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21 August, 2012

Article 1.	Foreign Policy <u>The Israeli debate on attacking Iran is over</u> Shai Feldman
Article 2.	Foreign Affairs <u>What Foreign Aid Can and Can't Do In the Arab World</u> Nancy Birdsall, Milan Vaishnav, and Danny Cuthrell
Article 3.	Ahram <u>Fierce debates plague final drafts of Egypt's constitution</u> Gamal Essam El-Din
Article 4.	Hürriyet Daily News <u>Kurdish issue becomes Turkey's main fallout from Syrian crisis</u> Semih Idiz
Article 5.	The National Interest

	<u>The China Challenge</u> <u>Robert W. Merry</u>
<u>Article 6.</u>	Project Syndicate <u>Eyesight for Israel's Blind</u> Dominique Moisi
<u>Article 7.</u>	Guardian <u>The abuse of dissenting Jews is shameful</u> Antony Lerman

Article 1.

Foreign Policy

The Israeli debate on attacking Iran is over

Shai Feldman

August 20, 2012 -- For all practical purposes this weekend ended the Israeli debate on attacking Iran. What tipped the scales were two developments. The first was the decision of the country's president, Shimon Peres, to make his opposition to a

military strike public. The second was an interview given by a former key defense advisor of Defense Minister Ehud Barak, questioning for the first time publically whether his former superior and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are fit to lead Israel in time of war.

Using every possible media outlet on the occasion of his 89th birthday, President Peres made clear last Thursday that "going it alone" -- attacking Iran without a clear understanding with the United States -- would be catastrophic. Peres did a great service to his country by focusing the debate away from some of the weaker arguments offered by opponents of a strike. Thus, the supposedly limited time that would be gained by such a strike was never convincing because in both previous experiences with such preventive action -- against Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981 and against the Syrian reactor in 2007 -- Israel ended up gaining more time than even the most optimistic proponents of these strikes had anticipated.

Similarly, the warnings that an attack on Iran's nuclear installations would ignite a regional war were not persuasive in the absence of Arab states volunteering to join such a war. Iran's only regional state ally is Syria, but President Bashar al-Assad would not be able to direct his armed forces to attack Israel when these forces are mired in a civil war and barely control a third of the country's territory.

Hezbollah, Iran's principle non-state ally, might react to an Israeli strike by launching its rockets against Israel, but with Iran weakened from the attack and Syria unable to protect it, such an assault would be suicidal. Certainly none of the region's Sunni Arab countries -- Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the smaller

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states -- will come to Iran's aid. None of these countries uttered a word when in 2007 Israel destroyed the nuclear reactor of Sunni-Arab Syria. Why the same countries would be expected to ignite the region in the event that the nuclear facilities of a Shiite Persian country would be attacked, was never clear.

Avoiding repetition of these weak arguments, Peres clarified what is really at stake in the event of an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities in the next few months: Israel's relations with the United States. The basic divide is not the two countries' different time constraints due to very different capacities to deal militarily with Iran's nuclear installations. Instead, it has to do with two issues. The first is the U.S. electoral timetable. The presidential election creates an imperative for U.S. President Barack Obama to avoid any unexpected fallout -- economic or otherwise -- of a military strike against Iran. Peres understands that ignoring Obama's concerns and instead banking on a victory by Republican candidate Mitt Romney in November, as Netanyahu seems to have done, is very risky if not irresponsible.

The second issue concerns the timeline for the drawdown of U.S. forces in the region. Clearly, the Joint Chiefs are worried about the prospects of becoming embroiled in a military conflict with another Muslim country as long as U.S. forces continue to be deployed in Afghanistan and hence exposed to Iranian retaliation. By going public Peres gave expression to what almost every former and presently serving Israeli defense chief understands: namely, since the Obama White House has accommodated Israel's defense needs above and beyond all previous U.S. administrations, and given the intimate relations between the Israeli and U.S. defense communities, Israel simply

cannot take action that would be framed in Washington as "putting American lives at risk."

The second important development of this past weekend was an interview given by the former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Director of Military Intelligence General Uri Sagi. A highly regarded senior military officer who served in various capacities under Barak when he was IDF chief of staff and prime minister, Sagi went beyond the questions that many of his former colleagues have already raised about the wisdom of attacking Iran.

Sagi questioned, for the first time publicly, whether Israel can rely on the judgment and mental stability of its current leaders to guide it in time of war. Listing a number of past strategic errors made by Barak and hinting at Netanyahu's ascribed tendency to traverse rapidly between euphoria and panic, Sagi expressed grave doubts whether Israel's current leaders can take the pressures and stress entailed in managing a major military confrontation.

Despite being a regional power Israel is a small country operating within narrow security confines. It has done wonders when operating within a national consensus as during the 1948 and 1967 wars. But after the 1973 war it was torn by the debate about the wisdom of fighting the Egyptians along the Suez Canal and after 1982 it was divided over the war in Lebanon.

