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Article 1.	NYT <u>Hezbollah Commits to an All-Out Fight to Save Assad</u> Anne Barnard
Article 2.	Asharq Al-Awsat <u>Syrian crisis leading towards open Turkey-Iran conflict</u> Soner Cagaptay
Article 3.	NYT <u>What Mideast Crisis? Israelis Have Moved On</u> Ethan Bronner
Article 4.	The Daily Star <u>In Lebanon, Salafists are on the move</u> Rami G. Khouri
Article 5.	BBC <u>What do radical Islamists actually believe in?</u> Dr Usama Hasan
Article 6.	Project Syndicate <u>The Sino-American Decade</u> Michael Spence
Article 7.	Israel Journal of foreign Affairs <u>Tested by Zion</u> Reviewed by Oded Eran

Article 1.

NYT

Hezbollah Commits to an All-Out Fight to Save Assad

[Anne Barnard](#)

May 25, 2013 -- BEIRUT, Lebanon — The leader of the powerful Lebanese militant group [Hezbollah](#) decisively committed his followers on Saturday to an all-out battle in Syria to defeat the rebellion against President [Bashar al-Assad](#). He said the organization, founded to defend Lebanon and fight Israel, was entering “a completely new phase,” sending troops abroad to protect its interests.

“It is our battle, and we are up to it,” the leader, Hassan Nasrallah, declared in his most direct embrace yet of a fight in Syria that Hezbollah can no longer hide, now that dozens of its fighters have fallen in and around the strategic Syrian town of Qusayr. Outgunned Syrian rebels have held on for a week there against a frontal assault by Hezbollah and Syrian forces. The speech signaled a significant escalation in Hezbollah’s military involvement in Syria, deeply enmeshing the group in the war across the border. It could put new pressure on the Obama administration and on Europe, where more countries have begun pushing to list the group as a terrorist organization as the United States does. It was also likely to further inflame tensions in Lebanon, where Syria’s civil war has spilled over in explosions of sectarian violence. Mr. Nasrallah, a shrewd political operator, appears to be calculating that the West, thrown off balance by the rise of jihadist factions among the Syrian rebels, will not jump in on the rebel side. The United States’ call for a political solution, while allowing Saudi Arabia and Qatar to arm the rebels, likewise, seems to have not shaken his confidence. To the contrary, Mr. Assad can now head into negotiations planned for next month with a stronger hand, while the Syrian opposition is as divided and disorganized as ever. Hezbollah “wouldn’t do this if they thought there was going to be some kind of reaction,” said Andrew J. Tabler, a Syria analyst with the [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#). “They’re basically calling Obama’s bluff.”

Ali Rizk, the Beirut bureau chief for Press TV, the satellite channel of Hezbollah’s patron Iran, said Mr. Nasrallah had revealed that “Hezbollah is in it militarily and is in it very deeply.”

Noting that Mr. Nasrallah, who had long equivocated about the depth of the group’s involvement, promised victory, Mr. Rizk said, “Victory means you’re in it to the very end and you’re going to go all the way. Hezbollah is going to go all the way.”

Mr. Rizk, an interpreter for Mr. Nasrallah who often speaks to Hezbollah officials, said that American hesitance might be convincing Hezbollah of what Syrian officials have believed for some time: that the United States is edging closer to the position of Russia, which wants a negotiated settlement that leaves open the possibility of a political role for Mr. Assad. A senior administration official, however, said that despite Hezbollah's increasing activity in Syria, the United States remained convinced that neither Mr. Assad nor the rebels were strong enough to defeat the other in battle. "Our assessment still remains that there is not going to be a military victory," the official said. The official described the situation inside Syria as essentially "a standoff" and said American officials did not believe that Hezbollah's involvement fundamentally changed the United States' position on diplomatic efforts to remove Mr. Assad from the country. Hezbollah's deeper plunge into Syria does appear to aid Mr. Assad's strategy of pushing for military gains to strengthen his negotiating position. By contrast, the fractious Syrian opposition continues to waffle on basic decisions like choosing a leader and whether to attend the peace talks. Hezbollah has essentially become the ground assault force for the Syrian Army, an unprecedented role for the group, in the battle for Qusayr and Homs Province, which links Damascus with the government's coastal strongholds.

"In Qusayr, the ones who are engaging on the front lines, the man-to-man firepower, that's Hezbollah," Mr. Rizk said. He said Hezbollah's "infantry role" could grow, especially in border areas.

Hezbollah is also fighting near Damascus, Mr. Assad's other top military priority, around the Sayida Zeinab shrine, a holy site particularly revered by the group's Shiite Muslims.

But Mr. Rizk said there were limits to how much Hezbollah could turn the tide, and that Hezbollah was unlikely to send a large force toward the rebel-held northern cities of Aleppo and Idlib.

"Even some members of Hezbollah say taking back all the territory that Assad has lost is impossible," he said.

Hezbollah's new assertiveness could also provoke Israel. Although Israel has sought to remain neutral in Syria's civil war, it is believed to have bombed targets in Syria three times this year to prevent the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah.

Mr. Assad has called the rebels stooges of Israel and the United States, and Mr. Nasrallah, in his speech on Saturday, echoed that theme, portraying Hezbollah's military venture in Syria as a fight to "immunize" Lebanon from the Israeli invasion he said would surely follow if Syrian rebels prevailed.

