbidden foods and are put in the position of starving or eating, they may eat without fear of condemnation. Again, the verse seems to be one in which common sense rather than some "legalistic" design is at work. To this reader, the verse inspires admiration rather than any other emotion.

The article then quickly moves on to argue that within Islam war is deceit and war is eternal. No reader needs to be reminded that deception in war is universal. Furthermore, it is manifestly not true that Muslims as a whole desire eternal warfare with non-Muslims.

It would be fundamentally incorrect to suggest that the strained positions of Osama bin Laden and other extremists somehow grow out of normal or mainstream Muslim thought: Al-Qaeda's deception does not grow out of valid religious duty. If we fail to make the distinction between radical Islamists and valid, thoughtful and authoritative views of expert Muslim jurists, we risk undermining one of the most promising tools to defeat radical thought. I am referring to recent successful programmes by the Saudis and Egyptians to persuade what the West might call radical jihadists that their extremist activities are actually against the canons of Islam as interpreted by mainstream jurists. ■

Further Analysis

■ **Islam's doctrines of deception**
Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst,
26 September 2008

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Global jihad versus national jihad

KEY POINTS

■ Muslim Empires launched the last campaigns of offensive jihad in the 17th century. Defensive jihad was then waged against colonial expansion and it inspired a long series of nationalist struggles, from the anti-French jihad in Algeria in 1830 to the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in 1979.

■ Al-Qaeda developed a new doctrine of global jihad. It demands an individual commitment to what was before a collective duty and it erases the moral, practical and territorial conditions set by the Islamic tradition.

■ The confrontation between national and global jihad is inevitable. It has already flared in Kashmir, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The subject of 'jihad' legitimately generates a lot of debates. *Jean-Pierre Filiu* summarises how the doctrine and the practice of jihad evolved during the long history of Islam. 'Nationalist jihad' is confronted today with the new challenge of Al-Qaeda-inspired 'global jihad' that aims to turn the whole Muslim world into the "abode of war".

The word "jihad" comes from the pattern "j-h-d" and is related to the notion of intense effort. "Jihad" appears just four times in the Quran. Thirty-five verses [out of 6,235] contain a word derived from the "j-h-d" pattern; only on 10 occasions does it have a strict military meaning, while social or financial assistance to Muslims falls also under the category of "jihad".

It is not the Holy Book that gave to "jihad" its mainly military dimension, but the practice of the Prophet Muhammad, who launched jihad from Medina against polytheist Mecca, in 624. But after the conquest of Mecca, in 630, Muhammad led a last campaign up to the northern city of Tabuk and, on his way back home he compared the "smaller jihad", namely the military one, to the "greater jihad", the struggle any Muslim has to wage against his own evil.

Jihad was the major force that led to the formidable expansion of Islam, from southern France to the Indus River, in just a century. This expansion eventually stopped before the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate, in 750, and the new Abbasid dynasty organised its relations with its non-Muslim neighbours. This is when the clerics, or ulema, introduced a new category between the "abode of Islam" [dar al-Islam] and the "abode of

war" [dar al-harb]: the "abode of pact" [dar al-'ahd], sometimes named the "abode of truce" [dar al-solh], became this new space where coexistence was not only possible, but legitimate.

Jihadi doctrines

During the 9th and 10th centuries, the four main schools [mazhab] of the Sunni orthodoxy elaborated their different doctrines. A clear distinction was

'But all the ulema, whether Sunni or Shia, agreed on a long list of prohibitions to be observed by the jihad-fighters, or mujahideen'

established between offensive jihad and defensive jihad. Offensive jihad had to be waged under the leadership of the caliph or of his representative, only after a public declaration of war and with reasonable chances of success. Defensive jihad could be launched after an aggression against the Muslim community [ummah] or the occupation of one of its territories.

The Islamic consensus prevailed that

jihad was mainly a collective duty (fardh kifaya) and that it could be fulfilled by one sector of the community on behalf of the whole ummah. Jihad had to be decided by the religious scholars and no individual was entitled to wage it on his own initiative.

The Shia clerics developed their own doctrine of jihad and suspended it until the return of the Hidden Imam, or Mahdi. It was as late as the 13th century that a Shia scholar claimed in Iraq that a representative of the Mahdi could actually lead jihad and, even in that case, only a defensive one.

But all the ulema, whether Sunni or Shia, agreed on a long list of prohibitions, to be observed by the jihad-fighters, or mujahideen: civilians had to be spared, women, children, monks and nuns were to be respected, corpses could not be mutilated. Long considerations were written about how the bounty had to be divided between the military leaders, the local fighters or the political ruler. And the four Sunni schools, along with the Shia, absolutely forbade jihad between Muslims.

Most of the Muslim population was not aware of these scholarly debates and had vague notions about the "jihad in the path of God" [al-jihad fi sabil Allah].

The crusades were resisted in Spain





INTERNATIONAL

and in the Middle East by semi-professional units of jihad fighters, with a strong class distinction between the cavalry and the infantry. The Reconquista ultimately won in Spain because a lot of local Muslims never engaged in direct jihad and preferred to contract Moroccan “volunteers” who fought on their behalf. This jihad by proxy led to the occupation of Andalusia by two successive North-African dynasties, the Almoravids and the Almohads, who proved unable to roll back the Christian progression.

European impact

The last campaigns of offensive jihad were waged in the 17th century by the Ottoman Empire in Europe and by the Mughal Sultanate in southern India. Ottoman and Mughal armies continued to represent a privileged elite, quite indifferent, when it was not aggressive, towards the Muslim population.

The whole picture changed with European colonial expansion. The French invasion of Algeria in 1830 quickly annihilated the Ottoman garrisons, only to face a deep-rooted insurgency. The Sufi sheikh Abd al-Qadir led, from 1832 to 1847, a jihad campaign against French “infidels”, but the betrayal of the Sultan of Morocco compelled him to surrender.

In the Caucasus, the Russian conquest was resisted from 1834 to 1859 by another Sufi sheikh, Shamil, who ultimately submitted to the “infidels”. In both cases, popular movements, led by charismatic figures, waged national jihad and guerrilla warfare against foreign occupation, while the Ottoman caliph and his professional armies were too weak to interfere.

This pattern of national [local defensive] jihad survived the demise of the Ottoman caliphate, in 1924, and inspired most of the anti-colonial struggles in the Muslim world.

For instance, one of the main nationalist militias to fight the British mandate in Palestine was called “Holy jihad” (al-jihad al-muqaddas) and the National

Liberation Front, that launched the anti-French war in Algeria from 1954, until independence in 1962, named its daily newspaper *El-Moudjahid*, the jihad-fighter. When the Red Army invaded Afghanistan in 1979, jihad became the rallying cry for all the guerrilla factions. This anti-Soviet jihad was deeply a nationalist movement, with local commanders, like Ahmad Shah Masud in the Panjshir valley, reaching far beyond their traditional constituency.

