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Article 1.

The Economist

Egypt, Israel and Sinai: The need for triangular co-operation

Aug 11th 2012 -- THERE was no shortage of warning. In the 18 months since Egypt's revolution, Bedouin chiefs in the Sinai peninsula have voiced mounting concern about the growing boldness of armed jihadist groups in their midst. In June a bunch of them based in Gaza launched an attack via Sinai that left one Israeli dead. In July jihadists released a video and leaflets promising to turn Sinai into an Islamic emirate and demanding that Egyptian government forces should impose sharia law or quit. On August 2nd Israel's government called on its own citizens to stay away from Sinai's beach resorts, citing intelligence warnings of a heightened risk. Three days later the Israelis fired a rocket, killing a Palestinian motorcyclist in Gaza, who, they said, was a jihadist. Retaliation beckoned.

Yet a few hours later, just before sunset, Egyptian soldiers manning a desert checkpoint near the three-way junction of Egypt's border with Israel and the Gaza Strip took no precautions before sitting down to break their Ramadan fast. Some still had food in their mouths when their bodies were recovered. The masked

men who pulled up in several cars showed no mercy, blasting the checkpoint with rocket-propelled grenades and automatic gunfire. They left 16 Egyptian servicemen dead.

Some of the attackers, wearing suicide-belts, then hijacked two armoured personnel carriers and sped towards the Israeli border. One vehicle, laden with explosives, failed to break through the barriers and caught fire. The other penetrated more than a mile into Israeli territory before being hit by a rocket fired from an Israeli helicopter. The Israelis were evidently readier than their Egyptian counterparts.

As Egyptian forces reinforced the northern part of Sinai, the risk of a full-scale local revolt grew. Eyewitnesses in el-Arish, North Sinai's biggest town, reported half a dozen attacks by jihadists at midnight on August 7th, with the airport and the road to Rafah, on the border with Gaza, coming under fire. Egyptian forces chased the attackers to el-Touma, home of the Qurn, a clan with links to extreme Islamists. Amid a partial news blackout in Egypt, initial reports claimed that ground troops, backed by helicopter gunships, had killed at least a score of the jihadists, though locals were sceptical of the claim. A fierce counter-insurgency campaign is now expected.

In Egypt blame was soon angrily flung around. Supporters of the "deep state" that still dominates the security establishment were quick to castigate Egypt's newly installed, Islamist-tinted civilian government. President Muhammad Morsi, they said, had foolishly relaxed controls on Egypt's border with the Gaza

Strip, cosyng up to his fellow Islamists in the Palestinian Hamas movement that runs the enclave. They blamed Mr Morsi for letting dangerous foreign elements infiltrate both Sinai and Gaza. Egypt's new prime minister, Hisham Kandil, was jeered and pelted with shoes at a state funeral for the 16 servicemen. The Muslim Brotherhood, from which both Mr Morsi and Hamas spring, suggested that Israel's intelligence service had somehow staged the attack. Others pointed fingers at Egypt's military rulers. On August 8th, perhaps deliberately exploiting the army's discomfiture, Mr Morsi threw down a gauntlet to the generals by sacking a string of senior officers, including the head of intelligence and the military governor of northern Sinai. This may help Mr Morsi regain some of his prestige, which has plummeted since he became president. In the decades since Egypt recovered Sinai from Israel, following the peace accords of 1979, a succession of generals appointed as governors has failed to tackle the desert region's malaise. A vicious security clampdown in 2004 following terrorist attacks on tourist resorts in southern Sinai, along with immigration by Egyptians from the Nile Valley, alienated Sinai's already disgruntled Bedouin. After Hamas took over the running of Gaza in 2007, prompting Israel—unchallenged by Egypt's government—to besiege it, the Palestinians began digging hundreds of tunnels under the border with Egypt. This fostered a bonanza of smuggling that profited Bedouin tribes, corrupt Egyptian officials and

the Islamists of Hamas. Arms smuggling in particular surged last year, as rebels in Libya grabbed huge stocks of weapons accumulated during the paranoid reign of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi.

Complaints from Israel and its Western allies over Sinai's increasing lawlessness have often been met with protests that the 1979 peace treaty restricted Egypt's army to a token, lightly armed presence. (An American-led multinational monitoring force in Sinai is often attacked.) Last year Israel agreed to let Egypt deploy an additional 1,500 men and to fly helicopters near a border strip. But only now, in the wake of the attack, is Egypt taking serious measures to seal the smuggling tunnels and hunt down the jihadists in the region's barren hills.

The Hamas conundrum

Alarming for Palestinians in Gaza, who have hoped for warmer ties with Egypt in the post-Mubarak era, Egypt has again closed its official border crossing, the territory's only reliable outlet to the world. Fearful of an anti-Palestinian backlash, Hamas expressed fulsome condolences for Egypt's fallen soldiers.

Hamas has struggled to suppress jihadist extremism in Gaza while at the same time exalting the right of its own people to fight Israel.

Hamas's prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh, led prayers in the road outside Gaza City's Egyptian consulate, with half his cabinet and hundreds of others prostrating themselves in unison. He is said to have discussed the situation for two hours with Egypt's (later sacked) intelligence chief, Murad Mowafi, and

promised to improve co-operation. An Egyptian newspaper said Hamas had provided the tip-off enabling an Egyptian helicopter to fire on jihadists on August 7th near the border town of Sheikh Zwayed, where masked men in Afghan dress were directing traffic.

For years Hamas has suppressed jihadists groups in Gaza, especially those espousing puritanical Salafist ideals that hark back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Hamas sought to prevent them from attacking hairdressers, internet cafés, Christians and other supposedly decadent influences. But it has been less eager to curb their missile attacks on Israel or to stop them infiltrating Egypt.

More recently, however, Hamas has closed the tunnel complex to slow infiltration and gun-running. If Hamas really wants to please the Egyptian government, it would arrest the 200-odd jihadists still at large in Gaza. Hisham Saidini, a jihadist preacher whom Hamas had freed soon after Ramadan started last month, defended the killing of Egypt's soldiers on the grounds that they were protecting Jews.