He spoke via videotape to supporters rallying in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley to commemorate the 13th anniversary of the end of Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon after years of battling Hezbollah's guerrillas, which the group considers its greatest victory.

He evoked Hezbollah's tenacity during its 2006 war with Israel, signaling that the organization considered the fight in Syria to preserve Mr. Assad and the crucial conduit he provides for weapons from Iran, as important as its founding mission, opposing Israel and driving it out of Lebanon.

That he would equate a battle with fellow Arab Muslims in another country to the 2006 conflict, in which Israeli airstrikes leveled much of Hezbollah's heartland in southern Lebanon and the suburbs of Beirut, is "nothing short of amazing," Mr. Tabler said.

Sectarian passions have heated across the region as Hezbollah, a Shiite group, and Iran back a government dominated by Alawites, who follow an offshoot of Shiism, against mainly Sunni Muslim rebels.

Mr. Nasrallah, though, sought to refute accusations of sectarianism, portraying Hezbollah as acting to defend Lebanon from some of the Sunni militant groups who have joined the rebel side and who consider the Shiites infidels. "If we do not go there to fight them," he said, "they will come here."

In fact, he urged the Lebanese to fight out their differences in Syria and to spare Lebanon further sectarian violence.

"Whoever wants to support the opposition should go fight in Syria," he said, "and whoever supports the regime fights there, too. Leave Tripoli alone. If both Lebanese parties are fighting in Syria, let's fight there alone."

That comment drew outrage on both sides of the border. Hezbollah's political rivals here generally support its mission against Israel, but Saad Hariri, the leader of the March 14 coalition, said in a statement that "the time of exploiting Palestine, resistance and national unity has ended."

Mr. Nasrallah, Mr. Hariri said, had doomed the resistance to "political and military suicide."

Asharq Al-Awsat

Syrian crisis leading towards open Turkey-Iran conflict

Soner Cagaptay

May 26, 2013 -- Soon after the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002, Turkey launched an ambitious foreign policy agenda to make itself a stand-alone regional leader. With this new vision, Turkey looked to cast itself as a central actor, wielding soft power to shape the Middle East.

The Syrian war and Iran's regional hegemonic designs have, unfortunately, stunted most of Ankara's ambitions.

AKP's mind-set around 2002 was that Ankara had played second fiddle to Washington for too long in the Middle East. Turkey could become a regional power only if it stood alone in the region, dissenting with US policy when and if needed. This sentiment rose to the surface during the lead-up to the Iraq war, and bestowed legitimacy upon the new Turkish regime in the eyes of the peoples of the region. Along the same lines, AKP elites envisioned making Turkey a soft power in the Middle East, hoping to shape the region through the country's cultural, social, and economic influence.

Thanks to Turkey's meteoric economic rise over the past decade, the second part of that vision has been, for the most part, fulfilled. Turkey today is the Middle East's dominant economy; surpassing runners-up Iran and Saudi Arabia by a wide margin. Turkish businesses are rising in the Middle East, and Turkish cultural products, from television programs to schools, are in demand across the region.

But, Turkey's plan to be a stand-alone power in the region is nowhere near fruition. The war in Syria has forced Ankara to revise this policy, and this has meant re-appraising the value of ties with the United States. Since 2011, Ankara has moved close to the United States, looking for shelter once again under the NATO umbrella.

In late 2011, hoping to help oust the Assad regime, Turkey began to host and arm the Syrian opposition. But, thus far, this policy has not borne results. Even if the Syrian rebels have made some gains, Assad and his supporters appear likely to continue to hold onto parts of Syria.

Accordingly, instead of a speedy collapse of the Assad regime, Turkey now faces the prospects of a weak and divided state next door.

This has created a security challenge more complex than any Ankara has faced. And the United States will be an indispensable ally helping the Turks to cope. Ankara now wants to work closely with Washington in order to shield itself from the instability of the Syrian War. The gambit of grim scenarios runs from proliferation of chemical weapons next door to state collapse across from Turkey's longest border.

Another Syria-related factor that drives Ankara's rapprochement with Washington is Turkey's proxy war against Iran in Syria. If Ankara fails to secure U.S. assistance against the Assad regime, Ankara could lose this war. Iran has thrown its full support behind the Assad regime, and has ably undermined Ankara's policy of regime change in Damascus.

In Iraq, too, Iran is Ankara's main competitor. Ankara supported the secular and pan-Iraqi Allawi block in the 2010 Iraqi elections. However, Allawi lost the elections to Nuri Al-Maliki, who Ankara considers "Iran's man in Baghdad." This has created a fissure between Ankara and Baghdad, as well as between Ankara and Tehran. In return, Ankara has built intimate ties with Iraq's Sunni north, bringing the Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen there into its fold to counter Maliki and Tehran's influence in Baghdad. In today's Iraq, the widespread perception is that Turkey and Iraq's Sunnis are facing off against Iran and Iraq's Shi'ites.

