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Article 1.

NYT

Let's Make a Deal

Thomas L. Friedman

November 19, 2013 -- Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates — The Middle East once again proves that if you eat right, exercise regularly and don't smoke, you'll live long enough to see everything, including a day when the Jews controlling Jerusalem and the Sunni Saudi Custodians of the Great Mosques of Mecca and Medina would form a tacit alliance against the Shiite Persians of Iran and the Protestants of America — with the Hindus of India and the Confucians of China also supporting America, sort of, while the secularist French play all sides.

I've now seen everything.

But is this good news? At one level, yes. I attended a Gulf security conference here in Abu Dhabi that included officials and experts from all over the Arab/Muslim world. In the opening session, Shimon Peres, Israel's president, flanked by the white and blue Israeli flag, gave an address by satellite from his office in Jerusalem. Good for the United Arab Emirates, the conference sponsor, for making that happen. Seeing the Israeli president speak to an audience dotted with Arab headdresses reminded me of the Oslo days, when Israelis and Arabs held business conferences in Cairo and Amman.

But this tacit Israeli-Sunni Arab cooperation is not based on any sort of reconciliation, but on the tribal tradition that my enemy's enemy is my friend — and the enemy is Iran, which has been steadily laying the groundwork to build a nuclear weapon. Diplomats and ministers from Israel and the Israel lobby have been working Congress, while officials from Arab Gulf states have been telling the Obama administration directly the same message: how much they oppose the proposed deal that Secretary of State John Kerry and the foreign ministers of France, Britain, Russia, China and Germany have drafted to trade limited sanctions relief in return for Iran starting to roll back its nuclear program.

Never have I seen Israel and America's core Arab allies working more in concert to stymie a major foreign policy initiative of a sitting U.S. president, and never have I seen more lawmakers — Democrats and Republicans — more willing to take Israel's side against their own president's. I'm certain this comes less from any careful consideration of the facts and more from a growing

tendency by many American lawmakers to do whatever the Israel lobby asks them to do in order to garner Jewish votes and campaign donations.

That said, I don't mind Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu of Israel and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia going ballistic — in stereo — over this proposed deal. It gives Kerry more leverage. Kerry can tell the Iranians: “Look, our friends are craaaaaazzy. And one of them has a big air force. You better sign quick.”

No, I don't begrudge Israel and the Arabs their skepticism, but we still should not let them stop a deal. If you're not skeptical about Iran, you're not paying attention. Iran has lied and cheated its way to the precipice of building a bomb, and without tough economic sanctions — sanctions that President Obama engineered but which Netanyahu and the Arab states played a key role in driving — Iran would not be at the negotiating table. I also understand the specific concerns of the Gulf Arabs, which I'd summarize as: “It looks to us as if you want to do this deal and then get out of the region — and leave behind an Iran that will only become economically more powerful, at a time when it already has enormous malign influence in Syria, Iraq, in Lebanon through Hezbollah, and in Bahrain.”

I get it, but I also don't think we'd just abandon them. In the long run, the deal Kerry is trying to forge with Iran is good for us and our allies for four reasons: 1) In return for very limited sanctions relief, the deal is expected to freeze all of Iran's nuclear bomb-making technologies, roll back some of them and put in place an unprecedented, intrusive inspection regime, while maintaining all the key oil sanctions so Iran will still be hurting aplenty. This way Iran can't “build a bomb and talk” at

the same time (the way Israel builds more settlements while it negotiates with Palestinians). Iran freezes and rolls back part of its program now, while we negotiate a full deal to lift sanctions in return for Iran agreeing to restrictions that make it impossible for it to break out with a nuclear weapon. 2) While, Netanyahu believes more sanctions will get Iran to surrender every piece of its nuclear technology, Iran experts say that is highly unlikely. 3) Iran has already mastered the technology to make a bomb (and polls show that this is very popular with Iranians). There is no way to completely eliminate every piece of Iran's nuclear technology unless you wipe every brain clean there. 4) The only lasting security lies in an internal transformation in Iran, which can only come with more openness. Kerry's deal would roll back Iran's nuclear program, while also strengthening more moderate tendencies in Iran. Maybe that will go nowhere, or maybe it will lead to more internal changes. It's worth a carefully constructed test.

If Israel kills this U.S.-led deal, then the only option is military. How many Americans or NATO allies will go for bombing Iran after Netanyahu has blocked the best effort to explore a credible diplomatic alternative? Not many. That means only Israel will have a military option. If Israel uses it, it may set Iran back, but it will also set Iran free to rush to a bomb. Is Israel ready to bomb Iran every six months?

