

**From:** Office of Terje Rod-Larsen  
**Sent:** Thur 9/26/2013 1:04:52 PM  
**Subject:** September 26 update

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Article 1.

The Washington Post

## **Rouhani sees a nuclear deal in 3 months**

David Ignatius

September 25, 2013 -- The U.S.-Iranian diplomatic train is rolling fast, with President Hassan Rouhani talking Wednesday about a three-month timetable for a nuclear deal. But Rouhani was also cautiously insistent about staying on the single track of the nuclear issue — perhaps fearing that if this becomes a runaway, it will derail.

It was a careful Rouhani who sat down for a one-on-one interview, following a lengthy session with several dozen

journalists and news executives. He appeared wary of using chits he may need in the negotiations or of complicating the diplomacy by raising issues of normalization, such as reopening embassies in Tehran and Washington.

Rouhani, wearing a white turban and his clerical robes, spoke slowly and deliberately; although he's fluent in English, he used a translator. As in other recent interviews, he wanted to show a new, moderate Iranian face — speaking at length with the larger group of journalists, for example, of the “crimes” the Nazis committed against the Jews.

This is a man who wants to “make haste slowly,” as the Latin aphorism puts it. Here are some highlights from the interview:

- Rouhani stressed that he is “fully empowered to finalize the nuclear talks” by Iran’s supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, a claim confirmed by Western intelligence reports. Analysts say Khamenei was surprised and rebuffed by the popular wave of support for Rouhani’s moderate policies and has given him a chance to cut a deal.
- The Iranian president wants to move very quickly to resolve the nuclear issue, through negotiations. Rouhani said his “choice” would be a three-month timetable, and that six months would still be “good,” but this should be a matter of “months, not years.” The speedy timeline may reflect the pressure of sanctions on the Iranian economy or Rouhani’s fear of a political backlash from conservative rivals. Whatever the reason, the time is short.
- Rouhani said he was prepared to offer extensive “transparency” measures to reassure the West that Iran doesn’t

intend to build a bomb. He likened these measures to what Iran allowed from 2003 to 2005, when he was the country's chief negotiator, including acceptance of intrusive "additional protocols" from the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as inspections to assess what the IAEA calls "possible military dimensions."

- He didn't discuss the level of uranium enrichment that Iran would adopt as part of a deal. But a knowledgeable Iranian source said this week that he might be willing to cap enrichment at 5 percent and limit Iran's stockpile of enriched material; those moves would seek to address U.S. and Israeli worries about a future "breakout" capability.

- Rouhani said Iran wants to join a new round of Geneva negotiations for a political transition in Syria so long as there are no preconditions on Iranian participation. The Obama administration has tentatively decided to offer Iran a seat at these talks, reasoning that a stable political transition would be impossible if the Iranians weren't a co-guarantor. He said that, in terms of a future government in Damascus, Iran would let Syrians decide at the ballot box; that's the standard Iranian formula.

- He stressed his desire to first resolve the nuclear issue, where he has the most expertise and authority from Khamenei. After that, he said, the United States and Iran can discuss broader issues of normalization. "Once the nuclear file is settled, we can turn to other issues," he said. "We need a beginning point."

One of the most intriguing exchanges came when I asked Rouhani about his campaign statements that he wanted to reduce

the power of security agencies such as the Revolutionary Guard Corps. He reaffirmed this goal of broadening cultural and social life and “diluting the security dimensions of society.” As for the Guard Corps, he said, “it shouldn’t get itself involved in any political groupings or activities,” echoing a similar statement a week ago by Khamenei. This is important because any real diplomatic breakthrough will be impossible unless Khamenei checks the Guard Corps’ power.

I asked Rouhani what he would have said if he had met with President Obama this week, as the United States had wanted. He offered a blandly upbeat statement that “we would have talked about opportunities and hopes.” But surely he avoided the Obama meeting because he knows he has limited time and scope and doesn’t want to make an early, over-enthusiastic mistake.

Article 2.

Chatham House

## **Obama's Off-Balance Foreign Policy**

Robin Niblett

September 25, 2013 -- The defining feature of President Barack Obama's foreign policy has been the so-called 'pivot': his attempt to rebalance US resources and focus from the Middle East to the Asia Pacific. However, the gyrations in America's diplomacy over Syria in recent months risk undermining the

administration's strategy.

Questions about America's willingness to carry the burdens of deterrence in one region will inevitably affect the other.

President Obama's prevarications over how to respond to the 21 August chemical attack in Damascus have given cause for some to doubt the clarity of his red line against the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran. If doubts grow among US allies in Asia about America's willingness to project military force, the United States could see its influence undermined in both regions.

Turning back to the Middle East

President Obama's handling of the Syria crisis would appear to confirm his commitment to the pivot. He has done all he can to avoid entangling the US in direct military conflict with Bashar al-Assad, including turning to Congress for authorization to uphold his own red line against the regime's use of chemical weapons.

But there are two ways in which the handling of Syria may undercut Obama's pivot to Asia. First, the Middle East will now take up a large amount of the administration's limited stock of foreign policy attention. US allies in Asia worry increasingly whether the administration will have the time and energy to follow through on its promised rebalancing to the region. Dealing with Syria, preventing a spillover of its civil war into its neighbourhood, and trying to leverage the attendant opportunities to make progress on Iran's nuclear programme are likely to suck the oxygen out of other major US foreign policy initiatives for the next year or two. It remains unclear whether Secretary Kerry's efforts to broker an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal will be a victim or beneficiary of this renewed US focus on the Middle East.

