

The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance

Iran dominates conversations on the Middle East as of late, lying at the center of a spider web of pressing issues: Tehran's influence in Baghdad, its nuclear policies, and a growing fear of an emerging "Shi'ite axis" that is purported to link Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Hizballah in Lebanon. The image is designed to stir geopolitical blood and has prompted new debate in Washington and the Middle East about how to treat the nature of this "threat."

The Shi'ite tail seems to be wagging the Sunni dog once again. After all, only about 15 percent of Muslims worldwide are Shi'a, making this group clearly outnumbered by its Sunni counterparts. Only in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain do Shi'a constitute a majority or plurality of the populace. Yet, two of Middle East's most active and outspoken Islamic forces, the Iranian regime and Hizballah, are Shi'a phenomena.

The summer 2006 war between Israel and Hizballah in Lebanon has recharged an ideological debate over the geopolitical relationship between Iran and Hizballah. During the Lebanese conflict, talk emerged of an Iran-Hizballah "axis" and even a "proxy war" in Lebanon between the United States and Iran. In the eyes of the Bush administration and much of the Israeli establishment, Hizballah is a dangerous Iranian creation that promotes Tehran's radical ambitions and forms an integral part of a dangerous and growing Shi'a bloc across the region. This view is also shared by the leadership of embattled and autocratic Sunni regimes in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia as well as by some Persian Gulf state rulers. Meanwhile, next door in Iraq, the Shi'a have electorally commandeered the formerly Sunni-run government

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in the wake of Saddam Hussein's ouster. Sunni-Shi'a sectarian violence is wracking the nation, particularly Baghdad.

Hizballah is not accumulating power in a Lebanese vacuum but rather in an environment of growing violence across much of the Middle East over several decades, sharply intensified since September 11, 2001, and the beginning of the U.S. global war on terrorism. The group's Iranian connection is profound and well established, but this link is not indicative of a burgeoning sectarian axis reinvigorated by the new power that the Shi'a have gained in Iraq. What is certain, however, is that Hizballah's growing power, although solidly rooted in Lebanon, reflects a broad intensification of resistance to the status quo throughout the Middle East. Invoking a Shi'ite axis may be a good scare tactic, but the phenomenon really signifies political change that is broader than sectarianism.

A Model of Resistance Emerges

Two historical trends have been significant to the Middle East's sociopolitical development and will continue to shape the region's future: a long-term Muslim/Arab determination to resist Western hegemony and a widening self-assertion by minorities within their own political orders. Hizballah is the product of these cultural and psychological forces that, in one form or another, persist throughout the region regardless of sect.

Resistance to Western domination can be traced back a century or more to the military and economic invasion of the Middle East by European imperialism, a process that sparked a wave of anticolonial movements across much of the globe. This resistance developed a "civilizational" character as it spread across Muslim Eurasia. States did not fight against Western dominance in isolation, but rather as part of a broader Muslim *ummah*, the global collective of Muslims who were engaged in separate but parallel struggles for independence. Growing awareness across the Muslim *ummah* of a seemingly common struggle against imperialism has generated an echo effect that has only been nourished and intensified by modern communications. Today, the Internet constitutes a "virtual" or "electronic" *ummah*, a sounding board and organizational tool for common Muslim grievances and struggles.

Ironically, this search for some kind of state power capable of resisting Western imperialism facilitated the emergence of the oppressive Middle Eastern security state after World War II. Most notably, the Arab nationalist movement under Gamal Abdul Nasser, president of Egypt from 1945 to 1970, championed Arab unity under a banner of revolutionary social change and modernization. In parallel, various pan-Arab Ba'ath parties sprang up in opposition to ongoing Western intervention in the Arab world and the creation of the Israeli state in

1947, perceived by many to be a political creation of Western Jewry on Arab soil, blessed by a West guilt-ridden over its own treatment of the Jews.

Israel's defeat of the principal revolutionary Arab states—Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq—in the 1967 Six-Day War was a turning point at which it became apparent that Arab nationalism had failed to deliver on its promises of unity, prosperity, and strength against the West. The foundering appeal of the discredited Arab nationalists gave rise to the emergence of new Islamist movements that promised an even more comprehensive transformation of society. The Islamists vowed to erase the abuses of the Arab dictatorial state while strengthening social foundations to establish greater social justice and to counter its foreign enemies more effectively.

