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The Daily Beast

Saudi Fears and Mysteries

[Leslie H. Gelb](#)

Oct 24, 2013 -- Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi Intelligence Chief, told European diplomats that Saudi Arabia would make a “major shift” in policy away from the United States. This bombshell was leaked by an unnamed source. Still, it should have triggered eruptions in Washington.

After all, the mighty oil rich Kingdom and investor in the American economy has been a mainstay of U.S. policy in the Mideast for over half a century. So, why the silence?

In good part, no one was quite sure what to make of the mysterious “leak.” Maybe it was just Prince Bandar doing his thing. To be sure, softer words along similar lines had come privately from Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal. But the Obama team had heard nothing so startling from the boss himself, King Abdullah. And the King’s voice is what truly matters. Besides, Prince Bandar is well known for his Republican Party leanings, his private snorts against President Obama’s “weakness,” and for his mighty hawkishness (his advocacy of the Iraq war was of Vice President Cheney-like proportions). To many a Mideast watcher, then, the supposed policy shift could be dismissed as Bandar rantings. But Prince Bandar was not the only Saudi Prince who is ranting. Prince Turki al-Faisal, the former Saudi Intelligence Chief and former Ambassador to the U.S., added his complaints on Tuesday. He said, “the current charade of international control over Bashar’s chemical arsenal would be funny if it were not so blatantly perfidious.”

Perhaps the silence towards Prince Bandar’s leaks reflects the mood of some policy experts who have already chalked off Saudi Arabia as an important ally. It’s true that Riyadh has done damage to American interests by supporting Islamic extremists in a number of countries. On the whole, however, Saudi funds and arms have leveraged American aims in many tight situations. This includes protecting America’s oil supply flanks from the likes of Iran. So, Riyadh cannot be written off so casually.

Another explanation for the relative silence to the Prince Bandar leak is even more telling: how could Washington fear a major policy shift from Riyadh when Riyadh has no real alternatives to the U.S., no country or countries that could conceivably take America’s place? Russia and China make no sense. Their policies in the Mideast region hurt Saudis even more than America’s, and the Saudis know this full well. Nor does it make any sense for Saudi Arabia to turn to an enfeebled Europe, and the Saudis also know this all too well. Nor can Saudi Arabia expect to conjure up a new league between Arab states as a strategic alternative to America. The interests of Arab states simply differ too widely to imagine any new and workable Arab alliance. This truth is also well known in Riyadh. But it

would be foolish and self-destructive for the Obama administration to simply believe that the Saudis, or other Arab states like Egypt, are stuck with America and have no alternative, no matter how self-destructive, no matter what.

Prince Bandar's leak contained specifics worth contemplating in Washington. Mainly, he complained about Obama's flip-flopping on Syria—particularly the President's failure to rapidly arm Syrian rebels and conduct air strikes in retaliation for Assad's use of chemical weapons. Prince Bandar also worried about America entering a slippery slope in negotiations with Iran. Shiite Iran is enemy No. 1 to the Sunni Saudi clan. And Saudi leaders worry neurotically that Iranian-American negotiations now underway would weaken American commitments to them. Prince Bandar also mentioned U.S. failure to back the Saudis when they sent troops into Bahrain in 2011 to support a Sunni leader against his Shiite majority people. Prince Bandar said nothing about America's withdrawal of aid from the new military government in Egypt, but that's a big issue in Riyadh as well. The Muslim Brotherhood government, overthrown by the Egyptian military, was a real adversary of the Saudis, and they wanted the U.S. to help, not criticize, the new Egyptian military rulers. Not least, Riyadh blames Washington for not being tough enough on Israel, especially when it comes to negotiations for a Palestinian state. Also part of Saudi unhappiness was last week's headline about Riyadh's declining a seat on the UN Security Council. That rejection was aimed both at the international body and at U.S. leadership.

These Saudi concerns are not just Saudi concerns. They are endemic throughout most Arab countries. For years now, Arab states aligned with Washington tremble at what they see as Obama's support for "the Arab Spring." They fear he sees this as a good democratization process that could well lead to U.S. support for similar movements in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States. They don't see the Arab Spring as democratization; they see it as an extremist Muslim challenge to their rule. Arab leaders don't think Obama understands that. Syria has also brought many Arab leaders' alarms to new heights. They see Syria as a crossroads battle between Shiite-backed Iran and their fellow Sunni rebels. They believe that the Sunni defeat at this point in Syria would directly endanger Sunni rulers

throughout Arabia. Remember, the largest oil province in Saudi Arabia has a huge Shiite majority.

