From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen
Sent: Fri 9/20/2013 2:24:37 PM
Subject: September 20 update

20 September, 2013

Article 1.	The Washington Post **Why Iran seeks constructive engagement** Hassan Rouhani
Article 2.	Los Angeles Times **A kinder, gentler Iran?** Ray Takeyh
Article 3.	New York Post **The perils of an Iran nuclear deal** Amir Taheri
Article 4.	Project Syndicate **Syria's Balkan Tragedy** Joschka Fischer
Article 5.	The Council on Foreign Relations **Awkward U.S.-Russia Dance on Syria** Interview with Nikolas Gvosdev
Article 6.	Al-Monitor **US-Russia Cooperation Opens New Era in Middle East**

	Geoffrey Aronson
Article 7.	Foreign Affairs **Israel Abandoned Them a Long Time Ago. Why Won't It Say So?** Avner Cohen and Shane Mason
Article 8.	Foreign Policy **The Mossad's secret war on the Syrian WMD machine** Ronen Bergman

Article 1.

The Washington Post

Why Iran seeks constructive engagement

Hassan Rouhani

September 20 -- Three months ago, my platform of "prudence and hope" gained a broad, popular mandate. Iranians embraced my approach to domestic and international affairs because they saw it as long overdue. I'm committed to fulfilling my promises to my people, including my pledge to engage in constructive interaction with the world.

The world has changed. International politics is no longer a zero-sum game but a multi-dimensional arena where cooperation and competition often occur simultaneously. Gone is the age of blood feuds. World leaders are expected to lead in turning threats into opportunities.

The international community faces many challenges in this new world — terrorism, extremism, foreign military interference, drug trafficking, cybercrime and cultural encroachment — all within a framework that has emphasized hard power and the use of brute force.

We must pay attention to the complexities of the issues at hand to solve them. Enter my definition of constructive engagement. In a world where global politics is no longer a zero-sum game, it is — or should be — counterintuitive to pursue one's interests without considering the interests of others. A constructive approach to diplomacy doesn't mean relinquishing one's rights. It means engaging with one's counterparts, on the basis of equal footing and mutual respect, to address shared concerns and achieve shared objectives. In other words, win-win outcomes are not just favorable but also achievable. A zero-sum, Cold War mentality leads to everyone's loss.

Sadly, unilateralism often continues to overshadow constructive approaches. Security is pursued at the expense of the insecurity of others, with disastrous consequences. More than a decade and two wars after 9/11, al-Qaeda and other militant extremists continue to wreak havoc. Syria, a jewel of civilization, has become the scene of heartbreaking violence, including chemical weapons attacks, which we strongly condemn. In Iraq, 10 years after the American-led invasion, dozens still lose their lives to

violence every day. Afghanistan endures similar, endemic bloodshed.

The unilateral approach, which glorifies brute force and breeds violence, is clearly incapable of solving issues we all face, such as terrorism and extremism. I say all because nobody is immune to extremist-fueled violence, even though it might rage thousands of miles away. Americans woke up to this reality 12 years ago.

My approach to foreign policy seeks to resolve these issues by addressing their underlying causes. We must work together to end the unhealthy rivalries and interferences that fuel violence and drive us apart. We must also pay attention to the issue of identity as a key driver of tension in, and beyond, the Middle East.

At their core, the vicious battles in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria are over the nature of those countries' identities and their consequent roles in our region and the world. The centrality of identity extends to the case of our peaceful nuclear energy program. To us, mastering the atomic fuel cycle and generating nuclear power is as much about diversifying our energy resources as it is about who Iranians are as a nation, our demand for dignity and respect and our consequent place in the world. Without comprehending the role of identity, many issues we all face will remain unresolved.

I am committed to confronting our common challenges via a two-pronged approach.

First, we must join hands to constructively work toward national dialogue, whether in Syria or Bahrain. We must create an

atmosphere where peoples of the region can decide their own fates. As part of this, I announce my government's readiness to help facilitate dialogue between the Syrian government and the opposition.

Second, we must address the broader, overarching injustices and rivalries that fuel violence and tensions. A key aspect of my commitment to constructive interaction entails a sincere effort to engage with neighbors and other nations to identify and secure win-win solutions.

We and our international counterparts have spent a lot of time — perhaps too much time — discussing what we don't want rather than what we do want. This is not unique to Iran's international relations. In a climate where much of foreign policy is a direct function of domestic politics, focusing on what one doesn't want is an easy way out of difficult conundrums for many world leaders. Expressing what one does want requires more courage.

After 10 years of back-and-forth, what all sides don't want in relation to our nuclear file is clear. The same dynamic is evident in the rival approaches to Syria.

This approach can be useful for efforts to prevent cold conflicts from turning hot. But to move beyond impasses, whether in relation to Syria, my country's nuclear program or its relations with the United States, we need to aim higher. Rather than focusing on how to prevent things from getting worse, we need to think — and talk — about how to make things better. To do that, we all need to muster the courage to start conveying what we want — clearly, concisely and sincerely — and to back it up

with the political will to take necessary action. This is the essence of my approach to constructive interaction.

As I depart for New York for the opening of the U.N. General Assembly, I urge my counterparts to seize the opportunity presented by Iran's recent election. I urge them to make the most of the mandate for prudent engagement that my people have given me and to respond genuinely to my government's efforts to engage in constructive dialogue. Most of all, I urge them to look beyond the pines and be brave enough to tell me what they see — if not for their national interests, then for the sake of their legacies, and our children and future generations.

Hassan Rouhani is president of Iran.

Article 2.

Los Angeles Times

A kinder, gentler Iran?

Ray Takeyh

September 20, 2013 -- In an autumn ritual, an Iranian president is once more coming to New York for the United Nations' annual meeting of the heads of state. Media frenzy is likely to follow, as the smiling visage of President Hassan Rouhani dominates the airways next week. Beyond vague pledges of

cooperation and lofty rhetoric about turning a new page, the question remains how to assess the intentions of the new Iranian government. The early indications are that Rouhani has put together a seasoned team that seeks to both advance and legitimize Iran's nuclear program.

One of the peculiarities of the Islamic Republic is that at times it seemingly floats its strategies in the media. On Sept. 3, a long editorial titled "A Realistic Initiative on the Nuclear Issue" appeared in Bahar, an Iranian newspaper with ties to the more moderate elements of the country's elite.

The article stressed that former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's confrontational policies and reckless rhetoric had caused the international community to perceive Iran as threatening and dangerous. In that context, Iran's quest for nuclear empowerment was bound to be resisted by the great powers. And cleverly manipulated by the United States and Israel, the United Nations censured Iran and imposed debilitating sanctions on its fledgling economy.

The editorial went on to say that to escape this predicament, Iran had to change its image. A state that is considered "trustworthy" and "accountable" is bound to be provided with some leeway. Iran can best achieve its nuclear aspirations not by making systematic concessions on the scope of its program but by altering the overall impression of its reliability as a state.

It appears that Rouhani is carefully following this script. One of his first acts as president was to appoint as his foreign minister Javad Zarif, an urbane diplomat unwisely purged by Ahmadinejad. Zarif's superb skill as a negotiator, his easy access

to Western power-brokers and his pragmatism are bound to impress Iran's skeptical interlocutors.