The war of liberation of Afghanistan lasted nearly 10 years. The Palestinian cleric, Abdallah Azzam, established the Services Bureau in the Pakistani city of Peshawar in 1984 to help channel foreign volunteers to the Afghan jihad. Even though Azzam was a Palestinian, he had clashed bitterly with PLO nationalism and he had joined the Jordanian

‘Bin Laden and Zawahiri transformed jihad into an individual obligation’

branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. He eventually left the Brotherhood when it opposed military solidarity with the Afghan ‘brethren’.

In the Services Bureau, Azzam was assisted by a young Saudi activist, Osama bin Laden, who publicised the Afghan cause in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Even at the end of the 1980s, there were never more than a few hundred ‘Arab Afghans’ in Peshawar. One of the most vocal militants in this close-knit community was Ayman al-Zawahiri, then a junior leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ).

The overwhelming majority of the ‘Arab Afghans’ remained in training camps or safe houses inside Pakistan and Bin Laden himself fought the Soviets only once in 1987. While nearly one million Afghans died during the war, only a few dozen Arabs were “martyred” in Afghanistan. Their contribution to the

withdrawal of the Red army was negligible, but the jihadist propaganda was elated at their “triumph”.

Azzam was killed in a booby-trapped car in Peshawar in November 1989, leaving Bin Laden and Zawahiri in charge and in possession of the database of the Services Bureau. This arguably became the nucleus of a jihadist transnational network, called “the base”, Al-Qaeda.

Modernist jihad

During their exile in Sudan, from 1991 to 1996, Bin Laden and Zawahiri expanded Azzam’s pan-Islamist vision to develop a radically new doctrine. They had very little respect for the Afghan national jihad and became convinced that their own jihadist activism was the driving force behind the Soviet humiliation in Afghanistan and therefore behind the demise of the former Soviet Union.

Global jihad was the wave of the future and was bound to win over the other superpower, the US. The infidel “far enemy” had to be targeted to weaken the “near enemy”, namely the Muslim regimes collaborating with “the Jews and the Crusaders”.

In May 1996, Bin Laden was expelled from Khartoum to Peshawar and he soon moved inside Afghanistan to regroup his followers. In August, he publicly declared jihad against the US, but this first statement by Al-Qaeda went nearly unnoticed.

In February 1998, Bin Laden and Zawahiri launched the “World Islamic Front of Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders”. They urged any Muslim, anywhere, to kill any American or any one of their allies, without distinction between civilian and military targets. In a few lines, they went against centuries of Islamic tradition: while jihad was historically a collective duty, they transformed it into an individual obligation; more importantly, they erased the relation between jihad and a community [to protect] or a territory [to liberate] by turning jihad global.

Al-Qaeda yearned to drag any Muslim, anywhere, into a global war.

Reduced doctrine

This new doctrine of global jihad was conceived by non-clerical militants with little in the way of Islamic religious credentials: Bin Laden never completed his studies in management and Zawahiri graduated from Cairo University, but with a degree in medicine.

Nobody in the Al-Qaeda leadership has dogmatic credentials and the global jihad reduces the immense legacy of Islam to just handful of scriptural references, always the same. The hypnotic dimension of this propaganda and its targeting of disenfranchised individuals was enhanced by the massive use of internet. A virtual ummah is created in cyber-space and the e-jihadist is conveniently devoid of any cultural or national root.

Al-Qaeda webmasters spent a lot of time and energy discarding the Islamic traditions that contradicted their own doctrine. So they repeatedly attacked the validity of the distinction between the military "smaller jihad" and the mystical "greater jihad".

While Islamic faith relies on five pillars [creed, prayer, Ramadan, charity and pilgrimage], the Al-Qaeda focus on jihad echoes the schismatic propaganda of the Khariji sect that dissented at the dawn of Islam and considered jihad to be the sixth pillar of the faith.

Global jihad became so extreme in its preaching that the few scholars who had initially condoned it quickly turned against this "deviation".

Al-Qaeda forged an alliance with the Taliban against the Afghan warlords who vied for dominance after the Soviet withdrawal. Afghanistan was turned by Al-Qaeda into a fully-fledged 'Jihadistan', a convenient base to launch global terrorism, first in eastern Africa in August 1998.

Al-Qaeda trained groups like Lashkar-

e-Tayyiba advocate the Islamisation of India, and sent them to Kashmir, where they ended up fighting against local Kashmiri anti-Indian guerrillas. In the summer of 1999, the Saudi jihadist Khat-tab launched an aggression against Dagestan and dragged nationalist Chechnya into a hopeless conflict with the Russian army, although there is debate as to whether Khattab (Samir Suwailem) was a Bin Laden-style global jihadist or a follower of Azzam, who led volunteers during the defensive jihad in Chechnya.

'The vast majority of Al-Qaeda's victims have been, and will probably continue to be, Muslims'

Then Bin Laden sent a death squad to kill Ahmad Shah Massoud, the symbol of Afghan nationalism in the eyes of many, two days before the 11 September 2001 attacks on the US.

The dismantlement of the Taliban regime in 2001 deeply weakened Al-Qaeda and sent it searching for a new sanctuary. It took advantage of the US invasion of Iraq, in March 2003, to organise networks and foster recruitment, and was initially fairly successful in this effort. However, the tactical collaboration with local groups collapsed by 2007 when many militant Iraqi Sunnis turned their backs on Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Iraqi Sunni guerrillas resisted Al-Qaeda because of their nationalist agenda and refused what the Taliban had effectively accepted in August 1998: the transformation of their territory into an Al-Qaeda-influenced 'Jihadistan'.

Turning point

The confrontation between the national and global jihad in Iraq has sharpened until today, with Al-Qaeda on the losing side. The 'Sons of Iraq' or 'Awakening'

militias are largely composed of former Sunni insurgents, who managed to expel Al-Qaeda from its stronghold of Anbar province.

While this nationalist rollback was underway, Saudi sheikhs, both from the government and the opposition, claimed that only Iraqis had the right to wage jihad in Iraq. These fatwas were a terrible blow for the global jihad that always relied on non-nationals to repress nationalist tendencies [the two successive leaders of Al-Qaeda in Iraq have been Jordanian and Egyptian].

Al-Qaeda stigmatises the UN as a "crusader" organisation and it had attacked their representations in Baghdad or Algiers. Zawahiri claims all the Muslim states should leave the UN as only "apostate" regimes can accept UN membership. It is true that numerous scholars consider that, by joining the UN, the Muslim nations turned the whole planet into the "abode of pact". On the contrary, Al-Qaeda and the global jihad seek to plunge the entire Muslim world into the "abode of war".

Despite the intensity of this struggle in Muslim countries, Al-Qaeda has confused world opinion about the real meaning of jihad. The different movements inspired by national jihad were always rooted in a territory and its Muslim population [Afghan national jihad was all waged inside Afghanistan and did not cross over into Soviet territory]. Global jihad is basically opportunistic in targeting any potential base and it is ready to liquidate any local resistance. The vast majority of Al-Qaeda's victims have been, and will probably continue to be, Muslims. ■

Further Analysis

■ Jihadist paradise - Yemen's terrorist threat re-emerges

Jane's Intelligence Review, 15 May 2008

■ Suicide bombings in Afghanistan

Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst, 13 August 2007

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Nuclear nationalism radiates in Iran

KEY POINTS

■ Surveys and anecdotal reports from Iran suggest that a clear majority of the populations is supportive of the country's nuclear programme.

