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Article 1.

NYT

The Belly Dancing Barometer

Thomas L. Friedman

February 19, 2013 -- The Daily News of Egypt reported that the national administrative court ruled last week that the popular Al-Tet “belly dancing channel” be taken off the air for broadcasting without a license. Who knew that Egypt had a belly dancing channel? (Does Comcast know about this?) It is evidently quite popular but apparently offensive to some of the rising Islamist

forces in Egypt. It is not clear how much the Muslim Brotherhood's party had to do with the belly ban, but what is clear is that no one in Egypt is having much fun these days.

The country is more divided than ever between Islamist and less religious and liberal parties, and the Egyptian currency has lost 8 percent of its value against the dollar in the last two months. Even more disturbing, there has been a sharp increase lately in cases of police brutality and rape directed at opposition protesters. It is all adding up to the first impression that President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood are blowing their first chance at power.

Sometime in the next few months, Morsi is to visit the White House. He has only one chance to make a second impression if he wants to continue to receive U.S. aid from Congress. But the more I see of Muslim Brotherhood rule in Egypt, the more I wonder if it has any second impression to offer.

Since the start of the 2011 revolution in Tahrir Square, every time the Muslim Brotherhood faced a choice of whether to behave in an inclusive way or grab more power, true to its Bolshevik tendencies it grabbed more power and sacrificed inclusion. This was true whether it was about how quickly to hold elections (before the opposition could organize) or how quickly to draw up and vote on a new constitution (before opposition complaints could be addressed) or how broadly to include opposition figures in the government (as little as possible). The opposition is not blameless — it has taken too long to get its act together — but Morsi's power grab will haunt him.

Egypt is in dire economic condition. Youth unemployment is rampant, everything is in decay, tourism and foreign investment and reserves are down sharply. As a result, Egypt needs an I.M.F. bailout. Any bailout, though, will involve economic pain — including cuts in food and fuel subsidies to shrink Egypt's steadily widening budget deficit. This will hurt.

In order to get Egyptians to sign on to that pain, a big majority needs to feel invested in the government and its success. And that is not the case today. Morsi desperately needs a national unity government, made up of a broad cross-section of Egyptian parties, but, so far, the Muslim Brotherhood has failed to reach any understanding with the National Salvation Front, the opposition coalition.

Egypt also desperately needs foreign investment to create jobs. There are billions of dollars of Egyptian capital sitting outside the country today, because Egyptian investors, particularly Christians, are fearful of having money confiscated or themselves arrested on specious charges, as happened to some after President Hosni Mubarak's fall. One of the best things Morsi could do for himself and for Egypt would be to announce an amnesty of everyone from the Mubarak era who does not have blood on his hands or can be proved in short order to have stolen government money. Egypt needs every ounce of its own talent and capital it can mobilize back home. This is no time for revenge.

The Brotherhood, though, doesn't just need a new governing strategy. It needs to understand that its version of political Islam — which is resistant to women's empowerment and religious and political pluralism — might be sustainable if you are Iran or

Saudi Arabia, and you have huge reserves of oil and gas to buy off all the contradictions between your ideology and economic growth. But if you are Egypt and basically your only natural resource is your people — men and women — you need to be as open to the world and modernity as possible to unleash all of their potential for growth.

Bottom line: Either the Muslim Brotherhood changes or it fails — and the sooner it realizes that the better. I understand why President Obama's team prefers to convey this message privately: so the political forces in Egypt don't start focusing on us instead of on each other. That's wise. But I don't think we are conveying this message forcefully enough. And Egyptian democracy advocates certainly don't. In an open letter to President Obama last week in Al-Ahram Weekly, the Egyptian human rights activist Bahieddin Hassan wrote Obama that the muted “stances of your administration have given political cover to the current authoritarian regime in Egypt and allowed it to fearlessly implement undemocratic policies and commit numerous acts of repression.”

It would not be healthy for us to re-create with the Muslim Brotherhood the bargain we had with Mubarak. That is, just be nice to Israel and nasty to the jihadists and you can do whatever you want to your own people out back. It also won't be possible. The Egyptian people tolerated that under Mubarak for years. But now they are mobilized, and they have lost their fear. Both we and Morsi need to understand that this old bargain is not sustainable any longer.

Agence Global

Obama's Appointment with History

Patrick Seale

19 Feb 2013 -- U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to Israel on 20-21 March is likely to be one of those seminal events which will decide his place in history. He will either seize this unique, and probably final, chance to breathe fresh life into the moribund two-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or he will consign Palestinian hopes of statehood to oblivion, and go down in the history books as a wimp who surrendered to narrow and partisan political concerns.

Like no other American President since the foundation of the Jewish state sixty-five years ago, Obama now has it in his power to shape Israel's future and its relations with its neighbours. Whatever the pressures he is under from Israel's supporters in the United States -- and they are very great -- the ultimate decision is his and his alone. He is President of the world's most powerful nation. He has secured re-election for a second four-year term, with all the moral and political authority that that achievement confers on him. Moreover, unlike many of his predecessors, he truly understands what needs to be done in the Middle East, as he demonstrated in his famous Cairo speech of 4 June 2009.

