

From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen [REDACTED]
Subject: November 27 update
Sent: Wednesday, November 27, 2013 4:41:09 PM

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Agence Global

The Iran Agreement Could Reconfigure the Middle East

Rami G. Khouri

27 Nov 2013 -- The most striking implication of the agreement signed in Geneva last weekend—to ensure that Iran’s nuclear industry does not develop nuclear weapons while gradually removing the sanctions on the country—is more about Iran than it is about Iran’s nuclear industry. The important new dynamic that has been set in motion is likely to impact profoundly almost every significant political situation around the Middle East and the world, including both domestic conditions within countries and diplomatic relations among countries.

This agreement breaks the long spell of estrangement and hostility between the United States and Iran, and signals important new diplomatic behavior by both countries, which augurs well for the entire region. It is also likely to trigger the resumption of the suspended domestic political and cultural evolution of Iran, which also will spur new developments across the Middle East.

Perhaps we can see the changes starting to occur in Iran as similar to the developments in Poland in the early 1980s, when the bold political thrust of the Solidarity movement that enjoyed popular support broke the Soviet Union’s hold on Polish political life, and a decade later led to the collapse of the entire Soviet Empire.

The resumption of political evolution inside Iran will probably move rapidly in the years ahead, as renewed economic growth, more personal freedoms, and more satisfying interactions with the region and the world expand and strengthen the relatively “liberal” forces around Rouhani, Rafsanjani, Khatemi and others; this should slowly temper, then redefine and reposition, the Islamic revolutionary autocrats who have controlled the power structure for decades, but whose hard-line controls are increasingly alien to the sentiments of ordinary Iranians. These domestic and regional reconfigurations will occur slowly, comprising the situations in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states led by Saudi Arabia. The critical link remains a healthy, normal, non-hostile relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which I suspect will start to come about in the months ahead, as both grasp the exaggerated nature of their competition for influence in the region and learn to behave like normal countries. They will learn to compete on the basis of their soft power among a region of half a billion people who increasingly feel and behave like citizens who have the right to choose how they live, rather than to be dictated to and herded like cattle. Should a more normal Iran-Saudi relationship occur, as I expect, this will trigger major adjustments across the entire region, starting in Syria and Lebanon where the proxies of both countries face off in cruel and senseless confrontations. The Geneva II conference in January, to explore a peaceful transition in Syria, will be the first place to look for signs of an emerging new order in the region that will be shaped by a healthier Iranian-Saudi relationship. The reason that Iran will be able to impact conditions around the region so significantly stems from what I believe is the

most significant underlying lesson of the Iran sanctions/nuclear agreement: It reflects the fact that Iran steadfastly resisted and boldly defied American-Israeli-led sanctions, assassinations, industrial sabotage and explicit military threats for over a decade, and finally caused the United States and allies to accept the two long-standing principal demands from Tehran: to accept the enrichment of uranium in Iran for peaceful purposes, and to drop the threats of changing the regime in Tehran through military force. In this dangerous game of diplomatic chicken, which nearly brought the region to a deadly war, the Americans blinked first, and then they sensibly engaged Iran in serious negotiations that have achieved an initial success.

This is coupled with a parallel historic development inside the United States, which is the successful determination of the Obama administration to stare down Israel and its powerful lobby in Washington and complete the agreement with Iran. In fact, the Obama administration has now done this twice in a row—first by going against the Israeli government’s strong advocacy for an American military attack against Syria a few months ago, and now in completing the Iran agreement which Israel’s lobby institutes and proxies in Washington worked hard to stop.

Obama has shown that a policy that is in the best interest of the United States and has the support of the American public will always prevail against even the most intense lobbying efforts by Israel and its American surrogates. This has profound and positive implications for future U.S. policy-making in the Middle East, which will benefit all concerned, including Israel. These breakthroughs reflect the fact that both the American and Iranian leaderships conducted policies that reflected the

sensible, non-violent preferences of their own people. They should both be congratulated, and let us hope that other leaders in the region follow suit.

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Article 2.

The Guardian

After Iran deal, the next step is to end the Middle East proxy war in Syria

Jeremy Shapiro and Samuel Charap

26 November 2013 -- On the heels of a successful Geneva agreement between the P5+1 and Iran, the announcement on Monday that the peace conference for Syria's civil war – the so-called Geneva II conference – will be held on 22 January is welcome news. But even if all sides actually show up to the meeting, there is considerable doubt as to whether a political settlement between the warring Syrian parties is possible at this stage. To increase the chances of success, the US and Russia should pursue a ceasefire among the regional supporters of the war as a precursor to Geneva II. Let's call it "Geneva 1.5".

The conflict in Syria is no longer a domestic struggle. It has become a regional proxy war, principally between Saudi Arabia and Iran, but with important roles played by Qatar, Turkey and Iraq. These external actors are fanning the flames of conflict and actively dissuading their Syrian allies from

committing to Geneva II.

The record on resolving such wars is clear. Until the external actors reach some sort of accommodation, they will continue to fund and arm their proxies and the war will continue indefinitely. We saw this unhappy dynamic frequently in civil wars that often lasted decades during the Cold War. In Iraq and Afghanistan, all of the might of the US military could not end civil wars fueled by outside powers. By contrast, in Lebanon in 1989, the regional supporters of the various sides of the civil war first had to agree to de-escalate before 15 years of bloody conflict could come to an end.

Thus far, no effort has explicitly addressed the role of regional actors in Syria and the conflicts between them. The Syrian factions would not be present as in Geneva II. Geneva I, which took place in July 2012, also did not include the Syrians but it focused on the principles of civil war resolution and excluded some of the key regional actors – particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia. The purpose of a Geneva 1.5 conference would be to facilitate eventual political resolution within Syria (executed in Geneva II) by first cutting off the activity of regional actors that fuels the conflict. The goal would be a ceasefire agreement.