■ Domestically, the authorities in Iran have successfully turned the nuclear issue into a conflict between discriminating Western states and the Iranian people and not just their government.

■ Allegations about Iran's intent to manufacture a nuclear weapons capability are confronted by Tehran's line that solving the nuclear crisis will not be the end of animosities between Iran and the West.

- Did you hear that the Iranian government has just designated the date as the "national" fruit?
 - Why date?
 - Because it gives energy and has a nucleus
- (Iranian joke transmitted via SMS)

The success with which the Iranian government has been able to turn the nuclear issue into the proclaimed position of the 'Iranian nation' has intrigued many external observers of Iran.

As the widely recounted joke reprinted above suggests, the Iranian nation has not lost its sense of humour and has taken the government's pronouncements about Iran's national rights with a grain of salt. At the same time, anecdotal evidence and recent independent polling suggests the Iranian public now holds a hardened nationalist stance of support for the nuclear programme.

For instance, in a poll conducted earlier this year by Terror Free Tomorrow, a non-profit organisation based in Washington, 89 per cent of Iranians "favour" or "strongly favour" the development of nuclear energy, while in a survey conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org, an international public opinion project based at the University of Maryland, 90 per cent of Iranians believe it is "important" or "very important" for Iran "to have

While the United States and the West continue to put pressure on Iran to suspend its nuclear development, within the country the public is largely in favour of the programme. *Farideh Farhi* examines how the Iranian government has shaped opinion on the nuclear issue.

a full fuel cycle nuclear programme".

Such a high degree of support can only be explained by the fact that public opinion on the nuclear issue has been successfully shaped by a government which has proved opportunistic in its use of historical, cultural and political levers to frame the issue. All the arguments used to rally public support have deep resonance with the Iranian public - technological defence of Iran's peaceful nuclear programme, valorisation of self-sufficiency and pride in all things Iranian, highlighting the injustices and hypocritical stances of Western powers in their dealings, and ultimately the "savagery" of the United States' approach to Iran and the non-Western world.

Iran's leadership has not relied on Shia Islamic evangelism or the glory days of the Persian Empire in shaping Iranian public opinion, but on much more mundane calculations about what is considered to be 'legitimate' Iranian regional aspirations.

By doing this, it has created a space for support of Iran's nuclear programme that is independent of popular opinion about the current government and its other policies. The nuclear issue has become tied in the minds of many Iranians to Iran as a country that is not a physical threat to the world; merely in need of being acknowledged as a significant regional player whose interests can neither

be ignored nor significantly challenged without a process of give and take.

Selling the nuclear programme

Since revelations about Iran's nuclear facilities in Natanz and Arak in 2002, Iranian public conversation about the country's nuclear programme has gone through many phases, depending on the nature and extent of pressures imposed on Iran from other countries and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Reacting to the details of Iran's negotiations with the IAEA or the EU's representatives in nuclear talks with Iran (EU-3), and reflecting the political schisms that have characterised Iran's political environment, conversation has shifted repeatedly.

Points of contention have varied from whether to reject the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to whether Iran should temporarily re-suspend enrichment and enter negotiations over a package of economic incentives offered by the US and Europe.

Between 2002 and 2006, the result of all this was a relatively open field for discussion, including a variety of views on one of Iran's most important foreign policy and security issues. It was during this period that the domestic audience learned in detail about the trajectory of Iran's nuclear programme as narrated

by those involved in the programme's administration. This was in response to attempts to know more by a domestic audience - journalists, parliamentary deputies, clerics, political pundits and commentators - but also because of the desire of those involved to sell the programme as a "national project".

From the beginning, the programme was not marketed as a solution to Iran's security needs; various government officials repeatedly argued that the pursuit of nuclear weapons would undermine Iran's security. Instead they pitched the objectives of civilian energy use and technological advance on their own merits.

Given the roots of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and its mottos of independence and liberty, along with years of war and isolation, the Iranian public proved receptive to the idea of self-sufficiency and moving away from reliance on oil and gas as a sole source of energy. Also appealing was the idea of a "national project geared toward strengthening the scientific and technological infrastructures of the country," according to Iran's former foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi.

Furthermore, given the history of Islamic Iran's treatment in international organisations, particularly during the Iran-Iraq War years when Iran's assertions that Iraq used chemical weapons were routinely ignored, the Iranian public believed the charge that international organisations such as the IAEA were working as political instruments of important international players such as the US in its quest to deny Iran technological advancement and progress.

The explanation of Iran's nuclear programme to the domestic audience was detailed and mindful of the possibility that it would be questioned if it was not in synch with the technical details known about Iran's nuclear programme in the international arena.

Both conservative and reformist newspapers, as well as various national television channels, were platforms to discuss

the issue, even if the framework used to gain the support of each audience varied.

In conservative papers, the nuclear programme was presented as a national programme requiring indigenous sacrifice and ingenuity. In reformist papers, nationalism was again emphasised but this time within the more reasonable framework of genuine disagreement with the Europeans.

Despite subtle differences in framing the issue, the trajectory offered for Iran's nuclear programme was essentially the

'The Iranian public proved receptive to the idea of self-sufficiency and moving away from reliance on oil and gas as a source of energy'

same; "scientific success" was posited as a key factor in continuing and expanding Iran's nuclear programme.

The risk and daring of the programme, in the face of international opposition and technological hurdles, were important selling points in generating pride as well as the necessary zeal in support of the programme.

Conflating of Iran's nuclear programme and general scientific advancement has been an important strategy in the government's attempt to present the country's nuclear programme as the cornerstone of its efforts to modernise the country, narrow the technological divide with the West, and frustrate the Western objective of hindering the country's progress.

In making the case, Iranian officials were also aided by the George W Bush administration's public pronouncements that the intent of pressures on Iran was to deny the country not only nuclear weapons and enrichment capability but

also the "knowledge" the pursuit of such a capability entails.

Conversation stopper

The contentious public conversation that occurred mostly during Mohammad Khatami's presidency (1997-2005) was important for generating and maintaining support for the nuclear programme. With the referral of Iran's case to the UN Security Council in 2006, which more or less coincided with the entrenchment of conservative control over all levers of government in Iran, conversation about what should be done about Iran's nuclear dossier became more restricted. However, the context for this shift was prepared during the last months of the Khatami administration.

The nationalist discourse that asserted nuclear energy as an "assured or indispensable right" and had from the start been a major part of Iran's case for pursuing its nuclear programme, for all practical purposes, became the whole focus, increasingly demanding conformity. In the process, arguments that proposed accepting temporary suspension of enrichment-related activities became marginalised in Iran's new proclaimed assertive or "aggressive foreign policy".

Not having developed an argument that questioned the wisdom of a civilian nuclear programme, at least the way it was pursued under the successive administrations of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) and Khatami, the case made by some reformers or dissidents for halting or suspending the enrichment programme under a conservative administration became a politically unsustainable position in Iran's competitive political environment because of international pressures.

