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18 December, 2013

Article 1.	NYT <u>Secretary Kerry's Derring-Do</u> <u>Thomas L. Friedman</u>
Article 2.	The Huffington Post <u>Israel: The Chimera of Friendship</u> John Tirman
Article 3.	NY Post <u>Iran nuke deal quietly collapses</u> <u>Amir Taheri</u>
Article 4.	The Washington Post <u>Iran's hard-liners resist nuclear deal</u> <u>David Ignatius</u>
Article 5.	NYT <u>Saudi Arabia Will Go It Alone</u> Mohammed Bin Nawaf Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
Article 6.	The National Interest <u>Russia's Middle East Chess Game</u> <u>Jiri Valenta, Leni Friedman Valenta</u>

[Article 1.](#)

NYT

Secretary Kerry's Derring-Do

Thomas L. Friedman

December 17, 2013 -- I don't know whether Secretary of State John Kerry will succeed in his two big chosen priorities: trying to forge an Israeli-Palestinian peace and a détente with Iran that deprives it of a nuclear weapon. But I admire his relentlessness. I admire the way he dares to fail — the only way to become a consequential secretary of state. And I admire his strategy: trying to construct a diplomacy that makes it impossible for Israel, the Palestinians and Iran to continue avoiding their big existential choices.

Strip away the details of the Iran deal and, at its core, Kerry is offering Tehran this choice: Do you want to be a big North Korea or a Persian China? If you want your power and influence to be defined by how many nuclear weapons you can make, you can do that, but you will be a big failed state, largely isolated from the rest of the world, with your people never able to realize their full potential. If you want your greatness to be defined by the talent and energy of your people — which will be fully unleashed once sanctions are removed and they can reintegrate with the world after 34 years of semi-isolation — you'll have to abandon all nuclear enrichment except for limited research and electrical needs. You choose. A better deal is not coming.

To Palestinians, Kerry is saying: You want to maintain the unity of the Palestinian people; you want an independent state in 100 percent of the West Bank with a capital in East Jerusalem; you want the total removal as soon as possible of all Israeli troops and settlements; and you want to be able to maintain some hostility to Israel in your textbooks and diplomacy. I can probably get you 95 percent of the West

Bank with swaps from Israel to compensate for the rest and a toehold in East Jerusalem, but you'll have to give up the hostility and probably your unity — because there will be virtually no return of refugees to pre-1967 Israel, and Israeli troops will have to be permitted to maintain defensive positions in the Jordan Valley for at least a decade. I know, it is half a loaf, but it is real bread. You can always wait another 100 years.

To Israelis, Kerry is saying: You want a Jewish state, a state in all of the Land of Israel and a democratic state. You can have two out of three. You can be Jewish and in all of the Land of Israel, but you will not be democratic, because the Arabs in the West Bank and Israel will constitute too big a voting bloc for you to tolerate democratically. You can be Jewish and democratic, but then you can't hold onto the West Bank. You can be democratic and in all of the Land of Israel, but then you can't be a Jewish state (see point No. 1). You choose. A better deal is not coming.

This is not a simple choice for Israel, given the Arab turmoil around it. Kerry's strategy has been to get the Pentagon to design a security scheme for the West Bank and Jordan Valley that would rely on satellites and other high-tech infrastructure to take the security question off the table as much as possible, so the choice for Israel is ideology versus a workable peace. Israeli officials, though, argue that the U.S. plan is insufficient. The truth is, no security arrangement is foolproof. The only thing that might be foolproof is, along with the best security tools, giving Palestinians a state worth their defending and preserving by surprising them with a little trust — exactly the way Nelson Mandela surprised South African whites. What Palestinians do and say matters. But what Israelis do and say

