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CHANGING AGENDAS ON IRAN

On Thursday 25 a big meeting involving the United States, Russia, Britain, France, China and Germany is supposed to be held in New York to discuss another round of sanctions on Iran for its alleged noncompliance in coming clean about its nuclear program. Washington had spent the past two weeks increasing its rhetoric against Iran and was intending for this meeting to add another layer of pressure on the clerical regime in Tehran. But the Russians have quite thoroughly sabotaged those plans. In a rather blasé manner, the Russian delegation announced on Wednesday 24 that the six-nation meeting on Iran had not been included in Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's U.N General Assembly agenda. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko earlier said: "We see no fire alarm which would require us to put off other things in the extremely busy week of the U.N General Assembly and meet in emergency session on the Iranian nuclear problem". In other words, the Russians simply couldn't be bothered by the issue. It is no surprise that the Russians are attempting to scuttle U.S policy on Iran. After all, playing defense for Tehran in the U.N Security Council (UNSC) requires very little effort on Moscow's part to take the steam out of Washington's pressure campaign against Iran. Compared to finishing Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant or shipping S-300 air defense systems to Iran, blocking votes in the UNSC is a low-cost way for Russia to prevent a U.S-Iranian rapprochement that would allow the United States to free itself from the Mideast theater and focus on a Russian threat in Eurasia. While the Iranians are more than happy to have the Russians cover for them in the UNSC, the United States has grown weary of playing Iranian negotiating games. Experts believe that the Iranians have used the threat of a nuclear program to extract concessions from the United States on Iraq, where Iran faces a historical opportunity to consolidate Shiite influence in the heart of the Arab world. But after five years of playing cat and mouse with Tehran, the strategic interest that the United States previously saw in making a deal with Iran on Iraq is fading. Simply put, the United States has already firmly placed the region's Sunni powers in its camp, and the added utility of making up with Iran is not as tempting as it seemed a few years ago. Now, Washington is far more concerned with the need to shift gears from the Middle Eastern theater so it can actually deal with the Russian re-emergence. And Washington has little time or patience to delve much further into open-ended negotiations with the Iranians. Before, the Iranians had two surefire ways to compel the United States back to the negotiating table. One was through its nuclear program, but it seems Iran has pushed the credibility of this issue a few steps too far. Despite the defiant rhetoric from Iran on uranium enrichment, the Iranians do not appear technologically capable of coming close to producing an actual nuclear device or they would have already - and even if they could, Iran remains a generation away from turning a nuclear device into a ruggedized deliverable weapon. If the case were otherwise, the United States would be acting a lot more concerned about dealing with the Iranians right now. Another Iranian tool was to use the threat of

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civil war in Iraq against the United States. In late 2006, this was certainly possible. Iran, through trained Shiite militias, had the option of turning the screws on Washington in Iraq by instigating Shiite militia attacks on the Sunnis, leading to an eruption of communal violence that threatened to fatally compromise the U.S position in Iraq. But, through complex negotiations and military force, the United States steadily rearranged the Iraqi chessboard. Now Washington backs the same Iraqi Sunni militants that it was previously fighting - a strategy that not only cornered al-Qaeda in Iraq, but threatened Iran with the long-term prospect of a resuscitated Sunni regime in Baghdad. One of General David Petraeus' major successes was to also selectively engage various Shiite factions and turn many of Iran's allies against each other. Within that strategy was planted the kernel of the current security environment, one that has evolved further and further away from bloodshed and Iranian control. The picture now looks very different in late 2008. None of this is to say that the Iranians have run out of options - far from it - but they have lost the ability to impose automatically their will on Iraq's Shia. If Tehran's credibility in Iraq is damaged, its ability to instigate civil war in Iraq as a negotiating tactic is not the surefire tool it once was - and the loss of credibility and power from attempting such and failing would be extreme. Iraq is not "over" - there are still 150,000 or so American troops, Iran still has plenty of leverage, and there are very real issues to work out. But we seem to be sliding tentatively into a situation where the United States is willing to settle for less than it initially wanted due to Russian circumstances, while the penalties for not cooperating with the Iranians are becoming less onerous. Far bigger policy shifts have been generated from far less.

