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Article 1.

NYT

Syria Is Iraq

Thomas L. Friedman

July 24, 2012 -- Lord knows I am rooting for the opposition forces in Syria to quickly prevail on their own and turn out to be as democratically inclined as we hope. But the chances of this best-of-all-possible outcomes is low. That's because Syria is a lot like Iraq. Indeed, Syria is Iraq's twin — a multisectarian, minority-ruled dictatorship that was held together by an iron fist under Baathist ideology. And, for me, the lesson of Iraq is quite simple: You can't go from Saddam to Switzerland without getting stuck in Hobbes — a war of all against all — unless you have a well-armed external midwife, whom everyone on the ground both fears and trusts to manage the transition. In Iraq, that was America. The kind of low-cost, remote-control, U.S./NATO midwifery that ousted Qaddafi and gave birth to a new Libya is not likely to be repeated in Syria. Syria is harder. Syria is Iraq. And Iraq was such a bitter experience for America that we prefer never to speak of it again. But Iraq is relevant here. The only reason Iraq has any chance for a decent outcome today is because America was on the ground with tens of thousands of troops to act as that

well-armed midwife, reasonably trusted and certainly feared by all sides, to manage Iraq's transition to more consensual politics. My gut tells me that Syria will require the same to have the same chance.

But because I absolutely would not advocate U.S. intervention on the ground in Syria or anywhere in the Arab world again — and the U.S. public would not support it — I find myself hoping my analysis is wrong and that Syrians will surprise us by finding their own way, with just arms and diplomatic assistance, to a better political future. I know columnists are supposed to pound the table and declaim what is necessary. But when you believe that what is necessary, an outside midwife for Syria, is impossible, you need to say so. I think those who have been advocating a more activist U.S. intervention in Syria — and excoriating President Obama for not leading that — are not being realistic about what it would take to create a decent outcome.

Why? In the Middle East, the alternative to bad is not always good. It can be worse. I am awed at the bravery of those Syrian rebels who started this uprising, peacefully, without any arms, against a regime that plays by what I call Hama Rules, which are no rules at all. The Assad regime deliberately killed demonstrators to turn this conflict into a sectarian struggle between the ruling minority Alawite sect, led by the Assad clan, and the country's majority of Sunni Muslims. That's why the opposite of the Assad dictatorship could be the breakup of Syria — as the Alawites retreat to their coastal redoubt — and a

permanent civil war.

There are two things that could divert us from that outcome. One is the Iraq alternative, where America went in and decapitated the Saddam regime, occupied the country and forcibly changed it from a minority Sunni-led dictatorship to a majority Shiite-led democracy. Because of both U.S. incompetence and the nature of Iraq, this U.S. intervention triggered a civil war in which all the parties in Iraq — Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds — tested the new balance of power, inflicting enormous casualties on each other and leading, tragically, to ethnic cleansing that rearranged the country into more homogeneous blocks of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds.

But the U.S. presence in Iraq contained that civil war and ethnic cleansing from spreading to neighboring states. And once that civil war burned itself out — and all sides were exhausted and more separated — the U.S. successfully brokered a new constitution and power-sharing deal in Iraq, with the Shiites enjoying majority rule, the Sunnis out of power but not powerless, and the Kurds securing semi-autonomy. The cost of this transition in lives and money was huge, and even today Iraq is not a stable or healthy democracy. But it has a chance, and it's now up to Iraqis.

Since it is highly unlikely that an armed, feared and trusted midwife will dare enter the fray in Syria, the rebels on the ground there will have to do it themselves. Given Syria's fractured society, that will not be easy — unless there is a surprise. A surprise

would be the disparate Syrian opposition groups congealing into a united political front — maybe with the help of U.S., Turkish and Saudi intelligence officers on the ground — and this new front reaching out to moderate Alawites and Christians who supported the Assads out of fear and agreeing to build a new order together that protects majority and minority rights. It would be wonderful to see the tyrannical Assad- Russia-Iran-Hezbollah axis replaced by a democratizing Syria, not a chaotic Syria. But color me dubious. The 20 percent of Syrians who are pro-Assad Alawites or Christians will be terrified of the new Sunni Muslim majority, with its Muslim Brotherhood component, and this Sunni Muslim majority has suffered such brutality from this regime that reconciliation will be difficult, especially with each passing day of bloodshed. Without an external midwife or a Syrian Mandela, the fires of conflict could burn for a long time. I hope I am surprised.

Article 2.

Stratfor

Consequences of the Fall of Syrian Regime

George Friedman

July 24, 2012-- We have entered the endgame in Syria. That doesn't mean that we have reached the end by any means, but it does mean that the precondition has been met for the fall of the regime of Syrian

President Bashar al Assad. We have argued that so long as the military and security apparatus remain intact and effective, the regime could endure. Although they continue to function, neither appears intact any longer; their control of key areas such as Damascus and Aleppo is in doubt, and the reliability of their personnel, given defections, is no longer certain. We had thought that there was a reasonable chance of the al Assad regime surviving completely. That is no longer the case. At a certain point -- in our view, after the defection of a Syrian pilot June 21 and then the defection of the Tlass clan -- key members of the regime began to recalculate the probability of survival and their interests. The regime has not unraveled, but it is unraveling. The speculation over al Assad's whereabouts and heavy fighting in Damascus is simply part of the regime's problems. Rumors, whether true or not, create uncertainty that the regime cannot afford right now. The outcome is unclear. On the one hand, a new regime might emerge that could exercise control. On the other hand, Syria could collapse into a Lebanon situation in which it disintegrates into regions held by various factions, with no effective central government.

