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NYT

Some Progress on Syria

Editorial

September 26, 2013 -- The resolution to rid Syria of its chemical weapons, agreed to by the five permanent members <<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/27/world/middleeast/security-council-agrees-on-resolution-to-rid-syria-of-chemical-arms.html>> of the United Nations Security Council, is a useful, if imperfect, step toward a credible international response to a bloody war that has killed more than 100,000 Syrians.

The resolution would legally obligate Syria to give up its stockpile of poison gas, estimated at 1,000 tons. While it does not threaten the use of force if Syria fails to comply, it says in that event the Security Council will reconvene to address the issue and impose unspecified measures under Chapter VII, a provision of the United Nations Charter that is used to authorize sanctions or the use of force.

Russia received a lot of credit for the recent deal with the United States that delayed American military action by requiring Syria to surrender its chemical weapons by the middle of next year. But, in recent weeks, as the major powers haggled over a resolution that would enforce the deal, it seemed as if Russia might revert to a more familiar, obstructive role by shielding President Bashar al-Assad of Syria from punishment if he fails to comply.

Since October 2011, Russia has blocked three attempts to condemn or punish Mr. Assad for brutality against civilians, leaving the Security Council looking feckless in the face of slaughter. It took the Aug. 21 poison gas attack that killed hundreds of civilians outside Damascus to provoke a long-overdue unified diplomatic response.

Absurdly, the resolution does not name the party responsible for the gas attack, but Western governments and most independent groups say it could only have been committed by Syrian government forces. Russia blames Syrian insurgents but has never offered any proof.

Russia had made it clear that it would not accept an initial resolution threatening action under Chapter VII and that any punitive measures would be considered only after Syrian noncompliance was clearly proved. The United States and France wanted tougher language putting the resolution directly under Chapter VII, but the two-step enforcement process, which gives Russia a chance to veto any punishment, appears to be the best they could get.

There are huge challenges ahead, including devising a plan to get rid of the chemical weapons and trying to reach a broader deal that could end the fighting and put a transitional government in place. That was made even harder on Wednesday when some Syrian rebel groups abandoned their Western-backed political leaders in exile <<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/26/world/middleeast/syria-crisis.html>> and cast their lot with an affiliate of Al Qaeda.

If there is any hope of a peaceful solution, it will take unity among the major powers to push it forward. The chemical weapons resolution moves toward that goal.

Article 2.

NYT

Rouhani, Blunt and Charming, Pitches a Moderate Iran

Somini Sengupta <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/s/somini_sengupta/index.html>

September 26, 2013 -- Descending on New York this week in a Shiite cleric's traditional fine wool robes, Iran's president, Hassan Rouhani, turned himself into a high-speed salesman offering a flurry of speeches, tweets, televised interviews and carefully curated private meetings.

On Tuesday, he capped his speech to the United Nations General Assembly with a nod to the Torah and the Psalms, which elicited applause and then, from him, the slightest hint of a smile. That day he also hosted a clutch of media executives as his chief of staff did what previously would have been unthinkable, meeting with a dozen influential American business leaders.

Over salmon kebabs in his hotel on Wednesday evening, he bluntly told a gathering of former United States diplomats and Iran scholars that he would never give up his country's right to enrich uranium, but would swiftly resolve its nuclear standoff with the West. The next day he took aim at Israel's nuclear arsenal in a public speech in the morning, and at night wooed his country's influential, often skeptical diaspora with a banquet for 800.

But amid the fervent diplomatic theater, intended to end Iran's isolation, it was at times difficult to tell whether Mr. Rouhani was a genuinely transformative Iranian leader, as his cabinet insisted, or a more polished avatar of the past, as his critics claimed.

In television interviews and public addresses throughout the week, he repeatedly sought to cast himself as a moderate ready to do business with the West. But it was also clear that whatever he said here was closely and instantly dissected at home, raising uncertainty over whether he could truly deliver a compromise with the West, if that is what he sought.

And so he condemned the Nazis in a television interview, but quickly hedged by saying he was not a historian. And even as he called for “time bound” talks to resolve the nuclear standoff, he skipped a lunch at which he might have had the chance to meet President Obama and shake his hand. Even charmed diplomats pointed out he offered no concrete proposals, while also noting he had received nothing concrete from Western officials to take back to his constituents.

Those who watched him closest this week describe Mr. Rouhani as serious, controlled and single-mindedly focused on message. He seemed intent to convey that he was prepared to take concrete steps to normalize relations with the West, that he was reasonable and that he enjoyed the backing of the street and his country’s religious establishment. He also seemed to be in somewhat of a rush, even while saying events might have been moving too fast.

“He did not come to New York to negotiate with speeches or throw in the towel and surrender. He came to New York to start negotiations,” said Vali Nasr, dean of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. “He is very clever, very pragmatic, but he’s also now showing himself to be bold, a risk-taker. He is taking the biggest risk any Iranian has in reaching out to the West.”