The most contentious issue that has crossed Rouhani's desk thus far is Syria's alleged use of chemical weapons against unarmed civilians. In the past, the ideological compulsions of the Islamic Republic would lead it to deny the charges, defend Syrian President Bashar Assad and accuse his detractors of fabricating the evidence. This time around, Rouhani and his functionaries have subtly distanced themselves from Assad, condemned the use of chemical weapons and welcomed Russia's efforts to resolve the issue through the United Nations.

Along with tweets commemorating the Jewish High Holy Days, Rouhani has managed to reverse some of the reputational damage that the theocratic regime had suffered under his impetuous predecessor.

The new government's soothing words have not lessened its determination to forge ahead with its nuclear program. Rouhani has stressed, as reported on state radio this month, that Iran "will not withdraw an iota from the definite rights of people." That message was reinforced by the appointment of Ali Shamkhani to the powerful position of secretary of the Supreme National Security Council.

Shamkhani is a creature of the security services, one of the founding members of the Revolutionary Guard and a former defense minister. Throughout his career, Shamkhani has been involved with the nation's nuclear program, procuring technologies for it and defending it. During his time as defense minister, he even subtly suggested the utility of nuclear arms in Iran's contested regional environment.

"We have neighbors who, due to international competition, have gained nuclear weapons…. We have no other alternatives but to defend ourselves in view of these developments," Shamkhani said in 2000.

If Zarif's appointment is designed to placate the international community, Shamkhani's selection is a signal to the hard-liners at home that Rouhani intends to preserve Iran's nuclear prerogatives.

Rouhani's attempt to refashion Iran's image and temper its rhetoric should be welcomed. After eight years of Ahmadinejad provocations that often unhinged the international community, a degree of self-restraint is admirable. However, judge Tehran by its conduct and not its words.

It is not enough for Rouhani to condemn the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Is he prepared to withdraw the Revolutionary Guard contingents that have done much to buttress Assad's brutality?

It is not sufficient for Rouhani to speak of transparency; he must curb Iran's troublesome nuclear activities and comply with the U.N. Security Council resolutions.

And it is not enough for Rouhani to speak of a tolerant society unless he is prepared to free his many former comrades and colleagues who are languishing in prisons under false charges.

Rouhani's reliability has to be measured by his actions, not by his speeches or tweets.

Ray Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Article 3.

New York Post

The perils of an Iran nuclear deal

Amir Taheri

September 20, 2013 -- The White House has announced that President Obama might meet with Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, should it seem they could talk seriously about the nuclear issue. One wonders if Obama is ready for another Russian offer to "help."

In the case of Syria, Russian "assistance" has left the United States committed to a process that may or may not dispose of the Assad regime's chemical weapons, in exchange for which Obama effectively dropped his longstanding demand that "Assad must go" (as well as sacrificing any credible threat to use force to punish Bashar al-Assad for his atrocities). Syria, of course, only used the weapons to keep Assad in power.

This week, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov offered a preview of Moscow's plan for "solving" the Iranian nuclear stand-off.

Fars, a news agency owned by Iran's Revolutionary Guard,

quoted Lavrov about tackling the standoff over Iran's nuclear program: "We have been in contact with Iranian partners and expect positive results soon."

Lavrov mentioned the possibility of Iran "voluntarily" suspending uranium enrichment above the 20 percent level in exchange for full recognition of its right to enrich uranium.

Lavrov's plan offers great advantages to Iran.

First, if America buys into it, it will abandon its freedom to develop a policy of its own on Iran.

Second, the five Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran would be set aside.

Third, the fact that Iran has been violating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty for more than 20 years will be forgotten — just as Assad's use of chemical weapons, a war crime and a crime against humanity, is not mentioned in the Russo-American accord.

Fourth, Iran will get to keep almost all of the 4,000 kilograms of uranium it has illegally enriched. To give Obama something to chew upon, Tehran may agree to transfer to Russia the uranium enriched to 20 percent. This would provide TV footage to create the illusion that Obama achieved something.

Fifth, as Lavrov made clear, the Iranian move would be reciprocated by a lifting of sanctions against the Islamic Republic — including the US and European Union sanctions that go beyond those imposed by the United Nations.

Finally, Iran will be invited to join the Geneva-2 conference on

Syria, thus having its leading role in the Middle East endorsed by both Russia and America.

The ease with which Russia managed to seize control of US policy on Syria has encouraged Rouhani that similar results could be obtained on the Iranian issue.

Rouhani and his advisers believe that Obama is desperate to make a deal with Tehran. “Obama is the best news for our revolution since Jimmy Carter,” says Hussein Seifi, a political consultant in Tehran. “We antagonized Carter and created problems for ourselves.”

Tehran policy circles believe that Obama was ready to concede Iran’s main demands even under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — but Ahmadinejad enjoyed being provocative and believed that humiliating America was more important than neutralizing it.

Rouhani rejects that method.

He has a history of direct and indirect contact with US politics. As far back as 1986, he acted as interpreter for Ayatollah Najaf Abadi in secret talks in Tehran with President Ronald Reagan’s emissary, Robert MacFarlane.

Scottish-educated, Rouhani also has British friends who advise him to seize the opportunity provided by Obama’s presidency.

Several key members of Rouhani’s Cabinet, including Foreign Minister Seyyed Muhammad-Javad Zarif, are US-educated and have spent years living and working in the America. Rouhani’s chief of staff, Muhammad Nahavandian even has a US Green Card.

At next week's UN General Assembly, Rouhani will be all smiles and will do his utmost to appear moderate and reasonable. Lobbyists have already fixed a series of media appearances and private meetings for him, including with select Jewish figures in New York.

In the runup to his trip, Rouhani spread the message that his administration does not deny the Holocaust and that the end of Ahmadinejad means an end to annual Holocaust-denial conferences in Tehran organized by the Islamic Republic.

The view in Tehran is that, since Obama proved ready to eat humble pie on Syria, he should be helped to do the same on Iran.

Article 4.

Project Syndicate

Syria's Balkan Tragedy

Joschka Fischer

19 September 2013 -- Pacifist doctrines may say otherwise, but combining diplomacy with the threat of military force is a highly effective tactic, as we have just seen in Syria. It was the credibility of the United States' threat of military intervention that seems to have led Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to cut a deal brokered by his main allies, Russia and, less directly, Iran. Assad now appears prepared to give up his chemical weapons in

exchange for remaining in power. But what will happen to America's credibility, and that of the West, if the agreement falls apart?

The deal struck by the US and Russia triggered widespread relief in most Western capitals, where political leaders simply are not prepared for military intervention, even if Syria's government is killing its own people with poison gas (on this score, the agreement amounts to a confession by Assad). After a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the West would rather stay at home; neither the US nor the United Kingdom – nor most other NATO members – wants to become entangled in another Middle East conflict that cannot be won.

Indeed, there are only bad options for the US in Syria. Military intervention has no visible end point and would only increase chaos. But staying out will produce nearly the same result and dramatically shake America's credibility in a crisis-ridden region, with serious consequences for the future. Furthermore, deployment of chemical weapons invites escalation.

Most people in the West regard Syria's civil war as a continuation of the sectarian violence in Iraq. But Syria is not Iraq. America's president is not searching for excuses to start a war; Assad's chemical weapons are not a fanciful pretext. The scale of the violence in Syria underscores the risk implied by inaction.

