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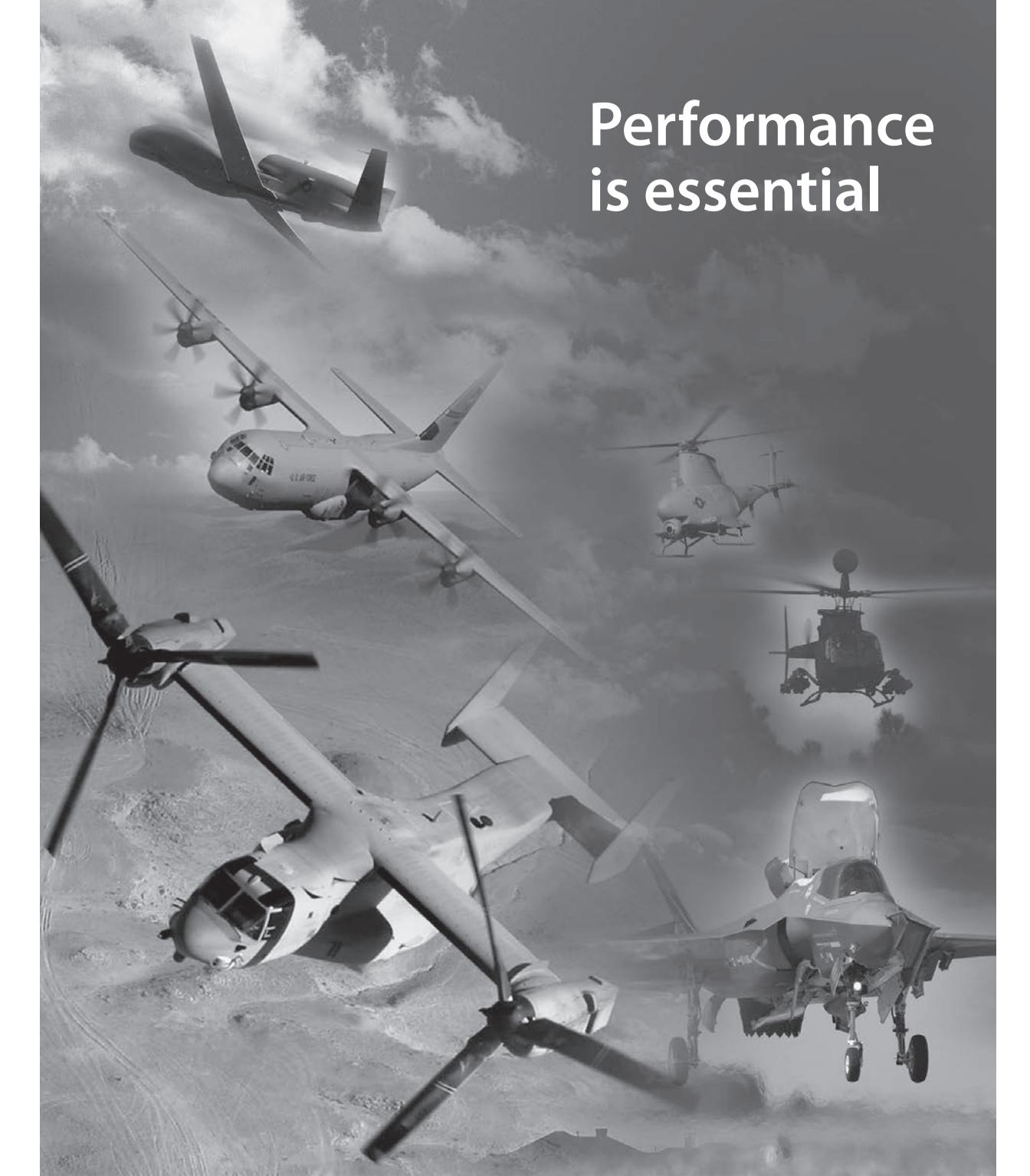


**The
Arab Spring
Year One**

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From the Publisher

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to present, as your new publisher, the very content-rich product in your hands, organized so well by Editor Ilan Berman and Deputy Editor James Colbert.

For a long time, the Arab Middle East—and the Muslim world more broadly—was considered immune to popular revolt and dramatic political change.

The collapse of communism, the reunification of Germany, the fall of South African Afrikaner rule, the end of autocracies in South America, and the economic liberalization of China were just some of the 20th century global transformations that seemed to pass Araby by.

But now, in the wake of Tunisia and Tahrir Square, post-Mubarak and Gaddafi, political realities in the Middle East and North Africa are shifting as quickly as the sands. Regimes and political systems have been challenged, raising many questions in the process. Who fell and who remained stable, and why? And just what are the consequences for American interests?

To address these questions, and others, this issue of *The Journal of International Security Affairs* presents a stunning range of scholarly insights.

But that is not all; in this edition, we also look to Asia. The Pacific has become a dominant factor in American economic, political, diplomatic, and military policy planning. North Korea, Pakistan, and China are just some of the hot spots in our dangerous, dynamic international environment.

In addition, we have foreign “dispatches” and reviews of important new books, as well as a rare one-on-one interview with the Honorable Robert C. “Bud” McFarlane, who served as National Security Advisor to President Ronald Reagan.

It is, without a doubt, a thorough presentation by an amazing array of scholars. Please take some time this spring and summer to work your way through our *Journal*. We promise that you won’t be disappointed. We will have another issue for Fall/Winter, when the world will have turned yet again.



Larry Greenfield
Publisher

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WHAT LIES BENEATH THE “ARAB SPRING”

Reva Bhalla

More than a year has passed since the fall of the region’s most stalwart Arab leader unleashed a current of dissent throughout the Arab world. That unrest, which spread from the Maghreb to the Arabian Peninsula, was simplistically treated in the media as an organic expression of liberal democracy that seemingly had the power to knock off Arab authoritarians one by one. Today, however, the initial euphoria over the so-called “Arab Spring” has predictably given way to disillusionment.

After sacrificing the Ben Ali regime, Tunisia’s army and security establishment stand ready to intervene should the country’s Islamist-filled legislature overstep its boundaries in challenging the relics of the ancien régime.

In Egypt, many forget (or fail to realize altogether) that the military establishment exploited the demonstrations to destroy Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s dynastic succession plan. Even as it seeks more creative maneuvers to rule behind what is expected to be an enfeebled parliament, the Egyptian military elite will remain the ultimate arbiter of the state for the foreseeable future.

In Libya, after a rare NATO-led military intervention played the instrumental role of driving Gaddafi and his family from power, the once-celebrated rebel forces are again being viewed as a ragtag assortment of militias vying for the spoils of war in the absence of a legitimate, much less democratic, political authority.

In Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh has given up his presidential title for now under a Saudi-mediated power-sharing agreement with his rivals. Still, there is little to hide the fact that Saleh’s regime, now led by his close family members, remains entrenched in the



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security, political and economic spheres of the state.

Meanwhile, embattled Arab leaders are thankful for the distraction Syria has created as the latest flashpoint in the Middle East. Just as the Assad regime has proven unable to stamp out its domestic opposition, so too have Syria's still fractious, outgunned and outnumbered opposition forces been unable to overwhelm a largely united Alawite-dominated security and intelligence apparatus. Barring a foreign military intervention—something that no military power, particularly the United States, seems keen on—the Syrian regime can endure for some time to come, even as it becomes all the more dependent on Iran for its survival.

The mainstream narrative regarding the Arab unrest has by and large failed to anticipate these developments. There is little predictive value in starting with an assumption that all demonstrations will lead to revolutions, and all revolutions to liberal democracies. Geopolitical context must also be applied. In particular, there are three underlying trends that began developing well before the start of the Arab unrest—and which can help to explain what has happened over the past year, and what to expect going forward.

The rise of Islamism

Any discussion on the Islamist revival in the Middle East must begin with a heavy caveat that this is a movement that takes on many distinct forms, from the Hanafi school of thought predominant in Turkey and the northern rim of the Middle East to the Wahhabism that spans the Arabian Peninsula to the Twelver Shi'a doctrine practiced in Iran to the ultra-orthodox Salafist ideology espoused by al-Qaeda and its *jihadi* affiliates.

The rise of political Islamists certainly did not begin with the "Arab Spring." It arguably started some six

decades earlier, when—following two world wars—the withdrawal of European imperial powers left the Arab monarchies of the region to fend for themselves against a surge of nationalist fervor that had spilled over from the European continent.

The Arab response to this nationalist current took on two main forms. One was embodied by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the founder of modern Egypt and of the concept of a United Arab Republic. The second was articulated by Hassan al-Banna, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt in 1928. The former saw the need for secular, socialist and statist regimes dominated by the military to replace the European-sponsored monarchies and ultimately unite in pan-Arab interests. The latter saw a return to Islam, and more specifically the eventual creation of a worldwide Islamic caliphate, as a remedy to the ills that had befallen Muslim societies.

While Nasserism toppled monarchies in Egypt, Libya, Syria and Iraq, the monarchist regimes of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Morocco held their ground. The Islamist forces in the Arab world, however, remained largely in the shadows, with some elements turning to militancy in an effort to achieve their aims, while others remained patient and focused on their long-term political agenda. Groups like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood positioned themselves as the eventual alternative to Arab regimes that descended into cronyism, corruption and nepotism.

That the Muslim Brotherhood ended up garnering as many votes as it did in post-Mubarak Egypt, therefore, should not have come as a surprise. This was a political opening that the organization had been anticipating for decades. Egypt's Islamists are not in a rush. No Muslim Brotherhood leader is under the illusion that the party will be able to exercise meaningful political power

under the shadow of the military. Thus it has become the “loyal opposition,” cooperating closely, albeit quietly, with the military during this sensitive political transition. But with time and even more patience, the group hopes to gradually chip away at the military’s authority and inject its Islamist political agenda back into Egyptian history.

The gradual international acceptance of the Muslim Brotherhood as a political player is naturally emboldening Islamist groups beyond Egypt, which are now hoping to ride the Brotherhood’s coattails to political legitimacy. Included among these groups is Hamas (itself an outgrowth of the MB), which is now in internal contortions over whether to follow its parent organization and moderate, or to stay the militant course.

The country most alarmed by this evolution is, of course, Israel. The past 33 years arguably have been the most strategically beneficial in Israel’s history. As a result of the Camp David Accords, Israel succeeded in securing a Sinai buffer on its southern border, augmenting the strong working relationship it had already established with Jordan to its east. The Syrians, meanwhile, were more preoccupied with making money in Lebanon, and could not alone pose a strategic threat to the Jewish state.

Israel now faces an uncertain future on every one of its frontiers. The Egyptian Brotherhood has a long-term agenda to undermine the military’s authority, while the Syrian regime is battling an opposition in which long-repressed Sunni Islamists compose a significant faction of, and carry considerable support among, Syrian street protesters. Even in Jordan, the Hashemite regime is coming under political pressure to shore up its credibility among Islamists.

The problems that Israel faces with its neighbors are not immediate, but they are building. This can already be seen in the preemptive posture Israel is taking in

trying to guard the Sinai while the Egyptian military remains distracted with its domestic turmoil. The Islamist revival in this region may have been a long time coming, but it isn’t one that Israel or regional mediators like the United States had prepared for.

The gradual international acceptance of the Muslim Brotherhood as a political player is naturally emboldening Islamist groups beyond Egypt, which are now hoping to ride the Brotherhood’s coattails to political legitimacy.

Iran’s ascendance

When demonstrations erupted in Bahrain in February 2011 and later spread to Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province, they were quickly lumped in with the unrest taking place in North Africa as part of the unfolding “Arab Spring.” Long-standing and legitimate grievances drove these demonstrations, but there was much more to the story of what was happening among the Shi’ite communities along the eastern littoral of the Arabian Peninsula.

As the United States completed its military withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, it left behind a power vacuum for Iran to fill in the heart of the Arab world. From Iran’s point of view, this was a moment well worth waiting for. The U.S. decision to topple Saddam Hussein in 2003 represented a historic opportunity for Iran. Far beyond the question of nuclear weapons, Iraq, which already demographically favors the Shi’a, is the key to Iran’s regional security and prosperity. If Iran is able to consolidate Shi’ite influence there, it not only avoids another nightmare scenario like the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war; it also secures a new source of abundant resources, as well as a foothold in the

Arab world from which to project influence. Iran was ready to seize the opportunity and, much to the displeasure of the United States and Iran's Arab neighbors, would do everything in its power to hold on to it.

The "Arab Spring" narrative has frequently blurred the ideological and strategic aims of the United States, resulting in mixed messages to its Mideast allies as well as to the Arab street at large.

To do so, Tehran needs to drive its main adversaries toward an accommodation that overwhelmingly favors Iranian interests. An ideal accommodation from the Iranian point of view would entail recognition of Iran's preeminent role in the region, security guarantees for the clerical regime, restrictions on the U.S. military's presence in the Persian Gulf, an end to sanctions, and economic concessions that would grant Iran greater access to the Arab world's energy wealth. These are big goals for Iran to realize, but the only way it can convince its adversaries to come to the negotiating table is if it can sufficiently intimidate them into thinking that the cost of an unsavory negotiation is still cheaper than confronting Iran militarily.

One opportunity came in the form of Shi'ite unrest in Bahrain. When demonstrations erupted there in February 2011, Iran succeeded in painting a nightmare scenario for the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council states: the potential for long-simmering sectarian unrest to ignite and spread from the isles of Bahrain to the Shi'ite-concentrated oil-rich Eastern Province in the Saudi kingdom. By March, the GCC states carried out a hasty (and unprecedented) military intervention in Bahrain. They knew what was

at stake; this was not simply about the "Arab Spring," but also about the need to prevent Iran from exploiting a Shi'ite wave of dissent and driving the GCC states toward capitulation.

Thus far, the Iranians have relied on their strengths in the covert arena to pursue their agenda in Bahrain and the wider Persian Gulf. This is a space in which Iran feels comfortable operating, a relatively low risk and potentially high reward method of realizing its strategic objectives. For Bahrain specifically, Iran seems to be relying primarily on its religious, political, business and intelligence links to block negotiations between the Shi'ite opposition and the royal Sunni al-Khalifa family, escalate the protests and instigate clashes with the aim of creating a sectarian affair that could potentially reshape the balance of power in eastern Arabia in favor of the Shi'a.

But Iran is not operating without constraints, either. Iran has experience in supporting proxies like Hezbollah at much greater distances than Bahrain, and could theoretically increase supplies of arms, materiel, training and other means of support to the hard-line Shi'ite opposition in Bahrain concealed in the day-to-day flow of commerce and civilian travel. However, the GCC states have been quick to crack down on their respective Shi'ite communities and, realizing what is at stake, now appear to be keeping a tight grip on the security situation. This is a theater that will need to be watched closely for signs of greater Iranian involvement, especially as the opposition February 14th Movement is now exhibiting much tighter organization and a much more advanced skill set than it did when the demonstrations first broke out.

Just as the unrest in eastern Arabia cannot be viewed solely through the prism of the "Arab Spring," the growing instability in Syria must also be viewed

in the context of the wider regional struggle with Iran. Maintaining an Alawite minority regime in Damascus that will remain favorable to Iranian interests is crucial to Tehran’s regional deterrence. Without that Levantine foothold, Iran faces a much more difficult time supporting key militant proxies like Hezbollah, and would no longer be able to claim influential reach into the Mediterranean basin.

This is an enticing prospect for those in the region seeking to punch a hole in Iran’s arc of influence, particularly after having largely conceded Baghdad to Tehran. The United States, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, in particular, see a strategic opportunity in Syria to contain Iran. Ironically, the Israelis this time are on the fence. From the Israeli point of view, the virtue of the Assad regime lies in its predictability. Whatever its public pronouncements about the desirability of change in Damascus, for Israel there is considerable danger in its northern frontier devolving into a sectarian war in which there is no clear victor.

Compounding matters for Israel is the fact that none of the stakeholders in the Syrian crisis appear willing to incur the costs of carrying out a military intervention to topple the Assad regime. Caught between the intent to weaken Iran and the lack of will to intervene militarily, the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and others are more likely to operate in the more politically-convenient grey area of covert operations to supply, train and arm rebel forces. These operations have been framed with the expectation that the regime will eventually crack from within and thus eliminate the need for military intervention, but that is still a big assumption to make. The Assad regime is doubtlessly struggling to contain the unrest, but its Alawite-dominated forces are largely holding together. This should not come as a surprise, considering that Alawite power in

Syria is only five decades old and that a significant number of Syrian minorities have much to fear from having power back in the hands of the Sunni majority.

Israel thus has an additional dilemma to contemplate. What happens if a severely alienated Alawite regime not only survives this conflict, but becomes all the more dependent on Iran for its survival? Iran, nervous at the prospect of losing a strategic ally, has already used the Syrian crisis to significantly augment the presence of its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in both Syria and Lebanon. In the end, a stalemated conflict in Syria may do more to strengthen Iran’s position in the Levant than weaken it.

A Turkish expansion

For Turkey, the “Arab Spring” has been a mixed blessing. On the one hand, regional events have allowed Turkey to accelerate its regional rise and position itself as the moderate Islamist model for energized opposition forces budding along its periphery. On the other hand, Turkey has yet to match its rhetoric with action in trying to mediate the Arab unrest. Turkish activism has been hampered by fears among the Arab states of deeper imperial motives behind the former Ottoman republic’s activism. On a deeper level, Turkey is finding through the crisis in Syria that it is not yet prepared to fulfill its natural role as the geopolitical counterweight to Iran.

Of late, Turkey has been on a resurgent path, using the inherent power in its economic clout, geographic positioning, military might and cultural influence to refill widening pockets of influence throughout the former Ottoman periphery. Most recently, it has sought to manage post-Saddam Iraq, increased hostilities with Israel for political gain, fumbled with the Russians in the Caucasus over Armenia and Azerbaijan, fiddled with Iranian nuclear negotiations, and so on.

With geopolitical opportunities presenting themselves on nearly all of Turkey's borders, Ankara can afford some experimentation. During this phase, Turkey could spread itself relatively far and wide in trying to reclaim influence, all while waving the white flag of "zero problems with neighbors."

The invisible hand of geopolitics teaches that politicians, regardless of personality, ideology or anything else, will pursue strategic ends without being necessarily aware of the contribution of policies to national power. The gentle nudges by the invisible hand guiding Turkey for most of the past decade are now transforming into a firm, unyielding push.

While it took some time for Turkey to find its footing, it has steadily sharpened its focus abroad, containing threats and exploiting a range of political and economic opportunities. Now, from the Sahara to the Persian Gulf, Turkey's Middle Eastern backyard is on fire, with mass protests knocking the legs out from under a legacy of Arab cronyism. Whether Ankara is ready or not, the Middle East is hitting the accelerator button on Turkey's rise.

However, when surveying the region, Turkish influence is still in its infancy. After flip-flopping on its support for the NATO military intervention in Libya, Turkey is now eyeing an opportunity to regain a foothold in North Africa. Turkish influence has historically had a difficult time in reaching the deserts of the Maghreb. The problem that Turkey faces, like every other power trying to claim a stake in Libya, is that there is no legitimate political authority in the country that Turkey can deal with on a strategic level, or that even wants to deal with Turkey on such a level.

In Egypt (where the Turks ruled under the Ottoman empire from 1517 to 1796), there does not appear much that Turkey can do to influence the

political transition. The Egyptian military remains the ultimate authority in Cairo and intends to keep its Islamist opposition in check. Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) welcomes the stability ushered in by the military, but would also like to see Egypt transformed in its own image. Having lived it for decades, the AKP leadership has internalized the consequences of military rule and has made the subordination of the military to civilian (particularly Islamic) political forces the core of its political agenda at home. Turkey's AKP therefore has a strategic interest in ensuring the military in Egypt keeps its promise of relinquishing control to the civilians and providing a political opening for the Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Well before Turkey can hope to project influence in North Africa, however, it must deal with the more immediate problem of Syria. Repeated ultimatums to the Syrian leadership have predictably fallen on deaf ears, and it is extremely unlikely that Turkey would undertake a military intervention on its own. The personal relationship between al-Assad and Erdoğan is irrelevant to this issue. Turkey's geopolitical imperative for the Levant is to see Syria return to Sunni rule. More specifically, Turkey's current rulers would prefer to see the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood develop its political authority under Turkish instruction. Naturally, all this puts Turkey directly at odds with Iran.

Turkey's confrontation with Iran was inevitable. Turkish-Iranian competition had already been quietly building in Iraq, but the crisis in Syria did far more to expose the underlying tensions between these two regional powers. The problem that Turkey faces is that it is simply not ready for a serious confrontation with its Persian neighbor. Indeed, even as Turkey has engaged in the most hard-line rhetoric against Iran's allies in

Syria, it has at the same time played a critical role in helping Iran circumvent sanctions. This is a balancing act that Turkey cannot avoid in this early stage of its regional rise.

The U.S. search for balance

In the mid-20th century, the United States replaced the United Kingdom as the Middle East’s primary security guarantor and external balancer. To maintain a balance of power in the Persian Gulf, it provided security guarantees to the Gulf Cooperation Council states while trying (and eventually failing) to keep a foothold in Iran to balance a Soviet-backed Iraq. To maintain an Arab-Israeli balance of power, the United States mediated a security agreement between Egypt and Israel that excised Soviet influence from Cairo and essentially eliminated the need for Egypt and Israel to engage in a mutually thankless military conflict across the Sinai desert. And in Eurasia, the United States developed a strategic relationship with Turkey to keep the Soviets from reaching the Mediterranean basin, and with Israel to keep Soviet-backed Syria, Egypt and Iraq off balance.

The atmosphere of the Cold War certainly helped fuel U.S. activism in the Middle East. But then again, when Saddam Hussein—following a devastating, protracted war with neighboring Iran—invaded Kuwait with the intent of changing the balance of power in the Persian Gulf, it was the United States that once again stepped in to maintain the status quo.

However, the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing war against militant Islam knocked the United States off balance. More than a decade after the attacks, the United States is still struggling to extricate itself from its wars in the Islamic world while trying to avoid getting ensnared in new ones. The distractions

that have consumed the United States have served Russia, Iran and China well, as all are now looking for additional ways to keep the United States too preoccupied to be able to fulfill its global policeman responsibilities in their respective corners of the world.

With instability rising from the Maghreb to the Persian Gulf, all regional stakeholders are looking to the United States to clarify its intentions. The GCC states want to know that America will place the strategic need to contain Iran above human rights condemnations. Egypt wants to know that the U.S. will place the strategic need to contain Islamism and maintain the Egypt-Israel peace treaty above its pronouncements on the need for a genuine democratic transition. Turkey wants to know that the United States will accept and work with political Islamists if it also wants Turkish assistance in balancing Iran and Russia.

The “Arab Spring” narrative has frequently blurred the ideological and strategic aims of the United States, resulting in mixed messages to its Middle-east allies as well as to the Arab street at large. Indeed, America has yet to clarify for itself what the idea of a “democratic peace” actually means, when laid against the hard realities of this region. Now is as good a time as ever for policymakers in Washington to take an introspective pause to reevaluate their long-term strategic interests in the Middle East. The only problem is that global superpowers rarely, if ever, have the luxury of being able to take such time-outs.





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MOROCCO'S MOMENTUM

J. Peter Pham

Amid the upheaval that swept across the Middle East and North Africa since the dramatic December 2010 suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old Tunisian street vendor, ignited long pent-up frustration with the regimes across the region, Morocco has stood out as an exception. Not only has the kingdom avoided both revolutionary tumult and violent repression, but while their neighbors were still struggling to come to terms with the so-called “Arab Spring,” Moroccans adopted a new constitution and elected a new government (albeit one led for the first time in the country’s history by an Islamist party). The question now is whether this extraordinarily peaceful transformation is sustainable, and, if it is, what the implications might be for the region as a whole.

Ahead of the game

Given the material reasons its people might have for grievance, Morocco was—at least superficially—a likelier candidate for revolutionary upheaval than its North African neighbors. In fact, on certain indices, Moroccans were indeed worse off than the citizens of any other country in the Maghreb. At the beginning of 2011, GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) in the kingdom was, respectively, just under half of what it was in Tunisia, three-fourths of what it was in Egypt, one-third of what it was in Libya, and two-thirds of what it was in Algeria. While the literacy rate in Morocco has been improving substantially in recent years, it still hovers at just above 50 percent, with women making up an overwhelming majority of those unable to read or write. Overall, the average Moroccan woman can expect to have six fewer years of schooling than



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her Tunisian sister and two years less than her Egyptian sister. Additionally, Morocco has a higher infant mortality rate and a lower life expectancy than any of the other four North African states.¹

So why didn't Moroccans revolt against a system that has so clearly left them behind their neighbors? It was not that they were unaware of the protests: satellite dishes are ubiquitous even in the poorest areas, virtually every Moroccan adult has a mobile phone, and the country has one of the most technologically advanced Internet services, both cable and wireless, in Africa. Rather, other factors were at play.

The current king, Mohammed VI, has made an ambitious program of reform and political opening the hallmark of his reign.

First, unlike most of the Arab Middle East outside Egypt, where the nation-state is a colonial artifice created out of the wreckage of the Ottoman Empire, Morocco has a political history that stretches back more than twelve centuries. The current Alaouite Dynasty, which traces its lineage from the Prophet Mohammed through his daughter Fatima and the Caliph Ali—thus justifying the reigning monarch's claim to be *Amir al-Mu'minin* ("Commander of the Faithful")—has occupied the throne since 1666, the year of the Great Fire of London. The fifteenth sultan of Morocco in that lineage, Mohammed III, was, in 1777, the first foreign sovereign to recognize the independence of the United States. Thus, the current monarch, King Mohammed VI, enjoys a historical and political legitimacy that is unmatched in the Arab world, and compared to which the Saudi royals—to say nothing of the region's presidential dynasties—are newcomers. The traditional bonds between

sovereign and people are renewed annually in the ceremony of the *bay'a*, or oath of allegiance, where representatives of all sectors of the populace pledge their fidelity to the throne and the monarch reaffirms his commitment to defending the rights of citizens as well as the independence, territorial integrity, and welfare of the kingdom.

Second, the current king, Mohammed VI, has made an ambitious program of reform and political opening the hallmark of his reign. In one of his first acts, the monarch created an Independent Arbitration Commission to compensate those who had suffered detention and other human rights abuses during his father Hassan II's long reign. The panel, the first of its kind in the region, heard more than 7,000 cases and awarded more than \$100 million in reparation payments. In 2004, acting on the recommendation of his Advisory Council on Human Rights (CCDH) as well as various civil society groups, the king established the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) with the mandate of establishing the truth about human rights violations that occurred between independence (1956) and his ascent to the throne (1999), administering assistance to victims and their families, and recommending measures to prevent future violations and foster reconciliation. The multi-volume final report of the IER, prepared after an exhaustive review of more than 22,000 cases and unprecedented televised hearings centered on victim testimony, was a landmark document that opened the way not only to the payment of \$85 million in reparation to some 9,000 people, but also the reform of state institutions and the strengthening of the rule of law.² Even before last year's constitutional reform expanded the powers of elected officials, Morocco had a boisterous multi-party system with groups ranging from socialists to Islamists contesting elections, including parliamentary polls in 2007.

Those elections were monitored by international groups, including the National Democratic Institute, whose report, while noting “isolated irregularities,” observed that “the voting went smoothly and was characterized by a spirit of transparency and professionalism” and praised the government for providing “a significant opportunity for Moroccans to make their political views known.”³

Likewise even the touchy issue of Moroccan sovereignty over the former Spanish Sahara has seen forward movement. In 2007, the government advanced a proposal to break the long-standing impasse over the issue by offering generous autonomy to the area (including not only an elected local administration but also ideas about education and justice and the promise of financial support). Under the plan, the only matters that would remain in Rabat’s control would be defense and foreign affairs as well as the currency. The regional authority, meanwhile, would have broad powers over local administration, the economy, infrastructure, social and cultural affairs, and the environment. No less senior a U.S. official than Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has described the autonomy proposal as “serious, credible, and realistic.”⁴

Third, the political opening has been accompanied by a broader liberalization, including a reform of the family code (*Moudawana*) which the king successfully pushed through in 2004 over conservative opposition by, in part, invoking his religious authority as Commander of the Faithful. Among other provisions, the legislation significantly advanced women’s rights by elevating the minimum age of marriage to 18, limiting polygamy, granting couples joint rights over their children, and permitting women to initiate divorce proceedings.⁵ Exceptionally for the Arab world, women also have a place in Morocco’s official religious establishment with *mourchidates*, or female

religious guides, trained alongside more traditional male imams.⁶

Despite these advances, Morocco remains at risk, if for no other reason than its geographic position in a region where violent extremist ideologies are increasingly merging with criminal and other networks.

While the Moroccan government recognized that the country’s persistent massive poverty was a serious regime vulnerability, it also realized that the way to spur economic growth—which, in recent years, has averaged a respectable, if not stellar, four to five percent—was to strengthen institutions of governance and encourage the private sector. Consequently, over the last decade, the state has gradually retreated from the business sector through a series of privatizations that has opened new opportunities for an emergent middle class of entrepreneurs and technocrats. Tariffs have been slashed dramatically, if not eliminated altogether, for capital goods, raw materials, spare parts, and non-locally-produced goods. The soundness of the country’s macroeconomic approach is attested to by the 2007 signing with the United States of a deal for a \$697.5 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grant—at the time the largest compact ever entered into by the MCC. A free trade agreement between Morocco and the United States entered into force a year earlier, joining an association agreement with the European Union signed a decade before that. These steps have not gone unnoticed; a 2011 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) lauded the country’s overall efforts to improve its business climate and recommended additional steps to consolidate the achievements to date.⁷

But despite these advances, Morocco remains at risk, if for no other reason than its geographic position in a region where violent extremist ideologies are increasingly merging with criminal and other networks.⁸ In this respect, Morocco has made a significant contribution to regional and international security through its comprehensive approach to combating terrorism and extremist ideologies. According to the most recent edition of the U.S. State Department's *Country Reports on Terrorism*, the Moroccan government's "vigilant security measures, regional and international cooperation, and counter-radicalization policies" have "effectively reduced the threat." Moreover, the Congressionally-mandated document acknowledged that "King Mohammed VI has promoted significant efforts to reduce extremism and dissuade individuals from becoming radicalized," citing in particular the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), a multibillion-dollar program aimed at generating employment, fighting poverty, and improving infrastructure in both rural areas as well as the sprawling slums on the outskirts of urban centers.⁹

Morocco's own "Spring"

That Morocco was spared both the revolutionary upheavals and violent reactions that afflicted its North African and Middle Eastern neighbors beginning last year did not mean that its people were without political and economic aspirations. Nor did it indicate that the country's leaders could afford to be complacent in the face of the historic winds of change blowing across the region.¹⁰

Yet, precisely because the country has already advanced considerably along the path of liberalization, the initial response of both Morocco's traditional political opposition and the populace as a whole was relatively reserved—largely limited to small manifestations of solidar-

ity to a phenomenon viewed through an almost exclusively international perspective. It was only after some delay, and then gradually, that anonymous young people with various socio-economic grievances began to use different Internet-based social media platforms, including Facebook and YouTube, to launch what would become known as the February 20 Movement. Observers noted that "their only omission (on which there was a broad consensus), setting them apart from protests elsewhere, was to question the monarchical form of the state and the position of Mohammed VI as a monarch."¹¹ Eventually, a number of more traditional political actors mobilized as well, among them civil society organizations and Berber (Amazigh) activists, small left-wing political parties, some trade unions, and the officially banned *Al Adwal Ihsan* ("Justice and Welfare") organization of the anti-monarchist Islamist Abdesslam Yassine.

The demonstrations on February 20, 2011, were widespread, taking place in more than fifty cities. They were, however, limited; organizers said that 300,000 took part nationally, while the Ministry of the Interior claimed that only 37,000 had turned out. In either case, these were not massive numbers in a country with a population of over 32 million. While the protest marches were overwhelmingly peaceful, violence broke out in a few places away from the political and economic hubs of Rabat and Casablanca, resulting in five deaths, 128 injuries (115 of which were suffered by police and other security forces), and 120 arrests. Interior Minister Taieb Cherkaoui blamed "troublemakers, minors, and criminals" for the violence, but heralded the "peaceful climate marked by serenity and discipline" which characterized most of the demonstrations.¹²

Nevertheless, in the wake of protests, the government accelerated the pace and, in some cases, expanded the

scope of its reform program. The Economic and Social Council, created by the Constitution of 1996 but never quite implemented, was finally established and tasked with coordinating national economic and training policies.¹³ A \$2 billion second phase was announced for the INDH to target underdevelopment in 701 rural communities and 530 urban districts.¹⁴ The king announced that the old Advisory Council on Human Rights (CCDH) would be replaced by an independent National Council on Human Rights (CNDH), composed of eight members appointed by the Crown, eight elected by parliament, and eleven chosen by civil society. One of the first actions taken by the new panel was to review the cases of some 190 political prisoners, including some Islamists, and recommending that they receive pardons or commutations of sentences, which were subsequently granted by Mohammed VI.¹⁵

The king then made a surprise announcement in a nationally-televised speech on March 9th. The address was supposed to be about plans to devolve authority to the country's regions, but instead the monarch announced an even more comprehensive constitutional reform.¹⁶ Three months later, in what he described as a "watershed event" in Morocco's movement toward democracy and good governance,¹⁷ Mohammed VI publicly unveiled the new draft constitution. The new charter shifted power significantly away from the monarch—described in the royal speech as the "Citizen King"—to a prime minister who, like his analogues in other parliamentary governments, would be the leader of the party that wins the most legislative seats in elections. The parliament itself would be strengthened with expanded powers and would also be responsible for passing legislation to further devolve power to the country's regions. An independent judiciary shorn of special tribunals for government officials would ensure the

equality of citizens before the law. In a first for an Arab country, international human rights conventions, including the ones covering gender equality, would be explicitly given preeminence over national legislation in the constitution.

Notwithstanding criticism of the rushed pace of reform as well as calls by a number of groups to boycott the referendum, the constitutional changes were put to a vote on July 1st. According to official results, 73.5 percent of the voters took part in the plebiscite. The new charter was approved by 98.5 percent of them.¹⁸

Unlike its regional counterparts, Morocco's Islamist opposition, the PJD, is nothing if not integrated into the political and institutional framework of the kingdom.

An electoral earthquake

Buoyed by the overwhelmingly positive results of the referendum on the constitution, the king used his July 30th speech on the anniversary of his accession to the throne to announce that, in order for the changes to be implemented as soon as possible, early elections would be called.¹⁹ The date for the poll to fill the 395 seats of the lower house of the country's parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, for a five-year term was subsequently set for November 25th.

Although some opposition elements, most prominently Al Adl wal Ihsan and followers of the February 20 Movement, called for an election boycott, most of the political parties opted to take part. A total of thirty parties fielded candidates, but the campaign was essentially a three-way contest between two broad alliances—the eight-member "Coalition for Democracy" (dubbed the "G8") headed by incumbent Finance Minister Sala-

heddine Mezouar and incumbent Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi's three-member "Koutla" ("Coalition") group consisting of the venerable conservative nationalist Independence Party (*Istiqlal*) and two left-leaning parties—and the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD), led by Abdelilah Benkirane.

The transition now under way in Morocco could end up having ripples far beyond the kingdom's borders, presenting the fragile and beleaguered monarchies of Arabia with a compelling model to follow.

While six members of the G8 cleared the threshold to gain seats in parliament, winning a cumulative 166 seats, the clean victor was the PJD, which won 27.1 percent of the vote and came away with 107 seats, making it by far the single largest party in the new legislature. Altogether, eighteen parties returned at least one deputy. According to official tallies, 45.4 percent of the electorate turned out for the vote, up from the 37 percent who took part in the 2007 election.²⁰

Since the new constitution stipulates that the king should appoint the prime minister from the largest party in parliament, the mandate to form a government was given to the PJD's Benkirane, who formed a coalition government with support from Istiqlal, the Popular Movement (MP) and the PPS. The largest leftist party, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), which had campaigned as part of the Koutla alliance, declined an invitation to join the coalition despite considerable lobbying by the prime minister-designate. The new government was sworn in on January 3, 2012, with the PJD holding eleven of thirty ministerial portfolios.²¹

An Islamist tilt?

