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Article 1.

American Interest

The Middle East Mess Part One: Over There

Walter Russell Mead

September 14, 2012 -- Coming in the middle of the American campaign season and timed to coincide with eleventh anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, the violence now shaking the Middle East has inevitably turned into a US domestic issue. I'll write about that as the situation unfolds, but at the moment it seems most important to think about what is happening over there — and then to think about what this might mean for US policy or politics.

This is not a subject I can write about dispassionately. Many of the places now appearing in the headlines are places I've been: from the consulate in Chennai, where I attended an iftar event with a group of American diplomats and some leaders from the Islamic community in that storied and beautiful city last month to embassies in Cairo, Khartoum, Tunis and elsewhere that I've visited over the years. Many of the diplomats there are people I know, and in all these places I've gotten to know religious, intellectual and cultural figures and had the chance to talk to students and others about their concerns. Violence that takes place somewhere when you know people on both sides of the barricades is always painful to think about.

With images on TV of smoke billowing from US embassies and angry crowds assembled outside, more than ever, I am grateful all the time for the service of the brave people who voluntarily represent the United States in places where at any moment their lives can come under grave threat.

If Americans are going to understand what's going on and process it effectively, the first thing we've got to realize is that this isn't all about us. The riots in Cairo are basically part of a local power struggle. Radical Salafists are in a power struggle with the Muslim Brotherhood; attacking the US embassy forces President Morsi (as the radical strategists presumably expected) to side with the US, however slowly or reluctantly. That's a win for the radicals, who want to tar the Muslim Brotherhood as soft appeasers who side with the Americans against their own outraged people.

Striking at the embassy pushes Egyptian politics in a more radical direction short term, and over the medium term it

weakens the Muslim Brotherhood and strengthens the more radical groups. After these last attacks, you are not going to see many tourists or foreign investors traipsing to Egypt anytime soon. The already struggling Egyptian economy has taken a hit that will cut employment. That's going to hurt, and it's going to reduce the popularity of the government, much to the benefit of the radicals who hope to replace it.

In many other places, from the West Bank and Gaza to Yemen and Tunisia, the protest movements are also more important for what they mean in local politics than about global policy. Radical movements and imams who work with them seized eagerly on the Youtube film to generate popular outrage and use mob anger to make a public statement. Moderates who speak against violence or try to cool matters look like American puppets; this is the kind of issue the radicals love, and we can expect them to milk it for all it is worth.

It's hard at this point to assess how much of this was at least quasi-spontaneous public reaction and how much reactions were stimulated and even shaped by organized radical groups. In Cairo, there seems to have been a mix of angry street protesters demonstrating more or less at random and organized activists with a much more definite agenda, but we will not really know the answers for some time — if ever. However, not all that many Middle Eastern Muslims are in the habit of trolling Youtube for blasphemous videos. That the protests came when they did and that in at least two cases (Egypt and Libya) well organized cadres used those protests to make more dramatic actions strongly suggests that something more than simple spontaneous outrage was at work.

Libya looks even more like a planned operation. There, radicals apparently allied to Al-Qaeda in some vague way and possibly cooperating with Qaddafi loyalists made what appears at this point to be a well planned, coordinated military strike against the consulate in Benghazi. Here the timing seemed clearly less about the film than about the 9/11 anniversary, and it looks more like a message from hard core radicals rather than explosion of popular rage.

Again, we will know more as the smoke clears and at this point we are talking about possibilities rather than conclusions, but ruling out some kind of planning in at least some of the incidents on the basis of what we now see is naive.

In any case, the biggest worry now may not be further attacks on US embassies and consulates in the region; security is very tight at those facilities now and unless something very unusual happens, crowds may gather outside the walls, but perimeters will not be breached. There are no guarantees, but the US has been thinking hard about these issues since well before 9/11.

The biggest bomb in the region right now, and let us hope and pray that it doesn't go off, involves the relations between Coptic Christians and Islamic radicals (and the mobs they can command) in Egypt. The news is only slowly getting to Egypt that the film — one of the stupidest pieces of hack work I myself have seen — was made by a Coptic Christian in the US. When and if the film is actually viewed in its 14 minutes of amateurism and low production values, its intention to vent the rage and frustration some Copts feel about their treatment in Egypt will be clear. It is an angry, embittered and perhaps not very spiritual Copt's view of the way Islam treats his community — and a cry

of anger and frustration.

This is the kind of provocation — even though by a marginal member of the community and disavowed by the leaders — that can light firestorms of communal violence and cleansing. That is what Egypt must watch out for right now, and if you don't like watching crowds marching against the US embassy, imagine what could happen if angry mobs with clubs, axes and guns head into the Christian neighborhoods of Cairo.

