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Article 1.

The Washington Post

# The end of Putinism

Jackson Diehl

March 5 -- No one in Russia was in doubt about the outcome of Sunday's presidential election. Vladi-mir Putin's triumph was assumed. But there is feverish speculation, and great uncertainty, about what will happen beginning Monday, when Putin prepares to begin a new six-year term. The question of the moment in Moscow is: How long will he last?

Not long, according to some of the more fevered spokesmen of the surging opposition, who predict the swelling of post-election

demonstrations. More sober analysts figure the strongman and his circle might hang on for a couple of more years, provided they choose to appease a disgruntled public with political and economic reforms.

The pessimists think Putin may survive for a full six years as president — but not for the second six he was clearly counting on when he announced his return to the job last September. Russians I spoke to in the past several weeks voiced a common refrain: The autocracy that dominated the country for the last decade is already dead. The only question is what will follow it, and when.

A similar observation can be made about another big and seemingly stable dictatorship: China. The well-orchestrated visit to the United States last month of ruler-in-waiting Xi Jinping was in keeping with the regime's plan for a smooth transition of power over the next year — and a decade-long reign of Xi.

Yet even China's own government planners say that the political stasis this implies is unworkable. In a remarkable new report co-written with the World Bank and released last week, technocrats at the Development Research Center of the State Council concluded that to sustain its economic growth in the next 20 years, "it is imperative that China adjusts its development strategy," including by allowing free debate, establishing the rule of law and opening up the political process.

Since the beginning of the century, Russia and China have been constants in the world: autocratic, resistant to the spread of freedom, occasionally belligerent toward their neighbors and increasingly prosperous. Their rulers have supposed this will

continue for another decade. But it's becoming evident they are wrong.

Interestingly, Putin and his counterparts in Beijing have a common understanding of the source of the rising pressure on them. "Our society is completely different from what it was at the turn of the 20th century," Putin wrote in an op-ed The Post published last month. "People are becoming more affluent, educated and demanding. The results of our efforts are new demands on the government and the advance of the middle class above the narrow objective of guaranteeing their own prosperity."

Says "China 2030," the World Bank-state planners collaboration: "The rising ranks of the middle class and higher education levels will inevitably increase the demand for better social governance and greater opportunities for participation in public policy debate and implementation. Unmet, these demands could raise social tensions."

In other words, the emerging middle classes in China and Russia won't tolerate exclusion from political decision making for another 10 years. In Moscow, the proof is already visible, in the crowds of tens of thousands who have turned out to denounce fraud in December's parliamentary elections. In China, the evidence is all over Sina Weibo, the micro blogging site where people flock to sound off.

For these two big countries and the world around them, the big question is whether the inevitable change will come from inside or outside the current system. Putin could be another Gorbachev — or another Mubarak. Some people believe that he will slowly

allow liberalization. But his conduct of the election campaign — founded on excluding opponents and bad-mouthing the United States — suggests otherwise. Xi has yet to take office, but has shown no sign of receptiveness to the reforms proposed by China 2030. Repression of pro-democracy dissidents has increased in the past several years.

Like the Arab Spring of the past year, the crumbling of the autocratic status quo in Russia and China will pose major challenges for the United States — the first of which is to recognize what is coming. For the past decade, U.S. policy toward the two countries has been based on acceptance of their denial of human rights, with occasional and pro-forma grumbles. To continue that regime-centered policy would be to make the same mistake that the Obama administration committed in clinging to the autocrats of the Middle East.

So as Putin and Xi take office, the question the administration should be pondering is not how to build — or "reset" — relations with them. It should be the point people are debating in Moscow: How long can he last?

Article 2.

Wall Street Journal

# Why Israel Has Doubts About Obama

Dan Senor

March 5, 2012 -- 'I try not to pat myself too much on the back," President Barack Obama immodestly told a group of Jewish donors last October, "but this administration has done more in terms of the security of the state of Israel than any previous administration."

Mr. Obama struck a similar tone at the annual policy conference of the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (Aipac) in Washington Sunday, assuring the group that "I have Israel's back." And it's little wonder why. Monday he meets with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu amid growing concern that a military strike will be necessary to end Iran's nuclear weapons program. He also knows that he lost a portion of the Jewish vote when he publicly pressured Israel to commence negotiations with the Palestinians based on the 1967 borders with land swaps. With the election nine months away, he's scrambling to win back Jewish voters and donors.

It is true that there has been increased U.S. funding for Israeli defense programs, the bulk of which comes from Mr. Obama maintaining a 10-year commitment made by President George W. Bush to Israel's government in 2007.

But a key element of Israel's security is deterrence. That deterrence rests on many parts, including the perception among its adversaries that Israel will defend itself, and that if Israel must take action America will stand by Israel. Now consider how Israel's adversaries must view this deterrence capability in recent months:

October 2011: Speaking to reporters traveling with him to Israel,

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta raised provocative questions about Israel. "Is it enough to maintain a military edge if you're isolating yourself in the diplomatic arena?"

This characterization of self-created isolation surprised Israeli officials. After all, for almost three years President Obama had pressured Israel to make unilateral concessions in the peace process. And his administration had publicly confronted Israel's leaders, making unprecedented demands for a complete settlement freeze—which Israel met in 2010. The president's stern lectures to Israel's leaders were delivered repeatedly and very publicly at the United Nations, in Egypt and Turkey, all while he did not make a single visit to Israel to express solidarity. Thus, having helped foment an image of Israeli obstinacy, the Obama administration was now using this image of isolation against Israel's government. Mr. Panetta's criticism was promptly endorsed by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a harsh critic of Israel, who said Mr. Panetta was "correct in his assumptions." Indeed, almost every time the Obama administration has scolded Israel, the charges have been repeated by Turkish officials.

November 2011: In advance of meeting with Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Mr. Panetta publicly previewed his message. He would warn Mr. Barak against a military strike on Iran's nuclear program: "There are going to be economic consequences . . . that could impact not just on our economy but the world economy." Even if the administration felt compelled to deliver this message privately, why undercut the perception of U.S.-Israel unity on the military option?