The administration is likely to continue to rebalance its naval presence eastwards, strengthen its diplomatic presence in Asian institutions, and deepen its commercial relationships in the region, including through the Trans-Pacific Partnership. But the credibility of the American pivot does not rest on these initiatives alone. The second spillover from the US handling of Syria is the way in which this chaotic process has led decision-makers in Manila, Seoul and Tokyo to question whether the United States will have the political will to back up its commitments to their security.

### Testing the credibility of the US pivot

China's military modernization continues apace. Its official defence budget grew by 10.7% in 2013 to some \$116 billion, dwarfing defence spending by other states in the region. Admittedly, a large portion of this spending, perhaps up to 50%, is applied to internal security. However, much of the remainder is focused on its ambitions for the region. In the latest sign of its growing regional assertiveness, Chinese naval forces have chosen this moment of US distraction to underscore Beijing's claim to the contested Scarborough Shoals, which lie some 200 kilometres off the coast of the Philippines.

If China's territorial disputes with many of its neighbours over its 'nine-dash line' in the South China Sea escalate into a more explicit stand-off, can US policy-makers and voters be trusted to deploy their military forces to stand behind their distant allies in the Asia-Pacific region? Or will the administration and US Congress be more selective and hesitant before committing its political and military muscle to protect its allies' interests? Will the importance of sustaining the US-China relationship trump

the concerns of smaller US allies, much as the desire to accommodate Russian concerns has been seen as influencing US diplomacy in Syria? These are the concerns which increasingly occupy America's Asian allies.

### Selective US leadership carries consequences

There are valid reasons for the president's hesitancy over Syria. And, by hesitating, a possible path has opened to a negotiated solution to this bloody conflict. Ironically, a decisive US military response to Syria may have reassured US allies in Asia of the credibility of America's deterrent in their region, but also deepened the US entanglement in the Middle East that the pivot was supposed to counter. In the end, however, the president's hesitation and ambivalence reflects a broader frustration among US policy-makers and voters about serving as the world's policeman. Leaders from Cairo to Riyadh already feel that they need to look out more for their own security and are acting accordingly. Some US allies and friends in Asia may arrive at a similar conclusion and hedge their bets by being more accommodating to Chinese interests.

Being selective about US political leadership in the Middle East, while trying to be more strategic in its application in Asia, will be supremely difficult for the Obama administration. US actions over Syria during the coming months will have repercussions not only for its reputation and influence in the Middle East. It will also affect the credibility of America's re-balancing towards the Asia-Pacific region. Under any circumstances, regaining the strategic momentum that the Obama administration set in train across Asia during its first term will be an uphill task.

*Dr. Robin Niblett is the Director of Chatham House.*

Article 3.

The Washington Post

## **Can Rouhani or Obama deliver on any deal?**

Fareed Zakaria

September 25, 2013 -- Hassan Rouhani presents himself as a striking contrast with his predecessor. For the past several years, the president of Iran has held a breakfast meeting with a small group of journalists during the opening of the U.N. General Assembly. In recent years, the event had become a depressing routine. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — dressed in his trademark shabby suit — would saunter in, ramble and rant about the dangers of U.S. hegemony, deny the Holocaust and taunt his invited guests. (By the end of his tenure, there was one change; his suits got nicer.) Rouhani, by contrast, arrived punctually, elegantly attired in flowing clerical robes, and spoke intelligently and precisely about every topic discussed. His only peroration was against “Iranophobia”; he implored the media to visit Iran and present the real picture of his country to the world.

“The nuclear issue can be resolved in a very short time,” Rouhani said, showing a surprising degree of optimism about an issue that has proved extremely difficult. “The world wants to be

assured that our program is peaceful, and we want to help them gain that confidence.” (The meeting was off the record, but he allowed a few of his answers to be made public.) The economic sanctions against Iran have taken a heavy toll. Rouhani spoke forcefully about the damage to ordinary Iranians — denying people food and medicine. He suggested that both the United States and Iran have made miscalculations but said that was in the past. He was hopeful about better relations.

I came away willing to believe that Rouhani is a pragmatist. (“Moderate” is a misleading term for the head of a quasi-theocratic regime.) He wants to end his country’s isolation. But it remains unclear whether he has the authority to act on behalf of his government. Consider what happened Tuesday, when the Iranians turned down a White House offer of a brief meeting with President Obama. Rouhani explained that he had no problem “in principle” with the handshake but said that this was a “sensitive issue” and that it would have been the first such meeting in 35 years, so steps have to be taken with proper preparation. One has to wonder: If Rouhani does not have the freedom to shake Obama’s hand, does he have the freedom to negotiate a nuclear deal?

The Tehran government has another side, made up of the Revolutionary Guard Corps, the special force whose political influence has grown over the past decade. These people are hawkish on all foreign-policy issues. They also profit from the sanctions because their businesses have become the only path for trade and smuggling. Perhaps the most encouraging news from Iran in the past two weeks was that its supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, publicly addressed the Guard and said its role was in national defense, not “policy.”

U.S. doubts about Rouhani's power can be addressed only over time and through Iranian actions. But Iranians probably also have doubts — about Obama's power. After all, the new Iranian president appears willing to cooperate on the nuclear issue in return for a relaxing of the sanctions crippling his country. But can Obama provide any such relief?

