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Article 1.

Guardian

## **Kofi Annan's Syrian peace plan has been blown out of the water**

Abdel Bari Atwan

13 May 2012 -- The two suicide car bombs in Damascus on 10 May were an alarming development. Before last December suicide bombs were unheard of in Syria. Now there have been 10 such attacks, becoming increasingly deadly – 55 died in the latest atrocity; and on 11 May another attack was thwarted in Aleppo, Syria's largest city, where a suicide bomber in a carwash killed five on 5 May.

Damascus and Aleppo are home to Syria's business and professional classes, who have not, in general, participated in

the uprising, tending to remain loyal to the Assad regime. The suicide bombs have targeted government buildings, the security services and the ruling Ba'ath party's headquarters. While many civilians died in Thursday's blasts, significant numbers of security personnel have also been killed.

None of this suggests that the regime is carrying out these atrocities, as the opposition has claimed, although it is true that Syria has armed and backed extremist groups such as the Abu Nidal organisation and Hezbollah. Moreover, it is unlikely that the Free Syrian Army, the armed wing of the opposition, has appropriated methods that are the hallmark of jihadist, not secular, groups.

My fear is that a third element has crept into this conflict, possibly from Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan, and that its agenda has nothing to do with the Arab spring or the clamour for democracy.

On Friday an Islamist group calling itself al-Nusra (Victory) Front released a video in which it added the Damascus bombs to others it has already claimed. In the manner of al-Qaida-associated groups, al-Nusra has already established a high production value news outlet, called the Al-Manarah Al-Bayda Media Foundation. The spokesman highlighted the sectarian intentions of the attack, stating that Sunni Muslims need "protection" from the ruling Shia Alawites, who will be made to "pay the price".

And this apparently sinister development has not occurred in isolation. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Gulf states were keen to arm the Syrian revolution – not because they are lovers of

democracy and reform, but because they would like to see Assad removed from power. Under pressure from the Islamist establishment inside their own countries (which has its own sectarian agenda), the Saudis in particular are also mindful of the 2005 assassination of Rafik Hariri (a close friend of the al-Sauds who held joint Saudi-Lebanese citizenship), which led to a long-standing personal vendetta between the Saudis and the Assad regime, which they held responsible.

The problem is that the Free Syrian Army, even well equipped, is unlikely to prevail, unaided, against Syria's mighty and highly professional armed forces, which in general remain loyal. Meanwhile, the advent of suicide bombers has given Assad a pretext for escalating the violence against his own citizens.

Given the course of events in Libya, the opposition were, understandably, gambling on foreign intervention, but none has been forthcoming: first, because long-term Syrian allies Russia and China stood by Assad and vetoed all relevant UN security council resolutions; second, because the US is reluctant to become embroiled in yet another costly – and dangerous – conflict, given its nine-year occupation of Iraq and its ongoing, decade-long, war in Afghanistan. Any American intervention is likely only after the presidential elections in November, and would be linked to an attack on Iran, which remains the main focus in the region.

Any hopes that Kofi Annan's peace initiative might succeed have been blown out of the water by the apparent arrival of an extremist group, or groups, intent on escalating the sectarian aspect of the conflict, which neither the regime nor the opposition can hope to control.

If the extremist groups manage to hasten the fall of the regime, their agenda is unlikely to end there. In post-Saddam Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaida offshoot fanned the flames of a Sunni-Shia sectarian war that was only extinguished by the US army's "surge" and General Petraeus's "Awakening" campaign, which overwhelmed the jihadis temporarily. But in Syria there are no US forces, no Petraeus in sight.

Whoever governs post-revolutionary Syria is unlikely to rule over a united country, but rather sectarian or ethnic pockets, engaged in ongoing battles with each other. The historical precedent here is Lebanon, which was mired in civil war from 1975 for 16 years.