By this logic, Turkey (as well as Qatar and Saudi Arabia) is backing Sunni rebels in the fight against a coalition of Iranian-supported Shi'ite forces in Syria. The latter is comprised of Iranians, as well as Iraqi and Lebanese Shi'ites, and last but not least the country's Alawite minority. An alignment of revolutionary Iran and the Syrian Alawites has been in formation since the 1970s, as evidenced by Ayatollah Hasan Mahdi Al-Shirazi and Musa Al-Sadr's issuance of fatwas arguing that Alawites are members of the Shi'ite sect.

Pulled into this sectarian quagmire, Turkey has tempered its stand-alone foreign policy ambitions. But considerable damage has already been done,

as sectarian flames start to melt away Turkey's hard-earned soft power in parts of the region.

Last but not least, the sharpening sectarian divide in the region is pitting Iran and Turkey against each other in ways not seen since the period between the 15th and 17th centuries when the Ottomans and Persians fought a 166 year war for influence in the Middle East.

Soner Cagaptay, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, is the author of the forthcoming "The Rise of Turkey: the 21st Century's First Muslim Power."

Article 3.

NYT

What Mideast Crisis? Israelis Have Moved

On

Ethan Bronner

May 25, 2013 -- FOR years, conventional wisdom has held that as long as Israel faces the external challenge of Arab — especially Palestinian — hostility it will never come to terms with its internal divisions. The left has sometimes used it as an argument: we must make peace with the Palestinians so that we can set our house in order — write a constitution, figure out the public role of religion. Others have viewed the threat as almost a silver lining keeping the place together: differences among Israeli Jews (religious or secular, Ashkenazic or Sephardic) are so profound, the argument goes, that if the society ever manages to turn its attention inward, it might tear itself apart. Back in Tel Aviv for a recent visit a year after ending my tour as Jerusalem bureau chief, I was struck by how antiquated that wisdom felt. At a fascinating and raucous wedding I attended and from numerous conversations with a range of Israelis, I came away with a very different impression. Few even talk about the Palestinians or the Arab world on their borders, despite the tumult and the renewed peace efforts by Secretary of State John Kerry, who has been visiting the region in recent days. Instead of focusing on what has long been seen as their central challenge — how to share this land with another nation — Israelis are

largely ignoring it, insisting that the problem is both insoluble for now and less significant than the world thinks. We cannot fix it, many say, but we can manage it.

The wedding took place near Ben-Gurion airport, where a set of event halls has gone up in the past seven years, including elaborate structures with a distinct Oriental décor of glistening chandeliers, mirrored place mats and sky-high ceilings with shifting digital displays. The groom's grandparents emigrated from Yemen; the bride's came from Eastern Europe, an example of continuing and increasing intermarriage between Sephardim and Ashkenazim.

The music was almost entirely Middle Eastern in beat, some of it in Arabic, some of it religious. The hundreds on the dance floor, many staying until dawn singing along with arms gesticulating, came from across a range of political, geographic and religious spectra — from miniskirted to ultra-Orthodox modesty. Frumpy settlers in oversize skullcaps mingled with Tel Aviv metrosexuals in severe eyewear. Some women hugged you; others declined to shake your hand. Everyone was celebrating. No one, especially the Orthodox rabbi who presided over the ceremony, mentioned that the young couple had been living together for more than three years. Some talked politics with me. No one mentioned the Palestinians.

ISRAEL today offers a set of paradoxes: Jewish Israelis seem in some ways happier and more united than in the past, as if choosing not to solve their most difficult challenge has opened up a space for shalom bayit — peace at home. Yes, all those internal tensions still exist, but the shared belief that there is no solution to their biggest problem has forged an odd kind of solidarity. Indeed, Israel has never been richer, safer, more culturally productive or more dynamic. Terrorism is on the wane. Yet the occupation grinds on next door with little attention to its consequences. Moreover, as the power balance has shifted from the European elite, Israel has never felt more Middle Eastern in its popular culture, music and public displays of religion. Yet it is increasingly cut off from its region, which despises it perhaps more than ever. Finally, while the secular bourgeoisie, represented by Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid Party, has forged an unexpected alliance with West Bank settlers, represented by Naftali Bennett's Habayit Hayehudi Party, aimed at reducing the political power of the ultra-Orthodox, alarm over the failure to address the Palestinian problem has

grown in a surprising place — among some of the former princes of the Zionist right wing. At a Jerusalem cafe one noon, Dan Meridor, the former Likud minister and son of right-wing Zionist aristocracy, could not stop talking about the Palestinians. “It is a sword of Damocles hanging over our heads,” he said. “We are living on illusions. We must do everything we can on the ground to increase the separation between us and the Palestinians so that the idea of one state will go away. But we are doing nothing.”

Mr. Meridor, nursing an American coffee at the cafe near the house his parents bought many decades ago in the upscale Rehavia neighborhood, sounded like two other public figures from famous right-wing families — Ehud Olmert, the former prime minister, and [Tzipi Livni](#), the justice minister and chief peace negotiator. Both have made a series of emotional speeches begging Israelis to take the Palestinian issue seriously. They are getting little traction.