Iran has dozens of layers of sanctions arrayed against it. Some are based on U.N. Security Council resolutions, others are decisions by the European Union, others are acts of Congress and still others are executive orders by the U.S. president. Obama can unilaterally lift only the last, which are the least burdensome. The most onerous by far are the sanctions passed through acts of Congress, and those will be the most difficult to lift.

In theory, it's possible to devise a rational process that requires concrete actions from Iran, verifiable checks by inspectors and then a reciprocal easing of sanctions by the United States. But that would require Congress to behave in a rational manner — which is a fantasy today. The most likely scenario is that any agreement with Iran — almost regardless of its content — would instantly be denounced by Republicans as selling out. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) has already gathered 10 other senators who insist that, unless Iran dismantles most of its civilian nuclear program and becomes a liberal democracy, none of the sanctions can be eased.

The Obama administration is conscious of the other side of American government. Much of the macho rhetoric emanating from the administration about Iran has seemed designed to inoculate it from charges of being soft. The reality is that it

remains unclear whether Iran can say yes to a nuclear deal — and equally unclear whether the United States could. Rouhani and Obama are probably each looking at the other and thinking the same thing: Can he deliver?

Article 4.

Financial Times

## **The Domestic Politics Driving Iran's Diplomatic Shift**

Ray Takeyh

September 25, 2013 -- The public relations rollout of Hassan Rouhani can best be compared to the unveiling of a new iPhone by the late Steve Jobs. The Iranian president is placed at the centre of a media frenzy, with scores of interviews, receptions where the global elite can mingle with the latest curiosity from Tehran and, finally, a speech at a high-profile gathering.

But Mr Rouhani's success abroad does not mitigate his problems at home. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader who holds the ultimate authority in the Islamic Republic, and his aggrieved Revolutionary Guard are wary of the new president. It is the domestic manoeuvres of these three parties that is likely to define the terms and limits of Mr Rouhani's diplomacy – particularly regarding Iran's nuclear programme.

Shortly after the president was elected, the powerful Revolutionary Guard subtly conveyed its view. An article appeared on a website close to the elite corps suggesting that it would confront "an emphasis on negotiating with America . . . and satisfying Europe and the White House".

It has long been known that the Guard oversees Iran's nuclear infrastructure and has a vested interest in the programme's survival. It was during Mr Rouhani's tenure from 2003 to 2005 as the nuclear negotiator that the programme was suspended, causing much resentment among those scenting the power of atomic weapons. Mr Rouhani's appointment of Ali Shamkhani – a longtime guardsman and an advocate of Iran's nuclear surge – as head of the Supreme National Security Council must have calmed nerves. The programme remains firmly with the SNSC despite official claims it has been transferred to the foreign ministry. Mr Shamkhani will devise the strategy while Mohammad Javad Zarif, the urbane, thoughtful foreign minister, will present it at any international talks.

Events since the election have been particularly kind to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The supreme leader's foremost objectives are preservation of the regime's revolutionary identity and ensuring that resistance to the west remains the main pillar of his republic. Before Mr Rouhani took office, Mr Khamenei was saddled with a fractured elite and an unsympathetic international community. All this has now changed; the Islamic Republic has now cobbled together a domestic political consensus, and its president is being praised at home and abroad.

Mr Khamenei is likely to offer Mr Rouhani an opportunity to

craft a nuclear settlement, but the terms have to be acceptable to the ever suspicious supreme leader and his Revolutionary Guard. Should the president succeed, commerce and contracts will return to Iran, ensuring the survival of the regime. Should he fail, a unified elite will try to persuade the Iranian populace that the cause of their hardship is American truculence. Putting aside the bickering and back-stabbing that has characterised Iran's politics in the past eight years, the Islamic Republic will try to fracture the international consensus on its nuclear programme. Either way, Mr Khamenei wins.

Given his domestic constraints, Mr Rouhani has launched an apparently clever strategy. If the mission of Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad, his predecessor, was dramatically to expand Iran's nuclear apparatus, Mr Rouhani's task is to gain international – particularly American – acknowledgment of that programme. He appreciates that the unwise and incendiary rhetoric of Mr Ahmadi-Nejad did much to mobilise the great powers against the republic's nuclear ambitions. In his maiden speech at the UN, Mr Rouhani stuck to the themes of opposing violence and favouring negotiations.

By changing the style and tone of its diplomacy in this way, Tehran can offer itself as a stable power and so legitimise its nuclear programme. By condemning the chemical weapons attacks in Syria as opposed to suggesting that the evidence was fabricated by Washington and Jerusalem, and by calling for nuclear transparency as opposed to denouncing the inspectors as spies of a mendacious west, Mr Rouhani can present Iran as a regional stakeholder not just a violent spoiler. Should perceptions of Iran change, then perhaps its nuclear programme can seem less menacing.

In the next few weeks, in a variety of conclaves and conferences, Iranian and western diplomats will test each other. It remains to be seen whether the international community will be comfortable with the new Iran retaining its nuclear plants. It seems implausible that Mr Rouhani can escape the noose of the sanctions without offering some measurable concessions on the scope and scale of the growing nuclear programme. Still, it may come to pass that he will be given allowances and reprieves not offered to his impetuous predecessor.

Hovering over all this, will be Iran's most consequential decision maker, assessing his latest protégé and determining the scope of his authority.