That same month, an open microphone caught part of a private

conversation between Mr. Obama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Mr. Sarkozy said of Israel's premier, "I can't stand Netanyahu. He's a liar." Rather than defend Israel's back, Mr. Obama piled on: "You're tired of him; what about me? I have to deal with him every day."

December 2011: Again undercutting the credibility of the Israeli military option, Mr. Panetta used a high-profile speech to challenge the idea that an Israeli strike could eliminate or substantially delay Iran's nuclear program, and he warned that "the United States would obviously be blamed."

Mr. Panetta also addressed the Israeli-Palestinian peace process by lecturing Israel to "just get to the damn table." This, despite the fact that Israel had been actively pursuing direct negotiations with the Palestinians, only to watch the Palestinian president abandon talks and unilaterally pursue statehood at the U.N. The Obama team thought the problem was with Israel?

January 2012: In an interview, Mr. Obama referred to Prime Minister Erdogan as one of the five world leaders with whom he has developed "bonds of trust." According to Mr. Obama, these bonds have "allowed us to execute effective diplomacy." The Turkish government had earlier sanctioned a six-ship flotilla to penetrate Israel's naval blockade of Hamas-controlled Gaza. Mr. Erdogan had said that Israel's defensive response was "cause for war."

February 2012: At a conference in Tunis, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was asked about Mr. Obama pandering to "Zionist lobbies." She acknowledged that it was "a fair question" and went on to explain that during an election season "there are comments made that certainly don't reflect our foreign policy."

In an interview last week with the Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg, Mr. Obama dismissed domestic critics of his Israel policy as "a set of political actors who want to see if they can drive a wedge . . . between Barack Obama and the Jewish American vote." But what's glaring is how many of these criticisms have been leveled by Democrats.

Last December, New Jersey Sen. Robert Menendez lambasted administration officials at a Foreign Relations Committee hearing. He had proposed sanctions on Iran's central bank and the administration was hurling a range of objections. "Published reports say we have about a year," said Mr. Menendez. "So I find it pretty outrageous that when the clock is ticking . . . you come here and say what you say."

Also last year, a number of leading Democrats, including Sen. Harry Reid and Rep. Steny Hoyer, felt compelled to speak out in response to Mr. Obama's proposal for Israel to return to its indefensible pre-1967 borders. Rep. Eliot Engel told CNN that "for the president to emphasize that . . . was a very big mistake."

In April 2010, 38 Democratic senators signed a critical letter to Secretary Clinton following the administration's public (and private) dressing down of the Israeli government.

Sen. Charles Schumer used even stronger language in 2010 when he responded to "something I have never heard before," from the Obama State Department, "which is, the relationship of Israel and the United States depends on the pace of the negotiations. That is terrible. That is a dagger."

Sen. Joe Lieberman, a Democrat-turned-independent, said of Mr. Obama last year, "I think he's handled the relationship with

Israel in a way that has encouraged Israel's enemies, and really unsettled the Israelis."

Election-year politics may bring some short-term improvements in the U.S. relationship with Israel. But there's concern that a re-elected President Obama, with no more votes or donors to court, would be even more aggressive in his one-sided approach toward Israel.

If Mr. Obama wants a pat on the back, he should make it clear that he will do everything in his power to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability, and that he will stand by Israel if it must act. He came one step closer to that stance on Sunday when he told Aipac, "Iran's leaders should have no doubt about the resolve of the United States, just as they should not doubt Israel's sovereign right to make its own decisions about what is required to meet its security needs." Let's hope this is the beginning of a policy change and not just election year rhetoric.

*Mr. Senor, co-author with Saul Singer of "Start-up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle" (Twelve, 2011), served as a senior adviser to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq in 2003-04, and is currently an adviser to the presidential campaign of Mitt Romney.*

Article 3.

The Daily Beast

# Former CIA Officials Say Iran's

# Clerics Want to Goad Israel Into an Attack

Aram Roston

March 5, 2012 -- Benjamin Netanyahu, in Washington today, is laying more political groundwork for a possible preemptive Israeli airstrike against Iran's nuclear sites.

But as Netanyahu rallies his American supporters and discourages diplomatic engagement with Tehran, some intelligence officials and Iran experts tell The Daily Beast that an Israeli attack may be exactly what Tehran's most hard-line leaders have been trying to provoke.

Marty Martin, a former senior officer in the CIA, ran the unit that hunted Al Qaeda terrorists from 2002 to 2004. Iran's most militant leaders "are goading the Israelis," he tells The Daily Beast, "because a bombing will help them put their internal problems aside."

Martin, who spent most of his 25-year career at the CIA in the Middle East, argues that some clerics and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders, confronted with a discontented and restless population, are looking for ways to solidify public support. "The way they see it, if Israel bombs them it relieves the internal pressure," says Martin. "Amid this turmoil, its always good to have an outside enemy."

This January a hard-line newspaper in Tehran considered close to Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, made the

incendiary announcement that a nuclear site buried deep underground was about to start enriching uranium., AP Photo

Iran's internal troubles include a 12 percent unemployment rate, a shattered economy (due in part to international sanctions), resentment over the oppressive regime, and widespread disgust over corruption.

Martin, who retired from the agency in 2007, now works as an independent consultant. He was prominent inside the agency not just for his leadership against Al Qaeda but also for his expertise on the Middle East: his Louisiana drawl disguises the fact that he speaks fluent Arabic.

"If you are an Iranian," he says, "there is actually a benefit to an Israel strike—an Israel strike which won't be successful completely militarily, but will be successful for saying 'game on'!"

Paul Pillar, the former national intelligence officer for the Middle East, agrees, though he emphasizes that only part of the Iranian leadership is likely plotting this way. "It's quite rational," he said, "from the perspective of the specific elements in the regime that believe it would work to their political advantage." Pillar, who spent 28 years at the CIA, is now a professor at Georgetown University. "I strongly believe that the net political effect of an attack would be to help the hardliners," he says.

This January, a hard-line newspaper in Tehran, a paper considered close to Ayatolla Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, made the incendiary announcement that a nuclear site buried deep underground was about to start enriching uranium.

Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, says that senior White House staff asked during that time period whether Iranian regime elements might be trying to goad Israel into launching airstrikes.

