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10 October, 2012

Article 1.	NYT <u>America's Role in the Middle East: It's Not Just About Us</u> Thomas L. Friedman
Article 2.	Stratfor <u>The Emerging Doctrine of the United States</u> George Friedman
Article 3.	Now Lebanon <u>Hamas in transition</u> Hussein Ibish
Article 4.	Los Angeles Times <u>A third option in Syria</u> Robert A. Pastor
Article 5.	Foreign Policy <u>American Jews Need to Stop Freaking Out</u>

	<p><u>About Israel</u></p> <p>Aaron David Miller</p>
<p><u>Article 6.</u></p>	<p>Scientific American</p> <p><u>Warning: Genetically Modified Humans</u></p> <p>Zaria Gorvett</p>

Article 1.

NYT

America’s Role in the Middle East:
It’s Not Just About Us

Thomas L. Friedman

October 9, 2012 -- Mitt Romney gave a foreign policy speech on Monday that could be boiled down to one argument: everything wrong with the Middle East today can be traced to a lack of leadership by President Obama. If this speech is any indication of the quality of Romney’s thinking on foreign policy, then we should worry. It was not sophisticated in describing the complex aspirations of the people of the Middle East. It was not accurate in describing what Obama has done or honest about the prior positions Romney has articulated. And it was not compelling or

imaginative in terms of the strategic alternatives it offered. The worst message we can send right now to Middle Easterners is that their future is all bound up in what we do. It is not. The Arab-Muslim world has rarely been more complicated and more in need of radical new approaches by us — and them.

Ever since the onset of the Arab awakening, the U.S. has been looking for ways to connect with the Arab youths who spearheaded the revolutions; 60 percent of the Arab world is under age 25. If it were up to me, I'd put Arne Duncan, the secretary of education, in charge of American policy in the Arab-Muslim world. Because we need to phase out of the cold war business of selling arms there to keep “strongmen” on our side and in power, and we need to get into the business of sponsoring a “Race to the Top” in the Arab-Muslim world that, instead, can help empower institutions and strong people, who would voluntarily want to be on our side.

Look at the real trends in the region. In Iraq and Afghanistan, sadly, autocracy has not been replaced with democracy, but with “elective kleptocracy.” Elective kleptocracy is what you get when you replace an autocracy with an elected government before there are accountable institutions and transparency, while huge piles of money beckon — in Iraq thanks to oil exports, and in Afghanistan thanks to foreign aid.

Meanwhile, in Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Iraq and Libya, we have also seen the collapse of the “Mukhabarat states” — Mukhabarat is Arabic for internal security services — but not yet the rise of effective democracies, with their own security organs governed by the rule of law. As we saw in Libya, this gap is creating openings for jihadists. As the former C.I.A. analyst Bruce Riedel

put it in a recent essay in *The Daily Beast*, “The old police states, called mukhabarat states in Arabic, were authoritarian dictatorships that ruled their people arbitrarily and poorly. But they were good at fighting terror. ... These new governments are trying to do something the Arab world has never done before — create structures where the rule of law applies and the secret police are held accountable to elected officials. That is a tall order, especially when terrorists are trying to create chaos.”

At the same time, the civil war between Sunni Muslims, led by the Saudis, and Shiite Muslims, led by Iran, is blazing as hot as ever and lies at the heart of the civil war in Syria. In addition, we also have a struggle within Sunni Islam between puritanical Salafists and more traditional Muslim Brotherhood activists. And then there is the struggle between all of these Islamist parties — who argue that “Islam is the answer” for development — and the more secular mainstream forces, who may constitute the majority in most Mideast societies but are disorganized and divided.

How does the U.S. impact a region with so many cross-cutting conflicts and agendas? We start by making clear that the new Arab governments are free to choose any path they desire, but we will only support those who agree that the countries that thrive today: 1) educate their people up to the most modern standards; 2) empower their women; 3) embrace religious pluralism; 4) have multiple parties, regular elections and a free press; 5) maintain their treaty commitments; and 6) control their violent extremists with security forces governed by the rule of law. That’s what we think is “the answer,” and our race to the top will fund schools and programs that advance those principles. (To their credit, Romney wants to move in this

direction and Obama's Agency for International Development is already doing so.)

But when we're talking to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or the new government in Libya, we cannot let them come to us and say: "We need money, but right now our politics is not right for us to do certain things. Give us a pass." We bought that line for 50 years from their dictators. It didn't end well. We need to stick to our principles.