Israel, too, will have to let both Egypt's security forces and those of Hamas in Gaza control their borders more effectively. Israel may have to allow Hamas to operate in a buffer zone along Gaza's eastern border. Egypt's air attack on the jihadists on August 8th was the first time that air power had been deployed in anger by Egypt in Sinai since the war with Israel in 1973, and was co-ordinated with Israel in advance. The Israelis say they have had several discreet high-level talks with

the Egyptians since Mr Morsi was sworn in a month ago.

The three governments also need to agree on new economic arrangements. For the past five years, the joint Israeli-Egyptian blockade of Gaza that fostered smuggling through the tunnels has hugely benefited people in Sinai who are beyond the law—of any country. Opening the borders to legal traffic and trade should lessen the power of jihadists and smugglers in Sinai and Gaza, and thus strengthen the arm of the governments in Cairo and Jerusalem.

Mr Morsi seems well aware of the dilemma. Egypt's main military academy and senior civil posts have been opened up to the Bedouin, and plans are afoot to improve the peninsula's several hundred villages, many of which have no piped water. He had already made a point, early in his presidency, of visiting Sinai. He has also hosted Hamas leaders. Before the Sinai attack, he received Mr Haniyeh and discussed definitively lifting Gaza's siege.

Israel may also have to consider co-operating with Hamas, its avowed enemy. After the attack on August 5th, Israel's leaders were careful to blame global jihadists rather than Gazans or Hamas. Although Egypt has yet fully to open the crossing at Rafah, Israel has already reopened its one nearby at Kerem Shalom, for trade if not yet for people. With the influence of Islamists in Syria likely to grow in the event of Bashar Assad's fall, Israel may have to decide whether to accommodate itself to the likes of Hamas lest a still fiercer version of Islamism comes to the

fore.

Article 2.

The Atlantic

7 Reasons Why Israel Should Not Attack Iran's Nuclear Facilities

Jeffrey Goldberg

Aug 11 2012 -- On his Twitter feed, Oren Kessler reports that news analysts on Israel's Channel 2 are in agreement that an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities seems to be imminent. Ari Shavit, of Haaretz, is reporting that an unnamed senior Israeli security official he interviewed who is identified in a headline as "the decision-maker" (If you guess Ehud Barak, the defense minister, you would not be wrong) is arguing that the zero-hour is approaching for an Israeli decision:

"If Israel forgoes the chance to act and it becomes clear that it no longer has the power to act, the likelihood of an American action will decrease. So we cannot wait a year to find out who was right: the one who said that the likelihood of an American action is high or the one who said the likelihood of an American action is low."

Aluf Benn, the editor of Haaretz, writes that the world seems to have accepted the idea that Israel will soon strike Iran: "All the signs show that the 'international community,' meaning the western powers and the U.S.

in the lead, seem to have reconciled themselves with Israel's talk of a military strike - and now they are pushing Netanyahu to stand by his rhetoric and send his bombers to their targets in Iran. In general terms, the market has already accounted for the Israeli strike in its assessment of the risk of the undertaking, and it is now waiting for the expectation to be realized." And then, of course, there is Efraim Halevy, the former head of the Mossad, who warned earlier this month that Iran should fear an Israeli strike over the next twelve weeks.

I'm not going to guess whether Israel will strike Iran tomorrow, next month, next year, or never. I believe it is highly plausible that Netanyahu and Barak will do so at some point over the next twelve months, if current trends remain the same. (The Atlantic Iran War Dial, which is set by a panel of 22 experts, currently puts the chance of an Israeli or American strike over the next 12 months at 38 percent.) Obviously, the Obama Administration believes that Netanyahu and Barak are itching to give the strike order soon. Otherwise, why would it have sent half the senior national security team to Israel over the past several weeks?

Though I have no idea what's going to happen in the coming weeks, this seems like an opportune moment to once again list the many reasons why an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities is a bad idea. Believe me, I take seriously the arguments made by Netanyahu and Barak in favor of action against Iran (read the

Shavit piece, linked above, for a very good summary of all the reasons why a nuclear Iran would be a catastrophe for Israel, and pretty damn bad for the Arabs and the West as well), but the negatives still outweigh the positives in my mind: Here are some potential consequences of an Israeli strike:

- 1) Innocent people will die. It is quite possible that even a limited Israeli strike could kill innocent Iranians, and it is an almost-sure thing that Iranian retaliation will kill innocent Israelis.
- 2) It very well might not work at all. The Israeli Air Force is very talented and brave, but it doesn't have the capacities of the USAF. It would only have one shot at these facilities, and it might not do much in the way of significant damage. It could also lose pilots, or see its pilots shot down and captured.
- 3) Even if a strike does work, it may only delay the Iranian program, and it might even speed it up. Any Israeli preventive strike would justify, in the minds of Iranians -- even non- or anti-regime Iranians -- that their country needs nuclear weapons as protection. Certainly much of the world would agree, and the sanctions put in place on Iran may crumble. So acceleration of the nuclear program may be a consequence of an Israeli strike.
- 4) An Israeli strike may cause a surge of sympathy for Iran among Sunni Arabs across the Middle East, who right

now despise the regime for, among other reasons, supporting the Assad government in Damascus. Right now, Arab opinion is hardened against Iran and its Lebanese proxy, the terror group Hezbollah. An Israeli strike could reverse this trend, and would be a boon to Assad and Hezbollah in many other ways as well -- for one thing, it would take attention away from the continuing slaughter of innocent Syrians by Assad. Conversely, an Israeli strike would be very useful for those forces around the world trying to delegitimize and isolate Israel.