It is worth recalling his words on that occasion:

The situation of the Palestinians is intolerable. America will not

turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspirations for dignity, opportunity and a state of their own... The only resolution is for the aspirations of both sides to be met through two states, when Israelis and Palestinians each live in peace and security. That is in Israel's interest, Palestine's interest, America's interest and the world's interest. That is why I intend to personally pursue this outcome with all the patience that the task requires.

The time has come to hold Obama to that pledge. He knows that only U.S. power can check and reverse the headlong land-grab of Palestinian territory by messianic Jewish settlers and their right-wing nationalist supporters, which is extinguishing all hope of Palestinian statehood -- and, by the same token, threatening Israel's future as a democratic state.

Will Obama give a speech at Rabin Square in Tel Aviv? Will he dare tell the Israelis that the U.S.-Israeli special relationship -- on which Israel depends for its very survival -- will be put at risk if the land-grab is not halted and reversed, making way for a Palestinian state?

Whether or not Obama has the courage to speak out -- and translate his words into deeds -- will determine not only war or peace in the region but also whether the United States will be seen as the friend or the enemy of Arabs and Muslims across the world, and all that that implies in terms of American influence, strategic interests, trade opportunities and ultimate security. The United States has already aroused ferocious hostility by its devastating wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as its pitiless drone strikes against alleged terrorists in several countries. But this will be nothing compared to the anger Obama and the United States will arouse if he is seen finally to abandon the Palestinians to their fate.

As well as visiting Israel, Obama will also be calling briefly on Mahmud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority at Ramallah and on King Abdallah of Jordan in Amman. But these latter meetings will be of trivial importance compared to his duel with Israel's hard-line Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, whose attachment to the dream of a "Greater Israel" no longer needs demonstrating.

Israel has pursued this dream relentlessly for decades -- certainly since the premiership of Menachem Begin, a pre-Independence terrorist leader who fought against Britain's mandatory government in Palestine. During his crucial term of office as prime minister from 1977 to 1983, Begin signed the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, which gave Israel's unchallenged military supremacy over the Arabs for more than three decades; he bombed Iraq's Osirak nuclear plant in 1981; and he invaded Lebanon in 1982 -- killing some 17,000 Palestinians and Lebanese. Israel remained in occupation of southern Lebanon for the next eighteen years, until driven out by Hizballah guerrillas in 2000.

Above all, Begin promoted the construction of settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, a systematic land-theft which has continued ever since. Begin's legacy lives on. Over the past several decades Israel has not hesitated to use great violence against the unfortunate Palestinians -- arresting, torturing and killing them in large numbers, seizing and settling their land, demolishing their houses, stealing their water, and subjecting them to innumerable humiliations and human rights abuses. It has illegally claimed sovereignty over Arab East Jerusalem -- thereby ruling out the possibility of a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel in peace and security. Will this pattern of criminal behaviour be halted and or will it continue with

impunity?

Obama is visiting Israel at a time when Netanyahu is still likely to be deep in negotiations over the composition of his next government. It will be Obama's opportunity to influence the choices Netanyahu makes. As their country's best -- and perhaps only real -- friend, Obama must remind Israelis that West Bank settlements are illegal under international law, and that if their land-theft and settlement construction continue, Israel must eventually face sanctions, international pressure and isolation -- much like the package of punitive measures which Israel has pushed the United States into imposing on Iran.

What hope is there that Obama will have the courage to tell Israelis that their actions are putting at risk their vital relationship with the United States? Obama's actions over the past four years give little ground for hope. He has allowed himself to be humiliated by Netanyahu. In a curious way, he seems to have fallen under Israeli control, at least where the Middle East is concerned. As Professor Fawaz Gerges of the London School of Economics writes in his new book, *Obama and the Middle East*: "The United States is no longer seen as omnipotent and invincible..." Or again, America's wars "have diminished America's power and influence in the Middle East and the international system." Could it be that Israel has managed to put a stranglehold over America's decision-making? There is certainly plenty of evidence of that.

Only this week the International Herald Tribune gave pride of place on its opinion page to an incendiary diatribe which seemed to be written by an Israeli propagandist. However, the author was none other than Tom Donilon, Obama's national security adviser. In the article, he categorically blames Hizballah for the despicable attack on Israeli tourists in Bulgaria (although no

convincing evidence has yet been published), calls on the world to recognise the “nefarious nature” of the Lebanese resistance movement, and demands that the European Union add Hizballah to its terrorist list. Such crass partiality is not worthy of a great power like the United States.

Perhaps, as Fawaz Gerges warns in his book, “We are witnessing the beginning of the end of America’s moment in the Middle East.”

Patrick Seale is a leading British writer on the Middle East. His latest book is The Struggle for Arab Independence: Riad el-Solh and the Makers of the Modern Middle East (Cambridge University Press).

Article 3.

