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NYT

The Talks, Round Two

Roger Cohen

Feb. 3, 2014 -- For six months now Israeli and Palestinian negotiators, led respectively by Tzipi Livni and Saeb Erekat, have been tied up in U.S.-mediated peace negotiations. For a few minutes at the Munich Security Conference participants caught a glimpse of how stormy those talks can be.

The catalyst was a little phrase from Erekat. “I wish the Israelis would stop running without being chased,” he said. “Am I a threat to you?”

Erekat’s an amiable fellow who has been jaw-jawing about a Middle East peace for so long he mumbles “Area C” in his sleep, but Livni was not about to let him have that one. Pulling her hair back she let him have it, a guttural volley about Palestinian rockets from Gaza on Sderot, terrorists in the West Bank, the perennial Israeli insecurity.

Then she was on to narrative — that overused word for the events, real or imagined, that define the nationhood of warring peoples — and warning Erekat that if there ever is a final-status, two-state peace ending all claims, “Don’t call Haifa by its Palestinian name” or give hope of return there to those “with

keys around their necks” in Palestinian refugee camps.

This infuriated Erekat. Proclaiming himself a proud son of 10,000-year-old Jericho, he declared, “I’m not going to change my narrative, guys.” He demanded of Livni why she demanded of him that Palestinians recognize Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people when Egypt and Jordan made peace without doing so.

And on we go, enmeshed in the claims and counterclaims and neuroses of two peoples eyeing the same small scarred patch of Biblical land — Israelis convinced after the Second Intifada and the experience of the Gaza withdrawal that living in security beside a Palestinian state is near impossible, Palestinians convinced after almost a half-century of occupation that the Israeli boot on their heads will never be withdrawn. The claws of the past are tenacious; Secretary of State John Kerry is trying to prize them loose.

He has made a little headway. Something more unexpected was in the air between the two sides at Munich, a familiarity, a rejection of failure, a sense of modest momentum, all summed up by Livni when she said the current opportunity could not be missed because “the cost of not having an agreement is greater than the cost of having an agreement.” Kerry has now kept the two sides in the room long enough to reduce the room for — and raise the price of — leaving. Ehud Barak, the former Israeli defense minister, told me that “Kerry’s obsession is the most important thing.”

Within the next several weeks the United States will produce a framework setting out the broad terms of a peace agreement.

This will reflect the work done and provide the scaffolding for an extension of the talks beyond the initial nine months, a deadline up in late March. I expect Israelis and Palestinians to agree, with serious caveats, to this American proposal and negotiations to proceed through most, if not all, of 2014.

Kerry and his envoy Martin Indyk have recently indicated, in public and leaked remarks, what will be in the framework. The elements include what Kerry has called “a full, phased, final withdrawal of the Israeli Army;” security arrangements in the Jordan Valley and elsewhere that leave Israel “more secure, not less;” a “just and agreed solution to the Palestinian refugee problem;” mutual recognition of “the nation-state of the Palestinian people and the nation-state of the Jewish people;” and a compromise for Jerusalem enabling the city to embody “the aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians alike.”

Borders established through equitable land swaps around the 1967 lines would place most settlers inside Israel, perhaps more than 70 percent of them, but the fates of the big settlements of Ariel and Ma’ale Adumim are deeply contentious.

This is not rocket science. The core elements of any two-state deal are well known. But neither side has been ready to embrace the suboptimal middle ground where peace is made. What is needed now are “pull factors” that begin to allay the core fears of both sides.

Palestinians need to feel the Israeli vise is loosening — that, for example, in the Israeli-controlled “Area C,” which accounts for some 60 percent of the West Bank, investment, construction and free movement become possible, creating jobs and stirring

growth. Israelis need proof that their concerns about security are being heard. Palestinian agreement to a five-year phased Israeli withdrawal is a start, but Gaza under Hamas is a huge problem going forward. A Palestinian election is overdue; without one Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, lacks the authority to deliver the peace he seeks.

In Munich, Henry Kissinger growled to Indyk: “Martin, you have a job for life.” He’s probably right. Nobody ever lost money betting against a Middle Eastern peace; I’ve done so myself. But Kerry has moved the ball.

Article 2.

The New Yorker

2014: The Year of John Kerry

John Cassidy

February 3, 2014 -- President Obama has publicly acknowledged the obvious: given the obstreperousness of congressional Republicans, he isn’t going to be able to accomplish very much on the domestic front in the coming year. But it is now time for us pundits and pontificators to acknowledge another reality: if the Obama Administration is able to bring about transformative change during the remainder of its existence, John Kerry, rather than the President, is likely to be its agent. In seeking diplomatic settlements to the standoffs in

Syria, Iran, and Israel-Palestine, Kerry has become, perhaps, the most important Secretary of State since Henry Kissinger.

That's not a knock on the President. Since the financial crisis of 2008, the country has been focussed on domestic-policy issues, in which the White House, naturally, takes the lead: the economy, financial regulation, health care, gay marriage, the environment. On the principal foreign-policy issues that animated Obama's Presidential campaign—ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—he has made sure that his agenda has been followed, sometimes to the frustration of senior officials, such as former Secretary of Defense Bob Gates.

As Gates's recent memoir makes clear, the White House national-security apparatus kept him and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on a pretty tight leash. But thanks to a unique constellation of circumstances Kerry has emerged with the opportunity, and the authority, to make a more distinctive mark on history. For the lanky New England prepster, who was previously known principally for his anti-Vietnam War activities and his ill-starred 2004 Presidential campaign, it is quite a turnaround—and one that few envisaged when he succeeded Clinton, last February.

Each of the three challenges Kerry faces is formidable, and he may end up failing at all of them. But even if he does it's a huge story. Arguably, the consequences of failure would be even greater than the consequences of success: a U.S.-Israeli military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, a Sunni-Shiite conflict spreading out from Syria to the rest of the Middle East, and an increasingly isolated Israel intent on going it alone, quite possibly in the face of a third intifada. That would be quite a

legacy.

For now, at least, there's a bit of hope. Last week's peace talks on Syria, which took place in Geneva, didn't achieve much. But, as Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations mediator, pointed out, the very fact that the two sides sat down together without walking out represented progress of a sort. The interim agreement on freezing Iran's nuclear program has opened the way for more substantive talks on preventing Tehran from acquiring nuclear bombs. In Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu is facing increasingly loud demands from some members of his right-wing coalition to reject Kerry's peace plan before it is even unveiled. So far, though, Netanyahu, despite criticizing some of Kerry's comments over the weekend, has declined to take that step.

The three sets of discussions are separate, of course. And each comes with its own tortuous complications. Still, there are some commonalities that explain why Kerry finds himself with some freedom to maneuver.

One factor playing in his favor is the sheer awfulness of the Sunni-Shiite conflict. If the violence in Syria and western Iraq continues unabated, bringing with it a growing number of hardened jihadist fighters animated by extreme ideologies and willing to export the conflict elsewhere, it could eventually threaten regimes throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Such a prospect tends to concentrate minds. Although regional powers like Turkey and Saudi Arabia have supported the Sunni insurgents who are fighting Assad and his Iranian backers, they have no interest in seeing the entire region turned into a sectarian battlefield. If some face-saving settlement could be

found in Syria, they might be willing to support it.

Another thing going for Kerry is the good working relationship that he has forged with his opposite number in Russia, Sergei Lavrov. It goes back to the Syrian chemical-weapons deal that the pair of them improvised last summer, which enabled President Obama to save face. Since then, they have worked closely together to set up the Syria peace talks in Geneva, even larking around on occasion. (At a meeting in Paris a couple of weeks ago, which was a precursor to the talks, Kerry presented Lavrov with two large Idaho potatoes, which the Russian foreign minister described as “impressive.”)