also conditions what Palestinians do and say — and vice versa. Up to now, neither this Palestinian leadership nor this Israeli leadership has shown an ounce of “Mandela-ism.” Everything they do to and for each other is grudging and fraught with suspicion, so there is never any sense of surprise. Without some trust breakthrough, I don’t see how a big deal gets done. But the status quo is not benign. Israeli-Palestinian clashes in the West Bank are mounting. With no deal, it could easily explode. Also, Israel’s steady expansion of settlements in the West Bank is giving its enemies more fodder to delegitimize the Jewish state. I am no fan of settlements, but I am also no fan of bigoted, one-sided boycotts of Israeli academic institutions like the one announced Monday by the American Studies Association, or A.S.A. (China threatens to throw out the U.S. press. Russia tries to rip Ukraine away from the European Union. But the A.S.A. singles out Israel for condemnation?) Does the A.S.A. even believe that Jews have a right to their own state anywhere in Palestine? After all, the A.S.A. statement says it opposes “the Israeli occupation of Palestine,” not specifying the West Bank. But I fear for Israel. If Israel doesn’t stop the settlement madness, denying the Palestinians a West Bank state, it will fit the caricature of its worst enemies.

No question — for America, Israel and the Palestinians, no deal is still better than a bad deal that blows up the morning after. What Kerry is trying to put together are decent, hardheaded deals, in which opportunities can legitimately outweigh the risks for all sides. His chance of succeeding on the Iran or Israel-Palestine fronts is very low, but I greatly respect his daring to fail.

The Huffington Post

Israel: The Chimera of Friendship

John Tirman

17 December 2013 -- A standard trope of U.S. politics is that Israel is America's major ally in the Middle East, the friendship being born of Harry Truman's support for the creation of Israel in 1948 and the "shared values" of democratic governance and open societies. The sugary paeans of mutual adoration have been flowing ever since, along with \$234 billion in aid and additional defense commitments over those 65 years. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu went so far in a joint appearance with President Obama to say that "you are us, and we are you," about as close an alliance as one can imagine.

The issue of Israel as BFF is now vivid because the Iran nuclear deal has cast a shadow over the relationship. Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman suggested recently that the Jewish State would seek new allies in the world.

Netanyahu has been harsh in his criticisms of the deal and has sought to quash it, while also renewing threats to bomb Iran. The Israel Lobby in the U.S. is working feverishly to disparage the deal and to coerce members of Congress to vote for new sanctions on Iran that would effectively end the negotiations. The irony of course is that a nuclear deal with Iran, of which the interim agreement of last month is the first step, would strengthen Israeli security and stabilize the region.

The pressure for additional sanctions is almost completely the work of the Israel Lobby, principally the American-Israel Political Action Committee, AIPAC, which exercises

extraordinary influence through its campaign contributions. But AIPAC's intimidation works mainly because of the Israel-as-sole-ally notion, one intoned by virtually every politician and the main reason there is a large contingent on the Hill ready to vote for more sanctions.

Israel has been an ally in a dodgy region that remains under the sway of strong militaries and reactionary monarchies, a human-rights disaster zone and one where grotesque inequality is the norm. And Israel and the United States do share some important values (constitutional government, political freedoms) and history (both are expansionist, settler nations that were ready to abuse the natives to gain territory and control).

But Israel's determination to be the spoiler of U.S.-Iran cooperation while continuing and intensifying its 46-year occupation of Palestine now casts doubt on its status as U.S. friend and ally.

A rational actor in the region would recognize the beneficial effects of encouraging Iran to stand down from the nuclear precipice. In a region where the United States, usually foolishly, has spent hundreds of billions of dollars on security -- trillions if counting the long-term costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars -- we owe it to ourselves to lower tensions and build cooperative relationships. Israel is the main obstacle to this broad and highly desirable goal of U.S. security and prosperity.

Israel's forceful occupation of Palestine is also an enormous cost to the United States. The fervent devotion to Israel by American politicians has linked the oppression of Palestinians to America in the eyes of much of the world. "The enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present

distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the [region]," General David Petraeus told Congress three years ago. "The conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of U.S. partnerships with governments and peoples in the [region] and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile, al Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support." Others in the U.S. military have quietly voiced similar concerns.