This is going to be a long struggle on many fronts. And it requires a big shift in thinking in the Arab-Muslim world, argues Husain Haqqani, the former Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., from "us versus them to us versus our own problems." And from "we are weak and poor because we were colonized" to "we were colonized because we were weak and poor." Voices can be heard now making those points, says Haqqani, and I think we best encourage them by being very clear about what we stand for. The Middle East only puts a smile on your face when change starts with them, not us. Only then is it self-sustaining, and only then can our help truly amplify it.

Article 2.

Stratfor

The Emerging Doctrine of the United States

George Friedman

October 9, 2012 -- Over the past weekend, rumors began to emerge that the Syrian opposition would allow elements of the al Assad regime to remain in Syria and participate in the new government. Rumors have become Syria's prime export, and as such they should not be taken too seriously. Nevertheless, what is happening in Syria is significant for a new foreign doctrine emerging in the United States -- a doctrine in which the United States does not take primary responsibility for events, but which allows regional crises to play out until a new regional balance is reached. Whether a good or bad policy -- and that is partly what the U.S. presidential race is about -- it is real, and it flows from lessons learned.

Threats against the United States are many and complex, but Washington's main priority is ensuring that none of those threats challenge its fundamental interests. Somewhat simplistically, this boils down to mitigating threats against U.S. control of the seas by preventing the emergence of a Eurasian power able to marshal resources toward that end. It also includes preventing the development of a substantial intercontinental nuclear capability that could threaten the United States if a country is undeterred by U.S. military power for whatever reason. There are obviously other interests, but certainly these interests are fundamental.

Therefore, U.S. interest in what is happening in the Western Pacific is understandable. But even there, the United States is, at least for now, allowing regional forces to engage each other in a struggle that has not yet affected the area's balance of power. U.S. allies and proxies, including the Philippines, Vietnam and

Japan, have been playing chess in the region's seas without a direct imposition of U.S. naval power -- even though such a prospect appears possible.

Lessons Learned

The roots of this policy lie in Iraq. Iran and Iraq are historical rivals; they fought an extended war in the 1980s with massive casualties. A balance of power existed between the two that neither was comfortable with but that neither could overcome. They contained each other with minimal external involvement.

The U.S. intervention in Iraq had many causes but one overwhelming consequence: In destroying Saddam Hussein's regime, a regime that was at least as monstrous as Moammar Gadhafi's or Bashar al Assad's, the United States destroyed the regional balance of power with Iran. The United States also miscalculated the consequences of the invasion and faced substantial resistance. When the United States calculated that withdrawal was the most prudent course -- a decision made during the Bush administration and continued by the Obama administration -- Iran consequently gained power and a greater sense of security. Perhaps such outcomes should have been expected, but since a forced withdrawal was unexpected, the consequences didn't clearly follow and warnings went unheeded.

If Iraq was the major and critical lesson on the consequences of intervention, Libya was the smaller and less significant lesson that drove it home. The United States did not want to get involved in Libya. Following the logic of the new policy, Libya did not represent a threat to U.S. interests. It was the Europeans, particularly the French, who argued that the human rights threats

posed by the Gadhafi regime had to be countered and that those threats could quickly and efficiently be countered from the air. Initially, the U.S. position was that France and its allies were free to involve themselves, but the United States did not wish to intervene.

This rapidly shifted as the Europeans mounted an air campaign. They found that the Gadhafi regime did not collapse merely because French aircraft entered Libyan airspace. They also found that the campaign was going to be longer and more difficult than they anticipated. At this point committed to maintaining its coalition with the Europeans, the United States found itself in the position of either breaking with its coalition or participating in the air campaign. It chose the latter, seeing the commitment as minimal and supporting the alliance as a prior consideration.

Libya and Iraq taught us two lessons. The first was that campaigns designed to topple brutal dictators do not necessarily yield better regimes. Instead of the brutality of tyrants, the brutality of chaos and smaller tyrants emerged. The second lesson, well learned in Iraq, is that the world does not necessarily admire interventions for the sake of human rights. The United States also learned that the world's position can shift with startling rapidity from demanding U.S. action to condemning U.S. action. Moreover, Washington discovered that intervention can unleash virulently anti-American forces that will kill U.S. diplomats. Once the United States enters the campaign, however reluctantly and in however marginal a role, it will be the United States that will be held accountable by much of the world -- certainly by the inhabitants of the country experiencing the intervention. As in Iraq, on a vastly smaller

scale, intervention carries with it unexpected consequences.

