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Article 1.

Washington Post

Is Israel preparing to attack Iran?

David Ignatius

February 2 -- Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has a lot on his mind these days, from cutting the defense budget to managing the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. But his biggest worry is the growing possibility that Israel will attack Iran over the next few months.

Panetta believes there is a strong likelihood that Israel will strike Iran in April, May or June — before Iran enters what Israelis described as a “zone of immunity” to commence building a nuclear bomb. Very soon, the Israelis fear, the Iranians will have stored enough enriched uranium in deep underground facilities to make a weapon — and only the United States could then stop them militarily.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu doesn't want to leave the fate of Israel dependent on American action, which would be triggered by intelligence that Iran is building a bomb, which it hasn't done yet.

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak may have signaled the prospect of an Israeli attack soon when he asked last month to postpone a planned U.S.-Israel military exercise that would culminate in a live-fire phase in May. Barak apologized that Israel couldn't devote the resources to the annual exercise this spring.

President Obama and Panetta are said to have cautioned the Israelis that the United States opposes an attack, believing that it would derail an increasingly successful international economic

sanctions program and other non-military efforts to stop Iran from crossing the threshold. But the White House hasn't yet decided precisely how the United States would respond if the Israelis do attack.

The Obama administration is conducting intense discussions about what an Israeli attack would mean for the United States: whether Iran would target U.S. ships in the region or try to close the Strait of Hormuz; and what effect the conflict and a likely spike in oil prices would have on the fragile global economy.

The administration appears to favor staying out of the conflict unless Iran hits U.S. assets, which would trigger a strong U.S. response.

This U.S. policy — signaling that Israel is acting on its own — might open a breach like the one in 1956, when President Dwight Eisenhower condemned an Israeli-European attack on the Suez Canal. Complicating matters is the 2012 presidential campaign, which has Republican candidates clamoring for stronger U.S. support of Israel.

Administration officials caution that Tehran shouldn't misunderstand: The United States has a 60-year commitment to Israeli security, and if Israel's population centers were hit, the United States could feel obligated to come to Israel's defense.

Israelis are said to believe that a military strike could be limited and contained. They would bomb the uranium-enrichment facility at Natanz and other targets; an attack on the buried enrichment facility at Qom would be harder from the air. Iranians would retaliate, but Israelis doubt that the action would be an overwhelming barrage, with rockets from Hezbollah forces

in Lebanon. One Israeli estimate is that the Jewish state might have to absorb 500 casualties.

Israelis point to Syria's lack of response to an Israeli attack on a nuclear reactor there in 2007. Iranians might show similar restraint, because of fear the regime would be endangered by all-out war. Some Israelis have also likened a strike on Iran to the 1976 hostage-rescue raid on Entebbe, Uganda, which was followed by a change of regime in that country.

Israeli leaders are said to accept, and even welcome, the prospect of going it alone and demonstrating their resolve at a time when their security is undermined by the Arab Spring.

“You stay to the side, and let us do it,” one Israeli official is said to have advised the United States. A “short-war” scenario assumes five days or so of limited Israeli strikes, followed by a U.N.-brokered cease-fire. The Israelis are said to recognize that damage to the nuclear program might be modest, requiring another strike in a few years.

U.S. officials see two possible ways to dissuade the Israelis from such an attack: Tehran could finally open serious negotiations for a formula to verifiably guarantee that its nuclear program will remain a civilian one; or the United States could step up its covert actions to degrade the program so much that Israelis would decide that military action wasn't necessary.

U.S. officials don't think that Netanyahu has made a final decision to attack, and they note that top Israeli intelligence officials remain skeptical of the project. But senior Americans doubt that the Israelis are bluffing. They're worrying about the guns of spring — and the unintended consequences.

Article 2.

NYT

How Bad Are Things, Really?

Roger Cohen

December 2, 2011 -- I recently spent a few weeks in one of Euroland's basket cases — a sunlit southern country whose debt exceeds its output and whose bonds nobody wants. The nation was run by a flamboyant former crooner who squeezed in his governing between dalliances. It is a place, I discovered, that has crisis writ large on every facet of daily life: the stylish throng strolling at dusk on streets packed with new cars, the designer-label clothes, the seductive boutiques. People looked stricken as they reviewed their vacation plans for Istanbul or the Alps.

The then-billionaire leader, his face lifted and tucked, seemed to be suppressing a great guffaw at the agony of Euroland. He struggled to look serious. Families laughed, lovers lingered, lunches of delectable abundance drifted into lazy afternoons. The gloom was overwhelming. I came away in a funk, convinced that Italy stood on the brink of some ghastly fate.

Quite possibly, it seemed, Italy would continue to be Italy.

