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From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen
Sent: Fri 12/14/2012 4:53:07 PM
Subject: December 12 update

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Article 1.

NYT

Can God Save Egypt?

Thomas L. Friedman

December 11, 2012 – Cairo -- When you fly along the Mediterranean today, what do you see below? To the north, you look down at a European supranational state system — the European Union — that is cracking up. And to the south, you look down at an Arab nation state system that is cracking up. It’s an unnerving combination, and it’s all the more reason for the U.S. to get its economic house in order and be a rock of global stability, because, I fear, the situation on the Arab side of the Mediterranean is about to get worse. Egypt, the anchor of the whole Arab world, is embarked on a dangerous descent toward prolonged civil strife, unless a modus vivendi can be found between President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood and his growing opposition. If Syria and Egypt both unravel at once, this whole region will be destabilized. That’s why a billboard on the road to the Pyramids said it all: “God save Egypt.”

Having watched a young, veiled, Egyptian female reporter tear into a Muslim Brotherhood official the other day over the group's recent autocratic and abusive behavior, I can assure you that the fight here is not between more religious and less religious Egyptians. What has brought hundreds of thousands of Egyptians back into the streets, many of them first-time protesters, is the fear that autocracy is returning to Egypt under the guise of Islam. The real fight here is about freedom, not religion.

The decisions by President Morsi to unilaterally issue a constitutional decree that shielded him from judicial oversight (he has since rescinded most of it after huge protests) and then to rush the completion of a new, highly imperfect, Constitution and demand that it be voted on in a national referendum on Saturday, without sufficient public debate, have rekindled fears that Egyptians have replaced one autocracy, led by Hosni Mubarak, with another, led by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Morsi and the other Muslim Brotherhood leaders were late comers to the 2011 Tahrir Square revolution that ended six decades of military rule here. And because they were focused only on exploiting it for their own ends, they have grossly underestimated the deep, mostly youth-led yearning for the freedom to realize their full potential that erupted in Tahrir — and it has not gone away.

Whenever anyone asked me what I saw in Tahrir Square during that original revolution, I told them I saw a tiger that had been living in a 5-by-8 cage for 60 years get released. And there are three things I can tell you about the tiger: 1) Tiger is never going

back in that cage; 2) Do not try to ride tiger for your own narrow purposes or party because this tiger only serves Egypt as a whole; 3) Tiger only eats beef. He has been fed every dog food lie in the Arabic language for 60 years, so don't try doing it again.

First, the Egyptian Army underestimated the tiger, and tried to get it back in the cage. Now the Muslim Brothers are. Ahmed Hassan, 26, is one of the original Tahrir rebels. He comes from the poor Shubra el-Kheima neighborhood, where his mother sold vegetables. I think he spoke for many of his generation when he told me the other day: "We all had faith that Morsi would be the one who would fulfill our dreams and take Egypt where we wanted it to go. The problem [now] is that not only has he abandoned our dream, he has gone against it. ... They took our dream and implanted their own. I am a Muslim, but I think with my own mind. But [the Muslim Brothers] follow orders from their Supreme Guide. ... Half of me is heartbroken, and half of me is happy today. The part that is heartbroken is because I am aware that we are entering a stage that could be a real blood bath. And the part that is happy is because people who were completely apathetic before have now woken up and joined us."

What's wrong with Morsi's new draft constitution? On the surface, it is not some Taliban document. While the writing was dominated by Islamists, professional jurists had their input. Unfortunately, argues Mona Zulficar, a lawyer and an expert on the constitution, while it enshrines most basic rights, it also says they must be balanced by vague religious, social and moral values, some of which will be defined by clerical authorities. This language opens loopholes, she said, that could enable

conservative judges to restrict “women’s rights, freedom of religion, freedom of opinion and the press and the rights of the child,” particularly young girls. Or, as Dan Brumberg, a Middle East expert at the U.S. Institute of Peace, put it, the draft constitution could end up guaranteeing “freedom of speech, but not freedom after speech.”

The wild street demonstrations here — for and against the constitution — tell me one thing: If it is just jammed through by Morsi, Egypt will be building its new democracy on a deep fault line. It will never be stable. Egypt is thousands of years old. It can take six more months to get its new constitution right.

God is not going to save Egypt. It will be saved only if the opposition here respects that the Muslim Brotherhood won the election fairly — and resists its excesses not with boycotts (or dreams of a coup) but with better ideas that win the public to the opposition’s side. And it will be saved only if Morsi respects that elections are not winner-take-all, especially in a society that is still defining its new identity, and stops grabbing authority and starts earning it. Otherwise, it will be all fall down.

Article 2.

