THE ROLE OF THE USA IN THE CURRENT LEBANON CRISIS

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After the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, the strategic environment in the whole Middle East region changed dramatically.  The launch of the George W. Bush-led war on terrorism was based on the doctrine of pre-emption which represented a general shift from the old strategic option of containment and deterrence.

The first target in the course of this shift in the US doctrine led to the fall of the Taliban regime and the destruction of the Al Qaeda infrastructure in Afghanistan. The invasion of Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein was the next step which has strongly changed the political and strategic balance in the Middle East.

 These changes have had a very deep impact on Lebanon, Syria, and Iran.  In spite of these changes in the regional strategic environment, Syria and Iran have strengthened their strategic alliance, one that began after Ayatollah Khomeini's victory in February 1979; after this revolution, Syria was the second country after the Soviet Union to welcome the toppling of the Palahvi's dynasty.

At present, Syria and Iran share common goals:  they closely cooperate in their strategies against the US military deployment in Iraq, as well as against the US influence in Lebanon and with the Palestinian Authority.  Syria and Iran offer military and financial support to Hezbollah in Lebanon to continue its operations against Israel on one hand and against the government of Fuad Siniora on the other.  Using the same logic, Syria and Iran support Hamas and other Palestinian groups in their struggle against Israel with the objective of weakening the authority of Mahmoud Abbas and spoiling any US attempt to broker new understandings between Abbas and Israel.

 Moreover, Syria and Iran wish to minimize the regional role of Saudi Arabia and Egypt because they feel that the roles of these two countries threaten the Iranian-Syrian interests and enhance the US posture throughout the region.  For Iran, increased power of moderate Arab states could pose a challenge to the Iranian drive to play a major role in the Middle East as a whole.  For Syria, the growing power of Saudi Arabia and Egypt could jeopardize the Syrian interesst in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq, as well as weaken the Alaoui regime.

We cannot isolate the strategies of the United States in Iraq from its general strategy towards the region, and, consequently, all decisions taken to influence the US policy in Iraq will have direct repercussions on the current of events in Lebanon as well as in Palestine and may lead to readjustment of Iran and Syria strategies in all three theatres.  This path of interdependence makes the US involvement in the current Lebanon crisis more complicated and limits the US capability to provide options in supporting the Lebanese authorities.

The fall of Saddam Hussein and the presence of 145,000 US troops near the Syrian borders pose an extraordinary challenge to the stability of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime.  President George W. Bush has accused Damascus of being a state sponsor of terrorism because it turns a blind eye to terrorist infiltration of the Syrian-Iraqi border.  The visits of Secretary of State Colin Powell in May 2003 and later on that of his deputy Richard Armitage were used to bring Syria's attention to stop these infiltrations though the latter visit took the tone of an ultimatum to the Syrian authorities.  American pressure grew stronger after the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri on February 14, 2005.  After Hariri's death, the United States and other permanent members of the UN Security Council, including Russia, asked Syria to withdraw its troops from Lebanon.  Syria's withdrawal increased Damascus's weakness and reduced its strategic options in the region as a whole, but the most dangerous effect of the rising international pressure on Syria in the wake of the Hariri assassination strengthened the country's internal religious and tribal and political divisions. (1)

The new regional strategic context has also posed new challenges for Iran.  Although Iran has welcomed the fall of its two historical enemies – the Taliban regime

in Afghanistan and the Baathist government in Iraq, the presence of US troops in two of Iran's immediate neighbors has been seen as a real threat.  Furthermore, the United States and the international community have been exercising all kinds of pressure on Iran to stop its extensive nuclear research program, accusing Iran of having a hidden agenda to manufacture a nuclear bomb.  Nevertheless, in contrast to the situation in Syria, Teheran has had more options to respond to American and European pressures.  For example, Iran is one of the largest oil exporters in the world; it controls the Strait of Hormuz.  Due to its geographic location and size, it is able to exercise a certain influence with other regional powers while Damascus lacks the resources of playing such a role.  Therefore, Syria works on strengthening its alliance with Iran, something which has enhanced the Syrian capability to challenge the US strategies in all three theatres of Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine.

**A Multi-Dimensional Conflict**

The situation in Lebanon is more complicated than ever before; the roots of the common crisis had spread well before the July 2006 Israeli war.  The Syrian occupation of Lebanon began in 1976; its implications continue to adversely affect the political, economic, and social life of Lebanon.  Syria continues to hold a very different view than all other Arab states about Lebanon being an independent, sovereign state.  It never truly "reconciled itself to an independent Lebanese Republic and seized the opportunity to involve itself in Lebanese affairs with the outbreak of the war in 1975 and then to impose occupation when the world's attention was focused on the occupation of Kuwait in 1991."(2)  In the war's aftermath, Syria had gained leverage in foreign policy and military strategy which allowed Damascus to politically and economically exploit Lebanon.

The tide for Syria has been changing since April 2004 when members of the US   Congress, with Eliot Engel (Dem/NY) and Eliana Ros-Lehtinen (Rep/FL) in the lead, announced the drafting of legislation (The Syria and Lebanon Liberation Act) calling for a transition to free democratic rule in Syria and the establishment of a program of assistance to independent human rights and pro-democracy forces in Syria and

Lebanon, including funding for independent media broadcasts.  To many observers this proposed legislation was unlikely to be adopted by the Bush administration unless US-Syrian relations deteriorate under the pressure of the increased number of US soldiers killed in Iraq.

The turning point for Syria's domination and influence in Lebanon was Bashar al-Assad's decision in September 2004 to extend President Emile Lahoud's term in office.  Lahoud's extension was widely opposed by the major political forces in Lebanon and strongly condemned by the international community and was leading to the passage of UN Security Resolution 1559, a process which had been sponsored by the United States and France.

The Syrian regime accused the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri of being behind the passage of the UN Security Council Resolution 1559 with the help of his close friend, the French President Jacques Chirac.  Bashar al-Assad believed that the French were using the situation in Lebanon to repair their relations with the United States which had suffered from the French opposition to the war on Iraq.  Bashar al-Assad, faced with what he figured was an inevitable clash over Syria's position in Lebanon, decided to extend Lahoud's tenure in order to make sure they had a strong ally in Beirut to confront what was to come. (3)  To the Syrian President, the UN Security Council resolution had nothing to do with the extension of Lahoud's term; it was to be extended anyway.

