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Article 1.

The Daily Beast

Obama's New Syria Options

Leslie H. Gelb

Aug 25, 2013-- After the most recent use of chemical weapons in Syria, President Obama is sheltering his next moves even from his closest advisers as the whole Obama administration inches painfully toward what they all see as the moment of truth in Syria.

Once again, he could walk away from the use of force because that option has little backing either in his administration or among Americans generally. But after an endless run of inter-agency meetings at the White House, the sense is that he is

nearing three conclusions: first, the Syrian government has put his credibility on the line irrevocably and inescapably; second, he now must take direct military action to punish the government of President Bashar al-Assad, though not in a manner that commits him to further use of force; and third, he needs to combine whatever force he uses now with dramatic and diplomatic initiatives.

Officials expect White House decisions to come quickly at this point. Most officials openly lament how they are being whipsawed between a general consensus in the administration against employing U.S. military force backed by huge opposition to doing so (60 percent) among polled Americans, and a growing and potent consensus among foreign policy experts and politicians to give Assad a hard punch.

Most administration officials and most Americans just can't see any lasting benefits from any form of direct U.S. military involvement in Syria, and they fear that initial actions would lead only to more and more force. On the other hand, policy experts and politicians are arguing with increasing vigor that America's and Obama's credibility in the Middle East and in the world are on the line, that he has drawn so many red lines against Assad's use of chemicals that neither he nor the U.S. can afford further thumb-sucking. This credibility argument is deeply reinforced by a humanitarian one. The refugee and death tolls are already sky high and leaping daily and now require more than mere rhetoric and emergency aid.

With these pressures and considerations in mind, here are the overlapping policy choices the Obama team has looked at over the last week:

1. Wait on the reports of U.N. inspectors, now apparently heading toward the site where chemical weapons were, in all probability, fired off. The expectation is the inspectors will find that such weapons were, in fact, employed. Few expect the inspectors can come to a definitive conclusion on whether the government or the rebels fired them. But the presumption is bound to be that the weapons belong to the government and that the government was responsible. As quickly as possible, take the matter to the U.N. Security Council, but anticipate a Russian and Chinese veto of military action. Taking these steps is more or less a given for Obama to satisfy his impulses to bow to international law.

2. Meantime, go to friendly Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates, plus key European allies such as Britain and France and see if they will join a military coalition as they did in Libya. This wouldn't provide full international or legal cover, but it would help. U.S. officials don't expect much support from Arab states, but hope for some from Paris and London. All this is to ensure the U.S. doesn't have to act alone.

3. Provide more and better military arms to the rebels, and this time actually expedite the equipment. Most administration officials still don't like this option. They remain unconvinced that they know enough about the rebels to make sure the aid doesn't fall into the wrong hands.

4. Attack Syrian government military targets with cruise missiles, drones or with the foregoing plus piloted U.S. aircraft. The number of attacks would be limited. The U.S. military still doesn't care for this option any more than it likes the idea of arming the rebels. They don't see its having much effect on

either Syrian capability or morale. They worry that it will produce only demands for more bombing.

5. Go further than air attacks and establish no fly zones over parts of Syria. These zones would border Turkey and Jordan, and perhaps Iraq, with the intent of protecting refugees and hitting Syrian fighters when and where possible. Some Congressional hawks love this option, but in the view of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, it would be very difficult to establish and conduct. The logistical problems are enormous and at least Turkey and Jordan would have to participate, an unlikely prospect.

6. Try to use the horror and political pressures of the latest chemical weapons attack to launch a new diplomatic negotiating initiative, perhaps focused on a cease-fire. To have any chance of success, this would require two things: first, genuine help from Russia to pressure the Assad government for compromises; and second, a U.S. willingness to make a deal with the Assad government plus some, but not all, of the rebels. No official is holding his breath on this one, but they all think it's worth marrying to any direct U.S. military force. The one concern is that diplomatic failure would serve to ramp up pressures for further military action. Besides, there's great uncertainty about how Assad will react to U.S. intervention, i.e., with more defiance or a willingness to talk.

7. Offer a significantly upgraded aid package for refugees in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, and a new and dramatic proposal for humanitarian aid to all needy Syrians inside Syria. Of course, the latter would require agreement and participation by Damascus. It might also be a good way to lay the groundwork

for future negotiations.

Obama has tried every which way to avoid any semblance of another war for America in the Middle East. It's the last thing he wants. But he may well have reached the point where taking some limited military action is the best way to build a wall against pressures for even more escalation.

Leslie H. Gelb, a former New York Times columnist and senior government official, is author of Power Rules: How Common Sense Can Rescue American Foreign Policy (HarperCollins, 2009), a book that shows how to think about and use power in the 21st century. He is president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Article 2.

The Wall Street Journal

Syria's Gas Attack on Civilization

Andrew Roberts

August 25, 2013 -- 'Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! An ecstasy of fumbling, fitting the clumsy helmets just in time; but someone still was yelling out and stumbling, and flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . . ."

Wilfred Owen's poem, "Dulce et Decorum Est," describing his experience of a chlorine-gas attack in World War I, highlights its horror and explains in part the thinking behind the Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, which comprehensively outlawed such weapons in 1925.

