

From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen
Sent: Tue 8/14/2012 4:50:24 PM
Subject: August 11 update

11 August, 2012

Article 1.	The Wall Street Journal <u>Hillary and the Hollowness of 'People-to-People' Diplomacy</u> Fouad Ajami
Article 2.	Foreign Policy <u>How Egypt's new president is outsmarting the generals</u> Steven A. Cook
Article 3.	NYT <u>President Morsi's First Crisis</u> Editorial
Article 4.	The Washington Institute. <u>Hezbollah's Karma in Syria</u> David Schenker
Article 5.	The Daily Star <u>A new approach is needed to resolve the Syrian conflict</u> Javier Solana
Article 6.	Le Monde diplomatique <u>Jordan Awaits Its Own Spring</u> Hana Jaber

Article 1.

The Wall Street Journal

Hillary and the Hollowness of 'People-to-People' Diplomacy

Fouad Ajami

The sight of Hillary Clinton cutting a rug on the dance floor this week in South Africa gives away the moral obtuseness of America's chief diplomat. That image will tell the people of the besieged Syrian city of Aleppo, under attack by a merciless regime, all they need to know about the heartlessness of U.S. foreign policy.

True authority over foreign affairs has been vested in the White House, and for that matter, in the Obama campaign apparatus. All the great decisions on foreign policy—Iraq and Afghanistan, the struggle raging in Syria, the challenge posed by the Iranian regime—have been subjugated to the needs of the campaign. All that is left for Mrs. Clinton is the pomp and ceremony and hectic travel schedule.

Much has been made of her time in the air. She is now officially the most traveled secretary of state in American history. She has logged, by one recent count, 843,458 miles and visited 102 countries. (This was before her recent African swing; doubtless her handlers will revise the figures.) In one dispatch, it was breakfast in Vietnam, lunch in Laos, dinner in Cambodia. Officially, she's always the life of the party.

This is foreign policy trivialized. If Harry Truman's secretary of state, Dean Acheson, was "present at the creation" of the post-World War II order of states, historians who bother with Mrs. Clinton will judge her as marking time, a witness to the erosion of U.S. authority in the international order.

After settling into her post in early 2009, she made it clear that the "freedom agenda" of the prior administration would be sacrificed. "Ideology is so yesterday," she bluntly proclaimed in April of that year. This is what her boss had intended all along. The herald of change in international affairs, the man who had hooked crowds in Paris and Berlin and Cairo, was, at heart, a trimmer, timid about America's possibilities beyond its shores.

Presidents and secretaries of state working in tandem can bend historical outcomes. Think of Truman and Acheson accepting the call of history when the British could no longer assume their imperial role. Likewise, Ronald Reagan and George Shultz pushed Soviet communism into its grave and gave the American people confidence after the diplomatic setbacks of the 1970s and the humiliations handed to U.S. power under the presidency of Jimmy Carter.

Grant Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton their due—they have worked well together, presided over the retrenchment of American power, made a bet that the American people would not notice, or care about, the decline of U.S. authority abroad. This is no small feat.

Yet the passivity of this secretary of state is

unprecedented. Mrs. Clinton left no mark on the decision to liquidate the American presence in Iraq—the president's principal adviser on Iraq was Vice President Joe Biden. We have heard little from her on Afghanistan, except last month to designate it a "major non-NATO ally." She opened the tumult of the Arab Spring with a monumental misreading of Egypt: Hosni Mubarak was a "friend of my family," she said, and his reign was stable. She will long be associated with the political abdication and sophistry that has marked this administration's approach to the Syrian rebellion.

With nothing save her words invested in Syria, she never tires of invoking the specter of jihadists finding their way into the fight: "Those who are attempting to exploit the situation by sending in terrorist fighters must realize they will not be tolerated, first and foremost by the Syrian people."

Aleppo, an ancient, prosperous city, the country's economic trading capital, shelled as though it is a foreign city, is subjected to barbarous treatment, and Mrs. Clinton has this to say: "We have to set very clear expectations about avoiding sectarian warfare." Syria has now descended, as it was bound to, into a drawn-out conflict, into a full-scale sectarian civil war between the Sunni majority and the Alawi holders of power. But Mrs. Clinton could offer nothing better than this trite, hackneyed observation: "We must figure out ways to hasten the day when bloodshed ends and the political transition begins. We have to make sure that state institutions stay intact."

