

To: jeevacation@gmail.com[jeevacation@gmail.com]
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Article 1.

The Atlantic

**Who Is Sheldon Adelson, the
Gingrich Super PAC's
Billionaire Backer?**

Molly Ball

The shadowy billionaire bankrolling Newt Gingrich's super PAC is a Las Vegas casino magnate who's given tens of millions to Republican and pro-Israel causes over the years -- and now, to boosting Gingrich. Sands Corp. CEO Sheldon Adelson and his wife, Miriam, have each given the Winning Our Future super PAC \$5 million to date, and the PAC has committed to spend \$6 million on television advertising in Florida. He's also a pugnacious pioneer in the world of gaming and tourism who's changed the face of Las Vegas and Macau alike, a aggressive operator who once lost more than \$20 billion in a single year and boasted of getting former Republican House leader Tom DeLay to do his bidding.

Adelson, 78, is a man of many facets, with a long and colorful history in business and right-wing politics.

Here are 10 things you might not know about the man whose money has helped change the course of the GOP presidential race.

1. He's a self-made man. The son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, Adelson, by his own account, grew up in a one-room tenement in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston and never graduated college. He showed his entrepreneurial streak early on, selling newspapers starting at 12 and running an operation that stocked candy-vending machines when he was 16. After serving in the Army, he and a brother went into business together, selling toiletries to hotels and vending a car de-icing spray. Adelson (pronounced "add-ul-son") cycled through various ventures before starting, with partners, the COMDEX electronics trade show -- the enterprise that would be the seed of his now-vast fortune. At its height, the show drew 200,000 attendees, but after Adelson's group sold it in 1995, the exposition declined and eventually closed in 2003.

2. He made Las Vegas a convention destination. When Adelson brought COMDEX to Vegas, the gambling mecca was generally hostile to the convention business, but Adelson had a vision of conventioners filling hotel rooms and spending disposable income on the casino floor. To house COMDEX, he purchased the Sands Hotel -- the decrepit former home of the Rat Pack -- and built a massive convention center next to it, then aggressively marketed it as a destination for other conventions. Today, the convention business is a cornerstone of the Las Vegas economy. Adelson

expanded his empire with two high-end hotel-casino-resorts, the Venetian (1999) -- complete with gondoliers ferrying tourists down fake canals -- and the Palazzo, which opened in 2007.

3. He's a union-buster. Some of Adelson's bitterest political battles have been fought in his adopted home state against the forces of organized labor, which has a strong foothold in the casino industry. The Venetian opened in 1999 as the only non-union casino on the Strip and has been the target of protest from the hotel workers union, Culinary 226, ever since. Many Democratic politicians in the state continue to observe the union's boycott of Adelson's properties. Rep. Shelley Berkley, a Nevada Democrat now running for Senate in what's likely to be one of 2012's highest-profile races, was once Adelson's top political lieutenant, but the two parted ways over labor issues. Adelson and Berkley have regarded each other as mortal enemies ever since -- even though Berkley, like Adelson, is a hawkish, socially liberal Jew.

4. He spent \$30 million on the 2008 election. It didn't work out so well. Adelson poured the money into Freedom's Watch, a "527" independent-expenditure group that was active in congressional races, airing ads across the country that emphasized national security. (It also ran ads targeting Berkley, though her safe Democratic seat was not remotely competitive.) The group's help failed to avert the Republican landslide that November, and it was further hampered by staff infighting; insiders accused Adelson, its nearly sole donor, of micromanaging the

organization's activities. It closed shortly after the 2008 general election. Notably, a top official at Freedom's Watch, Carl Forti, is now a chief strategist for Restore Our Future, Mitt Romney's super PAC -- putting him in direct opposition to Adelson's pro-Gingrich super-PAC.

5. He's a Zionist/neocon/right-wing Israel hawk. Much of Adelson's political activity is devoted to boosting the right-wing Israeli line, both in Israel and the U.S. He donated a posh new headquarters to AIPAC, the Israel lobby in Washington, though he reportedly feuded with the organization over activities he saw as unduly pro-Palestinian. He has given \$25 million to Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial organization, and \$100 million to Birthright, the organization that takes young American Jews on free trips to Israel to bolster their loyalty to the Jewish state. Adelson opposes a two-state solution or any accommodation of Palestinians. When Gingrich recently stirred controversy by referring to the Palestinians as "an invented people," Adelson praised the remark to a Birthright group, according to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz. In Israel, Adelson started a free daily newspaper known for its relentless drumbeat of support for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other right-wing politicians. The paper, Israel Hayom, has been called "the Fox News of Israel." Adelson's millions of dollars in contributions have purchased access to the highest reaches of the GOP -- during the Bush administration, for example, he hosted both President Bush and Vice President

Cheney in his home -- and he has used it principally to push for a hard line on Israel.