The Russian and Chinese Strategy

The geopolitical picture is somewhat clearer than the internal political picture. Whatever else happens, it is unlikely that al Assad will be able to return to unchallenged rule. The United States, France and other European countries have opposed his regime. Russia, China and Iran have supported it, each for

different reasons. The Russians opposed the West's calls to intervene, which were grounded on human rights concerns, fearing that the proposed intervention was simply a subterfuge to extend Western power and that it would be used against them. The Chinese also supported the Syrians, in part for these same reasons. Both Moscow and Beijing hoped to avoid legitimizing Western pressure based on human rights considerations -- something they had each faced at one time or another. In addition, Russia and China wanted the United States in particular focused on the Middle East rather than on them. They would not have minded a military intervention that would have bogged down the United States, but the United States declined to give that to them.

But the Russian and Chinese game was subtler than that. It focused on Iran. As we have argued, if the al Assad regime were to survive and were to be isolated from the West, it would be primarily dependent on Iran, its main patron. Iran had supplied trainers, special operations troops, supplies and money to sustain the regime. For Iran, the events in Syria represented a tremendous opportunity. Iran already held a powerful position in Iraq, not quite dominating it but heavily influencing it. If the al Assad regime survived and had Iranian support to thank for its survival, Syria would become even more dependent on Iran than was Iraq. This would shore up the Iranian position in Iraq, but more important, it would have created an Iranian sphere of influence stretching from western Afghanistan to Lebanon, where Hezbollah is

an Iranian ally.

The Russians and Chinese clearly understood that if this had happened, the United States would have had an intense interest in undermining the Iranian sphere of influence -- and would have had to devote massive resources to doing so. Russia and China benefitted greatly in the post-9/11 world, when the United States was obsessed with the Islamic world and had little interest or resources to devote to China and Russia. With the end of the Afghanistan war looming, this respite seemed likely to end. Underwriting Iranian hegemony over a region that would inevitably draw the United States' attention was a low-cost, high-return strategy.

The Chinese primarily provided political cover, keeping the Russians from having to operate alone diplomatically. They devoted no resources to the Syrian conflict but did continue to oppose sanctions against Iran and provided trade opportunities for Iran. The Russians made a much larger commitment, providing material and political support to the al Assad regime.

It seems the Russians began calculating the end for the regime some time ago. Russia continued to deliver ammunition and other supplies to Syria but pulled back on a delivery of helicopters. Several attempts to deliver the helicopters "failed" when British insurers of the ship pulled coverage. That was the reason the Russians gave for not delivering the helicopters, but obviously the Russians could have insured the ship themselves. They were backing off from supporting al

Assad, their intelligence indicating trouble in Damascus. In the last few days the Russians have moved to the point where they had their ambassador to France suggest that the time had come for al Assad to leave -- then, of course, he denied having made the statement.

A Strategic Blow to Iran

As the Russians withdraw support, Iran is now left extremely exposed. There had been a sense of inevitability in Iran's rise in the region, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula. The decline of al Assad's regime is a strategic blow to the Iranians in two ways. First, the wide-reaching sphere of influence they were creating clearly won't happen now. Second, Iran will rapidly move from being an ascendant power to a power on the defensive. The place where this will become most apparent is in Iraq. For Iran, Iraq represents a fundamental national security interest. Having fought a bloody war with Iraq in the 1980s, the Iranians have an overriding interest in assuring that Iraq remains at least neutral and preferably pro-Iranian. While Iran was ascendant, Iraqi politicians felt that they had to be accommodating. However, in the same way that Syrian generals had to recalculate their positions, Iraqi politicians have to do the same. With sanctions -- whatever their effectiveness -- being imposed on Iran, and with Iran's position in Syria unraveling, the psychology in Iraq might change. This is particularly the case because of intensifying Turkish interest in Iraq. In recent days the Turks have announced plans for pipelines in Iraq to oil fields in

the south and in the north. Turkish economic activity is intensifying. Turkey is the only regional power that can challenge Iran militarily. It uses that power against the Kurds in Iraq. But more to the point, if a country builds a pipeline, it must ensure access to it, either politically or militarily. Turkey does not want to militarily involve itself in Iraq, but it does want political influence to guarantee its interests. Thus, just as the Iranians are in retreat, the Turks have an interest in, if not supplanting them, certainly supplementing them.

The pressure on Iran is now intense, and it will be interesting to see the political consequences. There was consensus on the Syrian strategy, but with failure of the strategy, that consensus dissolves. This will have an impact inside of Iran, possibly even more than the sanctions. Governments have trouble managing reversals.

Other Consequences

From the American point of view, al Assad's decline opens two opportunities. First, its policy of no direct military intervention but unremitting political and, to a lesser extent, economic pressure appears to be working in this instance. More precisely, even if it had no effect, it will appear that it did, which will enhance the ability of the United States to influence events in other countries without actually having to intervene. Second, the current situation opens the door for a genuine balance of power in the region that does not require constant American intervention. One of the consequences of the events in Syria is that Turkey has