- 5) A strike could trigger an overt war without end (Iran, of course, has been waging subterranean war on Israel, and America, for a long time now, and Israel and America respond, in subterranean fashion), and an all-out missile war may escalate into something especially horrific, so in essence, Israel would be trading a theoretical war later for an actual war now.
- 6) A strike could be a disaster for the U.S.-Israel relationship. It might not be -- there is no sympathy for the Iranian regime among Americans (except on the left-most, and right-most margins) and there is plenty of sympathy for Israel. But an attack could trigger an armed Iranian response against American targets. (Such a response would not be rational on the part of Iran, but I don't count on regime rationality.) Americans are tired of the Middle East, and I'm not sure how they would feel if they believed that Israeli action brought harm to Americans. Remember,

American soldiers have died in the defense of Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, but they've never died defending Israel. I doubt Israel wants to put Americans in harm's way now. And it certainly isn't healthy for Israel to get on the wrong side of an American president.

- 7) The current American president is deeply serious about preventing Iran from going nuclear. I believe he would eventually use force (more effectively, obviously, than Israel) to stop Iran from crossing the nuclear threshold. His position will be severely compromised if Israel jumps the gun and attacks now. Again, what I worry about, at bottom, is that an Israeli attack would inadvertently create conditions for an acceleration of the Iranian nuclear program.

Jeffrey Goldberg is a national correspondent for The Atlantic and a recipient of the National Magazine Award for Reporting. Author of the book Prisoners: A Story of Friendship and Terror.

Article 3.

Foreign Policy

The Syrian Spillover

Daniel I. Byman, Kenneth M. Pollack

August 10, 2012 -- The Syrian civil war has gone from bad to worse, with casualties mounting and horrors multiplying. Civil wars like Syria's are obviously tragedies for the countries they consume, but they can also be catastrophes for their neighbors. Long-lasting and bloody civil wars often overflow their borders, spreading war and misery. In 2006, as Iraq spiraled

downward into the depths of intercommunal carnage, we conducted a study of spillover from recent civil wars in the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere in order to identify patterns in how conflicts spread across borders. Since then, Iraq itself, along with Afghanistan, Libya, and Yemen, have furnished additional examples of how dangerous spillover can be. For instance, weapons from Libya have empowered fighters in Mali who have seized large swathes of that country, while al Qaeda-linked terrorists exploiting the chaos in Yemen launched nearly successful terrorist attacks on the United States. Spillover is once again in the news as the conflict in Syria evinces the same dangerous patterns. Thousands of refugees are streaming across the border into Turkey as Ankara looks warily at Kurdish groups using Northern Syria for safe haven. Growing refugee communities are causing strain in Jordan and Lebanon. Meanwhile, the capture of 48 Iranians, who may be paramilitary specialists, could pull Tehran further into the conflict. Israel eyes developments in Syria warily, remembering repeated wars and concern over the country's massive chemical weapons arsenal. For the United States, these developments are particularly important because spillover from the civil war could threaten America's vital interests far more than a war contained within Syria's borders. Of course, much will depend on how exactly this spillover plays out -- and certainly no one yet knows what will happen in the wildly unpredictable war for control of Syria. But if past informs present, the intensity of the

war effect typically correlates strongly to the intensity of the spillover, often with devastating consequences. At their worst, civil wars in one country can cause civil wars in neighboring states or can metastasize into regional war. And it's the severity of the spillover that should dictate the appropriate response. There are five archetypal patterns of spillover from civil wars.

Refugees: Spillover often starts with refugees.

Whenever there is conflict, civilians flee to safety. The sad truth about civil wars is that often civilians are targets: Without clear front lines and when "enemy combatants" can be any young male who can pick up a gun, the danger is clear. So the goal of the warring armies is often to kill as many of the other side's civilians as possible or at least drive them from their homes. To avoid the rapine and economic devastation that accompany these kinds of conflicts, whole communities often flee to a foreign country or become displaced within their borders, as more than a million Syrians have. In addition to their own misery, refugees can create serious -- even devastating -- problems for the nations hosting them. The plight of Palestinian refugees and their impact on Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria since 1948 is a case in point, contributing to instability in their host countries, international terrorism, and wars between Israel and its neighbors. Beyond this, refugees can often become carriers of conflict. Angry and demoralized refugee populations represent ideal recruitment pools for the warring armies; the Taliban have drawn from angry

young Afghan refugees raised in Pakistan, offering them a chance for vengeance and power. Indeed, refugee camps frequently become bases to rest, plan, and stage combat operations back into the country from which the refugees fled. For instance, the camps set up in the Democratic Republic of Congo after Rwanda's genocide quickly became a base of operations for fleeing Hutu rebels to regroup.

Terrorism: Many civil wars have become breeding grounds for particularly noxious terrorist groups, while others have created hospitable sanctuaries for existing groups to train, recruit, and mount operations -- at times against foes entirely unconnected to the war itself. The Palestine Liberation Organization, Hezbollah, the Tamil Tigers, and al Qaeda, to name only a few, all trace their origins to intercommunal wars. Today, after years of punishing U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan, al Qaeda's core is weak, but its offshoots remain strong in countries wracked by internal conflict such as Yemen and Somalia. The most recent flare-up is in Mali, where fighters fleeing Muammar al-Qaddafi's Libya fled with arms looted from his arsenals, and have seized parts of Mali, in some areas even imposing a draconian form of Islamic law. While there had been intermittent rebellions in Northern Mali for years, the civil war in Libya vastly increased the capability of the rebels and created a worse terrorism problem for the region, and potentially for the world. These terrorist groups rarely remain confined by the country's borders. Some will nest

among refugee populations, launching attacks back into the country in civil war, and inviting attack against the refugee populations hosting them. In other cases, terrorists may decide that neighboring regimes or a segment of a neighboring society are aiding their adversaries and attack them to try to scare them into stopping their assistance. Terrorists often start by flowing toward civil wars, but later begin flowing away from them. Jihadists first went to Afghanistan to fight in that civil war in the 1980s but by the 1990s began using it as a base to launch attacks against other countries -- including, of course, the United States on 9/11.