The US and Russia could begin by bringing the key regional actors together to work on the question of humanitarian assistance in Syria and use that effort to move into discussions about the conflict and Syria's future. The very act of getting the Saudis and the Iranians around the same table to discuss Syria would be a major breakthrough, but once they're there, Washington and Moscow should push for genuine de-escalation. The key will be convincing all parties that they have little hope of realizing their maximalist goals and then

finding a formula that can accommodate all sides' interests in a future Syrian settlement.

Despite the myriad difficulties associated with this approach, there are reasons to think that such a deal might be possible. In Syria, Iran is wasting precious resources on a struggle that it cannot win and in the process validating the Saudi narrative of the Sunni-Shi'a split, destroying its standing in the Arab world. Iran may accept a settlement that protects its core interests of ensuring its connection with Hezbollah and Lebanon and preventing Damascus from being controlled by a puppet government of another power. The success of the nuclear talks might also have made Tehran more likely to engage.

Meanwhile, the Saudis are facing the growing threat that Syria is becoming an incubator of a brand of al-Qaida-linked extremism that might eventually threaten their own rule. Their path to victory in Syria looks increasingly unclear as the Assad regime continues to demonstrate its resilience. Simply put, the Saudis do not have the capacity to win a long proxy war with Iran. Therefore, they might see the benefits of a power-sharing arrangement in Damascus that would give them some influence with a Syrian transitional government. Despite these incentives, Turkey and Qatar, which maintain somewhat better relations with Iran, would have to be enlisted to pressure Saudi Arabia to attend and negotiate.

The United States and Russia are not neutral parties in the Syrian war, but they are nonetheless best positioned to lead a Geneva 1.5. They share an interest in ensuring that Islamist extremists do not gain control of Syria. The US has closer relations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey and Russia has better ties with Iran. If Washington can demonstrate that it is serious about reining in its regional allies, Moscow might

make a similar attempt to bring Iran to the table. Russia traditionally relishes the role of "guarantor" of the settlements to others' wars.

Convening a Geneva 1.5 would not be easy for Russia or the United States – there remains considerable distrust and differences between them over Syria. But as the chemical weapons deal demonstrates, US-Russia cooperation on Syria can pay significant dividends. Since agreement at Geneva II is probably beyond reach at the moment, pursuit of a regional ceasefire is the best option moving forward.

Article 3.

Stratfor

Israelis, Saudis and the Iranian Agreement

George Friedman

November 26, 2013 -- A deal between Iran and the P-5+1 (the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany) was reached Saturday night. The Iranians agreed to certain limitations on their nuclear program while the P-5+1 agreed to remove certain economic sanctions. The next negotiation, scheduled for six months from now depending on both sides' adherence to the current agreement, will seek a more permanent resolution. The key players in this were the United States and Iran. The mere fact that the U.S. secretary of state would meet openly with the Iranian foreign minister would have been difficult to imagine a few months ago, and unthinkable at the beginning of the Islamic republic. The U.S. goal is to eliminate Iran's nuclear weapons before

they are built, without the United States having to take military action to eliminate them. While it is commonly assumed that the United States could eliminate the Iranian nuclear program at will with airstrikes, as with most military actions, doing so would be more difficult and riskier than it might appear at first glance. The United States in effect has now traded a risky and unpredictable air campaign for some controls over the Iranian nuclear program.

The Iranians' primary goal is regime preservation. While Tehran managed the Green Revolution in 2009 because the protesters lacked broad public support, Western sanctions have dramatically increased the economic pressure on Iran and have affected a wide swath of the Iranian public. It isn't clear that public unhappiness has reached a breaking point, but were the public to be facing years of economic dysfunction, the future would be unpredictable. The election of President Hassan Rouhani to replace Mahmoud Ahmadinejad after the latter's two terms was a sign of unhappiness. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei clearly noted this, displaying a willingness to trade a nuclear program that had not yet produced a weapon for the elimination of some sanctions.

The logic here suggests a process leading to the elimination of all sanctions in exchange for the supervision of Iran's nuclear activities to prevent it from developing a weapon. Unless this is an Iranian trick to somehow buy time to complete a weapon and test it, I would think that the deal could be done in six months. An Iranian ploy to create cover for building a weapon would also demand a reliable missile and a launch pad invisible to surveillance satellites and the CIA, National Security Agency, Mossad, MI6 and other intelligence agencies. The Iranians would likely fail at this, triggering

airstrikes however risky they might be and putting Iran back where it started economically. While this is a possibility, the scenario is not likely when analyzed closely.

While the unfolding deal involves the United States, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany, two countries intensely oppose it: Israel and Saudi Arabia. Though not powers on the order of the P-5+1, they are still significant. There is a bit of irony in Israel and Saudi Arabia being allied on this issue, but only on the surface. Both have been intense enemies of Iran, and close allies of the United States; each sees this act as a betrayal of its relationship with Washington.

The View from Saudi Arabia

In a way, this marks a deeper shift in relations with Saudi Arabia than with Israel. Saudi Arabia has been under British and later American protection since its creation after World War I. Under the leadership of the Saudis, it became a critical player in the global system for a single reason: It was a massive producer of oil. It was also the protector of Mecca and Medina, two Muslim holy cities, giving the Saudis an added influence in the Islamic world on top of their extraordinary wealth.

It was in British and American interests to protect Saudi Arabia from its enemies, most of which were part of the Muslim world. The United States protected the Saudis from radical Arab socialists who threatened to overthrow the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula. It later protected Saudi Arabia from Saddam Hussein after he invaded Kuwait. But it also protected Saudi Arabia from Iran.