These are the words of someone running out the clock on the Syrians, playing for time on behalf of a president who gave her this post knowing there would be at Foggy Bottom a politician like himself instead of a diplomat given to a belief in American power and the American burden in the world.

One doesn't have to be unduly cynical to read the mind of the secretary of state and that of her closest political strategist, her spouse Bill Clinton. Defeated by Mr. Obama in 2008, the Clintons made the best of it. They rode with him without giving up on the dream of restoration. The passivity of Secretary Clinton, and the role assigned Bill Clinton in the Democratic convention as the one figure who might assure the centrists and independents that Barack Obama is within the political mainstream, are an investment in the future. The morning after the presidential election, the Clintons will be ready. They will wait out an Obama victory and begin to chip away at his authority. And in the event of an Obama defeat, they will ride to the rescue of a traumatized party. Mrs. Clinton will claim that she has rounded out her résumé. She needn't repeat fanciful tales of landing in Bosnia under fire in 1996; she will have a record of all those miles she has flown. She will pass in silence over the early hopes she had invested in Syria's Bashar al-Assad as a reformer, and over the slaughter he unleashed on his people. Her devotees will claim that all was well at State and that Hillary mastered her brief with what she likes to call "people-to-people" diplomacy.

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Article 2.

Foreign Policy

How Egypt's new president is outsmarting the generals

Steven A. Cook

August 9, 2012 -- Shortly after the Aug. 5 killing of 16 paramilitary policemen near Egypt's border with the Gaza Strip, Egyptian, Israeli, and U.S. officials determined that the perpetrators were part of an "extremist group" -- one they have yet to identify. According to official accounts, assailants firing AK-47s attacked the conscripts and officers as they prepared for iftar, the traditional breaking of the Ramadan fast. Eight of the terrorists were killed in the ensuing firefight, but not before the perpetrators hijacked an armored personnel carrier and tried unsuccessfully to cross the Egypt-Israel frontier. To a variety of observers, however, the official story seems a little too neat. The Egyptian government rarely comes to a quick conclusion about anything except when its leaders have something to hide, typically resulting in a half-baked story that few are inclined to believe. The tale about a shadowy group of militants fits the bill, leaving journalists, commentators, and other skeptical Egyptians with two

theories: Either the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and Egypt's intelligence services planned the operation to embarrass Egypt's new president, Mohamed Morsy, or Israel's Mossad did it -- a silly allegation that Morsy's own Muslim Brotherhood advanced. Lost in all this speculation, however, were the attack's unexpected but important political effects.

What makes the Rafah incident more interesting than previous attacks in Sinai -- of which there have been many -- is its potential to break Egypt's political logjam. At first it looked as if Morsy would bear much of the blame for the attack despite his tough rhetoric in its aftermath. Indeed, he stayed away from the funerals for the martyred policemen, claiming implausibly that his security detail would disrupt proper mourning rituals. Protesters chased Hisham Qandil, Morsy's handpicked prime minister, from the proceedings with a barrage of shoes. On Tuesday, it seemed that predictions of Morsy's early political demise would prove accurate. But just 24 hours later the tables had turned.

It was perhaps inevitable that Egypt's various political parties, groups, and factions would try to leverage the violence in Rafah to their political advantage. Even the April 6 Movement, Kefaya, and other less well-known groups seized the opportunity to burnish their now fading political images with what turned out to be a sparsely attended protest. They rallied near the Israeli ambassador's residence over Mossad's alleged responsibility for the killings, apparently indifferent to

the irony of expressing solidarity with the widely demonized security forces. At the end of the day, however, these antics were but a sideshow to the next act in Egypt's central political drama, pitting the SCAF against the Muslim Brothers.

For months now, it has seemed that this play had no end. The Brothers have long maintained a vision of society that resonates with many Egyptians but very little in the way of means to transform these ideas into reality. The military is an exact mirror image of the Brothers. The officers have no coherent and appealing worldview, but they have had the ability to prevent those who do from accumulating power and altering the political system. The result has been a stalemate, marked by a series of tactical political deals that only last until circumstances force the Brothers and the officers to seek accommodation.