Brookings Institution

Back to the Beginning in the Middle East

Marvin Kalb

February 19, 2013 -- Let us, for a moment, imagine what it might have been like in mid-February, 2009, if Barack Obama, then a new president, perhaps a transformational president (he was, after all, the first African-American elected to the job), decided that, in foreign policy, he would focus on the deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian negotiation and, miracle of

miracles, produce a breakthrough. Miracles have been known to happen in that part of the world. Instead of opening his Middle East diplomacy with a cutting critique of Israel's cantankerous settlements policy, often considered the third rail of Israeli politics, instead of traveling first to Egypt, where he delivered a warm speech, opening his arms to the Arab and Muslim worlds, but ignoring Israel, which proved to be a stunning blunder, instead of allowing, even encouraging, a discomfiting coolness in Israeli-American relations, instead of monopolizing America's foreign policy rather than leaving some of the legwork to his secretary of state—instead of all this, if Obama did then what he appears to be doing now, four wasted years later, the Israelis and the Palestinians might be engaging in serious, face-to-face negotiations on a peace treaty by this time. Who knows? Now, Obama appears to be allowing his new Secretary of State, John Kerry, to play a major role in the sensitive Palestinian-Israeli negotiation, a subject in which the former Senator has a passionate interest. He never allowed his first Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, once his principal opponent in the Democratic race to the White House, to lead an American initiative in this area, to engage in the sort of "shuttle diplomacy" that brought not only results but fame to another Secretary of State, named Henry Kissinger. On his first weekend as the nation's top diplomat, Kerry made news by telephoning Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, informing both that he intended to visit the Middle East very soon, his way of signaling a new American activism in the region, particularly in the dormant negotiation between these two old antagonists. Soon thereafter, apparently not by coincidence, the White House announced that the president himself will visit the Middle East

on March 20—in other words, to do now what he should have done in 2009, namely, visit Israel, the Palestinian West Bank and, then as a gesture to a tottering ally, Jordan. On this trip, he will not visit Egypt, perhaps because an unstable Egypt may be too dangerous a destination. According to American experts, Obama wants to focus on two main subjects in his talks with Netanyahu--Iran's nuclear program and Syria's convulsing civil war. But Netanyahu, having already talked to Kerry, expects the president to raise another hot topic—namely, the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock. Netanyahu told his Cabinet last Sunday that this subject is very much on the president's mind. “There is no doubt,” Netanyahu is quoted as saying, “this matter will be part of the work of the next government.” The prime minister is in the process of forming a new, broad-based government in Israel, one result of a political shake-up after the recent election that weakened his own base of political support and strengthened new and moderate forces more eager than he to resume negotiations with the Palestinians. If Obama is, in fact, intent on launching a new American initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation, he knows, or should know, that this effort requires a great deal of advance preparation, and little has been done. Realistically, Obama can do little more on this visit to the Middle East than set the stage for the negotiation and then leave it to his secretary of state to do the daunting, detailed legwork, starting with reopening the stalled dialogue between Netanyahu and Abbas. Then the serious work begins. Fortunately, for Kerry, he would have to shuttle only a short distance between Jerusalem and Ramallah, the interim Palestinian capital. 2013 may be the year, theoretically, for the US to pivot to Asia and the Pacific, but it is likely that this strategic pivot may have to be delayed, in part because the

Middle East has a way of nipping at America's heels. The crises in Iran and Syria may demand Obama's attention this year. No one really knows, or so it seems, but Iran may be on the edge finally of developing a nuclear bomb. Is she six months away, or a year? And what does Obama do? He is on the record as saying the US will stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons, even using its military power to do so. Syria is absorbed in a civil war of increasing intensity and danger. The US may be changing its policy about providing lethal weapons to the anti-Assad opposition, but everyone asks, who is the opposition? Can it be trusted? Or is it a new incarnation of al-Qaeda? And then there is the Palestinian-Israeli negotiation, for which guarantees of success can only be described as being in short supply. If even modest success were possible, it would clearly make it easier for the US and Israel to coordinate their strategies on the Iranian nuclear threat and on the unpredictable but deadly civil war in Syria. Every president seems to harbor a secret dream to bring peace to the holy land. This is now Obama's turn. In 2009, he started out with such high hopes and expectations and then quickly stumbled. Maybe now, four years later, he will do better. Maybe this is his time. Let's wish him well.

Marvin Kalb most recent book is Haunting Legacy: Vietnam and the American Presidency from Ford to Obama (Brookings Institution Press, 2011).

Article 4.

Los Angeles Times

A team of rivals on Syria

Doyle McManus

February 20, 2013 -- Last August, then-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and then-CIA Director David H. Petraeus proposed that the United States change its policy and send weapons and other aid to the rebels fighting the Syrian government. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, signed on too, an unusual step for the normally cautious Pentagon.

President Obama's national security advisor, Thomas Donilon, opposed the proposal, and in the end, the president sided with him. As a result, U.S. assistance to Syria's opposition remains limited to "nonlethal" aid to unarmed political groups, plus humanitarian aid to civilian refugees.

Obama critics have charged that the president sat on his hands for narrow political reasons: a presidential election campaign was underway last summer, and the last thing Obama wanted was to entangle the U.S. in another war.

Today, more than three months after the election, the playing field has changed. Syria is still mired in a bloody stalemate, with more civilians killed every day, but Clinton, Petraeus and Panetta are out, and the president is relying on a different set of advisors. The two most important will be his new secretary of State, John F. Kerry, and his soon-to-be-confirmed Defense secretary, Chuck Hagel.

The president is still the most important player, and he sounds like a man who's looking for excuses to stay out of conflicts, not to get into them. "I have to ask, can we make a difference in that situation?" he said in an interview with the New Republic. "How do I weigh the tens of thousands who've been killed in Syria versus the tens of thousands who are currently being killed in the Congo?"

In Hagel, Obama has an even more determined non-interventionist. Hagel didn't support Obama's escalation in Afghanistan or his decision to use U.S. force in Libya, and those dissents seem to have counted in his favor, rather than against him, when Obama made his choice.