Neither the Saudis nor other Arab states (nor, in fact, Israel) understand Obama's Mideast policy—and that's the heart of the problem. That's what is truly spooking them. Obama and his minions have been all over the lot. Arab leaders were, frankly, shocked that Obama had far more contact with Mohamed Morsi, the recently-overthrown Muslim Brotherhood President of Egypt, than Obama had with any other Arab leaders. They were happy when Washington ousted Colonel Gaddafi of Libya, and then unnerved when Washington simply walked away from the resulting chaos and extremism. And they certainly have not been reassured by what Washington has been telling them about its talks with Iran. For Secretary of State Kerry and others to simply say that the U.S. won't make any agreement with Iran that endangers America's allies in the region sounds to them like blowing hot air. Arab leaders have no idea where Obama administration leaders think they are going in relations with Tehran. The absence of an Obama strategy in the Mideast, and indeed in other parts of the world, is truly nothing new. This U.S. President has not had a clear and compelling strategy on most international issues and regions, in the opinion of most foreign leaders. The White House can and does deny this, but it will continue to be so at its own peril and the peril of the United States. Obama has got to provide a compelling overview for what he is trying to do throughout this explosive region of the world. Prince Bandar's leak—and the hundreds of conversations along similar lines—reflect two facts: Arab leaders are spooked by U.S. indecision and lack of clarity, and they are trying to spook America into getting its act together.

[Leslie H. Gelb](#), a former New York Times columnist and senior government official, is author of [Power Rules: How Common Sense Can Rescue American Foreign Policy](#) (HarperCollins, 2009), a book that shows how to think about and use power in the 21st century. He is president emeritus of the [Council on Foreign Relations](#).

[Article 2.](#)

The Washington Post

Saudia Arabia gets tough on foreign policy

Nawaf Obaid

October 24, 2013 -- Last week, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry announced that the kingdom would not join the [REDACTED] Security Council until the council "[reformed so it can effectively and practically perform its duties and discharge its responsibilities in maintaining international security and peace.](#)" Although this decision stemmed from Saudi frustration over the council's failure to end [the civil war in Syria](#) and to act on the issue of [Palestinian statehood](#), there is more to the rejection. Saudi Arabia opting out of a temporary position in an international forum is a sign of things to come as the kingdom pursues a new, and assertive, foreign policy.

[The decision came](#) after several weeks of intense debate among senior officials in Jeddah, the summer capital, over whether Saudis can achieve more by assuming a relatively nominal position in an international setting or by unilaterally expanding their work and implementing their doctrine. Over the past two years, the Saudi government had expended a great deal of energy and resources to prepare their diplomats and [REDACTED] mission to join the Security Council.

But events in Syria over the summer and the manner in which the debate over the war has played out on the Security Council changed the calculations of the Saudi foreign policy establishment. Central to the internal discussions was the question of whether, in such a charged regional environment, the kingdom could politically afford to be a powerless member — albeit with a “voice” on a docile council — when it faces the urgent imperative of ending the massacres in Syria.

The tipping point came the week before the [REDACTED] General Assembly meeting last month, when a draft resolution on dismantling Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons circulated among the permanent members of the Security Council. The Saudis, supported by the French and, to a lesser extent, the British, wanted the draft to say that President Bashar al-Assad and his thugs would suffer extreme punitive military actions for noncompliance. The Russians, however, were adamant that even an insinuation of this sort would be unacceptable. To get the resolution through, U.S. officials acquiesced to Russian wishes and pressured France and Britain to drop this demand. The tyrant Assad, then, was saved and practically given a [REDACTED] mandate to continue slaughtering the Syrian

people and destroying the remnants of the Syrian state. For the Saudis, this was a cold lesson in the Security Council's dysfunction.

At this point, the Saudis faced two options: become a non-binding member of a largely inactive clique in which only the five permanent members are able to push through policy, or excuse themselves from this ceremonial, and ultimately empty, responsibility. In choosing the latter, Saudi Arabia has sent a powerful message about the effectiveness of the Security Council and the Obama administration's Middle East policy. The Saudis realistically assessed their limited options within the Security Council as well as the fact that the kingdom already has power to influence global events and exerts enormous influence in the Muslim world. Joining the Security Council would not change those things.