The Israeli left is still there, of course, but in increasingly insignificant knots. Two Israeli friends in Jaffa, from which tens of thousands of Palestinians left, voluntarily or not, in 1948, have beautifully renovated a house, even preserving a pre-state lemon tree in the courtyard. They are friendly with the Arabs who live nearby. Their children refused military service in protest over the West Bank occupation. And on the outside of their house they have put up a plaque noting that until 1948 the structure was the home of the Khader family, a tiny homage to a destroyed world. But the family is rare. Mr. Lapid, the rising star of Israeli politics, is a former television host who agrees that something must be done about the Palestinians. But in an interview he offers no specifics other than hoping Mr. Kerry will pressure them to return to the negotiating table under conditions they have long rejected. Mr. Lapid, who spoke in the outdoor section of his neighborhood cafe in north Tel Aviv on a fragrant spring afternoon, was relaxed and buff in his long-sleeved black T-shirt and black jeans. Well-off Tel Avivians at nearby tables argued into their iPhones. Mr. Lapid said Israel should not change its settlement policy to lure the Palestinians to negotiations, nor should any part of Jerusalem become the capital of the Palestinian state he says he longs for. He has not reached out to any Palestinian politicians nor spoken publicly on the issue. As finance minister, he is focused on closing the government’s deficit. Mr. Lapid may

be a political novice but he knows the public mood. A former senior aide to Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) agreed, over a Jerusalem lunch of toasted bagels and salad, that most Israelis considered the peace process irrelevant because they believed that the Palestinians had no interest in a deal, especially in the current Middle Eastern context of rising Islamism. “Debating the peace process to most Israelis is the equivalent of debating the color of the shirt you will wear when landing on Mars,” he said. An afternoon in Ramallah revealed no stronger sense of urgency among Palestinians. But, unlike Israeli Jews, they are increasingly depressed and despondent over their quandary and dysfunctional leadership. Prime Minister [Salam Fayyad](#), who showed real competence in his job but is resigning, says Palestinian leaders must acknowledge their failure to deliver on their promises and call new elections. That is not happening. He tells friends that if he believed Mr. Kerry’s efforts had any chance of yielding results, he would not be quitting.

All of which suggests that, as has long been argued, there can be no Israeli-Palestinian peace deal so long as outsiders want it more than the parties themselves. Some have likened Israel to the deck of the Titanic. That may not be right, but you can’t help wondering about that next iceberg.

Article 4.

The Daily Star

In Lebanon, Salafists are on the move

Rami G. Khouri

26 May -- The sudden escalation of fighting in the north Lebanese city of Tripoli is troubling on two fronts and noteworthy on a third. The troubling dimensions are the chronic nature of urban warfare in Lebanon’s streets and the direct linkages between the Tripoli battles and the fighting in the Syrian town of Qusair. The noteworthy element is the growing role of Salafists in the Tripoli fighting, which is part of a remarkable expansion of Salafist groups’ public action in political and military spheres across the Middle East in recent years. Credible reports from Tripoli repeatedly chronicle the increased military role of Salafists in the city, directly reflecting the heightened clashes mirroring the fighting between pro- and

anti-Syrian government forces in Syria. Tripoli has long had its own localized confrontation between the Sunni-dominated Bab al-Tabbaneh quarter and the majority Alawite and mostly pro-Bashar Assad quarter of Jabal Mohsen.

Several new elements have transformed this chronic local tension spot into something much more ominous: the direct linkages between the clashes in Syria and in Tripoli, the movement of growing numbers of Salafist fighters into north Lebanon and other parts of the country in recent years, the movement of fighters from north Lebanon into Syria to support anti-Assad rebels, and the Lebanese Salafists' self-imposed role of countering the influence of Hezbollah in Lebanon and in the fighting in Syria – especially in Qusair this month.

This is not a sudden or unexpected development. Salafists have operated in small numbers in isolated parts of urban or rural Lebanon for some years, often expanding in direct proportion to adjacent conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Pockets of militants battled the Lebanese Army and security forces in the north a few years ago, mainly in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp. More recently, Lebanese security officials have been quoted in the press as expressing concern about the growing numbers of Salafists moving into Lebanon, anchoring themselves in Salafist-dominated urban neighborhoods such as Bab al-Tabbaneh or in some Palestinian refugee camps outside the control of the Lebanese state, such as Ain al-Hilweh in the south.

The militant nature of the Salafists adds a significant dimension to the nonviolent ways of the majority of Arab Salafists who tend to focus on recreating the “pure” Islamic lifestyles and societies from the earliest decades of the Islamic era, during and immediately after the days of the Prophet Mohammad. Most Salafists across the Arab world in recent years have operated quietly at the neighborhood level, seeking primarily to promote basic Islamic values (faith, modesty, charity, mercy) in the personal and communal behavior of individual men and women. Active political participation in public life was left to the Muslim Brotherhood or its various derivatives, who sought power at a national level, or to jihadists who waged their own battles across their imagined global battlefield. So today we can witness two important developments occurring simultaneously across parts of the Arab region. Some Salafists have

emerged from the shadows to participate in public politics and contest parliamentary and executive power, such as in Egypt and Tunisia most dramatically; and, a few Salafist groups have turned to military means to defend their local, regional or global causes, as we see in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq most clearly.

This means that we now have at least three distinct and identifiable kinds of Islamist movements in the Arab world that are engaged in public political, social or military action: Hezbollah- and Hamas-like resistance groups that are heavily anchored in individual nationalisms; parties like Ennahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Morocco and Jordan that operate within the available channels of political participation and contestation; and, Salafist militants that use violence and intimidation to impose their strict ways on society.