The contrast with his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, could not be more stark. Mr. Ahmadinejad used his podium at the General Assembly <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/23/world/middleeast/irans-president-mahmoud-ahmadinejad-rails-against-the-west-in-united-nations-speech.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1380237630-UOio07A4o0cN+/XxpgrLmA>> to criticize Israel, deny the Holocaust and dangle the notion that Sept. 11 was the handiwork of Americans. Mr. Rouhani, in his public speeches, has mentioned Israel only once, calling on it to sign the Nonproliferation Treaty <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/29/world/middleeast/29nuke.html>> .

All the same, he has insisted on Iran’s right to build what he says is a civilian nuclear program. At a dinner for about 20 former diplomats and Iran scholars on Tuesday at the One UN New York, a hotel across the street from the United Nations building, one guest recalled that Mr. Rouhani was bluntly asked: What is Iran doing and why is it doing it?

“His answer was very simple,” said the guest, who could not be named because it was a confidential meeting. “We are enriching. We are doing it because it is our right.”

The only time the usually unflappable Mr. Rouhani was mildly exercised, the guest said, was when he spoke of Israel’s complaints about Iran’s nuclear program. Mr. Rouhani, he recalled, sharply pointed out that Israel itself had nuclear weapons.

The next morning, speaking at a meeting on disarmament, Mr. Rouhani called on Israel to give up its nuclear weapons.

Remarks like that prompted some critics to say that Mr. Rouhani was simply a camouflaged version of Mr. Ahmadinejad, pressing the same aims. “Rouhani came here today to cheat the world, and unfortunately many people were willing to be cheated,” Israel’s minister of intelligence and internal affairs, Yuval Steinitz, said Tuesday at the United Nations.

Gary Samore, a former Obama adviser, and now the president of United Against Nuclear Iran <<http://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/>> , said the substance was “very similar to Ahmadinejad’s, but he says it in a much kinder and gentler way.”

“That’s the definition of a charm offensive,” he continued.

To foreigners, Mr. Rouhani may seem like something of a paradox. He wears the garb of a cleric, though with high-end dress shoes. He prefers to be called Dr. Rouhani, for his doctorate in law, rather than by his clerical title. His office has

used Twitter to congratulate Iran's women's volleyball team and blast excerpts from his address at the General Assembly.

"He's far from being a traditional Shia cleric," said M. Hossein Hafezian, who worked with him for nearly 10 years at his Center for Strategic Research <<http://www.csr.ir/center.aspx?lng=en>> in Tehran. He described Mr. Rouhani as a political "insider" and a moderate, but one who has shunned being called "westernized or liberal, because that would be a curse."

One diplomat here described him as so composed while meeting one of his Western counterparts that he seemed hard to grasp. The diplomat, who asked not to be identified because of the delicacy of the bilateral meeting, said he was struck by the fact that Mr. Rouhani "didn't have advisers whispering in his ears the whole time."

Mr. Rouhani's interest in lowering tensions with the West is most directly helped by his closest aides. He has surrounded himself with men, who, like other Iranian bureaucrats, favor trim beards and suits without ties, but who speak the language of the American elite. Several, like his foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, were educated here.

Perhaps the most unexpected — and closely guarded — encounter this week was attended by Mr. Rouhani's chief of staff, Mohammad Nahavandian. He attended a breakfast meeting on Tuesday, organized at his request, with about a dozen New York business leaders, most of them retired, from the banking and energy sectors. His message, according to the breakfast organizer, was that Iran is now pro-business and welcomes private investment, if and when sanctions are lifted.

"This was the beginning of exploring if something like that could happen," the organizer said, asking to remain anonymous because of the delicacy of the gathering.

Still, said William H. Luers, a retired United States ambassador who now runs an advocacy group called The Iran Project <<http://theiranproject.org/>>, Mr. Rouhani's greatest challenge would be to convince skeptics in Iran and the United States. "He has to demonstrate this is more than a charm offensive, that he means what he says, that if there's a response he's ready to be engaged," Mr. Luers said.

The same applies to Mr. Obama, he added. "It's too far along," Mr. Luers said. "We've said too much on both sides. There's too much distrust to just say we had a good conversation."

Article 3.

The Washington Post

The Iranian 'moderate'

Charles Krauthammer <http://www.washingtonpost.com/charles-krauthammer/2011/02/24/ADJkW7B_page.html>

September 26, 2013 -- The search, now 30 years old, for Iranian "moderates" goes on. Amid the enthusiasm of the latest sighting, it's worth remembering that the highlight of the Iran-contra arms-for-hostages debacle was the secret trip to Tehran taken by Robert McFarlane <<http://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/11/us/mcfarlane-took-cake-and-bible-to-teheran-ex-cia-man-says.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>>, President Reagan's former national security adviser. He brought a key-shaped cake symbolizing the new relations he was opening with the "moderates."

We know how that ended.