Agence Global

Watching the Incumbent Islamists in Egypt

Rami G. Khouri

12 Dec 2012 -- BEIRUT -- Political scientists and fortune tellers -- some people think these are a single demographic group -- are having a field day analyzing the kaleidoscope of developments related to the birth of a new political governance system in Egypt. This rare occurrence is particularly volatile when populist activism in the streets is the main driving force for creating a pluralistic democracy in the wake of several generations of police- and army-led autocracy, as is the case in Egypt and most other transitioning Arab countries.

Action in Egypt now centers around the debate on whether or not to proceed Saturday with the referendum on the draft constitution. This is indeed a historic and seminal moment in Egyptian political life; it is not really the most important aspect of current events, because constitutions can be amended and changed. The much more significant aspect of what is going on is the opportunity to watch the Muslim Brotherhood in action in public, to monitor their behavior and evaluate their political competence. How such Islamists perform will impact the Arab world's political development for decades to come.

This is truly historic and significant because of three principal factors:

- We rarely have a chance to assess the behavior of Muslim Brotherhood or Salafist politicians who are endowed with the great mantle of legitimate democratic incumbency and operate in a reasonably credible democratic system. Tunisia and Egypt are really the only two examples that meet these criteria and both of

them are passing through stressful days.

- Everything in Egypt except for its stunted cuisine eventually influences similar developments across the Arab world, whether in politics, culture and the arts, security sectors or other fields. How the Islamists perform will shape the Arab region's transitions much more profoundly than, say, developments in Turkey and Iran in recent years, where Islamists of differing shades assumed power.

- The newly dynamic, open and competitive nature of the public political sphere in Egypt has allowed a wide range of actors to take part in political activism, whether on the street, in the media, in formal institutions or in back-room planning or mediation meetings. The incumbency of the Muslim Brotherhood has been coupled with the equally decisive birth of a political system that allows for the mostly peaceful contestation of power, with the occasional lapse into momentary clashes that are politically insignificant in historical terms. For these reasons, how President Mohammad Mursi and his bearded band of Islamist colleagues perform during this constitutional tangle is the key factor to watch. My initial assessment is that Mursi and his supporters have acted with sustained incompetence, and have caused much temporary damage to the emerging fabric of Egyptian governance and politics. But, paradoxically, their failures are also a source of strength for the system in the long run.

The Muslim Brotherhood is very good at mobilizing supporters, but so far it is proving to be very poor at wielding power in a pluralistic system. Someone should tell Mursi that calling in thugs and the army, and holding million-man marches, are signs of political weakness, not strength, in a democratic system where others can also hold million-man marches.

The Muslim Brotherhood has failed on three counts to date, and we are still counting. They proved wildly ineffective and unresponsive to the important socio-economic and political issues that mattered to Egyptians in the months after they were first elected to parliament last year, when Egyptians followed their deliberations in the televised parliamentary sessions. Consequently, when the presidential elections took place months after the parliamentary ones, the Muslim Brotherhood's share of votes plunged from over 50 percent to around 25 percent -- a clear drop in public support and confidence. They also failed in Mursi's cloddish power grab last month, and they failed again when they called out their thugs to beat up anti-Mursi demonstrators earlier this month.

The main negative outcome of Mursi's behavior to date is not that he has damaged his and the Muslim Brothers' credibility, but that he has damaged the credibility of the presidency, at precisely the moment when it needs to be safeguarded and enhanced. Not surprisingly, millions of Egyptians have rallied to oppose Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood, and we now have a very polarized and tense situation in the country.

Difficult as this may be for Egyptians, we should respect and applaud this process and allow it to run its course, because it is an essential and fortifying stage of passage on the road from autocracy to democracy. The confrontations to come in the weeks and months ahead will shape a new governance system that captures the populist legitimacy that remains the single most important result of the 2011 January Revolution.

Rami G. Khouri is Editor-at-large of The Daily Star, and Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and

International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, in Beirut, Lebanon.

Article 3.

The Wall Street Journal

A Divided Jerusalem Will Not Stand

Nir Barkat

December 11, 2012 -- Israel's government is under heavy criticism for recently approving building permits in what the international community calls "the settlements." Yet places like Ramat Shlomo, Gilo and Givat Ha'matos are well within the municipal borders of Jerusalem, and the virgin hills of "E-1"—between the city of Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim—have over three millennia of deep Jewish roots. Here in Jerusalem, we stand saddened and appalled by the European Union ministers who condemn these construction projects while ignoring calls from the leader of Hamas for the destruction of the Jewish state of Israel.

When the people of Israel left Egypt and came to this region 3,500 years ago, each of the 12 tribes received a piece of land on which they built their cities and developed their ways of life. The exception to the rule was the holy city of Jerusalem, which wasn't divided or given to any of the tribes. Jerusalem served all 12 Jewish tribes equally, as it did the people of other faiths who came to worship here.

