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[Article 1.](#)

Politico

How Obama Can Win Over Congress on the Iran Deal

Ray Takeyh

December 01, 2013 -- The interim agreement reached between Iran and six world powers is supposed to be the first step on a long path of international diplomacy. Yet the accord, which temporarily freezes Iran's nuclear program over the next six months, is already proving contentious with the Obama administration insisting on the deal's merits and congressional critics highlighting its concessions. House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), for instance, [urged](#) that the agreement be met "with healthy skepticism," while Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) [said](#) that it "does not seem proportional."

If the White House wants talks to move toward a more comprehensive disarmament deal, it will need to make its case not just to allies in the region but also to a skeptical congressional audience — and soon. For the Iranians, a key component of a more permanent agreement is the rollback of sanctions, which fall to a U.S. Congress that has already been [itching](#) for further penalties. Diplomacy with Iran hinges not only on the Islamic Republic's compliance then but also Congress's buy-in. It is ironic that U.S. policy toward Iran is becoming so divisive since beneath all the bluster and bombast, this has been one of the most bipartisan issues in a Capitol perennially divided against itself. The Obama administration would be wise to nurture this rare bipartisan unity as much as the international coalition it has assembled against Iran.

It was Condoleezza Rice's State Department, after all, that originated the notion of a two-track policy of steadily increasing economic pressure on Iran while seeking a diplomatic settlement of the nuclear issue. Rice marshaled the United Nations Security Council to repeatedly censure Iran and demand that it suspend all of its nuclear activities. The Treasury Department, meanwhile, pursued an imaginative policy of segregating Iran from global financial institutions. The Obama administration inherited this policy, refined it and implemented it with discipline. On the legislative side, all the Iran sanctions bills to date have passed with overwhelming bipartisan majorities. Liberals and conservatives have come together to punish the Islamic Republic for its nuclear transgressions and sponsorship of terrorism. During the past three decades, while many countries have been enticed by Iranian commerce, Congress has distinguished itself by persistently holding Tehran responsible for its human rights abuses. It is inappropriate to attribute this consensus to the prodding of pro-Israeli

groups. American legislatures are perfectly capable of being offended by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's penal colony without such advocacy. The Obama administration can use this precedent of cooperation to its advantage, but it must also acknowledge that diplomacy with Iran cannot be concealed from congressional scrutiny. It is time for the administration to breach its own walls of secrecy and fully and frankly brief congressmen and senators about what happened in Geneva. Going forward, the administration would be prudent to take into consideration congressional concerns as it plots its course of action. What's more, future American delegation to Iran talks should include key Republican staffers from the relevant committees — not as mere ornaments but as active participants in the talks and the many planning sessions that usually precede such meetings. By firmly tethering the two branches of government together, the White House can ensure that a potential accord rests on a firm anchor. Those who lament such an activist congressional role should pay closer attention to how two legislative giants changed the course of American foreign policy. On the left, the famed 1966 Vietnam hearings of Sen. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) awakened the nation to the tragedy of that war. Less known were Fulbright hearings on China that established the intellectual foundation for the subsequent reconciliation between Washington and Beijing. No arms control agreement negotiated during the height of détente in the 1970s escaped the critical eye of the hawkish Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.), who forced Henry Kissinger to renegotiate, reconsider and even abrogate various provisions of his contemplated agreements. Two presidents, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, complained bitterly of such meddling, and yet, America is better off because of those efforts.

The White House might be tempted to fire back at its critics, but it would be a mistake to deride skeptical members of Congress as “marching to war” with Iran. The most realistic alternative to diplomatic stalemate or a bad deal is not war but a more concerted pressure strategy that may yet compel further concessions from a battered Islamic Republic. Republicans, in turn, should desist from cheap comparisons of President Barack Obama to [Neville Chamberlain](#). This is not the 1930s, and Iran is not Nazi Germany.

It remains to be seen whether a comprehensive agreement imposing stringent and permanent curbs on Iran's nuclear ambitions is possible. Iran has long been an unreliable negotiating partner — acceding to compromises under stress only to violate those commitments at a more convenient time. Still, the White House cannot simply negotiate an accord between Iran and the United States in secret conclaves and then spring it on an incredulous legislature. If Congress is not there on the takeoff, then it is unlikely to be there at the landing.

