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5 September, 2013

<a href="#">Article 1.</a>	The Washington Post <b><u>Syria nears a turning point</u></b> David Ignatius
<a href="#">Article 2.</a>	Los Angeles Times <b><u>As Obama hesitates, Israel worries</u></b> Benny Morris
<a href="#">Article 3.</a>	Foreign Policy <b><u>Is the Syrian Intervention Good for the Jews?</u></b> Steven J. Rosen
<a href="#">Article 4.</a>	The New York Times <b><u>The Stakes in Congress</u></b> Editorial
<a href="#">Article 5.</a>	The Guardian <b><u>G20 and Syria: Putin's show</u></b> Editorial
<a href="#">Article 6.</a>	The National Interest <b><u>G-20: Long Shadow Hangs Over U.S.-Russia Relations</u></b> <a href="#">Gerald F. Hyman</a>
Article 7.	<a href="#">The Washington Post</a> <b><u>Israeli proposal detailed in talks</u></b> Mohammed Daraghmeh and Josef Federman
<a href="#">Article 8.</a>	Nature <b><u>A Multitasking Video Game Makes Old Brains Act Younger</u></b> <a href="#">Alison Abbott</a>

[Article 1.](#)

The Washington Post

## **Syria nears a turning point**

David Ignatius

September 5 - A top Syrian rebel commander says that U.S. missile strikes could change the balance of the civil war in Syria. But even the Syrian opposition is worried about the political vacuum that might follow U.S. intervention and the possible collapse of President Bashar al-Assad. Gen. Ziad Fahd, the commander of the “southern front” for the Free Syrian Army, urged in a telephone interview Wednesday that the United States and its allies attack six air bases and three rocket-launching batteries around Damascus. He said that if the United States takes out these targets, his 30,000 troops in the Damascus area “can launch attacks on the rest” of the regime’s forces in the south. The rebel commander said that following an attack, his moderate wing of the opposition, organized in five sectors of the Damascus area, “is ready to take over government ministry buildings to ensure security and stop looting.” He said that the al-Nusra Front and other extremist organizations that are strong in northern Syria are relatively weak in Damascus, an assessment shared by other analysts.

This endgame talk may be overly optimistic, but it shows that the Syrian war is approaching a potential turning point. If the United States strikes, the rebels will push to seize the advantage, and the fighting could enter a decisive new stage. The United States hopes that if the opposition forces gain ground after an attack, the regime and its Russian allies would be more ready to negotiate a cease-fire.

Given the risks of an expanding conflict, this weekend’s Group of 20 summit may provide a last opportunity for the United States and Russia to agree on the framework for the negotiations to end the war that were begun in Geneva last year. New statements of support for a diplomatic solution have come this week from President Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry and, perhaps most significantly, Russian President Vladimir Putin. But the momentum toward U.S. intervention appears to be increasing, as congressional support grows for a resolution authorizing a military strike. The Syrian commander’s comments were reassuring in the sense that he has a military strategy for the next stage of the battle. But Fahd offered little detail on three key issues for any transition: protecting Syria’s Alawite community from revenge killing if the regime falls; working with reconcilable elements of the Syrian army to maintain order and prevent the kind of chaos that followed the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and

Moammar Gaddafi in Libya; and preventing the future use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime in a desperate last stand.

These issues are crucial, so they're worth special attention. "I don't anticipate revenge killing," said Fahd, adding that his forces would "look to the courts" to prosecute any crimes by the regime. That's not enough; the opposition needs a specific plan. On working with the army, Fahd said he has informants within the military but no plans for future liaison. That's also not adequate. And finally, Fahd said the regime "perhaps" might use chemical weapons again, and for that reason the United States should take out the stockpiles and command-and-control for such weapons. This would probably require the use of ground troops, which Obama has ruled out. These endgame issues are addressed in a new report to the State Department prepared this week by one of the Free Syrian Army's key strategists. He outlines what he calls the "Damascus plan" for "handling the power vacuum in case of a sudden Assad collapse." The plan includes steps for securing the chemical facilities; providing security in the city; protecting Alawites from reprisals; and working with the Syrian army. "The Syrian army is essential to have stability in the capital," notes the opposition memorandum. That's because many Syrians, even those who oppose the regime, fear a political vacuum. The plan urges the United States to encourage "defection of full units within the Assad army" that can be integrated with the opposition.