Only 4% of all battlefield deaths in the Great War had been caused by gas, yet the foul nature of those deaths meant that gas held a particular terror in the public imagination. Since 1925, it has only been countries that are recognized to be outside the bounds of civilization that have taken recourse to it.

The latest outlaw to do so is Syria's dictator, Bashar al-Assad, who deployed chemical weapons against opponents of his regime in the suburbs of Damascus on Aug. 21, according to press reports and a statement over the weekend by Doctors Without Borders.

The first was Benito Mussolini's Fascist Italy, which unleashed mustard gas on the Ethiopian subjects of Emperor Haile Selassie in the Abyssinian campaign of 1935-41. The gas dropped by the Italian air force was known by the Ethiopians as "the terrible rain that burned and killed."

The horrific results wrought upon unarmed civilians, photographed by the International Red Cross, were much the same as Wilfred Owen described in his poem about a comrade on the Western Front who had failed to put his gas-mask on in time: "Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light, as under a green sea, I saw him drowning. In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, he plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning."

Although both the Axis and Allied powers in World War II considered using poison gas, neither did, possibly through fear of retaliation. Adolf Hitler did use gas to perpetrate his Holocaust against the Jews in Europe. But he did not unleash this weapon on the battlefield—not even on the Eastern Front, where he considered that he was fighting against Slavic untermenschen (sub-humans).

His hesitation to use gas on the battlefield was not due to the fact that he had himself been gassed in the trenches of World War I, but because he rightly suspected an overwhelming Allied response to any first use of such a weapon. Winston Churchill actively considered using poison gas both defensively—in June 1940, when Britain faced invasion—and offensively, in July 1944, to aid the attacks on the Ruhr. Fortunately, no invasion came in 1940, and in 1944 he and the British chiefs of staff decided against the use of poison gas, putting moral considerations above the undoubted military benefits.

In the Korean War, the Chinese and North Korean intelligence services alleged that the United States had used aircraft to drop flies, fleas and spiders infected with anthrax, cholera, encephalitis, plague and meningitis in "germ bombs." In January 1998, documents in the Russian presidential archives conclusively proved that the charges were entirely fraudulent—invented as a way of blaming America for outbreaks of these infectious diseases in their own countries.

Some Marxist fellow-travellers in the West, such as the British academic Joseph Needham, promoted these foul libels, but even they—and, significantly, the disinformation machines of Beijing and Pyongyang—never went so far as to accuse the U.S. of

using poison gas. They recognized that no one would believe that United Nations forces in Korea would be so barbaric as to resort to such weapons.

In 1987 and 1988, Saddam Hussein launched attacks on no fewer than 40 Kurdish villages in northern Iraq, using new mixtures of mustard gas and various nerve agents such as Sarin, Tabun and VX. (Ten milligrams of VX on the skin can kill a man, while a single raindrop weighs eighty milligrams.) The worst attack came on March 16, 1988, in Halabja.

Iraqi troops methodically divided the town into grids, in order to determine the number and location of the dead and the extent of injuries, thereby enabling them scientifically to gauge the efficacy of various different types of gases and nerve agents. One of the first war correspondents to enter the town afterward, the late Richard Beeston of the Times of London, reported that "Like figures unearthed in Pompeii, the victims of Halabja were killed so quickly that their corpses remained in suspended animation. There was a plump baby whose face, frozen in a scream, stuck out from under the protective arm of a man, away from the open door of a house that he never reached."

Between 4,000 and 5,000 civilians, many of them women and children, died within a few hours at Halabja, through asphyxiation, skin burns and progressive respiratory shutdown. However, a further 10,000 were "blinded, maimed, disfigured, or otherwise severely and irreversibly debilitated," according to a report by the University of Liverpool's Christine Gosden.

These victims later suffered neurological disorders, convulsions, comas and digestive shutdown. In the years to come, thousands

more, the State Department noted, were to suffer from "horrific complications, debilitating diseases, and birth defects" such as lymphoma, leukemia, colon, breast, skin and other cancers, miscarriages, infertility and congenital malformations, leading to many more deaths.

It takes a barbarian to employ poison gas. Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler (with Zyklon B) and Saddam Hussein were three such, and today another is Assad. Yet the Chinese and Russians continue to excuse and defend him, and the White House ties itself into rhetorical knots in order to avoid having to topple him.

It's true that in this civil war, shrapnel and Kalashnikov bullets have killed many more of the 100,000 Syrians than has poison gas. Nevertheless, it is right that the use of poison gas by Assad be singled out for special condemnation.

Wilfred Owen, who was himself killed a week before the end of the Great War, recalled in "Dulce et Decorum Est" his gassed comrade's "white eyes writhing in his face, his hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin" and how he heard "the blood come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs, obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues." There is a long and honorable history of the civilized world treating those dictators who use poison gas as qualitatively different from the normal ruck of tyrants whose careers have so stained the 20th and 21st centuries.

President Obama, who talks endlessly of the importance of civilized values, must now uphold this one.

Mr. Roberts, an historian, is the author, most recently, of "The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War" (Harper, 2011).