[This unprecedented decision](#) also signals the coming of age of Saudi Arabia's forceful foreign policy and the methods it is willing to pursue to achieve its objectives. Out of necessity, the kingdom is reformulating its foreign policy to assess how best to solve the Syrian tragedy, a massive humanitarian crisis that has the potential to exacerbate already severe tensions among neighbors and destabilize the region. While brought to the fore by the Syrian dilemma, this necessity is the result of deeper trends that are also guiding Saudi decisions: the lack of U.S. leadership in the region, regional turmoil sparked by the "Arab Awakening" and the new policy of Iranian rapprochement toward the West.

In short, the Saudis find themselves in a drastically different foreign policy situation than even one year ago, having essentially been left alone to maintain stability in the Arab world. Given the pressure of this predicament, the fundamental basis of the new Saudi foreign policy doctrine is about changing course from being protected by others to protecting themselves and their allies. The Saudis know they need to restructure their foreign policy and national security establishments to conduct themselves internationally on par with the political, economic and religious significance and influence the kingdom holds.

The road ahead is long. It is clear, however, that the Saudis fully intend to pursue their national security interests much more assertively, even if that leads to a [strategic break with the United States](#).

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[Article 3.](#)

Foreign Policy

Can Obama deliver on Israel and Iran -- or is he overreaching?

Aaron David Miller

October 24, 2013 -- When it comes to the Middle East and perhaps foreign policy in general, Barack Obama is a curious president, a leader deeply ambivalent and seemingly at war with himself.

Last week, I [argued](#) that Obama may well be the first president to preside over a shrinking U.S. role in the Middle East. His actions on almost every issue -- getting out of old wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, avoiding new ones (Syria), avoiding interventions in lands visited by the Arab Spring, and resetting his relationship with Israel -- reflect a general attitude of risk aversion in the region.

And yet, the president himself doesn't seem to realize it, or at least he's not tuned in to the implications of his own words. Last month at the ██████ General Assembly (UNGA), in front of much of the world and all of its relevant diplomatic players, without the slightest hesitation, Obama [committed himself to near-impossible overreach](#) on two of the most intractable issues in the region: resolving the Israeli-Palestinian issue and Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. As Mitchel Hochberg, my research assistant, quipped the other day, you don't set high expectations in a region that eats them for lunch.

What's really going on here? Does the president actually mean that he's planning to resolve the two most challenging diplomatic puzzles in the Middle East? Or were these throwaway lines, rhetorical preludes to real American diplomatic initiatives, or just a "caught up in the moment" wish list?

For a guy who's remarkably disciplined when it comes to acting in the Middle East, the president is remarkably undisciplined when it comes to

talking about it. You may remember the 2009 [settlements freeze](#), the [Cairo speech](#) of the same year, the 2011 "Assad must go" [comment](#), and the 2012-2013 chemical weapons [red lines](#) in Syria.

Sure, every president engages in rhetorical excess from time to time. But it's no small matter for American credibility -- already in short supply -- when the president's own words leave a huge disconnect between his intentions and his capacity to deliver.

Let's look at some of the disconnects between intent and capacity on these particular issues -- in other words, the reasons Obama's ambitions in the Middle East are not likely to come to fruition.

(1) The negotiations would be a nightmare.

Just carrying out a negotiation with Iran on the nuclear issue or mediating another between Israelis and Palestinians would be hard enough. But balancing two sets of negotiations that could come to decision points at roughly the same time? It's a negotiator's nightmare however you look at it. First, U.S. domestic politics are at play in both. Even in Obama's second term, freed from reelection constraints, that will impose serious limits on American margin for maneuver. Second, the substantive challenges are formidable enough that even months of negotiations will not conclusively resolve them. These are evolutionary, not revolutionary, agreements -- no one is going to transform the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the Iranian nuclear issue in a single accord. Finally, the president is dealing with a tough and suspicious ally in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and a tough and suspicious adversary in Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. There will be little sentimentality, benefit of the doubt, or magnanimity in either process.

(2) You won't get a Palestinian deal without an Iranian one.