Ray Takeyh is senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

[Article 2.](#)

Reuters

Saudis have few options as they push tougher foreign policy

Angus McDowall

Dec 2, 2013 -- RIYADH (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia seems to have few viable options for pursuing a more independent and forthright foreign policy, despite its deep unease about the West's tentative rapprochement with Iran. Upset with the United States, senior Saudis have hinted at a range of possibilities, from building strategic relations with other world powers to pushing a tougher line against Iranian allies in the Arab world and, if world powers fail to foil Tehran's nuclear ambitions, even seeking its own atomic bomb.

But alternative powers are hard even to contemplate for a nation that has been a staunch U.S. ally for decades. Russia is on the opposite side to Riyadh over the Syrian war and China's military clout remains modest compared with the United States'.

Robert Jordan, U.S. ambassador to Riyadh from 2001-03, said there would be limits to any Saudi alliances with other powers.

"There is no country in the world more capable of providing the protection of their oil fields, and their economy, than the U.S., and the Saudis are aware of that. We're not going to see them jump out of that orbit," he told Reuters.

While Jordan was a senior diplomat in the administration of President George W. Bush, some Saudi analysts also say the kingdom is well aware of what major foreign policy shifts would involve - particularly any pursuit of nuclear weapons.

This could end up casting Saudi Arabia as the international villain, rather than its regional arch-rival Iran, and Riyadh has no appetite for the kind of isolation that has forced Tehran to the negotiating table.

"Saudi Arabia doesn't need to become a second Iran," said a Saudi analyst close to official thinking. "It would be a total reversal of our traditional behavior, of being a reliable member of the international community that promotes strategic stability and stabilizes oil markets."

Diplomatic sources and analysts in the Gulf say the kingdom, while unsettled, will not risk a breach in relations with its main non-Arab ally and will explore, however warily, a purely diplomatic response to the Iranian opening.

Top Saudis are nevertheless furious with Washington. Senior U.S. officials held secret bilateral talks with Iranian counterparts for months to prepare for last month's interim nuclear agreement between six world powers and Tehran, raising Gulf Arab rulers' fears that Washington is willing to go behind their backs to do a deal with Iran.

Saudi leaders were taken unawares by the content of the deal that was struck in the early hours of November 24, despite an earlier promise by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to keep them informed of developments, diplomatic sources in the Gulf said.

In Washington, a senior State Department official said Kerry had been in close contact with his counterparts throughout the two rounds of negotiations in Geneva, and had talked to Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal on November 25.

"The agreement was reached in the middle of the night and Secretary Kerry spoke with the Saudi Foreign Minister soon afterward," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The agreement offers Tehran relief from sanctions that are strangling its economy, in return for more oversight of its nuclear program. Riyadh, along with its Western allies, fears this is aimed at producing weapons, a charge Tehran denies.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif suggested on Sunday the deal should not be seen as a threat. "This agreement cannot be at the expense of any country in the region," he told reporters in Kuwait. "We look at Saudi Arabia as an important and influential regional country and we are working to strengthen cooperation with it for the benefit of the region."

Diplomatic sources in the Gulf say Riyadh is nervous that the deal will ease pressure on Tehran, allowing it more room to damage Saudi interests elsewhere in the Middle East.

The conservative Sunni Muslim kingdom is at odds with Iran's revolutionary Shi'ite leaders in struggles across the Arab world, including in Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen.

Most of all, Riyadh sees Iran's open support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in fighting a rebellion backed by Gulf states as a foreign occupation of Arab lands.

Two Iranian Revolutionary Guard commanders have been killed in Syria this year, and rebels have also said Iranian fighters are on the ground, although it is unclear whether they are there in any great numbers. The Lebanese Shi'ite movement Hezbollah, which is allied to Tehran, has also sent fighters to help Assad's forces, although these are Arabs.

BOLD DECLARATIONS

Riyadh has expressed lukewarm support for the nuclear deal, couched alongside caveats that it was a "first step" and that a more comprehensive solution required "good will".