While the headlines surrounding the parliamentary election and the PJD's unprecedented entrance into government focused on its Islamist roots, one of the most seasoned analysts of the region has questioned the sensationalist punditry, noting that "the PJD has publicly disavowed the label of 'Islamist party,' preferring instead to describe itself as a political party 'with an Islamic frame of reference'" and that in its campaign the party emphasized its "goals of seeking to improve social services, provide employment, and combat corruption as opposed to highlighting such hot button issues as whether or not women should wear the Islamic headscarf."²² Certainly Benkirane, a onetime leftist activist, has made a concerted effort to reassure nervous Morocco watchers abroad, some of whom expressed fears that, given its antecedents, the PJD might well be a wolf in sheep's clothes.²³

There are historical and institutional reasons to be at least guardedly optimistic. While Benkirane flirted with militancy in his youth, at one point even joining the *Chabiba al Islamiyya* ("Islamic Youth") revolutionary movement, he broke with it and, according to one well-informed analyst, "became one of the first Islamist leaders in the Arab world to review, assess, and reverse the violent theoretic positions of radical Islamism" and, significantly, did so "at a time when many political Islamists were fascinated by the Iranian revolution and radical Islamists were enthralled by stories of Muslim heroism in the face of the communist onslaught in Afghanistan."²⁴ This makes "the Islamist movement in Morocco one of the first in the Arab world to embark on a process informed by the logic of the Islamic modernism movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."²⁵

The PJD is nothing if not integrated into the political and institu-

tional framework of the kingdom. Some researchers have even argued that “the party is indeed allowed to participate in institutional politics precisely because it accepts the limits imposed... on the political game.”²⁶ Consequently, when Benkirane “initially ascended to the position of party head in 2008, one of the first people to congratulate him was none other than the king himself. The monarch’s praise was a reminder of the Islamist leader’s track record of working with, not against, the regime.”²⁷

Many Moroccans, including a number who do not share the Islamists’ perspective, see the king as the ultimate guarantor of the country’s political balance. Moreover, unlike in Egypt, electoral results in Morocco force the PJD to form a coalition government, a further check on its ability to upend the country’s traditional consensual political system. Furthermore, the new government will have its hands full contending with the bread-and-butter issues that were the most important to the voters who cast their ballots, including sustaining economic growth and, perhaps even more critically, creating jobs. It must also contend with the aspirations of young people like those who sparked the February 20 Movement and who make up the largest demographic cohort in Moroccan society. These youth have consistently demanded more social freedoms and enhanced political participation alongside economic opportunities.

Continuity, and change

It is not without its ironies that the first place where, in the wake of the “Arab Spring,” an Islamist-led government should be elected to office is Morocco, where the process of change was already well under way. As the outcome of any political process is never assured, nothing is certain; however, given the worries about power being exercised by even moderate Islamists

with rather limited experience in statecraft, there is some reassurance to be found in the king serving as a check on the government. In fact, both Mohammed VI and Abdelilah Benkirane benefit from their new partnership. The latter succeeded in winning the prize that had hitherto been denied Islamists everywhere else in the Arab world, the peaceful assumption of the highest elected office in his country. The former, for his part, gave further confirmation that the gradual reform that has been the hallmark of his reign is still on track.

Moreover, the transition now under way in Morocco could end up having ripples far beyond the kingdom’s borders, presenting the fragile and beleaguered monarchies of Arabia with a compelling model to follow. If it does, Morocco will end up becoming one of the few positive products of the “Arab Spring.”



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EGYPT'S PERFECT ECONOMIC STORM

David P. Goldman

A year after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's economic crisis has become a uniquely severe event. Markets are now forecasting a devaluation of Egypt's currency by about two-thirds, as capital flight and an enormous structural trade deficit exhaust the country's foreign exchange reserves. With perhaps half of Egypt's population living on \$2 per day, a major devaluation would price basic necessities out of the reach of tens of millions of people, despite the country's extensive (if inefficient) system of subsidies. The crisis seems uncontainable; Egypt's central bank appears to have exhausted its capacity to borrow from the domestic market, and is at odds with prospective foreign donors.

As a result, Egypt now faces a financial collapse similar to those in over-indebted Latin American countries during the 1980s and 1990s, except with a crucial difference: the Latin Americans are all food exporters, while Egypt imports half its domestically consumed foodstuffs. The difference between Egypt and a Latin American banana republic is the bananas.

This is an unprecedented state of affairs, a perfect economic storm. Egypt imports half its caloric consumption and is the world's largest importer of wheat. Economic collapse will "transform a peaceful revolution into a hunger revolution," the second-in-command of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood warned on February 3rd.¹

After months of refusing to bargain with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Egypt's government has begun negotiations for a \$3.2 billion loan, or less than the amount of capital flight in December alone. But the involvement of the IMF has done little to reassure Egyptian investors. And on February 11, 2012, Egypt's Finance Min-



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ister said that his country would need \$11 billion in external aid.² Moreover, as of this writing, Egypt's insistence on prosecuting American democracy activists threatens to shut off American aid at a critical moment. It is possible that Egypt's leaders have abandoned hope of forestalling the crisis and are directing their energies instead toward finding a foreign entity to blame.

Even under the most benign political conditions, though, it is unlikely that the West or the Gulf States would offer Egypt aid on the scale required to prevent a crisis. Unlike other countries threatened by famine, Egypt's requirements simply are too great for the rest of the world to shoulder for an extended period of time. Its governance, moreover, is so corrupt that its capacity to use foreign aid is in doubt.

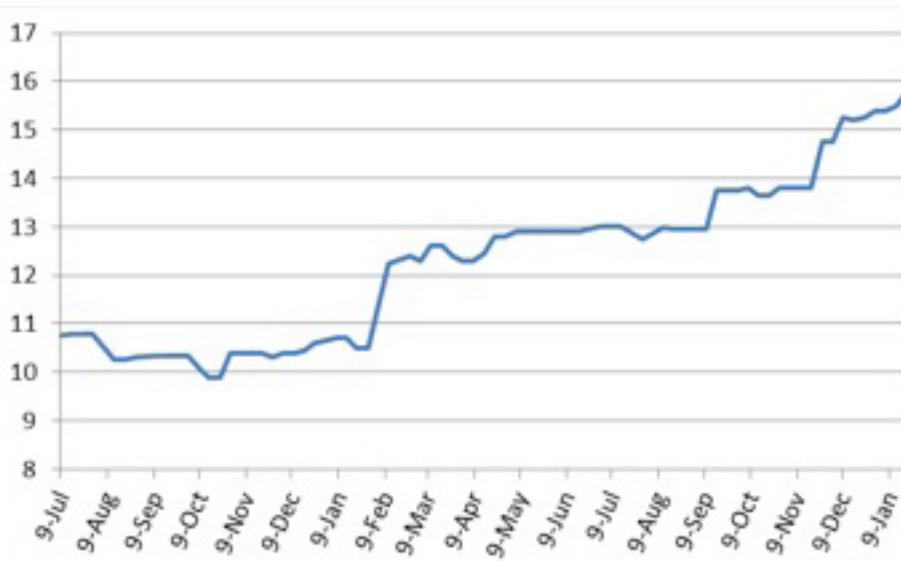
The most likely outcome is a humanitarian catastrophe too large for the rest of the world to ameliorate, and a political outcome too chaotic to permit large-scale humanitarian intervention, like Somalia.

An implicit assumption of public policy is that all problems have solutions. Egypt appears to be an outstanding exception, a major nation in existential crisis for which no solution will be found.

The economics of Egypt's malaise

Although Egypt's official data show a current account deficit of \$2 billion for the third quarter, the central bank admits to losing \$2 billion per month in reserves, suggesting that flight capital—in defiance of strict exchange controls—was at least \$4 billion during the quarter. The central bank reports that reserves fell to \$16 billion in January, down from \$36 billion a year earlier. The *New York Times*, though, estimates spendable reserves at only \$10 billion, or about two months of imports.³ Investors bought less than a third of the 3.5 billion Egyptian pounds, (U.S. \$580 million) worth of Treasury bills offered to the market on January 22, a red flag warning that Egypt's foreign exchange position is close to the brink.

Yield on Egyptian 9-Month Treasury Bill



Source: Bloomberg

The first reports of actual hunger in provincial Egyptian towns, meanwhile, are starting to trickle in through Arab-language press and blog reports. A shortage of gasoline accompanied by long queues at filling stations and panic buying was widely reported in early February. In some towns, for example Luxor in Upper Egypt, the disappearance of diesel fuel shut down bakeries, exacerbating the spot shortages of bread.

Distress is spreading in Egypt's population. Meat imports have already fallen by 60 percent over the past year, the *Egypt News* website reported on December 27, 2011, reflecting the collapse of purchasing power.⁴ More alarming is that bread has become scarce in some provincial cities. In Ismailia on the Suez Canal, a bread protest in January burned cars and blocked a main highway.⁵ Similar protests took place in other towns close to Cairo, including Zagazig and Ibousoar.

It is difficult to assemble a clear picture from the chaos, but many reports in Arab-language media claim that commodities that can be sold for hard currency—including wheat, rice, butane, diesel fuel and sugar—have disappeared from government warehouses during the past year. Arab-language journalists and bloggers claim that theft is endemic, although it is hard to quantify the problem. But the more one digs into the details of day-to-day food supply and the government's efforts to ameliorate conditions, the more fragile Egypt's position appears.

Whether Egypt has \$16 billion in reserves, as the central bank claims, or only \$10 billion, as the *New York Times* alleged, is difficult to say. Late last year, the central bank fired all of its outside directors. *Al-Ahram* reported on October 16 that the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces has cut the number of board members to nine from 15, all appointed by Egypt's president. Six outside directors, five from major banks and one from the accounting firm KPMG, have been dismissed.⁶

It appears at first glance that the army does not want to tell itself the truth about Egypt's economy. The truth probably is simpler, and more sinister. The simplest interpretation is that limiting membership on the central bank's board to flunkies of the Supreme Command clears the way for corruption on a grand scale. When the civil societies of developing countries disintegrate, the authorities often appear to be paralyzed. In most cases, the anonymous little men in charge of big functions are hard at work, making down payments on Paris apartments and private jets.

Egypt's trade deficit last year rose to U.S. \$26 billion, with exports at \$23 billion and imports at \$49 billion, according to Mahmoud Abdul Hai, a consultant to Egypt's National Planning Institute.⁷ That would put Egypt's trade deficit at a stunning 15 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). The central bank's website, by contrast, reports that the deficit during the six months through July ran at an annual rate of nine percent of GDP.

The central government probably has lost the capacity to count foreign trade flows accurately. A great deal of capital flight occurs through fraudulent invoices for imports as well as black-market exports of tradable commodities. If Mahmoud Abdul Hai of the planning institute is correct, his country's exports have fallen to \$23 billion from \$29 billion in 2009. If true, part of the decline probably represents disguised capital flight.

One example is amusing. In mid-September, Egypt banned exports of palm fronds (lulavs) for ceremonial during the Jewish festival of Succot, out of rancor towards the Jewish state. The palm fronds nonetheless arrived, as the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reported on October 10: "The lulav traders utilized long-existing ties with senior officials in Egypt, and succeeded to covertly purchase a large amount of lulavs. According to one of the traders in New York, a senior official in

Cairo received \$100,000 to aid in smuggling the palm fronds outside of Egypt.”⁸

A quarter of Egypt’s state budget subsidizes fuel, which is the most important commodity in Egypt’s black economy. During mid-September, the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation reported, daily demand for gasoline jumped from 14 million liters to 23 million liters. The *Egyptian Gazette* claims that “the rise in demand is the result of smuggling subsidized petrol to the neighboring Gaza Strip at a higher price.”⁹ If Gaza really provides the venue for gasoline smuggling on the grand scale, the Muslim Brotherhood’s Gaza branch, Hamas, might do more to destroy Egypt than anyone in Western intelligence services might have guessed.

“In the Mediterranean town of Alexandria earlier this week,” the *Egyptian Gazette* reported on September 27, 2011, “the military police seized 4.3 million liters of diesel hidden in stores ready for smuggling.”¹⁰ While Egyptians faced 24-hour queues for diesel fuel at gasoline stations last summer, tankers reportedly were waiting at Port Said on the Suez Canal to pump diesel oil from storage facilities. A black market in fertilizer has earned billions of dollars for senior officials, according to a Cairo University professor of agriculture quoted by the *Egyptian Gazette*. The *Gazette* story alleges that Hosni Mubarak’s agriculture minister, Amin Abaza, organized the fertilizer scam.¹¹ Abaza is awaiting trial on charges of illegally selling public land.

Egyptian bloggers, meanwhile, complain that ration cards are stolen from post offices before they reach recipients, and that stores refuse to honor them, preferring to sell to cash payers under the table. It is not clear whether the localized shortages of food and the nationwide shortage of gasoline reflect a buyers’ panic, or large-scale theft, or an effort by the central bank to conserve foreign exchange by slowing essential purchases—or all of the above.

Egypt’s national food distribution company is now issuing ration cards for cooking oil, sugar, rice and pasta, but this stopgap effort to ensure food deliveries to the poor has created its own set of problems. Cheap sugar is the government’s provision of last resort; 64 million Egyptians are supposed to have ration cards entitling them to buy two kilograms of sugar apiece at prices well below market. That is important because the 33 kilograms of sugar per capita that Egyptians consume each year constitutes roughly a fifth of the country’s total caloric consumption, by my back-of-the-envelope calculation.

Root causes

Analytically, it is hard to say with certainty whether Egypt’s economic problems arose from its political crisis, or whether a gathering critical mass of economic problems brought about the political crisis in the first place. Few countries in the world were so unready to compete in a globalized world economy or so vulnerable to a rise in prices of necessities, including food and fuel.

Nearly half of Egyptians are functionally illiterate. According to a World Health Organization study, 97 percent of Egypt’s married women have suffered genital mutilation, and 70 percent stated their intention to arrange the similar mutilation of their daughters, even though the Egyptian government outlawed the practice in 2007.¹² Almost a third of Egyptians marry first or second cousins, the fail-safe indicator of a clan-based society. Half of Egyptians live on less than \$2 a day, and must spend half of that on food. Only half of the 51 million Egyptians between the ages of 15 and 64 are counted in the government’s measure of the labor force, which is why the official unemployment rate stands at only 11 percent. America’s labor force of 153 million, by contrast, comprises three-quarters of the population aged 15 to 64. If Egypt’s labor force were

counted in the same way as America's, the unemployment rate would be 40 percent.

The effective unemployment rate is even higher, for three-fifths of Egyptians live on the land, while the country imports half its caloric consumption. Agriculture productivity in Egypt is so poor that most farm labor must be considered disguised unemployment. Local wheat yields are only 18 bushels per acre, compared to 30 to 60 for non-irrigated wheat in the United States, and up to 100 bushels for irrigated land. Thirty percent of Egyptians of the relevant age, moreover, attend university, while only half graduate, and of those, few find employment. Perhaps an additional three million Egyptian unemployed are warehoused in the university system.

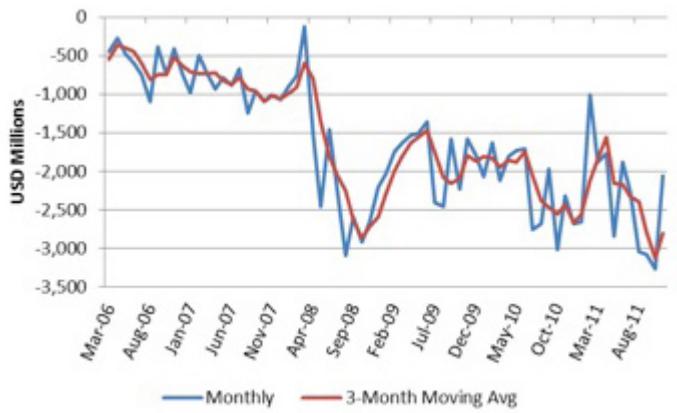
Egypt's "tech-savvy" protestors attracted a great deal of international sympathy, but there aren't very many of them. For two reasons, the Facebook revolutionaries of Tahrir Square have scant hope of ruling Egypt. The first is that only a tiny proportion of the population is wired; as of the most recent data (for 2007), Egypt had only 437,000 broadband Internet connections for a population of nearly 80 million, or a penetration rate of five per one hundred residents, about the same as Iran and Pakistan. South Korea has thirty-four broadband connections per hundred people; Israel has twenty-five.¹³

More than half of Egypt's population has little to do, and lives on one form or another of public subsidy. The world economy does not want them. With a 45 percent rate of effective illiteracy, Egyptians are unfit for modern factory work, and the products of the university system mostly are unqualified for engineering or administrative jobs. As Egypt's state finances disintegrate under conditions of unrest, the position of the redundant half of the country's people is becoming desperate. It is hard to see how a catastrophe can be avoided now that Egypt's tourism industry has dried up.

Hunger games

The unstable political situation contributed to Egypt's financial distress, to be sure, by sharply reducing the tourism revenues that formerly constituted Egypt's most important source of foreign exchange, as well as provoking capital flight. But after sixty years of military rule, Egypt's economy was a disaster waiting to happen. The trigger for the disaster was a global increase in commodity prices that threw Egypt's balance of payments into sharply negative numbers and contributed to the political unrest of 2011. Asia's growing demand for agricultural products in particular raised the cost of Egypt's main imports. In the peck-

Egypt's Trade Deficit Ballooned in 2008, Two Years Before the "Arab Spring"



Source: Bloomberg
The trade deficit was driven entirely by imports.

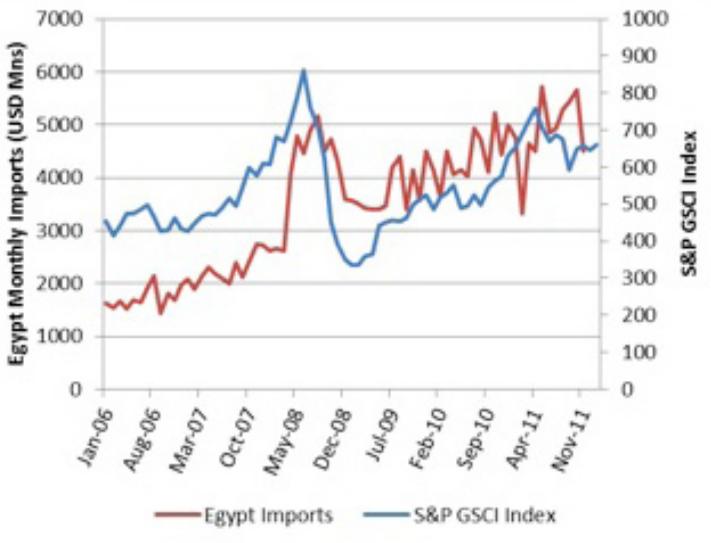
Egypt Imports and Exports



Source: Bloomberg

And the rise in imports followed the global rise in commodity prices.

Egypt Imports vs. Commodity Index (S&P/GSCI US Dollar Commodity Price Index)



Source: Bloomberg

ing order of world demand, Chinese pigs will eat before Egyptian farmers.

Egypt is Iran without oil, and Turkey without an educated elite. One might add that it is Gaza without foreign aid. Pundits and political scientists talk of a choice of political models as if they

were at a Ford dealership, rather than the scene of a national catastrophe. *New York Times* columnist Roger Cohen's February 7, 2011, offering was titled "Tehran 1979 or Berlin 1989?" That is, the Iranian or the German model? Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warns

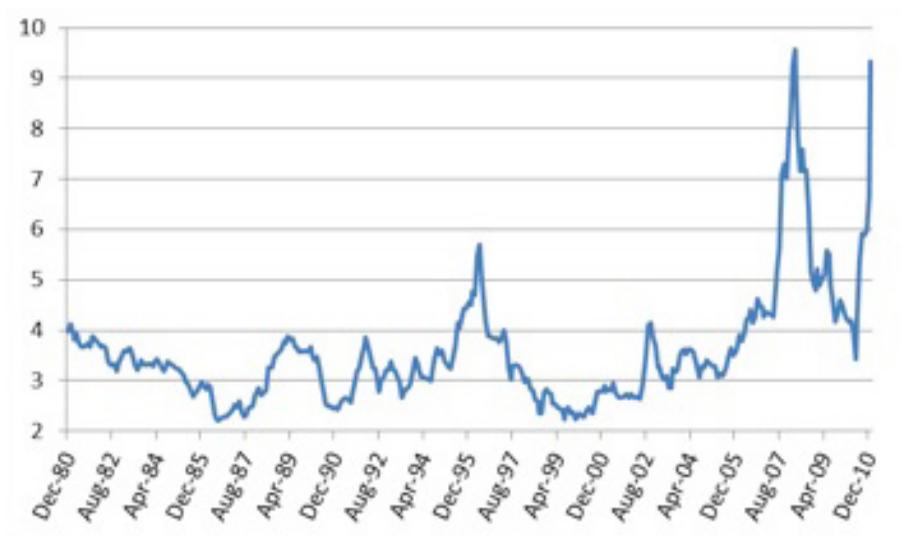
that Iran wants “a new Gaza in Egypt.”¹⁴ Swiss Muslim Tariq Ramadan opined on Egypt’s political future in the *Huffington Post* on February 8, 2011, under the title “Democratic Turkey is the Template for Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood.” (Ramadan is the grandson of Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna, whom he praises without mention of al-Banna’s allegiance to the Nazis during the 1930s and 1940s.) But political models are like automobile models: you can’t have them unless you can pay for them. It is whimsical to compare Egypt to Iran, which has enough oil to pay for a lot of blunders—let alone to Turkey.

Countries can only languish in backwardness so long before some event makes their position untenable. The greatest risk to the impoverished citizens of oil-poor Arab countries is competition from East Asia for scarce resources. In effect, Chinese and Indian demand has priced food staples out of the Arab budget. As prosperous East Asians consume more protein, global demand for grain increases sharply (seven pounds

of grain produce one pound of beef). East Asians are rich enough, moreover, to pay a much higher price for food whenever prices spike due to temporary supply disruptions. Egyptians, Jordanians, Tunisians and Yemenis are not. Episodes of privation and even hunger will become more common. The miserable economic performance of all the Arab states has left a large number of Arabs so far behind that they cannot buffer their budget against food price fluctuations.

Not only Egypt, but all the oil-importing Arab countries are vulnerable to hunger. A 2009 World Bank report on Arab food security warned, “Arab countries are very vulnerable to fluctuations in international commodity markets because they are heavily dependent on imported food. Arab countries are the largest importers of cereal in the world. Most import at least 50 percent of the food calories they consume.”¹⁵ The price of wheat, the staple food in the Arab world, has doubled in the past several years. Soaring food prices were one of the triggers for the political upheaval in the Arab world in 2011.

Wheat (US Dollars per Bushel)



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

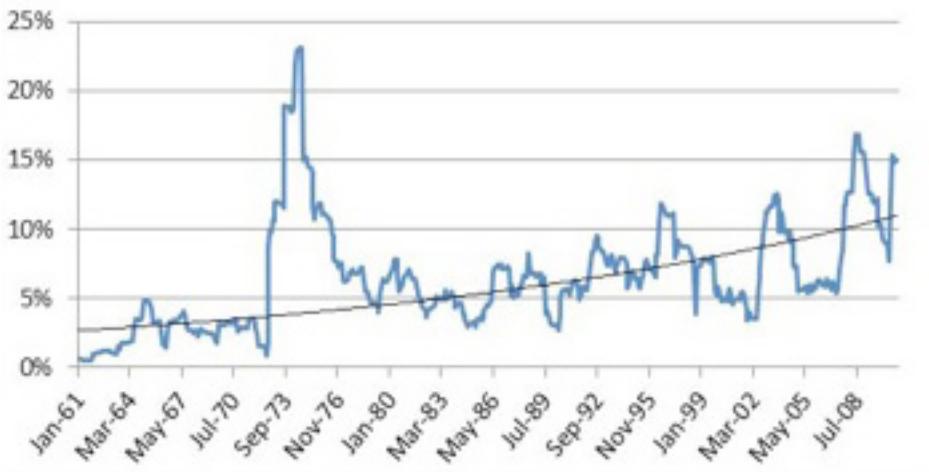
Arab dictatorships kept a large proportion of their people in rural backwardness as a matter of social control, a failed policy that set in motion the present crisis. Egypt's wheat yields are only 18 bushels per acre, compared to 30 to 60 for non-irrigated wheat in the United States, and up to 100 bushels for irrigated land. The trouble isn't long-term food price inflation: wheat has long been one of the world's bargains. The International Monetary Fund's global consumer price index quadrupled between 1980 and 2010 while the price of wheat, even after the price spike of 2010, only doubled in price. What hurts the poorest countries isn't the long-term price trend, though, but the volatility. People have drowned in rivers with an average depth of two feet.

It turns out that China, not the United States or Israel, presents the greatest existential threat to the Arab world, and through no fault of its own: rising incomes have gentrified the East Asian diet, and, more importantly, insu-

lated East Asian budgets from food price fluctuations. Economists call this "price elasticity." Americans, for example, will buy the same amount of milk even if the price doubles, but they will stop buying fast food if hamburger prices double. East Asians now are wealthy enough to buy all the grain they want. If wheat output falls, for example, because of drought in Russia and Argentina, prices rise until demand falls. The difference today is that East Asian demand for grain will not fall, because the Chinese are so much richer than they used to be. Someone has to consume less, and it will be the people at the bottom of the economic ladder, in this case the poorer Arabs.

The volatility of the wheat price (the rolling standard deviation of percentage changes in the price over twelve months) has trended up from about five percent during the 1980s and 1990s to about 15 percent today. There is now only a roughly two-thirds likelihood that the monthly change in the wheat price will be less than 15 percent.

Wheat Price Volatility



Source: USDA, Author's Calculations

With newly-rich East Asians buying more grain at any price, the occasional poor harvest will push the wheat price through the ceiling, as it did during the past twelve months. To make life intolerable for the Arab poor, the price of wheat does not have to remain high indefinitely; it only has to trade out of their reach once every few years. And that is precisely what has happened. After thirty years of stability, the price of wheat has had two spikes into the \$9 per bushel range at which very poor people begin to go hungry. The problem isn't production. Wheat production has risen steadily, very steadily in fact. Wheat supply dropped by only 2.4 percent between 2009 and 2010—and the wheat price doubled. That's because affluent East Asians don't care what they pay for grain. Prices depend on what the last (or "marginal") purchaser is willing to pay for an item (what was the price of the last ticket on the last train out of Paris when the Germans marched in on June 14, 1940?). Don't blame global warming or unstable weather patterns: wheat supply has been fairly reliable. The problem lies in the way that Asian demand has priced Arabs out of the market.

Downward spiral

Egypt thus appears caught in a vicious cycle. Its economic and social backwardness left it exposed to a global rise in the price of imported commodities, and contributed to the political instability of the past year. Instability, in turn, has worsened the economic crisis, by shutting off key sources of foreign exchange while the country's resources are looted by a kleptocratic elite. In the near future, Western policymakers may be forced to accept that state failure in Egypt is beyond their capacity to cure.



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ASSAD'S CRUEL CALCULUS

Yehuda Blanga

On January 31, 2011, at the height of the protests in Egypt, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad gave an interview to the *Wall Street Journal*. He spoke of how he was reading his country's political map correctly. He said he would soon announce reforms—because, in this day and age, Arab leaders must match their aspirations to the will of the people. Assad also declared that Syria was different from Egypt, and that, thanks to his anti-American and anti-Israeli stance, his position was better than Mubarak's. His policy, the Syrian president said, brought him the support of the Arab street in general and of the Syrian street in particular.¹

Though the interview was clearly detached from reality, Assad was correct in one respect: Syria is not Egypt. February 2012 marked the first anniversary of the protests and popular uprising in Syria, and yet the conflict between Assad and his own people rages on with no end in sight. So why has the Assad regime managed to weather the sustained domestic uprising of the past year—and so successfully thwarted the discontent that claimed its counterparts in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya? The answers lie in the unique dynamics of Syrian society, and the vested political stakeholders now working diligently to preserve the Assad regime's grip on power.

The dynamics of Syrian discontent

The analysis of Syria's unique socioeconomic situation must start with demographics. Some 57 percent of the Syrian population is below the age of 25. Since the turn of the century, natural growth is estimated at 450,000 per year—or 2.3 percent in 2009. Moreover, whereas Syria had six million people in 1970, when Hafez al-Assad came to power,



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the population now stands at approximately 20 million. This means that the youthful sector of the population is very large; with between 150,000 and 250,000 people entering a saturated labor market every year. The natural consequence is high unemployment; though official estimates peg unemployment at 12.6 percent, it is plausible that the true figure is far higher—around 20 percent.²

Second, according to World Bank figures for 2010, per capita Gross National Income (GNI) in Syria was \$2,750. Approximately 70 percent of the workforce earns around \$100 per month. In 2005, the United Nations Development Program reported that 30 percent of Syrians were living under the poverty line. The fact that Syria hosts more than 1.7 million refugees—1.2 million Iraqis, 558,000 Palestinians, and nearly 4,000 Somalis—does nothing to help the domestic economy flourish.³

Finally, there has been a sharp decline in Syria's natural resources, especially in crude oil production, since the beginning of the current century. Whereas Syria produced 582,000 barrels a day in 1996, by 2010 production had fallen to only 385,000 barrels. Of this amount, 150,000 barrels were exported, 95 percent of it to Europe. This export is extremely important, inasmuch as it supplies 25 percent of the total revenues of the Syrian economy. Any decrease of oil production or impairment of Syria's ability to export it would severely damage its economy.⁴

As a result, Syria is in a difficult economic situation—one exacerbated by a low growth rate of about three percent in 2010 and 2011.⁵ The number of job seekers grows from year to year, without an effective government response. This has led to high unemployment, especially in the country's younger cohorts. In addition, the government's inability to deal effectively even with the rate of natural increase, and the resulting expansion of poverty, has created a serious burden for the domestic economy and even more so for Syrian soci-

ety. A direct result is that the government is hard put to overcome economic crises, both local and international, and, what is worse, is unable to establish economic stability in Syria.

Why Assad has held on

On the surface, these problems should have been enough to bring hundreds of thousands of protestors out into the streets of Syria's large cities and touch off a revolution, as happened in Tunisia and Egypt. But that has not happened. Whereas young adults in Tunisia and Egypt proved able to topple the regimes by means of mass protest, in Syria the quiet protest against regime repression has turned into a bloody, protracted civil war between Assad's supporters and opponents. So, how does Syria differ from Egypt, Tunisia, and even Libya, where the rebel forces gained active Western support from NATO forces?

The first way is the so-called "Damascus Bubble." Since February 2011, the struggle in Syria has pitted outlying areas against the urban centers—Daraa against Damascus, or Deir al-Zour against Aleppo. The roots of this situation date back to the early 1960s, when, in a process that lasted many years, the regime encouraged the provincial population to move to cities. For residents of the Syrian hinterlands, the goal of relocation was to move up the social ladder, via the military or the ranks of the ruling Ba'ath Party. However, the results of the severe economic difficulties of recent years have been felt more acutely in outlying areas than in the larger cities. First, the former rely primarily on agriculture, which has been impacted by many years of drought. Second, the fruits of economic growth during the years predating the worldwide recession of 2008 were not distributed equally. Third, because people streamed to the cities, urban areas have thrived even as the periphery has grown weaker. By 2010, urbanites amounted to some 56 percent of Syria's population, with

an average annual growth rate of four percent; the two main cities, Damascus and Aleppo, are home to approximately 10 million out of the total population of 20 million.⁶ Therefore, whereas residents of the periphery have shouldered the burden of the uprising, the inhabitants of Damascus, the political capital, and Aleppo, the economic capital, have remained largely outside the struggle. This fact is of great importance, because these two cities constitute an important pillar of support for the regime, and their support is critical for its ability to survive. Their detachment thus far from the rebellion significantly lowers the chances of toppling Assad.

The second difference is that Assad's regime is one that rewards its supporters. Following his accession to power in November 1970, Hafez al-Assad created a regime that heaped benefits on its adherents in order to gain political legitimacy. Upon his death in June 2000, his son Bashar inherited this governmental structure, and since has worked to maintain and strengthen his father's legacy. The Syrian regime is Janus-faced. The outward façade is provided by the official institutions of the state: the government, parliament, and presidency, along with the organs of the Ba'ath Party. The dominant feature of this system is the emphasis on its Sunni character. Because they constitute the majority, Sunnis enjoy representation in parliament that is proportional to their weight in the population (approximately 60 percent), in the government, and in the Ba'ath Party Congress. However, the regime's hidden face—and Assad's true power base—lies in the shadows. This is a framework that stresses the sectarian nature of Syria's regime—namely, control of the country by the Alawite sect through the military and security apparatus that it commands.⁷

In parallel with these two systems, the Assad family has also forged alliances with other sectors of Syrian society. Some of these alliances are with

minority groups (Druze, Christians, and Ismailis), but no less important are those with Sunnis, both from the periphery and among the urban economic elite. As noted, the goal is to create a wide base of support for the regime, to gain legitimacy from the Syrian public and from the majority, and to create a picture that conceals the regime's Alawite roots while emphasizing its inclusive, nonsectarian nature. This is why we continue to witness mass demonstrations of support for Assad in Damascus, in part because of orders from on high issued to the governors of provinces and large cities.⁸

Third, there as yet is no significant organized opposition in Syria. Although the protests began in February 2011, primarily in outlying areas, the Sunni population has not joined the anti-Assad protests in monolithic fashion. Nor have we seen a substantive change in the attitude towards the regime on the part of various minorities, which together account for some 30 percent of the population.⁹ In other words, the absence of most Sunnis and members of minority groups from the armed opposition illustrates the extent to which these groups are expressing their desire, albeit silently, for Assad to remain in power. Because many of them do not see a suitable alternative to his regime, they are apprehensive about the rise of political Islam in Syria as occurred in Egypt and Tunisia or are afraid that the country may break apart, as is occurring in Libya.

Then there is the regime's ability to repress the people, albeit not necessarily in the physical and violent sense. As opposed to Egypt, where most of the demonstrations developed and were organized through social networks, Syria is one of ten countries deemed "Enemies of the Internet"; only 17 percent of the population uses the World Wide Web. In general, the use of fax machines in the early 1990s and the subsequent penetration by the Internet were permitted slowly and gradu-

ally; they still remain under the regime's strict supervision today. Supervision and censorship also applies to the local media. According to the press watchdog group Reporters without Borders, Syria ranks 173 out of 178 countries in its worldwide ranking of journalistic freedom.¹⁰ Hence, despite Bashar Assad's declared intent to introduce processes of modernization in Syria, nothing has changed substantively since the "Iron Hand" years of his father.¹¹

A fourth point of note is the Syrian military's loyalty to the president, and its heterogeneous composition. Going back to when the French established the Levantine Special Forces and encouraged minorities to enlist, the Alawites have had deep roots in the Syrian armed forces.¹² In fact, the hardened core of the Military Committee that carried out the Ba'ath Revolution in March 1963 was made up of five members of minority groups, of whom three were Alawites: Salah Jadid, Muhammad Umran, and Hafez al-Assad.¹³ After Assad came to power in November 1970, the Alawites took control of the security apparatus and the military. Today, approximately 90 percent of the senior commanders of the armed forces, including elite units and militia forces like the *Shabiha*, are Alawites. This gives the sect access to power and the ability to continue holding the reins of government.