Secessionism: As the Balkan countries demonstrated in the 1990s, seemingly triumphant secessionist bids can set off a domino effect. Slovenia's declaration of independence inspired Croatia, which prompted Bosnia to do the same, which encouraged Macedonia, and then Kosovo. Strife and conflict followed all of these declarations. Sometimes it is the desire of one subgroup within a state to break away that triggers the civil war in the first place. In other cases, different groups vie for control of the state, but as the fighting drags on, one or more groups may decide that their only recourse is to secede. At times, a minority comfortable under the old regime may fear discrimination from a new government. The South Ossetians, for example, accepted Russian rule but rebelled when Georgia broke off from the Soviet Union, as they feared they would face discrimination

in the new Georgian state. After Russia helped South Ossetia defeat the Georgian forces that tried to reconquer the area in 1991-1992, the next domino fell when ethnic Abkhaz also rebelled and created their own independent area in 1991-1992. The frozen conflict that resulted from this civil war finally burst into an international shooting war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008.

Radicalization: One of the most ineffable but also one of the most potent manifestations of spillover is the tendency for a civil war in one country to galvanize and radicalize neighboring populations. They regularly radicalize neighboring populations when a group in a neighboring state identifies with a related group caught up in the civil war across the border. These tribal, ethnic, and sectarian feelings always predate the conflict, but the outbreak of war among the same groups just across the border makes them tangible and immediate -- giving them a reason to hate neighbors and resent their own government. They may demand that their government or community leaders act to support one side or another. Alternatively, they may agitate for harsh actions in their own countries against groups they see as sympathizing with the enemy side over the border. Thus, the Iraqi civil war of 2005-2007 galvanized Sunnis in Egypt, Jordan, the Maghreb, and the Persian Gulf states both to demand that their own governments do more to support the Iraqi Sunni groups and (at least in the Gulf) to demand harsher treatment of their own Shiite populations. At

its most dangerous, this aspect of spillover can contribute to civil wars next door. The Lebanese civil war that began in 1975 prompted the Syrian Sunnis to launch their own civil war against Bashar al-Assad's father in 1976, a conflict that only ended with the horrific massacre of 20,000-40,000 people at Hama in 1982.

Intervention: But perhaps the most dangerous form of spillover is when neighboring states intervene in a civil war, transforming a local conflict into a regional one. Perversely, the goal is often to diminish the risks of spillover such as terrorism and radicalization. But it can take many forms: intervening in a limited fashion either to shut down the civil war, to help one side win, or just to eliminate the source of the spillover.

Occasionally, a neighboring state will see a civil war as an opportunity to grab some long coveted resource or territory. Typically, even limited intervention by a regional power only makes the problem worse.

Countries get tied to "clients" within the civil war and end up doubling down on their support for them. They assume that "just a little more" will turn the tide in their favor. Worse still, they can see neighborhood rivals intervening in the civil war and feel compelled to do the same to prevent their enemy from making gains. So when Rwanda and Uganda intervened in Congo in the mid-1990s to drive the *genocidaires* out of the refugee camps and topple the hostile regime in Kinshasa that supported them, so too did Angola, which sought to block them. As the conflict wore on,

several powers tried to carve out buffer zones where their preferred proxies would rule -- and where they could grab some of Congo's abundant natural resources. Seven of Congo's neighbors ended up intervening, turning the Congolese civil war into what became known as "Africa's World War." At its worst, this pattern can produce direct conflict between the intervening states over the carcass of the country in civil war. Syria first intervened in Lebanon in 1975 to end the radicalization of its own Sunni population. But the Syrians soon found that diplomacy, covert action, and support to various proxy groups were inadequate and reluctantly launched a full-scale invasion the following year. For its part, Israel suffered from terrorism emanating from the Lebanese civil war and covertly supported its own proxies, launched targeted counterterrorism operations, and even limited military incursions, before deciding in 1982 to invade to try to impose a single (friendly) government in Beirut. The result was a conventional war between Israel and Syria fought in Lebanon. But even winning did little for Israel. Thirty years later -- 18 in painful occupation of southern Lebanon -- Israel still faces a terrorism problem from Lebanon, and the Jewish state's nemesis, Hezbollah, born of the Israeli invasion, dominates Lebanese politics.

Bad Signs in Syria -- Our 2006 study also examined the factors that lead to the worst forms of spillover. They include ethnic, religious, and other "identity" groups that are in both the country caught in civil war

and its neighbors; neighboring states that share the same ethno-religious divides being fought over by the country in civil war; fragile regimes in the neighboring states; porous borders; and a history of violence between the neighbors. Unfortunately, Syria and its neighbors exhibit precisely these traits, explaining why we are already seeing the typical patterns of spillover from the Syrian civil war, and why spillover from the conflict could get much worse. The Syrian conflict has produced more than 120,000 officially registered refugees, but the real figure is closer to 300,000. Turkey has 43,000 registered refugees from Syria and probably more than 25,000 that have not registered. The Turks believe that the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), a separatist Kurdish terrorist group, is using this population to infiltrate Turkey to launch a new violent bid for independence. Ankara is convinced that PKK fighters allied with the Alawite regime have taken control of parts of Syria, particularly in ethnically Kurdish areas of the country. In response, Turkey is aggressively enforcing the sanctity of its border even as it assists Syrian refugees who are taking the fight back home. Public opinion in Turkey is strongly anti-Assad, and popular frustration grows as Ankara seems unable to stem the violence. Iraq is already struggling to avoid sliding back into its own civil war. It doesn't need any pushing from Syria, but that is just what it is getting. Iraqi Sunnis identify wholeheartedly with their Syrian brethren whom they see as fighting against a Shiite-dominated government backed by Iran -- which they see as an exact parallel

