

From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen <[REDACTED]>
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Article 1.

The Economist

Palestine and the West Bank: The calm may not last for ever

Jun 30th 2012 -- Balata Camp, Nablus -- Five years after Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, dismissed an elected government run by the Islamists of Hamas and decided to rule instead by decree, the

Palestinian Authority (PA) that oversees the West Bank is being dangerously challenged from within. In Nablus, the first city where Mr Abbas chose to fill the security vacuum with his American-trained national-security battalions, turf wars have recently erupted between rival commanders, puncturing four years of calm. The walls of Jacob's Well, a local church, a theatre and the UN office all bear the scars of recent shooting sprees. "It's hell," says a social worker in Balata, the city's largest refugee camp, which suffered grievously during two previous intifadas (uprisings), in 1987-93 and 2000-05. Now people are beginning gloomily to wonder whether there will be a third intifada, this time aimed at the PA as much as at the Israelis occupying the West Bank.

For the moment Mr Abbas has the upper hand. Dispatched from Ramallah, the PA's seat of government, his presidential guards have detained dozens of rogue security officers, some of them very senior, in Nablus and in Jenin, a smaller Palestinian city half an hour's drive to the north, where the governor recently died of a heart attack after machinegun fire raked his house. In Jenin triumphant officers loyal to Mr Abbas patrol the streets with M-16 rifles captured from their rivals.

The PA's Western donors praise Mr Abbas for his readiness to rein in his own rogues. Israel's generals, who give him a security umbrella, welcome the belated prevention of anarchy. And for the first time in months camp residents are enjoying their first nights of sleep unbroken by gunfire. Moreover, Nablus people still appreciate the relative prosperity that has revived the city since the second intifada ended in around 2005. Hundreds of businessmen have returned since Israel pulled back from the roadblocks at the city gates. Some 700,000 Arab citizens of Israel came shopping last year in the elegant medieval quarter. The governor hopes foreign tourists will follow, with plans for a "nativity trail" from Nazareth to Bethlehem to make a detour via Nablus. A new hotel and museum are due to open this summer on the ruins of a medieval khan, al-Wikala, which Israeli tanks pummelled during the second intifada. Unemployment has halved, say PA officials. In more affluent districts, young women are discarding veils.

But the camp's residents are deeply divided. Though many are grateful for the calm that Mr Abbas and his appointed prime minister, Salam Fayyad, have brought in the past few years, others resent the heavy-handed

security of the PA regime. Imposing muqatas (fortresses) are rising in all the West Bank's main cities. Many Palestinians find the PA's co-operation with Israel galling. "We give them the names and they arrest them," says an Israeli officer. Many Palestinians fear they are being condemned to indefinite occupation. At a recent funeral for three local fighters whose bodies Israel recently returned to their families, mourners chanted "Down with the PA! Down with Abbas!"

Most worrying for Mr Abbas was the fact that the ringleaders of the recent trouble hailed from his own Fatah party, which provides the bedrock of the PA's security forces. PA officials fear that certain senior Fatah commanders who have fallen foul of Mr Abbas—in particular a former intelligence chief, Tawfiq Tirawi, and a prominent strongman, Muhammad Dahlan—are stoking the unrest in the hope of creating a security vacuum they could later fill. Hamas, which still controls the Gaza Strip but is heavily suppressed in the West Bank by both Israel and the PA, awaits the tardy coming of the Arab spring to Palestine. The Israelis may be content to see Mr Abbas tied up with recalcitrant Palestinians rather than tackling Israel on the world stage.

Nablus's commercial regeneration cannot cure a gnawing national malaise. "There is no political horizon," say disgruntled Palestinians. They increasingly question the point of the PA. It has failed to usher in a Palestinian state, and appears powerless to prevent Israeli military incursions or the relentless expansion of Jewish settlements on the West Bank. "All the windows are closed, and the political elite has no keys to open them," says Raid Nairat, an academic. The West Bank's 30,000 security forces seem unkeen on a recent quest for reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas that would force them to share power. Their recent round-up of 150 Hamas men helped dampen hopes of a deal.

