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The Weekly Standard

## **The Persian Gulf Power Vacuum**

Lee Smith

October 21 - Despite the administration's hype of President Obama's "historic" 15-minute phone call with the ostensibly moderate Iranian president Hassan Rouhani, the looming prospect of direct engagement with the regime in Tehran over its nuclear weapons program, and all the other symptoms of Rouhani fever gripping Washington, the White House says it won't be suckered by the Iranians. American allies aren't buying it.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu made his skepticism public in his speech before the U.N. General Assembly two weeks ago, when he argued that the way to deal with the Iranians and their nuclear program is to "distrust, dismantle, and verify." America's allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman—are playing it closer to their vests than the Israelis, sharing their grievances with the administration

in much less public settings. They are, after all, just across the Persian Gulf from Iran.

“There are no public statements from the GCC states detailing their position,” Tariq al-Homayed, a columnist for Asharq al-Awsat, the Saudi-owned London-based pan-Arab daily, told me. “GCC officials are all very diplomatic, but when you talk to some of them, they say it clearly. They see the administration’s approach to Iran in light of its confusing Syria policy. I asked one senior GCC official what he thought about Obama’s Syria policy and he responded, ‘What day is it today, what hour? Because in half an hour the White House will have another position.’ With Iran, they’re worried about the administration falling into the [Tehran] regime’s game, and they’re watching it very nervously.” The prospect that Obama is taking Khamenei’s supposed fatwa against nuclear weapons seriously is patently absurd to Iran’s Arab neighbors.

American allies in the Middle East do not trust the Obama administration, but, says Brookings Institution scholar Michael Doran, “they are restrained in expressing it openly. Their fear is that if they show publicly how much they distrust the White House, they are likely to get even less of what they want. So whatever criticism we are hearing publicly, raise that to the power of 10 and you get a sense of where our allies are.”

Behind the scenes, the GCC is preparing for the possibility that, after 70 years of dominance, America may be bowing out of the Persian Gulf. The Arabs, like many Israeli officials, now assume that the United States is withdrawing from the region, at least for the time being, and perhaps permanently. Some Gulf states are taking matters into their own hands. “The idea is that we did it

with Egypt,” explains Homayed, referring to the support and money the GCC states poured into Cairo after General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi overthrew Mohamed Morsi while the White House declined to stake out a position. “So why wait for Obama with Syria?” says Homayed.

Indeed, since taking over the Saudi National Security Council, Riyadh’s former ambassador to Washington Prince Bandar bin Sultan has been eager to assert Saudi interests. With the White House leaving a vacuum in Syria, Bandar has wrested control of the rebel forces from Qatar and lined up the UAE and Jordan as useful allies. This is precisely the sort of alliance building that, up until now, had been the role of the United States.

If some in the administration, including the president, believe that these are positive developments, that it’s high time the Arabs learned to pull their own weight, the reality is the Arabs know they can’t go it alone, and so should the White House. The GCC could manage Egypt, as Homayed says, and is making a go of it in Syria, but with Iran it needs the United States. Without Washington, the Arabs are looking to hedge their bets. For instance, sources say that Kuwait has socked away several billion dollars as a future gift to ingratiate itself with either Iran or Russia, depending on who winds up winning the regional sweepstakes now that the White House doesn’t want to play.

Even Bandar seems to understand that there is a limit to what the Arabs can do on their own. His much-publicized recent visit to Moscow, where he offered to buy \$15 billion worth of Russian arms if only Vladimir Putin would scale back his support for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, was meant largely to get Obama’s attention. The Saudis recognize that even if

Putin has managed to enhance his position at Obama's expense, he doesn't have the capacity, or the blue-water navy, to replace the United States. Moreover, with Russia helping advance Iranian interests in Syria, it is not likely to work against Tehran, and on behalf of Saudi interests, in the Persian Gulf.