But the Rafah killings may well have tipped the scales. As weak as Morsy's position seemed to be, two distinct advantages have enabled him to spin the attack to his political advantage: the utter incompetence of Maj. Gen. Murad Muwafi, the head of the General Intelligence Service, and the very fact that Morsy is a popularly elected president.

On the first count, Muwafi admitted that his organization intercepted details of the attack before it happened, but that he and his team never "imagined that a Muslim would kill a Muslim brother at iftar in Ramadan." He then passed the buck, lamely offering that he had given the information to the proper authorities, presumably the Ministry of Interior.

Muwafi may have been using the reference to Muslims' killing of fellow Muslims while breaking fast to cast suspicion on the Israelis -- no matter that this theory is demonstrably untrue -- or because it reflected the complacency of the Mubarak era of which he is a product. Either way, it played to Morsy's advantage.

Under Mubarak, Muwafi would likely have gotten away with his ineptitude. No doubt, there were intelligence failures during the Mubarak era, but the former president and his minions could always count on force and state propaganda to cover their tracks. (It is important to remember that however unseemly it was for the Muslim Brotherhood to blame Israel for the Rafah attacks, it is a tactic that Hosni Mubarak perfected during his three decades in power. A little more than a month after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, for example, Mubarak told an Israeli TV audience, "You are responsible [for terrorism].") But old tricks don't always work in the new Egypt. Muwafi's admission that the GIS knew an attack was on the way provided Morsy with an opportunity to clean house -- a stunning move made possible only by the fact that he can claim a popular mandate. Out went Muwafi, North Sinai governor Abdel Wahab Mabrouk, and Hamdi Badeen, the powerful commander of the Military Police.

The SCAF, the GIS, and Ministry of Interior may yet respond, but they are in a difficult political position. How do they justify opposing the president for removing the people ostensibly responsible for failing

to prevent the deaths of Egyptian troops? In the new, more open Egypt, people are demanding accountability and Morsy is giving it to them, which may be why Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, head of the SCAF, has so far yielded to Morsy. Yet Tantawi's position is made all the more precarious because if he does not respond in some way, he is signaling that there is no price to be paid for defying Egypt's defense and national security establishment, opening the way to further efforts to undermine the deep state.

Given the SCAF's June 17 constitutional decree stripping the Egyptian presidency of virtually all of its national security and defense-related prerogatives, it is unclear whether Morsy has the authority to back up his sweeping personnel changes. Muwafi is a military officer, but General Intelligence is -- at least on the government of Egypt's organizational chart -- separate from the Ministry of Defense, which would suggest that the president was within his legal right when he sacked the intelligence chief. The same argument can be used regarding Abdel Wahab Mabrouk, who is also a military officer but, by dint of his position as governor, is subordinate to the interior minister. Yet like so much in Egypt, what is written is different from actual practice, so there may be ways that both men retain their positions. The fate of Badeen is clearer since he is an active military officer and the June 17 decree prohibits the president from making personnel moves without SCAF's approval. At the very least, President Morsy will have to leave the choice of

Badeen's replacement to Field Marshal Tantawi. As the New York Times, the Washington Post, and other major newspapers all dutifully reported, the violence in Sinai was an "urgent" and "crucial" test of Morsy in his "tense relationship with the military." It was, indeed, an early test, and Egypt's new president seemed to pass with flying colors. Against all expectations, Morsy made the most politically out of the Rafah killings. To be sure, this episode was not exactly Anwar Sadat's takedown of Ali Sabri, Gen. Mohamed Fawzi, and Gen. Sharawi Guma in 1971 for allegedly plotting a coup d'état that ended with all three behind bars and went a long way toward consolidating Sadat's power. Yet if Morsy can make the dismissals stick, he will not only have made a convincing case that he is much more than the weak transitional figure the SCAF has sought to make him, but he also will have begun a process that could alter the relationship between Egypt's security elite and its civilian (and now elected) leadership.

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Article 3.

