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Article 1.

The National Interest

Israel's Gift to Iran

Marvin G. Weinbaum

March 19, 2012 -- Are Iran's leaders rational actors? This question matters when justifying any decision by Israel to preempt Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons. An Iranian regime seen as driven to destroy the Jewish state has to be dealt with differently than one whose objectives are mediated by calculations of costs and benefits. Deterrents that would be

normally expected to restrain a state would not work with an irrational Iran. But if the Islamic republic, for all its bluster, in fact carefully weighs its policies and values regime survival, then threats alone could succeed in curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions—and presumably this Iran would allot high priority to avoiding armed attack on its homeland. But could the same rationally thinking Iranian leadership instead be welcoming a military strike on the nation's soil? Iran's more provocative statements and actions in recent months offer strong evidence that some influential policy makers see an attack on the country's nuclear assets by Israel or the United States as promising rich dividends. They would like nothing more than the opportunity it offers to shed the country's present international-pariah status and assume the mantle of a victim nation. Massive air attacks against nuclear sites across the country can be counted on to kill or injure hundreds of civilians. Should there be a release of radioactivity that threatens many more deaths, international sympathy for Iran would increase dramatically. Iran's leaders can look forward to angry demonstrations erupting across the Muslim world. Popular participation would predictably be more massive and potentially violent in this season of the Arab Awakening. The Tehran regime also could enjoy watching political protests fueled by exploding oil prices breaking out across Europe. The hard fight for economic sanctions against Iran would, in all probability, fall apart. UN resolutions of condemnation would certainly be expected to follow, votes where the United States could very well be left standing virtually alone in rationalizing the bombings. Even were it only Israeli planes that carried out the raids, Washington and Tel Aviv would be lumped together as aggressors. Iran's leaders well understand that certain

governing elites, especially among the Gulf countries, would be pleased to see a preemptive attack that dealt Iran's nuclear ambitions a setback. Yet an Israeli attack offers an opportunity to put Iran's regional rivals on the defense. Were these Arab leaders, some with restive populations, to fail to join the chorus decrying the strike on Iran, they would risk alienating their own citizens. After an attack, the continued presence of American military bases in the Gulf could become untenable. Other regional windfalls can be anticipated by Iran. Already inflamed anti-American public sentiment in Afghanistan and Pakistan undoubtedly would be further stoked by the bombing of Iran. Anxious to have American troops out of its backyard, Iran could count on pressures from all directions for an accelerated U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan. Fears of a negotiated strategic agreement between Washington and the Karzai government allowing a residual presence of foreign forces would disappear. Opportunities for Iran to expand its already extensive political and economic influence over its neighbor would certainly improve. In Pakistan, with conspiracies about nefarious joint American and Israeli designs already a staple of popular opinion, Iran could take pleasure in witnessing a further blow to Pakistan's relations with the United States and conceivably a genuine divorce. This international political bonanza would be more than matched by an appealing domestic payoff. Notwithstanding the disdain that millions of Iranians have for their Islamic government, the country's fiercely nationalistic public can be counted on to rally behind its leaders to the country's defense. An attack on the homeland could set back chances for the revival of the reformist Green Movement for at least a decade. Even the reformers have been solidly in favor of Iran retaining its nuclear program. Who now at home or abroad

would dare question the regime's argument if it decides to build a bomb? And the price to pay for all this good fortune would be minimal. For all that Israel's military operation could hope to accomplish, it would at best delay Iran's eventual building of a nuclear arsenal by a few years. Iran would also have the pleasure of knowing that its elaborate construction program to protect its nuclear assets had given them a high degree of invulnerability. Destruction of any of attacking planes could be hailed as a victory against the aggressor. A rational Iran is likely to refrain from openly retaliating against Israel. Iran's leaders can be expected to forgo any immediate payback in favor of cashing in on their accrued political bounty. Undertaking a direct military response might invite a more general war, drawing in the United States and risking Iran's entire military infrastructure. It would also detract from the country's portrayal of itself as the aggrieved party.

But a measured reaction to an Israeli attack would not preclude any violent response. Iran might encourage Hezbollah and Hamas to act as surrogates and launch rockets against Israel, or it might increase the clandestine stream of weapons it provides to the Afghan Taliban. Meanwhile, many would applaud the Tehran regime for showing restraint. For Iran, a Western-led attack could be a gift that keeps on giving.