The mistake committed by Syria to forcefully amend the Lebanese Constitution gave ammunition to anti-Syrian hawks in the US administration, galvanized the Lebanese opposition, and, most importantly, alienated Rafic Hariri and the French president as a traditional friend to Syria in Europe.  Up until this decision taken by Bashar al-Assad, Rafic Hariri had had a good working relationship with Damascus.  According to reliable reports, Hariri was summoned to Damascus and was asked in a forceful way to support the extension of Lahoud's term in office.  Hariri complied, but resigned his position as Prime Minister in protest to Syria's action.(4)

Hariri's opposition to Syria placed him in a dangerous position.  With parliamentary elections in Lebanon due to take place in May 2005, Hariri was preparing the ground for an electoral challenge that might return him to office against all Syrian wishes.

On February 14, 2005, Rafic Hariri was assassinated in a massive car bomb explosion in downtown Beirut.  Immediately, cries rang out in Lebanon and through out most of the Arab and international communities holding Syria responsible for his assassination.  Spontaneous demonstrations erupted in Beirut and other Lebanese cities, accusing Damascus and its allies in Lebanon of committing the crime.  It was unprecedented, open criticism of Syria accompanied by calls for Syria troop withdrawals from Lebanon.  No one in Lebanon, or in the international community were able to believe the claims advanced by the Lebanese and Syrian authorities that the attack was carried out by a Jihadist following Al-Qaeda's path named Ahmad Abou A'adas.  It was mostly believed that this individual was a smoke screen used by Syrian and Lebanese security services to divert responsibility for the murder.

 The Bush administration did not accuse Damascus directly for the killing, preferring to wait for the report of an international fact-finding committee investigating the crime.  However, some US officials held Syria responsible for the incident since it was the only power broker and security provider in Lebanon.  Syrian responsibility was made clear by the US representative at Hariri's funeral, Assistant Secretary of State, William Burns who stated, "Mr. Hariri's death should give – in fact it must give – renewed impetus to achieving a free, independent and sovereign Lebanon.  And what that means is the complete and immediate withdrawal by Syria of all of its forces in Lebanon."(5)

Washington gave a clear sign of linking the assassination with Syria by recalling its ambassador in Damascus the day after the assassination.  Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice explained that the Hariri killing was the "proximate cause" of the US ambassador's recall, also indicating that Washington was reviewing whether further sanctions against Damascus should be enacted. (6)

Both Paris and Washington strongly condemned Hariri's assassination and renewed their calls to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1559.  These were the immediate signs of support for Lebanese opposition groups to maintain their pressure on Syria by organizing anti-Syrian demonstrations in Lebanon.

The Syrian regime immediately denied any link with the assassination.  The Syrian ambassador in Washington Imad Mustapha claimed on CNN that anti-Syrian groups in Lebanon and abroad were using the crime to "score some points against Syria."  He went on to state, "It should be very clear to everyone that if anybody is insinuating about a Syrian role in the criminal atrocity that happened in Beirut, I think they are lacking in logic.  Syria has nothing to benefit from what has happened." The Lebanese Information Minister Elie Ferzeli rejected claims that Damascus or its allies in Beirut could have been responsible:  "We consider that the assassination of Hariri is against stability.  And we consider that stability is our concern. So, this action is against us."(7)

 It is strongly believed that the turning point for Hariri as well as for Syria's presence in Lebanon was the extra-constitutional extension of Emile Lahoud's term as a president in September 2004. The Lahoud extension was widely condemned by the international community, leading to the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559.  This UN resolution brought the US and France together to both call on Syria to withdraw its forces from Lebanon.

According to Syrian officials, rumors were circulating in Europe about something similar to the UNSC Resolution 1559 in May 2004, and that the French were behind it.  Chirac, who was Hariri's close friend, became very wary of Syria's opposition to many of Hariri's policies as a prime minister.  The Syrians also believed that Chirac has used the developments in Lebanon to repair French relations with the United States.  It was doubtful that the Syrian President fully understood the clash with the new French-US alliance over Syria's policy in Lebanon.  Bashar Assad made the decision to extend Emile Lahoud's term by three years, thinking that with such a strong ally Syria would be able to foil the coming plan which would call for the withdrawal of its troops and intelligence apparatus from Lebanon.  As Bashar once said, "We didn't have any other choice but to support Lahoud.  He has always supported Syra – he never changed.  He is a strong person, and I know him well as a person.  If we did not have him there, we thought we would have had a lot of problems.  The UNSC resolution (1559) really had nothing to do with the extension of Lahoud.  It was coming anyway."(8)

Bashar's mistake internationalized the issue of Lebanon's sovereignty and gave the needed ammunition to all the Neo-cons in the Bush administration; it has also galvanized the Lebanese opposition.

Hariri was summoned to Damascus and was firmly told to support the extension of Lahoud's term in office.  Hariri complied, but then he resigned from his position as prime minister in protest.

Hariri's opposition to Syria placed him in a dangerous position.  He was harshly attacked by all Syria's allies in Lebanon as well by the official Syrian media.

Hariri was accused of preparing the ground for an electoral challenge in May 2005 that might give him the majority in the new parliament which would allow him to return to the prime minister's office and to vote on a law for a complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.  Many observers believed that the assassination was a clear message to all the opposition factions that no one is protected.

There were many theories as to who was behind Hariri's assassination.  A UN fact-finding mission was authorized and sent to Beirut.   It was headed by Patrick Fitzgerald, a deputy police commissioner from Ireland.  The "Fitzgerald report" was issued on March 24, 2005; it stated, "It is clear that the assassination took place in a political and security context marked by an acute polarization around the Syrian influence in Lebanon and a failure of the Lebanese state to provide adequate protection for its citizens," and that Syria "bears primary responsibility for the political tension that preceded the assassination."(9)