It is fascinating that none of these three groups have demonstrated any credible capacity to provide programs that promote long-term socio-economic growth or address issues such as education quality, environmental protection or cultural creativity. The dominant focus of these different Islamist groups on resistance and identity issues allows them to be very successful in opposition mode, but their ability to manage a city or a country remains mostly untested. In the few cases where they have enjoyed executive or legislative incumbency, such as in Egypt, Jordan, Gaza, Sudan and Tunisia, they have proved mostly amateurish and incompetent.

So the troubling acceleration of fighting in Tripoli represents much more than a challenge for the Lebanese people. It reminds us that the expanding militancy of Salafist Islamists is a growing regional phenomenon that once again – as with Islamism everywhere – highlights important grievances that cause people to worry and then to act, but does not suggest any practical solutions to those grievances and vulnerabilities that continue to spread across our increasingly fractured and frail region.

Rami G. Khouri is published twice weekly by THE DAILY STAR.

What do radical Islamists actually believe in?

Dr Usama Hasan

24 May 2013 -- In the aftermath of the Woolwich attack in which a British soldier was killed, apparently at the hands of Islamist fundamentalists, Quilliam Foundation researcher Dr Usama Hasan argues that moderates must do more to win over Muslim youth.

For decades in the UK and abroad, Muslim discourse has been dominated by fundamentalism and Islamism.

I spent two decades, starting in my teens, as an activist promoting these narrow and superficial misinterpretations of Islam in the UK, along with thousands of others here and millions in Muslim-majority countries, until deeper and wider experiences of faith and life helped me out of these intellectual and spiritual wastelands.

These discourses need to be defeated, and the developing counter-narratives to these worldviews and mindsets need to be strengthened.

By fundamentalism, I mean the reading of scripture out of context with no reference to history or a holistic view of the world.

Specific examples of literalist, fundamentalist readings that still dominate Muslim attitudes worldwide are manifested in the resistance to progress in human rights, gender-equality and democratic socio-political reforms that are too-often heard from socially-conservative Muslims.

The universal verses of the Koran (eg 49:13, "O humanity! We have created you from male and female and made you nations and tribes so that you may know each other: the most honoured of you with God are those most God-conscious: truly, God is Knowing, Wise") promote full human equality and leave no place for slavery, misogyny, xenophobia or racism. However, other Koranic verses that may seem to accommodate slavery, discrimination against non-Muslims and women and even wife-beating (eg 4:34) were clearly specific for their time and always meant as temporary measures in a process of liberation.

Islam exalted the status of women and slaves in 7th Century Arabia.

Ahistorical, fundamentalist readings treat these specific stages as universal

and obstinately refuse any progress, effectively insisting on a return to 7th Century values for all societies at all times.

Islamism is often described as "political Islam". A more accurate description would be "over-politicised, fundamentalist Islam", since believers have every right to build their politics on basic religious ideals such as truth, justice and the welfare of all people.

The following may be regarded as the major components of Islamism: Umma, Khilafa, Sharia and Jihad - all of which have become excessively politicised.

Umma (nation) translates for Islamists into an obsession with the "Muslim people" and its imagined suffering worldwide (the blessings are never counted, only the problems) that in turn becomes a firmly entrenched victimhood and perpetual sense of grievance.

Conflicts involving Muslims with others are continually cited - Palestine, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Iraq - while ignoring savage internecine Muslim conflicts, such as the Iran-Iraq war or the current wars in Darfur and Syria, or the appalling persecution of Christians in many Muslim-majority countries such as Egypt, Iran and Pakistan.

Khilafa (caliphate) for Islamists is the idea that they are duty bound to establish "Islamic states" - described by vague, theoretical, idealistic platitudes - that would then be united in a global, pan-Islamic state or "new caliphate".

Sharia (law) for Islamists is the idea that they are duty-bound to implement and enforce medieval Islamic jurisprudence in their modern "Islamic state". Hence the obsession with enforcing the veiling of women, discriminating against women and non-Muslims and implementing penal codes that include amputations, floggings, beheadings and stonings to death, all seen as a sacred, God-given duty that cannot be changed.

Jihad (sacred struggle) for Islamists is an obsession with violence, whether of a military, paramilitary or terrorist nature. Their Jihad aims to protect and expand the Islamic state. Extremists even dream of conquering the whole world for Islamism by militarily defeating the US, Europe, Israel, India, China and Russia.

Counter-narratives to the Islamist narrative may be developed.

The Koranic references to Umma include the historical aspect, such as the prophets of other faiths and their followers, a strong, interfaith and spiritual

notion.

In early Islam, Umma also referred to political communities that included Jews and Christians, such as Medina under the Prophet Muhammad. The Ottomans abandoned the legal pluralism of the "millet" system (a faith-community framework) in the 19th Century and adopted a citizenship model that granted equal rights to all, irrespective of religion.

The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, articulated the same vision for his new Muslim-majority state with Hindu, Sikh and Christian minorities, but these developments have been forgotten under the avalanche of fundamentalist Islamism over the past half-century.

Sharia has had dozens of schools and interpretations over the centuries. Narrow approaches do not work in our modern world. The holistic approach to Sharia known as Maqasid al-Sharia (universal objectives of law) posits equality, justice and compassion as the basis of all law, and is the only way forward.

