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Article 1.

NYT

Talking With Iran

Editorial

April 16, 2012 -- Iran's agreement over the weekend to hold a new round of nuclear talks next month with the United States and five other powers is a constructive development. On Monday, Iran's foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, said Tehran

is ready to resolve its nuclear disputes “quickly and easily” and suggested flexibility on uranium enrichment.

But nothing is ever quick and easy with the Iranians. They are masters at diplomatic sleight of hand and have provided ample reason for mistrust. Resolving concerns about the country’s nuclear activities — a source of international alarm since the once-covert program was first exposed in 2002 — remains a long shot. But tough international sanctions on Iran, including an oil embargo that is set to take effect in July, and Israel’s threats of possible military action may be forcing Iran’s leaders to reconsider their posture.

The actual results of the weekend talks in Istanbul were very modest. Still, the Iranians seemed ready to talk seriously about their nuclear program and even put some ideas on the table. No details were disclosed, but the two sides were encouraged enough to schedule another session for May 23 in Baghdad. The pressure is now on for that next session to produce some concrete agreement. The most immediate needs are to get Iran to stop enriching uranium to 20 percent purity, just a few steps from bomb grade; to move its stockpile of uranium enriched to 20 percent out of the country; to close the underground production facility at Fordo; and to cooperate more fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Iran’s unsurprising push for an immediate lifting of sanctions must be resisted. Catherine Ashton, the European Union foreign policy chief, was right to stress a “step-by-step approach and reciprocity” if Iran complies with its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, including a promise to forgo nuclear weapons.

The major powers also need to confront Iran's divided leadership by spelling out explicitly a vision for the kinds of diplomatic and economic incentives — including access to peaceful nuclear energy — that Tehran would gain if it gives up its weapons-related nuclear activities.

Iran's nuclear ambitions are real and dangerous, though there is no proof yet that it has made the decision to move from producing fuel to building a bomb. It's not clear that any mix of sanctions and diplomacy can persuade the mullahs to abandon their course. But we do know the only possible way of achieving a negotiated deal is for the international community to stay united and keep on the economic pressure.

Article 2.

Al-Monitor

How Iran Talks Came Back From Verge of Collapse

Laura Rozen

Apr 16, 2012 -- New details on the Iran nuclear talks in Istanbul this weekend, which were largely touted as being "positive," now show the meeting had, in fact, deteriorated.

European Union Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton and

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili kicked off the first international nuclear talks in over a year with a three-hour dinner at the Iranian consulate in Istanbul Friday night. The mood at the informal dinner—meant to build rapport between the two chief negotiators ahead of the formal talks getting underway the next day—was described by aides as “good and friendly.” Conversation deliberately steered away from specific discussion of the Iran nuclear issue. (What did they discuss? “Political party funding in the U.S.,” a European diplomat apprised of the conversation told me Monday, among other topics, including the Arab spring.)

Whatever rapport was established at the Friday dinner may have helped right the conference from what some feared was a behind-closed-door threat of near collapse Saturday night.

By the conclusion of the meeting Saturday night, when Jalili and Ashton held another meeting, the atmosphere of the high-stakes talks re-launch had grown strained and tense—unbeknownst to most of the 500 journalists sitting in the Istanbul congress venue's basement press center.

In the 90-minute meeting, held in the office of the Turkish foreign minister, who vacated it, Jalili “relentlessly” pressed Ashton for a delay in European Union oil sanctions set to go into effect by July 1, another western diplomat told me Tuesday.

“During the Ashton bilateral, it was Jalili of old,” the diplomat told me on condition of anonymity Tuesday. “He asked 100 times” for a delay in the oil sanctions.

Ashton—who later privately characterized her Iranian counterpart during the encounter as a “relentless” character in

pressing the demand—demurred that that was not realistic, and not in her mandate, aides said. She was able to steer the meeting back to a successful conclusion, based mostly on what was agreed in the two-and-a-half hour morning plenary meeting involving all seven delegations.

“The morning session was very positive: the vibe in the 3+3 was wow, they are engaging,...we know what the principles are,” the Western diplomat said on condition of anonymity. “But let’s not get excited: it’s going to be a bloody long road for them to negotiate, a long and painful process.”

“In the afternoon, we get back and said all the delegations are available to do bilaterals if you wish,” he continued. “And it went quiet. Nothing happened.”

After what all parties describe as a successful and constructive morning plenary meeting involving the six nations in the P5+1 negotiating group—the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and China—and Iran, during which the sides agreed on the broad principles for re-launching a negotiating process and to hold the next meeting in Baghdad, the Iranians basically rebuffed offers to hold bilateral meetings with all the delegations except the Chinese.