"The White House," Sadjadpour says, "is mindful of the fact that there are radical elements in Tehran who might like to provoke an attack for their own domestic expediency."

(The National Security Council spokesperson, asked to comment, said no one was available to address the issue this weekend.)

"I do think that a military conflagration could be one of the few things that could potentially rehabilitate the regime," said Sadjadpour. "It could resuscitate revolutionary ideology and repair the deep fractures both amongst the political elite and among the population and the regime."

Pillar says the theory has some historical evidence on its side. "The big data point in support of this concept is the Iran-Iraq war: Saddam Hussein's Iraq attacking Iran," he says. "Iraq was the aggressor, and the attack [had] a big rally-around-the-flag effect and it had a positive effect in bolstering support for the [Iranian] regime. That's the most applicable way to look at."

Iran, in this view, could intentionally cross so-called "red lines" laid out by the Americans or Israelis, to invite an attack that it believes would be largely ineffective against its nuclear sites, and that would not bring large numbers of casualties.

Another veteran of the CIA's clandestine services, who spent years working with Iranian agents, says he finds the explanation

"entirely logical." (He asked that his name not be used because much of his work was classified.)

"The guys you are talking about, they are not going to die," he says. "They are not the ones who are going to get bombed. They can always find another lab technician, or another scientist. Those are the ones who are going to die."

Article 4.

The Weekly Standard

# Obama at AIPAC: Determined . . . to Win Their Votes

Elliott Abrams

March 4, 2012 -- President Obama's speech this morning to the AIPAC Policy Conference put the best spin possible on his record, and he had a good story to tell. Military and intelligence cooperation is excellent, and American diplomatic support for an isolated Israel was repeatedly (though not always, as he suggested) forthcoming. Still, any effort to paper over the differences between his administration and the Netanyahu government—or worse yet, to make believe there really are no important differences—was bound to fail. What many in the audience noticed, like many in the press, was the defensiveness

of the speech. Bill Clinton in 1996 and George Bush in 2004 did not have to spend long paragraphs explaining to AIPAC that things were not as they seem and that relations were really dandy. Nor did they have to warn the audience not to believe the "distortions" they were soon to hear from speakers representing the other political party.

First the president said this: "[Y]ou can expect that over the next several days, you will hear many fine words from elected officials describing their commitment to the U.S.-Israel relationship. But as you examine my commitment, you don't just have to count on my words. You can look at my deeds. Because over the last three years, as president of the United States, I have kept my commitments to the state of Israel. At every crucial juncture—at every fork in the road—we have been there for Israel. Every single time." Five paragraphs acclaiming his own record followed, culminating in this: "Which is why, if during this political season you hear some questions regarding my administration's support for Israel, remember that it's not backed up by the facts. And remember that the U.S.-Israel relationship is simply too important to be distorted by partisan politics. America's national security is too important. Israel's security is too important." And then he went back to singing his own praises again. Whether this will persuade any listeners not already inclined to vote for Obama is doubtful. His reference to "my friend Shimon Peres" was the kind of Washington nonsense that can make a sophisticated audience grimace. Similarly, his announcement at AIPAC that he will this spring award Peres the Medal of Freedom was pandering of the highest order.

But the part of speech that most listeners were focused on was, of course, the section on Iran. Here the president attempted to

sound very tough.

"No Israeli government can tolerate a nuclear weapon in the hands of a regime that denies the Holocaust, threatens to wipe Israel off the map. … A nuclear-armed Iran is completely counter to Israel's security interests. But it is also counter to the national security interests of the United States. … And that is why, four years ago, I made a commitment to the American people, and said that we would use all elements of American power to pressure Iran and prevent it from acquiring a nuclear weapon … the only way to truly solve this problem is for the Iranian government to make a decision to forsake nuclear weapons. … I have said that when it comes to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, I will take no options off the table, and I mean what I say. That includes all elements of American power: A political effort aimed at isolating Iran; a diplomatic effort to sustain our coalition and ensure that the Iranian program is monitored; an economic effort that imposes crippling sanctions; and, yes, a military effort to be prepared for any contingency. Iran's leaders should understand that I do not have a policy of containment; I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon."

The problem is that Israel is focused on Iran's acquisition of a nuclear capability, not just the final activities that produce a weapon—and that would probably come far too late for Israel to have a viable military option. To the Israelis, Iran cannot be permitted to get that close to having a useable weapon. So the red line the president drew is not the same as the one Netanyahu usually draws.

There are other problems with the AIPAC remarks. In his State

of the Union speech less than two months ago, Obama said, "America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon." This time he said, "I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon," a weaker formulation. And neither time did he say flatly "America will prevent Iran"—not "determined," not "have a policy," but a flat statement: Iran will never get a nuclear weapon because America will prevent it. Moreover, Obama's red line only works if we can all be sure our knowledge of Iran's program is reliable and that there is no possibility they could weaponize without our knowing it. That may well be true, but would you bet your country on it?

Obama twice contradicted his own request that Israel simply rely on him and thereby let the date pass when it can act militarily itself. In this speech he delivered the now customary line (one that precedes Obama): "Israel must always have the ability to defend itself, by itself, against any threat." But to this he added something new: "Iran's leaders should have no doubt about the resolve of the United States just as they should not doubt Israel's sovereign right to make its own decisions about what is required to meet its security needs." It is true that he soon followed that with, "Now is the time to let our increased pressure sink in, and to sustain the broad international coalition we have built," so he is clearly pressing the Israelis to wait. But the preceding sentence about "Israel's sovereign right" is either meant to scare Iran into negotiating, or is letting the world know now that if Israel acts we will come in behind her. Obama told the AIPAC audience that "there should not be a shred of doubt by now—when the chips are down, I have Israel's back." If Israel decides to exercise that "sovereign right" to "defend itself, by itself," this promise will be tested in the coming months.

Article 5.

Washington Monthly

# We Can Live with a Nuclear Iran

Paul Pillar

March/April 2012 -- At around 8:30 in the morning on Wednesday, January 11, while much of Tehran was snarled in its usual rush-hour traffic, a motorcyclist drew alongside a gray Peugeot and affixed a magnetic bomb to its exterior. The ensuing blast killed the car's thirty-two-year-old passenger, Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, a professor of chemistry and the deputy director of Iran's premiere uranium enrichment facility. The assassin disappeared into traffic, and Roshan became the fifth Iranian nuclear scientist to die in violent or mysterious circumstances since 2007.