The GCC states also recognize who else sees the region the way they do—Israel. When Netanyahu announced in his U.N. speech that if Israel has to stand alone to prevent a nuclear Iran, “we will be defending many, many -others,” he was referring to, among others, the GCC. Relations between Israel and the Gulf Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have never been warmer, with key, albeit unnamed, Arab officials reportedly visiting Jerusalem for high-level consultations on Iran. “Israel,” says Homayed, “is the most important player in the Middle East right now regarding Iran. They are capable of convincing Congress, and if anyone can convince Obama, it's Israel. They drew the red line on Iran, and that makes everyone in the region happy.”

This strategic convergence has been a long time in the making. Dore Gold, president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and Israel's former ambassador to the U.N., explains that Israel and GCC relations need to be seen in a larger context. “Going back to the late 1990s, Saudi Arabia was the primary funder of Hamas,” says Gold. “Thirty years earlier, Saudi Arabia had provided sanctuary for Muslim Brotherhood members fleeing from Egypt and Syria. But by 2005, Iran had replaced Saudi Arabia as the primary funder of Hamas, and leading members of the royal family, like Prince Nayef, repudiated the Muslim Brotherhood. This represented a huge shift in Saudi policy, which narrowed the degree of conflict it had with Israel.”

As the Iranian threat became even more apparent, Gold explains, Israeli and Arab interests further converged. “The GCC countries face a situation very similar to Israel,” says Gold, whose scholarly work has focused on Saudi Arabia. “Israel is encircled by Iranian-supported insurgencies—Hezbollah to the north, and Hamas to the south. In comparison, the GCC faces an Iranian-backed insurgency in Yemen, an Iranian-backed Shia government running Saudi Arabia’s northern neighbor Iraq, while Bahrain’s opposition is supported by Tehran, an arrangement that has implications for the Shia community in Saudi Arabia’s eastern province.”

The 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, says Gold, marked an important turning point. “While large parts of the Muslim Brotherhood fervently supported Hezbollah, the Gulf states were either silent or opposed to what Hezbollah was doing.”

If some wags joke that Obama’s legacy in the Middle East will be to have driven Israel and the GCC into each other’s arms, the reality is that it’s not clear how durable this relationship can be. After all, the much-heralded strategic alliance between Turkey and Israel that was forged in the ’90s on the basis of military and security ties proved more fragile than was hoped, crashed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s ambition to lead the region.

To be sure, as Homayed explains, “the Israeli position and Arab position is one—Iran cannot be allowed to have a nuclear weapon.” But it’s not clear what that means in practice. Even Homayed acknowledges that while Israel is the most important actor in the region right now, it still needs the White House on its side against Iran. Jerusalem’s significance, from his

perspective, is that only Israel has the ability to make its case to Congress and the president—like the Arabs, Israel can't do it alone.

“There are real limits to how far the GCC-Israel relationship can go,” says Doran, who was Middle East director in the George W. Bush White House. There are cultural limits as well as operational ones. “Saudi textbooks are filled with anti-Semitic material,” says Doran. “Whatever coordination that might exist must be clandestine because if it were in the open, Riyadh would come under attack regionally and domestically for making common cause with a people typically described as enemies of Islam.” Further, asks Doran, “what does cooperation look like? What can the Saudis give the Israelis that they don't have already?”

Aside from perhaps granting Israeli jets tacit overflight rights on their way to strike Iranian nuclear facilities, and maybe money for various clandestine projects, it's not obvious that the Saudis have anything Israel really needs. What Jerusalem wants above all, short of a U.S. strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, is the sort of political and diplomatic clout that only Washington can muster. However, by holding Rouhani in a close embrace as his partner in resolving the nuclear issue, Obama has effectively erected an antimissile defense system around Iran's nuclear facilities. If Netanyahu gives the order to go, Israel isn't just going without the United States, it's also undermining an Obama priority.

Sure, it would be a bonus to have quiet support from the GCC in the event of a strike. But what happens after that? These two American allies have been forced together by a reality that hasn't quite sunk in yet. A superpower they've counted on for

decades has gone missing, perhaps never to return.