As the clock ticks toward a possible U.S. military strike, Putin and Obama have a last chance to agree on terms for bringing together the opposition and responsible elements of the Syrian regime (including the army).

Otherwise, U.S. military action should follow, even with all its uncertainties and potential problems.

Assad's reckless decision to use chemical weapons may yet turn the balance of this war against him — on a chaotic and unpredictable final battlefield, if it comes to that, or at the negotiating table.

[Article 2.](#)

Los Angeles Times

## **As Obama hesitates, Israel worries**

Benny Morris

September 5 - President Obama has repeatedly and publicly declared that the United States will not allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons; he has, apparently, promised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as much. While he has not explicitly declared that the United States will employ military means if all else fails, a succession of senior American officials has stated that all options are "on the table."

In part, these declarations were prompted by a fear that, once diplomacy and sanctions were perceived in Jerusalem to have failed, Israel would go it alone and launch military operations against the Iranian nuclear project, sucking in the U.S. and risking a wide Middle Eastern conflagration. The American assurances were designed to staunch Israeli fears and give diplomacy and sanctions more time.

But as Obama has waffled on Syria, he has convinced most Israelis that there is no depending on Washington to pull the Iranian nuclear chestnut out of the fire. Israel will have to take out the Iranian nuclear installations itself — or learn to live with a nuclear Iran led by a fanatical Islamist leadership that seeks Israel's destruction.

Israeli officials have carefully avoided expressing these thoughts during the last few days; Israel continues to need Obama and American goodwill in a whole range of contexts. But most Israelis, to judge by comments in the media and by the man in the street, have despaired of Obama and the America he leads. Israel is alone (and, some might say, as the Jews of Europe were alone during the Holocaust).

Obama has enviable intellectual and moral qualities. But during the last weeks, he has displayed muddled thinking and a clear lack of leadership and resolution. A year or so ago, he drew a line over the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government. Since then, U.S. intelligence counts nine such attacks, according to news reports in Israel, culminating in the Aug. 21 attack that killed an estimated 1,400 Syrians, more than 400 of them children. And the United States has done nothing except talk.

Indeed, at first the talking appeared to be geared toward justifying an imminent military strike against Bashar Assad's assets, to degrade the Syrian president's ability to launch poison gas attacks and to deter him from resuming this form of warfare.

Then came Obama's Saturday speech, providing for a delay — of a week, two weeks, more? — and calling for congressional endorsement of the prospective military strike. As the Constitution arguably allows a president, as commander in chief, to order limited strikes without such endorsement, many around the world have interpreted Obama's move as a failure of will rather than keen democratic scruples.

Both Secretary of State John F. Kerry (explicitly) and Obama (implicitly) have mentioned Israel and Iran in arguing in favor of a strike: Kerry refers to America's "credibility" with its allies and enemies; the president talked of the need to confront a "world of many dangers."

But Obama's Saturday announcement sent a contrary signal: Clearly, he and America are irresolute and hesitant about launching a short, limited strike against Assad's government, and they can be expected to be much more irresolute and hesitant when it comes to tackling the far greater threat posed by Iran's nuclear project. That could require a weeks- or months-long campaign against a more powerful enemy than Assad's Syria and might involve the United States in extended challenges around the globe, given Iran's allies in the Middle East and its terrorist proxy networks around the world.

The administration's spokesmen have been careful to declare that the president could launch a strike against Assad even if Congress voted against taking action. But this is probably hogwash. Having called on Congress for endorsement, as Prime Minister David Cameron did with Britain's Parliament, does anyone seriously expect Obama to strike Syria if Congress votes no (a vote that reflects current U.S. public opinion)?

No matter how Congress votes, Obama's maneuver has clearly signaled Jerusalem that, at the very least, Obama can be expected to vacillate when it comes to the Iranian nuclear installations, and to turn to Congress then as well — and Congress, one may assume, will be even more chary to issue a green light, given the far greater challenges posed by the Iranian issue. Israel's political and military leadership has surely come away from Obama's Hamlet-like zigzagging with a sense of shock and, even more important, with a sense of isolation in the Iranian context — one that won't disappear, even if the U.S. finally delivers a slap on the wrist against Assad.

