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Article 1.

The New Yorker

Where Is the Kerry Plan for Peace?

Bernard Avishai

April 11, 2014 -- On Tuesday, when Secretary of State John Kerry appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the questioning from his former colleague John McCain was surprisingly mocking. Kerry and McCain are both Vietnam veterans (and failed Presidential candidates), and had been known to be friendly. But McCain said he was “gravely concerned about the consequences of America’s failure to lead in the world.” Israeli-Palestinian negotiations had collapsed; McCain chalked up their failure, and that of diplomacy with Syria and Iran—what he called Kerry’s “trifecta”—to weakness. Kerry was “talking strongly and carrying a very small stick.”

Kerry responded, sighing, that everything looks failed when it is half done. The Israeli-Palestinian talks, he said, were thrown

into crisis because of Israel's refusal to release a last batch of Palestinian prisoners, prompting President Abbas to apply for membership in fifteen United Nations agencies and conventions, to which Israeli Housing Minister Uri Ariel responded by announcing seven hundred and eight new apartment units in East Jerusalem—at which point, poof, negotiations collapsed. Neither party had been constructive, yet both continued to ask for intercession. Kerry told McCain, “You declare it dead but the Israelis and the Palestinians don't declare it dead.” McCain had his opening: “It's stopped. It is stopped. Recognize reality.”

McCain knows that, whether or not the talks actually end, there is never a political penalty for claiming that an international crisis is the result of Democrats not showing sufficient strength—a proposition that can never be falsified. Still, you have to wonder if McCain is right to ask if Kerry and his President have the will to follow through, by which I mean in the only way that can succeed: by offering an American plan for Israeli-Palestinian peace and rallying the world to it, while challenging, or even shattering, Netanyahu's fragile coalition.

Kerry has “gone as far as he can as mediator,” a senior American official said last week. Precisely. The question is whether he'll move the parties to something like binding arbitration, stop speaking about psychological breakthrough, and start implementing American policy—more Dr. Kissinger, less Dr. Phil.

The breakdown Kerry described, after all, is not in actual negotiations but in a contrived show of reciprocity that masks how negotiations are going nowhere. The most serious obstacle is Israeli and ideological. Most of Netanyahu's Likud, along

with his ultra-rightist, Orthodox coalition partners, believe that Jerusalem and the whole land of Israel is the sacred patrimony of their Jewish state. They aren't moved by Kerry's claim that endless rule over Palestinian Arabs will undermine Israel's democracy. They also believe, but won't just say, that the Palestinians' eventual state will be across the Jordan, when Palestinians in Amman finally topple the Hashemite king and West Bankers, beginning with the élites, join them. Anyway, most think democracy is overrated. More than a quarter of Israelis tell pollsters they would like to see Yitzhak Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir, pardoned.

This doesn't mean that Israelis and Palestinians could never come to terms. Twice during the past twenty years, when Netanyahu's Likud was out of power, Abbas conducted direct negotiations with Israeli leaders: first with Labor's Justice Minister, Yossi Beilin, in 1995, and then with centrist Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, in 2008. Twice, Abbas endorsed principles of action on the core issues proposed by Israeli interlocutors—principles he's reaffirmed in various interviews with Israeli media during the past twelve months.

As both Abbas and Olmert told me in separate interviews for the New York Times Magazine in 2011, the outline would include a non-militarized Palestinian state in the Jordan Valley, with American security guarantees for Israel; borders based on the 1967 lines, with land swaps to allow a majority of Jewish settlers to remain in place; two capitals in Jerusalem, sharing a common municipal administration; the Holy Basin under an international custodian; and a finesse of the Palestinian "right of return" through common endorsement of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, and through an international commission that

compensates post-1948 refugees on both sides while allowing a token few thousand Palestinian Arabs back into Israel proper.

All of these principles are anathema to the Israeli right and their friends in America. However cordial his personal relations with Netanyahu, Kerry must have known that he never had a chance to persuade this government to give up on Greater Israel any more than his boss had the chance to win the House over to a steep increase in income taxes. Settlement construction is not just an obstacle to negotiations; it gestures toward a maximal, neo-Zionist vision. If Kerry was not prepared to confront that vision and to help marginalize its advocates, he should not have undertaken this diplomacy in the first place.

The point is, the principles of a deal between moderate Palestinians and moderate Israelis are known. They are consistent with American policy since 1967. If packaged as an American plan, they'd likely gain the support of the European Union and the United Nations Security Council. All Kerry has to do—not a small thing—is embrace them and call them his own, much as President Obama haltingly did in 2011, when he argued for “the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps.” This is more or less what a bipartisan group of former foreign-policy advisers, including Zbigniew Brzezinski, Frank Carlucci, and Thomas Pickering, argued in *Politico Magazine* this week. If America had a foreign policy, and not (as George Kennan once lamented) just domestic politics, this plan might have been announced long ago.

The reality Kerry has to recognize is that his main chance at success now is to organize international consensus around a plan that he can call his own. The Oslo Agreements negotiator Dr.

Ron Pundak (who, sadly, passed away Friday) suggested to me that the substance of such a plan would be something equivalent to U.N. Resolution 242 in the nineteen-seventies. As such, it would inflame the advocates for Greater Israel, who would defy it from the Hebron Hills to Fox News. But it would mobilize advocates for Global Israel, whom I've described here in the past: entrepreneurs, professionals, military officials, and scholars who fear terror and the surrender of the West Bank intelligence assets they assume keep it at bay, but who fear international isolation more immediately. They understand that Israel's economy is part of a global network and that you can antagonize the globe only so far.

A Kerry Plan, moreover, would almost certainly precipitate a new election in Israel, which is the only hope for peace. Centrists like Finance Minister Yair Lapid and Justice Minister Tzipi Livni control twenty-five seats in Netanyahu's coalition; they would not likely stay with him to fight an open-ended political battle against Kerry—not if the Obama Administration stands with him. (The President may still be afraid to gain Jewish backers in Israel if it would mean losing some in America.)