*Ray Takeyh, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.*

[Article 5.](#)

Foreign Policy

## **Why modest thaw in U.S.-Iranian relations could change everything**

[David Rothkopf](#)

September 25, 2013 -- Handshake or no handshake, Hasan

Rouhani owes Barack Obama a debt of gratitude. That is because Rouhani is the president of the Iran that American sanctions made happen. After listening to him field questions from American media luminaries (and some not-so-luminous types like myself) for over an hour this morning, it was striking that, as the meeting closed, the biggest question of all remained the one posed by his very presence, his tenor, and the message he sought to deliver: What kind of change does he represent from the intemperate, combative, rogue Iran of the Ahmadinejad years? Rouhani is no transformational figure ... at least not yet. He is a self-defined moderate and what he has done during his months in office, hype aside, is to focus somewhat on adjusting the tone typically offered by his cartoonish predecessor. The political North Star in Iran remains the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He sets the direction for the country and determines precisely how much leash each president will be given. Nonetheless, while Iran is far from a democracy it is a country that contains potent democratic forces. In the last election the country's voters sent a clear message that among the carefully selected candidates the ruling clerics allowed to appear on the ballot, the one voters wanted was the one who had the most chance to repair relations with the outside world as well as end the sanctions that were crushing their economy and making millions of Iranians' lives miserable. While the mostly off-the-record exchange with Rouhani focused on headline issues -- like why there wasn't a meeting between Obama and Rouhani here in New York or what the next step would be with regard to the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the world, or whether or not the new Iranian president really accepted the existence of the Holocaust -- the subtext throughout was that the newly elected head of state had a strong desire to do what he could to restore

relations between Iran and the world in order to open up his country to more commerce and spark some degree of economic recovery. To the extent there has been an Iranian charm offensive here at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meetings it might be characterized as "smiling for dollars." Of course, the secret to getting the economy going again is lifting the international sanctions associated with stopping Iran's nuclear weapons program -- a program Rouhani (like his predecessor) still unconvincingly asserts does not exist. When Rouhani noted that it was the White House that reached out to Iran to stage a possible grip-and-grin moment between Obama and Rouhani, he added that there wasn't enough time to develop a plan for a follow-on to the discussion. (That will be the work of Secretary of State John Kerry and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif when they meet later this week.) But rest assured the plan Iran wants is one that will measure progress in steps to ease the relentless economic pressure the Obama team has put on the Iranians since they took office in 2008. On another front, while Rouhani's discussion of Syria and other issues at UNGA was off the record, it did underscore a growing sense I've gotten from talking with regional leaders and representatives of governments actively engaged in Syria this week that, as improbable as a deal between the United States and Iran may be, the thinking of key parties has evolved in interesting ways. While formulations change depending on who you talk to, Bashar al-Assad's friends may well be preparing to throw him under the bus -- with the enthusiastic support of the rest of the international community. Some characterize this as leaving the big decisions about the future of Syrian leadership to the ballot box. One pro-Western regional leader suggested that in the wake of a Geneva deal and a political settlement, Assad

would go but that the Russians could help orchestrate picking a new Alawite face to replace him. In each of my many conversations on the subject, the punch line was the same: no one seems to be making keeping Assad a critical element of a deal. It seems as though he may have gained a momentary respite as a consequence of the current negotiations, but if -- as those involved hope -- those negotiations lead away from "a chemical weapons deal to a Geneva deal to elections" they will also lead to his departure. As far as the Russians are concerned, this end result may be tolerable provided they can also count on his successor to be a friend in Damascus. If Assad recognizes this, of course, it may make him less inclined to be serious about negotiations and more inclined to play them out or even delay them, to buy him some time. (For what, I am not sure. This cannot end well for him unless he considers it a victory to spend his life ping-ponging around in exile like Baby Doc Duvalier and other similar ne'er-do-wells.) Predicting Assad's motivations moving forward is just one of the many, many challenges associated with the Syria crisis that makes any deal ultimately look tough -- from the number of combatants to the fact that this is not a zero-sum for Syria's president alone. As quid pro quo for Assad's ultimate ouster, it also seems reasonable to expect, based on UNGA corridor buzz, that the Russians, Iranians, and others will demand that al Qaeda, jihadist group Jabhat al-Nusrah, and other Sunni Islamic extremists who have flowed into Syria since the war began, depart the country as well. This in turn further complicates matters. Because in the eyes of respected long-time regional leaders with good relations with the West, six to 12 more months of fighting may see the strength of the extremists rise to a point where they cannot effectively be defeated. Intervening against them when they were weak -- 18 months or a

year ago -- would have given us a much greater chance of success. Now, with each week that passes, they grow stronger. This is one reason why the calls for the United States to much more actively push back on Turkish and Qatari support for the extremists have grown so urgent. There is a real sense that the president of the United States has a critical behind-the-scenes role to play here but that it is one he has shirked. (One leader suggested that the White House itself seemed clearly split on this issue even today.)

It is here that we see that Obama and Rouhani are not just connected by their missed photo op or by the fact that it was Obama's tough sanctions that helped create the conditions for Rouhani's election. Both leaders also illustrate the profound effects modest shifts made by key players who are being driven by domestic politics can have on Mideast regional dynamics. Hasan Rouhani is not the antithesis of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He is not a radical departure from a radical voice. He is modulating the message of a society whose true political power center has hardly changed its position in decades. He is a new face but mostly he is a nuance. The same might be said of Obama. He has, as many have noted, supported many Bush policies, actually turned up the volume of drone, special ops and cyber activity, turned up the pressure via sanctions, and maintained the traditional U.S. ties with Israel, etc. Even his decision to leave Iraq and Afghanistan is one that had its origins in the Bush years. No, in fairness, Obama isn't a transformational figure either, so much as he is making modest changes, leaning back slightly where his predecessor once leaned in further. He will still reserve the right to strike at Iran's nuclear programs if nothing else works and to strike at Syria if