By most counts, Iran, if not stopped, will have nuclear bombs in the course of 2014. Diplomacy and sanctions have failed over the last decade. In "negotiating" with the West, Iran has simply bought more time for its centrifuges to produce a growing stockpile of enriched uranium. In a few months' time, Israel will face its hour of truth — and it will face it alone. Sadly, we have seen Obama's mettle; we will shortly see Netanyahu's.

*Israeli historian Benny Morris is the author, most recently, of "1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War."*

[Article 3.](#)

Foreign Policy

## **Is the Syrian Intervention Good for the Jews?**

Steven J. Rosen

September 4, 2013 -- President Barack Obama's decision to make Congress decide on the course of the Syrian intervention has put the pro-Israel camp just where it did not want to be: openly advocating American military involvement in the volatile Middle East. It's a calculation based on the lesser of two evils, the greater being risking Washington's withdrawal from leadership on global security just as Iran crosses the nuclear threshold. No one has a greater stake in a strong United States -- and the credibility of America's deterrent capability -- than Israel and the Jewish people. Indeed, many of the arguments that motivate the president's opponents on Syria could also apply in the event that a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities becomes necessary.

Yet this is a debate about the American national interest, and most American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) supporters do not want it to degenerate into a debate about Israel. Most agree with former Israeli Ambassador Itamar Rabinovitch that, "It's [bad for Israel](#) [if] the average American gets it into his or her mind that boys are again sent to war for Israel."

Paralyzed by these fears, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and AIPAC supporters in Washington remained nearly [silent for weeks](#), even

after evidence of Bashar al-Assad's murderous chemical weapons attack on Syrian civilians outside Damascus. And they remained quiet even after Obama indicated that he was preparing a military strike. They did not want to be drawn into a political melee in a deeply divided Congress, risking strains in the bipartisan support for Israel that forms the bedrock of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

All that has now changed. Responding to a full-court press by the Obama administration -- a call to Netanyahu, a direct message to AIPAC, and messages via congressional leaders -- AIPAC has [weighed in](#) fully in support of the president's call for intervention.

This is a major change in precedent. Ten years ago, AIPAC struggled to stay out of the Iraq War vote when that issue was before Congress, and did not openly endorse that authorization. Neither the Israeli government nor AIPAC supporters in the United States considered Saddam Hussein nearly the threat that Iran was. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon then [warned](#) President George W. Bush privately that he thought an attack on Iraq would be a mistake. After the Iraq vote, to prove its innocence, AIPAC organized a letter from 16 Jewish members of Congress [stating](#) that "AIPAC as an organization never took a position on the war and none of us were ever lobbied by the organization on the war in Iraq." It did not work. Israel's detractors never cease asserting that the Iraq War was fought on Israel's behalf, and that belief has eroded support for Israel on the left wing of the Democratic Party.

But now, President Obama is making everyone stand up and be counted, and he is putting maximum pressure on all prospective allies to come out from behind the curtain and speak up. As a White House official told the New York Times, AIPAC is "the [800-pound gorilla](#) in the room" because it has close relations with and access to a vast array of members on both sides of the aisle and on all sides of the debate. Simply put, the president has staked a lot of political capital on the gambit to sway Congress on his Syria plan -- and he needs AIPAC's support.

The administration is certainly aware that many of the wavering members in the House and Senate could be influenced if Israel's outgoing but powerful ambassador, Michael Oren, and the pro-Israel lobby joined the fray. Public statements of support are helpful, but the main thing is the

mobilization of AIPAC's vast network of trusted "key contacts" to speak privately with members they know well.

AIPAC's leaders, like other Americans, don't see much to support on any side of the civil war in Syria, and in their hearts they would probably like to see both sides lose. But an American military strike that destroys Syria's aircraft and helicopters, degrades its air defenses, and disables its runways, would be a benefit to Israel and the region -- no matter who emerges victorious there.