Notionally, Netanyahu could cling to power by appealing to the Mizrahi Shas and other ultra-Orthodox parties to join him in defending exclusive Jewish control of Jerusalem. But his government has enraged those very parties by cutting them out and passing legislation to draft yeshiva students. Having just sixty-one out of a hundred and twenty seats puts Netanyahu on borrowed time. If the election is fought over a Kerry Plan, Netanyahu is not likely to win—not, at least, as leader of the Likud in its current configuration. The right is not toothless, but

it is fragmented, and potentially in disarray.

The Likud Party apparatus is in the hands of Danny Danon, the Party chairman. Avigdor Lieberman, the Foreign Minister, who's aiming to topple Netanyahu, controls his old ultra-rightist party, Yisrael Beiteinu; this has left many of the Likud's traditional Mizrahi voters displaced. Sheldon Adelson, the casino magnate, is thought to have bought the newspaper Makor Rishon to keep Economy Minister Naftali Bennett, a national Orthodox leader, from using it to attack Netanyahu. Clear?

Something like two-thirds of Israelis support a hypothetical Kerry Plan when its features are presented individually and on the condition that security is not compromised. The mean age in the country is thirty, which means that more than half of Israeli voters never experienced the country without the territories. They could be persuaded to vote pragmatically—if credible leaders were to back Kerry's initiative and keep Israel joined to the world.

Kerry would be putting his chips on a center-left anti-Likud front that does not have a face. Labor's leader, Yitzhak Herzog, has not emerged as a national leader. Ehud Olmert was convicted of taking a bribe; he knows his political career is over. Some contenders have not yet been heard from, chief among them Moshe Kahlon, the popular former Likud Minister of Communications. Then there are Meir Dagan, the former Mossad head, and Yuval Diskin, the former head of Israel's internal security agency. All are privately close to Olmert and had been waiting to see if he would be able to return; as a group, they would have considerable credibility. Labor's freshest face, the Jerusalem-based venture capitalist Erel Margalit, told

reporters he welcomes Kahlon's return to politics, suggesting an alliance may be taking shape. (Margalit has told me he wants a big-tent democratic coalition.)

On balance, if Kerry has the courage to reckon the risks, he'd find them worth running. His task is not to pressure the Israeli government but to create an international climate in which Israelis will pressure themselves. And his chances are better than even.

One last thing: in the meantime, what Kerry ought not to do is buy into the Netanyahu government's fatuous claim that the only way for Palestinians to prepare the ground for statehood is to stop dealing with international organizations. Kerry implied to the Senate committee that, indeed, Palestinian applications to join such U.N. agencies and treaties as the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are somehow as threatening as Israel's settlement construction, since both are "unilateral." In this conclusion, Palestine is a kind of aguna, an ultra-Orthodox woman petitioning for divorce, and he, Kerry, is a presiding rabbi, prohibiting the her from having relations with other men unless her husband agrees to a get, a husband's decree nullifying the marriage.

If Netanyahu were serious about a nonviolent two-state solution, what is lost to Israel by Palestinians joining international organizations that restrain its actions and commit it to international standards? Why not encourage investment by global companies? If Kerry ever had a plan, why wouldn't it include Palestine joining the world, too?

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[Article 2.](#)

The Week Magazine

How John Kerry can find success in the ashes of Middle East peace

Kori Schake

April 11, 2014 -- Secretary of State John Kerry's push for Middle East peace has come to this sorry impasse: The Israelis demanding the United States release a traitor before they are willing to proceed with previously agreed releases of Palestinians, and the Palestinians playing for international recognition over U.S. objections. Put another way, the Israelis want to impose a penalty on their main international backer for moving forward on a plan that is clearly not of their making, while the Palestinians think they can circumvent Washington's main leverage over them, which is recognition of Palestine as a state. Suffice to say that it's pretty difficult to see how the negotiations proceed from here to a stable two-state solution, despite Kerry's frenetic efforts and best intentions.

Kerry's effort to start his tenure as secretary with a major peace initiative was a reasonable gambit: It is one of the few things

countries in the region want that also aligns with U.S. interests. And it's certainly one of the only things ostensibly achievable by "smart power" alone. Many countries in the region argue that if only the United States would put a little effort and attention to the problem, if it would lean just a little on the Israelis over whom we have such enormous leverage, there could be justice for Palestinians, thus removing a major obstacle to public support for the United States throughout the region. Ambitious strategists in Washington take that even further — envisioning a Middle East wherein the Arab states not only extend diplomatic recognition to Israel, but cooperate openly with Israel to counter Iran. It's an appealing vision, but runs aground on how very little each of the parties (including those pressing hardest for U.S. involvement) are willing to give to achieve those outcomes.

So here we are again, with Kerry left pleading that "the leaders have to lead and they have to be able to see a moment when it's there." The political heads of Israel and Palestine see a moment, but it's not the moment Kerry sees. More worryingly, the Obama administration cannot seem to grasp the fundamental contradiction in its approach to diplomacy. The problem with leading from behind is that it necessitates others leading from the front ... and if others were willing and able to lead, they wouldn't need United States involvement.

Perhaps Kerry will yet channel Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's inner Anwar Sadat and find Benjamin Netanyahu's inner Menachem Begin. But right now that has about the same odds as Warren Buffet's March Madness bracket bet. The smart money says that yet another push for Middle East peace will sink into the sands and Kerry will be left with the recriminations of all parties believing if only Washington had pushed others more,

their preferred outcome could have been achieved. It will be a stinging defeat for the secretary, who alone in the Obama administration has argued for the peace process as a priority.