These lessons have informed U.S. policy toward Syria, which affects only some U.S. interests. However, any U.S. intervention in Syria would constitute both an effort and a risk disproportionate to those interests. Particularly after Libya, the French and other Europeans realized that their own ability to intervene in Syria was insufficient without the Americans, so they declined to intervene. Of course, this predated the killing of U.S. diplomats in Benghazi, Libya, but it did not predate the fact that the intervention in Libya surprised planners by its length and by the difficulty of creating a successor regime less brutal than the one it replaced. The United States was not prepared to intervene with conventional military force.

That is not to say the United States did not have an interest in Syria. Specifically, Washington did not want Syria to become an Iranian puppet that would allow Tehran's influence to stretch through Iraq to the Mediterranean. The United States had been content with the Syrian regime while it was simply a partner of Iran rather than Iran's subordinate. However, the United States foresaw Syria as a subordinate of Iran if the al Assad regime survived. The United States wanted Iran blocked, and that meant the displacement of the al Assad regime. It did not mean Washington wanted to intervene militarily, except possibly through aid and training potentially delivered by U.S. special operations forces -- a lighter intervention than others advocated.

Essential Interests

The U.S. solution is instructive of the emerging doctrine. First, the United States accepted that al Assad, like Saddam Hussein

and Gadhafi, was a tyrant. But it did not accept the idea that al Assad's fall would create a morally superior regime. In any event, it expected the internal forces in Syria to deal with al Assad and was prepared to allow this to play out. Second, the United States expected regional powers to address the Syrian question if they wished. This meant primarily Turkey and to a lesser degree Saudi Arabia. From the American point of view, the Turks and Saudis had an even greater interest in circumscribing an Iranian sphere of influence, and they had far greater levers to determine the outcome in Syria. Israel is, of course, a regional power, but it was in no position to intervene: The Israelis lacked the power to impose a solution, they could not occupy Syria, and Israeli support for any Syrian faction would delegitimize that faction immediately. Any intervention would have to be regional and driven by each participant's national interests.

The Turks realized that their own national interest, while certainly affected by Syria, did not require a major military intervention, which would have been difficult to execute and which would have had an unknown outcome. The Saudis and Qataris, never prepared to intervene directly, did what they could covertly, using money, arms and religiously motivated fighters to influence events. But no country was prepared to risk too much to shape events in Syria. They were prepared to use indirect power rather than conventional military force. As a result, the conflict remains unresolved.

This has forced both the Syrian regime and the rebels to recognize the unlikelihood of outright military victory. Iran's support for the regime and the various sources of support for the Syrian opposition have proved indecisive. Rumors of political

compromise are emerging accordingly.

We see this doctrine at work in Iran as well. Tehran is developing nuclear weapons, which may threaten Israel. At the same time, the United States is not prepared to engage in a war with Iran, nor is it prepared to underwrite the Israeli attack with added military support. It is using an inefficient means of pressure -- sanctions -- which appears to have had some effect with the rapid depreciation of the Iranian currency. But the United States is not looking to resolve the Iranian issue, nor is it prepared to take primary responsibility for it unless Iran becomes a threat to fundamental U.S. interests. It is content to let events unfold and act only when there is no other choice.

Under the emerging doctrine, the absence of an overwhelming American interest means that the fate of a country like Syria is in the hands of the Syrian people or neighboring countries. The United States is unwilling to take on the cost and calumny of trying to solve the problem. It is less a form of isolationism than a recognition of the limits of power and interest. Not everything that happens in the world requires or justifies American intervention.

If maintained, this doctrine will force the world to reconsider many things. On a recent trip in Europe and the Caucasus, I was constantly asked what the United States would do on various issues. I responded by saying it would do remarkably little and that it was up to them to act. This caused interesting consternation. Many who condemn U.S. hegemony also seem to demand it. There is a shift under way that they have not yet noticed -- except for an absence that they regard as an American failure. My attempt to explain it as the new normal did not

always work.

Given that there is a U.S. presidential election under way, this doctrine, which has quietly emerged under Obama, appears to conflict with the views of Mitt Romney, a point I made in a previous article. My core argument on foreign policy is that reality, not presidents or policy papers, makes foreign policy. The United States has entered a period in which it must move from military domination to more subtle manipulation, and more important, allow events to take their course. This is a maturation of U.S. foreign policy, not a degradation. Most important, it is happening out of impersonal forces that will shape whoever wins the U.S. presidential election and whatever he might want. Whether he wishes to increase U.S. assertiveness out of national interest, or to protect human rights, the United States is changing the model by which it operates. Overextended, it is redesigning its operating system to focus on the essentials and accept that much of the world, unessential to the United States, will be free to evolve as it will.