Episodes of mass violence and killing of religious minorities throughout the former territories of the Ottoman Empire — from the Danube to the Euphrates and the Nile — have been all too common in the last 150 years. Sometimes the victims have been Muslims (most recently in Srebrenica but between 1850 and the aftermath of World War One there were plenty of expulsions and massacres of Muslims as Ottoman power retreated from Europe); on an even larger scale in the modern Middle East they have been Christians and, sometimes, Jews and adherents to variant forms of Islam. If anybody wants to think about worst case scenarios in Egypt, this is the one to look at. Armenians, Chaldean Christians, most recently the Christians in Iraq: it has happened before and though one very much wants to discount the possibility, things like this could well happen again.

The person who comes out of all this looking smartest is Samuel Huntington. His book on the “clash of civilizations” was widely and unfairly trashed as predicting an inevitable conflict between Islam and the west, and he was also accused of ‘demonizing’ Islam. That’s not what I get from his book. As I understand it, Huntington’s core thesis was that while good relations between countries and people with roots in different civilizations are

possible and ought to be promoted, civilizational fault lines often lead to misunderstandings and tensions that can (not must, but can) lead to violence and when conflicts do occur, civilizational differences can make those conflicts worse.

The last few days are a textbook example of the forces he warned about.

The Islamic value — and it a worthy one on its own terms and would certainly have been understandable to our western predecessors who punished blasphemy very severely — of prohibiting insults to the Prophet of Islam clashes directly with the modern western value of free expression. To the western eye (and it's a perspective I share), a murderous riot in the name of a religion is a worse sin and deeper, uglier form of blasphemy than any film could ever hope to be. To kill someone created in the image of God because you don't like the way God or one of his servants has been depicted in an artistic performance strikes westerners as an obscene perversion of religion — something that only a hate-filled fanatic or an ignorant fool could do.

When acts like this take place all over the Islamic world, the message to many non-Muslims is that the Islamophobes are right: Islam as a religion promotes hatred, bigotry and ignorance. This will be held by many people to be a revelation of the “true” face of a violent religion. Or, alternatively, some will say that while Islam might be a good enough religion taken alone, Middle Easterners are savage and ignorant haters who cannot be trusted and whose culture (rather than their religion) is one that blends intemperance and stupidity into an ugly stew of hate.

At Via Meadia we don't think either Islam or Middle Eastern culture can be so simply categorized; that's not my point. My point is that the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims has grown wider; the reaction of the western world and the Islamic world to these recent events drives us farther apart. The gulf of suspicion between the worlds has grown deeper. Europeans will worry more and be less welcoming to Muslim immigrants. Many Americans will draw closer to Israel, be more concerned about any signs of increase in the US Islamic population and have a harder time trusting the Muslims in our midst.

Those reactions in turn will make Muslims in Europe, North America and the Islamic-majority parts of the world feel more suspicious, more threatened and more alienated.

These are some of the chains of causation Huntington was thinking of when he warned that the world faced the possibility for this kind of clash. The Obama administration has worked very hard to reduce the chance of this kind of division, but it seems clear at this point that a few hours can undermine the efforts of many years.

Unfortunately, Islamic radicals are deliberately hoping to promote a clash of civilizations in the belief that a climate of polarization will strengthen their political power in the world of Islam. Attacking the embassy in Cairo is an effort to push Egyptian opinion in a more radical direction, but the radicals hope that this is part of a larger push that will bring them to power across the Islamic world. Like Boko Haram in Nigeria, which hopes to provoke a religious war with the Christians partly in order to achieve power in the Muslim North, radicals use the prospect of a clash of civilizations to further their own

cause throughout the troubled Islamic world.

The US and more generally the west (including Russia, so perhaps I should say the “Christian world” instead) has tried several approaches to this situation and so far we haven’t been happy with the results. Confrontation, reconciliation, cooperation: there are good arguments to be made for them all, but in practice none of them seem to make the problem go away.

I’ll return to this topic in the next few days, but one thing should be absolutely clear to Americans. Since 9/11, we’ve had two presidents who attempted to deal with our problems in the Middle East. Both presidents notched up some achievements — but neither president got the job done.

The gap between American opinion and opinion in much of the Islamic world is as wide now as it was when President Obama flew to Cairo; things are not getting better.

Mr. Mead is a professor of foreign affairs and humanities at Bard College. His blog, Via Meadia, appears at the American Interest Online.

Article 2.