NYT

President Morsi's First Crisis

Editorial

August 10, 2012 -- Mohamed Morsi was forced to

respond quickly to his first security crisis as Egypt's first freely elected president. After 16 Egyptian soldiers were killed by gunmen in the Sinai Peninsula last Sunday, he dispatched troops to secure the border, moved to assert control of his security leadership team and avoided conflict with Israel. It was a challenging beginning for an inexperienced leader who had been in office less than two months.

The crisis, of course, is far from over. Militants have operated in the largely lawless Sinai for years, but the region grew increasingly unstable after President Hosni Mubarak was toppled in 2011. Security and police forces retreated from the region, giving Bedouin criminals, Palestinian militants from neighboring Gaza and other militants wider rein. Finally, violence exploded at the northern border, the nexus of Israel, Egypt and Gaza. Failure to prevent continued lawlessness would compound an already fragile situation and could conceivably unravel the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty.

Much of what is happening is subject to speculation. On Wednesday, Egypt reportedly sent hundreds of troops and armored vehicles into the Sinai, while airstrikes by the military hit several targets. But it was not clear whether reports in the Egyptian news media that about 20 militants had been killed and nine others captured were factual or embellished to give the impression of a successful crackdown.

Similarly, the identity of the attackers who killed the soldiers as they were breaking their Ramadan fast has not been firmly established. Israel, among others,

suspects the involvement of Al Qaeda-inspired militants with ties to Palestinians in Gaza. Egyptian leaders need to investigate thoroughly and be as transparent as possible about what they find and about the kinds of military operations they are carrying out. On Wednesday, Mr. Morsi fired his intelligence chief, the top military police officer and the governor of North Sinai — a stunning purge of officials who had been seen as tied to the old order and/or blamed for security lapses that contributed to the deaths of the soldiers. But, again, it was not clear whether Mr. Morsi acted unilaterally or whether the shake-up was part of a deal with the generals — with whom he has been engaged in a power struggle — so both sides could avoid blame. Whatever the truth, Mr. Morsi is going to have to consider even broader reforms in his security service.

If Palestinian militants from Gaza were responsible for the attack, it would be a particular affront to Mr. Morsi, an Islamist. His party, the Muslim Brotherhood, is allied with Hamas, which rules Gaza, and he has made a special effort to work with leaders there. This relationship also makes his decision to shut down the tunnels used to smuggle food, household goods, weapons and militants themselves between the Sinai and Gaza, which is under Israeli blockade, so sensitive.

Israel has long viewed these tunnels as a threat. It is unclear how many of them Mr. Morsi intends to shut or for how long. He will be under heavy pressure from Hamas to keep them open because they are a vital link

for consumer goods needed by Gaza citizens. Either way, a longer-term solution for Gaza is required. Perhaps the most remarkable development, at this early stage, is the apparent lack of friction with Israel, which has not objected to Egypt's ground-force buildup or the air missions, despite the fact that the Sinai was largely demilitarized by the 1979 peace treaty. Now that it is in power, the Muslim Brotherhood, which has a long history of antipathy toward Israel, may begin to appreciate the value of investing in mutual security.

Mr. Morsi and his government will have an even harder time dealing with Egypt's many problems — including rebuilding a shattered economy and creating jobs — if it has to deal simultaneously with growing militancy in the Sinai. Egypt and Israel could be forced to finally figure out how to work together to confront extremism and improve border security.

Article 4.

The Washington Institute.

Hezbollah's Karma in Syria

David Schenker

August 10, 2012 -- By supporting the massacres in Syria over the past sixteen months, Hassan Nasrallah and Hezbollah engendered the hatred of millions of Sunnis next door, who will almost assuredly hold a

grudge after Assad's ouster.

Earlier this month, 48 Iranian Shiite "pilgrims" were abducted in Damascus. The Free Syrian Army claims they were members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, who have been dispatched to Syria to protect one of Tehran's vital interests, Bashar al-Assad's regime. It's not the first time that anti-regime rebels have captured who they claim are Iranian-trained Assad allies. Since May, another armed opposition group called the "Syrian Revolutionaries-Aleppo Province" has been holding eleven Lebanese Shiites who say they are simply making their way back home after a trip to Iran for religious purposes. Initially, at least, these rebels alleged that five of these self-described pilgrims were in reality Hezbollah officials.