Absent the United States in the Persian Gulf, Iran would have been the most powerful regional military power. In addition, the Saudis have a substantial Shiite minority concentrated in

the country's oil-rich east. The Iranians, also Shia, had a potential affinity with them, and thereby the power to cause unrest in Saudi Arabia.

Until this agreement with Iran, the United States had an unhedged commitment to protect Saudi Arabia from the Iranians. Given the recent deal, and potential follow-on deals, this commitment becomes increasingly hedged. The problem from the Saudi point of view is that while there was a wide ideological gulf between the United States and Iran, there was little in the way of substantial issues separating Washington from Tehran. The United States did not want Iran to develop nuclear weapons. The Iranians didn't want the United States hindering Iran's economic development. The fact was that getting a nuclear weapon was not a fundamental Iranian interest, and crippling Iran's economy was not a fundamental interest to the United States absent an Iranian nuclear program. If the United States and Iran can agree on this quid pro quo, the basic issues are settled. And there is something drawing them together. The Iranians want investment in their oil sector and other parts of their economy. American oil companies would love to invest in Iran, as would other U.S. businesses. As the core issue separating the two countries dissolves, and economic relations open up -- a step that almost by definition will form part of a final agreement -- mutual interests will appear.

There are other significant political issues that can't be publicly addressed. The United States wants Iran to temper its support for Hezbollah's militancy, and guarantee it will not support terrorism. The Iranians want guarantees that Iraq will not develop an anti-Iranian government, and that the United States will work to prevent this. (Iran's memories of its war with Iraq

run deep.) The Iranians will also want American guarantees that Washington will not support anti-Iranian forces based in Iraq.

From the Saudi point of view, Iranian demands regarding Iraq will be of greatest concern. Agreements or not, it does not want a pro-Iranian Shiite state on its northern border. Riyadh has been funding Sunni fighters throughout the region against Shiite fighters in a proxy war with Iran. Any agreement by the Americans to respect Iranian interests in Iraq would represent a threat to Saudi Arabia.

The View from Israel

From the Israeli point of view, there are two threats from Iran. One is the nuclear program. The other is Iranian support not only for Hezbollah but also for Hamas and other groups in the region. Iran is far from Israel and poses no conventional military threat. The Israelis would be delighted if Iran gave up its nuclear program in some verifiable way, simply because they themselves have no reliable means to destroy that program militarily. What the Israelis don't want to see is the United States and Iran making deals on their side issues, especially the political ones that really matter to Israel.

The Israelis have more room to maneuver than the Saudis do. Israel can live with a pro-Iranian Iraq. The Saudis can't; from their point of view, it is only a matter of time before Iranian power starts to encroach on their sphere of influence. The Saudis can't live with an Iranian-supported Hezbollah. The Israelis can and have, but don't want to; the issue is less fundamental to the Israelis than Iraq is to the Saudis.

But in the end, this is not the problem that the Saudis and Israelis have. Their problem is that both depend on the United States for their national security. Neither country can

permanently exist in a region filled with dangers without the United States as a guarantor. Israel needs access to American military equipment that it can't build itself, like fighter aircraft. Saudi Arabia needs to have American troops available as the ultimate guarantor of their security, as they were in 1990. Israel and Saudi Arabia have been the two countries with the greatest influence in Washington. As this agreement shows, that is no longer the case. Both together weren't strong enough to block this agreement. What frightens them the most about this agreement is that fact. If the foundation of their national security is the American commitment to them, then the inability to influence Washington is a threat to their national security.

There are no other guarantors available. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu went to Moscow, clearly trying to get the Russians to block the agreement. He failed. But even if he had succeeded, he would have alienated the United States, and would have gotten instead a patron incapable of supplying the type of equipment Israel might need when Israel might need it. The fact is that neither the Saudis nor the Israelis have a potential patron other than the United States.

U.S. Regional Policy

The United States is not abandoning either Israel or Saudi Arabia. A regional policy based solely on the Iranians would be irrational. What the United States wants to do is retain its relationship with Israel and Saudi Arabia, but on modified terms. The modification is that U.S. support will come in the context of a balance of power, particularly between Iran and Saudi Arabia. While the United States is prepared to support the Saudis in that context, it will not simply support them absolutely. The Saudis and Israelis will have to live with

things that they have not had to live with before -- namely, an American concern for a reasonably strong and stable Iran regardless of its ideology.

The American strategy is built on experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. Washington has learned that it has interests in the region, but that the direct use of American force cannot achieve those goals, partly because imposing solutions takes more force than the United States has and partly because the more force it uses, the more resistance it generates. Therefore, the United States needs a means of minimizing its interests, and pursuing those it has without direct force.

With its interests being limited, the United States' strategy is a balance of power. The most natural balance of power is Sunni versus Shia, the Arabs against the Iranians. The goal is not war, but sufficient force on each side to paralyze the other. In that sense, a stable Iran and a more self-reliant Saudi Arabia are needed. Saudi Arabia is not abandoned, but nor is it the sole interest of the United States.

In the same sense, the United States is committed to the survival of Israel. If Iranian nuclear weapons are prevented, the United States has fulfilled that commitment, since there are no current threats that could conceivably threaten Israeli survival. Israel's other interests, such as building settlements in the West Bank, do not require American support. If the United States determines that they do not serve American interests (for example, because they radicalize the region and threaten the survival of Jordan), then the United States will force Israel to abandon the settlements by threatening to change its relationship with Israel. If the settlements do not threaten American interests, then they are Israel's problem.