*Lee Smith is a senior editor at The Weekly Standard.*

[Article 2.](#)

Asia Times

## **Fear and loathing in House of Saud**

Pepe Escobar

Oct 11, '13 -- Every sentient being with a functional brain perceives the possibility of ending the 34-year Wall of Mistrust between Washington and Tehran as a win-win situation.

Here are some of the benefits:

- \* The price of oil and gas from the Persian Gulf would go down;
- \* Washington and Tehran could enter a partnership to fight Salafi-jihadis (they already did, by the way, immediately after 9/11) as well as coordinate their policies in Afghanistan to keep the Taliban in check post-2014;
- \* Iran and the US share the same interests in Syria; both want no anarchy and no prospect of Islamic radicals having a shot at power. An ideal outcome would balance Iranian influence with a power-sharing agreement between the Bashar al-Assad

establishment and the sensible non-weaponized opposition (it does exist, but is at present marginalized);

\* With no more regime change rhetoric and no more sanctions, the sky is the limit for more trade, investment and energy options for the West, especially Europe (Iran is the best possible way for Europeans to soften their dependence on Russia's Gazprom);

\* A solution for the nuclear dossier would allow Iran to manage civilian use of nuclear energy as an alternative source for its industry, releasing more oil and gas for export;

\* Geopolitically, with Iran recognized for what it is - the key actor in Southwest Asia - the US could be released from its self-imposed strategic dogma of depending on the Israeli-Saudi axis. And Washington could even start pivoting to Asia for real - not exclusively via military means.

Ay, there's the rub. Everybody knows why the Israeli right will fight an US-Iran agreement like the plague - as Iran as an "existential threat" is the ideal pretext to change the debate from the real issue; the occupation/apartheid regime imposed on Palestine.

As for the House of Saud, such an agreement would be nothing short of Apocalypse Now.

I'm just a moderate killer

It starts with Syria. Everybody now knows that shadow master Bandar bin Sultan, aka Bandar Bush, has been fully in charge of the war on Syria since he was appointed Director of National Intelligence by his uncle, Saudi King Abdullah.

Bandar is taking no prisoners. First he eliminated Qatar - the major financier of the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA) - from the picture, after having a helping hand in Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad, deposing himself to the benefit of his son, Sheikh Tamin, in late June.

Then, in late July, Bandar spectacularly resurfaced in public during his now famous "secret" trip to Moscow to try to extort/bribe Russian President Vladimir Putin into abandoning Syria.

Notoriously, the House of Saud's "policy" on Syria is regime change, period. This is non-negotiable in terms of dealing a blow to those "apostates" in Tehran and imprinting Saudi will on Syria, Iraq, in fact the whole, mostly Sunni Levant.

In late September, the Jaish al-Islam ("Army of Islam") entered the picture. This is a "rebel" combo of up to 50 brigades, from supposedly "moderates" to hardcore Salafis, controlled by Liwa al-Islam, which used to be part of the FSA. The warlord in charge of Jaish al-Islam is Zahran Alloush - whose father, Abdullah, is a hardcore Salafi cleric in Saudi Arabia. And the petrodollars to support him are Saudi - via Bandar Bush and his brother Prince Salman, the Saudi deputy defense minister.

If this looks like a revamp of the David Petraeus-concocted "Sunni Awakening" in Iraq in 2007 that's because it is; the difference is this Saudi-financed "awakening" is geared not to fight al-Qaeda but towards regime change.

This (in Arabic) is what Alloush wants; a resurrection of the Umayyad Caliphate (whose capital was Damascus), and to "cleans" Damascus of Iranians, Shi'ites and Alawites. These are

all considered kafir ("unbelievers"); either they submit to Salafist Islam or they must die. Anybody who interprets this stance as "moderate" has got to be a lunatic.

Incredibly as it may seem, even Ayman al-Zawahiri - as in al-Qaeda central - has issued a proclamation banning the killing of Shi'ites.