The thing about a wired world of 7 billion people, a small fraction of whom are Italian, is that policymaking increasingly looks like a flailing exercise in trying to catch up with and regulate forces unleashed by their creativity. I've heard estimates that as much as a third of global economic activity never registers these days in official statistics. Certainly, Italian shopkeepers still ignore their decorative cash registers, installed at the taxman's insistence, preferring to scrawl receipts on scraps of paper — or not write them at all. Even taking account of Europe's accumulated wealth and its cushioning effect in hard times, the gap between the talk of crisis and the scarce physical evidence of it is large. The 1930s this is not.

Italy, a rich country, survived the incompetent Silvio Berlusconi much as Belgium does just fine on its protracted inability to form any government whatsoever. As the world passes that seven-billionth inhabitant mark, there are more obese than hungry people on the planet. Many of the obese are poor. Past generations could only dream of such problems. Huge numbers of people have been lifted out of poverty in the past decade. Population growth is slowing. The worst predictions of famine, pestilence and a poisoned atmosphere have proved exaggerated. China, India and Brazil are not alone in feeling the tide of history flowing their way.

So how bad are things really? That depends where you sit. The world feels particularly unpredictable because what is portrayed as a financial crisis in Frankfurt and New York is, at a deeper level, a crisis of transition. Confidence has drained out of the part of the world that is used to running the world while the ever

richer upstarts, anti-Western in varying degrees but unsure still what new principles to embrace, are not ready to take over. In the last century the British handover of power to the United States had the seamless quality of a transaction between cousins. America and China are tied at the hip and have learned how to conduct business. But they remain cultural rivals.

“We are used to a small group of like-minded democracies calling the shots, but these democracies now have increasingly less influence over world politics,” said Charles Kupchan, a professor of international affairs at Georgetown. “We are heading toward no-one’s world, a world of multiple modernities, interdependent and globalized without a dominant political center or model.”

No wonder a sullen anger inhabits much of the West (excluding prudent Canada). For the inhabitants of Euroland (the 17 nations that share the euro currency), it’s blowback time. Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president, now says it was an “error” to admit Greece to the euro. The French should know. The shared currency was largely their idea. It was a means to tie Germany to Europe; and how better for Europe to crown this political statement than including in the brotherhood of shared money the cradle of its civilization, Greece?

The Acropolis loomed much larger at the time than Greece’s bloated public sector or ultra-sketchy work ethic. Risk was waved away. Of course Greece could be hitched to the same economic wagon as Germany! Of course there was no risk in burying toxic loans in mortgage securities! The human capacity to disregard facts and believe that pigs have wings is fathomless.

Euroland, with its one currency and multiple sovereignties, has now had to go hat in hand to China, whose \$3.2 trillion in foreign exchange reserves could give a boost to a bolstered bailout fund. There could scarcely be a more direct symbol of the way power is shifting. A friend with property interests in Vancouver tells me there have never been such boom times. The Chinese are buying everything they can get. China's the place to get rich; the West's the place to buy into the rule of law. The first question the acquisitive Chinese ask in Vancouver or London is: Can anyone take this away from me? The West does still offer protection from the arbitrariness of the one-party state but its self-confidence is shot.

What's that whooshing sound? It is the tide of jobs disappearing never to return. What is it that does not sleep at night? The mountains of debt accumulated over the past decade. What is the racket in the streets? The legions of the Occupy movement enraged by the impunity of the powerful. What is that cracking sound? The agony of Euroland caught in the halfway house between federation and nations.

The great vexation today is about integration — how to advance cooperation when those at the table have disparate views on governance. That's patent at the euro level and true, if less obvious, at the global G-20 level. More integration is needed, but when people are angry they turn tribal: the objective imperative meets emotional resistance, be it in the form of the Tea Party or the Dutch rightist, Geert Wilders.

Nobody yet knows how to run a globalized world or make it more equitable. That is the issue of our times, one to which China, India, Brazil and other new powers will have to make far

more substantive contributions than they have. America, divided within, can no longer impose its will, yet the world's girders are still provided by Pax Americana. China is ready to go along with that for now in the name of the stability necessary for its full development by 2050. There's a thirsting for some new order but no readiness to adopt one. This translates as unease.

Demonstrators in New York and Madrid know what they are against but it's much less clear what they are for. The overthrow of capitalism sounds very 20th or even 19th century. Reforming capitalism, offsetting its harshest aspects, is also old news. It has been tried in the form of the welfare state — and these systems are under acute pressure as people live longer. No, the real if poorly articulated focus of Occupy is reforming globalization — particularly the way globalization favors the wealthy. Some ideas, like the Tobin tax on global financial transactions, have been around for years but they're almost impossible to apply. What's left, it sometimes seems, is the uplift of togetherness. With modern society and the Internet comes the scattering of people in solipsistic universes dominated by screens. The Occupy movement is also a reaction to that: an awakening to the possibility of coalescing to bring change.