Jerusalem became the de facto center of the world, managed by Hebrew kings for 1,000 years. All residents and pilgrims

entering her gates were treated with honor and respect.

After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70, the city traded hands from conqueror to conqueror—including the Babylonians, Assyrians, Turks, British and Jordanians—for two millennia. None of these rulers maintained the city's freedom of religion, Jerusalem's essence. These empires never adopted Jerusalem as their capital. The Jewish people, on the other hand—even in their darkest days, amid expulsions, pogroms, the Holocaust and waves of terror—have always comforted themselves with the saying: "Next year in Jerusalem."

In 1967, Israel reunified its capital, Jerusalem, which had been divided between Israeli and Jordanian control since the Jewish state's founding in 1948. Since then the city has maintained freedom of access, movement and religion. Peace-seeking pilgrims of all faiths can again visit the holy places without limitation or restriction. Tourism to Jerusalem is thriving, as is the city's economy, and its per capita crime rate is among the world's lowest.

Yet Israel and her capital are once again facing trials. Now more than ever, Israel and Jerusalem need real friends and real leaders. The threat we face now isn't from foreign invaders, but rather from international diplomats seeking to locate a simple but incorrect solution to the complex relationship between Israel and the Palestinians. As far as Jerusalem is concerned, we must recall that no divided city in history has ever succeeded.

Isn't it ironic that many in Europe who recently celebrated 25 years of the reunification of Berlin are at the same time calling for the division of another capital on another continent?

Despite tremendous international pressure and internal political risk, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has stood up for a united Jerusalem.

By 2030, the city's population will expand to one million residents from 800,000 today (33% Muslim, 2% Christian and 65% Jewish). Where does the world suggest we put these extra 200,000 residents? The expansion of Jerusalem's residential areas is essential for the natural growth of all segments of our population. It enables Jewish and Arab families alike to grow and remain in the city. The capital of a sovereign nation cannot be expected to freeze growth rather than provide housing to families of all faiths eager to make their lives there.

As for "E-1," this land has always been considered the natural site for the expansion of contiguous neighborhoods of metropolitan Jerusalem. "E-1" strengthens Jerusalem. It does not impede peace in our region. The international alarm about planned construction is based solely on the misplaced dreams of the Palestinians and their supporters for a divided Jerusalem.

Jerusalem has been and forever will be the heart and soul of the Jewish people. It is also the united and undivided capital of the state of Israel. The Jewish people and the Jewish state have a bumpy road ahead. We appreciate the support of our friends, and only through continued bold leadership at home—leadership willing to stand up to pressure from foreign capitals—will we get through this challenging time.

Mr. Barkat is the mayor of Jerusalem.

Foreign Policy

The case for short-term thinking.

David Rothkopf

December 11, 2012 -- Nothing reveals more about the present than a report about the future. Unfortunately, as these things go, reports about the future seldom do much to illuminate our understanding of what is yet to come. This is certainly the case with the U.S. National Intelligence Council's latest exercise in future-casting, "Global Trends 2030."

The authors of this report, produced every five years by the NIC, the intelligence community's in-house think tank (look for the federal budget line item entitled "navel gazing"), note at the outset that their objective is not to predict the future. This is the caveat offered up by all efforts to predict the future. Including it in the report ensures that at least one thing in it will actually turn out to be true.

I don't mean to be snarky. In fact, I would hate to do anything to discourage the production of such reports, even as swathed in caveats and burdened by the failures of past such efforts as they are. They are useful not because of their content but because they force readers to consider something outside the current news cycle, if only for a moment. That's important.

In Washington, typically, when someone says they are taking the long view, there are really only three possibilities: 1) They are lying; 2) They aren't from here; or 3) They can't figure out a short-term strategy.

We've seen an acute example of this recently with regard to U.S. Middle East policy. At a recent Foreign Policy conference, former Obama Middle East advisor Dennis Ross urged us not to refer to what is happening in the region as the "Arab Spring" because that implies it is a short-term phenomenon. He offered up as an alternative "Arab Awakening," and said that the events in the region would take a generation to play out.

Fair enough. But taking the historical view is fine when you're outside government. It's less comforting when you're actually in charge of setting U.S. policy. When diplomats from the region recently approached the administration to urge it to take a strong public stance calling out Egypt's Mohamed Morsy for his bald-faced, post-Gaza power grab, I'm told, they were given pushback by officials at the National Security Council who said the United States was taking "the long-term view" in Egypt and counseled patience.