In parallel with the rise of Islamism, religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East were no longer willing to be suppressed within the larger authoritarian state. Berbers, Kurds, Christians, Shi'ites, Copts, and other minorities all sought to assert themselves against the modern state's forced homogenization process. Western imperial powers had used these minorities to facilitate "divide and rule" policies, making them objects of suspicion in Middle Eastern societies. Yet, the new assertiveness of minorities has contributed to instability in the social order across the region as authoritarian orders weaken. In this context, the Shi'a of Lebanon, a plurality within the country, began their long journey to political dominance in the Lebanese political order.

This is not a burgeoning sectarian axis reinvigorated by the Shi'a rise to power in Iraq.

Hizballah: Independent Actor or Dangerous Proxy?

In Lebanon, the Arab Shi'a have long been a politically, socially, and economically marginalized minority—the "wretched of the earth." Yet, they have been present in Lebanon for at least six centuries. Despite being looked down on by many Sunnis, they nonetheless became a star in the Shi'ite crescent by playing a leading role in the Shi'i-fication of Iran in the early sixteenth century. At that time, the Safavids, a new ruling house, took over in Iran and decided to reject traditional Sunni Islam and embrace Shi'ism. The Safavids desperately needed Shi'ite jurists to help educate and impose its new creed on its Sunni Iranian public. The al-Sadr family so prominent in Iraq, which today includes the young firebrand cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and his famed uncle Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, were among those Lebanese jurists who went to what is now Iran and Iraq centuries ago to answer that call.

In a turnabout in the early 1970s, the Shi'ite community in Lebanon requested that a member of that same al-Sadr family, the young cleric Musa al-Sadr, to come back to Lebanon from Iran to work with the community to strengthen its jurisprudential and educational level. Al-Sadr's personal impact on the Lebanese Shi'ite community was unparalleled for nearly 20 years, all before the Iranian Revolution. Al-Sadr forged a powerful, new communal sense of dignity and self-help by organizing schools, clinics, economic promotion, and political institutions. He was not a radical but was quite critical

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of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, whose military confrontations in southern Lebanon were harming the Shi'ite community. Al-Sadr also called for a more equitable share of power within the Lebanese political order, which was dominated by Maronite Christians. These now legendary Lebanese Shi'ite links with Iran form the basis of contemporary references to a Shi'ite axis.

After al-Sadr's probable murder during a visit to Libya in 1978, his movement subsequently morphed into the successful Amal ("Hope") movement, a social movement that reflected and perpetuated his goals. In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon for the second time and occupied Shi'ite southern Lebanon. In response, various Shi'ite Islamist guerrilla groups, including the more radical elements of Amal, emerged and ultimately coalesced into a formal group in 1985 called Hizballah. The movement's first goal, to end the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, was finally accomplished in 2000 after 18 years of guerrilla warfare. Hizballah has declared Israel to be an illegal state based on Jewish exclusivity and founded through violence on Palestinian territory that continues to deprive the Palestinians of their patrimony and land.

Hizballah has particularly close links to revolutionary Iran, drawing inspiration from Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's Iranian Revolution of 1979, which called for revolution to correct injustices across the Muslim world. Today, Hizballah leader Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah follows the theological and sometimes ideological guidance of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei. All major ayatollahs have formal representatives abroad, and in 1995, Khamenei nominated Nasrallah as his deputy in Lebanon.¹

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has trained Hizballah forces in eastern Lebanon's Bekaa Valley and in Iran itself since Hizballah was founded. The IRGC also provides the bulk of weaponry that Hizballah has received over the years, including its missiles and rockets. Hizballah is in close and regular contact with Iran, which provides a considerable portion of Hizballah's funding, estimated by the U.S. government at tens of millions of

dollars per year, funds that figure importantly in Hizballah's ability to support its wide-ranging social and philanthropic programs in the country.

