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Article 1.

The Daily Beast

Bibi in a Box: Netanyahu Loses Support on Bombing Iran

Dan Ephron

September 24, 2012 -- Benjamin Netanyahu was fuming. For the first time in months, the Israeli leader had allowed a discussion in his security cabinet about Iran's nuclear program and it wasn't going well. Several cabinet members were questioning the wisdom of defying the United States, Israel's ally and protector, by weighing a strike on Iran before the American election in November, according to a source familiar with the details. The grinding back-and-forth went on for seven hours.

When it came time for the security chiefs to weigh in, at least two of them disputed the premise Netanyahu had been advancing—that Israel’s window for an attack would last only through this year, before Iran moves its nuclear components to hardened sites underground. “You can interpret the intelligence in different ways ... and some people were saying the time frame is longer,” the source told Newsweek. The next morning, leaks from the Sept. 4 meeting appeared in the Israeli press, prompting Netanyahu to cancel a second parley. Discussions at security-cabinet meetings are highly classified and the leak was unusual. For Netanyahu, the message was clear: members of his own government had reservations about his direction on Iran and wanted the public to know it. Netanyahu is in a box. After hinting for months that he would attack Iran if the Obama administration didn’t do more to stop its uranium enrichment, he now seems unable to marshal enough domestic support for military action. The setback could be temporary. His critics appear to be opposed more to the idea of disobeying Washington than going to war over Iranian nukes. (Some are deeply troubled by the public bickering between Washington and Jerusalem in recent weeks.) But the sheer scope of resistance at home—by members of the public; the military’s senior echelon; and now, apparently, Netanyahu’s defense minister, Ehud Barak—seems for the time being, at least, too vast to overcome. Barak’s shift marks the most significant change over the past few weeks. For much of the summer the defense chief had been Israel’s most aggressive proponent of quick military action. “Barak is even more hawkish than Netanyahu on this issue,” a former official who witnessed his decision making from up close told me in June. The source said Barak liked to tell people how, in the 1990s, he heard top

American leaders pledge repeatedly to Israel that Washington would prevent Pakistan from crossing the nuclear threshold. When Islamabad did eventually break out, testing its first nuclear devices in 1998, the Clinton administration condemned the action and then went about quietly adjusting itself to the new reality in South Asia. The lesson Barak absorbed, according to the former official: even ironclad American assurances are never truly ironclad. But the Obama administration has put in its time with Barak. At least a half-dozen times in the past year, he has made trips to Washington, where he usually meets with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Between the visits, U.S. military officials are on the phone with him almost every week. Though Barak denied in a recent Israeli newspaper interview that he and Netanyahu have moved apart on Iran, people who know him detect a change. “He was pressing on the Americans, and at some point he came to believe that they’re serious [about preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons],” says Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli diplomat who worked alongside Barak for years and is now a contributing fellow with the left-leaning Israel Policy Forum in New York. “I think he also came to believe that the price Israel would pay in the relationship [with the United States] would far outweigh the advantages” of an attack on Iran. Without support from Barak, who was an army general and one of Israel’s most decorated soldiers before turning to politics, it’s almost impossible to imagine Netanyahu undertaking an attack. Israelis tend to trust military figures more than politicians. In the past year, several retired security chiefs have come out against military action and gained wide public attention (former Mossad director Meir Dagan called it “the stupidest idea I’ve ever heard”). Any decision to go to war requires the approval of the security

cabinet, where current military and intelligence chiefs would weigh in. With Barak arguing against an operation, the already-reticent military brass would likely do the same. “Barak holds the key to any military action,” the former official told Newsweek. The weight of public opinion is also pressing on Netanyahu. Former prime minister Ariel Sharon used to tell people that to start a war, an Israeli leader needs broad public backing and an understanding with Washington (he learned the lesson from his disastrous invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which Ronald Reagan criticized and many Israelis opposed). Netanyahu has watched the polls move steadily against him for the past year. One of them, conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute in August, showed just 27 percent of Israelis support a unilateral strike—that is, an attack on Iran without a green light from the United States.