The attack was, in a sense, fairly typical of the covert war being waged against Iran's nuclear program, a campaign that has included computer sabotage as well as the serial assassination of Iranian scientists. Even the manner of the killing was routine; Roshan was the third scientist to die from a magnet bomb slapped onto his car during a commute. But the timing of the chemist's death—amid a series of diplomatic events that came

fast and furious in January and February, each further complicating relations with Iran—had the effect of dramatizing how close this covert war may be to becoming an overt one.

On New Year's Eve, eleven days before the bombing that killed Roshan, President Barack Obama enacted a new round of sanctions that essentially blacklisted Iran's central bank by penalizing anyone who does business with it, a move designed to cripple the Islamic Republic's ability to sell oil overseas. Iran responded by threatening to militarily shut down the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow shipping lane out of the Persian Gulf through which 20 percent of the world's oil trade passes. On January 8, three days before the attack on Roshan, U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta appeared on Face the Nation and reinforced America's commitment to keep Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Just in December, Panetta had emphasized the damaging consequences that war with Iran would bring, but now he stressed that Iranian development of a nuclear weapon would cross a "red line." When the European Union announced its own sanctions of the Iranian central bank in late January, Iran redoubled its threat to block shipping lanes in the Strait of Hormuz. Panetta called this another "red line" that would provoke a military response from the U.S. February brought more posturing from Iran, along with two assassination attempts against Israelis living in New Delhi and Tbilisi that were widely attributed to Tehran.

All of this has played out against the unhelpful backdrop of American election-year politics. The Republican presidential candidates, with the exception of the antiwar libertarian Ron Paul, have seized on Iran as a possible winning issue and have tried to outdo each other in sounding bellicose about it. Mitt

Romney has repeatedly discussed the use of military force as one way of fulfilling his promise that, if he is elected, Iran "will not have a nuclear weapon." In short, both Democrats and Republicans have so ratcheted up their alarm about the possibility of an Iranian nuclear weapon that they are willing to commit to the extreme step of launching an offensive war—an act of aggression—to try to stop it.

Meanwhile, the Israeli government, which has led the way in talking up the danger of an Iranian bomb, represents a significant hazard outside Washington's control. It was most likely the Israelis, for instance, who orchestrated the provocatively timed attack on Roshan. Defense Minister Ehud Barak recently dialed down the heat somewhat by saying that an Israeli decision to strike Iran was "far off." But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mindful of the U.S. electoral calendar and the possibility that Barack Obama might pull off a victory in November, may see a temporary opportunity to precipitate a conflict in which a preelection U.S. president would feel obliged to join in on Israel's side.

Yet even without an Israeli decision to start a war, recent U.S., Iranian, and Israeli actions already constitute an escalation toward one. Rising tensions have increased the chance that even a minor incident, such as a seaborne encounter in the Persian Gulf, could spiral out of control. And Iran's own covert actions—perhaps including the recent spate of car bombs targeting Israeli officials in India and Georgia and last year's bizarre alleged plot to blow up a restaurant in Washington, D.C., and kill the Saudi ambassador—feed even more hostility from the U.S. and Israel, escalating further the risk of open conflict.

Thus we find ourselves at a strange pass. Those in the United States who genuinely yearn for war are still a neoconservative minority. But the danger that war might break out—and that the hawks will get their way—has nonetheless become substantial. The U.S. has just withdrawn the last troops from one Middle Eastern country where it fought a highly costly war of choice with a rationale involving weapons of mass destruction. Now we find ourselves on the precipice of yet another such war—almost purely because the acceptable range of opinion on Iran has narrowed and ossified around the "sensible" idea that all options must be pursued to prevent the country from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Given the momentousness of such an endeavor and how much prominence the Iranian nuclear issue has been given, one might think that talk about exercising the military option would be backed up by extensive analysis of the threat in question and the different ways of responding to it. But it isn't. Strip away the bellicosity and political rhetoric, and what one finds is not rigorous analysis but a mixture of fear, fanciful speculation, and crude stereotyping. There are indeed good reasons to oppose Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons, and likewise many steps the United States and the international community can and should take to try to avoid that eventuality. But an Iran with a bomb would not be anywhere near as dangerous as most people assume, and a war to try to stop it from acquiring one would be less successful, and far more costly, than most people imagine.

What difference would it make to Iran's behavior and influence if the country had a bomb? Even among those who believe that war with the Islamic Republic would be a bad idea, this question has been subjected to precious little careful analysis. The notion

that a nuclear weapon would turn Iran into a significantly more dangerous actor that would imperil U.S. interests has become conventional wisdom, and it gets repeated so often by so many diverse commentators that it seldom, if ever, is questioned. Hardly anyone debating policy on Iran asks exactly why a nuclear-armed Iran would be so dangerous. What passes for an answer to that question takes two forms: one simple, and another that sounds more sophisticated.

The simple argument is that Iranian leaders supposedly don't think like the rest of us: they are religious fanatics who value martyrdom more than life, cannot be counted on to act rationally, and therefore cannot be deterred. On the campaign trail Rick Santorum has been among the most vocal in propounding this notion, asserting that Iran is ruled by the "equivalent of al-Qaeda," that its "theology teaches" that its objective is to "create a calamity," that it believes "the afterlife is better than this life," and that its "principal virtue" is martyrdom. Newt Gingrich speaks in a similar vein about how Iranian leaders are suicidal jihadists, and says "it's impossible to deter them."

The trouble with this image of Iran is that it does not reflect actual Iranian behavior. More than three decades of history demonstrate that the Islamic Republic's rulers, like most rulers elsewhere, are overwhelmingly concerned with preserving their regime and their power—in this life, not some future one. They are no more likely to let theological imperatives lead them into self-destructive behavior than other leaders whose religious faiths envision an afterlife. Iranian rulers may have a history of valorizing martyrdom—as they did when sending young militiamen to their deaths in near-hopeless attacks during the

Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s—but they have never given any indication of wanting to become martyrs themselves. In fact, the Islamic Republic's conduct beyond its borders has been characterized by caution. Even the most seemingly ruthless Iranian behavior has been motivated by specific, immediate concerns of regime survival. The government assassinated exiled Iranian dissidents in Europe in the 1980s and '90s, for example, because it saw them as a counterrevolutionary threat. The assassinations ended when they started inflicting too much damage on Iran's relations with European governments. Iran's rulers are constantly balancing a very worldly set of strategic interests. The principles of deterrence are not invalid just because the party to be deterred wears a turban and a beard.