Moreover, within the military and security forces, the Assad family showed special favoritism to the Alawite Kalabiya tribe to which it belongs. Members of the innermost family circle have been appointed to senior positions. In the past, Hafez's brothers Rifaat and Jamil commanded the Defense Companies and the Ali Murtada militia, respectively. Today, Bashar's brother Maher commands the Fourth Armored Division. So, rather than being a people's army, as in Egypt, the Syrian armed forces belong to a sect or family. Moreover, it is important to note that both the officer corps and lower ranks, made up largely of Sunnis, remain

loyal to the regime, despite the wave of defections of the past year. The military, in other words, has not disintegrated and has not declared its neutrality, as its Egyptian counterpart did. This has allowed the regime to continue to use force to put down the uprising.

An Alawite bulwark

The Alawites, the Shi'a religious minority that Assad both embodies and represents, have much to lose. The fall of the regime would spur hundreds of thousands of majority Sunnis (and possibly members of other Syrian minority groups), who suffered under the Alawite-dominated regime, to seek revenge. So as long as Assad and the Alawites can keep stymieing the West, the Arab League, and the United Nations, the regime will continue its cruel and violent repression of the demonstrators. Indeed, the fate of the entire sect hangs in the balance—not only its physical safety but also its economic status. Since the Alawites have much to lose, they are waging—and will continue to wage—a war for survival in which every means is acceptable.

Indeed, in light of the events of the "Arab Spring," the sectarian and social divisions in Syria have pushed the Alawites towards a "Samson option." They now realize that the fall of the Assad regime might well lead to a massacre along sectarian lines (in revenge for more than 40 years of repression) and possibly even a sectarian civil war. This is a sect that has experienced ups and downs and suffered exploitation and repression by Sunnis for hundreds of years. The rise of the Assad family in Syria brought some comfort to a persecuted minority. The Alawites will not take their loss of status kindly and will band together to defend themselves, just as they did in the past when forced to deal with threats, whether from within the sect or from the outside.¹⁴ This makes it essential for the international community to find a peaceful way out—one

that will safeguard the Alawites' security and preserve something of their economic and security-apparatus status in Syria. Any solution that is reached without their agreement will lead to civil conflict that could end with the country's breakup.

Since it gained independence in 1946, Syria has seen 17 military coups and attempted coups—more than any other country in the Middle East. Now the country is undergoing one of its most serious crises yet and, in the words of Bashar Assad, “We are at a critical moment in the history of our country.”¹⁵ That said, the makeup of Syrian society, the structure of the regime, and the Alawite control of the armed forces and security apparatus (coupled with the support Assad continues to receive from foreign sponsors such as Russia and China) give the Syrian president the ability to survive the grave domestic struggle now taking place in his country.



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FLUNKING THE SYRIA TEST

Matthew RJ Brodsky

With the Syrian uprising now past its one-year anniversary, it's long past time to take stock of the carnage. More than 7,000 people have been killed to date by the Assad regime, as it has unleashed war on its own people.

The spark that lit the fire was an errant one. On March 6, 2011, state security forces arrested 15 teenagers for spray painting anti-regime graffiti on a wall in the southern city of Deraa. Their continued detention sparked massive demonstrations in the city, and in turn were met by the regime's brutal crackdown using live fire and tear gas. By the time the teenagers were released, the flashpoints between the Syrian security services and the protesters had already claimed many lives. This began the cycle of funerals which became rallying points for further protests—and further regime violence.

The anti-regime opposition began as a peaceful protest against a dictatorship. President Bashar al-Assad's brutal response—including the arrest and torture of regime opponents, the indiscriminate shelling of cities, and the cutoff of escape routes to Turkey and Lebanon for civilian refugees—has pushed the opposition to respond with force.

Meanwhile, conventional wisdom in Washington and in European capitals is that the Syrian regime is doomed and that it is only a matter of time before Assad is removed from power. But these optimistic assessments are dangerously flawed. Despite Western sanctions and other punitive measures levied to date, the Assad regime as of this writing continues to maintain its grip on the four pillars of Syrian power: the unity of the Alawites; supremacy of the Ba'ath Party; supremacy of the al-Assad clan; and Alawite



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dominance over the military and intelligence apparatus.

Assad acts as both arsonist and firefighter, creating problems or preventing solutions on one hand, and asking for rewards and favors for non-destructive behavior on the other.

Why Syria matters

Syria doesn't matter because of the economic spoils it represents to the United States; it is a poor state with a weak economy and few resources. Nor does it hold strategic importance to the degree that did Egypt, where the Mubarak regime upheld the country's historic peace treaty with Israel, worked as an American ally, and stood in staunch opposition to Iran. And Syria doesn't matter the way Qaddafi's Libya mattered—which, from an American strategic standpoint, was not at all. Qaddafi was a past international pariah who gave up his nuclear program and support for terrorists years ago. He simply remained a colorful buffoon on the international stage, known for crazy antics, but without an ability to cause too many problems.

Rather, Syria's regional importance rests on the Assad regime's ability to create mischief. Without the means to play the role of spoiler, it would be a fairly weak player in the Middle Eastern arena. Assad acts as both arsonist and firefighter, creating problems or preventing solutions on one hand, and asking for rewards and favors for non-destructive behavior on the other.

Plainly stated, Syria under Assad has been diametrically and actively opposed to nearly every issue and initiative of importance to the United States. Syria is a charter member of the U.S. State Department's list of terror-supporting states. The regime is Iran's

only Arab ally, and transships weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Under Assad, Syria is a permanent threat to Lebanon's sovereignty and stability. Damascus hosted the headquarters of Hamas' external leadership until the current uprising left the terrorist group with little choice but to disassociate itself from the regime and leave Syria in December 2011. Assad continues to host a number of Palestinian rejectionist groups opposed to the peace process. As far as making peace with Israel is concerned, it remains the official policy of the Syrian government not to permit representatives to meet, talk, discuss, and debate with Israeli representatives at any level. And while it is assumed that its nuclear program was destroyed by a 2007 Israeli air strike, the IAEA since has been stonewalled in its investigation by the regime at every turn.

Above all else, however, the reason Syria's fate is important to the United States is because it is politically and tactically wedded to Iran. The Syrian regime provides Tehran with a vital ally—and an external base—to project power into the Middle East.

Failed U.S. policy

Syria represents what is perhaps the clearest example of the misguided "engagement" policy pursued by the Obama administration since it took office. From early on, the administration believed that President Assad could be convinced to reorient his state toward America's regional allies and play a constructive role in Middle Eastern affairs. But for that to be possible, the relationship between Syria and Iran would have to be nothing more than a "marriage of convenience" (rather than the full-fledged strategic partnership that prevails today). Still, the worthy goal of working to remove Syria from Iran's sphere of influence fell victim to the unsound policy of diplomatic engagement, as the White House set out to rehabilitate Bashar al-Assad.

In early 2009, the White House and the 111th Congress increased calls for greater U.S. engagement with Syria. Several congressional delegations visited Damascus, and administration officials held talks with their Syrian counterparts. In February 2009, the U.S. Department of Commerce approved an export license of Boeing 747 spare parts to Syria's national air carrier. A month later, assistant secretary of state Jeffrey D. Feltman was dispatched to meet with Syria's foreign minister—the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit Damascus in over four years.

In April, the Obama administration sent Feltman and senior National Security Council aides to attend the Syrian National Day festivities, thus ending the moratorium initiated during the Bush administration that forbade official U.S. attendance at Syrian embassy functions. Syria's ambassador, Imad Moustapha, wrote about it in his blog: "The huge attendance was a testimony to how Syria is regarded by the American people despite years of trying to distort its image, particularly during the Bush era... The implication of their heavy attendance was both a rebuke to the Bush legacy, and a strong condoning of President Obama's policies of dialogue and respect."¹

On June 24, 2009, the White House declared its intention to name a new ambassador to Syria. The post had been vacant since George W. Bush withdrew Margaret Scobey in 2005 when pro-independence Lebanese politician Rafiq Hariri was murdered in Beirut in an operation widely believed to be sponsored by the Assad regime. In July 2009, the Obama administration announced it would ease sanctions on Syria. The same month, the U.S. State Department spokesman explained that the president's Middle East envoy, George Mitchell, told President Assad that the U.S. would process all eligible applications for export licenses as quickly as possible.

In February 2010, President Obama followed through on his promise to name a new ambassador to Syria, and selected Robert Ford to fill the post. White House spokesman Robert Gibbs explained, "If confirmed by the Senate, Ambassador Ford will engage the Syrian government on how we can enhance relations, while addressing areas of ongoing concern."² Days later, the U.S. State Department lifted its travel warning for Syria.

Obama's overtures, however, met with a chilly reception in Damascus. In February 2010—the same month Team Obama named a new ambassador to Syria and lifted travel warnings for the country—the Assad regime rejected an IAEA request for a meeting; began importing sensitive nuclear-related military equipment from North Korea; exported Syrian-made *Fateh-110* missiles to Hezbollah; began training the terrorist group in the use of SA-2 and SA-6 surface-to-air missiles; mocked Hillary Clinton and the Obama administration with Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad over dinner in Damascus; met with Hezbollah's leader; vowed to strengthen its relationship with Tehran; pledged to continue support for the resistance; and threatened missile attacks against Israeli cities. One could be forgiven for concluding that Washington's diplomatic carrots had merely emboldened the Assad regime.

As a result of these actions, the Senate would not confirm Ford's appointment as ambassador. Nevertheless, President Obama made the recess appointment in December 2010, and Ford took up his post just as the year of Arab upheaval was about to dawn. And what a difference a year makes. Ambassador Ford was finally confirmed in October 3, 2011, seven months into the Syrian uprising. He was attacked by pro-regime thugs while attending a meeting of Syrian lawyers, and upon attending a funeral of a Syrian activist

he was chased by a violent mob tossing concrete blocks and wielding iron bars.

In March 2011, as the peaceful protests gained steam in Syria, the Obama administration joined NATO in setting up a no-fly zone in Libya. At the time, American news outlets such as CNN were identifying what they proclaimed was the “Obama Doctrine,” believing that the administration in fact had a strategy for dealing with Middle East conflicts. To this end, CNN cited President Obama’s March 28th speech regarding America’s involvement in Libya and concluded that the U.S. would intervene in conflicts overseas “when our safety is not directly threatened, but our interests and values are,” as the president said.³ The potential slaughter of Libyans rebelling against Qaddafi was the sure case in point.

The immediate goal of U.S. policy should be an end to the violence that has claimed over 7,000 Syrian lives so far. At the same time, however, the U.S. should endeavor to create the conditions for a stable democratic system in Syria that protects the rights of all minorities.

Yet, as now is apparent, there was no “Obama Doctrine.” When the United States decided to get involved in Libya, there were 1,000 known fatalities. By comparison, it took half a year and 2,000 deaths in Syria before President Obama even called for President Assad to “step aside” in August 2011.⁴ And he did so without any concrete plan for realizing that goal.

The era of official diplomatic engagement with the Syrian regime came to a close on February 6, 2012, when the United States shuttered its embassy in Damascus and removed its

ambassador and all diplomatic personnel. The move came days after Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for Assad to step down and for a transfer of power to take place. The U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, proclaimed she was “disgusted” by the veto.⁵ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called it “a travesty.”⁶

“Faced with a neutered Security Council, we have to redouble our efforts outside of the United Nations with those allies and partners who support the Syrian people’s right to have a better future.” Nevertheless, after the veto, Clinton reiterated, “military intervention has been absolutely ruled out, and we have made that clear from the very beginning.”⁷

U.S. options

The immediate goal of U.S. policy should be an end to the violence that has claimed over 7,000 Syrian lives so far. At the same time, however, the U.S. should endeavor to create the conditions for a stable democratic system in Syria that protects the rights of all minorities. American strategy must aim to weaken those who support the regime within and outside of Syria, while encouraging the opposition to demonstrate its goal of a nonsectarian and democratic Syria.

The U.S. must prepare for the militarization of the conflict. If the Syrian civil war grows, regional actors will likely become involved, eager to sway the outcome. In the event of such a scenario, the U.S. will need to have a plan in place to set up no-go, no-fly, and humanitarian zones. The deadlock at the UN Security Council means that this plan must take shape among a “coalition of the willing.” To prepare for this likelihood, Washington should form a contact group to work with international partners to share this cost and responsibility, while increasing the pressure on the Syrian regime.

The White House also should apply pressure on Russia, where the Kremlin has become Assad's lifeline, providing diplomatic cover and the continued supply of weapons. Moscow should know that Washington will base its future relations on how Russia acts during the Syrian crisis. It must be made clear that there are consequences for Russia's actions. On the other hand, Washington is not without carrots to offer Russia as well. Moscow's only base in the Mediterranean is the Syrian coastal town of Tartus. If Assad goes, the fear in the Kremlin is that they will lose their maritime base as well. Washington could guarantee that Russia could keep the base in a future Syria. It might be enough to change Russia's voting at the UN.

Any of the following measures should be taken, either independently or in conjunction with others:

Undermine the Syrian economy

The White House already imposed three incremental rounds of sanctions on Syria, in April, May and August of 2011, respectively. The first targeted several high-ranking Syrian officials and Iran's elite Qods Force, which is aiding Assad in his crackdown on protesters. The second set of sanctions expanded the list of Syrian officials to include Assad himself, in addition to many high-ranking ministers in his government. The latest round froze all Syrian assets under U.S. jurisdiction, and barred American citizens and companies from participation in a broad range of transactions with Syrian entities.

To build on these early steps, the U.S. should continue to target Syria's fragile economy and raise the cost among the country's predominantly Sunni business classes of remaining loyal to Assad. Many among the business community still straddle the fence between supporting the regime and joining the opposi-

tion. As Turkey's ambassador to the UN, Selim Yenel, told Reuters at the time, "Assad still has backing. The middle class is still supporting Assad. They are afraid of what comes after him."⁸

The EU has an important role to play as well. Ninety-five percent of Syrian crude oil exports—close to half-a-million barrels per pay—is destined for Europe. If European nations extricate themselves from Syria's economy, it would deal a severe blow to the regime in Damascus. There is movement in this direction already; in December 2011, the EU banned the export of gas and oil industry equipment to Syria, and more recently imposed a targeted freeze of assets against Syria's central bank. The EU should be encouraged to ramp up this economic campaign, including through the imposition of asset freezes on the Syrian central bank and bans on the Syrian trade of precious metals and minerals.

There is good reason to hope that further crippling Syria's vulnerable economy will reshuffle the internal political deck in favor of the opposition. Already last year, Syria's foreign exports were down by two-thirds, while foreign direct investment and tourism shrank to half the levels of previous years. Greater economic pressure (especially from Europe) could thus have real effect, and help squeeze both the regime and those who still support it.

Undermine regime supporters

The U.S. should pressure Syria's Alawite generals—who hail from the same minority sect as Assad—to step away from the regime. As an incentive, they should be promised a future for their communities in a post-Assad Syria, in exchange for their refusal to follow orders and kill their fellow citizens. Although the U.S. lacks military contacts with Syrian generals, Turkey,

Jordan, and France could be particularly useful in this effort. The Assad regime's stability does not depend on the Alawite community alone; rather, it relies on other Christian (10 percent of the population) and Sunni (74 percent of the population) communities with extensive familial ties to the West. Targeted sanctions levied by the U.S., EU, and Turkey against the regime's greatest supporters could provide an additional avenue of leverage.

The diplomatic illusion that a UN Security Council resolution could be passed without garnering Russian and Chinese opposition resulted in the waste of nearly a year.

Prepare regime alternatives

The lessons from Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya should make crystal clear the need to plan for the day after the regime falls. Simply replacing one radical dictatorship with another does not serve American interests, just as it does not serve the interests of those in the Middle East now calling for change. Today, there are two primary groups within the Syrian opposition.

The first is the Syrian National Council (SNC). According to its website, the SNC would affirm national unity among all components of Syrian society. The SNC rejects foreign intervention and hopes to safeguard "the non-violent character of the Syrian Revolution." Within the group itself, there are now divisions over whether it would accept foreign intervention, and if so, whether it should be in the form of Arab or Western intervention. The Arab League could soon consider recognizing the SNC as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, with key members now making the diplomatic case for doing so.⁹ Inside Syria, meanwhile, is the National Coordination Com-

mittee for Democratic Change, which represents many of the opposition groups bearing the brunt of the Assad regime's atrocities. The Committee at one time rejected foreign intervention outright, although it has since softened its stance. Between the two political bases, there is agreement that Assad must go but little unity on how that should happen—and what should follow.

Then there is the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which was formed in order to protect innocent civilians when the protests began and Syrian security forces and irregular armed thugs, or *Shabiha*, attacked unarmed civilians. It is composed of former Syrian soldiers who defected, youth from urban centers, and former gang members. It is believed to have some 30,000 to 50,000 soldiers,¹⁰ although other estimates put that number as much as two-thirds lower. The FSA also enjoys support from abroad, with Syrian expatriates in Qatar, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia known to have provided the group with money and material resources. Engaged in the day-to-day fighting with regime forces, the FSA has become frustrated with the SNC and now calls for a no-fly zone or buffer zone. This reflects a realization that the current stalemate on the ground is unlikely to be broken without outside help, and a recognition of the threat opposition forces face if the Assad regime unleashes its full military might.

Washington should work to unify these elements of the Syrian opposition, and help them find an agreed-upon strategy to move forward. At the same time, however, the White House needs to have a much clearer sense of their respective political platforms before it moves to recognize one or the other as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

Press Turkey to lead

If the United States and Europe remain unwilling to commit to military

options vis-à-vis Syria, Turkey should be pressed to take the lead. Turkey has spent much of the previous decade carving out a new regional role for itself. It is a regional power independent of Western countries and NATO and increasingly sees itself as an ideological and geopolitical balancer to the growing power of Iran. Ankara, along with Qatar, has been vocal about the need for regime change in Damascus. And Turkey may well be pressed to lead a regional force of Turkish and Arab armies against the Assad regime—something which policymakers in Ankara may see as preferable to a U.S.-led force that utilizes Turkish air space and military bases. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are already funding the opposition and would likely support Turkey in creating and maintaining safe havens.

Impose no-fly zones and safe havens

Safe havens along Syria's common border with Turkey and Lebanon would hasten defections from the Syrian army and provide a place for refugees to receive humanitarian aid. In order to create a no-fly zone, however, the U.S. and its allies will first have to destroy Syria's air defense systems. Since the start of its domestic turmoil, Syria has benefited greatly from its close ties and cooperation with Russia. Over the past year, Moscow has defiantly continued to provide Damascus with weaponry and military materiel¹¹—supplies which in turn have been leveraged by the Assad regime in its bid to stay in power. But the reality is that these weapons systems are no match for U.S. air power, and could easily be eliminated in the event of coalition action. More significant, however, is what would happen to those weapons if they fell into the wrong hands in the event of a collapse or implosion of central power in Damascus.

Deter arms proliferation

Both during and after the conflict, special attention must be paid to preventing the proliferation of Syria's weapons arsenal. First, there are Syria's national assets, such as combat aircraft, tanks, and naval vessels—all of which present a low risk of proliferation, given their size and probability of detection. More worrisome, however, are the Small and Light Weapons (SALW), which include Man Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS)—a type of surface-to-air missile. In the West, they are best characterized by the U.S. Stinger missile that gained its fame in the 1980s in the hands of the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan.

Then there is the issue of Syria's weapons of mass destructions. Syria is known to have amassed hundreds of tons of chemical weapons, including the nerve agents Sarin and VX.¹² The Syrian regime is also thought to have developed biological weapons such as Anthrax and Cholera.¹³ Intelligence sources believe that many of these are weaponized and ready to be used in artillery shells, bombs, and SCUD missile warheads.¹⁴ These stockpiles do not take into account any additional WMD that may have been transferred to Syria from Iraq in the opening weeks of "Operation Iraqi Freedom." Securing these weapons and preventing their proliferation should be a top priority for the U.S. and its allies—lest Syria's turmoil become a source of regional instability.

Late in the game

Although the Obama administration's focus remains on exerting diplomatic and economic pressure on Syria, CNN recently reported that the Pentagon and U.S. Central Command have begun an internal review of U.S. military capabilities in the event President Obama were to ask for them.¹⁵ This is not necessarily a sign that the White House has abandoned its pledge not to use military force; such wide-ranging reports tend to look at options ranging from mili-

tary strikes to humanitarian relief. Yet such signs of activism are most welcome.

The diplomatic illusion that a UN Security Council resolution could be passed without garnering Russian and Chinese opposition resulted in the waste of nearly a year. The internal review of U.S. military capabilities in Syria should have been completed months ago. Instead, Washington tried to placate Moscow and obtain the Kremlin's acquiescence to punitive measures against Damascus—a gift that Vladimir Putin used to great effect both at home and abroad.

Furthermore, the idea that U.S. involvement in a country vital to America's security interests should be subjugated to the wishes and actions of the Arab League is an unfortunate change in policy. The United States should lead the world in promoting freedom, and it should not take its cues from the Arab League, given its track record of inaction. With the stalemate at the UN, the U.S. will have to contemplate action with a coalition of the willing—something for which Team Obama had considerable disdain upon coming to office.

There is much at stake. So far, the result of U.S. engagement in the so-called “Arab Spring” has empowered the Muslim Brotherhood and those inspired by them in countries that were previously relatively friendly to Washington (e.g., Tunisia, Egypt, and beyond). Taking a pass on Syria now would be a victory for Iran, giving Tehran the dominion over the Shi'a crescent (stretching from Iran to Iraq to Syria to Lebanon) which it has sought since its 1979 revolution. The key to any possible gains in the “Arab Spring” lies in helping the Syrian spring succeed.



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RISE OF THE MALIKI REGIME

Joel D. Rayburn

One year into the “Arab Spring,” it must be said that Iraq has bucked the prevailing trend in the Arab world. While grassroots movements in half a dozen other Arab countries have dismantled or shaken authoritarian regimes, a new one is being built in Iraq. During the revolutionary year of 2011, the government of Prime Minister Nuri Maliki consolidated its power, violently suppressing a popular protest movement and cracking down on political rivals at home, while intervening in two “Arab Spring” crises abroad. In doing so, the Maliki government has created a high risk of blowback from its foreign policy initiatives, while doing little to address the underlying causes of domestic Iraqi unrest, which will continue to fester.

The politics of personality

In Iraq today, it is increasingly appropriate to speak not of the Iraqi government, or of a Shi'a-dominated government, but rather of a Maliki regime. The “Malikists”—or, in Arabic, the “Malikiyoun”—are the newly-dominant force in Iraqi politics, an analog to the “Saddamists” or “Saddamiyoun” that Iraqis once knew. These are the officials and operators who have enabled Prime Minister Maliki to consolidate control of state power and gradually marginalize other major political blocs while doing so.

On an individual level, the Malikiyoun do not really represent Maliki's Da'wa party. In the innermost circle, the Malikiyoun are instead composed of Maliki's family and personal advisors, both official and unofficial. Those Malikiyoun who do hail from Da'wa

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tend to be “orphans”: Da’wa members who have no independent base of their own in the party or in the larger movement that spawned it. The Malikiyoun also include a sizeable contingent of former Ba’athists, some of whom once worked directly for Saddam or other senior leaders in the old regime. These Ba’athists-turned-Malikiyoun are especially common in the intelligence services and among Maliki’s political generals, who were almost all formerly high-ranking officers in Saddam’s army.

In sectarian terms, the Malikiyoun are majority Shi’a, and exhibit clear favoritism toward their sect along with extreme distrust, sometimes crossing into paranoia, toward Sunnis and the Ba’ath. But they are not driven first and foremost by Shi’a sectarian interests. In fact, they include Sunnis, Kurds, and a few other minorities among their ranks. Though the Malikiyoun will certainly play the Shi’a sectarian card when it serves their political purposes, they are just as ready to suppress Shi’a opponents as Sunni ones. Nor are the Malikiyoun Iranian puppets, though they are, for the present, aligned with the Iranian regime’s foreign policy in the region. As a result, the Maliki regime behaves as a Shi’a sectarian power in the broader region to a greater extent than they do inside Iraq. At the same time, the Malikiyoun are distrustful of Iranian intentions toward Maliki and his government, and this has led them to try to preserve a relationship with the United States, in order to balance what would otherwise be dominant Iranian influence.

The Malikiyoun are not motivated by a shared ideology. They are driven, instead, by the acquisition and holding of power, and above all are deeply committed to keeping Prime Minister Maliki in power. The common characteristic among all Malikiyoun is that their power derives entirely from their association with Maliki. If he were to fall from power, none of them would have anywhere to go,

and this makes them more committed to him than any ideologue could be.

Steadily, since 2008, the Malikiyoun have enabled the Prime Minister to neutralize, one by one, the checks and balances the Iraqi constitution was meant to enshrine to prevent just such a consolidation of power.¹ Over the past three years, Iraq’s independent commissions, armed forces, intelligence services, and judiciary have come under the formal or de facto control of the Prime Minister’s office. The Malikiyoun have placed heavy emphasis on the coercive arms of the state and can now be found in the highest levels of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, and intelligence apparatus. They can also be found atop the Iraqi Special Operations Forces and police commandos that now answer directly to the Prime Minister’s office and have coalesced into a new set of coup-proofing forces akin to Saddam’s Special Republican Guard. As they have gained control of these arms of the government, the Malikiyoun have gradually purged political opponents or independents from many key government positions. In addition, practically all major military, security, and intelligence appointments are now made directly by the Prime Minister’s Office, without confirmation by the Iraqi parliament.

This, then, is the Iraqi regime that happened to be in power during the historic events of 2011.

Iraq’s suppressed spring

The Malikiyoun’s process of state consolidation collided with popular expectations and grievances in 2011. The improving security situation of 2009-2010 raised the Iraqi population’s expectations for the restored functions of the Iraqi state, as did the formation of a new national unity government. The Iraqi people had anticipated a “peace dividend” in the form of development and improved public services, which had suffered from eight years of conflict stacked atop the

dozen years of deterioration and neglect during the sanctions period of 1991-2003.

They had much to complain about. Iraq's electrical grid remained in shambles, with demand far exceeding the public grid's output. Iraq's growing youth population confronted a severe housing shortage, with the Iraqi government itself estimating a shortfall of over three million family housing units for a population of 27 million people.² The list went on and on.

Iraq's deeply entrenched socialist system saddled the state with the responsibility for fixing these problems, something that the weak Iraqi ministries have not proven themselves capable of doing. Nor has there been a private sector alternative; the Iraqi private sector remains a weak, dependent offshoot of the massive public sector, dominated by crony capitalists who compete for large government contracts.

As 2011 opened with massive demonstrations in Egypt and other Arab states, the same phenomenon began to take shape in Iraq. As had been the case in Egypt—and later in Syria—public anger over government corruption and the realization that services were not going to improve caused tensions to boil over in several major Iraqi cities. Friday demonstrations and “Days of Rage” generated crowds sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands. The crowds took on a different character in different cities, ultimately comprising a loose combination of activist Arab youth groups, liberal political parties, the Sadr movement, marginalized Sunnis, and Kurdish youth.

From the beginning, these demonstrators consciously modeled themselves after the protest movements that had toppled dictators in Tunisia and Egypt in preceding weeks. In Baghdad, for example, protesters rallied in the city's own Tahrir Square, drawing a comparison to its famous Cairo namesake.

The demonstrations of 2011 were at their largest in Baghdad and Basra in late February and early March. In both

cities, the size and anger of the crowds elicited a ferocious response from government security forces, which used a combination of lethal and non-lethal force to suppress the demonstrations. In the last week of February 2011, Iraqi Security Forces fired on crowds in several cities, killing about 30 protesters countrywide and producing scenes not dissimilar to those that had taken place in Egypt in early February. Also as in Egypt, the government deployed armed plainclothes loyalists to infiltrate demonstrations and beat or intimidate protesters.³ Uniformed security forces and police, meanwhile, detained hundreds of demonstrators and conducted raids of political and civic groups suspected of helping to organize demonstrations.⁴ Opposition groups subsequently raised allegations that the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) had been issued orders to use deadly force, but the allegations prompted no real government investigation, and no senior Iraqi officials were charged with the killing of protesters.⁵

There was also little international attention paid to the Iraqi demonstrations and the ensuing brutal crackdown. The killing of Iraqi protesters did not elicit the same outrage in the western media or among western governments that had resulted from the killing of Egyptian and Libyan protesters, and neither the United States nor its major allies denounced the Maliki government for its use of lethal force.

In domestic political terms, the “Arab Spring” protests in Iraq never reached the sort of critical mass that characterized protests in Tunisia and Egypt. No major Iraqi political parties, aside perhaps from the Sadrist, stepped forward to lead the protest campaign. Iraq's shoddy electrical grid also hampered the protest organizers' efforts: with few hours of electricity, Iraqis had poor Internet connectivity, meaning that social media could not be used as an organizational tool, as it had been

in Egypt. And unlike the Egyptian and Tunisian protests, the demonstrations in Iraq focused on calls for reform and better services rather than the toppling of the government.

Bahrain and Baghdad

The suppression of popular dissent between February and September 2011 meant that the example of other “Arab Spring” regime changes would not prove decisive for Iraq, as Tunisia had done for Egypt and Egypt had done for Libya. Instead, however, Iraq would become deeply involved in other “Arab Spring” crises. Foremost among these was Bahrain, where the Bahraini monarchy’s suppression of mainly Shi’a protesters in February and March prompted outrage in the Iraqi Shi’a community, which has long-standing familial and religious ties there. Iraqi Shi’a political groups, especially the Sadrists, organized large rallies and demonstrations in support of the Bahraini opposition, deploying thousands of followers in the streets of Baghdad and Basra⁶ (at exactly the same time that anti-Iraqi government protests were occurring in those cities). The Saudi-led military intervention in Bahrain in mid-March, in turn, provoked an even more charged response, with all of Iraq’s Shi’a parties denouncing the move and using their popular media outlets to decry what they saw as a brutal and sectarian suppression of a Shi’a majority population that was making demands not dissimilar to those made in Egypt.

By the late spring, the Bahrain crisis had become a domestic Iraqi political issue, one in which Iraqi politicians competed to be the most critical of the Bahraini monarchy and the Saudi intervention, and in which no Iraqi politician could afford to argue that Iraq should stay out of the matter. Prime Minister Maliki joined this chorus, warning that the crackdown in Bahrain could spark a regional sectarian war.⁷ Shi’a politi-

cian Ahmad Chalabi also attempted to capitalize on the affair by attempting to send an “aid flotilla” to Manama in June, but Maliki found it prudent to block this maneuver by one of his foremost Shi’a political rivals.⁸

The Bahrain crisis also had a significant impact on the question of whether Iraq should agree to the extension of the U.S. troop presence in Iraq. Iranian and Iraqi Shi’a media outlets were quick to allege that the United States had supported the crackdown against Shi’a Bahrainis in order to safeguard the U.S. naval base there.⁹ The United States was slow to push back on such assertions, leaving Iraqi leaders with little political cover under which to make the U.S. troop deal at precisely the time the two countries were entering negotiations on the question.¹⁰

For Iraqis, the Bahrain debate lost some of its original energy and passion as months passed without the resumption of large-scale unrest in Manama, but any renewed conflict in that country would most likely spark a popular Iraqi response once again.

The fading of Iraq’s spring

Following the February-March crackdown, protests continued routinely through the summer months in Baghdad, but on a smaller scale, and often dominated by Sadrists and restricted within Sadrist neighborhoods in Baghdad. The protests tended to be nested within the Sadrists’ campaign of criticizing the performance of the Maliki government, which accompanied Moqtada Sadr’s ultimatum that the Sadrist parliamentary bloc would withdraw support from the government if delivery of essential services did not improve immediately.¹¹

Alongside the Sadrists, other activist groups continued to mount weekly protests in Baghdad without the violence of February-March, but always in a tense standoff with ever-present government security forces and Maliki loyalists.¹²

Outside the protests, the activist organizers were subjected to intense pressure and intimidation from government loyalists. The clearest example was the case of popular journalist Hadi al-Mahdi, who used his radio talk show to help organize a high-profile series of anti-government protests and had previously been arrested for his role in fomenting protests in February. On September 8, 2011, al-Mahdi was assassinated in his home by unknown gunmen using silenced pistols just hours after posting on Facebook that he had received death threats from government loyalists.¹³

The assassination of al-Mahdi signaled the end of large-scale protests, indicating that the Maliki government's strategy of using official force and unofficial intimidation has worked, at least for now.

A political crackdown

By September 2011, the quelling of anti-government demonstrations had flowed seamlessly into a broader government crackdown against its political opposition—a campaign that began in earnest the following month. Days after President Obama announced on October 21st that U.S. military forces would not stay in Iraq beyond the end of year expiration of the U.S.-Iraq status of forces agreement, the Maliki government arrested more than 600 Iraqis for their roles in an alleged Ba'athist coup plot. The implausible scheme, which the Maliki government claimed had been revealed in intelligence shared by the new Libyan government, supposedly involved former Ba'athists throughout the country, with arrests taking place in all the Sunni-majority provinces and in Basra.¹⁴ On closer examination, however, the list of those to be arrested seems to have resembled “the usual suspects,” including some individuals who had left the Ba'ath party before 2003, some whose age or infirmity would have precluded involvement in any plot, and some Iraqis who were already dead.¹⁵

The Sunni community's response to the wave of arrests was vehement, and Sunni-majority provincial governments in Salahadin and Diyala, two provinces with sizeable Shi'a and Kurdish minority populations, immediately moved to begin the constitutional process of becoming federal regions—like the Kurdistan Regional Government—in order to insulate themselves from what they viewed as an overreaching government in Baghdad.¹⁶ The Maliki government, in turn, responded to the federalism bids with more force. Security forces deployed to Diyala with an arrest warrant for the provincial governor, who fled to the Kurdish region of the province, while other security forces deployed to Salahadin to contain anti-government protests there. Shi'a-majority towns in both regions were the scene of pro-government crowds that denounced the federalism bid and declared their intention to secede if the provinces attempted a bid for autonomy.¹⁷

While these events unfolded on the ground in November, Maliki effectively blocked the federalism initiatives by asserting that they were unconstitutional since they were “based on sectarian motives.”¹⁸ Maliki's extraconstitutional response to the legal maneuver showed both that he was willing to abrogate the constitution to block his political opponents' attempts to contain his consolidation of power—and that he truly already possessed the power to enforce his will upon them.

The federalism standoff also showed that Maliki still had the means of exploiting the ever-present fractures in the Sunni community. When the Anbar provincial government signaled its intention to join Salahadin and Diyala in seeking federal region status, Maliki responded with carrots rather than sticks, offering to increase all-Sunni Anbar's share of the national budget and meeting with Anbari leaders to hear their grievances, something he had not done in mixed-sect Salahadin and Diyala.¹⁹

After America, the deluge

The federalism crisis of October and November, in turn, set the stage for an even more intense crisis in December. In the first 96 hours after the December 15th ceremony marking the departure of U.S. troops from Iraq, the Maliki government moved to arrest, raid, or surround the homes of the most senior Sunni government leaders: Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, Deputy Prime Minister Saleh Mutlaq, and Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi. These steps, which came just three days after Maliki met with President Obama at the White House to hail the successful completion of the Iraq mission, sparked a political crisis that has not yet subsided. The three Sunni leaders' Iraqiya coalition responded by suspending its almost 90 members' participation in the Iraqi parliament, and by directing its ministers to boycott meetings of the Iraqi cabinet. Maliki answered the boycott by asserting the power to remove both Hashimi and Mutlaq from their positions without the approval of parliament. Hashimi fled to Iraqi Kurdistan, where he remains today.

Iraqi state television, meanwhile, aired "confessions" from Hashimi's bodyguards, who alleged on camera that Hashimi had ordered them to carry out assassinations and attacks for money. The confessions had the air of having been coerced, and anonymous government sources later claimed Hashimi's men had been beaten before answering their interrogators' questions.²⁰ Criticized for having acted without judicial approval, Maliki declared the formation of a judicial panel to consider the charges against Hashimi. The panel, headed by Iraq's chief judge Medhat al-Mahmud, who has issued a series of constitutional rulings in Maliki's favor since 2009, predictably endorsed the Maliki government's charges and ordered that Hashimi be tried in Baghdad for the crime of supporting terrorism.