Marvin G. Weinbaum is a former intelligence analyst for Pakistan and Afghanistan in the U.S. Department of State and a current scholar-in-residence at the Middle East Institute.

NYT

Falling In and Out of War

Bill Keller

March 18, 2012 -- WHEN you've been wrong about something as important as war, as I have, you owe yourself some hard thinking about how to avoid repeating the mistake. And if that's true for a mere kibitzing columnist, it's immeasurably more true for those in a position to actually start a war.

So here we are, finally, messily winding down the long war in Afghanistan and simultaneously being goaded toward new military ventures against the regimes in Syria and Iran. Being in the question-asking business, I've been pondering this: What are the right questions the president should ask — and we as his employers should ask — when deciding whether going to war is (a) justified and (b) worth it? Here are five, plus two caveats, and some thoughts about how all this applies to the wars before us.

1. HOW IS THIS OUR FIGHT?

It ought to be the first question we ask. Sometimes the answer is obvious. There is a broad agreement that it was in America's vital national interest in 2001 to go after the homicidal zealots behind the 9/11 attacks on America, and the Afghan regime that hosted them. Whatever you think of how the war was waged or how long it should continue, the going-in was, as the cops say, a righteous shoot.

Often the American stake is not so clear-cut. We may feel an obligation to defend an ally. (Some allies more than others.) We have been known to fight for our economic interests. We intervene in the name of American values, an elastic rubric that can mean anything from halting a genocide to, in George W. Bush's expansive doctrine, promoting freedom.

Senator John McCain, demanding American air strikes to help rebels topple the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, adopts the Bush "freedom agenda" rationale: by halting suffering and helping overthrow tyranny, we earn some leverage with the victors, improving the odds that Syria will become less hostile to our interests. For a variety of robust dissents, look no further than the conservative Web site National Review Online. There you find the neocon view that intervention is not about fomenting a Syrian democracy; it is about striking at an Islamist, anti-American cabal centered on Iran. You also find the libertarian view that our national interest is best served by staying out of a situation we can only make worse.

Nobody said these would be easy questions.

2. AT WHAT COST?

Judged solely by Question No. 1, there is little difference between Libya, where we helped an inchoate mix of rebels overthrow a brutally oppressive regime, and Syria, where we have so far chosen not to help an inchoate mix of rebels overthrow an even more brutally oppressive regime. The critical difference: Syria is much harder. Libya had weak air defenses deployed along the coastline, easily accessible to Western bombers. Syria's defenses are more lethal, more plentiful and

spread across inland population centers. “We’d have to carpet-bomb a path in and out, or risk American pilots being shot down by the regime and used as human shields,” said John Nagl, a retired Army counterinsurgency expert who teaches at the U.S. Naval Academy. “We’d be killing a lot more people.”

Cost-benefit analysis may seem a cold-blooded discipline — you can’t put a price on freedom, blah blah blah — but it is inseparable from the question of our national interests. After more than 10 years of war that have bled our treasury of at least \$3 trillion, killed or disabled many thousands of our troops, and created the kind of multiple-rotation stress that invites atrocities and desecrations, every incremental commitment has to be weighed against the cost to our economic security and our readiness to face the next real threat.

Karl Eikenberry, who served in Afghanistan both as a military commander and as ambassador, put it this way: “If we do not in the future better align ends, ways and means, historians may find that in the aftermath of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan the United States was compelled to contract its global posture similar to the British when they announced their ‘East of Suez’ policy in the late 1960s.”

3. OR WHAT?

Policy makers should — and President Obama mostly has — put a premium on appraising alternatives to war. Most notably, the president has held off an Israeli air assault on Iran’s nuclear facilities by mobilizing tough sanctions on Iran’s oil and banking industries, and by all but declaring that if Iran gets too close to making nuclear weapons the U.S. will send in the bombs. The sanctions show some signs of working.

The ultimate “or what” question about Iran is, if sanctions and threats fail, could we live with a nuclear Iran? Could we trust that like every other nuclear state Iran would be deterred from using its weapons by the certain knowledge that a counterstrike would turn Persia into a wasteland? It’s worth serious discussion, but while the idea of containment by deterrence is gaining ground in pundit-land, President Obama can’t touch it; to do so would undermine the whole effort to halt Iran’s program and, not incidentally, would be hazardous to his reelection.