[Article 2.](#)

The National Interest

Why a Nuclear Deal with Iran Is So Hard

Michael Eisenstadt

November 20, 2013-- It should have come as no surprise when talks between Iran and the P5+1 in Geneva two weeks ago ended without an interim confidence-building agreement—apparently because the Islamic Republic could not accept a revised draft agreement that did not recognize its “right to enrich.” Negotiations with Iran have always been difficult, protracted affairs—in this case, made more fraught by differences between France and the other members of the P5+1. Diplomacy has been further complicated by the fact that Tehran hopes to use negotiations to confirm (if not legitimize) its status as a nuclear threshold state, while preserving a degree of ambiguity regarding its actual capabilities—an outcome that the P5+1 is not likely—or at least should not—agree to. Finding a way through these thickets will be key if nuclear diplomacy with Iran is to succeed.

What the Negotiations are Really About. Although Iran’s diplomats continue to emphasize that the Islamic Republic’s interest in nuclear technology stems mainly from a desire to produce clean energy, one can get a better sense of the factors driving its nuclear program from [an infographic on Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s website](#) that describes how the regime’s ultimate decision maker thinks about the matter.

Based on a content analysis of 44 of Khamenei’s speeches on

the topic since 2004, it identifies a dozen major achievements of Iran's policy of "nuclear resistance." Two pertain to the production of electricity and the freeing of Iranian oil for export; the remaining ten, however, describe how the nuclear program has contributed to Iran's independence, enabled it to resist alleged efforts by the West to keep the Muslim world weak and backwards, and enhanced the Islamic Republic's power, prestige, and influence in the Muslim world and beyond. The infographic, makes clear that the regime considers the nuclear program to be key to the country's future as a regional and aspiring great power.

Iran's nuclear program has, in fact, relatively little to do with the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. After all, Iran has built only one nuclear power plant that has operated only fitfully, and it has invested little in the infrastructure needed for a bona fide nuclear-energy program. Rather, its nuclear program has much more to do with Iran's place in the world, while nuclear negotiations are about the degree of nuclear latency (i.e., proximity to the bomb) the international community is willing to tolerate in the Islamic Republic. There should be no illusions about that.

The Goals of Tehran's Nuclear Program. This reading of Tehran's nuclear aspirations is borne out by its actions, which provide important insights into its nuclear strategy. Its past weapons research and development work (as documented by the IAEA) and its construction of a secret underground enrichment facility at Natanz (before its existence was exposed in 2002) suggest that Iran was pursuing a clandestine parallel nuclear program at that time. If Tehran could have secretly built a bomb without getting caught, it might have done so, unveiling this capability only in the event of a crisis or war. (The model for

this may have been South Africa, which had secretly produced half a dozen nuclear devices by the late 1980s, intending to keep them secret. Only the end of apartheid brought the program to light.)

In its early negotiations with the EU3 which started following the exposure of Natanz, Tehran's goal was to deflect pressure, to deter preventive military action (believing that it would not be attacked as long as it was talking with the West), and to buy time to complete the critical facilities needed to enable a nuclear breakout.

Iran subsequently tried to build another secret underground enrichment facility at Fordow, whose existence was revealed by the United States in 2009. Twice burned, Tehran may have concluded that a parallel clandestine program is not a viable option at this time, though there are indications that some weapons research and development work continued. But there are no discernible signs that Tehran is building clandestine facilities elsewhere at this time, despite declaring in November 2009 that it would build ten more underground facilities like that at Fordow. Indeed, it would be the height of folly for it to do so while high-stakes negotiations are underway.

Thus, Tehran's goal is probably to continue to expand and upgrade its nuclear infrastructure so that if it were to decide to build a bomb, its nuclear infrastructure would be so vast, dispersed, and hardened that an effective Israeli or American strike would no longer be possible. Such a bombproof nuclear program would make Iran a nuclear threshold state with a rapid breakout capability, allowing it to, in effect, achieve "nuclear deterrence without the bomb" (since the United States and

others would tread lightly every time there is a crisis with Iran, lest the latter exercise its nuclear option)—or with the bomb, should it eventually opt to break out of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

The Strategic Logic of Tehran’s Nuclear Diplomacy. Iran’s nuclear redlines have been carefully designed to advance this objective. The most important of these is Tehran’s insistence that the P5+1 recognize its so-called “inalienable right to enrich.” (Such a right does not formally exist in the NPT, which speaks of the “inalienable right... to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.”) Recognition of such a putative “right to enrich” would legitimize Iran’s efforts to develop advanced enrichment capabilities and large stockpiles of enriched uranium. (It could also undermine global nonproliferation efforts by spurring the spread of enrichment technologies to countries that have thus far eschewed such a capability—such as the UAE.)

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif’s statement this past weekend that “Not only do we consider that Iran's right to enrich is unnegotiable, but we see no need for that to be recognized as ‘a right’, because this right is inalienable and all countries must respect that,” does not change the basic point that any decision by the P5+1 to acquiesce to an Iranian enrichment capability would be spun by Tehran as a tacit acknowledgment of such a right.