As the Western delegations sat waiting to see if the Iranians had any intention of responding to the offer, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu met with the Iranians to try to clarify their plans, according to European diplomats. (A spokesman for Davutoglu denied that Davutoglu had tried to facilitate any of the bilateral meetings, except the final one between Jalili and Ashton, which was held in his office.) American and European

diplomats—who have effusively praised the role of the Turks in hosting this year’s conference—suggested that Davutoglu may have tried to facilitate bilateral meetings, including one between the United States and Iran, but was essentially rebuffed by the Iranians for their own petty reasons. (Regional analysts have theorized that the Iranians didn’t want to deliver Turkey such a high profile diplomatic achievement, given the two nations’ growing tensions over Syria, among other matters.) “We don’t need Davutoglu to facilitate a bilateral between Ashton and Jalili,” a diplomatic source responded.

One sign of the prevailing sense of uncertainty: Saturday afternoon, Reuters picked up a report—wrong, it turned out—by Iran’s semi-official ISNA news agency that Jalili had accepted the Americans’ offer for a bilateral meeting. “Not that we know of here,” the lead American negotiator Wendy Sherman told European colleagues when they inquired if that was the case.

Sherman—the undersecretary of state for political affairs and former Clinton administration North Korea negotiator—is winning praise on her first round of leading Washington’s delegation in the Iran talks, from both those who see her as appropriately ‘tough’ with Tehran as well as those who advocate more vigorous American efforts to advance a dialog with Iran. They say she asks all the right questions and understands that tough sanctions alone will not necessarily get Iran to change its nuclear behavior. (Sherman, who arrived in Istanbul from Washington with the American delegation Friday at 1:30 pm, did not even get a chance to take a shower before the talks among the six nations in the P5+1 began Friday at 2pm, a U.S. official said.)

Despite the lack of a U.S.-Iran bilateral meeting, the Iranian delegation was engaged and attentive when Sherman directly addressed them during the morning session, several diplomats said. “The Iranian delegation body language when Wendy spoke was direct and engaged,” the European diplomat said. “Every delegation had the opportunity to speak directly to them.” After Ashton opened the meeting, the Russians spoke first (stressing, according to the diplomatic source, “Look, we are all unified on this, there’s no way you can split us.”); followed by the French (who “were firm but not tough,” the diplomat characterized), then the Chinese, the Americans, the Germans, with the British ‘bringing up the rear.’”

Diplomats acknowledge that a U.S.-Iran bilateral would have increased confidence in the meeting but insisted the fact that one didn’t occur this time shouldn’t take away from the key success of the meeting: namely that a negotiating process which had been moribund for over 15 months was able to be re-launched. And they give props to Ashton for steering the meeting over some quite rough bits.

“After one year of saber-rattling and war-war, the international community seems to have begun a process with Iran that looks like it could lead to greater international confidence in Iran's assertion that it does not seek illegal nuclear capabilities,” the European diplomat told me. “Part of the reason for having reached this stage has been pressure.”

But another reason, he continued, is that Ashton has earned “a status as a genuine, open-minded but tough—thinking negotiator who the Iranians trust and are willing to deal with,” and one “who can keep the sometimes fractious P5 +1

together.” At the pre-talks dinner, Ashton “rebuilt a rapport with Jalili,” he continued. “During the talks, she ran the show—choreographing the political directors, ensuring their intervention matched her script. As the day progressed, she ‘deployed’ the Russians and even the Turks to engage with the Iranians and persuade them to engage constructively.”

“Finally, in one-to-one negotiations, she headed off unrealistic Iranian demands and got everyone to agree ... that a next meeting had to be held; and crucially ... that it had to take place quickly so as not to drag this process out more than it needs to,’ he said. Indeed, the next Iran nuclear talks, scheduled to take place May 23 in Baghdad, is a couple weeks later than the Americans had hoped, diplomats told me. (Washington had been hoping for a May 10 meeting date.) But Ashton’s schedule could not accommodate one before then.

And that may have been deliberate too—to try to put a bit more time on the clock for a negotiating process that is realistically not likely going to solve the Iran nuclear issue at the next meeting in Baghdad either.

Laura Rozen reports on foreign policy from Washington, D.C. She has written for Yahoo! News, Politico and Foreign Policy.

Article 3.

FoxNews

The most powerful weapon Obama can deploy against Iran

Tom Ridge, General Hugh Shelton, Patrick Kennedy

April 16, 2012 -- To believe that the resumption of negotiations in Istanbul could -- or ever will -- avert Iranian nuclear breakout and a possible Middle East conflagration, is to believe in the triumph of hope over experience. When it comes to the Mullahs' intentions, however, we believe that the past is best viewed as prologue.

Consider that on the eve of these new negotiations, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad brazenly mocked President Obama's "last chance" proffer to the Mullahs, declaring that sanctions were a failure because Iran has stockpiled enough hard currency to survive for years without selling any oil. True or not, the fact remains that the so-called "P5 +1," (the US, Britain, China, France, Russia and Germany) have begun their first talks with Iran in over 15 months after a previous round of negotiations ended without agreement in January 2011.