The work of the recent or contemporary scholars Ibn Ashur, Nasr Abu Zayd and Ibn Bayyah are crucial in this regard.

It has to be recognised that Koranic penal codes, always accompanied by exhortations to mercy and forgiveness, were often suspended or replaced by imprisonment or financial penalties in the early centuries of Islam, since punishment, deterrence, restorative justice and rehabilitation were the operative concerns.

Also, arbitrary interpretations of Sharia were not enforced at state level in early Islam and most of Sharia is voluntary, relating to believers' daily worship and social transactions.

The Koranic spirit of freedom, equality, justice and compassion must be reclaimed, with an emphasis on Sharia as ethics rather than rigid ritualism. The Koranic notion of Jihad is essentially about the sacred and physical-spiritual nature of life's struggles, as summed up by "strive in God", a verse revealed in the pacifist period of Islam before war was permitted.

In our times, we need non-violent Jihads; social struggles against all forms of inequality and oppression, and for justice and liberation.

Socio-political Jihads are needed to achieve the goals of noble causes such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that may be seen as an extension of the themes of equality contained in the Prophet Muhammad's farewell sermon.

The military aspects of Jihad are covered by the ethics of warfare. The voluminous Geneva Conventions are in keeping with the spirit of the Koran, which also has a strong pacifist message.

Role-models for such counter-narratives include the many Muslim social reformers of the past century, such as Jinnah's sister Fatima, who is still an inspiration to millions of Pakistani women, and the many Muslim activists who contributed to the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

More recently, the youth of the Arab spring, with an instinctive Islamic, Christian or humanist love of freedom and justice, have broken through the impasse maintained by dictatorships and their subservient clergy.

Such counter-extremist, reform movements must be led at the grass-roots by community and intellectual activists.

Democratic government has a role, but a healthy civil society is best-equipped to resist tyrannical dictatorship, whether religious or secular.

We have much to do, but where there is faith, there is much hope.

Dr Usama Hasan is senior researcher at the Quilliam Foundation and a part-time imam. In 1990-91, while a Cambridge undergraduate, he took part in the "jihad" against Communist forces in Afghanistan. After the 7 July 2005 bombings in London, he started campaigning against extremism and for religious reform.

Article 6.

Project Syndicate

The Sino-American Decade

Michael Spence

24 May 2013 -- Hong Kong – The California summit between US President Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping on June 7-8 comes at a time of heightened tension between the world's two preeminent powers. But divisive issues – from computer hacking to America's "pivot to Asia" – must not claim all of the attention. If Obama and Xi lift their

heads above the parapets and begin charting a jointly agreed course through the coming decade, they may find that they have much in common.

The next ten years will be characterized by major structural adjustments and shifts in individual economies, and by a huge reconfiguration of the global economy as a whole. Above all, much depends on the policies adopted by the two largest economies, China and the United States, and their cooperation and leadership in creating global public goods and maintaining a stable and open economic environment.

Cooperation will be needed in many areas. One is the management of natural resources and the environment. The growth of China and the developing world will lead to a doubling of global output in 10-15 years, and probably a tripling in the 15 years after that. The growth model on which both advanced and developing countries relied in the past will not work at two or three times the scale. Climate, ecology, food, water, energy, and livability will not withstand the pressure.

Global problems are hard to solve. A productive starting point would be China-US collaboration on energy efficiency and security, greener growth, and climate change.

China's [12th Five-Year Plan](#) sets ambitious goals in this area. In the US, progress is somewhat more decentralized, though new national policies have been adopted, including [Corporate Average Fuel Economy \(CAFE\) standards](#) for automobiles. The US also is set to become energy independent, owing to the rise of shale oil and gas, with [diminishing reliance on coal](#) already bringing down per capita carbon emissions. The complementarity of the Chinese and US economies is changing rapidly, but it is not declining in significance. In the past, the US brought a large open market, foreign direct investment, and technology, while China supplied low-cost labor-intensive components in key global manufacturing supply chains. Today, China provides a large and rapidly growing market for a widening array of previously unaffordable goods, and will increasingly produce as well as absorb new technologies. In the process, it will shed lower-value-added jobs in its export sector as production moves to lower-cost developing countries.

Depending on policies on both sides, China may also become a foreign direct investor in the US economy in a wide range of areas – including

infrastructure. The US will continue to provide a large open market, even as China's role in serving it will shift upward in value added and in global supply chains. The US will also provide, share, and absorb technology and human talent, remaining at the top end of the higher-education spectrum and in basic and applied research.

Of course, there is also a healthy element of competition. The sharp differences in comparative advantage that were apparent two decades ago are diminishing as the gap in income, capital depth (including human capital), and capabilities narrows. Chinese multinationals with recognized brands will begin to appear, just as they did in Japan and Korea. They will compete with multinationals from a wide range of countries, and will become architects of global supply chains. Fair, rules-based competition in a rapidly expanding global economy is far from a zero-sum game.

The outlines of the structural changes needed to move toward a healthier, more sustainable growth pattern in the coming decade are relatively clear in China. The remaining questions concern policy implementation and institutional development – issues that will be clarified in the course of 2013, as China's new leaders formalize and communicate their reform priorities.