Of course, there is no denying the dangers associated with a military intervention: regional expansion of the conflict, the deaths of many more innocent people, and the strengthening of extremist forces among the rebels, to name only a few. But all of

this has been happening already, and it will continue to happen, especially without American military intervention. The civil war will escalate further, because it is part of a larger contest for supremacy between Iran and its Shia allies and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the other Sunni countries.

If the US had not responded to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons, the entire world would have asked what a US guarantee is worth if an American president's "red line" is crossed without consequences. In Jerusalem, Tehran, and other Middle East capitals, as well as on the Korean Peninsula and in other global hotspots, the consequences would be (and probably already are) dire.

From the outset of the Syrian conflict, the US and its European allies have lacked a strategy. Is their goal to end the civil war or bring about regime change? And who or what should take Assad's place? Or does the West aspire to reach a compromise with Russia and Iran that would leave Assad's regime in place? The latter goal would shift the axis of US policy in the Middle East, with far-reaching strategic consequences, because such a compromise could only be reached at the expense of America's Sunni allies.

Even if Russia and Iran are pursuing separate agendas in supporting Assad, both countries' interests are inextricably connected to the continuation of the regime, not necessarily to Assad's political survival. For Russia, regime change in Syria – its last military outpost in the region – would be another bitter defeat; for Iran, it would mean losing its most important ally in the Arab world, implying even deeper isolation.

Thus, in contrast to the West's temporizing, the strategy of Assad's allies is clearly defined: military victory for the regime, backed by ample supplies of weapons and, in the case of Iran, Lebanese proxy troops from Hezbollah on the ground.

Obama committed a fateful error when, for domestic political reasons, he decided to ask the US Congress to agree to a limited punitive military strike. A defeat in Congress – entirely foreseeable – would have been a foreign-policy disaster. And, though the Russian diplomatic initiative (based on a joint proposal with Iran) averted this disaster, everything has its price.

That price is not necessarily a gain in prestige for the Kremlin. The true risk implied by the US deal with Russia lies elsewhere.

It was not weakness or helplessness that induced Obama to play for high stakes. If he succeeds – Syria's chemical weapons are destroyed, a peace conference ends the civil war, a transitional government takes power, and the US and Iran launch direct negotiations about Iran's nuclear program and regional stability in the Middle East – he will truly deserve his Nobel Peace Prize.

If Obama fails, however, Syria will not be a second Iraq, but more likely a repetition of the Bosnian calamity. For years, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina escalated, alongside a "diplomatic process" marked by a series of broken promises, culminating in the massacre at Srebrenica of thousands of civilians supposedly under United Nations protection. In the end, intervention was necessary anyway.

Are the US and its European allies prepared for a scenario in which the agreement with Russia breaks down and Syria's chemical weapons are not destroyed under international control?

This is the decisive moral and political question for the West. If and when the time comes, it had better have an answer.

Article 5.

The Council on Foreign Relations

Awkward U.S.-Russia Dance on Syria

Interview with Nikolas Gvosdev

September 19, 2013 -- *Presidents Putin and Obama are far from close friends, but they have "tumbled into each other's arms" over Syria's chemical weapons, reports Russian expert Nicolas Gvosdev. Moscow wanted to "get out of this box as the defenders of the Syrian regime, no matter what," while the United States was looking for a way to check the Assad regime short of military action, says Gvosdev. However, he forecasts a "long, drawn-out process" for chemical weapons disarmament, whereby the United States and Russia will likely spar over the nature of Syrian delays.*

President Obama, who was hardly on talking terms with President Putin, now finds himself relying on the Russian leader for help in solving the Syrian crisis. The two powers are jointly trying to come up with a binding UN Security Council resolution that will lead to the Syrians putting an end to their chemical weapons. What has brought this about?

Two things, mainly. One was the reaction of other world leaders at the G20 in St. Petersburg in early September to President Putin's continual assertions that the opposition rebels used chemical weapons in Syria rather than the government. This has been the standard Russian line ever since the first attacks occurred earlier this year. At the G20, it was clear that Putin was not getting much traction with that argument and that most world leaders were convinced that, even if the attacks had not been necessarily ordered by the top echelon of the Syrian government, they nonetheless occurred because of the Syrian government's possession of these types of weapons. So that was putting some pressure on the Russians—as long as they appeared to be protecting Syria against international pressure, it made them look as if they were condoning the use of chemical weapons. From the Russian side, there was a need to get out of this box as the defenders of the Syrian regime, no matter what.

And the second?

President Obama had a completely different set of problems having to do with domestic issues—most Americans were more or less convinced that the Syrian government was responsible for the attacks, but they were not necessarily sold on the need for the United States to do something about it. The president was moving in the direction of a limited military strike to degrade Syria's capabilities, but he wasn't finding a great deal of public support for such action.

Increasingly, even if the congressional leadership supported a U.S. military strike, the rank-and-file in both parties were not behind it. So President Obama needed to find a way to appear to be addressing the question of chemical weapons in Syria, but

without committing the United States to a military strike. And so, in some ways, Moscow and Washington have tumbled into each other's arms. Then you had Secretary of State John Kerry's press conference in London last Monday where, almost as an aside to a question, he held out the possibility that military action could be averted if Syria was prepared to disarm.

And that did it, didn't it?

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who was meeting with Syrian foreign minister Walid al-Moualem in Moscow, immediately seized on this and in effect said, "Well, there's an initiative here, let's see if we can get the Syrians on board." And from that we move to the talks in Geneva, which essentially satisfied the core political requirements of both presidents. Putin was transformed from being seen as an obstructionist on Syria to being a facilitator, and President Obama gets to be able to do something about Syria without having to resort at this time to a military strike.

There still seems to be a difference of opinion between the United States, France and Britain, and the Russians in the drafting of the Security Council resolution and the threat of Chapter 7 [of the UN Charter] action—whether that should be included. The Russians seem adamant against it. How do you think this will work out?

That is one of the sticking points. Obviously, what the Russians want to prevent from happening, having learned the lessons of previous U.S. military interventions, is that if you have a Chapter 7 inclusion in the resolution, it can be used by the United States as a justification for military action without

necessarily having to go back to the Security Council for authorization. The Russians, I think, see this as a way to be able to exercise a veto once again, because if the agreement breaks down, the parties may not agree as to the causes. The United States is more likely to view setbacks in the agreement as the result of Syrian malfeasance and therefore be more willing to launch military action. So the Russians want to make sure that there's nothing in a forthcoming Security Council resolution that could be interpreted as an automatic trigger for U.S. or Western military action.

And the UN weapons inspectors are going back there because the Syrian government, through the Russians, has given them information that the rebels have used chemical weapons?

That's a consistent Russian narrative: that if weapons have been used, then either the opposition got their hands on the Syrian government's weapons or they constructed them themselves. But this does point to a problem for the [Obama] administration, because once you have the UN process in place, the UN has to respond to any and all of these allegations. They have to investigate. So Washington may see this as a delaying tactic. We want to make Syria comply as quickly as possible, but then if there's an ongoing investigation, it slows the process down. So that's why you have skepticism on the part of some in Washington that the agreement that was reached will in fact be enforceable.

And even if Syria complies with the agreement, they don't have to turn over their chemical weapons until next year sometime, right?