If it were earlier in his term, those poll numbers might not have been critical, but Netanyahu will be facing voters soon. His government has so far failed to pass a budget proposal for 2013, a sign that his coalition won’t last much longer. Though elections are scheduled for a year from now, analysts believe Netanyahu will be forced to bring up the date, possibly to March. A war between now and then—with fighting on several fronts and civilian casualties in Israel’s big cities—could well hurt Netanyahu in the ballot box. Netanyahu “reads polls for breakfast and he knows the Israeli public is not behind him [on Iran],” says Martin Indyk, a former ambassador to Israel and now director of the Foreign Policy Program at the Brookings Institution in Washington. “If Tel Aviv is under rocket attack and he’s at war with Lebanon, and he’s strained the relationship with the United States, that’s a very different context for him to

be going to elections. Netanyahu is not an adventurer. He's never started any war."

Of course there's always a first time—that's the fear in Washington. Even if some of Netanyahu's war rhetoric is explicitly designed to goad the U.S. into action against Iran, the perception of a nuclear Iran as a dire threat to Israel is real—and the military option remains very much alive. When President Obama phoned Netanyahu in early September to paper over the latest tensions between the two men, the Israeli leader sounded defiant, according to a source familiar with details of the call. He pressed for the U.S. to impose ultimatums on Iran over its uranium enrichment, but Obama refused. Like many of their other interactions, the conversation underscored the extent to which Netanyahu is more comfortable with Republicans in Washington.

The rub for the Israeli leader is that even some Republicans are now thinking an Israeli strike before the U.S. election is a bad idea. Karl Rove, the GOP's éminence grise, said on Fox News in August that a war now would cause Americans to rally around the president and likely clinch the election for him. The recent riots in the Middle East in response to an anti-Muslim video posted on the Internet seem to bear Rove out. Far from hurting Obama, they may have shored up his lead. "It's the kind of event that allows Obama to seem presidential, while [Mitt] Romney just looks politically craven," says Jim Gerstein, a Democratic pollster. For Netanyahu, that's one more obstacle—in a long list of them—to getting what he wants on Iran.

Article 2.

Ahram Online

Hamas & the Brotherhood: **Homogenous ideology but variant** **concerns**

Khalid Amayreh

23 Sep 2012 -- When Mohamed Morsi was finally declared the winner in the hotly-contested Egyptian presidential election on 23 June, Hamas's supporters in the Gaza Strip reacted almost euphorically.

Overwhelmed by a feeling of ecstasy, Islamists of all ages paraded the streets, distributing sweets and shouting enthusiastic slogans in support of Egypt's new Islamist president and his (their) mother party, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas's legitimate mother.

Many congratulated each others on the "historic Islamist victory," made possible thanks to the Egypt's January 25 Revolution.

The intense excitement was understandable. During the Mubarak era, especially in the final years of the deposed autocratic president's rule, Hamas and its allies suffered immensely as a result of what was perceived as Egyptian collusion with Israel against the Palestinian Islamist movement. Hamas's indignation at, and estrangement from, the Mubarak regime reached its highest point during the murderous 2008-9 Israeli blitz against the Gaza Strip, during which the Israeli army and air force attempted to destroy Hamas once and for all. Some Hamas leaders then spoke quite bitterly about the tacit

collaboration between the Mubarak regime and the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in "clipping the Islamist group's wings," probably in order to enable the Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas to reclaim the coastal enclave from Hamas's hands.

This is certainly what many Fatah leaders had hoped would happen then. (Some Fatah activists in the southern West Bank celebrated the Israeli onslaught, which lasted 23 days, by distributing sweets).

When the massive Israeli aggression ended with Hamas still alive and kicking, though badly beaten, the group's leadership became convinced of the existence of a tri-lateral conspiracy against the Islamist movement, with the accomplices being Israel, the Mubarak regime and Fatah.

Hamas knew that Mubarak was trying to complement and perfect the Israeli siege, not only by refusing to open the Rafah border crossing with Gaza but also by building a steel and concrete wall along the border in order to prevent Palestinian infiltration into Egypt through the tunnels.

The fact that the tunnels functioned as a vital though illegal route for supplying the thoroughly tormented Gazans with badly-needed consumer products was not of the concern of the Mubarak regime. Mubarak's main concerns were to obtain a certificate of good conduct from Israel and, therefore, the United States.

