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Article 1.

NYT

Iran Is Ready to Talk

Dennis Ross

February 14, 2012 -- SPECULATION about an Israeli strike against Iranian nuclear facilities is rife, but there is little discussion about whether diplomacy can still succeed, precluding the need for military action.

Many experts doubt that Tehran would ever accept a deal that uses intrusive inspections and denies or limits uranium enrichment to halt any advances toward a nuclear weapons capability, while still permitting the development of civilian nuclear power. But before we assume that diplomacy can't work, it is worth considering that Iranians are now facing crippling pressure and that their leaders have in the past altered their behavior in response to such pressure. Notwithstanding all

their bluster, there are signs that Tehran is now looking for a way out.

Much has changed in the last three years. In January 2009, Iran was spreading its influence throughout the Middle East, and Arab leaders were reluctant to criticize Iran in public lest they trigger a coercive Iranian reaction. Similarly, Iran's government wasn't facing significant economic pressures; Iranians had simply adjusted to the incremental sanctions they were then facing.

Today, Iran is more isolated than ever. The regional balance of power is shifting against Tehran, in no small part because of its ongoing support for the beleaguered government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. The Assad regime is failing, and in time, Iran will lose its only state ally in the Arab world and its conduit for arming the militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Iran's Arab neighbors in the Persian Gulf, and even the United Nations General Assembly, no longer hesitate to criticize Tehran. Gone is the fear of Iranian intimidation, as the Saudis demonstrated by immediately promising to fill the gap and meet Europe's needs when the European Union announced its decision to boycott the purchase of Iran's oil. Even after Iran denounced the Saudi move as a hostile act, the Saudis did not back off.

Iran cannot do business with or obtain credit from any reputable international bank, nor can it easily insure its ships or find energy investors. According to Iran's oil ministry, the energy sector needs more than \$100 billion in investments to revitalize its aging infrastructure; it now faces a severe shortfall.

New American penalties on Iran's central bank and those doing business with it have helped trigger an enormous currency devaluation. In the last six weeks, the Iranian rial has declined dramatically against the dollar, adding to the economic woes Iran is now confronting.

Grain is sitting on ships that won't unload their cargoes in Iranian ports because suppliers haven't been paid; Iranian oil is being stored on tankers as Iran's buyers demand discounts to purchase it; and even those countries that continue to do business with Iran are not paying in dollars. India plans to buy 45 percent of its oil from Iran using rupees, meaning that Iran will be forced to buy Indian goods that it may not want or need.

The Obama administration initially sought genuine engagement with Iran, but it understood that if Iran's leaders rebuffed such efforts, America would have to apply unprecedented pressure to halt Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

Beginning in 2010, Washington worked methodically to impose political, diplomatic, economic and security pressure, making clear that the cost of noncompliance would continue to rise while still leaving the Iranians a way out. This strategy took into account how Iranian leaders had adjusted their behavior in the past to escape major pressure — from ending the war with Iraq in 1988 to stopping the assassinations of Iranian dissidents in Europe in the 1990s to suspending uranium enrichment in 2003.

The Obama administration has now created a situation in which diplomacy has a chance to succeed. It remains an open question whether it will.

Israel worries that it could lose its military option, and it may be

reluctant to wait for diplomacy to bear fruit. That said, Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have consistently called for “crippling sanctions,” reflecting a belief that Iran’s behavior could be changed with sufficient pressure. The fact that crippling sanctions have finally been applied means that Israel is more likely to give these sanctions and the related diplomatic offensive a chance to work. And it should.

Still, it is unclear whether Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, whose regime depends so heavily on hostility to America, is willing to make a deal on the nuclear issue. Nonetheless, Iran is now signaling that it is interested in diplomacy. Its foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, has declared that Iran will resume talks with the five permanent members of the Security Council and the Germans. He recently said that Iran would discuss Russia’s step-by-step proposal to defuse the nuclear standoff, which Iran refused to entertain when a variation of it was first broached last year.

