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Article 1.

The Washington Post

## **Obama vs. Israel**

[Charles Krauthammer](#)

March 9 -- It's Lucy and the football, Iran-style. After ostensibly tough talk about preventing Iran from going nuclear, the Obama administration acquiesced this week to [yet another round of talks](#) with the mullahs. This, 14 months after the last group-of-six negotiations collapsed in Istanbul because of blatant Iranian stalling and unseriousness. Nonetheless, the new negotiations will be both without precondition and preceded by yet more talks to decide such trivialities as venue.

These negotiations don't just gain time for a nuclear program about whose military intent the International Atomic Energy Agency is issuing alarming warnings. They make it extremely difficult for Israel to do anything about it (while it still can), lest Israel be universally condemned for having aborted a diplomatic solution.

If the administration were serious about achievement rather than appearance, it would have warned that this was the last chance for Iran to come clean and would have demanded a short timeline. After all, President Obama insisted on deadlines for the Iraq withdrawal, the Afghan surge and Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Why leave these crucial talks open-ended when the nuclear clock is ticking?

This re-engagement comes immediately after Obama's campaign-year posturing about Iran's nukes. Speaking Sunday in front of AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee), he warned that "Iran's leaders should have no doubt about the resolve of the United States." This just two days after he'd said (to [the Atlantic](#)) of possible U.S. military action, "I don't bluff." Yet on Tuesday he returned to the very engagement policy that he admits had previously failed.

Won't sanctions make a difference this time, however? Sanctions are indeed hurting Iran economically. But when Obama's own director of national intelligence [was asked](#) by the Senate intelligence committee whether sanctions had any effect on the course of Iran's nuclear program, the answer was simple: No. None whatsoever.

Obama garnered much AIPAC applause by saying that his is not a containment policy but a prevention policy. But what has he prevented? Keeping a coalition of six together is not prevention. Holding talks is not prevention. Imposing sanctions is not prevention.

Prevention is halting and reversing the program. Yet Iran is tripling its uranium output, moving enrichment facilities deep under a mountain near Qom and impeding IAEA inspections of [weaponization facilities](#).

So what is Obama's real objective? "We're trying to make the decision to attack as hard as possible for Israel," an administration official [told The Post](#) in the most revealing White House admission since "leading from behind."

Revealing and shocking. The world's greatest exporter of terror (according to the State Department), the systematic killer of Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan, the self-declared enemy that invented "Death to America Day" is approaching nuclear capability — and the focus of U.S. policy is to prevent a democratic ally threatened with annihilation from preempting the threat?

Indeed it is. The new open-ended negotiations with Iran fit well with this strategy of tying Israel down. As does Obama's "I have Israel's back" reassurance, designed to persuade Israel and its supporters to pull back and outsource to Obama what for Israel are life-and-death decisions.

Yet 48 hours later, Obama says at a news conference that this phrase is just a historical reference to supporting such allies as Britain and Japan — contradicting the intended impression he'd given AIPAC that he was offering special protection to an ally under threat of physical annihilation. To AIPAC he declares that "no Israeli government can tolerate a nuclear weapon in the hands of a regime that denies the Holocaust, threatens to wipe Israel off the map, and sponsors terrorist groups committed to Israel's destruction" and affirms "Israel's sovereign right to make its own decisions . . . to meet its security needs."

And then he pursues policies — open-ended negotiations, deceptive promises of tough U.S. backing for Israel, boasts about the efficacy of sanctions, grave warnings about "war talk" — meant, as his own official admitted, to stop Israel from exercising precisely that sovereign right to self-protection.

Yet beyond these obvious contradictions and walk-backs lies a transcendent logic: As with the Keystone pipeline postponement, as with the debt-ceiling extension, as with the Afghan withdrawal schedule, Obama wants to get past Nov. 6 without any untoward action that might threaten his reelection.

For Israel, however, the stakes are somewhat higher: the very existence of a vibrant nation and its 6 million Jews. The asymmetry is stark. A fair-minded observer might judge that Israel's desire to not go gently into the darkness carries higher moral urgency than the political future of one man, even if he is president of the United States.

Article 2.

Real-Clear-Science

## **Three Scientific Problems for Iran's Nuke Program**

[Tom Hartsfield](#)

March 8, 2012 -- Is it likely that Iran will soon have the bomb? Israel is worried enough to consider taking matters into their own hands. Other countries are throwing up [economic sanctions](#) and [trying to reign in Iran's ambitions](#). Chillingly, setting off a nuclear chain reaction as powerful as that which leveled Hiroshima requires less than 60 kg (130 lbs.) of uranium!