Three decades later, the mirage reappears in the form of Hassan Rouhani <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/rouhani-sworn-in-as-irans-president/2013/08/04/eb322736-fd25-11e2-8294-0ee5075b840d_story.html> . Strange résumé for a moderate: 35 years of unswervingly loyal service to the Islamic Republic as a close aide to Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei. Moreover, Rouhani was one of only six presidential candidates <http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-06-13/world/39944179_1_iranians-presidential-election-six-candidates> , another 678 having been disqualified by the regime <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/14/us-iran-election-idUSBRE95C1E120130614>> as ideologically unsound. That puts him in the 99th centile for fealty.

Rouhani is Khamenei's agent but, with a smile and style, he's now hailed as the face of Iranian moderation. Why? Because Rouhani wants better relations with the West.

Well, what leader would not want relief from Western sanctions that have sunk Iran's economy <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/irans-president-faces-no-easy-task-in-bid-to-ease-western-sanctions/2013/09/24/a9b90f46-24e3-11e3-9372-92606241ae9c_story.html> , devalued its currency and caused widespread hardship? The test of moderation is not what you want but what you're willing to give. After all, sanctions were not slapped on Iran for amusement. It was to enforce multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding a halt to uranium enrichment.

Yet in his lovey-dovey Post op-ed <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47e9c_story.html> , his U.N. speech and various interviews, Rouhani gives not an inch on uranium enrichment. Indeed, he has repeatedly denied that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/echo-of-the-old-in-new-iran-leaders-un-speech/2013/09/24/5c2a1ac2-2565-11e3-9372-92606241ae9c_story.html> at all. Or ever has. Such a transparent falsehood — what country swimming in oil would sacrifice its economy just to produce nuclear electricity that advanced countries such as Germany are already abandoning <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/echo-of-the-old-in-new-iran-leaders-un-speech/2013/09/24/5c2a1ac2-2565-11e3-9372-92606241ae9c_story.html> ? — is hardly the basis for a successful negotiation.

But successful negotiation is not what the mullahs are seeking. They want sanctions relief. And more than anything, they want to buy time.

It takes about 250 kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iran-says-it-has-reduced-its-20-percent-enriched-uranium-stockpile-by-producing-reactor-fuel/2013/09/13/b97b1d7a-1c73-11e3-80ac-96205cacb45a_story.html> to make a nuclear bomb. The International Atomic Energy Agency reported in August that Iran already has 186 kilograms. That leaves the Iranians on the threshold of going nuclear. They are adding 3,000 new high-speed centrifuges <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/a-mysterious-iranian-run-factory-in-germany/2013/04/15/92259d7a-a29f-11e2-82bc-511538ae90a4_story.html> . They need just a bit more talking, stalling, smiling and stringing along of a gullible West.

Rouhani is the man to do exactly that. As Iran's chief nuclear negotiator between 2003 and 2005, he boasted in a 2004 speech to the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council <<http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB5.pdf>> , "While we were talking with the Europeans in Tehran, we were installing equipment in parts of the [uranium conversion] facility in Isfahan. . . . In fact, by creating a calm environment, we were able to complete the work in Isfahan."

Such is their contempt for us that they don't even hide their strategy: Spin the centrifuges while spinning the West.

And when the president of the world's sole superpower asks for a photo-op handshake <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/iran-leader-open-to-meeting-obama-at-later-date/2013/09/25/aa681254-25f4-11e3-9372-92606241ae9c_story.html> with the president of a regime that, in President Obama's own words <http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transcript-president-obamas-speech-at-the-un-general-assembly/2013/09/24/64d5b386-2522-11e3-ad0d-b7c8d2a594b9_print.html> , kills and kidnaps and terrorizes Americans, the killer-kidnapper does not even deign to accept the homage. Rouhani rebuffed him <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/iran-leader-open-to-meeting-obama-at-later-date/2013/09/25/aa681254-25f4-11e3-9372-92606241ae9c_story.html> .

Who can blame Rouhani? Offer a few pleasant words in an op-ed hailing a new era of non-zero-sum foreign relations, and watch the media and the administration immediately swoon with visions of detente.

Detente is difficult with a regime whose favorite refrain, fed to frenzied mass rallies, is "Death to America." Detente is difficult with a regime officially committed, as a matter of both national policy and religious duty, to the eradication of a U.N. member state, namely Israel. It doesn't get more zero-sum than that.

But at least we have to talk, say the enthusiasts. As if we haven't been talking. For a decade. Strung along in negotiations of every manner — the EU3, the P5+1, then the final, very final, last-chance 2012 negotiations held in Istanbul, Baghdad and Moscow at which the Iranians refused to even consider the nuclear issue, declaring the dossier closed. Plus two more useless rounds this year <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/diplomats-iran-fails-to-respond-seriously-in-nuclear-talks/2013/04/05/0db71214-9ded-11e2-a941-a19bce7af755_story.html> .