Yet this "moderate" tag is exactly at the core of the present, Bandar Bush-concocted PR campaign; sectarian warlords of the Alloush kind are being "softened", so they are palatable to a maximum range of Gulf sources of funds and, inevitably, gullible Westerners. But the heart of the matter is that Jaish al-Islam, essentially, sports just a slight chromatic difference with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) - the al-Qaeda-linked umbrella which is the prime fighting force in Syria; as in a bunch of weaponized fanatics on varying degrees of (religious) crystal meth addiction.

#### Paranoia paradise

To complicate matters, the House of Saud is in disarray because of the succession battle. Crown Prince Salman is the last son of King Abdul Aziz, the founder of the Saud dynasty, to have a shot at power gradually by age.

Now all bets are off - with hordes of princes engulfed in the battle for the great prize. And here we find none other than Bandar Bush - who is now, for all practical purposes, the most powerful entity in Saudi Arabia after Khalid Twijri, the chief of King Abdullah's office. The nonagenarian Abdullah is about to meet his Maker. Twijri is not part of the royal family. So Bandar is running against the clock. He needs a "win" in Syria as his ticket to ultimate glory.

That's when the Russia-US agreement on Syria's chemical weapons intervened. The House of Saud as a whole freaked out - blaming not only the usual suspects, UN Security Council members Russia and China, but also Washington. No wonder the perpetual foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, snubbed his annual address to the UN General Assembly last week. To say he was not missed is an understatement.

The House of Saud's nightmare is amplified by paranoia. After all those warnings by King Abdullah for Washington to cut "the head of the snake" (Iran), as immortalized on WikiLeaks cables; after all those supplications for the US to bomb Syria, install a no-fly zone and/or weaponize the "rebels" to kingdom come, this is what the House of Saud gets: Washington and Tehran on their way to reaching a deal at the expense of Riyadh.

So no wonder fear, loathing and acute paranoia reign supreme. The House of Saud is and will continue to do all it can to bomb the emergence of Lebanon as a gas producer. It will continue to relentlessly fan the flames of sectarianism all across the spectrum, as Toby Matthiesen documented in an excellent book.

And the Israeli-Saudi axis will keep blossoming. Few in the Middle East know that an Israeli company - with experience in repressing Palestinians - is in charge of the security in Mecca. (See [here](#) and [here](#) (in French)). If they knew - with the House of Saud's hypocrisy once more revealed - the Arab street in many a latitude would riot en masse.

One thing is certain; Bandar Bush, as well as the Saudi-Israeli axis, will pull no punches to derail any rapprochement between Washington and Tehran. As for the Bigger Picture, the real

"international community" may always dream that one day Washington elites will finally see the light and figure out that the US-Saudi strategic alliance sealed in 1945 between Franklin D Roosevelt and King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud makes absolutely no sense.

*Pepe Escobar is the author of Globalistan: How the Globalized World is Dissolving into Liquid War (Nimble Books, 2007), Red Zone Blues: a snapshot of Baghdad during the surge (Nimble Books, 2007), and Obama does Globalistan (Nimble Books, 2009).*

Article 3.

Ma'an News Agency

## **New EU settlements guidelines already biting**

Anders Persson

10/10/2013 -- Even before they are set to begin, the new EU guidelines against the Israeli settlements on the West Bank are already biting. While few in Europe took notice of them when they were issued in mid-July, they created a political storm in Israel.

The new guidelines prohibit grants, prizes or funding from the

EU to the settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem or the Golan Heights. Most significantly, however, they also include a clause stipulating that these areas are not part of the State of Israel. In other words, in future agreements between the EU and Israel, the new guidelines will actually force the Israeli government to admit that the occupation is illegal under international law -- something no Israeli government, least of all the incumbent -- will ever do. Many on the political right in Israel immediately labelled new guidelines with accusations of antisemitism. In the center, the guidelines were condemned for being one-sided and for not differentiating between isolated settlements far into the West Bank and those settlements closer to the Green Line that Israel most likely will keep in a future deal with the Palestinians. Only on the far left in Israel were the new guidelines welcomed as an ever-more tangible sign of the costs of continued occupation. Palestinian commentators, for their part, were generally supportive of the guidelines, although many saw them as too little, too late. The Israeli government has responded that it will be unable to sign the upcoming 80 billion euro Horizon 2020 research project, set to begin in January 2014, if the guidelines remain in place. Israel is the only non-European country offered to participate fully in Horizon 2020, expected to contribute about 600 million euros to the project and receiving more than 1 billion euros in return.