And if, conversely, the red lines that have been declared by President Obama were to be wiped out by an isolationist Congress (much as British Prime Minister David Cameron was repudiated by Parliament), it could begin a wider U.S. retreat in the Middle East. It would certainly undermine the campaign to prevent Iran from completing its nuclear weapons program. Already, the Syrian regime and Hezbollah are boasting about a "[historic American retreat](#)," and extremist elements from al Qaeda to North Korea must be rubbing their hands in glee. Without a strong United States, the world of our children will descend into a very dark void, because after America there is no one else waiting in line to assume leadership except these forces of evil and chaos.

If AIPAC sits on its hands, Obama might well lose this historic vote on Capitol Hill. If so, the Rand Paul/isolationist right and the antiwar left may celebrate, and conservative critics can blame it on Obama's feckless leadership. But it will be a disaster for the Middle East and the world, and it may be impossible to contain the damage.

Some can close their eyes to these realities, but Israel and its friends in Washington don't have that luxury. Americans and Brits are far away, but Israel's permanent reality is that it lives in that very bad neighborhood, faced with an existential crisis and a Syrian civil war in danger of spiraling out of control. That is why, while Americans are divided on the issue, an overwhelming [majority of Israelis](#) are hoping President Obama will prevail. And why, in the end, the pro-Israel camp knows it needs to support Obama.

*Steven J. Rosen served for 23 years as a senior official of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. He is now the director of the Washington Project of the Middle East Forum.*

The New York Times

# **The Stakes in Congress**

Editorial

September 4 - The divided 10-to-7 vote on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday authorizing a strike against Syria for the use of chemical weapons showed there is no strong consensus yet on this critical question. While the committee's resolution — which limits military action to 60 days, with a possible 30-day extension, and specifically prohibits the use of American ground troops — was more restrictive than the language the White House suggested, it was rejected by five Republicans and two Democrats, with seven Democrats and three Republicans voting yes and one Democrat voting present. The full Senate and the House are expected to take up the issue next week.

The administration is walking a difficult line, trying to persuade Congress and Americans that limited military strikes will be enough to be punitive and effective yet will not pull the United States into another Middle East conflict. In more than three hours of hearings on Tuesday, Senate committee members asked many of the questions that Americans have about President Obama's plans for missile strikes. Some answers from Secretary of State John Kerry, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, about the plans were clear. In other instances, the answers were muddled; in still others, incomplete.

Initially, after the chemical weapons attack on Aug. 21 that killed an estimated 1,400 civilians, the White House argued that military action was intended to send a message — or, in Mr. Obama's ill-chosen phrase, deliver a “shot across the bow” — that President Bashar al-Assad could not use chemical weapons, which are banned under international treaties, with impunity.

By Tuesday, the administration had sharpened its military objective, describing its aim to “deter and degrade” Mr. Assad's ability to use those weapons. It argued that allies who depend on America for security will

doubt that commitment and states like Iran and North Korea will conclude that they can use nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction without reprisal if the United States does not act in this case. In Stockholm on Wednesday, Mr. Obama insisted that he did not set a red line against chemical weapons use but that “the world set a red line.”

Mr. Kerry said on Tuesday that Mr. Obama is “not asking America to go to war.” But one of the biggest unanswered questions is what the United States would do if Mr. Assad uses chemical weapons again. Mr. Kerry, in addressing that question before the committee, said if Mr. Assad is “foolish enough to respond to the world’s enforcement against his criminal activity — if he does, he will invite something far worse and I believe something absolutely unsustainable for him.” He left unclear what that means or what further actions would be required of the United States.

The administration is still committed to establishing peace and avoiding a complete collapse of the Syrian state, which could result in even greater chaos. It is not clear that there is a strategy to accomplish that, especially if military action is undertaken and the administration moves forward with plans for increasing support for the so-called moderate opposition, whose unity and effectiveness remain in doubt. The public deserves fuller explanations on these critical issues.

Administration officials have also been vague about the extent of international support for punishing Syria. Mr. Kerry said 34 nations have indicated that they would support “some form of action against Syria” if the claims of chemical weapons use are true, but he declined to give details. At a minimum, there should be severe international condemnation of Mr. Assad’s slaughter of civilians at the gathering of the Group of 20 nations this week in St. Petersburg, Russia. But since the meeting’s host is President Vladimir Putin, Mr. Assad’s arms supplier, even that may be unlikely.