Between that kind of talk and the NIC report, you might think Washington is experiencing a rare outbreak of virulent foresight. But that's not really what's going on here. With regard to Egypt, the United States is embracing the long view because it has no good short-term options. As in Syria, Libya, and elsewhere in the Arab world, we are not sure who is in charge, who are likely to be our friends, and how events are likely to unfold.

The problem with this kind of faux-perspective is that for all the

perfectly good reasons to maintain the long view, it is dangerous to let them be an excuse for not having a good short-term plan. After all, to paraphrase Freud, the short term is the father of the long term. If you get it wrong, it does have an effect.

Morsy has clearly demonstrated that he is not a good guy. He has been all too fast to set aside the constitutional impulses that brought him to power. His foreign policy, while seemingly a help in Gaza, has others in the region, from Jordan to the moderate states of the Gulf, seriously worried. They see Morsy's Muslim Brotherhood as a threat to their stability, actively working to stir up trouble in its desire to produce the spread not of democracy but of extremist theocracy to the region. No amount of palliative statements by U.S. officials to the effect of "we have leverage, they need us more than we need them, they need our money" will convince the region's players -- who believe they know better the true nature of the Brotherhood -- that the United States will actually maintain influence with these Islamist ideologues over the long term. In other words, America is once again being used by bad guys because we simply don't know whom else to deal with. (And by all reports, we are being misled by giving too much credence to advice given to the White House by the president's favorite interlocutor in the region, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.)

The United States needs to be careful, because failing to come up with a better alternative to bad actors like Morsy -- or at least failing to set much clearer lines as to what we will support or not -- could produce not an "Arab awakening" or "spring" but a new dark era across the region. In Egypt, in Syria, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and possibly in other fragile states that hang in the balance like those moderate allies currently pleading for stronger

support from the United States right now, we could end up with a new generation of authoritarian bosses with extremist ties or leanings. And the Obama administration's understandable desire to get out of the region to focus on "nation-building at home" is only making matters more complicated.

In the worst case, an anti-American, collapsing Middle East could be seen as the legacy of this administration. You could easily see it happening over the next four years. Don't believe me? Here's what one top U.S. official said the region might look like in just "three to five years": "either a failed state or all or part of Syria under control of extremists; instability in Jordan or all or some part of Jordan under control of extremists; continuing political instability in Lebanon with the growing power of Hezbollah; Hamas basically becoming a proxy of Iran; and Sinai becoming a danger to Egypt as well as to Israel."

That was Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, speaking off the cuff at the Brookings Institution's Saban Forum. Imagine what such a scenario might mean for Obama's legacy -- and for the president who had to pick up the pieces. The question, "Who lost the Middle East?" might resonate for generations.

And it could even be worse. The NIC report touches upon the possibility of the dysfunctional world that would be produced if the next 20 years produces unrest, strongmen, world energy market volatility, and the distractions associated with further festering in the arc of instability that extends from the Maghreb to the Hindu Kush but shows signs of spreading across Africa and Central Asia. The headings in the "game-changers" section alone tell a grim story: The Crisis-Prone Global Economy, the Governance Gap, the Potential for Increased Conflict, Wide

Scope of Regional Instability, the Impact of New Technologies and the Role of the United States.

But there's another way to look at those headings. The trouble with most such exercise in crystal ball reading is that they fall quickly into the biggest of all heuristic traps: They let our current experience restrict too greatly our vision of the future.

Yes, there is a connection between the two, to be sure. (See above comments on having a short-term strategy on that point.) But look at the "megatrends" and "game-changers" of the NIC study and you see only a rehashing of the past decade or so of Davos meetings and McKinsey studies, the dross of popular futurism. There is talk about "individual empowerment" without a deep enough exploration of whether new technologies and trends like those above might create a new golden age of authoritarianism. "Diffusion of power" is mentioned because that's a meme of the IT crowd, but it neglects to note that new technologies have also led to huge concentrations of power (see: Valley, Silicon). There is a discussion of "aging," but it is almost entirely as though that were an economic negative, totally ignoring the great promise that might come of harnessing the experience and talents of workers for much, much longer than in the past. The "food, water, energy nexus" is mentioned because it must be, but there is not much discussion of how regularly wrong past predictions of coming supply crises in these areas have been over the past two centuries or so (see Population Bomb, The). China and India will be bigger. Europe could be in trouble. Emerging markets will emerge. Or they might not. Let's watch that.

The NIC study offers a few potential worlds, turning as ever on

geopolitical and geoeconomic trends. The secret sauce seems to be whether the United States can continue to lead as it has in recent decades or not. The implication is that the future will be good if it looks enough like the past. (This is the "best case," with our European alliances swapped out for Asian ones.) As I said, it's all worth doing every so often because it makes us think. But the hard, on-the-ground realities of situations around the world as well as the inadequacies of our efforts at future-casting reinforce a message that our leaders will do well to heed: You're defining the future today, whether or not you intend to, and thus the very best way to ensure a good 2030 is to focus on making the right choices in 2013.