had to reconsider its policy toward countries on its periphery. In the case of Iraq, Turkey has an interest in suppressing the Kurdistan Workers' Party militants who have taken refuge there and defending oil and other economic interests. Turkey's strategy is moving from avoiding all confrontations to avoiding major military commitments while pursuing its political interests. In the end, that means that Turkey will begin moving into a position of balancing Iran for its own interests in Iraq. This relieves the United States of the burden of containing Iran. We continue to regard the Iranian sphere of influence as a greater threat to American and regional interests than Iran's nuclear program. The decline of al Assad solves the major problem. It also increases the sense of vulnerability in Iran. Depending on how close they are to creating a deliverable nuclear weapon -- and our view is that they are not close -- the Iranians may feel it necessary to moderate their position. A major loser in this is Israel. Israel had maintained a clear understanding with the al Assad regime. If the al Assad regime restrained Hezbollah, Israel would have no objection to al Assad's dominating Lebanon. That agreement has frayed since the United States pushed al Assad's influence out of Lebanon in 2006. Nevertheless, the Israelis preferred al Assad to the Sunnis -- until it appeared that the Iranians would dominate Syria. But the possibility of either an Islamist regime in Damascus or, more likely, Lebanese-style instability cannot please the Israelis. They are already experiencing jihadist threats in Sinai. The idea of

having similar problems in Syria, where the other side of the border is the Galilee rather than the Negev, must make them nervous.

But perhaps the most important losers will be Russia and China. Russia, like Iran, has suffered a significant setback in its foreign policy that will have psychological consequences. The situation in Syria has halted the foreign-policy momentum the Russians had built up. But more important, the Russian and Chinese hope has been that the United States would continue to treat them as secondary issues while it focused on the Middle East. The decline of al Assad and the resulting dynamic in the region increases the possibility that the United States can disengage from the region. This is not something the Russians or Chinese want, but in the end, they did not have the power to create the outcome in Syria that they had wanted.

The strategy of the dominant power is to encourage a balance of power that contains threats without requiring direct intervention. This was the British strategy, but it has not been one that the United States has managed well. After the jihadist wars, there is a maturation under way in U.S. strategy. That means allowing the intrinsic dynamic in the region to work, intervening only as the final recourse. The events in Syria appear to be simply about the survival of the al Assad regime. But they have far greater significance in terms of limiting Iranian power, creating a local balance of power and freeing the United States to focus on global issues, including Russia and China.

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Article 3.

TIME

Syria: Five Syria Nightmares

Tony Karon

July 24, 2012 --

1. The Sectarian Bloodbath Continues, or Intensifies

Renewed Arab offers of safe passage for President Bashar Assad if he agrees to abdicate miss the point: his isn't simply a personality-cult regime; it survives because many thousands of Syrians remain willing to kill for Assad — or at least, to hold the rebellion at bay. Assad runs a system of minority rule that has empowered the Alawite minority, supported by Christians, Druze and other minorities and an elite from within the Sunni majority. And the reason the regime's core forces remain intact, able and willing to fight on despite the defection of many thousands of Sunni conscripts and even senior officers, is fear of their fate if the rebellion triumphs. The 18 months of violence that has killed as many as 19,000 Syrians and

seen many thousands more wounded, tortured, raped and displaced may have helped make protracted violent retribution a self-fulfilling prophecy. That's why even if Assad were willing to go — and there's no sign that he is — those who have fought for his regime and now feel their backs to the wall are likely to remain armed, organized and willing to defend their turf at all costs. But a triumphant Sunni rebellion that has buried many thousands of “martyrs” would not tolerate armed enclaves of regime supporters in its midst. It's quite conceivable that a messy sectarian war will rage long after Assad loses meaningful control of Syria as a nation-state. The obvious solution, in the minds of U.S. officials, is for the opposition to reach out and reassure Alawites, Christians and other minorities of their place in a post-Assad future. Far easier said than done. For one thing, there is no single credible political leadership center that speaks for the rebellion — and the fact that this condition persists some 18 months into the uprising is a disturbing signal of prospects for stability after Assad goes. Western and Arab powers have spent more than a year trying to turn the exile-based Syrian National Council into a legitimate alternative national leadership, to no avail. It remains divided and ineffectual, and lacks legitimacy among popular local opposition organizations on the ground. Nor does the SNC have any authority over the Free Syrian Army — itself a catch-all term for a wide array of localized military structures — or other insurgent groups, many of them openly sectarian. The absence of a coherent

political leadership over the rebel militias raises the specter of chaos after Assad goes — exacerbated by the likelihood that the pro-regime Shabiha militias, whose thugs have the most to fear, would fight on, independent of central political leadership of their own. And the fact that unemployment among fighting-age Syrians stands at 58% doesn't bode well for the prospects of demobilizing the armed formations that have waged the civil war. Foreign troops may be needed on the ground not to bring down Assad but to stop the violence after he is gone. But there are unlikely to be many takers for such a thankless mission. U.S. officials claim that progress had been made in getting exiles to agree broadly on terms of a transition. Given the status of the exile groups, that may not be especially reassuring. "The connections between the opposition and the Free Syrian Army are still tenuous, but they're getting better," a State Department official told McClatchy. "If we can get Assad and his cronies out, that will at least create an atmosphere to have a dialogue. That can't happen now." The problem, of course, is that the dialogue that begins after Assad goes could be conducted with bombs and bullets.