ISRAEL: VEHICLE ATTACKS - A NEW MILITANT TACTIC?

Summary - Israel has seen three attacks in three months in which Arab Israelis from East Jerusalem used vehicles as weapons. No single group has claimed responsibility for all three attacks, but their similarities suggest that Palestinian militants have discovered a new tactic that, while not thus far as deadly as suicide bombing, could prove more difficult to prevent.

Analysis - An Israeli Arab man from East Jerusalem drove his BMW into a group of soldiers in central Jerusalem Sept 22. The attack injured 15 people; the only person killed was the driver, Qassem Mughrabi, who was shot by an off-duty Israel Defense Forces officer. Mughrabi's is the third case in as many months of an Arab from East Jerusalem using a vehicle to target Israelis. The previous two cases involved construction equipment. Only one of the attacks - a July 2 incident involving an earthmover - led to Israeli deaths. Vehicle Attacks:

- **July 2:** Husam Tayseer Dwayat, an Arab Israeli from the Sur Baher neighborhood of East Jerusalem drives an earthmover along Jaffa Road in West Jerusalem, tipping over a public bus and smashing cars. Four people are killed and another 45 injured. An off-duty IDF soldier shoots and kills Dwayat.
- **July 22:** Ghassan Abu Tir, from the Umm Tuba neighborhood of East Jerusalem, drives an earthmover into traffic on King David Street, crashes into a bus and rams several cars. Sixteen people are injured but only Tir dies, killed by an off-duty border guard.
- **Sept. 22:** Qassem Mughrabi from the Jebel Mukaber neighborhood of East Jerusalem drives his BMW into a group of soldiers in central Jerusalem, near the Jaffa gate to the entrance of the Old City. Fifteen people are injured, but only Mughrabi is killed, shot by an off-duty IDF soldier.

No single group has claimed responsibility for all three incidents - but based on the fact that all three men came from the same area, were in similar circumstances and used similar tactics, it is worth considering the idea that Palestinian militants have found a new tactic. It is not yet clear whether Palestinian militant groups really are behind these attacks. Several well-known groups - al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, Galilee Freedom Battalion and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - claimed

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responsibility for the first attack, whereas nobody claimed the second (though Hamas praised it), and Hamas' militant wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, took credit for the third. Even so, claiming responsibility does not mean that they actually carried it out. It is possible that the two later attacks were lone-wolf copycat incidents. However, the similarities and timing of these unconventional attacks raise the possibility that they might not be isolated. Compared to suicide-bomb attacks, using vehicles as weapons is much easier to plan and carry out without being detected beforehand. The tactic requires no smuggling in or production of explosives - as with a suicide bomber. The weapon (a perfectly legal earthmover or car) is already in the country and can be moved around freely. When it is time to attack, most of the damage has been done by the time security personnel can act on the attacker. Also, since all three attackers came from East Jerusalem, there was no need to smuggle in militants from Gaza or the West Bank - a practice that has been pretty well stamped out by Israeli security services. Recruiting for the attack remains the biggest challenge, because the attacker will in all likelihood end up dead. One common recruiting technique is to approach people who have been shamed, who might feel that they have nothing to lose or who believe that they can achieve some kind of redemption by carrying out an attack against Israel. It is worth noting that all three men who carried out these attacks had been recently socially ostracized. Mughrabi had just proposed marriage to his cousin but was rejected. The other two men were known in their communities as petty criminals and were reportedly coerced into carrying out the attacks to clear their names. The first attacker, Husam Tayseer Dwayat, had come under pressure from radical elements in his community to restore his reputation after being convicted of raping his Jewish girlfriend; the second, Ghassan Abu Tir, had a criminal background in drugs and theft and was related to imprison Hamas leader Muhammad Abu Tir. In many ways, using a vehicle as a weapon is nearly as effective (if not necessarily as destructive) as a suicide bombing and much easier to carry out without being detected. To the extent that the goal is to create a feeling of fear and uncertainty, it is effective because an attack can happen at any time and, so far, there appears to be very little that authorities can do to prevent it - even roadblocks with vehicle searches would not turn up anything incriminating. The casualty rate for these most recent attacks appears to be lower than suicide-bomber attacks, but as militants carry out more of these attacks, they could learn, improve their tactics and indeed increase casualties. In August, Chinese militants used a similar tactic in the western Xinjiang province to kill 16 border guards and injure another 16. The United States has also seen a similar attack. The biggest risk incurred by the group sponsoring such attacks - if indeed they were sponsored by a group or a handful of groups - is the Israeli response to East Jerusalem Arab communities. Since clamping down on the use of cars and construction equipment in the city is impractical, authorities could turn to clamping down on the communities from which the attackers came. Even if security forces are able to bring down those directly responsible for the recent attacks, the tactic is easily replicated. Taking away mobility or driving rights, or increasing police scrutiny on these communities, could result in backlashes that could be far more deadly and far more disruptive than the past three attacks we have seen. It appears likely that Palestinian militants have found a new tactic in their fight against Israelis, and it is clear that the Israelis will have to respond to these attacks in order to maintain security. What remains to be seen is how the Israelis will do so without triggering an even stronger response.