Now, with Iran feeling the pressure, its leaders suddenly seem prepared to talk. Of course, Iran’s government might try to draw out talks while pursuing their nuclear program. But if that is their strategy, they will face even more onerous pressures, when a planned European boycott of their oil begins on July 1.

Moreover, given Mr. Obama’s stated determination to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, Iran’s leaders may actually be making the use of force against their nuclear facilities more likely by playing for time.

Iran can have civilian nuclear power, but it must not have nuclear weapons. Ultimately, Ayatollah Khamenei will have to

decide what poses a greater threat to his rule: ending his quest for nuclear weapons or stubbornly pursuing them as crippling economic pressures mount.

With Iran reeling from sanctions, the proper environment now exists for diplomacy to work. The next few months will determine whether it succeeds.

Dennis B. Ross, a former State Department and National Security Council official, was a special assistant to President Obama for the Middle East, Afghanistan and South Asia from 2009 to 2011.

Article 2.

Los Angeles Times

On Iran, a stark choice

Benny Morris

February 14, 2012 -- Most people in the Arab world, according to opinion polls, believe that the Holocaust never happened, that it's a Jewish invention and trick to win the world's sympathy and support. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran is similarly minded; he has said so countless times.

In the West, speaking of the Holocaust, most leaders and

commentators concede that it did, indeed, occur. But, privately and sometimes publicly, some tell the Israelis: "Get over it." They mean that the murder of 6 million Jews during World War II should not dominate, or perhaps even strongly influence, Israel's policies today.

But is this reasonable or even moral? Should Israel set aside the memory and reality of what happened to its people, and conduct its life as a nation as if nothing happened?

The fact is that Israel's leaders, reflecting Israeli public opinion, take very seriously Iran's oft-repeated threat to create a second Holocaust, to wipe the Jewish state — "the Zionist entity" or "Zionist regime," as the Iranians call it — off the map. They take equally seriously Iran's nuclear program, which the international community, after years of denial or at least skepticism, now accepts is geared to the production of nuclear weaponry. Israelis, at least those who don't bury their heads in the sand, believe that if the Iranians get nuclear weapons they will, in the end, use them — or at a minimum, cannot be relied on not to use them — and that Israel's very existence is at stake.

After years of Israeli cajoling and blandishments, the United States and the European community have at last started to impose serious sanctions against Tehran, targeting its oil industries and central bank. But the sanctions have come too late — and, besides, many in the international community, meaning Russia, China, India, Turkey, the Arab states and some other countries, are not on board or are actively subverting these sanctions, rendering them ultimately ineffective. The Iranians have said as much: They will not abandon their nuclear program, even if the sanctions bite into their citizens' living

standards. (According to the Israeli military intelligence chief, Iran suffers from 24% annual inflation, 16% unemployment; its currency, the rial, has been depreciating by leaps and bounds.)

Yet America's and Europe's leaders tell Israel: Wait, give the sanctions time.

But time has almost run out. U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has publicly stated that if Iran decided to do it, it could have the bomb within a year and the means to deliver it a year or two later. And perhaps Panetta is wrong — perhaps there is less time than he thinks. Or, as Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak put it earlier this month, those who advise Israel to wait till later may end up discovering that "later is too late."

The choice is clear and stark. Either Iran, led by fanatical, brutal and millenarian leaders, will get the bomb, or it will be prevented from doing so by military assault on its nuclear installations, by America or Israel. If the Americans, who have the capability to do a thorough job, don't do it — and they don't seem to have the stomach for it after Iraq and Afghanistan — then the Israelis, with their more limited capabilities, will have to.

How Washington, which has repeatedly and more or less publicly vetoed the idea, would react to an Israeli strike deeply worries policymakers in Jerusalem. But it worries them far less than a nuclear-weaponized Iran. And besides, some Israeli officials believe that in an election year, President Obama would be seriously handicapped when considering anti-Israeli measures.