Washington Post

Next up in the Middle East mess? **Saudi Arabia’s succession fight**

15 September -- From afar, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia appears immune from the turmoil and uncertainty engulfing nations such as Syria, Egypt and Libya. But rather than being an oasis of stability in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is nearing its own crisis point.

The elderly sons of Saudi Arabia's founder, King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, who have ruled sequentially since his death in 1953, are approaching the end of the line. And as that happens, the future of this kingdom on which the world depends for oil has never been more precarious.

King Abdullah is nearly 90 and ailing. Crown Prince Salman is 76. The royal family can continue to pass the monarchy to remaining brothers and half-brothers, but even the youngest of those is already in his late 60s. None is likely to have the acumen and energy — or even the time — to usher in an era of reform to solve the kingdom's mounting problems: poor education, high unemployment, a corrupt bureaucracy, a sclerotic economy and an increasingly young and frustrated society. These domestic challenges are compounded by external ones including Middle East turmoil, the nuclear ambition of the radical regime in Iran and a fraying alliance with the United States.

The three historic pillars of Saudi stability are cracking. Massive oil revenue, which has bought public passivity, is threatened by peaked production and sharply increased domestic energy consumption. A supportive Wahhabi Islamic establishment that

bestowed legitimacy on the House of Saud is increasingly fractious and is losing public credibility. And now, the royal family is in danger of division as it is forced to confront generational succession.

Whether by the choice of the royal family sooner, or by the will of Allah a bit later, the crown is going to pass to the new generation. This entails risk as well as opportunity.

The opportunity is obvious. In theory at least, a new-generation royal — educated, more open-minded and above all more energetic — could begin to tackle the country's manifold problems by relaxing political and economic controls and by providing more efficient and accountable government to relieve the frustrations of a sullen populace.

Given the stakes involved, however, the risk is that the diffuse and divided royal family will dither or, worse yet, splinter. The issue is not merely which new prince would wear the crown, but the fear among the royals that his branch of the family would pass it on to its sons and grandsons in perpetuity, precluding other branches from ever ruling again.

For nearly 60 years, the crown has passed by family consensus from one brother to the next, occasionally skipping one deemed incapable or unsuitable for leadership, but otherwise following the tradition of seniority. Whoever reigned might favor his sons with particularly plum jobs, but he understood that the crown would go next not to his sons but to his brothers. It is a system unlike that of any other monarchy. But in a kingdom where princes often marry multiple wives and thus produce dozens of progeny each — now adding up to nearly 7,000 princes — it is a system that has largely worked.

Given the royal family's aversion to risk, perpetuation of the status quo — several more aged and infirm brothers ascending to the throne — is the most likely choice of senior Saud royals. But what may seem safe to them is dangerous for the country. Saudi Arabia these days is all too reminiscent of the dying decade of the Soviet Union, during which one decrepit leader succeeded another, from Leonid Brezhnev to Yuri Andropov to Konstantin Chernenko, before a younger and more open-minded Mikhail Gorbachev arrived too late to save a stagnant society and economy. As President Ronald Reagan famously said of those old Soviet leaders, and as the next U.S. president may say of the Saudis, "They keep dying on me."

In Saudi Arabia, there are some potential Gorbachevs — or better — among the grandsons of the founder. Ten of the 13 provincial governors are grandsons, all with administrative experience, some with genuine talent and almost all sons of kings. Similarly, there are grandsons holding prominent positions in some key Saudi ministries. A short list of third-generation princes who could be king includes Khalid al-Faisal, governor of Mecca and son of the respected late King Faisal; Muhammad bin Fahd, governor of the oil-producing Eastern Province and son of the late King Fahd; Khalid bin Sultan, deputy minister of defense and son of the late Crown Prince Sultan; and Muhammad bin Nayef, deputy minister of interior for security and son of the late Crown Prince Nayef.

How would a new-generation monarch be selected? Recognizing how large and divided the royal family had become, in 2006 King Abdullah established an Allegiance Council comprising each of his remaining brothers or, in the case of deceased brothers, each one's eldest son. This council of 35 princes is

intended to represent the entire Saud family in the selection of a crown prince to succeed the one who automatically ascends to the throne upon Abdullah's death. Each member of the council would have one vote; in a country that has no democracy, it would at least be a form of family democracy. Abdullah, who exempted selection of his own successor from this process, already is on his third crown prince, each of whom he personally chose and two of whom died. As a result, the council has met only once: at its formation, when it swore fealty to king and country. Many Saudis fear that the Allegiance Council process will die with King Abdullah — and with it the hope of a smooth generational succession.