What emerged from Damascus in the aftermath of the Hariri assassination was a series of reactions indicating confusion, if not division, within the regime over how to react to the pressures exercised by the French and the Americans, as well as by the Lebanese opposition.  Bashar Assad felt that the Americans were giving him a small space to maneuver and that they held him responsible for the Beirut bombing.  According to some reports circulated in the media at the end of February 2005, he had handed over to the Iraqi authorities Saddam Hussein's half-brother Saba'awi Ibrahim Al-Hassan, as well as twenty-nine other fugitives of Saddam's regime.  In an interview with *Time Magazine* Bashar stated that Syria was prepared to withdraw its troops from Lebanon by the end of 2005, but he attached such an achievement implicitly to a peace agreement with Israel:  "From a technical viewpoint, the repatriation [of Syrian troops] could happen by the end of the year, but from a strategic viewpoint, it will only happen if we get serious guarantees – in a word, peace…"(10)  The Bush administration exercised pressure for a more immediate timetable, forcing Bashar to amend his remarks, reducing the time for troop withdrawal by several months: "The withdrawal should be very soon and may be in the next few months…I would not say we could do it in two months because I have not had the meeting with the army people.  You need to prepare when you bring your army back to your country.  There are two factors:  the first is security in Lebanon…and the second thing, which is related to Syria, is that after withdrawing, we have to protect our borders."(11)

In the midst of these repeated signs of great Syrian confusion, the United States and France tried to maintain their pressure on Damascus.  Condoleezza Rice, in a joint conference with French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier, stated that their two countries were speaking with one voice on Lebanon and that both would support sending of observers to monitor the elections as well as to consider dispatching international peace keepers to oversee Syria's troop withdrawal.  Rice also stated,

"The Syrian is out of step with where the region is going and out of step with the aspirations of the people of the Middle East."(12)  President Bush came with a stronger voice to tell Syria, "You get your troops and secret services out of Lebanon so that good democracy has a chance to flourish."(13)

Another blow to Syria and its Lebanese allies occurred on February 28 when the pro-Syrian government of Omar Karami was forced to resign.

In the face of all these pressures, Bashar searched for any Arab cover he could find.  This was difficult; some of his traditional friends such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, strongly encouraged him to remove Syrian troops from Lebanon and set a timetable for doing so.

These Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan) exercised concerted pressure on Syria to withdraw its troops.  Syria seemed resigned to the fact that it must remove its troops from Lebanon, but it wished to do so in a phased manner and under the guise of the Ta'if accord, rather than solely under UNSCR 1559.  If this were arranged with help of some Arab states, then it would seem as though Damascus had not bowed to American and French pressure.

However, bowing to continuous international pressure, Bashar Assad gave a speech in the Syrian National Assembly on March 5 – it was clearly stated that Syrian troops would withdraw from Lebanon, first, to the Beka'a Valley and, then, to the Syrian borders:  "in so doing, we will have implemented both the Ta'if Accord and UNSCR 1559:  we started the withdrawal in 2000, and pulled back 60 percent of our troops … we made some mistakes in Lebanon."(14) Most Lebanese opposition parties as well as the international community were not pleased with Bashar's speech.  It was clear that Syria was carefully trying to calibrate the minimum it could do to assuage the United States and France.  But, it was not too late for the Russians to join, calling for a complete Syrian withdrawal, Sergey Pavrov was quoted as saying, "Syria should withdraw from Lebanon, but we all have to make sure that this withdrawal does not violate the very fragile balance which we still have in Lebanon."(15)

Nonetheless, the Bush administration, expressing its disappointment in Bashar's speech, rejected the two-phased approach and reiterated that Damascus must withdraw all its troops and intelligence services from Lebanon the soonest and certainly no later than the May 2005 elections in Lebanon.  A State Department spokesman was quoted saying, "It is clear to us not just the United States, but the international community, that his [Bashar's] words are insufficient; we have not heard the words immediate and full withdrawal."(16) Washington was drawing a line, not giving any leeway to Bashar in Lebanon; there was no middle ground left.

The United States quickly understood that Damascus could still wield a tremendous amount of influence over Lebanon, regardless of whether or not its troops were present on the ground.  This is something which the Bush administration understood very well and realized that its policies could backfire if it was seen to be trying to use the Hariri probe to disarm Hezbollah.  Washington and Paris, as the main players in the crisis, tried to make the issue of Hezbollah's weapons a lower priority.  The Bush administration seemed to have accepted the advice of France and other Europeans that it would be dangerous to antagonize Hezbollah too much at a time the country was getting prepared for general elections in May 2005.  With such a new attitude, they were trying to encourage Hezbollah to shed its military and to integrate itself totally in the political process.
The great fear remained centered on the Syrian's will to destabilize Lebanon in the aftermath of its withdrawal simply to prove what it has been saying all along: Syrian troops were necessary in order to keep Lebanon's stability.  Such fears were realized when several explosions ripped through East Beirut in late March with the assassinations of two leading anti-Syrian figures in June 2005.  All that reinforced the notion that Syria would attempt to use terror to intimidate the opposition and discourage its supporters.

 Since the murder of Rafic Hariri, UN investigators have been seeking to uncover the circumstances behind the crime and to ascertain responsibility.  UN Security Council Resolution 1595, adopted on April 7, 2005, established "an international independent investigation commission" based in Lebanon to assist the Lebanese authorities in their search for the terrorists who committed the crime.  The commission was initially headed by the German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis, followed by the Belgian Serge Brammertz, and lately by the Canadian Bellemare.  The commission mandate has been extended repeatedly, and is to due to expire by the end of 2008.  The commission has issued several reports; so far these reports have been inconclusive, but the first two tended to implicate Syrian and pro-Syrian Lebanese officials.  Some names were identified as those who may have been involved in the Hariri assassination.

An important point of contention among Lebanese leaders was the establishment of a "tribunal of an international character: to prosecute suspects in the murder of the late Prime Minister Hariri.  The tribunal called for in UNSCR1644 and 1664 has been strongly resisted by pro-Syrian factions in Lebanon.  Their concerns were centered on the possibility that such a tribunal would implicate the Syrian regime in the murder – six ministers from the March 8 movement (Headed by Hizbollah) resigned form the Siniora government on November 11, 2006.  Subsequently, on November 25, the Cabinet approved the UN proposals to establish the tribunal in the face of strong opposition from pro-Syrian factions who insisted that the Cabinet lacked legitimacy to take such a step.  Similarly, parliamentary approval was denied by the continuous refusal of its Speaker Nabih Berri to call for a session.(17)

To avoid any further complications over the proposed tribunal, 70 members of the parliament petitioned, on April 4, 2007, the UN Secretary General to act under the UN Charter and establish the Special Tribunal to try suspects in the Hariri assassination.  This petition was followed by a letter sent by Prime Minister Siniora on May 14 asking the Security Council to establish the court.  On May 30, 2007, a divided Security Council voted by 10 to 0 with five abstentions (Russia, China, South Africa, Indonesia, and Qatar) to adopt  Resolution 1757, which established a Tribunal to be held outside of Lebanon (in the Hague).