Although Hizballah would not exist in its present form without the strong support of the Islamic Republic of Iran since its founding, Hizballah today does not operate at the command of the Iranian government. Over the last decade, Hizballah's own independent funds have grown, particularly from wealthy Shi'ite merchants in Lebanon and from the sizable West African, South American, and U.S. Lebanese Shi'ite diaspora. Anthony Cordesman reported from Israel in August 2006 after the war in Lebanon that no serving Israeli official, intelligence officer, or other military officer with whom he had spoken felt that Hizballah had acted under the direction of Iran or Syria.²

Hizballah is thus not some foreign element grafted onto the Lebanese body politic. All Lebanese are fully aware of the group's deeply Lebanese character. Iran's support to the Shi'a elicits little surprise in the Lebanese context in which, regrettably, foreign manipulation of the political scene is nothing new. The French have supported the Maronites. The Syrians have alternately backed the Christians, Sunni, or Shi'a, depending on the geopolitical situation. Other Arab states—Egypt in Nasser's day, Saudi Arabia in more recent decades—have supported the Sunnis for long periods. Libya and Iraq have both aided Sunni political elements inside Lebanon for decades. Israel has funded the Maronites and various minor groups within the Shi'ite community to help support its own geopolitical goals. The Soviet Union actively supported a significant Communist movement in the country. The United States provided covert funding to facilitate the election of various leaders in Lebanon in the 1960s and has regularly lent support to various factions over the years.

In this context, Iran's involvement is hardly an exceptional phenomenon in the old Middle East political game—one of the reasons for the political dysfunction of the region. Iran could undoubtedly weaken Hizballah considerably as a force in Lebanon by cutting off financial assistance and arms shipments. Although Hizballah does have considerable financial resources of its own, the loss of Iranian funding would significantly constrain the organization's range of activities, especially its anti-Israeli guerrilla campaigns, even if the loss would not bring it to its knees. That strong Iranian influence, however, does not remotely mean that Hizballah is taking orders from Iran.

The two major Shi'ite movements, Amal and Hizballah, were not created to be instruments of Iranian control so much as to strengthen the independent power of the Shi'ite community and to meet its genuine security needs before and during the Lebanese civil war from 1975 to 1990. Throughout that struggle, sectarian militias were vital to the protection of all major Lebanese sectarian elements. Moreover, Hizballah's and, earlier, Amal's armed capabilities have not been used against other domestic groups since the civil war ended.

Hizballah will not readily relinquish the advantages it currently enjoys as a powerful militia for the sake of its constituency's welfare. The Lebanese state historically has never served the Lebanese Shi'a well. The Shi'a have been an ignored and deprived underclass that has never received an equal share of the Lebanese infrastructure, political representation, or economic benefits. Despite being a plurality in the country today, the Shi'a are constitutionally allocated only 27 out of 128 parliamentary seats. National power is gradually shifting toward the Shi'a in that body in part because of Hizballah's activities, but the process of power allocation in Lebanon remains highly charged. Few Lebanese aside from the Shi'a would accept the principle of one man, one vote, as this would weaken the other long-dominant sectarian groups, such as the Christian Maronites and Sunni Muslims. At this stage in Lebanon's political development, its Shi'a have little confidence that the state can or will meet their needs and thus place greater confidence in Hizballah and Amal as their political instruments. In this context, Iran's preferences on the matter are not particularly relevant to what Hizballah does.

Furthermore, Hizballah is a potential national military asset on which the Lebanese state may depend again in the event of further confrontations with Israel, a crucial resource, considering the Lebanese military's weakness. Following the mostly Hizballah-achieved Israeli withdrawal in 2000, Hizballah retained its armed militia to prevent further Israeli attacks in the south and to liberate the small territory known as Shebaa Farms, currently Israeli-occupied, internationally recognized as Syrian, but claimed by Lebanon.

These historic ties between the Lebanese Shi'a and Iran provide a clear indication that the relationship does not represent simply some latter-day development brewed up by Tehran as part of a new geopolitical weapon. Significant geopolitical implications do flow from their commonality of vision, but their impact is at least equally a result of the weakness and unpopularity of current pro-U.S. autocrats in the Arab world.

The 'Shi'a Revival's' Political Appeal to Sunnis

In Washington's search for a silver bullet with which to dispatch anti-U.S. movements within the Islamic world, much has been made of a split between the Shi'ite and Sunni world in the face of a reviving Shi'ite threat. Threatened Sunni regimes echo this concern. Yet, such a portrayal of the geopolitical situation in the Muslim world misses the big picture.