It is hardly surprising to us that little of substance was discussed and that no concrete proposals or confidence-building measures were agreed to now, either. After all, ten years of diplomatic efforts have only emboldened the Mullahs' terrorist regime. These latest talks only enable the regime in Tehran to buy time while building their nuclear weapons program. But the Obama administration has another option worth trying at its disposal. Secretary of State Clinton got it exactly right when she focused world attention on the critical distinction between the people of Iran and the Mullah's oppressive terrorist regime. Following the April 1 Conference on Syria, Clinton

rightly said that, “In the last six, eight months we’ve had Iranian plots disrupted from Thailand to India to Georgia to Mexico and many places in between. This is a country, not a terrorist group...the people deserve better than to be living under a regime that exports terrorism.” As President Obama struggles to find a solution to Iran’s increasingly threatening nuclear ambitions, he should realize that the most powerful weapon the US can deploy now is not the sanctions of diplomacy, or the missiles of war, but support for regime change in Iran. Opposition parties in Iran are brutally oppressed and the most viable organized resistance in the country—the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) has been exiled and persecuted relentlessly by the Mullahs for more than thirty years. The regime in Tehran views MEK as an existential threat because MEK strives to replace the unelected, clerical regime with a liberal democracy that champions a non-nuclear Iranian future, equal rights for women and minorities, and a free press. But the major opposition to the Mullahs is being prevented from realizing these dreams of freedom for the Iranian people because both Iran and the US designate them as a terrorist organization. MEK is a movement that epitomizes the very spirit of the Arab Spring. By removing MEK from an unjust designation, the Obama administration can create a new political dynamic – one that can effectively undermine the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism. The Clinton administration initially added MEK to the State Department’s blacklist in 1997 as part of a failed political ploy to appease Iran—mistakenly thought at the time to be moving towards moderation. The Mullahs demanded that the group be listed as a precondition for potential negotiations with the US. Those negotiations never materialized then -- and won't work now either.

Still, the Obama administration outrageously delays removing MEK, a declared democratic ally that has provided invaluable intelligence on the location of key Iranian nuclear sites, from its list of “Foreign Terrorist Organizations” (FTO) even though it meets none of the legal criteria. This folly has given Iran and its proxies in Iraq a license to kill thousands of MEK members, including a massacre on April 8 of last year, that killed 47, including eight women, or wounded hundreds of unarmed members of the exiled MEK dissidents living in Camp Ashraf, Iraq—each and every one of whom was given written guarantees of protection by the US government.

Now that US troops have left Iraq, Iran is determined to extend its influence in the region and has vowed to exterminate the unarmed men and women at Camp Ashraf. The residents of Camp Ashraf have all been interviewed by the FBI and seven other U.S. agencies and there has never been a shred of evidence anyone in that camp was motivated by, interested in, or capable of conducting acts of terrorism. In a bipartisan initiative, nearly 100 Members of Congress, including Chairs of House Intelligence and Armed Services as well as Oversight and Government Reform committees, have called for MEK to be delisted.

The unfounded MEK designation only serves as a license to kill for both the Iraqi forces and the kangaroo courts in Iran, which regularly arrest, torture, and murder people because of their MEK affiliation. It shames the State Department’s designation process that has wrongly maintained the blacklist for misguided political reasons and it prevents the safe resettlement of Camp Ashraf residents to other countries, including the United States where many Iranian-American citizens are waiting to be reunited

with their exiled family members.

Nearly two years after a US Court of Appeals found that the State Department had violated MEK's due process rights, and ordered a re-evaluation, Secretary of State Clinton is still "reviewing" this inappropriate and unlawful designation.

Under the agreement brokered by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Ashraf residents are in the process of relocating to a site at an abandoned former US military base known as Camp Liberty, in Baghdad. Despite uninhabitable conditions there, and frequent assaults by Iraqi police, Secretary Clinton told Congress that residents' cooperation in moving from their home of 26 years to Camp Liberty would be a precondition for delisting MEK.

So far, 1,600 residents have been relocated to Camp Liberty and this "process" has claimed one life and resulted in unprovoked attack by Iraqi police (at Iran's bidding) that left 29 wounded last week.

MEK members have shown remarkable cooperation and restraint and have been extremely tolerant and peaceful in dealing with Iraqi mistreatment. Still, the State Department continues to stall on de-listing the MEK, which explains why it has been ordered to appear in the US Federal Court of Appeals in Washington, DC on May 8 to publicly explain its reasons for inaction on this vital matter of grave humanitarian consequence.

In the meantime, one can only hope that Secretary Clinton means it when she says that the Iranian people deserve to be free of the mullahs. Unshackling the main Iranian opposition movement from an unwarranted State Department blacklist and

honoring US promises to guarantee the safety of exiled Iranian dissidents would certainly be a good place to start.