But some prominent Saudis have made bold declarations that Riyadh will develop a tough new foreign policy, defending its interests in keeping with its status as the richest Arab state and birthplace of Islam.

Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf, the Saudi ambassador to London, told The Times newspaper that "all options are available" to Riyadh, including seeking its own atomic weapon, if Iran managed to build the bomb.

But diplomatic sources in the Gulf and analysts close to Saudi thinking say the main problem in turning such rhetoric into action is the lack on an obvious replacement for the U.S. security umbrella in the Gulf, or for the American military's role in advising, arming and assisting the Saudi armed forces.

"There'll be more contact with the Russians and Chinese than in the past. They've gone elsewhere for weapons before and we'll see some more of that, but the overall environment will be America-centric," said Jordan. A Western adviser to Gulf countries on geopolitical issues said senior Saudis have looked at ways of reducing the kingdom's long-term reliance on the United States.

France is one option, albeit one that remains firmly in the Western camp notwithstanding past differences with NATO allies.

Riyadh has worked closely with Paris in recent months on both Syrian and Iranian issues, and has awarded it big naval contracts. That said, the Saudi armed forces and economy are so closely tied to the United States that any serious attempt to disengage over the longer term would be prohibitively costly and difficult, diplomatic sources in the Gulf say.

Washington remains much closer to Riyadh on every Middle Eastern issue than any other world power at present except France, which has taken a hard line on Iran.

In Syria - the issue over which there is the greatest disagreement between Riyadh and Washington, the kingdom is already arming and training some rebel groups which the United States, wary about arming jihadists, views with caution.

Diplomatic sources in the Gulf say these efforts will continue and may expand, but logistical challenges will hinder any rapid attempt to increase training much beyond the thousand or so rebels now working in Jordan with Saudi special forces.

Riyadh's own fears of an Islamist backlash, reinforced by a bombing campaign inside the country in the last decade, prevent it from arming more militant groups with ties to al Qaeda.

The sources say Saudi Arabia still relies on a lot of support from Western allies for command and control expertise, and would find it very difficult to build its own coalition of Arab allies to join forces in a military campaign. The kingdom and its five closest regional friends, the other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, have been unable to agree on a shared missile defense shield after years of discussions, they note.

THE SAUDI BOMB

Prince Mohammed's warnings on the possibility of seeking a nuclear bomb have previously been voiced by other top Saudis, including former

intelligence minister Prince Turki al-Faisal.

But on closer inspection this looks less like a serious statement of intent and more like an attempt to nudge world powers into being tougher on Iran by raising the specter of an atomic arms race in the Middle East, where Israel is already widely presumed to have nuclear weapons.

The analyst close to official thinking suggested that actively seeking nuclear arms would backfire, making Riyadh the proliferator of mass destruction weapons instead of Iran.

Media commentators have speculated the kingdom could obtain an atomic bomb from its nuclear-armed friend Pakistan, or on the arms market. But the analyst said it would never place itself in the position of being an international outcast like Iraq under Saddam Hussein and more recently Tehran.

"Iraq did it. Iran did it. Saudi Arabia would never do this type of behavior," he said.

Saudi Arabia is in the very early stages of planning an atomic power program, and has signed up to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and a more rigorous safeguarding protocol with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Any attempt to build a bomb in secret would probably take decades due to the kingdom's current lack of any nuclear technology, expertise or materials, analysts believe.

Even if it were to attempt to short cut that process by, for example, buying an off-the-peg atomic weapons system from Pakistan - a transaction itself fraught with difficulties - the obstacles would be formidable.

"There's a lot of infrastructure to put in place, to make the threat credible and deliverable. It's not clear to me that Saudi Arabia would be able to do that in short order at all," said Mark Hibbs, a senior associate at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and nuclear proliferation expert.

Such an effort would also incur a massive price in diplomatic and economic relations with other countries, notably the United States. The Saudi economy, reliant on oil exports and the import of many goods and services from overseas, appears ill suited to withstand such pressures.