The argument about the system's interest or expediency fuelled temporary suspension of enrichment-related activities and voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol for extra nuclear inspections as a means to build confidence,



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weather an “emergency situation”, and prevent the creation of an “international consensus against Iran”. However, this also lost its sway with the increased US troubles in Iraq and the Iranian negotiators’ inability to show any enhanced confidence in the peacefulness of Iran’s programme after what was seen in the country as a long period of suspension.

Iranian hardliners effectively used the perceived intransigence of the US in refusing to agree to even limited enrichment, even if Iran agreed to intrusive inspections, to suggest the US stance was only an excuse to pressure and, even worse, dismember Iran and that resolving the enrichment issue would not solve or even lessen Washington’s problem with Iran’s political system, and ultimately Iran, as an undesirable entity.

As a result, after Iran abandoned suspension – first at its uranium conversion plant in Isfahan in August 2005 and then at its enrichment plant in Natanz in March 2006 – the domestic argument for renewed suspension was not picked up and elaborated upon in the public by any significant national leader. Instead, the conversation atrophied into a technical discussion about the need to use acumen in diplomacy and avoid verbal adventurism – a reference to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s meditations regarding Israel and the Holocaust.

The same interactive process between the domestic and international forces that between 2002 and 2006 created the possibility of relatively open debate about how Iran should approach external pressures over its nuclear programme also opened the path for the ascendance of the hardline nationalist discourse that currently identifies stridence and standing firm as the only way to counteract equally hard external stances. Underlying this stance is the belief that a high-stake risk must and can be taken at this time in history to assure the survival, independence and influence of the Islamic Republic as a regional player.

The government hints to the Iranian public that the stakes are even higher as an attempted attack against the Islamic Republic is ultimately an attack against Iran. The government of the Islamic Republic does not tell its public war is coming; it says the opposite by pointing out that threat of war is “psychological warfare” to sow discord among the elite and between the government and people. The government uses the US threat of war to point out the “savagery” of the US system that can contemplate, with ease, destroying other societies because it dislikes their government.

‘The Iran government uses the US threat of war to point out the “savagery” of the US system that can contemplate destroying other societies because it dislikes their government’

US complicity

Not to be underestimated is the extent to which US rhetorical excesses regarding Iran’s nuclear programme have fed into Iranian nationalism. In the name of public diplomacy, the US has also been involved in its own version of trying to affect Iranian public opinion.

The most important instrument in this regard has been pronouncements by President George W Bush and other US officials, but the US has also used media avenues such as Radio Farda and Voice of America’s Persian service to highlight the repressive nature and adventurism of the Iranian government.

A fundamental misunderstanding about how politics works in Iran, however, has caused the Bush administration’s efforts either to push a large section of

Iranian public opinion to the government’s side or to make it fearful enough to retreat into the private sphere. This fundamental misunderstanding is based on the assumption that the Iranian government is doing nothing about the information coming in. At most, it is seen as trying to intercept information and prevent it from entering the country, a task which is difficult to perform in an era of the internet and satellite television.

The reality is that Iran’s government has connections that spread throughout the society. It does intercept information but it is also the filter through which information enters Iran and becomes significantly framed and interpreted to suit Iranian political memories and sensibilities. The Bush administration’s proclamations do enter the Iranian public sphere but only alongside images of violence in Iraq, Guantanamo, Lebanon, and Gaza. The Iranian government uses these images to make a point, but it does so because it knows that they resonate with the Iranian public and can be seen as examples of “US/Western hypocrisy”.

It uses these images effectively to back up the view that the problem the US has with Iran is not with its nuclear programme, which is peaceful anyway. Instead the US can be presented as having a problem with the regional, technological and political ascendance of a country and a people who, given their history, deserve to be “neither servants of foreign powers nor their enemies,” as often pointed out by Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Given Iran’s experiences in the past century, the power of this argument to the Iranian ear should not be underestimated. ■

Further Analysis

■ Boxed in – Containing a nuclear Iran

Jane’s Intelligence Review, 22 September 2008

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Lines drawn over Iran's resources

KEY POINTS

■ Given Iran's plentiful supply of natural resources and economic size, it is impossible for its southern Arab neighbours to ignore it as a potential partner.

■ The Gulf Co-operation Council also has serious reservations about the viability and durability of United States policy towards Tehran, so GCC economic collaboration with Iran has not ceased despite pressure from Washington.

■ Russia and China are waiting to fill any political, economic or even military vacuum if US leverage in the Persian Gulf region declines.

In its continued stand off with Iran over uranium enrichment, the United States would like Gulf Co-operation Council countries to comply with extended, resource-related sanctions against the Islamic Republic. *Ethan Chorin* and *Fariborz Ghadar* assess the long-standing, key economic relationship between the cross-Gulf neighbours and the wider ramifications of ending it.

Since the Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988, cross-Persian Gulf trade in natural resources has looked like drawing Iran and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states closer together.

Talks concerning GCC imports of Iranian water began in 1988 and continued until 2005. More recently, energy shortages on the Arab side of the Gulf led to a spate of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between Iran and the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar for the purchase or joint development of Iranian natural gas.

The US-Iran relationship is still antagonistic over Iran's refusal to cease uranium enrichment, and a question remains as to how the US should react to developments in the Gulf energy sector.

A comprehensive ban on trade in gas and refined oil products, in addition to causing grave strain on US Iran and US-GCC relations, may push Iran into the arms of countries like China and Russia. This would have significant ramifications both for GCC unity and US influence in the region. Recent tripartite talks regarding a possible three-way Russia-Qatar-Iran gas cartel modelled on OPEC underscore the imminence of this threat.

Friend or foe

The Gulf countries have for thousands

of years been connected by immigration and trade.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Tehran's attempts to control provincial revenues led to an increase in tariffs and the expulsion or migration of Arab traders, many of whom emigrated to the opposite shore. Arab-Iranian relations during the 1960s and 1970s were generally cordial, assisted by the evolution of a network of Cold War alliances linking the US to Iran and the GCC states, against Iraq and its Soviet-camp allies.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution led to a dramatic change in attitudes, raising Sunni Arab fears that the Shia state would try to undermine the authority of the Sunni-led GCC regimes. Arab-Iranian relations hit a low-point during the Iraq-Iran war (1980 to 1988). When Iraq seemed to be losing ground, the GCC states backed former president Saddam Hussein with money and arms.

A few years after the war ended, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait again shifted the balance. Iran was the first country to condemn Iraq's aggression – the first in a series of steps indicating a shift in Iranian policy in relation to its Arab neighbours. Iran's attitude had moved from low-level subversion to coercion, as it tried to counter deeper threats to its security posed by the US, and to a lesser extent, Iraq.

One of the little-discussed aspects of this post-Gulf War shift in Iran was an early focus on trade in water resources. The Arab side of the Gulf gets most of its water from runoff or shallow, non-renewable aquifers, and desalination remains expensive. Iran is comparatively rich in fresh water as it is supplied by four major rivers; the Karun, Dez, Karkeh and Jarrahi in the southwest hold two-thirds of country's surface water.