The US economy, meanwhile, retains many elements of dynamism and flexibility. But, while GDP growth seems to be returning slowly to potential, the slow pace of recovery in employment and the residual secular shifts in income distribution remain causes of concern. In particular, the shift of income from those who save less to those who save more implies uncertainty about the restoration of aggregate demand.

Political polarization has become another source of uncertainty. Many centrists agree that an optimal fiscal policy would feature short-term stimulus, a multi-year medium-term deficit reduction plan, and measures to reduce long-term liabilities, especially if retrenchment protected growth-oriented public-sector investments. But that is difficult to achieve in a context of deleveraging and fixation on debt.

If current trends continue, with the US economy recovering slowly but steadily, the pattern of convergence with China will continue. East Asia as a whole will surpass the US in terms of aggregate GDP by 2015, with China contributing the highest proportion of the total. China's GDP is projected to catch up to that of the US and Europe in 10-15 years, at which

point (if not sooner) both Chinese and US real GDP will exceed \$25 trillion (in 2012 prices), more than three times China's current GDP. Each will account for approximately 15% of global output.

And yet this shift will be accompanied by very substantial global economic challenges and uncertainties, underscoring the importance of Sino-US cooperation. A constructive, cooperative relationship can make a significant contribution to both countries' efforts to adapt their policies and institutions to achieve sustainable, inclusive growth patterns.

Beyond the bilateral benefits, the rest of the global economy is dependent on Chinese and US leadership – both in terms of growth and in matters concerning global economic governance and coordination. Trade and economic openness, financial stability and regulation, energy security, climate change, and many other issues confront the world collectively. It is very difficult to imagine successful global rebalancing and progress without China and the US taking a leading role in the process.

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Article 7.

Israel Journal of foreign Affairs

Tested by Zion

Reviewed by Oded Eran

*Tested by Zion: The Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict - by **Elliot Abrams***

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American presidents, diplomats, and emissaries were active in peacemaking in the Middle East before the 1973 Yom Kippur War. That war, however, marked a watershed in terms of cementing Washington's high profile and the intensity of its efforts in this field, and ensured it a virtual monopoly. Certainly, the record of US-Israeli relations is mixed one, with both successes and failures. It is also a tale of personal animosities and friendships between American presidents and Israeli premiers. The triple handshake in 1979 on the White House lawn after Carter, Begin, and Sadat had signed the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty is evidence of one of the greatest American diplomatic triumphs in the post-World War II era. Yet, the iconic photograph of that event tells us nothing of the personal distrust between the three.

Animosity certainly characterized the relationship between President George H.W. Bush and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. Some observers of US-Israel relations go so far as to attribute to the US president an attempt to bring down Shamir in the 1992 elections. (Shamir indeed lost, although it is not clear whether the deterioration in US-Israeli relations was a factor in his defeat.) The relationship between President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was quite different, with Clinton making no secret of his great admiration for Rabin. During their almost four years of cooperation, Washington was able to take some of the credit for the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians as well as the 1994 Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan. The two leaders had an excellent rapport-and even personal chemistry-based on a high degree of mutual trust that defied the differences in their professional lives, ages, and characters: Rabin is remembered as being extremely shy while Clinton is an extrovert.

A similar relationship developed between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President George W. Bush. In much the same way that Clinton admired Rabin, the younger Bush developed an admiration for Sharon's military background and his ability to take difficult political decisions.

Bush's victory in the 2000 presidential elections created some concern in Israel. The memories of Bush Senior's cold, distant presidential team were still fresh. Some of those very same people worked with the younger Bush during his campaign and transition to power. When Sharon took the reins of the Israeli premiership in early 2001, weeks after Bush had entered the

White House, the newly-minted Israeli head of government had ample reason to be apprehensive of the new US president. However, US-Israeli relations, and especially the Bush-Sharon relationship, blossomed and were continued by Ehud Olmert. In 2006 Olmert succeeded Sharon, who was incapacitated after suffering a serious stroke. The events of 9/11 certainly led to a change in priorities for the new American administration but these cannot serve as a complete explanation as to why relations between Washington and Jerusalem developed the way they did during the presidency of Bush the younger.

Elliot Abrams approaches this subject with almost unique credentials. A senior American diplomat, he served in high-ranking foreign policy positions under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. In his capacity as senior National Security Council officer, Abrams worked at the White House with Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and participated in innumerable meetings with most of the major protagonists in the conflict.

In the first chapter of his book, Abrams describes in detail the Saudi Arabian ultimatum, which led to Bush's declaration of his recognition of the need for a Palestinian state (November 10, 2001). He was the first American president to make such a statement. It took much less for President Barack Obama, in his first term, to be depicted by some in Israel and the US as Israel's public enemy number one. On March 12, 2001, Washington voted for UN General Assembly Resolution 1397 "[a]ffirming the vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized boundaries." Later, on June 24, 2002, Bush spoke very clearly of his two-state vision. He believed that this could be fulfilled at the end of a three-year process, which would include an end to Palestinian terror, the implementation of governmental reform, and, finally, provisional statehood.

