The attack by protestors on the British Embassy in Tehran on 29 November 2011 and the British government’s response marks a new nadir in relations with Iran. The violent protests have resulted in the closure of embassies in both Tehran and London. In sum, we have seen the reduction of diplomatic links with Iran, in the words of the UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, ‘to the lowest level consistent with the maintenance of diplomatic relations’. Hague declared that the protestors must have had ‘some degree of regime consent’ and that many were members of regime-backed Basij militia groups. Such claims, in combination with the contradictory statements later released by the Iranian foreign ministry and the speaker of the Iranian parliament, Ali Larijani, point to divisive internal political battles within the Iranian regime between the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and President Ahmadinejad.

These diplomatic incidents are not simply a matter of concern for domestic politics within the UK and Iran. The events which triggered these actions are embedded in a larger context which focuses, unavoidably, on the issue of Iran’s nuclear program, which was first revealed in August 2002. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has since highlighted aspects of Iran’s nuclear program which have fed high levels of ongoing distrust on the part of the international community regarding Iran’s peaceful intentions. Although Iran claims its nuclear program is only for civilian purposes, it is suspected of seeking a military nuclear capability. The focus of IAEA inspections, Iran has also been subject to an increasing number of sanctions following the referral of the nuclear file to the UN Security Council in February 2006 as a result of the Iranian refusal to cease uranium enrichment activities. The imposition of heavier bilateral sanctions is at the heart of recent events as the UK announced prior to the protests in Tehran that it would not only enforce sanctions against the Iranian Central Bank – which previous rounds of UN and bilateral sanctions had held back from targeting – but would curtail all financial ties with Iran.
The recent escalation of hostilities draws our attention to the bigger question of future relations with Iran. The appropriateness of a policy of harsher economic sanctions must be questioned given its failure to date in forcing Iran to comply and the obstacles which bilateral sanctions such as those introduced by the US Iran Threat Reduction Act place in the way of diplomacy and dialogue. The increasing use of language invoking the possibility of military action by political elites in the UK, US, and Israel is also cause for serious concern. By contrast, many sober and knowledgeable voices on all sides of the political spectrum have argued strongly and persuasively against adopting policies which are likely to lead to increased levels of hostility towards Iran and potential military action. Whilst I concur wholeheartedly with these calls for caution, I wish to challenge the political imaginary of diplomatic relations further still. Despite repeated negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program by a number of states since 2003 these have so far been unable to significantly transform relations. While limited space prevents engaging here with arguments regarding the failure or premature abandonment of diplomatic engagement it is evident that the need for creative engagement on these issues has become urgent.

In an eloquent and inspirational appeal to those engaged in conflict transformation and peacebuilding, John Paul Lederach has articulated the need to open our imaginations as well as our minds when it comes to thinking about constructive social change and breaking cycles of violence. While the techniques and skills of mediation, negotiation, and diplomacy remain important, the crux of conflict transformation lies in our ‘moral imagination’, which he defines as ‘the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist’. He understands imagination and transcendence as a messy, and personal, process of innovation and creation; a complex and dynamic process which neither ignores the existing hard realities of conflict and politics nor considers itself bound or determined by them. In Lederach’s terms, the moral imagination ‘requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies; the ability to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity; the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act; and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence’. In what may be considered as an appeal for such imaginative thinking, former U.S. Ambassador John Limbert said in March 2011 that ‘we used sanctions because it is a tool that we know. Changing the unproductive relationship that we’ve had with Iran for the last 30 years, now that we do not know how to do’. Imposing ever harsher sanctions, however, contributes to the cycle of violence without providing a means to transcend it.