I'm for negotiations. But only if it's to do something real, not to run out the clock as Iran goes nuclear. The administration says it wants actions, not words. Fine. Demand one simple proof of good faith: Honor the U.N. resolutions. Suspend uranium enrichment and we will talk.

At least that stops the clock. Anything else amounts to being played.

And about the Khamenei agent who charms but declares enrichment an inalienable right, who smiles but refuses to shake the president's hand. When asked by NBC News whether the Holocaust was a myth <http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/president-rouhani-iranians-should-be-free-subject-to-protection-of-our-national-identity/2013/09/19/83bcaad0-2120-11e3-ad1a-1a919f2ed890_story.html> , Rouhani replied: "I'm not a historian. I'm a politician."

Iranian moderation in action.

And, by the way, do you know who was one of the three Iranian "moderates" the cake-bearing McFarlane dealt with at that fateful arms-for-hostage meeting in Tehran <http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/09/20/irans_new_president_has_a_fan_club_in_us_intelligence_vets> 27 years ago? Hassan Rouhani.

We never learn.

Article 4.

The Washington Post

Obama's myopic worldview

Jackson Diehl <http://www.washingtonpost.com/jackson-diehl/2011/02/24/ABccMXN_page.html>

September 26, 2013 -- "The world is more stable than it was five years ago," Barack Obama assured the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday. This transparently self-serving but otherwise baffling claim came at the beginning of a long and dense address <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations-general-assembly>> aimed at answering the critique that he lacks a coherent foreign policy, particularly regarding the Middle East.

Judging from the widely varying <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ej-dionne-obamas-diplomatic-outreach--to-americans/2013/09/25/c8498ce6-2615-11e3-ad0d-b7c8d2a594b9_story.html> reactions he inspired <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trouble-at-the-core-of-us-foreign-policy/2013/09/25/b7d2652a-2608-11e3-b75d-5b7f66349852_story.html> , Obama didn't end the confusion about what he stands for. But his boast that his presidency has calmed the globe opened a window on his peculiar outlook on foreign affairs — and why it has led him to mismanage the most important crises on his watch.

So: Why, according to Obama, is the world better off than in 2008? Well, the global economic crisis has abated. But that's not all: "We've also worked to end a decade of war," the president said, by withdrawing U.S. and NATO troops from Iraq and Afghanistan and "shifting away from a perpetual war footing." Here's where you could almost hear the head-scratching in the Iraqi and Afghan delegations: Violence in both of those countries <http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/07/taliban_step_up_operations_in.php> is considerably worse than it was five years ago, in part because of the U.S. withdrawals.

Also, as Obama half-acknowledged, al-Qaeda is more of a threat in more places — Kenya, Nigeria, Mali, Libya, Syria <<http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/world/timeline-unrest-in-syria/207/>> — than it was in 2008. And then there is the region stretching from Morocco to Iran, which is experiencing not stability but an epochal upheaval, one that has brought civil war or anarchy to a half-dozen countries and spawned the greatest crimes against humanity since the turn of the 21st century.

It's easy to dismiss Obama's claim on factual grounds. More interesting is to see what prompted it: a soda-straw view of the world in which only the president's inauguration-day priorities are visible. His aim then was to bring home U.S. troops, end the "endless war" of George W. Bush, defend the homeland from al-Qaeda and step back from the quagmire of the Arab Middle East. He did all that; ergo, the world is more stable — and from the attenuated perspective of an American who mainly wishes the world would go away, perhaps it is.

This definition of stability, however, requires ignoring all that would disturb it — anything that might demand new military commitments or deeper U.S. engagement with Arabs and their seemingly endless conflicts. And so Obama spelled out four "core interests" for which he would use "all elements of our power, including military force": preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, stopping attacks on the U.S. homeland, defending allies and ensuring the "free flow of energy." All else, including promoting democracy and preventing genocide, was relegated to a lesser category, in which his administration will act only in concert with "the international community." And maybe not even then.

It's worth noting that Obama has not always been so small-minded, at least rhetorically. In May 2011, after the NATO intervention in Libya that he reluctantly joined, he delivered another major address <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa>> on the Middle East. He started by listing the same core priorities. Then he said: "We must acknowledge that a strategy based solely upon the narrow pursuit of these interests will not fill an empty stomach or allow someone to speak their mind."

He defined a new set of “core principles” that the United States would defend in the Middle East, including “free speech, the freedom of peaceful assembly, the freedom of religion, equality for men and women under the rule of law, and the right to choose your own leaders — whether you live in Baghdad or Damascus, Sanaa or Tehran.” He said: “Our support for these principles is not a secondary interest. Today I want to make it clear that it is a top priority that must be translated into concrete actions, and supported by all of the diplomatic, economic and strategic tools at our disposal.”