4. AND WHO ELSE?

In these optional wars, it is useful to have company — to enhance our moral authority, to amplify the intelligence, to share the cost, to spread the risk — and to second-guess us. In Libya, we had 17 other nations enforcing a blockade and no-fly zone, Arabs and Turks among them. “Leading from behind” may have been a mockable phrase, but it was a serviceable strategy.

In Syria, no one is volunteering to join us yet.

5. THEN WHAT?

This is the question Robert Gates made a mantra at the Defense Department: What happens next? How does this play out? What are the second-order and third-order effects?

One unintended (but foreseeable) consequence of invading Iraq was that it distracted our attention and energy from the far more important undertaking in Afghanistan. Now one possible consequence of rushing too fast for the exits in Afghanistan — tempting as that may be given the breakdown of Afghan-

American trust — is the increased likelihood that a collapsing Afghanistan would spill into a wobbly Pakistan. In Pakistan there are both numerous nuclear weapons and an abundance of rogue fanatics who would not hesitate to use them.

Syria, says Nagl, is another good place to think hard about collateral chaos: “The hard part is not toppling Assad, it’s what comes afterwards. Everybody raise your hands if you’re up for another occupation of an Islamic country.”

My first caveat is public opinion, which no democracy can ignore. Fighting wars is not something you do by poll. Public opinion can be wrong. It lagged behind F.D.R. before World War II; it was riding along enthusiastically with President Bush when he invaded Iraq. But public opinion puts a thumb on the scale. The U.S. used force to stop a genocide in Bosnia, but did not in Rwanda or Darfur — one critical difference being that Americans (and American TV screens) were paying attention to the European slaughter, but not to the African atrocities.

My second caveat is that asking the right questions only works if you are prepared to hear answers you might not like. Sometimes our leaders start with the answers and work backward, fixing the facts to the policy, as the head of Britain’s MI6 said of the Potemkin intelligence used to sell the invasion of Iraq. To pick just one example from the no-fact zone of Republican primary season, Rick Santorum, the most hawkish of the Republican candidates on Iran, keeps suggesting that Iran’s nuclear program is not under international inspection. It’s possible that Iran has hidden away some facility we don’t know about, but everything we know about — that is, everything we would bomb if we decided to attack — is monitored by international inspectors.

If Iraq taught us nothing else, it should have taught us this:
Before you deploy the troops, deploy the fact-checkers.

Article 3.

The Wall Street Journal

Russia's Stake in Syria and Iran

Melik Kaylan

18, 2012 -- Now that Vladimir Putin has allowed the Russian electorate to rubber-stamp him back into power, he can return with redoubled purpose to his consistently regressive interference in world affairs. That nobody is surprised at his obdurate defense of the regimes in Tehran and Damascus speaks volumes. Dictators support dictators, don't they?

At this point Mr. Putin apparently doesn't mind much that anyone should include him in that category. After all, if Putinism could be defined by any single principle, if it had a formula, it would have at its core the "power now people later" approach common to all strongmen. Less than 10 years before he ordered the 2008 invasion of Georgia in order to "protect" the separatist South Ossetians, he "solved" the Chechnya problem by ordering the scorched-earth obliteration of its capital, Grozny, where more civilians were killed than at Srebrenica and Homs combined.

And yet one shouldn't suspect Mr. Putin of sentimentality. He doesn't favor dictators for mere principle's sake. Iron-hard

strategic calculations underpin his support for the Syria-Iran axis.

Russia is rebuilding its Soviet-era naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus, which allows Moscow to reassert a plausible Mediterranean threat to NATO. Syria also provides Iran with a front line against Israel via Hezbollah in Lebanon, and that too can be a most effective anti-Western arrowhead for Russia. When I covered the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, I learned that a year earlier Israel had stopped providing Tbilisi with antitank and anti-aircraft missiles because the Russians had threatened to supply Hezbollah with the same.

But in the end, the pivotal consideration in Mr. Putin's efforts to re-establish his country's superpower status centers on Iran. Syria is a domino. Without its Syrian ally, Iran would be almost totally isolated and crucially weakened. That Moscow cannot allow.

Why is Iran so central to Mr. Putin's global pretensions? Take a look at the Caspian Sea area map and the strategic equations come into relief. Iran acts as a southern bottleneck to the geography of Central Asia. It could offer the West access to the region's resources that would bypass Russia. If Iran reverted to pro-Western alignment, the huge reserves of oil and gas landlocked in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and the like could flow directly out to the world without a veto from Moscow.