If we consider the ‘moral imagination’ as a guiding light in the architecture of conflict transformation, I want to suggest that the concepts of trust, empathy, and dialogue offer a concrete language which may be able to contribute towards creative approaches to conflict and to the transformation of relations with Iran. Trust, it is repeatedly recognised, is at the heart of the issue of Iran’s nuclear program and the international condemnation which it has been the target of since 2002. The international community does not trust Iran’s declarations of peaceful nuclear intent and points to decades of deception and covert nuclear activities. Iran, in turn, appeals to its right as a signatory of the NPT, its experiences of intervention and betrayal by those countries who now demand its compliance with sanctions and verification procedures, and the double standards exercised by the nuclear weapons states as reasons for its own mistrust of Western countries. Less attention is paid to thinking about how such relations of mistrust might be transformed through non-violence. The transformative process is, I suggest, grounded at least in part, in conceptions of empathy and dialogue which take time, perseverance, and imagination. While these concepts will undoubtedly be familiar to those working in peacebuilding and mediation, they are granted less significance in the international political sphere. At their core, they focus on the web of human relationships, shaping and reflecting changing, dynamic situations of conflict. Exercising empathy enables us to step into the shoes of the other and to understand why it is that they interpret situations as they do. This may serve to reframe our perceptions of the problem and potential solutions, as well as to change the public discourse through which the conflict is represented and perpetuated.
It is clear that while we cannot avoid having a relationship with Iran what remains at stake are the terms of this relationship.\textsuperscript{iv} Stephen Walt recently suggested that one game-changing move would be for the United States to remove the option to use military force from the table.\textsuperscript{v} While many key Western figures continue to declare that military options remain on the table and, in some cases, publicly advocate a preventive war against Iran, it is difficult to see why Iran and its leaders should be convinced of our sincerity and commitment to dialogue and constructive confidence-building measures. Indeed, it could be argued that such a threat only provides further incentive to continue developing a nuclear break-out capacity. Thus, removing military options from the table would be a welcome gesture and a significant confidence-building measure.

Much more, however, is necessary. In order to break cycles of violence we, as actors, must recognise our involvement in and perpetuation of such cycles. The Iranian regime’s support of violence against the British Embassy is unacceptable. But these actions did not take place in isolation; instead, they belong to ‘a history of actions, reactions, and counteractions’.\textsuperscript{vi} Only when we are able to look at these actions in the context of a broader, long-term, pattern can we understand how we choose to respond has consequences and implications which extend beyond the immediate facts and become embedded in historical narratives which are subject to multiple and diverging interpretations. In the case of Western relations with Iran, these historical narratives remain deeply emotional, coloured among other things by humiliation, anger, betrayal, mistrust, and pride. Lederach writes that ‘through our response, we choose to transcend or enter and sustain the cycle of violence’.\textsuperscript{vii} This is not simply academic rhetoric; it is a very real call for political, religious, and community leaders to exercise greater moral imagination in response to the ongoing cycle of violence between Iran and the West. Closing down our respective embassies in Tehran and London may address an immediate need for a political response to particular actions, but it does nothing to challenge the cycle of violence in which the actions of both sides are embedded and it further limits the lines of political, cultural, and diplomatic communication which remain a crucial element both for the de-escalation of hostilities and as a potential path for exercising our much-needed moral imaginations.

Notes:
\textsuperscript{i}. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-15966628, accessed 3 January 2012
\textsuperscript{iii}. Ibid., 5
\textsuperscript{v}. S. Walt, ‘Game Change’, December 13, 2011
\textsuperscript{vi}. www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/13/five_bold_moves_that_could_change_world_affairs, accessed 3 January 2012
\textsuperscript{vii}. Ibid.

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cii SEMINAR REPORT
The Civilian Contribution to Peace Operations: Assessing Progress and Identifying Gaps

Dr Stephanie Blair and Ms Sharon Wiharta\textsuperscript{i}

In 1999 the Brahimi report acknowledged the deficit of civilian specialists in peace operations. On the 10\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of that seminal report it was encouraging to note that progress has been made, particularly with regard to training and recruitment through the setting up of national and international rosters. However, the main challenges identified in the report, including the paucity of finding suitably qualified civilians at either the right time or in the number required, remains. The UN Secretary-General’s report on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict acknowledged that the policy discourse and debate has woefully been Western-centric and highlighted the need for greater engagement with the Global South. United Nation’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO) in its recently published non-paper entitled A New Partnership Agenda: Chartering a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping, echoed that sentiment and called for enhanced partnership arrangements with regional organizations and national governments alike through better information-sharing and coordination.

To continue reading please click here.

Note:
\textsuperscript{i}. Dr Stephanie Blair presented at a cii seminar on 18 January 2012. This contribution details her presentation.
From Kosovo to Libya: Air Strikes in Past and Future Military Interventions

Mr John Dandoulakis

Going over the recent Libyan intervention one is inevitably led to make comparisons with similar NATO operations of the past. At first glance it can quickly be assumed that the place of air strikes and network-centric technology in international intervention has been restored and strengthened. Indeed one has to go as far back as 1999 in Kosovo to find a strikingly similar intervention operation of applying overwhelming airpower without any land forces deployment. Both the Libyan and Kosovo campaigns present a full-scale application of the Effects Based Operations (EBO) based on network-centric technology. Following the Kosovo exploits, EBOs and network-centric warfare prevailed in American military doctrine during the George W. Bush administration and Donald Rumsfeld’s service as the Secretary of Defense. These concepts were solidified in Rumsfeld’s ‘Transformation Planning Guidance’ (TPG) in April 2003.