[Article 5.](#)

The Guardian

## **G20 and Syria: Putin's show**

Editorial

September 4 - Napoleon's foreign minister, Talleyrand, observed that Russia is always simultaneously too strong and too weak. As the world's major leaders gather in St Petersburg today for the G20 summit, they may find themselves thinking much the same. Over Syria – but also more generally – Vladimir Putin's Russia has proved strong enough to frustrate the US at key moments. But it is too weak to promote anything remotely constructive or widely endorsed as an alternative. Russia is an effective adversary. But it is not a world leader.

Mr Putin's anti-American resentment and anti-western posturing go down well in his own country. But there is no way in which he speaks for neutral or non-aligned opinion on these matters. A newly published global Pew Research Center poll shows that a median of 36% of the population of the 38 surveyed countries express a favourable view of Russia, compared with 63% expressing a favourable view of the US. Negative views of Russia are not confined to western Europe and North America. It is worth noting that in an arc of Middle East nations from Turkey, through Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Jordan to Tunisia – and including the Palestinian territories – unfavourable views of Russia predominate and are growing.

None of this matters much to Mr Putin, who is extremely content for domestic political reasons to be attacked by western opinion over such things as Russian human rights abuses, the official hostility to homosexuality or his cold war-style treatment of NGOs as foreign agents. Mr Putin is a child of the cold war, and his foreign policy is essentially instrumental. His enemies' enemies are his friends. A western failure is a Russian advance, and vice-versa. He will doubtless be enjoying David Cameron's humiliation by the House of Commons, François Hollande's uneasy grip on French opinion and – perhaps most of all – Barack Obama's twists and turns over Syria. The "reset" of the US-Russia relationship seems a distant illusion, especially after the Snowden affair.

Nevertheless, the choice for Mr Putin this week is whether he is content to continue to play the spoiler, or whether, with a bit of the same creativity he brings to negativity, the G20 can generate some effective action to calm and address the deepening crisis in and over Syria. On the face of things, there are few grounds for optimism. Absurdly, Syria is not even formally on the agenda in St Petersburg. Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN and Arab League envoy for Syria, is apparently not even due to attend the meeting. Add to

that Russia's generally obstructionist approach to international moves over Syria, and the prospects for progress at or in the margins of the G20 seem poor.

Angela Merkel – who has an election in two weeks – has been pressing Russia, seemingly with French support, to ease the international stalemate and thus delay the prospect of a US attack on Syria. Yesterday's publication of a German intelligence report pinning the 21 August chemical weapons attack on President Assad's regime is also a well-timed move that increases the pressure on Russia to act. And if Mr Putin was bothering with the House of Commons yesterday he will have heard MPs pressing for a fresh effort to get the Syrian parties round the table in Geneva.

Mr Putin's eve-of-summit interview may suggest that he has been listening. Russia's president continued to imply yesterday that the 21 August attack was the work of anti-Assad forces – a view for which there is no evidence. He stuck by the absurd position that, because of the Russian veto at the security council, international law is, in effect, what Russia decides it is. Mr Putin nevertheless said that he did not exclude the possibility that Russia would agree to a process including military action in Syria if it became convinced that the 21 August atrocity was carried out by the Syrian government. Russia may simply be leading the rest of the world in a dance here. But other G20 nations must test whether that is a genuine sign of flexibility. Whatever the formalities, Syria must be at the top of the agenda in St Petersburg.

[Article 6.](#)

The National Interest

## **G-20: Long Shadow Hangs Over U.S.-Russia Relations**

[Gerald F. Hyman](#)

September 5, 2013 -- In the Snowden affair and President Obama's decision to reject an invitation by Russian president Vladimir Putin for a one-on-one meeting ahead of the G-20, the danger is growing that the United States is repeating the unnecessary and costly mistakes of the 1990s in dealing with Russia. In the decade after the Berlin Wall was breached, a

weakened and disorganized Russia watched first as the Warsaw Pact disintegrated and then as the Soviet Union itself did. In both regions, especially Central Europe, the Kremlin might have responded with military force as it had before, possibly even with tactical nuclear weapons, but happily clearer heads prevailed even amidst the collapse. The George H.W. Bush administration, especially then-secretary of state James Baker, worked hard to negotiate a peaceful dissolution of the Soviet empire, and it found reluctant partners in Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin.