Why is it a struggle for an entire nation to assemble a lump of metal smaller than a volleyball and build a bomb around it? The answer is three-fold: (1) Fuel for nuclear weapons is hard to come by; (2) The design of the bomb is daunting; and (3) The brainpower to run the project is hard to assemble.

To build a bomb, Iran needs the chemical element uranium (U). A plutonium bomb requires less material, but it is almost certainly harder to design and build ([PDF](#)). Iran has little internal production of uranium, and there are [international agreements banning export to Iran](#). The country must rely on smuggling, illicit deals and its own slow internal production. Even more daunting is the amount of refinement necessary for naturally occurring uranium to become useful for weapons.

When the United States first developed an atomic bomb during the Manhattan Project, it spent more than \$15 billion in today's dollars. It

employed tens of thousands of skilled workers, required the largest building in the world at that time, [consumed more electricity than New York City](#) and took more than two years to produce enough uranium for one single bomb (used on Hiroshima). Today's technology lowers the cost, but it is still not easy to produce uranium suitable for weapons from scratch.

Uranium in the earth's crust is a 99.99% mixture of two isotopes. (Isotopes are elements that have different numbers of neutrons.) One isotope is U-238 with 146 neutrons, and the other is U-235 with 143 neutrons. Nuclear reactions, including inside both power plants and bombs, require U-235. However, natural uranium is only 0.7% U-235. (That is, there are merely 7 atoms of U-235 for every 993 atoms of the less useful U-238.) A nuclear power plant needs uranium to be purified to 3-4% U-235, while a nuclear bomb needs 90% U-235!

To put that into perspective: In order to obtain enough U-235 to make a bomb requires starting with at least 17,000 pounds of natural uranium. The next essential component is a design for the weapon. A critical mass of U-235 must be brought together to produce a sustained nuclear chain reaction. For U-235, that is about 60 kg. Usually this is accomplished by joining together two previously separated smaller pieces which weigh 60 kg combined. The tricky part is combining the pieces quickly or else most of the energy is lost and the bomb fizzes. Because the reaction produces neutrons (which sustains the reaction), a method to reflect them back toward the uranium is generally employed as well.

All known technical designs for nuclear bombs are kept extremely secret by the governments that develop them, so anyone seeking to build their own bomb from scratch must carry out a number of difficult calculations to refine and perfect a design. This is not hard in theory, but it once occupied some of the brightest physicists in the world for years.

The final essential component is scientific expertise. There are no Oppenheimers, Feynmans or Tellers in Iran. Aspiring nuclear scientists and engineers are not flocking to the country either. Iran's [research collaboration](#) in all scientific fields with the international community is among the lowest in the world; the United States for instance bans public funding of travel to Iran for scientific work. Thus they have a deficit of talent. Further, it appears that their scientists are [targeted for killing by](#)

[Israel](#). Iran may be resorting to desperate measures in their struggle to stop talent from leaving the country, as evidenced by their [arrest of a physics graduate student from the University of Texas last year](#).

A modern nation with strong scientific ties, abundant strong industry and a base of scientific and engineering expertise can produce a far more complex device in just a few years. However starting from scratch with little skill and almost no cooperation from the outside world makes the process vastly more difficult. So where does Iran stand in all of these areas? Information is difficult to come by, but the general picture is something like this.

The process of concentrating U-235 is known as enrichment. Iran uses devices called centrifuges to achieve this. First, the natural uranium is combined with fluorine to produce uranium hexafluoride (UF<sub>6</sub>), a gas. The centrifuges spin at a high speed, separating the gas by weight. UF<sub>6</sub> containing U-235 floats to the surface because it is lighter than the gas containing U-238. The U-235 is essentially skimmed from the surface, like fat off of milk, and centrifuged again. And again. And again. This process is repeated, perhaps for years, until the desired concentration of U-235 is achieved. Finally, the UF<sub>6</sub> is converted back to solid uranium.

Iran's largest known enrichment facility, the infamous Natanz, was sabotaged for several years by Stuxnet, the [most complex and technologically advanced computer virus ever designed](#). (Technically, Stuxnet is a "worm," which is a virus that does not reproduce through a host program, but on its own.) Amazingly, it is the first malware able to affect industrial equipment directly by targeting the control circuitry in machines and not just traditional computers. This means that infected machinery will malfunction on its own due to the virus even after all computers have been disconnected from it.

The worm also used four completely new attacks never used by any other virus to spread from computer to computer before making the jump into equipment. In some sense this is a super-virus, with an entirely new level of sophistication. It is unknown if Natanz has ever completely rid itself of the infection. Stuxnet was likely created by western governments specifically to accomplish this task. A [new enrichment facility](#) is now operational, however.

