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Presidential Press Bulletin

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Article 1.	NOW Lebanon <u>Post-Annan plan planning</u> Michael Weiss
Article 2.	Guardian <u>Kofi Annan is right – negotiation is key for Syria</u> Patrick Seale
Article 3.	Today's Zaman <u>What has happened to Egypt's 'revolution'?</u> Hossein Turner Durham
Article 4.	The Economist <u>Sudan and South Sudan</u>
Article 5.	The National Interest <u>Morocco: A New Breed of Islamist</u> Ahmed Charai
Article 6.	Spiegel <u>Israel's Other Temple</u> Matthias Schulz

Article 1.

NOW Lebanon

Post-Annan plan planning

Michael Weiss

April 14, 2012 -- As expected, Kofi Annan's six-point plan for ending the violence in Syria has failed. Bashar al-Assad's regime took the opportunity of an internationally certified timetable to escalate attacks against civilian areas in Syria, bringing the death toll for the last ten days to as high as 1,000, according to local activists. The northern town of Taftanaz in the north-Syrian province of Idlib was heavily damaged last week with artillery and helicopter gunships, which also fired on the suburbs of Syria's main industrial city, Aleppo. Fleeing residents in the north have spoken of mass graves. Human Rights Watch released a report documenting 85 cases of the regime engaging in extrajudicial killings of unarmed civilians, many of whom were killed in March just as the ink was drying on Annan's six points. True, after the 6 a.m. deadline for a cease-fire passed on April 12, the regime stopped its artillery shelling of most restive areas. However, talk of the cease-fire "holding" seems highly misleading, as 26 people were still killed by regime forces Thursday, according to the London-based Syrian Network for Human Rights. These include two infants who were shot by snipers. Further embarrassing the Annan protocol is how the regime has sought to rewrite or improvise the terms. On April 8, it announced that it would comply with the deadline contingent on written guarantees that "armed terrorist groups...stop violence in all its forms." Troops have yet to be withdrawn from population centers, and the US Embassy in Damascus posted satellite photos on Facebook showing that tanks and other military assets are still deployed throughout Syrian cities. Finally, as if to prove that Assad's

recklessness far outweighs his survival instinct, on April 9, Syrian security forces waged lethal cross-border raids into Lebanon and Turkey, violating both countries' sovereignty.

Funny, that. Respect for Syria's "sovereignty" has been cited by Assad's main allies, Russia and China, as the paramount reason for opposing any UN Security Council resolution demanding Assad's renunciation of power. Appeasing these Syrian allies was why Annan's plan, which made no such demand for regime change, was put into effect in the first place.

The United States now finds itself an awkward predicament of having backtracked on President Obama's earlier statement, made last August, that Assad squandered his role to lead a transitional government and therefore "must step aside." It is beyond time for the president to seriously advance this goal without further relying on Moscow or Beijing—or indeed, Damascus—to accommodate him. At the last Friends of the Syrian People conference in Istanbul, Washington announced that it would send more "non-lethal" aid to the Syrian rebels in the form of satellite phones and advanced communications because it doesn't want to further "militarize" the conflict. Yet the conflict has already been sufficiently militarized by the regime, and satellite phones are only good for giving the rebels something to call Washington on to ask for weapons. Members of the Free Syrian Army I've interviewed say that they need anti-tank and anti-aircraft munitions, neither of which have been forthcoming from Qatar or Saudi Arabia, making the US promise not to block such shipments moot. Contrast this to the steady flow of Iranian and Russian weapons to Assad. If we support the Syrian opposition, we have to support it all the way by arming it.

The US also offered, along with Gulf nations, to pay the salaries of Syrian military defectors in the hopes of encouraging more of them, though to do what exactly remains unclear. The majority of the Free

Syrian Army is composed of armed civilians. In fact, many defectors have fled Syria and are now in neighboring countries. They would make an excellent crop of candidates for training as a professional gendarmerie to help establish law and order in a post-Assad state, which will almost certainly be plagued with reprisal campaigns and lawlessness. The Jordan International Police Training Center, built in 2003 with US funds to train the Iraqi and later Palestinian authorities, should now house willing Syrian cadets. Not only would this be responsible forward-planning, it would also send a signal to Assad's power base that its replacement is being groomed next door. That might encourage more defections, all right.

Finally, and whether we like it or not, plans for some form of direct military intervention ought to be made now, in accordance with the suggestions of Senators John McCain, Joseph Lieberman and Lindsay Graham. This contingency grows more inevitable by the day as Turkey is beginning to view the Syrian crisis not just as a humanitarian catastrophe in itself but as a threat to Turkey's own national security.