PAKISTAN/U.S: DANGEROUS TENSIONS

Summary - Pakistani forces fired at U.S military helicopters along the Afghan-Pakistani border, the Pentagon said Sept 25. The border dispute highlights the dangers of the high tensions between Islamabad and Washington - tensions that are likely to get worse before there is any hope that they will get better.

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Analysis - Pakistani forces fired upon U.S military helicopters along the Afghan-Pakistani border, the Pentagon confirmed Sept 25. However, a Pentagon spokesman denied Pakistani claims that the helicopters had entered Pakistani airspace. Islamabad later claimed that only "warning shots" were fired and later insisted that only signal flares were fired to warn the helicopters off. This incident - almost a textbook border dispute, complete with each side claiming it was in the right place in an area where the precise border often is not clear and subsequent revisions of statements - highlights the dangers of tensions as high as they are between Pakistan and the United States. For Washington, Islamabad's lack of control over the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is providing a safe haven for Taliban and foreign jihadist fighters as well as a vector for arms feeding the Afghan insurgency. For Pakistan, the United States' increasingly overt and unilateral raids and strikes on Pakistani territory are challenging Islamabad's sovereignty, and with it the support of its people. Thus, Pakistan has increasingly threatened to forcefully oppose any further U.S intrusion, though the only casualty so far has been an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that crashed in the region Sept 23 - possibly for unrelated technical reasons. Indeed, though often flying well above the range of "trash fire" - small arms and anti-aircraft artillery - UAVs make a good intermediate step for Islamabad to demonstrate its resolve on the issue without firing upon U.S servicemen. Islamabad cannot hope to garner public support for the fight against its own jihadist insurgency while U.S forces continue to engage in unilateral strikes in the country. Meanwhile, unless a Pakistani patrol catches helicopters flying low, the danger from small arms fire is not particularly extreme. Nevertheless, should Islamabad begin to employ more capable air defense weapons, the situation could quickly escalate - though Pakistan's most capable air defense systems will remain committed to the Indian border. Both sides compound the potential for escalation. On the Pakistani side, the paramilitary Frontier Corps patrols much of the border. The corps harbors more intense local tribal loyalties - likely making any given patrol more inclined to shoot and more likely to be aggressive in trying to bring down whatever U.S target they might stumble upon, even if it is only approaching the border. The Frontier Corps is also likely to have individuals with conflicting loyalties - a situation that militants can exploit to deliberately trigger a U.S-Pakistani clash, which would work to their advantage. The Frontier Corps or other forces in the area also have broad direction from Islamabad - compounded by high profile public statements by senior officials that Pakistan will defend its own territory - that they can interpret as they see fit and act on their own at the tactical level. Moreover, an outpost in Mohmand agency was hit June 11 in a U.S strike that left 11 Frontier Corps soldiers - including a mid-level officer - dead. On the U.S side, rules of engagement stipulate very clearly the right to self defense - generally including preemptive self defense when the individual has a subjective sense of imminent hostile intent. Though more professional and restrained in a tactical sense, U.S forces are likely to act aggressively to defend themselves once fired upon. In fact, U.S Defense Secretary Robert Gates on Sept 23 told the Senate Armed Forces Committee that the United Nations Charter allowed the United States to act in self-defense against international terrorists in Pakistan if the government was unable, or unwilling to deal with them. Perceptions and misconceptions in such situations - on both sides - often make the situation all too quick to escalate. Even though this particular incident may boil down to the innocent firing of signal flares, the situation has all the ingredients for significant escalation while politically and militarily - in a strategic sense - both sides remain in limbo. Pakistan does not have the military capability to establish its writ in FATA on its own without reducing its forces opposite India to what it considers unacceptable levels. The United States is not only in mid-stride during the final weeks of election season, but is facing domestic economic troubles and is still formulating its new strategy for Afghanistan. In short, should things continue on this path, the situation may well get worse before there is any hope of it getting better.