(Additional reporting by [William Maclean](#) in Dubai, [Arshad Mohammed](#) in Washington, [Mahmoud Harby](#) in Kuwait and [Dominic Evans](#) in Beirut;

editing by [David Stamp](#))

[Article 3.](#)

[The Guardian](#)

Israel's new focus on the Iran nuclear deal

[Michael Herzog](#)

1 December 2013 -- The [interim nuclear agreement with Iran](#), touted by its proponents as a "historic deal", has been described as a "historic mistake" by Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu. How will Israel react in the months ahead? The answer is to be found in the struggle to shape the endgame deal.

The six-month deal is a mixed bag. On the positive side it stems the tide of Iranian nuclearisation by setting its clock slightly back, temporarily capping Iran's nuclear facilities, array of centrifuges and stockpile of low-enriched uranium, and improving the monitoring regime. On the other hand, Iranian enrichment has been accepted as part of the endgame; the clock in the uranium and plutonium tracks continues to tick, albeit at a slower pace; Iran's stockpile of low-enriched uranium (enough for at least five bombs) remains intact; Iranian concessions are all reversible; and International Atomic Energy Agency concerns about military dimensions have not been addressed. It remains to be seen whether the sanctions relief will entice Iran to make further concessions in the final deal or will erode the sanctions regime as a whole.

While putting the brakes on Iran's nuclear programme is better than allowing it to accelerate or triggering a confrontation, Tehran is far too close to a critical breakout capacity for this to be an acceptable situation in the long term. Israel's sight is therefore fixed on the endgame. There is widespread scepticism in Israel – shared by many of its Arab neighbours – that the US and its European allies possess sufficient resolve in the face of Iran's determination to establish itself as a threshold nuclear-armed state. For Israel, the endgame must deny Iran the capacity to swiftly break out a bomb before it can be stopped. Iran can already produce one bomb's worth of military grade uranium within weeks. If it commissions its [Arak heavy water plutonium reactor](#), which could take around a year, its route to weapons-grade plutonium cannot be stopped by outside intervention. Israel

would like the clock set back on breakout capacity to a weapon from months to years. For this, Iran must be denied some of the core capabilities it has or is pursuing, including the heavy water reactor. The International Atomic Energy Agency's open files on weaponisation research must also be closed and intrusive monitoring applied.

Israel will be pleasantly surprised if the six-nation group known as the [P5+1](#) produces such a deal. Senior Israeli officials question whether the group can agree among itself, and fear its eagerness for a deal weakens its bargaining position. They ask: if the pressure of sanctions could not get Iran to tackle the endgame now, why would relaxed sanctions produce the desired result in six months? Added to this are concerns that the legitimacy bestowed on Iran will give it a freer hand to advance its other destabilising regional policies, while the US seeks to focus its attention elsewhere.

In this context, the scathing Israeli criticism of the agreement now gives way to a cooler-headed diplomatic campaign to influence the endgame deal. Israel wants its US and European allies to define and stick to clear goals; to enforce remaining sanctions; and to clarify to Iran the consequences of non-compliance with the interim deal or averting a reasonable comprehensive deal.

Faced with possible additional sanctions and a credible military option, Iran is more likely to concede without the need for military action. In both respects, Israel has the potential to play an active role. It could encourage additional sanctions in the US Congress conditional on Iran's behaviour, while also making clear that its own military option is on the table.

For the next six months Israel's goal will be to seek an acceptable deal, rather than scupper the process. But a deal that does not meet its basic expectations, no deal at all, or an endlessly strung-out process while Iran advances its programme, will place its decision-makers back on the horns of a dilemma: whether or not to intervene to avert what it considers the most serious threat to its national security.

[Article 4.](#)

Mint

New Egypt constitution clears panel heading for referendum

[Salma El Wardany](#)

Dec 02 2013 -- The document guarantees absolute freedom of belief, bans torture, protects civil liberties and outlaws formation of parties based on religion

Two articles approved on Sunday would expand the role of the military, which installed the current interim government after removing Morsi, in Egypt's politics. Photo: AP

Washington: Egypt's constitutional panel approved an amended charter, clearing a key hurdle in the military-backed government's planned transition to democracy even as authorities fired tear gas to drive Islamists out of Cairo's Tahrir Square.

[Amre Moussa](#), head of the 50-member panel, said the new draft constitution would be handed on 3 December to interim President [Adly Mansour](#), who is to submit it to a national referendum within 30 days.

