

After Ghadafi's Declaration: The Impact of Changes in Libyan and Iranian WMD Policies on Israel and the Region

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- The Libyan declaration that it was ending its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, dismantling existing capabilities and facilities, and opening up its territory for inspection marks an important step in reducing threats and instability in the region.
- As in the case of the recent Iranian declaration that it has accepted the conditions of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the main test lies in the implementation of the Libyan pledge of transparency, both immediately and in the long term.
- However, the discovery of advanced uranium enrichment and other nuclear weapons-related activities in Libya have refocused attention on the weaknesses of the inspection and verification capabilities of the IAEA and other international agencies. In the absence of threats from the Bush administration, Libya and Iran would have continued to develop nuclear weapons. Therefore, the structure of the international non-proliferation regime and its verification procedures need to be examined and improved in order to establish credibility.
- To the degree that the Libyan and Iranian pledges are matched by credible action, Israel's security environment will improve. However, until these capabilities are dismantled, and as long as Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia continue to maintain or seek weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, the threat to Israel will continue.
- Calls on Israel to follow suit ignore the fact that, unlike Libya and Iran, Israel is not an NPT signatory and has not violated any of its international obligations. As long as Iranian and other leaders continue to seek Israel's elimination, Israel remains the only country in the Middle East whose physical existence is still threatened by states seeking weapons of mass destruction.

Previous Libyan Deception Leads to Cautious Optimism

Libya's sudden declaration that it was ending its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, dismantling the capabilities and facilities that it had already developed, and opening its territory for inspections marks another important stage towards the reduction of threats and instability in the Middle East. The first step in this process was accomplished with the removal of the Iraqi regime headed by Saddam Hussein, which used chemical weapons in the war with Iran and threatened to use them against Israel. (Although the status of Saddam's WMD programs in 2003 is unclear, had the Iraqi leader maintained power, the threat from biological

and nuclear weapons would have been developed quickly.) The second step in changing the regional threat environment was the Iranian government's agreement to accept the terms set out by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (under intense American pressure) including the Additional Protocol, which allows for far more credible inspections. In agreeing to U.S. and British demands to relinquish all WMD-related capabilities, the Libyan leadership under Muammar Ghadafi is following a similar path.

However, after decades in which Ghadafi was directly involved in terrorism, and given Libya's long history of deception, particularly regarding production of chemical weapons at Rabta, the latest pledges must be viewed with some caution. (After the U.S. threatened to bomb Rabta, the Libyans claimed that it was destroyed in a fire, while apparently moving production to another site.) In addition, in the Arab League and other frameworks, Libya's anti-Israel and anti-American rhetoric remains intense and rejectionist, and its position on "the Palestinian issue" calls for the replacement of Israel with a binational state.

It is true that this time, the Libyan public statement was preceded by inspections of WMD facilities by U.S. and British experts, which adds to the credibility. But Ghadafi's pledge to implement transparency and open up all facilities to international inspection remains to be implemented and tested. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw's reference to Ghadafi's "huge statesmanship and courage" is clearly premature.

The Libyan Disclosure: New Doubts about the Reliability of the IAEA

In these preliminary inspections, Libya, like Iran, was found to have blatantly violated its commitments under the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The unreported and unsafeguarded enrichment of uranium, which is the essential step for manufacturing atomic weapons, is explicitly prohibited, and remained undiscovered by the IAEA. In the absence of intelligence information pointing to such illicit activities or threats of major military action from both the Bush administration and the UK - backed up by the very visible example of Iraq - Libya and Iran would have been able to develop nuclear weapons within a short time period. Indeed, in September 2002 Prime Minister Ariel Sharon warned that Libya was working toward the development of nuclear capabilities and was likely to achieve such capabilities before Iran.¹

The ability of both Libya and Iran to violate their legal commitments and obtain the necessary technology from external suppliers (Pakistan, North Korea, as well as Western sources, are suspected in this process) is further proof of the inadequacy of the verification and safeguards systems that are employed by the IAEA, which is charged with implementing the NPT. It is important to recall that the IAEA, under Hans Blix, gave Iraq a clean bill of health prior to Israel's strike on its Osiraq reactor.

Recent actions taken by this international agency to improve its professional capabilities have yet to be demonstrated convincingly, although discoveries in Iran are important steps in this direction. To establish credibility and deter similar violations in the future, the IAEA and ancillary mechanisms that focus on preventing the supply and transfer of illegal and unsafeguarded technology must also insure that the sources of the Libyan technology and materials are also exposed.

Until the international non-proliferation regime - including the IAEA, as well as the OPCW (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons), charged with implementing the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention, and other elements - is proven to be reliable, Israel and other potential targets will need to guarantee their national survival through independent capabilities.

The Impact on Stability and Israeli Security

Given these caveats, to the degree that the Libyan and Iranian regimes demonstrate an end to WMD programs and capabilities, including long-range ballistic missiles, the Middle East will become more stable, and Israel's security environment will improve significantly. Libya and Iran are both involved in terrorism, and are leaders of the "rejectionist" front. Iranian officials continue to call explicitly for the destruction of Israel, which constitutes a direct violation of the basic rules of international behavior and the UN Charter. For example, in 1999, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, then speaker of the Iranian parliament, told Arab nations to "Come out openly, like Iran, and say you don't accept such a country as Israel on the world map. Have courage. We can make good use of our weapons, military equipment and all our forces."² Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has declared, "The cancerous tumor called Israel must be uprooted from the region" (December 15, 2000), and termed "the obliteration of Israel" to be "the perpetual aim of Iran." In December 2001, Expediency Council chairman (and strongman) Hashemi Rafsanjani declared the "application of an atomic bomb would not leave anything in Israel, but the same thing would just produce damage in the Muslim world."

Until the Iranian and Libyan capabilities are fully dismantled, with credible safeguards in place, the threat to Israel will continue. Furthermore, Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia continue to maintain or seek weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, and pose similar threats to Israel. Realistic efforts toward negotiating a WMD-free zone in the region would have to encompass these countries as well.

The Libyan and Iranian examples, if implemented, could provide a core for the development of the mutual verification and inspection mechanisms that will be necessary for such a zone, and even the most optimistic scenarios envision many years until this stage is reached. In the meantime, calls for Israeli reciprocity with respect to Libyan and Iranian pledges to end their illicit nuclear programs are out of place.

The Unique Israeli Case: The Only State Whose Existence is Threatened

In addition, the revival of calls on Israel to follow these examples ignores the fact that, unlike Libya and Iran (also Iraq, Syria, and Egypt), Israel is not an NPT signatory and has not violated any of its international obligations. Instead, Israel has repeatedly called for the creation of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in a Middle East at peace, based on mutual verification by regional states, as a more reliable monitoring mechanism than the IAEA. In addition, Israel has not called for the destruction of any country in the region, including Iran.

As the examples noted above demonstrate, Israel remains the only country in the Middle East whose physical existence is still threatened by states seeking weapons of mass destruction. The attempt to create symmetry involving Israel, where none exists, deflects attention from these very real threats. Its ambiguous deterrence capability has served Israel well in insuring its survival within a very hostile environment. If this environment changes, Israel's deterrence posture will adjust accordingly.

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Notes

1. Ze'ev Schiff, "Ghadafi's About-Face is a Victory for the Coalition," *Ha'aretz*, December 21, 2003; <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/374044.html>
2. AFP; <http://www.payk.net/maillingLists/iran-news/html/1999/msg00200.html>

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