In an important new study by Thomas Hegghammer & Joas Wagemakers, they underscore one of Petraeus' main points: "The argument that al Qaeda leaders opportunistically 'exploit' the Palestinian cause is an implicit admission that the same cause motivates recruits. There can only be opportunism if there is something to exploit." That is, the charge is sometimes heard that Osama bin Laden and his cronies did not actually care that much about Palestinians, and used the issue opportunistically. But these scholars note that the sentiments about Palestine are dynamic and effectual regardless of AQ leaders' intentions. "It is a fact of political life in the region that many young Muslims feel strongly about Palestine and that this emotion often factors into the decision by non-Palestinian Islamists to engage in militancy," they conclude. There is "enough evidence to suggest that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict helps new al Qaeda recruitment."

If one assumes, as I and countless international relations experts do, that violent Jihadism is a principal threat to the United States, this is a damning indictment of Israel. So we have two rather powerful examples of how Israel's actions and rhetoric -- and exceptional influence in American

institutions -- are seriously harmful to U.S. values and interests. One looks for a counterbalancing set of actions that brace the idea that Israel is a friend and ally, but such a search finds little, certainly nothing of comparable value. We trade with Israel, we cooperate on intelligence, we have various joint projects, but those are activities common to many bilateral relationships.

Israel's belligerent and persistent obstructionism is not the action of an ally. It is time to lay that mythology to rest, and allow Israel to seek its best friends elsewhere.

John Tirman is the Executive Director, MIT Center for International Studies.

[Article 3.](#)

NY Post

Iran nuke deal quietly collapses

Amir Taheri

December 16, 2013 -- Less than a month after it was hailed as “a great diplomatic coup,” the so-called Geneva accord to halt Iran’s nuclear ambitions seems to have come unstuck.

The official narrative in Tehran is that Iran signed nothing.

“There is no treaty and no pact,” says Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham, “only a statement of intent.”

Originally, Iran’s official media had presented the accord as a treaty (qarardad) but it now refers to a “letter of agreement” (tavafoq nameh).

The initial narrative claimed that the P5+1 group of nations that negotiated the deal with Iran had recognized the Islamic

Republic's right to enrich uranium and agreed to start lifting sanctions over a six-month period. In exchange, Iran would slow its uranium enrichment and postpone for six months the installation of equipment for producing plutonium, an alternate route to making a bomb. A later narrative claimed that the accord wasn't automatic and that the two sides had appointed experts to decide the details ("modalities") and fix a timetable. On Sunday, an editorial in the daily Kayhan, published by the office of "Supreme Guide" Ali Khomeini, claimed that the "six month" period of the accord was meaningless and that a final agreement might "even take 20 years to negotiate."

It was, therefore, no surprise that Iran decided to withdraw its experts from talks in Geneva to establish exactly how to implement the accord. "Now we have to talk about reviving the talks on modalities," says Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi.

Translated into plain language, the new Iranian narrative is that talks about implementing an accord that is not legally binding have collapsed and that, in the words of the head of the Iranian Atomic Energy Agency, Ali-Akbar Salehi, there is no change in the rhythm and tempo of Iran's nuclear project. "Our centrifuges are working full capacity," Salehi said last Thursday.

Having claimed that he had halted Iran's nuclear project, Secretary of State John Kerry might want to reconsider. He and his European colleagues, like many of their predecessors, may have fallen for the diplomatic version of the Three Card Monte played by the mullahs since they seized power in 1979. Khomeinist diplomacy has never aimed at reaching agreement with anyone. Instead, the regime regards negotiations as just another weapon in the jihad (holy struggle) for ensuring the

triumph of “true Islam” across the globe.

The regime can't conceive of give-and-take and compromise even with Muslim nations, let alone a bunch of “Infidel” powers. If unable to impose its will on others, the regime will try to buy time through endless negotiations.