Serious historical rifts exist between Sunni and Shi'a Islam, whose origins trace back to a 1,300-year-old dispute over the Prophet Muhammad's rightful successor. Yet, in practice, there is little serious theological difference between the two sects; their divisions have more to do with practice. As in

the rift between Protestants and Catholics in the West, religious differences have shaped separate communal existences over time.

Friction between the Sunni and Shi'a today manifests itself primarily in areas in which the two communities live in close proximity. This is especially true in Iraq, where the Sunni minority has politically and socially marginalized the Shi'ite majority for hundreds of years. The communal balance of power has now drastically shifted with the overthrow of Saddam's secular but Sunni-dominated regime and the accession to power of the Shi'a via the ballot box. The conflict in Iraq is occurring on a Shi'a-Sunni axis not because of any real theological or sectarian differences, but because of a struggle for concrete political power and interests in a newly volatile environment between two rival communities.

Sunni leaders fear change, not adherents of Shi'ism per se.

In overwhelmingly Sunni Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, North Africa, and Central and Southeast Asia, the Sunni-Shi'a issue is minor. In states in which Shi'ites represent significant minorities—Turkey, India, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, in rough order of their degree of successful minority integration—similar tensions arising from communal proximity do exist. In these states, however, democratization is a much less volatile process from a Sunni point of view because even the ballot box will not overturn the balance of political power that rests with the Sunni majority. Syria remains a major exception. There the 'Alawi Shi'ite minority, representing 13 percent of the population, rules over the Sunni majority, an arrangement that will eventually break down. Outside of rivalries between close-proximity communities, anti-Shi'a feeling among Sunnis elsewhere is largely theoretical and minimal.

Nonetheless, since the shift in the balance of power in Iraq, some extraordinary, near-hysterical pronouncements have come from Arab states that scarcely possess any meaningful Shi'ite minorities among their population. In December 2004, Jordanian King Abdullah II paraded fears of a new "Shi'ite crescent" cutting across the Middle East.³ In April 2006, Egyptian president Husni Mubarak, in reference to Shi'a living in Arab states, darkly opined, "Most of the Shi'ites are loyal to Iran, and not the countries they are living in."⁴ Then, at the outset of the July–August 2006 Lebanese-Israeli war, the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Saudi heads of state astonishingly all publicly opposed Hizballah's actions, suggesting that it and Hamas were engaged in reckless adventurism that endangered Arab interests.

These statements were surely not motivated by sympathy for Israel but rather by these rulers' fear of rising national resistance forces under the ru-

Shi'ite political movements generally possess a pan-Muslim or pan-Arab political vision.

bric of Islamism. Sunni leaders do not actually fear adherents of Shi'ism per se but rather the growing power of popular radical or revolutionary forces craving change, which is now emerging from within the Shi'ite world. The real regional fault line is thus not along a Sunni-Shi'a axis. Instead, we witness entrenched, threatened authoritarian rulers supported by the United States who are opposed by domestic populations that seek to dislodge these rulers, end the U.S. and Israeli occupations of Muslim lands, and resist overall U.S. policies. Sunni public opinion is galvanized at the prospect of changing the hated status quo through Hizballah's and Iran's unyielding posture toward Washington. Hizballah's ability, nearly unprecedented in Arab history, to stand up to the punishment of a powerful Israeli military machine and force it to a truce is electrifying.

Despite the bombastic statements of pro-U.S. Arab leaders, it is difficult to make the case that Shi'ite forces in modern history have acted in pursuit of narrow sectarian interests, at least on the international level. On the contrary, Shi'ite political movements generally possess a pan-Muslim or pan-Arab political vision that avoids invocation of Shi'ism. Autocratic Arab rulers actually fear the empowering forces of organizations such as Hizballah and Hamas, which seek to enable communities or the masses to take control of their own destiny. This self-empowerment in recent decades has mostly emerged through Islamist organizations; almost no other contenders exist.