If the stereotyped image of Iranian leaders had real basis in fact, we would see more aggressive and brash Iranian behavior in the Middle East than we have. Some have pointed to the Iranian willingness to incur heavy losses in continuing the Iran-Iraq War. But that was a response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of the Iranian homeland, not some bellicose venture beyond Iran's borders. And even that war ended with Ayatollah Khomeini deciding that the "poison" of agreeing to a cease-fire was better than the alternative. (He even described the cease- fire as "God's will"—so much for the notion that the Iranians' God always pushes them toward violence and martyrdom.)

Throughout history, it has always been worrisome when a revolutionary regime with ruthless and lethal internal practices moves to acquire a nuclear weapon. But it is worth remembering that we have contended with far more troubling examples of this phenomenon than Iran. Millions died from forced famine and purges in Stalin's Soviet Union, and tens of millions perished

during the Great Leap Forward in Mao Tse-tung's China. China's development of a nuclear weapon (it tested its first one in 1964) seemed all the more alarming at the time because of Mao's openly professed belief that his country could lose half its population in a nuclear war and still come out victorious over capitalism. But deterrence with China has endured for half a century, even during the chaos and fanaticism of Mao's Cultural Revolution. A few years after China got the bomb, Richard Nixon built his global strategy around engagement with Beijing. The more sophisticated-sounding argument about the supposed dangers of an Iranian nuclear weapon—one heard less from politicians than from policy-debating intelligentsia—accepts that Iranian leaders are not suicidal but contends that the mere possession of such a weapon would make Tehran more aggressive in its region. A dominant feature of this mode of argument is "worst-casing," as exemplified by a pro-war article by Matthew Kroenig in a recent issue of Foreign Affairs. Kroenig's case rests on speculation after speculation about what mischief Iran "could" commit in the Middle East, with almost no attention to whether Iran has any reason to do those things, and thus to whether it ever would be likely to do them.

Kroenig includes among his "coulds" a scary possibility that also served as a selling point of the Iraq War: the thought of a regime giving nuclear weapons or materials to a terrorist group. Nothing is said about why Iran or any other regime ever would have an incentive to do this. In fact, Tehran would have strong reasons not to do it. Why would it want to lose control over a commodity that is scarce as well as dangerous? And how would it achieve deniability regarding its role in what the group subsequently did with the stuff? No regime in the history of the

nuclear age has ever been known to transfer nuclear material to a nonstate group. That history includes the Cold War, when the USSR had both a huge nuclear arsenal and patronage relationships with a long list of radical and revolutionary clients. As for deniability, Iranian leaders have only to listen to rhetoric coming out of the United States to know that their regime would immediately be a suspect in any terrorist incidents involving a nuclear weapon.

The more sophisticated-sounding argument links Iran with sundry forms of objectionable behavior, either real or hypothetical, without explaining what difference the possession of a nuclear weapon would make. Perhaps the most extensive effort to catalog what a nuclear-armed Iran might do outside its borders is a monograph published last year by Ash Jain of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Jain's inventory of possible Iranian nastiness is comprehensive, ranging from strong-arming Persian Gulf states to expanding a strategic relationship with Hugo Chávez's Venezuela. But nowhere is there an explanation of how Iran's calculations—or anyone else's—would change with the introduction of a nuclear weapon. The most that Jain can offer is to assert repeatedly that because Iran would be "shielded by a nuclear weapons capability," it might do some of these things. We never get an explanation of how, exactly, such a shield would work. Instead there is only a vague sense that a nuclear weapon would lead Iran to feel its oats. Analysis on this subject need not be so vague. A rich body of doctrine was developed during the Cold War to outline the strategic differences that nuclear weapons do and do not make, and what they can and cannot achieve for those who possess them. Such weapons are most useful in deterring aggression

against one's own country, which is probably the main reason the Iranian regime is interested in developing them. They are much less useful in "shielding" aggressive behavior outside one's borders, except in certain geopolitical situations in which their use becomes plausible. The Pakistani-Indian conflict may be such a situation. Pakistan's nuclear arsenal may have enabled it to engage in riskier behavior in Kashmir than it otherwise would attempt, because nuclear weapons help to deter Pakistan's ultimate nightmare: an assault by the militarily superior India, which could slice Pakistan in two and perhaps destroy it completely. But if you try to apply that logic to Iran, no one is playing the role of India. Iran has its own tensions and rivalries with its neighbors— including Iraq, Saudi Arabia, other states on the Persian Gulf, and Pakistan. But none of these pose the kind of existential threat that Pakistan sees coming from India. Moreover, none of the current disputes between Iran and its neighbors (such as the one over ownership of some small islands also claimed by the United Arab Emirates) come close to possessing the nation-defining significance that the Kashmir conflict poses for both Pakistan and India. Nuclear weapons matter insofar as there is a credible possibility that they will be used. This credibility is hard to achieve, however, in anything short of circumstances that might involve the destruction of one's nation. In the case of Iran, there would need to be some specific aggressive or subversive act that Tehran is holding back from performing now for fear of retaliation—from the Americans, the Israelis, the Saudis, or someone else. Further, in order for Iran to neutralize the threat of retaliation, the desired act of mischief would have to be so important to Tehran that it could credibly threaten to escalate the matter to the level of nuclear war. Proponents of a war with Iran have been unable to