In Three Card Monte, suckers stay in the game in the hope of getting it right next time. A similar hope ensures outsiders' participation in Khomeinist diplomacy's version of the trick. Thus Tehran has been in negotiations with Russia and three other littoral states over sharing the resources of the Caspian Sea since 1992. Talks with Iraq over implementing Resolution 598 of the UN Security Council and reopening the Shatt al-Arab border estuary have been going on since 2004. Other talks over sharing water resources have been going on with Afghanistan since 2003; talks over joint exploitation of gas resources with Qatar have been going on for 25 years.

And for more than 30 years, Iran and the United States have been negotiating the settlement of mutual claims in accordance with the Algiers accord of 1980.

The series of nuclear negotiations that started in 1993 resumed with the European Union in 2002 and have already taken four years in their current format, which opened in 2009.

The tactic of delay has several advantages for the mullahs. First, hopes of a negotiated solution make it more difficult for anyone to advocate military action to thwart Tehran's ambitions. As long as talks are going on, “all other options”, the cliché favored by President Obama, remain off the table. Endless talks also force Iran's adversaries are forced to sacrifice policy to process. Under the Geneva deal, for example, the US and its European partners not only set the military option aside, but also undertake not to impose

additional sanctions. Instead of hiring expensive lobbyists in Washington, the mullahs can use Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and Kerry to lobby Congress on their behalf.

The mullahs have reaped other benefits from their three-card trick. The perception that the crisis is cooling down has already halted the Islamic Republic's economic free fall. The national currency, the rial, lost 80 percent of its value over four years, but now appears to have stabilized.

The mullahs also use the prospect of normalization, especially with the United States, to divert attention from their increasingly repressive rule. While Iranians are bombarded with talk of President Hassan Rouhani's "diplomatic miracle," an average of 10 people are executed in Iran every day.

Here is how Khamenei's daily mouthpiece put it Sunday: "If our centrifuges do not continue to turn, no other wheel shall turn for our dignity, independence, power and security."

The message from Tehran to Washington is clear: You talk, we act.

[Article 4.](#)

The Washington Post

Iran's hard-liners resist nuclear deal

David Ignatius

16 December 2013 -- Tehran -- Hossein Shariatmadari's business card identifies him as the "Supreme Leader's Representative" at Kayhan, Iran's leading conservative newspaper. Listening to his unwavering advocacy of Iran's revolutionary politics, you realize just how hard it will be to reach the nuclear agreement that many Iranians I talked with here seem to want.

Shariatmadari says frankly that he doesn't believe in compromise with the West. "The identity of both sides is involved in this conflict," says the stern editor. "It didn't 'just happen.' It is structural. The problem will be solved when one side gives up its identity, only then."

The Kayhan editor is using his powerful voice to resist the deal being negotiated by President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. He says bluntly that he doesn't think Iran should have signed the six-month freeze negotiated last month in Geneva, and he argues that Zarif misled Rouhani and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei when he said the deal guaranteed Iran's right to enrichment of uranium. "This gentleman [Zarif] did not tell the truth," he asserts.

Can hard-liners such as Shariatmadari and the leaders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps block a deal? An Iranian banker may have been right when he told me that "Zarif has the backing of 90 percent of the people" to negotiate an agreement that removes economic sanctions and eases Iran's isolation. But the vanguard represented by Shariatmadari and the Revolutionary Guard may hold the commanding heights. The power of the Revolutionary Guard is a crucial variable. Rouhani told me in an interview in New York this September that he thinks security organizations such as the Revolutionary Guard should have less power in Iran, and he made that argument to Iranians in June's presidential election. But when I ask Shariatmadari about Rouhani's critique, he dismisses it as "election propaganda."

Tehran this week seemed a city caught somewhere between Pyongyang and Los Angeles. It's a sprawling city with sophisticated, outgoing people. The slogans of the 1979 Islamic revolution are fading on the walls, literally.