Article 3.

The Washington Post

Syria will require more than cruise missiles

Eliot A. Cohen

August 26 -- In 1994, after directing the U.S. Air Force's official study of the Persian Gulf War, I concluded, "Air power is an unusually seductive form of military strength, in part because, like modern courtship, it appears to offer gratification without commitment." That observation stands. It explains the Obama administration's enthusiasm for a massive, drone-led assassination campaign against al-Qaeda terrorists. And it applies with particular force to a prospective, U.S.-led attack on the Syrian government in response to its use of chemical weapons against a civilian population.

President Obama has boxed himself in. He can no longer ignore his own proclamation of a "red line." The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a breach of proper civil-military relations, has publicly telegraphed his skepticism about any use of force in

Syria. But the scale, openness and callousness of the Syrian government's breaking of an important taboo seems likely to compel this president — so proud of his record as a putative war-ender — to launch the warplanes yet again in the Middle East.

The temptation here is to follow the Clinton administration's course — a futile salvo of cruise missiles, followed by self-congratulation and an attempt to change the topic. It would not work here. A minority regime fighting for its life, as Bashar al-Assad's is, can weather a couple of dozen big bangs. More important, no one — friends, enemies or neutrals — would be fooled. As weak as the United States now appears in the region and beyond, we would look weaker yet if we chose to act ineffectively. A bout of therapeutic bombing is an even more feckless course of action than a principled refusal to act altogether.

A serious bombing campaign would have substantial targets — most plausibly the Syrian air force, the service once headed by Assad's father, which gives the regime much of its edge over the rebels, as well as the air defense system and the country's airports, through which aid arrives from Iran. But should the Obama administration choose any kind of bombing campaign, it needs to face some hard facts.

For one thing, and despite the hopes of some proponents of an air campaign, this would not be surgical. No serious application of air power ever is, despite administration officials' claims about the drone campaign, which, as we now know, has killed plenty of civilians. A serious bombing campaign means civilian casualties, at our hands. And it may mean U.S. and allied casualties too, because the idea of a serious military effort

without risk is fatuous.

The administration would need congressional authorization. Despite his professed commitment to transparency and constitutional niceties, Obama has proved himself reluctant to secure congressional authorization for the use of force, most notably with Libya in 2011. Even if an authorization is conferred retroactively, it needs to be done here because this would be a large use of force; indeed, an act of war.

And it probably would not end cleanly. When the president proclaimed the impending conclusion of the war with al-Qaeda, he disregarded the cardinal fact of strategy: It is (at least) a two-sided game. The other side, not we, gets to decide when it ends. And in this case neither the Syrian government nor its Iranian patrons, nor its Hezbollah, Russian and Chinese allies, may choose to shrug off a bombing campaign. Chess players who think one move ahead usually lose; so do presidents who think they can launch a day or two of strikes and then walk away with a win. The repercussions may be felt in neighboring countries; they may even be felt in the United States, and there is no excuse for ignoring that fact.

Despite all these facts, not to act would be, at this point and by the administration's own standards, intolerable.

The slaughter in Syria, tolerated for so long, now approaches the same order of magnitude (with the number of dead totaling six figures at least) as Rwanda, but in a strategically more important place. Already it is late, perhaps too late, to prevent Syria from becoming the new Afghanistan or Yemen, home to rabidly anti-Western jihadis. A critical firebreak, the use of chemical weapons on a large scale, has been breached.

No less important, U.S. prestige is on the line. Why should anyone, anywhere, take Obama's threats (or for that matter, his promises) seriously if he does nothing here? Not to act is to decide, and to decide for an even worse outcome than the one that awaits us.

"War is an option of difficulties," a British general once remarked. The question before the president is whether he will make matters worse by convincing himself that he has found a minimal solution to a fiendish problem. He will convince no one else.

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Article 4.

The Wall Street Journal

The Failed Grand Strategy in the Middle East

Walter Russell Mead

August 24 - In the beginning, the Hebrew Bible tells us, the universe was all "tohu wabohu," chaos and tumult. This month

the Middle East seems to be reverting to that primeval state: Iraq continues to unravel, the Syrian War grinds on with violence spreading to Lebanon and allegations of chemical attacks this week, and Egypt stands on the brink of civil war with the generals crushing the Muslim Brotherhood and street mobs torching churches. Turkey's prime minister, once widely hailed as President Obama's best friend in the region, blames Egypt's violence on the Jews; pretty much everyone else blames it on the U.S.

The Obama administration had a grand strategy in the Middle East. It was well intentioned, carefully crafted and consistently pursued.