Of course, Iran, while not as powerful as its rhetoric often

suggests, is no paper tiger. It may react to an Israeli strike as Syria did in 2007 when Israel took out its North Korean-designed nuclear reactor — by doing nothing. But a more likely scenario is a worldwide increase in oil prices and conventional and terrorist counterstrikes against targets ranging from Israel to the Gulf of Hormuz to Iraq and Afghanistan to Western installations around the world. And an Israeli or American attack on Iran would likely rile much of the Muslim world, causing wide-ranging political fallout. But the consequences of nuclear bombs hitting Tel Aviv and Haifa — effectively destroying Israel, a very small country — are even more dire, certainly as seen from Jerusalem.

The Israelis may have the capability, using conventional weapons, only to delay the Iranian nuclear program and only by a few years. But any delay is good; perhaps the international community — who knows, maybe even the Russians — will wake up to the danger of a nuclear Iran and take effective measures to halt the Iranian nuclear weapons program definitively.

But one thought obtrudes above all else: If the Iranian nuclear project is not halted now by conventional means, there will be, by miscalculation, Iranian assault or Israeli preemption, a nuclear war in the Middle East.

Israeli historian Benny Morris is the author, most recently, of "1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War."

Article 3.

The Washington Post

The U.S.-Israeli trust gap on Iran

Editorial

February 15 -- TWO MONTHS ago we questioned a decision by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to spell out publicly his objections to an Israeli military strike against Iran's nuclear program — a speech that must have cheered the commanders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Now Mr. Panetta has indirectly caused a similar stir: After a conversation with Mr. Panetta this month, The Post's David Ignatius reported that the Pentagon chief “believes there is a strong likelihood that Israel will strike Iran in April, May or June.”

What could explain this public undercutting of one of America's closest allies? The unfortunate answer seems to be a lack of strategic agreement or basic trust between the Obama administration and the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu. A senior U.S. intelligence official recently said that Israel has grown reticent about discussing a possible attack on Iran and had declined to offer an assurance that it would consult Washington before acting. That leaves the administration facing the possibility that it will be presented with an Israeli-Iranian conflict that could expand to encompass U.S. forces and allies in the Persian Gulf and trigger unforeseeable consequences in the larger Middle East.

We continue to believe that military action against Iran, by Israel or the United States, is not yet necessary or wise. U.S. and Israeli officials share an assessment that, though Iran is building

up nuclear capability, it has not taken decisive steps toward building a bomb. In the meantime, the pressures on its leadership — from sanctions, sabotage, the disarray of allies such as Syria and domestic discontent — are growing. The best strategy for now is to fan those flames, which could cause the regime to retreat or even to fall. On that, we agree with the Obama administration.

Israel has two reasons for judging the matter differently. While the Obama administration suggests that only a clear Iranian attempt to produce a nuclear weapon would justify military intervention, Israel believes that Iran's acquisition of the capacity to do so — achieving the status of a threshold nuclear power, like India and Pakistan before 1997 — would also be intolerable. That's understandable for a country within missile range of a regime that has called for the extinction of the Jewish state.

Another factor is more subject to U.S. influence. Israeli commanders judge that in a few months, once Iran has fully prepared a new nuclear facility located under a mountain, Israel's capacity to disable the program with air strikes will be greatly reduced. The United States would retain a military window of opportunity for longer. But can the Netanyahu government count on the Obama administration to act if a moment of truth arrives?

For now, several top Israeli officials are skeptical. That is where Mr. Panetta and Mr. Obama should be making an effort. Rather than publicly arguing with Israel, they should be more clearly spelling out U.S. willingness to take military action if Iran is discovered taking steps toward bomb-making, such as enriching

its uranium beyond present levels or expelling U.N. inspectors. Saying “all options are on the table” is not enough; the Obama administration should be explicit about Iranian actions that will violate its red lines — and what the consequences will be.

Article 4.

NYT

Like Father, Like Son

Thomas L. Friedman

February 14, 2012 -- Watching the Syrian Army pummel the Syrian town of Homs to put down the rebellion there against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad is the remake of a really bad movie that starred Bashar’s father, Hafez, exactly 30 years ago this month. I know. I saw the original.