Kerry, a Vietnam veteran like Hagel, is skeptical of military intervention too. But unlike Hagel, he supported Obama's surge in Afghanistan and his decision to use force in Libya.

Kerry says Syria is one of the first problems he intends to tackle, and he has made plans to meet with civilian leaders of the Syrian opposition in Rome next week. He says he wants to give diplomacy another chance to persuade Syrian President Bashar Assad to step down peacefully.

"My goal is to see us change his calculation," Kerry said last week. "My goal is to see us have a negotiated outcome."

But there's no sign from Damascus that Assad will be receptive; his current belief, as Kerry put it, is that he can outlast the rebels, even as war tears his country apart.

If Kerry's mandatory exercise of diplomacy doesn't pay off, we may well see another schism among the president's advisors

about the best course of action.

One proposal that should be considered comes from Frederic Hof, who helped run Syria policy for Clinton until he left the State Department last year.

The idea, in a nutshell, is to find out what moderate factions among the rebels need most and get it to them quickly. "It doesn't need to be weapons," Hof told me this week. "We may decide that weapons are not essential. Other kinds of assistance may actually be more important — military equipment, training, sharing intelligence."

What's important, he said, is cementing U.S. ties with the armed men who may end up running Syria — and making sure the moderates in the opposition aren't displaced by better-armed Islamic radicals.

"This is not a slippery slope," he insisted. "Trying to build strong relationships with carefully vetted armed elements of the Syrian opposition is the conservative, low-risk option here."

It's hard to imagine Hagel, who sees every incline as a slippery slope, endorsing any aid to armed rebels. But would Kerry?

In fact, he already has. In a little-noticed interview with Foreign Policy magazine last May, the then-senator from Massachusetts said U.S. aid to the rebels should be increased.

"There could be some [military] training," he said then. "If we can enhance the unity of the opposition, we could consider lethal aid."

"You have to change the current dynamic. That's to me the

bottom line," Kerry said.

So here's a prediction for the next few months of Obama administration policymaking on Syria:

Kerry will make his trip. He will appeal to Assad to negotiate with the opposition and entreat Russia to end its aid to Syria. But those efforts will show indifferent results.

Then he'll come back to the White House and say it's time to revive the proposal that Clinton and Petraeus made last August for aid to Syria's armed rebels.

Obama will be caught in the middle again. He will have to make the call. But this time there won't be an election campaign underway, and the problems of Syria, along with the spillover problems for its neighbors, will have escalated.

Obama may find it harder to say no this time. But if he says yes, he'll have to explain why he waited seven months, during which both time and lives were lost.

Article 5.

The New Republic

Clueless in Gaza New evidence that Bush undermined a two-state solution

John B. Judis

February 19, 2013 -- A decisive turning point in the recent

political history of Palestine came in June 2007, when Hamas defeated Fatah's security forces in Gaza and took over uncontested administration of the strip. This was the moment that Palestine became divided in two with rival governments in charge—Hamas in Gaza and Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority in West Bank—which meant the end of a single, coherent Palestinian leadership that could negotiate with the Israelis. Afterwards, former Mossad chief Efraim Halevy, who has favored a two-state solution, wrote of the efforts to negotiate with Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas, "The notion that the Palestinian rump authority ... can be a credible partner in negotiation defies logic."

But if the political effects of Hamas' ousting of Fatah are clear enough, Washington's prevailing narrative about it has mostly been self-serving. In a new book, *Tested by Zion*, Elliott Abrams, who supervised American policy in the Middle East for George W. Bush's National Security Council, offers the standard line, charging that Hamas staged a "coup" in Gaza because it feared that "time might bring greater strength for what Hamas saw as Fatah and we saw as the legitimate PA national security forces." Abrams acknowledges that Hamas leaders might have believed there was "a conspiracy to crush it," but dismisses the possibility that there actually was one, and that the United States might have played any role in it.

This account is in marked contrast with the testimony put forth independently by two journalists, Paul McGeough and David Rose, by a former British intelligence official, Alistair Crooke, who had served as a special advisor on the Middle East to the European Union, and by UN Under-Secretary General Alvaro de Soto. Key parts of the this alternative narrative have been

confirmed by leaked government documents and contemporary newspaper accounts and by David Wurmser, who was Middle East advisor at the time to Vice President Dick Cheney.

This version of events is considerably more damning about Washington's role in the events leading up to the Hamas “coup”. According to the alternative narrative, the Bush administration blundered at every turn in its dealings with the Palestinians. It encouraged an election on the assumption that Abbas and Fatah would win. When Hamas was victorious, it sought to nullify the results and to block a unity government between Fatah and Hamas, even though such a government might have actually become a credible partner in peace negotiations. And the Bush administration helped arm Fatah's security forces against Hamas, which stoked the civil war and led to Hamas taking over Gaza. According to this narrative, Hamas was basically right about American intentions.

I am not absolutely certain which version of events is right. Too much of what happened is still shrouded in secrecy. Abrams' reputation is tarred by his admission that he withheld documents from Congress during the Iran-Contra investigation. On the other side, Rose published credulous accounts in 2001 linking Saddam Hussein to al-Qaeda. But I believe that the alternative narrative fits the outward events much better than what Abrams recounts in his book. And if this narrative is a better representation of what actually happened, it holds important lessons for American diplomacy today. While the Obama administration has generally taken a different tack in foreign policy than the Bush administration, it has not done so in its relations with Fatah, Hamas, and the Palestinian Authority—and it may be tempting the same kind of trouble that Abrams and the

Bush administration got themselves into.