On this basis, Iran undertook negotiations, first with Kuwait, then with Qatar and Saudi Arabia, to provide water, initially at highly favourable rates. As would be the case with later discussions over gas exports, the fundamental problem on the Iranian side was political, not economic. Many Iranians felt their government was exporting a valuable resource under-utilised at home, in part because of insufficient investment in infrastructure. For their part, the GCC countries were subject to pan-Arab pressure not to allow Iran leverage over key national resources.

Gas rules

In the past couple of years, Iran and the GCC have re-engaged in negotiations over resources, this time focused on natural gas.

The idea that Iranian gas might be needed to support GCC growth is not





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new. What is unusual is the convergence of Iran's massive supply of largely under-developed gas resources and a spike in demand, linked to an oil-fed liquidity boom which is itself partly fuelled by US-Iran tensions. The energy crunch has been particularly acute in the northern areas of the United Arab Emirates, where local energy demand far outstrips supply.

In May 2007, the Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC) and its Omani counterparts committed to develop the shared offshore Hengam/West Bukha gas field. Memoranda between Oman and Iran concerning the Hormuz and Kish fields followed, some of which were covered by a bilateral gas accord signed in Muscat in May 2007. Similarly, Crescent Petroleum, a subsidiary of UAE's Dana Gas, has been rumoured for some time to be on the verge of importing Iranian gas from the offshore Salman field. Iran and Qatar have long discussed joint developments of enormous contiguous offshore deposits encompassing Qatar's North Shore and Iran's South Pars fields. As early as 2004, Bahrain had been contemplating gas purchases from both Qatar and Iran, to be shipped via undersea pipeline.

Shifting ground

The political ascendancy of the Iraqi Shia since 2003, combined with Iran's quest for nuclear technology, certainly stirred GCC states regarding the motives behind Iranian commercial initiatives.

Iran has occasionally stoked such fears to send a message to the US regarding the Islamic Republic's 'reach' in the wake of any military action. In July 2007, the editor of Iran's *Kayhan* newspaper, an appointee of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, wrote that Bahrain was "very much a part of Iran, and had been for centuries". The Saudi-financed newspaper *Asharq Al-Awsat* called the editorial, "an unprecedented attack on the

Gulf States, and Bahrain in particular", while a Bahraini Salafist (Sunni) member of parliament issued a fatwa calling for the editor's head.

The publication of a late 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), however, precipitated yet another recalibration of GCC attitudes. The report, which significantly downgraded Iran's nuclear threat, aroused considerable emotion in the Sunni Arab heartland. Some among pro-US Sunni Arab officials saw it as a further sign that the US was throwing support to regional Shia at the expense of fundamental Sunni interests; others interpreted the move as a sign that the US was perhaps unable or unwilling to face down the Iranian threat. The latter view was further supported by the quickness with which the Russians exploited the findings to finalise an arrangement to supply Iran with fuel for its Bushehr reactor.

Faced with perceived US irresolution or bias and continuing, substantial trade interests, many of the GCC states began to renew talks, particularly on the topic of resources, and reverted to emphasising the mutual interests of Iran and its southern neighbours.

Abu Dhabi, traditionally cast in the West as the 'anti-Iran', in July 2008 hosted a pan-Arab dialogue with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in which participants expressed strong opposition to any attack on Iran.

A number of Iranian publications recently quoted Emir Hamad bin Khalifa of Qatar as saying: "Western countries resort to certain pretexts in a bid to sabotage Iranian relations with the regional nations, but joint co-operation among countries of the Middle East can foil all conspiracies of the enemies."

The roots of these apparently counter-intuitive movements can be found in Iran and Arab fears that US actions are making the Persian Gulf a more dangerous region. The Iranians fear US attempts to initiate regime change more

than they fear a limited strike on nuclear facilities, which could have the effect of rallying the people of Iran around their leadership. The GCC countries fear Iranian military retaliation against the US military installations they host. An Iranian news site recently alleged that Qatar and the UAE were making direct payments to Iran in exchange for assurances they would not be attacked.

Qatar and Oman are in many ways at the vanguard of efforts to draw Iran and the GCC closer. Qatar was the first to openly break ranks with the GCC on sanctions policy, casting the only 'no' vote during the first UN Security Council resolution on Iran in 2006. In October, Abdulla Bin Hamad al-Attiya, Qatar's oil minister, met his Iranian and Russian counterparts in Tehran to discuss forming a cartel to co-ordinate production among the three countries with the largest gas reserves.

Oman is accustomed to consistent but quiet trade with Iran and bilateral negotiations concerning Iranian investment in key Omani infrastructure projects and Oman's participation in newly privatised Iranian companies are ongoing.

Enter Russia and China

The more countries in the region see the US (and the West in general) as fickle or irresolute, the greater the incentives for cross-Gulf co-operation, but also a turn to other outside powers.

In December 2007, as the US tried to persuade the 5+1 Group - the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (France, Britain, Russia, China, and the US) plus Germany - to advocate further UN sanctions against Tehran, China's state-owned Sinopec signed an agreement with the Iran National Oil Company to develop Iran's massive Yadavaran field, which has reserves estimated at 12-18 billion barrels. Gholam Hossein Nozari, Iran's oil minister, hailed the Yadavaran agreement, saying: "We have much co-operation

with the Chinese in many fields, especially the energy sector, including expanding the North Pars field. Deals on gas [exploration] are coming to a head with Sinopec.”

In response to a question about US pressure, Zhou Baixiu, Sinopec's director of international affairs, said: “If we had wanted to pay attention to [US] pressure, we would not today have signed this agreement.”

While the Chinese are concerned mainly with access, the Russians focus on underlying control of energy resources, in which they already hold substantial stakes. This makes Russia's involvement potentially far more dangerous for the US. Gazprom has signed MoUs with Iran to develop oil and gas fields and build transport networks from Oman to the Caspian, while Russian firms Lukoil and Tatneft have purchased Iranian crude and undertaken exploration surveys on Iranian soil. Russian firms have also positioned themselves as key players in the construction of the Iran-India pipeline. Moscow has also sought to barter support for Iran's membership in the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation for bases on Iranian soil. Such developments would clearly threaten US regional interests.

Inducements aside, Moscow's core aim is to control the flow of gas and oil to markets. A proposed Russian military base on the island of Qeshm in the Strait of Hormuz could significantly alter the regional power calculus.

From the Iranian perspective, a deeper relationship with Russia is double-edged. Russia can foil UN sanctions, give Tehran nuclear energy technology and fuel, support military modernisation and acquisition and support Iran's economy with trade and investment. However, Russian interests have never been fully aligned with Iran's, and Tehran knows the risks associated with siding with Moscow.

As much as China and Russia's indi-

vidual interests are cause for concern, there is also the possibility of a three-way Tehran-Beijing-Moscow alignment, again fundamentally predicated on access to resources. Roger Howard, a writer and broadcaster on international relations, says: “In the longer term it is also possible that the new Tehran-Beijing access could herald the emergence of an even larger military coalition in which Russia could join Iran and China in a bid to thwart any future US expansion in the region.”