It was April 1982 and I had just arrived in Beirut as a reporter for The New York Times. I quickly heard terrifying stories about an uprising that had happened in February in the Syrian town of Hama, led by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Word had it (there were no Internet or cellphones) that then-President Hafez al-Assad had quashed the rebellion by shelling whole Hama neighborhoods, then dynamiting buildings, some with residents still inside. That May, I got a visa to Syria, just as

Hama had been reopened. The Syrian regime was “encouraging” Syrians to drive through the broken town and reflect on its meaning. So I just hired a cab and went.

It was stunning. Whole swaths of buildings had, indeed, been destroyed and then professionally steamrolled into parking lots the size of football fields. If you kicked the ground, you’d come up with scraps of clothing, a tattered book, a shoe. Amnesty International estimated that as many as 20,000 people were killed there. I had never seen brutality at that scale, and, in a book I wrote later, I gave it a name: “Hama Rules.”

Hama Rules are no rules at all. You do whatever it takes to stay in power and you don’t just defeat your foes. You bomb them in their homes and then you steamroll them so that their children and their children’s children will never forget and never even dream of challenging you again.

Well, 30 years later, the children of those Syrian children have forgotten. They’ve lost their fear. This time around, though, it is not just the Muslim Brotherhood rebelling in one town. Now it is youths from all over Syria. Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef, the editors of “Generation in Waiting: The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East,” note that more than 100 million individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 live in the Middle East, up from less than 67 million in 1990, and much of what their governments have promised them by way of jobs, marriage opportunities, apartments and a voice in their own future have not materialized. This is what sparked all these volcanic uprisings.

But Syria is not Norway. The quest for democracy is not the

only drama playing out there. Syria is also a highly tribalized and sectarian-divided country. Its Shiite-leaning Alawite minority — led by the Assads and comprising 12 percent of the population — dominates the government, army and security services. Sunni-Muslim Syrian Arabs are 75 percent, Christians 10 percent and Druze, Kurds and others make up the rest. While Syria's uprising started as a nonsectarian, nonviolent expression of the desire by young Syrians to be treated as citizens, when Assad responded with Hama Rules it triggered a violent response. This has brought out the sectarian fears on all sides. Now it is hard to tell where the democratic aspirations of the rebellion stop and the sectarian aspirations — the raw desire by Syria's Sunni majority to oust the Alawite minority — begin.

As a result, most Alawites are rallying to Assad, as are some Sunnis who have benefitted from his regime, particularly in Aleppo and Damascus, the capital. These pro-regime Alawites and Sunnis see the chaos and soccer riots in Egypt and say to themselves: "Assad or chaos? We'll take Assad." What to do? Ideally we'd like a peaceful transition from Assad's one-man rule to more pluralistic consensual politics. We do not want a civil war in Syria, which could destabilize the whole region. Remember: Egypt implodes, Libya implodes, Tunisia implodes. ... Syria explodes.

I don't know what is sufficient to persuade Assad to cede power to a national unity government, but I know what is necessary: He has to lose the two most important props holding up his regime. One is the support of China, Iran and Russia. There, the U.N., the European Union and Arab and Muslim countries need to keep calling out Moscow, Beijing and Iran for supporting Assad's mass killing of unarmed civilians. China, Iran and

Russia don't care about U.S. condemnation, but they might care about the rest of the world's.

The other prop, though, can only be removed by Syrians. The still-fractious Syrian opposition has to find a way to unify itself and also reach out to the Alawites, as well as Syria's Christian and Sunni merchants, and guarantee that their interests will be secure in a new Syria so they give up on Assad. Without that, nothing good will come of any of this. The more the Syrian opposition demonstrates to itself, to all Syrians and to the world that they are about creating a pluralistic Syria — where everyone is treated as an equal citizen — the weaker Assad will be and the more likely that a post-Assad Syria will have chance at stability and decency. The more the Syrian opposition remains fractured, the stronger Assad will be, the more some Syrians will cling to him out of fear of chaos and the more he will get away with Hama Rules.

Article 5.