Unfortunately, it failed. The plan was simple but elegant: The U.S. would work with moderate Islamist groups like Turkey's AK Party and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood to make the Middle East more democratic. This would kill three birds with one stone. First, by aligning itself with these parties, the Obama administration would narrow the gap between the 'moderate middle' of the Muslim world and the U.S. Second, by showing Muslims that peaceful, moderate parties could achieve beneficial results, it would isolate the terrorists and radicals, further marginalizing them in the Islamic world. Finally, these groups with American support could bring democracy to more Middle Eastern countries, leading to improved economic and social conditions, gradually eradicating the ills and grievances that drove some people to fanatical and terroristic groups. President Obama (whom I voted for in 2008) and his team hoped that the success of the new grand strategy would demonstrate once and for all that liberal Democrats were capable stewards of American foreign policy. The bad memories of the Lyndon Johnson and

Jimmy Carter presidencies would at last be laid to rest; with the public still unhappy with George W. Bush's foreign policy troubles, Democrats would enjoy a long-term advantage as the party most trusted by voters to steer the country through stormy times. It is much too early to anticipate history's verdict on the Obama administration's foreign policy; the president has 41 months left in his term, and that is more than enough for the picture in the Middle East to change drastically once again. Nevertheless, to get a better outcome, the president will have to change his approach. With the advantages of hindsight, it appears that the White House made five big miscalculations about the Middle East. It misread the political maturity and capability of the Islamist groups it supported; it misread the political situation in Egypt; it misread the impact of its strategy on relations with America's two most important regional allies (Israel and Saudi Arabia); it failed to grasp the new dynamics of terrorist movements in the region; and it underestimated the costs of inaction in Syria. America's Middle East policy in the past few years depended on the belief that relatively moderate Islamist political movements in the region had the political maturity and administrative capability to run governments wisely and well. That proved to be half-true in the case of Turkey's AK Party: Until fairly recently Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whatever mistakes he might make, seemed to be governing Turkey in a reasonably effective and reasonably democratic way. But over time, the bloom is off that rose. Mr. Erdogan's government has arrested journalists, supported dubious prosecutions against political enemies, threatened hostile media outlets and cracked down crudely on protesters. Prominent members of the party leadership look increasingly unhinged, blaming Jews, telekinesis and other mysterious forces

for the growing troubles it faces. Things have reached such a pass that the man President Obama once listed as one of his five best friends among world leaders and praised as "an outstanding partner and an outstanding friend on a wide range of issues" is now being condemned by the U.S. government for "offensive" anti-Semitic charges that Israel was behind the overthrow of Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi. Compared with Mr. Morsi, however, Mr. Erdogan is a Bismarck of effective governance and smart policy. Mr. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood were quite simply not ready for prime time; they failed to understand the limits of their mandate, fumbled incompetently with a crumbling economy and governed so ineptly and erratically that tens of millions of Egyptians cheered on the bloody coup that threw them out.

Tinfoil-hat conspiracy theorists and incompetent bumblers make a poor foundation for American grand strategy. We would have done business with the leaders of Turkey and Egypt under almost any circumstances, but to align ourselves with these movements hasn't turned out to be wise. The White House, along with much of the rest of the American foreign policy world, made another key error in the Middle East: It fundamentally misread the nature of the political upheaval in Egypt. Just as Thomas Jefferson mistook the French Revolution for a liberal democratic movement like the American Revolution, so Washington thought that what was happening in Egypt was a "transition to democracy." That was never in the cards.

What happened in Egypt was that the military came to believe that an aging President Hosni Mubarak was attempting to engineer the succession of his son, turning Egypt from a military

republic to a dynastic state. The generals fought back; when unrest surged, the military stood back and let Mr. Mubarak fall. The military, incomparably more powerful than either the twittering liberals or the bumbling Brotherhood, has now acted to restore the form of government Egypt has had since the 1950s. Now most of the liberals seem to understand that only the military can protect them from the Islamists, and the Islamists are learning that the military is still in charge. During these events, the Americans and Europeans kept themselves endlessly busy and entertained trying to promote a nonexistent democratic transition. The next problem is that the Obama administration misread the impact that its chosen strategies would have on relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia—and underestimated just how miserable those two countries can make America's life in the Middle East if they are sufficiently annoyed.

The break with Israel came early. In those unforgettable early days when President Obama was being hailed by the press as a new Lincoln and Roosevelt, the White House believed that it could force Israel to declare a total settlement freeze to restart negotiations with the Palestinians. The resulting flop was President Obama's first big public failure in foreign policy. It would not be the last. (For the past couple of years, the administration has been working to repair relations with the Israelis; as one result, the peace talks that could have started in 2009 with better U.S. management are now under way.) The breach with Saudis came later and this one also seems to have caught the White House by surprise. By aligning itself with Turkey and Mr. Morsi's Egypt, the White House was undercutting Saudi policy in the region and siding with Qatar's