No one knows how far along Iran's bomb designs are. The only notable nuclear expert that Iran may be able to access is [Abdul Qadeer Khan](#), a gifted nuclear physicist, and the man who guided Pakistan as it developed small nuclear devices to escalate its arms race with India in the 1990s. Otherwise, standout talents are scarce for Iran, unless a government such as China or Russia lends clandestine aid. The country also faces a tough battle to raise its own experts due to the isolated nature of its universities and their relatively low academic reputation.

If Iran pours enough resources into this problem they will probably be able to achieve something through luck, persistent mediocrity and generous internal resource allocation. Though physics and geopolitics conspire against them, a nuclear Iran is a very real possibility.

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Article 3.

New York Post

## **'One State' — for suckers**

Amir Taheri

March 7, 2012 -- Last weekend's Harvard conference raised the profile of a new industry that's springing up to promote a "one-state solution" to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The idea is that Israel, Gaza and the West Bank should become a single state for both Arabs and Jews.

The one-state solution (let's call it OSS) isn't new; rather, it came after decades in which the Arabs favored a "no-state solution" (NSS).

In the early decades of the 20th century, as Jews started migrating en masse to their ancient homeland and building their state, Arabs regarded Palestine (Ottoman provinces controlled by Britain after World War I) as just another chunk of their territory and rejected the idea of a distinct Palestinian people.

Syria claimed that Palestine had always been part of its territory. Iraq sought Palestine for access to the Mediterranean. Egypt believed that, as the most populous Arab state, it should annex Palestine. And Trans-Jordan

(later Jordan), a state carved out of the largest chunk of Palestine by Britain for its Arab clients from neighboring Hejaz, hoped to absorb the remainder. With all these countries coveting the Palestinian territories, the UN's 1947 proposed partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state met a united Arab rejection front.

The Arab-Israeli war of 1948, in which Egypt, Syria and Jordan seized chunks of the proposed Palestinian Arab state, didn't kill the no-state solution, but gave it a new dimension. The Arabs supported the NSS until 1974, when they implicitly recognized the Palestinians' right to a state of their own. Although they didn't specify the location of the putative Palestinian state, their refusal to recognize Israel implied a desire to see it wiped off the map.

The no-state solution had been built on the hope that Britain could be persuaded to hand the remainder of Palestine to one of its Arab allies. The one-state solution implicitly demands Israel's destruction to allow for the emergence of a Palestinian Arab state.

The Camp David accords marked the beginning of a slow Arab switch to a two-state solution. With the Oslo accords of the 1990s, even the Palestine Liberation Organization accepted the two-state goal, at least implicitly. Under President George W. Bush, the United States committed itself to working for it.

Yet the old one-state solution found new advocates in Libya, Iraq and Iran. The late Col. Moammar Khadafy and Saddam Hussein and Iran's "Supreme Guide" Ayatollah Ali Khamenei argued that the so-called "South African model" could be applied to Israel — a single state of Palestine in which Arabs would form a majority with some "native Jews" allowed to remain as a minority.

The Palestinian Hamas movement, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, committed itself to the OSS in the 1990s.

In Israel, however, support for a two-state solution has risen dramatically in the last decade. Some marginal groups still dream of annexing the West Bank and forcing its Palestinian inhabitants to "transfer" to other Arab countries, but polling shows that a majority of Israelis would vote for a two-state solution.

So why would anyone promote a one-state solution when majorities both in Israel and among Palestinians seek a two-state one?

Because the OSS is not a solution at all: It's a cover for a hidden agenda to deny Israel's right to exist and the Palestinians' right to a state of their own. The OSS is the political version of a suicide attack — and, as in a suicide attack, those who promote it are never those who carry it out.

The advocates of a one-state solution are in Tehran and in US universities, including Harvard — but not in Israel or the Palestinian territories.

But those who are supposed to implement the OSS — that is to say, commit political suicide — are Palestinians who are invited to abandon their aspirations for statehood in favor of the “wipe Israel off the map” agenda.

The least that OSS advocates could do is to have the decency not to present their conferences as scholarly “quests for peace.”

Article 4.

Guardian

## **Hamas is making a tactical appeal to the grassroots**

[Tareq Baconi](#)

8 March 2012 -- Hamas officials have said that in the event of a war between Iran and Israel, [they will not become involved on Tehran's side](#). While this is not surprising, other officials within the movement were [quick to deny such reports](#).

Historically, Hamas has always gone to great lengths to assert its independence from any foreign influence. It is widely recognised that it receives support from powers such as Syria (until recently) and Iran. Yet this has never been worn as a badge of honour by the movement.