Leave aside the violent cross-border raid by Syrian security forces into a Turkish refugee camp on Sunday, which left several people—including one Turkish policeman—seriously wounded.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan this week threatened that “the actions of the Syrian regime could force Turkey” to impose a buffer zone in northern Syria. True, his government has been threatening to impose such a zone since last June when it first absorbed 10,000 Syrian refugees. However, the recent rise in the refugees' number—a third of the total 24,300 arrived only in the last few weeks, according to the Turkish foreign minister—is inherently destabilizing to Turkey's own sectarian balance. Most refugees are Sunnis, and they're being housed in the Hatay province, a former Syrian territory that is home to a large number of Turkish Alawites—or “Arab

Alevis,” as they’re called—who tend to be pro-Assad. On March 1, several Alevi homes in Hatay were marked with the same red cross symbol that preceded the 1978 Maraş Massacre of Alevis by Sunni ultra-nationalists. The Turkish Red Crescent anticipates as many as half a million refugees: that’s the same number of Iraqi Kurds seeking safe haven in Turkey at the close of the First Gulf War, which ultimately led to the creation of the buffer and no-fly zones in northern Iraq. In that instance, Turkey had the help of US, British, French, Dutch and Australian air power.

The Assad regime is quickly eroding the middle ground for diplomatic maneuvering, leaving the United States with the prospect that not only will thousands more Syrian have to die, but that their sacrifice will be to ensure that Iran’s last ally in the Middle East remains standing.

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Article 2.

Guardian

Kofi Annan is right – negotiation is key for Syria

Patrick Seale

13 April 2012 -- The former UN secretary general Kofi Annan has reason to be proud of the Syrian ceasefire which, as a result of his persuasion and tireless travels to Moscow and Tehran, Turkey and Qatar, came into force on Thursday. It may well be breached here and there – the transition from killing to talking is bound to be messy; the violent emotions of a vicious year-long conflict will not easily be quelled – but it heralds, nevertheless, the beginning of a new political phase of the Syrian crisis.

The international community must be patient and give Annan its full support, because a durable ceasefire is an essential precondition for a negotiated resolution of the conflict – the only alternative to the horrors of an inter-communal civil war (such as was triggered in Iraq by the Anglo-American invasion of 2003, with the loss of tens of thousands of lives).

Several hundred independent observers, mandated by the UN security council, are expected to arrive in Syria within days to monitor events. Some will undoubtedly be unhappy with this outcome. Those Syrian opponents who dreamed of toppling President Bashar al-Assad – indeed, of putting him on trial and executing him – will be bitterly disappointed. His foreign enemies will be equally put out. This week saw the surprise visit to the Free Syrian Army – the main, Turkish-based rebel force – of US senators Joe Lieberman and John McCain. "This is war," they declared with their familiar belligerence.

"Diplomacy with Assad has failed!" They called for arming the rebels and for foreign air power to defeat the Syrian army.

But Annan is right in declaring that "any further militarisation of the conflict would be disastrous". Even armed with weapons from outside, the opposition could not hope to reverse the balance of military power, still overwhelmingly on the side of the regime. To think otherwise is political insanity. The more the opposition resorts to arms, the more the regime will feel justified in crushing it.

Men such as these US hawks and their Israeli allies will not like a settlement that leaves the Syrian regime in place, even though battered, impoverished and destabilised. They are typical of that current of opinion which, from the start, has wanted to overthrow the Syrian regime in order to weaken and isolate Iran, and bring down the whole Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah "resistance axis", seen as the main challenge to US and Israeli supremacy in the Middle East.

Will Assad now have the vision and the will to rise to the challenge created by Annan's ceasefire? He has in recent weeks announced a number of political reforms: the revamped constitution has stripped the Ba'ath party of the political monopoly it has enjoyed for close to half a century; six new parties have been licensed, and parliamentary elections are due to take place on 7 May. Many will dismiss these reforms as window-dressing.

Whatever he does, Assad will not satisfy his diehard enemies. They want his head. But his reforms will need to be a good deal bolder if he is to satisfy even moderate opinion which, while wanting to protect Syria from the destruction, chaos and uncertainties of civil war, will still want a radically different political system put in place. Any such new system will need to be free from the suffocating political controls of the past, free from police brutality and free from crony capitalism.

Urgent ways must also be found to defuse the grievances of Syria's rural poor, victims of the terrible drought of recent years. The urban poor, in turn, have been victims of the failed neoliberal economic model of the last decade, which has benefited an elite but impoverished everyone else. At bottom, the real motor of the Syrian uprising – as in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and across the region — has been the government's inability to satisfy the basic aspirations of a rapidly growing population.

It would seem that two immediate moves are now essential. The regime's indiscriminate repression of the uprising has caused deep wounds in Syrian society. Many will vengefully thirst for blood. The president will need to purge some violent men in his security services and set in train a sincere process of reconciliation. Something like a truth and reconciliation commission will be required. This might be a further task for Annan.