In fact, as Egyptians and Syrians can testify, he never followed up. On Tuesday, Obama relinked his rhetoric to his actions and his underlying worldview. He listed just two goals: striking an agreement with Iran that would curtail its pursuit of nuclear weapons and brokering an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord. Both are worthy but long-shot initiatives; both were on Obama’s agenda in January 2009. And neither, even if achieved, would address the larger Middle East crisis.

Obama warned the General Assembly on Tuesday that “the danger for the world is that the United States, after a decade of war . . . may disengage, creating a vacuum of leadership that no other nation can fill.” Sadly, it is not just a danger. It was the message of his speech — and the tangible result of his presidency.

Article 5.

The Economist

Al-Qaeda returns: The new face of terror

Sep 28th 2013 -- A FEW months ago Barack Obama declared that al-Qaeda was “on the path to defeat”. Its surviving members, he said, were more concerned for their own safety than with plotting attacks on the West. Terrorist attacks of the future, he claimed, would resemble those of the 1990s—local rather than transnational and focused on “soft targets”. His overall message was that it was time to start winding down George Bush’s war against global terrorism.

Mr Obama might argue that the assault on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi by al-Qaeda’s Somali affiliate, the Shabab, was just the kind of thing he was talking about: lethal, shocking, but a long way from the United States. Yet the inconvenient truth is that, in the past 18 months, despite the relentless pummeling it has received and the defeats it has suffered, al-Qaeda and its jihadist allies have staged an extraordinary comeback. The terrorist network now holds sway over more territory and is recruiting more fighters than at any time in its 25-year history. Mr Obama must reconsider.

Back from the dead

It all looked different two years ago. Even before the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011, al-Qaeda’s central leadership, holed up near the Afghan border in Pakistan’s North Waziristan, was on the ropes, hollowed out by drone attacks and able to communicate with the rest of the network only with difficulty and at great risk. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), its most capable franchise as far as mounting attacks on the West is concerned, was being hit hard by drone strikes and harried by Yemeni troops. The Shabab was under similar pressure in Somalia, as Western-backed African Union forces chased them out of the main cities. Above all, the Arab spring had derailed al-Qaeda’s central claim that corrupt regimes supported by the West could be overthrown only through violence.

All those gains are now in question. The Shabab is recruiting more foreign fighters than ever (some of whom appear to have been involved in the attack on the Westgate). AQAP was responsible for the panic that led to the closure of 19 American embassies across the region and a global travel alert in early August. Meanwhile al-Qaeda’s core, anticipating the withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan after 2014, is already moving back into the country’s wild east.

Above all, the poisoning of the Arab spring has given al-Qaeda and its allies an unprecedented opening. The coup against a supposedly moderate Islamist elected government in Egypt has helped restore al-Qaeda's ideological power. Weapons have flooded out of Libya and across the region, and the civil war in Syria has revived one of the network's most violent and unruly offshoots, al-Qaeda in Iraq, now grandly renamed the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham.

The struggle to depose the Assad regime has acted as a magnet for thousands of would-be jihadists from all over the Muslim world and from Muslim communities in Europe and North America. The once largely moderate and secular Syrian Free Army has been progressively displaced by better-organised and better-funded jihadist groups that have direct links with al-Qaeda. Western intelligence estimates reckon such groups now represent as much as 80% of the effective rebel fighting force. Even if they fail to advance much from the territory they now hold in the north and east of the country, they might end up controlling a vast area that borders an ever more fragile-looking Iraq, where al-Qaeda is currently murdering up to 1,000 civilians a month. That is a terrifying prospect.

No more wishful thinking

How much should Western complacency be blamed for this stunning revival? Quite a bit. Mr Obama was too eager to cut and run from Iraq. He is at risk of repeating the mistake in Afghanistan. America has been over-reliant on drone strikes to "decapitate" al-Qaeda groups: the previous defence secretary, Leon Panetta, even foolishly talked of defeating the network by killing just 10-20 leaders in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. The general perception of America's waning appetite for engagement in the Middle East, underlined by Mr Obama's reluctance to support the moderate Syrian opposition in any useful way has been damaging as well.

A second question is how much of a threat a resurgent al-Qaeda now poses to the West. The recently popular notion that, give or take the odd home-grown "lone wolf", today's violent jihadists are really interested only in fighting local battles now looks mistaken. Some of the foreign fighters in Syria will be killed. Others will be happy to return to a quieter life in Europe or America. But a significant proportion will take their training, experience and contacts home, keen to use all three when the call comes, as it surely will. There is little doubt too that Westerners working or living in regions where jihadism is strong will be doing so at greater risk than ever.

The final question is whether anything can be done to reverse the tide once again. The answer is surely yes. When Mr Bush declared his "war on terror", his aim was the removal of regimes that sponsored terrorism. Today, the emphasis should be supporting weak (and sometimes unsavoury) governments in Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Niger and elsewhere that are trying to fight al-Qaeda. Even Kenya and Nigeria could do with more help. That does not mean a heavy footprint on the ground, but assistance in intelligence, logistics and even special forces and air support. Most of all, it means more help to train local security forces, to modernise administrations and to stabilise often frail economies.