Contrary to what many think, Netanyahu and Barak never bluffed -- they did not threaten war simply to extort an American commitment to take care of the problem. They genuinely believe that a nuclear Iran poses Israel with untold threats that should be

avoided at almost any cost. They did not bluff, but they were defeated. With President Peres publicly joining the many formidable opponents of a military strike and General Sagi raising questions about the competence of Israel's current leaders, Israel now lacks the minimal consensus required for a demanding military campaign to destroy Iran's nuclear installations. The debate has been settled. At least for now.

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Article 2.

Foreign Affairs

What Foreign Aid Can and Can't Do In the Arab World

Nancy Birdsall, Milan Vaishnav, and Danny Cutherell

August 20, 2012 -- Shortly after assuming the presidency, Barack Obama set his sights on reorienting the United States' relationship with Pakistan. For decades, Washington had been a fair-weather friend to Islamabad, eager to work together when its

own security interests were at stake, but otherwise indifferent to Pakistan's domestic challenges. But recognizing that the fates of South Asia and, ultimately, U.S. security are inextricably linked with Pakistan's stability and prosperity, Obama signed into law the Enhanced Partnership for Pakistan Act (the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill) just a few months into his first term. The bill authorized up to \$7.5 billion in aid to Pakistan's civilian government over five years and was meant to usher in a new era of partnership and bolster democracy.

Nearly three years later, reality has set in. The partnership, although initially energized by the late Richard Holbrooke, Obama's special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, was hamstrung from the outset. The problems do not stem only from the U.S. drone campaign and the covert raid that killed Osama bin Laden, nor is Islamabad's failure to take on difficult domestic reforms solely to blame. The problems are also due to the United States' inability to insulate medium-term development investments from diplomatic and security pressures and its overreliance on a complicated and creaky foreign aid system to administer development programs.

Even as officials at the White House, in the State Department, and at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) cope with the problems of doing development well in Pakistan, they are in danger of repeating the mistakes made there in yet another civilian aid ramp-up. This time, Washington plans to use aid for political and economic development in the Arab Spring countries: Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and, perhaps, a few more players to be named later. The administration's starting point is a request earlier this year that Congress establish the \$770 million Middle East and North Africa Incentive Fund. The initiative is a

vaguely defined plan to "support citizens who have demanded change and governments that are working to deliver it." Pakistan has several lessons for future U.S. engagement with the countries of the Arab Spring.

First, it is fruitless to assume that U.S. civilian assistance provides serious leverage for democratic or other reforms, particularly when a recipient's civilian government exists in the shadow of a dominant military. The cardinal rule of Pakistani politics is that the military chooses the piece of the budget pie it wants. Civilian agencies are left to fight over the crumbs. U.S. assistance has not changed that fact; it did not strengthen the civilians' hand with the military, nor did it induce it to undertake politically costly reforms such as raising energy prices. It is naive to imagine that threats to revoke U.S. civilian aid -- a small portion of GDP directed to specific projects -- carry much weight with Pakistan's military intelligence establishment or even with the civilian government. The same would be true in Egypt. Civilian aid might help get the United States a seat and a voice at the policy table on difficult technical issues. But it cannot -- on its own -- coax change where there is no political will.

Second, it is unwise to spend aid dollars without general agreement among administration officials, and with Congress, on why those dollars are being spent. An enduring source of tension within the U.S. government is the disagreement between its foreign policy and development arms about the main goal of U.S. economic assistance. The White House, U.S. diplomats, and many in Congress want an early and visible return. They are motivated by a desire to improve the United States' standing in the short run. Those in the development community want investments to improve governance over the long haul,

independent of their immediate visibility and impact. In some cases, the two objectives overlap. In many others, they are at odds. The absence of a shared vision is further compounded by confusion about who is in charge of U.S. development policy, an issue that was further muddled by the creation of the special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan at the State Department, and which could haunt the department's new office of Middle East Transitions.

Third, a consensus in Washington on why the United States should spend aid dollars should be matched by a consensus on which activities those dollars are for. What has been missing in Pakistan -- and what the United States cannot afford to get wrong in the Middle East -- is a coherent strategy for deploying aid dollars that has buy-in across U.S. government agencies and in the countries themselves. In Washington, the assistance strategy for the Middle East should be sold to Congress as risky, but worth the risk. It should also be sold as limited in generating leverage on tough political and diplomatic issues. It should clearly articulate the goals of U.S. assistance, how policymakers will monitor progress, and how discrete U.S.-financed development projects might contribute to achieving those goals.

More important, assistance should not be the principal tool for engagement with the post-Arab Spring regimes. Rather, the strategy should focus on initiatives to expand trade and support private sector investment, and should reflect collaboration with the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), both active in Arab Spring countries, on helping countries with labor, tax, and competitive reforms they so desperately need.