A fiscal crisis is compounding the political one. On paper the PA expects a budget deficit of \$1 billion, equivalent to 10% of GDP. But this may well double when arrears owed to private businesses are added. Unpaid for years, suppliers refuse government orders on credit, and are having to cut production and their workforces. Palestinian builders complain that ministries pay them only when they give bribes. "We won't let our financial system go down with the PA," says a Palestinian banker.

Donors, too, are tired. Cash from the Gulf has dwindled, partly because the United Arab Emirates, which used to send \$200m a year, seems to have sided with Mr Dahlan. “The crash is coming,” says an official in Mr Fayyad’s office. “If we can’t pay salaries over Ramadan [the Muslim month of fasting which starts on July 20th], there will be a revolt.” Few Palestinians call for a renewal of violence. But such talk is again in the air. In some West Bank towns Hizb ut-Tahrir, an extreme Islamist group, has been making headway. “A Muslim army should defend Muslims, not Jews,” says an angry Islamist, denouncing the PA’s security co-ordination with Jewish kuffar (unbelievers).

Article 2.

NYT

How Egypt’s Army Won

Joshua Stacher

June 29, 2012 -- Cairo -- JUBILANT chants echoed far beyond Tahrir Square when the Muslim Brotherhood’s candidate, Mohamed Morsi, was confirmed as Egypt’s first civilian president last week. Mr. Morsi’s election was lauded across the globe, and many are hailing today’s “transfer” of power as a triumph for democracy.

But there is little reason for celebration. In this latest grand spectacle manufactured by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the generals symbolically respected the people’s choice while using the election to further entrench their unaccountable political autonomy.

In February 2011, most analysts assumed that Mr. Mubarak’s government had collapsed. They were wrong. The regime never changed. It was reconfigured. The underlying centralized structures of the system that the military council inherited from Mr. Mubarak persist, and the generals have sought to preserve them. The recent election was just the latest

attempt to formalize the generals' executive authority while winning public legitimacy.

The military council exemplifies the highly adaptive quality of Egypt's governing elite. Egypt's senior generals have remade the ruling coalition by using centralized authority to neutralize newly included political forces and divide the increasingly marginalized protesters. In the process, the military has effectively prevented all groups from resisting its encroachment as a fourth estate.

This was possible because the state's apparatus, while disrupted, held after Mr. Mubarak's departure. The hierarchy within the vast and largely cohesive state bureaucracy resumed functioning as the effect of the protests subsided. The state media began accusing protesters of causing chaos, scaring tourists and being agents of foreign elements. The demands of workers, women and Coptic Christians were dismissed as special interests of secondary importance.

The security services were re-branded, and successive courtroom acquittals gave them a guarantee that their repression of fellow Egyptians would have no legal ramifications. As time passed, the post-Mubarak regime began to look and act like its predecessor. Buttressed by the machinery of the state, the military then sought allies to contain the power of future protests. High electoral drama has produced what political scientists call a "pact making" exercise.

Egyptians have gone to the polls five times since March 2011. Rather than elections' producing real choices, though, the military has used them to create an environment in which it can negotiate a pact with the winners. And the Muslim Brotherhood, which is trying to gain a lasting foothold in the system, has willingly participated. Yet it remains a comparatively weak actor, forced to compete on the military's uneven playing field. The Brotherhood has long been skeptical of popular mobilization, making it a useful accomplice to the military's efforts to consolidate power. Despite some Brotherhood members' condemnation of the military's recent maneuvers as a "coup," protest politics has become more complicated now that one of their own occupies the presidency. The Muslim Brothers will have a hard time persuading others that they are still an opposition force. Indeed, any Brotherhood members who flock to Tahrir Square are now tacitly resisting their president.