The Council for Foreign Relations

The UN's Mideast Struggles

Interview: William H. Luers

February 14, 2012 -- Russia's and China's veto of a draft UN

Security Council resolution to end violence in Syria and their reluctance to impose more sanctions on Iran have raised questions over the ability of the UN Security Council to play an effective role in resolving these crises. This week, the UN General Assembly may take up a draft proposal by Saudi Arabia endorsing the Arab League's proposal for a political transition in Syria. A General Assembly resolution is non-binding and can still be vetoed by Russia and China at the UNSC, says William H. Luers, former president of the UN Association of the United States, but a vote at the UNGA will prompt broader global condemnation of Russia and China and "can bring together world support for action at the United Nations." On Iran, Luers says, the UN is not the best interlocutor, and Russia's role may be more beneficial in reaching an agreement on Iran's nuclear program.

Russia and China vetoed a resolution this month supported by the West and Arab countries that called for an end to the violence in Syria. Is this typical for the United Nations -- these kinds of stand-offs where nothing gets done?

No, things have gotten done over the years. But it depends on whether the five permanent members [the United States, Britain, France, Russia, and China] agree on what that role should be. The issue of the Arab awakening and the changes that are taking place out there and how involved the United Nations should be challenges some of the basic premises going back to the beginning of the United Nations in 1945. Historically, the Soviet Union--now Russia--and the Chinese have basically held that the United Nations should not authorize any action internal to any single country. This began as an attitude developed out of the general sense that the world was hostile to both

governments. So as a matter of principle, they believe that the internal affairs of another country is not an issue for the United Nations to deal with. That has been a fundamental premise throughout the Soviet /Russian existence.

Can you give a recent example?

Yes. In the case of Chechnya, the Russians were extremely nervous during the initial phases of that war [1994-1996] that there'd be some sort of UN resolution that argued for a different policy or intervention. This is something they've been opposed to, and it was not a Cold War phenomenon. Ironically, interventionism was for the Soviet Union something they did in their part of the world [East Berlin, 1953, Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia, 1968] and they had no compunction at interventionism as long as they were doing it. And then the Soviet forces began to intervene in places in Africa in the 1970s. Today, the challenge for the United Nations is to find out how to defend the basic principle of human rights--that governments have the responsibility to protect their people, a fundamental principle that was introduced into the United Nations as a result of the genocide in Rwanda [1994]. That was one of the guiding principles and legacies of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. He believed that the United Nations should take the responsibility to protect the citizens of a country if their own government will not do that. That was a fundamental and important shift in the general noninterference practices of the United Nations. And then who does the intervention? If you use the "responsibility to protect" principle in the African cases, where they've been used, or in the case of Libya [2011] or Syria right now, if the host government is unwilling or incapable of protecting its citizens, the United

Nations therefore has the right and responsibility to protect those citizens.

But that principle is obviously not working now.

You are right. I don't think either China or Russia agree with that principle. It's not a principle of the charter; it's an interpretation of the charter made by Kofi Annan and supported by many countries in the world.

The Russians and Chinese have said that they were tricked into abstaining on the Libyan resolution calling for enforcement of a no-fly zone. It was interpreted by NATO as justification to use force against the Libyan government leading to the assassination of Muammar al-Qaddafi. Do you think that's what is motivating the Russians to prevent the Arab League efforts to get a resolution on Syria?

Yes. The no-fly zone question was the foot in the door for a NATO intervention that didn't involve any overt troops on the ground, but it did involve military attacks, which went far beyond the no-fly principle. And the Russians say we talked them into doing this, and we convinced them that this is what they should go along with, but then it turned into quasi-intervention, and they're opposed to that.

The Russians have close relations with the Syrian government. Is that a major factor too?