An inspiration for the movement came from the Arab world. But there's a difference: the occupiers of Tahrir Square, the streets of Benghazi and the avenues of Tunis knew what they were for: more representative societies. The road to this goal has already proved uneven. A great debate over how to reconcile Islamic faith and modernity has been engaged. But the direction is set. The confidence that has drained out of the West has not merely headed in the direction of the BRIC countries. A share has been seized by Arabs.

Humiliation is a powerful force. For a long time it undermined the Arab world. Ottoman subjugation was followed, after World War I, by the encroachment of the Western powers. Then fell the most crippling blow: Israel's defeat of the Arab armies in 1948 and its subsequent successes. Palestinian refugees piled up in eternal camps; repeated wars only sharpened the dominance of the Jewish state. A dismissive phrase — “the Arab street” — came to characterize an indignant rabble. Until, on those very streets in 2011, the basis for a new pride was laid, not one fixated on a symbol of resistance to Israel — a Nasser, a Hassan Nasrallah — but one forged in shared and transforming endeavor. In some senses Arabs said basta — enough is enough — through their Spring to the Israel alibi.

After the establishment of Israel, David Ben-Gurion was pessimistic about the possibility of peace. “Why should the Arabs make peace?” he said. “If I was an Arab leader I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural: we have taken their country. Sure, God promised it to us, but what does that matter to them? Our God is not theirs. We came from Israel, it's true, but two thousand years ago, and what is that to them? There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They only see one thing: we have come here and stolen their country.”

Over more than six decades, that pessimistic assessment has been accurate. The will of the United Nations as expressed in Resolution 181 of Nov. 29, 1947 — calling for the establishment of two states, one Jewish and one Palestinian Arab — has proved unworkable. Arab rage was never quenched by the perception of a European attempt to expiate Nazi crimes in Palestine. The determination of Jews to hold on to the sliver of

land delivered to them by a world guilty of centuries of persecution never relented. It is hard, in the face of a confrontation so unyielding, to be optimistic.

Still, two lessons of the world today are these: things are not quite as they appear (in Italy or elsewhere) and change can be sudden. The abrupt birth of a new Arab pride is important. It shifts the focus. Arabs who are agents of their own lives are no longer Arabs who must seek in an enemy the explanation of their ills. Humiliation leads to more war: it did in Europe when the Versailles Treaty of 1919 punished Germany. Only when Europe began to integrate did it end war on the Continent.

Europe's difficulties have provoked much facile mockery, but its model is an inspiration and can be helpful in the new Arab world.

As in Euroland, as in the totality of a globalizing world, integration is inevitable in the Middle East.

The only question is what further price in blood and treasure will be paid before it is achieved.

Article 3.

NYT

Supporting the Arab Awakening

Catherine Ashton

February 2, 2012 -- Reactions in Europe to the Arab Awakening

have veered too wildly between optimism and pessimism. As the initial euphoria gives way to the inevitable doubts, we need to stay the course and reaffirm our commitment to the emerging democracies.

Our starting point should be that democracy — everywhere — can be awkward: thrilling, inspiring and liberating, but also messy, turbulent and unpredictable. Short-term upsets are inevitable. But history, not least the history of our own continent, tells us that once deep democracy sets down roots, with the rule of law, human rights, gender equality, impartial administration, free speech and private investment, as well as honest elections, countries prosper and seek to live in peace with those around them.

That is why I am an optimist. And what has happened in the past 12 months is truly remarkable. We have witnessed free and fair elections in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. Some have fretted over the Islamist successes at the ballot box. Others are asking for time in order to observe how this new political situation will unfold.

In Tunisia, Ennahda has entered into a coalition government with the secular political forces. In Morocco, an important chapter of “cohabitation” has been opened between the king and the prime minister from the Party of Justice and Development. A recent Gallup poll shows that while most Egyptians affirm the importance of Islam in their lives, they want religious leaders to be limited to an advisory role to the government authorities.

In Egypt, the first democratically elected Parliament in 60 years has had its first historic session. Of course, building real and

deep democracy demands sustained effort and commitment. Egyptian civil society must be allowed to play its crucial role as a pillar of democracy and it is important that the state of emergency be lifted completely and the transfer to civilian rule takes place as early as possible.

I also hope Libya will build a democracy that will benefit all Libyans. We are fully engaged. Together with the United Nations, the European Union is organizing a workshop with our Libyan partners to speed up our support. Our concern is not confined to North Africa. The newly discovered rights apply whether you are from Syria, Yemen, or for that matter from Jordan, Bahrain and the other Arab monarchies. And with rights come responsibilities. That is why we look to the Libyan authorities to leave no stone unturned in investigating recent allegations of torture.