Undoubtedly, the Egyptian revolution generated a lot of psychological comfort for most Gazans, especially those with an Islamic orientation. However reality was far from being that simple. Some naïve Islamist leaders took the Egyptian Brotherhood for granted, thinking that the Islamist authorities in Cairo would be at Hamas's beck and call. Others thought the

mere fact of Islamists assuming power in Egypt would create a dramatic transformation in the daily life of most Gazans. Obviously, all these exaggerated hopes proved to be little more than wishful thinking on the part of a frustrated people suffering economic misery as well as the claustrophobia of an unrelenting Israeli blockade.

Then came the Ramadan terrorist attack on an Egyptian garrison near the Rafah border crossing on 5 August, which killed 16 Egyptian soldiers as they were preparing to break their fast. The incident also shook the Islamist leadership in Gaza, as sporadic reports alleged that at least some of the perpetrators crossed into Egypt via the tunnels.

Hamas condemned the terrorist act in the strongest terms and promised to carry out a thorough and swift search for any possible Palestinian accomplices. The terror attack, which came on the heels of a successful visit by Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniya to Cairo and meeting with President Morsi, was fully exploited by Fatah which accused Hamas of responsibility. Fatah argued that even if Hamas was not directly involved in the incident, it was still responsible and guilty since "all these extremist groups hatched under Hamas's cloak."

The claim was not exactly correct since most of the nihilistic Takfiri groups preceded and predated the appearance of Hamas in 1988.

Both Hamas and Brotherhood leaders accused Israel of standing behind the murderous attack. They explained that Israel alone stood to benefit from killing the Egyptian soldiers.

When a prominent Islamist leader in Gaza was asked to elaborate on these accusations, he said that it was quite possible that some of the perpetrators were working for the Israeli

intelligence, knowingly or unknowingly.

According to reliable sources, the Egyptian leadership was initially in no mood to even hear explanations and justifications, which really caused a lot of distress and mental anguish to the Gaza leadership.

Eventually, Egyptian intelligence reached the conclusion that even if some Gazans were involved in the massacre, it was highly unlikely that Hamas had any pre-knowledge of the terrorists' plans.

Nonetheless, the 5 August terrorist attack and its subsequent ramifications, including the destruction by the Egyptian army of some tunnel openings at the Egyptian side of the borders, did convince many within Hamas not to take their Egyptian brethren for granted.

Palestinian Islamists discovered that the Egyptian Brotherhood had different priorities and even variant agendas, mostly pertaining to the internal Egyptian arena.

Privately, the Egyptian Brotherhood set up three main red lines which they asked Hamas not to cross: absolute non-interference in internal Egyptian affairs, that Hamas should not drag Egypt into a military confrontation with Israel and, finally, that Hamas must make every possible effort to maintain security along the borders.

In return, Hamas wants to benefit from Cairo's moral and diplomatic umbrella. It wants two more things from Egypt under Morsi: first, unfettered movement in both directions of the border at Rafah and, second, a serious Egyptian effort to link Egyptian commitment to the Camp David peace treaty with Israel to the latter's behaviors toward the Palestinians.

The relative coyness of Hamas's expectations vis-à-vis the

Egyptian Brotherhood may surprise many. It seems there are influential people within Hamas who are convinced that the Big Brother in Cairo knows better.

Khalid Amayreh is a Palestinian journalist based in Dura, near Hebron.

Article 3.

Agence Global

Why do Arabs and Muslims Hate America?

Patrick Seale

19 Sep 2012 -- Faced with a dramatic outbreak of anti-American violence by Arabs and Muslims in a score of countries -- including the killing of Ambassador Chris Stevens in Benghazi -- the American reaction has been one of puzzlement, outrage and a thirst for revenge. Send in the Marines! Few Americans seem to understand that their country is paying for decades of grossly mistaken policies.