Whereas the suppression of popular protests in the spring of 2011 had elicited little response from the international community, the Maliki government's heavy-handed crackdown on political opponents in the fall led to sharp criticism from abroad. Typical was the Human Rights Watch January 2012 report on Iraq, which blasted the Maliki government's systemic abuses of human and civil rights, citing its continued use of secret prisons, warrantless arrests, intimidation, and torture.²¹ Major media outlets in both the United States and Great Britain also documented what they termed a return to authoritarianism in Iraq, blunting the idea that the U.S. mission had successfully installed a working democracy in the country.

But it remains to be seen whether this kind of international approbation will have any effect on the Maliki government's behavior, which remains motivated mainly by its desire to eliminate its domestic political opposition. Thus far the Maliki regime has not paid a high cost in the international community for its poor track record; it continues, for example, to receive military assistance from the United States, indicating that the Iraqi government's diplomatic relationships are not conditioned on its domestic behavior.²²

Supporting the status quo in Syria

At time of writing, the standoff over Hashimi's fate and the rupture in Iraq's power-sharing arrangement remained unresolved, with few prospects for a political solution. Meanwhile, the deepening crisis in neighboring Syria has begun to exert a powerful influence on Iraqi politics and foreign policy.

Having sided with the revolution in Bahrain, the Maliki government chose to side with the counterrevolution in Syria. Before 2011, the Maliki government

considered Bashar al-Assad's Syria an adversary that pushed *ihadis* into Iraq to target the Iraqi Shi'a and Kurdish communities. In August 2009, for example, Maliki himself blamed Assad for the massive bombings of Iraqi ministries in Baghdad, and even called for a UN special tribunal to investigate Syria's role in the attacks and in terrorism in Iraq in general.²³ Two years on, however, Maliki and his government expediently changed their tune. As popular and regional pressure on the Assad regime mounted last summer, the Maliki government came to its defense, with Maliki criticizing the Syrian opposition and declaring that the Syrian people should "use the democratic process" to resolve their grievances against the regime (as though a democratic process already existed in Syria).²⁴

The change in the Iraqi government's stance was most likely influenced by the Iranian regime, which sought to use its extensive regional leverage to preserve Assad's rule, but it was also likely a *quid pro quo* in which the Iraqi government was promised the handover of senior Iraqi Ba'athists who had long used Syria as a safe haven from which to oppose the new Iraqi government. The most significant factor in the Maliki government's change of Syria policy, however, was the fear among Iraqi Shi'a leaders that Assad's fall could lead to the emergence of a Sunni Salafi regime in Damascus that would once again support the *ihad* against the Shi'a-dominated government in Baghdad.²⁵

Since last summer, the Iraqi government has extended political, economic, and even security support to the Assad regime. Politically, Iraq has largely abstained from Arab League motions against Syria, and in fact in November offered its own peace initiative to compete with that of the Arab League, though it fizzled as a result of the December political crisis in Baghdad. In the economic arena, as much of the rest of the

international community was seeking to isolate the Assad regime, the Maliki government took the step of exchanging trade delegations and reaching new trade agreements with the Syrian regime. More recently, the Iraqi central bank's foreign currency sales have been used by Syrian and Iranian figures as a means of evading international sanctions.²⁶ In the security realm, meanwhile, there have been serious allegations since last fall that Iraqi Shi'a militant groups have become directly involved in the Syrian conflict on the side of the regime, and the Syrian opposition has also alleged that the Iraqi government has either directly or tacitly supported this militant intervention.²⁷ By contrast, Maliki and his senior security officials recently declared their intention to tighten security on the Syria-Iraq border in order to prevent Iraqis from smuggling arms and sending fighters to aid the opposition.²⁸

Below the government level, the deepening Syrian conflict has also further polarized Iraq's factions. Since mid-2011, Iraq's Sunni tribes have materially supported the Syrian opposition, especially in eastern Syria, where tribes span the Iraq-Syria border. This Sunni tribal support has probably consisted of arms trafficking and the movement of fighters, as well as the offer of safe haven to Syrian insurgents.²⁹ At the same time, as noted above, there are indications that Iraqi Shi'a militant groups have begun to intervene in the conflict on the side of the Syrian regime, allegedly in coordination with Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iranian Quds Force.³⁰ The Iraqi Shi'a militant groups have also used their media outlets to signal support for the Assad regime. The Syrian conflict has involved Iraqi Kurds as well, and Kurdistan Regional Government President Massoud Barzani and his Kurdish Democratic Party have begun to compete with the PKK for influence among the Syrian Kurdish community as Syrian Kurds decide whether

to remain neutral or join the revolution against Assad.³¹ The Syrian conflict also now involves al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which appears to be shifting its primary emphasis to the campaign against the Assad regime, its former sponsors, and will undoubtedly have the support of the Syrian Salafi network in doing so.³² For AQI, whose regional support infrastructure has always been based in Syria, Iraq and Syria are increasingly blending into one theater of *jihad*.

The next phase

In the foreign policy realm, the Iraqi government's support for the Assad regime will increasingly place it at odds with the Arab League, the United States, and the international community in the near term. At some point, the Iraqi government may be forced to clarify its position, and will either have to openly defy international sanctions against Syria or go along with the enforcement of sanctions that run counter to Syrian-Iranian interests.

The Syrian conflict is also likely to have a destabilizing effect on Iraq's internal politics. The polarization of Iraqi parties on the Syria question could threaten any new power-sharing pact that the Iraqis reach in the next few months. Iraq's competing political blocs are already on the verge of intervening in the Syrian conflict on opposing sides, meaning that if Syria descends fully into civil war, the conflict could easily spill over into Iraq. And since Iraq's Sunni community tends to support the Syrian opposition, while the Maliki government supports the Syrian regime, the Syrian question could blend into and complicate the ongoing dispute between the Baghdad government and the Sunni-majority provinces pressing for federal region status.

Regardless of the course of the Syrian crisis, the Malikiyoun will most likely remain focused on their domestic political goal of eliminating the two major threats to Maliki's rule: Shi'a leaders Ayad

Allawi and Moqtada Sadr, whom they view as the only real alternatives to Maliki in Iraq. Maliki and his allies are unlikely to effect any lasting reconciliation with Allawi and his Iraqiyah bloc, since they are bent on forcing Allawi out of public life while fracturing Iraqiyah and refashioning it into a rump Sunni bloc that can be dominated and dealt with. As the Malikiyoun succeed in pushing Allawi away from a share of power, they can be expected to turn increasingly on Moqtada Sadr and his movement. Already, the Maliki government is attempting to split Moqtada's followers by introducing the Iranian-sponsored Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq militia (a Sadrism offshoot) into politics to act as a peer competitor to Sadr.³³ The Malikiyoun will also block any federalism initiatives in Iraq's southern provinces, where the Sadrists have a strong provincial-level share of power, in order to prevent a Shi'a provincial threat to the centralized Maliki state they are building in Baghdad.

Yet while the political competition continues to unfold at the elite level and within government institutions, Iraqi society is growing increasingly alienated from the state, which remains incapable of delivering the acceptable minimum in essential services, security, and development to its citizens. The government budget for 2012 will be historically high, set at more than \$110 billion, meaning that the government will have the means to make a material change in its people's quality of life. Yet it must be said that among the Iraqi political class that has brought the country to the brink of conflict again, there is no major leader who can articulate a strategic vision for addressing the country's crushing problems: its housing shortage, lack of economic opportunity, dilapidated infrastructure, broken education system, derelict agricultural sector, poor water management, and undeveloped tourism industry.

Unfortunately for the political class, Iraqis' expectations will run high, and if

the perceived corruption and ineffectiveness of the state persist, the Iraqi street could easily explode again, as it came close to doing last February. If that happens, we can trust that the Malikiyoun will respond not by making a concerted effort to answer the street's grievances by making the state more effective or increasing participation in the government and economy, but by using force to crush dissent. The Malikiyoun are, after all, the men who opted to use force and deploy the Iraqi Security Forces that fired on crowds a year ago.

Even if such a crackdown recurs, however, it is not certain to produce an elite political challenge to the Maliki regime. Maliki's opposition is deeply divided, and opposition leaders seem to be focused on acquiring their own share of power rather than on articulating a democratic vision for Iraq, all of which has enabled Maliki to consistently outmaneuver them.

It is an unfortunate fact that the Maliki regime's drive to power has been abetted, directly or indirectly, by Maliki's own rivals. Maliki has had little difficulty in playing his opponents off one another, so that the Malikiyoun have been able to coerce, intimidate, and even terrorize one isolated opposition group after another while the rest have looked on, having been co-opted or bribed, rather than defend the democratic system. The same applies to the United States, Iran, and the international community, which have done little to check—and have sometimes assisted—Maliki's rise in power.

All of these actors, Iraqi and international, could have done otherwise had they wished; after all, Maliki's consolidation has taken place in full view. Among the Iraqi political groups, none of Maliki's rivals has seriously demanded the overhauling of the overcentralized structures of the Saddamist state and the vast administrative and financial powers that have come to reside in the

prime minister's office, or the blocking of the prime minister's practice of seeding personal allies in key posts throughout the government—creating a virtual shadow government. It seems clear that most rival political leaders did not resist these matters because they hope to benefit from them themselves. It is likely for the same reason that few political groups have pressed for a crackdown on the economic corruption that has become the norm among senior government officials and their cronies, and hardly any senior officials have been tried for corruption.

Thus the Malikiyoun will probably succeed, for the time being, in consolidating control of Iraq's key state institutions—and in emasculating their political rivals. But though the Malikiyoun can certainly seize control of the state, the state they are seizing is not an effective one. While they have begun to resemble Saddam's regime, the Malikiyoun are not yet as violent or as capable as their Saddamist predecessors were, and they will not be able to control, secure and stabilize Iraq anytime soon.

As the Malikiyoun tighten control of their state, they may yet find the country slipping from their grasp.



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TURKEY'S MOMENT OF TRUTH

— Nora Fisher Onar & Joshua W. Walker —

Half a year after sweeping national elections for the third consecutive time, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) is unrivaled on Turkey's domestic political scene and making ever more of an impression on the international front. In Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the party has a forceful "man of the people"; in Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, it has a grand strategist who has offered a Turkey long plagued by an identity crisis a framework through which to make sense of the country's multi-dimensional profile.¹

However, Turkey's newfound confidence, in tandem with the attempt to reframe and reposition, also has upset a familiar pattern of regional interactions. This has perturbed many observers accustomed to assessing Turkey's behavior through the prism of its convergence with—or divergence from—U.S. and EU policies and preferences. What can we expect from a more assertive Turkey in the wake of the Arab revolutions as the status quo in the region at large is being reconfigured? The answer is critical. At best, Ankara stands poised to play a leadership role in the region. At the very least, Turkey can be a game-changing "swing" state in the rapidly unfolding geopolitical changes in the region.

Turkey's changing profile in a transforming Middle East is not necessarily detrimental to the West. Rather, Turkey's new approach could represent an important asset to its European and American partners. Yet promise does not translate into practice automatically. As U.S. Secretary of State Clinton reminded her Turkish audience on a trip to Turkey in July, "Turkish democracy is a model because of where you came

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from and where you are. That doesn't mean you don't have work to do."² In the emerging realities of the new Middle East, Turkey's ability to deliver on that promise hinges on its consistent pursuit of democratization at home and a principled foreign policy that puts authoritarian rivals in the region to shame.

At best, Ankara stands poised to play a leadership role in the region.

At the very least, Turkey can be a game-changing "swing" state in the rapidly unfolding geopolitical changes in the region.

Opportunity, and crisis

With the resignation of Turkey's top military commanders just six weeks after the latest AKP electoral victory, there is no longer any doubt about who is in charge of the country's domestic and foreign policy. In conjunction with the 2010 referendum on constitutional reform—in which the AKP call for change was endorsed by the highest portion of the electorate it has secured to date (58 percent)—the government has a mandate to write a new social contract. The time could not be more ripe as Turkey stands on the threshold of consolidating its democracy and the Arab world clamors for democracy in the first place.

This is the moment to capitalize on Ankara's investment of economic, moral, and political capital in its rapprochement with the Middle East. After all, the region's people demand what Turkish citizens have been enjoying for decades, a vibrant polity that, despite its flaws, can serve as an inspiration for reform in the region. If, however, Ankara is to be a credible mediator and leader rather than a rhetorically bombastic but ineffective pretender, the AKP must transcend Turkey's long tradition, as leading observer

Fuat Keyman puts it, of "democracy without democrats."³ Managing the interdependency between a democratizing and fractious domestic political scene with an ambitious foreign policy vision will be of critical importance.

The task at hand is to break the pattern that has characterized Turkey for decades—in which one group captures the state only to enact rules that enable it to monopolize power and govern without compromise. The AKP's recent track record is not particularly encouraging in this regard. Over the course of the election campaign, police brutality towards protestors resulted in miscarriages and fatal heart attacks, but no apologies or investigations. Growing numbers of journalists, intellectuals, and scholars are being detained without trial. The Prime Minister appears to have adopted a policy of "zero tolerance" towards critics, forgetting his own experience of censure before coming to power. Tellingly, an AKP spokesperson struggled to explain why the move of the Turkey Higher Election Board (YSK) to bar, on a technicality, a newly-elected Kurdish parliamentarian from taking the oath of office was legitimate and in no way comparable to Erdoğan's own experience of being prevented from taking office a decade ago.⁴

The crisis over the Kurdish deputy had a domino effect. In addition to precipitating refusals on the part of other parties to take the oath in solidarity with figures from their own camps who likewise had been prevented from taking office,⁵ it reignited the Kurdish conflict. Violence has since spiraled to the levels of the turbulent 1990s, and the sense of insecurity this has engendered is perhaps even more pervasive than in those bad old days, perhaps because the Kurdish question is no longer a taboo topic in the media. Barely a week passes without headlines about militant attacks, military reprisals, and civilian deaths. The mounting death

toll is in the hundreds, with an October attack alone resulting in the death of at least 24 soldiers (the last time so many military deaths occurred in one incident was in 1993). This, in turn, spurred thousands in western Turkey to take to the streets spouting heightened nationalist demands and exacerbating inter-communal tensions. The AKP government, meanwhile, authorized 10,000 troops backed by warplanes to engage in cross-border operations against PKK strongholds in northern Iraq. Emblematic of the fraught and tragic dimensions of Turkey's Kurdish question was the recent earthquake in Van, a province known to be a hotbed of PKK sympathizers. While most ordinary Turks responded with an overwhelming outpouring of sympathy, mobilizing to send aid in vast quantities, the move on the parts of some disgruntled citizens to send sticks, stones, and Turkish flags inflamed Kurdish sentiment. And while most journalistic coverage was profoundly empathetic, a number of media interventions proved inflammatory. A case in point was the embittered pronouncement by ATV's Müge Anlı that "[t]hey hunt down our soldiers in the mountains as if they were shooting birds, but when they need them, they ask for their help. It doesn't work like that[;] these people need to be given lessons."⁶ Meanwhile, while the AKP government has made concerted efforts to address the humanitarian crisis, there have been notable shortcomings in the provision of relief, and survivors living in tent cities in sub-zero temperatures have lost their lives to both fire and cold. Erdoğan's move to dismiss protests about the conditions in the tents as the work of "provocateurs" has only served to further fuel Kurdish frustration.

Good housekeeping first

At the heart of the crisis is an urgent need for Turkey to put its house

in order and project hope to the region. The AKP must relaunch the rapprochement process of the mid-2000s aimed at Turkey's Kurdish citizens in which it proved willing and able to name the problem and flag enhanced cultural rights as a solution (e.g., by launching public broadcasting in Kurdish and allowing for Kurdish-language instruction in some state educational institutions). In the build-up to last year's elections, however, the AKP took a harder and more nationalist stance, with an eye to wooing voters away from the Nationalist Action Party (MHP).⁷ It also has displayed persistent unwillingness to engage the succession of Kurdish political parties that have been subjected to repeat censure. To be sure, the PKK must be stopped, but as the bloody 1990s revealed, retreating from political and cultural empowerment only engenders a vicious cycle.

There is an urgent need for Turkey to put its house in order and project hope to the region.

Proving that Turkey's diversity is a source of strength rather than weakness will permit consolidation of the domestic/foreign policy nexus. Rather than focusing on distracting issues like turning Turkey into a presidential as opposed to a parliamentary system—one of various other red herrings presented to the public on a regular basis—Turkey must address the pressing Kurdish issue. And this cannot simply entail an alliance of convenience between the AKP and Kurds that prevailed in the late 2000s; which is not sustainable in the long run. One need only look at the historical record to see that all previous such unions have floundered (from the army and the left following the 1960 coup, to the army and the right after 1980, to the Islamist/liberal alliance of the 2000s). Rather, the new

settlement must include all of Turkey, secularists, liberal and Kemalist alike, Alevi, Kurds, women who fear conservative hegemony and every other type of citizen in Turkey's diverse society.

Despite superficial similarities, the various Arab Islamist movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood, have little in common with Turkey's AKP.

Only in this way can Turkey lead by example in the Middle East. After all, the standard refrain of those in the region who are skeptical of Ankara's ability to serve as a model is that, with its track record on the Kurds, Turkey is in no position to lecture anyone about how to conduct their domestic or foreign affairs. A liberal democratic, prosperous, and peaceful Turkey, however, would wield considerable power of attraction in a neighborhood where revolutions are being fought and won but where the even more arduous process of building stable and open societies is only just beginning and already being undermined by the twin dangers of fundamentalism and sectarianism. It is thus all the more important that Turkey continue to prove that Islamic values and secular lifestyles—that Turks and Kurds—can co-exist. Democratic depth represents Turkey's big chance for a meaningful leadership role in the region. It would diminish the resonance of Saudi money with its Wahhabi strings, and mitigate the influence of an Iran that seeks to support sectarian cleavages and its revolution. A Turkey that has consolidated its democracy would also complement the work of tiny, resource-rich UAE and Qatar in fostering education and critical journalism. And it just might prove inspiring to those Israelis and Palestinians who aspire to mutual recognition and co-habitation.

A “Turkish model” for the Arab world?

In the wake of the “Arab Spring,” the Turkish model has been much debated and its original connotation—in which a military-bureaucratic elite imposed secularism on a Muslim-majority society—has shifted. Under the AKP, the “Turkish model” has come to represent co-existence between conservative Muslims through democratic politics in a secular state with a strong, albeit weakened, military with organic links to the West.

This model may resonate in the region, but comparisons to Turkey also should be approached with extreme caution. Despite superficial similarities, the various Arab Islamist movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood, have little in common with Turkey's AKP. The broader political landscapes from which they emanate are also very different; Turkey, after all, has a parliamentary tradition that, for all the interruptions and reversals, dates back almost 150 years. Thus, any government in Cairo, Damascus, or Tunis may draw inspiration from the Turkish example, but will find it difficult to replicate.

Dissonance between Turkey's rhetoric and experience on one hand, and Arab realities on the other, mean that despite the initial successes of Turkish foreign policy in opening new markets and expanding into the neighborhood, Ankara has been forced throughout the “Arab Spring” to confront the new and complex realities of the Middle East. Having initially inspired admiration in both the Arab world and the West for its early embrace of Tunisia and Egypt, Turkey misjudged the situation in Libya by initially rejecting sanctions and even opposing NATO involvement, losing considerable credibility before changing course. Now having exhausted all options in the face of ongoing protests and brutal repression by the AKP leadership's “brother”—Syrian President

Bashar Assad—Ankara has forcefully spoken out and offered refuge as Syrian dissidents and opposition have poured across the border. Syria, having once been the showcase of AKP's policy of engagement in the Middle East, has now become the centerpiece of a policy of containment with a Turkish leadership that has "run out of patience" with Assad.

Turkey's every movement and statement on Syria is being keenly watched. Thus, Ankara finds itself in the uncomfortable situation of being a flip-flopping regional power, confronting accusations it used to lob at the West for its "double standards" and hypocrisy in the region. In a similar vein, Turkey's belligerence towards former allies in Israel and France stands in stark contrast to its total silence on Iranian repression and reluctant condemnation of Syria as these regimes used every coercive means in the book to silence their citizens' demands for democracy.

One reason for this state of affairs is that unlike with previous foreign ministers Abdullah Gül and Ali Babacan, who spoke softly and in unison with the prime minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu's tenure has been fraught with domestic disagreements over important foreign policy issues such as Armenia, Cyprus, and Israel. The Prime Minister's timbre often has drowned out the work and voice of the foreign ministry which has tried to navigate these treacherous waters without awakening populist nationalism and drumming up fodder for domestic politics. But, as the plot has thickened in places like Syria over the past year, Turkey has come close to squandering the influence it has carefully cultivated over the last decade. Turkey's soft power and active diplomacy as a regional leader can no longer just be about trade and diplomacy. For, as Ivan Krastev has noted, there is "zero chance for 'zero-problems.'"⁸ As such, Turkey needs to throw its weight behind and

provide active support for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Re-anchoring Turkey to the West

Reinvigorating Turkey's relations with the West continues to represent the best guarantee that the country's domestic transformation will culminate in a standard of democracy that will make it a guiding light in the Middle East. The Transatlantic anchor provided through NATO, for example, can inject the Turkish military with the necessary confidence to embark upon reforms.⁹

Likewise, in order to fulfill its Middle Eastern promise, Turkey's EU process must not be allowed to expire. It is not that in the absence of an EU anchor Turkey will morph into the Islamic Republic of Iran. Turkey's historical and contemporary experiences and specificity, as well as economic, social, and religious make-up and set-up, mean such fears are profoundly misplaced. However, as in many of its neighbors—and among more than a few of its EU counterparts—the lure of populism and streaks of intolerance are strong. In fact, the danger is more that a Turkey with no EU prospects comes to resemble an increasingly authoritarian Russia.

The EU, of course, is not and cannot be the sole driver of reform now that Turkey is coming of age as a multi-regional power. That must come from within. But the EU "anchor" is needed to encourage the pro-reform grand coalition that the AKP succeeded in rallying in its first years in office, a coalition now in disarray with curtailments of the freedom of the press, the shaky respect for rule of law in the conduct of the *Ergenekon* trial, the closure of the pro-Kurdish DTP, and continuing civil-military tensions. Rather than being blinded by ambitions of grandeur, AKP-led Turkey must realize that its added value in the neighborhood

largely hinges upon its ongoing domestic transformation—a transformation the EU process empowers.

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The link between Turkey's EU candidacy and the success in its foreign policy is best captured by Arab perceptions of Turkey. A survey of Arab public opinion which uncovered considerable positive attitudes towards Turkey revealed that 64 percent of respondents believed that Turkey's EU membership prospects made it an attractive partner for the Arab world.¹⁰ Likewise, the attractiveness of Turkey for Gulf investors (whose investments there have helped a Turkey whose economy is closely linked to that of the EU ride out the recent Eurozone crisis) is also bound up in its ability to bridge markets. Therefore, nationalist or ideological impulses to abandon the EU would be detrimental to Turkey's long-term interests.

But the EU, too, must come to realize that it needs Turkey to meet the dramatic challenges in their shared neighborhood. Turkey also increasingly stands to make a contribution towards Europe's economic wherewithal. To be sure, the EU is in the throes of a painful and protracted crisis, but this is all the more reason to engage in a long overdue rational debate on Turkey. Such a debate must account for the complex interplay between identity and institutional, political, economic and social interests; but above all, it must confront these questions in an open and outward-looking manner, at a time when commitment to

principles like inclusivity and solidarity which have underwritten the European project appear to be under siege. The time could not be more ripe as racist fanatics murder dozens of innocents in countries like Norway and Germany.¹¹

Washington can put steady pressure on both the EU and Turkey in this regard, though the prime impetus must come from the two entities themselves. What is needed is a new formula in which convergence is not hostage to the differences that do exist between the partners. This could be realized by moving beyond the Manichean mentality that characterizes "members versus non-members." For even though no Turkish government would formally renounce the prospect of full membership, it is true that there are certain areas in which all the parties might prefer an *à la carte* approach. In fact, in areas like outreach to the Middle East, mutual agreement to pursue somewhat differentiated but complementary pathways that play to the strengths of each actor could be fruitful. All this could be pursued under the rubric of "gradual" or "graduated" integration;¹² this would involve step-by-step negotiations but would see Turkey participating as a stakeholder in EU institutions and decision-making processes, albeit without a veto until the end of the integration process. This could bolster political will in Ankara for those crucial democratizing reforms, while giving both European and Turkish actors time to prepare for and debate the merits of full membership for Turkey. Meanwhile, any attempts by the EU to treat Turkey as a second-rate buffer state between Europe and the Middle East are bound to fail as there is no reason why a rising Turkey would accept such a role. Quite the opposite, insisting on ideas like "special partnership" only compels Turkey to envisage its relationships with Europe and the Middle East in binary terms which favor the Muslim world.

Looking ahead

The time is ripe for the AKP, with its mandate for constitutional reform, to carry Turkey across the threshold of full-fledged liberal democracy. Only by deepening and projecting its “democratic depth”¹³ can it have a lasting impact at home, representing the best and serving as a leader in its neighborhood.

If it fails, its tenure will go down in history as just one more troubled time in a region that has endured far too many; Turkey itself may be plunged into ever more intense internal conflict as the void left by the exit of the generals permits the Kurdish conflict to reignite. However, if AKP-led Turkey rises to its historic challenge by delivering on an inclusive contract for all of its citizens, it can contribute to the stabilization of the turbulent region, to the enduring benefit of the peoples of the region, Europe, and the United States.



1. For more on this concept, see Joshua W. Walker's "Architect of Power," *Journal of International Security Affairs* 18, Spring 2010.
2. "Coffee Break with Hillary Clinton," CNN-Turk, Istanbul, Turkey, July 16, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/07/168667.htm>.
3. Fuat Keyman, "'Demokratsız demokrasi' Türkiye Demokratikleştirilebilir mi?," *Radical* (Istanbul), July 4, 2010, <http://www.abhaber.com/ozelhaber.php?id=5854>.
4. He served a prison sentence on the grounds that a poem animated by Islamist sentiments which he had read to a crowd was inflammatory.
5. In the case of the Republican People's Party (CHP), the move proved polarizing within the party itself. The figures which the CHP insisted on backing were controversial hardliners imprisoned in the context of the ongoing Ergenekon trial, whose very inclusion on the list of candidates had alienated the reformist wing of the party.
6. Semra Polat, "Turkey's Kurds: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Paris), November 2011, <http://mondediplo.com/blogs/turkey-s-kurds-one-step-forward-two-steps-back>.
7. According to one reading of the AKP's election strategy, by seeking to co-opt right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP) voters, it hoped to ensure that the right-wing nationalist party would come in under Turkey's high electoral threshold of 10 percent, thereby giving the AKP a far greater proportion of the seats in parliament. A sex video scandal that emerged in the run-up to elections was alleged by its targets, the MHP, to be part and parcel of such a strategy.
8. Ivan Krastev, "Arab Revolutions, Turkey's Dilemmas: Zero Chance for 'Zero Problems,'" *opendemocracy*, 24 March 2011, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ivan-krastev/arab-revolutions-turkey%E2%80%99s-dilemmas-zero-chance-for-zero-problems>.
9. For more on this, see Kemal Kirişçi, Nathalie Tocci, and Joshua Walker, "Neighborhood Rediscovered: Turkey's Transatlantic Value in the Middle East," *Brussels Forum Paper Series*, March 2010.
10. See TESEV polling in Meliha Altunisik, "Turkey: Arab Perspectives," *TESEV Foreign Policy Analysis Series* 11, 2009, 25.
11. The attacks of Anders Behring Breivik in Norway resulted in 77 deaths, whereas the Neo-Nazi perpetrators of Germany's recent "döner killings" targeted one Greek-born and eight Turkish-born shopkeepers.
12. For an extended discussion of the concept, see Nora Fisher Onar, "Europe's Tipping Point: Turkey's Solution," *opendemocracy*, April 4, 2011, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/nora-fisher-onar/europe's-tipping-point-turkey's-solution>.
13. Nora Fisher Onar, "Democratic Depth: The Missing Ingredient in Turkey's Domestic/Foreign Policy Nexus?" in Kerem Öktem, Ayşe Kadioğlu and Mehmet Karlı, eds., *Another Empire? A Decade of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the Justice and Development Party* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2012).

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HOW SAUDI ARABIA HAS SURVIVED— SO FAR

Jonathan Schanzer & Steven Miller

On December 17, 2010, the self-immolation of Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, who was protesting the confiscation of his wares and harassment by the country's authorities, touched off mass protests that brought about the shocking exodus of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14th. Across the Middle East, the masses celebrated the drama in Tunisia as a step toward democracy. Indeed, it was the first time that mass protests forced an Arab leader from office. By January 25th, hundreds of thousands of protesters gathered in Egypt's Tahrir Square, also calling for the end of Hosni Mubarak's regime. At the same time, protest movements sprouted in Jordan, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen. Media commentators called it the "Arab Spring."

For the Saudi royal family, looking to preserve their autocratic state, this was the dead of winter. They watched events unfold and waited in fear. Would Saudi Arabia's population take to the streets?

In short, the answer was no. Saudi Arabia remained remarkably quiescent during the first year of the Arab protests.

Quite by accident, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies was monitoring Saudi social media during this time for another study (analyzing the ideas and influence of Saudi clerics online). What follows is an account, informed by both social media and more traditional sources, of how the Saudis dodged the proverbial bullet during the 2011 Arab uprisings, but may yet face challenges in their wake.



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A controlled media climate

One of the more remarkable aspects of the protest movements in Egypt and Tunisia was the extent to which Twitter, Facebook, and other social media enabled frustrated populations to express their anger against the autocratic regimes they sought to topple. Indeed, these relatively new means of communication helped the opposition coordinate their efforts and generate a nucleus of sentiment that led to the ouster of two dictators.

Saudi Arabia did not experience a similar Internet challenge, for several reasons. To be sure, the Internet is readily available to the Saudi people. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees lists the number of Saudi Internet users at 11.2 million, which is second only to Egypt in the Arab world.¹ The Internet and Democracy Project of Harvard University's Burkman Center for Internet and Society confirms that Saudi Arabia "comprises the second largest cluster." But the Center also notes a relative dearth of political activity, pointing out that this cluster "focuses more on personal diaries and less on politics..."²

The reason for this is simple: Saudi Arabia has a high level of censorship. In January 2008, the Saudi Ministry of Culture and Information enacted 16 articles of a law restricting the use of technology.³ The offenses for which perpetrators could receive long prison terms and harsh fines included anything that maligns Islam, is "contrary to the state," discusses the Saudi military without prior consent, "harms relations with other countries," damages the integrity of state officials, could be characterized as "the propagation of subversive ideas," or "disrupt[s] public order." In other words, the government prohibits Saudi citizens from using the Internet to discuss "controversial" politics.

As if that were not enough, on January 1, 2011, the Saudi Ministry of Culture enacted the Press and Publications Law, requiring all news sites, discussion

forums, mobile phone text messaging (and other mobile phone-based content), and email groups to obtain a government license. The regulation makes the license available only to Saudis, who must also be at least 20 years old and have a high school degree.⁴

This is a contract which Saudis have had little choice but to accept. The regime maintains an iron grip on the media. The result is a relatively tame online environment, when it comes to politics. It should therefore come as little surprise that Saudis were largely quiet on Facebook, Twitter and other social media in the early months of the Arab revolts.

The big bribe, part I

However, the Saudi royal family was not content to simply enforce its draconian media laws as a means to prevent unrest in the kingdom. In an attempt to buy the loyalty of his subjects, King Abdullah pledged more than \$35 billion to the Saudi people upon returning from his three-month convalescence in Morocco on February 23rd. This package included increased funding for housing, studying abroad, and social security. The state awarded its employees a 15 percent salary increase, and infused \$10.7 billion into the country's development fund, which offers interest-free loans for Saudis to build homes, marry, or start small businesses. The measures were further designed to alleviate unemployment, believed to be around 40 percent for Saudis between 15 and 24.⁵

These measures conspicuously lacked any indication that the king was considering the political reforms that masses were calling for around the region. The government proved as much when it arrested founding members of the Islamic Umma Party, a self-professed "moderate" party that blatantly flouted the state's long-standing ban on political parties.⁶

Some Saudis openly scorned the king's attempts to purchase stability by

voicing their dissatisfaction on Twitter using the hash-tag #saudimataleb (Saudi demands). As the *Financial Times* reported, one female student wrote, “We don’t want... money, I want to know that I’ll be protected under a written constitution for the rest of my short life.”⁷

Nevertheless, based on the relative calm that prevailed, the financial package appeared to allay some of the concerns of Saudi citizens, at least for the time being. On the other hand, they may have been afraid of protesting due to the expected response of the Saudi state.

The clerical factor

To be clear, the lack of activism did not reflect an absence of conditions that could make Saudi Arabia ripe for unrest. The corruption, poverty, authoritarianism, and lack of freedoms that set off uncontrollable protests in neighboring Arab countries certainly exist in the kingdom. And as French academic Stéphane Lacroix observed, “a new generation of young political activists” is on the rise. He notes that they are “connected... through social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter, and count among their ‘friends’ numerous young Egyptian and Yemeni activists, whose revolutionary ‘know-how’ they have been sharing...”⁸

The regime offset the zeal of this new cadre of Internet activists with online support from its clerics, who issued rulings and opinions that served to buttress the regime and reaffirm its legitimacy. Even the unsanctioned clerics who have a history of protesting against government policies, were careful not to challenge Saudi rule.

On March 6th, the kingdom’s highest religious body, the Council of Senior *Ulema*, called on “everybody to exert every effort to increase solidarity, promote unity and warn against all causes giving rise to the opposite.” The cumbersome statement further stressed the “importance of mutual advice, understanding,

cooperation in righteousness and piety and forbidding sin and transgression,” and cautioned against “injustice, evildoing and ingratitude.” More directly, the statement warned Saudis about “deviant intellectual and partisan (read Shi’a) tendencies, as the people of this country are a single unit following the example of the *Salaf* (righteous ancestors)... and contemporary Muslim *imams* when it come[s] to preserving unity.”⁹

In essence, the Saudi government appealed to its public via the clerical establishment, without having to threaten them directly.

Other clerics intimidated citizens with violence. Saad al-Buraik, a member of the government’s Counseling Program for re-educating extremists, issued a *fatwa* in which he called for “smashing the skulls of those who organize demonstrations or take part in them” on the Saudi-owned Al Majd TV. This statement, which the regime tacitly welcomed, prompted heated debate between regime supporters and detractors on Arabic language discussion forums.¹⁰

The al-Buraik controversy caught the attention of the *New York Times*. Writing in its “Room for Debate” section, Madawi al-Rasheed of Kings College London ripped into the cleric. “Al-Buraik, an extremist but also a government loyalist, preaches hate against anybody who does not worship the Al-Saud, obey their orders, and maintain silence over their excesses. He is part of a prolific network of preachers embedded in state-funded institutions. His [*fatwa*] against Shi’a and Sunni activists are notorious. He is one of the extremists retained by the government to preach obedience at home and *jihad* abroad.”¹¹

Madawi’s observations cut to the heart of the long-standing perception that the state-sanctioned clergy in Saudi Arabia serves as a rubber stamp for regime policies. This phenomenon was particularly obvious at the start of the Arab protests, when the Saudi cleri-

cal establishment warned against self-immolation in response to Bouazizi's now-historic act. A *fatwa* from the kingdom's Grand Mufti, Abdulaziz al-Sheikh, ruled that Islam forbids self-immolation, and called it a "heinous crime and a great calamity."¹² Nasir al-Omar, a prominent Saudi cleric, pointed out that killing oneself ranks among the greatest sins in the *Quran* and *Sunnah*.¹³ Clerics across the political spectrum also concurred.

Preemptive suppression

To the chagrin of Saudi officials and their clerical backers, the Arab protests did not subside, but instead gained momentum throughout the region. Building off that energy, a group of Saudi dissidents sought to organize a massive demonstration against the regime on Friday, March 11, 2011. The date was significant in two ways. First, protesters across the Arab world designated Fridays the "Day of Rage." Additionally, March 11 symbolically recalled the tragic date in 2002 when 15 girls died in a schoolhouse fire because Saudi religious police forbade the "improperly veiled" girls from exiting.