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RUSSIA: A CHECHEN ASSASSINATION

Summary - Ruslan Yamadayev, one of the heads of Chechnya's powerful Yamadayev clan, was shot dead in central Moscow late Sept 24 on his way to a meeting with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. Yamadayev's clan is the only remaining group in Chechnya that stands opposed to Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. His death could spark another clan war in the restive southern Russian republic.

Analysis - One of the heads of the powerful Chechen Yamadayev clan, Ruslan Yamadayev, was gunned down in central Moscow late Sept 24. His death diminishes the only opposition group left standing against Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. Sources told that Yamadayev was on his way to meet with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev - to speak yet again about the dangers of Kadyrov ruling Chechnya - when he was gunned down (almost certainly on Kadyrov's orders). The Russian Prosecutor General's office and Interior Ministry said an unidentified attacker walked up to Yamadayev's Mercedes S500 as it was stopped at a red light near Russia's White House in Moscow and shot into the car 10 times. His passenger, former Chechen military commander Sergei Kizyun, was critically injured. The car in which Yamadayev was shot actually belonged to his brother, Sulim, who is leading the charge back in Chechnya against the republic's president - though whether Sulim or Rulan was actually the target, it most likely made little difference to the attacker. Another Yamadayev brother, Isa, has already publicly stated that his family had known of a plot by Kadyrov to have either Sulim or Ruslan - or both - assassinated soon.

The Chechen Clans - The Yamadayev clan was made up of five brothers - Ruslan, Sulim, Isa, Dzhabrail and Badrudi - who supported Chechnya's independence from Russia in the 1990s, leading groups of ruthless guerilla fighters against equally ruthless Russian troops. Unlike the Chechen leaders like Shamil Basayev, who had a more Islamist ideology, the Yamadayev clan fought more for Chechen nationalism. The Yamadayev brothers also were one of two clans (the other being Kadyrov's) that did not employ terrorist tactics inside Russia, like the Beslan hostage crisis, as part of their war. This is not to say the Yamadayevs and Kadyrovs did not fight fiercely during the war, but they fought for a different cause. They wanted an independent, non-Islamist Chechnya, while Basayev sought to establish a regional "Islamic" state including Dagestan, Ingushetia and others. The Kremlin took advantage of the large difference between the pro-nationalist clans, such as the Kadyrovs and Yamadayevs, and those fighting under an Islamist banner. Such a plan was masterminded by then Russian President Vladimir Putin's right hand man, Vladislav Surkov - who is half Chechen. Under the plan, the Russians flipped the Yamadayev and Kadyrov clans starting in 1999 during the outbreak of the Second Chechen War and pitted them against the Islamists - such as Basayev and others, including Aslan Maskhadov, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev and Dzhokhar Dudayev - using Chechen guerilla warfare against themselves, instead of continuing to use Russian soldiers against such an entrenched resistance. Following the conclusion of the Second Chechen War, the Yamadayev brothers were awarded the Hero of Russia titles, while the Kadyrovs were given the republic's leadership. The Yamadayev brothers were placed in strategic roles in order to counterbalance the Kadyrovs' power and allow Moscow to manipulate the situation in Chechnya very easily. Kadyrov's father, Akhmed, became Chechen president in 2003 but was assassinated in 2004, leaving Kadyrov to take the role. As for the Yamadayevs, Dzhabrail and Sulim were put in charge of the elite Special Forces (the Vostok and Zapad battalions) in the republic made up of Russian and Chechen soldiers - though Dzhabrail was assassinated in 2003. Ruslan became part of the Russian Duma, actively lobbying against what he called Kadyrov's totalitarian power in Chechnya. To put things mildly, the two different pro-Kremlin factions became more than bitter rivals over the past few years, and have systematically eliminated each other's leaders and members, many times in very public shows.