Fourth, Washington should have lower expectations about its

own ability to manage a significant civilian surge. In hindsight, the Obama administration and those on Capitol Hill greatly overestimated the readiness of U.S. civilian agencies to rapidly expand the scope of their operations in Pakistan. Human resource constraints, evident from the start, abound: one-year posts for diplomats who cannot bring their families, harsh restrictions on leaving the embassy compound, and a frequently unhelpful (and occasionally hostile) host government have all played their parts. Those facts on the ground, combined with the stifling reporting requirements imposed by Washington that have become standard fare for development programs, have further limited the United States' agility. And, on top of all these constraints, sat the State Department's mandate that half of all U.S. aid be channeled through local (Pakistani) entities. The directive was a well-intentioned but overly ambitious operational shift in a country with deep governance problems. U.S. civilian agencies do have a large, established presence in Egypt (although less so in neighboring countries), but Washington would be wise to ramp up operations gradually and invest now in developing a cadre of Arab Spring hands. Fifth, Washington should leave logos behind. When you do a good deed for a friend but insist that your friend wear a sign advertising your virtue, you defeat your purpose. In Pakistan, branding has often driven U.S. development priorities, rather than the other way around. It is understandable that Washington has a deep interest in ensuring that the government -- as well as the American taxpayers -- gets credit for the assistance it provides. But using salability as a litmus test ensures that many worthy projects will not be pursued. Policymakers thinking about Egypt should keep in mind that credit flows to the benefactors of good, well-designed development projects, not to

those with the flashiest donor agency symbols.

The United States has considerable resources and expertise upon which it can draw to help the leaders of the Middle East and North Africa's transitional democracies. Yet to do so effectively requires U.S. policymakers to recognize both the strengths and weaknesses of the United States' development machinery. The United States can and should exploit its expertise across its public and private sectors, but it should not always pair that expertise with massive bilateral aid packages. Even when aid does begin to flow, it need not flow only -- or primarily -- through U.S.-managed programs. Other donors and institutions are often better placed to deliver assistance, and pooling resources with them reduces the burden on recipient country officials. Finally, instead of obsessing about getting credit for American largesse, U.S. policymakers should ensure that they support good ideas -- even when pioneered by others.

With access to resources, technology, and technical expertise, the United States has much to offer the countries of the Arab Spring. But, as the case of Pakistan shows, the United States' power and abilities have clear limits. The country that prospered by skillfully exploiting the concept of comparative advantage would be well served by returning to its roots.

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Ahram

Fierce debates plague final drafts of Egypt's constitution

Gamal Essam El-Din

20 Aug 2012 -- The 100-member Constituent Assembly has finished three quarters of the country's new constitution; as it prepares to reconvene post Eid, unresolved issues continue to cause contention

Egypt's Constituent Assembly is in the final weeks of drafting the country's new constitution, with as much as 70 per cent of the document already drafted, according to assembly member and newly-appointed Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Mohamed Mahsoub.

"As for the remaining 30 per cent of the new constitution," Mahsoub told Ahram Online, "this is expected to be written in the weeks immediately following Eid Al-Fitr holiday, so that the entire draft of the new constitution could be ready for public discussion by the middle of next September."

After adjourning on the 16 August following a busy few weeks of work, the five committees of the constitution-drafting body are expected to reconvene immediately after the Eid Al-Fitr holiday.

"We do not have any time to waste, we want to put the final draft of Egypt's constitution to a public discussion and review it as soon as possible," the assembly's Chairman Hossam El-Ghiriani told its members last week.

Mahsoub affirmed that he believed the constitution would then be put up for public referendum by the middle or end of this October.

The drafting process consists of three phases, Mahsoub explained.

"In the first stage, the Assembly's five committees were required to hold hearing sessions after which they began drafting the different chapters of the constitution," Mahsoub said, explaining that some of these committees were forced to branch off into sub-committees to finish the job.

For example, the system of government committee, he said, branched into two subcommittees: the first focusing on local administration and the second on judicial authority.

Mahsoub also disclosed that the freedoms and rights committee was the only group to finish a draft of its chapter.

The second stage, according to Mahsoub, sees all the committees submit initial drafts of their completed chapters to a team tasked with compiling the constitution as a whole before the document, in its final form, is discussed in plenary meetings by the entire 100-member assembly. This phase, Mahsoub explained, is expected to be completed by the end of next week. After this a first and second reading of the document by the whole assembly will take place.

"These readings will be aired live so that all of Egyptians can follow it minute by minute and give their comments on each point," Mahsoub added.

However, the assembly still faces an uphill struggle in the closing weeks of the constitution-drafting process, with certain unresolved issues potentially making it difficult for the constitution to be completed within such a short time period. The first sticking point relates to the regulation of the High

Constitutional Court (HCC).

On 15 August, Minister of Justice Ahmed Mekki and Judges' Club Chairman Ahmed El-Zind gave two contradicting points of view about the future role of the HCC during a meeting of the assembly's judicial authority subcommittee.

Minister Mekki said the HCC should no longer be referenced in an independent section in the new constitution.

"It should be included in the chapter dealing with judicial authority as a whole or under what I call unified justice," Mekki explained, adding that this was not an attempt to strip the constitutional court of its powers. "Rather the aim is to restructure the judicial authority as a whole by grouping all judicial authorities and courts under one section."