While in the past Iran has expressed a willingness to give up part of its stockpile of enriched uranium in exchange for reactor fuel, prior to the recent round of negotiations in Geneva, senior negotiator Abbas Araghchi rejected demands that Iran ship out

its stockpile of enriched uranium, stating that “we will negotiate regarding the form, amount, and various levels of enrichment, but the shipping of materials out of the country is our red line.” So Iran will likely insist on retaining its stockpile of enriched uranium—an essential component of any effort to achieve a latent breakout capability.

Iranian officials have also intimated that the Islamic Republic might accept restrictions on the number of centrifuges and level of enrichment. It is unlikely, however, to accept limitations on the type and quality of centrifuges it can deploy. There are centrifuges in use elsewhere that are more than one hundred times more efficient than Iran’s, and it may hope to eventually produce such advanced machines. This would enable it to compensate for any numerical cap it agrees to by substituting quality for quantity. Should Iran develop more efficient centrifuges, it also would be much easier to make small, hard-to-detect clandestine enrichment plants.

To assuage such concerns, President Rouhani has offered “greater transparency” as a confidence building measure, though other officials, such as Iranian Atomic Energy Organization chief Ali Akbar Salehi have proffered this with a caveat: that all monitoring activities be consistent with existing international regulations, laws, and treaties, and be approved by Iran’s parliament. So, while Iran might ultimately agree to implement the IAEA’s Additional Protocol (which many former nuclear inspectors consider inadequate), it is unlikely to accept more intrusive, tailored monitoring arrangements that would, in its eyes, reflect a discriminatory double standard toward Iran. (This has been Iran’s long-standing position toward monitoring arrangements in past arms control negotiations.) A monitoring

regime that provides just enough transparency to convey how quickly Iran could break out of the NPT, but not enough to catch a breakout in time to stop it, would undermine, rather than build, confidence—though it would advance Iran’s goal of being widely seen as a nuclear threshold state.

Ironically, it is the issue that is almost never mentioned that may have the greatest potential to sink a deal: Iran’s refusal to cooperate with the IAEA’s efforts to investigate possible military dimensions of its nuclear program. Tehran has repeatedly proffered offers of marginally greater transparency regarding its current nuclear activities, and declarations forswearing any interest in nuclear weapons (such as the supreme leader’s nuclear fatwa), as a substitute for cooperation on this issue. The reason is not hard to discern: any acknowledgement by Iran that it had a nuclear weapons program would blow up the regime’s carefully constructed nuclear narrative: that allegations about an Iranian nuclear-weapons program are part of an American-Zionist conspiracy to isolate Iran and keep the Muslim world weak and in thrall to the West.

For a regime that is all about spin and image management, the admission that the concerns of the international community were not misplaced, and the consequent gutting of its nuclear narrative would be a devastating blow. And it would make a deal even harder to reach—though it is hard to imagine a credible, sustainable deal without resolution of this issue. For any deal that overlooks Iranian stonewalling about the past will only encourage further Iranian stonewalling in the future.

Conclusions. For all these reasons, it will be difficult to square with Iran the requirements of a credible, sustainable

agreement—forthrightness regarding past nuclear activities, real transparency concerning current and future activities, and meaningful limits on enrichment and reprocessing—with the Islamic Republic’s goal of confirming its status as a nuclear threshold state, while preserving a degree of ambiguity regarding its capabilities. And it will take more than “heroic flexibility” (to use Ayatollah Khamenei’s phrase) to obtain such an agreement. Rather, it will require nothing less than for Iran to truly embrace the goal of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, by confirming its declaratory commitment to this goal with deeds to match. That would truly be change to believe in.

Michael Eisenstadt is a senior fellow and director of the Military and Security Studies Program at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Article 3.

The Christian Science Monitor

US-Iran negotiations are fragile, but there’s room for hope

Ramin Jahanbegloo

November 19, 2013 -- Iranian-American relations have been paved with mistrust and mutual misperceptions since the 1979

Iranian Revolution and subsequent hostage crisis. As such, the ill will that has existed between the two governments has been building for 35 years, and it is not going to be bridged easily by the talks on Iran's nuclear capabilities in Geneva. However, as the United States and its allies prepare for another round of talks with Iran on Nov. 20, both sides believe that they are getting close to a first step toward a comprehensive agreement.

A deal seemed close in the last round of talks in Geneva, but the French hard line on Iran's nuclear enrichment program created new skepticism. As a result, the Iranians refused to conclude a deal on what Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called "differences of opinion within the P5 plus 1 group."

As for the Obama administration, it found itself in a fragile position, on the one hand battling Congress over the new sanctions against Iran, on the other keeping alive the diplomatic channel in order to take off the table the military option supported by Israel and Saudi Arabia. The excessive US preoccupation with Iran has led these two old allies of American diplomacy in the Middle East to feel abandoned and to lobby against any pact that would let Iran keep its nuclear technology.

Therefore, the lesson understood by the Americans is that the challenge of diplomacy with Iran is that it conflicts with the strategic interests of a range of countries in the Middle East. It is hard to remember a time when Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have publicly expressed their dissatisfaction with American leadership in the Middle East.