But the radical roots of the regime are still intact. And Shariatmadari speaks for the vanguard that has internalized the message of a massive mural on Karim Khan Zand Boulevard, near his office, that shows founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini with the words: “We will never put down the flag you raised.”

A visit here makes clear that in the nuclear negotiations Iran is facing, as Shariatmadari says, an internal struggle over its identity. That’s evident in the public sniping between Zarif and his critics, including the Revolutionary Guard chief, Maj. Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari. The Iranian leadership may be allowing this debate to heighten its leverage in negotiations — to encourage concessions to sympathetic moderates who are battling hard-liners. But it’s not just for show: You can feel the underlying tension in ordinary conversation.

The public’s support for Rouhani stems in part from national fatigue after eight years of inflammatory former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He seemed to delight in shocking the West with his anti-Israel diatribes, but for many Iranians he was an embarrassment. A half-dozen people I talked to here said the Ahmadinejad years are remembered for bad economic policies and corrupt favoritism for the power elite.

The public gave Rouhani a 51 percent majority in a six-candidate field, and if he ran again, he would do far better, argues Saeed Laylaz, a prominent economic journalist, in an interview at his apartment in northwest Tehran. “We support him unconditionally,” he says, but there’s no polling data that confirm that support. As for the supreme leader, Laylaz expresses a view I also heard from others that “Khamenei is behind Rouhani because otherwise the system will collapse.” The public yearning to escape the drabness of the Islamic

republic is evident in small things. One Iranian tells me about the new fad of traveling to Sulaymaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan and paying \$100 a ticket to hear pop-music stars who can't come to Iran. There's also a boom in low-cost travel to less restrictive societies. Dubai and Istanbul, which used to be favorites, have gotten so expensive that Iranians out for a good time are turning to cheap flights to Yerevan in Armenia and Tbilisi in Georgia.

Shariatmadari thinks these Western temptations are poisonous. He's suspicious even of President Obama's phone call to Rouhani in September, which he saw as an attempt to demean Iran. I ask if Rouhani should have hung up. "We believe in politeness," he says with a rare smile.

Article 5.

NYT

Saudi Arabia Will Go It Alone

Mohammed Bin Nawaf Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

December 17, 2013 -- Saudi Arabia has been friends with our Western partners for decades; for some, like the United Kingdom where I serve as ambassador, for almost a century. These are strategic alliances that benefit us both. Recently, these relationships have been tested — principally because of differences over Iran and Syria.

We believe that many of the West's policies on both Iran and Syria risk the stability and security of the Middle East. This is a dangerous gamble, about which we cannot remain silent, and will not stand idly by.

The crisis in Syria continues unabated. There have been over

100,000 civilian deaths. Most shockingly of all, the Oxford Research Group reports that of the 11,000 victims under 17 and under, more than 70 percent were killed by air strikes and artillery shells deliberately targeting civilian areas.

While international efforts have been taken to remove the weapons of mass destruction used by the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad, surely the West must see that the regime itself remains the greatest weapon of mass destruction of all? Chemical weapons are but a small cog in Mr. Assad's killing machine. While he may appear to be going along with every international initiative to end the conflict, his regime will continue to do everything in its power to frustrate any serious solution.

The Assad regime is bolstered by the presence of Iranian forces in Syria. These soldiers did not enter Syria to protect it from a hostile external occupation; they are there to support an evil regime that is hurting and harming the Syrian people. It is a familiar pattern for Iran, which has financed and trained militias in Iraq, Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon and militants in Yemen and Bahrain.

And yet rather than challenging the Syrian and Iranian governments, some of our Western partners have refused to take much-needed action against them. The West has allowed one regime to survive and the other to continue its program for uranium enrichment, with all the consequent dangers of weaponization.

This year's talks with Iran may dilute the West's determination to deal with both governments. What price is "peace" though, when it is made with such regimes?