2. Jihadists Fill the Post-Assad Vacuum

The presence of an al-Qaeda-inspired element in the Syrian rebellion has long been established — U.S. intelligence concluded that some of the spectacular suicide bombings early on in Damascus were the work of such groups. And in response to a question in the German Parliament last week, it was revealed that

Germany's intelligence service estimates that about 90 bombings in Syria over the past six months were the work of "organizations that are close to al-Qaeda or jihadist groups." Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in February called on supporters in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq to join the fight against Assad, and a number seem to have responded, with opportunities expanding as the Syrian state frays at the edges. Last weekend, AFP reported that a border crossing near Turkey had been taken over by some 150 foreign fighters proclaiming themselves loyal to al-Qaeda. Libya and Yemen are recent examples of how the collapse of an authoritarian political order presents opportunities for jihadists to revive their fortunes, and they'll try to do the same in Syria. They're unlikely to take control of the rebellion, if the Iraqi experience is any example. By a number of accounts from on the ground, Sunni communities that have rebelled against the regime have resisted efforts by more ideologically extreme foreign fighters to impose themselves. Syria has a well-established national Islamist tradition of its own that is outside of al-Qaeda and unlikely to be drawn into that orbit — more akin to the mainstream Sunni insurgency in neighboring Iraq, with which the Sunni tribes of southeastern Syria are well integrated. Today the names, slogans and pronouncements of even many of the fighting units operating under the rubric of the Free Syrian Army appear to have an Islamist, and increasingly sectarian, hue. Even if foreign fighters fail to gain traction, the mainstream Sunni insurgency will likely have a strong Islamist component, which

history suggests will grow rather than ebb as long as the fighting persists. The U.S. has deployed the CIA to southern Turkey to vet rebel groups receiving outside military assistance, hoping to favor those more palatable to Western preferences. The Administration insists it is not providing weapons to Syrian rebels, but it is helping with intelligence and other military-support functions. The arming and funding of the rebels is being undertaken primarily by U.S. allies Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. But given the regional cold war that all three are engaged in to greater or lesser extents against Iranian allies across the region, those powers may not share the extent of Washington's concern to avoid empowering sectarian Islamist groups. The Saudis have backed Sunni radicals in Lebanon and elsewhere, and Saudi Arabia and Turkey are the key backers of the Sunni-led political opposition to Iraq's Iran-backed Shi'ite government. Moreover, the U.S. experience in Afghanistan in the 1980s should provide ample warning of how little influence Washington buys through the provision of weapons to insurgent groups. Even in the best-case scenario, the fall of Assad will likely boost Sunni radicals in neighboring countries. Indeed, Lebanon's Salafists have already been spurred into action, and a similar effect may be seen in Iraq. The wave of bombings in Baghdad and beyond on Monday may be a portent of some Iraqi Sunni insurgents, spurred by events in Syria, to try and reverse their defeat in that country's civil war. And there's no doubt that Lebanese Sunni groups will

see Assad's ouster as critically weakening Hizballah and therefore as an opportunity to reverse their own defeat at its hands. The instability that follows Assad's fall will be felt far beyond Syria's borders.

3. Chemical Weapons Let Loose?

The Assad regime's stocks of chemical weapons — developed decades ago ostensibly as a strategic hedge against the presumed nuclear capability of its prime enemy, Israel — have become an urgent focus of discussion among Western powers and Israel as the regime has begun to teeter. Fears that Assad would use such weapons to suppress a domestic rebellion may be overblown — they don't exactly lend themselves to urban combat, and Assad's conduct until now has suggested a keen sense of keeping the level of violence his regime unleashes below a threshold that would bring direct foreign intervention. Chemical weapons would not only cross that threshold but also almost certainly result in him seeing out his days in a prison cell at the Hague. President Obama on Monday warned Assad that he would be “held accountable” should those weapons be used.

The chemical-weapons problem, however, may be more acute post-Assad. A senior Israeli official told Haaretz on Monday that Assad “is handling chemical weapons responsibly,” taking steps to avoid them falling into rebel hands by moving them to more remote locations away from the fighting. Syria's Foreign Minister on Monday vowed that such weapons would be kept safe and used only in the event of “foreign aggression.” Israel's concern, of course, is

that should the regime fall, those weapons could find their way into the hands of Hizballah, Syria's longtime ally, or else be commandeered by jihadist elements in the rebel camp. The official told Haaretz that while there are no signs that Assad intends to move chemical weapons to Hizballah and is securing them from the rebels, "Israel is still very concerned because it is hard to know if these steps will be sufficient on the day Assad falls." Thus the irony: as long as Assad is in power, he can probably be relied on to refrain from using those weapons and keep them out of the hands of nonstate actors. But should the regime collapse precipitously, he'd be in no position to do so. And while the U.S. and Israel are weighing contingency plans to neutralize the threat posed by those weapons, any such intervention carries plenty of additional political risk.

4. Syria Breaks Up

Given the sectarian lines on which Syria's power struggle is being waged, it's widely assumed that the regime won't simply shatter into smithereens when the rebels arrive at the gates of Assad's home. Instead, it's assumed that those fighting to keep Assad in power will, when forced by overwhelming odds to do so, retreat to more defensible lines from which they can protect themselves and their core communities. It's been widely noted that Alawites are moving in large numbers to their coastal heartland and that the pattern of communal violence in Sunni villages and towns that abut it suggest a process of ethnic cleansing to prepare the way. An Alawite coastal ministate that

holds in the port cities of Latakia and Tartus, home to the Russian navy's key warmwater port, may not be viable in the long run, but that doesn't mean the regime's core won't try for one. Even before that, though, a scenario could emerge in which rival armed formations control adjacent territories, as occurred in Lebanon during its 17-year civil war and during Iraq's civil war in 2006.

None of those scenarios are sustainable outcomes, of course, but they could map the outlines of a next phase of warfare after Assad loses control of the Syrian state. But the Alawites aren't the only breakup threat. The consensus among Syria's Kurdish political factions, encouraged by Iraqi Kurd leader Massoud Barzani, who has hosted talks brokering agreement, is to keep their distance from the rebellion even as they take advantage of the regime's declining ability to control all of Syria by taking control of their own towns and cities.