The most dismaying aspect of al-Qaeda's revival is the extent to which its pernicious ideology, now aided by the failures of the Arab spring, continues to spread through madrassas and mosques and jihadist websites and television channels. Money still flows from rich Gulf Arabs, supposedly the West's friends, to finance these activities and worse. More pressure should be brought to bear on their governments to stop this. For all the West's supposedly huge soft power, it has been feeble in its efforts to win over moderate Muslims in the most important battle of all, that of ideas.

Article 6.

Daily Star

Refugees stretch Jordan to its limits

September 27, 2013 -- Recent estimates place the total number of Syrian refugees in Jordan at over 500,000. Zaatari refugee camp has become the fourth largest city in Jordan by population. It may not be much of a home, but each refugee costs the Jordanian government the equivalent of \$3,750 to host per year. The cost of Syrian refugees is putting a tremendous strain on the economy and is affecting the patronage systems that have ensured tribal loyalty to Jordan's monarchy in the past. In addition to increasing resentment within the tribal population, the presence of Syrian refugees has also provided a boost in support for the Muslim Brotherhood, Jordan's best-organized opposition, thereby adding to the tension the Hashemite kingdom faces.

Jordan's ability to absorb Syrian refugees has become a growing issue. Its fiscal position has deteriorated since the beginning of the Arab Spring; hosting 500,000 refugees has already cost Jordan over \$800 million since the Syrian war began, and unrest across the Arab world, particularly in neighboring Syria, has cost Jordan's economy as much as \$4 billion. Furthermore, foreign assistance, on which Jordan was able to rely while dealing with the influx of Iraqi refugees, is insufficient. Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour recently stated in an interview that "the foreign assistance extended to Jordan is not enough in the face of the extraordinary numbers of Syrian refugees who have sought a safe haven in the kingdom since the start of the Syrian conflict in March 2011."

Government and United Nations officials say the refugee influx has placed a huge burden on already overstretched water and power supplies, as well as housing and education, which has rendered subsidy cuts necessary. The government has raised the prices of fuel and commercial electricity – and bread and water are expected to follow soon.

Jordanians, reeling from these price increases, are also angry about the impact of the refugees on unemployment. According to the Ministry of Labor, approximately 160,000 Syrians work illegally in Jordan. They accept lower pay and tougher work conditions to fill positions in bakeries, garages, and cafes. This increases resentment among Jordanians, who suffer from an unemployment rate of 12.6 percent. It also feeds the attitude that "there is no room in Jordan for Jordanians" – the country is also home to 1.8 million Palestinian and 450,000 Iraqi refugees. Unlike their Palestinian and Iraqi predecessors, however, the majority of Syrians arrive with limited funds, placing an immediate burden on Jordan's social services.

Bedouin tribes and townships have expressed growing anger at the failure of the government to do more to help the areas that have borne the biggest burden from the refugees. Tribes are protesting against the loss of their traditional economic privileges from a nation with an enormous fiscal deficit. Should the economic strain brought on by the Syrian refugees continue, significant divisions are likely to develop between the monarchy and its institutions in the future: Tribal benefactors are the backbone of support for the monarchy, and their traditional economic privileges will likely continue to be reduced to meet the demands of the fiscal deficit.

This would give renewed impetus to street demonstrations and could fuel protests by public sector workers and army veterans at a time when the palace has done little to meet popular demands on corruption and economic restructuring. Moreover, it is possible that as Syrian refugees become increasingly desperate and politicized, these economic problems could mutate into political tension.

In response, the government has reportedly denied entry to Syrians of Palestinian origin, fearing it may upset Jordan's delicate political balance, although the government denies this. Memories of the 1970 Black September civil war between the Jordanian government and militias made up of Palestinian refugees make authorities wary of any political activity among the Syrian refugees.

Furthermore, Syrian refugees are finding resonance and appeal within Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front. The Syrian refugee population is used to bolster local perceptions of the movement's

political strength: Many who joined the movement on the street during protests over the last few months were, in fact, members of the Syrian Brotherhood. Although the increase in their numbers does not translate into electoral success, it allows them to demonstrate their informal power during weekly Friday protests. And while the IAF has remained loyal to the monarchy and continues to work within the confines of the established political order, its leaders have shown an increasing readiness to challenge royal authority in recent months.

Furthermore, as the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood opposition flecks to Jordan, it highlights an additional challenge for King Abdullah II, who – while calling for Syrian President Bashar Assad to step down – maintains hopes for a secular order in a new Syria and has long been wary of how the conflict might increase the clout of Jordan’s own Muslim Brotherhood.