This does not mean that the United States will disengage from world affairs. It controls the world's oceans and generates almost a quarter of the world's gross domestic product. While disengagement is impossible, controlled engagement, based on a realistic understanding of the national interest, is possible.

This will upset the international system, especially U.S. allies. It will also create stress in the United States both from the political left, which wants a humanitarian foreign policy, and the political right, which defines the national interest broadly. But the constraints of the past decade weigh heavily on the United States and therefore will change the way the world works.

The important point is that no one decided this new doctrine. It is emerging from the reality the United States faces. That is how powerful doctrines emerge. They manifest themselves first and are announced when everyone realizes that that is how things work.

George Friedman is an American political scientist and author. He is the founder, chief intelligence officer, financial overseer, and CEO of the private intelligence corporation Stratfor. He has authored several books, including The Next 100 Years, The Next Decade, America's Secret War, The Intelligence Edge, The Coming War With Japan and The Future of War.

Article 3.

Now Lebanon

Hamas in transition

Hussein Ibish

October 9, 2012 -- The recent exchange of attacks between Israel and militants in the Gaza Strip is unlikely to lead to a broader conflict, but it helps illuminate some of the dramatic changes happening within Hamas. It is yet another indication of the increasing willingness of Hamas factions in Gaza to resume not only countenancing but participating in rocket attacks against Israel. This, in turn, reflects the increasing influence and independence of more militant elements within the organization

and their strategy for trying to wrest control of Hamas away from externally-based leaders.

Hamas acknowledges that it has coordinated the rocket responses to Israeli attacks with its long-standing Gaza rival, Islamic Jihad. Gaza-based Hamas factions have worked diligently in recent months to repair their often-strained relations with Islamic Jihad, participating in its recent anniversary celebrations and making repeated declarations of common cause.

The power struggle is based on competing interests. The power and influence of the externally-based Politburo, which has traditionally dominated Hamas' decision-making, has been waning badly since its leaders had to abandon their headquarters in Syria. The rift with Syria, and by extension Iran, was underlined recently by unprecedented attacks against Politburo chief Khaled Meshaal by Syrian state media, which accused him of being, among other things, "a Zionist agent."

Meshaal has reportedly made it clear that he intends to resign as head of the Politburo, even though he probably still remains its single most influential member. But his decision to step aside reflects not only an intensifying power struggle between Gaza-based and external Hamas leaders, but also the growing crisis within the Politburo itself.

The external leadership has been unable to secure a stable, centralized base to replace Damascus, meaning that its members are scattered throughout the Middle East. This renders them less effective in every sense, particularly since under such circumstances they will inevitably develop distinct incentive structures based on relationships with different patrons that have varying interests.

Meshaal has been concentrating on developing Hamas'

relationship with Qatar. And Doha has attempted to cement its bid to become the organization's new primary patron, literally by announcing millions of dollars in reconstruction efforts in Gaza, and politically by announcing that it would open the first formal foreign diplomatic mission in the territory.

But Qatar's soft power, based almost entirely on financial clout, is proving no match for Egypt's hard power vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip. Hamas' hopes to benefit from the "Arab Spring" are still largely based on the conviction that in the long run it will enjoy a better relationship with a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Egypt. In reality, however, the new government of Mohammed Morsi has done nothing to aid Hamas or Gaza, and instead has tightened restrictions on the border and engaged in a campaign to destroy smuggling tunnels that has damaged Gaza's economy and undermined some of Hamas' most lucrative enterprises.

There has been such little progress with Egypt that Hamas has been reduced to ridiculous social campaigns in Gaza, such as arresting teenagers with hip hop-style baggy pants and prominent underwear, and extending its campaign against motorcycles in general and especially women riding on them. When political organizations can't achieve anything practical, crudely playing to the base is an appealing prospect. But this hasn't helped Hamas' extremely weak popularity with Palestinians in Gaza or in general.

It's ironically appropriate that Meshaal's apparent valedictory is to be whooped out of the "culture of resistance" by the very voices, such as official Syrian propaganda, that once trumpeted him as one of its most important leaders. Speculation suggests that the leadership battle to replace him will largely be fought between his longtime deputy and rival, Moussa Abu Marzouk, and his preferred successor, Saleh Al-Aruri. Aruri, a founder of

Hamas' paramilitary wing, is based in Turkey and would represent a last-ditch effort by Meshaal's faction to retain control.