In a sign of continuity, Mr. Morsi has met with the interior minister and pledged not to purge that despised ministry or seek revenge against it. Consequently, the Muslim Brothers have become invested in a centralized state that blocks the clamor for change from below. Given this political structure, Mr. Morsi isn't likely to be able to resist the generals' ultimatums in the short-term.

Mr. Morsi's control of any of the national security portfolios is unlikely. It remains unclear whether the disbanded parliament will be reinstated or when a new one might be elected. The military has laid mines in the constitution-drafting process, threatening to exercise its veto at every turn. This traps the Brotherhood between street protesters and the generals, with few good options.

The protesters can't seriously pressure the army into transferring actual political power without cooperating with the Brotherhood. And although the protesters won't disappear, the Brotherhood is unlikely to cooperate closely with them. Mr. Morsi is more likely to attend to Egypt's ailing economy and save political battles with the generals for another day. In the process, the unaccountable military will be able to better ingrain itself politically while the democratically elected Mr. Morsi becomes the object of popular blame for the country's economic ills and political gridlock. The military checkmated Mr. Morsi before he was crowned. Egypt's leading generals had a long-game strategy to capture control and they have emerged as the election's actual victors because they are poised to remain in charge of the country for the foreseeable future.

[Joshua Stacher](#), an assistant professor of political science at Kent State, is the author of "Adaptable Autocrats: Regime Power in Egypt and Syria."

Article 3.

Asharq Alawsat

Electing the new Egyptian President

Abdel Monem Said

29 June 2012 -- Last week was full of strange occurrences, and not only for my generation. It was a week full of astonishment; something which the word "surprise" cannot even describe. The week began on the 16th

June; a very hot and humid day, or to put it bluntly, a day when the climate was unpleasant for the Egyptian mood, and no one was encouraged to go to ballot stations. Hence, there was an initial shock when it seemed that no one had come to celebrate an event which has been eagerly anticipated for 6,000 years, during which the Egyptian people failed to elect a pharaoh, a king, a prince, a ruler, a Sultan or even a President of the Republic. Early statements shied away from announcing that the voting rate had not exceeded 35 percent, but press reports revealed that only 15 - 20 percent of eligible voters in Cairo had cast their votes. This suggested that people had refrained from participating in the election and that they were completely indifferent to the election campaign. The most likely explanation was that the people were bitterly disillusioned by having to choose between a candidate who seemed to be an affiliate of the former regime and era that the people rose against, and another candidate who seemed to belong to a reign that ended 14 centuries ago – or let me say a time that dates back to the fall of the Uthman caliphate. Hence it was a choice between two "remnants" – to use an expression that has circulated widely over the 17 months since the outbreak of the revolution. The night passed, the climate of wonder continued to prevail, and the next day was just as hot as the previous one. However, the Egyptian people were suddenly drawn towards the ballot boxes, and hence we encountered a second surprise when it turned out that over 50 percent of Egypt's eligible voters had participated in the presidential elections, with the total figure exceeding 25 million people. Thus, over two consecutive days, several talk shows had fluctuated between attempting to understand why the Egyptian people had declined to go to the polls, and then why there was such a surge the following day. Meanwhile, various media outlets began to leak the election results as they came in, prompting the question as to who was victorious: Was it Mursi or Shafik? Who had gained the majority of votes - even in minor polling stations where the electorate only amounted to several hundred? Was it the advocate of a religious state, or the would-be leader of a civil state? That night Cairo was extremely busy and full of observations, vote counting, additions and deductions. It was clear that at the beginning Mohammed Mursi (the Freedom and Justice Party's chosen candidate) was making progress. Then it became apparent that his victories were