Israel has outgrown its dependence on the United States. It is

not clear that Israel is comfortable with its own maturation, but the United States has entered a new period where what America wants is a mature Israel that can pursue its interests without recourse to the United States. And if Israel finds it cannot have what it wants without American support, Israel may not get that support, unless Israel's survival is at stake. In the same sense, the perpetual Saudi inability to create an armed force capable of effectively defending itself has led the United States to send troops on occasion -- and contractors always -- to deal with the problem. Under the new strategy, the expectation is that Saudi soldiers will fight Saudi Arabia's wars -- with American assistance as needed, but not as an alternative force.

With this opening to Iran, the United States will no longer be bound by its Israeli and Saudi relationships. They will not be abandoned, but the United States has broader interests than those relationships, and at the same time few interests that rise to the level of prompting it to directly involve U.S. troops. The Saudis will have to exert themselves to balance the Iranians, and Israel will have to wend its way in a world where it has no strategic threats, but only strategic problems, like everyone else has. It is not a world in which Israeli or Saudi rigidity can sustain itself.

George Friedman is chairman of Stratfor.

Article 4.

The Washington Institute

An Israeli Assessment of the Iran Deal

Michael Herzog

November 26, 2013 -- *BICOM Senior Visiting Fellow Brig. Gen. (res.) Michael Herzog gave his assessment of the Iran deal and its implications in a BICOM phone briefing on November 25. The following is a summary of his assessment, covering the positives and negatives of the interim deal, concerns around the endgame, and Israel's position. General Herzog is also a Milton Fine International Fellow with The Washington Institute.*

The Interim Deal

This is an interim deal for six months, so ultimately the judgment will have to be made in the context of the next phase, which is the comprehensive endgame deal. However, we can identify some positive and negative elements of the interim deal.

Main Positive Elements

- The preamble stipulates that under no circumstances will Iran seek to develop nuclear weapons. This of course is only declaratory, but it has significance in case of a future violation by Iran.
- In practical terms, it more or less stops the clock on Iran's nuclear programme. Under the deal they stop enriching uranium to 20 percent and they convert existing stockpiles. They continue to enrich to 3.5 percent but cannot add centrifuges, and any addition to their existing stockpile will be converted to oxide form.
- They are not supposed to manufacture any new centrifuges except for repairs, or operate the new generation of centrifuges.
- The inspections will now be on a daily basis, implicitly

involving cameras, and will also cover the manufacture of centrifuges, which is a new element.

Main Deficiencies

- The deal implicitly recognises Iran's right to enrich. This was a major stumbling block because Iran wanted a specific mention of this right. They are allowed to continue to enrich in the interim period, and the end of the document refers to guidelines for the endgame, in which it is clear Iran will be allowed to enrich.
- All the measures which stop the clock are reversible. No centrifuges are disabled and no site is decommissioned or mothballed. Even the stockpiles of enriched uranium converted to oxide form can be converted back.
- Regarding the heavy water processing facility and reactor at Arak, which could provide plutonium for a nuclear weapon, the agreement is that they will not advance the fuel cycle of the reactor, but it allows Iran to continue the physical construction.
- The IAEA's concerns on past and current activities dealing with the military dimension of Iran's programme are not addressed.
- The deal implicitly legitimises Iran as a member of the community of nations, and may allow it a freer hand to continue other negative activities in the region beyond the nuclear programme, including support for Assad in Syria, Hezbollah's terrorist activities, etc.
- The significance of the sanctions relief is not clear. There will be no additional sanctions, no more pressure on Iranian oil exports, they will be able to export gold and other precious metals, and sanctions will be lifted on

petrochemicals, automotive industries and more. Estimates of the benefits to Iran range considerably from \$5 billion to \$20 billion. Though this is not the collapse of the sanctions regime, there is major concern about the psychological impact of drilling a hole in these sanctions.

Lack of Clarity on the Endgame

- There seems to be no agreement amongst the P5+1 when it comes to the endgame. The guidelines in the deal regarding the endgame are not very promising because they implicitly recognise the Iranian right to enrich and suggest that sanctions will be fully lifted, but do not clearly address the concerns of Israel and many others in the region: will it really take Iran significantly back from the capacity to breakout to nuclear weapons through the dismantlement of core components in its programme?
- On enrichment, there is a need to define the endgame in concrete terms of setting the clock back on the breakout capacity (to military grade uranium and a nuclear device). Today they can breakout in between one and two months to one bomb's worth of military grade enriched material, so what is the endgame goal? According to a senior US official the goal is for the breakout time to be years instead of months, but this has not been clearly defined.
- On the plutonium track, the deal implies the endgame goal is to turn the plutonium plant from heavy water use to light water use (which removes the proliferation risk), but it has to be clearly defined.
- The endgame has to clearly address IAEA concerns about the military dimensions of the Iranian programme, to be included in the monitoring regime. It is not clear how open

files relating to suspicions around military research and weaponisation will be dealt with.

- The question also has to be asked: What do the Iranians assume will happen if there is no agreement in six months? They will still have all their capabilities. Meanwhile, the threat of more sanctions is not clear, and they do not see facing them a credible threat of a US military option. It is also important to effectively enforce existing sanctions during the interim period.

Israel's Role

- It is important for Israel to work quietly and efficiently with the US and the other countries to try and influence the endgame deal. Israel had some impact on the interim deal but not a significant amount, and not around the shape of the endgame.

- Israel is now fixing its sights on the end of the six months and will start a dialogue with the US on the desired endgame. The next decision point for Israel will be at the end of this interim period. If there is a deal, Israel will have to judge it on its merits and decide how to act.

Alternatively, there will be no deal and talks will continue beyond the six months, which is a very likely scenario.

Facing a strung out process will put Israel in a dilemma of deciding if and when to intervene.

