After all the bellicose bluster of recent weeks and months there is a faint chance that the tide of war may be receding in the Middle East -- specially in the two hot spots of Iran and Syria. The latest developments in these countries suggest the possible opening of a new phase of dialogue rather than of conflict.

Gaza is the major exception to this somewhat more promising picture. Israel’s air strikes have this past week taken the lives of some 25 Palestinians and wounded close to a hundred more. Palestinian factions struck back with rockets, wounding a dozen Israeli. But these painful events should not distract attention from the bigger picture.

Just when Benyamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister, was at his most bellicose at the recent AIPAC convention in Washington. Meanwhile, just when Syria seemed to be sinking into the hell of a “sectarian civil” war. Israel detests the idea of the great powers negotiating a settlement with Tehran, since it knows that talks must inevitably result in recognizing Iran’s right to enrich uranium, if only to modest levels for purely civilian purposes. Netanyahu wants Iran’s entire nuclear programme shut down — his goal is “zero enrichment” — a demand which no Iranian regime, whatever its colouring, could possibly accept.

On his recent visit to Washington, Netanyahu tried to secure a pledge from President Barack Obama to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities or to lend American support to an Israeli strike. He failed to get the pledge he wanted. Although Obama reaffirmed his determination to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, he also made very clear to Netanyahu that talks must first be given a chance to work. For all Netanyahu’s tough talk, it is highly unlikely that Israel will dare attack Iran on its own. Its strategy has been to get the United States to do the job for it — in much the same way as pro-Israeli neo-conservatives, like Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith, manipulated intelligence to push the United States into war against Iraq in 2003 on Israel’s behalf. Israel wants at all costs to protect its regional monopoly of nuclear weapons. It has a nuclear arsenal estimated at between 75 and 150 warheads, a range of sophisticated delivery systems, and a second strike capability based on long-range missiles mounted on German-supplied submarines. In contrast, there is as yet no convincing evidence that Iran intends to build a nuclear weapon. America’s annual National Intelligence Estimate — the collective opinion of its 16 intelligence agencies — has repeatedly confirmed that Tehran has not so far taken any such decision.

Talk of Israel facing an “existential threat” from Iran has no basis in fact. Rather it is Israel’s neighbours who risk annihilation. As the former French President Jacques Chirac once said: If Iran were ever to contemplate launching a suspect missile towards Israel, Tehran would be immediately
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obiterated! The issue is not, and has never been, about ensuring Israel's survival, but rather about ensuring its regional military supremacy -- a supremacy which, over the past several decades, has given it the freedom to strike its neighbours at will without being hit back. If Iran were ever to acquire a nuclear weapon -- or merely the capability of building one -- Israel fears this would restrict its freedom of action. It might even be a step towards creating a regional balance of power, which Israel is determined to prevent. Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said that if Iran were supplied with 20% enriched uranium for the Tehran Research Reactor and medical purposes, it would immediately stop enriching uranium to that level, restricting itself to 3.5% enrichment for electricity generation. (He repeated this pledge to Lally Weymouth of the Washington Post on 13 September 2011; to Nicholas Kristof of the New York Times on 21 September 2011; and to Reuters on 22 September 2011. To Iranian TV in October 2011, he declared: "If they give us the 20 per cent fuel, we will immediately halt 20 per cent.") In return, however, he would no doubt expect a US guarantee that it would not seek to overthrow the Iranian regime by subversion or force. The outline of a deal with Iran is, therefore, already on the table. As for the Syrian conflict, neither President Bashar al-Asad nor his opponents seem yet ready to compromise. Having flushed out the rebels from Homs, President Assad is now seeking to drive them out of their other strong-points before he will contemplate a negotiation. For their part, the rebels seem to believe that -- with fresh fighters, weapons and funds flowing in to them -- they must eventually triumph. Both sides are almost certainly mistaken. Kofi Annan's task is to persuade them that there can be no military solution to the conflict, and that, sooner or later, they must sit down and negotiate a way out of a crisis which is destroying their country. United States Counterinsurgency author Mr. David H. PETRAEUS another catastrophe such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I am thinking west shrugged off? Poyraz Gürson Ph.D.
Geçmişten geleceğe miras...