Remarkably, the campaign gained momentum via social media, despite Saudi Arabia's media restrictions. But the demands did not exactly mirror those of other regional protesters. Those who supported the campaign expressed their desire for wide-ranging reforms from the current government (rather than regime change, as in neighboring states). Indeed, Saudis clamored for the existing state to allow for a constitutional monarchy, elected members of the parliamentary *Shura* (Consultative) Council, greater freedoms for women and minorities, and the release of political prisoners.¹⁴

Despite the fact that the movement did not seek to topple the state, Saudi authorities took strong measures to put down this "Day of Rage." On March 5th, London's *Independent* reported that the government drafted "up to 10,000 secu-

rity personnel into its north-eastern [Shi'a] Muslim provinces, clogging the highways into Dammam and other cities with busloads of troops..."¹⁵ On March 10th, the security forces wasted no time dispersing several hundred Shi'a protesters in the Eastern province oil-towns of al-Qatif and Hofuf. When March 11th finally arrived, the government had already locked down the capital, Riyadh, with roadblocks and checkpoints, as helicopters circled overhead. Protesters were nowhere to be found. One lone man approached a *BBC* reporter to tell her, "We want freedom. We want democracy."¹⁶

Thus, some three months into the "Arab Spring," the Saudi government's three-pronged strategy of money, religion, and military force ensured that the Day of Rage passed without major incident. Undoubtedly, this relieved the House of Saud and world leaders who rely heavily on Saudi Arabia to maintain stable oil markets.

The big bribe, part II

One week after the March 11th protests failed to materialize, King Abdullah announced another financial package worth more than \$70 billion. By some estimates, the package allocated \$66 billion alone for 500,000 housing units to address the country's shortage.¹⁷ To be sure, this measure was long overdue; the Saudi population has been doubling every twenty years, and analysts expect it to reach 30 million by 2017. By some estimates, the government will need to construct two million housing units by 2014 to keep pace with demand.¹⁸ Additionally, the state injected \$4 billion in healthcare infrastructure to revamp and construct new medical centers. Finally, the king's cash infusion also covered raises and bonuses for government employees, more loan money to the average Saudi, and better unemployment and welfare benefits for those in need.¹⁹

But the monarchy did not only pledge \$70 billion to boost the Saudi people's spirits. Some of that money bolstered the regime's ability to subdue continued threats. Cash flowed to the religious establishment, military, and security forces. This included the creation of 60,000 security jobs within the Ministry of Interior, as well as promotions and salary hikes for all military officers. The religious establishment received some \$300 million to build more offices around the country, construct and renovate mosques and Islamic centers, and promote Islam.²⁰

Not surprisingly, King Abdullah's distribution of some \$130 billion to preserve calm evoked both cynicism and criticism from voices at home and abroad. One user on the *al-Jazeera Talk* discussion board slammed the king's decisions as a "failed attempt to bribe the constituents and an admission to the pressure exerted by reform movements."²¹ The *New York Times* pulled no punches when it ran a piece in June titled, "In Saudi Arabia, Royal Funds Buy Peace for Now."²² Professor Toby Craig Jones of Rutgers University concurred in the pages of *The Nation*, noting that the kingdom is "using its extensive wealth to buy off dissent."²³ Martin Indyk, writing for the *Washington Post*, predicted that these financial measures "can help postpone, for a time, the demands of unemployed Saudi youths. But political freedom... will not be assuaged by economic bribes or police-state suppression."²⁴

Domestic shifts

As the Saudi regime consolidated its position at home, its position on Arab protest movements around the region shifted. For example, after initially disavowing the unrest, the Saudi government subsequently supported military action (through the Arab League) in Libya to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi. More recently, the Saudi regime led the Arab charge to diplomatically isolate the regime in Damascus.²⁵

This shift was also apparent among its clerics. Even those who first described anti-regime protesters as traitors seeking to undermine stability began acknowledging some protest movements' "legitimate" demands. One could argue that this was a challenge to the standing orders of the regime, which largely remained silent. One could also argue that the clerics saw the wave of Islamist movements as a net advantage for the Wahhabi state. Either way, the clerics began backing the masses, while the regime stayed mum.

Salman al-Odah, one of the *Sahwa* (awakening) clerics who challenged the regime's Islamic credentials in the early 1990s, was arguably the first major Saudi cleric to break ranks when he expressed his support for the Egyptian demonstrators in early February. He openly advocated for Egyptian reform on Facebook and Twitter.²⁶ However, it soon became clear that he crossed the line when the Saudi-owned MBC1 channel canceled his popular television show.²⁷

Other clerics also jumped in to denounce dictators. Some who initially frowned upon regional protests appeared to experience a change of heart. For example, Nasir al-Omar, whose early *fatwa* against self-immolation served to temper the enthusiasm of protest movements, called on the Yemeni regime in June to cease its "bloody crimes against defenseless people."²⁸ In July, the Association of Muslim Scholars, for which al-Omar serves as Secretary-General, condemned the "massacres" in Syria and called for the end of the Assad regime.²⁹

Abdul Rahman al-Barrak, who initially denounced protests in Yemen, appeared to reverse his position on Egypt. According to one *fatwa*, the protests in Egypt were "a testimony to God's power... Praise the Lord for what happened, which was needed for the people of Egypt...the evil is removed..."³⁰

What prompted these clerics to reverse course and support the Arab pro-

tests is still unclear. However, the Saudi regime tolerated the clerics' support for regional unrest, apparently comforted that their security was intact.

Women find their voice

Arguably, the Saudis' most difficult challenge of the "Arab Spring" came not from protest movements but from its women. Manal al-Sharif was one woman who seized upon the momentum of region-wide protests as an opportunity to agitate for the right of Saudi women to drive. Her cause was made famous by a YouTube video of her breaking the law and driving on Saudi streets.³¹ She soon organized a bold campaign that challenged the state over its archaic law.

The debate was certainly not new to Saudi Arabia. In 1990, several dozen women held a public protest, calling for women to enjoy equal driving rights. As analyst Rachel Bronson notes, "The protests succeeded in capturing international attention, but also galvanized the Islamic opposition. The driving protest, and with it any hope for increased liberalization in Saudi society, was easily and effectively snuffed out. The same cannot be said for the increasingly radicalized Islamic opposition."³²

Some two decades later, the debate resurfaced in the same space where much of the "Arab Spring" debates were raging: online. By May 2011, a popular Facebook campaign was in full force. "I will drive my car myself on June 17th" encouraged female Saudis to violate the country's laws and drive.

Top brass from the Saudi state weighed in on this issue. Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Prince Ahmed ibn Abdulaziz confirmed that the ban was "still in effect" and those who "violate the ban will be severely punished."³³ Cleric Abdul Rahman al-Barak described female drivers as opening "the gates of evil, seeking to westernize the country."³⁴

While there was some dissent within the state's clerical and official hierarchy, the majority held firm. In December 2011, the Permanent Committee for Research and *Ifta*, a sub-committee of the Council of Senior *Ulema* (CSU), drafted a report on the potential impacts of repealing the driving ban. The report suggested that allowing women to drive would "provoke a surge in prostitution, pornography, homosexuality and divorce," and further stated that within 10 years, there would be "no more virgins."³⁵ One woman, 34-year-old Shaima Jastaniya, was sentenced to 10 lashes in September for defying the driving ban, though King Abdullah later commuted her sentence.³⁶

Women's rights issues continued to dog the regime throughout the year. In the late spring, web users engaged in vociferous debate over a new *fatwa* by the CSU banning gender mixing at work.³⁷ Concerns stemmed from the fact that a woman cashier "meets with tens of men in a single day, talks to them, and hands things to them..." The CSU responded that a "Muslim woman should not work in a place where there is mixing with men. It is her duty to stay away from grouping with men and look for a job that is allowed [by Islam], which does not expose her to lust... if men lust after her it is *haram* (forbidden), and her employment by these companies is helping her commit a *haram* act."³⁸

Debates also emerged over Saudi laws that banned female clerks from working in lingerie stores. As Ellen Knickmeyer wrote in *Foreign Policy* in June 2011, female consumers were forced to consult with "male clerks about cup sizes and overflowing muffin tops."³⁹ The debate underscored the inherent challenges of a Saudi social system under strain. Arguably, these debates came to the fore because of protests and dissent taking place around the Arab world. Nevertheless, as was the case with the planned protests in March, the Saudi state prevailed.

Stability, for now

At the start of the Arab protests, the Saudi state clearly reacted with alarm, took steps to shut down dissent at home, and even moved to mitigate challenges in its immediate sphere of influence, in places like Yemen and Bahrain. However, as it became increasingly clear to the monarchy that its grip on power was secure, Saudi policy shifted. Through their leadership roles in the GCC and Arab League, the Saudis pushed for regime change in Yemen, Libya, and, more recently, Syria. Given its long-standing track record of risk-averse policies, the state likely shifted in this direction because it felt insulated from the broader Arab protest movements.

It is further interesting to note that the clerics served as a harbinger of this change. While they initially circled the wagons around the Saudi state, the clergy soon weighed in on other regional protest movements. In some cases, they were vociferous advocates for precisely the kind of change that the Saudi regime fears.

Given that regional protests continue, and that spasms of unrest have been reported in the Shi'a strongholds of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province,⁴⁰ it is entirely unclear if the House of Saud can continue to withstand the storm. Indeed, the draconian laws and lack of meaningful participation in the monarchy have not changed. Thus, the underlying reasons for future unrest remain in place.

FDD's research on social media yielded one particularly relevant finding that could further impact the security of the Saudi state in years to come. As the unsanctioned clerics increasingly turn to various online platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, the Saudi regime may find it more difficult to control their messages. Despite the restrictive media laws, these clerics could yet pose a direct challenge to the regime. During the 20th century alone, Saudi Arabia had three

major confrontations with elements of the religious establishment: during the 1920s, when the zealous *Ikhwan* rebelled against King ibn Saud; in 1979, when the Grand Mosque in Mecca was held captive by the *Salafi* separatist group *al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba*; and in the early 1990s, as the *Sahwa* clerics denounced the Western military presence in the Gulf and demanded a more Islamic Saudi government and society. In all of those situations, the government was able to quell dissent with a mix of draconian measures and co-opting strategies.

But Saudi Arabia, like the rest of the Arab world, is now dealing with a political environment that looks nothing like the past.



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LEARNING FROM THE “ARAB SPRING”

Lawrence J. Haas

The growing turmoil of the “Arab Spring”—the populist awakening that spread like a brushfire across the Middle East and North Africa after a desperate fruit peddler in Tunisia set himself afire in December of 2010—can shake the optimism of even the most enthusiastic human rights promoter.

As of this writing, populist uprisings have toppled dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. But Egypt’s government remains in a leadership tug-of-war between its military and Islamist parties, while in Libya rebel militias control the streets and the government’s interim leaders still must establish their legitimacy, write a new constitution, and hold elections. Autocrats in Syria and Bahrain continue the brutal crackdowns on their respective populations, with the slaughter in Syria in particular reaching unspeakable levels. That experts wonder whether the “Arab Spring” is more accurately an “Arab Winter” or “Islamist Spring” reflects the uncertainty surrounding the region’s future.

For the United States, the Greater Middle East has long presented a host of tricky challenges. It is home to most of the world’s oil, on which the U.S. and global economies are so dependent; a dangerous theocracy in Iran that seeks nuclear weapons, is expanding the range of its ballistic missiles, and has killed U.S. troops directly and indirectly in Afghanistan and Iraq; the world’s most active state sponsors of terrorism in Iran and Syria; and a vital U.S. ally in Israel that is surrounded by states and terrorist groups seeking its destruction and is facing cooler relations with post-Mubarak Egypt and increasingly Islamist Turkey.



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In the short term, the United States must protect its vital interests by navigating the economic, military, and diplomatic landmines that these challenges present. Longer term, the challenge is quite different: to promote freedom and democracy across the region (just as the United States has promoted freedom and democracy in every other region in recent decades). That's because a freer, more democratic Greater Middle East would benefit America in myriad ways. Liberal democracies do not tend to sponsor terrorism, so a freer, more democratic region would lessen the threats to the United States and its allies. Meanwhile, new free-market economies would provide new trade and investment opportunities for U.S. businesses, generating more prosperity back home.

For Washington, the question is how to get from here to there—how to support democratic forces over the long term without compromising U.S. interests in the short term. That is no easy task. The answer, however, lies not in reducing our efforts to promote freedom and democracy as a result of regional turmoil and retreating to the relative safety of “stability.” Instead, it hinges on understanding that change is coming to this volatile region whether we like it or not—and that a deft combination of savvy diplomacy, targeted economic and technical assistance, and (when necessary) military power can nudge it in the right direction.

America's quest

For Washington, the challenge of how to balance short- and long-term foreign policy goals is hardly a new one. It cuts to the heart of debates that have dominated U.S. foreign policymaking since America's rise to power.

From the start, Americans have assumed a missionary role on the world stage, a sense that they created a revolutionary new government and soci-

ety, rooted in noble values that they were destined to bring to the far-flung reaches of our planet. In U.S. foreign policy, that spirit formed the basis of what's now known as American “idealism,” the doctrine that America can and should advance the spread of freedom and democracy abroad. Idealism is most often associated with Woodrow Wilson and his call for U.S. entry into World War I to “make the world safe for democracy,” but it reflects a role that Americans have assumed since they began to settle the New World.

Among the foreign policy cognoscenti, idealism competes with the doctrine of “realism,” which dates back at least to Teddy Roosevelt¹ and is perhaps most commonly associated with Richard Nixon (and his top foreign policy advisor, Henry Kissinger). Realists counsel that the United States should single-mindedly pursue its “national interest” and avoid the temptation of nobler goals, if only because the nation has far less capacity to make the world a better place than idealists believe. The battle between idealists and realists forms what Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, has called the “fundamental fault line” of U.S. foreign policymaking.²

A fault line? Yes. But an unbridgeable chasm? Hardly. Idealism and realism do not present an either/or choice for policymakers, for at least two reasons. First, even idealism is not completely, well, idealistic. It has a healthy dose of self-interest attached to it as well. Idealists believe the United States should promote freedom and democracy around the world not only because it's right, not only because the United States has the power and influence to make a difference, but for a more selfish reason as well; a freer, more prosperous world will mean more U.S. allies and fewer enemies, fewer wars and less terrorism, more U.S. trade and more markets in which U.S. businesses can invest and sell their goods. Second,

in practice, U.S. foreign policy is almost invariably a mix of idealism and realism, as most Presidents of modern vintage have sought to advance freedom and democracy when they could while resorting to hard-headed realism when circumstances required.

As the United States has sometimes learned to its painful dismay, Washington should not apply a one-size-fits-all approach to the world. Every region has its own history, its own politics, its own economy, and its own demography, and Washington has different short-term interests in each region that can constrain its activities. What works in Latin America does not necessarily work in Asia, and what’s appropriate for sub-Saharan Africa may not be appropriate just north in the Greater Middle East. Nor can Washington assume that, with just a clarion call for change or technical assistance to help democratic activists or military intervention to oust an autocrat, countries that were long ruled by despots will easily make the transition to a democracy of which Jefferson and Madison would have been proud. Establishing freedom and democracy is hard work and, for the United States, it requires a long-term commitment to advancing the values of liberty and tolerance and helping to build the infrastructure of political parties, an independent media, open elections, and transparent and accountable government.

All of that brings us to a volatile region of festering frustrations that, until recently, history appeared to have forgotten.

Short-term challenges

More than a year into the “Arab Spring,” you won’t find many experts who think that it has enhanced Washington’s standing in the region, advanced America’s values there, or strengthened U.S. security overall.

Take Egypt, the Arab world’s traditional leader, where Hosni Mubarak ruled

with an iron fist but was a U.S. ally who maintained the 1978 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and held radical forces in check. Pushed aside by President Obama as his support eroded badly in early 2011, he was replaced on a (purportedly) interim basis by military rule. Military leaders, however, are acting decidedly, well, Mubarak-y—only more so. In a move Western experts do not believe that even the difficult Mubarak would have dared to take, military leaders in February arrested 19 Americans, including the son of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who were working for leading U.S.-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that seek to advance freedom and democracy around the world. The government then began proceedings to try the 19, and two dozen others, for various crimes against the state.

Meanwhile, in parliamentary elections, voters gave two-thirds of the seats to the Muslim Brotherhood or the even more fundamentalist Nour Party, prompting *The Atlantic’s* Jeffrey Goldberg to write: “The majority of voters in the Arab world’s most populous country chose either a party whose motto is ‘Islam is the Solution’ [Muslim Brotherhood] or a party that believes that medieval Arabia is an appropriate state model [Nour Party].”³ Neither party is promising to uphold the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty—especially if Washington responds to the NGO crackdown by withholding aid to Cairo—and both subscribe to doctrines that are anti-liberal, anti-Western, and, thus, inevitably anti-American. Cairo’s relations with Washington will almost surely cool, depriving the United States of a reliable ally in its efforts to maintain regional stability and confront Iran.

In Syria, a defiant President Bashar al-Assad has left no doubt that he would do whatever it takes to retain power, continuing a slaughter that has claimed more than 7,500 lives (including women

and children), violating every one of his pledges to stop the violence and move toward reform, and provoking calls for international intervention. But the global community remains deeply split over whether to get involved and, if so, how. China and Russia vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution in early February to support an Arab League peace plan under which al-Assad would remove his troops from Syrian cities and step down, while the United States and NATO expressed no interest in military intervention of the kind that gave Libya's rebels the breathing room to topple Muammar Gaddafi. Syrian opposition groups were split as well, reducing their effectiveness. As Western powers debate whether to help the opposition unite, to arm rebel forces, or to create safe zones in the country, U.S. intelligence reports that al-Qaeda has been trying to capitalize on the chaos (as it sought to do elsewhere in the region).⁴

Hopes for a freer, more democratic Middle East and North Africa that would better serve U.S. interests rest on what we know about the region's people, what we've learned about their aspirations, and what tools are at their disposal.

As of early 2012, global inaction was improving al-Assad's chances to maintain power for months, years, or perhaps forever by crushing Syria's uprising. His future has enormous implications for Washington because he is a strong ally of Iran's radical regime and works closely with Tehran to arm and protect Hezbollah, Hamas, and other regional terrorist powerhouses. Depending on what kind of government followed, al-Assad's demise could further isolate Tehran, reduce its effectiveness

as a terror-sponsoring force, and make its quest for regional hegemony harder to achieve. Because Iran seeks to displace the United States as the region's leading power, Tehran's pain would be Washington's gain. Washington also would benefit if a new government in Damascus actually did what al-Assad often (though insincerely) hinted to Western audiences that he wanted to do: make peace with Israel, or at least reduce the threat that Syria presents to Israel's north.

Elsewhere in the region, the "Arab Spring" has been, at best, a mixed bag for the United States. Tunisia, where it all began, has since taken notable transformative steps from dictatorship to democracy, electing a new parliament that will draft a new constitution and witnessing the birth of an independent media and the beginnings of civil society. But, the country is increasingly split between secularists, who seek more economic opportunity to match their new-found political freedom, and Islamists, who seek to impose dress codes and criminalize insults to Islam. In Morocco, where political reform was well under way for years before the "Arab Spring," King Mohammed VI built upon those efforts with a more comprehensive program, including a new constitution that voters later approved, which shifted power from him to a prime minister. Though parliamentary elections gave power to a moderate Islamist party, that party's apparent seriousness about addressing economic problems and the reformist king's role as a check on parliament suggested the country would continue moving in the right direction.

In Libya, post-Gaddafi society remains in flux as interim leaders need to establish their legitimacy, restore some semblance of civil order, write a new constitution, and hold elections. Rebel forces patrol the streets and engage in discriminate detentions and torture, and Libyans in different regions worry about how

they will fare in a new political structure. In Yemen, strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh finally stepped down and his vice president replaced him after voters ratified a U.S.-backed deal. But, in the long run-up to those changes, military forces that remained loyal to Saleh were gunning down civilians, secessionist forces were gathering strength in the South, and al-Qaeda's dangerous branch in Yemen (which Washington worked with Saleh to control) capitalized on the mayhem by seizing some southern areas. In Bahrain, the Sunni dynasty's modest reforms have not satisfied the Shi'a majority's demands for more representative government, and the government is continuing a crackdown on protesters that, in its earliest stage last spring, was aided by Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states that fear the rise of Iran and other Shi'a forces. Saudi Arabia and Jordan have experienced more limited uprisings by disenchanting segments of their populations, and their monarchies have kept the protests in check through a combination of public subsidies to alleviate the unhappiness and governmental crackdowns to maintain order.

But while the regional turmoil presents a host of short-term challenges for the United States, the picture looks much brighter further into the future.

Long-term prospects

Hopes for a freer, more democratic Middle East and North Africa that would better serve U.S. interests rest on what we know about the region's people, what we've learned about their aspirations, and what tools are at their disposal.

First, the "Arab Spring" should refute once and for all the long-held notion of "Arab exceptionalism"—that, somehow, the people of the Greater Middle East do not crave freedom, do not desire democracy, do not want transparent and accountable government, and do not seek economic opportunity.

In a world that's fast becoming a global community, in which information and images move instantaneously across borders through Facebook and Twitter, YouTube and iPhones, authoritarian governments are increasingly hard-pressed to deny their people the freedom and opportunity that they can so easily see others enjoying not far from home. In seeking those things, people in the Greater Middle East are no different than their counterparts elsewhere.

Second, autocrats are increasingly hard-pressed to avoid global condemnation, global pressure, or even global intervention when they employ violent methods that were once sure-fire ways to suppress home-grown uprisings. Here, too, the revolution in global communications is the biggest reason why. Consider the far different fates that awaited Hafez al-Assad, who ruled Syria from 1970 until his death in 2000, and his son, Bashar, after each cracked down brutally on uprisings at home.

In 1982, the elder al-Assad sent his army to bring a Sunni uprising in Hama to an end, leveling the town, killing 10,000 to 40,000 people (depending on whom you believe), and marking what author Robin Wright described as perhaps "the single deadliest act by any Arab government against its own people in the modern Middle East."⁵ While planes bombed from the air, tanks knocked down buildings on the ground. Troops searched the rubble for survivors, who were subsequently tortured and executed. Through it all, a dictator had sent a strong signal to other would-be upstarts and, in an age before victims could show the world through pictures and video in real time, he got away with it.

Three decades later, his son would have no such leeway. In April of 2011, Robert Ford, the U.S. Ambassador to Syria, warned Syrian officials that Bashar al-Assad would not enjoy his father's impunity to move against a

home-grown uprising. “I told Syrian officials, ‘Do not think you can repeat the father’s tactics in Hama,’” Ford explained to CNN’s Wolf Blitzer nearly a year later. “I told them the world had changed, that with satellite television, with the Internet, with cell phones even, there was no way they could do what the father did and destroy a city without the world really being witness to it. And, as a result, now, we fast forward to 2012, the world can see what the Syrian government is doing and the Syrian government, as a result, is growing more and more isolated.”⁶

To be sure, as of this writing the younger al-Assad remains in power, brutalizing his people in hopes of crushing the uprising against him. Nevertheless, pressure continues to build for a tangible Western response to al-Assad’s brutality—and the relentless onslaught of video and pictures from inside Syria was clearly contributing to that pressure. By late February, U.S. and other Western officials were starting to talk less about the problems of intervention and more about possible options. Moreover, just last year real-time images of government abuse helped convince the West to intervene in Libya. When, in the aftermath of such imagery, a besieged Muammar Gaddafi threatened to slaughter his own people by the thousands, Washington answered calls from Paris, London, and other Western capitals to mount a military effort to protect the protesters from the air, giving rebels the requisite time to topple him. The lesson is clear: what a dictator might have done with impunity a decade or two ago is less possible now.

Third, if anything, the “Arab Spring” seems long overdue. Half of the people in the Middle East and North Africa are under 25, and they have grown increasingly disenchanted with autocracies that have not served them well. Unemployment among the region’s “youth” (those 15 to 24) was 24 percent in 2009, more than twice the rate for adults.

With little opportunity, youth search for jobs abroad. But the poor quality of their education leaves them unprepared for the increasingly sophisticated jobs that the global economy offers. Meanwhile, pervasive discrimination against women in the region, codified in law and enforced even more aggressively through family, tribal, and religious traditions, hurts not only the women themselves but the region’s economy. In essence, up to half of the population of Greater Middle East nations cannot contribute much to their countries’ economic growth.⁷

These three dynamics intersect in important ways. Today, the huge numbers of young people who are so dissatisfied with what their societies can offer are also the savviest generation in using social media to bring the outside world to the region and make it harder for despots to brutalize them. Tomorrow, that generation will inherit the responsibility to govern. Meanwhile, the region’s monarchs and strongmen are aging, and they will find it increasingly hard to simply hand down power to a son or other family member.

However the “Arab Spring” unfolds, change will continue to come to this region. The era of political stagnation is ending. The question is: what comes next? The further question is: what can the United States do to help steer that change in the right direction while avoiding the dangers inherent in pushing too hard?

Steps toward a U.S. strategy

Moving forward, Washington will need both a strategic vision and the flexibility to adapt it to “facts on the ground,” among them U.S. relations with the country in question and that nation’s political and cultural history. An effective strategy for the region would include at least the following elements:

Speak consistently, not episodically

If the three rules of real estate are "location, location, location," then the three rules of communications are "repetition, repetition, repetition." Presidents must speak regularly and forcefully about U.S. support for human rights because the Arab people, in particular, have reason to be skeptical. They know that, in the interest of regional stability, Washington traditionally has supported pro-Western autocracies in Cairo, Riyadh, and elsewhere who regularly abused human rights. The support that we provided, in turn, helped the autocrats ignore the aspirations of their people.

The President must make clear that, whether speaking to friendly or adversarial governments, he (or she) will push for reforms that will embed democratic values and structures into the societies that these governments oversee. He should, for instance, urge the military leaders and fundamentalist parties of Egypt to respect human rights as they build a post-Mubarak future, press the interim leaders of Libya to do the same when they write their new constitution, applaud the progress that Tunisia's leaders have made, and encourage the monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Jordan to build upon the limited reforms they have offered. All of that will nurture support among the restive people of the Greater Middle East who are seeking freer and more prosperous lives for themselves and their families.

Respect the home turf

While nurturing the values that, we believe, lie deep within the soul of every human being, the United States must not seek to impose its own formula for freedom and democracy on the region. The people of the Middle East, with their own ethnic and religious roots, their own histories and cultures, must pursue their own paths to freer and more toler-

ant societies. They may decide to build a U.S.-style federal system, a European-style parliamentary system, or something else entirely. The United States should work with them to ensure that, whatever they create, their political, economic, and social structures reflect the values of freedom and tolerance, transparency and accountability.

Monarchy may be anathema to U.S. views of democratic government—we were, after all, born from a revolution against monarchic rule—but the people of the Greater Middle East do not uniformly share our perspective. Moroccans, for instance, may be dissatisfied with the reforms that their King has provided, but they remain attached to the monarchy and express no broad-scale desire to topple it.⁸ The separation of church and state may be a bedrock principle of American government, but governments in the Greater Middle East will face pressure from rising Islamist forces to insert theological dogma into new constitutions. And, while the United States for two centuries stumbled over race and gender as it sought to perfect "The American Experiment," governments in the Greater Middle East will have to grapple with fierce Sunni-Shi'a rivalries across and within their nations that have long shaped the region's politics and economic opportunities.

Build beyond elections

As Middle East expert Kenneth M. Pollack put it recently, "Elections do not equal democracy."⁹ Washington and the NGOs with which it works must help transitioning nations to plant the values and create the institutions that ensure long-term freedom and democracy. Those values include free speech and free assembly, tolerance and non-violence, transparency and accountability, women's and minority rights, and respect for the rule of law. The institutions include opposition par-

ties, a free and independent media, and a thriving civil society that can hold government accountable.

Creating political systems of that nature, and institutionalizing them for the long term, is not easy. That's why, over the last several decades, nations all over the world have sometimes transformed themselves into free and democratic states, then slipped back to autocracy, and then returned to freedom and democracy. Success requires a sustained commitment by all participants. The alternative to deeply-ingrained democracy is one-time democracy ("one man, one vote, one time"), which could pave the way for authoritarian forces to gain control. That's what happened in the Palestinian territories in 2006 when U.S. officials pushed for elections; Hamas won a surprising victory, and it then seized Gaza in a violent coup a year later, proceeding to rule the narrow strip with an iron fist while launching thousands of rockets into southern Israel. "The proper role of the free world is not to encourage or to stop elections," the former Soviet dissident and current human rights promoter Natan Sharansky wrote late last year. "Its role should be to formulate, and to stick by, a policy of incremental change based on creating the institutions that will lead ineluctably to pressure for more and more representative forms of government."¹⁰

Tie U.S. aid to human rights

Washington should condition its economic, military, and political aid as much as possible on a nation's progress in protecting human rights. Even with its cash-strapped government, the United States retains enormous capacity to influence the direction of other governments through economic aid, diplomatic support, military sales and cooperation, trade and investment, and leverage over the lending decisions of multi-lateral development banks. By linking U.S. aid to governmental practices, a President

can put his rhetorical commitment to advancing human rights into tangible form, thus not only influencing foreign governments but also nourishing support among foreign peoples.

Egypt has long been a top recipient of U.S. aid, and U.S. officials have correctly threatened to slash or end it due to the military leadership's arrest and trial of the 19 Americans linked to democracy-building NGOs. Also correctly, U.S. officials have offered more aid to Yemen if its post-Saleh government moves toward democratic reform. Washington should keep a close eye on developments as well in Tripoli and Tunis, Riyadh and Amman, and it should boost aid to assist transitions to freedom and democracy and reduce it from governments that are moving in the other direction. It will, of course, have to balance those considerations against the short-term demands of national security, regional stability, and access to the oil on which our economy depends so heavily.

Focus on the long term

For the United States, the conflict between long-term visions of freedom and democracy and short-term exigencies remains a fact of life. But, it must not be a paralyzing one. Yes, Washington must set human rights considerations aside from time to time. Nevertheless, it must make clear, through word and deed, that it retains its long-term goal of advancing freedom and democracy and will pursue it whenever possible. It must avoid the trap of moving from one short-term exigency to another and losing sight of the long-term picture. It also must resist the age-old warnings of pro-American autocrats that U.S. promotion of freedom and democracy will invariably hand power to anti-American Islamic fundamentalists. Instead, it should nurture home-grown democratic forces that can become viable alternatives to authoritarianism of any kind.

Staying the course

In the coming years, as the "Arab Spring" runs its course and the Greater Middle East marinates in more turmoil, the United States is bound to make its fair share of mistakes. In seeking to help establish more freedom and democracy for the region and its people, Washington will push too hard in some places, not hard enough in others. It will assist democratic forces effectively in some places, but complicate matters in others. For U.S. officials, the task amounts to a balancing act.

In May of 2011, *The Atlantic's* Jeffrey Goldberg asked Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about what he called the "obvious" contradiction between "pushing for democratic reform" in some places while continuing to ensure that U.S.-friendly monarchs in Saudi Arabia and Jordan remain in place.

"I wouldn't accept the premise," she replied.

I think that we believe in the same values and principles, full stop. We believe that countries should empower their people. We believe that people should have certain universal rights. We believe there are certain economic systems that work better for the vast majority of people than other subsystems. So I think we're very consistent. I think that's been a cornerstone of American foreign policy for at least the last century.

At the same time, we live in the real world. And there are lots of countries that we deal with because we have interests in common. We have certain security issues that we are both looking at. Obviously, in the Middle East, Iran is an overwhelming challenge to all of us. We do business with a lot of countries whose economic systems or political systems are not ones we would design or choose to live under. And we have encouraged consistently, both publicly and privately, reform and recognition and protection of human rights.¹¹

The challenge is to ensure that, while protecting our interests in the short-term "real world," we don't lose sight of the long-term world that we aspire to help create.



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OUR LOSING WAGER ON CHINA

Gordon G. Chang

“We hope we can convey a positive message that China and the U.S. will stick to the principle of showing mutual support to people in the same boat and strengthen cooperation,” said Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping to his American counterpart, Joe Biden, during a phone conversation on the eve of his February get-to-know-you tour of the United States.

Xi, expected to become China’s next leader at the end of this year, undoubtedly used the boat analogy because he saw that Washington was reassessing the assumptions that have underpinned America’s relations with Beijing for the last forty years. The policies of today are the same as the ones President Nixon envisioned four decades ago, but only in broad outline. Chinese leaders, for good reason, are worried about recent American moves in their region.

China’s ascendance

When he made his groundbreaking trip to Beijing in 1972, Nixon knew that both China and the United States shared the same principal adversary, so he traveled half-way around the world to enlist Mao Zedong as an informal partner in the Cold War against the Soviets. The successful conclusion of that global struggle, which meant America no longer needed China, did not break the ties between two countries that then had little in common. And the horrible slaughter of Chinese citizens by their own government in their capital in June 1989 only interrupted close cooperation between Washington and Beijing; it did not end it.



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Since Nixon's visit to Beijing, the U.S. has sought to "engage" the Chinese and bring them into the liberal international system. This policy proved durable, despite tumultuous change over the course of decades, precisely because it was consistent with America's conception of its global role. Chris Nelson of the daily Washington report bearing his name maintains that today's China policies resemble those that produced the Marshall Plan because in both cases the United States was engineering, for the sake of the world, its own "altruistic decline."

Whether the two policies can in fact be linked, America's policy of engagement of China has been enlightened, far-sighted, and generous. And it has had an effect. Beijing, after Mao's death in 1976, reciprocated overtures from Washington and the West by dismantling the controls of a command economy, opening doors to foreign investment, and participating in international commerce.

This economic restructuring caused, or at least accompanied, a transformation of the country's external policies. Beijing dropped its shrill and antagonistic talk about spreading Marxist revolution. In fact, the Chinese began to speak in pleasing tones as they opened their country to the world. "We are trying to make as many friends as possible," said Li Zhaoxing, when he was foreign minister in 2004. "The more friends China has, the better."¹

And this was not just happy talk. Beijing did all it could to increase its friendships—and its clout. Once an outlander maintaining only one ambassador abroad, China is now close to the heart of world affairs, networked into almost every multilateral organization and virtually every other country. From its perches at the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund, Beijing is considered an indispensable player on every continent. In fact, the Chinese have been so successful that the

time we live in is considered to be *their* century. Consequently, Beijing's diplomats see themselves as representatives of history's next great power.

In a sense, this is the logical conclusion to America's engagement. It was always more probable that this century, marked by accelerating globalization that is spreading wealth around the planet, would be named after the country with more than 19 percent of world population—China—than one with less than five—the U.S. The hope of the engagers was that enmeshment of China into global institutions would lead, if not to a democratic nation, then at least to a benign one. So there was a bet that China would become a true partner rather than another Soviet Union. It was the grandest wager of our time, if not of all time.

Turning point

Yet the bet that once looked successful began to turn sour at the end of 2009. Soon after President Obama's troubled summit in Beijing in November of that year, China started to take on the world. The sudden change, markedly visible at the global climate summit in Copenhagen in December, meant that Chinese diplomats, officials, and officers spent less time explaining, persuading, and cajoling and more time complaining, pressuring, and threatening. For instance, in early 2010 China's flag officers and senior colonels went on a bender, making a point of publicly talking about fighting a war—a "hand-to-hand fight with the U.S." as one put it—in the near future.²

The new Chinese posture resulted in the now-famous "pivot" of the Obama administration. Last November, in the space of less than two weeks, Washington announced the Air-Sea Battle concept, which was obviously directed against China; launched the nine-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, with parameters designed to specifically exclude the Chinese; declared the U.S.

would rotate troops, planes, and warships through Australia to bolster the region's defenses; initiated, over Beijing's intense objections, a discussion of the South China Sea territorial disputes at a region-wide conference in Bali; and announced the dispatch of Secretary of State Clinton to Burma to explore ties with the troubled state, thereby trying to woo away from Beijing one of its closest allies.