[Article 5.](#)

The New-Yorker

Why the Iran Deal Scares Saudi Arabia

F. Gregory Gause

November 26, 2013 -- After the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany concluded a preliminary agreement with Iran on Sunday, it did not take long for regional critics of the deal to react. The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, blasted the agreement as “a historic mistake.” Saudi Arabia, the other American ally in the Middle East worried about an opening to Iran, took a different approach, issuing a carefully worded statement that cautiously welcomed the deal.

The Saudis have no allies in American politics to rally against the Obama Administration, and no desire to set themselves against the other international powers who signed the agreement, including their security partners France and Great Britain, their fellow oil producer Russia, and their major oil customer China. But they are as unhappy as the Israelis, if for slightly different reasons. The Saudis are not merely concerned about Iran’s nuclear ambitions. They have a more profound fear: that geopolitical trends in the Middle East are aligning against them, threatening both their regional stature and their domestic security. The Saudis see an Iran that is dominant in Iraq and Lebanon, holding onto its ally in Syria, and now forging a new relationship with Washington—a rival, in short, without any obstacles to regional dominance, and one further emboldened to encourage Shiite populations in the Gulf monarchies, including Saudi Arabia, to oppose their Sunni rulers.

In recent weeks, that fear has been on display in a series of vocal complaints about American outreach to Iran and the Obama Administration’s broader strategy in the Middle East.

Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, the superstar Saudi financier, is something of a black sheep in the ruling family, but a public criticism of Obama that he made last week reflects a strong sentiment among Saudi élites. “America is shooting itself in the foot,” Alwaleed told the Wall Street Journal’s editorial board. “It’s just complete chaos. Confusion. No policy.” A few days later, Saudi Arabia’s ambassador in London, Prince Mohammed bin Nawwaf bin Abdulaziz, called the negotiations with Iran “appeasement,” and indirectly threatened that Saudi Arabia would obtain its own nuclear weapons if necessary.

These very public denunciations of Washington reflect the same worries that motivated Riyadh to perform an extraordinary gesture of discontent at the U.N. in October. Famously low-key in their diplomacy, the Saudis drew attention to themselves by campaigning for a seat on the U.N. Security Council and then theatrically rejecting it, something no country has ever done. (The move even came as a surprise to Saudi diplomats, who had gone through extensive training to prepare for their new responsibilities.) “This was a message for the U.S., not the U.N.,” the Saudi intelligence chief Bandar bin Sultan, who spent twenty-two years as an ambassador in Washington, reportedly told a Western diplomat.

At that time, the immediate cause for Saudi displeasure was Syria. Riyadh had enthusiastically backed President Obama’s threat to use force against the Assad regime after a chemical-weapons attack on a Damascus suburb in August. The Saudis hoped that an American strike would draw the United States into greater and more direct military involvement in the campaign to bring down Assad. The deal negotiated between the U.S. and Russia to remove Syria’s chemical weapons—a

diplomatic victory for the Obama Administration—was seen in Riyadh as not only a missed opportunity to deal a decisive blow to Assad but as an acknowledgement that the regime was a legitimate international partner rather than a pariah to be overthrown. With the U.N. Security Council committed to the chemical-weapons deal, the Saudis decided that it was a club they would rather not join.

When Secretary of State John Kerry went to Riyadh on November 4th to reassure the Saudis of the continuing American commitment to their security, the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud Al-Faisal, referred to Syria as “an occupied land.” No one had to ask the Prince, “Occupied by whom?” Since the mid-aughts, Riyadh has tried to check the growth of Iranian power in the Arab world, and almost all of its attempts have failed. The Saudis backed the anti-Syrian March 14th Alliance in Lebanon in two electoral victories, only to see Iran’s ally Hezbollah remain the dominant force in Lebanese politics. They were powerless to arrest Iran’s growing influence in Iraq, watching helplessly as Tehran orchestrated the coalition politics that kept Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in office after the 2010 elections. In 2007, King Abdullah brokered a deal between Hamas and Fatah, which was intended to draw Hamas away from Iranian patronage. But the deal broke down within months, after Hamas took control of Gaza and turned again to Iran for support. Across the region, the Saudis were losing and the Iranians were winning.

This was not simply a geopolitical setback for Riyadh. The Saudi leadership believes that increased Iranian power will lead to political mobilization by Shia inside the Sunni-ruled Gulf states. The Saudis and their allies in the Gulf remain

certain that Iran meddles directly in their domestic affairs, but they are also convinced that Iran's heightened regional role will inevitably inspire Shia discontent, which makes Iran's ascendance an indirect threat to the stability of the Gulf monarchies.

It was through this lens that the Saudis viewed the sustained and peaceful demonstrations in 2011 against the Sunni monarchy in Shia-majority Bahrain, even though there was no objective evidence of an Iranian role in the protests. The Arab Spring also brought down Riyadh's most important Arab ally, Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt. But there was one bright spot for the Saudis amid the regional upheaval. The uprising against Assad in Syria, Iran's closest ally in the Arab world, represented the best chance in a decade for Riyadh to roll back Iranian power.

For the Saudis, therefore, Obama's refusal to take action against Assad was seen as another example of Washington's inability to appreciate both the dangers and the opportunities of the Arab Spring. Standing aside while Mubarak fell—as the Saudis saw it—was bad enough, but embracing a Muslim Brotherhood government in Cairo, which was an unreliable partner against Iran and a challenger to Saudi authority over the interpretation of Sunni Islam, was even worse.

The Obama Administration views its opening to Iran as part of a broader effort to bring stability to the region, and sees an Iranian commitment to forswear nuclear weapons as a benefit to allies like Saudi Arabia. But the Saudis, without a seat at the negotiating table, fear that Washington will ratify Iranian hegemony in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Persian Gulf in exchange for a nuclear deal.