They won't necessarily push for independence, but their alignment with the political leadership in Iraqi Kurdistan — and reports that their fighters have already taken control of many key Syrian Kurdish cities — suggests that they may be staking out an autonomous zone similar to that of their Iraqi counterparts. Turkey, which is waging a ferocious war against its own separatist Kurds, will be particularly concerned about developments in Syria's Kurdish region, although Ankara's handling of Iraqi Kurdish autonomy suggests it may be more inclined to opt for a strategy of co-option than of intervention.

Still, if the Alawites, Christians and Kurds all decline to embrace the rebellion, that would mean as many as 1 in 3 Syrians remain at odds with whatever new order replaces Assad. And that creates plenty of room for territorial political contests.

5. What Happens in Syria Doesn't Stay in Syria

Look at the map of the modern Middle East and what jumps out are the number of ruler-straight lines that describe the borders defining Syria and its neighbors Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Israel. These nation-states were all invented less than a hundred years ago, on the drawing boards of France and Britain as they gerrymandered what became a series of minority-ruled states out of what had been a series of Ottoman provinces. The Sunni minority came to rule Iraq; the Alawites came to rule Syria; Lebanon was created to give Maronite Christians a state of their own, but they too were reduced to a minority and then lost power; Jordan's Hashemite monarchy ruled over a state whose majority today is Palestinian; and in the British colonial entity of Palestine, Jewish immigrants from Europe (who comprised about 45% of the population in 1948) emerged in control.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq ended Sunni minority rule and sent sectarian political shockwaves across the region. Shi'ite majority rule may have been the democratic outcome, but it was never accepted by Iraq's Sunnis or by their patrons in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. Sunni-Shi'ite tensions have simmered across the region, flaring up in Lebanon and Bahrain — but Syria could prove to be a game changer.

There are signs that Lebanon's fragile peace may not survive the fall of Assad, with Saudi-backed Sunni groups tempted to take the opportunity of Hizballah being weakened by the loss of its Syrian patron and arms supplier to break the Shi'ite movement's political and military dominance. Similarly, the defeated Sunnis of Iraq will take courage from the success of their kin across a border straddled by their tribal and clan networks to push back against the Iran-backed government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Jordan's pro-Western monarchy is politically weak, and the same bleak economic outlook that drove many of Syria's rural Sunnis to rebellion prevails in much of the Jordanian hinterland. The triumph of an armed Sunni rebellion in Syria is likely to spur Jordan's Sunni Islamist opposition — both its more moderate parliamentary arm and its more radical extremist element — to press their case, possibly fueled by an influx of refugees from Syria.

Even Israel has little reason to enthuse about Assad's fall: his regime postured resistance and empowered Hizballah, but Israel's border with Syria had been stable for near on four decades under the Assads. Posturing resistance to Israel, in fact, was in part an ideological device through which an Alawite-dominated regime sought to legitimize itself in the eyes of the Sunni majority. Today, however, residents of Syria's massive Palestinian refugee camps appear to have thrown in their lot with the rebellion, and Hamas broke with Assad and left town last year. Even if

concerns about chemical weapons or jihadists on the Golan fail to materialize, Israel could find itself living alongside a new, Sunni-led Syrian polity that, if anything, could be even more insistent than Assad had been on recovering the Golan, occupied by Israel since the 1967 war — and which Israel has no inclination to give up.

When Assad falls, those straight lines on the maps drawn in the foreign offices of France and Britain in the 1920s will start to look even fuzzier than they already are. What happens in Syria is unlikely to stay in Syria.

Article 4.

Agence Global

The Destruction of Syria

Patrick Seale

24 Jul 2012 -- Once one of the most solid states in the Middle East and a key pivot of the regional power structure, Syria is now facing wholesale destruction. The consequences of the unfolding drama are likely to be disastrous for Syria's territorial integrity, for the well-being of its population, for regional peace, and for the interests of external powers deeply involved in the crisis.

The most immediate danger is that the fighting in Syria, together with the current severe pressure being put on Syria's Iranian ally, will provide the spark for a wider

conflagration from which no one will be immune. How did it come to this? Every actor in the crisis bears a share of responsibility. Syria is the victim of the fears and appetites of its enemies but also of its own leaders' mistakes.

With hindsight, it can be seen that President Bashar al-Asad missed the chance to reform the tight security state he inherited in 2000 from his father. Instead of recognising -- and urgently addressing -- the thirst for political freedoms, personal dignity and economic opportunity which were the message of the 'Damascus Spring' of his first year in power, he screwed the lid down ever more tightly.

Suffocating controls over every aspect of Syrian society were reinforced, and made harder to bear by the blatant corruption and privileges of the few and the hardships suffered by the many. Physical repression became routine. Instead of cleaning up his security apparatus, curbing police brutality and improving prison conditions, he allowed them to remain as gruesome and deplorable as ever. Above all, over the past decade Bashar al-Asad and his close advisers failed to grasp the revolutionary potential of two key developments -- Syria's population explosion and the long-term drought which the country suffered from 2006 to 2010, the worst in several hundred years. The first produced an army of semi-educated young people unable to find jobs; the second resulted in the forced exodus of hundreds of thousands of farmers from their parched fields to slums around the major cities. Herders in the north-east lost 85% of their livestock. It

is estimated that by 2011, some two to three million Syrians had been driven into extreme poverty. No doubt climate change was responsible, but government neglect and incompetence contributed to the disaster.