A jumble of strategies

As the debate over how to stop Iran's nuclear programme raged in 2007, US lawmakers introduced a spate of bills aimed at curbing Iran's hydrocarbon sector, including two companion bills, collectively known as the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act (ISEA).

The bill, if passed into law, would sanction any investment in Iran and target oil companies and banking institutions that support the country's energy, oil and petrochemical sectors, including “critical infrastructure projects, such as electricity”, potentially affecting Dubai's investment in Iranian power. ISEA also requires the administration to enforce the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA), ending the US Department of State's ability to waive penalties for foreign companies that invest more than USD20 million in Iran's energy sector.

Senators Christopher Dodd and Richard Shelby proposed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act of 2008, as an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act (S 3001). The bill repeats some of the language of the yet-to-be-passed ISEA, calling for pension funds and state government to be indemnified from lawsuits resulting from Iran-related divestment decisions.

The act also calls for stricter oversight of “sanctionable investments” in Iran's energy sector, as well as closing loop-

holes related to the transfer of dual use technologies by US firms.

Most alarmingly, bipartisan House Resolution 362, introduced in late 2007, repeats elements of previously proposed legislation, but adds the idea of a comprehensive air and sea embargo, “prohibiting the export to Iran of all refined petroleum products; imposing stringent inspection requirements on all persons, vehicles, ships, planes, trains and cargo entering or departing Iran”.

Are renewed attempts to clamp down on cross-Gulf trade in energy and other resources a good idea, and would they work? It is difficult to imagine any of the GCC states sustaining an indefinite, US-initiated trade embargo on one of their largest trading partners: the UAE's president Sheikh Khalifa underscored this point earlier in the month by insisting his country would abide by ‘international’ measure (assuredly those with full UN backing).

Even a lesser sanctions regime, one targeted at trade in gas and refined oil products, runs the strong risk of increasing Gulf Arab reluctance to interdict dual-use technologies, which should clearly be at the top of the sanctions agenda, as well as forcing Iran to look elsewhere to supply both its import and export needs. Momentum is already in favour of increased, not diminished, commercial contacts between the GCC countries and Iran.

The debate over optimal sanctions policy would be complex enough without taking into account the hydrocarbon acquisition strategies of both Russia and China. These strategies, however, are fundamental, and amplify the need to get the balance right. ■

Further Analysis

■ The Gulf states and disunity over Iran

Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst, 7 January 2008

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North African disunity aids Islamists

KEY POINTS

■ The states of North Africa are often touted as operational bases for radical Islamist groups, including Al-Qaeda.

■ Mauritania in particular is witnessing an upsurge in Islamist militant activity.

■ Political suspicion continues to hamper regional counter-terrorism co-operation.

Since 2006, North Africa has become a major front in the so-called 'war against terrorism'. While Algeria has witnessed regular attacks, Morocco, Tunisia and more recently Mauritania have also suffered from violence. In such an environment, counter-terrorism co-operation between these states should be a priority – but this is not the case.

The situation is pressing and the major militant group in the region, the re-named Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), is on the offensive. When the Algerian GSPC (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat) took that name in January 2007, the idea was to federate all the Islamist groups in the region.

From Mauritania to Chad, AQIM militants operate in the inhospitable Sahara, following the advice given in the early 2000s by a Yemeni representative of Osama bin Laden to the GSPC's then leader, Amir Hassan Hattab, to use the desert as its fallback base. Since then, the Sahel (a narrow band of semi-arid land south of the Sahara) has become a haven for jihadist groups loosely linked to AQIM.

They have built up alliances with numerous smugglers in the region (trafficking cigarettes, hashish, stolen cars, weapons and illegal immigrants) and the rebel Tuareg tribes that barter their knowledge of the area. Most concerning is the area at the Mali, Mauritania and Algeria borders.

Regional security officials confirm that AQIM has bases and caches in the Sahel, where it stores fuel, food and ammunition. Its members move quickly

Given the volatile security situation in North Africa, counter-terrorism co-operation between the regions' states should be a priority, but it is not. *Jane's* briefly assesses the main factors in this context.

throughout the region, avoiding busy tracks. AQIM also sets up training camps, where it welcomes young local people and gives them military training and brief indoctrination. It also welcomes European and Pakistani jihadists, as well as Islamist groups that have been forced to cease operating from Algeria, something that Mauritania's counter-terrorism czar, Mohamed Abdellahi Ould Dah, considers "a major concern". He points out two specific areas of concern: the border area between eastern Mauritania and Mali and the Timbuktu area in northern Mali.

During his visit to Nouakchott in February, France's Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner hinted that his country helps the authorities to monitor the long border with Mali. A reconnaissance aircraft, based in Dakar, flies over the area regularly, an operation that is tantamount to finding a needle in a sand dune. The US has a training centre in Gao, in northern Mali, where it trains Malian military units for counter-terrorism combat purposes. Co-operation on counter-terrorism between the West and North African states is quite good – even with Libya, which before 2004 was diplomatically isolated.

The issue remains the lack of collaboration among the countries of North Africa. This is a product of suspicion and animosity that characterises regional affairs. For instance, Morocco and Algeria have had a rocky relationship in the past 30 years and this does not favour the exchange of sensitive information between them. On the contrary, each country has

a tendency to accuse the other of being too lax on fighting terrorism, letting militants cross into the territory of the other. And then there is the reality of reputation. None of the countries in the region want to recognise they have a terrorism problem because of the impact such a perception could have on tourism and foreign investment.

After Mauritania's bloodless military coup on 6 August, most countries in the region and in the West decided to cut off ties with the new regime. For instance, the US and France forcefully condemned the coup, calling the new regime illegitimate and suspending their non-humanitarian help – that included financial support to fight radical Islamists.

One of the reasons behind the coup was to unseat President Sheikh Sidi Ould Abdallahi, who was viewed as weak against the Islamists. Al-Qaeda understood this and immediately after the coup, AQIM issued a communiqué on the internet calling for all the militant forces in the Maghreb to converge on Mauritania to kick out the new regime and install an Islamic state.

Today, more than ever, states in North Africa must put aside their divergences on the political level to better facilitate co-operation on counter-terrorism. Anything less would leave AQIM with a clear advantage. ■

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Shrine tensions deepen Kashmir divide

KEY POINTS

■ Ongoing communal tensions in Indian-administered Kashmir remain high as a result of the controversy associated with an annual pilgrimage by Hindus to the disputed state.

■ The controversy has sharpened Hindu-Muslim group boundaries and deepened communal divides.

■ A growing conservative Islamist movement in the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley and nationalist campaigns in Hindu-majority Jammu have exacerbated the situation.

When the state government of Indian-administered Kashmir granted acres of land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board, it raised Muslim fears of a government Hindu resettlement policy, reviving communal tensions in the disputed state. *Jane's* examines whether these protests are set to intensify.

After four years of relative calm in Indian-administered Kashmir, the disputed state has once again been stirred into violence. Communal tensions, rather than a resurgence of militant activity that gripped the state in the late 1980s and early 1990s, have led to ongoing outbreaks of violent protests.