Rather, its leadership has consistently asserted that the movement cannot be influenced or directed by any external power. It has insisted that it charts its course based on the will of the people – in stark contrast to Fatah and its leadership, who have frequently been portrayed as the pawns of western powers and Israel.

Hamas, which governs Gaza, is also territorialised, limiting its resistance to historic Palestine. Unlike the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and perhaps because of lessons learned from it, Hamas has rarely if ever meddled in regional or global affairs, either rhetorically or through acts of resistance.

Even its sporadic bouts of tension with Jordan were more due to the regime's discomfort at having an active Islamic party in its backyard and less about Hamas carrying out resistance activities from the kingdom. Being territorialised also meant that Hamas limited its war to a well-defined battle: that of liberating Palestine from "Zionist occupation". Siding with Iran in the much-hyped potential conflict with Israel would act against all these long-standing principles. It would flagrantly present the movement as an entity which is being influenced by an external player. More importantly however, it would demonstrate that the movement is fighting a tangential battle rather than what it sees as its historic one. On the other hand, it could be argued that Hamas's cause is aligned with that of Iran, especially since it has long acted as the movement's benefactor. But using this to justify extending Hamas's support to Iran would be one step removed from Hamas's *raison d'être*. Hamas firing rockets into Israel would really not be fighting the Palestinian battle any more; it would be fighting Iran's battle on a Palestinian playground. Rather than asking why Hamas would decide not to actively side with Iran, though, a more interesting question is why Hamas would feel the need to say so now.

If anything, this move comes on the heels of several recent manoeuvres aimed at better aligning Hamas with regional changes. The recent tour of the region by Ismail Haniyeh climaxed with [explicit support](#) for the people of Syria against a brutal regime. Also, [Khaled Meshaal](#) recently declared his intention to form a [Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood](#), suggesting a desire to capitalise on the democratic rise of "moderate" Islamic parties in regional politics.

Significant differences clearly exist among Hamas's leadership but they do not conceal its collective recent push to secure a formalised political role in the Palestinian establishment. The differences appear to be mostly about the means to achieve this goal.

Siding with Iran in what would be a high-profile and explosive conflict would ruin such efforts. Hamas would immediately incur the ire of the international community and risk being isolated once more – all to salvage a relationship with Iran that has already been severely weakened. If anything, Hamas has already clarified its choices when its leadership moved out of Syria, much to the chagrin of both Syria and Iran.

Rather than positioning itself as Iran's proxy, parts of the movement are trying to pre-emptively distance Hamas from the Islamic Republic and sticking to its principle of fighting solely for Palestinian liberation.

At a time when people at the grassroots are calling the shots across the region, Hamas is prudently differentiating itself from other regimes and parties by visibly siding with the people.

This is not a new concept for Hamas, since it has always derived its legitimacy and popularity from Palestinians. Hamas feels – probably rightly – that it can capitalise on the changes sweeping the region. This will almost certainly be more rewarding than defending Iran for a potential, but improbable, return to financial support.

*Tareq Baconi has an MPhil in international relations from Cambridge and is currently completing his PhD specialising in Hamas at King's College, London.*

Article 5.

Ma'an News Agency

## **Study: 37 percent of Palestinian women exposed to violence by husbands**

08/03/2012 -- RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- Some 37 percent of Palestinian women were exposed to violence by their husbands in 2011, says a new study revealed on International Women's Day.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics says the highest percentage of the phenomenon was reported in Gaza, where 58.1 percent of women were

subject to violence by their husbands.

The Ramallah and Al Bireh district witnessed the lowest rates of domestic violence against women for 2011, with 14.2 percent of wives exposed to violence.

International Women's Day is a national holiday in Palestine, which has a population of around 2 million women.

PCBS revealed that in 2012, literacy rates among Palestinian women have risen but are still lower than men's literacy rates.

Men's participation in the labor force is four times that of women while women's daily wages are 16 percent lower than men's.

Unemployment rates among women have risen by over 15 percent over the last decade, reaching 28.4 percent in 2011.

UN Women notes that women's participation in the labor force in Palestine is among the lowest in the world, particularly in rural areas.

Many women are employed in the agricultural sector on an informal basis, and UN Women is focusing efforts on enhancing rural women's economic security and rights.

The UN agency is cooperating with the Palestinian Authority Education Ministry in a project funded by Norway to support 200 female entrepreneurs who prepare and sell subsidized healthy meals to 70,000 school children.

In a message to mark International Women's Day, UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet noted that rural women and girls comprise one in four people worldwide yet they faced "some of the worst inequities in access to social services and land and other productive assets."

Rural women work long hours with little or no pay to produce a large proportion of the food grown to sustain their families, communities and nations, Bachelet said.