These two factors -- youth unemployment and rural disaffection -- were the prime motors of the uprising which spread like wildfire, once it was triggered by a brutal incident at Dar'a in March 2011. The foot-soldiers of the uprising are unemployed urban youth and impoverished peasants.

Could the regime have done something about it? Yes, it could. As early as 2006-7, it could have alerted the world to the situation, devoted all available resources to urgent job creation, launched a massive relief programme for its stricken population and mobilised its citizens for these tasks. No doubt major international aid agencies and rich Gulf countries would have helped had the plans been in place.

Instead, the regime's gaze was distracted by external threats: by the Lebanese crisis of 2005 following the assassination of Rafic Hariri; by Israel's bid to destroy Hizballah by its invasion of Lebanon in 2006; by its attack on Syria's nuclear facility in 2007; and by its bid to destroy Hamas in its murderous assault on Gaza in 2008-9.

From the start of Bashar al-Asad's presidency, Syria has faced relentless efforts by Israel and its complicit American ally to bring down the so-called 'resistance axis' of Tehran-Damascus-Hizballah, which dared challenge the regional dominance of Israel and the United States. Syria had a narrow escape in 2003-4.

Led by the Pentagon's Paul Wolfowitz, the pro-Israeli neo-cons embedded in President George W. Bush's administration were determined to reshape the region in Israel's and America's interest. Their first target was Saddam Hussein's Iraq, seen as a potential threat to Israel. Had the United States been successful in Iraq, Syria would have been next. Neither Iraq nor the United States has yet recovered from the catastrophic Iraqi war, of which Wolfowitz was the chief 'architect'.

Syria and its Iranian ally are once again under imminent threat. The United States and Israel make no secret of their goal to bring down both the Damascus and Tehran regimes. No doubt some Israeli strategists believe that it would be greatly to their country's advantage if Syria were dismembered and permanently weakened by the creation of a small Alawi state around the port-city of Latakia in the north-west, in much the same way as Iraq was dismembered and permanently weakened by the creation of the Kurdish Regional Government in the north of the country, with its capital at Irbil. It is not easy to be the neighbour of an expansionist and aggressive Jewish state, which believes that its security is best assured, not by making peace with its neighbours, but by subverting, destabilising and destroying them with the aid of American power. The United States and Israel are not Syria's only enemies. The Syrian Muslim Brothers have been dreaming of revenge ever since their attempt 30 years ago to topple Syria's secular Ba'athist regime by a campaign of terror was crushed by Hafiz

al-Asad, Syria's President at the time. Today, the Muslim Brothers are repeating the mistake they made then by resorting to terror with the aid of foreign Salafists, including some Al-Qaida fighters flowing into Syria from Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and other countries further afield. The liberal members of the Syrian opposition in exile, including several worthy academics and veteran opponents, are providing political cover for these more violent elements. Some Arab Gulf States persist in viewing the region through a sectarian prism. They are worried by Iran's alleged hegemonic ambitions. They are unhappy that Iraq -- once a Sunni power able to hold Iran in check -- is now under Shia leadership. Talk of an emerging 'Shia Crescent' appears to threaten Sunni dominance. For these reasons they are funding and arming the Syrian rebels in the hope that bringing down the Syrian regime will sever Iran's ties with the Arab world. But this policy will simply prolong Syria's agony, claim the lives of some of its finest men and cause massive material damage.

America, the dominant external power, has made many grievous policy blunders. Over the past several decades it failed to persuade its stubborn Israeli ally to make peace with the Palestinians, leading to peace with the whole Arab world. It embarked on catastrophic wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It failed to reach a 'grand bargain' with Iran which would have dispelled the spectre of war in the Gulf and stabilised the volatile region. And it is now quarrelling with Moscow and reviving the Cold War by sabotaging

Kofi Annan's peace plan for Syria.

There can be no military solution to the Syrian crisis. The only way out of the current nightmare is a ceasefire imposed on both sides, followed by a negotiation and the formation of a national government to oversee a transition. Only thus can Syria avoid wholesale destruction, which could take a generation or two to repair.

Patrick Seale is a leading British writer on the Middle East. His latest book is [The Struggle for Arab Independence: Riad el-Solh and the Makers of the Modern Middle East](#) (Cambridge University Press).

Article 5.

NYT

The Candidates Talk Foreign Policy

Editorial

July 24, 2012 -- The presidential candidates took a break this week from talking about the economy, the most important issue in the election, and turned to foreign policy. This was a chance for Mitt Romney to show that he could be a better international leader than President Obama, who has already proved himself in that field. He fell far short.

Mr. Romney [spoke about foreign affairs on Tuesday](#) to

the Veterans of Foreign Wars, which Mr. Obama addressed on Monday. There was a contrast, but not in favor of Mr. Romney, who is still struggling to differentiate himself. Even some of his advisers, when interviewed, have been unable to explain exactly what he would do differently on many issues, and, where he does draw a line, his positions are mostly troubling or unconvincing.

He has, for example, struggled to play down the simple fact that Mr. Obama ordered the killing of Osama bin Laden. He has tried to focus instead on how details became public, accusing the administration of politically motivated leaks. "It's a national security crisis," he told the V.F.W. With stunning overkill, he called for a special counsel to investigate an administration that has been more determined than most to find leakers.

Mr. Romney seemed just as disingenuous when he tried to blame Mr. Obama for \$500 billion in automatic spending cuts that the Pentagon is facing over the next 10 years, beginning in January. He called them "the president's radical cuts." In fact, it was Congressional Republicans who manufactured a crisis over the debt ceiling in 2010 and demanded passage of a budget bill that mandated the cuts to keep the government from defaulting.