But the worst thing about these two negotiating challenges is that they're tied together, sequenced in the mind of the one regional player with a primary stake in both -- Netanyahu. Netanyahu's laws of political gravity don't allow him to make historic decisions on the Palestinian issue without a stronger sense for where Iran is headed. For the Israeli prime minister, the Palestinians are a long-term ideological problem. Iran is short term and very much in his threat-oriented comfort zone. For Netanyahu, liberating

Israel from the shadow of the Iranian bomb squares much more with his own self-image than dividing Jerusalem. So the only chance for Obama to succeed in both negotiations would be to pursue Iran first and then move to the Palestinian deal.

Unfortunately, addressing Iran first carries major risks for Obama. If he fails, either producing no agreement with Iran or worse, producing a bad agreement, U.S. leverage over Israel is reduced to near zero and Israel has no incentive to move on the Palestinian issue. Not to mention the obvious: Without an agreement that substantially reduces the Iranian nuclear threat, Israel might actually strike Iran -- making an Israeli-Palestinian agreement in the near term all but impossible. It would be very hard to negotiate a Palestinian state with thousands of Hezbollah and Hamas rockets flying about and Israel responding. A successful agreement with Iran on the nuclear issue, meanwhile, wouldn't guarantee an Israeli-Palestinian accord. But it would at least increase Obama's capacity to press for one and reduce Bibi's capacity to resist.

(3) Time is not on Obama's side.

Neither negotiation can drag on interminably. On the Israeli-Palestinian issue, even though expectations are below zero, there will come a point when folks will start to wonder whether there's truly anything there. We're already into the second three months of [Secretary of State John Kerry's informal nine-month clock](#) for making a deal.

On Iran, the pressure won't come from any fixed clock as much as it will from an impatient U.S. Congress, hard-line mullahs and security types within Iran, and even an American administration that has all but committed itself to expedited talks. Indeed, the minute Rouhani and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif talked to the U.S. president and Kerry in late September, this process wasn't on mullah time anymore.

Ticking clocks can be good if they build urgency to make a deal. But as early as spring of next year, talks on these serious issues will start hemorrhaging credibility if there's nothing to show. And given what's at stake, second chances may not be possible.

(4) Resolution isn't possible right now.

Granted, we're the fix-it nation, and we really believe that trying and failing is better than not having tried at all. Clearly the president is right to

try. But Obama could have been somewhat more temperate in his UNGA speech, particularly when it came to the use of the word "resolving." Netanyahu isn't a resolver; neither is Khamenei or Rouhani. But surprise, surprise, neither is Obama. He's a transactor if there ever was one, balancing between the desirable and the achievable, between the possible and the probable. His entire presidency -- as his critics from the left complain -- reflects that fact. Obama is a man of the left, but he's also a man in the middle, always trying to reconcile his views with the other guy's. There is no conflict-ending agreement available between this Israeli prime minister and this Palestinian president where each stands publicly and says: While we don't have reconciliation, on all the core issues all claims have been adjudicated, all irredenta have been abandoned, and our conflict is over. Nor are we talking about some permanent end state where Iran abandons its right to enrich uranium or gives up its capacity at some point to weaponize. Obama needs to think outcomes, maybe even good outcomes. But not solutions and resolutions.

(5) There is no strategic grand bargain.

If this were Hollywood, the story line would be quite different and far more heroic. A strategic grand bargain might emerge.

The heroic American president would say to the visionary Israeli prime minister: Let's make history. Make my day on the Israeli-Palestinian issue; give me some real flexibility in negotiations with Iran too; and if the mullahs can't or won't address our needs on the nuclear issue, I'll make your day and ensure that Iran will not get nukes.

But this isn't the movies. It's planet Earth. And these sorts of grand trade-offs and neat bargains just don't appear very often or at all.

Instead what usually emerges is the tendency to end up neither here nor there, sometimes with half a loaf, sometimes with a big mess. If Barack Obama is lucky he'll avoid the latter. And if he's really willful, skillful, and even luckier, he'll get something on each issue that stabilizes matters, avoids conflict, and creates a real basis for more progress and perhaps -- over time -- even the "resolving" he identified in his UNGA speech. But he ought to dial down the rhetoric. The whole enchilada anytime soon? Not a chance. As the late, great Yitzhak Rabin used to say, cigarette in one hand as he dismissively waved the other, "You can forget about it."