Russia is not only a friend and supplier of arms to Syria’s President, Bashar al-Assad; it is one of Iran’s allies and trading partners, and a member of the P5-plus-1 group that reached the interim agreement with Tehran, last November. As the talks on a permanent settlement get going later this month, the Russians will play an important role. Vladimir Putin, the Russian President, has suggested several times that a possible solution to the crisis would be for Russia, or another country, to refine the uranium that Iran says it needs for power generation. Iran insists on retaining some refining capacity of its own. But, in any case, Lavrov, who visited with Hassan Rouhani, the Iranian President, in December, will be a key player.

Rouhani’s very presence is, of course, another reason why Kerry’s hopes aren’t completely forlorn. Until Rouhani’s election, last June, it appeared silly to think of the United States and Iran reaching any sort of rapprochement. Now the feasible set may be expanding. At the least, it is surely in the West’s interest to encourage moderates in Tehran and to see how far

they can bring the mullahs and the Revolutionary Guards. Even some of the U.S. senators who were threatening to bollix things up by introducing new sanctions against Iran appear to be coming around to this view. (In a letter released over the weekend, Hillary Clinton also urged the Senate to “give diplomacy a chance to succeed.”)

On Syria and Iran, there is a general agreement that if things aren't resolved soon they will only get worse. That also applies to Israel-Palestine, where Israel's settlement policies are threatening to undermine the viability of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank, even as a single-state solution, or a permanent occupation, are equally hard to imagine. Kerry, who has yet to reveal the land-for-peace map that he is widely assumed to be carrying in his back pocket, faces enormous obstacles. But his biggest advantage, perhaps his only advantage, is that all sides know this may well be the last chance for a peaceful settlement.

For now, and probably for much of this year, Kerry has the stage. The President's advisers, ever zealous to promote their boss, are well aware that foreign policy now represents his Administration's best chance of achieving something historic in his second term to rival universal health care; they also know that failure is the most likely outcome. The logical strategy is to let Kerry make the running. If he overcomes the odds, the President can get involved later on, close the deal, and share the credit. If the Secretary of State comes to grief, the White House can always say Kerry tried his best.

Over to you, John.

John Cassidy has been a staff writer at The New Yorker since 1995.

Article 3.

Haaretz

Kerry's success would be Zionism's success too

S. Daniel Abraham

Feb. 3, 2014 -- Try to imagine the following scenario: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gathers his ministers for an unusual brainstorming. He tells them that Kerry's efforts to reach a breakthrough in the negotiations stand a fair chance of succeeding. "I want each of you to outline for me how we can take advantage of a potential peace agreement with the Palestinians. I am tasking each of you to devise a plan how your ministries will leverage the peace agreement to optimally promote the nation's interests."

The Prime Minister shouldn't be surprised if his fellow ministers are left speechless, clearly shocked by his request. After all, they are not in the habit of envisioning, much less strategizing for an eventuality of peace.

Nevertheless, Kerry may well be successful in creating a breakthrough that could ultimately lead to a final Israeli-

Palestinian peace agreement. But the morning after would not reveal the absolute end of all antagonism and frustration. Deeply held perceptions and emotions can only change gradually; the process is sure to be slow. Therefore, we should now prepare for and creatively design a strategy to sustain the agreement and take advantage of its potential.

Here are some of the issues that call for a detailed strategy in preparation for a best-case scenario:

Security and Regional Geopolitics – an agreement with the Palestinians will provide Israel with an opportunity to normalize relations with the larger Arab and Islamic world, which, with the exception of Iran, support the Arab Peace Initiative. The current timing benefits such a move as Syria's potential to spoil it has been diminished by its internal civil war. An agreement will enable Israel to build new strategic partnerships (with Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf states), and strengthen those that have either been damaged (Egypt and Turkey) or are under threat (Jordan). All this would substantially advance Israel's security and its ability to be part of a regional strategic alignment to counter radical terrorists and Iran's hegemonic regional aspirations.

Jerusalem – a compromise solution for the Holy City, however rife with emotions, is unavoidable. If strategized creatively, such a solution has the potential, not only to bring an Israeli-Palestinian peace, but also to serve as an historic moment of reconciliation between Judaism, Islam and Christianity. The capital of Israel will have a clear Jewish majority, crowded with embassies from all nations. For the first time, our roots, presence, and rights in Eretz Israel – and in Jerusalem – would

be recognized by all.

The Economy – An agreement would significantly upgrade the ability of the Israeli economy to grow and find new markets. It would be much easier to cultivate business ties with the Arab and Muslim world, not to mention the rising powers of Asia and South America. Europe – Israel’s leading trade partner – is proposing, in the event of an agreement, an exceptional status upgrade to “special privileged partner.” Ending the conflict will enable Israel to attract unprecedented volumes of investment from all over the world. Tourism will have an entirely new potential: instead of being in line with Cyprus’s numbers (3 Million annually), Israel could reach those of Greece (15 Million). The threat of boycotts, disinvestments, and sanctions would disappear. The Negev and the Galilee will attract new investments and residents. The “start-up nation” will have new horizons to astonish the world with its economic and technological achievements.

Relations with the U.S. – It is not possible to exaggerate the importance of Israel’s relationship with the U.S., its only real ally, and home to 40% of the Jewish people. As the sponsors of the agreement, U.S. presence in the Middle East will be rehabilitated. Washington’s ability to achieve its goals in the Arab world will be enhanced. Continued U.S. engagement with the Middle East is an important asset for Israel’s security, standing and deterrence. The agreement will do just that.

Israel as a Jewish State – The agreement will preserve a Jewish majority within Israel’s new recognized borders. Only then will Israel be free to make itself an attractive state that embodies and fully reflects Jewish humanistic values. The agreement will also

help to respectfully and humanely manage internal co-existence with Israel's Arab minority. Israel's image and diplomatic standing around the world will be radically improved, the tide of de-legitimization against it stemmed. With Israel as an inspiring center-point for Jewish youth all over the globe, it would be an auspicious time to cement Jewish solidarity, identity, and the quest for "Tikun Olam."

The essence of Zionism and the establishment of Israel is the combining of an inspirational vision with a concrete program of implementation. But fulfilling that inspirational vision depends on peace, and that is the opportunity that Kerry is now offering. If Kerry succeeds, Zionism and the State of Israel succeed also.

S. Daniel Abraham is an American entrepreneur and founder of the Center for Middle East Peace in Washington.

[Article 4.](#)

Foreign Affairs

Zawahiri Aims at Israel

Matthew Levitt

February 3, 2014 -- On January 22, Israeli officials announced

that, several weeks before, they had disrupted what they described as an "advanced" al Qaeda terrorist plot in Israel. Although al Qaeda–inspired jihadists had targeted Israel before (three men who had plotted an attack near Hebron were killed in a shootout with police in November), this marked the first time that senior al Qaeda senior leaders were directly involved in such plans.

That might seem somewhat surprising to casual observers, given Israel's place of pride in al Qaeda rhetoric over the years. Although the need to target Israel and Jews does feature prominently in the al Qaeda mythos, it has rarely translated into operational missions against Israel. And that is what makes this latest plot, which was traced back to al Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri, so significant. Indeed, it speaks to a fear among al Qaeda's core leaders that the fight in the Levant -- particularly in Syria -- is passing them by.