Mekki's view was strongly rejected by El-Zind and some members of the HCC's board, such as Hossam Bagato, who insisted that the HCC must be kept independent of other branches of the judiciary and remain regulated under a separate chapter of the constitution.

"This is necessary to stress the sovereign nature of the HCC and its supreme role in preserving constitutional rights and freedoms," Bagato asserted.

The performance of the HCC is currently regulated by the fifth chapter of the constitution which grants its judges the final say on the constitutional validity of laws and decrees. It also gives its members of HCC's board judicial immunity so that no one, including the president, can dismiss them from their jobs.

Heated verbal exchanges between Mekki and the HCC's board of judges erupted last week.

The justice minister sharply criticised the HCC's 15 June ruling which invalidated the People's Assembly (Egypt's lower house of parliament). According to Mekki, "the ruling was politicised

and showed that judges of the court are still involved in politics."

This statement provoked a strong backlash from the HCC's incumbent members who accused Mekki of interfering in the court's business and doing his best to strip it of its powers. Mekki also strongly rejected a suggestion that military tribunals and civilian courts be grouped into one chapter.

The proposal, submitted by Major General Mamdouh Shahin, the legal advisor for the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), intended to end the "negative public view" of military courts.

Civilians facing military trial has been a key grievance of activists and the subject of many protests against the country's leaders since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak.

Shahin asserted that "citizens should know that there is no difference between military and civilian courts and this should be included in the new constitution."

This argument was rejected by Mekki and other members of the assembly, who agreed that military and civilian courts should be separated and not grouped under one chapter in the new constitution.

Article 2 dealing with Islamic Sharia law was another thorny issue for the constitution-drafting body.

The ultraconservative Salafists members insisted, at first, that the text of Article 2 reads that "Islamic Sharia – rather than the principles of Islamic Sharia - should be the main source of legislation in Egypt."

After a compromise was reached with members of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), Salafists changed their position, approving that the article be amended with the stipulation that Egypt's highest Islamic authority Al-

Azhar becomes the main reference on Islamic Sharia laws. This, however, was fiercely rejected by liberal members who expressed fears that this religious prerogative could be exploited to impose a dogmatic interpretation of Islamic law at the expense of free thinking and progress of society.

The assembly's spokesperson Wahid Abdel-Meguid told journalists that "the idea of making Al-Azhar a supreme reference on Islamic Sharia matters could be a mixed-blessing weapon especially if the Brotherhood managed some day to bring Al-Azhar under its control."

Pressure from the Salafists and other Islamist members forced Manal Al-Taibi, a human rights activist, to withdraw from the assembly.

In a statement issued on 16 August, El-Taibi asserted that "liberal members of the assembly are being harassed by Islamists to approve drafting several religious articles in a way that goes against liberties and human rights and the democratic ideals of the January 25 Revolution."

A third contentious issue erupted last week when Minister of Local Administration Ahmed Zaki Abdeen strongly recommended that provincial governors should be selected via elections rather than by appointment.

Speaking to the local administration subcommittee on 16 August, Abdeen said that "after the democratic revolution of 25 January, citizens will no longer tolerate that provincial governors come by selection rather than by election." He argued that elected governors are stronger and more "capable of implementing development plans without facing much objection from citizens."

Minister Mahsoub, however, disclosed another proposal that provincial governors should be appointed by the president after

consulting with the cabinet and following the approval of the two houses of Egypt's parliament.

Mahsoub argued that "provincial governors are part of the executive authority and for this reason they must be chosen by the president of the republic."

Instead of electing provincial governors, as is the case in America, Mahsoub said it is recommended that elected municipal councils be reinforced and granted sweeping supervisory powers – including the prerogative of directing questions and interpellations, "so that they could act as strong watchdog mini-parliaments over the performance of provincial governors and municipal executive officials."

The constitution is also expected to be longer than previous documents. Assembly spokesperson Abdel-Meguid said the total number of constitutional articles could reach as many as 250 (rather than 211 in the 1971 Constitution).

"This is largely because the powers in the new constitution will be delicately divided among the president, parliament, and the judiciary," said Abdel-Meguid, adding that "this division requires writing new articles about the powers of each authority and making sure that there is a balance between them." Under the now-abrogated 1971 Constitution, most of the powers were held by the president.

Abdel-Meguid also asserted that the drafting of the articles regulating the relationship between the president and parliament was not a matter of contention between members of the assembly.

"But I think issues might occur when the constitution is open to public discussion," Abdel-Meguid added, "these articles could cause a lot of problems because many politicians in Egypt still cling to the idea that a presidential system – rather than a mixed

parliamentary-presidential one – is best for the country until it stands on its own feet and recovers stability."

He also told Ahram Online that "because there was consensus among members that the constitution should reflect the January 25 Revolution's ideals on freedoms and liberties, the chapter on this subject was the first to be drafted completely."

Abdel-Meguid allayed fears that the articles regulating national press would be the hardest for the assembly to agree upon.

"There is a consensus that national media should no longer be regulated by the state or the upper consultative house of Shura Council," Abdel-Meguid affirmed, "as demanded by the Journalists' Syndicate, the national press will be regulated by an independent media authority like the BBC and it should not be subject to any kind of state control."