It should (but probably won't) occasion a reconsideration by the Obama White House of what diplomacy can achieve on its own. It should (but surely won't) occasion a reconsideration by the Obama White House of how their choices have diminished American standing in the world — we are not more respected because they eschew a forceful role. Instead, as the Middle East peace negotiations illustrate, hesitance and unreliability causes other states to reposition themselves in ways that reduce our ability to affect them. Call it insulation from our indifference.

If the Middle East peace negotiations crumble — much like negotiations to produce a unified opposition or alignment of U.S. and Russian interests in Syria, or negotiations to persuade Moscow to end its occupation of Crimea and quit its revanchist threats to any state that happens to have Russians among their population — Kerry should pause and reconsider how he is approaching diplomacy, what he might do differently to produce better results. Here are five suggestions:

1. Motion does not equal progress

Both Kerry and Secretary Hillary Clinton before him have operated on the "mileage plus" model of diplomacy, traveling constantly. Clinton even trumpeted it as a major achievement. There is advantage to showing up, but it is not the central element of a secretary's job nor the appropriate metric for determining effectiveness. Kerry should travel less, sending deputies and bringing leaders to Washington, tying his presence abroad to the concrete achievement of a diplomatic objective.

The arrival of an American secretary of State should be a form of leverage to achieve diplomatic outcomes, not a routine part of the diplomatic process.

2. Strengthen the institution

Most secretaries of State run the department from the seventh floor (the secretary's suite in Foggy Bottom), caring little about the foreign and civil service or the institutional weaknesses of the State Department. That absolutely should not be the case for an administration whose approach to the world is fundamentally diplomatic. The Obama administration is committed to reducing the role that military force plays in American strategy, but that cannot happen without a dramatic strengthening of the non-military means of national power. The Treasury Department has succeeded brilliantly in the past 10 years at developing new tools that can target sanctions on individuals, track terrorist money flows, and identify banks laundering money. The State Department is long overdue for just such a muscular effort to identify and develop new means of diplomatic leverage.

The State Department is also overdue for another Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review — one that doesn't celebrate the process as its main achievement or recommend more senior positions for its organizational chart.

Our diplomats deserve a secretary of State who will develop a vision for the organization that will inspire, orient, and involve them. They deserve investment in their professional education and development. They deserve a government that funds their activity as fulsomely as it does the military — and one that then holds them as accountable for producing results. Kerry has involved himself in none of those things.

3. Play team sports

Kerry and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel made a joint appearance at the Munich Security Conference in an attempt to persuade the world that America was not withdrawing from the world. They made a joint appearance before Congress in an attempt to persuade wary legislators that the administration had a policy on Syria. Kerry and Hagel should make this a habit. President Obama's foreign policy is suffering from the widespread perception that military force is not an option. Closer and more visible cooperation across the Potomac River would go some way to deflecting that perception. Having the secretary of State lead the development of truly integrated strategies — policies that have diplomatic, economic, and military components working in tandem to support clear political objectives and identifiable end states — would go even further.

4. Prioritize

Kerry has done this pretty well: One can see his priorities from the allocation of his time. The question is whether those are the right priorities. It does seem odd that Afghanistan figures so little, especially with the election looming and Obama's exit strategy so dependent on that election producing a cooperative political order — instead of the country going up in flames, as Iraq has. Given the behavior of both Israel and the Palestinians, a shift in effort is in order: What about shoring up states like Jordan that have been a force for good for a future without a peace agreement and that have borne the brunt of a bad Syria policy? Or come up with a policy for dealing with Gen. Sisi's Egypt? Closer to home, energy issues and political change in Mexico are creating new opportunities for North American

integration — an enormous strategic opportunity Washington has failed to take advantage of.

5. Stop compartmentalizing

The Obama administration persists in believing that its choices on Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria do not affect how allies and enemies alike see the United States. It is a parallel to their belief that the wars are ending, when in fact all that is ending is our participation in them. The war in Iraq is not over for Iraqis; the war in Afghanistan will not be over for Afghans or Pakistanis. The administration develops exclusive policies without considering how they are fundamentally interrelated. For example, the administration continues to believe that even after the stand-off in Crimea, Russia will continue to advance the president's pet project of cooperative nuclear non-proliferation, including U.S. involvement in securing nuclear materials in Russia and upholding the Iran sanctions effort. That is transparently wishful thinking, and it clouds the ability to fireproof the most important U.S. policies. What is needed is a perspective of how our actions in one arena will ricochet into others.

Israel and Palestine once again foregoing the opportunity for a peace treaty is a great disappointment, but Kerry could profitably reflect on the opportunities it provides to focus his attention and strengthen America's hand for future rounds. It is a silver lining worth grasping, not least by the secretary of State who invested so much in trying to foster a new era of defenseless diplomacy.

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Article 3.

Trib Total Media

The takeaway from the languishing Middle East peace process

John Bolton

April 12, 2014 -- Barack Obama has announced a “pause” for a “reality check” in his Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy, although no one is really deceived by this euphemism. His “peace process” is verging on collapse, despite a year's investment of U.S. diplomatic time and effort. Not only will the negotiations' impending failure leave Israelis and Palestinians even further from resolving their disputes than before but America's worldwide prestige will be significantly diminished. Our competence and influence are again under question, Israel has been undermined and by misallocating our diplomatic priorities, we have impaired our ability to resolve international crises and problems elsewhere, such as Russia's annexation of Crimea.

All of this was entirely predictable and therefore entirely

avoidable. What sustained the administration's effort this past year was the world of illusions that Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry inhabit, a world unfortunately populated with many leading figures in the American and European political, academic and media elites.