David Rothkopf is CEO and editor at large of Foreign Policy.

Article 5.

The Atlantic

Turkey's Distinctive Brew

Soner Cagaptay

Dec 11 2012 -- It is 5 a.m. in Istanbul, and I am looking for coffee. Having arrived in Istanbul's old city the night before and

seriously jetlagged, I decided to walk into the Eyup quarter, which hosts Istanbul's most sacred mosque, Eyup Sultan. I hoped the revered shrine, which attracts early morning worshippers, would have an open coffee shop nearby, and I was right. As prayers ended, I watched Eyup's worshipers flow from the mosque, sipping a bland cup of instant coffee, unaware I was about to be treated to an experience of cultural flavor unique to Turkey. A large group of Salafists, with their trademark trimmed beards and kaftans, walked out of the mosque, heading to my coffee shop. What happened next is a lesson in Turkey's distinctive direction compared to its Muslim neighbors: The Salafist men ordered coffee and Turkish bagels (simit) from the barista, a young woman sporting a tattoo and sleeveless shirt. Neither the exchange between the barista and the Salafists, laden with polite honorifics and formal Turkish speech, nor their body language, suggested tensions between the two opposing visions of Turkey brought into close encounter for me to witness.

As this encounter so succinctly encapsulates, Turkey's two halves are like oil and water; though they may not blend, neither will disappear. Turkey's Islamization is a fact, but so is secular and Westernized Turkey. But the historical roots and current manifestations of this synthesis indicate that it is a model that will be difficult to replicate elsewhere in the region, as Islamist governments rise to power after the Arab Spring. Starting with the late 18th century, Turkey went through two centuries of societal and structural Westernization under the Ottoman sultans, a unique experience among Muslim societies to this day. The Ottomans considered their state a European one, and borrowed European institutions, setting up women's colleges and building secular schools and courts, to catch up with the

continent. Enter young Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who imbibed the secular mindset in such Ottoman schools. The sultans' rule was followed by eight decades of constitutional secularism installed by Ataturk during the 20th century. This campaign, unique among Muslim-majority Middle East societies, mandated strict separation of religion, government, and education. Since coming to power in 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, rooted in Islamism, has challenged these premises, and the firewall between religion, politics, and education has collapsed. The result has been a rising tide of Islamization in Turkey. Take for example, a recent law that mandates the teaching of religion in public schools for nine-year-old children. What is more, Turkey now has a different identity. It considers itself Middle Eastern, rather than European, and views other Muslim countries as brother nations. This is a far cry from Ataturk's vision that viewed Turkey as a European country, only accidentally placed in the Middle East. Turkey's Islamization is old news. But what is new -- as demonstrated by my encounter at the coffee shop -- is that such Islamization is taking place within the constraints of pre-existing and institutionalized Westernization, a feature unique to Turkey among its Muslim neighbors in the Middle East. The country is so thoroughly westernized that even the AKP and its Islamist elites cannot escape trappings of their Western mold. From the role of women in society, to the country's membership in the NATO alliance, Turkey's western legacy is an insurmountable fact. Perhaps most importantly, it is Turkey's embrace of liberal economics that has driven the AKP to the top in the first place.

Regardless of how Islamicized Turkey becomes, it will be impossible to take women out of the public space. Women's

participation in public life, so deeply engrained in secularist Turkey, is also a trademark of the new Turkey. Consider Turkey's first lady Hayrunnisa Gul, the wife of President Abdullah Gul. The Turkish first lady has a very public presence, runs her own policy initiatives, and her website appears to be a mirror image of the White House website set up for Michelle Obama.

When it comes to the country's foreign policy orientation, Turkey's Islamization is meeting its match as well. To be sure, the new Turkey does not consider itself a de facto member of the Western world, but neither does it consider itself antithetical to the West, as it did until a few years ago. This point was underlined during Turkey's recent debate on deploying NATO Patriot missiles on Turkish territory against Syria. This happened without significant domestic opposition: The Turks have lived with NATO too long to think outside of its box.

This is where Turkey's structural Westernization -- its institutional connections to the West and its adoptions of Western ways -- makes a difference compared to other Muslim-majority societies in the region. It is hard to imagine that NATO presence would be so welcome in other Muslim majority countries. Even the most diehard Islamists in Turkey had reason to support the NATO alliance because it is what protected Turkey against "godless" communism.