General Hugh Shelton was the 14th Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. Former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge served as the first U.S. Homeland Security Secretary. Patrick Kennedy represented Rhode Island's 1st District in the House of Representatives from 1995 to 2011.

Article 4.

Los Angeles Times

Don't abandon the Mideast

Hassan Bin Talal

April 17, 2012 -- Early this year, the Pentagon's strategic review signaled a shift in priorities for U.S. foreign policy, suggesting that more attention would be paid to the Asia-Pacific region. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton spoke of this as a "pivot" toward Asia, signaling what for many analysts and ordinary Americans has been a long-overdue transition away from Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East in general. But there's a problem with that. The act of pivoting involves turning your back, and the United States should not turn its back on the Middle East. Of course it makes sense for the U.S. to pay more attention to the Asia-Pacific region, which will be both a leader

in economic growth and a security challenge during the 21st century. It is not just the United States that understands this. In Jordan, we are also directing more of our attention eastward, which makes sense because we, along with much of the Middle East, are located in West Asia. Economic, political and military centers of gravity are clearly changing. Still, America does have a duty to this region and to the Arab world in general. The euphoria generated by the "Arab awakening" cannot hide the fact that the Middle East is as much of a mess as it ever was. In 2009, President Obama spoke in Cairo of how "while America in the past has focused on oil and gas in this part of the world, we now seek a broader engagement." Such engagement, which we all hope for, cannot be sustained by pivoting.

American military disengagement from Iraq and Afghanistan is welcomed within the Arab world. But other types of U.S. engagement are still needed. The desire by many Middle Eastern countries for greater self-determination is also qualified by an obvious question: After a decade of war and continued stalemate in the peace process, will America abandon this region and leave it to pick up the pieces? A sense of mission fatigue in Washington has meant that the lessons of history are being overlooked. Until there is peace between Israel and Palestine, this area of the world will continue to dominate the desks and the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. There are currently four central powers in the Middle East: Israel, Iran, Turkey and the U.S. Not one of those powers is Arab. Any substantive pulling back by America is likely to create a power vacuum. In a region where intermediaries are important, this will have consequences. For instance, there is no security forum in the Middle East in which Iran and Saudi Arabia sit at the same

table. Beyond the question of Iran, there is growing potential for the movement of nuclear fissile material, including weaponization technology, and biological agents, across the Middle East and North Africa. The Nuclear Threat Initiative, of which I am a board member, has concluded that 32 countries possess 1 kilogram or more of weapons-usable nuclear material. If that material ends up being illicitly moved anywhere, it is likely to end up here. West Asia and North Africa has long been a laboratory for every kind of weapon. Recent upheavals have made borders far more porous: We have seen this in Syria, in Sinai and across the Sahel region, where a huge cache of weapons systems have crossed the border from Libya. The Middle East has the largest number of stateless and internally displaced peoples in the world, and recent upheavals have caused these numbers to surge. The U.N. estimates that well over 1 million people fled Libya to border countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Niger and Chad. Archipelagoes of the dispossessed exist throughout the region. Locking down weapons-usable material and the weapons-based underground economy has never been more difficult. The potential for nuclear terrorism within the region has never been greater. The United States would not be wise to pivot too far or too fast. There is too much that has been left undone. America can help in three ways. First by focusing on the resourcefulness of the people of this region rather than the resources of their governments. The Middle East is the most militarized region of the world, yet nowhere else is insecurity such a physical and psychological fact of life. Programs that support start-up culture, creative enterprises and local good governance, or which provide training opportunities and micro-loans, actively combat anti-Western propaganda, promote social cohesion and

propagate "human security." People with hopes and opportunities do not become terrorists. The second thing America can do is foster better relations between states within the region. The frameworks that connect West Asia and North Africa are ad hoc and personalized to an excessive degree. A lack of regional institutions means that when tensions rise, there is no release valve, and conflict is made all the more likely. At present no body exists to coordinate water and energy policy between countries, despite the fact these resources are shared, take no account of national boundaries and are quickly depleting. There is no Council for Security and Cooperation in the region. Thirdly and finally, America can renew its legacy in the Middle East, and its image in the world, by bringing about a firm, just and equitable settlement to the peace process. The move to project American leadership in the Asia-Pacific region through economic growth, regional security and enduring values, in the words of Hillary Clinton, is broadly based on the three elements of the 1975 Helsinki Act: security, economic and technical cooperation, and human rights. Taken together, they form the foundation of a promising new blueprint for relations not just with the Asia-Pacific region but with West Asia too.

Hassan Bin Talal, a member of Jordan's royal family.

Article 5.