The struggle of the Arab autocrats against Islamist fundamentalism thus more accurately translates into a struggle against spontaneous, civic-based activism and resistance that the state cannot control rather than a Sunni backlash against Shi'a. This is not to say that Islamist actions automatically equate to democracy in action, but they are closer to democracy than most other currently existing political forces, which are manipulated and controlled by the state. Regimes' references to "Islamic fundamentalism," "Iranian ambitions," or "Shi'ite ambitions" are code words that they know will resonate in Washington, bringing continuing political support even as the Bush administration speaks of bringing democracy to the Middle East.

Iran's Resistance Model Today

Iran challenged the ruling status quo in the Arab world in the fervid early years of the Iranian Revolution, calling for the overthrow of U.S.-supported despotic rulers. Khomeini called for social and political justice, especially for the Palestinians, who are Sunni. He inveighed against the imperialist United

States, or “Great Satan.” He expelled the shah, the top U.S. ally in the region; seized U.S. hostages; and bested the U.S. government’s ill-fated military rescue operation, all wildly popular events across most of the Muslim world. Iran generally presumes to speak for pan-Muslim causes, rarely invoking its own Shi’ite character except to condemn injustices committed by repressive Sunni regimes on occasion.

Today, Tehran is determined to strengthen its resistance to the U.S. agenda in the Middle East by insisting on its right to master the nuclear fuel cycle and calling for political change across the region in ways that no Arab ruler dares. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s violent diatribes against Israel are directed as much at the wider Arab world as at the Iranian population. Most Arab populations even seem to view the prospect of Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons with some equanimity. Not even a nuclear-armed Shi’ite regime worries most Middle Eastern regimes as much as the populist drawing power of the Iran, Hizballah, and Hamas combination, which challenges these rulers’ domestic control. In September 2006, in solidly Sunni Cairo, two of the most popular figures were Ahmadinejad and Nasrallah.⁵

Iran champions genuinely popular issues that resonate across the Muslim world. It reflects a revolutionary spirit of resistance with deep appeal to populations who feel impotent and who crave bold leadership that will assert their dignity against the United States and Israel. Iran itself, of course, is no longer a truly revolutionary state. It accepts and works with the status quo when needed and is quite pragmatic in its foreign policy. Ironically, its present ability to win broad regional sympathy would quickly fade if the leading Arab states were to be taken over by popularly elected leaders who would predictably express more outspoken opposition to unpopular U.S. policies. Iran would in that case lose its monopoly on the fiery stance that gives them so much popular support, at present only enjoyed by other Islamists, Sunni and Shi’a alike. These forces of resistance to the United States run deep. It is only a question of who will ride them.

Can Hizballah Be Contained?

Hizballah is cast from the same mold. Its character is mainstream Shi’ite, but its rhetoric focuses on Arab unity, the illegitimacy of the Israeli state, and the need for change in Arab leadership. Hizballah champions the (Sunni) Palestinian cause and cooperates closely with Hamas, a preeminently Sunni Islamist organization. Hizballah’s kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers in July 2006 was also partially in support of the newly elected Hamas government that has been struggling under a U.S.- and Israeli-led boycott. Lebanese Sunnis as well as Shi’a fully approve of this aspect of Hizballah’s policies.

These policies, its successful 18-year-long guerrilla war against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, and its impressive ability to withstand the Israeli onslaught in the summer of 2006 enabled Hizballah to win the hearts and minds of most Sunnis on the street. These publics have been exhilarated by these demonstrations of Arab bravery, sacrifice, and military skill. It makes no difference that members of Hizballah are Shi'ites; they are perceived to be on the right side of vital Arab national issues. Admiration for the Shi'a is more restrained only in states where the communities live in close proximity, especially in Lebanon, where the entire country had to bear the brunt of Israel's punishment. Even in Iraq, most Sunni Islamists called for support of Hizballah against Israel. Even Ayman al-Zawahiri, the number two leader of Al Qaeda, an organization known for its clear anti-Shi'ite sentiments, stated that all Muslims should support this just cause in Lebanon.⁶

Hizballah is thus a manifestation of deeply entrenched geopolitics of resistance and revolution in the Muslim world. Its growing influence and popularity have long-term historical and ideological roots, and its ambitions and actions are neither exclusively Shi'ite nor anti-Sunni in character. It represents a powerful regional current that is larger than itself and thus cannot be easily suppressed or disarmed.