While Syrian refugees increase their support for the Muslim Brotherhood, the Hashemite monarchy is responding by strengthening its backing for Western efforts to replace the Brotherhood-dominated Syrian National Council with a more varied opposition, one that is inclusive of Alawites and other minorities. This secularism would be necessary to dilute the effects of a more powerful Muslim Brotherhood next door and maintain the much-needed secular balance within the Hashemite kingdom.

The monarchy now faces the difficult task of bolstering its support domestically while negating the effects of religious politicization.

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Article 7.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Arab myths of American policy

James Zogby

25-09-2013 -- As I attempted to demonstrate in Arab Voices: What they are saying and why it matters, we, in the West, are still mystified by the Arab world. Absent real understanding, our public discourse and, too often, our policy debates are informed by crude myths and negative stereotypes of the region, its culture and its people.

I have noted on other occasions that much the same is true in the Arab world. Having just returned from the Middle East, I continue to be struck by how much of the Arab world’s political discussion about American policy is myth-based.

There are two persistent myths that influence Arab perceptions about why and how America does what it does in the world. The first is that they think we are smart — that we know what we are doing and intend the consequences of our actions. The other myth is a variation of the first, and that is that we are all-powerful and can do almost anything — so when we do something and make a mess or when we don’t act, there must be a reason.

These myths are both ill founded and dangerous. Ill founded because, to be quite honest, we aren't that smart and, therefore, sometimes blunder. And dangerous because they all too often given birth to fantastic conspiracy theories in an effort to make sense out of the disastrous consequences of American policy mistakes.

Both of these myths, after having been given a real run in conversations about the horrific war in Iraq, are again on full display in analyses of US policies towards Egypt and Syria. In discussions about both situations, assumptions are made that American policies are informed and intentional with the resultant consequences having been anticipated.

In the case of Egypt, one line of thought begins with "America supported the Muslim Brotherhood". As it is developed, the argument is made that the US saw (or hoped for) the creation of a "Sunni crescent" in the Middle East as a check against Iran and its allies.

As evidence for this assumption, some point to the simple fact that President Barack Obama recognised the elected Muslim Brotherhood president, Mohamed Morsi, and continued US assistance programmes to Egypt. Adherents of this view believe that their case gets stronger when they note that in the lead up to Tamarod (the Rebel campaign that spearheaded the 30 June demonstrations), the US Ambassador to Egypt addressed a public gathering in which she actively discouraged demonstrations, suggesting that political activists should, instead, strengthen opposition political parties and prepare for the next election. A few days later, the ambassador paid a visit to the Muslim Brotherhood headquarters to meet with the group's leader.

Then, after the military deposed Morsi, the US administration didn't immediately embrace the transition and instead sent a high-ranking State Department official to urge reconciliation and political compromise. Case closed.

The reality, however, was far more complex. On the one hand, it was entirely reasonable for the US to attempt to work with the elected government of the largest and most strategically important Arab country. America has important interests to protect in the region and sees peace, stability, and progress in Egypt as a key component to those interests. It might also be seen as reasonable that a US official would caution against potentially destabilising demonstrations and, for the same reason, after the military action of 3 July, urge the parties to seek some level of accommodation and a restoration of civil order.

Where fault can be found is with American intelligence failing to understand the depth of Egyptian frustration with the Morsi government and the degree to which its agenda had alienated the population. The bottom line is that as difficult as it may be for those who would rather comfort themselves with the certainty of myths and conspiracy theories, America didn't have a clue what was going on in Egypt and was operating blind and on autopilot. No conspiracy, just mistakes in an effort to protect interests.

I have also been struck by the myths playing out in reaction to the admittedly awkward scenario that developed over the threats to bomb, then not bomb, Syria. It wasn't the "America's smart" myth that played out here; it was myth of "America, the all-powerful". I have heard too many members and supporters of the Syrian opposition express the conviction that America could, if it wanted to, "take out" Bashar Al-Assad and end his regime. They were, at first, disappointed that the US administration only intended to teach Al-Assad's government a lesson. They wanted much more. But it was never on the cards that America would play the role of *deus ex machina*. Their expectations, from the outset, were too high and, frankly speaking, not reality-based.

President Obama was hesitant to act without UN — or at the very least NATO — support. Even the US military command was not supportive. And then there is the fact that in the dysfunctional hyper-partisan world of Washington politics, Congress had to be considered. This is the same Congress that has voted over 30 times to defund healthcare reform, the president's signature legislative victory, and still can't agree to pass a budget or keep the nation from defaulting on its debt. This Congress would have eaten him alive had he bucked their will and gone to war without their acquiescence.

An additional restraint that must be factored into this discussion is the war-weariness of the American people. The notion that if America would "just help the Syrian opposition win" ignores the question "then what?" Since it is clear

that the deeply fractured opposition cannot, at this time, govern, with the fall of the regime, who will stabilise Syria? The American public will not tolerate a new occupation, and I don't see any other country stepping up to the plate to offer its services.