Absolutely. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was fairly clear about that when he talked about the role that Russia's played in protecting Syrian interests over the years. But the overriding factor is that they don't want to enshrine the principle of the

world powers getting together and authorizing, under UN auspices, an intervention. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin doesn't feel good about that. If they have to run their country the way they feel that they have to run it, they don't somehow want an authorization to intervene approved from outside. The Russians will never forget that at the outset of the the Korean War in 1950, they walked out of the Security Council, which permitted the approval of UN intervention in South Korea. It's going to be very difficult, with the Arab states hanging together in an unprecedented, remarkable way, for the Russians to continue to go against the Arab League's desires. It's quite surprising. Now, whether they come under pressure as things get worse and worse, I don't know. This is a matter of principle for them. And self-protection.

The General Assembly may take up a draft resolution introduced by Saudi Arabia calling for a joint peacekeeping operation of the UN and Arab League in Syria. Do you think it'll have any impact once it's passed?

It will bring about even broader global condemnation of the Russians and the Chinese, because there'll be a lot of support in the General Assembly for it. It's a uniting for peace idea, that the General Assembly can bring together world support for action at the United Nations. The practical fact is that if the Russians still want to veto in the Security Council, nothing can happen. The question is: How do you go about working with the Russians on this? I don't know to what degree we're working with the Russians to find ways to find agreement on some steps the Security Council might take, which will increase the pressure on Assad. My suspicion is, the way things are going, he's not going to leave on his own; he is going to be there until he's either

overthrown by his own people or he's taken out by some kind of opposition force, supported from the outside.

How has this worked in the case of Iran, where you have these occasional negotiations between the Security Council permanent five plus Germany (P5+1) and Iran?

The Russians and the Chinese have gone along with the pressure the Western countries have applied on the assumption that if you increase the pressure, eventually the Iranians will accede to the resolutions of the UN Security Council and the requirements of the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]--that they suspend their uranium enrichment, and they open up and solve the problems that Iran has with the IAEA. I doubt very much whether the Russians will approve of any more sanctions.

They've been opposed to it, they've been brought along reluctantly, and the Chinese are the same way. What's interesting is that the Russians have begun to seek a sort of middle ground, and they have been working with the Iranians on a step-by-step approach trying to resolve the issue. And my understanding is that the United States has taken some interest in the Russian role. The Russians are trying to find an arrangement that could be workable, that they could then take to the P5+1 and have a joint, prepared presentation to the Iranians. If they can get it together, which will be a more interesting and far-reaching proposal on Iran's nuclear program than we've seen before, it could present opportunities for a change in dynamics in this difficult situation. The United Nations has played an interesting role in the Iran dialogue, a sort of yin-yang role in the sense that the IAEA, of which Iran is an original signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, continues to have good, not perfect access, not desired access to the Iranian nuclear program. They

regularly monitor it; they have inspection visits. Most of the information we have, we get from the IAEA. That's not mentioned very often. The negative side of the equation comes from the UN Security Council, which is bringing pressure on the Iranians to do what the IAEA wants of them.

You and former senior official Thomas R. Pickering wrote an op-ed (NYT), calling for the United States to take an initiative to open a direct dialogue with Iran. Have you received much feedback on that from the government?

We've talked to a lot of people; they've been very receptive. The basic concern they have is that the Iranians have not been very responsive to President Obama's initiatives. There are a number of people in the U.S. government who know something about Iran, who would always be interested in an opportunity for a dialogue with Iran. The P5+1 is an interesting vehicle, but not probably the best way to go about trying to get an agreement with Iran. And there are a lot of reasons for that. My own sense is that the United States, if it were prepared to do it, could probably be a lead negotiator for the P5+1. Yet the Iranians believe profoundly that we're not the best interlocutors right now, because they believe we're interested only in changing their regime. And much of the things we're doing seem to support their belief in that. Russia is playing that intermediary role, and Iran has always had a conflicted and confusing relationship with the Russians.

William H. Luers, Adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

NOW Lebanon

Hamas of contradictions

Hussein Ibish

February 14, 2012 -- The growing split that has been emerging within the leadership of Hamas has exploded into a bitter public feud. It was prompted an agreement reached last week in Qatar between the head of Hamas' political bureau, Khaled Meshaal, and the Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas.