For months, Mr. Romney has criticized Mr. Obama for failing to halt Iran's nuclear program, disparaged negotiations between Tehran and the major powers and offered the hollow pledge that Iran will not have a nuclear weapon if he is president. In his speech, Mr.

Romney seemed less hostile, saying “negotiations must secure full and unhindered access for inspections.” He said Iran must halt all uranium enrichment but did not say how he would enforce a demand often made by the United Nations Security Council.

No one can predict if Mr. Obama’s approach will yield a deal. He has had more success at rallying international support behind tougher sanctions — including financial controls and an oil embargo — than his predecessor ever had. He has also helped Israel and Persian Gulf states boost their defenses and made clear that the option of using force is on the table. He has been much more willing to pursue engagement than Mr. Romney, who on Tuesday pledged to “use every means necessary to protect ourselves and the region and to prevent the worst from happening while there is still time.”

After suggesting for months that he might keep American forces in Afghanistan indefinitely, Mr. Romney said he would transition security to Afghan troops by the end of 2014, which Mr. Obama and NATO have already promised to do. He said he would rely on the advice of military commanders, as if Mr. Obama has not been doing just that. Given all the American lives and treasure expended over the past 12 years, it was a serious failure that he did not say more, including whether he would leave residual forces behind or how he would handle Afghanistan more broadly.

Mr. Romney, who plans to visit Israel this week as

well as Britain and Poland, is fighting hard for support from Jewish voters. He attacked Mr. Obama for “shabby treatment” of Israel. Relations between Mr. Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are obviously tense. But the administration has backed Israel in almost every way, and Israeli leaders have publicly acknowledged that.

Mr. Romney took some potshots at Russia (but dropped his absurd reference to Russia as the No. 1 geopolitical foe) and China. He ignored Pakistan, Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He tried to sound stern toward Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood now runs the government, and said tough things like “I am not ashamed of American power.” But, at this point, what he is offering voters on American security is neither impressive nor convincing.

Article 6.

The Atlantic

Mitt Romney's Trip to Israel: Is the Jewish Vote up for Grabs?

Beth Reinhard

Jul 24 2012 -- Why is this election year different from all other election years? The answer to this twist on the age-old Passover seder question is, probably not

much, at least when it comes to the Jewish vote. Every four years, the Republican presidential nominee makes a play for Jewish voters, and every four years, the ticket falls woefully short. Since 1992, the GOP nominee has received between 15 percent and 23 percent of the Jewish vote, according to a new analysis from the nonpartisan Solomon Project.

Recent history is not deterring Mitt Romney, however, who will make the biggest overture possible to the American Jewish community when he arrives in Israel on Sunday.

For Romney, it could be worth it.

Tight races like the 2012 campaign are won and lost at the margins -- picking up a percentage here, another there -- and strategists in both parties say that the Jewish community is one place where Romney could find an edge. A Gallup poll in June showed Obama receiving 64 percent of the Jewish vote. That's a 10-point drop from his level of support shortly before the 2008 election and five points worse than his overall decline among registered voters.

"He's in what I would call the danger zone for a Democrat," said Tevi Troy, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and a Romney adviser. "The question is not whether the Republican nominee is going to get the majority of the Jewish vote. It's whether the party will make important inroads in the community, and I'm optimistic that we will."

Romney also will visit London and Poland in his first overseas trip as the presumed GOP nominee.

In a sign that Obama's team is eyeing Romney's

itinerary closely, top campaign surrogates gave a sweeping defense of the administration's commitment to Israel nearly a week in advance of the Republican's trip in a telephone call with reporters. Robert Gibbs, a senior adviser to the Obama campaign, said on Monday that Obama had "substantive meetings" with Israeli and Palestinian leaders as a candidate in 2008 and questioned whether Romney's overseas trip will be "one long photo-op." Gibbs also downplayed the tension between the Obama administration and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Colin Kahl, former deputy assistant Defense secretary for the Middle East, said that Obama has offered "record high" security funding, helped build an iron-dome system to protect Israelis from rockets coming from the Gaza strip, and acted aggressively to thwart Iran's nuclear threat.

Kahl also went so far as to say that Jewish voters could expect Obama to make a trip to Israel during his second term. He noted that Ronald Reagan never visited Israel during his administration and that George W. Bush did not go until the last year of his second term.

"Being a friend to Israel, at least in our view, shouldn't be judged purely by a travel itinerary," Kahl said. "The administration's support and cooperation for Israel has been unprecedented."

Obama himself affirmed his commitment to Israel just last week while campaigning in a heavily Jewish retirement community in West Palm Beach, Florida, where candidates often warm up the crowd with free

bagels and cream cheese. "I want everyone here to know, in my administration, we haven't just preserved the unbreakable bond with Israel -- we have strengthened it," Obama told hundreds of residents. Republicans are energetically circulating the opposite message, particularly in toss-up states with large Jewish populations, such as Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia. Hours after the Obama campaign's call on Romney's trip, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., and Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell both issued broadsides against Obama's relationship with Israel. Ros-Lehtinen called the hint right before Romney's trip that Obama would visit in his second term "politically inspired."

"U.S.-Israeli relations have been strained by the failure of the Obama administration to stress unequivocal support for our long-standing ally," McDonnell said in a statement. "Thus, it's no surprise that President Obama is struggling to shore up support in the Jewish community."

Exit polls in 2008 suggested that Obama received 78 percent of the Jewish vote, roughly the same level of support that Bill Clinton got in 1996, Al Gore got in 2000, and John Kerry received in 2004. But the analysis of the Jewish vote by the Solomon Project, which combined national and state data, pegged Obama's Jewish support in 2008 slightly lower, at 74 percent. That's still a high benchmark, but a lower baseline than widely reported.