In recent weeks, the revolutionaries have tempered their assertions about the Hezbollah association of all the Lebanese captives, but the Syrian opposition is still holding the organization responsible for Assad regime atrocities. In a statement provided to Al Jazeera, the kidnappers indicated that negotiations for the hostages would be predicated on Hezbollah general secretary Hassan Nasrallah apologizing for "assist[ing] in the suppression of the uprising." Nasrallah refused to express contrition for supporting Assad, but Hezbollah's own hostage crisis has just added to his recent woes.

Prior to the so-called "Arab Spring," Nasrallah was among the most beloved and feared men in the Arab world. But a year and a half into the popular Syrian

uprising, with Hezbollah's allies in Damascus in trouble and the militia's clerical patrons in Tehran facing a possible American or Israeli attack, Nasrallah seems to have lost his mojo. Lately, the once confident and charismatic Nasrallah has been more whiney than menacing. Nasrallah has not only taken up the cause of the detained "pilgrims" in most of his speeches, but he has also defined the prisoner's release as a policy priority of the Lebanese government, which, says Nasrallah, bears full responsibility for their return. During his May 25 speech celebrating Liberation Day -- when Israeli troops withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000 -- Nasrallah bemoaned the kidnappings at length. "Religiously, this is forbidden. Morally, this is a very disgraceful crime," he said. Moreover, he advised, "kidnapping the innocent does harm to you and all what you claim or say you are seeking." Just a week later at his lecture commemorating the death of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Nasrallah made a personal appeal to the hijackers. "If you have any problem with me [or] Hezbollah," he said, "let's separate the cause of the kidnapped and put it aside and let's solve your problem with us. Using the innocent visitors as hostages to resolve the problem -- regardless of its nature and essence -- is a great injustice you should abandon." Coming from the longtime leader of Hezbollah, the anti-kidnapping messaging is not particularly credible. After all, in the 1980s kidnapping Westerners in Lebanon was an essential element of the organization's

modus operandi. Even today, Hezbollah still favors the tactic, now prizing Israeli civilian and military targets. Needless to say, Hezbollah has not suddenly reformed and decided to reject kidnapping. The organization merely opposes the abduction of its members.

Meanwhile, the affiliation of all the Lebanese detainees remains unclear. When the news of the kidnapping broke, Voice of Beirut International Radio reported that six of the abducted men held posts with Hezbollah, including officials responsible for explosives and ammunition in the south, intelligence in Bint Jbeil, and training camps in the Bekaa Valley. It also identified one of the detainees, Ali Safa, as Nasrallah's nephew.

While the story may have been fabricated by Hezbollah detractors to embarrass the militia, it is plausible that at least some of the men have a connection to the organization. Most compelling, perhaps, is the fact that three of the same men identified as members of Hezbollah in the Voice of Beirut report subsequently confirmed their names (if not their identities) in a video of the kidnapped men released to Al Jazeera.

Regardless of exactly who these alleged "pilgrims" are -- and we may never know -- there is some poetic justice in Nasrallah suffering the frustration of vulnerability in the face of kidnapping. At the same time, by supporting the massacres over the past 16 months, Nasrallah and Hezbollah engendered the hatred of millions of Sunnis next door who almost assuredly

will hold a grudge after Assad. Ultimately, this dynamic is likely to exacerbate sectarian tensions along the Lebanese/Syrian border, exposing Lebanon's Shiites to violence on a scale not seen in decades.

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Article 5.

The Daily Star

A new approach is needed to resolve the Syrian conflict

Javier Solana

August 11, 2012 -- The feeling is growing stronger by the day that Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime is approaching a tipping point. Kofi Annan, the United Nations and Arab League special envoy, has abandoned as hopeless his efforts to implement an internationally agreed six-point plan to end the violence. Now the international community must think seriously about how to minimize the dangers inherent in Syria's domestic turmoil.