The new American diplomatic positioning in regard to Iran owes much to a political shift in Tehran from a policy of confrontation

to one of constructive dialogue. After winning a surprise June victory in the presidential election against conservative candidates, Hassan Rouhani found himself with a country in economic distress and diplomatic isolation.

Mr. Rouhani's election brought back a spirit of openness to Iran's foreign policy while sending a positive message of dialogue and friendship to the Americans, and especially to the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) in order to help reintegrate Iran into the world economy and withdraw some of the toughest sanctions imposed on the Iranian economy.

During the past six months, all-out support has been provided to Rouhani by two former Iranian presidents, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami. Rouhani also had the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's benediction to start talks with the US in order to ease Iran out of its eight years of political decline and international embarrassment under former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

But Rouhani's uphill battle to uplift Iranian diplomacy has not been an easy task. The blame after the first round of nuclear talks in Geneva is coming not only from Israel and Saudi Arabia, which had a chance to mobilize against what they consider a "failed" deal, but also from hardliners in Iran, who are now looking for an excuse to quit the negotiations and to criticize the Rouhani administration. Rouhani will therefore face increasing pressure from conservative groups inside Iran to alter course back toward the "Death to America" slogan.

However, there is still room for hope. A diplomatic deal is

clearly preferable for all sides, including Israel and Saudi Arabia, which in the long run have no other option but to accept a broader American strategy of deterrence and containment of a nuclear Iran rather than a costly military engagement that would involve a great number of states and political actors in the region.

The final question is whether an agreement with Iran should only be limited to the nuclear program, or take into consideration all issues of mutual concern between Iran and the US (apologies for past abuses, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria). In the meantime, approval of new sanctions against Iran by the US Congress would seriously jeopardize diplomatic efforts to settle the nuclear standoff. The risk is that the fragile Iran-US talks will suffer once again from a drumbeat leading to war, while ending the dream of millions of Iranians who voted for Rouhani with the hope that his administration would change the course of Iranian politics both internationally and domestically.

Ramin Jahanbegloo, the Iranian philosopher, dissident, and advocate of nonviolence, lives in exile in Canada. Among other books, he is author of "Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity."

[Article 4.](#)

New York Post

Desperate for a deal — even if it helps Iran get a bomb

John Bolton

November 19, 2013-- Barack Obama seems poised this week to reach an agreement with Iran on its nuclear-weapons program in talks that resume Wednesday. Negotiations came unstuck this month in Geneva either because France felt the terms too favorable to Iran, because Iran refused to compromise its “right” to enrich uranium, or both. The outcome embarrassed President Obama and fortified Tehran’s view that he is desperate for a deal on almost any basis.

Secretary of State John Kerry has spared no effort to avoid another Geneva debacle, almost certainly making more concessions to Iran to secure agreement. The failed deal was certainly wretched from America’s perspective, involving countless problems and deficiencies. This week’s deal will be worse.

It is no answer that Obama is seeking merely an “interim” understanding with Iran. “Interim” concessions have a way of getting locked-in, as seemingly ad hoc trade-offs freeze into permanence. Indeed, Obama’s “step-by-step” approach itself tells Tehran’s mullahs how desperately Obama wants a deal, and how willingly he ignores the reality that Iran’s nuclear program has never been peaceful.

But there is a larger point here, beyond whatever specific terms emerge this week in Geneva. The West’s efforts to negotiate with Iran are doomed to failure because the parties’ objectives are utterly incompatible. A decade of abortive negotiations alone demonstrates this basic truth, which Iran’s ongoing diplomatic

“charm offensive” cannot obscure.

Obama sees negotiations as deflecting the threat of Iranian nuclear weapons. Iran sees them, by contrast, as helping ensure success for that very weapons program. There is simply no compromise between these objectives. There are no “bridging proposals” that can overcome irreconcilable differences.

Tehran’s primary negotiation objective is to eliminate the threat of military strikes against its nuclear program. Despite Obama’s rhetoric that “all options are on the table,” no one believes he will use force. And who knows what private assurances Obama or Kerry have already given the ayatollahs (a fruitful area for Congressional inquiry)? That leaves Israel, which the Obama administration is pressuring unmercifully, not just on Iran but also on the Palestinians. In Israel before his Geneva embarrassment, Kerry squeezed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to make more concessions to the Palestinians, implicitly green-lighting both a third intifada and continuing European efforts to delegitimize Israel in their absence. This pressure on Netanyahu, already back-breaking in Obama’s first term, is now at unprecedented levels. That means Iran is very close to its goal of neutralizing Israel.