"No enduring solution to the major changes of our day—from climate change to political and economic instability—can be solved without the full empowerment and participation of the world's women. We simply can no longer afford to leave women out."

# **America and the Crisis of Global Power**

[Zbigniew Brzezinski](#)

March 08, 2012 -- The argument that America's decline would generate global insecurity, endanger some vulnerable states, produce a more troubled North American neighborhood, and make cooperative management of the global commons more difficult is not an argument for U.S. global supremacy.

In fact, the strategic complexities of the world in the 21st century — resulting from the rise of a politically self-assertive global population and from the dispersal of global power — make such supremacy unattainable. But in this increasingly complicated geopolitical environment, an America in pursuit of a new, timely strategic vision is crucial in helping the world avoid a dangerous slide into international turmoil.

America's global standing in the decades ahead will depend on its successful implementation of purposeful efforts to overcome its drift toward a socioeconomic obsolescence and to shape a new and stable geopolitical equilibrium on the world's most important continent by far, Eurasia.

America can significantly upgrade its domestic condition and redefine its central international role in keeping with the new objective and subjective conditions of the 21st century. But, in order to achieve this, it is essential that America undertake a national effort to enhance the public's understanding of America's changing, and potentially dangerous, global circumstances.

America's inherent assets still justify cautious optimism that such a renewal can refute the prognoses of America's inevitable decline and global irrelevance. But public ignorance of the growing overall vulnerability of America's domestic and foreign standing must be tackled deliberately, head-on, and from the top down.

In America, truly comprehensive national decisions require a unique degree of consensus, generated by dramatic and socially compelling circumstances (such as, at their extreme, a great financial crisis or an

imminent external threat) and/or propelled by the persuasive impact of determined national leadership. And since only the President has a voice that resonates nationally, the President must drive America's renewal forward.

Thus, America's central challenge and its geopolitically imperative mission over the next several decades is to revitalize itself and to promote a larger and more vital West, while simultaneously buttressing a complex balance in the East, so as to accommodate constructively China's rising global status and avert global chaos.

Without a stable geopolitical balance in Eurasia promoted by a domestically renewed America, progress on the issues of central importance to social well-being and ultimately to human survival would stall. America's failure to pursue an ambitious transcontinental geopolitical vision would likely accelerate the decline of the West and prompt greater instability in the East. In Asia, national rivalries, foremost between China and India and Japan, would contribute to greater regional tensions while eventually intensifying the latent hostility between China and America, to the detriment of both.

#### Enlarging the West

Alternatively, a successful American effort to enlarge the West, making it the world's most stable and also most democratic zone, would seek to combine power with principle. A cooperative larger West — extending from North America through Europe into Eurasia and embracing Turkey and a truly democratizing Russia — would geographically reach Japan, the first Asian state to embrace democracy successfully, as well as South Korea. That wider outreach would enhance the appeal of its core principles to other cultures, and thus encourage the gradual emergence in the decades ahead of varied forms of a universal democratic political culture.

At the same time, America should continue to engage cooperatively in the energetic and financially influential but also potentially conflicted East. If America and China can accommodate each other on a broad range of issues, the prospects for stability in Asia will be greatly increased.

Hence, to respond effectively in both the western and eastern parts of Eurasia, America must adopt a dual role. It must be the promoter and guarantor of greater and broader unity in the West, and it must be the balancer and conciliator between the major powers in the East.

Both roles are essential — and each is needed to reinforce the other. But to have the credibility and the capacity to pursue both successfully, America needs to show the world that it has the will to renovate itself at home.

*Editor's note: This essay is an excerpt from [Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power](#) by Zbigniew Brzezinski (Basic Books).*

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Article 7.

[Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)

## **The Kingdom Divided**

[Elham Fakhro](#)

March 8, 2012 -- Saudi Arabia's "day of rage" planned for last March failed to gain ground, and protests concentrated in the Eastern Province fell short of producing a national consensus around demands for political reform. The country's domestic stability has been attributed to a combination of three factors: the regime's ability to rely on an influx of oil reserves to buy-off political unrest, its domestic alliance with a conservative religious establishment and powerful tribal groups as a means of dividing and controlling sources of dissent, and the long-standing support of Western powers for external security. While in recent years growing economic challenges have weakened some of the regime's most reliable pillars of stability and pockets of opposition inside the country have grown, the inability of such groups to mobilize collectively or otherwise offer a unified vision of reform has hindered the growth of serious challenges to the current order.