Abu Marzouk's main appeal is that he is based in Cairo and has been focusing on developing relations with the new Egyptian government on which so much of what does and doesn't happen in Gaza will be based. If he does win, Hamas's external leaders will be doubling down on their bet that an Islamist-dominated Egypt will ultimately prove the group's salvation, even though there is no indication of this whatsoever to date.

There has also been speculation that Hamas' most prominent Gaza-based leader, Ismail Hanniyeh, could also be a candidate for the post, but that seems unlikely at the moment. In the long run, however, a shift from domination of decision-making by externally-based leaders to those based in Gaza will be difficult to avoid. This trend likely means that a more militant, radical and strident strain within the organization will become increasingly influential and will recklessly use tensions with Israel, such as those that have erupted in recent days, to advance its interests.

Hussein Ibish writes frequently about Middle Eastern affairs for numerous publications in the United States and the Arab world.

Article 4.

Los Angeles Times

A third option in Syria

Robert A. Pastor

October 10, 2012 -- The conflict in Syria was "extremely bad and getting worse." That's what Lakhdar Brahimi, special envoy to Syria for the United Nations and the Arab League and one of the world's most skillful diplomats, told the Security Council in late September. The major powers listened but offered no new ideas on how to end the crisis. We need to change direction.

Up to now, two strategies have been pursued. Kofi Annan, the former U.N. secretary-general and Brahimi's predecessor as special envoy, tried to negotiate a cease-fire and forge a consensus among the great and middle powers. That failed.

A second strategy has been to assist the fragmented opposition to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Assad. Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf states and Turkey have provided guns. Other governments, including the United States, are helping. The opposition is much stronger than when the uprising began 18 months ago, and it can now attack the regime almost everywhere. The opposition is encouraged by international support, and some seek foreign intervention to hasten Assad's fall. That is unlikely to happen.

The Syrian army remains strong enough to retake areas seized by the rebels, and it is being resupplied by Iran and supported by Russia. Assad retains some support in the country, and the security forces — led by family and his minority Alawite clan — have remained a potent force, despite defections. They are fighting hard because they fear that defeat will mean their annihilation. Moreover, the regime fears that compromise could be construed as weakness.

With the two sides balanced and resisting serious negotiations, the conflict won't be over soon. Indeed, Syria might very well be entering the second year of a decade-long civil war. Each year, the sectarian violence will worsen, atrocities will multiply, the most fundamentalist elements will grow stronger and neighboring countries will become more involved.

Some have urged the U.S. to increase military support for the opposition, but President Obama's caution is wise. If the U.S. goes down this road, it cannot afford to lose, but it is unlikely to "win" soon or inexpensively. Americans are weary of wars in the Middle East, and they learned in Iraq that winning can be elusive. In Syria, the winners might be jihadis, and one result could be a regional war by and against the Kurds.

This is the time for a new goal and strategy, and Brahimi is the man because it was he who defined the terms that provided Lebanon an exit from its long civil war. The goal should not be to overthrow Assad, however desirable that might be to many. The goal should be to construct a path to a political system that provides voice and vote for all Syrians, and institutional checks and balances to protect all minorities and sects.

What would the agreement look like? At the start of the uprising, the Assad government proposed reforms of election administration, political parties, the media and nongovernmental organizations, among others. That is the right agenda, but the reforms were so flawed that no one took them seriously. Last year, representing the Carter Center, Hrair Balian and I discussed with the Assad government an approach that would modify the reforms to make them credible and convincing to the democratic opposition.

Some senior government officials supported the idea, but at that time, the security forces were sure they could crush the opposition. They were mistaken.

As the government and opposition will not deal with each other, the special envoy should shuttle between them to craft credible reforms that could permit an internationally supervised election that protects all groups. A U.N. peacekeeping force would be essential to oversee and implement the agreement. With the conflict intensifying but stalemated, it is hard to imagine any serious leader denying the reforms.

Is democracy possible in Syria? It seems improbable. But the most likely alternative — a decade-long descent into self-destruction — is too awful to contemplate. The time might be ripe to place the weight of the international community behind a third option.

Robert A. Pastor is a professor of international relations at American University in Washington and the author of "The North American Idea." He is a senior advisor to the Carter Center on conflict resolution in the Middle East.

Foreign Policy

American Jews Need to Stop Freaking Out About Israel

Aaron David Miller

October 9, 2012 -- It must be something in the water.

Once every four years, rational, right-thinking Americans get crazy. Election ads clearly hype up an already polarized electorate. And right about now, on the hot-button issues of the day -- debt, deficit, who's leading from behind in foreign policy and who's not -- many Americans seem to lose the capacity to think for themselves.