PLAN ON IT

According to Israeli authorities, the recent plot began when Ariv al-Sham, a Gaza-based al Qaeda operative who worked for Zawahiri, recruited three men to take part in an attack -- two men from East Jerusalem and one from the West Bank. While it is unclear how Israeli security officials first came to know about the recruitments, which took place over Skype and Facebook, they apparently monitored these communications for a few months until they arrested all four in late December.

In one sense, the decision to target Israel could be seen as Zawahiri ticking off the boxes in his long-planned strategy.

Sham's primary recruit, the Israelis report, was 23-year-old Iyad

Khalil Abu-Sara, from the Ras Hamis neighborhood in East Jerusalem. Abu-Sara reportedly volunteered to carry out a "sacrifice attack" on an Israeli bus traveling between Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim. The plan was for gunmen to shoot out the bus' wheels and overturn it. After that, they would they would gun down the passengers at close range. Finally, they assumed, they would die in a firefight with police and first responders. Sham and Abu-Sara also sketched out simultaneous suicide bombings at a Jerusalem convention center, where a second suicide bomber would target emergency responders, and at the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv, which would be carried out by five unnamed foreign terrorists who would travel to Israel as tourists with fake Russian passports. In preparation, Sham sent Abu-Sara computer files for a virtual bomb-making training course. Abu-Sara was to prepare the suicide vests and truck bombs, and to travel to Syria for training in combat and bomb-making. He had already purchased a ticket on a flight to Turkey by the time he was arrested.

Sham's other two recruits -- Rubin Abu-Nagma and Ala Ghanam -- were working with him on carrying out attacks on Israel as well. Abu-Nagma reportedly planned to kidnap an Israeli soldier from Jerusalem's central bus station and bomb a residential building in a Jewish neighborhood in East Jerusalem. He, too, learned to manufacture explosives online. Ghanam, who lived in a village near Jenin, a Palestinian city in the northern West Bank, was tasked with establishing a Salafi jihadi cell in the West Bank that would carry out future attacks.

Israeli authorities were shocked by Zawahiri's involvement. He directly instructed Sham to carry out this plot. But perhaps even more surprising was how fast -- mere months in all -- the plot

developed. "Abu-Sara and Al-Sham coordinated a trip to Syria, and money transfers. This all happened very quickly," a security official said. "All three channels formed at a fast rate."

BEYOND RHETORIC

Israel and the Palestinian cause have long been lightning rods for al Qaeda. In nearly every one of his public statements from 1990 to 2011, Osama bin Laden referenced the Palestinian cause. In 1994, he wrote a letter to the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia entitled "The Betrayal of Palestine," taking issue with the Grand Mufti's endorsement of the Oslo Accords a year earlier. In his 1996 declaration of war against the West, bin Laden once more invoked the Palestinian cause to rally Muslims to fight "the American-Israeli" alliance. And in a 1998 fatwa, bin Laden, Zawahiri, and others called on Muslims to kill Americans and their allies -- civilians and military personnel alike -- and to liberate the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Even 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed saw in the September 11 plot an opportunity to denounce Israel. In the original plans for the attack, he was reportedly tasked with hijacking a plane himself, landing it at an airport after nine other flights had been crashed, and giving a speech denouncing U.S. support for Israel, the Philippines, and repressive Arab governments.

Although, until now, that rhetoric has rarely translated into actual operations against Israel, there have been some exceptions. Richard Reid, the British "shoe bomber," prepared for his 2002 mission by testing airline security on Israeli's El-Al airlines and scouting potential targets in Israel and Egypt. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed claims to have been involved in a variety of plots for attacks on Israel, including one in which

planes from Saudi Arabia would enter Israeli airspace and crash into buildings in Eilat, Israel's southernmost city. The one part of his plan that succeeded was the November 2002 attack on the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, which killed three Israelis and wounded 20 more. Similarly, long before Zarqawi became famous as the leader of al Qaeda, he had reportedly attempted to set up a terrorist cell to target Israel. By 2001, the Treasury Department reported, Zarqawi had received more than \$35,000 for training Jordanian and Palestinian fighters in Afghanistan and facilitating their travel to the Levant. Zarqawi "received assurances that further financing would be provided for attacks against Israel," and according to some reports may have traveled to the Palestinian territories himself by 2002. But nothing came of it.

These exceptions prove the rule: al Qaeda's plotting against Israel has never matched its anti-Israel propaganda. And that harks back to debates that raged between the group's future leaders in the waning days of the jihad against Russia in Afghanistan. Following the Soviet withdrawal in February 1989, bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam -- a West Bank Palestinian who served as chief ideologue of the Afghan jihad -- disagreed over where the jihadi fighters should go next. Bin Laden pointed to the United States, which supported Arab governments that were insufficiently Islamist and should be toppled and replaced with a new caliphate. In this, he followed Zawahiri and the Egyptian Islamists who long emphasized the imperative of toppling apostate Muslim regimes. Having turned away from the Palestinian conflict because it had been dominated by secular militant groups, he now saw an opportunity to reinvigorate that struggle with Islamist underpinnings as the next jihadi front.

Azzam was killed in a mysterious 1989 car bomb, and the rest is history.

The al Qaeda senior leadership has generally not focused its operations on Israel, nor has it been particularly receptive to Gaza-based groups that have claimed to be affiliated with or inspired by al Qaeda. During the December 2008–January 2009 war in Gaza, al Qaeda expressed support for Palestinian fighters and denounced Arab states for failing help them, but stopped short of backing up its words with action. A few months later, in August 2009, when a Hamas raid on a Salafi jihadi mosque in Gaza ended in a gun battle that left some 24 dead and 130 wounded, al Qaeda leaders denounced Hamas and called on Allah "to avenge the blood of the murdered men and to destroy the Hamas state." Bin Laden and Zawahiri also called for jihad in Gaza, but al Qaeda still never recognized any of the Palestinian groups that took up its charge.

WIN, LOSE, OR DRAW

So why the sudden change of course?

In another sense, the recent foiled plot has more to do with Zawahiri and other senior al Qaeda leaders' standing among other global jihadi groups.

Like bin Laden, Zawahiri, now leader of al Qaeda, has long placed targeting Israel farther down the operational totem pole than more immediate targets. In the 1990s, Zawahiri maintained, "the road to Jerusalem passes through Cairo." In other words, Palestine could be liberated only after illegitimate and insufficiently Islamic regimes in places such as Egypt were dealt with. Years later, in a letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq,

Zawahiri would explain that targeting Israel was a "fourth stage" goal following (or coming at the same time as) the expulsion of Americans from Iraq, the establishment of an Islamic emirate there, and extending the jihad to secular countries neighboring Iraq.

Well, al Qaeda's war in Iraq, once believed to have been defeated, is now on the rebound, thanks to the group's efforts next door in Syria. In one sense, then, the decision to target Israel could be seen as Zawahiri ticking off the boxes in his long-planned strategy.

In another sense, though, the recent foiled plot has more to do with Zawahiri and other senior al Qaeda leaders' standing among other global jihadi groups. Events in Syria are quickly changing the nature of jihadi enterprise. Its epicenter is no longer Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, or Yemen, but the heart of the Levant -- al Sham -- in Syria. There, two al Qaeda affiliates -- ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra -- are fighting the Assad regime and its Shiite allies and more moderate Syrian rebels. The two groups have not merged, and only one (al-Nusra) has pledged allegiance to Zawahiri. Indeed, when Zawahiri instructed ISIS to focus on Iraq and leave the Syrian theatre to al-Nusra, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi flatly refused. This week, Zawahiri responded in kind, blaming ISIS for "the enormity of the disaster that afflicted the Jihad in Syria" and disavowing its ties to al Qaeda. "ISIS," Zawahiri insisted, "is not a branch of al Qaeda and we have no organizational relationship with it."