The committee, dominated by secularists, approved the last of 247 articles late Sunday in a televised session, winding up the revision of a constitution drafted a year earlier by an Islamist-leaning panel. Supporters say the new charter entrenches civil liberties. Detractors say it tightens the military's grip on Egyptian politics by giving it new powers.

The rewriting of the constitution marked a milestone in the government's so-called road map to restoring democratic rule following the military's July 3 ouster of President [Mohamed Morsi](#). His overthrow was followed by the suspension of the old charter, which, while approved in a referendum, fueled deadly protests that encouraged the army to topple his government. The referendum on the amended charter is to be followed by parliamentary and presidential elections next year.

Islamist setback

The approval of an amended charter also dealt a setback to Morsi's Islamist supporters, who refuse to recognize Egypt's transitional authorities or process and have vowed to press on with protests demanding his reinstatement. Islamists called for rallies against the new draft, urging Egyptians to reject the farce, according to an e-mailed statement by the Egypt Anti- Coup Alliance, a grouping of the Muslim Brotherhood that fielded Morsi for office and its backers.

Hundreds of Brotherhood supporters who gathered in Tahrir Square on Sunday were quickly dispersed by security forces who moved in firing tear

gas. The square, which had served as the epicenter of the 2011 uprising against longtime Egyptian leader [Hosni Mubarak](#), factored prominently in the mass movement against Morsi, and over the past year has been the domain of secularists and liberals.

Many secularists had said the constitution drafted under Morsi paved the way for Islam to exert greater influence over daily life in Egypt. The secularist-leaning panel that drafted the amended charter said it would cement civil liberties.

Door to stability

This is the real door to implement the road map and for Egypt to make the transition from the phase of unrest toward stability, Moussa told reporters 30 November.

The document guarantees absolute freedom of belief, bans torture and protects civil liberties, while outlawing the formation of parties based on religion.

Not included in the new charter is a 2012 article that restricted the interpretation of Islamic Shariah, the primary source of legislation, to the rules accepted in Sunni doctrines. The clause, according to panel spokesman [Mohamed Salmawy](#), risked turning Egypt into a sectarian country.

Two articles approved on Sunday would expand the role of the military, which installed the current interim government after removing Morsi, in Egypt's politics. One allows civilians accused of direct attacks on armed forces to be tried in military courts. The other, applicable only to the next two presidential terms, requires the military's top brass to approve the appointment of Egypt's defense minister.

'Absolute powers'

Those articles give the military absolute powers over an elected government, said [Ahmed Ezzat](#), director of the legal unit at the Cairo-based Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression. This proves the army still has control over the democratic path.

The government, whose security forces have killed hundreds of Islamist demonstrators since Morsi's overthrow, last week adopted a law restricting the right to protest, sparking renewed clashes. Police arrested 11 people Sunday, the interior ministry said in an e-mailed statement.

Rushing through a draft amid serious human-rights violations, including hundreds killed and tens of hundreds others detained, will naturally result in a constitution that falls short of meeting the aspirations of the Egyptian people, Ezzat said.

[Article 5.](#)

The Washington Institute

How Israel Could Be Drawn into the Syrian Conflict (An Introduction)

Patrick Clawson

{The full study: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/no-good-outcome-how-israel-could-be-drawn-into-the-syrian-conflict>}

November 2013 -- THIS STUDY BEGINS WITH AN examination by Jeffrey White of six scenarios that could draw greater Israeli military involvement in the Syrian conflict. Demonstrating the complexities and uncertainties of the situation, these scenarios suggest that the longer the conflict goes on, the deeper Israeli military involvement in Syria could become. The scenarios range from Israeli strikes in Syria to prevent the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah (most likely) to direct Syrian strikes on Israel (least likely). The scenarios are interconnected in the sense that one could lead to another. For example, an Israeli attack on a weapons shipment bound for Hezbollah could lead to Hezbollah attacks on Israel from southern Lebanon. The scenarios, in sum, suggest how the Syrian conflict puts the entire regional security architecture at risk. What happens in Syria may not stay in Syria. An important conclusion of this study is that if Israel actively intervenes in Syria, the regime and the Islamist rebels would compete to present themselves as the most active opponents of the Israeli presence. Aaron Zelin explains that the jihadists' ideological mindset would make them absolutely certain that any Israeli action indicated some kind of a plot to help Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and hurt them. Jabhat al-Nusra/ Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham would become all the more attractive for Sunni foreign fighters, and these groups could probably make effective use of the Israeli actions to win more support among Syrians. The possible reaction by the Syrian regime to