provide an example of a scenario that meets these criteria, however. The impact of Iran possessing a bomb is therefore far less dire than the alarmist conventional wisdom suggests. To be sure, the world would be a better place without an Iranian nuclear weapon. An Iranian bomb would be a setback for the global nuclear nonproliferation regime, for example, and the arms control community is legitimately concerned about it. It would also raise the possibility that other regional states, such as Saudi Arabia or Egypt, might be more inclined to try to acquire nuclear weapons as well. But that raises the question of why these states have not already done so, despite decades of facing both Israel's nuclear force and tensions with Iran. Ever since John F. Kennedy mused that there might be fifteen to twenty-five states with nuclear weapons by the 1970s, estimates of the pace of proliferation—like estimates of the pace of Iran's nuclear program—have usually been too high. Furthermore, it's not clear that any of this would cause substantial and direct damage to U.S. interests. Indeed, the alarmists offer more inconsistent arguments when discussing the dynamics of a Middle East in which rivals of Iran acquire their own nuclear weapons. If, as the alarmists project, nuclear weapons would appreciably increase Iranian influence in the region, why wouldn't further nuclear proliferation—which the alarmists also project—negate this effect by bestowing a comparable benefit on the rivals? In the absence of further proliferation among Iran's rivals, there is a chance that Iran would be marginally bolder if it possessed a nuclear weapon—and that the United States and other countries in the Middle East would be correspondingly less bold. Perceptions of strength do matter. But two further observations are important. First, once concrete confrontations occur, strategic realities trump perceptions. One

of the conjectures in Jain's monograph, for instance, is that Hezbollah and Hamas might become emboldened if Iran extended a nuclear umbrella over them. But in the face of Israel's formidable nuclear superiority, would Iranian leaders really be willing to risk Tehran to save Gaza? The Iranians could not get anyone to believe such a thing. Second, one must ultimately ask whether the conjectured consequences of an Iranian bomb would be worse than a war with Iran. The conjectures are just that. They are not concrete, not based on nuclear doctrine or rigorous analysis, and not even likely. They are worst-case speculations, and not adequate justifications for going to war. When the debate turns from discussing the consequences that would flow from Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon to discussing the consequences of a U.S. military attack on Iran, the mode of argument used by proponents of an attack changes entirely. Instead of the worst case, the emphasis is now on the best case. This "best-casing" often rests on the assumption that military action would take the form of a confined, surgical use of air power to take out Iran's nuclear facilities. But the dispersed nature of the target and the U.S. military's operational requirements (including the suppression of Iranian air defenses) would make this a major assault. It would be the start of a war with Iran. As Richard Betts remarks in his recent book about the American use of military force, anyone who hears talk about a surgical strike should get a second opinion. If the kind of worst-casing that war proponents apply to the implications of a nuclear Iran were applied to this question, the ramifications would be seen as catastrophic: we would be hearing about a regional conflagration involving multiple U.S. allies, sucking in U.S. forces far beyond the initial assault. When the Brookings

Institution ran a war-games simulation a couple of years ago, an Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities escalated into a region-wide crisis in which Iranian missiles were raining down on Saudi Arabia as well as Israel, and Tehran launched a worldwide terrorist campaign against U.S. interests.

No one knows what the full ramifications of such a war with Iran would be, and that is the main problem with any proposal to use military force against the Iranian nuclear program. But the negative consequences for U.S. interests are likely to be severe. In December, Secretary Panetta identified some of those consequences when he warned of the dangers of war: increased domestic support for the Iranian regime; violent Iranian retaliation against U.S. ships and military bases; "severe" economic consequences; and, perhaps, escalation that "could consume the Middle East in a confrontation and a conflict that we would regret."

Surely, Iran would strike back, in ways and places of its own choosing. That should not be surprising; it is what Americans would do if their own homeland were attacked. Proponents of an attack and some Israeli officials offer a more sanguine prediction of the Iranian response, and this is where their image of Iran becomes most inconsistent. According to this optimistic view, the same regime that cannot be trusted with a nuclear weapon because it is recklessly aggressive and prone to cause regional havoc would suddenly become, once attacked, a model of calm and caution, easily deterred by the threat of further attacks. History and human behavior strongly suggest, however, that any change in Iranian conduct would be exactly the opposite—that as with the Iran-Iraq War, an attack on the Iranian homeland would be the one scenario that would motivate Iran to respond

zealously. Iran's specific responses would probably include terrorism through its own agents as well as proxy groups, other violent reprisals against U.S. forces in the region, and disruption of the exports of other oil producers.

An armed attack on Iran would be an immediate political gift to Iranian hard-liners, who are nourished by confrontation with the West, and with the United States in particular. Armed attack by a foreign power traditionally produces a rally-round-the-flag effect that benefits whatever regime is in power. Last year a spokesperson for the opposition Green Movement in Iran said the current regime "would really like for someone" to bomb the nuclear facilities because "this would then increase nationalism and the regime would gather everyone and all the political parties around itself." Over the longer term, an attack would poison relations between the United States and generations of Iranians. It would become an even more prominent and lasting grievance than the U.S.-engineered overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq in 1953 or the accidental shooting down of an Iranian airliner over the Persian Gulf in 1988. American war proponents who optimistically hope that an attack would somehow stir the Iranian political pot in a way that would undermine the current clerical regime are likely to be disappointed. Even if political change in Iran occurred, any new regime would be responsive to a populace that has more reason than ever to be hostile to the United States.

Regional political consequences would include deepened anger at the United States for what would be seen as unprovoked killing of Muslims—with everything such anger entails in terms of stimulating more extremist violence against Americans. The emotional gap between Persians and Arabs would lessen, as

would the isolation of Iran from other states in the region. Contrary to a common misconception, the Persian Gulf Arabs do not want a U.S. war with Iran, notwithstanding their own concerns about their neighbor to the north. The misconception stems mainly from misinterpretation of a Saudi comment in a leaked cable about "cutting off the head of the snake." Saudi and other Gulf Arab officials have repeatedly indicated that while they look to U.S. leadership in containing Iranian influence, they do not favor an armed attack. The former Saudi intelligence chief and ambassador to the United States, Prince Turki Al Faisal, recently stated, "It is very clear that a military strike against Iran will be catastrophic in its consequences, not just on us but the world in general."