Iran also wants relief from economic sanctions. And why not, given the economic harm they are causing? Remember, however, the mullahs are not US consumers. Threatened with a diminished lifestyle, too many Americans would concede almost anything. Not so the Islamic revolution. Tehran understands that securing even modest sanctions relief in Geneva will carry it over a critical inflection point. Instead of slowly increasing in severity, the sanctions will have decreased. To exploit Obama’s

(and Europe's) palpable diplomatic weakness, Iran will make superficial concessions, like those reported in leaks about this month's aborted deal. President Hassan Rouhani employed precisely this strategy 10 years ago as Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, making purely cosmetic, tactical concessions. He is using the same playbook today.

Iran knows that under existing US law, India, China and others themselves face sanctions unless they continue to reduce their imports of Iranian oil. Obama fears either having to sanction such important countries or granting them further waivers, thus undoubtedly triggering vociferous domestic political criticism that he can hardly now afford. Moreover, Iran will have won an enormous psychological victory in Beijing, New Delhi and other important capitals, which will realize that the diaphanous sanctions regime is near total collapse.

US sanctions advocates also need to acknowledge reality. Even if their policy could work to stop Iran's nuclear efforts (which it can't), hard-headed strategists are not administering America's sanctions. Barack Obama is. Any policy that rests on Obama taking a tough negotiating position with Iran is doomed to failure, given his desperation for a deal, his naïveté and incompetence and his basic operating premise: He fears an Israeli military strike more than an Iran with nuclear weapons.

That is why evaluating the terms of the upcoming interim deal — who scored on this issue, who scored on that — is beside the point. The negotiation process itself buys Iran both time to continue its nuclear-weapons activities and international legitimacy. Kerry and others, even at this supposedly interim stage, are already speculating openly about ultimately

normalizing relations between Washington and Tehran. This tells the ayatollahs everything they need to know.

Consider one historical analogy. In 1938, Germany wanted the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia. It would either get the territory or not. There was no compromise position. Ask Neville Chamberlain how that worked out.

Article 5.

The National Interest

We're Close to a Good Deal with Iran. **Why Sabotage It?**

Alireza Nader

November 20, 2013 -- The details of a first step in a comprehensive deal with Iran have not been made public. Both the P5+1 (U.S., UK, France, Russia, China and Germany) and Iran have managed to keep them a secret, fearing that hardliners on both sides may try to sabotage the deal before an agreement is signed. However, this has not prevented those with maximalist positions on the nuclear program, including Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, from opposing the first step. Netanyahu, among others, has demanded that the entire Iranian nuclear program be dismantled, and has encouraged the U.S. Congress to pass more sanctions against Iran. According to media reports, it appears that Iran and the P5+1 are close to

agreeing for Tehran to suspend major aspects of its program, including the enrichment of uranium to a medium level of 20 percent, and installation of more advanced centrifuges, in return for reversible and limited easing of sanctions, including allowing Iran to export petrochemicals and access oil revenue frozen by sanctions.

Critics of the first step claim that it gives Iran too much without anything substantial in return. They are wrong. Sanctions against Iran will only be lifted under a final comprehensive deal in which Iran rolls back its program. The sanctions regime itself would not be weakened in the first step, as access to limited funds and additional exports (estimated in the range of \$6-10 billion) will not fix Iran's declining economy, which will continue to suffer even after an initial agreement is reached. Iran is now earning from its oil less than half [6] of what it did before the worst of the sanctions hit. The first step of the current deal under discussion will not change that, since Iran's oil exports will not increase; but it may be enough for Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to sell the deal at home. Given the past decade of Iranian intransigence, Tehran's adherence to the first step could be a great victory for the United States and the entire international community. So why are the maximalists against it?

Israeli Anxiety

A potential nuclear deal between Iran and the United States has caused a lot of anxiety for U.S. allies, notably Saudi Arabia and various Persian Gulf states, but primarily Israel. The sources of anxiety are understandable. Israel is a geographically small state with many enemies in the Middle East. Its powerful conventional military and stockpile of nuclear weapons make it

the regional Goliath. However, this does not erase Israel's vulnerability to even one nuclear bomb, which could devastate the entire country. Netanyahu may have adopted a maximalist position in order to enhance Israel's interests in the nuclear negotiations. He may secretly believe that Israel can live with a limited amount of enrichment capability, but wants to make sure Tel Aviv drives a hard bargain. Or he may truly believe that the entire Iranian program should be dismantled. Let us assume the latter is true; Netanyahu feels he cannot tolerate even a limited Iranian capability.

The problem with this approach is that Iran has already mastered knowledge of the nuclear fuel cycle. Israel is rightly concerned about Iran's physical nuclear facilities, some of which it can damage or maybe destroy through military strikes. However, Israel cannot destroy Iran's mastery of nuclear technology. Any facilities dismantled through military force, or even through pressure by sanctions, can be reconstituted by Tehran at an opportune moment, and without the oversight of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors who currently monitor Iranian installations. It is therefore in Israeli interests to keep the inspectors in Iran. A military strike, and even the collapse of negotiations, could put that in jeopardy. A more realistic approach is one that allows Iran to keep limited enrichment under the scrutiny of the international community.