But this is not about money, neither for Israel, nor for the EU. For Israel, this is about legitimizing its hold over the territories it captured in the 1967 war. For EU, it is about delegitimizing the occupation of what it perceives to be Palestinian and Syrian lands.

The guidelines, therefore, are the most significant EU action in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the 1980 Venice

Declaration, which called for a special role for Europe in the conflict, Palestinian self-determination and talks with the PLO. They clearly show the potential for the EU to become a 'player' in the conflict, instead of just writing checks to finance the increasingly irrelevant 'peace process', which has been a long, expensive process without peace for the past 20 years.

It is also clear that the guidelines represent a new policy tool for the EU, potentially very effective, as it is hard for a small post-industrialized, high-tech oriented country like Israel to flourish in the 21st century if it is excluded from major international research projects.

As such, the guidelines represent a powerful combination of what political scientists call 'hard' and 'soft power'. Perhaps more than anything else, the guidelines show the potential for the EU to exercise its normative and legitimizing power in the conflict - as an example that others will follow.

In my own and other's research, it is increasingly clear that the EU is emerging as a normative and legitimizing power in international affairs.

The EU is by far the largest bloc of liberal democracies in the world, and its 28 members can collectively legitimize or delegitimize many features of international affairs. Many other states in the world pay close attention to how the EU countries act, vote and speak in various international fora.

This is certainly the case even in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the EC/EU successfully legitimized Palestinian rights in the 1970s, self-determination for the Palestinians in the 1980s, and their right to statehood in the 1990s. While all sides involved in the conflict, including the Palestinians themselves, initially heckled these ideas when they were first issued, they now form a significant part of a future two-state solution.

While many have used big words for small things before in this conflict, it may certainly be that the guidelines will change nothing on the ground; either because they in the end will be watered-down or not implemented properly; or because it may simply be too late to roll back the occupation.

But the guidelines are a potential game-changer in the over-100-year conflict in the Middle East.

Resembling a 21st century Balfour Declaration, they are the first detailed declaration ever by a major international actor on the settlements. This is why Benjamin Netanyahu has been quoted as saying that Israel's failure to stop them represents his country's biggest diplomatic failure since he entered politics three decades ago. (For anyone familiar with Israeli politics, that says a lot).

It may well be that Jan. 1, 2014, when the guidelines go into effect, will be remembered as the day when the settlements began to be delegitimized on a large scale.

*The author is a political scientist at Lund University, Sweden. He has recently defended his PhD thesis on the role of the EU in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.*

[Article 4.](#)

Now Lebanon

## **Barack Obama: real, unreal, for real?**

Michael Young

October 11, 2013 -- Turn to your manual of realpolitik, dear reader, and contrast two very different forms of political behavior.

The United States decides to cut military assistance to Egypt because it is displeased with the slow pace of democratization after the coup against President Mohamed Morsi. But then, off the record, officials characterize this as “temporary,” and say they hope assistance will resume as democratic practices are adopted.

Then look at what is happening in Syria. A psychopathic regime has carried the country into a civil war that has quickly become a regional and international free-for-all. It uses chemical weapons against its own citizens, but somehow manages to make it sound relative by killing not far from 100,000 people, most of them civilians, in other ways. Despite all this its Russian ally continues to supply weapons, defend the Syrian leadership, and look the other way on its most monstrous crimes, all the while retaining its influence.

Morally, the United States is right and Russia wrong. But politically, Washington is ensuring that it becomes less relevant in a country that had been a cornerstone of its regional policy until not so long ago. Russia, in contrast, has used stubbornness over Syria as a trampoline back into regional relevance after a long period of marginalization.