Nor is the prospect of sectarian conflict confined to Syria's borders. Regional polarisation might see a Sunni bloc, headed by Turkey and Saudi Arabia and incorporating any number of extremist groups, facing off a Shia alliance led by Iran. Here we have an even more chilling template – from 1514 the Sunni Muslims of the Ottoman empire and the Shia Safavid of Persia battled over the region for more than a century, fuelled by their religious differences.

*Abdel al-Bari Atwan is the editor-in chief of the London-based pan-Arab newspaper Al-Quds Al-Arabi.*

The Washington Post

## **Obama's misguided wooing of an uninterested Putin**

Jackson Diehl

May 14 -- It's becoming clear that President Obama regards Vladimir Putin as a prime partner for a second-term foreign policy. The problem is that Putin is refusing to play his part.

The White House's bland announcement Wednesday that the Kremlin chief would not attend a Group of 8 summit at Camp David this week covered a rude rebuff. Obama had tailored the conclave to Putin, moving it from Chicago so that it would be clearly separate from a NATO summit. Earlier this month, Obama dispatched national security adviser Tom Donilon to Moscow to hand Putin what a Russian official described as "a multi-page, detailed document, whose main message is that Obama is ready to cooperate with Putin."

Putin's response was to claim that he needed to skip Camp David in order to put together a new government cabinet — even though he is now the president, not the prime minister. Some Russian analysts dismissed that explanation; they posited that Putin was offended by the State Department's mild criticism of the beatings of demonstrators during his inauguration last week. Others speculated that he was managing serious behind-the-scenes power struggles.

Either way, Putin appears lukewarm at best about the main cause

of Obama's focus on him: his ambition to conclude a groundbreaking nuclear weapons accord in 2013. The deal would go well beyond the New START treaty of 2010 and aim at a radical, long-term reduction of the U.S. and Russian arsenals. It would be Obama's legacy achievement on the foreign-policy issue that most engages him, and the retroactive justification for his Nobel Peace Prize.

Putin, however, doesn't seem terribly interested. A seven-point directive on relations with the United States he issued last week listed "further reduction of strategic offensive arms" sixth, and said they "are possible only within the context of taking into account any and all factors influencing global strategic stability." That means missile defense: Point seven reiterates Moscow's demand for "firm guarantees" about U.S. anti-ballistic missile systems.

Obama's fixation on a nuclear deal has prompted a major turnaround in his treatment of Putin, whom he shunned for three years in the hope of promoting the supposedly more "reformist" Dmitry Medvedev. Though he might have waited several days to call, Obama nevertheless congratulated Putin on an election that international observers said was neither free nor fair. He has made repeal of the 1974 Jackson-Vanik amendment, which limits U.S. trade with Russia, a priority in Congress this spring.

What's striking about this strategy is its disregard for the biggest foreign-policy lesson of Obama's first term. The Arab Spring showed that "engagement" with autocratic leaders isn't wise if their grip is slipping. With thousands of opposition demonstrators roaming the streets of Moscow and clashing with his security forces, Putin looks more than a little like Hosni

Mubarak or Bashar al-Assad when Obama was courting them three years ago: For now he's in control — but his governing model is broken, and his country is beginning to turn on him.

A little bet-hedging would seem to be in order, particularly given Putin's stiffing of a presidential invitation. That's why the most wrongheaded piece of the administration's policy may be its continuing and stubborn opposition to the "Magnitsky bill" — a piece of legislation, authored by Democrats, that aims to restore human rights to the center of U.S.-Russian relations.

Sergei Magnitsky, after whom the bill is named, was a Russian

lawyer who uncovered a \$230 million embezzlement scheme by

Russian tax and interior ministry officials; those same officials had him put in prison, where mistreatment led to his 2009 death. The bill, sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.) and in the House by Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.), would strip those officials of U.S. visa rights and freeze any of their assets in U.S. banks. More important, it would mandate the same treatment of any other Russian officials involved in gross human rights violations.

This sanction strikes at the heart of the web of corruption around Putin. Moscow's bureaucratic mafiosi rely heavily on foreign bank accounts; they vacation in France, send their children to U.S. colleges and take refuge in London when they fall from Putin's favor. The fear and loathing provoked in Moscow by the bill is encapsulated by item No. 3 on Putin's new priority list:

“Work actively on preventing unilateral extraterritorial sanctions by the U.S. against Russian legal entities and individuals.”