6. He's a social liberal. In 2008, Adelson told the Las Vegas Weekly, "I'm socially very liberal. Too liberal."

His political activities have never targeted cultural issues, and his hotels market to gay customers.

Adelson supported Rudy Giuliani in the 2008 GOP presidential primaries, and his political philosophy is perhaps best understood as Giuliani-style conservatism -- liberal on social issues and preoccupied almost exclusively with a hawkish, pro-Israel, anti-radical-Islam national-security stance, plus opposition to unions.

7. He's big in China. Adelson is credited with revolutionizing the American gaming industry by opening the Chinese port of Macau to the business. In 2002, he secured a gaming license in the seedy former Portuguese colony, and in 2004 he opened the opulent Sands Macau -- the first non-Chinese concession in the territory. The investment would power Sands Corp.'s public offering and turn Adelson from a multimillionaire into a billionaire practically overnight. He now operates three casinos there (one is on the so-called Cotai Strip, a former bay Adelson had filled to turn it into land) and has another in the works. But not everyone has been pleased with Adelson's Chinese success. A former Chinese business partner has successfully sued in Nevada court, claiming Adelson failed to pay him as promised, and the FBI and SEC continue to investigate charges he attempted to bribe Chinese officials, which the company denies.

Adelson also once bragged to Chinese officials of using his clout to help the country secure the 2008 Olympics by getting his friend Tom DeLay to kill a human-rights bill in the House. DeLay denied it, saying the bill was withdrawn for reasons that had nothing to do with Adelson.

8. He's made -- and lost -- a massive fortune. By 2008, Adelson's Macau windfall had pushed his net worth to \$27 billion -- making him the third richest man in America, according to Forbes. But the financial crisis that year devastated the gaming industry. The stock lost 95 percent of its value, and Adelson lost \$24 billion in the space of a few months, dropping to #178 on the Forbes list. Sands teetered on the edge of bankruptcy. To save it, Adelson pumped a billion dollars into the company. Today, the company hasn't made a full recovery, but it's come back substantially. Adelson's wealth was last clocked at \$22 billion -- eighth on the Forbes roster.

9. He really, really likes Newt. How the Adelson-Gingrich relationship came about is murky. Adelson recalls meeting Gingrich on Capitol Hill while lobbying on Israel issues in 1995, though a Gingrich operative in Nevada told The New York Times recently that he'd introduced the two to talk about union issues in the late 1990s. However the men met, it's not clear why Gingrich has such a singular hold on the political imagination of Adelson, who has met plenty of politicians. What is clear is that Adelson's support has been generous. Before Gingrich embarked on his current presidential run, Adelson had given

\$7.7 million to Gingrich's various enterprises. A source close to Adelson said it's a well Gingrich's boosters can keep going back to: "He's willing to do more, depending on how Florida goes." The super PAC is not particularly diversified, the source noted: "There's really no one else bankrolling Winning Our Future." (Rick Tyler, the super PAC's senior adviser, declined to comment on Adelson's involvement.)

10. His wife is a doctor. Adelson married Miriam Ochshorn, his second wife, in 1991. They have two school-age sons together. An Israeli-born physician some years Adelson's junior with signature platinum-blond hair, she specializes in addiction treatment. Her influence has led the couple to start drug-treatment centers in Las Vegas and Tel Aviv. It's an issue that has affected the family directly: a son from Sheldon Adelson's first marriage died of a drug overdose. And in court testimony in 2008, Adelson testified that he was hobbled by painkillers, including methadone, that he took for a neurological condition for much of 2001, a state he characterized as "a little cuckoo."

Molly Ball is a staff writer covering national politics at The Atlantic.

Article 2.

al-Quds Center, Amman

Spring Elections

Oraib Al Rantawi

26 - 01 - 2012 -- "If the national reconciliation agenda

proceeds according to the agreed timetable, this spring will witness the Palestinian people electing their political and constitutional institutions, These include the president, the Palestinian National Council (PNC) the Palestinian Legislative Council, as well as municipal councils – all of which are institutions to which elections have been delayed for many long years.

Coinciding with these elections, Hamas is also supposed to elect a new leadership before this summer: A new Politburo with a new head.

According to public statements Palestinian President Mahmoud 'Abbas and Hamas' Politburo head [Khalid Mish'al] do not intend to run for a new 'presidential' term. 'Abbas will leave his post as the PA's head; but we do not yet know what he will do regarding the PLO's presidency [which he holds concurrently]. Similarly, Khalid Mish'al does not intend to run for a new term as head of Hamas's Politburo.