I have heard skepticism about whether “we” can trust these new political groups, who inspire themselves from various strands of Islamism. Some are worried and argue that it is not in the interest of Europe to support and assist the Arab Awakening. I disagree. We have a moral duty as well as a practical need to help our neighbors secure democracy and prosperity. We are not “spectators.” We have committed ourselves to engage, work and discuss with all the governments, parliaments and organizations with whom we share our commitment to democracy.

So let me address the issue of trust directly. It goes both ways.

A question the Islamists often raise is whether “they” can trust us? I think there is an acute need for getting beyond this mutual suspicion and for getting to know each other better. Lumping all

Islamists into one and the same category is misleading and unhelpful.

We realize the need for more first-hand knowledge. Each political party and movement has to be understood and appreciated according to its own merits, just as they need to be judged by their concrete actions and deeds. These are political movements that are learning and changing before our eyes and we have taken note. They are eager to learn and government responsibility and public office will now give them the opportunity to translate their commitments into concrete laws and policies. The more we do to understand them, and help them to understand us, the better.

That is why we need mutual trust as the basis for the engagement with the new political leadership. This can only be done through direct dialogue. We will show humility in front of this huge task.

I am delighted that the prime minister of Tunisia, Hamadi Jebali, has accepted our invitation and chosen Brussels for his first official visit abroad. This visit this week is as symbolic as it is important. It shows the new government wants a close relationship with the E.U.

With Tunisia, we held a successful joint task force in September to inject direction and joint ownership into our support for the transition. We were able to bring together the international community, E.U. institutions, multilateral financial institutions, and crucially, private sector companies with one objective: backing the transition and making sure that together we become a catalyst for quicker and more effective assistance.

Now, one year after the Tunisian people decided to take the future in their own hands, the visit of Prime Minister Jebali shows that the E.U. and Tunisia want to work together to respond to the hopes of all Tunisians.

Elections are an important part of democracy. But building deep democracy is about much more. It is about the next election, about defining the ground rules and then sticking to them. It is about delivering on one's promises, and it is about drafting constitutions that are inclusive and protect citizens' rights, particularly with regard to women. Governing is also about providing jobs, and about being pragmatic in the face of the many social and economic challenges.

Pulling together in broad coalitions is a promising start. The journey will not be easy. But the E.U. is committed to staying the course: navigating the bumps along the way and quietly helping the demonstrators who toppled tyrants to live their dream.

Catherine Ashton is the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Article 4.

The Washington Post

Syria: It's not just about freedom

Charles Krauthammer

February 3 -- Imperial regimes can crack when they are driven out of their major foreign outposts. The fall of the Berlin Wall did not only signal the liberation of Eastern Europe from Moscow. It prefigured the collapse of the Soviet Union itself just two years later.

The fall of Bashar al-Assad's Syria could be similarly ominous for Iran. The alliance with Syria is the centerpiece of Iran's expanding sphere of influence, a mini-Comintern that includes such clients as Iranian-armed and -directed Hezbollah, now the dominant power in Lebanon; and Hamas, which controls Gaza and threatens to take the rest of Palestine (the West Bank) from a feeble Fatah.

Additionally, Iran exerts growing pressure on Afghanistan to the east and growing influence in Iraq to the west. Tehran has even extended its horizon to Latin America, as symbolized by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's solidarity tour through Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Cuba.

Of all these clients, Syria is the most important. It's the only Arab state openly allied with non-Arab Iran. This is significant because the Arabs see the Persians as having had centuries-old designs to dominate the Middle East. Indeed, Iranian arms and trainers, transshipped to Hezbollah through Syria, have given the Persians their first outpost on the Mediterranean in 2,300 years.

But the Arab-Iranian divide is not just national/ethnic. It is sectarian. The Arabs are overwhelmingly Sunni. Iran is Shiite. The Arab states fear Shiite Iran infiltrating the Sunni homeland

through (apart from Iraq) Hezbollah in Lebanon, and through Syria, run by Assad's Alawites, a heterodox offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Which is why the fate of the Assad regime is geopolitically crucial. It is, of course, highly significant for reasons of democracy and human rights as well. Syrian Baathism, while not as capricious and deranged as the Saddam Hussein variant, runs a ruthless police state that once killed 20,000 in Hama and has now killed more than 5,400 during the current uprising. Human rights — decency — is reason enough to do everything we can to bring down Assad.