The foreign policy choices being made in some Western capitals risk the stability of the region and, potentially, the

security of the whole Arab world. This means the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has no choice but to become more assertive in international affairs: more determined than ever to stand up for the genuine stability our region so desperately needs.

Saudi Arabia has enormous responsibilities within the region, as the cradle of Islam and one of the Arab world's most significant political powers. We have global responsibilities — economic and political — as the world's de facto central banker for energy. And we have a humanitarian responsibility to do what we can to end the suffering in Syria.

We will act to fulfill these responsibilities, with or without the support of our Western partners. Nothing is ruled out in our pursuit of sustainable peace and stability in the Arab World as King Abdullah — then Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince — showed with his leadership of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We showed our preparedness to act independently with our decision to reject a seat on the United Nations Security Council. What point was there in serving in an international talking shop when so many lives are threatened, and so many opportunities for peace and security are being thwarted by the U.N.'s inability to act?

We continue to show our determination through our support for the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian opposition. It is too easy for some in the West to use the threat of Al Qaeda's terrorist operations in Syria as an excuse for hesitation and inaction. Al Qaeda's activities are a symptom of the international community's failure to intervene. They should not become a justification for inaction. The way to prevent the rise of extremism in Syria — and elsewhere — is to support the champions of moderation: financially, materially and yes,

militarily, if necessary. To do otherwise is to walk on by, while a humanitarian disaster and strategic failure continue to fester. Saudi Arabia will continue on this new track for as long as proves necessary. We expected to be standing shoulder to shoulder with our friends and partners who have previously talked so much about the importance of moral values in foreign policy. But this year, for all their talk of “red lines,” when it counted, our partners have seemed all too ready to concede our safety and risk our region’s stability.

Mohammed bin Nawaf bin Abdulaziz al Saud is Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Britain.

Article 6.

The National Interest

Russia's Middle East Chess Game

Jiri Valenta, Leni Friedman Valenta

December 18, 2013 -- Why does Vladimir Putin still support Syria’s Bashar Assad and flirt with the mullahs in Iran? What is his larger goal in the Middle East? Excavating some long-term, domestic roots of Russian conduct may furnish some important clues about the importance of the Middle East in general and Syria in particular for Moscow. The Middle East represents an important global theater for Russia. And for both America and Russia, the Middle East represents an area where they can cooperate.

Alas, for Russia, its attempts to intervene in the Middle East and elsewhere have always triggered some suspicion abroad. It was that keen observer of Russia, Winston Churchill, who

noted: “The Russians will try all the rooms in the house, enter those that are not locked, and when they come to one that cannot be broken into, they will withdraw and invite you to dine genially that same evening.” “Within the land-locked Heartland,” wrote French historian Fernand Braudel, “Russia could not really exist unless it filled the whole isthmus between the Baltic and her southern seas.” Yet, the emerging empire, embarking on its manifest destiny was cursed with a major handicap. Landlocked! In the North, its Arctic Ocean was frozen. In the South, the Caspian Sea was closed. Only the tiniest bottleneck through the Ottoman Bosphorus and Dardanelles led to the Mediterranean and world's oceans. But this has never stemmed Russia’s aspiration to play a leading role on the global stage. Quite the contrary. It has always sought to expand its influence and reach abroad.

Continually lusting for the Straits, it was Russia that helped trigger the Crimean War when it instructed the Ottoman Empire in 1853 that it was intent on preserving the rights of Eastern Orthodox Christians. Constantinople balked. Britain and France intervened. War broke out. Equilibrium was restored in 1856 with the Treaty of Paris. Russia had little to show for its bellicosity. After World War II, Stalin lusted for the Dardanelles, but Harry S. Truman sent Turkey military aid to stymie Moscow. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, some Cold Warriors speculated that it was part of a fresh drive for a warm-water port; in retrospect, it was a sign of weakness rather than strength.