Israeli involvement is explored by Andrew Tabler, who argues that while Damascus would ignore periodic tactical air or missile strikes, the regime would actively resist Israeli land operations even if aimed at the jihadists. Tabler also investigates perhaps the most likely scenario for Israel being drawn into the Syrian conflict—a decaying security situation along the border in which groups affiliated with either the opposition or the regime launch attacks into Israel. One of the key arguments proffered by Hezbollah in its propaganda aimed at justifying its operations in Syria is that they are part of its resistance (muqawama) against Israel. But as Matthew Levitt explains, outside Hezbollah’s staunchest Shiite supporters, there are few takers for the con-torted logic that the Syrian rebellion is an American or an Israeli scheme. To increase the credibility of Hezbollah’s claim that its involvement in Syria is somehow part of its campaign of resistance, the group may try to draw Israel into sporadic and contained exchanges along the Lebanese or Syrian (Golan) borders. With a focus on Lebanon’s Sunnis and Shiites, David Schenker explains that while the two constituencies have shown remarkable restraint so far, it is by no means assured that some egregious incident will not reignite a full-scale civil conflagration. Israel would try to avoid being pulled into another bloody Lebanese civil war, but a single hit on a Jewish kindergarten would be all it took to draw Israeli military involvement. In the absence of any state authority in Lebanon, Israel’s ability to establish deterrence along the frontier—as it has done with Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon—will also be limited. Michael Eisenstadt explores how, over the years, Israel and Syria have avoided a larger conflict through “rules of the road.” But those rules have not worked as well in dealing with the expansion of the Israeli-Syrian conflict beyond its traditional bounds, whether in the nuclear arena or Syria’s deepening involvement in the various shadow wars involving Israel. This record does not augur well for the two sides’ handling of the growing conflict inside Syria, despite Israel’s attempt to stay aloof from the Syrian civil war. It is hard to see U.S. interests being well served by the sorts of conflicts outlined here, especially if the Syrian conflict drags on. Thus, the United States has strong reason to forestall such conflicts. Patrick Clawson offers a few remarks on this theme to conclude this study. While a variety of useful goals can be envisaged, none will be as certain and lasting as bringing the Syrian conflict to a close. For

that reason if no other, the United States would do well to play a more active role in ensuring that Assad goes quickly.

[Article 6](#)

The National Interest

Gazprom Goes to the Middle East

[Allison Good](#)

December 2, 2013 -- There is no question that Russia is making a play for natural gas in the Levant basin. Between the overt ambitions of President Vladimir Putin's government, state-owned energy giant Gazprom, and private companies, a concerted effort to establish a strategic commercial edge in the developing Israeli, Lebanese and Cypriot markets is underway. So far, the approach has produced relatively few gains for Russia, but local governments and the companies operating in them must vigilantly monitor and, if needed, seek to curb Moscow's ambitions.

The Levant basin, which [according to the U.S. Geological Survey](#) contains an estimated 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil and 122 trillion cubic feet of recoverable gas, is an attractive financial and geopolitical prospect for Russia. Some experts [estimate](#) Lebanon's natural gas reserves to be worth between \$300 billion and \$700 billion, while Israel's are [valued](#) at \$280 billion. Cypriot energy minister Yiorgos Lakkotrypis [claims](#) his country's offshore Aphrodite field alone has a gross value of "approximately \$50 billion," and companies are actively exploring for more gas offshore the island.

Furthermore, while Europe is Gazprom's biggest export customer, it is becoming less lucrative. European demand is stagnating, and countries are diversifying their natural gas supplies to reduce dependence on the company notorious for its stranglehold on foreign markets. The European Union, in fact, is set to [charge](#) Gazprom with "abusing its dominant position in central and eastern Europe" following an aggressive antitrust investigation, which could result in a fine of up to \$15 billion. Europe's increasing inhospitality, in addition to the potential for American liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports and China's campaign to open its growing

domestic market to a wide range of international producers, is forcing Gazprom to find new sources of revenue.