But strategic opportunity compounds the urgency. With its archipelago of clients anchored by Syria, Iran is today the greatest regional threat — to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states terrified of Iranian nuclear hegemony; to traditional regimes menaced by Iranian jihadist subversion; to Israel, which the Islamic Republic has pledged to annihilate; to America and the West, whom the mullahs have vowed to drive from the region.

No surprise that the Arab League, many of whose members are no tenderhearted humanitarians, is pressing hard for Assad's departure. His fall would deprive Iran of an intra-Arab staging area and sever its corridor to the Mediterranean. Syria would return to the Sunni fold. Hezbollah, Tehran's agent in Lebanon, could be next, withering on the vine without Syrian support and Iranian materiel. And Hamas would revert to Egyptian patronage.

At the end of this causal chain, Iran, shorn of key allies and already reeling from economic sanctions over its nuclear

program, would be thrown back on its heels. The mullahs are already shaky enough to be making near-suicidal threats of blocking the Strait of Hormuz. The population they put down in the 2009 Green Revolution is still seething. The regime is particularly reviled by the young. And its increasing attempts to shore up Assad financially and militarily have only compounded anti-Iranian feeling in the region.

It's not just the Sunni Arabs lining up against Assad. Turkey, after a recent flirtation with a Syrian-Iranian-Turkish entente, has turned firmly against Assad, seeing an opportunity to extend its influence, as in Ottoman days, as protector/master of the Sunni Arabs. The alignment of forces suggests a unique opportunity for the West to help finish the job.

How? First, a total boycott of Syria, beyond just oil and including a full arms embargo. Second, a flood of aid to the resistance (through Turkey, which harbors both rebel militias and the political opposition, or directly and clandestinely into Syria). Third, a Security Council resolution calling for the removal of the Assad regime. Russia, Assad's last major outside ally, should be forced to either accede or incur the wrath of the Arab states with a veto.

Force the issue. Draw bright lines. Make clear American solidarity with the Arab League against a hegemonic Iran and its tottering Syrian client. In diplomacy, one often has to choose between human rights and strategic advantage. This is a rare case where we can advance both — so long as we do not compromise with Russia or relent until Assad falls.

Article 5.

The Financial Times

No more halfhearted efforts in Syrian diplomacy

Itamar Rabinovich

February 2, 2012 -- Diplomatic and media interest in the Syrian crisis has focused in the past few days on Russia's obstruction of more effective UN action. But irritating as Moscow's policy is, it is but one aspect of a complex puzzle.

Ten months after the outbreak of the Syrian version of the Arab spring, President Bashar al-Assad's regime continues its slow decline towards collapse. The developments of the past few days – the failure of the Arab League's mediation effort, the regime's loss of control over additional parts of the country, further desertions from the army and the high-level discussion at the UN – reinforce this trend but do not yet add up to a more dramatic change. While the Assad regime is ultimately doomed, the western powers, Turkey and the Arab League must do more to speed up the inevitable.

Regime and protesters are currently battling to a finely balanced draw. The regime is seen by most of the Sunni population as sectarian, dominated by the Alawite community and sustained by Iranian Shia patrons. Thousands of Syrians are willing to risk injury and death to protest on the street.

But sectarianism is also a source of strength: a cohesive community controls the army, the security apparatus and the government machinery. The middle classes in Damascus and Aleppo and such minority groups as Christians and Druze have yet to oppose the regime. People with a stake in the status quo are afraid of another Islamist takeover or simply of anarchy. They look west to Lebanon and east to Iraq, and decide they prefer the status quo. Meanwhile, the Syrian opposition is divided and shapeless.

Thus, the domestic situation in Syria is not like that of Egypt or of Tunisia. Nor does its external vulnerability remind one of Libya. The US and Europe also view this regime as illegitimate but Russian and Chinese opposition to intervention is stronger. Israel has been atypically quiet and passive, even though it no longer prefers Mr Assad as “the devil we know”. It is primarily concerned with the desperate measures his regime could resort to as its parting shot. Military intervention by the west, even if the UN Security Council authorised it, would be costly and chaotic.

And unlike Libya, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the Syrian crisis for the region. Iran views Syria as its most important regional client – its land bridge to the Shia community in Lebanon and to the Mediterranean. Iraq is already the scene of a Sunni-Shia conflict. Lebanon is a failed state where a Shia

group, Hizbollah, is more powerful than the state. If Syria remains a battleground, a large swath of land from Iraq to the Mediterranean will be in play.

What could end the stalemate in favour of political transition? There are three interrelated variables: the army; the bourgeoisie of Damascus and Aleppo; and the international community. A change of attitude in one could affect the others, and tip the balance against the Assads.