This would be a long, drawn-out process. Even in the best of conditions, it takes time to identify all the stockpiles, secure them, safely transport them, and then begin the process of destruction. When this was done in Libya in the 1990s, it took years, and that of course was in conditions of peace. In conditions of fighting, it's going to be much more difficult. The United States is going to look at delays and say the Syrian government is stalling; they're not sincere about the agreement. Meanwhile, the Russians will say delay is normal. Look at the environment. Look at the conditions. Of course, [Syria] can't expect to stick to an agreed timetable because of all of these variables. So which side are you going to believe? The problem for the Obama administration, whether it likes it or not, is that it's a successor to the Bush administration. A number of countries around the world now believe—and it turns out based on the post-[Iraq] war inspections that those concerns were legitimate—that the Bush administration rushed the [weapons inspection] process [in Iraq]. They believe it was too quick, that [Bush] didn't allow the inspectors to do their job, and, therefore, you could have avoided the Iraq War.

So what's the timetable now?

The timetable that was agreed to in Geneva is extremely optimistic—that we're supposed to have a full accounting of Syria's chemical stockpiles within days. I'm sure we can get a start on it, but I don't know that we'll have a full accounting and that within weeks we're going to have a process to start transferring weapons out. The Russians, I think, will then be prepared to say that we have to give this process more time. Meanwhile, the United States wants Syria to comply as quickly as possible, and it is going to be putting pressure on not only

Syria, but on U.S. allies to be ready for a retaliatory military strike if it perceives delaying tactics. The other problem that the agreement has is that, again, both Moscow and Washington have preset narratives when it comes to Syria. So let's assume that the Syrians do submit a completed declaration either by the deadline or at some point after, and then there's another chemical weapons attack in Syria. The Russians will say, well, if the Syrian government made its declaration, then any further chemical weapons used in Syria must be the opposition. On the other hand, the United States is going to say, well, the Syrian government cheated, these are weapons that were hidden. So then we're back to the impasse we had right before the G20 summit, with Moscow saying one thing about a chemical strike and the United States saying something else.

And what about relations between Obama and Putin? They have only had the briefest of meetings at the G20 summit. Do you think it would help if they had a regular sit-down to really thrash things out?

It might, if we thought that there was a potential breakthrough to be had. I don't think there is. The Putin-Obama relationship, since the 2009 Moscow summit, never got off on the right foot. They've had subsequent meetings and things haven't connected. This may be a case where it's important for the two presidents to say to their deputies: we entrust you to make sure this works, and we give you our full support—but don't expect a face-to-face between Obama and Putin as part of the process. It's interesting to see how John Kerry and Sergey Lavrov—based on their earlier meetings, particularly their meeting in Berlin earlier this year—have reached some sort of personal accord, and that they're able to talk to each other, and have a good working

relationship. So it may not be a bad thing to have Kerry and Lavrov be the two main guys working on this, just as long as both presidents make it clear that they are acting with their full support. We just have to accept that Obama and Putin are going to have cool personal relations. It's not like Obama can invite Putin to Washington and say, "Let's go out for a hamburger," the way he did with Dmitry Medvedev. The best thing for both of them to do is, maybe, step back and not do anything that could mess up the cooperation currently under way.

Nikolas Gvosdev, Associate Professor, U.S. Naval War College.

Article 6.

Al-Monitor

US-Russia Cooperation Opens New Era in Middle East

Geoffrey Aronson

September 19. -- If Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Barack Obama can manage to work together on Syria — and rid the country of its chemical weapons stores — why shouldn't a cooperative superpower approach to Israel and its conflict with the Arabs be next? If Washington and Moscow can establish common ground on Syria's nonconventional arsenal

why not agree upon a revived Geneva process — the one convened in 1975 — to settle the Israel-Arab conflict?

Closeting Syria's chemical weapons may whet an appetite to "think big" across the wide canvas of the Middle East and encourage both Obama and Putin to summon the will to jointly address at long last Israel's prodigious chemical weapons and nuclear arsenals. In such an environment, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may have reason to reconsider his tough line against Assad and his support for superpower intervention to address Syria's chemical weapons program. His former national security adviser, Giora Eiland, explained to Israel's army radio on Sept. 10 that "real moves to dismantle [Syria's] chemical weapons is no small thing. For us, it is a good result without having to do anything."

Yet, Netanyahu may discover to his dismay that his wish may come true. In that case, not only Syrian President Bashar al-Assad will pay a price. So, too, may Netanyahu and his dream of a nuclear-armed "Greater Israel" strategically dominating a region in conflict, from Morocco in the west to Pakistan in the east.

Good things can happen when great powers cooperate. That is the message that increasingly — if tenuously — defines key regions of the Middle East today. In the wake of the progress made by Moscow and Washington, Assad has embarked on a charm offensive courtesy of the US media. In a not unrelated arena, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Obama are sending not-so-secret, encouraging missives to each other. These are not the only signs of the alluring potential for a dramatic transformation in a region that only a few weeks ago was

anxiously awaiting the United States' armed entry into Syria's war.

It is far too early to pronounce an end to the cold war between Obama and Putin. Skeptics of the the much-praised, ambitious agreement on Syria's chemical weapons arsenal could yet win the day. Tomahawks made in the United States might once again grace the skies of the region. The current fragile era of good sense might prove fleeting — a hopeful peak in what has otherwise been a long bumpy road along the bottom. But for the first time in recent memory, Moscow and Washington are putting pieces into place that have the potential to move Syria — and not just Syria — away from a seemingly inevitable trajectory of escalating violence and war.

When great powers start to arrange affairs of state between themselves the world follows their lead. Some do so by choice. Others must accommodate the choices made for them by powers greater than themselves. For Obama, and certainly for Putin, the taste of successful application of power can be an aphrodisiac, broadening the horizons of possible international action and spurring the imagination of policymakers to attempt what they have long hesitated to do.

These "birth pangs of a new Middle East" — one built upon diplomatic agreement rather than on the ruins of Lebanon — might affect Israel and its multifaceted disputes with the Arabs in two related spheres. First, from Israel's earliest days as a state, its leaders have viewed great power rivalry in the Middle East as an opportunity to promote Israel's interests — from the race between the Soviet Union and the United States to recognize the new state in 1948 to the stalemate following the

June 1967 war and the creation of an Israeli nuclear weapons capability under a US Cold War security and political umbrella. In contrast, Israel has always feared superpower collaboration — joint efforts that have constrained Israel's territorial and strategic ambitions. Witness the forced retreat from the Gaza Strip and Sinai after the "tripartite aggression" against Nasser in 1956. Similarly, international conferences reflecting superpower collaboration — the Geneva international peace conference model established in the wake of the Yom Kippur War (October 1973) comes to mind — reduce the space for Israel (and Arabs as well) to exploit great power rivalries for their own purposes.

Article 7.

Foreign Affairs

Israel Abandoned Them a Long Time Ago. Why Won't It Say So?

Avner Cohen and Shane Mason

September 19, 2013 -- As the world tries to get Syria to hand over its chemical weapons, Israel's alleged possession of those same weapons looms large. In a familiar twist, senior Russian and Syrian officials -- including Russian President Vladimir Putin -- have loosely linked the prospects of Syria's chemical weapons disarmament to Israel's overall posture of amimut (opacity or ambiguity) about its own weapons of mass

destruction (WMD) and specifically to its refusal to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Although the attempt to bring Israel into the debate stems from clear political motivations, it also highlights the uncomfortable, indeed problematic, nature of Israel's evasion on all matters relating to WMD. Israel's refusal to acknowledge its chemical weapons program only further underscores what has been clear for some time: ambiguity on WMD has become a political burden for Israel [1], particularly as it tries to rally the world behind preventing a nuclear Iran. Its unwillingness to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention -- a stance it takes largely for the sake of opacity, since it has no use for chemical weapons whatsoever -- undermines its security interests and intensifies its international isolation.