Lack of agreement within the U.N. Security Council has prolonged the conflict and contributed to changing its nature. What began as a popular uprising inspired by the demands of the Arab Spring has taken on

increasingly sectarian and radical tones. This reflects loss of hope in international support, while making it more difficult to achieve a negotiated solution. In particular, there is a growing danger of Sunni retaliation against the Alawite minority, which comprises 12 percent of the population, but controls the government, the economy and the army. The Alawites, who overcame second-class citizenship only when Assad's Baath party came to power in 1963, now believe that their very survival is linked to that of the regime.

If the Syrian opposition does not take the Alawites' concerns seriously, the country could be wracked by years of civil war, worse than the conflict that devastated Lebanon from 1975 to 1990.

The regional consequences are already being felt. Fighting between the rebels and government forces is spreading, and the resulting refugee flows into neighboring Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon threaten to bring these countries directly into the conflict.

Turkey is also worried about the conflict's possible repercussions for its Kurdish population, among whom aspirations for independence are resurfacing; and for its relations with the Kurdish populations of Iraq and Syria, which are woven into a complex balance.

Jordan, for its part, considers the growing numbers of Syrian rebels entering its territory a threat to national security, while the arrival of thousands of refugees in Lebanon has revived old sectarian disputes in Tripoli between Alawites, most of whom support Assad, and

Sunnis, who overwhelmingly sympathize with the opposition.

Chaos and confrontation could easily reach Iraq, too, where the possible fall of the Syrian regime seems to be revitalizing Sunni resistance to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's predominantly Shiite government. The outcome of the Syrian conflict will also have a direct impact on the Middle East's alignment of power. A Sunni takeover after Assad's fall would mean a change of strategy with respect to Iran and its Lebanese Shiite ally, Hezbollah, whose viability might be in danger, as a Sunni government in Syria would most likely cut off the conduit for arms flowing from the Islamic Republic to Lebanon.

The disturbances in Syria have already weakened some of Iran's traditional alliances in the region. For example, Hamas has taken a position in favor of the Syrian opposition by emphasizing its ties with the Muslim Brotherhood. It also gave its support last year to Egypt's transitional government after it had permanently opened the frontier with Gaza.

Although the complex situation in Egypt suggests that its leaders will be preoccupied with domestic politics for some time, the new government will also try to redefine its relations with neighboring countries.

Significantly, Egypt's recently elected president, Mohammad Mursi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhoods' political party, chose Saudi Arabia for his first official foreign visit, a decision laden with religious as well as political symbolism.

For Saudi Arabia – which, along with Qatar, is arming

the Syrian opposition – the post-Assad period is a strategic opportunity to break the alliance between Syria and Iran, and, at the same time, deliver a severe blow to Hezbollah.

The weakening of the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis would directly benefit Israel, which has stepped up its not-so-veiled threats to launch a unilateral military strike against Iran's nuclear installations. Likewise, Israel accuses Hezbollah – together with Iran – of recent efforts to attack Israeli objectives, including the bombing of a bus carrying Israeli tourists in Bulgaria. This new scenario will doubtless affect Iran's position in the ongoing international talks on its nuclear program, which are fundamental to achieving a diplomatic solution. But, as long as the Syrian conflict continues, it will be difficult to make any progress with an Iran fearful of the impact that a new government in Syria might have on its regional influence.

In the same way, achieving an agreement – or not – with Russia (and thus with China) to contain the Syrian crisis will also determine how much room for maneuver the United States and the European Union will have with these two countries to address Iran's nuclear program.

The Security Council's members agree on how to address Iran's nuclear program, but not on steps to resolve the Syria conflict, owing to fundamental disagreements between Russia (and China) and the rest. But these are, in effect, parallel negotiations, closely dependent on each other for progress.

In order to reach an agreement, it is essential that Turkey, the Gulf states and the Arab League forge a common position. Only in this way could they win the backing of the various sectors of the Syrian opposition – suspicious of the intentions behind unilateral support – and bring their positions closer to those of Syria’s minorities, which cannot be left out of this process. This would create more pressure for backing by the Security Council and set in motion a process leading to a transition policy in Syria. Reaching an agreement on a post-Assad scenario will not be easy, but no alternative is more promising for Syria and the region.