Aaron David Miller is vice president for new initiatives and a distinguished scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. His forthcoming book is titled [Can America Have Another Great President?](#). "[Reality Check](#)," his column for [REDACTED], runs weekly.

[Article 4.](#)

Project Syndicate

Turkey's Lost Illusions

Dominique Moisi

24 October 2013 -- "Day by day, Europe is moving further away from Turkey," Egemen Bağış, Turkey's Minister for European Union Affairs, declared last week. But the reverse is equally true: With a mixture of disillusion and defiance, Turkey has been distancing itself from Europe in recent years. "If you do not want us," the Turks appear to be saying, "we really do not want you."

In reality, nearly three years after the beginning of the "Arab Spring," Turkey is more in search of itself than it is of Europe, even if it needs Europe more than Turks are willing to admit. What is Turkey today, what are its values, and what is its destiny in a highly fluid regional environment?

The Arab Spring was initially seen as a great opportunity for Turkey, an ideal setting in which to highlight the country's economic success, democratic political model, and indispensable strategic role in the region. The inheritors of one of the world's great empires were proving to the world that Islam and modernity were perfectly compatible – an inspiring example for Arab countries like Egypt.

Instead, Turkey's role inspired reservations among Egyptians; after all, the Ottoman Empire had ruled over Egypt. And, on the Turkish side, there was a sense of superiority vis-à-vis the Arab world.

The collapse of the Soviet Union awakened "neo-Ottoman" Turkish ambitions in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and revolution in the Middle East seemed to offer the heirs (if not orphans) of a long-dead empire an opportunity to avenge its loss. If a lazy and fearful Europe did not want

Turkey, so much the worse for Europe; history was offering more glorious alternatives to the Turks.

Whereas Turkey could appear too Oriental and too religious in Brussels or Paris, when viewed from Cairo or Tunis, it looked like an ideal Muslim bridge to the democratic West and economically dynamic Asia. Moreover, Turkey could play some powerful cards, owing to its “good neighbor” policy with two partners and rivals, Iran and Syria, as well as its support for the short-lived presidency of Mohamed Morsi in Egypt.

Unfortunately, Turkish elites’ hopes (if not expectations) were not realized. The Arab revolutions ended up exposing Turkey’s own weaknesses and contradictions, further aggravated by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s repressive policies and overweening political style. This became clear in the demonstrations that spread this spring from Istanbul’s Taksim Square to much of the rest of the country (though the protests had more in common with Brazil’s recent unrest or the revolt in Paris in 1968 than with the popular movements in Egypt or Tunisia).

What characterizes Turks today is not so much pride and hope in their country’s expanding influence as fear of its disintegration. The Kurdish problem preoccupies Turks, as does their growing sense that they are losing control of two essential issues – the Syrian and Iranian crises. In recent months, Turkey’s government has adopted an increasingly tougher stance toward Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime, convinced that it can only fall. The agreement recently reached by the United States and Russia is, from this standpoint, frustrating news: For the price of destroying its chemical arsenal, the regime may have saved itself. So Turkey must wonder what purpose is to be served by courting the West. Why resume, under US pressure, a nearly normal dialogue with Israel if the outcome is to be abandoned, if not betrayed, by American policy? Similarly, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani’s moderate rhetoric, together with possible progress on Iran’s dispute with the West over its nuclear program, has left Turkey with a sense of uselessness, if not isolation. How can a country perceive itself, and be perceived by others, as a key regional actor if it finds itself marginalized at the critical moment?

History is moving in the Middle East, but not in the direction that Turkey would prefer. And, with their country’s economic growth faltering, its government hardening, and its diplomatic performance a source of growing

disappointment, many Turks now openly wonder what happened. But, far from engaging in an open and positive self-examination, they are too often retreating into a strident nationalism that is all the more defensive to the extent that it reflects a growing lack of self-confidence.

Turkey's current challenge is to overcome lost illusions. And that means that Turks may need Europe more than they are willing to admit, even to themselves. But is Europe today any more ready and willing than it was yesterday to engage in serious talks with Turkey?