Considering the fact that at that time Israel was battling a wave of Palestinian terror in its major cities, its reaction to such a dramatic statement by a US president can be described as mild. In part, this can be explained by the impact of the 1999-2001 negotiations and the conclusion that although they had failed, a Palestinian state was just a matter of time. Abrams adds his own plausible explanation that Sharon looked at this problem as a sequential one. Sharon believed that an end to terror had to

come first and that the establishment of Palestinian security organs would aid in achieving that objective. Sharon must have also found comfort in Bush's clear abhorrence of Arafat, who was not mentioned in the June 24 speech. By the time his involvement in the Karine A affair was disclosed, Arafat had lost every shred of credibility in the Bush White House.

The behind-the-scenes arguments within the administration during the Bush years on how much effort to invest in trying to broker a Palestinian-Israeli agreement echo a very similar debate that has emerged in the Obama presidency. "Don't get completely consumed with Arab-Israeli issues," Vice President Cheney advised Secretary of State Colin Powell (p. 34). But the Bush administration did get deeply involved and the Obama administration is not about to abandon the issue either, especially not the settlements, as some in Israel and the US believe.

As Abrams portrays it, the settlement issue accounts for a major part of the discourse between the two governments. He identifies (pp. 67-68) a tacit understanding according to which new construction could take place only inside already built-up areas, without, therefore, utilizing land beyond the perimeters of existing settlements. Abrams also alludes to a formula proposed by Sharon's bureau chief Dov Weissglass—a freeze on all construction in settlements beyond the security fence and unlimited construction in the major settlement blocs (p. 139). If the US administration ever succeeds in reviving the Israeli-Palestinian talks, this formula ought to be revisited. In his eight-year tenure, President George W. Bush dealt with two Israeli prime ministers—Sharon and Olmert. Both of them made significant decisions in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sharon decided to withdraw all Israeli settlers and soldiers from the Gaza Strip. Olmert made a far-reaching offer to Abu Mazen, his interlocutor in the 2007-2008 talks. Abrams attempts to identify the personal motives of the two Israeli prime ministers. Bush himself asked Sharon what had motivated him to disengage from Gaza. Sharon answered that he had seen his friends killed in battle and that he desired peace. Abrams apparently was unsatisfied with that answer, and quotes Israelis who explained that both Sharon and Olmert hoped that bold political decisions would ultimately erase in the history books the stains on them arising from their own personal improprieties (p. 205, for example). Reading this book, one can imagine the current conversations between

President Obama and his Secretary of State, John Kerry. Kerry, like Rice before him, relentlessly pushes for an active US role. Political circumstances in Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and indeed the entire Middle East have changed dramatically since the final months of the George W. Bush "era." Certainly, there is no denying that overriding personal ambitions and considerations can cloud the decision making process of politicians.

When taking into account the current regional instability in the neighboring states and the weakness of the Palestinian political leadership versus the need to preserve the two-state option, Israel may consider unilateral steps. These are almost by definition second-best options as they are not based on bilateral, binding agreements. They can, however, serve the purpose of creating progress toward a solution, though in an incremental way.

The 2005 Israeli exit from Gaza comes to mind in the context of American assurances and involvement in post-withdrawal arrangements. Abrams devotes considerable space to the 2004 exchange of letters between Bush and Sharon that preceded the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. This episode is a significant one, as it relates to the gap in thinking between Washington and Jerusalem on key aspects of the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ever since 1969, the US has tenaciously maintained the view that a solution to this conflict will have to be based on the 1967 lines with minor alterations or rectifications. In Bush's April 2004 letter to Sharon on settlement, it was made clear that "[i]n light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of Final Status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the Armistice Lines of 1949."

The Palestinians themselves have estimated that the built-up areas of the settlements account for almost 2 percent of the territory of the West Bank and thus Washington could always respond to Palestinian complaints that nothing in the Bush letter contradicts well-known, long-held US positions. Furthermore, according to that very letter, borders should emerge from negotiations between the parties and "it is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities," thus subjecting changes in the 1967 lines to a Palestinian agreement. It is therefore difficult to understand why "[a] beaming Sharon saw the April 14 letter as a great victory for his

disengagement strategy" (p. 109). As Abrams notes, the US Congress endorses the letter, but as he knows from his days on the Hill, this endorsement is hardly binding. If Israel ever seeks US assurances and commitments, this exchange should not serve as a precedent.

Throughout the years of cooperation, partnership, and, according to some, alliance, Washington and Jerusalem have disagreed on matters pertaining to Israel's view of its security. The US expressed criticism of Israel's attacks on the Iraqi nuclear reactor in June 1984 and its incursion into Lebanon in June 1982, and in that respect the Bush era was no different. The Second Intifada and Israel's military responses elicited angry reactions from Bush himself (p. 34), but more instructive still was the US-Israeli dialogue in 2007 over Syria's nuclear reactor. It was a forerunner to the current debate on the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons and Iran's burgeoning nuclear project. Abrams describes in great detail the inner debate in the US administration on the evidence on the reactor submitted by the head of the Mossad. Secretaries of State and Defense Rice and Robert Gates, respectively, were not only against a US military action eliminating the reactor, but according to Abrams, Gates went so far as to say that the US should put relations with Israel on the line to prevent it from neutralizing the Syrian reactor by itself (p. 237). Both suggested to the president that it would be better to mount a diplomatic campaign in the relevant international organizations. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose...

To be sure, Abrams' work constitutes a very important addition to the library of books by American officials on Washington's role in Middle East peacemaking.

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