Dealing with the United States, the Saudi Foreign Minister

Prince Saud al-Faisal once said, “makes a sane man go mad.” There is no doubt that American policymakers have often felt the same way about Saudi Arabia. The current tensions between Washington and Riyadh, however serious, are hardly unprecedented: the unlikely allies have never seen eye-to-eye on regional issues. The Saudis did not like the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979, the crowning diplomatic achievement of the Carter Administration; nor did they appreciate the American invasion of Iraq, in 2003. The Americans, meanwhile, have had their own complaints: on oil policy, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Saudi funding for radical Islamic causes. The rhetorical volleys of the past few months are minor compared to the most serious episodes of tension between the two allies: the oil embargo imposed by Saudi Arabia in 1973 to protest American support for Israel during the Yom Kippur War, which sent a permanent shock through global oil markets, and the aftermath of September 11, 2001, when few Americans thought it a coincidence that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were from Saudi Arabia.

The present disagreements between the Saudi and American governments will not lead to a permanent rupture in the relationship, as the Saudis themselves acknowledge. The core interest that has held the Saudi-U.S. relationship together for many decades—Persian Gulf security and the free flow of energy resources from the region—remains intact. But the nature of the recent disputes suggests an underlying conflict between the two allies. The problem is not that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have divergent goals in the region: both countries want Assad out, an Iran without nuclear weapons and diminished regional influence, a stable Egypt, and a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The problem is

that they have very different views about how important these goals are, and how much effort should be expended to achieve them.

Saudi fears that Washington will sell out their regional interests in a “grand bargain” with Iran are exaggerated. The American policy in the Gulf, for many decades, has been to prevent any other power from becoming dominant, and Washington is not about to turn the keys over to Iran. But the Saudis are correct to worry that the U.S. will not insist that any nuclear deal includes concessions from Iran on regional geopolitics. They are also right to conclude that Washington regards Assad’s ouster as a lower priority than Riyadh does, and that the U.S. does not see the Palestinian issue as central to its policy in the region.

The Obama Administration does think that the U.S. is overcommitted in the Middle East, and seeks to “pivot” at least some American foreign-policy resources and attention to East Asia. Substantial increases in domestic production have made the Middle East less important to American energy calculations, though Persian Gulf oil and gas will remain significant for decades to come. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates have almost all the world’s spare oil-production capacity; only they can bring substantial amounts of oil onto the market in a short period of time to make up for production lost elsewhere. That is reason enough for the U.S. to maintain good relations with Saudi Arabia. But the overall trend is toward a diminished role for the Middle East in the global energy market.

Still, there are many common interests to keep the allies united, including shared worries about Iran’s regional influence and about Al Qaeda and its affiliates. The Saudis do

not have any alternatives at present to the security provided by their ties to the U.S.: the Europeans are too weak militarily, Russia is in decline, and China has neither the capability nor the inclination to project power into the Persian Gulf. But over time, we can expect to see more periods of turbulence between Washington and Riyadh. The allies may not disagree on their goals, but their priorities will increasingly differ. When the end of the “special relationship” finally arrives—likely decades from now—it will end not with a bang but with a gradual drift apart.

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Article 6.

TIME

Saudi Arabia Considers Nuclear Weapons After Iran’s Geneva Deal

Aryn Baker

Nov. 26, 2013 -- As Middle Eastern nations attempted to elbow one another aside in their efforts to offer encouraging statements about the recently concluded nuclear talks between Iran and six world powers on Sunday, Saudi Arabia took its time. More than a day later the Cabinet offered its own pallid take: “If there is goodwill, then this agreement could represent a preliminary step toward a comprehensive solution to the Iranian nuclear program.” Behind the gritted-teeth delivery

there lurked an almost palpable sense of frustration, betrayal and impotence as Saudi Arabia watched its foremost foe gain ground in a 34-year competition for influence in the region. As discussions leading up to the historic agreement in Geneva unfurled over the past several months, Saudi did its utmost to express its discontent, lobbying behind closed doors for greater restrictions on Iran's nuclear program and rejecting at the last minute a long-sought seat on the U.N. Security Council. Saudi officials even threatened to get their own nuclear weapons; just before the talks concluded the Saudi ambassador to the U.K., Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf bin Abdulaziz, told the Times of London: "We are not going to sit idly by and receive a threat there and not think seriously how we can best defend our country and our region."

"It's as if Saudi Arabia and Iran suddenly traded places," marvels Riyadh- and Istanbul-based Saudi foreign-affairs commentator Abdullah al-Shamri. "Now [U.S. President] Obama and [Iranian President] Rouhani are talking on the phone while their Foreign Ministers shake hands, and it's Saudi Arabia that is throwing the temper tantrums at the U.N., shouting about nuclear weapons and trying to show the world that they are angry."

Saudi Arabia's frustration with the Iranian deal has little to do with nuclear weapons, and everything to do with insecurity, says F. Gregory Gause III, a professor of Middle Eastern politics at the University of Vermont. "It comes from a profound and exaggerated fear that a nuclear deal with Iran is a prelude to an American-Iranian geopolitical agreement that in essence leaves Iran as the dominant power in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq." The U.S., of course, is unlikely to turn the keys to the region over to Iran anytime soon, but the Saudis are not

entirely wrong in thinking the Obama Administration wants to disengage from the region, says Gause. The U.S. “backed off in Syria, it’s not taking an active role in Iraq, and it does want better relations with Iran.” From this, he says, the Saudis have pieced together a convincing narrative of abandonment that is causing them to lash out in unpredictable ways.