Geopolitically, Russia wants to be involved in eastern Mediterranean gas to maintain its interests and protect assets. Lebanese gas could help improve access to markets, because it would likely be processed at an LNG facility in Cyprus and exported from there. Israeli gas has the same potential, and the Supreme Court's [decision](#) to uphold the cabinet's allocation of 40 percent of the country's reserves for export means that Russia needs to act now if it wants a piece of the pie.

Russia's interest in Cypriot gas, on the other hand, is more complicated. First, Cyprus has been a tax haven for Russia's oligarchs for several years, in addition to serving as a [backdoor to Europe](#), since "anyone spending a minimum of €300,000 on property is granted permanent residency." This cash flow is so integral to the Cypriot economy that Russian money "accounted for up to €20 billion of the €35 billion of foreign money in Cypriot banks" at the end of the first trimester of 2013.

Second, Russia uses Cyprus to check Turkey's rising power, particularly its desire to become an energy hub for transporting non-Russian gas to Europe. Cyprus and Russia formed close defense ties in the 1990s, and Moscow rejects Ankara's claim to North Cyprus in the conflict over the island. Ankara and Nicosia have yet to delineate a maritime boundary, so Turkish attempts to explore for gas in offshore areas it claims for North Cyprus could result in fiscal losses for Greek Cyprus, which is trying to use its gas reserves to keep people from taking their foreign money elsewhere. Because "Moscow cannot allow Cyprus to go under without incurring serious domestic losses," it has gone as far [raising the stakes](#). In 2011, when Turkey [threatened](#) to attack Cyprus if it allowed Noble Energy to drill in the disputed Block 12 as per a concession granted by the government in Nicosia, Russia [responded](#) by dispatching "an aircraft carrier with fighter planes, and at least one submarine" to the island. Unfortunately for Russia, its interests in the Levant basin have not proven to be directly proportional to its success. Cyprus, for one, [rejected](#) Gazprom's offer to bail out its economy in exchange for gas exploration rights in March. Novatek, Russia's largest independent natural gas producer, was leading a consortium to develop one of the Cypriot blocks with France's Total and Gazprom-owned GPB Global Resources, but those

negotiations [collapsed](#) in December 2012. The only way left for Russia to get its hands on Cypriot gas is via getting involved in its [supply](#)—either through providing expertise in the construction of an Israel-Cyprus pipeline, or buying LNG “from a plant built either in Cyprus, Crete, or Israel.”

While Moscow gained a modest foothold in Lebanon by [signing](#) a memorandum of understanding on energy cooperation with Beirut in October, the reach of Russian companies remains unclear. Novatek, majority state-owned oil company Rosneft, and public Lukoil have been [prequalified](#) for the first license round, whose exploration blocs will be auctioned on January 10. However, they will be competing against tens of other international companies for the tender, and only as non-operators with a minority stake in the consortium.

As for [Israel](#), a Gazprom delegation discussed partnership options for the country’s offshore Leviathan field during talks with local energy players in 2011, and the company allegedly had plans to set up a subsidiary in the country focused on drilling and gas transmission. Gazprom also submitted the highest offer for a 30-percent stake in Leviathan in 2012, but was denied. Finally, in February it signed a letter of intent with the partners in the consortium for the Tamar field to finance an offshore LNG facility and sell the product for 20 years. Meanwhile, the recent [confirmation](#) that the Israeli government is talking to Moscow about the development of Israel’s natural gas fields does renew cause for Russian optimism in general. Cyprus, Lebanon, and Israel have so far shown a reluctance to let Russia become too involved in their natural gas sectors. The only operator agreement a Russian company has is with the Tamar consortium, but it is nonbinding and actual plans have not yet materialized. However, this will not deter Russian players from continuing to make moves in the region, and if Levant basin countries are not careful, they may end up getting more than they bargained for.

Allison Good is a freelance writer and analyst currently based in Jerusalem.