"I don't expect he will do quite as well in 2012," said Democratic pollster Mark Mellman, one of three

authors of the report. "He's going to do less well in the country as a whole, so you'd expect him to do less well in the Jewish community."

Jewish voters remain much more Democratic than the rest of the electorate, the Solomon Project found. The analysis takes the long view, noting that between 1972 and 1988, Republican nominees attracted between 31 percent and 37 percent of the Jewish vote. Since 1992, the GOP nominee hasn't broken 23 percent, a trend Mellman described in part as a reaction to the rise of the Religious Right's influence in the GOP.

But Romney sees an opening in the administration's failure to broker peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. He has delivered critical speeches to pro-Israel advocacy groups such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Republican Jewish Coalition, and he's deployed high-profile surrogates in the Jewish community, such as John Bolton, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and Dan Senor, an adviser to the Bush administration.

"Republicans say every four years that Jews are moving away from the Democratic Party, but, if anything, the trend is in the other direction," Mellman said. "I don't expect that to change significantly."

Obama's success among Jewish voters in 2008 defied a whisper campaign that called him a Muslim with terrorist leanings -- falsehoods that the campaign sought to dispel with truth-squading websites that emphasized Obama's Christian background.

Obama's reelection campaign has not launched any similar platforms this year, suggesting that it does not

see the persistent rumors about his religion as a problem for now. However, the campaign website does include a section titled "President Obama's Stance on Israel: Myths vs. Facts."

Beth Reinhard is a political correspondent for National Journal.

Article 7.

Project Syndicate

How the West Was Re-Won

Dominique Moisi

24 July 2012-- In 2005, at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, a prestigious exhibit sponsored by the Chinese Government, "The Three Emperors," celebrated the greatness of Chinese art. The show's central piece was a giant painting in the European (Jesuit) style depicting the envoys of the Western world lining up to pay respect to the Chinese emperor. The message could not have been more explicit: "China is back." The West would have to pay tribute to China in the future the way it had kowtowed to it in the past.

In 2012, China is on the verge of becoming the world's largest economy and is by far the leading emerging power. Yet two simultaneous phenomena suggest that the West may have been buried prematurely by its own Cassandras and by Asian pundits who sometimes behave like "arrogant

Westerners.”

First, the West, particularly Europe, is slowly taking the measure of the Asian challenge. Second, it is doing so at the very moment that the emerging countries are starting to feel the consequences of a world economic crisis that has Europe as its epicenter. In other words, a new balance of strengths and weaknesses is emerging beneath the surface of events – and runs contrary to current mantras. Europe has awakened to the Asian challenge just as its own crisis exposes and intensifies the emerging countries’ economic, political, and social weaknesses.

A few years ago, in my book *The Geopolitics of Emotion*, I stressed the differences that existed between a Western world dominated by fear and an Asia animated by hope. While the West accumulated debts, Asia had startled the world with its long economic boom. This continues to be the case, but nuances are appearing. There is more fear today in the West, but also a little less hope in Asia.

Indeed, global investors are starting to hedge their bets, as if preparing themselves for a more genuinely balanced world spanning different continents and cultures. Asia may have caught up with the West; Latin America may be on track to do so; and Africa may be slowly positioning itself to grow. The Arab world, too, with its ongoing revolution, may also be joining the game, overcoming the humiliation that had been its peoples’ animating emotional force.

The West, meanwhile, may be slowly adapting to the new realities of a world that it no longer dominates,

but in which it still occupies an essential role, owing to values whose universalism is now formulated in a more restrained and coherent way. Indeed, to fear, hope, and humiliation, I would now add a fourth and decisive cultural mood: modesty.

Today's West is very different from the historical West. It is a reduced entity, increasingly aware that it can no longer be the center of the world, if only because of its shrinking demographic weight. Europe accounted for 20% of the world's population at the beginning of the eighteenth century; the population of the West as a whole will constitute slightly more than 10% in 2050.

The West is also fragmented: the American West is growing increasingly apart from the European West. The question is no longer one of shared interests or common security goals, but of culture, as the United States, in particular, increasingly looks to Asia and Latin America and attracts immigrants from those regions. As for the Asian West, Japan will continue to remain alone and unique.

Given this, it might seem premature, to say the least, to announce the "return of the West," especially at a time when the US economy remains fragile, Europe's financial crisis is fueling an existential funk, and Japan's deep structural malaise continues. Still, across Europe, particularly in the south, one is witnessing a willingness to learn from others. There is a growing awareness, even in France – not known for its humility – that benchmarking is necessary, and that tough sacrifices will have to be made.

In other words, Europeans are beginning to understand that they have lived well beyond their means materially, and well below their means intellectually, spiritually, and ethically – a process that might be described as the beginning of Europe’s “Montization,” to pay tribute to Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti’s embodiment of responsibility and courage. Just imagine: a more virtuous Europe encountering a more “decadent” China, whose venal elites are starting to turn on each other? What we may be witnessing is the consolidation of a truly multipolar world, in which the West no longer dominates, but is not about to be replaced by Asia or the emerging world in general. The West is not “striking back.” But a more modest West may stabilize its position with respect to China, particularly at a time when China has become both more arrogant and less confident in its own political and social system.

Dominique Moisi is the founder of the French Institute of International Affairs (IFRI) and a professor at Institute d’Etudes Politiques (Sciences Po) in Paris. He is the author of The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World.