In brief, the 2003 TPG provided increased investment in network-centric technology that applies mainly to air warfare and stand-off naval operations; an application of which was well demonstrated during the Kosovo war and the recent Libyan operation. The TPG augmented ‘Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance’ or C4ISR capabilities, for navy, air and land forces alike, yet with an unequal distribution in favour of the former two branches of the US military.

Network-centric warfare formed the basis for the planning of 2001 ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ in Afghanistan and ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’ in 2003, where its application proved successful in delivering the initially required outcome. These doctrines were, however, challenged following the later debacles in the Iraq and Afghanistan theatres. The “Afghan model” of 2001 started to break down when, after 2004, enemy insurgency reappeared and persisted.

As a response to the evolving challenges US military doctrine was once again revised in 2006 through the FM 3-24 Joint Army/ Marines Counter-Insurgency Doctrine Field Manual. In summary, FM 3-24 replaced main attention at Counter-Insurgency (COIN) and ‘Three Block Warfare’, concepts of modern warfare that apply to land forces operating in non-conventional situations and especially within a civilian environment.

The Iraq and Afghanistan operations had to master the successful combination of air and land warfare from the very beginning. The Libyan civil war, instead, allowed...
for the stand-alone employment of air strikes and network-centric technology at a large scale, coupled with a successful result, for the first time since Kosovo. Yet, the scenario will not be always similar one in the future. Besides, it has been proven that a conventional high-scale operation can very rapidly evolve into a low-to-medium scale insurgency situation where conventional tactics and network-centric technology have proved inappropriate.

In fact, it appears that air strikes, whether stand-alone or accompanied by land forces, can only be successfully applied against a conventional military apparatus and one that is highly dependent on the civilian infrastructure of its country. For strategic infrastructure is the main feature that network-centric technology of modern air warfare can target and destroy delivering the desired effects. Such was the case with the Serbian army in 1999 and similarly with the Taliban in 2001. At that time the Taliban regime was officially ruling the country, their military functioned more like a conventional army than the insurgent outlook it later adopted, and of course relied on Afghanistan civilian infrastructure as well. The same was certainly true of Saddam Hussein’s army in 2003. In these scenarios, thus, land forces operating on the ground and air force striking from above can be successfully combined. After 2004, however, both in Iraq and Afghanistan, the surviving enemy or successors to the old enemy (as such successors always appear to be), began to use insurgent tactics. Such an army presents external characteristics quite different to a conventional one. It is capable of hiding and unpredictably striking at anyplace and at anytime, but
most importantly does not rely on any targetable strategic infrastructure. Hence, air strikes and EBOs cannot assist the deployed land forces against an insurgent army in any decisive way.

Now, the effective application of network-centric warfare in the Libyan intervention has reminded everyone that Kosovo-style stand-alone air strikes can actually work. Firstly, we have had this upshot before, and secondly, it does in no way imply that NATO can expect to solely rely on air strikes. Gaddafi’s army, against which NATO forces were deployed, was just another conventional military apparatus relying on its targetable military and civilian infrastructure. This is exactly the reason why air strikes and the reliance on vastly superior weaponry proved successful in assisting the anti-Gaddafi forces. There exists some scarce information about Special Forces operating on the ground in Libya. They are reported as small groups of operators that assisted only in training and consultation to anti-Gaddafi forces. Yet, even if their deployment had been wider and their role larger they would still be facing an easy challenge. Fighting against a conventional army is what they have been trained for, while the flat unvegetated Libyan landscape would have been a quite less complex environment to operate than that of Afghanistan.

Finally, yes, the idea of economising on land forces whenever possible is a legitimate and a very noble one. Nonetheless, not all conflicts of the future are guaranteed to be similar to the Libyan or the Kosovo scenarios. In fact, since a modern conventional conflict scenario can so easily turn into an insurgent one, the chances of both types of warfare reappearing in the future are quite equally balanced. In future, the choice between the deployment of COIN tactics or network-centric warfare will be defined by the nature and character of the enemy. In the meantime, instead of exclusively arguing in favour of either network-centric warfare or COIN, western military thinkers and policy-makers should invest in ‘Three Block Warfare’ capabilities, as generously as in network-centric C4ISR technology.