Foreign Policy

The New Islamists

Olivier Roy

April 16, 2012 -- The following is an excerpt from the book The Islamists Are Coming: Who They Really Are, which will be released on April 18 by the U.S. Institute of Peace and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

The longstanding debate over whether Islam and democracy can coexist has reached a stunning turning point. Since the Arab uprisings began in late 2010, political Islam and democracy have become increasingly interdependent. The debate over whether they are compatible is now virtually obsolete. Neither can now survive without the other.

In Middle Eastern countries undergoing political transitions, the only way for Islamists to maintain their legitimacy is through elections. Their own political culture may still not be democratic, but they are now defined by the new political landscape and forced in turn to redefine themselves -- much as the Roman Catholic Church ended up accepting democratic institutions even as its own practices remained oligarchic.

At the same time, democracy will not set down roots in Arab countries in transition without including mainstream Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Ennahda in Tunisia, or Islah in Yemen. The so-called Arab Spring cleared the way for the Islamists. And even if many Islamists do not share the democratic culture of the demonstrators, the Islamists have to take into account the new playing field the demonstrations created.

The debate over Islam and democracy used to be a chicken-and-egg issue: Which came first? Democracy has certainly not been

at the core of Islamist ideology. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has historically been strictly centralized and obedient to a supreme guide, who rules for life. And Islam has certainly not been factored into promotion of secular democracy. Indeed, skeptics long argued that the two forces were even anathema to each other.

But the outside world wrongly assumed that Islam would first have to experience a religious reformation before its followers could embark on political democratization -- replicating the Christian experience when the Protestant Reformation gave birth to the Enlightenment and then modern democracy. In fact, however, liberal Muslim intellectuals had little impact in either inspiring or directing the Arab uprisings. The original protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square referred to democracy as a universal concept, not to any sort of Islamic democracy.

The development of both political Islam and democracy now appears to go hand-in-hand, albeit not at the same pace. The new political scene is transforming the Islamists as much as the Islamists are transforming the political scene.

Today, the question of Islam's compatibility with democracy does not center on theological issues, but rather on the concrete way believers recast their faith in a rapidly changing political environment. Liberal or fundamentalist, the new forms of religiosity are individualistic and more in tune with the democratic ethos.

The Evolution

When Islamism gained ground during the 1970s and 1980s, it was initially dominated by revolutionary movements and radical

tactics. Over the next 30 years, however, the religious revival in Arab societies diversified, and social shifts reined in radicalism. The toll of death and destruction that radical Islamism left in its wake also diverted interest in militancy.

Even the proliferation of media free from overbearing state control played a role. In the mid-1990s, Al-Jazeera became the first independent satellite television station in the Arab world. Within a generation, there were more than 500 such stations. Many offered a wide range of religious programming -- from traditional sheikhs to liberal Muslim thinkers -- which in turn introduced the idea of diversity. Suddenly, there was no single truth in a religion that has preached one path to God for 14 centuries.

Islamists also changed both through victory and defeat -- or a combination. Shiite Islamists won a political victory in Iran's 1979 revolution, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini rose to power. But three decades later, the world's only modern theocracy was increasingly ostracized by the world, leading many Islamists to ask, "What went wrong?"

In Algeria, Sunni Islamists were pushed aside in a military coup on the eve of an election victory in 1992. The party was banned, its leaders imprisoned. A more militant faction then took on the military, and more than 100,000 people were killed in a decade-long civil war. The bloody aftermath of the Arab world's first democratic election had a ripple effect on the calculations of Islamist groups across the region.

As a result of their experience with the power of government repression, Islamists increasingly compromised to get in, or stay

in, the political game. In Egypt, the Muslim Brothers ran for parliament whenever allowed, often making tactical alliances with secular parties. In Kuwait and Morocco, Islamists abided by the political rules whenever they ran for parliament, even when it meant embracing those countries' monarchies.

Morocco's Justice and Development Party recognized the sacred dimension of the king in order to participate in elections, while Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood publicly supports the king despite growing discontent among the Arab Bedouin tribes.

A generation of Islamic activists forced into exile also played a major role in redirecting their movements. Most leaders or members ended up spending more time in Western countries rather than Islamic nations, where they came into contact with other secular and liberal dissidents as well as non-government organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Freedom House. These new connections facilitated the flow of ideas, and their movements' evolution.

In the 1990s, exiled activists increasingly framed their agendas in terms of democracy and human rights. They acknowledged that simplistic slogans like "Islam is the solution" were not enough to build programs or coalitions capable of removing dictators. Rachid Ghannouchi, co-founder of Tunisia's Ennahda Party, concluded almost 20 years before the Arab uprisings that democracy was a better tool to fight dictatorships than the call for either jihad or sharia.

The Social Revolution

Islamists have changed because society has changed too. The rise of Islamists has reflected the social and cultural revolutions within Muslim societies as much as a political revolution.