While any U.S. failure internationally is disheartening — especially as we confront a rising tide of isolationist sentiment domestically — we should at least try to learn from the debacle. And while the list of lessons is unfortunately long, two in particular merit immediate attention. First, U.S. foreign policy cannot rest effectively on illusions about an ideal global order. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, the sustaining myth for decades has been that a lasting solution rests on creating a Palestinian state. Under this view, one wholly embraced by Obama and both Secretaries of State John Kerry and Hillary Clinton, a sufficient amount of American pressure on Israel would produce such a state and peace would break out in the region. To the contrary, however, the gravest threat to Middle Eastern peace has long been Iran's nuclear-weapons program and its financial support for terrorism. Pursuing an ideological fixation with Palestinian statehood ignores the unpleasant reality that no Palestinian institutions possess democratic legitimacy (or any other justifiable claim to legitimacy), nor, sadly, do they have any discernible capacity for sustained adherence to difficult commitments and compromises, which Israel rightly insists upon. Moreover, Obama never grasped that what matters most is not a new Palestinian state's precise borders but the kind of state it would be — a terrorist regime like Hamas, an aging kleptocracy like Fatah or a truly representative Palestinian government. Until the third alternative becomes possible, Israel

cannot safely settle with a “Palestine” that would simply resume its assault on Israel's very existence at the earliest opportunity. A second, equally pernicious delusion is the idea that diplomacy always is cost and risk free, that we should “give peace a chance” and that negotiation always is in America's interest. This is simply nonsense. But it commands incredible support within the aforementioned political, academic and media elites. While negotiation is eminently suited for resolving the vast preponderance of international disputes, its utility in the most serious conflicts always requires judgment and strategy (or “cost-benefit” analysis, as the economists say). In the early Cold War, for example, Secretary of State Dean Acheson resolutely rejected pressure from the U.S. left to negotiate with Moscow until Washington was able to do so from “a position of strength.” Acheson recognized that the conditions, timing and scope of negotiations all involve complex strategic and tactical considerations. None of it is cost or risk free. Moreover, for America, entering into a fraught, potentially doomed negotiation incurs enormous costs, now being demonstrated throughout the Middle East as all of Obama's major diplomatic initiatives (Israeli-Palestinian negotiations; Syria's civil war; and Iran's nuclear weapons program) crash and burn. Our failures have consequences. Both U.S. friends and adversaries will analyze the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and make judgments about advancing their own interests in light of the perception (and the reality) of a weaker, less-effective, less-competent U.S. presidency. Today, for example, foreign governments understand far more clearly than Americans the potential implications of three more years of continued U.S. weakness under Obama. Finally, the “opportunity costs” always are critical. While Obama and Kerry have been fiddling over

Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Ukraine has been splintered; other former Soviet republics are at risk of the same; NATO is in disarray; Iran's and North Korea's nuclear-weapons programs proceed unhindered; Beijing's territorial claims in the East and South China Seas go unanswered; and the global threat of terrorism continues to metastasize. And that's just a partial list. It is simply not possible for mere human beings to invest as much time and energy as Obama and Kerry did in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and not thereby divert their attention from other problems and opportunities.

Whether the Obama administration is capable of correcting its errors is highly doubtful. But as American citizens consider who should succeed Obama, they must urgently consider whether the various prospective candidates live in the real world or in a world of illusion.

John Bolton, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Article 4.

The Guardian

America stands accused of retreat from its global duties. Nonsense

Michael Cohen

April 12, 2014 -- A new word, it seems, has come to the fore to describe US foreign policy in the age of Obama: retreat.

The signs of alleged American fecklessness are everywhere: withdrawal from Afghanistan, which followed the ignominious departure from Iraq; negotiations with the mullahs in Iran rather than bombs over Tehran; an aimless and hollow pivot to Asia that is failing to deter a rising China; a newly assertive Russia seizing territory without consequence; cuts in defence spending while al-Qaida franchises pop up across the Middle East and perhaps the worst of all sins – failure to stop the bloodletting in Syria. It's a policy that Niall Ferguson calls "one of the great fiascos of post-World War Two American foreign policy". (Mental note: send Niall Ferguson a book about the Vietnam War.) The charge isn't just being hurled in Washington. According to John McCain: "I travel all around the world and I hear unanimously that the United States is withdrawing and that the United States' influence is on the wane and that bad things are going to happen, and they are happening." The charge of retreat is a potent one. It's also a complete fantasy. Those who argue that the US is retreating from the world stage don't understand the limits of US power, don't understand how the world works and, truth be told, don't appear to understand the meaning of the word "retreat".

The last point is a good place to start because from a merely objective standpoint tricky things called "facts" belie the notion of US disengagement. For example, a nation in retreat might forsake its alliance commitments, reduce its presence in international organisations and cede ground to rising powers.

America is doing none of these things. No military alliances are being shed, no international organisations abandoned and while the US is working to reduce its presence in one locale (the Middle East), it is slowly and methodically ramping it up in another (the Far East). In the process, the US is challenging the rise of China and some might argue putting itself on a crash course toward conflict with Beijing. In the Middle East, the US diplomatic presence has rarely been greater. Secretary of state John Kerry singlehandedly propelled negotiations to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The US and its international allies reached a deal with Iran to chill its nuclear ambitions and the US is now deeply engaged in talks toward a final agreement with Tehran, much of which was made possible by international sanctions pushed by the United States. And in January the US helped convene talks in Geneva aimed at resolving the Syrian civil war. This came only months after the threat of US military force against Damascus convinced the Assad regime to abandon its chemical weapons programme.

In both the Far East and Europe, the Obama administration is pushing ambitious trade initiatives. On Russia, the US has been leading the way in trying to punish Putin for his annexation of Crimea. Drones continue to fly in Yemen and elsewhere. And all of these big examples leave out the many small ways in which the US is promoting its foreign policy agenda in countries around the world.

Now one can argue that some of these efforts will not succeed or are ill-conceived – Kerry's peace efforts appear to be on life support and trade talks are going nowhere in the US Congress – but their mere existence is a crushing rejoinder to the idea of retreat. So it raises the question: what are the anti-retreaters

talking about?