The reality for most Saudis is far-removed from the Kingdom's reputation for extravagance. Official unemployment stands at 10 percent, but unofficial estimates place it as high as 20 percent. The [latest official figures](#) reveal that 670,000 families—approximately 3 million out of a total population of 18 million—live in poverty. Nor is hardship restricted to rural areas: a recent [documentary](#) on poverty in Riyadh, Maloub Alayna (The Joke's on Us) recorded testimonies of families living on one meal a day, with as many as twenty people living in the same home.

Saudi Arabia's position as the leading exporter of oil is threatened by unrestrained domestic fuel consumption, which grows at [7 percent annually](#). At this rate, the Kingdom is set to become a net oil importer within the next twenty-five years. Long-term plans to diversify the economy have made little impact: the government derives almost [75 percent of its revenue](#) and 90 percent of export earnings from oil, and the country still has the lowest GDP per capita within the Gulf Cooperation Council—lower than Oman or Bahrain. Economic handouts to quell unrest—such as the \$130 billion spending package announced last year to increase welfare benefits and construct 500,000 new housing units—are unsustainable and likely to lead to growing discontent over distribution of the country's oil wealth.

While sustained opposition movements continue to battle for their own Saudi Spring, their success hinges on their ability to unite around a common and national set of political demands—and lay to rest the demons of tribalism and sectarianism.

Among the more successful of the regime's strategies to maintain power is its historic alliance with the religious establishment. By co-opting the ultra-conservative Wahhabi base, the Al Saud have built a state fused around a single cultural and religious identity, to the exclusion of competing historic identities from the Hejaz and Eastern parts of the country. The benefits of this alliance to the regime are clear: as opposition activists began to mobilize in early 2011, the country's Council of Senior Scholars issued a [fatwa](#) denouncing protests as “un-Islamic,” stating that “Islam strictly prohibits protests in the Kingdom because the ruler here rules by God's will.” In addition, [key ministerial and military positions](#) have been delegated to a core of wealthy tribal families--institutionalizing powerful loyalties within the state and creating a strong elite with vested interests in the status quo.

These alliances, coupled with harsh punishments towards dissent, have thus far succeeded in suppressing the growth of liberal reformist movements. In November, sixteen men were given [lengthy prison sentences](#) after they attempted to set up a human rights organization. The founder of another organization, the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, was arrested last May, as were ten founding members of the Islamic Umma Party—which demanded greater representation and an end

to absolute monarchy. During the past year, hundreds of citizens were also detained across the country under security-related charges. Moreover, a new anti-terrorism law is [reportedly](#) under discussion that will allow extended detention without charge under such broad definitions of terrorism as “endangering national unity” and “undermining the status of the Kingdom in the world.”

The most vocal constituency of those calling for reform are Shi‘a activists in the Eastern Province. Although home to 90 percent of the country’s oil reserves, the region is one of Saudi Arabia’s most impoverished, and its residents have long complained of sectarian discrimination. Shi‘a are excluded from both cabinet ministries and the armed forces, and educational textbooks routinely refer to them as apostates. Fatwas by senior clerics (such as the one issued in 1991 by former head of the Higher Council of Ulama Abdullah al-Jibrin) have even gone as far as sanctioning their killing. As recently as 2009, religious and community leaders in the region were arrested for participating in ‘Ashura religious ceremonies. Institutionalized discrimination has fueled affinity with other Shi‘a abroad. Affinity to Bahrain’s community is strong as a result of a shared sense of victimization and historical connections between the two populations: both come from the Baharna ethnic group, speak the same dialect of Arabic, and historically belong to the extended region of Bahrain (once encompassing areas in southern Iraq and the eastern cities of al-Ahsa and Qatif). In recent years, Saudi Shi‘a have expressed these grievances through petitions, such as the 2003 [“Partners in the Nation.”](#)

The February 2011 protests in Bahrain provided the necessary spark to re-energize activists in the Eastern Province. Facebook pages like “AlQatif and AlHasa are with Bahrain’s noble revolution” and “AlQatif and Bahrain Are One People” attracted thousands and provided a platform to share photos of martyred protesters, revolutionary songs, and Bahraini activists’ speeches. Mimicking Bahrain’s protesters, chants of “no to humiliation” echo during Friday marches in cities such as Qatif, attracting hundreds of protesters. Security forces often swiftly descend on these protests, and activists have accused them of firing live ammunition. At least two demonstrators were killed last month as a result of shotgun wounds in addition to the two killed in [January](#). The state officially denies responsibility for such deaths, claiming they were killed in “crossfire” with

armed groups. Like the Bahraini government, the Saudi regime has depicted activists as backed by Iran and accused them of sedition. Saudi Arabia's position as the leading exporter of oil is threatened by unrestrained domestic fuel consumption, which grows at [7 percent annually](#). At this rate, the Kingdom is set to become a net oil importer within the next twenty-five years.