It was expected that when the "all powerful" myth didn't play out, conspiracy theories would go wild. "America doesn't want the opposition to win; they merely want to continue the war to bleed Iran" or "America wants the regime to stay, because they fear Al-Qaeda more than they dislike Bashar, or because Israel wants the regime to remain."

America is powerful, but reality imposes necessary limits on that power. And America is smart, but we do make mistakes.

In this context, I have shuddered when I have heard some Arabs and Americans say "I wish we had Bush back, he never hesitated to act on his beliefs" — forgetting the absolute ruin he left in the wake of his thoughtless use of power that ignored reality.

Both Egypt and Syria pose unique and unprecedented challenges to America and the region. Each poses real problems for policymakers that must be understood, in the clear light of day. Better to see them that way than to view them through a lens distorted by myths.

The writer is president of the Arab American Institute.

Article 8.

World Affairs Journal

China's Leaders Ignore Dissent at their Peril

Gordon G. Chang

25 September 2013 -- On September 22nd, the Intermediate People's Court in Jinan found Bo Xilai, once China's most charismatic politician, guilty of bribery, embezzlement, and abuse of power and sentenced him to life imprisonment.

No sooner was the stiff term handed down than we began seeing assessments that the Communist Party had finally put behind it a troubled chapter in its history. Perhaps a Guardian headline <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/22/china-move-on-bo-xilai> said it best when it announced that "China hopes to move on after Bo Xilai life sentence."

Yet it's clear that Bo has not been the party's main problem. For instance, the Financial Times, two days before the verdict and sentencing, reported <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/533a6374-1fdc-11e3-8861-00144feab7de.html#slide0> that at the Party School of the Central Committee, in Beijing, talk of the failure of the country's political system has been the hot topic of late.

The school, according to the article, is the only place in China where discussion of the party's failure can take place "without fear of reprisal." That may be true, but the institution, "an intellectual free-fire zone" and the training ground for elite officials, is not the only place where the matter is under discussion.

It is, after all, obvious that there is something very wrong in China at the moment, and there is no greater indication of impending troubles than the Maoist rantings of the country's new leader, Xi Jinping. Many analysts try to explain his words away by telling us he is merely attempting to placate the extremist supporters of Bo or that he is talking "left" before moving "right," but these assessments look like wishful thinking. "The more pessimistic, and frankly more realistic, interpretation is that Xi has no fresh ideas so he just quotes Mao and tries to hold on tight to power," said one reformist Chinese to the Financial Times. "If that is the case, then China has no hope and eventually the anger in society will explode into a popular uprising."

Can China really explode? Xi's prolonged attack on civil society—crackdowns, one right after the other—is only increasing the pressure in the country, and that is occurring while the tolerance of the population is decreasing. The fundamental problem for China's Communists is that, from all we can tell, most Chinese do not believe a one-party system is appropriate for their country's modernizing society. Simply stated, they want much more say in their lives and demand institutional restraints on their rulers.

This does not mean they are ready to take to the streets. It does mean, however, that people are dissatisfied and may not support their government when forced to choose. And the consequence of this state of affairs is that it probably will not take much to topple the system, which will celebrate its 64th anniversary in power on October 1st.

An incident—of which there are many possibilities—can spiral out of control. We have seen, in the past few years, small crowds in China push around local officials, on issues of both local and national import. For instance, it took only a little over a thousand demonstrators this July to scrap <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-07-14/china-protest-forcing-nuclear-retreat-shows-people-power.html> the Heshan uranium-processing plant in Guangdong Province.

The Chinese people are losing their fear of the party and are becoming emboldened by getting what they want through street protest. Senior leaders, in these circumstances, can hold on to power only if they adjust. "Xi Jinping and this administration provide the last chance for China to implement a social transformation that comes from within the party and within the system," says Shen Zhihua of the East China Normal University. "Without these reforms there will certainly be a social explosion."

What in fact is Xi Jinping's answer? "Our red nation will never change color," he said <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323455104579014960827162856.html> early this summer. His demand <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1310566/xi-jinping-goes-back-future-strengthen-party-control> for "ideological purification"—made in August—sounds off-key to a population that cares little for theory, especially of the Maoist variety.

Xi's problem is that citizen dissatisfaction is increasing and that he does little to address it. Chinese leaders, from Xi down, obsess over the breakup of the Soviet Union, and their view is that Mikhail Gorbachev's lack of ideological rectitude was the driving cause. Having misinterpreted the reasons for the USSR's disintegration, rulers in Beijing ignore popular concerns at their peril.

In reality, the Chinese want many things, but the most fundamental is far more say in their lives, and that is the one thing Xi Jinping is not prepared to grant them. In a time of turmoil in society, a time when most anything can happen, the detention of Bo does nothing to address the fundamental divide between a restless people and an intransigent government.

Gordon G. Chang is the author of *The Coming Collapse of China and Nuclear Showdown: North Korea Takes On the World*. He lived and worked in China and Hong Kong for almost two decades as a lawyer.