As a result, the two major movements – Fateh and Hamas – will have to agree early on two accord candidates to take the helm in the coming phase. This seems a possible mission in Hamas's case, even though it may be of the 'easy but difficult' variety. In Fateh's case, however, the mission seems difficult, not to say impossible.

If it occurs, change will come at a fateful moment in both cases. In President 'Abbas's case, he will leave the arena as the Palestinian political scene will be discarding the negotiations option and burying the peace process. That arena will then enter a new phase

with new strategic options whose image and main features remain unclear.

In the early days of his extended term in office, 'Abbas undertook to achieve three main aims: Improved security, a more vigorous economy, and national independence.

The president claims that he has succeeded in achieving the first two aims – security and the economy – but failed in the third. But his opponents dispute his claims because both the first two elements are temporary and dependent on the third which has not been achieved. For there is no guarantee that economic improvement will continue, and no one can wager that the security situation will remain under control as long as the occupation remains in place. After all, the occupation is the source of insecurity, which necessarily elicits all sorts of rightful and legitimate resistance.

In Hamas's case, change – if it arrives at all– will come at a turning point in the movement's history. At one level, the movement is facing questions concerning the consequences of five years of [Fateh-Hamas] division and siege [in Gaza] on the one hand. At another level, it is facing the requirements of reconciliation and the challenges of accord over a political program and the forms of struggle in the coming phase. At yet a third level, these challenges come at the peak of the Arab Spring, the rise of political Islam and the shaping of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab region, with all the challenges and problems these developments entail.

If Khalid Mish'al's absence from Hamas's leadership will

leave a vacuum that is difficult to fill by his brothers and counterparts, Mahmoud 'Abbas' absence from Fateh and the PA's presidency will leave both in a situation that is difficult to predict. This is especially likely given the absence of charismatic leaders who are the subject of accord and consensus among what has come to be described as Fateh's 'tribes' and wings.

We realize that the two main factions' need to cross this difficult transitional phase's bridges at the factional and national levels will give birth to enormous pressures that may, in turn, drive the two men to back down from their decisions.

However, each is facing political and organizational circumstances and challenges that could render their 'current decision' final and irrevocable.

President 'Abbas, who belongs to the generation of founders of the contemporary Palestinian national movement has placed all his political wagers on an option that is all but breathing its last. I do not suppose that Abu Mazin – who is now 76 years old – will continue to consider leading a new strategic phase of Palestinian national action, unless this is the sole remaining option open to Fateh (not to 'Abbas); and unless, he reaches a deep understanding with Hamas concerning the coming phase. I no longer believe that the latter is impossible after a close scrutiny of Hamas's new political thinking, especially that of its Politburo head (Mish'al).

Khalid Mish'al, who belongs to the second generation of leaders of national and Islamist action, has actually

begun to face a deluge of domestic and (Arab) Muslim Brotherhood pressures, let alone those from friendly and brotherly states and governments. He will find himself forced to change his decision not to run. In fact, evident consequences of his decision to step down inside the movement will push him to retract his decision.

This is because there are many modes of behavior, positions and tendencies within Hamas that Abu al-Walid (Mish'al) wished to seriously shake up; and they have actually been shaken for all to see, not just for the so-called 'Gaza faction' within Hamas. In fact, his decision amounted to a 'wake up call,' sounding the alarm bells inside the movement.

In short, the transitional phase that the Palestinians – with their cause, frameworks, institutions, and factions – are now passing through will be pregnant with surprises. These include the possibility that we shall move into the second half of this year without 'Abbas or Mish'al, or without one of them, or with them both together.

“Let us wait and see,

Oraib Al Rantawi - Director, Quds Center for Political Studies, Jordan.

Article 3.

The Daily Star

Palestine is nearly here, deal with it

By Ibrahim Sharqieh

Jan. 26 will mark the three-month deadline for Palestinians and Israelis to submit their opening positions on mutual borders and security. The deadline was set by the international Quartet – the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia. It followed the decision last September of a frustrated Palestinian Authority to pursue independent statehood through the United Nations, after 18 years of futile negotiations with Israel.

In response to that strategy, the United States led an aggressive diplomatic campaign to thwart Palestinian application for statehood, insisting that a state could only be established through direct negotiations with Israel. To make the process more credible, the Quartet intervened with its request for clarification on borders and security. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has submitted a proposal, warning that the Palestinian Authority “will take measures” if no progress is made by the deadline. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, meanwhile, was quoted as having asked Abbas not to end recently initiated talks hosted by Jordan after the Quartet deadline.