 In the meantime, the pro-Syrian forces led by Hizbollah moved to the streets trying to bring down the Siniora government.  They held many manifestations, cutting the main roads around the capital and establishing a camp in downtown Beirut (at the gates of the Prime Minister's offices in the Grand Serail) in an attempt to force the government to resign.  All their attempts to overthrow the government failed.

 The expiration of President Emil Lahoud's term on November 22, 2007 brought the country to face another impasse as electing a new president was another divisive issue.  The partial elections, held on August 5, 2007 to replace the two members of Parliament, Pierre Gemayel and Walid Idou –  who were assassinated in November 2006 and June 2007 respectively, were interpreted by local commentators as strengthening the pro-Syrian forces in Lebanon.

In the latest developments of the crisis and after Hezbollah's militia took over West Beirut, the Arab League and the Prince of Qatar called the Lebanese leaders to a conference in Doha.

Electing Michel Suleiman as a new President came as a compromise in the Doha conference in which several countries, including Qatar, Syria, Iran, and France, participated in orchestrating it.  The Doha Agreement came as a last minute compromise imposed by Iran on the opposition led by Hezbollah.

In the meantime, the US House of Representative passed on September 25, 2007 Resolution 548, pledging continued support for the Siniora government and the lebanese people.  The US support, however, did not exceed verbal and moral support for the Siniora government and the parliamentary majority.

The Siniora government and the majority supporting it found themselves deprived of any meaningful foreign or Arab support (the roles of Egypt and Saudi Arabia were in retreat, not to say in total disarray) which would have helped it to face the military invasion of West Beirut as well as parts of the Mount Lebanon districts in the Shouf and Aley.

**The War of July 2006**

The 2006 war in Lebanon was the latest manifestation of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah along the Blue Line demarcated by the UN after the Israeli withdrawal of May 25, 2000.

On July 12th, possibly in a gesture of solidarity with Hamas combating Israeli forces in Gaza, Hezbollah launched an attack across the Israeli border killing 8 Israeli soldiers.  Israel retaliated by launching air raids against Hezbollah bases and headquarters and Lebanese infrastructures, including Beirut International airport, vowing to continue the attacks until the two Israeli soldiers would be returned.  Hezbollah responded by launching daily rocket attacks on Israel with some extended-range rockets reaching as far as Haifa and beyond.  According to experts, Hezbollah fired 12 thousand rockets of different sizes and ranges.

 Initially, Israel primarily used airpower and artillery fire in their strikes against Hezbollah; however, by mid to late July they had started ground operations to penetrate South Lebanon.  On July 21st Israel began amassing ground forces along the Lebanese border to carry out ground operations to strike Hezbollah defenses along the line of towns and villages in the area south of the Litani.  The Israeli forces failed to achieve a sizeable penetration in South Lebanon.  As a consequence of Israeli failure on the ground, US diplomacy stepped in to delay any UN attempt to call for cessation of hostilities and ceasefire in order to give the Israelis more time to achieve a limited victory against Hezbollah on the ground.  By August 4th Israeli forces in Lebanon numbered 10,000 and had positioned themselves around a dozen villages and towns up to 6 kilometers inside Lebanon in several locations.  The poorly managed war on the ground forced the Israeli inner cabinet meeting on August 9th to expand the Israeli offensive in an effort to drive Hezbollah fighters north across the Litani River and create a new buffer zone before accepting any call for a cease fire.  According to many reports the Israeli plan was based on suggestions offered by the US administration.

The Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, in an interview with Seymour Hersh accused the Bush administration of working with Israel to instigate an insurrection and a war of fragmentation within Islam.  "In my opinion, there is a huge campaign through the media throughout the world to put each side up against the other."  Nasrallah argued that Hezbollah had attempted to prevent the Americans and Israelis from instigating sectarian tensions leading to Sunni-Shiite confrontations in Lebanon.(18)

Nasrallah believed, according to the story told by Seymour Hersh in The New Yorker on March 5, 2007, that President Bush's goal was the drawing of a new map for the region:  he wants the partition of Iraq; Iraq is not on the edge of civil war; there is a civil war.  The daily killing and displacement of population in Iraq aims to create three Iraqi parts which would be sectarian and ethnically pure as prelude to the partition to Iraq.  Nasrallah also believes according to Hersh' story that Bush also wanted to bring about the partition of Lebanon and of Syria.  In Syria, the game consists of pushing the country into chaos and internal battles like in Iraq, while in Lebanon the plan consists of creating a Sunni state, an Alaoui state, a Christian state, and a Druze state with a question mark on the Shiite state.  According to the same story, the aim of the Israeli bombing in the summer of 2006 was the destruction of the Shiite areas and the displacement of Shiites from Lebanon.

 Martin Indyk, a senior State Department official in the Clinton administration and former ambassador to Israel, said, "The Middle East is heading into a serious Sunni-Shiite cold war."  In his opinion, it was not clear whether the White House was fully aware of the strategic implications of its new policy.  "The White House is not just doubling the bet in Iraq; it is doubling the bet across the region.  This could get very complicated.  Everything is upside down."  Of course, Lebanon did follow this last prediction and still hasn't recovered yet, even after the Doha agreement, the election of Michel Suleiman as President, and the formation of a national unity government headed by the US-backed Fuad Siniora.(19)

 Israelis supported the war as a "legitimate" response to Hezbollah's attack.  As the conflict progressed, the public and media increasingly questioned the government's ability and the military commanders' skills to wage the war against Hezbollah.  After the war, criticisms were that the kidnapped soldiers were not freed and that Hezbollah had retained its arms and gained more political ground.  The charges levied against the government and the military command included hesitant decision making; excessive reliance on air power; delayed launch of a ground offensive;  launching an unnecessary and costly final ground action encouraged by the US administration; poor intelligence concerning Hezbollah's military capabilities; deficient training; unsuitable tactics for the terrain and the enemy; ill-prepared internal and civil defenses; poor presentation of the Israeli view to the international community; severe harm to Israeli deterrence.