Incredibly, Obama has sided with Putin against Congress. His lobbyists have tried repeatedly to block the bill, even though it has become key to passing the trade legislation Obama wants. As the measure moved toward a vote in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last month, senior White House and State Department officials demanded that it be postponed until after Putin’s visit to Camp David.

Now that Putin has canceled, maybe it’s time to put human rights in Russia back on the agenda.

Article 3.

Al-Hayat

## **A National Unity Government Has Always Foreran a War**

Jihad el-Khazen

13 May 2012 -- On the third of March this year, Shaul Mofaz, the leader of Kadima after that date, said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is a liar, and that he would never hold any agreement with him. In a rowdy session at the Knesset, he said: “Listen up: I will not join Bibi’s government. Not today, not tomorrow and not after I head Kadima on March 28. This is a

bad and failed government and Kadima under my leadership will replace it in the next elections. Is that clear enough?”

It is very clear, and it is also my view which I continue to espouse, unlike Mofaz. To be sure, Mofaz, at two-thirty in the morning of Tuesday, May the 8th, declared that he agreed with Netanyahu to form a national unity government in which Mofaz, the leader of Kadima, would serve as Deputy Prime Minister without any portfolios for his party.

Thus, the government led by Netanyahu now has a majority of 94 seats out of 120 in the Knesset, an unprecedented majority in the history of Israeli governments.

Many Arab and foreign commentators said that Netanyahu got the best possible deal to lead a war government, since every ‘national unity’ government in Israel had culminated with a war, as was the case in 1967.

This is my opinion too. In recent days, I went back to the Israeli press and found that Iran had been absent from mention, with the exception of the attack railed by the Defense Minister Ehud Barak against the former head of the Shen Bet, Yuval Diskin, and former Mossad head Meir Dagan, for their stances in opposition to a war on Iran.

The absence of news on Iran in the media means that it is being discussed extensively in the corridors of power and in secret meetings. Since my opinion on the Israeli war criminals is well documented, I chose some views expressed by Israeli politicians concerning one another.

“This is small, disgusting, nauseating politics” the leader of the

left-wing Meretz party Zehava Gal-On said about the agreement.

Labor Party Chairwoman Shelly Yacimovich, meanwhile, was quoted as saying, “This is a pact of cowards and the most contemptible and preposterous zigzag in Israel’s political history... the Labor Party has been given a rare and important opportunity to lead the opposition, and it will do so energetically and faithfully.”

Mofaz took the oath of office in the Knesset on May 7, becoming the Deputy Prime Minister. In reaction, Binyamin Ben-Elizer said that he has “sold his soul to the devil”.

Haim Ramon, one of the founders of Kadima and a supporter of the former party leader Tzipi Livni, resigned from Kadima and said that he is no longer a centrist. Many others followed suit.

The commentator Nahum Barnea explained in Yedioth Ahronoth how the new alliance would benefit Netanyahu in his domestic policies, and also in saving Mofaz from political death. He warned against the dismantlement of the opposition in the Knesset and said: “Do not mourn Netanyahu’s morals or Mofaz’s credibility. Mourn democracy”.

Other commentators said that Netanyahu has succeeded in dismantling, or destroying Kadima, and some warned against a dictatorship by the majority.

The above overlaps with some of my views on Netanyahu and the other war criminals in the fascist government of Israel. Since the Israelis are saying it, then it must be true, thereby settling any potential debate over it. I also read in their papers that Netanyahu and Mofaz agreed on the issue of Iran before even

agreeing on the shape of their government.

Iran is then behind the political coup in Israel. The absence of the latter from the news - which I mentioned in the beginning - is one indication. The deal itself was cooked at night, which is another indication, because the Israeli press itself was insisting on May 6 that the early elections< threatened by the Prime Minister< would be held on September 4, and that Netanyahu would set the date for the elections during Likud's conference on that day, i.e. May 6. Yet in less than 24 hours, the surprise announcement had come.