attempt to seize the diplomatic initiative from its larger neighbor. Many Americans don't understand just how much the Saudis dislike the Brotherhood and the Islamists in Turkey. Not all Islamists are in accord; the Saudis have long considered the Muslim Brotherhood a dangerous rival in the world of Sunni Islam. Prime Minister Erdogan's obvious hunger to revive Turkey's glorious Ottoman days when the center of Sunni Islam was in Istanbul is a direct threat to Saudi primacy. That Qatar and its Al Jazeera press poodle enthusiastically backed the Turks and the Egyptians with money, diplomacy and publicity only angered the Saudis more. With America backing this axis—while also failing to heed Saudi warnings about Iran and Syria—Riyadh wanted to undercut rather than support American diplomacy. An alliance with the Egyptian military against Mr. Morsi's weakening government provided an irresistible opportunity to knock Qatar, the Brotherhood, the Turks and the Americans back on their heels. The fourth problem is that the administration seems to have underestimated the vitality and adaptability of the loose group of terrorist movements and cells. The death of Osama bin Laden was a significant victory, but the effective suppression of the central al Qaeda organization in Afghanistan and Pakistan was anything but a knockout blow. Today a resurgent terrorist movement can point to significant achievements in the Libya-Mali theater, in northern Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere. The closure of 20 American diplomatic facilities this month was a major moral victory for the terrorists, demonstrating that they retain the capacity to affect American behavior in a major way. Recruiting is easier, morale is higher, and funding is easier to get for our enemies than President Obama once hoped. Finally, the administration, rightfully concerned about the costs of intervention in Syria,

failed to grasp early enough just how much it would cost to stay out of this ugly situation. As the war has dragged on, the humanitarian toll has grown to obscene proportions (far worse than anything that would have happened in Libya without intervention), communal and sectarian hatreds have become poisonous almost ensuring more bloodletting and ethnic and religious cleansing, and instability has spread from Syria into Iraq, Lebanon and even Turkey. All of these problems grow worse the longer the war goes on—but it is becoming harder and costlier almost day by day to intervene.

But beyond these problems, the failure to intervene early in Syria (when "leading from behind" might well have worked) has handed important victories to both the terrorists and the Russia-Iran axis, and has seriously eroded the Obama administration's standing with important allies. Russia and Iran backed Bashar al-Assad; the president called for his overthrow—and failed to achieve it. To hardened realists in Middle Eastern capitals, this is conclusive proof that the American president is irredeemably weak. His failure to seize the opportunity for what the Russians and Iranians fear would have been an easy win in Syria cannot be explained by them in any other way. This is dangerous. Just as Nikita Khrushchev concluded that President Kennedy was weak and incompetent after the Bay of Pigs failure and the botched Vienna summit, and then proceeded to test the American president from Cuba to Berlin, so President Vladimir Putin and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei now believe they are dealing with a dithering and indecisive American leader, and are calibrating their policies accordingly. Khrushchev was wrong about Kennedy, and President Obama's enemies are also underestimating him, but those underestimates

can create dangerous crises before they are corrected. If American policy in Syria has been a boon to the Russians and Iranians, it has been a godsend to the terrorists. The prolongation of the war has allowed terrorist and radical groups to establish themselves as leaders in the Sunni fight against the Shiite enemy. A reputation badly tarnished by both their atrocities and their defeat in Iraq has been polished and enhanced by what is seen as their courage and idealism in Syria. The financial links between wealthy sources in the Gulf and jihadi fighter groups, largely sundered in the last 10 years, have been rebuilt and strengthened. Thousands of radicals are being trained and indoctrinated, to return later to their home countries with new skills, new ideas and new contacts. This development in Syria looks much more dangerous than the development of the original mujahedeen in Afghanistan; Afghanistan is a remote and (most Middle Easterners believe) a barbarous place. Syria is in the heart of the region and the jihadi spillover threatens to be catastrophic.

One of the interesting elements of the current situation is that while American foreign policy has encountered one setback after another in the region, America's three most important historical partners—Egypt's military, Saudi Arabia and Israel—have all done pretty well and each has bested the U.S. when policies diverged.

Alliances play a large role in America's foreign policy success; tending the Middle Eastern alliances now in disarray may be the Obama administration's best hope now to regain its footing.

As the Obama administration struggles to regain its footing in this volatile region, it needs to absorb the lessons of the past 4½

years. First, allies matter. Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Egyptian military have been America's most important regional allies both because they share strategic interests and because they are effective actors in a way that groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and smaller states aren't. If these three forces are working with you, then things often go reasonably well. If one or more of them is trying to undercut you, pain comes. The Obama administration undertook the hard work necessary to rebuild its relationship with Israel; it needs to devote more attention to the concerns of the Egyptian generals and the House of Saud. Such relationships don't mean abandoning core American values; rather they recognize the limits on American power and seek to add allies where our own unaided efforts cannot succeed.

Second, the struggle against terror is going to be harder than we hoped. Our enemies have scattered and multiplied, and the violent jihadi current has renewed its appeal. In the Arab world, in parts of Africa, in Europe and in the U.S., a constellation of revitalized and inventive movements now seeks to wreak havoc. It is delusional to believe that we can eliminate this problem by eliminating poverty, underdevelopment, dictatorship or any other "root causes" of the problem; we cannot eliminate them in a policy-relevant time frame. An ugly fight lies ahead. Instead of minimizing the terror threat in hopes of calming the public, the president must prepare public opinion for a long-term struggle.

Third, the focus must now return to Iran. Concern with Iran's growing power is the thread that unites Israel and Saudi Arabia. Developing and moving on an Iran strategy that both Saudis and Israelis can support will help President Obama rebuild America's position in the shifting sands. That is likely to mean a much

tougher policy on Syria. Drawing red lines in the sand and stepping back when they are crossed won't rebuild confidence.