chemical weapons talks fail. But the nuance is that he will hesitate more, act in a more limited way, and seek political cover at home and abroad more assiduously. The core policy remains the same -- the speed and degree to which he implements is all that will change. Except of course, as we have seen, such nuances make all the difference in the world. On the one hand they shift America from being viewed, depending on where you are sitting, as either a stalwart or a bully in the region, to being seen as disengaging, more hesitant, or less likely to act. It is a shift that has had high-level Israelis no longer wondering aloud whether Obama will act alongside them to strike Iran but rather whether he would even step in to support Israel the day after such an attack if the Iranians were about to strike them. This is not a moot point. While Iran and the United States shift slightly, some in the region defy even such adjustments and Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu seems to be one of them, warning Americans against falling into the "honey pot" of the Iranian charm offensive. And the Iranians, while their leader may now acknowledge the Holocaust (while coyly leaving open questions about its scope) and while he may send out Rosh Hashanah wishes or bring along the Iranian parliament's representative for the Jews of that country to press events (like he did today), it is clear that the official Iranian position is still to dispute and deny the legitimacy of the Israeli state.

The calculation that must be made now is what the consequences of these measured shifts by the leaders of the United States and Iran may mean. Even after all the media roundtables and hoopla, we are still left with many more questions than answers. Is there a greater opening for genuinely constructive talks on the Iranian nuclear program? On a lasting

political settlement for Syria? To what extent do these openings come primarily from newfound Iranian openness or from a strategically thought out American desire to engage rather than fight? Or do they come more from a momentary Iranian weakness brought about by economic stress or from the fact that the war-weary and war-wary American people and U.S. Congress have taken a lastingly more isolationist turn having said "enough" to the president? How will these changes, whether they come from relative strength or weakness, impact the outcomes that may be engineered or encountered? (It is my sense that the Iranians and the Russians may both be open to pursuing negotiations now, at least as much because they feel a United States that is "leaning away" may be open to a better deal as because of any U.S. saber-rattling re: Syria.) And finally, of course, there is the longer term question as to how all these changes may affect the broader calculus throughout a region in which a U.S.-Iranian hegemonic proxy war has been so central for so long that any U.S.-Iranian rapprochement would have profound implications for all the allies and enemies of each of the countries.

The primary conclusion I can draw from this week's meetings in New York and in particular from the postures of Obama and Rouhani -- these two presidents whose fates may be so intertwined -- is that lingering questions aside, the United States and Iran will both attempt to explore the current shift in mood because it is in the immediate interest of both countries and both leaders to do so. The problem for the United States is that slow, incremental progress alone would be a win-win for the Iranians -- buying them time to defuse their economic time bomb even as they also buy time to develop the capability to create bombs of a

much different sort. This is a potential trap that President Obama must avoid. His sanctions may have helped create this opening, but they are only half of a strategy. He must have an endgame, real resolve, healthy skepticism, and a hard timetable or the moment he helped engineer will be lost and fears of America's gradually shrinking influence in the region will be compounded.

*David Rothkopf is CEO and editor at large of Foreign Policy. He is the author of Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power.*

Article 6.

The National Interest

## **Time for a U.S. Middle East U-Turn**

Chris Luenen

September 26, 2013 -- While the U.S.-Russian agreement on Syria's chemical weapons is a positive development, the danger of an outside military intervention in Syria has not yet been averted, and the wider problem of how to bring to an end the Syrian civil war remains. In this context, given the continuing threat of a wider regional war in the Middle East, and mounting international tensions more generally, a review of the entire

Western policy towards the region is clearly in order.

In the wake of the chemical weapons attack on August 21 near Damascus, we have been told that the ‘international community’ cannot stand idly by in face of this monstrous atrocity and blatant disregard for international norms. In response to the attack, the United States, Britain, France, and others were quick to call for some kind of military response. What is far less clear is what any military intervention in Syria was meant to achieve in the first place, aside from, in the words of Giles Fraser writing in the Guardian, ‘satisfying our own sense of retributive morality, and one that has become blurred with a large dollop of action-hero crap.’ And even a limited military engagement would have carried significant risks.

So what are the roots and sources of all this mess?

Much of what has gone so terribly wrong in the Middle East, including in Syria, over the past few years must be attributed to the longstanding regional cold war between Saudi Arabia, the Sunni Arab Gulf states and Israel (and more recently also including Jordan, Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood) on the one hand, and Shiite Iran and its regional proxies on the other, as well as to the active support of this Sunni-Israeli axis by the United States and the West. This cold war has significantly heated up since the American overthrow of the Sunni-dominated Baath regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Together with the divisive and destabilising effects of the so-called Arab Spring and the rapid regional ascendancy of the Muslim Brotherhood, this ongoing conflict is now threatening to tear the entire region apart.

So given all the dangers associated with the conflict in Syria and the deterioration of the regional security environment more generally, a reappraisal of western policy in the Middle East as a whole might be in order. To be clear, the existing policy has indeed been rather coherent. Its core elements, as has already been alluded to, have been to support Israel, Turkey, and the Sunni Arab states in their regional contest with Iran, to break up the so-called Shiite crescent of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power. But why was this policy adopted in the first place? It appears that the desire to rollback Iran's regional influence and ultimately affect regime change in Iran among some circles in the United States and elsewhere is so great, for reasons that go well beyond Iran's refusal to cave in to western demands to abolish its nuclear program, that a policy towards the entire region has been fashioned on it.