A new generation has entered the political space, especially in the major cities. It is the generation of Tahrir Square, the epicenter of Egypt's uprising against Hosni Mubarak. When the uprisings began, two-thirds of the Arab world's 300 million people were under the age of 30. They are better educated and more connected with the outside world than any previous generation. Many speak or understand a foreign language. The females are often as ambitious as their male counterparts. Both genders eagerly question and debate. Most are able to identify and even shrug off propaganda.

The shift does not necessarily mean the baby-boom generation is more liberal or more secular than their parents. Many Arab baby boomers are attracted by new forms of religiosity that stress individual choice, direct relations with God, self-realization, and self-esteem. But even when they join Islamic movements, they bring along their critical approach and reluctance to blindly follow an aging leadership.

The transformation is visible even among young Egyptian Salafis, followers of a puritanical strain of Islam that emphasizes a return to early Islamic practices. They may wear baggy trousers and long white shirts in imitation of the Prophet Mohammed. But they also often wear shiny sunglasses and sport shoes. They are part of a global culture.

For decades, the Salafis opposed participation in politics. But after the uprisings, they completely reversed course. They jumped into politics, hastily registering as political parties. At universities, clubs of young Salafis -- including females -- have joined public debate forums.

The influence of the current baby-boom generation will be enduring. Their numbers are likely to dominate for much of their lives -- potentially another 30 to 40 years -- because the fertility rate has plummeted almost everywhere in the Arab world since their birth.

The Three Camps

During the centuries-old debate about Islam and democracy, Muslim religious scholars and intellectuals fell into three broad camps.

The first camp rejects both democracy and secularism as Western concepts that are not even worth refuting. In this fundamentalist view, participating even in everyday politics, such as joining a political party or voting, is haram, or religiously forbidden. This has been the position of the Wahhabi clerics in Saudi Arabia, the Taliban in Afghanistan and, for decades, the various Salafi schools across the Arab world.

The second camp claims that returning to the "true tenets" of Islam will create the best kind of democracy. In this conservative view, the faithful may deliberate to understand the true path, but the idea that religion is the ultimate truth is not negotiable. These Islamists invoke the concept of tawhid, or the oneness, uniqueness and sovereignty of God, which can never be replaced by the will of the people.

The second camp also invokes Muslim practices to claim modern political ideology meets the basic requirements of democracy. For example, it often points to the shura or advisory council, where ideas were debated before submitting proposals to the leader --as the equivalent of a parliament.

The third camp advocates ijtiḥād, or reinterpreting Islam to make it compatible with the universal concept of democracy. This position is more common among lay intellectuals than among clerics. But the opening up the doors of ijtiḥād, which conservative scholars had believed were closed in the Middle Ages, has already produced its own spectrum of ideas, not all in agreement.

The Islamist reformers often have a larger audience in the West than in their own countries -- and not just because of censorship and harassment. Some are deemed to be too intellectual, too abstract, or tied to an artificial theology. Their philosophical approach is disconnected from popular religious practices and the teachings at most madrasas, or religious schools.

The Future

The new Islamist brand will increasingly mix technocratic modernism and conservative values. The movements that have entered the political mainstream cannot now afford to turn their backs on multiparty politics for fear of alienating a significant portion of the electorate that wants stability and peace, not revolution.

But in countries undergoing transitions, the Islamists will face a tough balancing act. In Egypt, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood cannot cede its conviction that Islam is all-encompassing. Yet it risks losing popular support unless it can also reconcile Islam with good governance and human rights.

To do that, the Muslim Brothers may have to translate Islamic norms into more universal conservative values -- such as limiting the sale of alcohol in a manner more similar to Utah's

rules than to Saudi laws, and promoting "family values" instead of imposing sharia norms on women.

Many Islamist movements still do not share the democratic culture of the uprisings. But given their own demographics and the wider constituency they seek, they will increasingly have to take into account the new political playing field created by the demonstrations -- even within their own movements.

The exercise of power can actually have a debilitating effect on ideological parties. And for all their recent political success, Islamists also face a set of constraints: They do not control the armed forces. Their societies are more educated and sophisticated in their worldviews, and more willing to actively express their opinions than in years past. Women are increasingly prominent players, a fact reflected in their growing numbers in universities.

Ironically, elected Islamists may face opposition from the clergy. Among Sunnis, Islamists usually do not control the religious institutions. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood does not control Al Azhar University, the Islamic world's oldest educational institution dating back more than a millennium. The Brothers may have won a plurality in parliament, but none of them is authorized to say what is or is not Islamic without being challenged by a wide range of other religious actors, from clerics to university scholars.

The biggest constraint on Islamists, however, may be economic realities. Focusing simply on sharia will not spawn economic development, and could easily deter foreign investment and tourism. The labor force is outspoken and does not want to be

forgotten, but economic globalization requires sensitivity to international pressures too. The newly elected Islamists face political rejection if they do not deliver the economic goods.