THE FIRST WEAPONS OF LAST RESORT

Although neither confirmed nor denied by the Israeli government, it is widely presumed that, at one time in its history, Israel possessed chemical weapons. Israel likely launched its chemical weapons program in its first decade after independence in 1948, prior to its nuclear program, in an era when Israeli leaders believed their country's survival was in peril. At the time, chemical weapons were Israel's weapons of last resort. The recently discovered 1983 CIA documents published in Foreign Policy [2], which claim that Israel had an active chemical weapons program, may refer to the last residues of such a program. Today, however, Israel does not have an active chemical weapons arsenal (one that could quickly be made operational and deployable for battlefield use) and has not had one for decades.

The Israeli decision to pursue a chemical weapons capability must be understood in the strategic and international context of the time. Surrounded by hostile Arab armies, and without a security guarantee from the United States, Israelis were worried. The country's neighbor and most powerful foe, Egypt, not only possessed chemical weapons but used them during its intervention in Yemen's civil war in the mid-1960s.

On the eve of the 1967 Six-Day War, Israeli military leaders feared that Egypt might unleash its chemical weapons, either on the battlefield or even against Israeli civilians. In response to these concerns, Israel hastily purchased tens of thousands of gas masks from Europe (primarily from West Germany) just days before the war began. Some evidence also suggests that Israel successfully deterred Egyptian use of chemical weapons by making its own chemical weapons capability battle-ready. According to the Israeli analyst Dany Shoham, Egypt "probably did not resort to chemical warfare because it feared Israeli retaliation in-kind." Israel considered chemical weapons to be nasty but probably legitimate retaliatory weapons, especially considering that the United States and some NATO countries also stockpiled chemical munitions at that time for deterrence purposes.

In the following years, the prospect of an Egyptian chemical attack continued to haunt Israel's leaders. Early in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Egypt apparently prepared chemical weapons for launch in the event that Israel continued its military offensive after restoring the status quo that existed before the war. In 1975, the Egyptian military's chief of staff, General Mohammed el-Gamasi, warned publicly that Egypt would employ its own nonconventional arsenal if Israel made use of its nuclear

weapons. In addition, Egypt allegedly supplied Syria with chemical agents sometime in the 1970s, and it cooperated closely with Iraq on chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq war.

During these early years, the international norm against chemical weapons was still nascent. Before the Chemical Weapons Convention opened for signature in 1993, chemical and biological weapons programs were not illegal. The 1925 Geneva Protocol, which prohibited the use of chemical and biological weapons in warfare, was silent on developing, producing, and stockpiling such arsenals. Moreover, many countries that ratified the Geneva Protocol did so while explicitly reserving the right to employ such weapons for retaliation in kind. By the 1950s, all three major NATO powers -- the United States, the United Kingdom, and France -- had significant offensive chemical and biological capabilities, and the United States did not ratify the Geneva Protocol until 1975.

As Israel's strategic position in the Middle East improved following the peace agreement with Egypt in 1978 and the strengthening of the U.S.-Israeli alliance, its stockpiles of chemical weapons became less relevant. By the mid- to late 1970s, Israeli policymakers decided that chemical weapons were no longer effective instruments of warfare, or even deterrence, and briefly considered dismantling the country's chemical and biological weapons facility at Ness Ziona. Later, in 1989, Israel's high-profile participation in the Paris conference on chemical weapons demonstrated that Israel sided with the international community in its efforts to strengthen the international norm against chemical warfare.

The sense in Israel's strategic community that an international

ban on chemical weapons was in the country's interests only grew. When Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin came to power in 1992, he considered the emerging Chemical Weapons Convention to be a net benefit for Israel. Given its nuclear capability, Rabin figured, Israel stood to gain the most from a Middle East in which no country had chemical weapons. Even if major Arab states refused to join the convention, an Israeli decision to sign would probably improve its diplomatic position, perhaps even easing the pressure on the nuclear issue.

In response to criticism from within the security bureaucracy that Israel was going too far, the Rabin government noted that signing the Chemical Weapons Convention, while an important symbolic act, was not the final word; only ratification would make Israel's commitment complete. Guided by these considerations and under pressure from the United States, Israel overcame its longstanding aversion to global arms-control conventions and signed the convention on January 13, 1993, the first day it was open for signature.

Two decades have passed since Israel signed the convention, but it has yet to ratify the treaty, which would most likely require a Knesset vote. Since Rabin's assassination in 1995, Israel has gradually retreated to the comfort of its traditional opacity on WMD. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his recent predecessors, Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, and Ehud Olmert, never liked the idea of formally ratifying the Chemical Weapons Convention. The issue was too politically irrelevant, strategically insignificant, and diplomatically marginal to stir any interest. The Arab Spring, and the Syrian civil war in particular, only served to solidify the attitude that Israel should stick to its old policies in a time of turbulence.

THE BURDEN OF AMBIGUITY

It is time for Israel to revisit its old-fashioned chemical weapons ambiguity. In light of the Assad regime's use of the weapons, and with the international community intensely focused on their prohibition, Israel's past program and its reluctance to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention have become a strategic, diplomatic, and military burden -- both for Israel and its most important ally, the United States. By failing to ratify a convention banning a weapon it does not need, Israel finds itself in the company of Angola, Egypt, Myanmar (also known as Burma), North Korea, South Sudan, and Syria -- a motley crew of pariah and failed states with which it would certainly like to avoid association.

The proposed U.S.-Russian agreement to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons program is great news for Israel. If successful -- which is still a big if -- the deal would eliminate the largest and last remaining chemical weapons program in the Middle East, and the only one that is deeply integrated into a country's military doctrine. Israel would further enhance its strategic and moral position -- and help the deal's success -- by openly supporting the framework to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons and by committing to ratify the convention. That last step shouldn't be too hard: Israel has absolutely no need for chemical weapons. Chemical weapons have no role in the country's military doctrine, and no scenario exists in which the program would have to be reactivated.

Furthermore, ratifying the convention would strengthen Israel's credibility on WMD-related issues, long undermined by the ambiguity surrounding its WMD programs, particularly its

nuclear arsenal. Whether the issue is the use of chemical weapons in Syria or Iran's nuclear program, Israel's adversaries can always respond to international pressure by pointing at Israel's nuclear arsenal and its opacity on chemical and biological weapons. While this rhetorical tactic is politics pure and simple, it effectively frustrates Israel's ability -- and that of the United States -- to stop proliferation activities in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Until Israel's leaders realize the cost of ambiguity, the country will be held hostage by weapons it no longer possesses, in order to deter threats that no longer exist, causing it to suffer isolation it does not deserve.

Avner Cohen *is writer, historian, and professor, and is well known for his works on the nuclear age. His seminal work, Israel and the Bomb, which chronicled the Israeli nuclear program, was published in 1998. This book led him to encounter problems with the Israeli censor, and provoked substantial legal difficulties upon his return to Israel to give a keynote speech at an academic conference. His book, The Worst-Kept Secret: Israel's Bargain with the Bomb, was published in 2010 and explored Israel's policy of opacity when it comes to its nuclear history.* ***Shane Mason*** *is currently a Master's candidate in the Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies Program at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Mason also has interned at the CTBTO.*

Article 8.