The Obama administration must avoid a new diplomatic confrontation this week. Continued U.S. interference will not stop the Palestinians’ quest for a state. Instead, it will only exhaust American diplomatic resources, deplete Washington’s political capital and accelerate the decline of U.S. influence in the Middle East.

In September, the Obama administration intervened to prevent voting on the Palestinian application for U.N. membership. This involved President Barack Obama writing to the Bosnian Presidential Council to encourage a vote against Palestinian statehood, while exerting similar pressure on Colombia, Nigeria and Gabon. Clinton dispatched special envoys David Hale and Dennis Ross to pressure the Palestinians into withdrawing their applications. The U.S. Congress blocked \$200 million in aid to the Palestinians and later penalized UNESCO, which had recognized Palestine as a member, by withdrawing \$60 million in funding to the organization.

Ultimately, for the Palestinians, U.N. recognition is a strategic option, regardless of how long the process may take to achieve. The Palestinians realize that though their state may not be recognized soon, the U.S. will eventually have to face the same reality that other governments have faced in the past after unsuccessfully blocking U.N. recognition of independent states.

In particular, the U.S. should learn from the experience of the former Soviet Union. Moscow used its veto 51 times to obstruct the U.N. membership applications of countries such as Kuwait, Mauritania, Vietnam, North Korea, South Korea, Libya, Cambodia, Nepal and Ceylon. Nonetheless, these countries ultimately gained U.N. acknowledgment. In fact, it took Japan until 1956 to join the U.N. after three Soviet Union vetoes, the first of which came in 1948. It seems, then, that the process of Palestinian

recognition has only just begun.

The U.S. must also recognize that its veto privilege in the Security Council comes with responsibilities.

Excessive use of the veto has a high cost in terms of U.S. credibility and the U.N.'s ability to function. This crisis has demonstrated the U.S. failure to act as a responsible global leader in established international organizations.

With the Palestinians set to take "new measures" after Jan. 26, the U.S. must begin realizing that it is making a mistake in bowing to the pressure of the pro-Israel lobby by blocking Palestinian membership. The power of Israel's supporters in Washington was clearly on display last year when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu received a standing ovation from the U.S. Congress. In the words of New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman, the ovation was "bought and paid for by the Israeli lobby."

The Palestinians, on the other hand, have been engaged in serious reforms, which the United States has failed to acknowledge. Abbas has demonstrated a strong commitment to nonviolence and has rejected what he has called "a third intifada." His prime minister, Salam Fayyad, has been recognized internationally for his efforts in building strong Palestinian state institutions.

Though it may not fully meet U.S. expectations, Hamas has also been responding to the changes sweeping the region. It has accepted to become part of the Palestine Liberation Organization and to engage with Fatah in a broad reconciliation process, which

will make agreements with PLO more representative of the Palestinian people. Reflecting the changes in the Palestinian ranks, Khaled Meshaal, the head of Hamas' politburo who was seen as a more hard-line figure, will reportedly not seek re-election. Hamas has been reported to be on "the brink of renouncing armed resistance and moving to a policy of nonviolent resistance to Israel," according to an analysis in Jane's.

Avoiding a diplomatic confrontation after Jan. 26 requires that the U.S. take note of the changes in the Middle East, specifically in the Palestinian territories, and alter its approach accordingly. Pressuring Palestinians to go back to futile negotiations will not work. Abbas has already taken a great risk by engaging in the Jordan-hosted talks while Israeli bulldozers are still operating on Palestinian land. Returning to the old, failed approach will exacerbate the problem, and further erode American effectiveness in the region.

Ibrahim Sharqieh is a foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution and deputy director of the Brookings Doha Center.

Article 4.

TIME

What the World Learns from What Obama Didn't Say

Tony Karon

January 25, 2012 -- Strategic decision-makers in the Middle East, Europe and Asia who stayed up late to catch President Barack Obama's State of the Union address on Tuesday may have initially wondered why they had bothered. In sharp contrast to the Bush era when three quarters of a typical SOTU address covered matters of national security and the projection of power abroad, Obama had precious little to say about his intentions on the global stage. Indeed, the U.S. military figured most prominently in Obama's speech as an inspiring example of the cooperation, commitment and shared sacrifice that will be asked of all Americans in tackling the country's economic woes.

Obama stressed that he's the President bringing the troops home, having accomplished their mission in Iraq, killed Osama bin Laden and "broken the Taliban's momentum" (the last a somewhat optimistic take on the state of play in Afghanistan). He certainly didn't seem to be preparing Americans for new military engagements abroad — save for keeping the proverbial "all options on the table" in dealing with Iran. Even then, he made plain his preference for diplomacy and his belief that it had to be given time to work, in concert with sanctions.