Instead of weighing issues deliberately, coolly and logically, they (we?) freak out. Indeed, to borrow a phrase from poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (though this is really not what he actually meant), Americans tend to willingly suspend their disbelief and accept uncritically the wackiest notions on domestic and foreign policy.

And the more Americans seem to care about an issue, the greater that wackiness becomes.

Nowhere is this more apparent than on the Israel issue, where very smart and politically engaged members of the American Jewish community persist in turning the election into a dramatic battle over which candidate is better for the Jews. Indeed, lost somewhere in this very foggy and politicized Bermuda Triangle,

Jewish Republicans and Democrats trade dueling cosmic oaths about what may happen to Israel if their guy isn't elected or the other guy wins.

There's nothing terribly remarkable or new about any of this. American Jews care deeply about Israel and are always worried about its security and concerned about the level of American support. And they're constantly creating litmus tests to judge the candidates' fealty to Israel. Whether there's more hysteria this time around is hard to say. The dynamic in 1980 between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan and again in 1992 between George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton got pretty intense.

But sure enough, here we go again.

Too many Democrats want to pretend that Barack Obama is the most pro-Israel president in American history (see Joe Biden's [paean](#) to Obama). And too many Republicans want to believe that Mitt Romney is Israel's salvation and will rescue the Jews from the clutches of a sitting president they somehow think is a cross between Carter and Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

None of these morality plays, of course, bear the slightest resemblance to reality. There are indeed significant differences in the way Obama and Romney relate to the Israel issue. Regardless of who wins, however, it's just not going to make much of a difference in the U.S.-Israel relationship. Here's why.

Let's start with the president. I've written before that Obama really isn't Clinton (or George W. Bush either) when it comes to emotionally bonding with or intuiting Israeli fears and hopes. And his supporters -- both Jewish and non-Jewish -- should stop pretending that he is, or that he's a member of their synagogue's

men's club. This fantasy reached a truly ridiculous level when New York magazine ran a cover story portraying Obama as "the first Jewish president."

As perhaps America's best emoter-in-chief, Clinton, broke the mold in relating to Israelis (and Palestinians too) on a gut level. After all, it was Clinton who wrote in his memoirs that he loved Yitzhak Rabin as he'd loved no man -- a remarkable statement by any standard. I remember a high-ranking Israeli walking out of a meeting with Clinton wondering why he couldn't be their prime minister. And after Clinton's historic 1998 address to the meeting of the Palestine National Council in Gaza, a very frustrated Palestinian blurted out the very same sentiment.

Nor is Obama Harry Truman, as Biden keeps implying. Truman was frustrated and angry about Zionist pressure for statehood. But he was genuinely and spontaneously moved emotionally and morally by the tragedy of the Holocaust, the condition of refugees and the displaced, and the hopes for a Jewish state. And it showed.

Times were different then. And Obama is different now too. Part of it's generational. He was born after the Israeli occupation and spent most of his time not in the political world, where being good on Israel is as natural as breathing, but in a university environment where Israel is viewed as only one side of a coin, with the Palestinians on the other.

The president wasn't raised on the Paul Newman Exodus movie trope in which the Israelis were the brave cowboys and the Arabs were the hostile Indians. Indeed, his penchant for nuance, complexity, and detachment drives him to avoid seeing matters

in black and white. These skills might serve him well if he ever got a chance to get to real negotiations. But that's the point: His inability to connect emotionally as Clinton and Bush did may make it harder for him to get there in the first place.

No matter how hard his advocates keep trying to hype Obama's pro-Israel accomplishments (security assistance, defending Israel at the United Nations), it just doesn't seem to resonate. I had a similar experience during the Bush 41 administration, when I was trying to persuade a Jewish audience in Detroit of all the good the president had done for Israel -- taking care of Saddam Hussein, absorbing Russian Jews, and so on. After laying out my list, an elderly guy in the back raised his hand and asked, "If things are so great, why do I feel so bad?"

That same lack of a connection is mirrored at the very top today, where Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have struggled without finding much common ground. Despite differences on settlements and the peace process, Clinton managed to actually reach two agreements with Bibi. Likewise, Bush 43 managed a relationship with an even tougher Ariel Sharon, partly because he was just as prepared almost instinctively to give the Israelis the benefit of the doubt more times than not.