Israel is still unpopular and anti-Western xenophobia has visibly grown, but Islamist movements will need more than these old issues to sustain their rise to power. The Arab uprisings have shifted the battle lines in the Middle East, and Islamists will find it harder to play on the Arab-Israeli conflict or tensions with the international community.

At the moment, the most dangerous divide is persistent tensions between Sunnis and Shiites. The differences are symbolized by deepening political fault lines between the Sunni religious monarchy in Saudi Arabia and Iran's Shiite theocracy, but they ripple across the region -- from the tiny archipelago of Bahrain to strategically located Syria.

Just as Islamism is redefining the region's politics, Islamic politics and sectarian differences are redefining its conflicts.

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The National Interest

The New Russian Empire

Nikolas K. Gvosdev

April 16, 2012 -- In his last major address as Russia's prime minister before retaking the presidency, Vladimir Putin outlined "five priorities" for his third presidential term. His fifth task is to boost cooperation across the Eurasian space, enhancing Russia's global position by having it lead a new effort towards integrating the states of the former Soviet Union. Speaking before the Duma last Wednesday, Putin said, "Creation of a common economic space is the most important event in post-Soviet space since the collapse of the Soviet Union."

Russia is already in a customs union with Kazakhstan and Belarus, and it has long sought to bring Ukraine into the common economic space. Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization may help to remove some of the barriers that impeded Ukraine's participation. In addition, at the recent summit meeting of the Eurasian Economic Community in Moscow, the countries that make up the customs union, as well as the other Central Asian states that are members, committed to completing work on a proposed Eurasian Union treaty by 2015.

Throughout his time as president and prime minister, Putin has had a clear "Eurasian vision," seeing Russia as the metropolitan center of the region. With the eastward expansion of Euro-

Atlantic institutions sputtering to a close, and with China still primarily focused on South and East Asia, Moscow feels it has the window to begin consolidating a new Eurasia. Rather than have the territory of the former Soviet Union effectively "partitioned" into European and Asian "spheres of influence," Russia instead can reemerge as a leading global power by creating a new bloc of states that will balance the European Union in the West and a Chinese-led Asia in the East.

USSR Reborn?

These aspirations, however, have always caused concern. Is Putin, who famously described the collapse of the Soviet Union as a geopolitical catastrophe, trying to put the USSR back together again? Putin himself declared in his Duma speech that the "post-Soviet period" is over. Given the rising demands of an increasingly restive Russian middle class, Putin has no desire to once again drain resources away trying to maintain a single, unified state. There is little interest in paying for education and health-care expenses for Central Asians or Caucasians.

But Putin would like to see more of the old Soviet (and Imperial-era) linkages restored, with trade, resources and labor flowing between Russia and its neighbors. This would keep Moscow as the economic center of the area, rather than seeing a Central Asia more tightly connected to South Asia and the western parts of the old Soviet Union pulled even more into the European orbit. A Russian-led regional economic order keeps the ruble as the regional currency and Russian as the de facto business language of the area, and it allows for more horizontal and vertical integration, especially between Russian, Kazakhstani and Ukrainian firms.

Creating such economic linkages, in turn, creates political ties that make it less likely Russia's neighbors would be able to join blocs or groups that exclude Russia. Assessing the political ramifications of the Eurasian Union project, Azamat Seimov points out:

“The realization of the idea of Eurasian Union is the centerpiece of Putin's master plan to unite the efforts of the former Soviet republics to strengthen the Russian position in the geopolitical competition with the U.S., EU and China. . . . Setting the 2015 as the deadline for the formation of the [Eurasian Union], is possibly associated with the confidence of Moscow that by that time the United States will turn their attention to the Eurasia again, since towards that deadline Washington will be relieved from its commitments in Iraq and have significantly reduced the number of troops in Afghanistan, whereas the wave of "colored revolutions" in the Arab world will pass away. Therefore, by 2015, Washington will have both the military and diplomatic resources available to turn the attention to the Eurasian region. In addition, by that time the US will have the ballistic missile defense sites ready for deployment in Central Europe.”

So Putin seems interested in presenting the world with a fait accompli—while Europe is consumed by its own economic troubles, while the U.S. remains bogged down in the Middle East and while China focuses on its domestic transition, he will move ahead with setting the Eurasian Union in motion.

Euraskepticism

This process is not so automatic. Many Eurasian states want closer economic relations with Russia and would be interested in

the benefits Russia is prepared to offer—among them access to lower-cost energy and the ability to "export" their surplus labor force to Russia (both to decrease tension at home and to benefit from a steady stream of remittances). But Russia's neighbors are not so anxious to give up their sovereignty.