The story begins in June 2002, when Bush in a White House speech pressed for the Palestinians to “to elect new leaders” and “build a practicing democracy.” Bush was initially determined to promote an alternative to Yasir Arafat, but after Arafat died, he continued to urge elections as part of the administration’s plan to build Arab democracies. In February 2005, Mahmoud Abbas won an election to succeed Arafat as president of the Palestinian Authority, and at Bush’s urging, agreed to hold elections for a legislative council, which were scheduled for August and then postponed until January 2006. Israel was worried about Hamas’s participation, but in a meeting with Abbas in Washington in October, Bush, who was confident that Fatah would win the elections, did not raise the possibility of banning Hamas candidates.

Hamas, of course, won 74 out of 132 seats. Fatah candidates won a majority of the vote, but lost seats because the party could not agree on a single candidate and split their own vote. Earlier, to sideline Arafat, the American government had pressured the Palestinian Authority to shift power from the president’s office to the prime minister’s, and now Hamas was entitled to the prime ministership and to control of the country’s finances and security. In effect, the election result had sidelined Abbas and Fatah and put Hamas in charge of the country.

According to a mission report from de Soto, who was the U.N. representative to the Middle East Quartet, Abbas and the Hamas officials wanted to create a unity government of the two parties. Abbas was convinced that Hamas, which had not campaigned against a two-state solution, would allow him to pursue

negotiations with Israel. And de Soto and the UN wanted the Quartet wanted to open a “channel of dialogue” with Hamas. Like Abbas, they believed that Hamas’s decision to participate in elections indicated a willingness to lay aside their opposition to the peace process.

But despite having pushed for the election, Washington would not legitimate its results. In the wake of the election, the United States, together with Israel, pressed for the international community, including the U.N., to cut off aid to a Hamas government unless it agreed to recognize Israel, abide by previous treaties and renounce violence and terror. The Bush administration couldn’t get the U.N. to cut funding, but they did eventually convince the Quartet to cut aid to the Palestinian Authority. The U.S. also approved Israel’s decision to deny the Palestinians the tax revenues (through a VAT on their imports and exports) that they collected on their behalf. (Israel was now levying a tax on Palestinians for participating in the election.) And the U.S. repeatedly urged Abbas not to conciliate Hamas. Abbas didn’t dissolve the government, as the U.S. wished, but he restored the Arafat-era power of the Presidency over security, finance, and patronage. Abbas’s moves may have pleased Washington, but they were predictably provocative to Hamas and helped fuel armed clashes in Gaza.

Israel and the United States believed that by depriving the PA of the funds it needed to pay workers and dispense welfare, it could bring down the government. Abbas would call new elections and this time Fatah would win. But Israel and America’s strategy backfired. By denying the PA funds, it initially crippled Abbas and Fatah’s patronage base and security force. Hamas, meanwhile, whose sources of funding in the United States were

drying up because of federal prosecution, turned to Iran for support, and Iran's funding allowed Hamas to pay its fighters and to maintain its own system of clinics and schools. Hamas retained its political support, while Fatah continued to lose ground.

In November 2006, with civil war already breaking out in Gaza between Hamas and Fatah, Lieutenant General Keith Dayton, whom Bush had appointed the U.S. security coordinator for the Palestinians, met with Muhammed Dahlan, a Gazan who was Fatah's security chieftain. According to Rose's account in Vanity Fair, which draws upon notes taken during the meetings, Dayton urged Dahlan to "build up your forces in order to take on Hamas," and promised \$86.4 million in aid. Two months later, an administration spokesman reported, Bush instructed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to transfer "about \$86.4 million in aid to help Palestinian security forces under President Mahmoud Abbas's direct control ... to help provide law and order in Gaza and the West Bank, fight terror, and to facilities movement and access especially in Gaza." That announcement, combined with an announcement from Fatah that Dahlan would be financing a "security and protection force" in Gaza, further enflamed the conflict between Hamas and Fatah.

Congress balked at the \$86.4 million grant—in part because some members didn't want to send any military aid to the Palestinian Authority and in part because some thought the aid would end up in Hamas's hands. Congress finally agreed to \$59 million in non-lethal aid, but the Bush administration tried to get around Congress by seeking lethal aid from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. In December, Egypt had already begun sending military aid to Fatah in Gaza.

That effort sparked a fierce debate among neo-conservatives, some of whom, like Wurmser, believed that the United States would end up provoking a Hamas takeover. Wurmser told me that he opposed the plan to arm Fatah in order to defeat Hamas. The administration, Wurmser said, “was engaged in an effort to help Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas]—a corrupt dictator—to stay in power.”

Abbas, alarmed by the growing violence in Gaza, had periodically urged a unity government. So did de Soto in Quartet meetings, but de Soto got no support from the United States. According to de Soto, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch, who, along with Abrams, were the point men for the U.S. policy, told him in January 2007, “I like this violence. It means that other Palestinians are resisting Hamas.” But in February, the Saudis surprised the Quartet members by bringing Hamas and Fatah leaders to Mecca for unity talks that resulted in an agreement between the two sides establishing a new government. The government included prominent Fatah and Hamas officials as well as several academics and policy experts, including Salam Fayyad, who were not at that point aligned with either faction. The two sides agreed that Hamas would handle domestic matters and Fatah and the independent experts international affairs, including negotiations with Israel.