Javier Solana, a former secretary-general of NATO and EU high representative for the common foreign and security policy, is a distinguished senior fellow in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution and president of the ESADE Center for Global Economy and Geopolitics.

Article 6.

Le Monde diplomatique

Jordan Awaits Its Own Spring

Hana Jaber

August 2012 -- In Amman, as in other Arab capitals, speech is becoming freer. Nader O, a well-known theatre director, runs a tiny restaurant in the Lweibdeh neighbourhood of Amman: "That's what's happened to culture here -- I serve koshary [a popular Egyptian dish] so that I can afford to direct." Everybody in the restaurant is talking about a new satirical play parodying the deposed Tunisian president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's speeches, *Now I've Understood You*. Even the king went to see it.

In 1999, when Abdullah II, the current monarch, ascended the throne after the death of his father King Hussein, ardent Hashemite supporters predicted that "the kingdom began with Abdullah and will end with Abdullah." This was a reference to the 1951 murder of Abdullah I, founder of the kingdom and father of Hussein. In the context of the Arab revolutions, that seems a bad omen, although Jordanian society has so far maintained its cohesion despite decades of chaos. The relationship between Abdullah II and his people has predictably been one of disenchantment. After he was crowned, his overly British education, detachment from his people, World Bank-style speeches to the nation, and alignment with George Bush during the 2003 Iraq war, destroyed any hope of getting closer to his subjects. "This king has never spoken to us," people say. "He talks through us to the Americans." A government campaign to unite the country with the slogans "Jordan first" and "We are all Jordan" has not helped. There are rumours about the king's passion for

gambling and his massive debts, which, true or not, have become established facts in people's minds. The unease goes far deeper than the monarch. Since the kingdom was established, history has repeated itself -- a regional war, a demographic clash, an inflow of people. That was so in 1948, with the first Israeli-Arab war, which led to Jordan's annexation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Then again in 1967, with the loss of those territories to Israel and the arrival of Palestinians refugees. Again in 1990-91, with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the war that followed and the expulsion of Palestinians who fled to Jordan. And again in 2003 with the US invasion of Iraq, when Iraqi citizens fled to Jordan. Not to mention the "events" of 1970-71 when the king crushed the Palestinian resistance organisations. Each time the same forces were mobilised -- from above, through international, western or Gulf states aid; from below, through family solidarity and social and regional networks. That cushioned the day-to-day impact of each event, while the social contract between the segments of the population -- as well as between society and government -- was constantly rewritten.

Today that mobilisation has ended. The international funding that once allowed King Hussein to manipulate divisions, especially between Palestinians and East Bankers (or Transjordanians), and suppress discontent in the south has dried up. So too have the remittances from migrant oil workers in the Gulf states, which benefitted mostly Palestinians, because those workers

have been replaced by Asians. All-out privatisation in water, telecommunications and electricity, and the establishment of free zones have led to a massive increase in the cost of living while the local labour force has been discarded in favour of cheaper foreign workers. Since 2003, uncontrolled real estate investment, leading to spiralling house prices, has damaged the middle class and sidelined peripheral areas by focusing solely on a bloated capital.

The unease in society began to express itself long before the Arab uprisings. In 1989, a revolt broke out in Ma'an and spread throughout the country, leading to the abolition of martial law, and legislative and municipal elections. Despite censorship, many cases of corruption have been revealed, the latest over Hajaya, collectively owned by the tribe of the same name, which was requisitioned by the government and registered in the king's own name to "facilitate investment." The scandal caused anger and further tarnished the court's image.

Southern Jordan, especially the Tafleh-Karak-Ma'an triangle, formerly loyal to the Hashemite throne, has now become its weak point. Two leading groupings (tjammu') are active there: the 36 Tribesmen and National Initiative. They hold meetings and demonstrations and have clashed with the police; members have been imprisoned for lèse-majesté. The 36 Tribesmen, which demands the return of the Hajaya lands, complains about offensive treatment in the diwan (court). "Today, tribal chiefs with a complaint have to queue up in the diwan. When King Hussein

was on the throne they did not have to submit to that kind of humiliation,” said Yasser Muhaisen, an activist from Tafileh.