Foreign Policy

The Mossad's secret war on the Syrian WMD machine

Ronen Bergman

September 19, 2013 -- On Aug. 20, 2012, U.S. President Barack Obama declared that if Syrian President Bashar al-Assad began shifting around or using his chemical weapons, Obama would consider that "a red line." The implication was that such a move would lead to American intervention in Syria. Some officials from the Israeli Foreign Ministry believed that Obama drew the line because he believed it would never be crossed. If that was his assumption, he made it based, in part, on assessments received from the Israeli intelligence services, which have waged a multidecade clandestine campaign to strip Assad of his deadliest weapons -- and which also have emerged as the United States' primary partners in collecting information on Middle Eastern regimes.

According to two former high-ranking military intelligence officials with whom I had spoken recently, Israeli intelligence agencies believed at the time that Assad would not use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and would keep his chemical arsenal as a bargaining chip to be traded in exchange for political asylum for himself, his loyal wife, and his close associates, if necessary. Israel was wrong.

On March 10, 2013, Israeli intelligence sources began reporting

that the Syrian regime had made use of chemical weapons. A number of different and cross-checked sources produced this information. Among them: sources that eavesdropped on the Syrian army's tactical frequencies and surveillance satellites that monitored movement out of a bunker known to protect chemical weapons.

Israel shared its findings with the United States, but Washington would not acknowledge those findings' veracity. It was clear to the Israelis that the Americans saw those findings as a hot potato that the president was in no mood to hold. Without grasping the deep political significance of publicizing this material (or perhaps doing so intentionally to put pressure on Washington), Brig. Gen. Itai Brun, the head of the Aman, the Israeli military intelligence corps' research division, stated clearly in an April 23 speech at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons on its citizens.

This utterance angered and embarrassed the U.S. administration. Washington stuttered for a few days and demanded clarifications from Israel. In the end, and following a report submitted to the United Nations by Britain and France, the Obama administration had to admit that the information was in fact correct. Since then, to avoid similar commotions, Aman officers are forbidden to appear in public conferences.

Either way, the intelligence coordination between Israel and the United States has not suffered, and Israel continues to share the vast amounts of information that it has about Syria with the United States. Published reports credit Israel with giving the CIA, as the Wall Street Journal put it, "intelligence from inside

an elite special Syrian unit that oversees Mr. Assad's chemical weapons" after the massive Aug. 21 sarin attack outside Damascus.

"We have a very extensive knowledge of what is happening in Syria. Our ability to collect information there is profound. Israel is the eyes and ears, sometimes exclusively, sometimes as complementary aid, to what the U.S. intelligence is able or unable to collect itself," Maj. Gen. Uri Sagi, Israel's former chief of military intelligence, told me on Sept. 19. While the threat of an American attack on Syria -- and a possible Syrian counterattack on Israel -- has subsided for the moment, the Israeli-American efforts to penetrate the Assad regime continue. This is a history of those efforts.

American and Israeli spies have long been partners. "Information we collected, especially by Unit 8200 [Israel's eavesdropping corps], has always been of the highest value to the NSA [U.S. National Security Agency] and other U.S. intelligence agencies," Sagi noted. A top-secret memorandum, recently revealed by the Guardian, shows that the NSA passes along raw intercepts to Unit 8200. But the partnership hasn't always produced results. Regarding the 1990-1991 Gulf War, for instance, "one must honestly admit that when it came to Iraq back then, both Americans and Israelis had very little information to share," Sagi said.

At the time, the joint effort to spy on Syria's weapons of mass destruction wasn't much better.

In March 1990, North Korea's premier visited Damascus, and the two states signed a secret deal for military and technological

cooperation that centered on the supply of Scud C missiles and launchers to Syria. In early February 1991, the first consignment of some 30 missiles was shipped to the Syrian port of Latakia. The NSA, Israeli intelligence later learned, was aware that something was going on, but Washington refrained from informing Tel Aviv because the Americans feared that the Israelis would try to intercept the shipment and start yet another Middle Eastern brawl.

However, Israel had sources of its own. The Mossad -- Israel's national intelligence agency -- was keeping an eye on the ship. Agents of the Mossad's Caesarea division, who are trained to penetrate Arab countries, were waiting in Morocco for the vessel that had set sail from North Korea and had docked in a number of African ports en route to the Mediterranean Sea and Latakia. Two Mossad operatives, working undercover as tourists, successfully dove under the ship and attached a powerful transponder to it. An Israeli F-15 fighter jet was supposed to launch a missile to hone in on the beacon signal on the ship and blow the vessel to smithereens. In the end, however, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir decided to call the operation off out of a fear that it would spark a major conflagration in the Middle East due to the fact that the Gulf War was under way.

In retrospect, two former Israeli intelligence officials with whom I spoke in early September -- one from the Mossad and one from the Aman -- expressed regret at Shamir's decision.

"If we were to make a point at that time," one of them said, "that we will not allow Syria to further develop missiles to deliver WMD, we might not be threatened today by a huge arsenal of missiles able to strike any place in Israel with chemical agents."

For now, the Israeli assessment is that Assad will not attack Israel, even if he is attached by U.S. forces. Israel, however, is preparing for a counterstrike. To some degree, Israel is already involved, as it is helping the United States to collect intelligence on Syria.

For a long time, Israel saw Syria as its prime enemy. Abutting its northeastern border with a huge military, it had fought four bloody wars against the Jewish state (in 1948, 1967, 1973, and 1982). "For many years, until the civil war broke out, the Syrians were the last army to pose a serious threat to Israel, and therefore the investment of our intelligence resources in that direction was enormous," said Sagi, who served as the head of Israel's military intelligence from 1991 to 1995 and as a special advisor on intelligence to the chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from 2006 to 2010.

Continuously, Israel's intelligence agency, the Mossad, recruited agents in the Syrian military and government and planted its own operatives under false identities in Syria to carry out various missions. Meanwhile, Israeli military intelligence collected material on Syria's defense systems.

Over the years, the Syrians were able to catch some of these spies. Most known is the story of Eli Cohen, who was sent to Syria in the early 1960s under the guise of a Syrian merchant who returned to his homeland as a very wealthy man after years in South America. Cohen made ??excellent contacts with senior military and intelligence officials in Syria. During wild parties that he held in his fancy flat right across the street from the general staff headquarters in Damascus, he drew from them many state secrets. Cohen's Mossad case officer, Gedaliah

Khalaf, told me how Cohen transmitted the latest information on a daily basis, including quite a bit of gossip from Syria's high echelon, using a Morse-code machine that was hidden in his apartment.

David Kimche, a Mossad officer and later deputy chief of the organization, described how the Mossad passed some of the information obtained by Cohen and other sources to the CIA. "We wanted to prove to the American intelligence that we are an important asset in the Middle East and are able to collect information they cannot," said Kimche, in a 2002 interview. "I thought we could be the long arm of the United States' espionage agencies in Africa and Asia," said Isser Harel, the second chief of Mossad, in a 2001 interview.

Particularly important in this context is the involvement of Unit 8200, which is responsible for intercepting enemy communications. Utilizing thousands of soldiers, it monitors messages, breaks codes, and translates, processes, and analyzes the material. In the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel achieved a fast-as-lightning, decisive victory over Syria and Egypt largely thanks to the high-quality information supplied by Unit 8200 and other intelligence branches.