According to an Oct. 16, 2008, Wall Street Journal report, Turkmenistan is "one of the world's hydrocarbon provinces" with enough natural gas to supply Europe's annual needs three times over. Similarly, Kazakhstan's Tengiz oil field is

considered one of the world's largest. As things stand, these countries depend on Russian pipelines for their national income.

At stake here is not merely the liberation of a vast landmass from the Kremlin's yoke. The damage to Russian leverage would amount to a seismic shift in the global balance of power equal to the collapse of the Warsaw Pact.

Russia's gas and oil leverage over Turkey, Ukraine and much of Europe would evaporate. The Silk Road countries would finally reclaim their history since it was diverted forcibly toward Moscow in the 19th century. Their nominal post-Soviet independence would become a reality. Perhaps most irksome for Mr. Putin and his kind, large swaths of the non-Russian zone would prosper disproportionately in comparison to neighboring Russian Federation provinces.

After some 12 years in the Kremlin, Mr. Putin has failed to deliver prosperity and a hopeful future to much of his population. In return for their sacrifice, he has fed them inflated dreams of empire and superpower nostalgia which he has deliberately identified with his own judoka personality cult.

This is not a scenario in which free peoples voluntarily choose their destinies and alliances. They bow to what's good for them as determined by a kind of paternal supreme power.

If the mystique of Russian hegemony were to deflate, if formerly subject colonies suddenly rose to stability and affluence—as is happening in Georgia—Mr. Putin's threadbare illusionism would fall apart entirely. He would never recover from the triumph of freedom in Syria and Iran.

Mr. Kaylan is a writer in New York.

Article 4.

The Daily Beast

China's Great Leap Backward

Niall Ferguson

March 19, 2012 -- “To understand China you have to think in generations,” my Chinese friend explained. “And the key is that after 2012 the Cultural Revolution generation will be in charge.”

While antiwar protesters clashed with the National Guard on American campuses and Czechs defied the Red Army in the streets of Prague, China had the Cultural Revolution. In some ways it was the ultimate '60s teen rebellion. In other ways it was totalitarianism at its worst: a bloody revolution from above unleashed by one of the 20th century's most ruthless despots.

That it disrupted the lives of a generation is clear. Only consider its effects on the two men poised to inherit the top two positions of president and premier. Xi Jinping was a “princeling,” the son of one of Mao Zedong's loyal lieutenants. He was just 15 when his father was arrested on Mao's order. Xi spent the next six years toiling in the countryside of Yanchuan county in central China. Li Keqiang had a similar experience. No sooner had he

graduated from high school than he was sent to labor in the fields of impoverished Anhui province.

To get an idea of what exactly this means, imagine Barack Obama feeding pigs in Iowa or Mitt Romney mending a tractor in Wisconsin. Except that no American farm could ever match the grinding hardship of a Chinese collective farm.

One of China's leading economists put it to me like this: "The one thing I learned on the collective farm"—which in his case was out west on the Chinese-Soviet border—"was to judge a person's character inside 10 seconds." (As he said this, he gave me a piercing look.) "I also learned what really matters in life: to think freely—and to have friends you can trust."

Generational Civil War: The Cultural Revolution began in the summer of 1966, when posters appeared slamming senior party figures as "takers of the capitalist road." Mao chimed in, expressing his "passionate support" for protesting students, whom he christened the "Red Guards." This was the cue for young people all over China to flock to Beijing, dressed in identical uniforms and brandishing Mao's Little Red Book.

Mao's stated ambition was to remove the capitalist elements that were impeding China's progress. More likely, he intended to implement a ruthless purge of his critics. Yet the Cultural Revolution soon grew into an all-out civil war between the generations.

Not only party officials but also academics were targeted. In the summer of 1966, more than 1,700 people were beaten to death in Beijing alone, including elderly former landlords and their families. Some victims were killed by having boiling water

poured over them; others were forced to swallow nails.

But it did not take long for the revolution to consume itself. Buried in a dingy corner of Chongqing's Shapingba Park are the bodies of 537 Red Guards from different factions who, after dealing with their teachers, killed each other.