Another suggestion would be for the president to summon a national congress of leading Syrians, representing all communities and all political views, to debate and agree on the way Syria is to be governed in the future. Such deliberations will inevitably take time. A new Syrian political system, in which power and perks are more equitably distributed, will not be built in a weekend.

Any future regime will also have to devise a way in which Syria – a mosaic of religious communities like its neighbour Lebanon, which requires a degree of mutual tolerance – can integrate a movement such as the Muslim Brotherhood and other even more radical Islamist currents. The Muslim Brotherhood are, very probably, the most powerful and most determined of Assad's opponents. They will not want to negotiate with the regime, nor will the regime want to negotiate with them. Jihadi opponents of all stripes will want revenge for the repression Islamist extremists have suffered in Syria over the past several decades. This is not a problem that will go away.

Article 3.

Today's Zaman

What has happened to Egypt's 'revolution'?

Hossein Turner Durham

15 April 2012 -- The eyes of the mainstream media have mostly turned away from the so-called Arab Spring in Egypt, particularly as other events have transpired in the Middle East -- namely in Syria, where violence continues to cause problems not only for Syria but also neighboring countries, with violence spilling over the border.

No such armed resistance is taking place in Egypt, however, which makes it an interesting exception to both Libya and Syria, which experienced both protests and armed resistance. Egypt's "revolution," as many media commentators have termed it, never really occurred, despite the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak. The members of the army who were loyal to Mubarak still effectively control the country, and it seems they have been willing to work out deals with former rivals, such as the Muslim Brotherhood party. Was this really a revolution, or is it time for the movement to oust the entire army from its influence on politics and business?

On Monday, April 9, the Reuters news agency reported that Mubarak's former intelligence chief, Omar Suleiman, decided to stand as a candidate in the coming Egyptian presidential election. One of his rivals is Khairat al-Shater of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Shater was formerly imprisoned by the government in which Suleiman served, but now they are both competing for the nation's top job. The election is due to be held in May, and both of these candidates are apparently expected to perform well, according to the Reuters report. The leading candidate at the opinion polls, however,

is Amr Moussa, the former Egyptian foreign minister who has spent the longest time on the campaign trail.

The candidates

An “army council” effectively rules Egypt, and their favorite candidate for president is apparently Suleiman, given that he was a powerful figure in the former regime in which the army and Mubarak held sway. Suleiman claims he will be supported by Egyptians if there is a chance the Muslim Brotherhood gains a dominant role in politics. After all, there are anxieties about an end to the secular political institutions that have generally held sway in the country for many years. “Pro-democracy” activists, according to Reuters, see both the Brotherhood candidate and Suleiman as a sign that the “revolution” has effectively stalled or failed to occur, with both candidates wanting to consolidate power at the expense of democratic reforms.

It would hardly be fair to paint the Muslim Brotherhood in an entirely negative light, however. An article by Erin Cunningham on April 3 for GlobalPost describes the Muslim Brotherhood’s endeavors to hold the Egyptian army accountable for its alleged influence over the nation’s business sector. Analysts in Egypt, according to the article, state that the Egyptian army invests in and obtains revenue from tourism, elements of the food industry, the weapons industry and other manufacturing sectors -- from underwear to computer chips. Karim Radwan, a member of the Brotherhood’s executive committee, told GlobalPost that it was time for the army to end its position as a “state within a state.” The extent of the influence of the army on the nation’s economy is not really known. However, estimates have varied from as low as 5 percent to as much as 40 percent of the economy, according to the article. The chief financial officer of the army, Mahmoud Nasr, recently told reporters that the army has been

“building” its projects for 33 years and that it refuses to hand over these projects for other people to “destroy.”

The Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party has stated that it has formed a committee in parliament to investigate the army’s financial dealings. The army does have its defenders, however, who state that the investments are mostly small and based on guaranteeing that the army will be able to sustain its members with food, clothing and equipment. However, even if this were true, it would be against the principle of democratic accountability. Armies, after all, should be controlled by those who have been elected and should serve and defend the nation rather than their own pockets.

According to GlobalPost, the military has a history of enjoying exemptions from taxation and has received subsidies from the state. Its influence has grown to the extent that it almost has a monopoly on access to capital. Some of this was revealed in December of last year, when the military was able to prop up the Egyptian government’s finances with a massive \$1 billion loan. Joshua Stacher, a professor of Egyptian politics at Ohio State University, told GlobalPost that it would be inaccurate to merely describe the Egyptian army as “purveyors of state capitalism.” It’s worse.

“The military is incredibly neoliberal. But they control access to capital; they are the gatekeepers of capital. And this is what makes them extremely powerful,” he said. Stacher stated that the Muslim Brotherhood lacks the influence, in terms of its financial and economic power, to bring the army to heel. The Brotherhood risks becoming co-opted or bribed by the army.