National Initiative, a grouping rooted in Arab nationalism, targets social issues and pay claims, and supports strikes by teachers and postal employees. The workers in the Dead Sea potassium mines have struck to prevent their plant from being sold to a Canadian buyer. “The Aqaba free zone should benefit us, but that’s not the case. Now they want to sell off the main source of employment in Karak. What’s to stop the Canadians from hiring Asian workers instead of ours?” asked Waddah M, a lawyer and member of the grouping.

Further north, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Palestinians have added their weight to the anger of the tribes and the historical hostility of some Transjordanian families to the Hashemites. The mainly Palestinian working-class neighbourhoods and the refugee camps remain calm. “For once, these are Jordanian quarrels and the Palestinians have nothing to do with it,” said a resident. Jordan’s Palestinians are now spectators of a story that is not their own. They follow it closely, pay attention and are critical, but resigned. They have enjoyed vicarious victories in Tunisia and Egypt, and compare the repression in Syria to Israel’s repression in Gaza. “Only it’s worse because Bashar is killing his own people,” said Abu Anas. His brother spoke of the invisible hand of the United States: “What kind of revolution is this, where the opposition receives support from Qatar and

instructions from Washington?”

There is now a rift between the people and the dominant political organisations. Ironic comments can be heard about Khaled Meshaal, leader of Hamas. After asserting his loyalty to the Syrian regime, he suddenly reversed his position following a visit to Qatar, and aligned himself with the Muslim Brotherhood. In January, Meshaal met a Qatari envoy and King Abdullah, just a few days after the king returned from a trip to Washington, leading to speculation about a permanent settlement of Palestinian refugees in Jordan to be financed by Qatar. “What can we expect from a political leader who left Syria to return to Gaza after meeting the emir of Qatar and the king of Jordan?” asked Abu Omar.

The Muslim Brotherhood is trying to use the general dissatisfaction to position itself as a vital political player. That has led to clashes with the government, other opposition groups and the tribes (in Mafraq with the Bani Hassan, one of the largest tribes, in December 2011). According to Khalil K, a journalist close to National Initiative, “They are not reliable. They collect people’s complaints and speak on their behalf, and then they dictate a different programme. We organised a demonstration in front of the ministry of the interior and they organised one at exactly the same time in front of the Syrian embassy... By trying to appropriate the protest movement they are sinking it. And if it means having Islamists in power -- no thanks!”

Assem O, a lawyer, sees the situation differently. “I

know the Islamists well, my father was one. Their history here in Jordan is not the same as in other countries. They have always been close to the government, which has relied on them. They have regional and international reach, which the liberal opposition does not. They are obliged to compromise and if they don't succeed they will be thrown out, so what's the problem?"

People are fearful. The Constitutional Monarchy grouping is well aware the kingdom could collapse. Jamal T, who founded the grouping with three high-ranking officers, has clashed with the regime on many occasions. He travels around meeting organisations, tribal chiefs and major national and international political players to convince them of the need to overhaul the constitution on the British model, in which parliament, not the king, would appoint the government. "There is no other way to save the country. The people must be able to decide their own fate. Everything else will follow. Any other solution would be too expensive. Since the Hashemites are out of favour and the king has created a family vacuum around him, it would be almost impossible to replace him with one of his brothers... A republic? What for? People feel reassured by the fact that they live in a kingdom. Look at what's happening in republics like Syria and Yemen."

The king alone appears not to understand the seriousness of the situation. He has delayed implementing the promised reforms, changed prime ministers regularly, each time accusing the previous

one of inefficiency and being unable to deal with corruption -- an issue that is passed around the government, the parliament and the courts. He is playing for time while watching the fate of the Syrian regime. Meanwhile the cost of fuel and electricity continues to soar.

On 25 March 2011 in Amman, the police beat up protestors and pursued them into the hospitals. In November, riots burst out in Ramtha and were severely put down. Since then tougher measures have been introduced, with a massive reinforcement of the riot police. May's military manoeuvres with the United States and 15 other nations, code name Eager Lion, provided a further show of force. The army and the security forces, more favourable to change, do not see eye-to-eye, but no one seems to realise there can be no more undelivered promises.

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