At that time Israel also unveiled, for the first time, the capabilities of Unit 8200. Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who were losing the war and lost their air forces during its first hours, lied to Jordan's King Hussein about the real situation in order to persuade him to enter combat. Unit 8200 was listening to the conversation, and Israel, to further embarrass the Arab countries, decided to publish it.

In the war of October 1973, Syria took Israel by surprise, but despite this, it could not win the war. Despite generous aid from the Soviet Union in the form of warplanes and anti-aircraft systems, Syrians planes did not succeed in penetrating Israeli airspace or gaining air superiority.

After this 1973 war, the Soviet Union agreed to supply Syria with a few dozen surface-to-surface missiles of the Scud B type with a range of 300 kilometers. This was the beginning of Syria's missile command, which is today engaged in fighting the rebels in the civil war raging in that country.

The 1973 war had another result: Amos Levinberg, an officer of Unit 8200 with a very high security clearance and access to innumerable secrets, was taken prisoner by the Syrians. He had a phenomenal memory, but he also suffered from claustrophobia. The Syrians managed to convince him that their offensive has succeeded and Israel had been destroyed, causing him to tell them everything he knew. The content of his interrogations were conveyed directly to Hafez al-Assad, who was amazed. Israel had been listening in to almost all the Syrian military transmissions traffic, he learned, including those between Assad himself and his divisional commanders. It also emerged that the Israelis had penetrated Syrian territory and had installed listening devices that were connected to all of Syria's communications cables and relayed all information collected from them to Unit 8200 bases.

The confessions of the "singing officer," as he was called in Israel, caused immense damage to Israeli intelligence, whose secret methods and devices had been exposed. When he was returned to Israel in a prisoner exchange, one of his commanders

even publicly suggested he commit suicide. The Syrians were convinced that they had made Israel blind and mainly deaf for the coming years.

They were wrong. On April 1, 1978, maintenance work was being carried out on the main telephone cable between Damascus and Jordan. Buried deep in the ground, the workers discovered a strange device. Military and secret service personnel who were called in were sure that this was another sophisticated Israeli listening instrument and tried to dig beneath it to remove it from the ground. But it was booby-trapped and it blew up, killing 12 of them. Syria submitted an official complaint against Israel to the U.N. Security Council. Over the years, the Syrians kept on finding similar devices buried deep in the ground. On these subsequent occasions, they took care not to handle them and instead called in agents of the GRU, the Soviet Army's intelligence arm, who had special equipment for dealing with booby traps. But they too made mistakes, and four of them were killed in one blast.

In June 1982, Syria once again suffered a bitter defeat when approximately 100 of its planes were downed during Israel's invasion of Lebanon without Syria managing to shoot down even one Israeli aircraft. This was due to, among several reasons, superb intelligence that Israel had collected about the Syrian air force and its anti-aircraft batteries. After the war, Assad, a former commander of the Syrian air force, began allocating his resources to other options. He drastically cut the budget of Syria's "regular" army and put the money saved into the rehabilitation of the air force and the acquisition of missiles.

So, in 1984, Syria signed a deal with China for a supply of M-9

missiles that were fueled by a solid propellant and had a longer range than the Scuds previously purchased from the Soviet Union. The deal, however, was canceled thanks to heavy pressure from the United States, itself under heavy pressure from Israel, which had obtained intelligence about the impending deal from a high-ranking agent in Damascus.

In 1990, the Syrian 9th Mechanized Division joined the U.S.-led coalition forces against Iraq's Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War as it was important to Washington that Arab armies be among its partners in the war against Saddam, at least symbolically.

In the end, this division did not fight, but its mere presence on the battlefield was of enormous significance. The commander of the division -- together with the Syrian chief of staff, Gen. Hikmat al-Shihabi -- returned home to Damascus full of admiration for the "American mighty war machine" to which they had been exposed. They were particularly deeply impressed by the accurate munitions that the U.S. Air Force had made massive use of, some of which was being deployed in combat for the first time.

In the wake of their reports, Assad convened a series of meetings in the second half of 1991, meetings that he presided over in person and were attended by the heads of the Syrian armed forces, intelligence, and the country's agency for the development of armaments, the Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC). The content of the meetings was obtained by Israeli intelligence.

Assad informed his people that as far as he was concerned, the basic assumption must be that if the Americans possessed this

impressive arsenal, the Israelis must also have similar items. In other words, the technological and qualitative gap between the Syrian and Israeli armies was now even wider than before. Assad declared that, in his opinion, there was no way of closing the gap between the Syrian army and the IDF in the near future.

Thus, Assad decided to invest in a powerful missile arm -- a division of the air force, but under his direct command and led mainly by loyal Alawites like him. Assad also decided that the missiles that the arm deployed would be tipped with lethal chemical warheads.

The investment in missiles was based on the assumption presented by Assad at the meetings that the Syrian air force was not capable of penetrating Israel's air defenses, but showers of missiles laced with chemical warheads could do so.

In the wake of the decision, a series of deals was signed with North Korea. At first, the production of the missiles was closely overseen by teams of North Korean engineers, but later on the Syrians managed to acquire the requisite know-how themselves.

In early July 2001, a new Israeli radar system detected the firing of a Scud from northern Syria's Aleppo area. With a range of 700 kilometers, the Scud D enabled the Syrians to deploy a broad, flexible missile network covering Israel's entire area, Lebanon, and parts of Turkey and Jordan. Before the Syrian civil war broke out, the Syrians had all the classes of Scud missiles and their launchers. They have used some against the rebels and against civilians, and it is not clear how many they still have in their arsenals today.

In parallel to their acquisition of missiles in the 1990s, the

Syrians launched a large-scale drive to obtain chemical weapons.

At first their bombs were filled with sarin gas, made to be dropped from aircraft. Later on, warheads for Syria's Scud missiles were developed. Israeli intelligence sources say that most of the equipment and know-how for the manufacture of these weapons came from the Soviet Union, China, and Czechoslovakia, along with the assistance of private individuals and companies in Western Europe and Japan.

In the mid-1990s, Syria succeeded in the manufacture of the most toxic chemical agent, VX. This agent is so hazardous that it consists of two separate substances that are kept apart inside a missile warhead and combine only when the warhead hits the ground, creating an extremely lethal neurotoxic agent. Unlike other chemical warfare elements, VX does not disperse in a short time. The know-how for the manufacture of this weapon was supplied by Russian President Boris Yeltsin's advisor on chemical weapons disarmament, Gen. Anatoly Kuntsevich.

Under the guise of a routine working visit to Syria, and as part of the good military relations that had remained between Syria and Russia (with the Russians still maintaining intelligence bases in the Golan Heights and in northern Syria), Kuntsevich began forming personal links with the heads of the Syrian regime. He received huge amounts of money from them, and in turn, he supplied them with the know-how and some of the equipment, which he acquired in Europe, for the manufacture of VX weapons.

In 1998, the Mossad learned details of some of these

transactions. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak tried to warn the heads of the government in Moscow about the general's doings in meetings he held with them in 1999, but to no avail. It seemed as though Yeltsin could not, or would not, intervene. When the Israelis saw that their pressure was not working, Mossad agents in Europe were assigned to pose as independent researchers working on the background for a documentary film on gas warfare. They repeatedly contacted high-ranking officials in the Kremlin and the Russian army and said that according to their information, Kuntsevich was selling chemical warfare agents to Syria. The goal was to scare Moscow into believing that the information was about to be made public. Unfortunately, this didn't work either, and apart from a stern warning, nothing was done to curb the general.