 The Israeli government countered all these criticisms by claiming that the war succeeded by forcing Hezbollah away from the border and by degrading its military posture, particularly in eliminating a substantial number of its long and mid-range missiles.  It also felt that the war succeeded in forcing the Lebanese government, aided by the US and Europe to assert control over southern Lebanon, which had been an unfulfilled demand made by Israel since the withdrawal of its troops from the region in May 2000.  Most notably, it took Nasrallah's admission that he would not have authorized the operation across the border if he had known how strongly Israel would react as an indication that Hezbollah had been weakened and that Israel's deterrence had been strengthened.

**Assessing the War Implications on Lebanon**

 Prior to 2005, Lebanon's internal politics were dominated by Syria, which maintained a large military presence in Lebanon.  The Syrian presence benefited from the support of some Lebanese, including many of the Shiites, Hezbollah, and Amal; while the Syrian presence were increasingly resented by other communities including Sunni Muslim, Maronite Christians, and the Druze community.  The assassination in February 2005 of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri led to a dramatic change of events that profoundly altered the Lebanese political stage.  Under heavy domestic and international pressure, Syria withdrew its military forces from Lebanon in April 2005.

The UN Security Council passed Resolution 1595 which established an independent commission to investigate the Hariri murder.  Initial reports of the commission seemed to implicate Syrians and pro-Syrian agents in the murder.

Many observers interpreted Syria's rapid withdrawal and the subsequent election of an anti-Syrian parliamentary majority as a major setback for all the Syrian plans to dominate Lebanon forever.  However, Syria was to rely in the future on its proxies in Lebanon:  a government comprising pro- and anti- Syrian elements; a residual Syrian intelligence assets in Lebanon; Amal movement led by the Parliament Speaker, Nabih Berri; and Hezbollah which kept its weapons and continued to support Syria's agenda in Lebanon.

The thirty-four day war between Hezbollah and the Israelis in July and August 2006 greatly enhanced the position of Hezbollah at the expense of the Lebanese government headed by Siniora and its US backers.  Hassan Nasrallah acquired a prestigious status as his organization proved itself by its military performance in the war and by its ability to put up the best disaster-relief project to repair the damage and help the population far more quickly and efficiently than the official government organizations.  The disaster-relief project was aimed to absorb and to mute the anger of all these people who were opposed to the war.  Hassan Nasrallah in the aftermath of the war declared that Hezbollah had won the war and qualified that the victory had been a divine victory.  He was now in a strong position to withstand internal and international pressures to disarm his militia.  The Syrian president stepped in to benefit from Hezbollah's proclaimed victory.  He found now a greater space for maneuvering to deal with the Lebanese government and the parliamentary majority supporting it as well with the US policy in Lebanon.  In the fog of this new environment, the hope of uncovering a possible Syrian role in the Hariri assassination has dissipated to a considerable extent.  The comparison being drawn between Hezbollah's effectiveness and the Lebanese government lack of performance raised questions about the future of the Siniora government and its ability to withstand all kinds of domestic pressure and criticism.  As a result of the mounting crisis, the Siniora government was physically besieged and paralyzed for almost two years.  Hezbollah and its allies were doing everything possible to bring down the Siniora in what they thought as a first step to derail the US domination of the Lebanese political scene.  It has been proven on several occasions that the US administration was not able to provide the Siniora government and its backers with more than unfulfilled promises and moral support.

 During the whole crisis which emanated from and was intensified as a result of the war, the government officials acted in awkward ways complicating the whole political scene as well as the national decision-making process by increasing their dialogue with the United States and the European Union, while severing their relationship with Hezbollah and its political allies.  The United States decision to list Hezbollah as a foreign terrorist organization during the war did not help the Siniora government; Hezbollah seized that as an opportunity to accuse Siniora himself and other political leaders in the majority as being Israeli agents and working in the hands of the Americans to plot against Hezbollah.  Siniora and Nasrallah have communicated a few times through the Speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri, who is allied with Hezbollah.  Siniora has gained some stature in negotiating the UNSC Resolution 1701.

On August 11th, 2006, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted UNSCR 1701 calling for a cessation of hostilities.  The resolution called on Hezbollah for immediate cessation of all attacks as well as on Israel to cease all its military operations in South Lebanon.  The resolution provides an extension of the existing UNIFIL from 2000 men to a maximum of 15,000 with a sizeable force from the Lebanese Army to deploy in South Lebanon to monitor a cease fire.  The resolution called on the withdrawal of Israeli forces in parallel with the deployment of UN and Lebanese forces in the region south of the Litani River.  The resolution established a ban on delivery of weapons to any entity or individual in Lebanon except the Lebanese Armed Forces.  The preamble of the resolution emphasized the need to address the issue of prisoners of both sides.  This resolution requested the international community to extend financial and humanitarian assistance to the Lebanese people and to insure a safe return of displaced people.

This resolution entered into effect on August 14th after it had been accepted by Israel, Hezbollah, and the Lebanese government.  The deployment of the Lebanese troops preceded the arrival of the new UNIFIL force and the displaced population moved back quickly to their homes and towns.  The UNIFIL with the Lebanese army have been able to accomplish their mission in the area south of the Litani and to overcome all risks and major obstacles they have encountered.

**The Unresolved Issue of Sheba'a Farms**

The withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon in May 2000 left several sensitive border issues unresolved, including an enclave on the Lebanon-Syria border known as the Sheba'a Farms.  Israeli argued that the enclave is not Lebanese territory, but rather a part of the Golan Heights occupied by Israel since 1967.  On June 16, 2000 the UN Secretary General Kofi Anan informed the Security Council that the requirement for Israel to withdraw from South Lebanon, according to the UN resolution 425 had been met, implying that the Sheba'a Farms are not part of Lebanon.  However, the Secretary General made it clear that the UN had no intention to challenge the Syrian and Lebanese right to agree on the demarcation of their borders in the future.

 Hezbollah immediately seized upon the Sheba'a Farms issue to declare its refusal to relinquish its weapons, arguing that its weapons were still needed to force the Israelis out of the Sheba'a Farms.  For five consecutive years the Sheba'a Farms remained as a central issue in the military confrontation between Hezbollah and Israeli forces in the area.

The situation of the Sheba'a Farms is made more complex by the fact that Syria and Lebanon have never demarcated their borders and have never established formal diplomatic relations.