President Obama now faces a moment similar to the one President Carter faced when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. The assumptions that shaped key elements of his foreign policy have not held up; times have changed radically and policy must shift. The president is a talented leader; the world will be watching what he does.

Mr. Mead is the James Clarke Chace Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College and editor-at-large of the American Interest.

Article 5.

NYT

Adrift on the Nile

Bill Keller

August 25, 2013 -- IN May 2011, when the promise of the Arab Spring was still fresh and exhilarating, President Obama went to the State Department to proclaim an important reorientation of American policy in the Middle East. For decades America had defined its interests in utilitarian terms: regional stability, countering terrorism and nuclear proliferation (and, in the cold war years, Soviet influence), defending Israel's security,

assuring the free flow of oil and other commerce. That often meant alliances of convenience with brutal authoritarians.

"But the events of the past six months show us that strategies of repression and strategies of diversion will not work anymore," the president said. The uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia and Libya had affirmed "that we have a stake not just in the stability of nations, but in the self-determination of individuals. The status quo is not sustainable." Without renouncing our commitment to those old interests, the president embraced a supplementary set of "core principles": supporting universal rights, encouraging political and economic reforms, opposing violence and oppression.

"Our support for these principles is not a secondary interest," he insisted. "Today I want to make it clear that it is a top priority that must be translated into concrete actions and supported by all of the diplomatic, economic and strategic tools at our disposal."

In the excruciating test that Egypt has become, the president has largely failed to live up to his own eloquently articulated standard. In the two years since his speech — and most shamefully in the eight weeks since the army's coup — America has seemed not just cautious (caution is good) but timid and indecisive, reactive and shortsighted, stranded between our professed commitment to change and our fear of chaos. One of the administration's most acute critics, Vali Nasr of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, goes so far as to suggest that United States policy is, whether by design or inertia, coming full circle: back to a pre-Arab Spring, Islamophobic, order-at-all-costs policy that puts us in the cynical company of Saudi Arabia and Russia. Is it any wonder that the

generals in Egypt feel they can get away with murder — or, for that matter, that Syria's Assad thinks he can call our bluff and poison his people with impunity?

It has become the conventional wisdom in Washington that the United States has no "leverage" in Egypt. That is at best an excuse for not trying very hard, at worst a self-fulfilling prophecy. Of course, "leverage" does not mean that supplying a few F-16 fighter planes buys you the compliance of a foreign army. (Witness Pakistan.) And, of course, Egypt's fate is, and must be, in Egyptian hands. But we have serious strategic interests in a democratic Egypt, as the president himself asserted with such fervor, and we have influence. We should have used our influence earlier. We can and should use it now.

During the last great democratic opening, when the Soviet Union lost its grip, the states that were newly liberated did not transform themselves unaided from Communist vassals into model democracies. The United States and Western Europe offered infusions of money, expertise and, just as important, a new status: the prospect, if the novice democracies met certain tests, of membership in the great clubs of civilized nations, NATO and the European Union. It took years, and not all of the former Soviet republics have made the transition, but we helped midwife some thriving new democracies.

I get that this is different. Egypt is not Poland, Europe's economy is not as robust as it was then, and Americans have lost their appetite for overseas engagement. There is no Middle East equivalent of NATO or the E.U. And there is a gloomy sense that Egypt may already be in a kind of death spiral.

But with a little leadership the U.S. could have mobilized a united Western front, embraced the standards Obama laid out in 2011, and offered Egypt's factions incentives to stay on a path toward political reconciliation and economic growth. There was a halfhearted effort led by France in 2011 to create a sort of collective support system for Arab Spring democracy; the so-called Deauville Partnership never got much beyond the stage of rhetoric. I'm told a more ambitious proposal for a concerted Arab Spring initiative was debated within the Obama administration in 2012 but was rejected because it might have been a distraction from President Obama's all-about-the-middle-class re-election campaign.

It is late for Egypt, but maybe not too late. The president could still join forces with European allies, some of which seem more willing than we are to stand up to the generals. Europe has pledged $6.7 billion to Egypt, and the U.S. gives about $1.5 billion, most of it military. Imagine if the West suspended all that aid and deposited it into a kind of trust fund, to be disbursed to help Egypt's recovery if it kept on a course away from violent repression and intolerance and toward inclusion and the rule of law.

You will hear several arguments for continuing to supply aid to the military regime, in spite of the slaughter in the streets, in spite of the generals' apparent intention to disenfranchise not only the Muslim Brotherhood, the party that won the first free elections, but, as David Kirkpatrick reported in Sunday's Times, dissenters of any stripe. The money, we are told, keeps the lines of communication open. It helps assure Egypt's adherence to the Camp David accords and cooperation against terrorists. We get an E-ZPass through the Suez Canal and automatic permission

for our military aircraft to transit the region. If we stop our aid, the Saudis and the Arab Emirates will just replace it.

There is something to each of these worries, but less than meets the eye. Egypt's rulers behave out of self-interest. They cooperate with the U.S. — and with Israel — against terrorists because they fear terrorists, a mutual concern that has only become more acute with the alarming rise of extremist attacks in Sinai.