As a Muslim country that takes NATO seriously, the new Turkey's foreign policy falls somewhere between Ataturk's Turkey and the AKP's vision. Regional instability has made Turkey's access to NATO a valuable asset, hence Ankara's pivot towards Washington and away from the lofty notion of Muslim

solidarity. This has been most significantly demonstrated by Turkey's 2010 decision to join NATO's missile defense project that aims to protect alliance members against missiles coming from Iran, hardly an expression of solidarity with a Muslim nation. The civil war in Syria has accelerated Ankara's run for cover under NATO's embrace: when Damascus shot down a Turkish plane in June, Turkey swiftly asked the Western alliance to come to its assistance. Further unrest in the Middle East and competition against Iran in Iraq and Syria will only increase Ankara's pivot towards the United States and NATO.

All this suggests that Turkey's Islamization is bound by the country's deep-rooted and institutional traditions of Westernization, as well as continued regional instability. Accordingly, Turkey and its Muslim neighbors in the Middle East may be heading in different directions. Countries such as Egypt lack Turkey's institutional westernization experience and constitutionally-mandated secular heritage, and are therefore more susceptible to thorough Islamization. In Turkey, Islamization will be tempered by the unique heritage of institutional and structural westernization. This has ushered in a blend of Western ways and Islamist politics -- a first anywhere in the world.

Sheer numbers require this culture of co-existence, if not tolerance, to take root. In the most recent 2011 elections, the AKP received nearly 50 percent of the vote. Excluding the 15 percent of the voters that supported other Islamist and conservative parties, 35 percent of the population, totaling twenty-five million people, did not vote for the AKP. These voters stand for secularism, and they will never buy into the religious movement in Turkey. This block will constitute the

domestic limitation of Turkey's Islamization. After ten years in power, and likely to run the country for another term with a humming economy boosting its support, the AKP is making Turkey in its own image. But the new Turkey will have a uniquely distinct flavor: a bit Islamist, a bit secularist, a bit conservative, and a bit Western.

Soner Cagaptay is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Article 6.

World Affairs Journal

Superpower Symbiosis: The Russia-China Axis

Richard Weitz

November/December 2012 -- At the recent Russo-Chinese summit in Beijing, both governments again hailed their close ties, signed seventeen agreements on economic and other issues, and vowed to expand their joint military engagements. China pledged to invest more in the Russian Far East and buy more Russian nuclear energy technology. The two countries also declared their identity of views regarding Asia-Pacific security, Iran's nuclear program, Syria, and other global hot spots. It is hard to contest the regular assertions of Russian and Chinese leaders that relations between Beijing and Moscow are the best

they have ever been.

Although sunny assessments about current Sino-Russian ties are correct, such alignments are vulnerable to shifts in the underlying conditions that support them. In the case of Russia and China, these shifting variables include China's increasing military power, its growing economic penetration of Central Asia, and its impending leadership changes, along with Russia's political disorders, dependence on a mono-economy of energy, and gloomy demographic prospects. These and other plausible changes could at some point undermine the foundations of their current entente. Interested third parties may or may not be able to shape these variables, but at least other governments need to understand the evolving dynamic of this important relationship and prepare for its future evolution.

Since the Soviet Union's disintegration in the early 1990s, the two countries have for the most part acted on the basis of shared interests—particularly in maintaining stability in Central Asia, whose energy supplies are vital for both countries' economic development. China consumes the resources directly, whereas Russian companies earn valuable revenue by reselling Central Asian hydrocarbons in third-party markets, especially in Europe. Both countries know that certain regional events such as further political revolutions or civil wars could adversely affect core security interests. Both governments especially fear ethnic separatism in their border territories supported by Islamic fundamentalist movements in Central Asia.

The shared regional security interests between Beijing and Moscow have meant that the newly independent states of Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,

Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—have become a generally unifying element in Chinese-Russian relations. Their overlapping security interests in Central Asia are visible in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Since its founding in 2001, the SCO has essentially functioned as a Chinese-Russian condominium, providing Beijing and Moscow with a convenient multilateral framework to manage their interests in Central Asia.

Chinese diplomatic rhetoric also seeks to put Russians at ease about the growing Chinese commercial presence in the former Soviet space by stressing Beijing's deference to Moscow on regional security issues. The bilateral defense relationship has evolved in recent years to become more institutionalized and better integrated. As befits two large and powerful neighbors, the senior military leaders of China and Russia now meet frequently in various formats. In addition, the two armed forces engage in many small and several large joint exercises, sometimes along with their Central Asian partners. China and Russia conducted their first official bilateral naval exercise, "Maritime Cooperation 2012," from April 22 to 27, 2012, in the Yellow Sea near Qingdao.