concentrated in Upper Egypt and the border regions, where the towns were small and the vote counting was fast, unlike the situation in the north, the Delta and in Cairo, where the populations are far larger. It is likely that this prompted Mohammed Mursi to surprise everyone by holding a press conference at 3am on Monday, in order to declare his electoral victory. All of a sudden, the election battle was at times a soap opera, a tragic play at other times, and a comedy at others still. There were widespread complexities; the beginning of the elections coincided with the Supreme Constitutional Court's ruling that the political isolation law was unconstitutional. At the same time, the Court also pronounced a ruling denouncing the parliamentary election law – according to which MPs were elected earlier this year, and the parliament was dissolved as a result. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) not only had to contend with this or the demonstrations that broke out in Tahrir Square as a result. Just before votes were due to be counted, SCAF issued a supplementary constitutional declaration, which was strongly criticized by more than one political entity, and nevertheless, SCAF added an article stipulating the establishment of the National Defense Council. This package of measures gave the Muslim Brotherhood's chosen candidate Mohammed Mursi a political boost, which he proceeded to use to mobilize the protestors in Tahrir Square and elsewhere. The Muslim Brotherhood began to adopt a sharper tone and vowed vengeance upon everyone if the election result was not as they expected; meaning that Mursi must be declared victorious and SCAF must allow the parliament to re-convene, regardless of the opinion of the Supreme Constitutional Court. There was also a great sense of tragedy inherent in this drama, with the deplorable health of former President Hosni Mubarak. There was even an official announcement at one point that he was "clinically" dead. The situation seemed tragic; whilst one president was being elected, another was being taken to the grave amidst various medical reports. Simultaneously, public rallies were organized by Mursi to celebrate his victory in order to give the impression that nothing could stand in the way of his rise to power. In turn, Shafik's campaign awoke and sought to discredit Mursi's claims to victory, suggesting that they were all baseless and incorrect and that if there was already a winner, it must be Shafik. All of a sudden, the figures declared by Mursi became the subject of scrutiny

and seemed dubious. As both parties contested the election results, people began to wonder: Why should Mursi put forth all these contestations if he believes he had already won the race several days ago? Thus, the situation became part comedy when the majority of Egyptians became experts in legal analysis, and Mursi and Shafik's respective campaigns declared themselves victorious and launched criticism against the other. It was also later revealed that pens with "erasable ink" were used in some ballot stations, and that certain state-run print houses produced ballots with the president's name already filled in before the election process started.

Drama was mixed with both tragedy and comedy at the same time. As is customary in such situations, public mobilization for Mursi began in the squares, and so Shafik's adherers discovered that it was time for them to take to streets, hence choosing a symbolic location in front of the unknown soldier memorial as a place to assemble. However, the masses were also mobilized by another party; an Egyptian group claiming to represent the Egyptian people named "the third current" or "the third way." This group believes that the longstanding shortcomings of Egyptian politics can be blamed on its two central currents: the Egyptian state, regardless of the various names it adopts, and the Muslim Brotherhood. If this is correct, then the only way to remedy the dilemma of Egyptian politics is for a third current to emerge in order to strike a balance. The problem is that this "third current" has a variety of identities and could probably encompass a fourth, fifth and a sixth current after it is divided into its various groups and leaderships. We see them on our television screens, on the radio and in the press for long periods of time, yet they fail to accomplish any truly worthwhile political work. Meanwhile, the real political achievements are being accomplished by SCAF, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian election commission, which recently scrutinized appeals and declared the name of the new Egyptian President. Was this the historic moment we have long been waiting for? Perhaps so, but we do not know what such historic moments look like. Maybe I will be able to tell you more next week.

Abdel Monem Said is the director of Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo.

Syrian Conflict Promises Toxic Outcome

[Dilip Hiro](#)

June 29, 2012 -- There's no satisfying solution to the 16-month old Syrian bloodshed. To let Syrian President Bashar al-Assad crush popular demand for genuine political reform through brutal force, with support from Moscow and Beijing, would strengthen the hands of Russia and Iran. Saudi Arabian and Qatari weaponry, supplied to Sunni militants through Turkey, risks sectarian bloodbath not only in Syria but in Lebanon and Iraq as well as Bahrain and the Saudi kingdom's Eastern Province, paving the way for al-Qaeda affiliates such as the Farouq Brigade to benefit from the power vacuum following Assad's downfall.