As the first round of nuclear talks got under way on Nov. 7 in Geneva, select leaks to the Western media suggested that Saudi Arabia was planning to buy nuclear weapons from Pakistan. A month before, former Israeli military intelligence chief Amos Yadlin told a conference in Sweden that if Iran got a bomb, “the Saudis will not wait one month. They already paid for the bomb, they will go to Pakistan and bring what they need to bring.”

There may be truth to Yadlin’s comments. Saudi Arabia has backed and at times helped fund Pakistan’s nuclear program, according to proliferation experts. (The program became public in 1998.) That doesn’t mean that acquiring a nuclear bomb is as easy as shipping it across the Arabian Sea. Saudi, as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, would risk global reproach, possible sanctions and the launch of a regional arms race if it had its own bomb. A more likely scenario, says Gary Samore, Obama’s former arms-control adviser and director for research at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University, would be some sort of pact that could see Pakistani nuclear weapons moved to Saudi Arabia. “Even if U.S. diplomacy fails and Iran gets nuclear weapons, Pakistan isn’t just going to hand over nuclear weapons; it’s more likely that Pakistan would station forces in Saudi, and those forces will have the ability to deploy nuclear weapons from Saudi soil” — much like American

troops are able to do in Europe, without contravening those country's nonproliferation treaties.

Still, such a pact would have significant drawbacks, points out Gause. Pakistan may not be willing to attack its neighbor Iran for fear of repercussions, and it would be a death knell for the U.S.-Saudi friendship. "In terms of putting at risk relations with the United States, a Pakistani nuclear pact would be the most provocative Saudi foreign policy decision since the 1973 oil embargo," says Gause. That might serve Saudi pique at being sidelined by its old ally America as that ally pursues a lasting deal with Iran, but it would ultimately be self-defeating. Better for Saudi in the long run would be a deal that brings Iran closer to the U.S., and further from a bomb.

Aryn Baker is the Middle East Bureau Chief for TIME, covering politics, society, culture, religion, the arts and the military in the greater Middle East, including Pakistan and Afghanistan. She currently resides in Beirut, Lebanon.

[Article 7.](#)

Project-Syndicate

The Perils of Backseat Negotiating

Christopher R. Hill

NOV 26, 2013 -- The agreement reached in Geneva between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (the so-called P5+1) is an excellent start to the difficult process of dissuading Iran from attempting to become the world's newest nuclear-weapons power. It is too early to praise the deal as an historic

achievement, but it is also far too soon to peg it as a failure, or to suggest that better negotiators somehow could have done a better job of wrangling concessions from their Iranian counterparts.

Negotiating across a table is a lot different from talking on a television news program. As with many efforts of its kind, the agreement needs to be compared to alternative outcomes, starting with the real possibility of not concluding any deal at all. Critics of the agreement ought to be pressed to explain how more sanctions could achieve better results than they have shown thus far.

The agreement will be hotly debated in large measure because it comes against a backdrop of unprecedented partisan tension in Washington. The breakdown of bipartisan foreign policy in the United States has rarely been so complete and seemingly irreparable as it is today. The traditional dove-versus-hawk debate is now crosshatched by an isolationism-versus-engagement cleavage, all of which is overlain with a deep mistrust of all government institutions.

Moreover, because it comes at a time of exceptional tumult in the Middle East, the agreement will have to survive another barrage of criticism. Putting aside the Israeli government's well-known skepticism about Iran's sincerity and intentions, to suggest that Saudi Arabia's opposition simply has to do with geopolitical competition with nearby Iran is to overlook one of the main factors driving the current crises in the Middle East. The sectarian dimensions of today's Middle East, with its active Sunni-Shia fault line, are more pronounced than they have been in centuries. Whether Iraq's switch from a Sunni-minority regime to Shia-majority rule is a cause or a symptom of the current regional churn, it is clear that the sectarian

divide has underpinned the crises in Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and parts of Saudi Arabia. There is certainly a special animus to Saudi-Iran relations, particularly given the Saudi view that Iran is instigating Shia restiveness in the region. The nuclear issue is just one of many Saudi concerns, and it pales in comparison to the sectarian struggles unfolding in the Arab Middle East. Minutes after the announcement of the agreement, many critics condemned it, arguing that if sanctions had worked to bring the Iranians to the table, surely sanctions would have soon brought them to their knees. But the argument that sanctions would work better than negotiations flies in the face of the facts: despite stronger sanctions, Iran has dramatically increased its uranium-enrichment capacity. Moreover, it is an argument that is often made by those who have never supported any diplomatic process, and who have little experience with the give and take of international negotiations. In their view, any concession in the course of a negotiation is weakness. It is instructive to consider whether those who suggest that a country like Iran would capitulate over the freezing of some bank accounts would themselves give in to the sort of coercion posed by sanctions. Another frequent criticism of the Geneva talks is that they resemble the negotiations with North Korea over that country's nuclear program. In fact, the two negotiations followed entirely different structures. The five countries negotiating with North Korea agreed to take steps of their own, including provision of specific amounts of fuel oil, in exchange for steps taken by the North. When the North Koreans failed to take such steps, primarily in the form of refusing to agree to a verification regime, its interlocutors stopped providing fuel oil. There was one instance of frozen

bank accounts holding \$23 million that involved applying the US Patriot Act against a bank in Macau that did not even operate in the US market. North Korea eventually regained its money, but this so-called “sanctions relief” was in no way equivalent to the billions in question in Geneva. In late 2008, after months of effort, the US, joined by other countries in the process, ended the negotiations with the North Koreans, owing to the inability to secure adequate verification that they were fulfilling their commitments. The North was prepared to allow verification of the shutdown and decommissioning of its graphite-moderated reactor (responsible for producing enough plutonium for several bombs), but was not prepared to allow inspections of undeclared sites. Suspicions that these sites could be involved in enrichment activities proved to be well founded. What is on offer to Iran is not just relief from economic sanctions; Iran is being offered membership in the international community – an outcome that some Iranian leaders (though obviously not all) clearly want. Bilateral talks between the US and Iran should continue in some form, in order to lay out what kind of future Iran can expect when it has abandoned its quest for nuclear weapons and ended its support for terrorist organizations.