But are things as clear as that? The zeal with which American officials sought to play down the measures against Egypt was reminiscent of Secretary of State John Kerry’s statement that an

attack against Syria would be “unbelievably small.” The effective consequence was to negate the very policy Washington was implementing--without, however, tempering Egyptian annoyance, since nothing is more annoying than to be penalized by a country unconvinced by the penalty.

The Obama administration is still not clear about what it wants in Egypt. That’s partly because Egypt presents such a litany of contradictory reactions and impulses. In 2011 the Americans called on their old ally President Hosni Mubarak to step down, fearing that by not doing so the US would be overtaken by events and fall on the wrong side of the revolution. They then supported the democratic process, which brought in an Islamist majority to parliament and Morsi as president. When he was overthrown by the army, the US found itself again caught up in a dilemma of either supporting a legitimate president or backing the army with whom it had close ties.

Barack Obama’s choice satisfied nobody. The president tried to play the middle ground--neither calling the military intervention a coup, so as not to be legally bound to cut funding to Egypt (a charade that convinced nobody), nor endorsing the actions the military took against the Muslim Brotherhood--even as it warned against the consequences of repression. For this ambiguity it was accused of sympathizing with the Brotherhood, a ridiculous charge, but one which the cutoff in military aid will not help to discredit.

Russian behavior has been less angst-ridden. President Vladimir Putin opted to go all the way with a barbaric Syrian regime, whatever the consequences. That meant aiding and abetting mass murder, but apparently with no lingering consequences to

date, since Putin has been hailed around the world as a master tactician while Obama is routinely (and justifiably) dismissed as a tiresome ditherer.

How strange it is to hear that. Recall that political realists welcomed the president's election as a refreshing contrast to George W. Bush, whose alleged neoconservatism and taste for democratization jarred with the practical and calculating realist mindset. But it very quickly became apparent that Obama's desire to disengage from the Middle East did not really qualify as "realism," because as the region dissolved into violence, American interests were seriously harmed.

The Arab Spring provided both challenges and opportunities for Washington. In retrospect the US failed on both counts. While Obama managed the initial revolution in Egypt well, he has since lost much ground. Ironically, this happened once Morsi was overthrown, which should have been a moment the Americans would welcome. Instead they waffled, allowing Saudi Arabia to intervene with a generous cash injection that bolstered the military's credibility.

Now the Egyptian Army is far more concerned with Saudi approval than with American disapproval. And many Egyptians agree.

In Syria, a true realist would have exploited the opportunity in 2011 to help get rid of the Assad regime, and in that way undermine Iranian power in the Levant. Obama opted to do nothing, neither arming the rebels with weapons that could have threatened the regime nor using its influence to impose unity on the fragmented Syrian opposition groups and the divided countries bolstering them.

The delay (for Obama, typically, would later reconsider and start arming the rebels) gave Iran and Russia the time they needed to send weapons and reorganize Bashar Assad's army, allowing him to regain his footing. While Washington was emptyly calling on Assad to step down, the Iranians and Russians were making sure he wouldn't do so.

So what are the lessons of the story? There are several. That being morally right but politically indecisive is worse than being morally wrong yet clear-minded about one's objectives. That Barack Obama is a realist only in the imagination of his admirers. That America in two years has lost in Egypt much of what it spent more than three decades building up. And that nothing is more wretched than a president who wants to be a moral paragon and a cool calculator at the same time.

Above all, that a successful leader is the one who seizes the moment, not the one who has the hubris to believe that the world will somehow bend itself around his priorities and hesitations.

*Michael Young is opinion editor of THE DAILY STAR.*

[Article 5.](#)

The Stimson Center

## **Syria And Iran: The U.N. Proves Its Worth To The U.S.**

Ellen Laipson

on October 10 2013 -- At this year's annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly there was less idealistic posturing and more hard work done on the most intractable of problems -- Syria's violent civil war and Iran's nuclear activities. The United States worked with and relied on the U.N. system to advance its interests and move towards the goal of establishing international peace.