Chinese diplomats were stunned by the series of events—especially the South China Sea initiative—and have yet to craft their long-term response. In the meantime, the White House looks like it is hoping that Beijing will go back to what had become known as its “smile diplomacy” of earlier years. Yet for various reasons it is unlikely that China will be able to execute such a diplomatic pivot.

As an initial matter, this is a time of an historic political transition in China. This fall, the Communist Party is slated to appoint a new general secretary, the most powerful position in the country, as well as replace seven of the nine members of the all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee, seven of the sixteen regular members of the Politburo, and at least seven members of the 12-member Central Military Commission. Moreover, 60 percent of the 370 seats on the Central Committee will change hands. All of these changes will, in one way or another, cascade down, affecting senior central government positions and many provincial-level ones.

This transition from the so-called Fourth Generation leaders, under the command of current supremo Hu Jintao, to the Fifth, presumably to be led by Xi Jinping, is already shaking China. For one thing, it is the first handover of power in the history of the People's Republic that has not been masterminded by Deng Xiaoping. Deng, after making quick work of Mao's designated successor, picked Jiang Zemin to succeed himself and Hu to follow Jiang.

Even before the transition from Hu formally begins at the 18th Party Congress later this year, there has been major turmoil inside the Communist Party. For instance, a high-level Chongqing official, Wang Lijun, attempted to defect to the American consulate in the Sichuan capital of Chengdu, carrying with him papers that may have documented the foreign assets of the wife of Bo Xilai, his former boss. Bo, the Chongqing Party secretary, tried to prevent Wang from getting away by ordering hundreds of his armed security troops to cross into neighboring Sichuan province to surround the Chengdu consulate.³ This bizarre incident was, according to some, engineered by Hu as a means of sidelining Bo, but it could end up destabilizing Vice President Xi, a Bo ally and Hu adversary. Whatever happens, sharp Maoist politics are making a comeback in 21st century China.

At this moment, China's officers, from generals to lieutenants, are thinking about what they want, and as a result they have become dangerous, arrogant, and bellicose. By their own admission, they are spoiling for a fight.

The Communist Party had already been dividing along factional lines, and the transition, by accelerating the splintering, is further eroding its ability to govern. We saw a similar process after the last major transition, from Jiang Zemin, Deng Xiaoping's successor and Third Generation leader, to Hu Jintao. After Deng's death, Jiang tried to linger in the limelight, by holding on to the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission, long after he was supposed to leave his other Party and government positions in 2002 and 2003. In response, Hu Jintao courted flag officers for their support in

his struggle with Jiang. Hu's tactics, by all indications, largely paid off.

The military, in return for its support, apparently gained greater say over central budgets and external policies during Hu's rule. In short, generals and admirals reversed more than a decade of declining influence, and they even began the partial remilitarization of politics.

Red army rising

At one time, the People's Liberation Army was organically linked to the Party. It was the PLA that installed the Communists in Beijing, and the first two leaders of the new communist state, Mao and Deng, were military officers. Then, the army was powerful, making or breaking China's rulers. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, the two successors to Mao and Deng, are civilians.

Jiang's elevation to top Party and government offices, beginning in the dark days of 1989, marked the start of a period of rapid decline of military influence, with progressively fewer generals and admirals holding posts in top Communist Party organs. For instance, no military officer has served on the Politburo Standing Committee since 1997. That loss of influence led to what analysts Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip Saunders have termed the "bifurcation of civil and military elites."⁴

Now, however, the situation is being reversed, with the PLA gaining clout during Hu's tenure. And splits in the run-up to the 18th Party Congress appear to be once again giving leverage to the military. Bo Xilai, for instance, has reportedly been talking to friendly generals in Kunming, Yunnan province, seeking protection from his political adversaries, who seek to deny him a promotion from the Politburo to the Standing Committee. Moreover, the military is set to gain a crucial ally if, as expected, Xi Jinping succeeds Hu as the country's next leader. Xi is thought to have

retained strong ties to the army, having served early in his career as a secretary to veteran general Geng Biao. Finally, the PLA is gaining power because in recent years it has been better able to maintain its cohesiveness than other power blocs in the increasingly faction-ridden Party.

Yet it is not so much that the flag officers are gaining control over civilians; the generals and admirals are winning the latitude to conduct their own affairs with only limited interference from civilians. In January of last year, then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates spoke of the "disconnect" between China's civilian and military leaders.⁵ As he suggested, the regime is dividing into constituent elements, which often carry out their own policies with little evident coordination.

The fracturing of the regime—something especially evident during Gates's troubled visit to Beijing in January 2011—is something that has not happened to this degree since the Beijing Spring of 1989, or maybe even since Mao's death. As Arthur Waldron of the University of Pennsylvania points out, Chinese history is marked by periods where civilian and military leaders drift apart, and now China is entering one of those turbulent eras.⁶

The implications of these internal changes are, obviously, large because the generals and admirals do not want a closer relationship with Washington. Yet there is an even more fundamental problem. "China's military spending is growing so fast that it has overtaken strategy," said Huang Jing of Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy to London's *Telegraph*. "The young officers are taking control of strategy and it is like young officers in Japan in the 1930s. They are thinking what they can do, not what they should do."⁷

At this moment, China's officers, from generals to lieutenants, are thinking about what they want, and as a result

they have become dangerous, arrogant, and bellicose. By their own admission, they are spoiling for a fight. And in a time of political transition, almost no civilian leader is in a position—or willing to take a risk—to tell the top brass what to do.

This fracturing of the Chinese political system makes it particularly hard for Beijing policymakers to make those adjustments that are obviously in China's best long-term interests. Perhaps the worst sign from Beijing at the moment is that the country is taking on, at the same time, most of its neighbors to the east and south, especially India, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, not to mention the U.S. If anything, this indiscriminate hostility betrays an inability of Chinese leaders to engage in the strategic thinking for which they were once famous.

No straight talk

It is in this context that hopeful Washington officials seek to engage the Chinese military to avoid conflict. There have been seemingly innumerable American attempts over the past decade to establish rules of engagement at sea, to open hotlines, to participate in exchanges, to talk officer-to-officer. Some of these efforts have succeeded, but the U.S. overall has little to show for its initiatives.

There are obviously many reasons why Chinese officers have not, on the whole, wanted to be engaged by their American counterparts, and many of them appear to be beyond our control to remedy. We cannot, for instance, do much to change the PLA's Middle Kingdom mentality, no matter how hard we try. Yet there is one thing that Washington can do, and that is to speak candidly to the Chinese. Incredibly, American officials and officers have, for the most part, not done so.

America's failure to talk plainly understandably frustrates Chinese officials and officers, as was evident from the 12th round of the U.S.-China Defense Consultative Talks, which were held in Beijing last December 7th. Then, Undersecretary of Defense Michele Flournoy said "I think we had a good exchange of views," even as her counterpart, General Ma Xiaotian, appeared much less satisfied.⁸ On that occasion, the deputy chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army questioned Ms. Flournoy, then the Pentagon's policy chief, about the November 2011 announcement, by President Obama and Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, that the U.S. would be rotating forces through Australia. Chinese state media has portrayed that move as part of an effort to "encircle" China.⁹

Flournoy, however, told the PLA that the United States had no such intention. "We assured General Ma and his delegation that the U.S. does not seek to contain China," she said, referring to Beijing's concerns about the deployments. "We do not view China as an adversary."¹⁰ The Marines will be going to Australia, she mentioned, primarily to meet "non-traditional challenges."¹¹

Flournoy, in her post-meeting remarks, also mentioned she raised "transparency between our two countries," but she was obviously much less candid than her Chinese interlocutors. They denounced the Obama-Gillard announcement, leaving Washington in no doubt how they felt, and they complained that American defense officials had not been honest with them. "The U.S. has always asked China to be transparent about its strategy," said Major General Luo Yuan, referring to America's basing of troops in Australia, to the official *China Daily*. "It is the U.S. who should make its intentions clear."¹²

The general has a point. While the Air Force is preparing to land B-52s on Australian runways, Washington is busy

strengthening defense ties with traditional allies Japan and the Philippines as well as establishing relations with former enemy Vietnam. This is occurring while the U.S. Navy is making plans to deploy to Singapore its new Littoral Combat Ships. And the Chinese know that the Pentagon's Air-Sea Battle concept is directed against them, in part because defense officials have confirmed that it is. Yet Flournoy insisted on denying the obvious throughout her consultations in Beijing in December.

Clearly, the Obama administration is not ready to talk about what it is really doing with its celebrated "pivot" and why the American military presence in Asia is necessary in the first place. And if we cannot do that, can we expect the Chinese to understand what regional leaders expect of them? When Xi Jinping said the region did not want to see an increased U.S. military presence, as he did in his written answers to the *Washington Post* in February,¹³ he was either being devious or totally misinformed, but in either case it was a failure of American policy that he thought he could get away with making such an obviously incorrect statement or, worse, that he might actually have believed what he said was true.

At a minimum, we cannot expect China to change its policies unless Beijing hears us say that they are incompatible with its obligations as a member of the international community. And Chinese officials, unfortunately, have every right to complain about their American counterparts, who are not willing to be as forthright with them as they are with us.

Gut check time

U.S. policymakers are also less than forthright in another respect: they have not been able to admit that four decades of engagement of the Chinese may prove to be a mistake. So far, we have, through engaging China, created an economically powerful state that at the moment

is moving in all the wrong directions. For example, it is, as Robert Sutter of George Washington University points out, the only major power planning to kill Americans.¹⁴ And, judging from public comments, China's senior officers are relishing the prospect of doing so.

Today, those in favor of engagement argue that it has nonetheless resulted in great change in China and that more engagement is needed to complete the transformation of that country. The first proposition is indisputable, but the second is debatable because it is not necessarily clear that the remedy for the failure of engagement is still more of it. And despite the pivot, which is the first step to better policies, Washington has yet to give up hope that China can be effectively "engaged."

We have to recognize that our engagement of China has, unfortunately, reinforced the worst tendencies in the Communist Party's authoritarian system by inadvertently creating a set of perverse incentives. The Chinese engaged in bad behavior, and we provided benefits in the hope they would change. So they continued irresponsible conduct, yet we continued to reward them. In these circumstances, Beijing naturally became more assertive and less cooperative. After all, we offered incentives for unacceptable conduct.

As the Chinese have exhibited less and less desire to engage us, we have felt more and more need to engage them. It is evident, from recent conduct, that the old approach toward China is no longer working. If we do not begin to pursue "correct" policies, to borrow the Party's Marxist-tainted lingo, our patience—actually complacency and indulgence—may end up creating the very thing we have sought to avoid—an incurably aggressive Chinese state. After all, the Obama administration's pivot is only necessary because 40 years of engagement has made China a danger to its neighbors and to us.

China, unfortunately, looks as if it is approaching the limits of its ability to transform itself from an adversary of the international system to a “stakeholder” in it. Ronald Reagan opposed the Soviet Union because he knew that the form of its government mattered, that it prevented Moscow from evolving to better policies and serving as a reliable partner.

Yet we have taken the opposite tack with the People’s Republic, hoping that it can become a responsible great power. Now, when it is showing that it cannot be one, there is nonetheless a renewal of hope that new personalities will change China’s policies. As we saw during Xi Jinping’s February visit to America, many gush over the fact that he visited Iowa, that his daughter goes to Harvard, that he says he likes Hollywood blockbusters. We have been repeatedly told he has a deep personal affection for Americans.

Maybe he does, yet we forget China’s policies are not personality-driven and that any general party secretary, no matter how charming he may be, must act within the institutional constraints of a capital now dominated by hard-liners. Moreover, Xi will, due to factional infighting, be the weakest leader in the history of the People’s Republic when he takes over this year, and he will have to reflect militant views just to remain in power. As a result, it will be hard to engage either him or his country, especially at a time when the Chinese political system is turning on itself.

So what do we need to do? We need to see China clearly. We need to talk to the Chinese frankly in public. We need to stop condoning unacceptable conduct. We need, in short, not just short-term responses to Beijing but a new policy framework. And we should not make the grandest wager in history even more of a long shot.

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CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN NORTH KOREA

Andrei Lankov

Kim Jong-il, the hereditary ruler of North Korea, is dead, and his son—visibly shaken and patently unprepared for the job—has replaced him as the head of the world’s last remaining Stalinist state. The start of a new era in the DPRK is a good time to speculate on what we should expect from the “Hermit Kingdom” in future. While crystal ball-gazing has never been an exact science and history often takes quite sudden turns, it is difficult to be optimistic when thinking about North Korea’s future.

The dictator is dead, long live the dictator

Kim Jong-il’s death on the early morning of December 17, 2011, was one of those events which, while expected sooner or later, nonetheless occurred suddenly. It certainly could not be termed a surprise, however. Kim had suffered a stroke in late 2008, and never completely recovered. Soon thereafter, North Korea began preparations for a hereditary transfer of power.

Many observers pointed out that these began belatedly. Had Kim Jong-il been more serious about the future of his regime, a successor should have been firmly in place by the early 2000s. Nonetheless, in October 2010 the choice of successor was made public. Kim Jong-un, Kim’s youngest (known) son, was suddenly promoted to the rank of four-star general, and thereafter his name began to appear in North Korean propaganda with growing frequency.

Nevertheless, it appears that North Korea’s policy makers believed that they would have a few more years at their disposal before they would need to finalize the hereditary



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power transition. For, when Kim Jong-il died, Kim Jong-un had yet to officially become his second-in-command. As of mid-December, Kim Jong-un was, technically speaking, merely one of many members of the country's top leadership: neither a Politburo member nor a member of the National Defense Commission, the supreme executive body of the state.

This constituted a major potential handicap. Yet when Kim Jong-il died, no one dared exploit this potential weakness of the heir apparent. Kim Jong-un was recognized as the new leader immediately upon the death of his father and, seemingly, without much resistance.

As of this writing, the transition in Pyongyang appears to be unfolding smoothly. The North Korean elite appears to be united—not so much by their loyalty to the Kim family, or by some shared ideological convictions, but rather by an understanding that political infighting at the top might endanger the whole system. They probably never heard of Benjamin Franklin's famous adage that "We must, indeed, all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." Yet they are acting in full accordance with this famous dictum.

Still, the smoothness of the transition now taking place in Pyongyang is misleading. North Korea might in the future follow a number of different trajectories, but none guarantees an orderly and gradual transformation of the country.

No China model

It has often been argued that Kim Jong-un might turn out to be a reformer—a young North Korean version of Deng Xiaoping. Indeed, he has studied overseas, speaks foreign languages and surely knows of China's impressive economic success. Hence, it is hoped, he might be tempted eventually to emulate that example, presumably after his conservative regents lose their grip on power in a few years' time. Perhaps this indeed

will be the case, but it is useful to remember that in the peculiar situation of North Korea, reforms are inherently dangerous.

Unlike China, North Korea is only one part of a divided nation. There is little doubt that Chinese-style reforms, if actually undertaken by the North Korean leadership, are likely to produce an economic boom. In China, this was enough to secure significant popular support for the Communist Party, but the situation in North Korea is different. It is the existence of South Korea—with its impressive economic success—that makes the situation of the North Korean regime so precarious and potentially unstable.

The regime in Pyongyang lives next to a country whose people speak the same language and are officially described as "members of our nation," but who enjoy a per capita income at least 15 times (some claim even 40 times) higher than that of North Koreans.¹ This represents the largest per capita income disparity in the world between two countries sharing a land border. To put things in comparison, the income ratio in divided Germany was merely 1:3, and even this was enough to cause East Germans to overthrow their regime as soon as they could do so without fear of Soviet retribution.

This is the reason why the North Korean regime has gone to such great lengths to control the flow of information to its citizens. The DPRK is the only country in the world which bans the private ownership of tuneable radios; a North Korean needs a security clearance to read any non-technical foreign publication in a library; and most foreigners are not allowed to wander unsupervised. The North Korean government understands that if average North Koreans were to become fully acquainted with the true depths of their poverty vis-à-vis the South, the regime's legitimacy would be forfeit.

China's reformers, by contrast, do not face such problems. The prosperity of, for example, Japan or the United States

is well known in China, but is not seen by the Chinese public as politically relevant. After all, those are different nations, with different histories and cultures, so their current prosperity does not necessarily demonstrate the inefficiency of Communist Party rule.

North Korea, however, is different. If market reforms are eventually launched by Pyongyang's leaders, North Koreans will not be satisfied with the resulting economic improvement, however impressive and dramatic it will be. Once they fully learn about the unbelievable prosperity of South Korea, and once they become less fearful of their own government, they will likely demand unification with the affluent South—on the somewhat naive assumption that such unification will immediately deliver them South Korean living standards.

Unfortunately for North Korean authorities, Chinese-style reform is bound to result in the spread of uncensored information about the outside world and, especially, South Korea. Nowadays, the average North Korean suspects that the South is doing better, but has no clue about how big the gap between the two Koreas actually is. Reforms, moreover, will also bring an unavoidable relaxation of domestic surveillance, which will make domestic political stability even more difficult to sustain. In other words, in the peculiar situation of North Korea the results of reform will be not an economic boom *à la* China, but rather state collapse *à la* East Germany (albeit, likely, more violent).

North Korean elites are acutely aware of the danger. In January 2011, journalists from Tokyo's *Shimbun* daily managed to interview Kim Jong-nam, Kim Jong-il's oldest son. Nam lives overseas in semi-exile in Macao, and is the only member of the Kim family who occasionally talks to the foreign journalists. His remarks have become more frank in recent years, and in January

2011 he described the predicament of his father's regime in no uncertain terms: "I personally think that reforms and openness are the best way to make lives of the North Korean people more affluent. But if one takes into account the peculiarities of North Korea, one might fear that reforms and openness will bring about system collapse."²

As of this writing, the transition in Pyongyang appears to be unfolding smoothly. The North Korean elite appears to be united—not so much by their loyalty to the Kim family, or by some shared ideological convictions, but rather by an understanding that political infighting at the top might endanger the whole system.

It is not impossible, however, that the potential danger of reforms will be underestimated by Kim Jong-un and his young friends who are likely to take over the North Korean leadership. These people are foreign-educated, and may harbor some illusions about the outside world and their own people. So it is perhaps not outside the realm of possibility that in a few years' time CNN will report the opening of the first McDonald's outlet in Pyongyang, while the *New York Times* will run an article about an iconoclastic North Korean professor who is boldly teaching his students that Generalissimo Kim Il-sung—hitherto believed to be without fault—was merely 80 percent correct in his policies.

The very idea of such a "Pyongyang Spring" is sure to generate tremendous optimism in the international media. Sober observers, however, would do well not to get carried away by the enthusiasm. Indeed, a milder version of the reality that currently prevails in North Korea

is simply unsustainable—and it is likely to be pulled apart by the irresistible attractiveness of the rich South.

No amount of economic success is likely to help the North Korean rulers. Even under the most favorable of circumstances, it will take decades to bridge the yawning North-South gap; throughout this time, a reformist government will remain extremely vulnerable to internal discontent. Average North Koreans will see the regime as the major obstacle to enjoying South Korea's fabulous prosperity. And it would be only a matter of time before a popular protest movement, seeking immediate unification, will arise.

The unsustainable status quo

The path of reforms is risky, and there is a good chance that Kim Jong-un will understand this, as his father (and, for that matter, grandfather) once did. However, the refusal to reform is not a solution either. At best, it is merely a way to postpone the inevitable. The problem is that the current system is disintegrating slowly, and the government cannot do much about it.

North Korea is often depicted as the world's last Stalinist state. In truth, this ceased to be the case in the mid-1990s. The old facade of bellicose rhetoric is still present, certainly. But the state-run economy has shrunk dramatically. The survival of the average North Korean family now depends largely on the booming, if largely unofficial, private economy. North Koreans are not given government rations any more. Instead they grow their own food, manufacture dress and footwear, and are engaged in many kinds of grassroots market activities. Last but not least, they often travel to China looking for job opportunities there. It was recently estimated that in the decade between 1998 and 2008, the share of income from informal economic

activities reached 78 percent of the total income of North Korean households.³

The worldview of the North Korean populace has changed as well. Nowadays, North Koreans know that the outside world, including South Korea, lives better than they do (even though few fully comprehend how huge the gap between the two Koreas actually is). They are less afraid of the authorities: contrary to what is often claimed, the North Korean state has become less repressive since the late 1990s (partially, but not exclusively, thanks to endemic corruption, which has meant that officials are willing to turn a blind eye to all kinds of "irregularities"). The marketplace has even become a social space where new horizontal connections are being formed, and where the very first signs of an emerging civil society can be observed.

The continuation of this marketization is dangerous for the regime. The new generation of North Koreans—people now in their twenties and early thirties—know that they are living a lie and strongly suspect that better alternatives are available. The spread of foreign videos, widely reported by refugees and the media, seems to be of special significance: the South Korean movies and soaps smuggled to North Korea from China in recent years have become the major staple of popular entertainment.⁴ It will take a long time—a decade or two, perhaps—before these dangerous social developments will start to really threaten the foundations of the regime. But, nonetheless, this will happen.

The regime understands the danger perfectly well, and from around 2005 its leaders have fought an unsuccessful uphill battle against the markets and private economy.⁵ Their efforts culminated with the 2009 reform—an initiative which ended in a spectacular failure. More recently, the regime has abandoned its attempts to put the genie of the market back into its bottle. Politicians in Pyong-

yang have learned two important lessons: first, anti-market policies are difficult or impossible to enforce (largely because the state cannot to pay the enforcers); second, without markets there would be no way to feed the populace.

Nonetheless, the growth of markets is likely to create insurmountable problems for the regime. Right now, it is impossible to say what will trigger the final crisis. It may start as a result of spontaneous protests, provoked by some relatively minor incident at a marketplace or in some provincial city—as was the case in Romania in 1989 and Tunisia in 2011. It is not impossible that lower echelons of the elite (those with least vested interest in maintaining the regime) will challenge the current system through a coup or conspiracy. A contagion from nearby China is also possible, presuming that China will experience an outburst of popular, pro-democratic protest in the foreseeable future. In short, opportunities are numerous and essentially unpredictable. But the result will be the same: the disintegration of the North Korean state as we know it.

Alternative futures

The North Korean leadership thus finds itself in a lose-lose situation: North Korea is heading toward crisis, and government action (or lack thereof) can at best slow the speed of the decline—but not reverse it. An attempt at reforms and/or an open outbreak in elite rivalries are likely to accelerate this crisis, while stubborn attempts to maintain the present set of policies might postpone the collapse for some time. They will not, however, be able to prevent it.

There is good reason to suspect that this collapse will be quite violent. Kim-era officials and members of other privileged groups are aware that in post-unification Korea they will have no future. In the worst-case scenario, they might even be persecuted for the gross

human rights abuses of the Kim era. This is a major difference with the recent spate of revolutions in the Arab world. A Tunisian colonel knew that, whoever was in control in the capital, he would still command his battalion, while an Egyptian clerk saw no reason to worry about his desk job when democrats and Islamists were waging their campaign against Mubarak. Their North Korean peers, by contrast, cannot be so certain about the future. Thus, if crisis were to come, those people are likely to fight—assuming that they will fight for political and even physical survival.

It is often assumed that the collapse of the Kim regime will inevitably trigger a South Korean intervention, followed by unification. However, recent events in South Korea have cast doubt upon that assumption.

Such Kim loyalists, while clearly a minority, are by no means a small or powerless group. Their number includes party and state officials, police and security personnel, as well as many military officers. If family members are included, they number one to two million people. These people have good reason to be determined in their resistance; they have access to arms and, in some cases, they have been prepared for guerilla operations in case of war or a major insurgency.

From their point of view, fighting anti-regime forces might make sense. First of all, there is a relatively good chance that they might succeed in subduing opposition elements. Second, there is a relatively good chance that China would come to their aid and install in Pyongyang a pro-Chinese regime. Such a regime, in turn, would obviously employ the vast majority of Kim-era officials, giving this group ample reason to look upon Chinese occupation more favorably than unification under South Korean control.

Indeed, the positions of China and South Korea are two crucial variables which will determine the outcome of the coming systemic crisis of North Korea.

It is often assumed that the collapse of the Kim regime will inevitably trigger a South Korean intervention, followed by unification. However, recent events in South Korea have cast doubt upon that assumption.

Due to the peculiarities of North Korea's domestic and international situation, neither a gradual and manageable transformation of the regime nor its perpetual survival are likely outcomes. Sooner or later, it will go down in crisis—in all probability, suddenly and, alas, violently.

Over the past two decades, perceptions of North Korea in the South have changed dramatically. Earlier generations of South Koreans saw the division of the country as a great tragedy that must be overcome as quickly as possible. These people had no doubt that North Koreans were members of the same nation. Of course the Right and the Left in the South have always had vastly different opinions of how to achieve unification, but nobody doubted that unification is—and should be—the national salvation and the nation's destiny.

Not so now. Younger South Koreans are skeptical and sometimes even openly hostile toward the idea of immediate unification. Most of them believe that unification with the impoverished North will create an impossible financial burden which they are not enthusiastic about shouldering. Furthermore, a steadily growing number of younger South Koreans do not see the North as part of their nation. For them, North Korea is, rather, a foreign country, one whose population happens to speak a dialect of their lan-

guage. In other words, younger South Koreans look at the North pretty much like Germans look at Austria or Australians look at New Zealand.

Unification is still conceptually embedded in almost all political ideologies in South Korea, and therefore it still is not to be challenged in public discourse. But the above-described changes in the popular mood might become decisive in a time of crisis. No doubt if the coming revolution in the North turns out to be a velvet one—if North Koreans start, more or less unanimously, waving South Korean flags and express their passionate love for their Southern brethren—the Seoul public will have no choice but to reluctantly accept unification (and the associated responsibilities).

But, this is not all that likely to happen. As suggested above, Kim loyalists will in all probability mount a violent resistance, and therefore South Korean forces will have to fight their way to Pyongyang. Some North Koreans will meet them with flowers, but others will greet them with shells and grenades instead.

It is still possible (and indeed probable) that the South Korean government will nonetheless decide to get involved in the crisis. This is by no means certain, however. South Korean decisionmakers might drag their feet while a significant part of the South Korean public opposes the idea of involvement in the chaos-stricken North. Whatever happens, though, one should not count on South Korea's automatic willingness to physically intervene and to establish control over the North; things have changed much over the last two decades (and keep changing in the same direction).

This leaves another key issue: China. Contrary to popular belief, China is none too eager to get involved in North Korean issues. It would prefer to keep the Korean peninsula divided, and maintain the North Korean state as a buffer

zone—at least as long as doing so does not cost too much. China's main priority is stability, not expansion.

But Beijing would not be particularly joyful about unification of Korea under Seoul's control. It does not want to see the emergence of a nationalist and, likely, pro-American state on its borders. That said, this is an outcome China can live with, so long as some Chinese interests are accommodated. What worries China most is not the prospect of Korea's unification, but the prospect of instability and chaos in a neighboring country—one which, among other things, has nuclear weapons as well as an impressive stockpile of other weapons of mass destruction.

The statements of Chinese academics and experts make it possible to gauge what price China is likely to demand in return for its acceptance of unification. In his April 2010 presentation in Seoul, Shi Yinhong of the International Relations department of People's University talked frankly about the Chinese position: "There are indeed two clear and determined 'Nos' [...]: the [Korean] Peninsula should not function as a strategic fortress for the U.S. against China, and [a unified government] must not damage China's territorial and national integration by any irredentist and 'Pan-Korean' aspirations."⁶ In other words, China might be ready to accept a Seoul-led unification if it does not produce an increase in the regional U.S. military presence, and if the new Korean government relinquishes existing territorial claims to China.

But even though China is likely to grudgingly accept unification, it will not remain idle if the South Korean government is indecisive at a time of acute crisis. If Seoul does not show its willingness to take control of the disintegrating North, Chinese intervention in some form will become highly probable. If this is to happen, the eventual outcome might well be the emergence of

a pro-Chinese state in the northern part of the Korean peninsula. Such an entity will probably maintain some symbolic continuity with the Kim regime—it will have the same official name, same coat of arms and even, most likely, the same constitution (albeit with some important amendments). Its relations with China will be reminiscent of those of Soviet relations with the countries of Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. Life for North Koreans under such a regime will improve considerably. But such a turn of events is likely to be bad news for South Korea, reducing the likelihood that Korea will ever achieve unification.

Be prepared

The picture above is not particularly encouraging. North Korea is a major international problem, and it is likely to remain one in the years and even decades to come. It is a problem without an easy solution; the world cannot do much to influence developments in the DPRK. The experience of the last two decades has shown that North Korea is remarkably insensitive to both aid and sanctions.

Due to the peculiarities of North Korea's domestic and international situation, neither a gradual and manageable transformation of the regime nor its perpetual survival are likely outcomes. Sooner or later, it will go down in crisis—in all probability, suddenly and, alas, violently. We should be prepared for a sudden, dramatic change and we should understand that in the midst of crisis, we will have little time to plan, analyze and consult. It is important to be prepared for the coming crisis.

There is therefore a need to initiate consultations with China about measures that should be undertaken if and when a crisis comes about. Specifically, it is necessary to negotiate the conditions under which China would accept unification under Seoul's tutelage. Moreover, it is necessary to ensure that a crisis in North

Korea would not produce an unnecessary deterioration in Sino-U.S. relations.

Under current circumstances, one cannot count on South Korea's readiness to intervene in case of a crisis in the North. Other measures must therefore be considered. If South Korea chooses to stay away from domestic chaos in the North, an international peacekeeping operation might become necessary.

But while it is possible to influence events there to a certain extent, the outside world has little or no leverage when it comes to dealing with the North Korean state. There is little reason to be optimistic. North Korea's history to date has been a tragedy. But the future might hold even more turmoil and misery.



1. For details on the ongoing argument over the actual size of North Korean GDP, see Yi Chong-seok, "Pukhan kukmin soteuk chaepyongka" [Reassessment of the National Income of North Korea], *Chongsewa chongchaek* no. 3 (2008), 1-4.
2. *Shimbun* (Tokyo), February 2, 2011.
3. Kim Byung-Yeon and Song Dongho, "The Participation of North Korean Households in the Informal Economy: Size, Determinants, and Effect," *Seoul Journal of Economics* no. 2 (July 2008), 373.
4. For a detailed account of the North Korean "video revolution," see Yi Chu-chol, "Pukhan chuminui oepu chongpo suyong taeto pyonhwa [The Research of Changes in North Koreans' Attitudes toward the Outside World Information]," *Hankuk tongpuka nonchong* 46 (2008), 245-48.
5. On the market restrictions policies of 2004-2009 see Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Witness to Transformation: Refugee Insights into North Korea* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2011), 10-11; See also Andrei Lankov "Pyongyang Strikes Back: North Korean Policies of 2002-08 and Attempts to Reverse 'De-Stalinization from Below,'" *Asia Policy* no. 8 (July 2009), 47-71.
6. Shi Yinhong, "Back to the Future: Looking Ahead into Post-Integration by Looking at the Past and the Present," paper presented at the conference on "Integration of the Korean Peninsula," Seoul, South Korea, April 2010.

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OUR PYONGYANG PROBLEM

— General Michael Dunn (ret.) & Peter Huessy —

Today, the overwhelming focus of the United States and its allies is aimed at stopping Iran from securing a nuclear weapon. The ongoing nuclear weapons program of North Korea appears to be, at best, a serious but somewhat secondary consideration. Yet the two programs are inexorably intertwined, and are part of an identical strategy adopted by these two rogue states and their allies to harm U.S. security interests.

Policymakers in Washington still appear to believe in both cases that a “deal” of some kind monitoring their respective nuclear programs—as opposed to ending them—is possible. Such a view is naïve at best, and deeply dangerous at worst. This is true for two key reasons. The first is North Korea’s “Ten Step” negotiating strategy—an approach that the DPRK has successfully adopted over the past two decades to shake the U.S. and its allies down for oil, food and economic assistance and to “buy time.” The second is that North Korea’s true strategic objective—ignored all too often by experts and the media alike—is one of reunifying the Korean peninsula under Communist rule and this requires a nuclear weapons program as a shield.

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When viewed through these two prisms, Pyongyang's policies in recent years make sound strategic sense. Washington's, by contrast, too often do not.

Recent weeks have added a new layer of unpredictability, as the North Korean regime weathers a protracted transition following the January death of Dear Leader Kim Jong-il.

Contextualizing the North Korean threat

How much of a danger is posed by the DPRK? Some have assessed that the North's strategic capabilities pose a threat only to our forces in South Korea and Japan. Critics of U.S. missile defense deployments, for example, have long held that North Korea's missile tests have not demonstrated a capability to successfully launch a three-stage rocket capable of striking the continental United States. In the words of one critic, the sole reason for long-range U.S. missile defense was to "make us feel better" and to be able to claim to the American people that the U.S. was protected from such North Korean threats.¹

But these assessments are highly misleading. As Robert Walpole of the CIA and General Trey Obering, former Director of the Missile Defense Agency, point out, all North Korea has to do to be able to strike the U.S. homeland is successfully launch their current rockets with a third stage.² Moreover, much of the DPRK's strategic development is taking place away from the eyes of international observers—and as a result, there is considerable risk of "strategic surprise." Relevant in this regard is the fact that Iran tested both staged missiles and solid-fueled rockets in 2009, just a matter of weeks after a major report from the

East-West Institute claimed there was no evidence Iran was anywhere near having such a capability.

Worrisome as it is that North Korea might use its nuclear weapons capability for its own military aims, its proliferation activities are equally problematic. The Bush administration was the first to seriously focus on Pyongyang's role as "one of the world's leading proliferators of missile and nuclear technology," especially to Iran and Syria. It was in early 2007 that the U.S. learned North Korea was assisting Syria in the construction of a nuclear reactor, one hidden from United Nations inspectors. Most officials, when shown satellite pictures of the reactor, noted its similarity to North Korea's Yongbyon reactor.

In providing assistance to Syria, North Korea was part of a larger proliferation chain. The late Benazir Bhutto once explained that, as Pakistani Prime Minister, she knew the network of Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan—in coordination with her government—had furnished nuclear weapons technology to North Korea in return for help with ballistic missiles.³ Pyongyang, in turn, has become a willing provider of WMD-related technologies to other rogue states—as well as developing an increasing strategic arsenal of its own.