None of this will be easy, but the Geneva agreement was a good start. Rather than second-guessing the negotiators – or the very possibility of successful negotiations – we all need to understand the stakes a little better.

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Al-Monitor

Hamas mixed on Iran nuclear deal

Asmaa al-Ghoul

November 26, 2013 -- Gaza City, Gaza Strip — The Iranian nuclear agreement announced in Geneva on Nov. 24 has unsettled not only Israel but also Hamas.

Mousa Abu Marzouk, the deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, wrote on his Facebook page on the evening of Nov. 23, "Talks between Iran and the P5+1 group will end with an agreement whereby Iran would promise to reduce uranium enrichment in return for the West ending its Iran sanctions, restoring ties with Iran and releasing its frozen funds."

He added that the agreement would make "the Zionist entity safer, because now it is comfortable knowing that no Iranian nuclear threat is coming, nor are there any chemical weapons anymore. Only Israel has those now."

Political analyst Mukhaimer Abu Saada told Al-Monitor over the phone that Abu Marzouk's statements were another indication of the tense Iran-Hamas relationship. Hamas, he said, is exploiting the strained ties to score points against Iran by alluding that the latter made concessions to the United States.

But he said that it is difficult to judge the agreement now, saying, "Some say America won, and some say Iran won. But this is premature."

Abu Saada added that the deal included provisions related to enrichment and releasing frozen Iranian funds. He suspected that the agreement also included undeclared items about how the United States and Iran would share influence and that Iran

would stop supporting militant groups.

“The long-term impact of the agreement will appear on the resistance movements,” he added. “I expect Iran to stop supporting Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Hezbollah, but not soon.”

On the other hand, some in Hamas see a positive side to the agreement.

“It was smart of Iran to resolve its problems with the world after years of being characterized as a terrorist state and of provoking the Gulf states, only for it to come back and take its place among the nations by easing the wave of hostility that is hampering it economically,” moderate Hamas figure Ahmed Youssef told Al-Monitor in an interview in his Dar al-Hikma office. He added that it was a smart move by President Hassan Rouhani to resolve the crisis with the West and to open new horizons with Europe. He added that Rouhani would not have made that move had the United States upheld the ban on dealing with the Iranian economy and oil.

“I have met with [former Iranian President] Mohammad Khatami three times. I noticed that he favored an agreement with the United States. So what’s happening now is a continuation of Khatami’s [vision],” Youssef noted. He explained that these talks come after years of both sides demonizing each other, especially after the United States sided with the Shah of Iran, which led to the conflict continuing for more than 30 years, during which Iranian leaders called the United States “the Great Satan.”

He said that what used to prevent an agreement was the power of the Israeli lobby during the administrations of former Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, “but Obama is keen not to open new fronts with the world and to resolve the

areas of tension. Iran under Rouhani is a strong state that is trying to dismantle its problems with the West. This trend in Iran comes after the Iranian Revolutionary Guard gave the diplomatic option a chance.”

Youssef said that achieving this kind of relationship and staying away from the circle of hostility serves Hamas and restores Iran’s influence in international politics, adding, “Not all solutions involve rockets. Politics always tries to make diplomacy win over wars. From that, defending the Palestinian cause takes its place as the core issue.”

He asserted that Hamas doesn’t interfere in Iran’s affairs, that the deal was an Iranian decision and affects Iranian interests. He said, “This kind of detente and disengagement with the West will be positively reflected on Hamas.”

In the same context, political writer Akram Atallah said during a meeting with Al-Monitor that the Iranian leadership played a smart game to strip Israel of its international pretext that Iran wishes it harm.

He said that Israel fears it will now have a hard time promoting its claims about Iran and terrorism, adding, “Hamas remains a trump card in Iran’s hands, and the new spirit of dialogue between Iran and the United States will have a clear impact on Gaza. The atmosphere of detente between Iran and the United States will be reflected in Gaza.”

But Youssef disagrees. “We don’t expect Iran to sell us to America. Iran supports Hamas as a matter of principle and it considers Palestine and Al-Aqsa Mosque Iranian priorities. Iran cannot compromise on Palestinians’ rights.”

Islamic Jihad, a strong Islamic faction supported by Iran, agrees. On Nov. 25, Nafez Azzam, a member of the Islamic Jihad political bureau, told Palestine Today, which has ties to

Islamic Jihad, of the movement's approval of the deal, saying, "We are happy with the announcement of this agreement because it spares the region many dangers, the most important of which is America waging a war on the region." Azzam noted, "The agreement enhances the people's chances to achieve their will and their right to say what they want, which reflects positively on the conflict imposed on us. ... We wish that peace would prevail all over the world. We are a people who don't like bloodshed or wars. We are defending our right and our nation." Azzam said that Israel is the only party to announce its rejection of the agreement.

For his part, Islamic Jihad figure Ahmed al-Mudallal brushed off concerns in a phone interview with Al-Monitor that Palestinian resistance groups might lose in an Iran-US detente. "We consider the agreement a victory for Iran. It will not affect the resistance, which will not make concessions," he said, adding, "The agreement will not affect the resistance or its capabilities. Islamic Jihad and the resistance are in no one's pocket."

Asmaa al-Ghoul is a columnist for Al-Monitor's Palestine Pulse and a journalist from the Rafah refugee camp based in Gaza.