One key factor behind this policy has been the increasing global competition between the United States as well as Russia and China, both close allies of Iran, and the faltering of U.S. global hegemony. Competing pipeline projects, the role of energy prices, the future of the petrodollar system, and ultimately even the continued international role of the dollar all play a role in this regard. Would sanctions as well as international pressure on Iran be lifted and Iran, supported by Russia and China, be allowed to pursue its intended pipeline projects in the Middle East and South Asia, this would provide Iran, and by extension Russia, with a huge strategic victory over the United States, shift the regional balance of power decisively in Iran's favour, and further increase Russia's stranglehold over European energy supplies, while simultaneously weakening OPEC and Saudi

Arabia's influence over international energy markets. On the other hand, this whole policy has been very detrimental to international security and in conjunction with other U.S. policies, while having allowed it to postpone, for now, the inevitable global economic and political readjustments that are clearly on the horizon, does not provide any long-term answers to the problems the United States and the West more generally are facing.

It is with the recognition that western policies in the Middle East are intrinsically linked to wider questions concerning the future of the West and world order that an alternative policy in the Middle East should be seriously considered. The core of such a policy would be a U.S. rapprochement with Iran and Russia and the construction of a new security architecture in the Middle East underwritten by the combined power of the United States, Russia, and the EU. Ideally, it would also involve a wider regional reconciliation, especially between Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran, or, alternatively, the fashioning of a new regional alliance centred on Iran, Turkey and Egypt to replace the Sunni-Israeli alliance of today.

Such a policy shift would have several benefits: First and foremost, close cooperation between the United States, Russia, and the EU, with the active involvement of regional powers like Iran, Turkey and Egypt (and hopefully involving Saudi Arabia and Israel) would allow for the geopolitical stabilisation of the Middle East, significantly reducing, if not ending, the threat of an otherwise increasingly likely regional conflagration. It would also be potent enough to contribute to the stabilisation of Iraq and Syria, press for a swift resolution of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to crack down and dismantle jihadist

and other terrorist groups across the region. In addition, an alliance between Iran, the United States and Russia in particular would have an unparalleled ability to stabilise Central Asia and the Caucasus, and perhaps with the help of India also of South Asia, and enable the implementation of much-needed pipeline and other energy infrastructure projects for the benefit of the respective regions, Europe and other net-energy importers as well as the world economy.

So instead of continuing the zero-sum New Great Game over control of the energy resources and transportation routes in what Brzezinski once called the “global Balkans”, the United States, EU, Russia and Iran could join hands in this endeavour. This would have the effect of simultaneously curtailing the ever-growing power of Gazprom while alleviating Russian fears of an American military encirclement and providing Europeans with much needed new sources of energy. It would also weaken China’s growing influence in these regions and undermine its aggressive efforts at striking bilateral energy deals with an increasingly growing number of producer states. The key question the United States and the European Union should ask themselves is whether they really want to continue their futile struggle against Russia and Iran, driving them ever more deeply into the arms of China and risking a degree of convergence between key Eurasian states that would make the British geostrategist Halford Mackinder turn in his grave; or whether they should not instead attempt to build a stronger and deeper Atlantic system by enlisting the help, as genuine partners, of Russia and Turkey as called for by Brzezinski in his latest book Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power, with the addition of Iran.

Such a reversal of policy, while not easy to implement and facing strong opposition, would help to reinvigorate the West and allow for the construction of a new and more stable core of the international system; i.e., an expanded and deepened transatlantic community, to which other emerging countries would once again feel compelled to gravitate. It would also do a lot more to keep globalisation going, guarantee the survival of an open global economy, and extend American power and influence well into the future than any desperate attempt to unilaterally save its 'empire' by increasingly divisive and ineffective policies. Offering the EU and Russia a genuine stake in a cooperative empire of sorts, in which it would nonetheless remain the single most important player, should certainly be preferable to the United States than the very real possibility of a more sudden and much more damaging, for itself and the world, collapse of its hegemony, which would simultaneously bring down the liberal international system with it. So instead of calling the deal struck between the Obama administration and the Russians on Syria's chemical weapons 'the worst day for U.S. and wider Western diplomacy since records began', as retired British ambassador Charles Crawford did, maybe it should be regarded as a positive first step towards a long overdue overhaul of the West's failed policy in the Middle East and a wider shift in policy that aims to reset relations with both Russia and Iran.

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City Journal

## **Vladimir Putin tries to keep former Soviet republics in Moscow's economic orbit**

Judith Miller

24 September 2013 -- Russia's trade war on Ukraine, aimed at stopping its neighbor from moving closer to the European Union, began in earnest last July not with a carrot, but with a chocolate bar. Peter Poroshenko, a Ukrainian parliamentarian who owns Roshen, the Hershey's of the Ukraine, was in his office when he read in the morning paper that Russia's chief food inspector was banning all chocolate imports to Russia from his factory.

“Russia's chief food inspector said that my chocolates contained carcinogens,” Poroshenko recalled in an interview this weekend in Yalta, where he was attending a conference sponsored by Ukrainian oligarch and philanthropist Victor Pinchuk. Moscow's ban applied only to Roshen's Ukrainian-made chocolates. The company's Russian-made chocolate products were safe, the inspector reported. Exempted, too, was Roshen chocolate made in Hungary and Lithuania. “Only chocolate from Ukraine was somehow mysteriously tainted with cancer-causing

agents,” said Poroshenko, whose factories employ some 20,000 people. His company, the world’s fifteenth-largest chocolate producer, gave Russian officials safety certificates from European purchasers and the U.N.’s main food agency, provided other studies documenting product safety, and urged Russian inspectors to visit the Ukrainian plant themselves to examine it, but the Russians did not respond. “This is not about chocolate or health and safety,” Poroshenko said. “It’s all about politics.”