The government of Benjamin Netanyahu is preparing for war on Iran. Every 'national unity' government in Israel foreran a war.

I have another proof which I believe is conclusive: On May 3, Israel mobilized six reserve battalions and announced that it would mobilize 16 more, a security measure "due to potential problems in the Sinai desert and the volatile situation in Syria".

Twenty-two battalions for potential problems in the Sinai desert and Syria? I am a simpleton and I am naïve, but not to this degree.

Article 4.

NYT

## **Can Islamists Be Liberals?**

Mustafa Akyol

May 13, 2012 – Istanbul -- FOR years, foreign policy discussions have focused on the question of whether Islam is compatible with democracy. But this is becoming passé. In Tunisia and Egypt, Islamists, who were long perceived as opponents of the democratic system, are now promoting and joyfully participating in it. Even the ultra-Orthodox Salafis now have deputies sitting in the Egyptian Parliament, thanks to the ballots that they, until very recently, denounced as heresy.

For those concerned about extremism in the Middle East, this is good news. It was the exclusion and suppression of Islamists by secular tyrants that originally bred extremism. (Ayman al-Zawahri, Al Qaeda's leading ideologue, was a veteran of Hosni Mubarak's torture chambers.) Islamists will become only more moderate when they are not oppressed, and only more pragmatic as they face the responsibility of governing.

But there is another reason for concern: What if elected Islamist parties impose laws that curb individual freedoms — like banning alcohol or executing converts — all with popular support? What if democracy does not serve liberty?

This question is seldom asked in the West, where democracy is often seen as synonymous with liberalism. However, as Fareed Zakaria warned in his 2003 book "The Future of Freedom," there are illiberal democracies, too, where the majority's power isn't checked by constitutional liberalism, and the rights and freedoms of all citizens are not secured. This is a risk for the post-Arab Spring countries, and even for post-Kemalist Turkey. The real debate, therefore, is whether Islam is compatible with liberalism.

The main bone of contention is whether Islamic injunctions are legal or moral categories. When Muslims say Islam commands daily prayers or bans alcohol, are they talking about public obligations that will be enforced by the state or personal ones that will be judged by God?

For those who believe the former, Saudi Arabia might look like the ideal state. Its religious police ensure that every Saudi observes every rule that is deemed Islamic: women are forced to cover themselves, men are forced to frequent the mosque, and everyone is barred from anything considered sinful. Yet members of the Saudi elite are also famous for trips abroad, where they hit wild nightclubs to commit the sins they can't at home. And while this is their civil right, it raises the question of whether Saudi Arabia's intense piety is hypocritical.

By contrast, rather than imposing Islamic practices, the ultra-secular Turkish Republic has for decades aggressively discouraged them, going so far as to ban head scarves. Yet Turkish society has remained resolutely religious, thanks to family, tradition, community and religious leaders. Hence in today's Turkey, where one has the freedom to choose between the bar and the mosque, many choose the latter — based on their own consciences, not the dictates of the state.

Yet even in Turkey, where democracy is rapidly being consolidated under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, known as A.K.P., there are reasons to worry that illiberal democracy could emerge. For Turkey still suffers from a paranoid nationalism that abhors minority rights, a heavy-handed judiciary designed to protect the state rather than its citizens, and an intolerant political culture

that regards any criticism as an attack and sees provocative ideas as criminal.

These obstacles to liberal democracy are unrelated to religion though; they are the legacy of years of secular but authoritarian politics. But the A.K.P., which has been in power for almost a decade and has introduced important liberal reforms, has lately let its progressivism wane. The party has absorbed some of the traditional illiberalism of the establishment in Ankara, the capital, that it now fully dominates. It has not been too Islamic; it is just proving to be too Turkish.