First, arguments about retreat aren't really about retreat – they are about policy differences. Take for example, a recent op-ed by Washington Post columnist David Ignatius in which he outlines growing concern from Saudi Arabia. The Saudi king "is convinced the US is unreliable" (this is a familiar synonym for retreat), reported Ignatius, who also notes this view is shared by four other traditional US allies in the region: Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Israel. What do these four countries have in common? They don't like diplomacy with Iran, US condemnation of the military coup in Egypt or the refusal to go all out to topple Assad. In short, they don't like the US pursuing its interests in a way that goes against their perceived interests. Or perhaps to put it more bluntly, these are nations that recoil at signs that the US won't fight their battles for them or allow them to continue to free-ride off US security guarantees. What looks like retreat to them is actually restraint.

Second, it's politics, stupid. If there is one truism of American foreign policy it is that it is domestic politics by other means. For example, when the conservative magazine the Weekly Standard complains that at a time when America needs a leader who will "sound forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat" it is cursed to have a president who "has a piccolo that only calls retreat", it is not providing an accurate description of US foreign policy – but that's hardly the point.

Rather, these are evocative smear words intended to portray Obama (though honestly it would be any Democratic president) as spineless and weak. After all, in the 1950s, Democrats were the party that lost China; in the 1970s, they stabbed America in

the back on Vietnam; in the 1980s, they were "blame America firsters"; in the 00s, they were merely "French" in their approach to foreign affairs. (Mental note: send anyone who used this slur a book on the Algerian War.)

While the specific insults might change, the attack line is always the same. If in the process they allow the person making the criticism to cover themselves in the mantle of toughness and strength – without having to bear any of the consequences for their policy positions – well, that's kind of the idea.

Third, those who argue that the US is retreating from the global stage have a very clear sense of what US leadership looks like – the use of American military force. This is why the failure to bomb Syria has become such a cause celebre to the retreat crowd. Never mind that Obama fulfilled his policy goal of disarming Syria of its chemical weapons capability.

"Diplomacy" is for wimps. The failure to use force in Syrian not only left Assad unpunished, it emboldened other world leaders, or so the argument goes. So Russian troops had barely stepped foot in Crimea before Obama's critics were blaming Putin's actions on Obama's Syria fecklessness. Of course, even if Obama had turned Damascus into a car park, he would never have sent troops to Ukraine to reverse Putin's aggression in Crimea. In other words, even if he did what the hawks wanted, it wouldn't have convinced Putin to act differently in Crimea, a fact well understood by both Putin and Obama's critics. In the child-like worldview of those bemoaning retreat, every missed opportunity for the US to bomb or invade a country is a clear and unmistakable signal to the world's bad guys that they can do whatever they want and the US will not lift a finger to stop them. Just as in 2008, after the US invaded Iraq and

Afghanistan, Putin demurred at invading Georgia for fear of upsetting the fearsome and brobdingnagian George W Bush. Oh wait.

Finally, those who argue against retreat are besotted by the myth of American omnipotence and the idea that when America acts the world is transformed. Take, for example, the hawkish editor of the Washington Post editorial page, Fred Hiatt. In a recent op-ed complaining about Obama's flawed "global strategy", he asserted: "When democratic uprisings stirred hope from Tunisia to Egypt and beyond, some foreign-policy veterans ... urged Obama to seize the unexpected opportunity and help support historic change. Obama stayed aloof, and the moment passed." If only Obama seized the moment, the Middle East today would be defined by Jeffersonian democracy and region-wide respect for human rights. As Obama himself sagely commented about such nonsense: "I hear people suggesting that somehow, if we had just financed and armed the opposition [in Syria] earlier, that somehow Assad would be gone by now and we'd have a peaceful transition. It's magical thinking."

For 12 years, the United States has maintained a troop presence in Afghanistan, fought a fearsome counterinsurgency, spent hundreds of billions of dollars – and that nation's leader wants America to leave even as his desperately poor country remains mired in civil war and dysfunction. If that US presence can't stabilise Afghanistan with 100,000 troops – just as America failed fully to stabilise Iraq – what would lead anyone to believe that the intangible concept of US non-aloofness in Egypt, Syria or elsewhere would transform those nations?

Indeed, at its core, the retreat argument is informed by the

unshakeable belief that more US power, more US commitment and more leadership will always produce better outcomes. The irony is that so many of those bemoaning US retreat are the same people calling for war with Iraq a decade ago. It's almost as if those who advocated a calamitous conflict that undermined US interests, took more than 4,000 American lives (and many more Iraqis) and cost trillions of dollars in national treasure learned absolutely nothing from that experience. Whether those who believe in US omnipotence believe it or merely adhere to the notion because it furthers their political interests is hard to say. It's likely a mixture of both, but the impact is all too often disastrous. Arguing that the US has interests everywhere and more importantly possesses the levers with which to affect the political trajectory of other nations has become an encouragement to one hubristic US miscalculation after another – from Vietnam to Iraq to Afghanistan. When the failure to use American force is consistently portrayed as a sign of weakness the political imperative is always to act. And Obama who foolishly "surged" 30,000 American troops to Afghanistan in 2009 is hardly immune from the political pressure. Five years later, he seems far more inclined to take his cue from an electorate that has little interest in looking around the world for new monsters to destroy.

None of this is to say that US power and influence are worthless. Far from it. But there are serious constraints on how effectively that power can be exercised – and grave consequences when it is wrongly applied. As history has consistently shown, the United States faces enormous barriers in affecting events in faraway lands that have their own political, ideological, religious and ethnic idiosyncrasies.