Obama isn't. Neither the Iranian nuclear issue nor the peace process seems to have yet created any real foundation for personal trust or chemistry. And it has led -- even four years in -- to perhaps the most troubled ties between an Israeli prime minister and an American president. Netanyahu bears his fair share of the responsibility. Obama doesn't believe Bibi is prepared to accommodate American interests, and Bibi thinks

Obama is bloodless when it comes to understanding Israel's own needs.

Obama clearly doesn't like Netanyahu's bravado or what he believes is his callous disregard for American interests. In this regard, Obama probably fits somewhere between Carter and Bush 41 when it comes to how frustrated they were with the Israelis.

But get a grip, people: Obama is not an enemy of the state of Israel. Biden is right to claim that security cooperation and the institutionalized components of the U.S.-Israel relationship are thriving. And while this piece of the relationship has a certain automaticity to it and has improved under every American president since Richard Nixon, Obama is not going to "throw Israel under the bus" and pursue an approach that jeopardizes Israel's security. No American president ever would or could.

It's equally unreal and fantastical for Jewish Republicans to see Romney as the savior of Israel or somehow as the guy who has the will and skill to solve Israel's tough challenges or to somehow make them easier to manage. Right now, a Romney presidency is only a counterfactual exercise. But there's very little on the face of it that would suggest that a President Romney would have any more luck than his predecessors in fixing these critical issues.

There's no doubt that the personal relationship between these two leaders will improve. And that's important. But there's no sense at all that Romney has any better ideas on Iran or certainly the peace process than Obama. Greenlighting an Israeli attack on Iran and ignoring the peace process may not be the best course

for Israel or America. Indeed, my own view is that on the nuclear issue, there will be little difference between the actual policies both would adopt and that in the end there will be more cooperation with the Israelis on Iran not less -- largely because Washington and Jerusalem will need one another to see this through without a disaster.

On the Palestinian issue, based on their track records, I have just as little confidence in Obama's activist approach as I do in Romney's professed policy of under-engagement. In any event, the road to an Israeli-Palestinian agreement is littered with challenges that will be tough to overcome regardless of who's elected. On the security side, both will continue to support maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge.

As for American Jews, I know they worry for a living. The history of the Jewish people impels them to do so. But when it comes to the health of the U.S.-Israel relationship, they ought to take a deep breath and relax.

The key indicator in choosing the next president shouldn't be the U.S.-Israel relationship. That's too big to fail -- shared values, a strong pro-Israel community, and the behavior of the Arabs and Iran will all sustain it. Indeed, there's little chance of a divorce here. And like a committed marriage, it will endure across moments of happiness and tension, as well as its fair share of ups and downs. In fact, should Romney become president and Netanyahu remain in power, I'd bet that within a year they'll be annoying each other too.

Instead, the key question American Jews need to ask themselves isn't whether Romney or Obama is good for the Jews, but who's

better for America. Indeed, particularly when it comes to domestic policy, where there are huge differences, American Jews ought to be far more focused on which of these guys would be better for their own country and less concerned about their policies toward somebody else's.

Aaron David Miller is a distinguished scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. His forthcoming book is titled Can America Have Another Great President?

Article 6.

Scientific American

Warning: Genetically Modified **Humans**

Zaria Gorvett

October 4, 2012 -- ANATOLIA, 9,000BC – The rising sun advanced over the hills, engulfing the arid land in a blaze of warmth. Below the amber sky lay a patchwork of wheat fields, in which a scattering of stooped figures silently harvested their crops.

Later, their harvest would be scrutinised, and only the largest grains selected for planting in the autumn.

A revolution was occurring. For the first time in 3.6 billion years, life had subverted the evolutionary process and began to steer it not with natural selection, but artificial selection. Selection pressures became synonymous with the needs of the architects; the farmers. The technique led to a widespread transition from hunter-gathering to agriculture, a shift that would transform human culture and lay the foundations for the first civilisations. Moreover, in their efforts to permanently remodel the characteristics of a species, early farmers were pioneers of genetic modification.

The modification of plants would later be followed by the domestication of animals, and perhaps eventually, human beings.

From the promotion of eugenics to justify genocide in Nazi Germany, to the mass-produced and homogenous population of Aldous Huxley's dystopian future in the novel 'Brave New World', to 'Frankenfood', genetic engineering has amassed a reputation as a treacherous pursuit. However, a recent development appears to have slipped under the public radar: human pre-natal diagnosis. Screening foetal genomes to eliminate genetic 'defects' may lead to incremental changes in the human genetic reservoir, a permanent shift in our characteristics and eventually, self-domestication.