Meanwhile, other Islamist groups, such as Ahrar al-Sham, remain independent even as they share some ideological underpinnings with al Qaeda. Today, the jihadi centers that are

drawing new recruits, donations, and foreign fighters are not run by al Qaeda. Knowing that, Zawahiri perhaps felt the need to be able to claim something big that jihadist fighters of all shapes and sizes could rally around. What better than an attack on Israel?

Among those who study terrorism and political violence, a debate rages over the continued relevance and importance of the traditional al Qaeda core and other al Qaeda senior leadership. The debate was given new life by a flippant comment that President Barack Obama made in a New Yorker interview in which he lauded his administration's successful "decimating" of al Qaeda along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and played down the threat of al Qaeda franchises more focused on attacking their homelands than that of the United States. Obama compared such groups to a jayvee team -- not as dangerous as the varsity teams that carried out 9/11. As for that team, the State Department recently asserted that "the entire leadership been decimated by the U.S. counterterrorism efforts. [Zawahiri is] the only one left." At this point, a State Department spokesperson speculated, Zawahiri likely spends "more time worrying about his own personal security than propaganda, but still is interested in putting out this kind of propaganda to remain relevant."

Zawahiri's plotting against Israel may well have resulted from a need to reassert his position among other jihadist groups, especially in Syria, but that doesn't mean that the threat of terrorism is less real. However one defines al Qaeda today -- as a singular group with a few close franchises, or as the sum of all franchises and decentralized parts -- it is clear from plots like this one that the West, including Israel, need beware.

Matthew Levitt is an American expert on Islamist terrorism. Levitt is a senior fellow and director of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute.

Article 5.

The Washington Post

Isolationism's high price

Richard Cohen

This being the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, I have plunged into several books on the subject, most of them relating to what started it, and I have come up with the following conclusion: mustaches. Most of Europe's leaders had either a mustache or a beard — the German kaiser, the jejune Wilhelm II, had the most resplendent mustache of them all, “fixed into place every morning by his personal barber,” Margaret McMillan tells us in her new history of the road to war. This confirms what I always thought: The Germans started the war.

I am being a bit of a smarty-pants here, although my mustache theory is as good as anyone's. The war killed at least 16 million people and changed history on a dime, creating the modern Middle East, for instance, and setting the stage for World War II, and yet it is still unclear what caused this epic conflict. Was it alliances? Was it nationalism? Was it the arms race or a

variation on that theme, capitalism with all its alleged evils?

I am severely underqualified to provide an answer. But the sheer irrationality of the war does offer a lesson: Expect the unexpected. Leave room for irrationality. Respect the role of emotion and remember that most men fight for the man next to them, not for their country or some great cause. In the end, though, that sucker trait is used by countries and great causes. It doesn't really matter why you fight, just as long as you fight.

I exhume World War I not just to mark its centennial but also for a purpose. The war ended after the United States got into the fray. America then reverted to its traditional isolationism and we got, partially as a result, World War II. Now we are reverting once again to a form of isolationism — not as extreme as the first, but the emotion is there, this time even more so on the left than on the right. On the left, anyone who suggested that the U.S. intervene early in Syria, when the Assad regime might have been toppled without resorting to putting boots on the ground, was denounced as a war-monger. I am tempted to say that the United States did nothing. Actually, it was worse than nothing.

Those who believe World War I was caused by a crazy-quilt of alliances among the European powers may shudder at the ones America has now. We are obligated to defend Japan, and we are obligated to defend South Korea. Both countries have issues with one another and, more important, with China. Japan and China contest a group of islands, and China and South Korea contest a different area of the East China Sea. None of this is worth the life of a single person.

But in the Far East, what concerns South Korean, Japanese and

other policymakers is not just the potential instability of the region but also the Obama administration's erratic Syrian policy. A "red line" was pronounced, then ignored. Force was threatened by the president, and then the decision was lateraled to Congress where, to further the metaphor, the ball was downed and, just for good measure, deflated. None of this comforted the nations that see China as a looming menace and rely on the United States for backup. "[T]he administration's prevarications over Syria continue to linger for the elites who drive national strategy in these countries," wrote Michael J. Green, senior director for Asian affairs at the National Security Council under President George W. Bush.

The Syria debacle, coupled with the consensus that the United States is turning inward, is bound to produce instability. The South Koreans, in particular, have to worry if the Dear Leader in the North considers President Obama to be a paper tiger. The Japanese have to worry whether the Chinese have reached the same conclusion. The United States' European allies worry that the United States has pivoted to Asia. In Asia, the worry is that the proclaimed pivot is just a rhetorical device.

In 1996, Madeleine Albright popularized a phrase used by President Clinton. She repeatedly called the United States the "indispensable nation." The phrase lends itself to mockery, but it is dead-on. Nowhere is the United States more indispensable than in the Far East, where a rising China, acting like pre-World War I Germany, is demanding respect and flexing its muscles. It's all too familiar: rising nationalism, excessive pride, irrationality ready in the wings and America going into its habitual hibernation. Only the mustaches are gone.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies

Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Clash within a Civilization

Anthony Cordesman

February 3, 2014 -- No one has ever been able to travel to the Gulf without discovering just how different the perspectives and values of the West and the Middle East can be. During the last two years, however, these differences have threatened to become a chasm at the strategic level. Many in the West still see the political upheavals in the region as the prelude to some kind of viable democratic transition. Western commentators focus on Iran largely in terms of its efforts to acquire nuclear forces, and see Saudi Arabia and the other conservative Gulf states as somehow involved in a low-level feud with Iran over status. The reality in the Gulf is very different. Seen from the perspective of Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states, the upheavals in the Arab world have been the prelude to chaos, instability, and regime change that has produced little more than violence and economic decline. The tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia reflect a broad regional power struggle that focuses on internal security, regional power, and asymmetric threats far more than nuclear forces. It is a competition between Iran and the Arab Gulf states that affects the vital interests and survival of each

regime.

This struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia is now made more complex by growing doubts among Saudis and other Arabs about their alliance with the United States and about U.S. policies in the region. At a popular level, these doubts have led to a wide range of Arab conspiracy theories that the United States is preparing to abandon its alliances in the Arab world and turn to Iran. At the level of governments and Ministries of Defense, these doubts take the form of a fear that an "energy independent" and war-weary America is in decline, paralyzed by presidential indecision and budget debates, turning to Asia, and/or unwilling to live up to its commitments in the Gulf and Middle East. Finally, few in the United States and the West understand the extent to which this is a time when both Iran and Arab regimes face a growing struggle for the future of Islam. This is a struggle between Sunnis and Shi'ites, but also between all of the region's regimes and violent Islamist extremists. This is a struggle where the data issued by the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center and other efforts to track the patterns in terrorism indicate almost all of the attacks and casualties are caused by Muslims attacking Muslims, and much of the violence is caused by Sunnis attacking Sunnis. The West is only on the periphery of this struggle, not its focus. It is a "clash within a civilization," and not a clash between them. These are Gulf and Arab perspectives that the United States and Europe cannot afford to ignore. They affect divisions and threats that are all too real in a region where some 20% of all world oil exports, and 35% of all oil shipped by sea, move through the Strait of Hormuz, along with substantial amounts of gas. Millions more barrels move through the Red Sea and an increasing flow of oil

moves through Turkey, transshipment routes that are also affected by regional instability. The global economy and that of every developed nation is heavily dependent on the stability and security of this flow, and on steady rises in its future volume. No nation can insulate itself from a crisis on the Gulf region. All nations will pay higher world prices in a crisis regardless of where their petroleum comes from. Talk of U.S. energy independence ignore the fact the U.S. Department of Energy still projected at least 32% U.S. dependence on the import of liquid fuels through 2040 in the reference case in estimates issued as recently as December 2013. More importantly, the U.S. economy will remain far more dependent indirect imports - imports of Asian exports of manufactured goods that are dependent on Gulf oil - than it is on direct imports of petroleum

Iranian and Arab Perspectives on Tensions in the Gulf and the Region

There is nothing new about Arab Gulf tension with Iran. Arab fears are built on the legacy of the Shah's ambitions and claims to Bahrain that Iran has sporadically repeated ever since Britain withdrew from the region in the 1960s; Iranian occupation of Abu Musa and Tunbs - islands near the critical shipping channel just West of the Strait of Hormuz; and the Shah's nuclear weapons programs.