By the end of 1968 it was clear that China was in a state of anarchy. So the Great Helmsman gave the rudder another swing. Now he ordered the "educated youth" to go to the countryside to receive "reeducation" on collective farms. The Red Guards were broken up. The Army reimposed order in the cities. The universities emptied. And a generation of young Chinese exchanged the library for the pigsty.

Revolution Reversion: More than 40 years later, the historian Xu Youyu calls for a "total condemnation" (chedi fouding) of the Cultural Revolution. Yet his is a minority view. If you visit the National Museum of China in Beijing, you will find almost no reference to the Cultural Revolution. When I tried to interview Xu on the subject last August, we were kicked off the campus of the university where he teaches.

Even more remarkable is the evidence of a growing nostalgia for the Cultural Revolution. During my last visit to China, I ate dinner at a themed restaurant where the waitresses dress up like Red Guards and the floorshow features propaganda songs from the period. Incredibly, just 200 yards away from the graves of Cultural Revolution victims in Chongqing, I saw a group of middle-aged women singing some of these songs, including "Chairman Mao Is the Sun That Never Sets."

Until last week, such nostalgia was being encouraged by the

Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai, who was hoping for promotion to the all-powerful Standing Committee of the Politburo. The strange thing is that in 1966, Bo and his family were imprisoned for five years, after which they were placed in a labor camp for a further five.

China's '60s generation has every reason to remember the years of their youth with bitterness. That many of them feel something more like "Maostalgia" is just a little scary. But even scarier was the headline in the Financial Times on March 15: "Bo Xilai Purged." Just like old times.

Article 5.

NYT

To Save Israel, Boycott the Settlements

Peter Beinart

March 18, 2012 -- TO believe in a democratic Jewish state today is to be caught between the jaws of a pincer.

On the one hand, the Israeli government is erasing the "green line" that separates Israel proper from the West Bank. In 1980, roughly 12,000 Jews lived in the West Bank (excluding East

Jerusalem). Today, government subsidies have helped swell that number to more than 300,000. Indeed, many Israeli maps and textbooks no longer show the green line at all.

In 2010, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel called the settlement of Ariel, which stretches deep into the West Bank, “the heart of our country.” Through its pro-settler policies, Israel is forging one political entity between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea — an entity of dubious democratic legitimacy, given that millions of West Bank Palestinians are barred from citizenship and the right to vote in the state that controls their lives.

In response, many Palestinians and their supporters have initiated a global campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (B.D.S.), which calls not only for boycotting all Israeli products and ending the occupation of the West Bank but also demands the right of millions of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes — an agenda that, if fulfilled, could dismantle Israel as a Jewish state.

The Israeli government and the B.D.S. movement are promoting radically different one-state visions, but together, they are sweeping the two-state solution into history’s dustbin.

It’s time for a counteroffensive — a campaign to fortify the boundary that keeps alive the hope of a Jewish democratic state alongside a Palestinian one. And that counteroffensive must begin with language.

Jewish hawks often refer to the territory beyond the green line by the biblical names Judea and Samaria, thereby suggesting that it was, and always will be, Jewish land. Almost everyone

else, including this paper, calls it the West Bank.

But both names mislead. “Judea and Samaria” implies that the most important thing about the land is its biblical lineage; “West Bank” implies that the most important thing about the land is its relationship to the Kingdom of Jordan next door. After all, it was only after Jordan conquered the territory in 1948 that it coined the term “West Bank” to distinguish it from the rest of the kingdom, which falls on the Jordan River’s east bank. Since Jordan no longer controls the land, “West Bank” is an anachronism. It says nothing meaningful about the territory today.

Instead, we should call the West Bank “nondemocratic Israel.” The phrase suggests that there are today two Israels: a flawed but genuine democracy within the green line and an ethnically-based nondemocracy beyond it. It counters efforts by Israel’s leaders to use the legitimacy of democratic Israel to legitimize the occupation and by Israel’s adversaries to use the illegitimacy of the occupation to delegitimize democratic Israel.

Having made that rhetorical distinction, American Jews should seek every opportunity to reinforce it. We should lobby to exclude settler-produced goods from America’s free-trade deal with Israel. We should push to end Internal Revenue Service policies that allow Americans to make tax-deductible gifts to settler charities. Every time an American newspaper calls Israel a democracy, we should urge it to include the caveat: only within the green line.