According to the deal, Abbas would take on the additional role of prime minister until elections are held later this year.

Since the beginning of the Arab uprisings, the divergence of interests between Hamas' leadership in Gaza and its leadership abroad has been steadily intensifying. External leaders, Meshaal in particular, have come under increasing pressure to adapt to regional transformations, particularly the growing sectarian split in the Middle East.

It has become impossible for Hamas to remain friendly with Sunni Arab governments and Islamist movements while being simultaneously allied to Syria and Iran. The days in which the mythology of an "axis of resistance" could rationalize a Sunni Islamist movement being part of an Iranian-led—essentially Shia—alliance are long gone. Hamas leaders proved unable to side with Bashar al-Assad while their colleagues in the Syrian

Muslim Brotherhood are a key component in the uprising against his regime. No Hamas official remains in the movement's Damascus headquarters.

The external Hamas leadership has a branding and identity crisis, and needs desperately to find new patrons and headquarters, and a new international political and strategic profile. Hence Meshaal has been intensively courting Qatar, Jordan and Egypt, among others, seeking alternative sources of support and a new regional orientation.

The Gaza leadership does not share much of this crisis. Their rule is effectively unchallenged, and they continue to draw on various sources of income. From their perspective, there is no immediate need for a major reorientation. They argue that sooner rather than later their fellow Islamists will gain unchallenged power in Egypt and other key Arab states, and that it makes no sense to compromise with Abbas or anyone else at this stage. This is a gamble the external leadership cannot afford. Many Gaza leaders clearly think the external leadership is making momentous decisions for its own purposes, but at their political expense. Resentment has boiled over. Already, last year a Hamas hardliner in Gaza, Mahmoud Zahhar, was disciplined for insisting that the primary leadership of Hamas was the one in Gaza. That proved to be a foretaste of the current crisis.

The "Change and Reform" bloc in Gaza, which includes Zahhar and the de facto prime minister, Ismail Haniyyeh, immediately reacted to the agreement with Abbas by issuing a blistering "legal memorandum." The document laid out detailed and categorical objections to the accord, declaring it illegal. Zahhar, speaking on behalf of many and openly attacking Meshaal, said that "no one in the organization had been consulted," and described the deal as "a mistake" which "could not be

implemented” and “a real crisis.”

Meanwhile, Haniyyeh visited several Gulf states, and more importantly Iran, to shore up Iranian support, despite the dispute over the Assad regime. If the Gaza leadership is to mount an effective pushback against this new initiative, which enjoys Arab Gulf backing, it is going to require significant support from Iran. The Iranians might have incentives to continue to fund Hamas in Gaza to try to sabotage the Arab-led Palestinian reconciliation agreement, and to retain Hamas as a potential chit in the face of a possible Israeli or American attack on its nuclear facilities.

How the crisis in Hamas develops depends on several factors. A close ally of Meshaal, Ahmed Youssef, has implied that Qatar promised strong financial backing in return for the agreement. If that is delivered, especially if it is augmented by aid from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, it will require a great deal of Iranian and other leverage for the Gaza-based leaders to prevail. The position of the Hamas paramilitary Ezzeddine al-Qassam Brigades will also be crucial. Its leaders, Ahmed Jabari and Marwan Issa, have traditionally deferred to the leadership of the political bureau, and reportedly urged Meshaal not to step down as its chief. But they have also expressed dismay at some of Meshaal’s recent comments regarding the tactical value of nonviolent resistance.

The power struggle in Hamas reflects regional rivalries and strikingly divergent interests that have developed in the context of the Arab uprisings. But a complete split in the movement is highly improbable, and one side is going to prevail.

Whether the agreement with Abbas is implemented or not, Hamas will only go as far as it absolutely must to adjust to new realities. But relying on states like Qatar, Egypt and Jordan will

necessitate very different behavior than being a client of Syria and Iran. And Hamas leaders counting on the Arab Spring turning into an “Islamic Awakening” that fulfills their ideological fantasies are spending more time reading coffee grounds than the emerging regional order.