In this sense, what is so often dismissively labelled as retreat, withdrawal or isolationism is, in reality, restraint and pragmatism on the global stage; acknowledgment of the limits on US power; recognition that the American people are tired of foreign misadventures; and an understanding that even the best of US intentions can lead to the worst possible results

Michael A Cohen is author of Live from the Campaign Trail: The Greatest Presidential Campaign Speeches of the 20th Century and How They Shaped Modern America.

[Article 5.](#)

The National Interest

Turkey: Return of the Generals

Aliza Marcus, Halil Karaveli

The Turkish military wasn't supposed to matter anymore. Over the past three years, many of Turkey's senior military officers were tried and imprisoned on charges of planning coups against Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's democratically elected government. The trials came after Erdogan successfully moved to reduce the military's role in political decision-making and put it under the firm control of civilian rule. Together, these actions not only reduced the threat of a coup against the Islamist-leaning Erdogan, but also helped the prime minister cement popular

backing from other Islamic conservatives and Turkey's liberals, all of whom were happy to see the armed forces pay for their past abuses. The power struggle that broke out a few months ago between Erdogan and his former allies in the Islamist conservative camp, the followers of the Pennsylvania-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen, changed the dynamic. Erdogan started to reconsider his moves to undercut the generals. He and his officials took steps and made statements that appeared to support a renewed role for the military as political actors, albeit hand-in-hand with him.

The March 30 local elections, widely seen as a referendum on Erdogan's increasingly autocratic and anti-democratic rule, gave him the results he needed to continue to promote his own agenda. His Justice and Development Party (known by its Turkish initials, AKP) won 43 percent of the vote nationally, with the strongest rival, the social democrat Republican People's Party (known as CHP, for its Turkish initials), polling 26 percent nationwide. CHP was unable to wrest control of Istanbul from AKP and even in Ankara, where the incumbent AKP mayor appeared weak, the two parties' candidates just about tied, and votes are still being contested. Having scored a strong victory at the ballot box, Erdogan is now ready to move actively against the Gulen movement's network. Members of Gulen's movement dominate the country's police force and judiciary, and they are believed to be behind the broad corruption probe launched on December 17, 2013 that seemed to target Erdogan by going after businessmen and the sons of politicians close to him. Gulen supporters are also suspected of being responsible for wiretapping Erdogan and others and then leaking the tapes that appear to implicate the prime minister in some of the

alleged corruption. (Erdogan denies the veracity of the tapes and allegations.)

In his victory speech on election night, Erdogan made clear that his main concern was Gulen and his followers. “We’ll walk into their dens. They will pay for this,” he said. Erdogan, whose increasingly autocratic ways—including banning Twitter prior to the election—have led to a rift with liberals as well, is also likely to keep up the pressure on his opponents in the media, arts and business worlds. He won’t do this alone. He has indicated that he is planning to team up with his former nemesis, the military, to undercut forces that threaten his personal hold of the state. This gives the generals the opportunity to move back into a position of political primacy. The new, de facto alliance between Erdogan and the Turkish General Staff was launched at the February 26 meeting of the National Security Council, whose members include the country’s five most senior military officers. The council unanimously voted to designate the Gulen movement—which they referred to as “the parallel structure”—as a threat to national security. They declared “total war” against Gulen activities in Turkey and approved a blueprint of action that includes identifying and purging Gulen’s cadres from the state.

A few weeks later, the constitutional court voided the life sentence against former Chief of the General Staff Ilker Basbug, one of the many senior military officers jailed for alleged coup plotting. When Basbug was released on March 7, Erdogan personally called to congratulate him, saying that he expected to see others freed too. Given that Turkey’s AKP-controlled parliament in February approved a measure to disband the special courts that convicted most of the military officers, it

seems very likely that more officers will be released soon. In his victory speech on March 30, Erdogan said that he had been naïve to let the Gulenists move into important positions. It's true that over time, as Gulen's followers grew more powerful, they sought to exert a more direct say in the government's daily affairs. They objected to the AKP government's peace talks with the PKK Kurdish rebel group. The chief prosecutor in Istanbul, seen as a backer of Gulen, called in Erdogan's chief of intelligence, Hakan Fidan, in February 2012, to question him over the government's overtures to the PKK. Relations collapsed completely in the late fall, with the corruption probe and release of tapes that appeared to implicate Erdogan. But Erdogan doesn't appear to see similar risks in partnering with the military. This may be his mistake. For the moment, the military has good reason to bury any resentment of Erdogan and move forward jointly. The military blames the Gulen movement for the trials against their officers and for what the military long claimed was doctored evidence. Basbug, the former chief of staff released last month from jail, said that neutralizing the threat posed by the Gülenist was the country's priority. "If there is corruption then this should of course be addressed," he said in a statement shortly before being released. "But an elected government should be voted out of power; attempts to bring it down with non-electoral maneuvers amounts to a coup." Senior officers aren't just angry at the cases that decimated their prestige and morale. They are also worried about Gulen's influence over the military's rank and file. Over the years, pro-Gulenist young officers have risen in the ranks. The military's top brass is afraid of being overtaken by Gulenist officers. The various leaks of government tapes showed the reach of the movement's supporters—but no more so than the recent tape of

Erdogan's senior national intelligence chief, the deputy Chief of the General Staff and his foreign minister discussing intervention scenarios in Syria. That was a sign that even the country's highest officials, including the military top brass, aren't immune from the wiretapping. The military knows that their officers wouldn't have been in prison if it hadn't been for Erdogan, who let Gulen supporters take the lead for so many years and ignored claims of doctored evidence. Nonetheless, partnering with AKP now is the only way for the military to exact revenge and reclaim power. But there is no reason to take for granted that the military will remain loyal to Erdogan. They are bound to be as deeply resentful against Erdogan as they are against the Gulenists. The return of the military may be good for Erdogan in the short-term, but he's likely creating a potential new challenge in the future. The lesson of Turkish history is clear: the military always triumphs. The mighty Janissary army that had defied the authority of countless Ottoman sultans was slaughtered by Mahmut II in 1826, but that did not spell the end of the military's political role. Don't bet on a break with history in Turkey.