Article 4.

Hürriyet Daily News

Kurdish issue becomes Turkey's main fallout from Syrian crisis

Semih Idiz

August/21/2012 -- The biggest fallout for Turkey from the Syrian crisis will not be the refugees streaming in across the border, but developments relating to its perennial "Kurdish

problem.” Refugees will eventually go back. Turkey’s Kurdish problem, whose foreign dimension has taken on unexpected turns with developments in Syria, however, is here to stay; unless, that is, a reasonable solution can be found to it. The idea of another entity like “Kurdish northern Iraq” developing along Turkey’s borders with Syria, which also borders northern Iraq, is a nightmare scenario for the Turkish establishment and for nationalist Turks in particular. The fear is this will pave, in time, the way to a “Greater Kurdistan” that will also incorporate much of Southeast Anatolia.

Given that separatist terrorism by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) has peaked since spring, it is not surprising that every body bag containing the remains of a Turkish conscript killed by this group is making Turkish blood boil even more in terms of the Kurdish issue.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and other senior government officials vehemently deny accusations that they never foresaw what is transpiring in northern Syria, where most of that country’s Kurds live, and now appear to be heading for some kind of autonomy.

For the public at large, however, developments belie this.

The general impression is of a government that literally woke up one day to face the prospect of another autonomous Kurdish region along Turkey’s borders, and does not know how to react to this now, except by means of empty threats.

If, on the other hand, the government had indeed factored this possibility into its calculations from the start, then, the feeling is, it did little to show it was taking the matter seriously. The appearance is of an Ankara that was so fixed on Bashar al-Assad’s departure that other matters were never considered

properly.

The sad fact in all this that Turkey is nowhere nearer today than it was 10 or 15 years ago to sorting out its own Kurdish problem in a political and democratic way. Had that matter been resolved, the existence of a stable northern Kurdish Iraq and a stable Kurdish northern Syria would not have posed such a challenge today, but would have provided advantages to all concerned instead.

Positive economic and political developments in ties with northern Iraq over these past few years point clearly to this. But the inability to start a meaningful political process with its own Kurdish population, the largest in any country, is sullyng the atmosphere in this respect, even with northern Iraq.

What makes it sadder is that the situation in terms of Kurdish cultural rights is much better than it was a decade ago, and the government has the strongest mandate from the electorate any government has had over the past four to five decades. Given this situation, the government was in a position to take bold steps aimed at solving the Kurdish problem.

Instead of moving in that direction, however, it has moved in the traditional direction of considering the Kurdish problem as one that is not political in nature but a simple question of security and terrorism. If it were that simple, the problem would have been resolved a long time ago.

Like the situation in Northern Ireland, Turkey's Kurdish problem was always a political one with social and economic dimensions. Terrorism, on the other hand, is the offshoot of the inability to face this fact.

With developments unfolding as they are in Syria now, the problem is being aggravated further and the government appears

unable to come up with any creative ideas to address it. The prospects for solving the Kurdish problem soon, therefore, do not appear good, which unfortunately points to more bloodshed and increased ethnic estrangement.

Article 5.

The National Interest

The China Challenge

Robert W. Merry

August 21, 2012 -- Senator James Webb's recent op-ed in the Wall Street Journal constitutes a powerful warning to the man who will occupy the White House Oval Office after January's inauguration day, whether he is President Obama in a second term or Republican challenger Mitt Romney in a first term. Webb, the Virginia Democrat who will relinquish his Senate seat after November's election, called attention to China's ever growing aggressiveness in laying claim to vast and far-flung areas of Asia, including 200 islands (in many instances mere "islets" of uninhabited but strategically significant rock) and two million square kilometers of water.

"For all practical purposes," writes Webb, "China has unilaterally decided to annex an area that extends eastward from

the East Asian mainland as far as the Philippines, and nearly as far south as the Strait of Malacca.” This huge territorial claim, which includes nearly the entire South China Sea, clashes with territorial claims of China’s neighbors in the region, including Vietnam, Japan and the Philippines. Brushing aside these counter-claims, China has created a new administrative “prefecture,” called “Sansha,” with headquarters in the Paracel Islands and lines of authority that go directly to the central government in Beijing.

The Paracels are more than 200 miles southeast of China’s southernmost point of territory, and for decades Vietnam vehemently has claimed sovereignty over them. But now they will house offices for 45 Chinese legislators appointed to administer the new prefecture, along with a 15-member Standing Committee, a mayor and a vice-mayor. Writes Webb: “China’s new ‘prefecture’ is nearly twice as large as the combined land masses of Vietnam, South Korea, Japan and the Philippines.”

At stake is control of sea lanes, fishing rights and large mineral deposits, as well as the question of who will exercise strategic dominance in the region. China seems bent on wresting that strategic dominance from the United States so it can become the region’s dominant power. Gone would be America’s decades-long capacity to maintain stability—and hence prosperity—in the region.