The root of the unrest has been the state government's provisional granting in late June of 100 acres of forest land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board, which manages the Amarnath cave - where Hindus believe the god Shiva explained the secret of life and eternity to his divine consort Parvati - and organises an annual pilgrimage to the shrine.

The state government had initially granted land to the board to put up temporary, prefabricated restrooms and shelters for pilgrims, but was forced to rescind its decision as a result of violent demonstrations in June and July across the former princely state. Although Indian-administered Kashmir has historically never experienced the large-scale communal violence that has in the past scarred much of northern and western India, these protests marked a new phase in Hindu-Muslim divisions that has been taking place in the state since the first decades of the 20th century.

Innocuous decision?

The decision made in June by outgoing

State Governor SK Sinha to grant 100 acres of public land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board to build a temporary pilgrimage centre at the site of the sacred Amarnath cave may have been entirely innocent. Sinha was appointed by the Congress Party which, with the local and largely Muslim People's Democratic Party (PDP), had been trying to run a 'secular', or at least cross-religious, coalition government for the previous four years. Also, there was a strong case that the pilgrimage site needed better facilities.

Since the security situation in Kashmir had begun to improve from 2003 - when India and Pakistan entered into an ongoing peace process - Hindu pilgrims had been returning to the state in increasing numbers. In 2007, more than 240,000 worshippers made the long and difficult journey to the cave, located in the Jammu region, frequently sleeping in open-air camps along the way. However, Sinha's land grant to the shrine's management board was interpreted in much of the Kashmir Valley as anything but innocent and, although it was rescinded a few days later, it has sparked a major political conflagration.

The ongoing violent protests since late June culminated in the resignation of Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad on 7 July and the subsequent imposition of governor's rule in the state.

The temporary land grant was widely

viewed by the Kashmir Valley's Muslim majority as part of a larger plot to alter the state's demographic character. Protesters in the valley accused the state government of settling large numbers of 'foreign' Hindus in the region. After nine days of protests between late June and early July, the state government revoked the land grant. At the same time, if the government's intention was to ease communal tensions, its decision to revoke the grant backfired spectacularly.

For example, in the aftermath of the government's move, the Hindu-majority Jammu region witnessed a week of continuous strikes and clashes between protesters and police. In a mirror image of events in the Kashmir Valley, protesters in Jammu claimed the government was infringing on their religious rights. Hindu nationalist parties accused the state government of plotting to destroy Hinduism and expel Hindus, just as militants had done with the region's small Hindu minority during the early years of the Pakistan-backed insurgency between 1989 and 1990.

Worsening situation

The revival of communal tensions has rekindled memories of the insurgency. Indian-administered Kashmir has suffered from a Pakistan-backed insurgency since 1989. Militant activity first started in the Kashmir Valley and subsequently spread



to the Jammu region during the 1990s.

The situation was exacerbated by widespread rumours in the Kashmir Valley that since stability had slowly been restored from 2003 onwards, a conspiracy had been devised to encourage Indian Hindus to re-settle in the Valley to dilute its overwhelmingly Muslim (96 per cent) character, and to turn back the consequences of the ethnic or religious cleansing achieved during the early days of the insurgency. Then, as many as 200,000 Kashmiri Pandit (Brahmin) families were driven out of the Valley and mostly into the adjacent enclave of Jammu, which is now 66 per cent Hindu.

However, this conspiracy theory seems implausible given that it is illegal for non-Kashmiris to acquire property in the disputed state. Under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which was written in acknowledgement of Kashmir's belated and difficult accession to the Indian Union, non-Kashmiris cannot acquire land in Indian-administered Kashmir without government approval, which has been given very sparingly.

Deepening communal divides

More likely, the rumours have their origins in two other developments. On the one hand, an Islamist fundamentalist movement has been sweeping through the valley, sharpening Muslim identity and the threats posed to it. The Ahl-e-Hadith movement aims at converting Kashmiri Muslims, who have traditionally followed heterodox (unorthodox beliefs), syncretist (fusion of differing systems of belief) and tribalist practices, to adherents of mainstream Islamic traditions. The Ahl-e-Hadith movement is also far less tolerant of non-Muslim Kashmiris.

Indeed, the development of the Amarnath shrine controversy against this backdrop of the Ahl-e-Hadith movement's growing influence, raised local fears that the Indian government was trying to emulate the re-settlement practices that Islamabad has been pursuing in neighbour-

ing Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Until the late 1980s, the Muslim population of Pakistan-administered Kashmir was 80 per cent Shia Muslims, who comprise Pakistan's minority sect. Since then, the Pakistani government has encouraged the re-settlement of large numbers of Sunni Muslims from Punjab, and as a result they now number half of the total population. Kashmir Valley Muslims fear that the Indian government may follow similar policies and encourage Hindu settlement.

Another factor that has triggered fears among the local Kashmiri Muslim population is that as peace has slowly taken hold in the disputed state over the past four years, many more Hindu Indians can be seen on the streets of Srinagar. These fears have been exacerbated by political campaigns in Hindu-majority Jammu. For example, the opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - with the help of Hindu militant organisations such as the Shiv Sena, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal - has built a strong constituency for itself in Jammu, especially among Kashmiri Pandit families displaced from the Valley and hostile to their fellow Kashmiri Muslims.

Political machinations

Since losing the 2002 state assembly election to the cross-religious Congress-PDP coalition, the BJP has set out to challenge the inclusionary and secularist policies pursued by the latter. In particular, it has championed the break-up of present-day Indian-administered Kashmir into three separate states - Kashmir, Jammu and the Buddhist-majority Ladakh - and their full absorption into the Indian Union at the expense of Article 370 of the Constitution and the 'special' status enjoyed by the existing state. This would free the Jammu Hindus from having to live under a permanent Muslim majority in the unitary state, and also undermine the last vestiges of Kashmiri claims not to be full members of the Indian Union.

However, with a Congress Party-led

government at the centre in Delhi and with insurgency-related violence in the disputed state diminishing, the BJP had made little headway even with most Jammu-based Hindus, who preferred the Congress at the 2002 and 2004 state assembly elections. But the controversy over the Amarnath cave has now come as a rare gift. Responding to Muslim protests against the Amarnath grant, in July, the BJP organised an economic blockade in defence of Hindu interests, which cut Valley farmers off from most of their markets and sharpened communal hostilities once again.

Unable to carry their produce to market by conventional routes, valley farmers appealed to both the Pakistan and Indian governments to be allowed to take it through Pakistan-administered Kashmir - thereby reuniting the two parts of the province dismembered by the 1947 partition. The state's Fruit Growers and Dealers Association in August eventually led a protest march towards the Line of Control, which divides the former princely state into Pakistan- and Indian-administered Kashmir. The march resulted in violent clashes between police and protesters and left at least 20 people dead, prompting the BJP to hastily back down.