The Sheba'a Farms emerged into the limelight once again after the political turmoil occurring after Hariri's assassination and the war that erupted between Hezbollah and Israeli in July 2006.  All the diplomatic Western efforts which aimed to settle the Sheba'a Farms issue at the end of the war have failed.  At an international conference on Lebanon held in Rome while the war was still being waged, Prime Minister Fuad Siniora presented a seven-point proposal which called for, among other things, placing the Sheba'a Farms under UN jurisdiction until border delineations between Lebanon and Syria is fully completed.  It was clear from the beginning of the Rome conference that this Lebanese request concerning the Sheba'a Farms would not be supported by the US administration.  UN Security Council Resolution 1701 did not endorse the seven-point plan of Siniora, especially the proposal for dealing with the Sheba'a Farms issue; however, the Sheba'a Farms issue was mentioned in the preamble and later in Paragraph 10 of the Resolution and requested the UN Secretary General to develop proposals to implement a delineation of the international borders of Lebanon, especially where the border line is disputed or uncertain, such as the Sheba'a Farms area.

The status of the Sheba'a Farms remains an important factor in the stability of Lebanon and in any future discussions involving peace between Israel, Lebanon, and Syria. The Sheba'a Farms are claimed officially by Lebanon as Lebanese territory occupied by Israel in 1982 and that it should come under the provisions of UN resolutions 425 and 426.  The Israelis refused to withdraw from the Sheba'a Farms, not even allowing it to be put under UN jurisdiction, claiming that it was part of the Golan Heights which was occupied by Israel in 1967 and it would come under the provisions of UN resolutions 242 and 338.  The Israelis refused to accept all the new findings concerning the Lebanese identity of the Sheba'a Farms that were brought to them by UN cartographers.  The Bush administration was not seen to be enthusiastic about finding a solution for this issue despite all the claims presented by the Siniora government that resolving this issue would weaken the Hezbollah position.

**US Policy toward Hezbollah**

The war between Hezbollah and Israel in July 2006 and the subsequent effort by the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to prolong the fighting to give Israel the opportunity to inflict more damage on Hezbollah showed a clear US intent to weaken Hezbollah in favor of its local allies and the Siniora government.  But, in a broader sense, the destruction of large parts of Lebanon's newly rebuilt infrastructure complicated US support for Lebanon's political reconstruction.  The conflict jeopardized, not only the long-term stability of Lebanon, but presented the US administration with a dilemma:  on one hand, the administration was backing Israeli military action against "a terrorist organization" – President Bush and his Secretary of State had spoken of Israel's right of self-defense and that Hezbollah was responsible for the war; on the other hand, the fighting and its consequences dealt a setback to US administration efforts to rebuild the democratic institutions.  The US policy towards Lebanon was vacillating between two major agendas:  one was anti-terrorism aiming for the destruction of Hezbollah, and the second was the promotion of democracy and better governance in Lebanon – the two agendas were colliding with each other, putting the US diplomacy under great strain, not only in Lebanon but throughout the whole region.  Mounting tension between Hezbollah and the parliamentary majority in the aftermath of the war resulted in an impasse in reestablishing a political dialogue and threatened the long-term rehabilitating of Lebanon's political system.  If Lebanon disintegrates through a return to civil war, or falls again under Syrian domination or Iranian influence, US goals in Lebanon as well as US interests throughout the whole Middle East could be seriously affected.  In such a case, the United States would lose a promising example of a modern pluralist state anxious to move towards a resumption of democratic practice and economic reform.  Lebanon faced in the aftermath of the war a high risk of returning to the chaos that had prevailed in the country during the seventeen-year civil war.  From the American viewpoint, the side responsible for such backward process was Hezbollah.  US officials accused Hezbollah of exploiting its military organization to foster terrorism, spread unrest on Israel's border, and spread other forms of regional instability.  Alternatively, the Syrian-Iranian combined influence in Lebanon – through Hezbollah and other proxies – could strengthen the rise of extremists and terrorist movements like Al-Qaeda or Fatah Islam.

The sentiment of enmity between the US and Hezbollah did not come as a result of the war but can be traced back to the attacks mounted against the US embassy in Beirut and the marine barracks in 1983.  There was a continuous effort by the various US agencies to constrain Hezbollah activities.  In December 2004, the US State Department put Al-Manar television station on the TERRORIST EXCLUSION LIST (TEL).  The effects of Al-Manar being placed on the TEL could include the possible deportation and exclusion from the United States of individuals found belonging to or supporting the TEL designated Al-Manar.  Concurrent with placing Al-Manar on the TEL, the organization was no longer allowed any satellite service into the United States.  On March 23, 2006, the US Department of Treasury designated Al-Manar as a SPECIALLY DESIGNATED GLOBAL TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

(SDGT).  Making this designation, Treasury Under-Secretary for Terrorism, Stewart Levy stated, "Any entity maintained by a terrorist group – whether masquerading as a charity, a business, or a media outlet – is as culpable as the terrorist group itself."(20)

The effects of this decision include the blocking of access to all assets under US jurisdiction by the organization, its parent companies, and individuals who are known to support its activities.

In other efforts to combat Hezbollah, a Lebanese (Mr. Boughader) was arrested by Mexican authorities on human smuggling charges to the United States.  He admitted to knowingly providing assistance to an employee of Al-Manar in gaining unlawful entrance into the US.  He also stated that he assisted several individuals with ties to Hezbollah.  He did not see Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.(21)

On August 23, 2006, Mr. Iqbal was arrested in Brooklyn on charges of offering live broadcasts of Al-Manar channels to potential customers in New York through selling special equipment to the customers.(22)

On August 29, 2006, the US Department of the Treasury designated the Islamic Capital Resistance, Support Organization of Lebanon as especially Global Terrorist

Entity for serving as a key Hezbollah fund-raising organization.  According to a US authority the IRSO allowed its donors to specify their wishes for the use of their donations for military activities or weapons purchases.  The IRSO was prohibited from operating in the US and its assets, under US jurisdiction, were frozen.