As the A.K.P.'s rule empowers Turkey's religiously conservative majority, it is imperative that the new elite liberalize the political system, rather than simply co-opt it for their own advantage. And as new questions about religion and public life emerge — Should schools promote Islam? Should alcohol sales be restricted? Should the state instruct private TV channels to uphold “moral values”? — the government must protect civil liberties, including the “freedom to sin,” and constrain those who seek to use state power to impose their values on others.

If Turkey succeeds in that liberal experiment, and drafts its new constitution-in-the-making accordingly, it can set a promising example for Islamist-led governments in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere. All of these countries desperately need not only procedural democracy, but also liberalism. And there is an Islamic rationale for it as well: Imposed religiosity leads to hypocrisy. Those who hope to nurture genuine religiosity should first establish liberty.

Mustafa Akyol, a Turkish journalist, is the author of “Islam Without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty.”

Article 5.

Wall Street Journal

## **NATO's First Step on Missile Defense**

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

May 13, 2012 -- Last month, NATO conducted a historic exercise: the first comprehensive test of the alliance's new missile-defense capability. A U.S. ship, radar and satellite, as well as interceptor batteries from Germany and the Netherlands, conducted a series of simulated engagements to test the alliance's ability to defend against missile attacks. The test was successful.

None of the countries involved could have dealt with the simulated attacks alone. But together, working under NATO command and control, allies could—and did. The test was a clear demonstration of trans-Atlantic solidarity in action. It also shows NATO's continuing determination to protect our members' territory and populations from attack and the threat of attack.

Today, we face a grave and growing threat from the proliferation of ballistic-missile technology. More than 30 countries have acquired such technology or are working to acquire it. Some already have missiles that can be fitted with conventional warheads or weapons of mass destruction, and some of these missiles can reach Europe. That's why the U.S. and European allies are working together within NATO to develop appropriate responses.

NATO allies already have a range of proven tools at their disposal: diplomacy, disarmament and deterrence. But we must also be ready to respond when a potential aggressor, armed with ballistic missiles, resists diplomacy, rejects disarmament, and refuses to be deterred.

That is why we agreed at the 2010 Lisbon Summit to develop the capability to defend NATO's European populations, territory and forces. That capability is now coming together.

The U.S. and a number of European allies have announced their intention to contribute interceptors, sensors and control systems, as well as to host key parts of the overall system. At our summit in Chicago on May 20-21, we will declare an interim capability that brings these individual contributions together under NATO command and control.

This interim capability will provide the alliance with a limited but operationally meaningful and immediately available capability against a ballistic-missile threat. It is the first step, but a real step, toward providing full coverage for all NATO populations, territory and forces in Europe.

I have seen this plan referred to as "the U.S. defending Europe."

The U.S. contribution to NATO's missile defense is indeed vital. But this is true trans-Atlantic teamwork: North American and European allies working together to make the whole alliance more secure.

The U.S. contribution reflects America's vital interest in security and stability in Europe. The Continent is home to America's most committed and capable allies, to say nothing of countless American businesses, citizens and forces. That is why the U.S. has offered to place missile-defense assets in Europe under NATO command and control, as America's contribution to the Alliance's defense.

The first elements of the U.S. network of satellites, sensors and sea-based interceptors are already deployed to Europe. The other elements, including land-based interceptors, will be deployed in the coming decade.

From the very beginning, the whole point of NATO missile defense has been to go beyond the U.S. contribution. European allies are fully involved—supporting it politically, sharing the costs, and providing substantial assets of their own. Many different assets from European allies are being drawn together with the U.S. assets into a common, integrated and shared NATO capability.

The alliance has already developed an initial command-and-control system to link the U.S. assets with sensors and interceptors provided by European allies. This part of the system is designed by NATO, paid for by NATO, and operated by NATO.

After the Chicago summit we will continue to expand the system

toward full operational capability. The Netherlands has already announced plans to upgrade four air-defense frigates with missile-defense radar. France plans to develop an early-warning capability and long-range radar. Germany has offered Patriot missile batteries and is hosting the NATO command-and-control at Headquarters Alliance Air Command in Ramstein. Turkey, Romania, Poland and Spain have all agreed to host U.S. assets. I expect more announcements in the months and years ahead.