A Resilient Iranian Regime

A negotiated deal with Iran would also not have the power to completely erase Iran's nuclear knowledge. Nor would it have the ability to dismantle the entire program. The Iranian regime is not made of fools; it has survived thirty-four years of war,

insurgency, sanctions, isolation, assassinations, and the opposition of its own people. A dismantling of the entire nuclear program could demonstrate that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his system are weak, a signal the regime cannot afford to send to its many enemies.

Additional sanctions by Congress may choke off the Iranian economy, but they will not choke the regime. While unpopular and weakened, the Islamic Republic is hardly on its last legs. It is a regime, ostensibly ruled by God's representative on Earth, that is willing to sacrifice its own people. After all, it is the same regime that sent thousands of young Iranian boys across Iraqi minefields to clear them for advancing Iranian troops in the 1980s. It is the same regime that systematically raped Iranian protestors as part of their crackdown against the 2009 Green uprising.

At the same time, Iran is no North Korea; it is not a dictatorship, but an authoritarian regime that responds to pressure. However, there are certain red lines that cannot be crossed, and humiliation is one. The maximalist approach by Netanyahu and others is a call for the regime's surrender, and Khamenei is not, and may never be, ready for surrender.

But Khamenei and Rouhani do want to rid Iran of sanctions. The regime's business interests are suffering and Khamenei no doubt feels pressure from his loyal constituents. Hence, his support for negotiations. It remains to be seen whether Tehran will sign off on the first step, as nothing is guaranteed. But there are indications that Iran and the P5+1 were very close to sealing a deal in the November 7-8 Geneva negotiations. The next round of negotiations, set to take place on November 20, could lead to

a first step by Iran to halt its nuclear activities.

Take Your Pick: A Deal, Or a War and/or Nukes

Israel's concerns and anxieties have been felt in the U.S. Congress, which is considering new sanctions against Iran. Many members of Congress argue that sanctions brought Iran to the table, so more sanctions are needed. However, additional sanctions would come perilously close to crossing Iran's red line of humiliation. They could also confirm Khamenei's belief that the U.S. seeks to implode his regime through endless sanctions.

Like most rulers, Khamenei would be concerned about the effects of a total oil embargo (through sanctions) on Iran. But it would be no surprise that Khamenei has thought through the consequences of such a possibility. He has the political motives to continue with the nuclear program even in the face of total sanctions. He could tell Iranians that it was the U.S. Congress, pressured by Israel, which reneged on a deal. The Iranian regime, including the suave Rouhani, may then tell foreign powers that Iran was the victim of American 'duplicity.' Many Iranians, even those opposed to the Islamic Republic, may believe Khamenei. And many countries that have enabled the sanctions regime against Iran may also come to have their doubts. Finally, the collapse of negotiations would mean a permanent sanctions regime, which means Iran would have no reason to stop its nuclear progress toward a weapons capability.

The United States would face two choices: to attack Iran, since the Israelis likely lack the means to completely destroy the nuclear program through air strikes; or accede to a nuclear Iran. But even a U.S. military strike against Iran would not destroy

Iran's nuclear knowledge, or its willingness to build nuclear weapons in order to deter future attacks.

Americans and Israelis cannot let their anxieties rule the day. There is good reason to be skeptical of the Iranian regime, and that skepticism should not go away until Iran sees a fundamental change in its political system. In 2009 the Iranian people demonstrated that they wanted change. They have not given up. However, a better future for Iran, and ultimately for U.S. and Israeli interests in the Middle East, cannot be achieved through war or endless sanctions.

The Islamic Republic may not be on its knees, and it may survive the worst of economic pressures, but it cannot survive the demands of the Iranian people. But the Iranian people need space to achieve a more democratic country. Giving diplomacy a chance, without more sanctions at this point, could be the first step.

Alireza Nader is a senior international policy analyst at the nonprofit, nonpartisan RAND Corporation.

[Article 6.](#)

Agence Global

Puzzled by Syria?

Rami G. Khouri

20 Nov 2013 -- BEIRUT—Four simultaneous trends seem to define the war in Syria these days, which only becomes more complicated and difficult to resolve with every passing week: persistent fighting on the ground, continued fragmentation of the country into self-governed zones, a worsening humanitarian tragedy that plagues Syria and its neighbors, and intensifying efforts to seek a political resolution of the conflict. Every aspect of Syria today is frightening and tragic, but also consequential for the region and the world, which is why it cannot be largely ignored, like some other local wars in Yemen, Somalia or even Iraq.

Unlike other conflicts, though, it only gets worse with time, and more intractable. Just in the past two weeks we have seen two significant new developments that reflect ongoing trends: the autonomous development of the Kurdish regions of northeast Syria, and another burst of tens of thousands of refugees leaving the country amidst intensified local battles, and pouring into the already saturated Lebanon border areas.