Take the Palestine problem. Most Americans have long since dismissed it from their minds and consciences. But Arabs and Muslims have not. Israel's 45-year-long oppression of the Palestinians -- the cruel siege of Gaza, the relentless land-grab on the West Bank -- remains a major source of humiliation and rage. The United States bears the prime responsibility because,

having sustained Israel in every possible way, it has failed to persuade it to give the Palestinians a fair deal. Some American presidents have tried to break the Arab-Israeli logjam but were defeated by domestic politics and by obdurate Israeli leaders. Jimmy Carter was defeated by Menachem Begin; George H W Bush by Itzhak Shamir; Bill Clinton almost clinched a deal before he left office but was sabotaged by pro-Israeli officials like Dennis Ross. Barack Obama's defeat by Binyamin Netanyahu has turned the huge hopes he first aroused into bitter disappointment. The poison of the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict continues to inflict grave damage on the United States and to threaten Israel's long-term future. There will be no peace in the region until a fair settlement is reached. But no president has dared exert American power in this cause. Not only has the United States failed to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, it has also built Israel up into the regional bully, and must therefore be judged complicit in its numerous assaults against its neighbours. The origins of this policy may be traced to Israel's comprehensive victory in 1967, which caused Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to view it as the guard-dog of America's regional interests. Kissinger's idea was to bolster Israel with funds and weapons in order to keep the Arabs down and the Russians out. His plan reached fruition after the 1973 October War, when he plotted to exclude the Palestinians from the post-war settlement and remove Egypt from the Arab military line up, thus laying the foundations for the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. "Remove a wheel, and the car won't run," was the triumphant Israeli version. Indeed, the Treaty guaranteed Israel's supremacy for the next three decades, while exposing Lebanon, Syria and the Palestinians to the full force of Israeli power. Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, killing 17,000 people. It

expelled the PLO and sought to turn Lebanon into an Israeli protectorate. Syria fought back; the man who was to serve as Israel's vassal was assassinated; and the American-brokered Israel-Lebanese accord was scrapped. But not before Israel seized Beirut and presided over the horrific massacre by right-wing Christians of 800 Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Israel remained in occupation of south Lebanon for the next eighteen years until driven out in 2000 by Hizballah guerrillas -- whom the United States still insists on calling 'terrorists'. Americans have rarely paused to ask themselves why they were attacked on 11 September 2001. Palestine was certainly a motive. Another was the severe punishment inflicted by the United States on Iraq in expelling it from Kuwait in 1991 and then in starving it over the next thirteen years with punitive sanctions, which are said to have resulted in the death of half a million Iraqi babies. Yet another major motive was the callous way the United States treated the tens of thousands of Arab fighters from across the region -- 25,000 from Yemen alone -- whom it had recruited and armed to fight the Russians in Afghanistan. Once the Russians withdrew in 1989, Washington dropped the mujaheddin. Large numbers of these 'Afghan Arabs', angry, alienated and battle-hardened, were let loose on the region. Some caused mayhem in their own countries; others joined Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaida.

George W Bush's 'global war on terror' after 9/11 was another grotesque misuse of American power. Instead of using police methods to hunt down Al-Qaida, the United States blundered into war in Afghanistan -- where, twelve years later, it is still inflicting and taking casualties. It then allowed itself to be tricked by Paul Wolfowitz and other pro-Israeli neo-cons into invading Iraq -- a country which the neo-cons, after the Iran-Iraq

war, saw as a possible threat to Israel's eastern front. Some 1.4m Iraqis are estimated to have died as a result of the occupation and destruction of Iraq, together with about 4,500 Americans.

This was the heyday of the militarisation of American foreign policy -- brutal wars, extraordinary rendition and routine torture, the expansion of overseas bases (including half a dozen in the Arab Gulf states), a grossly inflated military budget -- still around \$700bn a year!

The catalogue of blunders continues to this day. Instead of engaging with Iran as he promised to do when he came to office, Obama has waged an undeclared war against the Islamic Republic with 'crippling sanctions' and cyber attacks -- largely, it would seem, to prevent Israel from dragging America into yet another Middle East war. The chance of a 'win-win' deal with Tehran -- which would have allowed Iran to produce low-enriched uranium for electricity generation while giving up 20% uranium -- has been thrown away because Israel insists that Iran's nuclear industry be destroyed altogether. The United States is now attempting to bring down not just the Iranian regime but the Syrian regime as well, indeed the whole Tehran-Damascus-Hizballah axis which has dared challenge Israel's hegemony. Little Israel has now turned the tables on its mighty patron: Instead of Israel being America's guard-dog, it is the United States which has become Israel's guard-dog, harassing, sanctioning, demonising and waging wars on Israel's enemies on its behalf. Americans may have forgotten these facts, if they ever knew them, but the Arabs and Iranians have not. If this were not bad enough, Obama has authorised a vast expansion of U.S. drone attacks against alleged Islamic militants in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere, inevitably causing large numbers of civilian casualties and inflaming local populations