Let us assume that the middle class of Damascus or Aleppo joins the fray. This would force the regime to use large units of the regular army rather than special forces or gangs. The number of victims would rise dramatically. Desertions would accelerate. Public pressure for action from the Arab league and the west would intensify. This could very well lead to the end of the regime.

But this has yet to happen and the status quo is unacceptable. Military intervention is not being contemplated by those who can execute it. In contrast, the three main parties who can and must escalate pressure on the Assads have adopted a halfhearted approach. (Russia's approach has been effective thus far because it knows precisely what it wants.) The western powers, Turkey and the Arab League must expand economic and other sanctions, recognise the opposition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people and suspend Syria's membership in Unesco and other UN bodies. Most importantly, they must overcome their own ambiguity and send a clear message to Moscow and Damascus that they are determined to act – and if need be do so – without the UN Security Council's sanction.

The Syrian opposition must also overcome its divisions and present a coherent front with a clear agenda that would generate more domestic and international support.

All of these steps could weaken the Assads' ability to maintain a semblance of normalcy; increase internal dissension; tilt the position of Damascus and Aleppo; and ultimately expedite the Assads' collapse. Syria is not a lost cause. Hastening the departure of a doomed and violent regime is possible, charitable and statesmanlike.

The writer, Israel's former chief negotiator with Syria, is the author of 'The View From Damascus' and 'The Lingering Conflict'.

Article 6.

The National Interest

Israel's New Allies

Benny Morris

February 2, 2012 -- Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu

is scheduled to visit Greek Cyprus this month in what will be the first ever visit by an Israeli leader to the neighboring Mediterranean island. And, according to UPI, Nicosia is currently studying an Israeli request to station military aircraft in its territory.

These are two developments in what is fast becoming a regional alliance driven by a mutual fear of and antagonism toward Turkey, which has vaguely threatened military action against both countries—Cyprus in connection with its offshore gas-drilling activities, which Turkey has charged impinge on Turkish Cypriot waters and possibly on underground gas deposits; and Israel in connection with what Turkey regards as Israel's "illegal" blockade of the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. Turkey has recently upgraded its naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean and has threatened to provide naval escorts for ships carrying what it terms "humanitarian" aid to Gaza. (Two years ago, Israel boarded a flotilla of Turkish ships bound for the Gaza Strip and, on one ship, the Mavi Marmara, killed nine Turkish activists who attacked the boarding party. Ever since, Ankara has demanded that Israel apologize and pay compensation. Israel has refused. A UN inquiry subsequently deemed the blockade of the Gaza Strip legal, though it criticized what it termed Israel's "excessive" use of force against the flotilla.)

But the bounding Israeli-Cypriot alliance should be seen within a wider context. The increasing aggressiveness of Iran, with its ongoing nuclear-weapons program; the increasing power and militancy of Islamist Turkey; and the empowerment of Islamist parties in the surrounding Arab world as the main upshot of the "Arab Spring" have all combined to push Israel to reconfigure

its "peripheral policy," conceived by Israel's founding prime minister David Ben-Gurion back in the 1950s, following the 1948 pan-Arab onslaught against Israel and continued Arab belligerence and rejectionism thereafter. Ben-Gurion sought to forge alliances with Israel's enemy's enemies—that is, the non-Arab countries and minorities around and inside the neighboring Arab states (Iran, Turkey, the Kurds, Lebanese and Southern Sudanese Christians, for example).

Today's realities—which include both already radicalized and radicalizing neighboring Arab states and parties and increasingly militant non-Arab Muslim states in an outer ring (Turkey, Iran, Pakistan)—have prompted Israel to expand its concept of the potentially friendly or even aligned "periphery" to include such states as Azerbaijan, India, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and (Greek) Cyprus. Last month, Southern Sudan's president, Salva Kiir Mayardit, visited Israel, and Netanyahu is expected to reciprocate the visit this year. For decades, Israel supplied southern Sudan's Christian and animist rebels with arms and training in their guerrilla war against (northern) Sudan's Muslim Arab government. Now that the South is independent, it is likely that relations with Israel, including military relations, will flourish.

The announcement of the Netanyahu visit to Nicosia followed news reports that Israel and Cyprus have secretly signed an agreement to cooperate in protecting the gas-drilling sites—the newly discovered gas fields are apparently worth tens of billions of dollars. The Iranian-aligned Hezbollah organization, which effectively controls Lebanon, has recently stated that Israel's offshore gas-drilling installations are justifiable targets for attack, claiming that some of the fields are under Lebanese

"economic" waters.

For decades, Cyprus—like Greece itself—held Israel at arm's length, preferring friendship and trade with far larger and wealthier Arab states. But militant Islam—long seen by Greeks as oppressive and threatening—apparently now also has the Greek Cypriots worried. Islamist Turkey may be viewed by Washington as "moderate," but this is not how some of its neighbors see it.