The politics are ugly, indeed. Russian president Vladimir Putin has been steadily strong-arming the former Soviet republics into shunning European and other Western associations and renewing their ties with Moscow. The U.S. ambassador in Kiev and American diplomats in the region have publicly endorsed closer ties between Ukraine, the E.U., and the West. But senior Obama administration officials in Washington, still hoping for an elusive “reset” of America’s rocky relations with Moscow and preoccupied with securing Russian cooperation on Syria and Iran, have seemed reluctant to denounce Putin’s campaign to restore political and economic dominance over the now-independent states that were once part of Russia’s empire.

Armenia, which became independent following the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, has also been feeling Moscow’s pressure. Like Ukraine, Armenia had been on the verge of signing an association agreement with the 28-member European Union, but it abruptly cancelled its plans to do so in September and announced that it would join Russia’s Eurasian Customs Union, which includes Belarus and Kazakhstan. At the Yalta conference, prominent political figures from multiple countries—including Bill and Hillary Clinton, Tony Blair, David Petraeus, Lawrence Summers, and the presidents of

Ukraine, Israel, and Lithuania—said that Armenian president Serge Sarkisian had abandoned plans to join forces with the E.U. after Russian officials threatened to increase arms shipments to Armenia’s rival and foe, Azerbaijan, with whom it has a longstanding territorial dispute. Russia has shipped an estimated \$1 billion worth of military equipment, including artillery and tanks, to the oil-rich, Muslim-majority nation.

Russia has also stepped up economic pressure on Moldova, which, like Ukraine, remains heavily reliant on Russian gas. The BBC reported in September that Dmitry Rogozin, a senior Russian envoy, recently reminded Moldovans that “energy supplies are important in the run-up to winter. I hope you won’t freeze.” But so far, Moldova’s president, Nicolae Timofti, seems determined to sign up with the E.U. and move his country closer to the West, despite Russian sanctions and warnings. Moldova, he said, “cannot live under pressure or threats.”

Ukraine has been experiencing similar economic bullying. While the latest chapter in Russia’s campaign began with chocolate, Ukrainian exports of agriculture, dairy, and meat products have also been blocked on alleged sanitary grounds, and exports of steel pipes and heavy industrial products have been affected as well. Diplomats and experts on Ukraine predict that Russian political and economic pressure will rise sharply in coming weeks on Ukraine and other former Soviet states contemplating signing the association accords. Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia are scheduled to sign these agreements at an E.U. summit in Vilnius, Lithuania in late November. The agreements cover not only trade, but also requirements for greater government transparency and political reform. The agreements would put the states on the path to full E.U.

membership, a prospect that has infuriated Russia. Though Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich has already instituted reforms required by the E.U., the roughly 1,000-page association agreements would commit his country—in which Soviet-style bureaucracy, security, and political traditions have deep roots—to pursue even more extensive economic, judicial, and political changes.

At Yalta, some European leaders expressed doubt that Ukraine has reformed sufficiently to qualify for E.U. associate membership. Some officials criticized the country's deeply entrenched public corruption and often flagrant violations of human rights and the rule of law. For instance, European leaders have insisted that Yulia Tymoshenko, a former prime minister found guilty of corruption in 2011 and sentenced to seven years in jail, be released prior to any association deal. Tymoshenko was convicted of abusing her office by signing a costly gas deal with Russia in 2009. Known colloquially as the “gas princess,” she is said to suffer from a debilitating back injury. Several opposition leaders and Western officials predicted that Yanukovich would agree to release her so that she can seek medical treatment outside of the country. But the Ukrainian president, who confronted angry opposition critics at the Yalta conference, did not tip his hand on her political fate or on whether he intends to sign the association agreement. He comes from eastern Ukraine, where support for a close relationship with Russia is strongest.

Sergey Glaziev, a key Putin advisor who has called Ukraine's planned association agreement with the E.U. “suicidal,” warned the 46 million Ukrainians this weekend that they would suffer economically if they spurned Russia's customs union in favor of

closer ties with the E.U. and the West. Would the E.U. bail out Ukraine should it default on its debt? he asked. Glaziev, the only senior Russian official to attend the conference, warned that Russia's and Ukraine's economies were deeply intertwined. Ukraine's economic condition is indeed precarious. The nation's public debt, \$69 billion, represents 38 percent of expected GDP, and the government was unable or unwilling to carry out its reform pledges to the International Monetary Fund. The Ukraine economy contracted by roughly 1–2.5 percent in the last four quarters. Reserves of foreign currency have dropped sharply; in August, they covered just 2.7 months of imports, a financial vulnerability that Russia has shrewdly exploited.

But Anders Aslund, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute, offered a more optimistic picture, pointing out that the E.U. and Russia were now equally important to Ukraine as export markets. In 2012, Ukraine sold one-quarter of its exports to Russia and a roughly equal share to the E.U. Each market accounted for about 30 percent of Ukraine's imports. Moreover, Aslund and other economists predict that Ukraine's imports of Russian gas will drop sharply in future years: Ukraine has signed or is expected to sign shale-gas exploration and production deals with Western energy giants Shell and Exxon Mobil.