Iran was the only point of aggravation abroad that received any attention at all in the SOTU (unless you count the President's expressing the hope that Syria's President Bashar al-Assad is swept out of power by his own people), and even then it was given short

shrift in a matter of seconds towards the end of the 50-minute speech: Obama noted that his Administration's diplomacy had imposed "crippling sanctions" on the Islamic Republic. "Let there be no doubt," he warned, "America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal." That line drew applause, but it was quickly followed by this: "But a peaceful resolution of this issue is still possible, and far better, and if Iran changes course and meets its obligations, it can rejoin the community of nations." Then, after checking the related box of proclaiming an "ironclad" commitment to Israel's security, he pivoted to America the reemergent Pacific power, the breakthrough with Burma and renewing American leadership.

Had Obama been preparing the country for a military showdown with Iran, it would have behooved him to paint that country as a grave and gathering danger that must be confronted with resolute force as a matter of urgency — think Bush's 2002 and 2003 SOTU speeches. But that's not how Washington sees Iran. It shares the Western intelligence consensus that while Iran steadily expands the dual-use technologies that would allow it to build a nuclear weapon, the leadership in Tehran has not taken the strategic decision to build a bomb, much less operationalized a program to do so. Hence Obama's point that diplomacy backed by sanctions pressure needs to be given more time to produce a change in Iran's behavior.

This is a president girding for a different battle, on the home front, against economic decline and inequality — and, of course, for his reelection. But although he didn't talk much about it, a perilous global environment could yet produce some uncomfortable challenges for the President in the year ahead.

Despite the Administration's best intentions, there remains a danger that miscalculation or provocation by Iran or by Israel — which insists that it retains the right to independent military action against Iran should it deem Western efforts insufficient — could spark a confrontation that would force Washington to respond, particularly with GOP candidates making a top talking point out of their claim that Obama is feckless in the face of an Iran threat.

But even some of the issues under which the President sought to draw a line may not be quite as cut and dried as he'd prefer. "For the first time in nine years there are no Americans fighting in Iraq", Obama noted. That may be true for uniformed personnel, but the U.S. embassy commands at least 4,000 armed civilian contractors, and thousands more diplomatic personnel in a country whose sectarian political conflicts once again threaten to tear it apart at the seams. While there may be little the U.S. can do about Iran's deep-seated domestic political conflicts, a renewed civil war breaking out around the remaining Americans in Iraq will be used by Obama's opponents to paint the decision to withdraw as a tragic error — even if it proceeded on the basis of an agreement between Baghdad and President George W. Bush.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban's momentum has often been a seasonal phenomenon; the salient reality remains that after more than ten years of war, the U.S. and its allies are no closer to defeating the insurgency — indeed, the focus of the U.S. and its allies has turned increasingly towards negotiating peace terms with the Taliban ahead of the planned U.S. withdrawal in 2014. “No talks with the Taliban” is another Republican campaign bumper sticker.

Libya's longtime tyrant Colonel Muammar Gaddafi is gone, as President Obama noted, and the use of NATO air power to help bring that about was previously hailed by the Administration as a model of “intervention lite”. But his ouster has left a power vacuum being filled by competing militias, with the country's fragile new order threatening to unravel in a chaotic and violent power struggle.

Other potential flash-points that didn't rate a mention in the SOTU, but which could break uncomfortably for the President this year, include:

- * North Korea's newly installed “Brilliant Leader” Kim Jong Un looking to demonstrate his manhood by launching new provocations across the world's most dangerous geopolitical frontline;
- * Syria, where the escalating violence is fueling calls for an intervention of which the Western powers remain skeptical given the complex sectarian and geopolitical implications;
- * Renewed conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in the absence of any prospect of negotiations ending the occupation of the West Bank as Israeli settlers

look to expand their grip and Palestinian communities look to the protest tactics of the Arab Spring; and
* The growing threat of a de facto military takeover or Islamist ascendancy — or some combination of the two — in Pakistan, at a time when relations with the U.S. are at an all-time low and showing no sign of reviving.

But the gravest of the dangers gathering beyond these shores to American well-being — and therefore to President Obama's reelection prospects — is another one that didn't rate a mention in the SOTU address: Europe's expanding financial crisis, which leaves U.S. banks exposed to another round of shocks of the sort suffered by the global financial system in the wake of the Lehmann Brothers collapse, and which looks set to sink a prime U.S. export market into the mire of recession. It's hard, though, to fault President Obama for not mentioning the dangers the U.S. faces as a result of Europe's troubles and the inability of the continent's leaders to get a grip on the situation. Despite the potential consequences of the continent's crisis, the U.S. these days has precious little leverage over European decision-making.

Article 5.