with their own circumstances. External support to the Syrian opposition from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Sunni Arab governments is reportedly flowing through the Sunni tribes of Western Iraq, many of which span the Syrian border. This support appears to be an important cause of the resurgence of al Qaeda in Iraq and the worsening sectarian violence there. The Iraqi regime (rightly) claims that it is fighting the same terrorists that the Alawite Syrian regime is struggling with on the other side of the border. As the Alawites are a splinter of Shiism, the growing cooperation between Damascus and Shiite-dominated Baghdad is feeding Sunni fears of a grand Shiite alliance led by Iran. All of this conjures a self-fulfilling prophecy about sectarian war. Meanwhile, Iraqi Kurds are now contemplating a bid for independence in a way that they haven't for many years. Key Kurdish leaders, including Kurdistan Regional Government President Massoud Barzani, have concluded that they cannot work with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki -- whom they routinely brand as a "Shiite Saddam." And they increasingly believe that Turkey might eventually be persuaded to support such a bid. This makes whatever happens with Syria's Kurds of particular importance. Indeed, Barzani and the Turks are wrestling against the PKK and the Syrian regime for the loyalty of Syria's Kurds, who might well attempt to declare independence, putting pressure on Iraq's Kurds to do the same. Lebanon may be suffering the worst so far. It is inundated with Syrian refugees -- 30,000 have registered with the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees, but the latest spike in violence probably added at least another 10,000 -- a number the tiny country simply cannot handle. The Syrian conflict is tearing at the seams of Lebanon's already fragmented politics. Its Sunnis champion the Syrian opposition while Shiite Hezbollah backs the Syrian regime, provoking gunfights in the streets of Beirut and Tripoli. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is reportedly funneling arms to the Syrian opposition through Sunni groups in Lebanon and opposition groups are building bases in Lebanon, triggering reprisal attacks by Syrian regime forces and their Hezbollah allies. So far, Jordan has escaped relatively unscathed, but that may not last. Amman already faces huge challenges from its Palestinian and Iraqi refugee populations, and now refugees from Syria have begun to flow in (almost 40,000 officially at last count, but other sources put the number closer to 140,000). Syrian army and Jordanian border patrol forces have clashed as the Jordanians have tried to help Syrian refugees. Moreover, many Jordanians, including not only those of Palestinian descent but also the monarchy's more traditional supporters, have lost patience with King Abdullah II's endless unfulfilled promises of reform triggering rioting and terrorism there unrelated to Syria's troubles. More refugees, terrorism, and a further radicalized population could be more than the Hashemite Kingdom can take. Remarkably, Israel has gotten off scot-free, so far. While we can all hope that will last, it would be foolish to insist blindly that it will. The longer the

civil war in Syria lasts, the more likely it is that the spillover will get worse. And it's possible this war could drag on for months, even years. The United States and other powerful countries have shown no inclination to intervene to snuff out the conflict. Within Syria, both the regime and the opposition have shown themselves too powerful to be defeated but too weak to triumph. The war has also left the country awash in arms, so any new government will face a daunting task unifying and rebuilding the country. Most ominously, the opposition is badly divided, so victory against Assad might simply mean a shift to new rounds of combat among the various opposition groups, just as Afghanistan's mujahideen fell to slaughtering one another even before they finished off the Soviet-backed regime there in 1992. In the best case, the current problems will deepen but not explode. Refugee flows will increase and impose an ever greater burden on their host countries, but the stress won't cause any to collapse. Terrorism will continue and more innocent people will die, but it won't tear apart any of the neighboring states. And, from the narrow perspective of U.S. interests, the violence would remain focused within Syria rather than becoming regional, let alone global. Various groups -- starting with the Iraqi Kurds -- will continue to flirt with secession and other tensions will simmer, but none of these factors will boil over. The neighbors will provide some forms of support to various groups within Syria without crossing any Rubicons. Overall, the Middle East will get worse but won't immolate.

This best case is not very good, and unfortunately it's also not the most likely. Worse scenarios seem more plausible. The fragility of Lebanon and Iraq in particular leaves them vulnerable to new civil wars of their own. It might be hard, but it is not impossible to envision a regional war growing from the Syrian morass. Turkey seems like the primary candidate to up its involvement in Syria. Fears that Kurdish secessionism may spread, mounting criticism that the regime is ignoring atrocities next door, or a risky belief that Ankara could tip the balance in favor of one faction over another might eventually lead the Turks to intervene militarily -- grudgingly and in a limited fashion at first, of course. If the plight of the Assad regime worsens, and if the Turks are heavily engaged, Iran might press Baghdad to increase its direct support of the Alawites and step up its own aid. Baghdad will be reluctant, but it might feel more inclined to do so if the Turks continue to support the Iraqi Kurds in their fight with the central government and if worsening internal divisions in Iraq -- doubtless exacerbated by spillover from Syria -- leave the Maliki government even more dependent on Iranian support. An embattled Alawite regime -- especially one facing ever greater Turkish intervention -- might opt to employ its chemical warfare arsenal or, alternatively, amp up terrorist attacks on Israel to try to turn its civil war into an Arab-Israeli conflict, a development that could turn public and regional opinion in favor of the regime and discredit Assad's opponents. Under those circumstances, Israel might mount limited military

operations into Syria to take out its chemical weapons caches or terrorist bases, which no doubt would have repercussions among Syria's neighbors and Arab states in general. So far, the humanitarian nightmares of Syria have evinced little more than pity from the American people and only modest aid from their government. After a decade-plus of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, there is justifiably deep ambivalence about new military commitments in the Middle East. Stories of the humanitarian nightmares of Syria have evinced little more than pity from the American people. This creates a dilemma for the Obama administration and concerned Americans as they watch Syria burn: They have no interest in getting involved, but standing idly by is risky. If spillover from Syria worsens, squaring this circle could prove a major challenge. At the very least, Washington should place a premium on keeping the Syrian civil war from dragging on indefinitely. Stepping up our efforts to arm, train, and unify the Syrian opposition factions that matter most -- those fighting the regime within Syria rather than those squabbling outside it -- would be a good place to start. Progress is likely to be limited, but Washington carries a bigger stick than the regional allies already backing Assad's opponents and U.S. leadership can help prevent them from working at cross purposes. Supporting the efforts of our regional allies to feed, shelter, and police their refugee communities would be another option. Some neighbors could also use help dealing with their own political and economic problems, which could help

them better weather the spillover from Syria. And some medicine might be needed along with the sugar: Pressing our regional friends to begin overdue reforms will help mitigate the discrimination and misery among their own populations that can act as kindling when sparks from Syria come flying their way. The Syrian civil war is undoubtedly a tragedy for the people of that country. The longer it burns, though, the more likely it will ignite something much worse. However difficult it is to end the fighting today, it will be even harder as the violence snowballs and spillover grows. Less can be more when it is soon.

Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack are, respectively, the director of research and a senior fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

Article 4.

BBC News

Why Azerbaijan is closer to Israel than Iran

James Reynolds

12 August 2012 – Baku -- First of all, you need to ask for an appointment well in advance. Security agents call your head office to make sure you are who you say you are.

If your credentials check out, an appointment is made, and a guard escorts you to the top floor of the building. Another guard calls you in, tests your equipment and ask you to leave behind your mobile

phone. You are taken through further checks and invited to sit in a corridor and admire works of art on the wall as you wait.

Then, just a few minutes behind schedule, one of the most fortified men in the Caucasus region arrives for his interview.

Michael Lotem is Israel's Ambassador to Azerbaijan. His embassy is the closest that Israel physically gets to its principal enemy, Iran. From the embassy it is only a four-hour drive south to the Iranian border.

The Israeli embassy in Baku is an important, and occasionally a dangerous, outpost. In January 2012, Azerbaijan's government said it broke up an Iranian plot to kill the ambassador.

"I can tell you that the Iranians don't sit still for a second," says Mr Lotem slowly, as he fiddles with his shirt sleeve. "But I'm not worried about my security. I have full confidence in the Azeri security services."

'More Tel Aviv than Tehran'

Israel and Azerbaijan have had diplomatic relations since April 1992, six months after the republic declared its independence from the Soviet Union.

Israel and the secular government of Azerbaijan share the same goal: to check the spread of political Islam in general and Iran in particular.

Theirs is an alliance reinforced by hardware. In February 2012, Israel sold Azerbaijan \$1.6bn (1.3bn euros) of sophisticated weapons systems.

"We share the same view of the world, I guess," says Michael Lotem. "We share quite a few common problems. For us Israelis to find a Muslim country

which is so open, so friendly, so progressive, is not something the Israelis take for granted."

Earlier this year, America's Foreign Policy magazine suggested the alliance between Israel and Azerbaijan went deeper than many had previously thought.

The magazine reported that Israel had secured an agreement to use Azerbaijan's airfields in case it went ahead with a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities.

If true, this would give Israel a significant tactical advantage. But Israel denies the claim.

"That's sheer science fiction", says the ambassador, "or maybe we should drop the science out of it. The aim is having very solid relations with Azerbaijan."

Azerbaijan's population is mostly Shia Muslim. But its government is intensely secular.

A lone shop in the centre of Baku, called simply The Muslim Shop, shows how rare the public expression of Islam is in the capital.

In the evenings, restaurants serve Turkish-made beer to customers in Fountains Square. Most women do not wear headscarves. The centre of town has a McDonalds, a Mothercare and a Versace shop. Baku feels more like Tel Aviv than Tehran. The government is determined to stop its Islamic neighbour from encroaching.

"Azerbaijan naturally rejects the Iranian Islamic influence because it is perceived as a threat to the very nation state," says Leila Alieva, the Director of the independent Centre for National and International Studies in Baku.

"On the other hand, Azerbaijan has always enjoyed a very good relationship with the Jewish community."

Strike 'disastrous'

But there are those in Azerbaijan who disagree with their government's embrace of Israel.

Ilgar Ibrahimoglu is an Islamic cleric who campaigns for a greater role for Islam in Azerbaijan.

He works from a small office and prayer room in Baku. Guests are invited to take off their shoes when they enter in order to respect Islamic custom.

Mr Ibrahimoglu enters the room, sits behind a desk and warns that previous journalists have made him look stupid. So he says that he will speak in short sentences, perhaps conscious that Azerbaijan's government will keep a close eye on his words.

"Iran is a Muslim country and a close neighbour of Azerbaijan", he says, "but I won't say more. Even if this was a live interview I'd say the same thing for five hours straight."

But when the staccato conversation turns to Israel, the cleric decides to loosen his rules and speak slightly more expansively.

"Azerbaijan shouldn't be friendly with a country that carries out state terror against another people, the Palestinians. Israel can't beat Iran. It couldn't win in Gaza or Lebanon, and it won't win in Iran."

The cleric's words won't make Azerbaijan switch alliances. In May 2012, two Azerbaijani poets were detained in Iran on charges of espionage. Azerbaijan's government has since advised its citizens not to travel to the Islamic Republic.

Elman Abdullayev, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, deals with Iran every day. He studied in California, and bounces from foot-to-foot as he talks.

He apologises for the renovations being made to the Ministry's Soviet era building (the apology is prompted when we pass a man who accidentally pulls a door off its hinges.)

"Azerbaijan has always been famous for its modernistic approach - for its secularism." Mr Abdullayev says. "You know we have been first secular state in the Muslim East. So we develop our relations with different countries based on our national interest - be it Israel, be it Muslim countries."

Mr Abdullayev rejects the reports that Azerbaijan might lease its airbases to Israel. But what would his government do if its ally, Israel, strikes its neighbour, Iran?

"This a hypothetical question which would be difficult to answer," he says. "We think that the Iranian issue has to be resolved diplomatically, peacefully, politically, because anything like that [a military strike] would be disastrous for the whole region, for all of us."

Iranian suspicions

Relations between Azerbaijan and Iran are made more difficult because they share not just a border, but a common heritage.

The Azeri people once lived under the Persian Empire. In 1813, the Treaty of Gulistan after the first Russo-Persian war split the ethnic Azeri people into two. Those in the north lived under Russian, then Soviet

rule - and are now in independent Azerbaijan. Those in the south lived under the Persian Empire - and are now in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Today, around nine million ethnic Azeris live in Azerbaijan. But even more ethnic Azeris live across the border in Iran. Figures show that there are around 10-20 million Azeris in Iran - around a fifth of the country's population. Millions more Iranians have Azeri ancestry, including Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Among many Azeris there is a desire for reunification. Simon Aruz is an ethnic Azeri from Iran. He worked as a writer and political activist and campaigned for better rights for the Azeri people in the Persian State. In 2009, he fled the country for Azerbaijan.