The action against IRSO was extended to involve an Iranian financial entities suspected of providing support to Hezbollah.  The designated entities were *Bayt Al*-*Mal* and the *Yousser* company for finance and investment in Lebanon for serving as an unofficial Hezbollah treasury.  On September 8, 2006, Treasury officials announced that Iran's bank*Saderat* would be prohibited from conducting direct or indirect financial activities with the US financial system.  The bank was used by the Iranian government to fund Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations.(23)

In addition and prior to US legal actions, Israel supposedly conducted a series of air strikes during the July war 2006 on Hezbollah financial centers and on Lebanese banks alleged to conduct business with Hezbollah.(24)

**US Foreign Assistance to Lebanon**

 As a result of the Israeli-Hezbollah war, the United States pledged 230 million dollars in humanitarian and reconstruction aid to Lebanon.  At the same time, the Bush administration planned to submit a request to Congress to extend the authorization of Israel's loan guarantees through FY 2010 with a remaining amount of 4.6 billion dollars – backed commercial credit – left to draw on out of the 9 billion dollars decided in Fiscal Year 2003.The United States provides modest amounts of assistance to Lebanon, including economic and military assistance along with small amounts for humanitarian de-mining efforts in South Lebanon.

Modest amounts of assistance were used to provide funds for the modernization of the Lebanese army.  The Pentagon tried to attach conditions to the aid package, requiring the LAF to use the equipment provided to contain the Hezbollah militia, (based on accusations by sources close to Hezbollah).

There were other packages of foreign military sales added to the initial package, increasing the FMF since the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon to improve the capabilities of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces.  The largest financial assistance package came in FY 2007 when President Bush requested 770 million dollars in supplemental aid from Congress for Lebanon.

A campaign was waged to increase financial assistance to Lebanon.  This campaign, led by Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, had strong US, European, and Saudi Arabian support.  The summer 2006 war and the opposition's campaign to bring down the Siniora government have placed enormous financial strains on the Lebanese economy.

The United States has committed several hundred million dollars to Lebanon's rebuilding efforts.  Bush announced on August 21, 2006 that the US would provide an immediate aid amount of 230 million dollars to Lebanon during a conference in Stockholm.  In January 2006 in Paris III conference, Secretary of State Rice pledged an additional 250 million dollars in cash transfers directly to the Lebanese government.  Foreign assistance pledges in the Paris III conference were linked to an economic reform program to be undertaken by the Lebanese government designed to lower Lebanon's crippling 41 billion dollar public debt.  The US administration decided to increase significantly the military assistance to include 220 million dollars.  According to the US State Department, US security assistance would promote Lebanese control over South Lebanon and Palestinian refugee camps to prevent them from being used as bases to attack Israel.  The US government's military to military programs were intended to increase the professionalism of the Lebanese Armed Forces and reinforce the Lebanese government to withstand all the pressures exercised by Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah.

**Israel's Use of Cluster Weapons**

The United Nations and several foreign governments along with international non-governmental organizations have criticized Israel for its extensive use of cluster weapons in populated areas.  Since the United States is a major provider of military assistance to Israel, the cluster weapons issue received media attention and the subject reportedly has been investigated by the US administration as well as by the Congress.

Israel fired many cluster weapons during the last 48 hours of the conflict.  These munitions are known for their high rate of failure and each unexploded bomblet becomes like a mine ready to injure and kill civilians.  The United Nations has counted several dozen deaths and three times that number of injured from these unexploded bomblets.  Over 448 cluster weapons strike sites have been identified and UN experts estimate that many years will be needed to clear these sites.  The Israelis maintained that the IDF carefully considered the potential for civilian casualties during the military operation and that the use of cluster weapons was legal under international law.  Israel claimed that Hezbollah has used civilian homes as launching pad and munitions storage – and this is why the IDF targeted these populated areas.  However, other IDF sources acknowledged the use of the cluster bombs was meant to suppress the katyusha rocket launch sites in open areas.  The Israelis have refused to transfer accurate maps showing locations for mines and unexploded munitions.  The US administration decided to expand its on-going land mine and unexploded ordinance clearance in Lebanon in the aftermath of the July 2006 war.  The expansion of the program consisted of an emergency grant of $425,000 in fiscal year 2006.  The Department of State also sought Congressional approval for the allocation of up to two million dollars to continue the clearing operation during FY 2007.

 According to unnamed administration officials, the State Department has held up a shipment of M-26 cluster munitions to Israel and initiated an investigation of Israel's use of cluster munitions during the war in Lebanon.  Initial reports suggested that the shipment was delayed out of concern over potential use in Lebanon again.  In addition, Senators Feinstein and Leahy introduced an amendment to the FY 2007 Department of Defense appropriation bill that would have prevented these funds from being spent to acquire, utilize, sell, or transfer any cluster munitions unless the rules of engagement reference cluster munitions are fully implemented.  The amendment failed to pass during Senate floor consideration on December 6, 2006 by a vote of 30 to 70.  The Israeli lobby was able to have this amendment defeated.

**Bush's Strategy and Priorities**

 The Bush administration has been scrambling to mobilize international support for the Siniora government.  Early in the Bush administration term it seemed Bush intended to follow previous US policy and to continue to pay lip service to supporting Lebanon's independence and sovereignty.  Things changed after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.  Bush decided to pursue a clear strategy to wage a global war on terrorism advocating a more offensive posture that included the right to engage in pre-emptive operations.  In Bush's doctrine the strategy aimed to fight international terrorism with the possibility of waging war against countries harboring terrorists.  Another goal of the Bush strategy was to promote greater freedom through democratic reforms, free enterprise, and the elimination of groups or nations that organized with the intention to stop such progress through radicalism and violence.

This new US grand strategy was heavily influenced by political morality and greatly affected present and future policy actions towards several Middle Eastern countries, including Lebanon.  The Bush foreign policy stated among its goals its moral commitment to support democratic rule, advance freedom, and increase emphasis on state independence

 For Lebanon, this new strategy provided an opening for changing its path and redefining policy towards Lebanon. In May 2003, Collin Powel stated, "Lebanon could be a model for democracy and free trade in the region."  He continued, "The US supports an independent and prosperous, free of all, all foreign forces."(25)  Powel promised during his visit to Beirut to address Lebanon's and Syria's concerns about their roles in the peace process with an emphasis on Lebanon becoming an integral part of a comprehensive Middle East approach.