Note: i The Effects Based Operations (EBOs) was first coined as a concept by Gulf War 1991 American veterans, who had already realised the potential of modern technology’s application in military operations. In short, EBOs refers to air strikes and other stand-off attack tactics combined with non-military means, such as disabling the enemy’s mass media network or disrupting telecommunications, that promise the delivery of a decisive effect against the enemy before being engaged in, and thus minimising the work required by, close combat. EBOs rely on a fully computerised and digitalised C4ISR system; they take full advantage of the complex information technology system that US Navy and Air Force have at their disposal. It has worked perfectly against state-actors with conventional targetable infrastructure, but very poorly against non-state actor insurgency.

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Media Reviews

November - December 2011

Ms Katharine Wright

The cii media review seeks to examine commentary on key international intervention issues across the globe from November to December 2011. In doing so this review draws strongly on the cii twitter community and in particular the tweets and retweets of Professor Sir Michael Aaronson (@MikeAaronson), Dr Roberta Guerrina (@rguerrina) and Dr Jack Holland (@DrJackHolland)

The issues covered include: Pakistan and Obama’s use of drones; Libya; the ICC; Syria, Iraq and gender and opinions of military intervention.

Pakistan and the Drones
Murtaza Hussain’s piece for Al Jazeera via (@ajenglish) sheds light on the legal retaliation against the US drone
attacks on Pakistan. The Pakistan based NGO, the Foundation for Fundamental Rights (FFR) and the UK NGO Reprieve are challenging US impunity, with the hope of bringing to an end an un-manned bombing campaign which the CIA have admitted makes it difficult to distinguish between civilian and non-civilian targets.

Libya
A blog by Sean Rocha (@seanrocha) critiqued Hugh Roberts essay in the London Review of Books entitled ‘Who said Gaddafi had to go?’ Although Rocha agrees with the legitimacy of Roberts’ initial question, this is where their approaches and arguments take different turns. Rocha criticises Roberts’ placement of the intervention in Libya in the context of other Western interventions and failure to draw on their significant differences, primarily that few of these other interventions have been preceded by large scale public revolts against the regime. Rocha also questions whether Gadaffi would have agreed to resign, and Roberts fails to show any evidence that he would have, suggesting a ceasefire and negotiations would have served as stalling tactics for the regime to rearm. This is an interesting and nuanced exchange which raises important questions which will need to be addressed in order to assess the legitimacy of NATO’s intervention. For further insight see Mike Aaronson’s assessment on our blog: ‘Was the International Intervention in Libya a Success?’. (@MikeAaronson).

Following the death of Gadaffi and the emergence of mobile phone footage showing how he was treated, the ICC Prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, has raised the possibility that it may have been a war crime under Article 8 (2a). The National Transitional Council in Libya has been asked to investigate but as David Bosco (@multilateralist) comments in Foreign Policy, there is a question of whether the ICC will investigate, given that it has consistently prioritised large-scale crimes over individual ones.

Syria
In the Guardian ‘comment is free’ section, Nick Cohen argues that the “West has a duty to intervene” militarily in Syria. Cohen is perhaps unfairly critical of the Arab League’s current efforts to resolve the situation and is keen to cite Michael Weiss’s assessment of the legality and logistics of intervening in Syria. This article has provoked debate on twitter with Emile Hokayem (@emile_hoyakem) questioning the reliance on Syrians abroad to gauge the opinion of those within the country. Hokayem goes on to defend Arab League observers arguing that despite their inadequacies they have created a space for Syrian protesters.

Iraq
In Iraq, we saw the withdrawal of all US forces in time for Christmas and Obama’s U-turn with the “dumb” war becoming a “success”. Was electoral logic driving Obama, as Dr Holland suggests via @DrJackHolland?

Gender and Opinions on Military Intervention
The LSE Politics blog has a piece on the relationship between support for UK military intervention and gender, which was highlighted by Dr Guerrina (@rguerrina). Cross-national research has consistently shown significant differences in the level of approval or disapproval between men and women. In a continuation of this women have continued to be less supportive of military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya.

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January 2012

Sir Michael Aaronson

Iran/ Syria

Throughout January there was a surge of media activity covering possible military intervention to halt Iran’s nuclear programme. This, together with the continued agonising over whether armed intervention was needed to resolve the crisis in Syria, prompted Professor Sir Mike Aaronson to post a piece on the cii blog entitled ‘The Interventionist Fallacy?’, questioning the assumptions on which much talk about intervention appears to be based.

Sir Michael Aaronson is co-director of the Centre for International Intervention.