against the United States. On the receiving end of brutal American policies, it is hardly a surprise that Arabs and Muslims hit back when they can. Has the United States given the Middle East security? Or has it spread calamitous insecurity? Does the Gulf really need the U.S. 5th Fleet, squadrons of warplanes and thousands of infantry and armour? Is the U.S. presence stabilising or destabilising? Might it not be time to disengage? The Islamic revival, which has been such a striking feature of the Arab Spring, should be seen as a rejection of Western meddling and of Western controls, and a reaffirmation of Muslim identity. It is only the latest phase in the Arabs' long struggle for independence. The vile film about the Prophet Muhammad may have been the spark which set Arab and Muslim anger alight, but it was only able to do so because of the large quantities of highly combustible material around.

*Patrick Seale is a leading British writer on the Middle East. His latest book is *The Struggle for Arab Independence: Riad el-Solh and the Makers of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge University Press).*

Article 4.

The Washington Post

Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Israeli threats, nuclear program and Syria

David Ignatius

23 September -- Iran may be on the firing line, but President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was as calmly combative as ever Sunday, dismissing Israel's military threats and predicting that nothing will happen in the nuclear talks until after the U.S. presidential elections.

In an interview on the eve of his visit to the United Nations, Ahmadinejad seemed unfazed by recent months of speculation about bombing strikes or by the precarious state of Tehran's allies in Damascus. Instead, he talked often about politics — including a reference to what he saw as the war-weariness of the American public.

The hour-long conversation was a case study in the bob-and-weave style, and unrelenting self-confidence, that has made Ahmadinejad a survivor in Iranian politics and a particular nemesis for critics in the U.S., Israel and the Arab world. While he expressed a willingness to negotiate on a range of subjects, he retreated into generalities when pressed about details. His tone was calm, even in discussing a potential clash with Israel.

“We, generally speaking, do not take very seriously the issue of the Zionists and the possible dangers emanating from them,” he said early in the interview. “Of course, they would love to find a way for their own salvation by making a lot of noise and to raise stakes in order to save themselves. But I do not believe they will succeed.”

Asked if he thought Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was bluffing in his threats to strike Iranian nuclear facilities, the Iranian president said he agreed with that view and asserted that

this analysis was a “common consensus.”

Ahmadinejad’s bland self-assurance is partly a matter of style, for no politician ever wants to display weakness before his adversaries. But in this third interview I’ve had with the Iranian president, I had the sense that he genuinely believes the world is going Iran’s way. He sees an America that is facing reversals across the Muslim world — in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and most recently, in dealing with the Arab uprisings. Close U.S. allies such as Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak are gone, and Ahmadinejad is still standing.

In discussing Iran’s negotiations with the international group known as the P5+1, Ahmadinejad said Iran was willing to make a deal to limit its stockpile of enriched uranium. But he implied that the Obama administration wants to slow the negotiations down until after the November election, to avoid bargaining concessions that might embarrass the president.

“We have always been ready and we are ready” to make a deal that will address the P5+1’s concerns, he said. “But experience has shown that important and key decisions are not made in the U.S. leading up to national elections.”

Ahmadinejad observed at another point in the conversation: “I do believe that some conversations and key issues must be talked about again once we come out of the other end of the political election atmosphere in the United States.”

In talking about America, Ahmadinejad several times referred to a country that, in his words, is tired of “back-breaking expenses” of foreign wars overseas and where public opinion is trending against Israel. He didn’t cite evidence for these views.

“Will the people of the U.S. accept meddling and intervention in the affairs of others?” he mused at one point, before answering his own question. “I don’t believe so. I believe the people of the U.S. are peace-loving people.”

The Iranian president said Iran is eager to help broker deals to end fighting in Syria and Afghanistan. On Syria, which has been Iran’s Arab ally, he said he supported transitional elections for a new government. Asked if President Bashar al-Assad should be a candidate, he answered this was for Syrians to decide. It was hard to read whether this represented any step away from Assad.

On Afghanistan, the Iranian leader claimed he had no knowledge of a February 2011 invitation to Tehran for U.S. special representative Marc Grossman. But he in effect renewed the offer, saying that after the U.S. elections, Iran was ready for direct discussions with the United States about how to stabilize Afghanistan.