Family feuds are not an idle worry. The Sauds have ruled Arabia on and off for more than 250 years. Infighting among several brothers ended their rule in 1891 and forced into exile a teenage Abdul Aziz, who later returned and founded the current kingdom. On his deathbed in 1953, the long-reigning Abdul Aziz forced his two eldest sons, Saud and Faisal, to swear to avoid a repetition of this history.

The admonition fell on deaf ears. The two brothers quickly began quarreling, and their feud continued for more than a decade before Faisal, with the backing of family members and religious leaders, forced his elder brother into exile.

Aware of this history, Saudis can only watch and wait, exerting no influence on succession decisions but aware that rivalries could break out and a royal house divided might not stand.

Saudi society now bears little resemblance to the passive populace of even a decade ago. Thanks to the Internet, Saudis

know about life inside their kingdom and in the wider world, and they resent the disparities they see. Fully 60 percent of Saudis are under 20 years old. They know that 40 percent of Saudis live in poverty; 70 percent can't afford to own a home; and 90 percent of workers in the private sector are foreigners, even while unemployment among 20- to 24-year-olds is nearly 40 percent. Saudi men won't take the lower-skilled jobs for which they are qualified, and even well-educated Saudi women are not allowed to take jobs for which they are qualified.

Most ordinary Saudis aren't demanding democracy, but merely a more efficient government and a more equitable distribution of the oil riches that they believe belong to the country, not just to the royal family. It is far from certain that a ruler from the new generation could meet these demands, however modest they may seem. What is more certain is that the diminishing line of elderly brothers cannot.

So for the foreseeable future, the royal Saudi 747, richly appointed but mechanically flawed, flies on, its cockpit crowded with geriatric pilots. The plane is losing altitude and gradually running out of fuel. On board, first class is crowded with princely passengers, while frustrated Saudi citizens sit crammed in economy. Among them are Islamic fundamentalists who want to turn the plane around, as well as terrorists who aim to hijack it to a destination unknown. Somewhere on board there may be a competent new flight team that could land the plane safely, but the prospects of a capable pilot getting a chance at the controls seems slim. And so the 747 remains in the sky, perhaps to be hijacked or ultimately to crash.

Karen Elliott House, a Pulitzer Prize winner for coverage of the Middle East, is the author of the forthcoming "On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines — and Future," to be published next week.

Article 3.

Los Angeles Times

In an Islamist Egypt, can diversity survive?

Michael Wahid Hanna and Elijah Zarwan

September 16, 2012 -- Egypt is now set to enter arguably its first period of Islamist rule. How long that period lasts and what form it takes is far from determined, a situation highlighted by the protests and violence in Cairo last week. If all goes according to plan — a big "if" in Egypt — Egyptians who believe in a democratic, civil state theoretically have the remainder of President Mohamed Morsi's term of office to get their collective act together.

But practically speaking, the short-term political calendar will not allow them such a lengthy reprieve, with the likelihood of new parliamentary elections in the coming months and the current debate over a new constitution. Although broad-based national political action requires patient grass-roots organizational efforts that will take years, the current phase of the country's transition will go a long way toward fashioning a new legal and political order.

If non-Islamists and liberals hope to preserve any chance of having a role in shaping the nation's future, a constructive, engaged and coordinated opposition will have to emerge. Those who truly believe in a civil, democratic state must overcome two bad habits: sniping from the sidelines, as they did under Hosni Mubarak, and splitting into factions, as they have since time immemorial.

Following the heady days of Egypt's uprising, the story of the country's transition has largely been dictated by the struggle for power between the Muslim Brotherhood and its military interlocutors. To the extent these two traditional antagonists have been able to reach stable accommodations and pacts, they have largely held sway.

We may never know what happened in the corridors of power in the days leading up to Morsi's surprise military shake-up in August. However, whether through acquiescence or outright collaboration, Morsi appears to have made his peace with enough of the remaining senior leadership now that the obstinate, old military brass has been swept aside. The exact parameters of that accommodation between civilian and military leaders will evolve over time, and the armed forces will undoubtedly remain an important center of authority.

But now that Morsi has apparently settled the question of whether he or the generals run domestic affairs, Egypt's non-Islamists and liberals can no longer hide behind the military. Their strategy of making Faustian bargains with the generals, of sacrificing "some" democracy in exchange for a "civil" (non-religious) state, has been shown to be as ineffective as it was morally bankrupt.

Preaching to Muslim Brotherhood politicians that they should be less Islamist or less politically self-serving has proved to be naive and ineffectual. The conduct of these politicians since the fall of Mubarak makes it clear that they seek to consolidate power and to implement their agenda — an Islamist agenda.