The inherent weakness of Syria's present political order is obvious: Whereas the population is 70 percent Sunni, its military, police and intelligence services are led mainly by Alawis, a Shia sub-sect, as is the ruling Arab Baath Socialist Party. Such disjunction also exists in Bahrain – a tiny group of islands in the Gulf with the main island linked by a causeway to predominantly Sunni Saudi Arabia – with the roles reversed. The Shia factor underwrites the alliance Syria has forged with predominantly Shia Iran, since the latter's establishment of an Islamic republic, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, founded in 1982 with assistance of the Iranian ambassador in Damascus.

Around the hard core of the Alawi support for the Assad regime are the Christians, 10 percent, and equally numerous Ismailis, Druzes and ethnic Kurds, who collectively fear the onset of a post-Assad regime dominated by militant Sunnis. According to the Vatican news agency Fides, Sunni fighters recently went from house to house in the Hamidiya and Bustan al-Diwan neighborhoods of Homs under their control, forcing Christians to flee. All told, 50,000 Christians have lost their homes in Homs, some by army shelling, but many more because of ongoing targeted assaults by Sunni extremists such as the Farouq Brigade, composed mainly of foreign jihadists who have poured into Syria.

Among Syria's immediate neighbors, Turkey has emerged as a leading opponent of the Assad regime for two reasons, one aired publicly and the other unspoken. As leaders of the governing Justice and Development Party in a secular, democratic Turkey, President Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan were genuinely horrified by the Syrian Army's use of heavy weapons against civilian targets.

Left unmentioned so far is the low esteem in which the Turkish government and political establishment hold their own Alevi minority. Turkey's Alevis, akin to the Alawis in Syria, form up to 15 percent of the population, and are victims of widespread discrimination.

It's therefore not surprising that Turkish leaders have allied with Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's Sunni rulers. Indeed the al Saud and al Thani ruling families belong to the ultra-orthodox puritanical Wahhabi sub-sect within Sunni Islam, founded by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (1703-87) in central Arabia. In 1802 Wahhabi warriors attacked the shrine of Imam Hussein, martyred son of Imam Ali, founder of Shia Islam, in Karbala. Since then Wahhabi preachers have continued to regard Shias as almost heretical.

Wahhabis' enmity toward Shias reemerged with the rise of Iran run by Shia mullahs since 1979. With increasing alarm, the Wahhabi House of Saud watched Iran extend its influence into the Arab world – in Syria and Lebanon, among the Palestinians through Hamas, topped by the emergence of a Shia-dominated government in Iraq, thanks to U.S. military intervention against Sunni Saddam Hussein.

Underscoring the anti-Assad alliance of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey is the Sunni affiliation and a shared aim to frustrate Iran's ambition to become the hegemonic power in the Persian Gulf region and end that influence in Syria and Lebanon. Their strategic goal coincides with Israel's.

The Saudi and Qatari weapons shipped to Turkey are being smuggled into Syria to arm the rebel Free Syrian Army. FSA. by a center in Istanbul, controlled by the Turkish intelligence agency and manned by exiled Syrians, who coordinate supply lines into northern Syria, with U.S. Central Intelligence Agency officials deciding which rebel group gets which weapons. The FSA is a loose conglomeration of military defectors, armed volunteers and al-Qaeda operatives from several Arab countries.

Whereas internal sectarian and external geopolitical elements have combined to propel Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey to boost the armed rebellion against the Assad regime, the focus of the U.S. and Israeli policymakers is geopolitical – to delink Iran from Syria, depriving it of the Mediterranean flank next to Israel, and divest Russia of its Mediterranean naval presence, narrowed down to the Syrian port of Tartus since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya last year.