Arab fears are also built on eight years of Iraqi-Iranian conflict and the "tanker war" that involved the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the other Arab Gulf states during that Iraq conflict. They are built on more recent Iranian threats to close the Gulf, Iranian intervention in Lebanon dating back to the foundation of the Hezbollah, Iran's growing role in Iraq since the fall of

Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iran's alliance with Syria that began early in the Iran-Iraq War and has taken on a steadily more threatening form since 2011, and a major arms race in the Gulf region that has steadily accelerated since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took the presidency in 2005.

Most recently, they are based on the fear that the recent nuclear agreements between the P5+1 and Iran, coupled to the lack of U.S. action in Syria, mean that the United States is either unwilling to take risks in dealing with Iran, or may reach some rapprochement with Iran at Arab expense. The Arab perspective following the P5+1 agreement with Iran is in some ways a mirror image of Iran's. At one level, there are Arab voices that feel some kind of lasting détente and stable strategic relationship with Iran may be possible. At an official and military level, however, Arab fears and concerns about Iran - and particularly its role in Iraq and Syria are still all too real. In the case of Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, officials and senior officers see Iran posing a range of serious military threats from asymmetric forces to efforts to acquire nuclear-armed missile forces. They see the United States as keeping forces in the Gulf, and as providing over \$70 billion worth of modern arms transfer, but as taking positions on Egypt, Iraq, and Syria that do much to explain the growing Saudi distrust of the United States and actions like refusing a seat on the UN Security Council. At still another level, it is impossible to attend a academic Arab conference on the security situation in the Gulf without encountering a wide range of voices that really believe the United States is engaged in a secret dialogue, if not plot, to create an alliance with Iran, betray its Arab allies, and back Shi'ite instead of Sunnis. The "conspiracy theory school" of

Arab Gulf opinion reflects the critical limits to strategic studies and the media in the Arab Gulf; a failure to ever examine numbers, facts, and trends; the details of the regional military balance; and the details of U.S., British, and French military cooperation and exercises with Arab forces. Like their Iranian counterparts, these Arab voices choose a conspiracy theory, push it to extremes, and never seek to verify the underlying facts.

At the same time, Iranian fears and ambitions are the mirror image of Arab views as well. They are built on some thirty years of war and tension with Arab states. Iran sees Saudi Arabia as a nation that supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, the United States in liberating Kuwait, and as an enemy backing Sunni jihadist forces in Syria. Iran is reacting to de facto Arab military alliances with the United States - as well as Britain and France. Iran has its own religious and revolutionary ambitions, and ties to Shi'ites and other sects outside Iran. Iranian fears of the U.S. alliance with the Arab Gulf states emerge out of a history of confrontation with U.S. forces in the Gulf that took the form of active combat during the "tanker war" in 1987-1988. They respond to the times the United States seemed to present the threat of invasion of Iran after the United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, when Iranians feared that might launch a major intervention to force regime change on Iran.

If one talks to Iranians in the Gulf and Europe today, some Iranians have real hope that the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 over the nuclear issue will put an end to sanctions and open up Iran to a more moderate and progressive regime.

At the same time, many Iranians who want a more moderate

regime still deeply distrust the United States and the West, and see Iran as under threat when it should be the leading power in the Gulf. They see the sectarian struggle in Islam as a growing struggle between Shi'ites and Sunni extremists, see Iran as facing encirclement by hostile states, and see Iran as the victim of a massive military build up by the Gulf states and the United States. They often fear U.S. ties to the Arab states as much as the Arab states fear U.S. actions that would align the United States with Iran.

Other more hardline Iranians feel the United States and Europe will accept nothing less than a weakened and vulnerable Iran, drastic regime change, and U.S. and Arab dominance. This kind of thinking is particularly common among the most hardline clerics and officers in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), but even quiet personal conversations with moderate Iranians in Europe and the Gulf make it clear that most Iranians see a threat to their nation and culture, question U.S. motives and goals, and worry about Sunni extremism.

"Arab Spring" versus National Survival

These tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states cannot be separated from the political upheavals in other parts of the Arab world, tensions with the United States, and the other factors driving the full mix of security issues in the region. They are part of a game of three dimensional chess where there are no rules and the piece often seem to move on their own, but every regional power has to play.

For what should be obvious reasons - but which seem to be

obvious to few in the West - Saudi and other Gulf officials and officers - and key members of royal families -- do not see the upheavals in the Arab world as some kind of "Spring" or prelude to political reform, democracy, and development. Like Iranian leaders, officials, and officers, they put national stability and security first.

This is not simply a matter of regime survival - although no leader or regime in world wants to "go gentle into that great night." Most see the faults in their country and political system, but they also see the cost of every upheaval to date in terms of massive political instability, failed new political systems and governance, economic crisis, refugees, and human suffering.

They look across the region and they see chaos in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Iraq, and Yemen. With a considerable Sunni bias, they see instability in Bahrain and see a U.S. and European emphasis on "human rights" and "democracy" that so far has done little more than devastate the nations most affected and directly threaten their country and their political system.

The more sophisticated and informed Saudi and Gulf leaders and officials do not share conspiracy theories about U.S. plots with Iran or U.S. and European efforts to bring the Muslim Brotherhood to power in Egypt. They do, however, see U.S. and allied efforts in Iraq as having led to the creation of a de facto Shi'ite dictatorship in there, as well as the destruction of the Iraqi forces that served as a military counterbalance to Iran until the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

They see U.S. and European efforts at reform as being just as ineffective and destabilizing in Afghanistan, and as having been

a key factor in Mubarak's fall and the creation of political and economic chaos in an Egypt - a chaos where many Arab officials and analysts privately question how long the Egyptian military can bring some degree of order and stability. Arab leaders see a lack of any concerted or useful U.S. and European effort in Libya or Tunisia. They see a focus on Shi'ite rights in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia that ignores the risk of violence and instability, and the role Iran has played in supporting such Shi'ite actions - a role they sometimes exaggerate but which U.S. and European intelligence experts and diplomats do feel is real to some degree.

Western experts may argue with some justification that the upheavals in the Arab world since 2011 have been the product of decades of authoritarian repression, weak and ineffective governance, failed social policies, poor economic development and growing inequality of income distribution, corruption, and crony capitalism - points made equally clear by Arab experts in the series of Arab Development Reports issued by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

The fact remains, however, that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies have valid reasons to see these upheavals as direct threats on or near their borders, and to the two other remaining monarchies in Morocco and Jordan, and can argue that they were far better at meeting popular needs with their oil wealth than any of the Arab states with titular presidents and pseudo democracies. It is also interesting to note how many Russian and Chinese diplomats and scholars have the same impression of the results of the upheavals in the Arab world and the Western response - views that strike an immediate chord with Arab experts at conferences and meetings in the region.