Furthermore, with significant pressure from more rigid Salafist elements to his right, as was vividly on display in aspects of last week's demonstrations at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Morsi will face stiff challenges if he does shift course and seek a more inclusive approach to governance.

In the meantime, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood are carving out control of as much of the state as they can. No doubt they see these steps as necessary for implementing their plans for reform and delivering on their promises of a better life for Egyptians. Be that as it may, there is currently no credible institutional check on their power to make domestic policy.

It would be foolhardy for Egyptian opposition leaders, however, to again place their faith in the ability of the military to serve as a check on the ambitions of the Muslim Brotherhood. Such authority, to the extent that it might exist, is inherently undemocratic and lacks transparency. Similarly, the opposition should take no great comfort in the ability of bottom-up pressure generated by mass mobilization and public protest to serve as a barrier to the monopolization of power and the abuse of authority. In a weary society craving a modicum of stability, such public shows of force may never again be re-created.

But despite its dominant position in Egyptian politics today, the electoral strength of the Muslim Brotherhood should not be

taken as a given. The demands of leadership, the magnitude of Egypt's challenges and the high expectations of the populace have already begun to erode its widespread popularity. The fluidity of political dynamics and the shallowness of party allegiances were clearly on display in the first round of the presidential elections, when Morsi won only a quarter of the vote.

While not losing sight of longer-term efforts to expand their popular appeal and to establish nationwide political organizations, the Egyptian opposition must take immediate steps to counteract the president's de facto monopoly on formal political power. Liberals must cohere around a core set of constitutional demands: equal rights for all citizens, religious freedom, separation of powers, rule of law and issues of due process.

At this sensitive moment in Egypt's history, consensus-driven decisions taken by a broadly inclusive coalition stand the best chance of enduring and ensuring the political stability Egypt needs to recover economically.

Toward that end, Morsi would do well to remember his promises to be "a president for all Egyptians," mindful of the fact that a majority of those who voted for him in the runoffs preferred someone else in the first round. His political rivals would do well to cooperate with him and the Brotherhood to meet the serious practical challenges Egypt faces, to present themselves as credible alternatives rather than only as armchair critics, and to keep the agenda focused on solving the country's problems. To the extent opportunities arise, Morsi's opponents should meet him halfway, cooperating on those issues on which

they can agree while articulating a positive alternative on those issues where they do not.

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Article 4.

Al-Ahram Weekly

The gravest Arab challenge

Galal Nassar

13 - 19 September 2012 -- What Arab and Egyptian political elites need is clearer focus in their analyses and understanding of regional and international relations and a vision unclouded by extraneous details. For the most part, their approaches to the puzzles of international relations are still shaped by rigid classical or hand-me-down formulas. As a result, the conclusions they reach are often fallacious and the decisions they take accordingly frequently backfire or, at best, fail to produce concrete results. Perhaps this, more than any other factor, helps account for the mounting frustration at the

succession of defeats and failures of Arab national and multinational projects that has brought us to the threshold of the "Islamist project". But will this project, which presents itself as the alternative and legitimate successor to the Arab nationalist project, be able to accommodate the types of changes that have taken place regionally and internationally? Will it be able to interact with the world effectively, forge productive cooperative relations or even fight successfully, if it has to, from time to time?

Perhaps the foremost challenge the Islamist project faces is that strategic marriage between Israel and the US. This was the shoal upon which all regional and national projects floundered, again because of inaccurate readings of strategic equations. Will the Islamist project succeed where the others failed? Will the Palestinian cause be rescued from the vicious cycle of conflict between ineffective Arab national and regional projects and a persistent US-Israeli project? I suggest not, unless our ability to read the facts becomes more accurate or, otherwise put, unless we learn to see the forest for the trees.

Israeli and Western media has recently disclosed the existence of six US bases in occupied Palestine. They are brimming with military equipment and ammunition, medical supplies, and advanced weaponry, and they are constantly being renovated and replenished. Do these really fall into the category of military secrets, now revealed? Or do they actually amount to a blatant reaffirmation of a truth that the Arab world has known from the very outset, ever since the Balfour Declaration?

All the injustices and crimes that have been visited on the Palestinian people confirmed this truth/purpose. All the colonial

powers were complicit in it and took turns in carrying it out. Their officials spoke of it -- even boasted of it -- in books and speeches. The chairman of the US Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee stated it explicitly in a speech he delivered on 29 March 1953 to a crowded assembly dedicated to raising funds for the Zionist entity: "The US considers Israel as its primary military and economic base and its mainstay of democracy in the Middle East." Nine years later, on 10 July 1962, a Haaretz headline proclaimed, "Israel: the 51st state of the USA". The accompanying article explained that the leaders of Israel and most of its people looked to the US for the security of Israel and had truly begun to believe that Israel was an American state.

