

SEDMED

Seguridad y Defensa en el Mediterráneo



TELL, Nawaf (2008) “Rethinking security strategies: New threats and new actors”, en SOLER i LECHA, Eduard y HILALI, Fadela, *VII Seminario Internacional sobre Seguridad y Defensa en el Mediterráneo. Conflictos regionales y estrategias de seguridad*. Barcelona: CIDOB / Ministerio de Defensa, pp. 159-160.

Este artículo es el resultado de la ponencia presentada en el VII Seminario Internacional sobre Seguridad y Defensa en el Mediterráneo. Conflictos regionales y estrategias de seguridad, organizado en Barcelona por CIDOB y el Ministerio de Defensa los días 1 y 2 de Diciembre de 2008.

SEDMED
Seguridad y Defensa
en el Mediterráneo

www.sedmed.org

RETHINKING SECURITY STRATEGIES: NEW THREATS AND NEW ACTORS

Nawaf Tell

Director and researcher, Centre for Strategic Studies (CSS), Amman

When talking about new threats and actors one cannot but begin with the new reality that led to the emergence of these threats and actors. This new reality can be identified with the repercussions of the war on Iraq in 2003. The direct impact of this war was the elimination of one of the pillars of regional balance of power, creating a vacuum of power that led to the emergence of a new environment which resulted in a more prominent role for these new actors representing new threats.

The vacuum created by the 2003 war provoked three players to attempt to fill: Iran, non-state actors, and radical thought. Iran is a regional power that has a long history with the region, and shares many demographic, cultural, and religious ties with the Arab Middle East. Throughout the twentieth century, however, Iran was not a major regional player, whether under the shah, or under the revolutionary regime that followed in 1979, its efforts in the post 1979 period to introduce itself as a regional player, through exporting the Islamic revolution experiment, had failed and led to a confrontation between the Iraq and Iran, with severe repercussions on both.

The mid 1990s Iran efforts were more successful, during the Khatamy administration, when Iran introduced itself as an equal partner in the region. Nonetheless the short-lived moderate approach by Iran was replaced by another hard-line approach which prevented any sustainable outcomes from the Khatamy era. Since 2003, however, Iran was the main beneficiary of the vacuum of power; the war on terror has eliminated its most threatening adversaries, the Ba'th regime in Iraq, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, allowing Iran to pursue its regional ambitions in an unprecedented manner. While Iran is a big, strong, and influential country that is entitled to play a regional role that matches its size and capabilities, Iran is however pursuing this objective through intrusion, not acceptance. Indeed, it sees its role today on the basis of a regional hegemony, not partnership, hence this role is the source of contention that will be resisted by the region.

I would like to end by mentioning the Iranian nuclear program. There is a difference between the perception of the west and the region with regards to this program. For the region, this program in itself is not an immediate threat; the immediate threat is the negative Iranian role in the

Since 2003 Iran was the main beneficiary of the vacuum of power; the war on terror has eliminated its most threatening adversaries, the Ba'th regime in Iraq, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, allowing Iran to pursue its regional ambitions in an unprecedented manner

The moral disarmament of radicals does not automatically mean the moral armament of the moderates in the region. This can only be achieved through a political process that tackles the issues of the region, with the Palestinian issue at the forefront

region, which will indubitably become much more aggressive with nuclear capability. For the region, the Iranian nuclear program falls within the broader objective of having a Nuclear Free Middle East.

While non-state actors have always been present in the Middle East, and have been able to play a significant role in regional politics, the post 2003 era has enabled these actors to become prominent. Their role today is no longer that of rejectionist spoilers that place sticks in the wheels, today they play a role that is capable of shaping not only the regional, but also the international agenda. These non-state actors can be classified into three categories.

First, Al Qaeda which has proved to be a resilient network that is capable of evolving and shaping the international agenda; the second kind consists of political organizations that do not exclude violence as means to achieve their objectives, such as Hamas and Hezbollah; and the third category is of a different nature and motivations, private security companies. Private security companies which have also become prominent in the post 2003 period and so far, there has been no accurate assessment of their role, whether positive or negative but without a doubt, they are a new actor that needs to be evaluated.

The key in addressing all these issues and the link that combines the new challenges is the wave of radicalization, and addressing, adequately the threat of radicalization is the key to address all the new threats. The threat of Radicalization does entail the threat of sectarian violence, similar to what we have seen in Iraq in the aftermath of Samara bombing. An all out sectarian war would be of repercussions that exceed the borders of any country, and would have all Muslim countries as a possible battlefield of such a confrontation.

To address the issue of radicalization is to be able to morally disarm radical thought and radical groups. The moral disarmament of radicals does not automatically mean the moral armament of the moderates in the region. This moral disarmament can only be achieved through a political process that tackles the issues of the region, with the Palestinian issue at the forefront. If one observes the doctrines of all radical leaders, the Palestine issue represents a cornerstone of their approach that manipulates the injustice suffered by the Palestinians to promote their radical ideology. An exercise of removing all the sentences that relate to Palestine from these doctrines would leave them baseless and irrational.