Wall Street Journal

Channeling David Axelrod

Karl Rove

January 26, 2012 -- In a rare moment of senior-presidential-adviser-to-senior-presidential-adviser telepathy, I overheard the private thoughts of David Axelrod as he prepared to appear on television Tuesday night, following President Barack Obama's State of the Union address:

Well, this is about as pleasant as a dentist appointment. Sure hope we're right that no matter what the question is, all I need to say is, "President Obama believes everyone should get a fair shot, everyone should do their fair share, and everyone should play by the same set of rules." Say it loud, say it proud, say it again and again.

Speaking of which, I love that line about "asking a billionaire to pay at least as much as his secretary." Sure, the top 10% pay 70% of federal income taxes, so billionaires already pay more taxes than their secretaries, and no one's really for doubling capital gains taxes. But it sounds so good, and stokes so much anger toward the rich.

I did enjoy how Barack went after Congress. A couple of times it looked like he was going to turn around and slap Boehner for obstructing his agenda. Hope it helps voters forget we Democrats controlled both chambers for two years and got pretty much everything we wanted. Now we have to pretend it never happened. But do I really have to appear on Chris Matthews again? He's always interrupting me with "It's true" or "I agree." Good lord, he even calls me Barack's "much beloved senior strategist" and says that Obama has

"done great things, he's put points on the board." Valerie loves that stuff—soaks it up—but it's too much for me. On the other hand, we have to fire up our true believers—and what better place than on Matthews?

Matthews toadies too much, but Candy Crowley challenges me more than I want—like pointing out that there are 1.7 million fewer jobs since Barack took over and dropping that CNN poll on me that says Romney leads by 13 points on who can best get the economy moving again.

Aw, the Mittster: I know we're not supposed to want him, but truth is I'd like to go after him for being so successful in business. Thank goodness Newt and Perry did the spadework on Bain. What did a New York Times reporter call Newt? Our "useful surrogate"?

I especially want to hit Mitt on the car companies: Repeat after me, over and over, "We would have lost 1.4 million jobs" if we'd let them go bankrupt as Romney urged. As if that many people work for the Big Three and as if going through bankruptcy meant liquidation. Fortunately most voters don't know any better. Hell, if the car companies went through bankruptcy, we couldn't have rewarded the UAW. And Newt. Like I told reporters, "he's back as the lion in winter. That's L-I-O-N." Called him a liar, but subliminally. Of course, I compared him to a monkey a few weeks ago and the press just laughed along. Jeez, do I have Stephanopoulos tomorrow morning? Early wake up. He's tougher than most, but heck,

George let me get away with saying "I'm not sure Mitt Romney would have made that decision" to kill bin Laden.

The one thing that keeps me up at night is that we're so vulnerable. The economy still sucks—and housing's worse. Barack's approval ratings are underwater.

Pollster.com says 37% favor and 50% oppose ObamaCare—er, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Barack is the first Democratic president to have a negative approval rating in Gallup on health care.

Maybe Rahm was right. Go incremental, he said. The rest of us said health reform would be a winning issue in 2012. No wonder Barack gave the subject only 44 words in his address. But that's not as bad as the stimulus and "shovel-ready projects." Zip in the speech on those.

These State of the Union addresses are fine, but I'm glad it's over. In that setting it's hard to use a baseball bat to club Republicans. Now we can and will—for nine straight months. Plouffe was saying it would be nice if we actually had a record we could defend and a positive vision to offer. I told him we don't—and get used to it. Let's make a virtue of simplicity. Our job, as we say around here, is to savage the GOP nominee, grind him to dust, turn him into a freak. I'm ready. After all, it's the Chicago Way.

Mr. Rove, the former senior adviser and deputy chief of staff to President George W. Bush, is the author of "Courage and Consequence" (Threshold Editions, 2010).

Article 6.

Forbes

If Assad Survives, Peace with Israel?

Daniel Freedman

1/25/2012 -- The outcome of the uprising in Syria has the potential to revolutionize Israel's relations with her neighbors and turn the Middle East upside down for the better – if the current Syrian leader, Bashar Assad, survives. It would, however, require the type of foresight and deft diplomacy rarely seen anywhere these days, let alone in the Middle East.

Until today the Syrian regime, first under the rule of Hafez Assad and now his son Bashar, has been a sworn enemy of Israel. It went to war with Israel in 1948, 1967, and 1973 (and lost every time); and while Israel's other neighbors, and former enemies, Jordan and Egypt, signed peace agreements, Syria never did. The Assad regime has also been a strong supporter of the terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah, and is a prime ally of Iran – all declared enemies of Israel. The U.S. is also a primary foe. For this reason some of Israel's leaders and friends are preparing to dance the Hora if Assad junior meets the same fate as Libya's Muammar Gadhafi. But that's not necessarily wise.