How is Russia attempting to expand its influence today in the Middle East? One of the most profound changes in Russia's Middle East policy is Putin's tilt towards Israel. With 40 percent of its citizens Russian immigrants, Israel is now a large

trade partner. Enthralled with the Holy Land, Putin is the first Russian leader to visit Israel. Still, he has to be even-handed. There are twenty million Muslims in Russia, and only six hundred thousand Jews. Yes, Moscow still supports the Palestinians. Yes, it is close to Tehran. But unlike his Soviet predecessors, Putin is anything but committed to supporting terrorism—exactly what he is dealing with in Chechnya.

Russia, a Middle East Energy Superpower

Today the Turkish question is again acute for Russia. “We no longer expect the arrival of either Cossacks or tanks at the Straits, but gas and oil pipelines and the invasion of beautiful blonde Russian women.” So said a Turkish businessman in 2009 as we dined at a Golden Horn restaurant overlooking the Bosphorus’s narrow waterway, overcrowded with oil tankers. Here we arrive at Putin's key chess moves in the Middle East—involving a multitude of planned and already competing pipelines too complex to detail here. State-owned gas giant Gazprom and oil giant Rosneft execute Moscow’s new expansion. A major guarantor of Russia's weal, Gazprom bears liquid natural gas [LNG] to European markets. Significantly, the most important energy hubs of the myriad Middle East pipeline plays—are Syria and Turkey, the latter linked to Russia’s second doorto the Middle East, through Georgia and the Caucasus.

Russia is now Turkey's second-largest trading partner, supplied with gas by Russia’s Blue Stream pipeline across the Black Sea. Russia’s near monopoly of gas to Europe provides a means of pressuring European Union countries into political and economic concessions. Understandably, Russia's aim is to keep other pipelines from encroaching on Gazprom’s monopoly and Rosneft’s profits. One of these was the planned

Nabucco pipeline, designed to lesson Europe's vulnerability to Russia. Because of Russian pressure, a less ambitious Trans-Adriatic (TAP) pipeline has replaced it, crossing Turkey but cutting out the Balkans and Central Europe. Meanwhile, Russia's support of the dictatorial Assad in Syria during the recent crisis has much to do with the fact that it is Assad who decides which and whose pipelines go through Syria.

Fixing Our Middle East Policy

Undoubtedly, Vladimir Putin's stock in the Middle East is rising. The Russian president's black belt, better-than-Chuck-Norris machismo, and his dual background as a KGB operative, and reform-minded administrator, make him a formidable leader. He is proud and wants to be treated as an equal. In Libya, the Russians supported the NATO intervention in the U.N., only to be excluded from the transition process. Russia should surely be part of any Middle East settlements involving both Syria and Iran.

President Barack Obama's Middle East stock is falling. The Saudis are enraged by his compromise with Russia. Egypt, livid at Obama's reducing military aid after the ouster of Islamist Morsi, has just welcomed a Russian delegation. Israel isn't happy either. Conversely, one can only admire Putin's skillful moves.

Yet long-term trends are not encouraging for Russia. In his "Near Abroad," few countries have joined his Customs Union. Maintaining only nuclear parity with America, Russia's military hardware, compared to ours, is largely obsolete. Traditionally, the Russian navy has been unable to compete with those of the more advanced Western powers. America, with its new shale deposits and fracking technology, is projected to become self-sufficient in oil production by 2035,

and thereafter to become a top gas exporter.

No country is more dependent than Russia on oil and gas—their high prices a major factor behind its recovery under Putin. Both American and Russia have powerful incentives to cooperate, not least because of the rise of China, and a common interest in stability and fighting terrorism in the Middle East. In the West's historical rivalry with Russia, we have continually balanced the Russian expansion, but we also have not been an implacable foe. Twice, in 1917 and in 1941, we allied with Russia against a common enemy threatening the survival of both nations. Today, we must once again work with rather than against Moscow.

Leni Friedman Valenta is CEO of the Institute of Post-Communism and Terrorism. Dr. Jiri Valenta is its president and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.