Belarus's president Alexander Lukashenko may continue to depend on Russia, but that has not dimmed his enthusiasm for pushing for decision-making structures within any proposed Eurasian Union that would firmly defend national sovereignty. (And he and other hesitant Eurasian leaders have plenty of ammunition provided by the Euroskeptics in the neighboring EU). At the recent summit, Lukashenko expressed his opposition to any "Union"-level decision making that could impose itself on the member states; decisions taken by any Eurasian Union ought to be ratified by the national parliaments, and national governments should have the ability to opt out of Union decisions.

Lukashenko's version of "Euraskepticism" is quietly shared by other regional leaders. They may be prepared to make some concessions to Russia but not to sign away their hard-won independence. Russia, for its part, does not want to become the Eurasian equivalent of Germany—the regional checkbook that underwrites the integration process and in turn pays the bills for the smaller states.

Putin has done the easy part: he has signaled his intent to create a Eurasian Union. Bringing it to fruition, however, may prove to be a far harder challenge than he expected.

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Article 7.

NYT

Echoes of the End of the Raj

Kwasi Kwarteng

April 16, 2012 -- THE Arab Spring, the threat of Iran as an emerging nuclear power, the continuing violence in Syria and the American reluctance to get involved there have all signaled the weakness, if not the end, of America's role as a world policeman. President Obama himself said in a speech last year: "America cannot use our military wherever repression occurs."

America's position today reminds me of Britain's situation in 1945. Deep in debt and committed to building its National Health Service and other accouterments of the welfare state, Britain no longer could afford to run an empire.

Moreover, Britain, which so proudly ruled the waves a generation ago, was tired; it lacked the willpower to pursue its imperial destiny. America's role as an imperialist is even more fragile, as it never had Britain's self-confident faith in its own imperial destiny. Americans have always been ambivalent about the role of global hegemon.

Today, American retreat is not motivated by traditional

isolationism, but by practical necessity. Like post-World War II Britain, contemporary America no longer has the financial resources to maintain an empire — one which, in America’s case, was pursued only halfheartedly in the first place. Deficits and debt have been more damaging to dreams of empire than any genuine shift in ideology.

My own parents grew up in the Gold Coast of Africa, as British power ebbed, so I feel I have a direct connection with this phenomenon of collapsing empires. The Gold Coast, of course, became Ghana in 1957, the year after the Suez crisis. Today I am a member of Parliament, so I have a double perspective on empire.

Much as the Second World War has been identified as the end of the British Empire, future historians may well see the financial crisis of 2008 as the end of the American empire. Yet, the retreat of American power, particularly in the Middle East, has potentially left the world considerably more unstable and uncertain.

America is a much smaller figure than the colossus that seemed to bestride the world in 1989, when an article titled “The End of History?” could, paradox though it was, be taken seriously.

The suspicion has always lingered that America was a less than enthusiastic imperial power. It never sought to administer foreign lands directly and indefinitely, even though the presence of American bases in Japan, Germany, Britain and, more lately, in Saudi Arabia did look like soft imperialism.

During the cold war, America saw itself as the leader of the “free world,” a claim to moral leadership as bold as that of any empire

in history. Its dominion relied on the force of alliance, direct assistance and social and economic example, rather than occupation. Only in the last 10 years has America intervened militarily to decide who rules in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. This assumption of responsibility as a global policeman was nothing if not the act of an empire. Yet Americans were always reluctant to admit this.

It was striking that, during this period, neoconservatives espoused a more overt imperialism. American reluctance to wield the sword of Britannia was the core of their irritation at their country's foreign policy. They exhorted the United States, like a slow, sluggish pupil, to play a role for which it had no natural inclination.

A hesitancy to get involved in the messy details of international politics has been a feature of the American body politic since independence. George Washington's famous admonition to "avoid foreign entanglements" is one of history's most notorious false quotations — a three-word compression of a more subtle thought about avoiding Europe's squabbles. Nowhere, in fact, does that phrase appear in the great Farewell Address of 1796. Yet subsequent leaders have followed the accepted version of Washington's remarks. Later, Woodrow Wilson preached self-determination abroad, and the Vietnam War taught Americans that their powers were limited. Today, the neoconservatives seem like quaint figures from a past that many Americans would rather forget. In 23 years we have gone from the "end of history," a world in which liberal capitalism and democracy seemed utterly dominant, to President Obama's rather limp declaration about the limits on what America can do.

The financial crisis and mounting indebtedness have finally led to an end to American imperial behavior. It is unlikely, even if the economy recovers, that the country will enter campaigns with the buoyancy and naïveté of its invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The history of the British Empire suggests that any form of empire is misguided. First, empire is too expensive. The rise of China and the emerging world has meant that, even if America rebounds, its economy's relative size will be smaller. Surely it will not be as preponderant as it was in 1945 and 1989. This alone makes multilateral action more likely than solitary leadership.

Second, as the British discovered, maintaining an empire requires too many calculations and too much knowledge — experience, even — for any one power in today's world even to attempt it.

Iraq and Afghanistan should have taught America those lessons.

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