One purpose of the U.N. Security Council is to regulate the legitimate use of force in the international arena. The willingness of the administration of US President Barack Obama to forego military action against Syria in favor of a coordinated diplomatic solution to rid the nation of its deadly stockpile of chemical weapons validates the role of the Security Council, as envisioned by its founders more than 65 years ago.

In both Syria and Iran, other parts of the U.N. system have also been mobilized and are playing important roles in managing, rather than preventing, conflict.

The U.N. is playing both humanitarian and political roles in Syria, where more than 100,000 people have been killed in fighting and millions have fled their homes. The major U.N. agencies are implementing programs to provide food, shelter and health care for internally displaced people in Syria as well as Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

Leaders of these U.N. agencies came to Washington over the

summer to coordinate with their partners at the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development, to try to persuade members of U.S. Congress to appreciate and support their work. There is no doubt that the U.S. has been the largest contributor to the diverse -- and sadly insufficient -- efforts to assuage the terrible suffering of the Syrian people, working quietly and letting the U.N. take the lead role.

On the political front, the process to attempt a negotiated replacement of President Bashar Assad as Syria's leader is now back in play -- despite the U.N.'s past inability to persuade the factions in Syria to engage. The U.N.-led peace process stalled soon after it was established more than a year ago, as the civil war intensified and forces opposing Assad made clear they were not interested in a negotiated settlement.

By de-legitimizing the Assad regime and calling for its ouster, America and other nations undermined the U.N. peace process -- intentionally or not. Now there is renewed interest in seeing whether the U.S. and Russia, working with the U.N., can persuade the parties to stop the slaughter and work for a less-than-ideal outcome for all that would at least curb the violence and prevent the complete collapse of the Syrian state. U.N. mediators will need strong support from the key members of the Security Council to make such progress.

With respect to Iran, the U.N. structure has been in place for years, waiting for a push from both Tehran and Washington. The election in June of President Hassan Rouhani provided the opportunity for Obama to renew his pledge to engage Iran with an open hand, not a clenched fist. The new mood and momentum was palpable in New York at the end of September.

Now the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which reports to both the Security Council and the General Assembly, has a challenging assignment. The agency will be supporting the efforts by the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany to negotiate an agreement that prevents Iran from getting nuclear weapons, while still developing nuclear power for peaceful purposes.

The IAEA will have to carry out additional monitoring and inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities to ensure Iranian compliance with any agreement that is reached in order to give the international community information it needs to justify the lifting of crippling economic sanctions against Iran.

The U.N. has its limitations – sometimes caused by its own bureaucratic culture of caution and sometimes caused by the lack of strong consensus among member states that direct the world body and often lead to funding shortfalls for approved activities.

For example, the U.N. has been criticized for not pushing the Syrian government hard enough for access to vulnerable populations. However, the U.N. took a public stand Oct. 2 calling for unhindered access to Syrians in need.

On Iran, the U.N. depends entirely on the will of the five permanent members (the U.S., Russia, China, France and Britain) to set the agenda and to respond to the ups and downs of Iran's behavior on nuclear issues

America always has the option of going it alone in taking military action, and there is indisputably a part of the U.S. electorate that prefers that approach. The sheer capacity of the

United States military dwarfs any invocation of collective security rights and responsibilities of the U.N. The U.S. willingness to use force to protect its interests, or even to defend the global commons, creates friction between Washington and the U.N.

The asymmetry of power and the different political cultures can generate centrifugal force. In the case of Iran, no one doubts that a more normal relationship with Washington is the real prize. Iran's desire to be accepted as a regional power in the Middle East will be addressed in a bilateral channel, and then perhaps validated at the multinational level.

These challenges notwithstanding, the U.S. and U.N. demonstrated good teamwork in recent weeks to fulfill the U.N.'s objective of resolving international disputes diplomatically rather than militarily.