But a settlement boycott is not enough. It must be paired with an equally vigorous embrace of democratic Israel. We should spend

money we're not spending on settler goods on those produced within the green line. We should oppose efforts to divest from all Israeli companies with the same intensity with which we support efforts to divest from companies in the settlements: call it Zionist B.D.S.

Supporters of the current B.D.S. movement will argue that the distinction between democratic and nondemocratic Israel is artificial. After all, many companies profit from the occupation without being based on occupied land. Why shouldn't we boycott them, too? The answer is that boycotting anything inside the green line invites ambiguity about the boycott's ultimate goal — whether it seeks to end Israel's occupation or Israel's existence.

For their part, American Jewish organizations might argue that it is unfair to punish Israeli settlements when there are worse human rights offenses in the world and when Palestinians still commit gruesome terrorist acts. But settlements need not constitute the world's worst human rights abuse in order to be worth boycotting. After all, numerous American cities and organizations boycotted Arizona after it passed a draconian immigration law in 2010.

The relevant question is not “Are there worse offenders?” but rather, “Is there systematic oppression that a boycott might help relieve?” That Israel systematically oppresses West Bank Palestinians has been acknowledged even by the former Israeli prime ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert, who have warned that Israel's continued rule there could eventually lead to a South African-style apartheid system.

Boycotts could help to change that. Already, prominent Israeli writers like David Grossman, Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua have refused to visit the settlement of Ariel. We should support their efforts because persuading companies and people to begin leaving nondemocratic Israel, instead of continuing to flock there, is crucial to keeping the possibility of a two-state solution alive.

Others may object to boycotting settlements near the green line, which will likely be incorporated into Israel in the event of a peace deal. But what matters is not the likelihood that a settler will one day live in territory where all people enjoy the right to citizenship regardless of ethnicity, but the fact that she does not live there yet. (That's why the boycott should not apply to East Jerusalem, which Israel also occupied in 1967, since Palestinians there at least have the ability to gain citizenship, even if they are not granted it by birth.)

If moderate settlers living near the green line resent being lumped in with their more ideologically driven counterparts deep in occupied territory, they should agitate for a two-state solution that would make possible their incorporation into democratic Israel. Or they should move.

As I write this, I cringe. Most settlers aren't bad people; many poor Sephardic, Russian and ultra-Orthodox Jews simply moved to settlements because government subsidies made housing there cheap. More fundamentally, I am a committed Jew. I belong to an Orthodox synagogue, send my children to Jewish school and yearn to instill in them the same devotion to the Jewish people that my parents instilled in me. Boycotting other Jews is a painful, unnatural act. But the alternative is worse.

When Israel's founders wrote the country's declaration of independence, which calls for a Jewish state that "ensures complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex," they understood that Zionism and democracy were not only compatible; the two were inseparable.

More than six decades later, they look prophetic. If Israel makes the occupation permanent and Zionism ceases to be a democratic project, Israel's foes will eventually overthrow Zionism itself.

We are closer to that day than many American Jews want to admit. Sticking to the old comfortable ways endangers Israel's democratic future. If we want to effectively oppose the forces that threaten Israel from without, we must also oppose the forces that threaten it from within.

Peter Beinart, a professor at the City University of New York and the editor of the Daily Beast blog Zion Square, is the author of "The Crisis of Zionism."

Article 6.

The Economist

Morocco's reforms

Mar 17th 2012 -- ON HIS drive home from work Morocco's prime minister, Abdelilah Benkirane, stopped by a mob of angry graduates demanding jobs. "We voted for you, and you send the police to beat and arrest us," they cried. Mr Benkirane apologised and promised that any police officers who broke the law would be punished. Some of the graduates clapped.

Something is changing in Morocco. The stuffy feudalism that made the kingdom a museum piece is lifting. New construction includes a web of motorways, double-decker trains that run on time and the Mediterranean's largest port. Unlike other Arab autocrats who dithered when uprisings erupted last spring, King Mohammed VI unveiled a new constitution within weeks. This promised to transfer real (though not all) powers to a freely and fairly elected government. Within a year he accepted an electoral triumph by the Justice and Development Party (or PJD, after its French initials), a mildly Islamist group.

The PJD has discarded its predecessors' hierarchical ways. Its leader, Mr Benkirane, lives at home with two guards at his door, not in a government-issued palace with liveried servants. At his swearing-in he gave the king a perfunctory peck on the shoulder, not a full bow-and-kiss on the hand. Mr Benkirane speaks the street dialect of his people rather than the formal Arabic that many Moroccans struggle to grasp. His ministers hold meetings in cafés and travel by train.