Webb is not the first to issue such a warning, but his piece accentuates a central reality of this unfolding drama—namely, that the drama is unfolding much more rapidly than most people in the United States realize. Asia is watching to determine whether America will, as Webb puts it, “live up to its

uncomfortable but necessary role as the true guarantor of stability in East Asia, or whether the region will again be dominated by belligerence and intimidation.”

China today represents the most fundamental geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and it has been a long time since the need for American boldness and imagination has been as acute as it is now in light of the Beijing challenge. Therefore, not only must next year’s president respond to this challenge, but he must also prepare the nation for it. That suggests a number of policy imperatives.

A smooth exit from Afghanistan: Upon taking office, President Obama ratcheted up the Afghan mission to include a major counterinsurgency effort, which meant a large dose of nation-building. Since then, he has ratcheted down the mission under a concept called “Afghan good enough.” What this means precisely has not been spelled out by the president, who has said, however, that by the end of 2014 Afghans will be “fully responsible for the security of their country.”

In light of the China challenge, “Afghan good enough” is not good enough. And a vague 2014 deadline, without any clear explanation of what kind of U.S. effort would continue beyond that time, lacks the kind of policy clarity the country needs. In his book on Obama’s foreign policy, *Confront and Conceal*, the New York Times’ David E. Sanger writes that a decade from now visitors to that country will see few traces of the American experiment there—“apart from military hardware and bases.” In reality, though, there is little need for U.S. bases in Afghanistan.

Al Qaeda is washed up in the region (though problematical elsewhere); the Taliban doesn't represent any kind of major threat to America; the Afghans will go their own way, as they have for centuries notwithstanding multiple efforts to subdue the place; and the United States can't afford the effort in terms of blood, treasure or focus.

Get right with Russia: In his recent book, *The Revenge of Geography*, Robert D. Kaplan writes that China's ability to project power into the Pacific is made possible by its dominance over its Central Asian land borders, "from Manchuria counterclockwise around to Tibet." He explains: "Merely by going to sea in the manner that it is, China demonstrates its favorable position on the land in the heart of Asia." But it is not in the interest of Russia to have China serene on its western borders, positioned to increase its influence in Central Asia and control the extraction of valuable natural resources there. Neither is it in the interest of the United States (or Russia) to see China emboldened in its territorial demands in the Pacific because it feels secure in its land position.

Thus, if China represents America's greatest strategic threat, a strong relationship with Russia represents one of its greatest strategic imperatives. It's time for the United States to downplay its discomfort with Russia's authoritarian rule and widespread civic corruption. As troubling as Russia is, it hardly represents the kind of evil entity that Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill snuggled up to during World War II. As a regional power, Russia has legitimate regional interests, and the United States should acknowledge those and incorporate them into its

effort to establish a sound and mutually beneficial relationship with Russia—one that, if necessary, can be helpful in any future confrontation with China.

Avoid war with Iran: The United States currently is on a path to war with Iran, and it is a path that was blazed primarily by Israel, which has issued threats of a possible unilateral strike against Iran to stiffen America's stance against the Islamic Republic. So far, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has managed to get Obama to foreclose any U.S. acceptance of an Iranian nuclear weapons capability (meaning no deterrence policy). That leaves open the question whether the United States should permit—and whether Iran would accept—low-level uranium enrichment for peaceful purposes only. Netanyahu is against such an approach, and it isn't clear it could pave the way to a peaceful resolution of the issue in any event. But the current tough sanctions will not, in and of themselves, get the desired response from Iran if that response entails an Iranian humiliation. That's why the peaceful-enrichment approach should guide U.S. thinking on the matter, even if that means an open rupture with Netanyahu. The American people would rally behind the president in such circumstances if the president levels with them about the stakes involved. U.S. leaders shouldn't get sucked in to the kind of journalistic saber rattling that was visible on last week's cover of *The Weekly Standard*, which showed a photo of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, under the headline: "The Most Dangerous Man in the World." America's most dangerous threat is thousands of miles from that man. And the United States should not seek a military confrontation with Iran, if it can be avoided, because such a

conflict would pulverize the global economy and likely unleash far more instability into the region.

No more U.S. boots on the soil of Islam: The Middle East is in turmoil, and the entire region is in danger of being destabilized by the civil war in Syria. Events there could deal a heavy blow to the interests of the United States, the West and much of the rest of the industrialized world. Actual U.S. military action could prove necessary to stabilize the region, but the United States should do everything possible to avoid such a course. Another U.S. intervention in the region would prove highly incendiary. But sitting by and watching is not an appropriate policy either. The situation calls for deft, imaginative and stealthy efforts, always in conjunction with Islamic powers in the region, particularly Turkey, to avert the worst possible outcomes and keep the situation under wraps to the greatest extent possible. The pressures for U.S. involvement in Syria on humanitarian grounds should be resisted forcefully.