*Ellen Laipson is president and CEO of the Stimson Center, a nonprofit and nonpartisan international security think tank. She served as a member of the U.S. mission to the U.N. from 1995-97.*

[Article 6.](#)

NYT

## **The End of the Nation-State?**

Parag Khanna

October 12, 2013 -- Singapore — EVERY five years, the United States National Intelligence Council, which advises the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, publishes a report forecasting the long-term implications of global trends. Earlier this year it released its latest report, “Alternative Worlds,” which included scenarios for how the world would look a generation from now. One scenario, “Nonstate World,” imagined a planet in which urbanization, technology and capital accumulation had brought about a landscape where governments had given up on real reforms and had subcontracted many responsibilities to outside parties, which then set up enclaves operating under their own laws. The imagined date for the report’s scenarios is 2030, but at least for “Nonstate World,” it might as well be 2010: though most of us might not realize it, “nonstate world” describes much of how global society already operates. This isn’t to say that states have disappeared, or will. But they are becoming just one form of governance among many.

A quick scan across the world reveals that where growth and innovation have been most successful, a hybrid public-private, domestic-foreign nexus lies beneath the miracle. These aren’t states; they’re “para-states” — or, in one common parlance, “special economic zones.” Across Africa, the Middle East and Asia, hundreds of such zones have sprung up in recent decades. In 1980, Shenzhen became China’s first; now they blanket China, which has become the world’s second largest economy. The Arab world has more than 300 of them, though more than half are concentrated in one city: Dubai. Beginning with Jebel Ali Free Zone, which is today one of the world’s largest and most efficient ports, and now encompasses finance, media,

education, health care and logistics, Dubai is as much a dense set of internationally regulated commercial hubs as it is the most populous emirate of a sovereign Arab federation.

This complex layering of territorial, legal and commercial authority goes hand in hand with the second great political trend of the age: devolution. In the face of rapid urbanization, every city, state or province wants to call its own shots. And they can, as nations depend on their largest cities more than the reverse. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York City is fond of saying, “I don’t listen to Washington much.” But it’s clear that Washington listens to him. The same is true for mayors elsewhere in the world, which is why at least eight former mayors are now heads of state. Scotland and Wales in Britain, the Basque Country and Catalonia in Spain, British Columbia in Canada, Western Australia and just about every Indian state — all are places seeking maximum fiscal and policy autonomy from their national capitals. Devolution is even happening in China. Cities have been given a long leash to develop innovative economic models, and Beijing depends on their growth. One of the most popular adages among China watchers today is: “The hills are high, and the emperor is far away.” Our maps show a world of about 200 countries, but the number of effective authorities is hundreds more. The broader consequence of these phenomena is that we should think beyond clearly defined nations and “nation building” toward integrating a rapidly urbanizing world population directly into regional and international markets. That, rather than going through the mediating level of central governments, is the surest path to improving access to basic goods and services, reducing poverty, stimulating growth and raising the overall quality of life.

Connected societies are better off than isolated ones. As the incidence of international conflict diminishes, ever more countries are building roads, railways, pipelines, bridges and Internet cables across borders, forging networks of urban centers that depend on one another for trade, investment and job creation. Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda have formed the East African Community to coordinate everything from customs to investment promotion to peacekeeping. If they can leverage Chinese-built infrastructure to overcome arbitrary political borders, (the ubiquitous and suspicious straight lines on the map), they could become a nascent European Union for Africa. NOWHERE is a rethinking of “the state” more necessary than in the Middle East. There is a sad futility to the reams of daily analysis on Syria and Iraq that fail to grasp that no state has a divine right to exist. A century after British and French diplomats divided the Ottoman Empire’s eastern territories into feeble (and ultimately short-lived) mandates, the resulting states are crumbling beyond repair. The Arab world will not be resurrected to its old glory until its map is redrawn to resemble a collection of autonomous national oases linked by Silk Roads of commerce. Ethnic, linguistic and sectarian communities may continue to press for independence, and no doubt the Palestinians and Kurds deserve it. And yet more fragmentation and division, even new sovereign states, are a crucial step in a longer process toward building transnational stability among neighbors.

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