Before his death in 1999, Hassan II, Mohammed VI's father,

dabbled with reform, even appointing as prime minister a leftist he had once sentenced to death. But whereas that proved largely a smokescreen for continued royal rule, Mr Benkirane has the power to choose his own ministers, present his own budget and promote his own legislation. Nor is the makhzen, Morocco's royal court, quite the brute it was in Hassan II's day. Police still induce fear, but less so than elsewhere in the Arab world, where their counterparts' gunfire turned protests into uprisings.

The Islamists have worked hard to reassure Morocco's long-entrenched elite that they can be trusted. "In Egypt and Tunisia the army defends democracy," says a dutiful Mr Benkirane. "In Morocco it's the king." His party has muted its anti-secular rhetoric, to the joy of alcohol distributors. "We are not a morality police," insists a minister. The PJD has placated nervous Western allies, too, especially France. Ministers insist that they will honour a €1.8 billion (\$2.4 billion) contract to build a high-speed train line, despite having once attacked it for rewarding Morocco's former colonial masters.

The Islamists may have a harder task persuading their own voters. No other force could have revived legitimacy in the kingdom's antiquated system, but despite Mr Benkirane's personal popularity, sceptics abound. "The switch in power is of people not policies," gripes a trade unionist. "Nothing will change."

Fortunately for Mr Benkirane, his opponents are lacklustre. Efforts to build an alliance of disgruntled groups have crumbled. Adl wal-Ihsan, a more radical Islamist party that rejects the monarchy, withdrew from protests last month, deflating the remnants.

Yet even as the formal opposition has fizzled, an informal one is rising. In the rural areas, where the poorest half of Morocco's 30m people live, discontent periodically boils over. Curfews, water-cannon and arrests have failed to prevent clashes from engulfing two northern towns. Protests over utility prices are acquiring a secessionist edge. A looming drought will only make matters worse.

The fiscal situation is also deteriorating. Until now the economy has weathered Europe's doldrums remarkably well. But the previous government drained foreign reserves into salary and subsidy increases, so there is little left to give. The return of thousands of jobless workers from depressed Europe and lawless Libya has further shrunk the cushion.

The police struggle to claw back lost authority after a year of slippage. In cities peddlers spill into the streets, clogging the traffic; crime is rising. The security forces have begun demolishing some of an estimated 44,000 homes built illegally over the past year by Moroccans exploiting the vacuum; the attempted show of strength risks provoking a backlash.

It would have been easy for the government to blame the ancien regime for hobbling their prospects. Refreshingly, the Islamists say the buck stops with them. They promise transparency and a fairer distribution of wealth. They have published a list of bus companies granted prime intercity routes by unexplained orders from above. Next they may shame army generals who have long grabbed maritime fishing licences to feather their nests.

The campaign may have its limits. Mr Benkirane's coalition is full of ministers from the previous government he has hitherto

criticised for nepotism and waste. It will be hard to fight the old order while sharing power with it.

Failure could be costly. A new book, “Le Roi Prédateur” (“The Predator King”), published in France, describes how the king has quintupled his wealth in his 11 years on the throne, with the secretive makhzen continuing to hold large, lucrative chunks of the economy. Despite a ban, the book has gone viral online. Café chatter contrasts Mohammad VI’s surfeit of palaces with the hovels his forces knock down. Yet Morocco’s ruler is less cursed and more kissed than his fellow Arab kings. Sacrificing a few of his greedier courtiers should help him keep it that way.

Article 7.

NYT

Your Brain on Fiction

Annie Murphy Paul

March 17, 2012 -- AMID the squawks and pings of our digital devices, the old-fashioned virtues of reading novels can seem faded, even futile. But new support for the value of fiction is arriving from an unexpected quarter: neuroscience.

Brain scans are revealing what happens in our heads when we read a detailed description, an evocative metaphor or an emotional exchange between characters. Stories, this research is showing, stimulate the brain and even change how we act in life.

Researchers have long known that the “classical” language regions, like Broca’s area and Wernicke’s area, are involved in how the brain interprets written words. What scientists have come to realize in the last few years is that narratives activate many other parts of our brains as well, suggesting why the experience of reading can feel so alive. Words like “lavender,” “cinnamon” and “soap,” for example, elicit a response not only from the language-processing areas of our brains, but also those devoted to dealing with smells.