In December 2010, Israel and Cyprus reached agreement demarcating the economic maritime border between them, an agreement denounced by Turkey as "madness." Recently, Cyprus's defense minister, Dimitris Eliades, visited Israel—another first—and signed an intelligence-cooperation agreement with his counterpart, Ehud Barak. The Cypriots are apparently interested in Israeli assistance in monitoring the air space above the gas fields and drilling equipment and in augmenting their (small) navy's patrols in their economic waters. Barak has asked the Cypriots to allow Israel to station aircraft in the Papandreu Air Base outside the town of Paphos in western Cyprus. And two months ago, the Israeli and Cypriot air forces held a joint exercise. It remains unclear whether Netanyahu's visit to Israel's long-troubled Mediterranean neighbor will be truly historic, but all signs point to a stronger alliance.

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).

The Washington Post

The importance of U.S. military might shouldn't be underestimated

Robert Kagan

February 3 -- These days “soft” power and “smart” power are in vogue (who wants to make the case for “dumb” power?) while American “hard” power is on the chopping block. This is, in part, a symbolic sacrifice to the fiscal crisis — even though the looming defense cuts are a drop in the bucket compared with the ballooning entitlement spending that is not being cut. And partly this is the Obama administration’s election-year strategy of playing to a presumably war-weary nation. But there is a theory behind all this: The United States has relied too much on hard power for too long, and to be truly effective in a complex, modern world, the United States needs to emphasize other tools. It must be an attractive power, capable of persuading rather than compelling. It must convene and corral both partners and non-partners, using economic, diplomatic and other means to “leverage” American influence. These are sensible arguments. Power takes many forms, and it’s smart to make use of all of them. But there is a danger in taking this wisdom too far and forgetting just how important U.S. military power has been in building and sustaining the present liberal international order.

That order has rested significantly on the U.S. ability to provide security in parts of the world, such as Europe and Asia, that had known endless cycles of warfare before the arrival of the United States. The world's free-trade, free-market economy has depended on America's ability to keep trade routes open, even during times of conflict. And the remarkably wide spread of democracy around the world owes something to America's ability to provide support to democratic forces under siege and to protect peoples from dictators such as Moammar Gaddafi and Slobodan Milosevic. Some find it absurd that the United States should have a larger military than the next 10 nations combined. But that gap in military power has probably been the greatest factor in upholding an international system that, in historical terms, is unique — and uniquely beneficial to Americans. Nor should we forget that this power is part of what makes America attractive to many other nations. The world has not always loved America. During the era of Vietnam and Watergate and the ugly last stand of segregationists, America was often hated. But nations that relied on the United States for security from threatening neighbors tended to overlook the country's flaws. In the 1960s, millions of young Europeans took to the streets to protest American "imperialism," while their governments worked to ensure that the alliance with the United States held firm.

Soft power, meanwhile, has its limits. No U.S. president has enjoyed more international popularity than Woodrow Wilson did when he traveled to Paris to negotiate the treaty ending World War I. He was a hero to the world, but he found his ability to shape the peace, and to establish the new League of Nations, severely limited, in no small part by his countrymen's

refusal to commit U.S. military power to the defense of the peace. John F. Kennedy, another globally admired president, found his popularity of no use in his confrontations with Nikita Khrushchev, who, by Kennedy's own admission, "beat the hell out of me" and who may have been convinced by his perception of Kennedy's weakness that the United States would tolerate his placing Soviet missiles in Cuba. The international system is not static. It responds quickly to fluctuations in power. If the United States were to cut too deeply into its ability to project military power, other nations could be counted on to respond accordingly. Those nations whose power rises in relative terms would display expanding ambitions commensurate with their new clout in the international system. They would, as in the past, demand particular spheres of influence. Those whose power declined in relative terms, like the United States, would have little choice but to cede some influence in those areas. Thus China would lay claim to its sphere of influence in Asia, Russia in eastern Europe and the Caucasus. And, as in the past, these burgeoning great-power claims would overlap and conflict: India and China claim the same sphere in the Indian Ocean; Russia and Europe have overlapping spheres in the region between the Black Sea and the Baltic. Without the United States to suppress and contain these conflicting ambitions, there would have to be complex adjustments to establish a new balance. Some of these adjustments could be made through diplomacy, as they were sometimes in the past. Other adjustments might be made through war or the threat of war, as also happened in the past.

The biggest illusion is to imagine that as American power declines, the world stays the same.