The technique involves testing for diseases in a human embryo or foetus, and may be performed to determine if it will be aborted, or in high-risk pregnancies, to enable the provision of

immediate medical treatment on delivery. Until recently, pre-natal screening required invasive procedures such as amniocentesis, in which the fluid from the sac surrounding the foetus, the amnion, is sampled and the DNA examined for genetic abnormalities. The procedure can only be performed after the 15th week of pregnancy, and carries a 1% risk of miscarriage and the possibility of complications. In the light of such limitations and risks, the technique hasn't gained widespread popularity.

However, a research group based at the University of Washington in Seattle has developed an alternative. Their simple test can be performed weeks earlier than current pre-natal screening, and crucially, requires only a maternal blood sample and DNA from both parents. The technique exploits the fragments of foetal DNA in the mother's blood plasma, which can be strung together by sequencing each nucleotide many times, and then differentiated from maternal and paternal DNA by statistical comparison. It's quick, harmless, and may soon become widely available. Therein lies the problem. Such a tool is a powerful new route gleaning information about unborn offspring. The object of the exercise: to identify foetuses with the earmarks of genetic disease as candidates for abortion.

Inevitably, the technique is vulnerable to abuse and will empower parents to discriminate the characteristics of their progeny pre-emptively, in a step towards 'designer babies'. Nevertheless, there is a more immediate concern. Screening for inheritable disorders requires knowledge of their genetic basis, which can be dangerously precarious. Some conditions, such as Down's syndrome; characterised by the presence of an extra chromosome, are glaringly obvious. Others have more subtle

and complex genetic origins. Just as the invention of vaccines to prevent infectious diseases was followed by attempts at total eradication, our efforts to eliminate genetic characteristics may have permanent consequences.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has already been singled out as a potential target for the screening technology. The disorder, which is characterised by difficulties in communication and social interaction, and repetitive or stereotyped behaviours and interests, has a strong but elusive genetic basis. Intriguingly, there has been much speculation that the genes involved in the development of ASD may be linked to mathematical and scientific ability.

The theory has roots in the overlap between certain useful aptitudes in technical professions, and behaviour typical of ASD. An obsessive attention to detail, the ability to understand predictable rule-based systems, 'systemising', and a narrow range of interests, are traits characteristic of both groups. Professor Baron Cohen of the University of Cambridge is a strong proponent of the idea, and has suggested that scientist couples are more likely to have children with the disorder. It's a compelling idea with intuitive plausibility, but the evidence isn't there (yet). Until we know better, perhaps restraint is needed in eliminating these potentially important genes from our gene pool. There has been speculation that Einstein and Newton were 'on the spectrum'- what if we inadvertently 'cured' the future world of similar talent?

Will our descendants be less than human? Another candidate for remedy with reproductive technology is schizophrenia. The disorder affects cognition, and can lead to chronic problems

with emotional responsiveness. The 1% prevalence of schizophrenia makes it an apt target for prevention. However, the globally consistent and high incidence of this disease may be an indicator of its association with advantageous genetic characteristics. The ‘social brain hypothesis’, the main theory to explain the evolution of schizophrenia, suggests that the human brain evolved to select for genes associated with schizophrenia in a trade for higher order cognitive traits. These include language and the ability to interpret the thoughts and emotions of others. Schizophrenia is the cost that humans pay for being able to communicate, and as such, the genes responsible may be an essential component of the human gene pool. As with ASD, the elimination of the disease may have unintended consequences, and permanently alter the social dynamics within our species.

This mechanism, termed a ‘heterozygote advantage’, can arise from the benefits of carrying different forms of a gene, as opposed to two of the same variant, or ‘alleles’. The phenomenon has been proposed for a wide variety of genetic diseases; however usefulness is often dependent on environmental context. Because human lifestyles have diversified to such an extent from those of our ancestors, certain advantages may be outdated. The malaria protection conferred by carrying a single sickle-cell gene is hardly worth the risk of debilitating anaemia if you end up with two- especially in a modern world where anti-malarial medication is widely available. The systematic eradication of this disorder, and many others, will be a welcome and significant medical advancement. But caution is needed.

Following a recent project to build a comprehensive map of the

functional elements in the human genome, ENCODE, a function was assigned to 80% of our DNA sequence. However, our genomes are still poorly understood. Many sequences are multi-functional, and knowledge of mechanisms of gene expression is essential to any meaningful model.

We urgently need a regulatory framework for the use of procedures such as pre-natal screening, and to exercise restraint in gene eradication. A detailed assessment and forecast of the long-term consequences is essential before a potentially corrosive procedure become entrenched in modern society. The alternative: we might just end up domesticating ourselves.

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