The two governments coordinate their foreign policies in the United Nations, where they regularly block Western-backed efforts to impose sanctions on anti-Western regimes. Most recently, China and Russia have established a common front in the UN Security Council against Western involvement in Syria. Their leaders share a commitment to a philosophy of state sovereignty (non-interference) and territorial integrity (against separatism). Although they defend national sovereignty by appealing to international law, their opposition also reflects

more pragmatic considerations—a shared desire to shield their human rights and civil liberties abuses, and those of their allies, from Western criticism. Chinese and Russian officials refuse to criticize each other’s domestic and foreign policies in public.

Beijing and Moscow oppose American democracy promotion efforts, US missile defense programs, and Washington’s alleged plans to militarize outer space. Chinese and Russian leaders both resent what they perceive as Washington’s proclivity to interfere in their internal affairs as well as their spheres of influence by siding with neighboring countries in their disputes with Beijing and Moscow. Chinese and Russian officials openly call on their US counterparts to stay out of issues that are vital interests for Beijing and Moscow but should, in their view, be of only peripheral concern for the United States, dismissing Washington’s claims to stewardship in upholding universal values, principles of international behavior, freedom of the seas, and a free Internet.

Most Russians do not consider the People’s Republic of China an imminent military threat, and Beijing has prudently avoided provocations that could arouse such concerns in Moscow. Russians generally admire the PRC’s ability to develop its economy so rapidly within the constraints of a single-party political system. Many regret that Russia did not pursue such a path back in the 1990s instead of seeking to align with the West, which they (rightly) believe failed to offer sufficient assistance during Russia’s difficult post-Communist transition and (wrongly) accuse of exploiting Russia’s weaknesses to expand NATO at Moscow’s expense.

With Vladimir Putin in office for a third presidential term, Sino-

Russian relations will likely continue improving at a moderate clip. Putin clearly intends to maintain strong relations with Beijing. In one of his pre-election newspaper articles, he said that Russia aimed to catch the wind filling China's sails.

The Russian government is particularly eager to secure Chinese investment to help modernize the Russian economy. In another article that appeared shortly before his June state visit to China, Putin laid out an ambitious agenda for future Russia-China cooperation, both bilaterally and within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Yet the summit failed to produce the long-awaited natural gas deal between the two countries due to sharp differences over the price China should pay for Russian gas. Even their earlier oil deal, which began delivering Russian oil to the PRC by direct pipeline in 2011, has now become engulfed in litigation and Chinese demands for lower prices. Russian energy firms' habit of trying to get European and Asian customers to bid against one another might enhance Moscow's bargaining leverage, but it also creates doubts among the Chinese about Russia's reliability as a long-term energy partner.

The two governments also remain suspicious about each other's activities in Central Asia, where their state-controlled firms compete for energy resources. Chinese officials have steadfastly refused to endorse Moscow's decision to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which Russia pried from Georgia during the August 2008 war, as independent states. In East Asia, Russia has not supported China's extensive maritime claims, and has backed Vietnam, a major Russian arms client, in its bilateral dispute with Beijing, which is impeding the offshore operations

of Russian energy companies there.

At the societal level, culturally embedded negative stereotypes about the other nationality persist in both countries. Despite years of sustained efforts by both governments to promote cultural exchanges and the study of the other country's language, ties between Russians and Chinese remain minimal. Their political and commercial elites send their children to schools in Europe and the United States rather than to Beijing and Moscow. The Chinese media criticizes Russian authorities' failure to ensure the safety and rights of Chinese nationals working in Russia. Russians in turn complain about Chinese pollution spilling into Russian territory and worry that large-scale Chinese immigration into the Russian Far East will result in large swaths of eastern Russia becoming de facto parts of China.

The 2012 SCO summit in Beijing that followed the Russian-China summit confirmed the two countries' diverging priorities. The economic agenda of the summit, dominated by the Chinese proposal for an SCO development bank, stalled in the face of Russian opposition, as have earlier PRC proposals to establish an SCO-wide free trade zone. With Moscow increasingly wary of China's economic presence in Central Asia, the two countries are unlikely to come to an agreement on such matters in the near future. Putin's first visit abroad following his return to the presidency was not to Beijing, but rather to Belarus, followed by trips to France and Germany. The order of these visits is a clear signal of Putin's geopolitical priorities—to strengthen Moscow's influence in the former Soviet republics. His Eurasian Union initiative would exclude China from the former Soviet space and erect trade barriers between China and Central Asia. In the security realm, Russia plans to continue transforming the

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which excludes China, into Central Asia's primary multilateral security institution. In East Asia, the Middle East, and other regions, the governments of China and Russia have followed parallel but typically uncoordinated policies.