The primary driving force in the anti-Assad camp is Sunni hostility toward Alawis/ Shias. The success in overthrowing the status quo in Syria can only be achieved by inflaming Sunni-Shia relations. This is tantamount to playing with fire, because the sectarian fault line extends beyond the oil-rich Middle East, well into Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Iraq, Sunni-Shia relations deteriorated to a low-intensity civil war in 2006-2007 and remain strained. On 13 June concerted suicide attacks on Shia gatherings in Baghdad and elsewhere killed 72 people. In Lebanon, pro-Riyadh Sunnis and pro-Tehran Shias coexist uneasily. In Bahrain, the Shia majority has protested against the Sunni al Khalifa ruling family off and on since 1994.

Saudi Arabia is vulnerable. Most of its Shias, 15 percent of the population, are concentrated in its oil-bearing Eastern Province, where they're an integral part of the petroleum industry. In March 2011, defying warnings by authorities, Shias in the province's major city of Qatif demonstrated, shouting: 'One people, not two – the people of Qatif and Bahrain.' In oil-rich Kuwait, Shias are 30 percent of the indigenous population. Sabotage of the Saudi or Kuwaiti oil industry by local Shias, facing a Sunni onslaught, would have global repercussions.

This factor weighs heavily with the policymakers of China, dependent on Middle East oil supplies. In collaboration with the Kremlin, the Chinese have consistently opposed any move, covert or overt, by Western powers at the UN Security Council to bring about regime change in Damascus. The Beijing-Moscow stance is in line with a common aim to create and sustain a multipolar globe on the ashes of a unipolar world dominated by Washington.

Such global visions do not inform FSA commanders, who routinely foreswear any sectarian bias. Yet the FSA consists almost entirely of Sunnis, many followers of the clandestine, deeply rooted, anti-Shia

Muslim Brotherhood. Most FSA units are named after historical Sunni warriors who battled Shias.

al-Qaeda leader Ayman Zawahiri called on Muslims in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and elsewhere to join the fight against 'the pernicious, cancerous regime' of Assad last February – and many militant jihadists heeded the call.

Terrorist attacks on the Syrian government's targets have been claimed by Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl Ash-Sham, or Support Front for the People of Syria, an al-Qaeda affiliate. Farouq Brigade, composed mainly of al-Qaeda operatives, is an openly recognized part of the FSA, and performing better than other FSA units.

Regrettably, leaders in Washington, Ankara, Riyadh and Doha have either failed to ponder the probable consequences of the overthrow of Assad or feel unduly confident of managing them: a bloody civil war destabilizing the region, at worst; the post-Assad regime inheriting a fractured country where al-Qaeda militants have free rein, at best; and an inevitable spike in oil prices for a world in the midst of the longest recession since the 1930s Great Depression.

Dilip Hiro's most recent book is 'Apocalyptic Realm: Jihadists in South Asia,' published in April by Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

Article 5.

The National Interest

Why Russia Won't Abandon Syria

Nikolas K. Gvosdev

June 29, 2012 -- After months of diplomatic exchanges, public shaming at the United Nations, even a direct tête-à-tête between presidents Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Los Cabos, Mexico, the United States has been unable to change the Russian

position on Syria. Understanding why the Russian side is so adamant in its support for the regime of Bashar al-Assad could help in limiting the fallout generated by this ongoing disagreement on the larger trajectory of U.S.-Russian relations.

Both Washington and Moscow share an aversion to revolutionary upheavals in the region that threaten well-established interests. The relatively muted U.S. response to some of the steps taken by the Egyptian military to limit the powers and authority both of the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated parliament and of the newly elected civilian president Mohamed Morsi reflects the perspective that key U.S. objectives, including maintaining the security relationship with Egypt and sustaining the peace treaty with Israel, are better served by having the military act as a counterweight to the Brotherhood. In some ways, what may emerge in Egypt is a version of the bargain that operates in many of the pro-American "moderate" monarchies of the region, where unelected kings and emirs retain the fail-safe levers of power to ensure that elected institutions do not cross certain red lines.