Two years ago, I wrote that Syria was three conflicts in one—the domestic rebellion for dignity and democracy, the regional Cold War driven by Iran and Saudi Arabia, and a global confrontation between the United States and Russia primarily, but also comprising actors like China, Turkey and France. Earlier this year I expanded this view to include other regional actors who have been so deeply involved in the Syria situation, including Turkey, Iran, Israel, Hizbullah and pan-Islamic Salafist militant movements.

Well, that was an optimistic and over-simplified view. I would now say that Syria in fact comprises at least ten different

conflicts and historical confrontations in the region that have come together at this moment and in this place, and are all active simultaneously. The basic underlying battle in Syria started as that between freedom-loving citizens and their modern security state, but this soon was overwhelmed by the many other antagonisms of the modern Middle East, such as: Arabs vs. Iranians; Arabs vs. Israelis; Kurds vs. Arabs; Sunnis vs. Shiites; Islamists vs. secularists; Arab conservative monarchies vs. Arab nationalist republics; Arab and Iranian revolutionary Islamists vs. conservative Arab monarchies; pro-American vs. pro-Russian forces; and—the most recent—Qaeda-like Arab and foreign Salafist militants who fight against virtually everyone else in the region and the world.

So Syria has become the patch of sand where Americans and Russians draw and defend their red line of influence in the region today. Saudi Arabia and Iran face off in Syria expecting that the outcome there will shape the Middle East region for decades to come. Salafist militants who only thrive in conditions of chaos claim patches of territory where they can establish imagined pure Islamic states, and quickly find that many of the locals resent and even fight them.

So what does one do in the face of such persistent complexity, suffering and danger? Well to start with, there is really only one thing to do, which is to read a book in order to better grasp the dimensions of the Syrian situation and the various policy options that are suggested by many different actors. It is a perilous enterprise to publish a book on Syria in the midst of such fast changing conditions, but I must note with admiration the small volume entitled *The Syria Dilemma* that was recently published by the Boston Review series of MIT Press, and edited by Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, respectively the director

and assistant director of the new Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver.

This book offers a very useful and credible variety of 21 short essays, many of which were originally columns while others originated at a conference on Syria that was held at the university earlier this year. The variety of texts by Syrian and international writers (including Shadi Hamid, Asli Bali, Aziz Rana, Richard Falk, Radwan Ziadeh, Kenneth Roth, Rafif Jouejati, Vali Nasr, Christopher Hill, Marc Lynch, Afra Jalabi and others) aptly captures the lack of easy answers as to what should be done in Syria by the many local and foreign actors there.

In their introduction, the co-editors say they aim to assemble “what we consider the most thoughtful perspectives” on possible courses of action in the Syrian crisis, where “morally serious people disagree over what should be done.” They offer essays to support the fact that Syrians and Arabs, and also Western liberals and neo-conservatives, disagree on the best response to developments in and around Syria, including about international humanitarian or security interventions, arming Islamist rebels, negotiating a transition to a new political system in the country and other related matters that remain both confounding and compelling.

“This book is by no means the final word on the ethical dilemma that Syria poses, but it is an invitation to critical engagement with that dilemma,” the editors note. If you wonder what can or should be done about the war in Syria, sitting down with this compact little book for a few hours is as good a starting point as I have encountered to date.

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Article 7.

New-Yorker

Lebanon and the Long Reach of Syria's Conflict

Dexter Filkins

November 20, 2013-- The suicide bombing of the Iranian Embassy in Beirut on Tuesday morning offered up the sort of grim tableau that is typical of such affairs: blackened bodies, wailing survivors, and, in seeming defiance of physical laws, the visible remains of one of the bombers, stuck to a nearby wall. But the most significant aspect of the bombing was not its aftermath but its implication: the sectarian war unfolding in Syria is beginning to engulf Lebanon as well. We don't yet know who carried out the attack, which took place in the largely Shiite neighborhood of Bir Hassan. The Iranian Ambassador, who survived, blamed the Israelis. A jihadi group known as the Abdullah Azaam Brigade claimed responsibility, according to a Lebanese press report. A leader of Hezbollah, the Lebanese armed group, blamed takfiris—Muslims who accuse other Muslims of apostasy. The best bet is that the attack was carried out by a group close to the Syrian rebels, who are trying to

topple the government of Bashar al-Assad. In the two and a half years since the rebellion began, the war in Syria has become an almost entirely sectarian struggle. On one side sits the Assad government, dominated by Alawites, who consider themselves Shiites. Arrayed against them (and Syria's other minorities) is the vast majority of Syria's population, which is Sunni Muslim. It's a death match; the Alawites rightly fear that if they lose the war they will probably vanish from Syria altogether. Only a year ago, Assad's government appeared to be on the verge of collapse. The rebels were gaining ground across the country. The Sunni-led states in the region, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey, were funnelling arms to the rebels. And then, at the last possible moment, the Iranian regime launched a dramatic rescue mission. The number of Iranian cargo planes flying into Damascus jumped steeply, carrying guns, ammunition, and, crucially, men. Hundreds, possibly even thousands, of members of the Quds Force, the external branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, fanned out across Syria, offering battlefield advice and helping to monitor rebel communications. Quds Force officers set up a command post in Damascus and largely took over the direction of the war. ([I wrote about the role of the Quds Force in Syria in a recent piece.](#)) The Iranian regime, despite the severe economic pain being inflicted on them by Western sanctions, extended the Assad regime a loan of seven billion dollars. At the same time, the Iranians called on their protégés next door, in Lebanon: as many as two thousand Hezbollah fighters crossed the border to engage in direct combat with the rebels. For the Iranians, the motivation was simple: they have spent thirty years trying to insure that they are surrounded by friends. "If we lose Syria," one Iranian cleric said earlier this year, "we cannot keep Tehran." The Iranian intervention proved