So far, Russia's strong-arm tactics seem to have backfired. Pollsters say most Ukrainians, especially younger, better-educated citizens, have grown increasingly supportive of the E.U. association agreement as Putin steps up his offensive against it. Some feel the Russian president has insulted Ukraine's culture and identity. "I don't want a trade war with Russia," says Poroshenko, the chocolate king. "I want good

relations with Russia. But what Russia has done is an outrage.” Putin’s economic warfare has become an emotional issue for Ukrainians, he added. The Russian boycott has definitely reduced his company’s bottom line. “But ultimately,” he says, “Ukraine’s future is more important than my personal welfare.”

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[Article 8.](#)

Project Syndicate

## **Merkel in the Land of Smiles**

Joschka Fischer

24 September 2013 -- Germany’s elections are over. The winners and losers are clear, and the political landscape has changed profoundly. The real drama, however, occurred not among the country’s main parties but on the boundaries of the political spectrum.

Chancellor Angela Merkel is celebrating a landslide victory, with her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) having fallen just short of an outright parliamentary majority. But the scale of her triumph is mainly due to the collapse of her liberal coalition

partner, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), which for the first time in the German Federal Republic's history will not be represented in the Bundestag.

The liberals have always formed a key part of German postwar democracy; now they are gone. Responsibility for that lies, first and foremost, with the FDP. No governing party can afford such woefully incompetent ministers and leadership; Merkel had merely to stand back and watch the liberals' public suicide over the last four years.

The opposition parties, too, paid the price for their failure to come to grips with reality. The economy is humming, unemployment is low, and most Germans are better off than ever before. But, rather than focusing on the government's weaknesses – energy, Europe, education, and family policy – they bet their political fortunes on social justice. Merkel's Panglossian campaign was much more in tune with the sentiment of the German electorate than the opposing parties' tristesse about working-class distress, which was rightly seen as a ploy for raising taxes.

Governing majorities (and therefore elections) in Germany are always won in the center. Merkel's predecessor, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Gerhard Schröder, knew this well. But this time her opponents – the SPD, Die Linke (The Left), and the Greens – cleared the center and cannibalized each other on the left. The leadership issue made matters worse – the SPD's Peer Steinbrück and the Greens' Jürgen Trittin never had the slightest chance against Merkel and Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble.

The only new factor that could bring about a structural change in German politics is the rise of the new Alternative for Germany (AfD). Though its share of the popular vote fell just below the 5% threshold required to enter the Bundestag, the party performed surprisingly well. If its leadership can build on this success, the AfD will make news in next spring's European Parliament elections.

Indeed, the AfD scored well in eastern Germany – where three state elections will be held in 2014 – by gaining many votes from The Left. This implies that the AfD could establish itself on the German political landscape permanently, which would make a comeback for the FDP all the more difficult.

Still, despite the FDP's implosion and the opposition parties' disastrous electoral strategy, Merkel needs a coalition partner. The Left is not an option, and any attempt at building a coalition with the Greens – a party that will be reeling from the shock of its poor performance for quite some time – would court instability.

So Germany will be left with a grand coalition – just as the German electorate wanted. The SPD will recoil at the prospect, sit on the fence, and finally give in, because Merkel has a powerful disciplinary instrument: she could call a new election, in which the CDU would probably win an outright majority.

A grand coalition is not the worst option. Nothing fades as quickly as the glow of an election victory, and the German idyll will soon be disturbed by harsh reality – the European Union's simmering crisis, Syria, Iran, and energy policy.

The need for consensus is especially acute with respect to the

difficult decisions concerning Europe that the German government now faces. Greece needs more debt relief. A European banking union with joint liability cannot be put off much longer. The same is true of many other issues. A winter of discontent awaits Merkel, followed by a European election campaign that is likely to bring the CDU back down to earth.

But no one should expect a significant change in Merkel's EU policy or her approach to foreign affairs and security questions. Her positions on these issues have now been endorsed by a huge portion of the German electorate; and, from a certain age, most people – including those in high office – do not change easily. Besides, in these matters, there is no longer much difference between the center-right CDU and the center-left SPD.

A grand coalition could show greater flexibility in addressing the euro crisis, but less on questions of foreign and security policy. In this respect, however, Germany would gain much from the opportunity to craft a proper foreign policy in the framework of the EU and the Western alliance that in recent years has had a dangerous void where Germany used to be – though this is more a vague hope than a concrete expectation.

It will also be interesting to see if and how Merkel tackles Germany's muddled *Energiewende* (energy turnaround) – the move to a low-carbon economy that is the most important domestic project of her tenure. Either she will succeed with it, or it will become a monumental disgrace for Germany and a disaster for the German economy. The decisive questions now are whether she musters the courage to concentrate all the necessary responsibilities for this mega-project in the energy ministry, and whom she entrusts with overseeing this Herculean

task.

The late editor of the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, Rudolf Augstein, who never liked former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, titled his commentary about German reunification “Congratulations, Chancellor!” For Merkel, Sunday’s election has opened a door, especially with respect to overcoming the euro crisis and to deepening European integration. But, until she walks through it, I will refrain from congratulating her.

*Joschka Fischer was German Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor from 1998-2005, a term marked by Germany's strong support for NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999, followed by its opposition to the war in Iraq. Fischer entered electoral politics after participating in the anti-establishment protests of the 1960's and 1970's, and played a key role in founding Germany's Green Party, which he led for almost two decades.*