It is hard to argue why most citizens of any Arab Gulf state or Arab monarchy would envy or want to emulate any citizen of Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, or Yemen. Whatever hopes outsiders may have in the eventual triumph of modernization, democracy, and development, it is far from clear why anyone in their right minds would want to live through any of the examples of such transitions to date. At present, the best any outside power can do is to try to find the least bad course of action. There are no good sides, merely ones that offer less risk and less potential for future damage.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states view the Arab spring in different terms from Iran. The political upheavals in the Arab world have so far benefited Iran. It may face a greater threat from Sunni extremism, but it has had new opportunities in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. It no longer faces a stable and largely hostile Egypt, and it has new opportunities to try to make use of the Shi'ites in the Arab Gulf states and Yemen.

The Arab-Israeli Peace Process and Preventive Strikes

The tensions between Iran on the one side and Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf states on the other are further complicated by the role of Israel and its relations with the United States. For Iran, Israel has been as much a convenient political tool as a serious threat. While some Iranian leaders really do oppose Israel's right to exist - and see its mature thermonuclear-armed missile forces as a serious threat - many others have seen demonizing Israel as a way to justify Iran's military build-up, nuclear programs, role in Lebanon and Syria, and Islamic legitimacy in spite of its Shi'ite character.

Iran cannot ignore the risk Israel poses in terms of preventive strikes on its nuclear facilities, as a potential trigger to U.S. intervention if Israel acts unilaterally, and role in pressuring the United States to take a hard line on sanctions and Iran's nuclear programs. At the same time, Iran may feel that its negotiations with the P5+1 have reduced or ended that risk and it may still be able to covertly pursue a nuclear option.

In contrast, Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states have to live with the fact that the United States is Israel's closest and only major ally. They have to live with the priority the United States - and especially the U.S. Congress - gives to Israel, and with the uncertainties this creates for U.S. policy and arms sales.

The Saudi and Arab League peace proposals have made it clear that most Arab leaders want to put an end to the issue, but they have made it equally clear that they do give serious priority to Palestinian concerns and the issue of the Islamic status of Jerusalem. As a result, they view Secretary Kerry's new peace efforts with deep distrust, many see the United States as a major barrier to reconciliation between Hamas and the Palestinian leadership on the west Bank, and many see U.S. efforts as weak and doing little more than buy time for Israel to create new facts on the ground.

Saudi Arabia and Israel do share one common goal: opposing Iran's nuclear programs. This eases their tensions to some degree. The fact remains, however, that they do not share any other common goals, have different priorities in dealing with the United States, and very different priorities in dealing with the other aspects of Iran's conduct - particularly in dealing with Syria and with the military threat that Iran poses in the Gulf.

A Different Set of Threat Perceptions and Priorities

If one analyzes the security threats shaping Iranian and Saudi tensions in more detail, it is important to understand the hierarchy of how both Iran and Saudi Arabia perceive such threats. Internal security and counterterrorism come first. Regional security and influence come second, asymmetric and conventional warfare come third, and the Iranian nuclear threat comes last - in some ways the exact reversal of how many in the West see regional security priorities.

Threat Priority One: Internal Threats and Regime Stability

At this point in time, the Iranian regime seems to feel relatively secure in dealing with its internal threats - although that feeling of security still seems relative. U.S. and other outside efforts at regime change have had little or no real effect. The "green revolution" has been largely suppressed. No one takes the "baby Shah" or Mujahideen-e-Khalq (People's Mujahedin of Iran) seriously.

Arab unrest in Iran's southwest seems to have been fully suppressed, and anti-regime elements in the Baluch areas in the southeast east are capable of only token violence. President Rouhani may be a "moderate" within the Iranian power structure but does not contest the Supreme Leader's position or role. If anything, he is a lightning rod that defuses the legacy of Ahmadinejad's extremism.

The Saudi and Arab Gulf perspective on their internal threats is different. Ever since 2003, Saudi Arabia has faced an all too real threat from Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) - one it has largely brought under control inside the Kingdom but which

has moved to Yemen and remains an active threat. The other Arab Gulf states face lesser threats from Sunni Jihadist extremism, but these threats are still all too real and are reflected in major increases in internal security forces as well as in major new efforts at a job creation and meeting other popular expectations.

The demographic and economic forces that helped generate the political upheavals in the rest of the Arab world increasingly interact with terrorism and religious extremism. Massive increases in mature populations have left many young men without jobs or with disguised unemployment - estimates as high as 20-30% in Saudi Arabia. While Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE have enough wealth to buy off such tensions for at least the near term, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Bahrain do not.

Few in the US and West understand just how relative oil "wealth" is in terms of per capita income, job creation and value, and economic incentive to support the regime. The CIA estimates that Qatar ranks 1st - and it the wealthiest state in per capita terms in the world. Kuwait ranks 25th. The UAE ranks 49th, but only if both the native and foreign labor are counted. The UAE has more than enough wealth to take care of its native citizens.

In contrast, Saudi Arabia ranks 44th -- a moderate ranking by world standards for a nation with a large native population. It is a tribute to the Saudi royal family, technocrats, and businessmen, and other members of the Saudi elite that they have reacted to these pressures with a massive investment and economic and educational reform effort. Iran - with a dismally low per capita income ranking of 100th in the world, has tended

to rely far more on propaganda and repression, and most other Arab states have relied on rhetoric and let the situation grow worse.

The other Arab states face progressively more serious problems. Oman ranks 51st in GDP per capita, and Bahrain ranks 52nd - ranks that are moderate to low. As for the other Arab states in the Gulf region, Jordan ranks 147th, Iraq ranks 140th, and Yemen ranks 187th -- all at the low to crisis level and all effectively facing serious threats to internal stability.

Several of the Arab Gulf states also face sectarian threats that they fear Iran now actively exploits. Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Yemen have significant Shi'ite populations, and Bahrain - a partial shield to Saudi Arabia - has a Shi'ite majority. No one has a reliable estimate of the relative percentages of Sunni and Shi'ite nature populations or Shi'ite foreign workers and residents. They have, however, presented internal security problems in each Gulf state, in part because they often face religious, economic and political discrimination. Iran, for its part, does not face any serious internal sectarian threats.

While Arab Gulf states sometimes exaggerate Iran's role in covert efforts to use their Shi'ite population, U.S. and European intelligence experts do agree that a combination of a covert elements of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards called the Al Quds Force - the same group that attempted to assassinate Saudi Ambassador Adel Al-Jubeir in the US - and the Ministry of Intelligence and National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran (MISIRI or MOIS) have actively supported Shi'ite unrest in the Arab Gulf and particularly in Bahrain and Yemen.

Given the primacy that Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states now assign to internal security, this is a driving factor in their perceptions of Iran as a threat that matches the threat posed by Jihadists and violent Sunni extremism.

Threat Priority Two: Arab Gulf Tensions with Iran over Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon

If one looks at the second set of threats and tensions in terms of Iranian, Saudi, and other Arab Gulf perspectives, it is again important to point out that Saudi and Arab Gulf strategic priorities do not give Iran's nuclear programs the same priority as do those of the United States, Europe, and Israel. Saudi Arabia and its neighbors are particularly concerned with the threats posed by the outcome of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the political upheavals in Syria, and the long-standing instability of Lebanon have created. They fear what Arab voices like King Abdullah of Jordan have called the "Shi'ite crescent" - a zone of Iranian influence which extends from the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean.