decisive. The Assad regime has regained the initiative. It is no longer losing territory; it still controls Damascus, most of Aleppo, and the highways leading to the Alawite strongholds on the Mediterranean coast. For the Iranians, this has come at a cost: at least seven Iranian officers have been killed in Syria, including two generals. One of them, Hassan Shateri, had been in charge of Quds Force operations in Lebanon. Indeed, according to Western security officials, most of the Iranians in the embassy in Beirut are members of the Quds Force. Lebanon has always been an arena for confrontations between the region's more powerful regimes. The Lebanese civil war, which ended in 1990, after fifteen years, pulled in the Syrian, Israeli, and even American militaries. (It's no small irony that the suicide attacks on the American Embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, which killed more than two hundred and fifty people, were orchestrated with Iranian help.) In more ways than one, Lebanon is the Middle East's playground.

Since Lebanon's civil war ended, the peace has held because the country's main confessional groups—the Sunnis, the Shiites, and the Christians—have been very careful not to grab too much power. It's a delicate balance, and now the war in Syria is overwhelming it. When Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah—the vanguard of the Shiites—looks to the east, he sees an ocean of angry Sunnis. Without Assad in Damascus—the critical link in the Iranian supply line—Hezbollah could be doomed. Hence Nasrallah's decision to send his fighters across the border. The day before the Embassy bombing, Nasrallah reaffirmed his commitment to Assad. "As long as there are reasons for us to stay in Syria, we will stay there," he said. For months, Syrian rebels have been

vowing to take revenge on Hezbollah and their Iranian benefactors. It's a good bet that on Tuesday they did. The longer the war in Syria goes on, the stronger the sectarian calculus in Lebanon will become. Last year, I spent a couple of days tagging along with a mid-level Hezbollah fighter. The fighter, who went by the name of Dani, refused to acknowledge that Hezbollah was sending fighters into Syria, even though it was an open secret. But he was unashamed to show his support for Assad, or to contemplate the consequences that support might have for his own country. "If the Sunnis take over Syria," Dani said, "we're going to be fighting them in Beirut." It seems that fight has already begun.

Before coming to The New Yorker, Filkins had been with the New York Times since 2000, reporting from Afghanistan, Pakistan, New York, and Iraq, where he was based from 2003 to 2006.

[Article 8.](#)

Wall Street Journal

Enabling Bashar

Editorial

Nov. 19, 2013 -- The polls have not been kind to [Barack Obama](#) lately, but the President seems to think he's pulled off at least

one improbable policy triumph this fall: disarming Syria's Bashar Assad of his chemical weapons. It's an overstated victory that comes at an underappreciated price.

Overstated, because even as Damascus makes a show of handing over its entire chemical arsenal for destruction, U.S. intelligence believes the regime continues to hide weapons from international inspectors. Even if Assad is handing over the entire arsenal, he can always purchase new stocks of these weapons from North Korea, which maintains a robust chemical weapons complex. All he needs to do is hold on to power.

He's succeeding. With the help of Hezbollah and Iran, Assad's forces have recaptured two towns and a military base near Aleppo, Syria's commercial capital, along with key suburbs of Damascus that had long been in rebel hands. The tide of battle has shifted before in this war and may shift again, but the chances of Assad falling from power are increasingly remote.

Especially now that the Administration is invested in Assad's survival. So long as the goal of American policy in Syria is to divest the regime of its chemical weapons—rather than to divest the country of its regime—it will need Assad to remain in power to hand those weapons over. That gives Assad an incentive to prolong the "disarmament" process as long as he can while his forces make gains against the rebels.

Though it won't say it publicly, the Administration thinks that's not such a bad thing, on the view that Assad's survival may not be the worst scenario for Syria. More than a few Republicans agree. But as we've noted from the start of this war, Assad's victory would also be Iran's, and it is Tehran that is our major

adversary in the region. A credible U.S. policy would aim to inflict a strategic defeat on the mullahs, not that credibility is this Administration's strong suit.

In the meantime, note that the most lethal WMD in Syria today is Bashar Assad himself. If Mr. Obama were serious about stopping the killing in Syria he would not make a partner of the principal killer.