While Shi'a activists and liberal reformists have faced the brunt of the state's crackdown, the government has also been careful to check the power of even its most loyal constituency. In mid-January, King Abdullah sacked the head of the moral police amidst growing complaints that that organization was growing too aggressive. This follows the sacking of a prominent cleric from the country's Higher Council of Ulama in 2009 for [denouncing](#) the King's decision to allow gender integration in a new science university. Wary of losing their privileged status, the country's most conservative elements have also criticized the King for granting women the right to vote in municipal elections, accusing the regime of floundering to Western influence. Occasional public disagreements, however, have not disrupted the roots of the alliance which both sides recognize as critical to checking other potential sources of unrest, including that stemming from militant fundamentalists who question the ruling family's claim to govern according to shari'a.

While Saudi's opposition remains deeply divided along sectarian (as well as tribal and ethnic) lines, the country faces a host of challenges that may provide the opportunity for the formation of cross-sectarian and cross-political alliances along a common set of demands, as demonstrated in 2003 when a group of liberals and Islamists from various sects signed a petition calling for democratic change. The deteriorating economic situation and growing unemployment are additional challenges atop questions regarding the line of succession, which does not define a process for passing power beyond the first generation of the Kingdom's founders. Disputes within the second and third generation of the royal family—who have competing visions on the pace and direction of reform—might provide the opportunity for a reshuffle of alliances as new leaders seek to develop their own spaces of power. While sustained opposition movements continue to battle for their own Saudi Spring, their success hinges on their

ability to unite around a common and national set of political demands—and lay to rest the demons of tribalism and sectarianism.

*Elham Fakhro is a research associate for international law at the International Institute for Strategic Studies-Middle East.*

Article 8.

Asia Times

## **Syria: Straining credulity?**

Alastair Crooke

Mar 9, 2012 -- UN Secretary General was reported on March 3 saying that he had received "grisly reports" that Syrian government forces were arbitrarily executing, imprisoning and torturing people in Homs after retaking control of the Baba Amr district from insurgents. Did he really believe this; or was he just "saying it"?

"One of the defining bifurcations of the future will be the conflict between information masters and information victims" the US officer assigned to the Deputy Chief of Staff (Intelligence), charged with defining the future of warfare, wrote in the US Army War College Quarterly in 1997.

"But fear not", he writes later in the article, for "we are already masters of information warfare ... Hollywood is 'preparing the battlefield' ...

Information destroys traditional jobs and traditional cultures; it seduces, betrays, yet remains invulnerable. How can you [possibly] counterattack the information [warfare] others have turned upon you? [1]

"Our sophistication in handling it will enable us to outlast and outperform all hierarchical cultures ... Societies that fear or otherwise cannot manage the flow of information simply will not be competitive. They might master the technological wherewithal to watch the videos, but we will be writing the scripts, producing them, and collecting the royalties. Our creativity is devastating."

This information warfare will not be couched in the rationale of geopolitics, the author suggests, but will be "spawned" - like any Hollywood drama - out of raw emotions. "Hatred, jealousy, and greed - emotions, rather than strategy - will set the terms of [information warfare] struggles".

Not only the US army, but it seems mainstream Western media insist that the struggle in Syria must be scripted in emotional image and moralistic statements that always - as the War College article rightly asserts - trump rational analysis.

The UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry condemns the Syrian government of crimes against humanity, but only on the basis of what the opposition says, and without having investigated evidence of opposition "crimes": and then proceeds to "charge" the Syrian government with this process based simply on "reasonable suspicion": Do they really believe what they have written, or is it just a part of "writing the script"?

[2]

Having quite forgotten what US Marines did to Falluja in 2004 (6,000 dead and 60% of the city destroyed) when armed insurgents there also sought to establish a Salafist "Emirate" - the Western media focus on Homs gives vent to the indignant cry that "something must be done" to save the people of Homs from "massacre". The question of what effect exactly that something - whether external military intervention or providing heavier weapons for the insurgents - might be, and what its wider consequences might entail, meanwhile recedes entirely from view. Those with the temerity to get in the way of "this narrative" by arguing that external intervention would be disastrous, are roundly condemned as complicit in President Assad's crimes against humanity.

This school of journalism - the Guardian and Channel Four are good examples of this "I-was-there" reporting - that emphasizes the reporter as participant, and indeed victim, a co-sufferer amid the charged, heart-tugging emotional sufferings of war, uses emotive images precisely to underline that "something must be done". By focussing on mutilated bodies and weeping bereaved women they assert and determine that the conflict must be viewed as being of utmost moral simplicity - one of victims and aggressors.