What has been true since the time of Rome remains true today: There can be no world order without power to preserve it, to shape its norms, uphold its institutions, defend the sinews of its economic system and keep the peace. Military power can be abused, wielded unwisely and ineffectively. It can be deployed to answer problems that it cannot answer or that have no answer. But it is also essential. No nation or group of nations that renounced power could expect to maintain any kind of world order. If the United States begins to look like a less reliable defender of the present order, that order will begin to unravel. People might indeed find Americans very attractive in this weaker state, but if the United States cannot help them when and where they need help the most, they will make other arrangements.

Article 8.

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The Decline of the West Revisited

Shlomo Ben-Ami

2012-02-02 – Since the publication in 1918 of the first volume of Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*, prophecies about the inexorable doom of what he called the “Faustian Civilization” have been a recurrent topic for thinkers and public intellectuals. The current crises in the United States and Europe – the result primarily of US capitalism’s inherent ethical failures, and to Europe’s dysfunction – might be seen as lending credibility to Spengler’s view of democracy’s inadequacy, and

to his dismissal of Western civilization as essentially being driven by a corrupting lust for money.

But determinism in history has always been defeated by the unpredictable forces of human will, and, in this case, by the West's extraordinary capacity for renewal, even after cataclysmic defeats. True, the West is no longer alone in dictating the global agenda, and its values are bound to be increasingly challenged by emerging powers, but its decline is not a linear, irreversible process.

There can be no doubt that the West's military mastery and economic edge have been severely diminished recently. In 2000, America's GDP was eight times larger than China's; today it is only twice as large. Worse, appalling income inequalities, a squeezed middle class, and evidence of widespread ethical lapses and impunity are fueling a dangerous disenchantment with democracy and a growing loss of trust in a system that has betrayed the American dream of constant progress and improvement.

This would not be, however, the first time that America's values prevailed over the threat of populism in times of economic crisis. A variation of the fascist agenda once appeared in America, with Father Charles Coughlin's populist onslaught in the 1930's on Franklin Roosevelt's "alliance with the bankers." Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice, whose membership ran into the millions, was eventually defeated by the American system's powerful democratic antibodies.

As for Europe, the eurozone crisis has exposed democracy's weaknesses in dealing with major economic emergencies, as

well as the flaws in the European Union's design. In Greece and Italy, technocratic governments have taken over from failing politicians. In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has pressed for an authoritarian "re-establishment of the state." Such cases seem to point to the return of a European past in which democracy's failures gave way to more "expedient" forms of government.

And yet, while Europe remains a question mark, economic growth and job creation, however fragile, are back in America. Moreover, even if China becomes the world's largest economy in, say, 2018, Americans would still be far richer than Chinese, with per capita GDP in America four times higher than in China.

To be sure, income inequality and social injustice are a concomitant of capitalist culture throughout the West. But challengers like China and India are in no position to preach. Compared to Indian capitalism, capitalism's ethical failures elsewhere look especially benign. A hundred oligarchs in India hold assets equivalent to 25% of GDP, while 800 million of their compatriots survive on less than a dollar a day. Politicians and judges are bought, and natural resources worth trillions of dollars are sold to powerful corporations for a pittance.

Having the largest economy is vital for a power aspiring to maintain military superiority and the ability to define the international order. Hence, the receding power of the West means a tougher fight to uphold the relevance of key components of its value system, such as democracy and universal rights.

Europe, with its almost post-historical mentality, has long

abandoned the pretension of being a military power. The same cannot be said of the US. But, rather than reflecting a decline in its military superiority, America's setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan are the result of wrongheaded policies that sought to use hard power to solve conflicts that were simply not amenable to it.

The recent massive cuts to the US military budget need not signal decline; they can launch an age of smarter defense, one that relies on innovative ideas, strong alliances, and building partners' capacity. The shift of US military priorities to the Asia-Pacific region is an understandable strategic rebalancing, given America's excessive focus on the Middle East and its maintenance of an unnecessary military presence in Europe.

Tempered by the US public's fatigue with overseas adventures, America's missionary zeal to save the world from the wickedness of faraway autocrats will be reduced substantially. But this does not necessarily mean that China will automatically take over ground from which America withdraws. Despite the recent cuts, America's defense budget is still five times higher than China's. More importantly, China's long-term strategy requires that it focus in the short term on satisfying its vast appetite for energy and raw materials.

Make no mistake: Euro-centrism and Western hubris have been dealt severe blows in recent years. But, for those in the West overtaken by fatalism and self-doubt, a message of hope is now emanating from the Arab Spring, and from the resumption in Russia of the unfinished revolution that ended communism. Nor has the inconsistency between China's capitalism and its lack of civil liberties been resolved yet. A Chinese Spring cannot be

ruled out.

The West faces serious challenges – as it always has. But the values of human freedom and dignity that drive Western civilization remain the dream of the vast majority of humanity.

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