Abrams makes no mention of these concessions in his book, but they were widely reported at the time. As recounted in award-winning Australian journalist Paul McGeough’s history of Hamas, Hamas leader Khalid Mishal, who led the negotiations, reasserted Hamas’s opposition to the state of Israel, but agreed to abide by past treaties between the PLO and Israel, including

the Oslo accords, and to support negotiations for a two-state solution. “ Hamas is adopting a new political language,” he said afterwards. “ The Mecca agreement is a new political language .. and honoring the agreements is a new language, because there is a national need and we must speak a language appropriate to the time.”

The U.S. and Israel, however, refused to deal with the new government, and according to Rose and McGeough, pressed ahead with its plans to force Hamas out of the government. Abbas was convinced to name Dahlan, whom Hamas saw as its enemy, as the new security chief in the cabinet. And the United States sought to develop a new “ action plan” with Abbas and Fatah that would lead by the year’s end to Hamas’s removal. In the months after the Mecca agreement, fighting had abated in Gaza, but on April 30, the Jordanian newspaper Al-Mayd published a leaked 16-page draft of the action plan, which did not emphasize military means, but did include the need for a military buildup. The Jordanian government confiscated the issues before they got on the streets, but the text remained on Al-Mayd's website, and was widely disseminated.

Hamas interpreted the plan accurately as a conspiracy to block the Mecca agreement and to remove it from power. Then two weeks after the plan surfaced, new Egyptian trained and armed Fatah forces arrived in Gaza with Israel’s approval. The fighting in Gaza resumed. Then on June 7, Ha’aretz reported that Fatah officials in Gaza has “ asked Israel to allow them to receive large shipments of arms and ammunition from Arab countries, including Egypt.” Ha’aretz also reported that Dahlan was organizing another paramilitary force in Gaza to fight Hamas. At this point, Hamas, who had already lost 250 fighters that year,

took the final step and drove the Fatah forces out of Gaza and took control of its government. Wurmser told Rose, "It looks to me that what happened wasn't so much a coup by Hamas but an attempted coup by Fatah that was pre-empted before it could happen." Wurmser, who left the Bush administration a month later, told me he still stands by this judgment.

On June 13, two days before Hamas took over, American Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones sent a cable recounting conversations he had at the time with Israeli Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin and Military-Intelligence Chief Amos Yadlin. The cable, which Wikileaks released in 2010, confirms parts of the alternative narrative. Diskin told Jones that he opposed American proposals to supply weapons and ammunition to Fatah, because he feared that Hamas would get their hands on them. He also told Jones of Fatah's request that Israel attack Hamas. "They are approaching a zero-sum situation, and yet they ask us to attack Hamas," Diskin told Jones. "This is a new development. We have never seen this before. They are desperate."

On the same day, Jones sent another cable describing a conversation he had the previous day with Military-Intelligence Chief Amos Yadlin. The Israeli Defense Forces had earlier been eager to help Fatah against Hamas, but when Jones spoke to Yadlin on the eve of Hamas's takeover, Yadlin said he was actually "happy" with the prospect that Hamas would gain control of Gaza. He thought that Israel could then treat Gaza as a "hostile territory." And several weeks after Hamas's takeover in Gaza and Abbas's ouster of Hamas officials from the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, Israel's cabinet did declare Gaza a "hostile territory." And in a 2010 article, Ha'aretz revealed that

during Operation Cast Lead in December 2008, Israel's Defense Minister asked Fatah's leadership whether it wanted to take back control of Gaza after Israel had ousted Hamas. That operation ended badly, of course, for Israel and its government.

If the alternative narrative to Abrams' is plausible, and I believe it is, what are the lessons to be drawn? The first, and most obvious, is that the Bush administration was utterly incompetent at foreign policy. That clearly goes for Bush's second as well as his first term. And in the case of its policy toward Israel and the Palestinians, it is not just Abrams and the White House that is to blame, but the State Department under Condoleezza Rice. Nothing they did—from urging elections on the Palestinian Authority to attempting to oust Hamas from the PA—achieved what they hoped. They were constantly being upended by events that they had not foreseen—from Hamas's victory in January 2006 to the Saudi's Mecca agreement in February 2007 to the Hamas takeover in June 2007.

The second, having to do with American policy toward Hamas, is more complicated and controversial. In the 1990s, the Clinton administration had good reason to try to isolate and sanction Hamas, which was using suicide bombers to undermine the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO. But by 2006, the situation had changed. Oslo was, to all intents and purposes, dead. Fatah and Abbas were unpopular, and in participating in the 2006 elections, and in occasional statements, Hamas had shown some willingness to let the PLO negotiate with the Israelis and to a long-term "hudna" or ceasefire with Israel. The Bush administration had at its disposal all kinds of circuitous means of dealing with Hamas without directly recognizing a an organization that the State Department had designated as

“terrorist.” For one thing, as de Soto suggested, it could have acted through the Quartet.