Just how robust was outlined by the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper. Clapper told Congress in 2010 that Pyongyang was continuing to develop nuclear weapons, along with testing long-range rocket technology and pursuing expanded enrichment facilities. A year later, in 2011, Clapper told Congress that North Korea may have produced more nuclear weapons but had no specific information one way or the other.⁴

What is still unclear is whether the North conducted two nuclear tests in 2010—a possibility that has nuclear-weapons experts puzzled. If confirmed,

one analysis detailed, it would “double the number of tests the country is known to have conducted and suggest that North Korea is trying to develop powerful warheads for its fledgling nuclear arsenal.”⁵ It might also explain North Korea’s claim in May 2010, that it had achieved nuclear fusion—a claim considered plausible by at least some nuclear experts.⁶



The end result is unmistakable. Dr. Larry Niksch of the National Defense University’s Institute for National Security Studies explained in a presentation in Seoul recently that “North Korea is close to achieving a fundamental military-strategic goal of its nuclear and missile programs: developing nuclear warheads that it would mount on its missiles.” According to Niksch: “Nuclear warheads initially would be mounted on North Korean Nodong and Scud missiles. Later, Pyongyang possibly could mount them on the intermediate range Musudan missile and a longer range missile that it is attempting to develop that could reach U.S. territory...”⁷ Even more worrisome, Hans Ruhle, a former

high-ranking German defense official, writes in the March 4th edition of Germany’s *Die Welt* that the two North Korean nuclear tests “might have been conducted for Iran.”⁸

Finally, to those convinced that South Korea has sufficient military capability to defend itself from potential aggression from the North, two points need to be made. First, in a crime family such as the Kim regime, straightforward, realistic calculations in a crisis may be in decidedly short supply. After all, who is going to tell North Korea’s leader and his entourage that the military simply “cannot win”? Second, for all of its problems, the correlation of military forces on the Peninsula still favors Pyongyang. A sobering assessment by the Seoul-based Korea Economic Research Institute says, “North Korea operates a 1.02-million-strong army and a record number of tanks, warships and air defense artillery... The depressing reality is it would not be entirely wrong to say North Korea’s military strength is stronger than the South’s based on the most updated data from 2011.”⁹

Recent weeks have added a new layer of unpredictability, as the North Korean regime weathers a protracted transition following the January death of Dear Leader Kim Jong-il. During his recent Senate confirmation hearings, the incoming head of U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Samuel Locklear, noted that “North Korea’s leadership change adds to regional security concerns on top of the possibility of the communist regime using weapons of mass destruction.” He further warned that “[w]ith the uncertainties associated with the ongoing leadership transition, upcoming challenges on the Peninsula may be even greater.”¹⁰

Locklear continued: “North Korea’s potential use of WMD presents a serious threat... On the surface, North Korea appears stable, and Kim Jong-un and

his leadership are primarily focused on domestic matters. However, enduring U.S. and allied concerns—North Korea's past provocative behavior, large conventional military, proliferation activities, and pursuit of asymmetric advantages through its ballistic missile and weapons of mass destruction programs, including uranium enrichment—presents a serious threat to the United States, our allies and partners in the region and the international community." Locklear concluded by noting that North Korea is a "proven proliferator" of ballistic missiles and relevant technologies to countries like Iran.¹¹

Each of the past three administrations has fallen back to the tried-and-failed approach of trying to gain "the upper hand" in negotiations with Pyongyang, with media observers serving as our referee and telling us whether we are pursuing things the right way.

Diplomatic rope-a-dope

Many now acknowledge that the Agreed Framework inherited by the Bush administration in 2001 was a failure. In the preceding six years, the North had received some \$4.5 billion in assistance from the international community—all the while reneging on its pledge to suspend work on its covert nuclear weapons program. At the beginning of the last decade, the North was threatening to restart its facilities. This led the incoming administration to reverse the negotiating posture of the U.S.: we henceforth would demand North Korean "performance" prior to any assistance or concessions. Call it "performance-based" diplomacy.

In at least one case, Libya, the strategy worked. Muammar Gaddafi gave away his nuclear program to U.S. inspectors and officials, but only after the

United States interdicted the *BBC China*, a ship carrying thousands of centrifuge parts, some manufactured in Malaysia by the A. Q. Khan network and destined for Tripoli. Its capture played a significant role in pushing the Libyans to a disarmament deal.

Also fresh on the mind of the Libyan dictator were the pictures of Saddam Hussein being hauled out of a spider hole by American soldiers. According to one senior U.S. official who helped personally negotiate the transfer of nuclear weapons components from Libya to the U.S., Gaddafi was adamant that the U.S. not exercise the "Saddam option" of full-on UN sanctions and inspections.¹²

But we have no such leverage with the North Koreans. And therefore, each of the past three administrations has fallen back to the tried-and-failed approach of trying to gain "the upper hand" in negotiations with Pyongyang, with media observers serving as our referee and telling us whether we are pursuing things the right way.

In her thoughtful memoir, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice explains why the Six-Party talks were established in the first place. Under the Agreed Framework, the U.S. ended up in bilateral negotiations that favored Pyongyang, allowing the latter to serially use other parties such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, China and Russia, for negotiating leverage, playing one country off against another. The Six-Party talks, by contrast, allowed the U.S. to present to the North a unified position.

As it turned out, the Bush administration did succeed in eliminating three WMD threats—Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan. But whereas it adopted a policy of regime change in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Bush White House stopped short of doing the same in either Iran or North Korea. It is true President Bush did directly suggest regime change

in Pyongyang while talking to President Jiang Zemin in October 2002, and that this may have been the catalyst for China's subsequent agreement to establish the Six Party Talks.¹³ But serious proposals to end the North Korean threat through regime removal never got off the ground floor.

Instead, the U.S. tried to turn the negotiations into a political forum to debate superior talking points. The U.S. assumed the North Korean "bad actions" such as missile tests and underground explosions would allow it to secure support from China, for example, and provide a public relations "upper hand" with which to push a grand bargain. That deal was straightforward: the North gives up its nukes, and in return the U.S. recognizes the Kim regime.

To the credit of the administration, a "Joint Statement" was agreed to in September 2005, which set a framework for denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. In early 2007, the U.S. again

sought to go the "extra mile," agreeing to ease sanctions and provide fuel oil in exchange for North Korea agreeing once again to a process for dismantling its nuclear weapons program. Again, while the North agreed in principle to "denuclearize" the peninsula, no concrete steps to begin the process were even put forward.

Rice writes that by 2008, even with the full knowledge that the North was still seeking further nuclear weapons development, and had engaged in proliferation activities toward Iran and Syria, she argued that the administration should try and get a "breakthrough."¹⁴ One report noted, "She persuaded Bush to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism in exchange for a 'verbal commitment' from North Korea to address its uranium enrichment program. Bush removed it from the list; the commitment went unfulfilled; the talks collapsed again."¹⁵



KPA NEGOTIATING TACTICS

- Step 1: Cause the "appearance" of tension**
- Step 2: Blame the UNC, ROK and US for the tense situation**
- Step 3: Quickly agree "in principle" to a major improvement in relations. Publicize the "Breakthrough."**
- Step 4: Set artificial deadlines to pressure the other side**
- Step 5: Politicize and draw out negotiations front-loading the agenda and demanding preconditions
*(the preconditions are often the true objectives)***
- Step 6: Blame UNC, ROK and US for the protracted talks**
- Step 7: Demand compensation or a major concession, before attending future meetings**
- Step 8: Go back to Step 1**



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Pyongyang's end game

We are not arguing that there is some magical concession which the U.S. just needs to make in order for an agreement to be reached with North Korea. Rather, our argument is that the only concession sought by Pyongyang is the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the peninsula—a condition which it demands in almost every communication with the United States or Six-Party talk members. In that demand lies the key to unlocking Pyongyang's true agenda.

The highest goal of Pyongyang is reunification under communist rule—a reunion that would be secured by military force.

On October 10, 2011, Hwang Jang-yop, a former tutor to the late North Korean leader Kim Jong-il and secretary to the North's ruling party, died in Seoul, Korea. He had defected during a 1997 trip to Beijing; the highest-ranking North Korean ever to do so. As such, Hwang was one of the architects of North Korea's disastrous policy of *juche* (self-reliance). Upon his defection, Hwang told the world the Kim family had killed three million people in their famines of the 1990s.

However, in an interview in Seoul some ten years ago with one of the authors, Gen. Dunn, he said much more. At that time, Hwang was asked why the North had nuclear weapons. He was incredulous that we did not know, and explained that the North needs a nuclear capability to make sure the U.S. does not come to the defense of South Korea after the North has invaded. He underscored that the highest goal of Pyongyang was reunification under communist rule—a reunion that would be secured by military force.

This goal is rarely if ever acknowledged by U.S. negotiators, State Depart-

ment officials or by those who comment on the Six-Party talks, especially in the media and arms control community. But it is a seminal point. For, if Hwang is right, negotiations with the North over its nuclear program are useless, and Pyongyang's advances in ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons have concrete, and immediate, strategic importance.

This is a crucial point. As our colleague Chris Ford of the Hudson Institute has eloquently explained, "Versailles Treaty arms inspectors during the inter-war years are said to have downplayed evidence of German rearmament, for example, because their home governments were unprepared to deal with it and did not want to know. President Clinton also once admitted that U.S. proliferation sanctions laws created incentives for his administration to 'fudge' intelligence assessments in order to downplay proliferation transfers, lest acknowledging them disrupt diplomatic relationships with countries such as China."¹⁶

If North Korea's nuclear program is really simply a prelude to invasion, then the Six-Party talks are nothing more than an elaborate shield behind which Pyongyang hides not only its own nuclear program but its proliferation activities as well. While there is value as former Secretary Rice explains in knowing more about the North's activities, once talks are ongoing, there is pressure not to see the bad news which would call into question the benefits of the talks in the first place.

This explains, interestingly, the hostility of those responsible for putting together U.S. intelligence estimates on North Korea's military during the initial year of the Agreed Framework. For example, one estimate of North Korean missile capability done in 1995 by the administration deliberately cooked the books, concluding that the North "could not threaten the United States" with ballistic missiles for at least fifteen years.¹⁷

The subtext? We have nothing to worry about. Negotiate on! This was used as one of the central talking points in the 1995 House of Representatives debate on whether or not to proceed with the building of a missile defense. It was later discovered the Administration's assessment had assumed North Korea would be somehow precluded from receiving any outside technical assistance, thus making the time frame for development of ballistic missiles appear far greater than was actually the case at the time the assessment was completed. Even more astoundingly, the assessment deliberately excluded Hawaii and Alaska from the definition of what constituted "United States" territory.

An accurate estimate of the North's capabilities would have called into serious question the very premise of the "Agreed Framework" and later the Six-Party talks—unless North Korea's extensive support of terror states, its own terrorist activities and its advanced military capabilities could somehow be explained away. And in Washington, a cottage industry within the arms control community sprang up to do just that.

Not only did the U.S. fool itself with its intelligence estimates of North Korea's capabilities, it also convinced itself that there was some kind of deal to be had—a fiction that continued into the Obama administration. The North understood this all too well, and soon reverted to familiar policy toward the new administration in Washington. As one analyst noted, the "North Korean issue would soon settle into a kind of predictable pattern; cooperation from Pyongyang and progress in negotiations followed by misdeeds and stalemate... the talks stalled once again, and they would lie fallow for more than a year as North Korea probed for division among the parties and an opportunity to walk back past agreements."¹⁸

Déjà vu all over again

So what should Washington do now? Short of regime change, the United States and its allies should add considerably to the economic pressure on North Korea—not lessen it. The North Korean regime historically has carefully calibrated its behavior to at times appear less confrontational, facilitating a U.S. retraction from the region and providing cover for its weapons modernization. In the late 1990s, for example, the regime agreed to a missile test moratorium, one sought by the Clinton administration. As part of this charade, the North shipped its rocket engines to Iran, which did static tests to further North Korean missile progress.¹⁹ The agreed-upon limits to enrichment are, of course, applied to those facilities at which Pyongyang says enrichment is being carried out, which we know to be a fairy tale as we have been down this road many times before. Any deal must completely eliminate any vestiges of a nuclear program, restrict Pyongyang's missile programs, and limit the conventional threat to the Republic of Korea by a dramatic scale-back in forces poised to attack.

If North Korea's nuclear program is really simply a prelude to invasion, then the Six-Party talks are nothing more than an elaborate shield behind which Pyongyang hides not only its own nuclear program but its proliferation activities as well.

We do know that economic pressure works. Cutting off the regime's access to banking is critical and was done during the Bush administration to great effect. But the issue was much broader than the money involved. It was that by cutting off North Korea's money access to the world, we could cut off the economic lifeline that

kept the military and the elite furnished with their luxuries. Through those measures (colloquially known as the “Banco Delta Asia” sanctions), we effectively electrocuted the North Korean regime. Over time, however, in response to international pressure, the Bush administration rolled back the sanctions—and, by extension, abdicated its most potent tool for shaping North Korean behavior.

So what should Washington do now? Short of regime change, the United States and its allies should add considerably to the economic pressure on North Korea—not lessen it.

Our own view is that when the North complains about U.S. action, we should do more of it. To the extent we can use economic leverage to unravel the North Korean piece of today’s global nuclear proliferation puzzle, we should do so expansively. Our end goal must be regime elimination, to close one of the most horrendous gulags left on this planet. Our security, and that of many of our allies and friends, will depend on our doing so.



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ASSESSING THE ASIA PIVOT

Walter Lohman

In the course of two months in the fall of 2011, the President and his administration—particularly the Secretary of State—conducted a political and diplomatic offensive to prove American staying power in Asia. It marked a 180-degree turn from where the White House had begun three years earlier.

The fall offensive began with the long-awaited passage of the Korea-U.S. FTA (KORUS), an agreement of major economic importance. After years of accumulated opportunity costs, in October, the administration finally pushed the agreement forward and arranged for South Korean President Lee Myun-bak to be in Washington for the occasion of its passage.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton framed the new approach in her November “America’s Pacific Century” speech, wherein she declared the Administration’s “Asia Pivot.”¹ President Obama gave the approach authority and economic substance at APEC, where the U.S. secured a game-changing commitment from Japan to join the Transpacific Partnership trade pact (TPP).

The President then embarked on his third visit to the Asia Pacific. In Australia, he announced new training rotations of up to 2,500 U.S. Marines through Australia’s northern shore, a move with obvious implications for the security of our allies and sea lanes, and in Indonesia, he became the first American president to participate in the East Asian Summit (EAS). At the EAS meeting of 18 regional leaders, President Obama raised the importance of maritime security and freedom of navigation and “expressed strong opposition to the threat or use of force by any party to advance its territorial



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or maritime claims or interfere in legitimate economic activity”²—thereby tying American interests to regional concerns about China.

The administration was not always so assertive in Asia. Throughout 2009, in an environment shaped primarily by the misperception of American decline, and by the very real rise of China as a major political, military, and economic power, the Obama administration reached for a partnership with the Chinese that would “shape the 21st century.”

For her part, Secretary Clinton headed to Manila to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT)—and then on to America’s other treaty ally in Southeast Asia, Thailand. In Manila Bay, she signed a reaffirmation of the U.S.-Philippines MDT on the deck of a U.S. Navy destroyer and essentially declared America ready to “fight” for the Philippines. She also announced the dispatch to Manila of the second (of what will likely be four) refurbished coast guard cutters.

En route to Indonesia, President Obama phoned long-suffering Burmese human rights icon Aung San Suu Kyi to get her blessing for a Burma visit from Secretary Clinton.

Clinton arrived in Burma by the end of November, meeting Suu Kyi and the Burmese president and beginning a careful, “action for action” process of normalization that could have major implications for the U.S. strategic position in the region. The Chinese have long taken advantage of Burma’s isolation from the U.S. If Burmese political reform proves to be real, it will offer an opportunity for the U.S. to reassert itself there. It will also remove a roadblock in Ameri-

ca’s relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with which it has long disagreed on Burma. A democratic Burma would tip the scales in ASEAN—a hodgepodge of governing systems—in favor of democracy, a state of play that improves the sustainability of American engagement.

Early dependency

The administration was not always so assertive in Asia. Throughout 2009, in an environment shaped primarily by the misperception of American decline, and by the very real rise of China as a major political, military, and economic power, the Obama administration reached for a partnership with the Chinese that would “shape the 21st century.”³

In February 2009, during her first trip abroad as Secretary of State, Clinton famously told the press in Seoul that the U.S. had to be careful not to allow concerns over human rights to interfere with other priorities in the areas of economics, environment, and security. She wrapped up the visit in Beijing by publicly encouraging the Chinese to buy American bonds. The two statements together implied Chinese leverage over American decision-making.

Secretary Clinton’s early missteps were compounded by those of President Obama, who that year broke with the Presidential precedent of meeting in person with the Dalai Lama. The administration also continued to sit on the second half of a major arms sale to Taiwan, negotiated by the George W. Bush administration early in its first term.

The President carried a great deal of baggage with him when he visited China himself in November 2009. His gestures of partnership were weighed down by it. Perhaps sensing the opportunity, the Chinese pressed for a “Fourth Communiqué,” as an addition to the three that form the basis of the U.S.-Chinese relationship.

(From the American perspective, the U.S.-China document canon also includes the Taiwan Relations Act and Reagan's Six Assurances.) When the President failed to cite America's prerogative to sell arms to Taiwan when given the opportunity on his visit to Shanghai, it looked like the Chinese might have a chance at rewriting America's commitment to Taiwan's defense needs.

In the end, the joint statement to commemorate the visit was decidedly not a joint communiqué and did not have the force of one. It did, however, make compromises that made America's friends in the region uncomfortable, including an invitation to China to play a more active role in South Asia. After the historic achievements of the U.S.-India relationship during the Bush administration, the invitation shocked officials in India, who themselves are involved in a long-term geostrategic rivalry with the Chinese

Policy shift

The year of "partnership" began to unravel in December 2009 at Copenhagen. The U.S. and China deadlocked on an agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. After so much sunk cost in the relationship, the failure to agree on an issue so important to the administration demonstrated the limitations of the China-deferential approach.

From there, the policy clashes with the Chinese piled up over the course of 2010. Early in the year, the Obama administration made good on \$6.4 billion in arms sales, including Blackhawk helicopters and Patriot missile batteries, to Taiwan. The President also met with the Dalai Lama—to China's outrage. For their part, the Chinese sided with North Korea over the sinking of the South Korean warship *Cheonan* against the opinion of both the U.S. and South Korea. And they kept the waters of the South China Sea roiled with repeated physical asser-

tions of authority—as well as a widely reported high-level identification of China's claims there as an area of "core interest"—thereby putting the South China Sea on a level with China's interests in Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

Chinese aggressiveness at sea seemed to get the Obama administration's attention. In July 2010 at the ASEAN Regional Forum in Hanoi—an annual meeting that brings together the foreign ministers of 27 countries, including China and the other claimants in the South China Sea dispute (except Taiwan)—Secretary Clinton and 11 other Ministers raised the issue of security in the South China Sea. The Secretary offered to "facilitate initiatives and confidence-building measures" there, and singled out the need for maritime claims to be derived from "legitimate" claims to land features.⁴ Clinton's declaration put the Chinese on notice that no nation can legally claim the entire expanse of the South China Sea.

Soon thereafter, following a September incident in the East China Sea involving a Chinese fishing trawler and Japanese coast guard vessel, the U.S. was obliged to issue cabinet level reminders that the Japanese-administered Senkaku islands there fall within the purview of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty.

In November 2010, President Obama made another visit to Asia—this time with a much different message than that of 2009. The White House marketed the fact that the President was visiting fellow democracies: India, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea. In India, he made up for the shocker in the 2009 U.S.-China Joint Statement by picking up the U.S.-India relationship where the Bush administration left off, pledging support for India's membership in several major nonproliferation groups and offering support for its permanent membership on the UN Security Council.

Prospects for diplomatic retreat

The Obama administration's discovery of a more assertive, less China-deferential policy in the Pacific is a welcome development. But retreat is not out of the question. There is ample reason to hedge against the possibility that it is only a temporary phase. Continuities in the administration's approach to diplomacy, defense, and trade policy, wherein lie the seeds of the earlier policy errors, could resurface when changes in the regional environment, personnel, and election cycle permit.

In her "America's Pacific Century" speech, Secretary Clinton stated the following:

To those in Asia who wonder whether the United States is really here to stay, if we can make and keep credible strategic and economic commitments and back them up with action, the answer is: Yes, we can, and yes, we will. First, because we must. Our own long-term security and prosperity depend on it. Second, because making significant investments in strengthening partnerships and institutions help[s] us establish a system and habits of cooperation that, over time, will require less effort to sustain.⁵

The first half of the statement is unassailable. One could go back 150 years to Commodore Perry's "black ships" and the opening of Japan as the first major demonstration of American interest in the Western Pacific. Especially since World War II, the connection between America's "security and prosperity" and its commitments in Asia has become inseparable. The U.S. has been a "resident power" in the Western Pacific for well over 100 years. Indeed, that is not changing.

The rub comes in the second half of the statement. It harkens back to the idealistic Asia policy of 2009 and

asserts that the commitment can be sustained long-term with less effort than currently required.

In February 2009, Secretary Clinton previewed her first trip to Asia to an audience at the Asia Society in New York. It was a speech full of idealism. She led off with the need to "build partnerships that transcend geographic and political boundaries" and "find regional and global solutions to common global problems" through "smart power."⁶ "Smart power" was something Clinton had prominently featured in her confirmation hearing as "the full range of tools at our disposal—diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural—picking the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation." Because, of course, this is the natural course of any administration, i.e., using all elements of national power to secure national objectives, what the new approach essentially meant was a new emphasis on soft power, a de-emphasis of the military, and a focus on border transnational concerns.

In 2009, "architecture" for Secretary Clinton meant the "architecture of global cooperation" that would "advance [American] interests by uniting diverse partners around common concerns" and "tilt the balance away from a multi-polar world ... toward a multi-partner world." By 2011, it had become a way to ensure an American Pacific century.

The Obama administration talks a great deal about "architecture" in Asia. On its face, there is nothing wrong with this. The initiatives that the administration has actually undertaken are good. If there is a change in American presidents next year, the new one would do very well to continue the patterns of Asia engagement established by President Obama, i.e., participation in the East Asian Summit, the US-ASEAN Leadership Summit, APEC, and consistent, frequent participation of cabinet

officials in regional forums. The mere quantity of Secretary Clinton's visits to Asia offers a positive quality in and of themselves. They demonstrate the high-level commitment that is absolutely necessary to American leadership in the region.

The mistake lies in thinking that these regional institutions, or others—and there are quite a few that have been proposed over the years—will ever acquire a self-sustaining capacity that serves American interests.

What is good about Asia's evolving security architecture is that it is, indeed, "evolving," tightly tied to the interests of the participants. It is not "grand." If it lacks concrete accomplishments, it is because that's the way the nations involved intend it to be. It promotes national interests only to the extent that leaders and governments use the forums to promote their interests. ASEAN is a perfect example. Its secretariat has room to improve its capacity for monitoring commitments and organizing initiatives ordered by its leaders, but it will never have the power to be an actor itself. The member countries simply will not allow it. This is similar to other ASEAN-associated institutions, like the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asian Summit, and to APEC.

None of these institutions will ever have the ability to stand without a consensus of its member countries. They certainly will not protect American interests without the robust involvement of the United States. Any real multilateral security cooperation, such as response to natural disasters, significant military exercises, and substantive diplomatic initiative, sanctions and the like, will continue to result from ad hoc subsets of members in these groups without the endorsement of the institution. Even that will only be an occasional supplement to the security provided by the U.S. and its alliance network.

Commitment to security

The Obama administration entered office denigrating the resort to force. It has certainly rediscovered the utility of military power as an instrument of national power in the time between then and November 2011. Yet even as the administration relies on the military to draw red lines around the Senkakus or the Philippines, shades of its earlier disposition are apparent in the Defense Department's current budget travails.

The Department of Defense budget, released in February 2012, proposed a reduction in the active duty Marine Corps from 202,000 to 182,000 troops and a cut in active duty Army from 562,000 to 490,000 troops. The budget eliminates seven tactical fighter aircraft squadrons and slows the rate of procurement for F-35 Joint Strike Fighters. It retires some ships early and delays or reduces procurements of others.⁷ The administration has struggled to reconcile these and future cuts of a total of \$487 million with its Asia "pivot." That is, even as forces are reduced, the administration has maintained that it will "rebalance toward the Asia Pacific."⁸ The Defense Department's Strategic Guidance released on January 5th makes this case, as did President Obama himself during his trip to Australia in November 2011.

An explanation of how defense cuts and a "pivot" to Asia are possible is conveniently concealed in deployment details and other decisions not yet disclosed. However, given the extent of America's global commitments, the prominence of flashpoints like Iran, and the current deterioration in the readiness of America's armed forces, there is ample reason for skepticism.

Take the Navy. The United States is a maritime power. Its relevance in the Western Pacific is heavily attributable to this fact. Yet, even before this round of cuts, the Navy is 28 ships below its long-term goal of 313—not to

mention 61 ships below the level that a bipartisan commission chaired by former Secretary of Defense William Perry and former National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley determined it should be.⁹ The Navy seems to be actively adjusting expectations. The Chief of Naval Operations is already signaling that in five years the fleet will be about where it is today¹⁰—at 285 ships—far behind schedule.

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The Marine Corps is another good example. On February 8th, the U.S. announced a revision to the Guam Agreement to restructure the Marine Corps footprint on Okinawa. Originally, the plan from 2006—reaffirmed by the Obama administration in 2009—was to move 8,000 Marines from Okinawa to new facilities in Guam. The move was part of an interlocking set of commitments that included turnover of base property to local officials and the building of a new facility on Okinawa that would relieve the inconvenience experienced by the local population. The amendment to the agreement delinks these elements and opens up the possibility that fewer Marines would go to Guam, and may, in fact, go elsewhere, back to the U.S. West Coast or Hawaii, or perhaps to Australia.

The numbers are all over the place. What is not at all clear is whether this is a reduction in force—partly due to budget pressure and Congressional concerns over the cost of the new facilities on Guam—or to truly redistribute forces in a way that both appeases Okinawans and retains a mission-capable presence.

Guam, not to mention the U.S. West Coast, is not as close to Okinawa, or the Korean Peninsula, as one might imagine. How many marines are involved, where they go, which specialties are targeted, and how they are deployed (permanently or on rotation) matter a great deal to their ability to fulfill their mission. The answers will also go along way to demonstrate the viability of the “pivot.”

If it is difficult to reconcile the “pivot” with roughly half a trillion dollars in defense cuts, it cannot possibly be reconciled with looming cuts of a half trillion more as mandated by the “sequestration” that kicked in when the Administration and Congress failed to reach agreement on a debt reduction deal at the end of 2011. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and the Service Chiefs have all acknowledged the disaster that sequestration poses to America’s ability to protect and promote its interests abroad. In this light, President Obama’s own disregard for this prospect (he has vowed to veto any effort to avoid the trillion dollars in cuts) is mystifying.

Support for free trade

China is the number one trading partner of Australia, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN. There is nothing inherently wrong with this—unless of course, the U.S. is not also in the game. The governments in the region watched the U.S. debate over KORUS very carefully for signs of its competitive spirit.

The passage of KORUS was only slightly more encouraging than the fact that it took four years to pass it. It was first blocked by a Democrat-led House of Representatives during the Bush administration; then it was put on ice by the Obama administration over concerns raised by the automotive lobby and its unions. So little was changed in the agreement as renegotiated by President Obama’s U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) that the delay came off as an

entirely political exercise. It is precisely those politics where the red flags concerning the administration's new commitment to free trade lie.

All attention is now on the fate of the Transpacific Partnership (TPP)—the nine-nation (ten, if Japan is included) FTA begun under the Bush administration. The Obama administration aims ambitiously to finalize an agreement by the end of 2012. USTR has been actively engaged in reaching this goal through multiple rounds of negotiations.

The President's position on trade is contingent on the political environment. The enabling event for free trade was the House election of 2010 and the change in House leadership. The House Democratic caucus is today heavily protectionist. During the Bush years, FTAs passed the House with as few as 12 Democratic votes in one case, 15 in another. Even given President Obama's stamp of approval, KORUS only garnered 59 Democratic votes and enough Republican votes to pass it without their support. By contrast, and contrary to much media shorthand expectations about the nature of the Tea Party surge, the Republican freshman class is heavily in favor of free trade.

If the administration reaches agreement this year on the TPP, it will have to do so in close consultation with Republicans on Capitol Hill. It will also require leadership from a President willing to take on the base of his own party. If the TPP slips the deadline, which is likely, the future of America's commitment to free trade will depend on the outcome of the 2012 elections.

If recent history is any guide, a Democratic resurgence in the House of Representatives could portend a return to trade paralysis. Trade is the lifeblood of Asian geopolitics. A U.S. return to the sidelines would mean resignation to current trend lines that are not in America's favor.

Clues to the future

The last two years of the Obama administration's Asia policy have been mostly reassuring. The administration has very energetically prioritized America's allies in the region, often in rhetoric strikingly similar to that used by the Bush administration. Allies have welcomed the U.S. attention to their capabilities and needs.

In terms of capabilities, the Obama administration has picked up most notably on its predecessor's attention to Australia and refocused it on regional security. Australia has been brought deeply into American military planning for the region, and in return, offered a major expansion of alliance cooperation. The Philippines is the ally with the greatest security shortfalls and the administration is actively working to fill them, even as it stresses the role of its treaty in ensuring the Philippines' security.

The administration has done well by South Korea on security issues. It has stayed closely coordinated with South Korea on issues related to North Korea. It has, in fact, shown more staying power on the North Korea nuclear issue than the second-term Bush administration. Under the stewardship of Assistant Secretary Chris Hill, the Bush administration repeatedly lowered the bar on North Korean compliance with a 2005 agreement to give up its nuclear program—most notably moving to unfreeze illicit North Korean bank accounts and take it off the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism.

In the case of Japan, the Obama administration has successfully avoided "Japan passing"—a phrase implying a greater U.S. interest elsewhere in the region; in particular, China. The relationship with ASEAN has improved markedly as the administration picked several low-hanging diplomatic fruit, such as signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and assigning a resident ambas-

sador to ASEAN. At the same time, it has thus far refrained from putting too much stock in ASEAN's processes.

The last two years of the Obama administration's Asia policy have been mostly reassuring. The question is whether the administration will continue on this line or retreat to the policy priorities of 2009.

The question is whether the administration will continue on this line or retreat to the policy priorities of 2009. The following issues are likely to provide clues to its future direction:

- *Reaction to efforts to avert the impact of sequestration and trim defense budget cuts already proposed.* Shaping the military in a way that is necessary to secure American interests in Asia is impossible in the event of sequestration and highly doubtful in light of cuts already proposed.
- *Continued emphasis regarding American treaty commitments in the region.* Any successful American approach to the Western Pacific must be an allies-first policy. American expressions of support for Japan and the Philippines in particular have been important parts of the dynamic in the back and forth over maritime security.
- *The composition of regional architecture.* Architecture should remain broad-based, consensus-oriented, and supplementary to the American network of defense alliances and partnerships. It should remain ASEAN-centric, but not reliant on it. Trilateral dialogues are also useful supplements, but only to the extent that they engage allies and security partners. Efforts to engage China directly in trilateral dialogue will only dilute their impact and send confusing signals to those left out.
- *The physical assertion of freedom of navigation in the Western Pacific.* The Chinese continue to protest America's military survey activities and intelligence-gathering in waters seaward of China's 12-mile territorial limit. The U.S. cannot accede to Chinese demands to dial back operations without setting a precedent that will never be overturned. UNCLOS ratification could be a prelude to a de-emphasis of this necessity.
- *Continued diplomatic attention to maritime security, freedom of navigation and the peaceful settlement of disputes.* The administration's turn on this issue has been the single most important diplomatic move it has made in its Asia Pacific policy. The Chinese muting their declarations of sovereignty over entire seas cannot substitute for official statements retracting or reconsidering the bases for the claims. The U.S. must hold the line to keep faith with the region.
- *Meeting Taiwan's defense needs, especially F-16C/Ds, and high level-diplomatic engagement.* Taiwan desperately needs new fighter aircraft to replace 35-year-old F-5s and has gone without a cabinet level

American visit since 2000. The only factor preventing either step is concern about Chinese sensitivities.

- *Meeting Philippines' defense needs.* The Philippines finally has the political leadership, sense of urgency, and funding to make military modernization a priority. It has expressed an interest in a range of military equipment suited for territorial defense that the U.S. ought to prioritize.
- *Active support for free trade.* This includes accommodating Japanese involvement in the TPP, moving negotiations aggressively toward conclusion, and identifying new trade partners.

The Obama administration's Asia policy has changed considerably since Secretary Clinton's confirmation hearing in 2009. On balance, current Asia policy is effectively promoting and protecting American interests in the region. But it was a very difficult path to get here. 2012 begins in a much better place. If the Obama administration holds the line, it will continue to find broad support in Washington for its Asia policy. The fear is that changes in personnel and effective diplomacy on the part of the Chinese will enable the administration to revert to its earlier, idealistic disposition.



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"Unconventional warfare requires unconventional thinkers."

—Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, April 2008



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PERSPECTIVE

Dangerous Drift An Interview with the Honorable Robert C. McFarlane

Robert C. “Bud” McFarlane is Founder and Chief Executive Officer of McFarlane & Associates, an international consultancy focused on energy and political risk. In a public policy career spanning more than half a century, he served as a Marine lieutenant colonel, a State Department diplomat, and—most prominently—as National Security Advisor to President Ronald Reagan from 1983 to 1985. In February 2012, he spoke with *Journal* editor Ilan Berman about the ongoing international stand-off with Iran, the state of our struggle against radical Islam, and the challenges facing the U.S. in the Greater Middle East.

Today in Washington, speculation is rife that Israel might soon strike Iran in order to derail its nuclear program. The Obama administration has responded with stepped-up economic sanctions and political signals that it disapproves of a potential Israeli attack. But if Israel does indeed use force against Iran, what can and should the United States do?

The driving force behind the Iranian nuclear weapons program is the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), not the Army or even the government. Israel and the United States both understand that. In the months and years ahead, both countries will concentrate their efforts on both overt and clandestine programs to undermine the ability of the IRGC to sustain its efforts to build a nuclear weapon. I believe they will succeed.

With withdrawal from Iraq now complete, and a similar one slated to soon take place in Afghanistan, America’s geopolitical footprint in the greater Middle East is clearly receding. Yet, for numerous reasons, the region remains vital to U.S. national security. What equities and interests will we need to preserve and protect as we pull back “over the horizon”?

The misguided U.S. invasion of Iraq was motivated by hubris and delusion: the belief that our country could establish pluralism and a prosperous model of quasi-capitalism in the Muslim world, and that—over time—such a model would be admired and adopted throughout Islam from Morocco to Indonesia in preference to the violent model being espoused by al-Qaeda and its affiliates. However wrong-headed in concept, by mid-2011 our strategy and the remarkable performance of our military had put us within reach of leaving a reasonably stable Iraq in place. But the President's decision to abort the plan to complete the necessary training of Iraq security forces, risks prolonged sectarian violence and a steady increase in Iranian influence over Iraq—at the cost of more than five thousand American lives, untold treasure, and our country's credibility as a power qualified and able to lead the region toward a more stable, prosperous future. Similarly, in Afghanistan, the President has chosen to end our involvement before the job of forging a functional coalition government and of training sufficient Afghan security forces is complete. Together, these two impending losses after ten years of effort promise incalculable damage to American standing and to our ability to rally Western allies in the promotion and defense of the rule of law, peaceful resolution of disputes, a free and open trading system and other principles essential to a more stable world.

Enduring U.S. interests in the Middle East—and indeed throughout the world—lie in nurturing stability that comes from nations adopting the rule of law, pluralistic governance, market-driven economies, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Israel is a model and success story in that effort. We further have an interest in a free and open trading system in which goods and services flow securely throughout the region and the world. In order to protect and advance those interests, the U.S. must remain a visible presence diplomatically and at sea just over the horizon, always able to project force if and when it is necessary. Finally the region's energy resources will remain important in underwriting the growth of the global economy; however nations everywhere have an interest in removing oil's status as a strategic commodity through the introduction of alternative fuels and elimination of OPEC cartel pricing. All of these goals and purposes rely importantly on a strong Navy and Marine Corps.

The past year has seen tremendous change sweep over the Middle East, as unrest in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere has reconfigured the traditionally-stagnant politics of the region. How has America's standing changed as a result?

The fact that our government didn't see this tide of popular unrest coming speaks volumes about our decline as a world power that is able to lead and inspire followership among emerging nations of the world. Serious powers gather intelligence, they know what is going on at the grassroots level of countries in ferment, they use that intelligence to nurture pro-western opposition elements, and urge them to encourage adoption of the foregoing tenets of stable governance, within the bounds of prudent risk. We have a long way to go in restoring our overseas intelligence resources, and in restoring people-to-people programs as well as special operations and training capabilities.

The rise of Islamist movements and parties has emerged as a defining feature of the so-called "Arab Spring." Over the past year, Islamist groups have gained ground throughout the Middle East and North Africa. What is your assessment of the Obama administration's response to this phenomenon so far?

The response has been pitiful. But indeed our attention to the rise of Islamism predates the Obama administration and has been gathering momentum since the 1980s. In the past twenty-five years, Pakistan has gone from hosting a fairly insignificant violent terrorist cadre to a condition today where a Saudi-funded, Wahhabi-guided system of madrassas has spawned more than a half million kids willing to blow themselves up at the behest of a handful of Islamist leaders, and literally to deliver whatever level of violence is needed to bring down any government for as far in time as the eye can see. Conceiving and funding programs that can overcome this menace will take decades.