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[Article 5.](#)

Project Syndicate

The Obama Anti-Doctrine

Christopher R. Hill

24 October 2013 -- US President Barack Obama was right to forego the [Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation \(APEC\) meeting in Bali, Indonesia](#), and focus instead on dealing with the political pathologies of the US Congress. But his decision, while correct, had the effect of reviving an increasingly common refrain in the East Asian region: What happened to the "pivot"?

Conceived as a long-overdue shift in resources and attention from wars and other urgent challenges in the Middle East toward the vast expanse of opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region, America's much-vaunted strategic pivot immediately ran into a gauntlet of unintended consequences (the handmaidens of inconsistent and poorly articulated policy).

For starters, there was the perception that the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan amounted to a downgrading of US interests in the Middle East. Coming as it did on the eve of the cataclysmic Arab Spring, the Obama administration has struggled with this unintended

consequence of the pivot ever since. Whoever in the administration devised the phrase “leading from behind” only compounded the problem.

Second, many Europeans understood the pivot to Asia as implying a reduction in America’s commitment to the Atlantic alliance. Though several European countries have done relatively well in terms of maintaining consultations and commitments with the US, Europe’s leaders have watched with growing concern as the postwar security structure has faltered.

To be sure, Europeans have contributed to this dynamic: witness their own haste in exiting the NATO mission in Afghanistan. But the increased sense of drift in Euro-Atlantic structures, fueled principally by Europe’s financial crisis and America’s prolonged political rift, leaves little room for optimism.

Finally, efforts to explain the pivot’s goal – US affirmation that Asia is now at the center of the world economy – have fallen flat from the start. The Chinese believed that the entire purpose was to confront and contain their country’s geopolitical rise. And who could blame them, given the drumbeat of US policy pronouncements expressing concern about China?

Indeed, in the weeks that followed the initial announcement of the pivot (which came just as the 2012 US election campaign was getting under way), China-bashing by American officials got worse. A perfectly normal extension of the US-Philippine security agreement turned into an occasion to bemoan China’s claims on what former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the [“West Philippine Sea.”](#)

In this environment, the Chinese perceived a routine decision to send US marines to train in Australia as another link in the chain meant to hold China down. Even the opening to Myanmar was briefed to the press as a move designed to counter Chinese influence in that resource-rich country. Soon after these episodes, the US Department of Defense announced that it would begin relocating American forces to the western Pacific, focusing China’s attention further. Likewise, the [Trans-Pacific Partnership \(TPP\)](#), a proposed mega-regional free-trade deal from which China has so far been excluded – has fueled concern in China regarding US intentions.

But China has been far from blameless: witness its heavy-handed approach to its Asian neighbors in pressing its territorial claims in the East and South China Seas. And, while growing signs of impatience with North Korea

have been welcomed as a harbinger of an eventual policy shift, fresh thinking in China has not been sufficient to forestall US efforts to step up military cooperation with South Korea and Japan.

But perhaps China does not need to do anything to change US policy again. Since Obama's re-election, there appears to have been a pivot away from the pivot, toward something that can be described only as retro. Secretary of State John Kerry's effort to jump-start the Arab-Israel peace process was a laudable initiative. But, if the Arab Spring has taught us anything, it is that the Middle East's real fault lines have little to do with Israel and much to do with the Arab world's deepening secularist-Islamist divide and growing sectarian struggle between Shia and Sunni. Israel is but a small part of this overall pattern.

More recently, there was America's event-driven shift toward cooperation with Russia on ending Syria's civil war, following a chemical-weapons attack that left at least 1,400 people dead.

All of this raises a fundamental question: Does the US even need an overarching design for its foreign policy? If the outcome is to make its foreign policy less reliable and predictable – or, worse, susceptible to misunderstanding – then it certainly does not.

The new world order has given way to an order-less world, in which reliability and predictability have given way to rapid shifts in focus and fickle commitments. And, sadly, this state of affairs seems to be emanating not from countries in crisis, but rather from the US itself.

Now that Obama appears to have a brief respite from his domestic problems, this might be an opportune moment for him to set out America's foreign-policy priorities and explain how the US plans to pursue them. Is the pivot to Asia sustainable? What are America's objectives in the Middle East? Is the US to be a kind of hectoring NGO, lecturing friends and detractors alike for not being more like Americans? And just what is the US trying to accomplish with Russia? Can it identify ways to cooperate with this difficult, undemocratic state, in order to address issues of mutual concern?