The most intractable subject in any conversation with Ahmadinejad is Israel, and Sunday’s discussion was no different. Pressed why he continued to make comments that Israelis regarded as hate speech, he parried back with a series of questions about Israeli occupation of Arab territory. Asked to affirm Israel’s existence, he wouldn’t.

Ahmadinejad’s term as president will end next year, so in theory this is probably his last visit to New York as Iran’s leader. But as he spoke Sunday, it seemed unlikely that this veteran counter-puncher will disappear from Iranian politics, or the world stage, without a fight.

NYT

America's Inevitable Retreat From the Middle East

Pankaj Mishra

September 23, 2012 -- THE murder of four Americans in Libya and mob assaults on the United States' embassies across the Muslim world this month have reminded many of 1979, when radical Islamists seized the American mission in Tehran. There, too, extremists running wild after the fall of a pro-American tyrant had found a cheap way of empowering themselves.

But the obsession with radical Islam misses a more meaningful analogy for the current state of siege in the Middle East and Afghanistan: the helicopters hovering above the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon in 1975 as North Vietnamese tanks rolled into the city.

That hasty departure ended America's long and costly involvement in Indochina, which, like the Middle East today, the United States had inherited from defunct European empires. Of course, Southeast Asia had no natural resources to tempt the United States and no ally like Israel to defend. But it appeared to be at the front line of the worldwide battle against Communism,

and American policy makers had unsuccessfully tried both proxy despots and military firepower to make the locals advance their strategic interests.

The violent protests provoked by the film “Innocence of Muslims” will soon subside, and American embassies will return to normal business. But the symbolic import of the violence, which included a Taliban assault on one of the most highly secured American bases in Afghanistan, is unmistakable. The drama of waning American power is being re-enacted in the Middle East and South Asia after two futile wars and the collapse or weakening of pro-American regimes.

In Afghanistan, local soldiers and policemen have killed their Western trainers, and demonstrations have erupted there and in Pakistan against American drone strikes and reported desecrations of the Koran. Amazingly, this surge in historically rooted hatred and distrust of powerful Western invaders, meddlers and remote controllers has come yet again as a shock to many American policy makers and commentators, who have promptly retreated into a lazy “they hate our freedoms” narrative.

It is as though the United States, lulled by such ideological foils as Nazism and Communism into an exalted notion of its moral power and mission, missed the central event of the 20th century: the steady, and often violent, political awakening of peoples who had been exposed for decades to the sharp edges of Western power. This strange oversight explains why American policy makers kept missing their chances for peaceful post-imperial settlements in Asia.

As early as 1919, Ho Chi Minh, dressed in a morning suit and armed with quotations from the Declaration of Independence, had tried to petition President Woodrow Wilson for an end to French rule over Indochina. Ho did not get anywhere with Wilson. Indian, Egyptian, Iranian and Turkish nationalists hoping for the liberal internationalist president to promulgate a new “morality” in global affairs were similarly disappointed.

None of these anti-imperialists would have bothered if they had known that Wilson, a Southerner fond of jokes about “darkies,” believed in maintaining “white civilization and its domination over the world.” Franklin D. Roosevelt was only slightly more conciliatory when, in 1940, he proposed mollifying dispossessed Palestinian Arabs with a “little baksheesh.”

Roosevelt changed his mind after meeting the Saudi leader Ibn Saud and learning of oil’s importance to the postwar American economy. But the cold war, and America’s obsession with the chimera of monolithic Communism, again obscured the unstoppable momentum of decolonization, which was fueled by an intense desire among humiliated peoples for equality and dignity in a world controlled by a small minority of white men.

Ho Chi Minh’s post-World War II appeals for assistance to another American president — Harry S. Truman — again went unanswered; and Ho, who had worked with American intelligence agents during the war, was ostracized as a dangerous Communist. But many people in Asia saw that it was only a matter of time before the Vietnamese ended foreign domination of their country.

For the world had entered a new “revolutionary age,” as the

American critic Irving Howe wrote in 1954, in which the intense longing for change among millions of politicized people in Asia was the dominant force. “Whoever gains control of them,” Howe warned, “whether in legitimate or distorted forms, will triumph.” This mass longing for political transformation was repressed longer by cold war despotism in the Arab world; it has now exploded, profoundly damaging America’s ability to dictate events there.