Hussein Ibish writes frequently about Middle Eastern affairs for numerous publications in the United States and the Arab world.

Article 7.

NYT

Next Up: Turkey vs. Iran

Soner Cagaptay

February 14, 2012 -- Hardly a day goes by that an Iranian official doesn't threaten Turkey. Take for instance Maj. Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi's recent warning to Ankara: “Turkey must radically rethink its policies on Syria, the NATO missile shield and promoting Muslim secularism in the Arab world, or face trouble from its own people and neighbors.”

This is no surprise. Turkish-Iranian rivalry goes back centuries, to the Ottoman sultans and the Safavid shahs. It briefly subsided in the 20th century, when Turkey became an inward-looking nation-state, leaving a vacuum in the Middle East. In the past decade, though, Turkey's economic growth and emergence as a regional giant under the Justice and Development Party, or A.K.P., have revived its standing. From the Syrian uprising to

Iraq's sectarian convulsions to Iran's push for nuclear power, Ankara is the main challenger to Tehran's desire to dominate the region.

Following the A.K.P.'s ascent to power in 2002, the Turks were, initially, not interested in competition with the Iranians and relations between Ankara and Tehran seemed quite warm. Both countries defended the Palestinian cause. Ankara did not appear threatened by Iran's nuclear project. High-level visits between the two governments became routine and trade boomed.

Meanwhile, shared objections to the Iraq War appeared to bind the Turks and the Iranians. Iran even stopped harboring rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., which it had encouraged to attack Turkey because of Ankara's pro-Western stance. After the Iraq War, Tehran began bombing the very P.K.K. camps it had earlier permitted on its territory, winning points with the Turks.

Then came the Arab Spring. The uprising in Syria put Ankara and Tehran at polar opposite ends of the regional and political spectrum. Given its democratic traditions, Turkey supported the revolution and sided with the protesters; authoritarian Iran continued its support for the Assad regime and backed his brutal crackdown on civilians.

The Syrian uprising has become a zero-sum game: Either Bashar al-Assad will win, or the demonstrators will triumph. Likewise, it has become a proxy war between Tehran and Ankara, in which there will be only one winner.

Hence, all is fair game now between Ankara and Tehran. Encouraged by Iran, Assad ignored Turkish advice to reform.

Turkey is now supporting, hosting, and reportedly arming the Syrian opposition. Iran's response has been to strike at Turkey by once again supporting the P.K.K., which has launched dozens of deadly attacks, killing more than 150 Turks since the summer of 2011.

Competition over Syria has also mobilized fault lines in Iraq, where Turkey and Iran have been supporting opposing camps. Since Iraq's first democratic elections in 2005, Iran has supported the Shiite-backed Dawa party of Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, while Turkey has backed the secular pan-Iraqi movement of Ayad Allawi. Following months of contention after the 2010 elections, Maliki formed a government in Baghdad, scoring a victory for Tehran.

Maliki has cracked down on Ankara-backed factions, issuing an arrest warrant for Tariq al-Hashimi, Iraq's vice president and leader of the country's Sunni community. Hashimi has taken refuge in the Kurdish-controlled part of Iraq. The Kurds, who have until recently despised the Sunni Arabs for their persecution of the Kurds under Saddam Hussein, are now making amends. They are also closely aligning with Turkey to balance Iranian influence inside Iraq.

Turkish-Iranian rivalry in the Fertile Crescent has opened up a can of worms: Iranian leaders attack Turkey's "secular Islam" and threaten to "strike Turkey" should Ankara act on its commitment to support NATO's missile defense project by placing radars on its territory.

Turkey, anchored in NATO and oriented toward the Middle East, is a greater threat to Iranian interests than the merely pro-

Western Turkey of a decade ago. There is a chance that Iran might become even more aggressive: Some analysts suggest that the Iranian Quds Force, the special-operations unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, might be connecting with the P.K.K. in northern Iraq to target both Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds.

Both countries are slowly showing their hands in the region's oldest power game. In the Middle East, there is room for one shah or one sultan, but not both a shah and a sultan.

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