Instead, the administration joined the Israelis in doing everything it could not only to isolate but to defeat and destroy Hamas, even though Hamas had won elections that the Bush administration had urged. At this point, the administration’s strategy recalled earlier failed attempts of American administration to deny the existence of regimes and movements of which it did not approve. By refusing to deal with, or attempting to destroy, movements or governments that have genuine popular support, and that were not at war with the United States, the United States has almost invariably strengthened those movements and governments, and in some cases, removed the possibility that they could have been brought around. There is no question that the American and Israeli strategy against Hamas strengthened that movement, deepened its support, and also hardened its ties to a country, Iran, that both the US and Israel see as hostile.

American or Israeli politicians who back the idea of a “greater Israel” that incorporates lands that the Jews inhabited several millennia ago might agree with Yadlin’s judgment that Hamas’s takeover in Gaza boded well for Israel. But it would be hard for anyone who backs a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to agree. Hamas remains a force in the West Bank as well as Gaza, and as Halevy and other prominent officials have contended, would eventually have to be brought into any viable peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. That should have been clear during Bush’s misadventure in his second term, but the lesson seems not to have been learned.

While Obama sought initially to press Israel to conclude an agreement with the Palestinians, he continued to harbor the illusion that it could be done while pretending that Hamas does not exist. Obama also followed the Bush administration in rejecting the idea of a unity government between Hamas and Fatah when the two parties again agreed to reconcile early last year. The agreement fell apart—and not least because of an absence of American support. Will Obama change course in his second term and attempt to deal with Hamas and Fatah? In Obama's State of the Union address, he managed to mention Israel's security, but not the peace process or the Palestinians. Evidently, the administration is now denying the existence not only of Hamas, but of Abbas and the Palestinian Authority. That suggests that the lessons of Bush's disaster in Gaza have still not sunk in.

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Article 6.

Spiegel

How the Mossad Works: The Mystery of Israel's 'Prisoner X'

Ulrike Putz

19 Feb. 2013 -- An Israeli agent commits suicide in his prison cell. Was he a traitor? The mysterious case of "Prisoner X," reported to be Australian-born Benjamin Zygier, provides an insight into the workings of the Mossad. The Milan office building exudes elegance with its stucco facade, brass name plate, concierge service and expensive wooden furniture inside. There's nothing to suggest that the firm based here, which specializes in the sale of satellite communications technology, is a front for the Israel foreign intelligence service Mossad. But the Milan company is reported to have hired Israeli agents who needed legends for their operations in enemy territory. One of them was Ben Zygier, an Australian Jew and a committed Zionist who emigrated to Israel as a young man. The company is reported to have vouched as Zygier's employer when he applied for a work visa at the Italian consulate in Melbourne in 2005. That, at least, is what Australian intelligence agents claim.

Ben Zygier died aged 34, just four days after the birth of his second child, on December 15, 2010, in a solitary confinement cell in the Ayalon high-security prison near Tel Aviv. He was reported to have hanged himself, even though he was the country's best-guarded prisoner, monitored by four cameras. His lawyer had met him one or two days beforehand and said Zygier had seemed normal.

His case made headlines last week after an Australian news program identified Zygier as Israel's mysterious "Prisoner X." What crime can the agent have committed to prevent even his guards from knowing his identity? Israeli officials said he had been a danger to national security. His lawyer said the accusations against him were "serious." When Zygier died, Israel issued a gag order preventing media from covering the

case.

'Access to Secret Installations'

The agent was arrested in February 2010, shortly after the Mossad had murdered the weapons dealer of Hamas in Dubai. Now there's speculation that Zygier was involved in that killing, and that he may have divulged secrets. Or did he have something to do with the killings of Iranian scientists or software attacks against Iran's nuclear program? There are no answers, but Zygier and two other Australian Jews who also worked for the Milan firm were reported to have been successful agents. "The nature of their business gave them access to military and secret installations," said an Australian intelligence source. Zygier's case provides insight into the methods of Mossad. It shows how the service recruits agents and masks operations. As a young man, Zygier got involved with the "Community Security Group" in Melbourne, a kind of Jewish citizens' defense league. These groups often have links to Mossad and are instructed by agents. Ben Zygier was probably recruited in this way. At around the same time, Paul Y. and David Z. were recruited.

Australian Jews are particularly attractive to the Mossad because of a quirk in the law: Australians are allowed to change their first and last names once a year. It's a wonderful way to adopt a new identity.

After he completed his education, Zygier emigrated to Israel. Y. and Z. also moved there. The three of them -- all holding Israeli and Australian citizenship -- got jobs with the Milan-based firm. Back in Australia, they applied for new names. Ben Zygier got

the names Benjamin Burrows and Benjamin Allen. Y. and Z. also changed their names at least twice.

Under Surveillance

But in 2009 their repeated name-changing aroused the interest of the Australian authorities -- especially when Zygier handed in his old passports, filled with Iranian entry visas. Paul Y. spent a lot of time in Syria, Iran, Egypt and Dubai. David Z., too, travelled to Iran several times. That wasn't just evident from his passport stamps. During one trip in 2004, he sought help from the Australian consulate in Tehran.

The three men were now put under surveillance whenever they went back to Australia. Britain's MI6 foreign intelligence agency also began to take an interest in David Z., who possessed a British passport as well. Ben Zygier also attracted attention with his choice of friends. During a trip to Melbourne in 2009, his followers noticed that he was approaching Iranian and Saudi-Arabian students at Monash University. Soon after that, a source told the Australian journalist Jason Koutsoukis that the three men were caught up in espionage. When he confronted Zygier with these accusations, he denied it. "I asked him why he changes his name so often," said Koutsoukis. "He replied he had personal reasons for that."