"We used to live under pressure in Iran," he says. "We are always thinking about our brothers, our sisters, our family. I hope they can be free soon. "

Such words make Iran suspicious. The government of the Islamic Republic is concerned that Azerbaijan wants to steal both land and people - a charge denied by Azerbaijan's government. The tensions of a shared, divided heritage are now magnified by the different ways in which each government sees the world.

Border tension

The overnight train from Baku to the southern border town of Astara leaves at 11pm and makes its way slowly south, along the coast of the Caspian Sea. Some travellers fall asleep immediately. Others drink and listen to the chorus of frogs outside.

"Ask me anything about the Iranians," says one man

who says he is travelling to Astara simply to drop off a music CD with friends. "I know them better than they know themselves."

Early in the morning, the train arrives in Astara. My colleagues and I take a taxi to see the Iranian border. We stop at a gap in the trees half way up a hill.

A group of Polish tourists is already standing by the fence. They are in Azerbaijan to watch a Europa League football match - and happily pose for photos with Iran as their backdrop.

The Islamic republic is just on the other side of the fence. Houses with white walls and red roofs are clearly visible across the valley. Cars in northern Iran head towards the border crossing with Azerbaijan. The Polish tourists head off to watch their match. After a few minutes the security forces arrive and order my colleagues and me to accompany them to their base.

They inspect the TV pictures we have filmed which show little more than the fields of northern Iran and order us to delete the footage.

They explain that broadcasting the pictures would get them into trouble - they say that they do not want to do anything to increase tension with their Islamic neighbour. The commander, a vocal Wayne Rooney fan, finally drops us off at a hotel in Astara.

At the border crossing itself, crowds of Azeris load up their cars with boxes of food and sweets. Day-to-day goods cost less across the border in Iran. One woman has brought back soap, bananas, biscuits for her grandchildren.

"We are going to Baku," says Ali Mani, a carpet merchant from Iran. "Our friends invited us. There are some restrictions in Iran that we don't see here. It's interesting here.

"We haven't any problem with Azerbaijan and I know Azerbaijan language," adds his friend in English. Our interpreter asks them in Azeri if they would like to talk about Iran and Israel. They say no, and also decline to have their picture taken.

Next to the border gate, a driver called Ismail stands next to his car. His 23-year-old son is slumped in the front seat, trying to hide from the sun, barely able to move. The two are returning from a trip to hospital in Tehran.

"My son was having treatment here in Azerbaijan but it wasn't doing anything," Ismail says. "The doctors didn't say what his problem was. That's why some people advised me to go to Tehran.

"We went there, they carried out a stomach operation and it was successful. My attitude [towards Iran] is very positive. I went there with big hopes - for my son to be cured there. It was successful. So I'm happy."

Ismail says that his son's operation cost \$6,000. He has paid a first instalment to the Iranian hospital and has promised them he will pay the remainder.

Azerbaijan and Iran share both history and mistrust. Their network of competition draws in both the Caucasus and the Middle East.

But for those Azeris on the border Iran is more simple and more immediate. It is a cheaper place to shop, and the only hope to save a son's life.

Article 5.

Al-Quds Center (Amman)

The Road to the Great

Kurdistan

Oraib Al Rantawi

11/8/12 -- Iraqi Kurdistan can only be described as a 'semi-independent state', since its autonomy has never been officially announced. It has its own government, security forces, heavy weapons, independent defensive policy and independent foreign relations. It also agreed oil deals without consulting its central government, is involved in regional and international alliances and stands against the government's political stance in Baghdad, particularly in the case of the Syrian crisis.

If any of the world's autonomous regions enjoys the same privileges of Iraq's Kurdistan, such a region is closer to being considered an independent state rather than being an autonomous region within the Iraq state.

The Syrian Kurds seem to be Walking the same way of their fellow Iraqis. While the ferocity of the conflict between the regime and the opposition is reaching its highest level, Syria's Kurds repeated the same attitude of Iraq's Kurds by distancing themselves from the nationwide issues and focusing on the Kurds' rights and demands only. They don't keep a firm

commitment, neither to the regime nor the opposition, except their commitment to grab as many benefits as possible from whoever grants them what they want. There are Syrian Kurds who decided to side with the regime as they believed this would be for the favour of the Kurds' position in Syria. While other Kurds are serving as members in the Syrian National Council (SNC) and even chairing it hoping that their efforts will guarantee a favourable position to the Kurds in "Syria post-Assad". The Kurds always looked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a model for their aimed independent entity, and we can see that similar organisations to the PKK are being established in Kameshli, Afrin and other towns and villages in Syria's north-east.

There are reports coming from Syria about autonomous governance held by the Kurds in towns where they pose a majority, in addition to the formation of Kurdish militias which are provided help and training programmes by the neighbouring autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq. Other reports talked about early election for choosing the members of the so-called "Parliament of Western Kurdistan". The Syrian Kurds have also been making international and regional communications to avoid hostile reactions from the powers which are likely to be worried about the possibility of establishing an independent Kurdish state in Syria, especially Turkey. The Kurdish efforts in Syria are being intensified on all fronts in order to replicate the Kurdish achievement in northern Iraq. The Sunni-Shia conflict in Iraq put the Iraqi Kurds in a

position where they found in themselves a power that can decide the country's future, as everybody was seeking their support, in addition to the fact that they were the only party who retained a reasonable voice amid the deadly disputes between the Sunni and the Shias. The same scenario could be repeated in Syria, as the Sunni-Alawite conflict there is developing on the same track. We saw how the "nationalist" ruling regime in Syria which used to undermine the rights of the Kurdish minority has given Syrian nationality to more than 250,000 Kurds who were not registered as Syrian citizens before. What is more significant is that the Syrian regime has withdrawn its military forces and even its administrative institutions from the Kurdish regions. They were then turned by the Kurds into semi-independent regions, in preparation to announce an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria.