Egyptian youths and the Muslim Brotherhood

In an article published by Haaretz on Nov. 25, 2011, Avi Issacharoff wrote how the youthful “secular” Egyptians behind much of the revolution now face an unholy alliance between two former rivals (the Muslim Brotherhood and the army council). The youth of the

revolution see the military as desiring to preserve its rule and to prevent any power transfer to the people. There have been protests as a result, with some fatalities due to confrontations with police in the streets of Cairo. The Muslim Brotherhood refused to take part in the “demonstration of a million” that was declared by secular groups largely behind Mubarak’s ousting. This is telling, because the march was in protest of the power of the army’s ruling council and how it has blocked the path towards negotiating a truly democratic constitution. The Brotherhood was more interested in consolidating its political gains and pushing for an agreement with the army council and for a presidential election to take place in June 2012.

An article by Sajida Tasneem, published by International Policy Digest on Dec. 21 of last year, paints an interesting summary of the revolutionary movement in Egypt and its challengers. The protesters do not simply want electoral reform and parliamentary democracy. People want measures to immediately be implemented in order to change lives for the better. They want decent healthcare, reasonable housing, a decent education, a living wage and a right for unions to exist without being crushed and dismantled, among other demands. Military tribunals have quashed any sense of accountability and real justice, and the protesters want an end to these, too. They want an end to people disappearing or ending up dead inside police stations. They want some form of independent media that isn’t the victim of threats or violence -- particularly if they go too much against special interests. Out of a population of 83 million, around half live either near poverty or in absolute poverty. The army has suppressed dissent, often with violence, and has criminalized labor strikes. How can the Muslim Brotherhood make deals with such people? After all, they will rightly face criticism for not living up to the name of Islamic justice.

Amazingly, as Tasneem wrote, despite one of the most violent and massive protests that started in Egypt on Nov. 28 of last year, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, “I congratulate the Egyptian people for a peaceful, successful start to their election process.” Days before her statement, 42 people were killed and thousands were injured by weapons that were manufactured in the United States. In conclusion, it appears that Egypt’s “revolution” is effectively stalled. As long as the vast poverty and daily injustices are not addressed, this will only serve to discredit the elections that are set to take place. The elections will also serve to further divide Egyptians and possibly create future internal conflict -- particularly as there are those who oppose the Arab Spring and the protests in Tahrir Square. The future looks volatile and unpredictable.

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Article 4.

The Economist

Sudan and South Sudan

Apr 14th 2012 -- THE cold war between Africa's newest neighbours is heating up. South Sudanese troops advanced deep into Sudan on April 10th, capturing its most valuable oilfield, Heglig, in the biggest clash since the south seceded from the north last July. Southern troops claimed to be responding to air and ground attacks from their former master, but the scale of the offensive is unprecedented. A fragile peace process that has survived several bumps in the past few months may now falter. Sudan has suspended its participation in the divorce negotiations in neighbouring Ethiopia. Parliaments in both countries are calling for military mobilisation. The drums of war beat ever louder.

The last straw could be South Sudan claiming Heglig as its own. A ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in 2009 appears to put the field in the Sudanese state of Southern Kordofan. But the south now disputes this. "Heglig is deep inside our borders," says Colonel Philip Aguer, a spokesman for South Sudan's army, adding that its troops have moved farther north. Sudan will not accept this, and for once it seems to be getting some international support. The African Union is calling on the south to withdraw its soldiers immediately and unconditionally. Sudan has complained to the UN Security Council.

The crisis is a direct result of both sides' failure to make progress in negotiations over post-secession security arrangements, citizenship rules and oil revenues, among other issues that should have been resolved long ago. Both countries have accused each other of supporting rebels on their territory since before separation. Of the two, the southern rebels in Sudan are by far the stronger. Known as

SPLM-North, they supported the decades-long southern fight for independence but found themselves on the wrong side of the border at separation. The group controls much of the Nuba mountains in Southern Kordofan and launches guerrilla raids in Blue Nile state. Sudan says SPLM-North is getting weapons and supplies from South Sudan, and that its fighters go there to rest after battles. The northern rebels in the south are smaller but have sometimes caused havoc in Unity and Upper Nile states. A local oil worker says they previously helped to defend Heglig.

Just as Sudan faces a renewed threat from the south, the long-running civil conflict in its western Darfur region is escalating again. Three years ago, General Martin Agwai, then commander of African Union peacekeeping troops in Darfur, said the conflict was “over” and that banditry was now the biggest problem. But on April 3rd areas around Sortony in North Darfur were hit by aerial bombardments and attacked by pro-government militias on the ground, forcing thousands of civilians to flee and sparking fears that the bad old times are back. They may be. A dissident report by former UN investigators that has been submitted to the Security Council—but not yet published—documents the recent recruitment of non-Arab militias by the Sudanese Armed Forces. They are accused of ethnic cleansing of the Zaghawa tribe, which is led by Minni Minnawi, a Darfuri rebel who last year withdrew from a peace agreement that had made him a presidential adviser. The report says the use of non-Arab militias marks a “significant evolution”. At least 70,000 civilians appear to have fled new attacks in 2011.