[Article 7.](#)

Agence Global

France's Aggressive Foreign Policy

Immanuel Wallerstein

1 Dec 2013 -- In the last few years, France has asserted herself on the international scene in a very active way—first under President Nicolas Sarkozy and then even more under President François Hollande. She led the way among Western powers to intervene in Libya in order to oust Muammar Khaddafi. She has pushed the hardest line of all Western powers on Syria's Bashar al-Assad. She has intervened unilaterally in Mali to stop the downward sweep of Islamic armed movements. Hollande was received virtually as a hero when he came recently to Israel because of his hard line on negotiations with Syria and with Iran. And now she has sent troops to try to restore order in the Central African Republic. This is the same France which, ten years ago, was being pilloried by the United States Congress for its refusal to go along with U.S. intervention in Iraq, to the point that the food term "French fries" was publicly rejected in the United States. This is the same France that was regarded as far too pro-Palestinian by the Israelis. This is the same France that not so long ago publicly renounced the concept of "Françafrique"—France's presumed duty to keep order in its ex-African colonies—as no longer appropriate behavior. What has happened to explain this turnaround?

There are of course some factors internal to France that contributed to these developments. Because of its colonial history, France today has a large number of Muslim residents and citizens who are largely an economic underclass. Many of the younger Muslims have become increasingly militant and some of them have been attracted to the more radical versions of Islamist politics. While this shift has occurred throughout the pan-European world, it seems particularly strong in France. It has therefore evoked a political reaction not only from extreme-right xenophobic groups like the Front National but from persons holding unyielding versions of secularism (laïcité) on the political left. Today the most popular Socialist minister seems to be Interior Minister Manuel Valls, whose major activity is taking extra-strong measures against illegal migrants, mostly Muslim migrants, to France. Furthermore, at a time when neo-con ideas seem to have passed their prime in U.S. politics, the French

equivalent, centering on the slogan of *responsabilité de protéger* (RdP), has been getting stronger within France. One of its leading figures, Bernard Kouchner (founder of Doctors Without Borders), had been a foreign minister under Sarkozy. Another leading figure, Bernard-Henri Lévy, played a formidable pressure role on governmental politics under Sarkozy and still does under Hollande. The greater explanation however may be external—the role France thinks it can still play on the world scene. Ever since 1945, France has strived to remain a major figure on the world scene. And in this effort, it always saw the United States as the major force trying to diminish its role. The reassertion of France's world role was the primary concern of Charles de Gaulle. It was a goal he pursued in many ways, from early outreach to the Soviet Union to withdrawal of French troops from NATO. He wove a strong relationship with Israel during the Algerian war, at a time when the United States was pursuing a quite different policy. It was France that put together the Franco-British-Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956. To be sure, once Algeria gained its independence in 1962, France ended its special link to Israel, more concerned with renewing good relations with its North African former colonies. This policy was not merely a Gaullist policy. Non-Gaullist (or anti-Gaullist) political figures like François Mitterand and Sarkozy adopted Gaullist stances on multiple occasions. From Churchill during the Second World War to Obama today, the United States and Great Britain have always found French leaders too rambunctious, too difficult to control for their taste. What is permitting this current return to aggressiveness is precisely the decline of United States' effective power on the world scene. Suddenly, France can seem more hardline against the enemy, now defined as the Islamic enemy, than the United States. Once again, after a long delay since 1962, Israel can see France as a better friend, if a less powerful friend, than the United States. The problem for France is that although U.S. decline allows for a stronger rhetorical position for France, the new somewhat chaotic geopolitical scene is not one in which France can really replace the United States as the hardliner. There are too many other powerful nations involved in the Middle East for France to play a primary role there. Even less can France play a major role in East Asia, despite the fact that it had been a major colonial power there. The one place where France can reassume a major role is Africa, because for the moment neither Great Britain nor the United

States is as ready, for various reasons, to act with military force. France is seizing the opportunity. And Hollande, otherwise in increasing domestic unpopularity, finds support from public opinion for this role. However, this kind of aggressive policy has a major downside, as the United States has discovered in the Middle East. It can be very difficult to withdraw one's troops once they are there. And public opinion at home begins to sour on the interventions, seeing them as increasingly futile and unsuccessful.

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