The need for economic growth: Obama has not been a successful president in the economic realm. Economic growth has been languid throughout most of his presidency. This needs to change abruptly. But addressing the growth problem without exacerbating the country's ominous debt problem isn't going to be easy. That's why the next presidential term must be devoted assiduously to a comprehensive fiscal reform designed to address out-of-control federal spending while boosting economic activity and growth. Entitlement reform will have to

be combined with a comprehensive tax reform that slashes tax rates while eliminating large numbers of tax preferences, including many that have been considered sacred cows for decades. Only by restoring its fiscal health can the country face major challenges of the kind that looms in Asia. But this will take presidential leadership in abundance, the kind of leadership that we have not seen for a long time.

As Webb's Wall Street Journal article makes clear, Obama was wise in fashioning his "pivot" to Asia. But it isn't enough merely to shift focus, dabble in Asian diplomacy and issue statements. As Webb writes, "The question is whether the China of 2012 truly wishes to resolve issues through acceptable international standards, and whether the America of 2012 has the will and the capacity to insist that this approach is the only path toward stability."

Precisely how America meets this challenge remains an open question. It will take deft, imaginative, flexible and tough-minded diplomacy, mixed with resolve and a clear understanding of the stakes involved. But it also will take recognition that the United States must focus on priorities, must accept that it can't do everything everywhere in the world, and must avoid distractions as it faces with a cold eye its most pressing tests. Among those tests, none seems more pressing these days than China.

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Project Syndicate

Eyesight for Israel's Blind

Dominique Moisi

20 August 2012 -- To find a glimmer of hope on the Israel-Palestine question has become difficult, if not impossible. Most Israelis now believe that a peaceful solution will not come in their generation. As for the Palestinians, the political stalemate, and ongoing Israeli occupation, has led to radicalization: if they cannot have “something,” they want it all.

And many believe that whatever their weakness today, time is on the Palestinians' side. Even the most moderate Palestinians now reject Israeli leftists' offers of help in terms of human support against the actions of Israeli settlers or police. The political dialogue between moderates of both camps is mostly dead, and personal contact has become minimal. In the streets of Jerusalem, Israelis and Palestinians give the impression of deliberately trying not to see each other.

Moreover, as Israel increasingly resembles a successful

developed country, its Jewish citizens tend to ignore its Arab citizens, just as the rich elsewhere often do not see the poor in their midst. But, unlike the poor in many emerging and developed countries, who can hope for social mobility, Israeli Arabs are second-class citizens, even if their living standards remain higher than those of most Arabs in the region. As we know from Deuteronomy, “Man does not live by bread alone.”

This distrustful ignorance of the other can be found everywhere in Israel. Or almost everywhere, for there is a place that escapes this reality: the hospital. Because of an urgent eye problem upon my arrival in Israel in late June, I had to spend seven hours in the ophthalmology department of the Hadassah Hospital in Ein Kerem, which is the main center of treatment, teaching, and research in Jerusalem.

What I saw during those hours were, despite my personal condition, the most comforting and hopeful signs that I have encountered in the entire region in many years. Arab citizens of Israel – that is, Palestinian doctors and nurses – were treating Jewish and Arab patients. Israeli doctors and nurses attended to Arabs’ needs. I even saw some interaction among patients themselves. Old Israelis who had clearly come from Eastern Europe before World War II were playing with very young Palestinian children. There was an atmosphere of reassuring tolerance of the other.

In the highly professional, well-organized, and yet very relaxed (if not slightly confused) atmosphere of the hospital, one could glimpse what the future might hold with different political leadership on both sides. It was as if the ill were behaving in a healthy way, whereas, outside of the hospital, the healthy were

behaving pathologically. In the hospital, patients' only choice was to place themselves in the hands of the other.

What I encountered that day in Ein Kerem was the best of Israel – and a direct rebuttal to the frequent accusation that Israel is an “apartheid state.” And it was fitting that this token of a possible future should be found in an ophthalmology department, an enterprise devoted to restoring vision. Arab citizens of Israel and Jewish citizens of Israel interact with each other as equals when they are placed in a situation in which they can and must. Might all Israelis and Palestinians find themselves in such a position one day?

I am not naïve. I understand that what I saw that day (with one eye) in the Hadassah Hospital cannot easily be replicated elsewhere. Two days after my hospital experience, a tour of the Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem – surrounded or divided by the security wall – served as a reminder of the region's harsh and sobering realities.

But the lessons from the Hadassah Hospital remain alive in my heart as much as my head. When people have no other choice but to trust each other, they will be able to do so and feel better for it. It is a question of balance, competence, and respect.

Can the reality of the hospital be transferred to the reality outside? Probably not. But that should not prevent people from reflecting on what a different world could look like one day – or from working to bring about that world now.

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International Affairs (IFRI) and a professor at Institut d'études politiques de Paris (Sciences Po). He is the author of The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World.

Article 7.

Guardian

The abuse of dissenting Jews is shameful

Antony Lerman

20 August 2012 -- Is the US state department's decision to label extremist settler violence as "terrorist" going to make the Israeli government more likely to enforce the law to protect Palestinians? Those diaspora Jews already critical of Israel's trajectory will surely doubt it. But is the Israeli government really bothered by the doubts of Jewish critics abroad?