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NYT

Go Ahead, Vladimir, Make My Day

Thomas L. Friedman

April 12, 2014 -- SO the latest news is that President Vladimir Putin of Russia has threatened to turn off gas supplies to Ukraine if Kiev doesn't pay its overdue bill, and, by the way, Ukraine's pipelines are the transit route for 15 percent of gas consumption for Europe. If I'm actually rooting for Putin to go ahead and shut off the gas, does that make me a bad guy?

Because that is what I'm rooting for, and I'd be happy to subsidize Ukraine through the pain. Because such an oil shock, though disruptive in the short run, could have the same long-term impact as the 1973 Arab oil embargo — only more so. That 1973 embargo led to the first auto mileage standards in America and propelled the solar, wind and energy efficiency industries. A Putin embargo today would be even more valuable because it would happen at a time when the solar, wind, natural gas and energy efficiency industries are all poised to take off and scale. So Vladimir, do us all a favor, get crazy, shut off the oil and gas to Ukraine and, even better, to all of Europe. Embargo! You'll have a great day, and the rest of the planet will have a great century.

“Clean energy is at an inflection point,” explains Hal Harvey, C.E.O. of Energy Innovation. “The price reductions in the last five years have been nothing less than spectacular: Solar cells,

for example, have dropped in cost by more than 80 percent in the last five years. This trend is underway, if a bit less dramatically, for wind, batteries, solid state lighting, new window technologies, vehicle drive trains, grid management, and more. What this means is that clean energy is moving from boutique to mainstream, and that opens up a wealth of opportunities.”

New houses in California now use one-fourth of the energy they used 25 years ago, added Harvey. Chevrolet, Dodge and Ford are in a contest to make the most efficient pickup — because their customers want to spend less on gasoline — so they are deploying new engines and lighter truck bodies. Texas now has enough wind to power more than 3 million homes. New Jersey generates more solar watts per person than California.

And check out Opower, which just went public. Opower works with utilities and consumers to lower electricity usage and bills using behavioral economics, explained Alex Laskey, the company’s co-founder, at their Arlington, Va., office. They do it by giving people personalized communications that display in simple, clear terms how their own energy usage compares with that of their neighbors. Once people understand where they are wasting energy — and how they compare with their neighbors — many start consuming less. And, as their consumption falls, utilities can meet their customers’ demand without having to build new power plants to handle peak loads a few days of the year. Everybody wins. Opower just signed up the Tokyo Electric Power Company and its 20 million homes.

Putting all its customers together since it was founded in 2007, said Laskey, Opower has already saved about “4 terawatt hours

of energy” and expects to be soon saving that annually. The Hoover Dam produces about 4 terawatts hours of energy a year. So we just got a new Hoover Dam — for free — in Arlington, Va.

A gas embargo by Putin would also reinforce the message of the United Nations’ latest climate report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which warned with greater confidence than ever that human-created carbon emissions are steadily melting more ice, creating more dangerous sea level rise, stressing ecosystems around the globe and creating more ocean acidification, from oceans absorbing more CO₂, posing “a fundamental challenge to marine organisms and ecosystems.”

Sunday, at 10 p.m. Eastern time, Showtime will begin airing a compelling nine-part series, called “Years of Living Dangerously,” about how environmental and climate stresses affect real people. The first episode features Harrison Ford confronting Indonesian officials about the runaway deforestation in one of their national parks, Don Cheadle following evangelicals in Texas wrestling with the tension between their faith and what is happening to their environment, and this columnist exploring how the prolonged drought in Syria contributed to the uprising there. The ninth episode is an in-depth interview with President Obama on environment and climate issues.

I asked Harrison Ford, a longtime board member of Conservation International, whether working on the documentary left him feeling it was all too late. “It isn’t too late; it can’t be too late,” he said. “Is it too late to teach our kids the difference between right and wrong? If we are not ready to

redress something happening on our watch, how can we expect our kids to do something about it?” Remember, he added, “nature will be just fine without us. Nature doesn’t need people. People need nature. That is why we can’t save ourselves without saving nature.”

Ford is right. We can still do this. We are closer to both irreversible dangers on climate and scale solutions on clean tech than people realize. Just a little leadership now by America — or a little scare by Putin — would make a big difference.

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Al Ahram

The Brotherhood and terrorism

Ammar Ali Hassan

10 April 2014 -- The Muslim Brotherhood had three choices on 3 July. They could revise their outlook and behaviour, and apologise for their disastrous year in power. That would have been the most sensible choice, the best for the country and ultimately better for them. But their calculations were awry as always. The second option was to engage in a head-on collision with the state and society and attempt to bring down the new authority by means of a new mass uprising. This is obviously the course they initially opted for and in which they have failed. Although they are still playing the game of trying to wreak attrition on the state they will fail in this as well.

The third option was to attempt to win over revolutionary and

other political forces by assigning a portion of Muslim Brotherhood members the task of connecting with such forces with a peaceful and conciliatory rhetoric. Simultaneously, the organisation would continue in its drive, in alliance with terrorist and takfiri groups, to undermine the state, wreak economic havoc and otherwise create conditions that would force the government to enter into negotiations that would result in their social and political revival and the restitution of some of the gains they had won by virtue of the 25 January Revolution and that they could never have dreamed of in the Mubarak era. This is the course that the Muslim Brotherhood is currently pursuing with total single-mindedness. It has led some to wonder whether if the Egyptian people had left them in power they would have spared Egypt the miseries of the terrorism that the Brotherhood has unleashed against Egyptians today and that looks like it will persist for some time to come, especially given the way it is being fed by various regional and international powers.