Given its long history of complicity with dictators in the region, from the shah of Iran to Saddam Hussein and Hosni Mubarak, the United States faces a huge deficit of trust. The belief that this deep-seated suspicion can be overcome by a few soothing presidential speeches betrays only more condescending ignorance of the so-called Arab mind, which until recently was believed to be receptive only to brute force.

It is not just extremist Salafis who think Americans always have malevolent intentions: the Egyptian anti-Islamist demonstrators who pelted Hillary Rodham Clinton’s motorcade in Alexandria with rotten eggs in July were convinced that America was making shady deals with the Muslim Brotherhood. And few people in the Muslim world have missed the Israeli prime minister’s blatant manipulation of American politics for the sake of a pre-emptive assault on Iran.

There is little doubt that years of disorder lie ahead in the Middle East as different factions try to gain control. The murder of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens in Libya, the one American success story of the Arab Spring, is an early sign of the chaos to come; it also points to the unpredictable consequences likely to follow any Western intervention in Syria

— or Iran.

As in Southeast Asia in 1975, the limits of both American firepower and diplomacy have been exposed. Financial leverage, or baksheesh, can work only up to a point with leaders struggling to control the bewilderingly diverse and ferocious energies unleashed by the Arab Spring.

Although it's politically unpalatable to mention it during an election campaign, the case for a strategic American retreat from the Middle East and Afghanistan has rarely been more compelling. It's especially strong as growing energy independence reduces America's burden for policing the region, and its supposed ally, Israel, shows alarming signs of turning into a loose cannon.

All will not be lost if America scales back its politically volatile presence in the Muslim world. It could one day return, as it has with its former enemy, Vietnam, to a relationship of mutually assured dignity. (Although the recent military buildup in the Pacific — part of the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" — hints at fresh overestimations of American power in that region.)

Republicans calling for President Obama to "grow" a "big stick" seem to think they live in the world of Teddy Roosevelt. Liberal internationalists arguing for even deeper American engagement with the Middle East inhabit a similar time warp; and both have an exaggerated idea of America's financial clout after the biggest economic crisis since the 1930s.

It is the world's newly ascendant nations and awakened peoples that will increasingly shape events in the post-Western era. America's retrenchment is inevitable. The only question is

whether it will be as protracted and violent as Europe's mid-20th century retreat from a newly assertive Asia and Africa.

Pankaj Mishra is the author of "From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia."

Article 6.

The Economist

China and Japan: Could Asia really go to war over these islands?

Sep 22nd 2012 -- THE countries of Asia do not exactly see the world in a grain of sand, but they have identified grave threats to the national interest in the tiny outcrops and shoals scattered off their coasts. The summer has seen a succession of maritime disputes involving China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan and the Philippines. This week there were more anti-Japanese riots in cities across China because of a dispute over a group of uninhabited islands known to the Japanese as the Senkakus and to the Chinese as the Diaoyus. Toyota and Honda closed down

their factories. Amid heated rhetoric on both sides, one Chinese newspaper has helpfully suggested skipping the pointless diplomacy and moving straight to the main course by serving up Japan with an atom bomb.

That, thank goodness, is grotesque hyperbole: the government in Beijing is belatedly trying to play down the dispute, aware of the economic interests in keeping the peace. Which all sounds very rational, until you consider history—especially the parallel between China's rise and that of imperial Germany over a century ago. Back then nobody in Europe had an economic interest in conflict; but Germany felt that the world was too slow to accommodate its growing power, and crude, irrational passions like nationalism took hold. China is re-emerging after what it sees as 150 years of humiliation, surrounded by anxious neighbours, many of them allied to America. In that context, disputes about clumps of rock could become as significant as the assassination of an archduke.

One mountain, two tigers

Optimists point out that the latest scuffle is mainly a piece of political theatre—the product of elections in Japan and a leadership transition in China. The Senkakus row has boiled over now because the Japanese government is buying some of the islands from a private Japanese owner. The aim was to keep them out of the mischievous hands of Tokyo's China-bashing governor, who wanted to buy them himself. China, though, was affronted. It strengthened its own claim and repeatedly sent patrol boats to encroach on Japanese waters. That bolstered the leadership's image, just before Xi Jinping takes over.