The UN report also documents fresh ammunition deliveries by the Sudanese army to Darfur and reports on a series of air bombardments of civilians in the Zaghawa stronghold of Shangal Tobay in early 2011. A UN arms embargo was apparently violated by the deployment of at least five Sudanese Sukhoi ground attack jets in

Darfur and the acquisition by Sudan of new Antonov aircraft of a type that has previously been used in bombing campaigns. One Antonov was photographed next to open crates of bombs.

On the opposing side, Darfuri rebel groups seem to have formed an alliance with South Sudanese troops. Together they call themselves the Sudan Revolutionary Front. A separate report published this month by the Small Arms Survey, a Geneva-based think-tank, says that the two groups have claimed credit for the same attacks around Jau and Tarogi in February and for downing an unmanned Iranian-made plane in Southern Kordofan on March 13th.

The fighting is making life ever harder for the half million South Sudanese who live in the north. "I have been in this country for 43 years but am no longer welcome here," says one, as he makes plans to leave in a hurry. Following separation, South Sudanese were given until April 8th to sort out their status. But South Sudan has failed to issue identity documents, leaving them in legal limbo. Most are keen to leave, fearing for their welfare.

Only a month ago a solution seemed at hand. Negotiators on both sides initialled a "Four Freedoms" agreement, allowing citizens to move, live, work and own property in either country. But Islamist hardliners in Sudan objected, accusing southerners of being fifth columnists. The loss of Sudan's main oilfield will not reassure them.

Article 5.

The National Interest

Morocco: A New Breed of Islamist

Ahmed Charai

April 13, 2012 -- Following the adoption of a new constitution last summer, Moroccan voters delivered their verdict: the current government is in the hands of the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD). The party enjoys a commanding majority in the present ruling coalition, a third of all parliamentary seats, while its secular, leftist and royalist opponents are divided—at least for now. Yet the situation in Morocco today is markedly different from Egypt, Tunisia and other countries where Islamists dominate or rule. Morocco's new Islamist-led government did not come about as the result of a revolution. Rather, it was Moroccan king Mohammed VI himself who designed the new constitution, which cedes most domestic authority to an elected prime minister. He is the only Arab leader in this season of upheaval to have engineered a democratic transition.

The king enjoys the legitimacy and credibility that enabled him to make these changes due to the exceptional history of the Moroccan monarchy: his grandfather spearheaded Morocco's struggle against colonial rule, and his father braved a Soviet-backed coup and assassination attempts to enable the rise of unions and civil opposition. The young king, for his part, has devoted the last thirteen years to fostering civil society, promoting the rights of women and minorities, and ushering the monarchy's erstwhile enemies on the Left into government. Though Islamists now hold the reins of authority, their power is strictly provisional, as in any democracy, because a system of checks and balances is in place to assure the rotation of power, subject to the will of the majority.

In Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, the new Islamist elites have only just emerged from years of underground revolutionary activism. By contrast, in Morocco they gradually have been inducted into the mainstream by a watchful government over the course of a generation. Along the way, they have learned about and embraced the logic of consensual rule and civil discourse.

Morocco's Islamists won this year's elections on an electoral platform of cooperation with the West, tourism and global commerce, a moderate foreign policy and individual rights. They will now be held accountable to an electoral base demanding the fulfillment of these promises. Whether Islamists in other Arab countries prove committed to the same democratic principles is a matter of chance; in Morocco, it's the outcome of a history of moderation.

No Sure Thing

This contrast can serve as a barometer for analyzing conditions in other Arab countries. There are hopes for good governance in Tunisia because the Islamist al-Nahda party has proclaimed the Moroccan PJD a model worthy of emulation. Al-Nahda leaders have signaled their respect for the ancien regime's insistence that secularism and Islam can coexist and encouraged the population to hold them to this principle. By contrast, Egypt's Salafis and elements within the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood call for a total break with former president Mubarak's policies: they assert that a renewed conflict with Israel should be a prime directive, even at the expense of the effort to heal the country's many domestic woes.

To be sure, there are valid concerns about the political future of Morocco as well. Liberal and progressive parties face an uphill battle in competing with Islamists in the marketplace of ideas: they have not yet articulated an alternative formula for reconciling Islam and progressivism, and in their complacency, they have become internally fractious. They need to roll up their sleeves, form their own coalition,

and make the case to voters that they embody Islam's inherent liberalism.