On April 3, 2002, Kuntsevich died mysteriously while on a flight from Damascus to Moscow. Also mysterious is the inscription on his headstone in Moscow, which states his death date as March 29. Syrian intelligence is convinced that the Mossad was behind his demise. Israeli officials have not commented on such allegations.

Historically, Israel has devoted many resources to keeping a watch on the Scientific Studies and Research Center, the main Syrian agency in charge of the effort to produce chemical and biological weapons. The SSRC was identified by U.S. intelligence as the front organization for the Syrian defense establishment, and the U.S. Treasury Department consequently imposed financial sanctions.

With over 10,000 personnel, the SSRC is responsible for operating the main facilities in Syria where chemical weapons

are manufactured and stored, according to Israeli military intelligence estimates. The main site is at al-Safir, in northern Syria, where the chemical weapons are assembled and stored and some of the Scud missiles and launchers are kept.

Al-Safir was one of the prime targets for the possible American attack proposed in late August. Now that such an attack has been called off, it will be a site of enormous interest to international weapons inspectors. Al-Safir is an enormous facility, covering dozens of square kilometers and comprising several sections, surrounded by patrol roads and high double fences.

On July 25, 2007, at al-Safir, a horrendous breakdown occurred in the production line of VX warhead components, a line that was constructed by the Syrians and North Koreans. One of the pipes feeding substances to the assembly line burst, and within seconds the entire line became a blazing inferno. The blast was so powerful that doors were blown off the building and the noxious gases escaped and spread across the entire al-Safir facility. The initial explosion killed 15 Syrians and, according to reports reaching the Mossad, 10 Iranian engineers at the site. An unknown number of people were seriously wounded, and some 200 are believed to have been affected. The rescue and first-aid forces permanently stationed at al-Safir were unable to handle all the casualties, and the authorities had to call in outside firefighting and rescue services, violating their goal of maintaining maximum secrecy at the site.

Investigations carried out after the incident by a special team appointed by the Syrian president reached the unequivocal conclusion that this was an intentional act of sabotage, though to

this day footprints leading to the perpetrators have not been traced. A senior Israeli cabinet minister speaking with me under terms of not identifying him would not refer directly to the al-Safir explosion, but would only say with a wink and a nod that it was "a marvelous mishap."

In June 2002, Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father, Hafez al-Assad, as president of Syria and introduced changes and reforms of his own in the country's defense establishment. He appointed Gen. Mohammed Suleiman to head up all special projects, including running, from the presidential palace, Syria's chemical arms arsenal.

Assad and Suleiman used the existing relationship with North Korea to reach a deal for the supply of a nuclear reactor, with the aim of using it to manufacture nuclear weapons.

Assad and Suleiman managed to conceal the existence of the entire plant from the Israelis. They did it mainly by issuing orders not to transmit any project information electronically and in effect "went back in time," as stated in an investigation conducted by Israeli military intelligence, with everything printed out as a hard copy and sent to its destination by couriers on motorcycles. When the Israelis came to identify the network that was built under their noses, in much delay, it was nicknamed by military intelligence as "General Suleiman's Shadow Army."

Without any connection to the project, about which the Israelis knew nothing for five years, Mossad agents managed to trail a senior Syrian official who traveled to London in January 2007. While a female operative of the Mossad's Rainbow unit

occupied him in the bar of his hotel, his room was broken into, and the contents of two USB flash drives in a bag next to his laptop were copied.

The stolen material was found to contain photographs of the reactor under construction. The Israelis were startled by the findings, and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert urgently conveyed them to U.S. President George W. Bush. The CIA and NSA conducted their own investigations and reached the conclusion that the information was accurate. Olmert asked Bush to bomb the plant, and when the negative reply was received, he ordered the Israeli Air Force to destroy it in September 2007.

Suleiman, before he was assassinated by Israeli special operations forces in August 2008, also encouraged Assad to strongly intensify links with the militant group Hezbollah. These ties were channeled mainly between Suleiman and Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah's military supremo, who was taken out in a February 2008 Mossad operation in Damascus.

In February 2010, Israeli intelligence identified a convoy of trucks leaving the al-Safir facility and crossing the border into Lebanon. The Israelis believed the cargo that the trucks carried consisted of Scud missile components on their way to Hezbollah. For Israel, a red line had been crossed, and according to a source working with the Israeli prime minister, it was suggested to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel should bomb the convoy. Netanyahu ultimately decided not to attack, and instead the information was conveyed to the Americans. On March 1, 2010, the Syrian ambassador to the United States, Imad Moustapha, was summoned urgently to the State Department, where he was informed that the United States

expected Syria to cease arming Hezbollah because of the very real risk of war.

The civil war that broke out in Syria some two and a half years ago has profoundly altered the balance of power in the Middle East. History plays strange games. If a deal to sequester and destroy Syria's chemical weapons isn't brokered at the United Nations, it could once again become possible that the huge missile force built by the Assad family will be the target of an attack by the "mighty American war machine," as General Shihabi, the Syrian chief of staff, had admiringly described it on his return from the Persian Gulf in 1991.

Indeed, many generations of technologies, resources, training, and quality of personnel separate the two forces, and that gap was true with regard to the Syrian army even before it was stretching its forces out in all directions in the attempt to stop the current uprising. The gap today is even more significant. The Syrian army has been worn down in the tough fighting of the last two-plus years.

Today, as the fighting rages, Israel enjoys the best intelligence on Syria in Western hands, and it is sharing that intelligence with the United States in advance of a possible attack. The Americans are also getting information from two other allies that have common frontiers with Syria: Jordan and Turkey, both of which gather information themselves and allow the NSA to set up listening posts on their territory.

Israel is well aware of the weakness of the Syrian army. Highly secretive intelligence collected by Israeli espionage agencies during the last year dealing with the transfer of weapons,

including Scud parts and advanced Russian shore-to-sea Yakhont (SS-N-26) missiles, from SSRC installations across Syria to Hezbollah was received with less hesitation by Netanyahu. A number of Israeli higher-ups, including the prime minister, have repeatedly declared that Israel will not agree to the transfer of such weapons to Lebanon, and each time that a consignment has been identified, it has been destroyed with pinpoint missile attacks. Israel has not admitted it was behind the six such attacks so far, but American intelligence sources and Syrian announcements made it explicitly clear that it was the Israeli Air Force that fired the missiles.

"Israel and other countries are following events in Syria with all the intelligence-gathering means at their disposal, and with great apprehension," Israeli President Shimon Peres told me in an unpublished excerpt from an interview for the New York Times Magazine this year. "If the Syrians dare to touch their chemical weapons and aim them at us or at innocent civilians, I have no doubt that the world as well as Israel will take decisive and immediate action. No less important -- Assad is liable to transfer the chemical weapons to Hezbollah, which from our point of view will constitute crossing a red line. It is incumbent upon Israel to prevent such a thing from happening, and it will take firm military action to do so."

Ronen Bergman is a senior correspondent for military and intelligence affairs for Yedioth Ahronoth, an Israeli daily, and a contributing writer for the New York Times Magazine.