It is time for a tour ██████████ from Obama. His administration still has three years to go, and the world is waiting, watching, and, frankly, wondering.

Christopher R. Hill, former US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, was US Ambassador to Iraq, South Korea, Macedonia, and Poland, a US special envoy for Kosovo, a negotiator of the Dayton Peace Accords, and the chief US negotiator with North Korea from 2005-2009. He is currently Dean of the Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver.

[Article 6.](#)

NYT

Ten Years a Prisoner

Mikhail Khodorkovsky

October 24, 2013 -- Segezha, Russia — Ten years have gone by, 10 years — to the day — that I have spent in the jails, prisons and camps of the new Russia.

Much has changed. My oldest son now has his own baby daughter, who is not a baby any more — my first grandchild, whom I have never seen.

My youngest sons, whom I left as little four-year-old boys, are now taller than I am and on the threshold of adulthood. My daughter is close to graduating from college. My wife, who has been supporting me all these years, is alone at home now. My parents are already very old, and their health leaves much to be desired.

The whole world has changed a great deal as well. I can only read in magazines about e-book readers and tablet computers. The same goes for Facebook, Google, Twitter and many other things that are now commonplace, like hybrid engines and electric cars.

My family tells me that I also would not recognize Moscow: Many new buildings have gone up, and people look different, less Soviet.

Against the background of these changes, my world is practically standing still: There is little difference between the camp barracks on the Chinese border where I spent the first part of my term and my current barracks on the Finnish border. The people are also pretty much the same: Each has his own thoughts and his own unhappy fate.

But despite all the years that have passed, I have never become a part of this closed system, and I continue to live by the events taking place in

Russia and the world. They reach me by way of newspapers and endless letters and the stories told by the people who are constantly coming in “from the outside.”

I have watched as my country has prospered from rising oil and gas prices. People’s incomes have increased significantly as well.

But the prices of goods and housing have also soared. Life in many Russian cities is now more expensive than in the United States or Europe. The reasons are well known: state monopolism, corruption and inefficient administration, a consequence of the implacability of power and its excessive centralization in the hands of a single executive.

Many talented people are leaving the country; more than 2 million Russians have gone in just 10 years. The capital flight that started in 2008 stands at \$350 billion and counting. Three million entrepreneurs have been subjected to criminal prosecution, and some of them, like Sergei L. Magnitsky and Vasily G. Aleksanyan, have died as a result of being in prison.

This is the reason why there is so little innovation in Russia, and why dependence on raw materials prices is rising while the overall growth rate is slowing. The quality of education is decreasing, while industry is falling technologically further behind the West, and now even China.

Russia’s place in the world has likewise changed. Our country, having become richer as a result of the raw materials boom, has begun playing a more active role in the global arena: recall its recent diplomatic successes in the Middle East and the multitude of recent and upcoming global political forums, economic meetings and sporting events held here.

Unfortunately, the prestige that comes with such success has been erased by events like the imprisonment of the women from the band Pussy Riot, the recent, inappropriate arrest of Greenpeace ecologists and the ban on adoptions by Americans.

The reason for each of these events is the same: An irremovable and out-of-control central power is losing the ability to adapt to an ever-more-changing world. It is incapable of offering an attractive vision for the future, a paradigm that might inspire people to follow it. This is why all the money, all the global-outreach efforts, all the technical achievements have no effect. A frozen and stiff society offers no hope for the young.

This is nothing new. Fearfully withdrawing into one's shell is the usual reaction of people who lack sufficient ability to adapt (or who are afraid to display such ability). The interests, and even the fears, of such sufferers certainly have to be taken into account, but following them can only lead into the abyss.

Today the system for running the country is called "Vladimir V. Putin." Can he change? I don't want to give a categorical answer: A human being is too complicated a creature for that. But the chances are slim, as are the chances that Mr. Putin's inner circle would allow him to cede his presidential powers, even temporarily, a second time. He will not control what follows him.

Inside the country, the number of supporters for a democratic transformation of power beyond the Putin regime is decreasing, while radical moods are slowly but surely increasing — something that will inevitably give rise to just as radical a leader in a crisis. Put differently, no matter what Mr. Putin does, Russia runs the risk of seeing another authoritarian regime follow his.