While the Moroccan PJD has articulated a moderate political agenda, it has left religious preaching to a sister organization called al-Tawhid wa 'l-Islah ("Monotheistic Action and Reform"), which is still ideologically strident. On the domestic front, al-Tawhid has called for the prohibition of music festivals and railed against Morocco's economically vital tourism industry as essentially oriented around sexual exploitation. It has also called for the imposition of a retrograde interpretation of Islamic law on Moroccan society. When al-Tawhid makes a statement that falls outside the realm of political civility, the PJD leadership reins it in through a critical public pronouncement. The two related movements are unable to unite in moderation, posing a structural problem for the PJD and, by extension, the population it now governs.

Going forward, the PJD needs to truly break with al-Tawhid's extremist elements and discipline the remaining leadership. All must be on the same page and support a coherent, constructive strategy for addressing the country's high unemployment and economic insecurity, as well as advancing the values of pluralism and tolerance.

The Salafi Threat

Morocco is a society in transition which has fallen prey to the scourge of terrorism. Other, more dangerous Islamist elements have reared their heads, declared war on modernity and even looked to the Islamic Republic of Iran for inspiration. The radical Salafi community, essentially advocating a return to the seventh century, has sympathy among some elements of the population too. Radicals and reactionaries are also entitled to vote. How should the Moroccan majority engage the forces of Salafism and the like peaceably and constructively? What mechanisms are necessary to ensure that extremists do not exploit and subvert the democratic process?

In this context, it is surely helpful that the king has seen to fit to maintain his position as “commander of the faithful”—the ranking arbiter of religious authority in the country. This role enables him to continually fine-tune the practice and interpretation of Islam, ensuring that the public sphere is consecrated for a culture of tolerance and open-minded deliberation. He will referee the electoral process and weigh in on how and when Salafi leaders with a history of militancy should be integrated into the political game. Salafi leader Mohamad Fizazi has already announced his intention to create a party of his own. Most liberals and a great many Islamists feel his agenda falls outside the realm of civil discourse: whereas the ruling Islamic PJD has disavowed the goals of monopolizing Islam and prohibiting divergent political views, Fizazi and his cohorts have yet to do so. Until they do, their agenda should be recognized as constitutionally ineligible. Any other response to an ideology built on divisiveness and hatred would amount to political suicide for the country, both domestically and internationally. And in a part of the world where money and weapons are always available to antidemocratic forces, Morocco is lucky a benign reformist leader stands guard.

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Article 6.

Spiegel

Israel's Other Temple

Matthias Schulz

04/13/2012 -- The Jews had significant competition in antiquity when it came to worshipping Yahweh. Archeologists have discovered a second great temple not far from Jerusalem that predates its better known cousin. It belonged to the Samaritans, and may have been edited out of the Bible once the rivalry had been decided.

Clad in gray coat, Aharon ben Ab-Chisda ben Yaacob, 85, is sitting in the dim light of his house. He strikes up a throaty chant, a litany in ancient Hebrew. He has a full beard and is wearing a red kippah on his head.

The man is a high priest -- and his family tree goes back 132 generations. He says: "I am a direct descendent of Aaron, the brother of the prophet Moses" -- who lived perhaps over 3,000 years ago. Ab-Chisda is the spiritual leader of the Samaritans, a sect that is so strict that its members are not even allowed to turn on the heat on the Sabbath. They never eat shrimp and only marry among themselves. Their women are said to be so impure during menstruation that they are secluded in special rooms for seven days.

Outside, on the streets of Kiryat Luza, near Nablus, a cold wind is blowing. The village lies just below the summit of Mount Gerizim. There's a school, two shops and a site for sacrifices. This is home to 367 Samaritans. It's a small community.

Everyone here is required to attend religious services in the synagogue on Saturdays. "Every baby boy has to be circumcised precisely on the eighth day," says the high priest -- not beforehand, and not afterwards.

Most important of all: the sect only believes in the written legacy of Moses, the five books of the Pentateuch, also commonly known as the Torah. They reject all other scripture from the Bible.

Once in the Majority

From a historical perspective, the Samaritans and the Jews have a common lineage. The Old Testament recounts that 10 of the 12 tribes in the region of Samaria founded the state of Israel in the year 926 BC. The two other clans lived farther south, in the mountainous region of Judah, with its capital Jerusalem (see map).

In other words, the Samaritans were once in the majority. In ancient times, there were 300,000 of them -- perhaps even over a million. But their strictest law almost led to their downfall. It states: "None of you may settle outside the promised land."

As a result, while the Jews fled across the globe to escape the cruelty of foreign rulers, their relatives persevered in the land of their forefathers and suffered under Byzantine tyrants and merciless sultans. At the end of World War I, there were only 146 of them.

"Today we are doing better," says Ab-Chisda cheerily, as he gazes out the window. Now, together with another group in Holon near Tel Aviv, this religious community consists of 751 individuals.