They spoke three more times before mid-February 2010. Zygier was getting increasingly annoyed, he said he just wanted to build a normal life for himself in Israel. During the last telephone call he shouted: "Fuck off!"

At this point the Australian authorities already planned to arrest Zygier for espionage. But the Israeli authorities were quicker.

On Feb. 24, Israel informed a liaison officer from the Australian secret service in Tel Aviv that Zygier had been arrested.

Zygier died in December. Calls to the firm in Milan are only answered by voicemail. Paul Y. and David Z. are reported to be still living in Israel. Possibly under new names.

Article 7.

Project Syndicate

The Rise of the Robots

Robert Skidelsky

19 February 2013-- What impact will automation – the so-called “rise of the robots” – have on wages and employment over the coming decades? Nowadays, this question crops up whenever unemployment rises.

In the early nineteenth century, David Ricardo considered the possibility that machines would replace labor; Karl Marx followed him. Around the same time, the Luddites smashed the textile machinery that they saw as taking their jobs.

Then the fear of machines died away. New jobs – at higher wages, in easier conditions, and for more people – were soon created and readily found. But that does not mean that the initial fear was wrong. On the contrary, it must be right in the very long run: sooner or later, we will run out of jobs.

For some countries, this long-run prospect might be uncomfortably close. So, what are people to do if machines can do all (or most of) their work?

Recently, automation in manufacturing has expanded even to areas where labor has been relatively cheap. In 2011, Chinese companies spent ¥8 billion (\$1.3 billion) on industrial robots. Foxconn, which build iPads for Apple, hopes to have their first fully automated plant in operation sometime in the next 5-10 years.

Now the substitution of capital for labor is moving beyond manufacturing. The most mundane example is one you will see in every supermarket: checkout staff replaced by a single employee monitoring a bank of self-service machines. (Though perhaps this is not automation proper – the supermarket has just shifted some of the work of shopping onto the customer.)

For those who dread the threat that automation poses to low-skilled labor, a ready answer is to train people for better jobs. But technological progress is now eating up the better jobs, too. A wide range of jobs that we now think of as skilled, secure, and irreducibly human may be the next casualties of technological change.

As a recent article in the Financial Times points out, in two areas notoriously immune to productivity increases, education and health care, technology is already reducing the demand for skilled labor. Translation, data analysis, legal research – a whole range of high-skilled jobs may wither away. So, what will the new generation of workers be trained for?

Optimists airily assert that “many new types of job will be

created.” They ask us to think of the lead drivers of multi-car road trains (once our electric cars join up “convoy-style”), big data analysts, or robot mechanics. That does not sound like too many new jobs to me.

Imagine a handful of technicians replacing a fleet of taxi drivers and truckers, a small cadre of human mechanics maintaining a full robot workforce, or a single data analyst and his software replacing a bank of quantitative researchers. What produces value in such an economy will no longer be wage labor.

We can see hints of that future now. Twitter, the social-media giant, is an employment minnow. It is valued at \$9 billion, but employs just 400 people worldwide – about as many as a medium-size carpet factory in Kidderminster.

It is not true that automation has caused the rise of unemployment since 2008. What is noticeable, though, is that structural unemployment – the unemployment that remains even after economies have recovered – has been on an upward trend over the last 25 years. We are finding it increasingly difficult to keep unemployment down.

Indeed, the days when we in Britain thought it was normal to have an unemployment rate of 2% have long since passed. It was considered a great achievement of the last government that it brought unemployment down to 5% at the height of an unsustainable boom. And it only succeeded in doing so by subsidizing a lot of unnecessary jobs and useless training schemes.

No doubt some of the claims made for robots replacing human labor will prove as far-fetched now as they have in the past. But

it is hard to resist the conclusion that “technological unemployment,” as John Maynard Keynes called it, will continue to rise, as more and more people become redundant.

The optimist may reply that the pessimist’s imagination is too weak to envisage the full range of wonderful new job possibilities that automation is opening up. But perhaps the optimist’s imagination is too weak to imagine a different trajectory – toward a world in which people enjoy the fruits of automation as leisure rather than as additional income.

During the Industrial Revolution, working hours increased by 20% as factories replaced feasting. With our post-machine standard of living, we can afford to shed some of the Puritan guilt that has, for centuries, kept our noses to the grindstone.

Today we find a great deal of work-sharing in poor countries. It is the accepted means of making a limited amount of available work go around. Economists call it “disguised unemployment.”

If escape from poverty is the goal, disguised unemployment is a bad thing. But if machines have already engineered the escape from poverty, then work-sharing is a sensible way of “spreading the work” that still has to be done by human labor.

If one machine can cut necessary human labor by half, why make half of the workforce redundant, rather than employing the same number for half the time? Why not take advantage of automation to reduce the average working week from 40 hours to 30, and then to 20, and then to ten, with each diminishing block of labor time counting as a full time job? This would be possible if the gains from automation were not mostly seized by the rich and powerful, but were distributed fairly instead.

Rather than try to repel the advance of the machine, which is all that the Luddites could imagine, we should prepare for a future of more leisure, which automation makes possible. But, to do that, we first need a revolution in social thinking.

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