 Congressional leadership continued to be engaged in shaping US policy towards Lebanon.  Several Congressional hearings were held and the result was the passing of the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003.  The act was signed into law by President Bush on December 12, 2003.  This law aimed to halt Syrian support for terrorism and its occupation of Lebanon and the ceasing of its development of weapons of mass destruction.  The Bush administration was actively advocating Lebanese independence and sovereignty.  Together with France, the US sponsored UN Security Council Resolution 1559 that called for the respect of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity and political independence.(26)

The Bush administration raised hopes of an American initiative to end the Lebanese- Israeli imbroglio after the war of 2006.  The elements of that initiative were the following:  a comprehensive ceasefire; extension of the government's authority to South Lebanon; an effective international force to help the Lebanese army keep peace south of the Litani; a return to the 1949 armistice; prisoner-exchange negotiations between the Israeli and Lebanese government; an international fund for reconstruction; and implementation of UNSC resolutions 1559 and 1701, to include the disbanding and disarming of all militias.  Missing from this framework is the *way* to disband Hezbollah or at least to contain its efforts to widen the crisis and to bring down the Siniora government.  President Bush and Ms. Rice have exercised pressure on Syria to bring Hezbollah to heel.  The Syrians were not willing to exercise any pressure on Hezbollah in favor of its enemies in the March 14th coalition.  The Bush administration had no means to pressure Iran which provides funds and arms to Hezbollah to agree on the dismantling it while it is serving as a strategic asset in Iran's regional policy.

The missing part in Bush's strategy was an irrefutable, clear and firm message to Teheran and Damascus that if they do not stop supporting Hezbollah using its military capabilities to instigate violence in South Lebanon as well as in Beirut, they would be held responsible.  Besides that, the US initiative failed to strengthen the Lebanese government to contain and isolate and restrain Hezbollah from using its military capabilities in Beirut.

 It was clear to Secretary of State Rice that Hezbollah was not acting alone when its gunmen took over West Beirut on May 9, 2008.  Hezbollah could not have taken such a brazen action without a green light from Teheran, given the military and political risks involved.  The Bush administration worked hard to mobilized international support for the Siniora government.  Rice spoke to Siniora as well as to UN Secretary General and the French and Saudi Arabian foreign ministers.  The Arab  League held an emergency meeting on May 11 to discuss the crisis.  All of these contacts and diplomatic moves prepared the ground for the Doha meeting which resulted in a framework known as the Doha Agreement.  Based on this agreement, a new president was elected and a new government – a national unity government – was formed.  However, Hezbollah and its allies gained a veto power within the newly formed government as well as recognition for a continuing role of the resistance.

**Conclusion**

The July 2006 war has posed its own set of challenges for US policy towards Lebanon.  The war has jeopardized, not only the stability of Lebanon, but has presented the Bush administration with a basic dilemma.  On one hand, Bush and Rice have supported the Israeli military operation.  On the other hand, the fighting dealt a set back to the administration's efforts to support the rebuilding of democratic institutions in Lebanon.  Now, with the Bush administration at the end of its second term, everything should be done to support the truce established by the fulfillment of the Doha agreement.  It should be understood that if Lebanon disintegrates, US goals throughout the whole Middle East could be seriously affected, and the end result would be likely to foster terrorism, unrest along Israel's border, and other forms of regional instability.  Moreover, Lebanon will fall under Syrian or Iranian hegemony for several decades.  Hezbollah is becoming more engrained in Lebanese Shiite society; moreover, it has gained more political influence by turning its weapons inwards.  Many Lebanese are becoming deeply skeptical about international efforts to disarm Hezbollah which has become an autonomous state within the Lebanese state.  A key aspect of Hezbollah's rearmament is the multitude of questions concerning the willingness of the United States and Israel to engage Syria in a diplomatic process in return for its cooperation to rein in Hezbollah in Lebanon. Some observers suggest a variety of incentives could bring Syria to cooperate with the US strategy in both Iraq and Lebanon.  Iraq was in the center of the Bush administration's strategy; it will remain a focal point for the new US administration.  Attaching such importance to ending the US military involvement in Iraq should not be a cause of neglecting the US goals in Lebanon.  Eventually, it is hoped that Lebanese independence and transition to democracy will be a by-product of an honorable US exit from Iraq.  Many studies show Lebanon's potential for further democratic development among the Arab countries.  Lebanon has an established constitution; it has a civil society and all the other resources necessary for a democracy to effectively influence state-making decision – something rare in most Middle Eastern societies.

It's becoming more evident that Iran is becoming the real winner from the new status gained by Hezbollah; it has achieved an ideological and strategic victory against Israel and it has gained a new beachhead on the Eastern Mediterranean.  There is an opportunity to rescue the Lebanese state through the new parliamentary elections which are due in the spring of 2009 with some hopes that the coalition of March 14 will come back with a parliamentary majority.  However, Lebanon's legitimate government still needs concerted support from the new US administration as well as from the moderate Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan.

**Notes**

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26.  Note:  Despite UNSCR 1559, the Syrians forced Lebanon's parliament to amend the constitution to extend Emile Lahoud's presidential term for an additional three years.

**دور الولايات المتحدة الأميركية في الأزمة الللبنانية الحالية**

بعد هجمات الحادي عشر من أيلول على نيويورك  وواشنطن تغير المناخ الاستراتيجي في منطقة الشرق الأوسط  بأكملها بشكل جذري. وقد قامت الحرب على الإرهاب التي اندلعت بقيادة الرئيس الأميركي جورج بوش على مبدأ الحرب الوقائية الأمر الذي مثل تغييراً عاماً وانتقالاً من الخيار الاستراتيجي القديم القائم على مبدأ الاحتواء والردع.

وقد أدى الهدف الأول في سياق هذا التحول في العقيدة الأميركية إلى سقوط نظام طالبان وتدمير البنية التحتية الخاصة بالقاعدة في أفغانستان. وشكل اجتياح العراق وخلع صدام حسين الخطوة التالية التي غيرت إاى حد كبير التوازن السياسي والاستراتيجي في الشرق الأوسط.

وكان لهذه التغيرات تأثيراً عميقاً في لبنان وسوريا وإيران. بالرغم منها التغيرات في المناخ الاستراتيجي الإقليمي، عززت سوريا وإيران تحالفهما الاستراتيجي الذي كان قد بدأ بعد الانتصار الذي حققه آية الله الخميني في شباط من العام 1979.

حالياً تتشارك سوريا وإيران أهدافاً مشتركة فهما تتعاونان بشكل وثيق لصيغة استراتيجيتهما ضد الانتشار الأميركي العسكري في العراق وضد النفوذ الأميركي في لبنان والسلطة الفلسطينية.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/role-usa-current-lebanon-crisis#sthash.HWI3J24r.dpuf