Back in 2005 then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon warned President George W. Bush against toppling Assad, arguing that the devil we know (Assad) is better than what would come (the Muslim Brotherhood).

That's because the Brotherhood would likely be even more hostile to Israel than the Assads, as it has deeper, more theological roots – stemming from the writings of Sayyid Qutb. A glance around the region seems to support Mr. Sharon's fear: Ever since the Justice and Development Party (or "AK"), whose roots are in the Brotherhood, took power in Turkey, relations with Israel have worsened; the Brotherhood in Egypt refuses to recognize the peace treaty with Israel; and of course, Hamas, an offshoot of the Brotherhood, is committed to destroying Israel.

The Assads, on the other hand, positioned Syria as Israel's leading enemy more for realpolitik reasons. They wanted to distract the region's dominant Sunni countries (and their own majority Sunni population) from the fact that Assad's clan practices Alawite Islam, which Sunni Islam views as heretical (and is theologically worse than infidels), and yet still rules over Sunnis. It's a distraction trick employed by Shiite Iran too, ever since Ayatollah Khomeini seized power in 1979.

But this game of dangling of a carrot labeled "Israel" to distract Sunnis from the reality of the Assad rule in Syria was finished, once world attention was fixed on the demonstrations in Syria. Even if leaders would have wanted to turn a blind eye, the pressure of Sunni

solidarity was too much.

As a consequence Turkey, along with all of Assad's former drinking (non-alcoholic of course) buddies in the Arab League, turned against him. Syria's only real remaining ally in the region is now Iran, which only serves to further remind everyone else that this is a Sunni-Shiite divide. (Syria also has support in Lebanon, but it comes primarily via Hezbollah – a Shiite group.) So even if Assad survives the current protests, the old game is up: he'll forever be seen as the heretic oppressing the majority Sunnis.

This is bad news for Assad (and Iran), but potentially good news for Israel. Economically (and politically) Syria can't handle being both an enemy of the West and the Arab states. There's an opportunity, therefore, to offer Assad rapprochement with the West, if he makes peace with Israel, cuts his alliance with Iran, ends his meddling in Lebanon, and stops supporting terrorist groups.

It's certainly a lot for Assad to give up, but survival trumps all. It wouldn't be the first time that the West "forgave" murdering thugs: Just look at the deal made a few years ago with Gadhafi, or what's happening now with Burma's military junta. Leaders often need to be realists, and Syria abandoning Iran and terrorism would probably be worth it.

Some in Israel appear to get this. The army chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Benny Gantz, told the Knesset's foreign affairs and defense committee a few weeks ago that: "On the day the Assad regime falls, it is expected to harm the Alawite clan. We are preparing

to receive Alawite refugees on the Golan Heights.”

To the al Jazeera correspondent in Jerusalem, this was “a very unusual statement”; but to those with an eye on the bigger picture, it was the perfect subliminal message to send to both Assad (let’s talk business) and the West (think what happens if Assad falls).

Where does this leave the Sunni states? If they understand the broader stakes – and that’s an “if” the size of the Middle East – they’ll want to pre-empt any deal between Assad, Israel, and the West. If Assad survives, their options would be either to make their own deal with him – abandoning their Sunni brethren – or to make their own deal with the Israelis. The later, as strange as it might seem, would be the easier to stomach.

Of course if Assad falls, there will be no reason for peace with Israel. But that’s yet another big “if”: The Assads have a ruthlessness that might enable survival, and they now appear to have Russia in their corner (which will prevent U.N. action).

It looks like the balance of power, therefore, is in the hands of the U.S. and the West: Will they introduce a no-fly zone or support sending troops, as the Sunni states now want, or will they look at the bigger picture, and make Assad an offer he can’t refuse?

It’s never wise to bet on the right path being taken in the Middle East (until all other options have failed – and often even beyond that point), but then again, it wouldn’t be the first time that the road from Jerusalem to Damascus has seen a game-changing conversion.

Daniel Freedman is the director of strategy and policy analysis at The Soufan Group, a strategic intelligence consultancy and a columnist for Forbes. His writings can be found at www.dfreedman.org. He is the co-author of the New York Times bestseller “The Black Banners: The Inside Story of 9/11 and the War Against al Qaeda.”

Article 7.

The National Interest

Egypt's Growing Pains

Benny Morris

January 25, 2012 -- The massive victory of the Islamist parties in the Egyptian general elections received its official imprimatur last weekend, and the country appeared headed for a major constitutional tussle between the ruling Supreme Military Council and the emergent parliament.