But this population increase only took place because they broke with age-old traditions and rescinded the ban against mixed marriages. In 2004, five Jewish women from Ukraine and one from Siberia, all of them ready and willing to get married, were accepted into the community.

Nevertheless, due to inbreeding, they have a wide range of genetic defects. Trade journals have published studies on the forgotten children of God. They often suffer from muscle weakness and Usher syndrome, also known as deafblindness.

A Grim Fate

But their religion is alive and well. They all gather for Passover, a holiday where the men wear white robes and perform a great animal sacrifice.

During the ceremony, a priest cuts the throats of 50 lambs. Streams of blood flow through a stone channel into a hole, where they are burnt along with the intestines. The meat, which is cooked in a large earthen oven, must be completely consumed during the night -- otherwise it becomes unkosher.

But where do these archaic people come from?

It is a question that intrigues an increasing number of religious scholars. Recent discoveries show that the Samaritans suffered a grim fate. They were once the guardians of the Ark of the Covenant and the keepers of the Mosaic tradition. But then they became the victims of a smear campaign.

His hair windblown, Stefan Schorch stands in front of the synagogue in Kiryat Luza. An expert on the Old Testament, Schorch hails from the University of Halle-Wittenberg in eastern Germany and comes here often -- usually armed with a tape recorder. He works like an ethnologist would when studying a remote indigenous tribe.

Above all, Schorch is looking for sacred books.

It's 7:30 a.m., and a priest unlocks a small house of worship and disappears into a niche behind a heavy red curtain. Inside stands a safe filled with old volumes of the Pentateuch. "Unbelievable," says the researcher, as he leafs through "a completely preserved edition from the 14th century." He photographs each page of the tome. Then the priest locks it away again.

'One Main Difference'

There was a time when nearly every affluent family possessed such a precious handwritten book. Some of them reached Europe. Now, the professor, who comes from the historic birthplace of Martin Luther's Reformation, studies these texts, checking them line by line, and

word by word. And he compares the Samaritan Torah with the Jewish version.

"Actually there's only one main difference," he says. Among the Jews, Jerusalem is the world's religious epicenter, whereas for the Samaritans it's Mount Gerizim.

But which Torah is the original? Until recently, the generally accepted school of thought was as follows: In the fourth century BC, the Samaritans split off as a radical sect. In the Bible, they appear as outsiders and idol worshipers; they are evil. The parable of the "good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37) offers a rather atypical portrayal of a member of this sect.

The historian Titus Flavius Josephus, himself a Jew, mentions that the apostates erected a shrine "in all haste" in the year 330 BC, as a rather dilettantish attempt to emulate the Temple in Jerusalem. Increasingly, though, it looks as though the Bible has handed down a distorted picture of history. Papyrus scrolls recovered from Qumran on the Dead Sea, as well as a fragment of the Bible that recently surfaced on the market for antiquities, necessitate a "complete reassessment," says Schorch.

The Site of the Original Temple

Yet the most exciting indication of how history actually transpired has now been unearthed by Yitzhak Magen. Working behind security fences, the archaeologist has been digging on the windswept summit of Mount Gerizim.

His findings, which have only been partially published, are a virtual sensation: As early as 2,500 years ago, the mountain was already crowned with a huge, dazzling shrine, surrounded by a 96 by 98-meter (315 by 321-foot) enclosure. The wall had six-chamber gates with colossal wooden doors.

At the time, the Temple of Jerusalem was, at most, but a simple structure.

Magen has discovered 400,000 bone remains from sacrificial animals. Inscriptions identify the site as the "House of the Lord." A silver ring is adorned with the tetragrammaton YHWH, which stands for Yahweh.

All of this means that a vast, rival place of worship stood only 50 kilometers (31 miles) from Jerusalem.

It is an astonishing discovery. A religious war was raging among the Israelites, and the nation was divided. The Jews had powerful cousins who were competing with them for religious leadership in the Holy Land. The dispute revolved around a central question: Which location deserved the honor of being the hearth and burnt offering site of God Almighty?

Revising Holy Scripture

Researchers have a long way to go before they uncover all the details of this conflict. It's clear, however, that it was extremely acrimonious. Each side reviled the other. There was murder, mayhem and, ultimately, even the Holy Scripture was revised.

At first -- so much is clear -- the Samaritans had the upper hand.

Indeed, compared with Jerusalem, Mount Gerizim enjoyed significantly older rights: In the great tale of the history of the chosen people, the mountain plays a key role.

Abraham, the progenitor of the Israelites -- who, according to legend, roamed through the Orient as a shepherd around 1500 BC -- stopped there because God had appeared to him in a wondrous vision. Later, Jacob the patriarch traveled there to build the original shrine.

In the fifth book of Moses, the mountain summit finally earns a prominent place in biblical history: After the flight from Egypt, the Israelites wandered through the Sinai desert for 40 years. At last, they reached the Jordan River from the east. Their old and weary leader gazed across the river to the promised land, where "milk and honey flow."