"It's not as if aid gets cut off and Egypt says, 'We're going to war with Israel,' " said Nathan Brown, a Middle East scholar at George Washington University and the Carnegie Endowment. "Egypt's attitude toward Islamic terrorism — right now, they're on the same page as Fox News."

Sure, if aid is suspended gulf states will send money in the short term, but Egypt has no desire to become a permanent ward of the petro-monarchs. The military is thoroughly enmeshed in Egypt's impoverished economy, and desperately wants the Western investment, trade and tourism that bring growth and jobs.

One real risk of suspending aid is that the Egyptians who most share our values — the more secular, more moderate young Egyptians who deplore the Muslim Brotherhood and seem to support the military coup — will feel that we have abandoned them. This is an intensely nationalistic moment in Egyptian history and a popular backlash against America is a real worry in the short run. But the truth is, the Egyptian moderates already blame us — for standing by while the Morsi presidency played Islamist winner-take-all. In the short run, we are not going to be popular in Egypt.

There is a strong moral argument and a strong legal argument for refusing to bless the military's repression, but there is also a persuasive pragmatic reason. The current course is, in the president's phrase, not sustainable.

"The behavior of the Egyptian military is driving the country farther down the path of instability," said Tamara Cofman Wittes, director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. "And it's going to make Egypt less able to cooperate with us on counterterror and other regional security concerns because it will be more enmeshed in its own domestic strife."

"We have to think through strategically what's going to be in our long-term national interests," the president told CNN last week, speaking of his options in Egypt and Syria. He might start by going back and reading his own speech.

Article 6.

The National Interest

Arab Spring or Islamic Spring?

Ross Harrison

August 26, 2013 -- Is the Arab Spring still an appropriate moniker for describing the series of uprisings that started with the overthrow of Tunisian president Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and then spread eastward to engulf Libya, Egypt, Syria and Yemen? Or given how the region has evolved over the past couple of

years, would a more accurate label be the Islamic Spring? Prior to the overthrow of Egypt's president Mohamed Morsi, whose roots were in the Muslim Brotherhood, the trend line looked pretty clear. Islamic-flavored governments had sprouted in Tunisia and Egypt, and there had been an alarming rise of extremist Islamic groups in the civil conflicts in Syria and Iraq. But the recent violent purges of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt should cause a reassessment of whether the emergence of Islamic leadership in the region is an intermediate stage of a process that will ultimately return to a more secular brand of politics, or whether this will be a permanent legacy of the Arab Spring. This question isn't trivial, as the political fortunes of Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, and the interests of the United States, hang in the balance. A window onto the question of whether it will be political Islam or secular nationalism that will emerge strengthened from the current regional instability is provided by examining the complex relationship between secular and religious identities in the Middle East. In the political psyche of countries with strong national identities, like Egypt, Islamic identity and national identity are two sides of the same coin. While wrapped in very different symbols and ideologies, secular and religious identities both are receptacles for, and get stirred by, nationalist goals and grievances. The identity which achieves primacy in the political consciousness of a particular individual or group is likely to be the one perceived as the most instrumental in solving political (and social) problems, not necessarily the one with the deepest ideological or historical roots.

Let’s look at the historical relationship between secular and religious identities in the Middle East in this light, starting with

the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1920s, and culminating with the Iranian revolution in 1979. In both of these countries, Islamic identity gained political currency, not as a repudiation of nationalism, but as a more effective vehicle for delivering on nationalism's promises.

In Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s it was the inability of secular nationalist leaders to deliver the country from the vice-grip of British colonialist control that stirred the Islamic political identity of Egyptian youth, and transformed the Muslim Brotherhood from a fringe to a more mainstream movement. Inspired by the anticolonialist rhetoric of Islamic leaders, both secular and religious-minded youth abandoned the nationalist Wafd party to join the Muslim Brotherhood. And in Iran in 1979, individuals who were ardent secular nationalists donned Islamic garb and supported the Islamic Revolution and its leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. For them, Islam became a more potent outlet for nationalist ambitions than the Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, who had lost political legitimacy. This tilt towards political Islam by Iranians normally predisposed to be secular tells us that the revolution wasn't a repudiation of secular nationalism, but rather an alternative vehicle for expressing it. So what does this retrospective view mean for the future of Egypt's national identity? It means that Islamic politics is likely to continue to be a viable part of the political mix because of, not in spite of, Egypt's strong national identity. For the followers of the Muslim Brotherhood, the popularity of the organization doesn't merely stem from its ability to tap into religious fervor, but also from its deftness in tapping into Egypt's national narrative and its political aspirations. Despite the terrorist labels Egypt's current military