When a regime that has unknowingly entered a stage of irreversible degeneration, and is highly reluctant to give its opponents the space for real political competition, the only hope for change lies in the success of a broad-based, peaceful protest movement.

Such a movement does exist in Russia, and its goal is to force the rational part of the ruling elite to negotiate over the direction and speed of necessary reforms. Not just to listen condescendingly, but to actually negotiate and undertake the agreed-upon actions.

Unfortunately, there is never such a thing as peaceful protest without victims. Today there are many, many political activists and sympathizers in jail or on their way. This includes not just the 27 activists arrested during a recent, enormous protest in Moscow's Bolotnaya Square, but dozens of other lower-profile cases as well. And there will probably be many more of these if the regime continues to respond with force to the voices of independent opponents.

But the opposition will achieve victory if it can turn each case around and put the regime on trial. Society, especially the youth, is keenly aware of the difference between words and deeds. And unlike violent protest, peaceful

protest cannot backfire and push frightened ordinary citizens and moderate political forces into the arms of the regime.

What should the opposition do if it achieves its goals? Above all it must remember that, once victory is achieved, it is very important not only to overcome the desire to seek revenge against yesterday's persecutors, but also to give them an opportunity to participate in determining the country's course.

Second, it must recognize the need to compromise in the struggle for change. Historical experience teaches us that society has been able to get itself out of a tailspin with minimal losses only in those places where reformers found the strength and courage to reach a consensus with their opponents. The opposition must be influential! Without this there can be no democracy!

The movement must take inspiration from Nelson Mandela of South Africa, who was able to rise above personal grievances and racial and class prejudices to lead his society along a difficult road from civil war to social peace. Mr. Mandela's genius lies in the fact that when he came out of jail, instead of shutting the door in the face of his jailers, he left it open, so they could come out together with him.

Vengeance cannot be recognized as a worthy and socially significant objective. Only the achievement of a national consensus will give Russia a chance at survival. But this consensus has to be achieved on a foundation of respect for the rights of each person and of each minority in that society. It is imperative to acknowledge the principles of a law-based state and an aspiration for social justice.

Russia has things it can offer the world. We are not Asia, and not even Eurasia, but an inseparable part of Europe. The same Europe that not only created today's civilization, but also continues to be the world's leading political laboratory for testing new social and ethical approaches, which are then adapted and implemented around the world.

But Europe faces a multipronged crisis: Its rate of scientific and technical progress is insufficient to ensure economic support for the higher-than-anticipated increase in the cost of the social welfare state, while European society has overestimated its ability to integrate diverse populations. And the idea of a postindustrial economy has been interpreted to mean the rejection of all industry, and not the creation of new types of industry.

This crisis has adversely affected the course of the European integration process, which itself represents a huge sociocultural experiment.

But a crisis — even a multifaceted one like this — by no means signifies a collapse. Today's European crisis is a challenge, but also a powerful impetus for change. The contours of such changes can already be seen, though a long and complex road lies ahead.

Thanks to a cultural and historical affinity and territorial proximity, Russia is capable of being a part of this solution, by lending its experience at handling a gigantic territory and diverse economic and cultural patterns. Russia and Europe need to find ways to work together, much more closely than ever before.

Yes, such a change would require a serious new effort from the Euro-Atlantic civilization. First in terms of personnel, and second in terms of technology and innovation. We would be talking about hundreds of thousands of entrepreneurs and specialists, about a gigantic splash of energy from a new generation of Europeans onto huge, and thus far poorly developed, expanses, about joint work, about a new Europe — from the Atlantic all the way to the Pacific.

For our people — the Russian people — this would become a real opportunity to overcome a situation that has existed since the 17th century, and to bridge the gap that has formed between the limited number of Russians who have a notion of modern Europe and live by its standards, and the rest of the country's population, the many millions whose dream of a better life has been unscrupulously exploited for centuries by politicians who continue to preach a nonexistent “special way” for Russia that only leads people deeper into misery.

Today, against the background of ongoing migrations into Europe and ongoing change in Asia, the split between Europe and Russia is a gap that can lead to extremely unfavorable consequences. The disastrous project of stagnation needs an ambitious European alternative.

Change or be destroyed: This has been the historical choice for any human civilization for thousands of years.

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