Washington classifies Hizballah as an international terrorist organization and targets it with broad sanctions. Although Hizballah has undeniably engaged in a number of terrorist acts, this generalized label and approach are not a recipe for success. Hizballah is a vastly different creature from Al Qaeda, for example. The latter is a globally focused network that promotes the sweeping, violent elimination of all Western influence, the overthrow of virtually all existing governments of the region, and the imposition of ultra-fundamentalist forms of Islamic governance. Yet, the U.S. government treats the two groups as functionally identical phenomena.

Despite its widespread popularity and Iranian connections, Hizballah is a basically local organization with goals primarily in the immediate region. It has operated almost exclusively within Lebanon and against military or foreign government installations. Aside from two anti-Israeli terrorist attacks in Argentina on Jewish targets, the organization has not engaged in any violent activities in the United States, Canada, or anywhere else outside Lebanon except across the border against Israel, although it has engaged in fundraising activities and efforts to gain political support in North and South America among Lebanese Shi'ite communities there. Hizballah's basic lack of involvement in out-of-state guerrilla operations is indicative of its essentially Israel-Lebanon-Palestine orientation and concentration on local grievances. There is little credible evidence that Hizballah has ties to Al Qaeda, which is generally strongly anti-Shi'a and whose version of radical Salafism is responsible for killing large numbers of Shi'ites in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

Disarming Hizballah is not currently realistic in the context of present regional power politics. The players who exert the greatest influence over it have little incentive to surrender a key element of their geopolitical power package. Iran, for example, has absolutely no reason to weaken the vitality of this long-standing link, particularly when Tehran perceives Washington as determined to whittle down Iran's regional power sharply. Nor can Syria be ignored in this equation. Damascus has routinely facilitated passage of Iranian weapons to Hizballah and has provided some of its own weapons as well, because Hizballah's power helps to divert Israeli pressure away from Syria and supports Syrian aspirations to regain the lost Golan Heights from Israel.

If the United States seriously desires to weaken the Iran-Hizballah nexus, it must deal with a range of regional problems as a unit and engage in unprecedented thinking about the region. The Middle East is a graveyard of failed attempts to achieve salami-style solutions that seek to isolate and pick off smaller and weaker elements of the problem without dealing with the crux of the issue. Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights and Palestinian territories since 1967 is the very node of the complex of problems from which nearly all other calculus proceeds. A genuine and equitable regional peace settlement would drastically change the internal calculus for Hizballah, Hamas, and all other regional players.

Even among the Shi'a, many, most notably a growing and gradually prospering middle class, at present reluctantly support Hizballah but aspire in the longer run to a more modern and unitary Lebanese state. In this sense, once a regional settlement has been reached, Hizballah will largely have fulfilled its own historic mission and, even for most Shi'a, will have little reason to exist as anything except a local political party. Meanwhile, Washington's jealous monopoly on the peace process over three decades has dramatically failed to bring an end to this fundamental fact of occupation, an issue to which so many other regional issues are held hostage.

The Iran-Hizballah nexus is very real, has deep historical roots, and will not likely be crushed by transient squeeze plays by Washington or Tel Aviv. A campaign designed to exacerbate Sunni-Shi'a hostility as currently promoted by Washington and its nervous acolytes in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan will be hard pressed to succeed when Iran and Hizballah are seen by Sunni publics as pursuing popular Arab national issues. Only an Iranian war of aggression against an Arab state or states might whip up enough Sunni regional emotion to deflate the influence of this Shi'ite entente. Such an action does not seem likely, given Iran's basic lack of territorial aggression for more than

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two centuries. Even nervous Gulf sheikhdoms know that a hostile U.S. policy toward Iran will not serve their long-term interests, even though they seek political counterweight to Tehran's influence.

Washington has few longer-range options other than dealing with the reality of Iranian influence and Hizballah's established role in Lebanon, withdrawing its hated military presence from the region, and bringing about a just settlement of the Palestinian situation. With every passing month that the issue of U.S. and Israeli occupation is allowed to fester, the Iranian and Hizballah strategy pays rich dividends to both throughout the Sunni world.

Notes

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