Neither country is the main economic partner of the other. Russians still look to the Europeans, especially Germany, as their standard, while viewing the other former Soviet republics as their main source of imported raw materials. China is also increasing its economic ties with Europe, but the United States still has primacy in Beijing's commercial calculations. Chinese and Russian business enterprises will need to work extra hard to realize their governments' ambitious targets for Sino-Russia trade, which is targeted to reach \$100 billion by 2015 and \$200 billion by 2020. They also will find it hard to address the imbalances in their existing two-way exchanges. China mostly buys Russian raw materials while selling Russians value-added consumer and industrial goods, sometimes made from Russian materials. Russians worry about becoming a natural-resource appendage of the Chinese economic power plant and complain that PRC investors avoid the Russian market in favor of easier opportunities in other countries. Chinese entrepreneurs think that Russia needs to make greater progress in its economic reform program.

Despite their mutual concern about American strategic ambitions, the governments of China and Russia have not undertaken any widespread collaboration to blunt them. For example, they have not pooled their military resources or expertise to overcome US ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems by, for instance, undertaking joint research and

development programs to create shared anti-BMD technologies. Nor have they coordinated pressure against other countries in Europe or Asia to try to force them to abstain from deploying US BMD assets, even in Central Asia or Northeast Asia, regions that border Chinese and Russian territories.

Until recently, Russian defense analysts were confident about maintaining military superiority over China for at least the next decade, but recent displays of growing Chinese defense capabilities, combined with a more confrontational manifestation of Chinese diplomacy, appear to be causing the same unease in Russia as in other countries. Russian arms controllers now openly cite China's increasing military potential as a reason why China needs to join future rounds of nuclear arms talks. The commander in chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, has also cited Beijing's interest in the Arctic as a reason to field a larger fleet. The Russian military is also undertaking its own Asian pivot. Although Russian rhetoric is directed against NATO and the United States, Russia's newest weapons now typically flow to eastern Russia.

The next few years will most likely see a continuation of this mixed pattern of relations between China and Russia, in which they loosely cooperate on a few issues but basically ignore each other regarding most others. But there are several potential developments that could worsen the relationship. Russian resentment could build as China continues to ascend to superpower status, which Moscow once held but has lost. A major Chinese military buildup could also alarm Russians as much as other neighboring countries, who already fear it. Alternately, Russian plans to create an EU-like arrangement among the former Soviet republics could irritate Beijing because

such a development could impede China's economic access to Central Asia. Russian diplomats may soon tire of Beijing's practice of hiding behind Moscow and relying on Russia to take the heat in blocking Western initiatives regarding Iran, Syria, and other global hot spots. The harmony between Beijing and Moscow in Central Asia arises primarily because the Chinese leadership considers the region of lower strategic priority than Moscow, which still regards it as an area of special Russian influence. This too could change.

A major worsening of China-Russia ties would actually represent a regression to the mean. The modern Chinese-Russian relationship has most often been characterized by bloody wars, imperial conquests, and mutual denunciations. It has only been during the last twenty years, when Russian power had been decapitated by its lost Soviet empire and China has found itself a rising economic—but still militarily weak—power that the two countries have managed to achieve a harmonious balance in their relationship. While China now has the world's second-largest economy, Russia has the world's second most powerful military, thanks largely to its vast reserves of nuclear weapons. But China could soon surpass Russia in terms of conventional military. Under these conditions, Moscow could well join other countries bordering China in pursuing a containment strategy designed to balance, though not prevent, China's rising power.

Heightened China-Russia tensions over border regions are also a possibility. The demographic disparity that exists between the Russian Far East and northern China invariably raises the question of whether Chinese nationals will move northward to exploit the natural riches of under-populated eastern Russia. Border tensions could increase if poorly managed development,

combined with pollution, land seizures, and climate change, drive poor Chinese peasants into Russian territory. Russians no longer worry about a potential military clash with China over border issues, but they still fear that the combination of four factors—the declining ethnic Russian population in the Russian Far East, Chinese interest in acquiring greater access to the energy and other natural resources of the region, the growing disparity in the aggregate size of the Chinese and Russian national economies due to China’s higher growth rate, and suspected large-scale illegal Chinese immigration into the Russian Far East—will result in China’s de facto peaceful annexation of large parts of eastern Russia. Although the Russian Federation is the largest country in the world in terms of territory, China has more than nine times as many people.

With the end of the NATO combat role in Afghanistan, an immediate source of tension could be Russian pressure on China to cease its buck-passing and join Russia in assuming the burden of stabilizing that country. Should US power in the Pacific falter, China and Russia might also become natural rivals for the allegiance of the weak states of East Asia looking for a new great-power patron. But for now such prospects linger in the background as Beijing and Moscow savor a far smoother relationship than the one they shared back in the day, when they competed to see which would achieve the one true communism.

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