NATO missile defense is based on solidarity and cooperation among 28 nations, on both sides of the Atlantic—nations that face a common threat, share common values, and are committed to defending our common security.

*Mr. Rasmussen is secretary-general of NATO.*

Article 6.

The Daily beast

## **The European Farce**

Niall Ferguson

May 14, 2012 -- With the sap rising and the governments falling, all the European powers are merrily acting in national character.

In the midst of a severe financial crisis, the French have just elected a champagne socialist on promises of a 75 percent top tax rate and a lower retirement age. The Greeks also had an election in which the established parties lost to a ragbag of splinter groups. The outcome of the election was that they need to have another election. (Cue Zorba the Greek theme music.) Meanwhile, the wailing gloom of the flamenco emanates from Spain, where youth unemployment is now around 50 percent.

Within a few hours of arriving in London, I hear the following announcement on the train: “We apologize for the late departure of this service. This was due to the late arrival of essential personnel. [Translation: the driver overslept.] However, we are happy to inform customers that the London Underground is running a nearly normal service.” It’s that “nearly” that is so quintessentially English.

Three days later, in Berlin, I finally reach the Europe that works. Well, sort of. As usual, I find myself marveling at the sheer idleness of the richest and most successful country in the European Union. Lunchtime in the leafy garden of the Café Einstein on the Kurfürstenstrasse shows no sign of ending even at 3 p.m. It’s Thursday. Did you know that the average German now works 1,000 hours a year less than the average South Korean? That’s why when you go on holiday the Germans are already there—and when you go home, they stay on.

Understandably, many American investors have simply given up

on Europe. After two years of the world's most tedious soap opera ("Can Angela get on with François, the new boy in town? Is Mario the real thing after phony old Silvio?"), they have come to the conclusion that it is only a matter of time before the whole euro zone comes crashing down, with Greece in the role of Lehman Brothers.

Meanwhile, in Berlin they still talk of "buying time." They mean by this that as long as the European Central Bank keeps printing money, lending to weak Mediterranean banks so that they can buy the bonds of weak Mediterranean governments, it will all work out in the end. This is a delusion. The economies of the Southern European countries are in a disastrous state, comparable with the conditions of the Great Depression. True, they no longer have the Keynesian option to engage in deficit finance; their debts are already too large. But the German prescription of austerity tax hikes and spending cuts in the teeth of recession is losing political credibility with every passing week.

Suddenly it is no longer so hard to imagine a Greek politician deciding to gamble on exiting the euro zone, restoring the drachma, and letting a drastic devaluation do its work. Suddenly it is no longer so hard to imagine the horrendous consequences, with investors asking the obvious question: "If they can leave, who will be next?"

As last year's Nobel economics laureate Thomas Sargent pointed out in his brilliant acceptance lecture, Europe is now roughly where the United States was between the Articles of Confederation of 1781 and the Constitution we know today, which replaced them in 1789. What is desperately needed is an

Alexander Hamilton, prepared to take all or part of the debts of the individual states onto the federal balance sheet. What is desperately needed is a recognition that Europe's present confederal structure is incompatible with monetary union created in 1999.

The solution is available. Since November of last year the European Commission has been actively considering how to create "Stability Bonds" that would put the full faith and credit of the EU (i.e., Germany) behind at least part of the national debts of the member states. Taken individually, some of these debts are hopelessly high. Added together and compared with total euro-zone GDP, they are manageable.

What stands in the way is not French socialism or Greek populism. It is quite simply German complacency. Life in Berlin is good. In Munich, the capital of the German manufacturing machine, it is even better. You should try explaining to the average Bavarian beer drinker at the Stammtisch why he needs to get ready to finance an annual transfer to the Mediterranean countries of up to 8 percent of German GDP. I never get very far.

Here, then, is the twist in my tale of national character. For two generations, the Germans really did want to take over Europe—by force. But today, when they could do so peacefully, they can't be bothered.