I am not making this up. I have actually heard people say that if we had left Morsi on his seat, swallowed our tongues and did not revolt against Brotherhood rule, we would have averted the evils of terrorism that have been inflicted on our country today. However, as we shall see, the argument is simplistic and fallacious.

Firstly, the overthrow of any despotic, corrupt or failed regime comes at a price. Affiliates of that regime will do all in their power to obstruct the process of change or to turn the clock back to the point that it was their interests — and perhaps their attitudes and beliefs — that were served. This applies as much to the Muslim Brotherhood and its circles as it does to the Mubarak regime and that client class of officials, senior

bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, chief security officials, some army commanders, large land-owners, prominent families, some tribal leaders and an assortment of middlemen that benefited from the patronage of Mubarak and his son. In like manner, both former regimes schemed to return to power and/or defend their special interests. Though whereas the Brotherhood has opted for violence and terror, the remnants of the Mubarak regime tended towards subtler methods.

Second, most everyone had anticipated that the cost of toppling the Brotherhood regime would be considerable. In fact, the ordinary people that I had interviewed before 30 June had expected that the price would be huge and, indeed, much harsher than we are paying now.

Thirdly, the price Egypt is paying now is far less than what we would have had to pay if the Brotherhood had remained in power much longer than they did. It is important to bear in mind how they hijacked and betrayed the revolution and its principles, how they conspired against the nation and society, and the dangers to which they exposed our national security in their pursuit of their particular vision of “global mastership” in alliance with jihadist and takfiri groups and foreign powers and intelligence agencies.

Fourthly, there is no doubt that if Morsi had remained in power he would have used terrorism and the Brotherhood’s connections with terrorist groups as a means to protect and perpetuate Brotherhood rule. Egyptians saw this in practice when the Hazemoun besieged the Supreme Constitutional Court and Media Production City, set fire to the Wafd Party headquarters and Al-Watan newspaper premises, and stood alongside Morsi in Cairo Stadium to threaten all Egyptians who opposed him. In the weeks following 30 June, one speaker after

another ascended to the podium in front of Rabaa Al-Adawiya Mosque to issue such proclamations as, “we will crush them,” “I see their heads and they are ripe for plucking,” “one hundred thousand armed men are ready to march on Cairo if the people call for the fall of the government,” and “bombs will be planted among the crowds of peaceful demonstrators and these bombs will reap what they wish.”

If we had given the Muslim Brotherhood another year in power, they would have formed their own militias to perpetuate their rule, whether as an organ of state muscle in the manner of the Iranian “basij” or in a less formal form. The Muslim Brotherhood was a state within a state and even after it came to power it refused to legitimise itself as an organisation.

In short, Muslim Brotherhood terrorism was coming one way or another. Moreover, it may have been stronger and deadlier if they had remained in power than it currently is now that they have lost power and are fighting to return or at least to wreak their vengeance on the Egyptian people. While in power, they would have availed themselves of all the material and symbolic resources of the state to build and fund their militias, weaken the defences of the state, and supply intelligence to terrorists.

To make matters worse, the Brotherhood were as corrupt and tyrannical as the Mubarak regime. In a study I wrote in 2003 on the Muslim Brotherhood’s stance towards political reform I observed, “the Muslim Brothers have no interest in comprehensive reform or radical change of the Mubarak regime. They want to inherit it as it is so that they can manage its corruption and despotism towards their own benefit.” The Mubarak regime and Muslim Brotherhood cooperated and benefited from one another. They feigned animosity in the open

and scratched each other's backs in private. If the government occasionally clamped down on the Muslim Brotherhood it did so selectively because it still needed them to use as a bogeyman at home and abroad. Prior to Mubarak, Sadat used the Muslim Brotherhood to crush the Egyptian left and bury all the gains in social justice that had come with Abdel-Nasser.

It is useful to recall that, while its parliament was sitting, the Muslim Brotherhood regime refused to pass a "political isolation" law, which would have banned former Mubarak regime affiliates from political activity; that is until Omar Suleiman announced that he would run for president. They also concealed from the public the results of the fact-finding report on rights violations from January 2011 to June 2012 and instead used it to barter with affiliates of the old Mubarak regime.

Brotherhood business magnate Hassan Malek was quick to haggle with his Mubarak era counterparts over ways to divvy up the national wealth at the expense of the Egyptian people. Saad Al-Katatni, head of the Brotherhood's political wing (the Freedom and Justice Party), huddled up with leaders of the former state party (the National Democratic Party) in the governorates to work out how they could stage manage the next parliamentary elections, which never took place. In fact, Morsi personally paid courtesy calls on some former NDP luminaries during his campaign tours between the first and second rounds of the 2012 presidential elections.

It was not just that the Muslim Brotherhood shared the Mubarak regime's neoliberal — which is to say unrestrained monopoly capitalist — outlook and its penchant for self-perpetuation in power. The two were much cosier than that. Let us not forget that in an interview with Akher Sa'a before the January 2011 Revolution, the then Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide said

that he would have no problem with Gamal Mubarak running for president. He went on to praise President Mubarak in glowing terms. Echoing his sentiments, Morsi said: “We have kept electoral constituencies open for patriotic figures such as Zakariya Azmi and Ahmed Ezz.” Such were the Mubarak era faces that would have found their way back to power with the benevolent aid of the Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide. Finally, I should add that the road taken by the Muslim Brotherhood leadership has forced some other Muslim Brotherhood members to pay a price. I refer to those who opposed to the decision to nominate a candidate for the presidency, the sacrifice of religious and moral principles for the sake of the thirst for power, and the pursuit of violence. These were left to dangle in the wind by a hardline Qotbist leadership that had aligned itself with the schemes and projects of regional and international powers. In all events, the folly, arrogance or vindictiveness of the Muslim Brotherhood has blinded it to this truth that is as glaring as the scorching sun on a summer day.