A Western military outpost in the Middle East -- this was the main selling point of the Jewish homeland turned state, and colonial and neocolonial powers have continued to pursue that aim to this day, to the mounting detriment of the Palestinian people. This fact is as clear and as well known as the increasing levels of military aid to that entity. What is not well known and rarely, if ever, discussed is who is paying for all that? What are the real sources of the billions of dollars that are poured into manufacturing, equipping and sustaining that strategic bastion? Such questions need to be probed and the relevant facts and figures must be brought to attention to all peoples concerned. In like manner, all those responsible should be exposed for the role they played in this and in the consequences that were inflicted on the Palestinian people and on the Arab and Islamic worlds. People have a right to this knowledge, which is part of history and should be part of our history books.

Do revelations on the number and location of US bases and how well they are stocked and equipped alter what we already know?

In the course of revealing the existence of the six US bases, the Israeli media confirmed that Israel does function as a strategic foothold and that it actively participates in US offensive military plans and manoeuvres, such as the military exercises that are being organised ostensibly in anticipation of Iranian and Syrian missile strikes.

Austere Challenge 12, as this latest military exercise is known, is scheduled for October. Some 3,000 US troops are to take part alongside thousands of Israeli forces with the purpose of testing missile defence capacities. The manoeuvres are one in a long series of planning exercises and thinly veiled threats.

Informed sources told Al-Ahram Weekly that Austere Challenge 12 will be the largest ever joint military drill that the US has held in its strategic outpost and that it may be the final stage of preparations for a military attack on Iran with the aim of destroying its nuclear programme while anticipating an Iranian retaliation. Military officials in the US and Israel have stressed that this round of manoeuvres is of major importance because it will also bring into play the Iron Dome and Magic Wand missile defence systems. According to reports in the Israeli press, the Israeli army will also be using its newly upgraded Jericho-2 missile early warning system, while the US will be engaging its Aegis defence system and Patriot missile batteries. It was also reported that the US administration has requested the manufacture of 361 Tomahawk guided missiles for the exercise. The Tomahawks were used in the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The foregoing information, which is publicised and easily accessible, further confirms what it's all about: an uninterrupted connection between successive US administrations and American strategic bases in occupied Palestine and elsewhere.

They further testify to the fact that these are advanced bases for operations whose ultimate purpose is offensive and to help carry out US designs to invade, occupy and subjugate other peoples and plunder their countries' resources.

The military preparations, manoeuvres and drills are the war drums heralding the project of imperial hegemony over the entire region. Even the plans themselves are no longer secret while a train of high-profile official visits by senior US military officials, such as the commander of the Third Airborne Division of the European Command, or the US chief-of-staff, or the secretary of defence, proclaim the true nature and purpose of Israel as America's number one ally and strategic base in the region, as well as of the constellation of bases, agreements and treaties that round out the picture. It takes little effort to read between the lines of all the statements and reports in order to take stock what is being planned for the future of the people of the Arab and Islamic worlds in particular.

The history of that military super-base tells all. The treaties and agreements with it constantly belie its role and its purpose, and every obligation, alliance and war in this region has underscored its primary function and the integral connection between colonial interests and its own aggressive projects. In Yediot Aharonot on 3 December 1974, Ariel Sharon (the former Israeli premier and the chief executor of the Sabra and Shatila massacre) wrote: "The Americans regard Israel as the bastion they can rely on to solve the question of Arab oil through military means." This pursuit has defined the colonial mission from the Balfour Declaration to today. Did the news about six military bases add anything new to the equations under which the Arab and Islamic peoples have been paying the price in oil

and other resources? How do we explain the silence that has surrounded this essential reality that has existed for decades?

These are crucial questions that need answers. But more pressing and more mystifying is the question as to whether those in this part of the world that are wittingly or unwittingly complicit in this in some way or other are fully aware of the true needs and interests of their peoples and what is best for the future of their nations. We can only hope that this realisation strikes home soon, for otherwise the Arab Spring will end up being bent to the service of the US-Israeli project while Egypt and other countries in the region will continue to suffer a drain in brain power and resources. Good intentions and patriotic sounding declarations are not an alternative to opening our eyes.

Article 5.

NYT

The Talk of China

Thomas L. Friedman

September 15, 2012 -- Beijing -- HERE is the story of today's

China in five brief news items.