The May 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, was a key counterterrorism success, and a major political victory for the Obama administration. In its aftermath, however, more than a few policymakers appear to have concluded that the “War on Terror” is now a thing of the past. Is it?

Credit for the death of Osama bin Laden goes to SEAL Team Six, and to the men and women in uniform who helped bring it about. But Bin Laden’s successors have lost no time in growing their affiliates in almost 60 countries throughout the world. In order to engage this menace properly, our country is about to go through a massive restructuring of our military and intelligence services, moving away from large formations such as were appropriate during the Cold War and reorienting toward smaller, more agile forces capable of a wide spectrum of operations—from training local constabularies and security forces to projecting force ashore when needed either for humanitarian or combat missions. All of these functions will rely on a much more robust U.S. Navy.





DISPATCHES

Seeking a New Devil in Damascus

Oren Kessler

TEL AVIV—“Better the devil you know than the one you don’t.” It’s a 500-year old Irish proverb, but to Mideast policy wonks the phrase is instantly identifiable as Israel’s decades-long policy toward its nettlesome neighbor Syria.

Nearly four decades have passed since the Yom Kippur War, the last conventional conflict between the two states. During that time, Syrian Presidents Hafez and later Bashar Assad kept their frontier with Israel largely quiet, continuing the fight against it via their proxies Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territories.

In Israel’s never-ending search for regional stability—and amid uncertainty over who might replace the Assads—that arrangement seemed good enough. When in 2005 President George W. Bush asked Ariel Sharon his thoughts about toppling Assad, the Israeli premier responded with a question of his own: “Are you crazy?”

Likewise, when Syrians first rose up against their regime last spring, Israeli officials remained cagey. Asked last March for comment, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu replied laconically, “Any answer I’ll give you wouldn’t be a good one.” Shlomo Brom, a former head of IDF strategic planning and an Israeli negotiator with Syria in the 1990s, described Bashar Assad as a “known quantity,” while veteran diplomat Dore Gold urged caution given the volatility caused by anti-government dissent spreading “from the Turkish border down to the Suez Canal.”

But in the year since the start of the Syrian uprising, that consensus appears to have dissipated. Assad, Israeli officials and analysts now believe, is doomed, and it’s a good thing, too. Barring a few stubborn holdouts, Israel’s policymakers have concluded that weakening the Iranian “resistance” axis is their uppermost strategic priority—even at the risk of an Islamist or otherwise belligerent successor regime seizing power in Damascus.



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The shift has been noticeable since last spring. In April, Israeli President Shimon Peres said a democratic Syria is his country's "best bet," and two months later Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to the U.S., chided the *Wall Street Journal* for suggesting his government prefers to see Assad stay put. "Assad has helped supply 55,000 rockets to Hezbollah and 10,000 to Hamas, very likely established a clandestine nuclear arms program and profoundly destabilized the region," he wrote. "The violence he has unleashed on his own people demonstrating for freedoms confirms Israel's fears that the devil we know in Syria is worse than the devil we don't."

Itamar Rabinovich, one of Oren's predecessors in Washington and later head of Israel's negotiating team with Syria, said late last year that Jerusalem had come to see Assad's survival as more risk than reward. Strategic Affairs Minister Moshe Yaalon described Assad's demise as a matter of "time and bloodshed," and in January, Defense Minister Ehud Barak said flatly that the Syrian despot "deserves to be toppled."

As my colleague Yaakov Katz has reported in *The Jerusalem Post*, Assad has beefed up his troop presence adjacent to the Golan Heights, and Israeli defense officials suspect he could try to divert attention from trouble on the home front by provoking Israel into a fight. The past year brought two previews of just such a scenario, when on Nakba Day (marking Israel's creation in 1948) and Naksa Day (commemorating Arab territorial losses in the 1967 Six-Day War) he bused hundreds of Palestinian-Syrians to the border with the Golan. Thirteen of them were killed on Nakba Day when more than 100 people rushed the border fence and Israeli troops opened fire.

In Hosni Mubarak's Egypt, the depth of support enjoyed by the Muslim Brotherhood was apparent to any unbiased observer. In Syria, though, questions over succession abound—not least because the last reliable census was conducted almost a century ago by French colonial authorities. Today, rough estimates put the Sunni population at 70 percent, but 10 percent of those are Kurds and another 10 percent tribal or Bedouin—none of whom have displayed much attraction to Islamism. The remaining quarter of the populace comprises Assad's own Alawite sect (12 percent), Christians (10 percent) and others (3 percent, mostly Druze and Shi'ites), none of whom want anything to do with the Brotherhood and its ilk.

Barry Rubin, an Israel-based analyst, estimates Islamist support in Syria at just 15 percent, but describes half the known members of the opposition Syrian National Council's secretariat as Islamists. Rubin attributes the SNC's skewed composition to influence from Turkey, where the council is based. (In a feat of remarkable recklessness, the Obama administration all but outsourced its Syria policy to Ankara's Islamist AKP government for much of the uprising's first year.)

Burhan Ghalioun, the secular Sorbonne lecturer who heads the SNC, has dismissed a Brotherhood takeover as all but impossible, estimating Islamists' support at just 10 percent. Ghalioun has said that should the opposition council take power, it would end its strategic and military alliance with Iran; for a majority Sunni Arab state like Syria, he said, the decades-long alliance with Shi'ite Persia is "abnormal."

Assad's successor, whoever it is, will likely inherit weapons caches that would make even a hardened terrorist titter. Syria has one of the world's most extensive chemical weapons arsenals, including Sarin, VX and mustard gas, and hundreds of long-range SCUD missiles courtesy of Russia and North Korea. Should Assad's fortunes decline, Hezbollah may make a run for his weaponry. The group has already started moving its own arms to Lebanon for fear its erstwhile patron is on the outs.

Consensus is a rare commodity in Jerusalem, but two perceptions enjoy wider currency than any other: Assad is doomed, and Iran represents Israel's greatest security threat. Today the Jewish state, with full knowledge of the risks involved, hopes to see a new devil in Damascus.



The Transformation of Southeast Asian Terrorism

Hamoon Khelghat-Doost & Govindran Jegatesen

PENANG—One of the major repercussions following the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington was new interest in certain regions that were previously regarded as of relatively low importance with regard to terrorism hotspots. Southeast Asia is one such example. The extremely diverse ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic texture of Southeast Asia—coupled with an alarming number of legislative deficiencies—provides a safe haven for many different varieties of extremism. The prevalence of groups such as Abu Sayyaf (the Philippines) and Al-Ma'unah (Malaysia), as well as events such as the 2002 Bali bombing, clearly demonstrate the attractiveness of Southeast Asia as a terrorism hub—and the potential for terrorist activity there.

The reasons are obvious. Southeast Asia is home to more than 20 percent of the world's Muslims, making Islamic radicalism a core security challenge for countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Indeed, after knowledge of al-Qaeda's extensive global terrorist network was made public, several extremist groups in Southeast Asia were identified as Al-Qaeda regional partners and terrorist cells. These include Jemmah Islamiah (JI), Abu Sayyaf, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Islamist separatists of Patani and Laskar Jihad (LJ).

The manner in which these groups take action, as well as their operational styles, vary according to their respective ideologies and their immediate environments. For the Islamist separatists of Patani (Thailand), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Philippines) and the Free Aceh Movement (Indonesia), the establishment of an independent Islamic state or territory has been their primary objective. In comparison to other extremist groups in the region, such "independence-based" entities tend to have had longer, more turbulent, histories—as well as agendas that are more "local" in nature (i.e., the acquisition of a "homeland" for Muslims within the confines of either a non-Islamic country, such as Thailand or the Philippines, or a largely secular one, like Indonesia).

But other extremist groups in Southeast Asia maintain and share close relations and ideology with al-Qaeda's global network. For instance, in the late 1980s, the Philippines became al-Qaeda's primary entry point into the region; some of the Bin Laden network's most wanted (such as 1993 WTC bomber Ramzi Yousef and 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed) used Manila as the meeting point to plan and stage further terrorist activities. During this time period, al-Qaeda provided substantial financial support for members of local groups to carry out training in the region.

When the Filipino government tightened its security measures in the mid- and late 1990s, al-Qaeda's focus shifted to Malaysia as a potential hub. At the time, Malaysia appeared to be an attractive option, given its lax visa requirements and background checks, as well as weak immigration policies, which proved to be of great advantage to al-Qaeda members seeking to infiltrate Southeast Asia. Additionally, the region's



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loosely-regulated financial and banking systems provided a relatively secure and uncomplicated environment for the organization's financial transactions.

The Philippines were not the only place where radical foreign ideologies and organizations found fertile soil. Malaysia, too, became affected by the worldview of Indonesia's extreme Jemaaah Islamiah, leading to the involvement of Malaysians in the group's terrorist activities. For instance, two Malaysians—Azahari Husin and Noordin Mohammad—were behind the Bali bombing in 2002, as well as the bombing of Jakarta's Marriott Hotel in 2003 and the bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta in 2004. The Bali bombing alone led to more than 200 civilian deaths, many of them Western nationals.

Southeast Asia's geographic characteristics likewise work to the advantage of terrorist groups. Countries such as Indonesia or the Philippines consist of hundreds if not thousands of islands, which facilitate the movement of terrorist groups in navigating borders and also make it much more difficult for federal governments to control their territories. Cross-border cooperation between terrorist groups in Southeast Asia is one of the main challenges facing regional counterterrorism. Terrorist groups in countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand often cooperate closely at the regional level, with JI appearing to be the dominant power and playing the role of coordinator.

The role that international terrorist actors such as al-Qaeda play in shaping Southeast Asian extremism should not be ignored. Often, entities such as JI get their start as local extremist groups with local demands. However, once exposed to al-Qaeda's teachings and training, as well as its steady financial resources, JI and other extremist groups in the region began to coordinate their activities against regional and international targets. Other factors, such as weak border control, corruption among local officials, strong anti-Western sentiment in the region, loose banking regulations, weak immigration policies and the traditionally established network of Islamic groups all have a role to play in turning Southeast Asia into an attractive platform for regional and international terrorists. With that in mind, a keener eye should be kept on the region with regard to potential terrorism—and greater efforts need to be exerted regionally to combat the threat.





BOOK REVIEWS

An Islamo-Bolivarian Revolution

Joseph M. Humire

JORGE VERSTRYNGE, *La Guerra Periférica y el Islam Revolucionario: Orígenes, reglas y ética de la Guerra asimétrica* [*Peripheral Warfare and Revolutionary Islam: Origins, rules and ethics of asymmetrical warfare*] (Spain: El Viejo Topo, 2005), 174 pp.

In April of 2005, Spanish politician and ideologue Jorge Verstrynge delivered a keynote address to a room full of Venezuelan military officers in the “First Military Forum on Fourth Generation War and Asymmetric Conflict,” held at the Military Academy in Caracas, Venezuela. The source for Verstrynge’s speech was his own recently published book, *Peripheral Warfare and Revolutionary Islam: Origins, Rules and Ethics of Asymmetrical Warfare*.

Hugo Chávez and his top military commander at the time, General Raul Isaias Baduel, were so intrigued by Verstrynge’s exposition that they flew him across the Atlantic, from Spain to Venezuela, to deliver this ever-so-important speech. Shortly thereafter, Chávez would finance the publication of a special edition of Verstrynge’s 174-page book as a pocket-sized field manual, adorned with the Venezuelan Army’s coat of arms stamped on the inside cover. On the direct orders of Gen. Baduel, thousands of copies of this special edition were distributed to the Venezuelan military officer corps with the instructions to study the book from cover to cover.

Verstrynge’s book is not a studied analysis of the strategic and tactical aspects of asymmetric warfare, but more



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of a glorification of Islamic terrorism coupled with ideological quotes from a wide range of individuals, from military philosopher Sun Tzu to renowned terrorist Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, better known as Carlos the Jackal.

In fact, Verstrynge dedicates a whole appendix to “the Jackal,” and utilizes some of the writings from Carlos’s recent work, entitled *Revolutionary Islam*, to illuminate one of the key themes of his book—that terrorism is morally superior to conventional warfare because it produces less collateral damage. As Verstrynge writes:

Everyone admits that a bombing causes civilian casualties... then, why are bombings by B-52’s, land mines, or surface to air missiles considered more legal than an individual who straps on a bomb and sacrifices himself for a cause. (Translated from original text in Spanish, pg. 115)

In an asymmetric war, Verstrynge opines, it is legitimate for a smaller combatant to use all means at his disposal, including suicide bombings and car bombs in civilian areas, to fight a larger opponent, because the rules of engagement are nonexistent. No careful analysis of the laws of war or international humanitarian law is offered; just blanket statements making the case for, and even glorifying, terrorism.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the lack of any profound military insight is because Verstrynge himself is not an expert on asymmetric or unconventional warfare. Having never worn a military uniform, or had any formal training in unconventional warfare, Verstrynge draws from academic and political writings to form his thesis.

Verstrynge, who was born in Morocco to Belgian and Spanish parents, began his career under the tutelage of the right-wing Spanish politician Manuel Fraga, who would later expel Verstrynge

from the Alianza Popular party in the mid-1980s on charges of betrayal. Having been dumped by the Spanish right, Verstrynge simply moved to the left and joined up with the Spanish Socialist Workers Party, though he wasn’t able to gain much traction within the party’s hierarchy because of his previous affiliations with the right-wing establishment in Spain.

Failing in the political realm, Verstrynge transitioned to academia, where he has had more success. A self-professed “Marxist” with socialist sympathies, Verstrynge has published many works throughout his time as a professor of political science at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

Verstrynge has shown a tendency to gravitate towards the extremes of whichever political persuasion he happens to be involved with at the time. During his youth, Verstrynge flirted with far-right neo-Nazi groups, such as the “Spanish Circle of Friends of Europe” (*Circulo Español de Amigos de Europa*, CEDADE). Later, during his adulthood, he would advise far-left politician Francisco Frutos of the Communist Party of Spain. By the time Verstrynge published *Peripheral Warfare and Revolutionary Islam*, his penchant for extremism had outgrown even Spain’s volatile parties, and led him to the newest international extremist phenomenon—radical Islam.

Thus, chapter five of his book, headed “New War and New Islam,” begins to draw parallels between radical Islam and asymmetric warfare, claiming that the Arabs were the first to use this strategy successfully during the Arab uprising against the Ottoman Empire. Verstrynge goes on to assert that Islam has resorted to a peripheral means of warfare because larger enemies constantly attack it with a stronger military capacity.

Verstrynge also lauds radical Islam for expanding the parameters of what he

believes asymmetrical warfare should encompass, to include terrorism, and more specifically, suicide bombings—an act he views as noble and just when taking into account the scale of difference between the two opponents' military capabilities.

Although there are glimpses of Verstrynge's admiration of Islamist terrorist tactics throughout the book, it is in the final chapter that his penchant for the extreme comes into full view, as he attempts to justify of the use of biological weapons. (He goes on to endorse chemical weapons in Appendix four, which is tellingly titled "WMD's for everyone.") Here, the book suddenly turns into more of a terrorist training manual than a strategy text, as Verstrynge lays out the steps to make a "dirty bomb," and even provides leads for finding materials and detailed instructions on the production of a basic nuclear weapon:

How could a terrorist group produce a basic nuclear weapon? Well, for example, you could use civilian plutonium (which is separate from the fuel used on nuclear energy reactors in processing plants) and produce a bomb (and a proper physician could do this without much problem) of 100 tons of TNT in effect: producing a crater of 30 meters... (Translated from original text in Spanish, pg. 109)

Verstrynge goes on to make the case for how biological weapons are more efficient (and deadly) because they can be spread virally, and he also mentions the use of cyberwarfare, though downplaying its effectiveness because he claims that the U.S. is adequately prepared for that sort of an attack.

Besides the technical instruction Verstrynge pulls from open source materials, he also repeats the trope that has become standard for far-left "anti-imperialists"—namely, that the U.S. is building a global empire and must be defeated.

While not an expert on asymmetric warfare, Verstrynge demonstrates a working knowledge of the radical Islamic terrorist *modus operandi*, even confessing in an interview with Univision late last year that his understanding of asymmetric warfare was modeled after the Iranian-backed terrorist group Hezbollah. Nevertheless, since most of his insights are borrowed from more qualified experts, it falls short of being a significant treatise on modern revolutionary warfare, and rather reads more like a literary review of other works on the topic.

Despite Verstrynge's lack of *bona fides* as a military strategist, however, his work was considered to be good enough for him to be named a "military consultant" to the Venezuelan Armed Forces. And while not a best-seller in his home country of Spain, the endorsement of his book by Hugo Chávez has placed Verstrynge in high regard indeed among the world's leading extremists. For Verstrynge, so enamored with radical ideology both leftist and Islamist, that may be reward enough.





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Mixed Record

Eric Rozenman

CONDOLEEZZA RICE, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), 766 pp. \$35.00.

Condoleezza Rice is an American Renaissance woman. A diplomat able to converse with Vladimir Putin in Russian, a pianist skilled enough to duet with famed cellist Yo-Yo Ma, a football maven and fitness enthusiast who looks great in Oscar de la Renta gowns, she has even been mentioned as a Republican vice-presidential prospect during this election season. Nevertheless, her time as national security advisor and secretary of state to President George W. Bush was maddeningly uneven.

Rice's account of that period showcases some of the Bush administration's more important foreign policy successes. These included improved U.S.-India relations; the administration's Africa initiatives; the successful American military-civilian "surge" in Iraq; Libya's abandonment of its nuclear weapons program; and a refocusing of the federal government toward both homeland security and counterterrorism after 9/11. But in Rice's recollections readers also encounter a self-deceiving pursuit of "breakthroughs" with North Korea over its nuclear weapons program; tactical successes but strategic failures with Russia and China; and zealous promotion of the will-'o-the-wisp "two-state solution" to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Rice, the first black woman to serve as secretary of state, begins her narrative in the summer of 1998. Former President George H. W. Bush has invited her, a former Soviet specialist on his National Security Council, to join him and wife Barbara at their Maine vacation home. "The elder Bush didn't hide his desire to get me together with his son George just so we could get to know each other better and talk a little about foreign policy," she writes. She and the Texas governor fished, worked out, and "talked about Russia, China, and Latin America... I liked him. He was funny and irreverent but serious about policy." Thus began a friendship that would be tested but endure.

Improved U.S.-India ties, now taken for granted, resulted from a long struggle. New Delhi "had viewed the United States with suspicion for decades," Rice recalls. But as "a direct consequence" of how 9/11 changed the Bush administration's worldview, when Pakistani-based terrorists struck the Indian parliament in December 2001 the White House affirmed India's right to self-defense while simultaneously trying to defuse war fever between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

Afterward, "we accelerated the changes in our policies toward India and Pakistan." Bush and Rice already had "talked about the importance of India as a rising, multiethnic democracy on the world stage" and the president sought a deep relationship with India. But sanc-



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tions dating to India's 1974 nuclear weapons test blocked high technology cooperation. "...[T]he high priests and protectors of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in Congress (and in some corners of the State Department) would resist anything that looked like a change of U.S. policy," Rice explains. It took six years of domestic and international diplomacy before the president could sign the United States-India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Nonproliferation Enhancement Act.

Sufferers of "Bush derangement syndrome" barely registered the administration's accomplishments in sub-Saharan Africa either. Among them Rice counts the quadrupling of U.S. aid, the creation of the Millennium Challenge Account to support improved governance and reduced corruption, substantial funding to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and Washington's leadership of the international push to oust Liberia's destructive leader, Charles Taylor. These moves did not go unnoticed in the region; asked in 2008 about African pride in U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama, Tanzania's president, Jakaya Kikwete, said, "For us, the most important thing is, let him be as good a friend of Africa as President Bush has been."

"Initially skeptical" about a troop surge in Iraq, where by 2006 even the president saw the U.S. effort as failing, Rice considered herself burned by previous overly optimistic Defense Department forecasts. More troops "pursuing the same flawed strategy would only result in more casualties," she believed. "I hadn't been insistent enough as national security advisor when the President had accepted the Pentagon's assumptions about what it could achieve in Iraq. As secretary of state, I didn't want to make that mistake again." But, encouraged by the Anbar Awakening in which local Sunni leaders turned against outside al-Qaeda affiliates, Rice endorsed the surge and then had to field "the best

[diplomatic] team in Iraq and Provincial Reconstruction Teams... fully staffed with experienced people." She threatened to "direct people to serve if they don't volunteer" and insisted on diplomatic ace Ryan Crocker as ambassador in Iraq. She also had to sell the build-up to members of Congress who charged the administration with having deceived them in 2003 about Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction.

Yet not subjected to painstaking analysis in the same fashion were the Bush-Rice quests for an Israeli-Palestinian "two-state solution" and North Korean nuclear disarmament, among other efforts.

Bush obviously mistrusted Yasser Arafat, yet he and Rice repeatedly imagined that agreement between Israelis and Palestinian Arabs on "two states, Israel and Palestine, democratic and at peace" needed just one more push from Washington, and a few more concessions from Jerusalem, to become reality. As secretary of state, Rice undertook more than 20 Middle East trips to advance Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy. She and Bush convinced themselves that Mahmoud Abbas, Arafat's successor, was a genuine peace partner for Israel. They, like Israeli officials, ignored Abbas' role as a top Arafat aide during more than 30 years of Palestine Liberation Organization terrorism and his more recent disavowals of violence in parallel with praise of terrorist "martyrs."

Rice describes the administration's 2007 Annapolis conference, following which Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were to resume with international support, as "historic." This even though less than a year later, Abbas rejected Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's reiteration of former premier Ehud Barak's sweeping 2000 and 2001 proposals, which added "land swaps" to compensate for settlement annexation.

Rice's own background appears to have played a large role in her efforts. She writes, "I know something of what the Palestinians and Israelis feel. I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, at a terrible time for black people. I think I know what it's like for a Palestinian mother to tell her child that she can't travel on that highway—because she is Palestinian. ... But I know too what it's like for an Israeli mother to put her child to bed and not know if a bomb will kill him in the night. My parents had to comfort me when my little friend was killed in that church in Birmingham in 1963." But, of course, black Americans did not terrorize white Americans in the segregated South. And Israeli Jews don't bar Palestinian drivers from certain roads because they are racists. They do it to prevent Arab terrorists from blowing up synagogues, buses and restaurants. False equivalencies ultimately lead to failed policies, and so it was with the administration's peace push.

Rice recounts similar, if less dramatically subjective, efforts to engage China on North Korean nuclear disarmament, Russia on sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, and Pakistan to move beyond simultaneous support of the war against terrorism and protection of Islamic extremists. On all fronts, she chronicles repeated "breakthroughs" that somehow did not lead to desired goals. North Korea repeatedly broke promises, Benazir Bhutto was assassinated upon her U.S.-sponsored return to Pakistan, and Russia laid waste to Georgia—developments that confounded official Washington but reflected historical continuity.

Rice likewise recounts her clashes with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney, attributing them to differences over policy and procedure, not personality—even though it sounds like all three were at issue. She outlines a relationship of mutual trust, determination, and loyalty

with President Bush. The two came from dramatically different backgrounds but joined to pursue common goals.

A young Rice was mentored by mandarins of the Republican foreign policy establishment, like "realists" Brent Scowcroft and James Baker. But she also was eager, at least early on, to promote President Bush's "Freedom Agenda" in the Middle East and elsewhere. This broke with the conventional wisdom of the "realists." And yet Rice, now a pillar of the establishment herself, may return to Washington once more. The question is will she do so a "realist," an activist, or—having learned from misplaced enthusiasms—a realistic activist?



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Death Spiral

Stanley Schrager

JAMES P. FARWELL, *The Pakistan Cauldron: Conspiracy, Assassination & Instability* (Potomac Books, 2011), 360 pp. \$29.95.

Honesty compels me to begin this review with a pair of disclosures. The first is that the author, Jim Farwell, is a good friend of mine. The second is that I had inputs into the work in question; I spoke several times with Farwell about the book as it was being written, and as a result am mentioned on the Acknowledgments page. That said, I have no trouble being objective.

Some twenty years ago, I supervised the Urdu and Pashto services at the *Voice of America* in Washington. In that capacity, I had many conversations with a Pakistani member of the Urdu Service who kept trying to convince me to give him a promotion. I, in turn, told him repeatedly that regulations prohibited him from moving up to the next grade. This went on and on. I mentioned the exchanges to a friend, who provided a telling bit of context: “You don’t understand. He knows that the regulations prohibit the promotion, but he also knows that if you really wanted to do it, you could do it. That is the way it is done in Pakistan.”

The “way it is done” in Pakistan continues to bedevil U.S. policymakers.

When it comes to the tortured relationship between Washington and Islamabad, a presumably rational discussion of “shared and mutual interests,” and the underlying logic that should in principle animate cooperation, simply does not apply. It is a testament to Farwell’s prose and knack for storytelling that *The Pakistan Cauldron* brings these contradictions and resulting frustrations to the fore.

Farwell has, in fact, provided us with several books, or themes, in one volume.

The Pakistan Cauldron begins with a useful and fascinating account of the nuclear scientist AQ Khan, and an analysis of his rogue nuclear network. True to his inquisitive nature, Farwell asks more questions than he supplies answers about Khan’s nefarious proliferation activities and their global impact.

The discussion of AQ Khan gives way to what is the best part of the book by far: the chapters on Pervez Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto. The fates of these two leaders are intertwined, and, while they could not have been more different, their ascent through the complexities of the bitter, dangerous and complicated world of Pakistani politics is illuminated in perceptive prose and compelling paragraphs.

Farwell’s chapters on the assassination of Benazir Bhutto read more than a

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bit like a mystery novel. He describes a force of nature, a towering political figure, and a woman of great intellect and courage. In the process, he raises the inevitable question: how might Pakistan be different today had she not been killed?

Another theme woven deftly throughout the book is the question of “national sovereignty.” As U.S. policy-makers have discovered, Pakistanis are particularly sensitive about the subject, and perceived U.S. violations of it. This is not an exaggeration; as a retired U.S. State Department Foreign Service Officer, I have found that Pakistanis are the most sensitive to real and imagined slights against their nation than any other nationality or culture.

The matter has gained even greater salience of late. The May 2011 raid that killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, was a major milestone in the War on Terror. But it also created fresh frictions in the already-troubled relationship.

All roads lead to India, as Farwell notes in his book. He capably describes how the U.S. focus on al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Afghanistan, and our continuing efforts to persuade Pakistan that our mutual interests are in fact mutual, inevitably turn to the other border of Pakistan and its perceived threat of India. For Pakistan, as we have learned, the threat of India far supersedes that of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. We talk of “existential threats,” and vague as that term may be, it takes on real meaning when you discuss India with Pakistanis.

The final part of Farwell’s book is an attempt to bring the preceding sections up-to-date. The raid and subsequent killing of bin Laden is clearly added at the end to make the analysis contemporary. Some of the speculation about the raid and its effects on U.S.-Pakistan relations, however, are obviously outdated (even though Farwell, in typical fashion, at least asks the right questions). This

is unfortunate; while the reason for the “update” is obvious, the power of this volume stems from its ability to stand alone, impervious to the temporary currents of U.S.-Pakistan crises.

For the past several years, I would visit an acquaintance, a Pakistan military officer, monthly. Invariably, we would begin each of our conversations by noting that U.S.–Pakistan relations could not get any worse. That assessment held until the next crisis, when we would have to revise our assumptions downward. Farwell’s work captures the deepening spiral of the downhill relationship, and highlights the personalities that have contributed to that contemporary misunderstanding.

Crisis breeds attention, and today there is an awful lot being written about Pakistan. Pakistan, however, is nothing if not an ephemeral subject. The situation in that compelling and complex nation continues to evolve, and it is difficult for anything written about it to have legitimate staying power. *The Pakistan Cauldron* stands as an exception to that rule, and should be required reading for anyone seeking to understand the dynamics of U.S.-Pakistan relations, and why what is arguably the most dangerous nation on earth is so vital to U.S. long-term strategic interests.



Clumsy Assassins

Emanuele Ottolenghi

ROYA HAKAKIAN, *Assassins of the Turquoise Palace* (Grove Press, 2011), \$25.00.

When, last October, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced that the FBI and DEA had thwarted a plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States by planting a bomb in a Washington, DC restaurant, he blamed “factions in the Iran government” for authorizing the attacks.

Since then, pundits have been conducting a strange but entirely predictable ballet. Nobody is willing to point the finger of blame at Iran’s top dog, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. It may instead have been “a rogue faction” of the Revolutionary Guards, as *Newsday* pointed out in an editorial. Or it could have been other elements in the regime, since, as many experts have suggested, the plot was too clumsy and amateurish to have been approved by what some consider to be the A-team of terrorism.

Had any of them bothered to judge Iran by its own track record, however, they would conclude otherwise. As Roya Hakakian has brilliantly documented in her masterful book on the 1992 “Mykonos” massacre, orders to carry out such terrorist outrages come from the highest echelons of Iran’s regime. Dissidents Iran murdered over the years were on a list drawn up by the late founder of the Islamic Republic, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini; the decision to go after them

was taken by a special affairs committee made of top government officials. The Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, in turn, approved the committee’s decisions before the Intelligence Ministry and the *Pasdaran* worked out the logistics of each operation.

The same goes with other terrorist operations, such as the 1992 and 1994 bombings of the Israeli embassy and the Argentine-Israel Mutual Association building in Buenos Aires, Argentina, or the 1983 bombings of the U.S. Marine and French paratroopers barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. Hakakian’s book shows how, when Iran dispatched agents to kill eight Kurdish and Iranian opponents of the Iranian regime as they gathered for dinner at the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin in September 1992, incompetence marred the plot and ultimately led to the arrest and trial of the culprits.

That the orders come from above does not preclude incompetence down below, once orders are carried out. Indeed, in the plot to murder the Saudi Ambassador, pundits dismissed a direct link with Tehran because the ringleader was a used car dealer from Texas. Yet, the Mykonos ringleader was a grocer with Hezbollah connections who lent a hand to the Iranian regime’s money laundering activities in Germany in exchange for his own profit.

Nor were his picks professional characters from a James Bond movie. After the hit, the team drove off and



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split up, but the driver inadvertently parked the car in front of a private garage entry—ensuring it was towed away and identified within 48 hours of the murder. Tasked with disposing of the weapons used in the attack, he threw the bag containing them under a nearby car in a car dealership on the same street where he had parked the car. They were quickly found. One of the assassins forgot to wear gloves during the shooting rampage—leaving his fingerprints on the weapons. He was just as quickly identified. As it turns out, he and the hit team's watchman did not leave Germany immediately. News of police findings made their presence in Germany a liability; yet, Iran's supposedly-efficient terror machine failed to deliver them fake passports to escape quite on time. As for the ringleader, he returned to Germany the day after two of his squad had been arrested, and he was himself arrested at the airport.

This tale of incompetence, of course, does nothing to diminish the horror and the tragedy of the murders, or the regime's ruthlessness in bankrolling it. Hakakian masterfully depicts both with a style, eloquence and rhythm that makes you sometimes wonder if this is not actually a gripping spy novel. Highly readable yet robustly documented, *Assassins of the Turquoise Palace* offers great insights into the way Iran runs its wars in the shadows. It also opens a window onto the civilized world of Western bystanders. For nothing is more astounding in the story of the Mykonos case than the efforts of German authorities to downplay the direct responsibility of Iran's highest echelons of power, much like many now do in the case of the Saudi Ambassador plot. Hakakian weaves this aspect into the story of the trial and keeps the suspense going until the end, when it becomes clear that the Mykonos case is not just a telltale of the wickedness of the Iranian regime but also an instance

in which only thanks to overwhelming evidence were Western decision makers forced to confront Iran for what it is and not what they wish it to be.

In the lengthy history of Western relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, this is a rare moment of clarity that still awaits repetition.

The Mykonos case led not only to convictions at the highest levels of Iran's intelligence and political power structure—it also triggered an unprecedented withdrawal of European ambassadors from Tehran and a severing of diplomatic relations to protest the murder of innocents on European soil at the hands of Iranian assassins. This sort of outrage was something Europe could not bring itself to muster after the 2009 elections or the trashing of the British Embassy in Tehran in November 2011. Hakakian's book then reveals another important truth for policymakers who wish to break the riddle of negotiations with Iran: namely, that pressure sometimes works.

If there is a flaw in Hakakian's book, then, it is her overly-optimistic conclusion that such gestures (short-lived as they were, since European ambassadors returned to Tehran six months later) prove that Iran can be brought to act reasonably without "a bomb" being "dropped over Tehran and no blood [being] shed."

The truth, however, is more complicated. That Tehran stopped its campaign of assassinations after Mykonos is more evidence of the shocking cowardice and indifference of European governments, up to that point, vis-à-vis Iran's reckless and ruthless manhunt in the streets, squares, and cafés of Europe. Had a cover-up been possible, or had Iran's assassins been more professional, Europe might have continued to turn the other way. Besides, at the first whiff of cosmetic change inside Iran—Mohammad Khatami's electoral victory in the 1997 presidential elections, and the ambiguous retraction of the fatwa levied

by Khomeini against Salman Rushdie—Europeans rushed to restore relations and promote trade. The dead were soon forgotten, and Iran's intelligence operatives roam European streets anew. The moral clarity made inevitable by the Mykonos trial was an exception to an otherwise smug pattern of engagement and cooperation with Iran—a pattern which, to some extent, continues even to this day.

Iran bends eventually, as it did in the Iran-Iraq war. But the price it must be made to pay is so high that there may be no courage for such action in the West. After all, the eight dead dissidents remain dead today, and as Hakakian painfully tells us in her epilogue, all the assassins eventually walked free. Still, *The Assassins* is a must-read, a reminder of Iranian evil in our time that should always be referenced when Iran's Western friends tell us the Islamic Republic isn't so bad.



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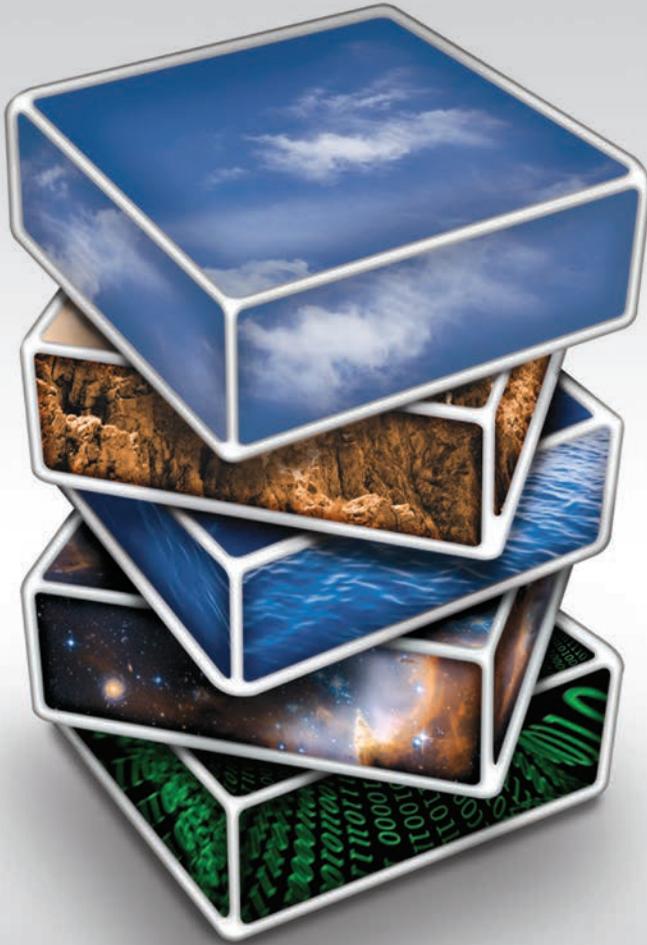
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