Meanwhile, the "hypocritical" Syrian opposition has done nothing except facilitate the Kurdish efforts aimed at seceding from Syria. I call the Syrian opposition a "hypocritical" one because it speaks a double language in order to achieve its goals. Sometimes it seeks the Kurds' satisfaction, other times it tries to reassure the Turks who are worried about the Kurds. The core concept of the Syrian opposition is to keep all the regional and international powers satisfied. That includes the supportive powers, the donors and the sponsors.

Turkey, which has always been worried about the "Kurdish threat", now finds itself facing its worst nightmares. Being in a rush to eliminate Bashar al-Assad's regime

forced it to endorse the "legitimation" of the autonomous Kurdish region in north Iraq. It was a paradox to see Turkey supplying the Kurdish autonomous region with arms and helping it to work separately of the Shia-controlled Iraqi government, despite the fact that Turkey was the fiercest enemy of the prospect of establishing an independent Kurdish state. Turkey made this to guarantee that the Iraqi Kurds will be able to contribute to the efforts aimed at removing the Syrian regime, but the Turks have to remember that they will not be able to stop the Kurdish moves for full independence in the future.

Sooner or later, Turkey will also find itself facing another independent Kurdish entity in Syria, and the Turks will not be able to do anything to stop this from happening. The Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu admitted recently that the Syrian crisis has gone out of control, and it is supposed that one of the "uncontrolled" results of this crisis will be the emergence of an independent Kurdish entity.

The Arabs are required to reconsider their stances towards the "Kurdish cause", they had previously avoided to tackle this issue as they feared the possibility of a separation to take place within their states. However, and after the recent developments, the Arabs have to fear the possibility of the emergence of the "Great Kurdistan". The Kurds have permanently stepped aside from the Arab World, and that is the price the Arabs had to pay for their weakness and their violations of the Kurds' rights. But the Arabs will not be the only side to pay, as the Turks and Iranians have

scores to settle with the Kurds too.

The region is now witnessing the birth of a nation which has finally found its opportunity to establish its independent and unified state. This state will not be established at the expense of only the Arabs, but the Turks and Iranians as well as each of the three nations has its share in the compensation the Kurds should get for their previous sufferings.

Oraib Rantawi is the founder and director general of the Amman-based Al Quds Center for Political Studies and an established writer and columnist. He is a frequent commentator and analyst on television and has produced his own show "Qadaya wa Ahdath" (Issues and Events.)

Article 6.

Los Angeles Times

Can Romney break the Democrats' lock on the Jewish vote?

Dan Schnur

August 12, 2012 -- Have you heard the one about the Westside Jewish Republican Club? Its members take turns hosting the gatherings, and they meet each month in the host's car.

The Democrats' advantage among Jewish voters might not be quite that extreme, but there's no question that the Jewish community in this country has always leaned strongly toward the Democratic Party and its

candidates. Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush achieved a high-water mark for the GOP by winning more than 30% of the Jewish vote during their elections in the 1980s. But in the last 20 years, no Republican presidential nominee has won even a quarter of the Jewish vote. Four years ago, Barack Obama won among Jewish voters over John McCain by a margin of 78% to 22% (a bigger margin, by 10 points, than his advantage among Latinos). But even in the face of this vast historical imbalance, Republicans see an opportunity this year to make inroads for Jewish votes. They believe that President Obama's record on issues relating to Israel and the Middle East has created an opportunity. Recent polling by the Public Religion Research Institute shows that Jewish voters still lean strongly leftward, favoring abortion rights and same-sex marriage at almost unanimous levels, and strongly supporting Obama on most economic issues as well. But the Jewish community is much more equivocal on questions regarding the Middle East conflict, with barely one-third supporting Obama's approach on this front.

Many U.S. Jews were troubled by Obama's early insistence on a settlement freeze. They also took umbrage at his use of the emotionally charged term "occupation" in reference to the Israeli military presence in Palestinian territory in a seminal speech in Cairo during his first months in office. The ongoing coolness between Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not helped matters, nor has

the administration's emphasis on diplomacy over military engagement when it comes to Iran's nuclear facilities. It was these issues that Mitt Romney felt opened a small but important window of opportunity that made it worth his going to Israel at the end of July.

Though the media coverage of Romney's trip was dominated by his ill-chosen observations about the London Olympic Games, his stop in Jerusalem allowed him to reinforce the contrast he hopes to draw between Obama's approach to the Middle East and his own. Even Romney's comments about the link between the Palestinians' economic and cultural challenges, which drew widespread criticism from international quarters, probably did him more good than harm with Jewish voters who are dissatisfied with Obama's approach to the Middle East.

The challenges for Romney are steep, as Jewish voters remain deeply supportive of Obama's reelection. Most have decided that the president's goals on economic, environmental and social policy outweigh their reservations on Middle Eastern matters. Some also doubt that the full-throated support that Republican leaders have demonstrated for Netanyahu's Likud government represents the best path to peace. But a statistically relevant segment of the Jewish community — between 10% and 15% — has indicated a willingness to consider shifting from the Democratic to the GOP candidate this year. Even such a sizable shift would not allow Romney to win anything close to a majority of Jewish voters, but it could provide his

campaign with opportunities in key swing states such as Florida, Nevada and Pennsylvania.

Take Florida. Although the state's Jewish community represents only about 4% the population, Jewish voters make up more than 8% of the electorate. In a state still known for hanging chads and butterfly ballots, and where most polls show this year's race within the margin of error, an increase in Romney's support to the levels that Reagan attracted could determine the outcome there.

Romney's campaign team also understands that Israel is a matter of critical importance to evangelical voters, many of whom are still lukewarm in their support for a Mormon candidate. Romney also hopes he'll be helped by the rapid growth in this country's Orthodox Jewish community, whose members tend to place a higher priority on the Middle East than on domestic policy. Still, the vast majority of Jewish voters will not give Romney even a moment's consideration before casting their ballots this fall. The question is whether enough of them are sufficiently concerned by the incumbent's relationship with Israel for the challenger's trip there to make a difference.

Dan Schnur is the director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at USC.