Iran now has a significant military presence and zone of influence in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. The U.S. invasion of Iraq not only destroyed Iraqi military capability to counterbalance Iran, it created a level of sectarian and ethnic tensions and Shi'ite dominated central government which has come to give Iran more influence in Iraq than the United States. Iraq is not an Iranian proxy, but it also is not an "Arab state" tied to other Arab states, and its Shi'ites and not its Sunnis are now the dominant political elite.

The Arab Gulf states do not take a unified approach to Iraq, but

Saudi Arabia and several other states see Prime Minister Maliki and his government as being under heavy Iranian influence and Iraq as a potential threat. Saudi Arabia has adjusted its military forces to deal with a potential threat from Iraq and Iran in the upper Gulf and with the fact that Iraq has an 814-kilometer long border with Iran. Saudi Arabia is building a security fence and barrier along this entire border, and also plans for the risk that Iran might try to thrust through Iraq against Kuwait. While Saudi Arabia probably does not see these as a high probability threats, it again has a fundamentally different perspective from the United States and Europe. These threats are on its borders, and proximity alone gives them a strategic importance that Saudi Arabia cannot ignore.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia and all of the Gulf states see the Syrian civil war as a nightmare that has created a humanitarian disaster, tied Assad to Alawite and Iranian support, pushed Sunni rebels increasingly into Jihadist extremism, and linked instability in sectarian conflict in Iraq to sectarian conflict in Syria and Lebanon - boosting Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in ways that have spread its influence deeply into Syria and had some impact in strengthening Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, (AQAP) in posing a threat inside Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

The end result not only poses what Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other Arab states see as a serious growth in Iran's influence and the Iranian threat, it has raised serious questions about the credibility of the U.S. role in the Gulf and the credibility of many of the West's humanitarian goals and postures.

Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other Arab states do not really care about U.S. efforts to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons or hold

conferences like Geneva II. They care about the U.S. and European failure to make good on claims they would back moderate rebel elements against Assad and above all, President Obama's failure to strike Assad's military with cruise missiles after the regime employed chemical weapons in August. They care about the outcome of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the U.S. treatment of Egypt and Mubarak, they raise serious Saudi and Arab concerns about placing trust in the United States - especially in the light of the P5+1 agreement with Iran and the U.S. secret talks with Iran that helped make such an agreement possible.

And yet, Iran has regional fears of its own that fuel its tensions with the Arab Gulf states. Iran's gains in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria are tenuous. Iran's level of regional vulnerability remains all too real, and its influence only goes as far as the self-interest of Iraqi, the Assad regime, Hezbollah, and independent Shi'ite and Alawite factions coincide with Iran's policies. As always, the Middle East is a region where alliances are sometimes for rent but never for lasting sale.

Iran's leaders have to understand that Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon are not Iran's "proxies." Even Iran's allies will only be its allies to the extent this is clearly to their advantage. None take Iran's revolution or its concept of a Supreme Leader seriously, and Alawites are not Shi'ites in any meaningful sense of the term. All of the regional states Iran can see as partial allies are Arab, not Persian.

In spite of Saudi and Arab Gulf doubts about the United States, Iranians also understand that sanctions are all too real; US and P5+1 pressures to limit Iran's arms imports have been effective;

and the United States possesses overwhelming dominance in air, sea, and missile power, supported by key allies like Britain and France.

Threat Priority Three: The Threat of Asymmetric Warfare and "Closing the Gulf"

The third set of threats that shape the tensions between Iran -- and Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states - is the steady build-up of Iran's asymmetric warfare capabilities in the Gulf, around the Strait of Hormuz, and in the Gulf of Oman. Iran has steadily repeated its threats to use its steadily increasing number of mine warfare, missile attack boats, IRGC naval forces, submarines and undersea craft, and land and air-launched anti-ship missiles to "close the Gulf."

Iran first made such threats publically in June 2008, when Mohammed Ali Jafari, the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards threatened that if Iran would close the Strait of Hormuz if Iran were attacked by either Israel or the United States. It stepped up such threats repeatedly in 2012, and it steadily increased its exercise activity after 2008 to show how serious its threat could be - along with creating new bases and dispersal facilities along its entire coast within the Gulf on key Iranian islands, and increasing its capability to deploy forces east of the Strait and in the Gulf of Oman.

As Iran's exercises again made clear in January, February, April, and July 2013; Iran has created very real military capabilities and regularly exercises them. There is nothing symbolic about these Iranian activities, and while the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the other Arab Gulf states could counter even the

most determined Iranian effort this could take up to several weeks to make effective enough to reopen the Gulf under worst case circumstances.

This Iranian build up has been serious enough for the United States to hold major international anti-mine warfare exercises, work with Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states to improve their ability to defend their coasts and facilities in the Gulf, deploy more mine warfare and patrol boats, deploy a Special Forces command ship and base in the Gulf, and create and begin to implement plans for restructuring the 5th Fleet and U.S. air and missile capabilities in the region.

It helps explain why the United States transferred some \$50.4 billion worth of new arms deliveries between 2004 and 2011 - out of total Arab Gulf orders of \$78.4 billion, and why it now has over \$70 billion worth of new orders in delivery or the pipeline - many of which will give Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Arab Gulf some of the most advanced air combat, land-based air defense, and naval warfare capabilities in the world.

Threat Priority Four: Missiles and Air-Sea Conflict

The fourth set of threats that divide Iran from Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf states lies in the changing balance of Iranian missile forces vis-a-vis U.S. and Arab Gulf missile defenses and air-sea power. Iran is not waiting for nuclear weapons to build-up steadily larger ballistic missile forces that can attack targets throughout the Gulf. While Israel may worry about the longest-range Iranian missile systems like the Shahab 3, and the United States may worry about the longer term risk of some form of Iranian missile capability to strike deep in Europe or reach the

United States - Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states already face a far more serious and very different missile and rocket threat.

Many of Iran's short to medium-range ballistic missiles can be used to strike any area target in the Gulf. Some of its artillery rockets could be used to strike targets in the Gulf or nearest to Iran. Unclassified estimates of such numbers and capabilities are very uncertain, as are the level of precision in Iranian strike capability and its ability to launch large enough numbers or "volleys" of such weapons to do serious damage to key targets rather than act as terror weapons that destroy buildings and kill civilians almost at random.

This is why virtually all of the Arab Gulf states have bought improved versions of the Patriot and are examining options for far more advanced missile defenses like THAAD and the Standard. It is why the United States is deploying new missile defense ships in the Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean.

Iran also is seeking to create more accurate systems that can attack critical infrastructure and point targets in the Gulf and on the Arab side of the Gulf. It is developing cruise missiles and armed drones. It also is developing long-range anti-ship missiles and drones and other systems to target them. The Iranian missile threat is adding to the naval threat posed by Iran's ability to use smaller patrol boats, submarines and submersibles, and a variety of ordinary and "smart" mines.

This is why the combination of U.S. and Arab Gulf air and sea strike power has taken on new meaning regardless of the Iranian nuclear threat, and another reason why Saudi and Arab Gulf concern with the depth of the U.S. commitment to defend them is so critical.