As many commentators already have explained in detail, Russia has a number of key interests in Syria, the main one being that Damascus is critical to Moscow's ability to project any sort of power in the region via one of Russia's most important military bases based outside the former Soviet Union. The Russians have concluded that if Assad is overthrown, any successor government will expel Russia from its facilities at Tartus. They see no reason to accelerate this process or even join it.

Perhaps if the Syrian opposition had, early on, announced its adherence to what might be termed the Guantanamo standard, things might have been different. Despite his implacable anti-Americanism, Fidel Castro never interfered with or abrogated the lease the United States has for the naval facilities at Guantanamo Bay. An announcement by the Syrian opposition that it was prepared to honor all contracts and arrangements of its predecessor might have led Moscow to adopt a more neutral stance.

Interestingly enough, the opposition candidate in Venezuela, Henrique Capriles, has indicated that if he wins the elections this fall, he would not automatically cancel the deals concluded between Hugo Chávez and the Chinese and the Russians—part of an effort to try to change their calculus that they must support Chávez unconditionally to protect their interests.

And the Russian government duly noted how, even though it had abstained from the UN resolution used by NATO as the basis for the air operation that ultimately helped to drive Muammar el-Qaddafi from power, the Libyan Transitional Government openly questioned whether a new Libya would honor the contracts the previous regime had concluded with Russia. Certainly this helped to reinforce a view in the Kremlin that there would be no benefit to Russia in backing away from its support for Assad.

If this had been done early on, the Russians might have been persuaded to support a Yemen-style transfer of power, which would have satisfied the U.S. objective of seeing Assad removed from office and would have protected some of Russia's key equities. But now, the window for that sort of arrangement has ended. And it is important to note that Russia's perspective on the Syrian revolution now is being shaped by events that have little to do with the Middle East.

A consistent question posed by U.S. policy makers is the basis of the loyalty the Kremlin is showing to Assad. Why can't Moscow simply "cut a deal" with the revolutionary forces (assuming one could be brokered) and switch sides? If the Syria conflict existed in isolation, perhaps. But the steadfast support the Kremlin continues to provide to Assad—shielding the regime against stronger UN sanctions and providing its security forces with the wherewithal to try to suppress the uprising—is meant to reassure another group of leaders: presidents in the post-Soviet space concerned with their own successions.

At a bare minimum, Russia cannot afford to be complicit in any overthrow of the Assad regime. Its support for the Annan plan was predicated on the assumption that it would leave Assad in the driver's seat in terms of charting Syria's political future. Keeping Assad's sovereign prerogatives intact is essential.

This defense of the Syrian leader and his regime has as much to do with reassuring Russian partners in other parts of the world, particularly in Central Asia, that Moscow is prepared to stand by its friends and associates even when things get difficult. This is particularly important in the former Soviet space, where other countries are attempting to follow the Syrian example of a "republican monarchy" and keep executive power within a ruling family. Both Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan and Nursultan

Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan have been in office for more than two decades. Both are concerned with ensuring a safe succession that will protect the interests of their families and associates and want to mitigate the risk that a new regime would seek to sacrifice the personnel and loyal servitors of its predecessor as a way to cement its own power.

This is why there is no "silver bullet" argument that will convince Moscow to change its perspective on the Syria issue. It also means that the likely concessions that the West might offer in order to gain Russian support for regime change would be insufficient. Given that the United States is not going to make Russian acquiescence with U.S. preferences on Syria a litmus test for the bilateral relationship, Russia has too much to lose, in terms of sustaining its relationships with other potentially embattled leaders around the world, by seemingly abandoning a trusted and reliable client.

So expect no major breakthroughs in the U.S.-Russian impasse over Syria.

Nikolas K. Gvosdev, a senior editor at [The National Interest](#), is a professor of national-security studies at the U.S. Naval War College.