But its intended purpose was more than fulfilled. Hindu-Muslim hostilities were raised again and, under their pressure, the predominantly Muslim PDP felt compelled to abandon its alliance with the Hindu-majority Congress, ending the state's experiment with secular government and also precipitating a new assembly election (scheduled to take place at some point before the end of the year) in a climate of deepening religious hostility. ■

Further Analysis

■ Violence in southern Philippines set to escalate

Jane's Country Risk Daily Report, 2 October 2008

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Pakistan's pride and prejudice

KEY POINTS

■ US military incursions on Pakistani soil have raised popular resentment, but the political condemnation in Islamabad has not been resolute.

■ The dilemma for the Pakistani government is how to tackle US requests for increased counter-terrorism co-operation while satisfying a long cherished policy line on sovereignty.

■ The issue of combating terrorism is more of a domestic concern than just a glitch in bilateral ties with the US.

September saw the first incursion onto Pakistani soil by US troops based in neighbouring Afghanistan. In doing so, the United States not only crossed the country's border with Afghanistan but also a long-held policy line dictated by the Pakistani administration, namely that any US military presence would be regarded as a threat to the country's sovereignty.

The incident has created considerable domestic fall-out, refocusing the debate over the US presence and operations in the region, as well as raising questions about Pakistan's policy options.

Unilateral acts

It was only a matter of time before US troops would cross the Durand Line from Afghanistan and head into Pakistani territory. Al-Qaeda and Taliban attacks on allied forces in Afghanistan have escalated over the course of 2008, with militants often escaping back to safe-havens in Pakistan.

Aerial strikes by US drone craft have been increasing. Washington has long claimed the right for its soldiers to cross the border in 'hot pursuit', and faced with a Pakistani government that is either unwilling or unable to fully commit to the war on terrorism, it comes as little surprise that the US has decided to act unilaterally. US President George W Bush reportedly authorised cross-border

Islamabad's collaboration with the United States against militants in the Afghan-Pakistan border region is indispensable. But, as *Elizabeth Mills* suggests, since the US military's recent push into Pakistan, rather than welcome US support, Pakistanis have largely rejected it as a threat to the country's independence, a sentiment that can benefit Pakistan's political opposition

activity in July, with US ground troops opting to pursue militants across the border into Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) for the first time on 3 September.

On the face of it, Pakistan has not welcomed the move. President Asif Ali Zardari first publicly berated the US for undermining Pakistan's sovereignty. Still, Zardari was reported by the *Wall Street Journal* on 5 October, as suggesting that Islamabad has an understanding with the US regarding the latter's cross-border operations.

Moreover, debate has stirred among Pakistan's elite, with some observers suggesting that the militant presence threatens the country's sovereignty far more than US operations. In these circles, there may be reservations over support for the US, but Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are viewed as far more problematic.

It took Pakistan's government more than a week to respond to the US incursion. This suggests a lack of direction and confidence in policy making, and/or that the policy options are too limited to risk excluding the US. When he did speak about the matter, Zardari opted for the well-worn sovereignty argument. Notably, there were no specific policy comments from federal coalition partner, the Awami National Party (ANP), which governs the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) abutting Afghanistan.

Similarly, noted firebrand and Jamaat-e-Ulema-Islam (JUI) chief, Fazlur Rehman, has remained quiet on the issue.

The only parties to have taken a stronger stand are the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). The former, led by Nawaz Sharif, elected in August to leave the ruling coalition and so is one of the few parties that has the luxury of not having its hands tied. The JI is in a similar position, currently having no parliamentary representation after boycotting February's polls.

General machinations

Both parties are biding their time, waiting for the government to fall. Both are Islamist in outlook, although the JI is far more ideological and its leader, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, more inflexible than Sharif. Both would be more supportive of a negotiated settlement with the militant elements operating in or from Pakistan. Given that the PML-N is in the ideal position to take power following fresh polls, it makes sense for it to tap into public discontent with the fall-out from the war on terrorism.

It fell to Chief of Army Staff, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, to berate the US for crossing Pakistan's international border. The general announced that the country's borders would be defended "at all costs" and that no external force would be allowed to conduct operations



inside Pakistan. Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani later endorsed the statement, rather weakly telling reporters that the government would take all possible steps to "safeguard the country's borders".

Gen Kayani's swift and clear statement, particularly in the face of a reaction vacuum from the civilian administration, garnered him considerable public support. The electorate has swiftly tired of its civilian leaders, irritated by their inability to tackle pressing policy needs since February's landmark polls.

A delicate balancing act

No one is more cognisant of the balancing act Pakistan needs to pursue than Gen Kayani. Shortly after the 17 September talks between the country's leaders and US Joint Chief of Staff chairman Admiral Mike Mullen, which were aimed at reducing tensions following the US troop incursion, a jirga of pro-government tribal elders met in Wana (South Waziristan) and agreed a resolution, in which they warned that they would enter Afghanistan to fight US forces if incursions continued. The local *Daily Times* quoted one eyewitness as reporting tribal elders to have said that "each and every... tribesman, young or old, will take up arms against the US and fight alongside the Pakistan Army".

Here, the crux of the balancing act is laid bare. The military has invested a lot of energy into trying to bring the tribes inside. Contrary to popular belief outside Pakistan, large segments of the

country's tribal communities do not welcome the Al-Qaeda and Taliban strongholds that have emerged in their territories. Instead, they would rather support military operations against them, if this is the best means by which to win back their long-held autonomy. The militants are regarded as being as 'foreign' as the US forces and their NATO allies operating in the region.

It is easy to underplay the sense of anti-Americanism that has developed in Pakistan. After all, outside FATA, there have been no anti-US protests of note and no particularly strong public reaction to incidents such as the troop incursion. In many respects, anti-Americanism is a direct consequence of the price that Pakistan has paid as a result of the war on terrorism. The country has lost more soldiers in counter-terrorism operations than all the allied forces combined. Acts of terrorism have become a nationwide phenomenon. None of the country's major cities have escaped as militant strength has grown.

Among mainstream Pakistani society, the US is regarded as part of the enemy forces with its own agenda. Conspiracy theories abound: some regard it as aiming to break down the Pakistani state, others view it as keen to take control of the country's nuclear arsenal. With the present government believed to be kowtowing to US policy initiatives, disdain for the administration has grown.

Any attempt by the US or NATO forces to steadily move their operations onto

Pakistani soil will prompt stronger retaliation from the already operating militants against US troops, Pakistan's government and any of the region's tribesmen which, at the time, is aligned with Islamabad's policies.

Outlook: a Faustian pact?

In many respects, Pakistan is often depicted as having little choice but to follow US counter-terrorist policies and demands. This is largely true, but it ignores the fact that Pakistan has a considerable militant problem, which is largely of Islamabad's own making and one it will need support to address.

How the Pakistani government navigates its way through difficult bilateral relations and growing domestic discontent is another question. There is no sense that it will stop supporting the US and its allies but it may be forced into a position where it simply cannot be seen to be offering the same level of support. This increases the risk that the US will decide to take security matters into its own hands. To do so, is likely to make the task of Pakistan's military more difficult. In turn, this will make the civilian administration's position all the less tenable, further undermining fragile political stability. ■

Further Analysis

■ Zardari's ISI honeymoon

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