Shortly before his death, Moses issued an important command: The people must first travel to Mount Gerizim. He said that six tribes should climb it and proclaim blessings, while the other six tribes should proclaim curses from the top of nearby Mount Ebal. It was a kind of ritual taking possession of the promised land.

Finally, the prophet tells the Israelites to build a shrine "made of stones" on Mount Gerizim and coat it with "plaster." Indeed, he said, this is "the place that the Lord has chosen."

No Mention of a 'Chosen Place'

That, in any case, is what stands in the oldest Bible texts. They are brittle papyrus scrolls that were made over 2,000 years ago in Qumran, and have only recently been examined by experts.

In the Hebrew Bible, which Jerusalem's priests probably spent a good deal of time revising, everything suddenly sounds quite different.

There is no longer any mention of a "chosen place."

The word "Gerizim" has also been removed from the crucial passage. Instead, the text states that the Yahweh altar was erected on "Ebal."

"By naming the mountain of the curses," says Schorch, "they wanted to cast the entire tale in a negative light, and deprive Gerizim of its biblical legitimacy."

Schorch dates the intervention to around 150 BC. The researcher stops short of calling it fraud, though, preferring to label it an "adaptation of the Bible to their own religious view."

But why was this ruse ultimately successful? Why did the minority win out? Didn't the opponent have the more populous country? A palace already stood in their capital city, Samaria, in the year 1000 BC. Ivory has been found there. At the time, Jerusalem was still little more than a village, with barely 1,500 inhabitants.

Researchers have solved this puzzle, and the answer even has a face: It sports a curly beard and wears a bronze helmet. Starting in the year 732 BC, the Assyrians used their chariots to advance to the

Mediterranean and subjugate the state of Israel. The inhabitants were either impaled or taken into captivity.

This devastated the country. The land of the Lord had been overrun by violent hordes. Many fled to their cousins in Judah. Jerusalem's population soared to 15,000.

Drinking and Whoring Heathens

Strengthened by this influx, the priests there decided it was time for them to play the leading role in religious matters. Only a few years after the invasion, King Hezekiah persuaded all Israelites -- Jews and Samaritans alike -- to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He said this was the only place that still retained the freedom and purity to worship the Almighty. The neighboring country was, of course, occupied by drinking and whoring heathens.

To underscore their claim, the Jewish people wove an entire biblical tale around their small, southern kingdom. According to this story, around 1000 BC the biblical King David ruled from Jerusalem over a glorious kingdom. His son Solomon allegedly built in the city a temple made of cedar, "completely overlaid with gold." According to the Bible, over 180,000 workers toiled to build it.

Total nonsense: Not a single shred of archaeological evidence has ever been found to confirm the existence of Solomon's Temple.

The goal of the deception was clear, though: Judah's priests sought to magnify the glory of their own city. And they passed up no opportunity to vilify their rivals: In the Bible the Samaritans were nearly always portrayed as unsavory characters. They were also said to be ethnically impure because their blood had supposedly been mixed with that of foreign colonialists.

The book of Ezra even recounts that these "enemies" tried to hinder the reconstruction of the destroyed Temple of Jerusalem -- out of pure envy, because they didn't have one of their own.

In reality, though, at that time, a shining divine fortress had already stood for many years on Mount Gerizim. Magen, the archaeologist, has discovered jewelry, silver, a fine cosmetics set and a small golden bell from the splendid robe of a high priest.

Living in Peace

Around the year 180 BC, the ceremonial building grew to a size of roughly 200 by 200 meters. The Samaritans added a monumental staircase and rooms for "thousands of pilgrims." There were apparently huge crowds of devout visitors. None of this is mentioned in the Bible.

The dispute finally came to a head. In the year 128 BC, John Hyrcanos, a Jewish prince, ascended Mount Gerizim with an army and burned the proud sanctuary to the ground. Archaeologists have found a "burn layer" along with arrow heads, swords, daggers and lead missiles for slings.

The Samaritans never rebuilt their temple. From then on, the victors wrote the (biblical) history books and forced their rivals into oblivion.

And yet the "guardians of the law," as they call themselves, still exist today. When Mark Twain visited the region in 1867, he encountered the "sad, proud remnant of a once mighty community," which he stared at "just as one would stare at a living mastodon."

Today, this astounding religious community is better off. They have a seat in the Palestinian parliament and they maintain contacts with the United Nations. "We want to live in peace with everyone," says the high priest Ab-Chisda.

Despite their tragic history, the spiritual leader has not lost his sense of humor. In response to the question as to what the Samaritan paradise looks like, the old man hesitated briefly. Then, he said mischievously: "It must be a wonderful place. Nobody has ever returned to make a complaint."