As long as the United States is a reliable ally, Iran is anything but the "hegemon of the Gulf." It has no truly advanced combat aircraft in inventory - only a limited number of early export versions of the MiG-29, as well as Su-24s, F-14s and F-4s left over from the time of the Shah. Its basic land based air defense systems consists of versions of the U.S. Hawk surface-to-air missile whose technology dates back the Shah, and Russian and Chinese systems which - with the except of few very short-range TOR-Ms, date back to the Vietnam War.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE alone each have far more advanced combat aircraft like the F-15, F-16, and Typhoon in larger numbers than Iran. While neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE emphasizes the fact, they both are buying long-range precision strike systems they can use against Iran. The United States not only has carriers, but land-based air forces in Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE and access to British facilities in Diego Garcia. It can deploy steadily larger numbers of stealth strike aircraft and more advanced air-to-surface weapons and sea-launched cruise missiles.

The United States also has a vast advantage in terms of modern naval systems, key command and control systems, and sea-air-space based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems. It can strike -- and coordinate strikes -- on Iran as well as use them to defend and deter in ways no other nation can come close to matching. Moreover, these U.S. capabilities, bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states, and regular Gulf-wide and bilateral exercises and training activity allow the United States to make up for the fact the Gulf Cooperation Council has made only limited and largely cosmetic progress increasing any ability to effectively coordinate Arab

Gulf forces.

It is this combination of U.S., Saudi, and other Arab Gulf forces - with British and French support - that offsets the Iranian advantage in asymmetric forces and missiles, underpins deterrence and defense in the Gulf area, and acts as a key stabilizing force. At the same time, the limits to Arab capability without the United States remain critical, pose very real Iranian threats to Saudi Arabia and its Arab neighbors, and again help create deep Saudi and Arab concerns about the reliability and persistence of the U.S. role in the Gulf.

Threat Priority Five: The Nuclear Arms Race

The fact that Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states do not give priority to the nuclear threat over more immediate threats does not mean they do not recognize that it is real. It also does not mean that they do not share U.S. concern with preventing an Iranian nuclear breakout that is the current focus of the P5+1.

Key Saudi voices have pushed for a weapons of mass destruction free zone in the Middle East. At the same time, Saudi Arabia is considering its own military options.

Saudi Arabia has upgraded its Chinese supplied ballistic missile forces and to have expanded its launch areas. Key Saudi strategic thinkers like Prince Turki al-Faisal have said that the Saudis are considering a nuclear option, and some analysts feel that Pakistan might sell Saudi Arabia nuclear weapons.

The United States has also done more than negotiate. It has steadily refined and improved its military options for preventive strikes. Then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton began to discuss

giving the Arab Gulf states the same kind of extended nuclear deterrence that the United States once offered Europe in 2008, and made this offer public in a NPR radio broadcast on August 29, 2009. The United States has repeatedly said it will not tolerate Iranian deployment of nuclear weapons and that it has developed military options for preventive strikes - planning informally confirmed by U.S. officers in the staff of the U.S. joint chiefs.

Israel has clearly planned and exercised more limited forms of preventive strikes. More importantly, it has long been engaged in a preemptive nuclear arms race with Iran that both Iran and Arab states like Saudi Arabia are fully aware of. Israel sharply upgraded the range-payload of its missile booster in the late 1980s, and had a remarkable level of access to French fission and thermonuclear weapons design and test data before De Gaulle publically cut French ties to Israel in November 1967.

At the same time, there are reasons why Saudi Arabia is uncertain about the present and future U.S. commitment to the defense of the Gulf and support of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf states - and future P5+1 enforcement of a truly meaningful nuclear agreement with Iran. Saudi Arabia is deeply concerned about the prospect of Iran actually deploying a nuclear force that might offset the credibility of both U.S. and Arab Gulf deterrent forces and willingness to actually use them. Recent calls in the Iranian Majlis for 60% enrichment if the United States increases sanctions have not helped ease Saudi concerns, nor have all the uncertainties surrounding Iranian weapons development activities and possible simulated tests at place like Parchin.

From a Saudi perspective, Iran's nuclear programs are not an

exercise in status or prestige. They are not a matter of reaching the nuclear threshold. They are a matter of Iran actually acquiring a capability that could begin with some real nuclear launch on warning or launch under attack capability, test the credibility of US security guarantees and Arab willingness to act, compensate for the limits to Iran's conventional missiles, and offset the current massive Saudi, Arab Gulf, and U.S. advantage in air and sea power.

Moreover, references to existential nuclear threats apply far more to a Saudi Arabia and Arab Gulf without nuclear weapons than to an Israel, Israel may be a state with a small population and list of key targets, but Israel has the ability to launch thermonuclear warheads against every Iranian city and produce at least as much existential damage to Iran.

What Bernard Brodie might have called the "indicate balance of terror" in the Gulf region is another very real issue dividing Iran and Saudi Arabia, creating deep concern over just how real the P5+1 agreement with Iran will prove to be, and the strength of alliances with the United States. In fact any such Iranian capability is at least several years away - as distinguished from timelines that could be less than a year for some kind of Iranian rush to detonate a first nuclear fissile event - do not mean that nuclear threats are not a key and real part of the tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Looking Towards the Future

There are no easy ways to deal with any of the major forces that now divide Iran and Saudi Arabia and threaten the stability and security of a region so critical to the global economy. It is all too

easy to "round up the usual suspects" and call for regional security conferences and solutions, more arms control negotiations and treaties, more dialogue and confidence building measure, and trust in the good intentions of all involved. Rounding up the usual suspects, however, has led to remarkably little real world progress in conflict resolution to date, and once again there are so many key variables that this is a game of three dimensional chess where there are no clear rules and no clear limits to the number of players.

Some things are clear. A truly successful P5+1 agreement with Iran could have a powerful impact in eliminating the most dangerous mid-to-longer term threat in the region. Firm U.S. and other P5+1 insistence on a real and verified elimination of Iranian nuclear weapons efforts would go a long way towards creating military stability, just as ending sanctions and establishing normal relations between the P+1 and Iran would greatly ease Iranian fears and concerns. This will take at least year, but it is a beginning.

U.S. efforts to reassure Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states that it will not turn to Iran, and will sustain its military alliance, will be critical to any Saudi and Arab willingness to deal with Iran and avoid Arab efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. The United States has already begun such efforts with Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel's visit to the Gulf in early December 2013, and his December 7th speech at the Manama Dialogue.

As Secretary Hagel pointed out, the United States actually increased its presence and exercise activity with Arab states in 2012, will deliver some \$70 billion more worth of advanced

arms, and its strategy and defense planning documents give the Middle East the same priority as Asia. These are reassurances, however, that the United States now needs to repeat and publicize on a much broader level, and do in cooperation with Britain and France. The only meaningful criteria for reassuring an ally is that you must do it as often and as in many ways as they want.

The United States and Europe also need to stop seeing regional political upheavals as some brief prelude to the triumph of Western values and democracy, and focus on their real world human impact as well as the threat to they pose. This does not mean accepting repression or exaggerated claims of Iranian involvement, but it does mean giving the security and stability of allied states the priority it deserves. It means accepting the fact that years of effort will now be needed with unstable states and changing regimes. It means dealing with the human consequences of what is happening, and understanding how deep the threat of the religious struggles within Islam and posed by violent religious extremism has become.

Finally, it means all sides need to begin efforts to find some form of a credible negotiated security structure in the Gulf that can ease the current arms race. It may take years before serious negotiations are possible, but some form of negotiations are needed to produce more trust between Iran and Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, and gradually ease Arab reliance U.S. and European presence in the Gulf without either creating new Arab fears or empowering Iran. This may take a decade in the real world, and a real and fully enforced P5+1 agreement with Iran is an essential precondition to making a meaningful beginning. It is, however, the only strategic goal that can ensure lasting

security and stability.

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