Then there are the economic consequences that would stem from a U.S.-Iranian war, which are incalculable but likely to be immense. Given how oil markets and shipping insurance work, the impact on oil prices of any armed conflict in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf would be out of proportion to the amount of oil shipments directly interdicted, even if the U.S. Navy largely succeeded in keeping the Strait of Hormuz open. And given the current fragility of Western economies, the full economic cost of a war would likewise be out of proportion to the direct effect on energy prices, a sudden rise in which might push the U.S. economy back into recession.

In return for all of these harmful effects, an attack on Iran would not even achieve the objective of ensuring a nuclear- weapons-free Iran. Only a ground invasion and occupation could hope to accomplish that, and not even the most fervent anti-Iranian hawks are talking about that kind of enormous undertaking. Panetta's estimate that an aerial assault would set back the

Iranian nuclear program by only one or two years is in line with many other assessments. Meanwhile, an attack would provide the strongest possible incentive for Iran to move forward rapidly in developing a nuclear weapon, in the hope of achieving a deterrent to future attacks sooner rather than later. That is how Iraq reacted when Israel bombed its nuclear reactor in 1981. Any prospect of keeping the bomb out of Iranian hands would require still more attacks a couple of years hence. This would mean implementing the Israeli concept of periodically "mowing the lawn"—a prescription for unending U.S. involvement in warfare in the Middle East.

"There's only one thing worse than military action against Iran," Senator John McCain has said, "and that is a nuclear-armed Iran." But any careful look at the balance sheet on this issue yields the opposite conclusion. Military action against Iran would have consequences far worse than a nuclear-armed Iran.

War or a world with an Iranian bomb are not the only alternatives. The judgment of the U.S. intelligence community, as voiced publicly by Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, is that Iran is retaining the option to build nuclear weapons but has not yet decided to do so. Much diplomatic ground has yet to be explored in searching for a formula that would permit Iran to have a peaceful nuclear program with enough inspections and other safeguards to assuage Western concerns about diversion of nuclear material to military use. As Trita Parsi reports in a recent book, the Obama administration's brief fling at diplomacy in 2009 was, in the words of a senior State Department official, "a gamble on a single roll of the dice." Now the administration, having seen how stridency toward Iran has threatened to get out of hand, seems willing to

try diplomacy again in talks with Iran that will also include Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and China.

The sanctions on Iran have probably contributed to Tehran's willingness to negotiate as well. Unless carefully wedded to diplomacy, however, sanctions risk being a counterproductive demonstration of Western hostility. Besides being serious about searching for a mutually acceptable formula of inspections and procedures that would safeguard against Iranian use of nuclear material for military purposes (and which may need to permit some Iranian enrichment of uranium), Western negotiators need to persuade the Iranians that concessions on their part will lead to the lifting of sanctions. This may be hard to do, partly because the legislation that imposes U.S. sanctions on Iran mentions human rights and other issues besides the nuclear program, and partly because many U.S. hawks openly regard sanctions only as a tool to promote regime change or as a necessary step toward being able to say that "diplomacy and sanctions have failed," and thus launching a war is the only option left. The challenge for the Obama administration is to persuade Tehran that this attitude does not reflect official policy.

Why would anyone, weighing all the costs and risks on each side of this issue, even consider starting a war with Iran? The short answer is that neocon habits die hard. It might seem that the recent experience of the Iraq War should have entirely discredited such proclivities, or at least dampened policymakers' inclination to listen to those who have them. But the war in Iraq may have instead inured the American public to the extreme measure of an offensive war, at least when it involves weapons of mass destruction and loathsome Middle Eastern regimes.

The Iranian government has provided good reason for Americans to loathe it, from its harsh suppression of the Green Movement to the anti-Semitic rants and other outrageous statements of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Unfortunately the belligerent rhetoric in Iran feeds belligerent rhetoric in the United States and vice versa, in a process that yields beliefs on each side that go beyond the reality on the other side. The demonization of Iran in American discourse has gone on for so long that even unsupported common wisdom is taken for granted. The excesses of the Republican primary campaign have contributed to the pattern. Michele Bachmann, for example, may be out of the race, but when she stated that the Iranian president "has said that if he has a nuclear weapon he will use it to wipe Israel off the face of the Earth," it was the sort of untruth that has tended to stick in the current climate (never mind that Iran claims it doesn't even want nuclear weapons).

As for Israel, it is impossible to ignore how much, in American politics, the Iran issue is an Israel issue. The Netanyahu government's own repeated invocation of an Iranian nuclear threat has several roots, including the desire to preserve Israel's regional nuclear weapons monopoly, the usefulness of having Iran stand in as the region's "real problem" to divert attention from the festering Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and simple emotion and fear. What American politicians don't seem to understand but any reader of Haaretz would know is that many leading Israelis, whose experience demonstrates both their deep commitment to Israel's security and their expertise in pronouncing on it, see the issue differently. Former Mossad chief Meir Dagan described the idea of an Israeli air strike on Iranian nuclear facilities as "the stupidest thing I have ever

heard." Another former Mossad head, Efraim Halevy, and the current director of the service, Tamir Pardo, have both recently denied that an Iranian nuclear weapon would be an existential threat to Israel. Even Defense Minister Barak, in an interview answer from which he later tried to backtrack, acknowledged that any Iranian interest in a nuclear weapon was "not just about Israel," but an understandable interest given the other countries that are already in the nuclear club.

If Iran acquired the bomb, Israel would retain overwhelming military superiority, with its own nuclear weapons—which international think tanks estimate to number at least 100 and possibly 200—conventional forces, and delivery systems that would continue to outclass by far anything Iran will have. That is part of the reason why an Iranian nuclear weapon would not be an existential threat to Israel and would not give Iran a license to become more of a regional troublemaker. But a war with Iran, begun by either Israel or the United States, would push Israel farther into the hole of perpetual conflict and regional isolation. Self-declared American friends of Israel are doing it no favor by talking up such a war.

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Article 6.

The New Yorker

# Threatened

David Remnick

March 12, 2012 -- Democracy is never fully achieved. At best, it's an ambition, a state of becoming. In America, it took generations for blacks, women, and gays and lesbians to win the rights of citizenship—rights that, in many instances, remain incomplete. (Various contenders for the Presidency are now competing to scale back such rights.) The twenty-first century began with a fraudulent Presidential election. And this is in the luckiest of nations. Elsewhere—in Russia, in Hungary, in Zimbabwe—the fragility of democratic aspiration is a brutal fact of history.