STORY NO. 1 For most of the last two weeks, Xi Jinping, the man tapped to become China's new Communist Party leader, was totally out of sight. That's right. The man designated to become China's next leader — in October or early November — had disappeared and only resurfaced on Saturday in two photos taken while he was visiting an agricultural college. They were posted online by the official Xinhua news agency. With the Chinese government refusing to comment on his whereabouts or explain his absence, rumors here were flying. Had he fallen ill? Was there infighting in the Communist Party? I have a theory: Xi started to realize how hard the job of running China will be in the next decade and was hiding under his bed. Who could blame him?

Chinese officials take great pride in how they have used the last 30 years to educate hundreds of millions of their people, men and women, and bring them out of poverty. Yet, among my Chinese interlocutors, I find a growing feeling that what's worked for China for the past 30 years — a huge Communist Party-led mobilization of cheap labor, capital and resources — will not work much longer. There is a lot of hope that Xi will bring long-delayed economic and political reforms needed to make China a real knowledge economy, but there is no consensus on what those reforms should be and there are a lot more voices in the conversation. Whatever top-down monopoly of the conversation the Communist Party had is evaporating. More and more, the Chinese people, from microbloggers to peasants to students, are demanding that their voices be heard — and officials clearly feel the need to respond. China is now a strange hybrid — an autocracy with 400 million bloggers, who

are censored, feared and listened to all at the same time.

So Xi Jinping is certain to make history. He will be the first leader of modern China who will have to have a two-way conversation with the Chinese people while he tries to implement some huge political and economic reforms. The need is obvious.

STORY NO. 2 In March, Chinese authorities quickly deleted from the blogosphere photos of a fatal Beijing car crash, believed to involve the son of a close ally of President Hu Jintao. The car was a Ferrari. The driver was killed and two young women with him badly injured. “Photos of the horrific smash in Beijing were deleted within hours of appearing on microblogs and Web sites,” The Guardian reported. “Even searches for the word ‘Ferrari’ were blocked on the popular Sina Weibo microblog. ... Unnamed sources have identified the driver of the black sports car as the son of Ling Jihua, who was removed as head of the party’s general office of the central committee this weekend.” It was the latest in a string of incidents spotlighting the lavish lifestyles of the Communist Party elite.

Chinese authorities are so sensitive to these stories because they are the tip of an iceberg — an increasingly corrupt system of interlocking ties between the Communist Party and state-owned banks, industries and monopolies, which allow certain senior officials, their families and “princelings” to become hugely wealthy and to even funnel that wealth out of China. “Marx said the worst kind of capitalism is a monopolistic capitalism, and Lenin said the worst kind of monopolistic capitalism is state monopolistic capitalism — and we are practicing it to the hilt,” a

Chinese Internet executive remarked to me.

As a result, you hear more and more that “the risks of not reforming have become bigger than the risks of reforming.” No one is talking revolution, but a gradual evolution to a more transparent, rule-of-law-based system, with the people having more formal input. But taking even this first gradual step is proving hard for the Communist Party. It may require a crisis (which is why a lot of middle-class professionals here are looking to get their money or themselves abroad). Meanwhile, the gaps between rich and poor widen.

STORY NO. 3 Last week, the official Xinhua news agency reported that authorities in the city of Macheng, in Hubei Province in central China, agreed to invest \$1.4 million in new school equipment after photos of students and their parents carrying their own desks and chairs to school, along with their books, “sparked an outcry on the Internet. ... The education gap in China has become a hot-button issue.”

STORY NO. 4 President Hu Jintao suggested that it would be good if the people of Hong Kong learned more about the mainland, so Hong Kong authorities recently announced that they were imposing compulsory “moral and national education” lessons in primary and secondary schools. According to CNN, “the course material had been outlined in a government booklet called ‘The China Model,’ which was distributed to schools in July.” It described China’s Communist Party as “progressive, selfless and united” and “criticized multiparty systems as bringing disaster to countries such as the United States.” High school students from Hong Kong, which enjoys more freedom than the mainland as part of the 1997 handover from Britain,

organized a protest against Beijing's "brainwashing" that quickly spread to parent groups and universities. As a result, on Sept. 8, one day before local elections, Hong Kong's chief executive, Leung Chun-ying, Beijing's man there, announced the compulsory education plan was being dropped — to avoid pro-Beijing candidates getting crushed.