leaders apply to followers of the Brotherhood, one shouldn't forget that Islamic identity isn't a negation of nationalism, but rather a different embodiment of it. For this reason, the Egyptian military, unable to completely quash the Brotherhood, would be wise to eventually create a pathway back into the political system for the Islamic organization. The political dynamics in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, countries with weak national identities, however, are completely different. In these countries, Islamic and national identities aren't two sides of the same coin, but rather polar opposites of one another. In the absence of strong national identities and communities, Islamic groups fill the political vacuum. But in contrast to Egypt, where national and Islamic identities are mutually reinforcing, Islamic identities in these weak states don't strengthen the national fabric; they tear at it. Some have suggested that one way out of the current conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon is the devolution of existing states into more viable Shi'ite, Sunni, and Christian enclaves. But the emergence of rump states built on sectarian religious identities is unlikely, as the current conflicts along sectarian lines are symptomatic of crumbling states and illegitimate political structures, not evidence of a crystallization of new and durable political communities. Sectarian religious identities may represent a pathway into conflict, but they don't necessarily provide a roadmap out. Predictions about the formation of states built on sectarian religious identities also ignore the tug of ethnic and nationalist identities that may form a solider foundation for political community. A tilt towards these types of secular identities could be reinforced by the geopolitics of the region. If Syria, Lebanon and Iraq do start to splinter on sectarian lines, the threat of possible exploitation by Iran and Turkey could be a stimulant for some kind of revived Arab

nationalism. As we saw with Egypt and Iran, identity shifts can occur in response to the need to generate power. The rise of non-Arab Iran and Turkey as regional powers, juxtaposed with the weakening of states like Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, might just be that imperative. The specter of this could be the jolt required to push sectarian identities once again beneath the surface in favor of a more powerful, unifying nationalist identity. So the outlook for political Islam in the region is likely to be mixed. Paradoxically, in Egypt where the Muslim Brotherhood is being brutally suppressed, the prospects for an eventual role for Islamists are reasonably strong. The only question is whether that will be played from the underground opposition or as part of a new government. The Egyptian military will hopefully pull back from the brink before it is too late, keeping in mind that the challenges from the Brotherhood revolve around issues of legitimate governance and leadership, not Egypt's national identity. This is in stark contrast to Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, where current battles are being fought for national identity. Washington lacks the leverage to stem any of these conflicts. But if its goals are stabilization of Egypt and prevention of further advances by Islamic elements in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, then it must take care not to unwittingly sully the credentials of secular-nationalist elites in these countries. For this reason, despite the political pressure in Washington for more muscular responses to the situations in Syria and Egypt, at this point the Obama administration is correct in its decision to tread lightly.

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Thinking in 3D: A Guide for National Security, Foreign Policy and Business Professionals *(Potomac Books: 2013).*

Article 7.

The New York Times

Reading Tweets from Iran

Editorial

August 25 - Social media are an unorthodox, but useful, way to start to get a sense of Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani. In a flurry of English-language posts on Twitter since his election in June, Mr. Rouhani has given reason to hope that he is serious about resolving disputes with the United States and other major powers, most urgently about Iran's nuclear program. "We don't want further tension. Both nations need 2 think more abt future & try 2 sit down & find solutions to past issues & rectify things," he, or somebody writing in his name, said on June 17. On the nuclear program, he commented: "Our program is transparent, but we can take more steps to make it clear to world that our nuclear program is within intl regulations." This seemingly reasonable outlook — refreshing after the ugly, confrontational approach of his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — has been reinforced by other recent moves. The most significant is Mr. Rouhani's appointment of Mohammad Javad Zarif as foreign minister. In addition to being educated in the United States and serving many years as Iran's ambassador at the United Nations, Mr. Zarif has been at the center of several rounds of secret negotiations over the years to try to overcome

decades of enmity between the two countries. Mr. Zarif is also being considered to lead a new round of nuclear negotiations with the major powers, replacing the conservative Saeed Jalili, who made things worse when he was in that job. At his first news conference, President Rouhani parried questions about possible direct talks with Washington — which will be essential at some point for any deal to be concluded — but said he was ready to "seriously engage and interact with other parties." It would be naïve to assume that the path to ending Iran's isolation is now clear. Hostilities between America and Iran have hardened since the 1979 Islamic revolution. For some time after the covert nuclear program was discovered in 2002, Iranian officials shrewdly played a weak hand to divide the international community and avoid sanctions. It seems likely that Mr. Rouhani, with his benign demeanor, seductive tone and more "moderate" message, will be more focused, serious and skillful in negotiations than Mr. Ahmadinejad, but still unyielding in Iran's core demand to retain significant nuclear capability. Even so, there are strong forces propelling both sides toward a deal. Harsh sanctions imposed by the United States, Europe and the United Nations since 2009 have devastated Iran's economy, which Mr. Rouhani is desperate to revive. Although there is no evidence that Iran has produced a nuclear weapon, its program has steadily advanced, prompting both President Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to warn of possible military action. At a time when the Middle East and South Asia are in turmoil, there are also many regional issues that could benefit from American-Iranian cooperation, including Afghanistan and Syria.

President Rouhani is sending strong signals that he will dispatch

a pragmatic, experienced team to the table when negotiations resume, possibly next month. That's when we should begin to see answers to key questions: How much time and creative thinking are he and President Obama willing to invest in a negotiated solution, the only rational outcome? How much political risk are they willing to take, which for Mr. Obama must include managing the enmity that Israel and many members of Congress feel toward Iran?

And finally: Do the two sides have the courage to resolve a conflict that has been decades in the making?