To revisit the Arab Spring, one year later, is to celebrate popular awakening but also to acknowledge the distance between the ecstasy of rebellion and the realization of democratic institutions. In Egypt, autocratic military officers vie for power with varying shades of Islamists. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad has responded to the demands of his people by slaughtering them, many hundreds each week. In the Persian Gulf, sultans and emirs stifle potential protest with petro hush money.

There is another state in the region that is embroiled in a crisis of democratic becoming. This is the State of Israel. For decades, its citizens—its Jewish ones, at least—have justifiably described their country as the only democracy in the Middle East. Although Israel as imagined by Theodor Herzl and built by the

generation of David Ben-Gurion was never intended to be a replica of the Anglo-American model—its political culture, even now, is closer to that of the European social democracies—its structures of governance are points of pride. And yet, as an experiment in Jewish power, unique after two millennia of persecution and exile, Israel has reached an impasse. An intensifying conflict of values has put its democratic nature under tremendous stress. When the government speaks daily about the existential threat from Iran, and urges an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, it ignores the existential threat that looms within. Reactionary elements lurk in many democracies. Ask the Dutch, the British, the Austrians, the French. The Republican Party has flirted with several in this election cycle. But in Israel the threat is especially acute. And the concern comes not only from its most persistent critics. The former Prime Ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert have both warned of a descent into apartheid, xenophobia, and isolation.

The political corrosion begins, of course, with the occupation of the Palestinian territories—the subjugation of Palestinian men, women, and children—that has lasted for forty-five years. Peter Beinart, in a forthcoming and passionately argued polemic, "The Crisis of Zionism," is just the latest critic to point out that a profoundly anti-democratic, even racist, political culture has become endemic among much of the Jewish population in the West Bank, and jeopardizes Israel proper. The explosion of settlements, encouraged and subsidized by both Labor and Likud governments, has led to a large and established ethnocracy that thinks of itself as a permanent frontier. In 1980, twelve thousand Jews lived in the West Bank, "east of democracy," Beinart writes; now they number more than three

hundred thousand, and include Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's wildly xenophobic Foreign Minister. Lieberman has advocated the execution of Arab members of parliament who dare to meet with leaders of Hamas. His McCarthyite allies call for citizens to swear loyalty oaths to the Jewish state; for restrictions on human-rights organizations, like the New Israel Fund; and for laws constricting freedom of expression.

Herzl envisioned a pluralist Zionism in which rabbis would enjoy "no privileged voice in the state." These days, emboldened fundamentalists flaunt an increasingly aggressive medievalism. There are sickening reports of ultra-Orthodox men spitting on schoolgirls whose attire they consider insufficiently demure, and demanding that women sit at the back of public buses. Elyakim Levanon, the chief rabbi of the Elon Moreh settlement, near Nablus, says that Orthodox soldiers should prefer to face a "firing squad" rather than sit through events at which women sing, and has forbidden women to run for public office, because "the husband presents the family's opinion." Dov Lior, the head of an important West Bank rabbinical council, has called Baruch Goldstein—who, in 1994, machine-gunned twenty-nine Palestinians at the Cave of the Patriarchs, in Hebron—"holier than all the martyrs of the Holocaust." Lior endorsed a book that discussed when it is right and proper to murder an Arab, and he and a group of kindred rabbis issued a proclamation proscribing Jews from selling or renting land to non-Jews. Men like Lieberman, Levanon, and Lior are scarcely embittered figures on the irrelevant margins: a hard-right base—the settlers, the ultra-Orthodox, Shas, the National Religious Party—is indispensable to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition.

A visitor to Tel Aviv and other freethinking precincts might

overlook the reactionary currents in the country, but poll after poll reveals that many younger Israelis are losing touch with the liberal, democratic principles of the state. Many of them did their military duty in the Occupied Territories; some learned to despise the Occupation they saw firsthand, but others learned to accept the official narratives justifying what they were made to do.

Last year, a poll conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute found that fifty-one per cent of Israelis believed that people "should be prohibited from harshly criticizing the State of Israel in public." Netanyahu encourages the notion that any such criticism is the work of enemies. Even the country's staunchest ally, the United States, is not above suspicion. The current Administration has coöperated with Israeli intelligence to an unprecedented extent and has led a crippling sanctions effort against Iran, yet Netanyahu, who visits Washington this week, has shown imperious disdain for Barack Obama. In fact, the President is a philo-Semite, whose earliest political supporters were Chicago Jews: Abner Mikva, Newton and Martha Minow, Bettylu Saltzman, David Axelrod. He was close to a rabbi on the South Side, the late Arnold Jacob Wolf. But to Netanyahu these men and women are the wrong kind of Jew. Wolf, for example, had worked for Abraham Joshua Heschel, the rabbi most closely associated with the civil-rights movement and other social-justice causes. Wolf brought Martin Luther King, Jr., to speak in his synagogue, marched in Selma, and, in 1973, helped found Breira (Alternative), one of the first American Jewish groups to endorse a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu has distaste for such associations; his gestures toward Palestinian statehood are less than halfhearted. (After he spoke

of giving Palestinians their own state, his father, the right-wing historian Benzion Netanyahu, shrewdly observed, "He supports it under conditions that they will never accept.") To Netanyahu, the proper kind of ally is exemplified by AIPAC and Sheldon Adelson—the longtime casino tycoon and recent bankroller of Newt Gingrich—who owns a newspaper in Israel devoted to supporting him. Netanyahu knows that young American Jews are split, with the growing Orthodox community solidly in his corner, and the less observant and secular majority—a majority that is increasingly assimilated and uninterested in Jewish learning—losing their attachment to Israel. The Prime Minister clearly feels that the fervor of the few offers him more than the disillusion and drift of the many.

"The dream of a Jewish and democratic state cannot be fulfilled with permanent occupation," Obama has said. Netanyahu and many of his supporters believe otherwise; too often, they consider the tenets of liberal democracy to be negotiable in a game of coalition politics. Such short-term expedience cannot but exact a long-term price: this dream—and the process of democratic becoming—may be painfully, even fatally, deferred.