More generally, argue the optimists, Asia is too busy making money to have time for making war. China is now Japan's biggest trading partner. Chinese tourists flock to Tokyo to snap up bags and designer dresses on display in the shop windows on Omotesando. China is not interested in territorial expansion. Anyway, the Chinese government has enough problems at home: why would it look for trouble abroad?

Asia does indeed have reasons to keep relations good, and this latest squabble will probably die down, just as others have in the past. But each time an island row flares up, attitudes harden and trust erodes. Two years ago, when Japan arrested the skipper of a Chinese fishing boat for ramming a vessel just off the islands, it detected retaliation when China blocked the sale of rare earths essential to Japanese industry.

Growing nationalism in Asia, especially China, aggravates the threat (see [article](#)). Whatever the legality of Japan's claim to the islands, its roots lie in brutal empire-building. The media of all countries play on prejudice that has often been inculcated in schools. Having helped create nationalism and exploited it when it suited them, China's leaders now face vitriolic criticism if they do not fight their country's corner. A recent poll suggested that just over half of China's citizens thought the next few years would see a "military dispute" with Japan.

The islands matter, therefore, less because of fishing, oil or gas than as counters in the high-stakes game for Asia's future. Every incident, however small, risks setting a precedent. Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines fear that if they make concessions, China will sense weakness and prepare the next demand. China fears that if it fails to press its case, America and others will

conclude that they are free to scheme against it.

Co-operation and deterrence

Asia's inability to deal with the islands raises doubts about how it would cope with a genuine crisis, on the Korean peninsula, say, or across the Strait of Taiwan. China's growing taste for throwing its weight around feeds deep-seated insecurities about the way it will behave as a dominant power. And the tendency for the slightest tiff to escalate into a full-blown row presents problems for America, which both aims to reassure China that it welcomes its rise, and also uses the threat of military force to guarantee that the Pacific is worthy of the name. Some of the solutions will take a generation. Asian politicians have to start defanging the nationalist serpents they have nursed; honest textbooks would help a lot. For decades to come, China's rise will be the main focus of American foreign policy. Barack Obama's "pivot" towards Asia is a useful start in showing America's commitment to its allies. But China needs reassuring that, rather than seeking to contain it as Britain did 19th-century Germany, America wants a responsible China to realise its potential as a world power. A crudely political WTO complaint will add to Chinese worries. Given the tensions over the islands (and Asia's irreconcilable versions of history), three immediate safeguards are needed. One is to limit the scope for mishaps to escalate into crises. A collision at sea would be less awkward if a code of conduct set out how vessels should behave and what to do after an accident. Governments would find it easier to work together in emergencies if they routinely worked together in regional bodies. Yet, Asia's many talking shops lack clout because no country has been ready to cede authority to them. A second safeguard is to rediscover ways to shelve disputes over

sovereignty, without prejudice. The incoming President Xi should look at the success of his predecessor, Hu Jintao, who put the “Taiwan issue” to one side. With the Senkakus (which Taiwan also claims), both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping were happy to leave sovereignty to a later generation to decide. That makes even more sense if the islands’ resources are worth something: even state-owned companies would hesitate to put their oil platforms at risk of a military strike. Once sovereignty claims have been shelved, countries can start to share out the resources—or better still, declare the islands and their waters a marine nature reserve.

But not everything can be solved by co-operation, and so the third safeguard is to bolster deterrence. With the Senkakus, America has been unambiguous: although it takes no position on sovereignty, they are administered by Japan and hence fall under its protection. This has enhanced stability, because America will use its diplomatic prestige to stop the dispute escalating and China knows it cannot invade. Mr Obama’s commitment to other Asian islands, however, is unclear. The role of China is even more central. Its leaders insist that its growing power represents no threat to its neighbours. They also claim to understand history. A century ago in Europe, years of peace and globalisation tempted leaders into thinking that they could afford to play with nationalist fires without the risk of conflagration. After this summer, Mr Xi and his neighbours need to grasp how much damage the islands are in fact causing. Asia needs to escape from a descent into corrosive mistrust. What better way for China to show that it is sincere about its peaceful rise than to take the lead?