The fact is that Jewish diaspora support is vital for Israel, whose governments have taken that support for granted for decades, exploiting it to bolster the country's international position. But they also treat Jewish communities as subservient to Israel by claiming to speak and act on behalf of Jews everywhere. Were that support to weaken dramatically and Jewish diaspora critics of the Netanyahu government's policies become dominant, Israeli officials privately acknowledge that the state would face

an unprecedented crisis.

While this outcome is far from realisation, fear that growing Jewish criticism could seriously challenge Israel's assumption of Jewish solidarity is a principal reason why the country is devoting resources to strengthen Jewish support, in close collaboration with Jewish communal leaders and pro-Israel advocacy groups worldwide.

One method of achieving this is to make it harder for Jews to criticise by accusing them of disloyalty, succumbing to "Jewish self-hatred", and being "fellow travellers" of antisemites – spurious and groundless charges. Jewish critics with radical ideas for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – particularly those who stress there is a Jewish moral obligation to support Palestinian rights and that this is in Israel's own interests if it wants to be a genuinely democratic state – are subjected to a process of vilification, demonisation and marginalisation. Since such Jews often describe themselves as being outside the organised Jewish community, ostracising them has been effective.

The Jewish establishment in the UK – which includes the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Jewish Leadership Council, the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre, the Zionist Federation and numerous private groupings of the great and the good – is highly experienced at this. I saw it happen in the 1980s when communal leaders sought to make life impossible for the small but highly active radical Jewish Socialists' Group. And I became a target for such treatment myself when I was appointed head of the influential Jewish Policy Research (JPR) thinktank for a second time in 2005, an experience I recall in my

book *The Making and Unmaking of a Zionist*.

By then I had served the community professionally for 26 years. A Zionist for decades, I was one no longer. But I wished passionately that Israel would become a democratic state for all its citizens, end the occupation, recognise the Palestinians' right of return, and acknowledge that Israel's establishment in 1948 was a Nakba, a catastrophe, for the Palestinians. I had no intention of using JPR as a platform for advocating these views but rather made one of my principal aims creating space for Jewish critical thinking and debate about how Jews should relate to Israel, to its policies towards Palestinians and to the serious impact of its actions on European Jews. I believed that only through open and civil discussion of these issues could the necessary change in diaspora Jewish opinion occur.

But those who thought my views were beyond the pale had other plans for me. As head of one of the community's major institutions, I represented far more of a danger than so-called marginal Jews. Brazen efforts were made to prevent my appointment, and then, once hired, to force me out. Prominent public figures staged high-profile resignations from JPR's board. Communal leaders secretly sought to silence me and undermine JPR's work. After three years, I concluded it was impossible to carry out my responsibilities effectively, and at the end of 2008 resigned.

In the four years since then, has anything changed? Is it any easier for critics to find a receptive communal audience? There are reasons to think it should be. A 2010 survey of Jewish opinion in the UK revealed that while 72% described themselves as Zionists, 74% opposed settlement expansion and 35% said

Jews should always feel free to voice public criticism of Israel. New "pro-Israel, pro-peace" groups that support a two-state solution and an end to occupation have emerged. Even one of British Jewry's most senior leaders – Mick Davis, chair of Britain's largest pro-Israel charity and CEO of the mining conglomerate Xtrata– criticised Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, questioned some of Israel's policies, and called for criticism to be voiced freely throughout the community.

But even as opportunities for expressing dissent appear to have grown, rightwing Zionists staged a media-savvy fightback, using the usual accusations of disloyalty and "giving succour to our enemies", especially targeting liberal Zionist Jewish critics. The latest charge is "'Jew-washing', Jews using their Jewishness to give token cover for [boycotting Israel] and even antisemitism" – a calumny, itself redolent of antisemitism, promoted by the Israel-based, rightwing NGO Monitor. Spearheading this crusade is an assortment of columnists, bloggers and thinktankers of an aggressive and apocalyptic mindset who smear their targets to the edge of actionable defamation. Even Mick Davis was attacked and has since been tellingly silent. Many leading Jewish communal professionals I know have grave doubts about Israel's direction but censor themselves for fear of losing their jobs, funding or establishment support.

Yet attacks on Jewish critics are becoming desperate, for obvious reasons. Even many liberal Zionists are demonstrating their support for a "selective" boycott, aimed at shunning everything to do with the Jewish settlement enterprise in the occupied Palestinian territories. So, too, are some prominent Israelis, including Avraham Burg, the former speaker of the Knesset, a well-known and influential figure among diaspora

Jews, who publicly announced his position in an Independent op-ed. Many young British Jews are exposed to the reality of life in the occupied West Bank through visits and contact with Israeli human rights groups. While a just Palestine-Israel peace has never seemed more distant, the tectonic plates of Jewish diaspora awareness of Israel's self-destructive path are definitely shifting.

That dissenting Jews are still demonised is shameful and undermines Jewish pluralism. But it's manageable. Because the Jewish diaspora's support matters so much to Israel's leaders, the quest for serious, open and civil debate among Jews about what is really best for Israel must continue.

Antony Lerman is the former director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research.