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Recent Events - Though Kadyrov has the upper hand in ruling Chechnya, the Yamadayevs have remained the only opposition group that could challenge his control. Ruslan even moved the Chechen resistance from Grozny to Moscow, lobbying the Duma and specific government officials to see how dangerous it is to have just one person in charge of the volatile Chechnya. In the past year, though, Kadyrov has been methodically whittling away at the Yamadayev brothers' forces inside Chechnya, consolidating nearly all the security, military and Special Forces under his control. The only forces not under the president's were the Vostok and Zapad battalions, amounting to approximately 4.000 troops, under the Yamadayevs; Kadyrov's forces are thought to range closer to 30.000-40.000. In late June, the president had Sulim's battalions officially disbanded, calling for those troops to fall under his newly organized security forces. Furthermore, when the Russian-Georgian war broke out, the president assumed it was his time to shine and offered his forces to fight in South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Georgia. However, Putin thought that formally deploying the Chechens could have a negative (in Russia's eyes) connotation since these Chechen forces have a reputation for brutality. Instead, Putin had Sulim informally deploy his "disbanded" battalions to the conflict to give the Kremlin plausible deniability regarding Chechens fighting in Georgia. The Yamadayev clan was praised back in Chechnya for its "bravery" during the war - a personal sting for Kadyrov.

The Fallout - The Kremlin's preferential treatment of the Yamadayevs, added to questions about Kadyrov's leadership back in Chechnya, has led to the death of yet another clan member. In the short term, it is assured that Sulim will lash out against Kadyrov and his forces back in Chechnya. Though Sulim does not have his own forces formally, the former battalions are still loyal to the Yamadayevs and have proven over the past two decades to be highly resourceful and resilient. Of course, Kadyrov has the upper hand in this matter by sheer number of forces under him. He could clamp down on Sulim and the battalions - though it would be a messy affair either way. But the effects this assassination will have back in Moscow are of greater concern. Ruslan was on his way to meet with Medvedev for a reason, and the president is part of that faction in the capital that is concerned about having one man as the sole power in Chechnya. On the other hand, Surkov and Putin feel confident that they have control over Kadyrov and see this assassination as just the typical outflow from anything having to do with Chechnya - especially a clan war from the explosive republic. In Surkov and Putin's view, the important thing in the short term is to have Chechnya stable and prevent another situation like the wars from breaking out - especially after the Georgian war and a recent increase in tensions in other Caucasus regions, such as Ingushetia. Both understand that Kadyrov could pose a problem in the future with such a large and powerful set of forces under him; furthermore, the last leader who single-handedly ruled Chechnya was Dudayev, whose reign was one of the reasons for the First Chechen War. So while Medvedev will push for an immediate reaction to the assassination and Kadyrov's autocratic rule, this is a battle that Putin will want to try to contain within the republic for as long as possible, knowing a battle is on its way but wanting to put that off for another day.

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