In a 2006 study published in the journal *NeuroImage*, researchers in Spain asked participants to read words with strong odor associations, along with neutral words, while their brains were being scanned by a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) machine. When subjects looked at the Spanish words for “perfume” and “coffee,” their primary olfactory cortex lit up; when they saw the words that mean “chair” and “key,” this region remained dark. The way the brain handles metaphors has also received extensive study; some scientists have contended that figures of speech like “a rough day” are so familiar that they are treated simply as words and no more. Last month, however, a team of researchers from Emory University reported in *Brain & Language* that when subjects in their laboratory read a metaphor involving texture, the sensory cortex, responsible for perceiving texture through touch, became active. Metaphors like “The singer had a velvet voice” and “He had leathery hands” roused the sensory cortex, while phrases matched for meaning, like “The singer had a pleasing voice” and “He had strong hands,” did not.

Researchers have discovered that words describing motion also stimulate regions of the brain distinct from language-processing

areas. In a study led by the cognitive scientist Véronique Boulenger, of the Laboratory of Language Dynamics in France, the brains of participants were scanned as they read sentences like “John grasped the object” and “Pablo kicked the ball.” The scans revealed activity in the motor cortex, which coordinates the body’s movements. What’s more, this activity was concentrated in one part of the motor cortex when the movement described was arm-related and in another part when the movement concerned the leg.

The brain, it seems, does not make much of a distinction between reading about an experience and encountering it in real life; in each case, the same neurological regions are stimulated. Keith Oatley, an emeritus professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Toronto (and a published novelist), has proposed that reading produces a vivid simulation of reality, one that “runs on minds of readers just as computer simulations run on computers.” Fiction — with its redolent details, imaginative metaphors and attentive descriptions of people and their actions — offers an especially rich replica. Indeed, in one respect novels go beyond simulating reality to give readers an experience unavailable off the page: the opportunity to enter fully into other people’s thoughts and feelings.

The novel, of course, is an unequaled medium for the exploration of human social and emotional life. And there is evidence that just as the brain responds to depictions of smells and textures and movements as if they were the real thing, so it treats the interactions among fictional characters as something like real-life social encounters.

Raymond Mar, a psychologist at York University in Canada,

performed an analysis of 86 fMRI studies, published last year in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, and concluded that there was substantial overlap in the brain networks used to understand stories and the networks used to navigate interactions with other individuals — in particular, interactions in which we’re trying to figure out the thoughts and feelings of others. Scientists call this capacity of the brain to construct a map of other people’s intentions “theory of mind.” Narratives offer a unique opportunity to engage this capacity, as we identify with characters’ longings and frustrations, guess at their hidden motives and track their encounters with friends and enemies, neighbors and lovers.

It is an exercise that hones our real-life social skills, another body of research suggests. Dr. Oatley and Dr. Mar, in collaboration with several other scientists, reported in two studies, published in 2006 and 2009, that individuals who frequently read fiction seem to be better able to understand other people, empathize with them and see the world from their perspective. This relationship persisted even after the researchers accounted for the possibility that more empathetic individuals might prefer reading novels. A 2010 study by Dr. Mar found a similar result in preschool-age children: the more stories they had read to them, the keener their theory of mind — an effect that was also produced by watching movies but, curiously, not by watching television. (Dr. Mar has conjectured that because children often watch TV alone, but go to the movies with their parents, they may experience more “parent-children conversations about mental states” when it comes to films.)

Fiction, Dr. Oatley notes, “is a particularly useful simulation

because negotiating the social world effectively is extremely tricky, requiring us to weigh up myriad interacting instances of cause and effect. Just as computer simulations can help us get to grips with complex problems such as flying a plane or forecasting the weather, so novels, stories and dramas can help us understand the complexities of social life.”

These findings will affirm the experience of readers who have felt illuminated and instructed by a novel, who have found themselves comparing a plucky young woman to Elizabeth Bennet or a tiresome pedant to Edward Casaubon. Reading great literature, it has long been averred, enlarges and improves us as human beings. Brain science shows this claim is truer than we imagined.

Annie Murphy Paul is the author, most recently, of “Origins: How the Nine Months Before Birth Shape the Rest of Our Lives.”