STORY NO. 5 A few weeks ago, Deng Yuwen, a senior editor of The Study Times, which is controlled by the Communist Party, published an analysis on the Web site of the business magazine Caijing. According to Agence France-Presse, Deng argued that President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao "had 'created more problems than achievements' during their 10 years in power. ... The article highlighted 10 problems facing China that it said were caused by the lack of political reform and had the potential to cause public discontent, including stalled economic restructuring, income disparity and pollution. 'The essence of democracy is how to restrict government power; this is the most important reason why China so badly needs democracy,' Deng wrote. 'The overconcentration of government powers without checks and balances is the root cause of so many social problems.' " The article has triggered a debate on China's blogosphere.

This is just a sampler of the China that Xi Jinping will be inheriting. This is not your grandfather's Communist China. After three decades of impressive economic growth, but almost no political reforms, there is "a gathering sense of an approaching moment of transition that will require a different set of conditions for Chinese officials to maintain airspeed," observed Orville Schell, the Asia Society China expert. The rules are going to get rewritten here. Exactly how and when is

impossible to say. The only thing that is certain is that it will be through a two-way conversation.

Article 6.

The Diplomat

Is China's Global Times Misunderstood?

Allen Carlson and Jason Oaks

September 14, 2012 -- A growing conviction is taking root in America that Chinese views of the international system are becoming increasingly assertive and nationalistic. One of the prime referents for this contention is the Global Times (Huanqiu Shibao), a hugely popular Chinese newspaper that is frequently portrayed as promoting an ever more hardline and nationalist take on the world.

At first glance this reputation appears to be well deserved. In recent months the paper has published a number of combative editorials on the ongoing standoff with the Philippines regarding ownership of portions of the South China Sea and its territorial

dispute with Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. In short, it appears to be at the epicenter of a growing wave of aggressive Chinese rhetoric. The actual content of the paper, however, does not live up to such a characterization.

The Global Times' editorial page, called the International Forum (Guoji Luntan), contains a much more diverse set of views than the paper's reputation would lead one to expect. Editorials have appeared in this influential section of the paper for well over a decade. A comprehensive reading of these pieces uncovers that while fervent nationalist perspectives were published during this time, the most prolific non-staff contributors to the International Forum did not frequently promote such a worldview. On the contrary, within this elite group a plurality of perspectives about both China and the rest of the international system was evident. Even more surprisingly, in recent years such diversity of opinion became more, rather than less, pronounced.

The top contributors to the International Forum fell into two distinct periods. The first of these lasted from 1999 through October of 2008. During this time the vast majority of authors were members of the Chinese foreign policy establishment. While a handful of these individuals consistently expressed combative views about China's position in the world, most were not especially assertive and generally promoted conventional, albeit largely realist, stances on international relations. Writing that was quite internationalist and cosmopolitan in both tone and tenor often complemented these approaches. Nationalism, while visible, was far from the dominant note in such commentary.

Fall 2008 witnessed a sizeable shift in both the editorial page's top contributors and the content of their essays, as a new crop of

authors with backgrounds in economics assumed prominence. This new group's celebrity stems as much from their popularity in cyberspace as stature in academic journals, and their writings focused on the repercussions of the worldwide economic downturn rather than traditional security concerns.

To be clear, since 2008 many of those who have written in the paper seemed to take pleasure in how the financial crisis negatively impacted the United States. In response, some also called on China to adopt a more assertive position within the international arena. However, many other contributors focused less on America's supposed decline, and more on critiquing China's own numerous shortcomings in responding to new economic realities. In addition, a number of authors continued to stress the importance of maintaining a stable relationship with America, and some even advocated the strengthening of multilateral cooperation to cope with the emerging problems within the global economic system. Indeed, especially nationalist interpretations of the worldwide economic meltdown were relatively rare and not especially confrontational.

The implications of such findings are wide-ranging, especially at a time when many outsiders have already concluded that China is singularly committed to taking a more aggressive stance toward resolving its outstanding territorial disputes. To begin with our findings directly challenge the dominant perception outside China about the Global Times. Guest contributors to the editorial section frequently express nuanced and complex worldviews. Readers encounter diversity and disagreement rather than uniformity and convergence of belief inside its pages.

The endurance and expansion of such diversity in the paper raises fundamental questions regarding the supposed broader confrontational trend in Chinese thinking about the rest of the world. The continuing reverberations within China caused by Bo Xilai's rapid fall from grace earlier this year are a public example of how such differences persist, and are perhaps growing, within the highest levels of the Chinese leadership.

Pronounced debates could be found within China well before Bo's fall, and were even visible in a paper where one would have least expected them to be present. We anticipate they will become more noticeable now that it has occurred. While such divides may not be visible at first glance, and may be temporarily silenced, they are easy to discover if one looks beyond the headlines. Only through making such an effort is it possible to gain a more accurate understanding of how Chinese views of the world are developing in response to an ever-changing global landscape.

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