Egypt announced that, after three bouts at the polls and a number of individual run-off elections, the main 498-member lower house of parliament, the People's Assembly, which convened this week, will have 235 representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood and 121 from the Salafist al-Nour party and its affiliates.

Together they will hold 71 percent of the seats—47.18 percent for the Brotherhood and 24.29 percent for al-Nour). The house will contain another ten "moderate" Islamists from the New Center Party. The centrist and traditional al-Wafd Party will have thirty-six members, and the liberal bloc will have thirty-three seats. The

"Revolution Continues" party, representing the leaders of the Facebook and Tweeter generation that featured so prominently in the demonstrations that ultimately toppled the old regime, won only 2 percent of the vote.

Given the nature of the gradual democratic takeover of the state by the Muslim Brothers, many observers see the victory of Hamas, the Palestinian offshoot of the Brotherhood, in the 2006 Palestinian general elections as the true herald of the revolutionary change in the Egyptian polity (and perhaps of the so-called Arab Spring in general, given its evident Islamist trajectory).

Fresh mass demonstrations are scheduled this week in Cairo's Tahrir Square, marking the one-year anniversary of the demonstrations that overthrew the regime of Hosni Mubarak, who ruled Egypt since 1981. The demonstrators likely will press the army to relinquish its hold on power and subordinate itself to the popular will, meaning accept parliamentary oversight and control of its budget and operations. But many liberal Egyptians suspect that the Brotherhood and the army have already secretly struck a power-sharing deal that will sideline both the secularist liberals and the al-Nour Salafists. If so, the protests will be symbolic and pro forma and will pass quietly. At the end of this week, Egypt will hold its first elections for parliament's upper house, the Shura Council. After these are completed, the two houses are scheduled to set up a committee to formulate the country's new constitution. The military, headed by

General Tantawi, will likely seek to retain its independence from civilian control and possibly its actual control of the state. Elections for the presidency are scheduled for June. The Brotherhood months ago announced that it will not field a candidate from the party ranks—but, given its electoral success, there can be little doubt that it will either eventually put forward a candidate of its own or advance the cause of a straw man of its choosing.

Observers expect the Muslim Brotherhood, which is likely to form a coalition government with the small centrist-secular parties rather than with its Islamist competitors from al-Nour, to focus in the coming months and years on sorting out Egypt's internal problems—consolidating its hold on power, battling the flight of foreign investors, reducing unemployment, shoring up crumbling infrastructure and reviving foreign tourism. Thus, it probably will forego its traditional foreign-policy agenda of breaking with the West and annulling the 1979 peace treaty with Israel. The Egyptian economy can ill afford the loss of the annual American foreign-aid subsidy of \$1.5 billion.

But events may confound expectations, as often happens in the Middle East. The core elements of the Brotherhood ideology—anti-Westernism, anti-Semitism, sharia fundamentalism—may come to the fore despite the wishes of (at least ostensibly) more pragmatic leaders. Earlier this month, the spiritual leader of the movement, Muhammad Badia, defined the resurrection of a "world-embracing Islamic

caliphate" as the "goal" of the Brotherhood. This must be done in stages, he wrote: First, the individual person must be reformed, "then the family must be built, then the society and the state, and [then] the just caliphate that will guide the world."

In recent weeks, other Brotherhood spokesmen, such as deputy leader Rashad Bayumi, have repeatedly declared that the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty will have to be reviewed by "the people," implying the eventual holding of a referendum. The treaty was signed, on the Egyptian side, as Bayumi put it, "far from the eyes of the people and parliament," meaning by the unrepresentative, undemocratic Sadat regime. Bayumi also declared that the movement would "never recognize Israel, under any circumstances. [Israel] is a conquering entity." He was referring not to the semi-occupied West Bank, largely populated by Palestinian Arabs, but to the state of Israel itself, which in Islamist discourse is said to be situated on and occupying Arab-Muslim land. Bayumi's statement, in an interview in the Arabic language daily Al Khayat, contradicted assurances given to Washington by other Brotherhood spokesmen that it would not harm Egyptian-Israeli relations.

External factors could also upend the Brotherhood's intention to focus on Egypt's internal problems. Palestinian militants have recently renewed their low-key rocketing of Israel from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, which may lead to a new bout of major Israeli-Palestinian violence. A Brotherhood-led Egypt may find it difficult to stay aloof from such a conflict.

And above all looms the Iranian nuclear crisis, which may yet lead to an Israeli-Iranian confrontation. At Iran's bidding, that would probably suck in Hezbollah of Lebanon and Hamas of Gaza. In such an event, the newly configured Egypt wouldn't likely stay on the sidelines.

Benny Morris is a professor of history in the Middle East Studies Department of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He is the author of *1948, A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (Yale University Press, 2008).