Article 6.

The Washington Post

Bombing or the bomb?

[David Ignatius](#)

June 30 – Jerusalem -- A popular new slogan making the rounds among government ministers here is that in dealing with Iran, Israel faces a decision between “bombing or the bomb.” In other words, if Israel doesn’t attack, Iran will eventually obtain nuclear weapons.

This stark choice sums up the mood among top officials of the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: It’s clear that Israel’s

military option is still very much on the table, despite the success of economic sanctions in forcing Iran into negotiations.

“It’s not a bluff, they’re serious about it,” says Efraim Halevy, a former head of the Mossad, Israel’s intelligence service. A half-dozen other experts and officials made the same point in interviews last week: The world shouldn’t relax and assume that a showdown with Iran has been postponed until next year. Here, the alarm light is still flashing red. Israeli leaders have been warning the Obama administration that the heat isn’t off for 2012. When a senior Israeli politician visited Washington recently and was advised that the mood was calmer than in the spring, the Israeli cautioned that the Netanyahu government hadn’t changed its position “one iota.”

The [negotiations with Iran](#) by the group of leading nations known as the “P5+1,” rather than easing Israel’s anxieties, may actually have deepened them. That’s not just because Netanyahu thinks the Iranians are stalling. He fears that even if negotiators won their demand that Iran stop enriching uranium to 20 percent and export its stockpile of fuel already enriched to that level, this would still leave more than 6,000 kilograms of low-enriched uranium that, within a year or less, could be augmented to bomb-grade material.

Netanyahu wants to turn back the Iranian nuclear clock, by shipping out all the enriched uranium. And if negotiations can’t achieve this, he may be ready to try by military means.

The numbers game on enrichment reveals a deeper difference: For President Obama, the trigger for military action would be a “breakout” decision by Iran’s supreme leader to go for a bomb, something he hasn’t yet done. For Netanyahu, the red line is preventing Iran from ever reaching “threshold” capability where it could contemplate a breakout. He isn’t comfortable with letting Tehran have the enrichment capability that could be used to make a bomb, even under a nominally peaceful program. Netanyahu sees his country’s very existence at stake, and he’s prepared for Israel to go it alone because he’s unwilling to entrust the survival of the Jewish state to others. But some Israeli experts, including several key supporters of his government, don’t like this “existential” rhetoric warning of another Holocaust, arguing that it nullifies Israel’s defense capabilities and deterrence.

Though most members of Netanyahu's government would probably support him, there are some subtle nuances of opinion. U.S. officials say Defense Minister [Ehud Barak's](#) focus is stopping Iran before it enters a "zone of immunity" when it begins full operation of centrifuges buried under a mountain near Qom. Iran probably will enter this zone sometime later this year. As Israeli officials have put it, the deadline for action "is not a matter of weeks, but it's not a matter of years, either."

American officials think Barak may also be more willing than Netanyahu to accept a deal in which Iran retains some modest enrichment capability — and can save face by saying it hasn't compromised its rights as a signatory of the non-proliferation treaty — but can't accumulate enough material to make a bomb.

Some Israeli experts are skeptical about the "zone of immunity" timeline. They believe that no facility, even the hardened site at Qom, is invulnerable to a clever attack: Iran will have immunity only with an actual nuclear-weapons umbrella.

While I understand Netanyahu's concerns, I think an Israeli attack could be counterproductive. It would shatter the international coalition against Iran, collapse the sanctions program when it is starting to bite and trigger consequences that cannot be predicted, especially during a time of sweeping change in the Middle East.

Before he rolls the dice, Netanyahu should recall the shattering experience of Menachem Begin, a prime minister no less devoted to Israel, who was haunted in his final days in office by the sense that his invasion of Lebanon in 1982, intended to protect Israel's security, had been a mistake. The potential costs and benefits of an attack on Iran are unknowable, but for better or worse, it would be, as Halevy says, "an event that would affect the course of this century."