"In Baba Amr. Sickening. Cannot understand how the world can stand by. Watched a baby die today. Shrapnel: doctors could do nothing. His little tummy just heaved and heaved until he stopped. Feeling helpless". [3]

Those who try to argue that Western intervention can only exacerbate the crisis, are confronted by this unanswerable riposte of dead babies - literally. As the War College article so rightly states: how can you counter attack

this manner of "information warfare" unleashed against the Syrian government who are on the receiving end of those "writing the scripts, producing them, and collecting the royalties"?

I too, saw such terrible sights in Afghanistan in the 1980s: It does of course create an emotional abyss into which the helpless spectator slips; but do these reporters really believe that innocents and children are not always the victims of conflict? Do they believe their personal distress to be somehow so primary that it must set aside all complexities, and all potential possibilities? Is more conflict the answer to the awful death of an infant? This reductionist, emotional ardor is but a form of concealed political advocacy - little different to that of an information "warrior" such as AVAAZ, who help write and produce those info-war videos. [4] And while nobody openly endorses such "journalism of participation", this approach seems to have triumphed in certain journalistic quarters. And indeed it is creeping further: increasingly we see even certain Western diplomats acting as though they are "activists" and participants in the internal struggles of the states to which they are posted. What sort of reporting must their governments be getting?

Are we now to understand that the armed opposition, who originally brought Western journalists to Homs - and then insisted to exfiltrate them perilously, and at the cost of many lives, via Lebanon, rather than through the good offices of the Red Crescent to the nearest airport, were not motivated by a desire to advocate, and impel the argument for externally-imposed humanitarian corridors to be opened to Homs? In other words, were not witness to the construction of une piece de theatre in favor of a type of external intervention? Will a Kosovo-type solution will make things better in Syria?

What has become so striking is that, whilst this "information warfare" may have been almost irreversibly effective in demonizing President Assad in the West, it has also had the effect of "unanchoring" European and American foreign policy. It has become cast adrift from any real geo-strategic mooring. This has led to a situation in which European policy has become wholly suggestible to such "advocacy reporting", and the need to respond to it, moment-by-moment, in emotive, moralistic blasts of sound-bites accusing President Assad of having "blood on its hands".

In one sense the West inevitably has fallen hostage to its own information

warfare: it has locked itself into a single understanding, stuck to a "singleness" of meaning: a simplistic victims-and-aggressor meme, which demands only the toppling of the aggressor. Europe, in this manner, effectively is cutting itself off from other options - precisely because the humanitarian theme, which policy-makers may have thought would suffice to see Assad easily deposed, now impedes any shift towards other options - such as a peaceful negotiated outcome.

But does anyone really believe American and European objectives in Syria were ever purely humanitarian? Is it not the case - given that the turnout of events in the Middle East are taking such an ominous and dangerous turn - that it has now becoming somewhat awkward openly to admit that their info-war was never primarily about reforming Syria, but about "regime change", and that it was that even from before the first protest erupted in Dera'a?

In his recent interview with Jeffrey Goldberg of the Atlantic, [5] given in advance of President Obama's American Israel Public Affairs Committee speech, the president, inter alia, was questioned about Syria. His response was very clear:

GOLDBERG: Can you just talk about Syria as a strategic issue? Talk about it as a humanitarian issue, as well; but it would seem to me that one way to weaken and further isolate Iran is to remove or help remove Iran's only Arab ally.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Absolutely.

Do these Western interventionist proselytizers really believe that the onslaught on Syria is only about democracy and reform? Obama said it plainly. It was always about Iran. And, as Europe and America increasingly become bystanders to a Qatari and Saudi frenzy to overthrow a fellow Arab leader by any means it takes, do these "apostles" truly think that these absolute Arab monarchies simply share the Guardian's or [Channel Four's](#) nice humanitarian aspirations for Syria's future? Do these reporters really believe that the armed insurgents that Gulf states are financing and arming are nothing more than well-intentioned reformists, who have simply been driven to violence through Assad's intransigence? Some perhaps do, but others perhaps are simply "saying these things" to prepare the battlefield?

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## Notes:

1. [Constant Conflict](#), Parameters, Summer 1997, pp. 4-14.
2. [The United Nations Accuses Syria of "Crimes against Humanity"](#), 3. [The danger of reporters becoming 'crusaders'](#), [spiked-online.com](#), Feb 27, 2012.  
<http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/printable/12159/>
4. See ['How Avaaz Is Sponsoring Fake War Propaganda From Syria'](#), March 3, 2012.
5. [Obama to Iran and Israel: 'As President of the United States, I Don't Bluff'](#)