In the following decade, U.S. policy was less wise and balanced, and Russia also provided a less judicious counterpart. No doubt, Russian power and influence had dissipated. No longer a central player, let alone one of two global superpowers, Russia was treated publicly as an irrelevance. Its objection to the bombing of Serbia and the intervention in Kosovo was brushed aside, its certain veto in the Security Council ignored by avoiding the United Nations entirely through NATO. Russian warnings against invading a sovereign country in Iraq for what turned out to be no real direct—let alone imminent—threat to the United States carried no weight. When Russia and China agreed not to prevent a no-fly zone or a limited humanitarian engagement in Libya, the effort broadened into a war for regime change, but without any modification in the UN mandate.

Leaving aside whether all of these may well have been good, well-founded choices by the United States and its allies, from the Russian perspective they were all undertaken against its strong objections, and that would not have happened in, say, the mid-seventies. President Clinton and President George W. Bush hardly even pretended to take Russia's interests, positions, or sensibilities into account, a reflection of certain hard geostrategic realities perhaps, but maybe not so judicious.

The past decade has brought numerous disagreements and little reason to expect comity at any "summit" meeting (although even the term now seems quaint, especially since Russia is no longer at the summit in any meaningful sense). Russia and the US have been at odds on Syria, Iraq, Kosovo, Serbia, and a host of other international issues. Moreover, Putin campaigned using anti-American broadsides, continues anti-American propaganda on state-owned television, has re-constricted freedoms of speech and association, seen to police raids on and the prosecution of liberal politicians and NGOs (many funded in part by the United States

and, if so, required to register as foreign agents), appointed cronies to govern whole regions and sometimes-critical media outlets, evicted USAID, and encouraged the statesmen of countries that have been thorns in the U.S. side.

Then came Snowden and his documentary treasures, uninvited by the Russians and the subject of a U.S. request for extradition. Obama has been insistent that he be returned and, although visibly annoyed at being afflicted by Snowden's surprise arrival, Putin could not easily have given him up without looking weak internationally and especially domestically. Would the United States have sent Snowden back to Moscow were the roles reversed, even with the assurance that torture and capital punishment were not an option?

So, with Snowden the final straw as it were, President Obama has now cancelled his acceptance of Putin's invitation to meet, ostensibly because the groundwork for progress had not been laid. But is that really accurate and, even if so, is it wise? It is true that unlike China, Russia has provided material, military, and apparently financial support to Syria (although Russia has basing rights in Syria, which China does not). Yet notwithstanding China's opposition at the United Nations and its provocations in the South China Sea, President Xi Jinping was invited for a bilateral meeting with Obama without a specific agenda for progress on potential agreements during their two-day informal meeting in California (including an informal dinner), not at a short meeting ahead of a twenty-country international forum.

Yet with Russia as with China there are several issues on which bilateral concurrence could be pursued and others (like Syria) in which disagreements could perhaps be softened, as they have at earlier summits. At the very least, better mutual understanding have resulted, especially over differences. The fact is that both the U.S. and Russia are concerned about Iran and its nuclear potential and (albeit for different reasons) its encouragement of Islamic fundamentalism. Russia supported the U.S.-initiated arms embargo, but will it do so in the future? The growing turmoil in the Middle East and Turkey is another. Missile defense and strategic arms reduction are still on the table.

Moreover, Russia has been helpful on a number of issues important to the United States, for example providing territorial access via the Northern

Distribution Network to resupply NATO forces in Afghanistan when the route through Pakistan was cut. Whatever the U.S. disagreement with Putin's domestic policies—which themselves could have been raised or at least reasserted by the president—these are domestic policies and so perhaps not the most pressing subjects for a bilateral meeting. Even at that, those measures are nowhere near as extreme as the Kremlin once perpetrated on its citizens while summit meetings went forward for other reasons. International meetings are primarily about relations between states or about global affairs of mutual concern. This would have been a chance to acknowledge Russia's place as a central power, even if more in form than in substance, while exploring ways to cooperate or at least moderate disputes. Meetings among those who agree are not the only useful meetings. As others have noted, diplomats normally negotiate with their adversaries, not their allies. The cost of a side meeting would have been low—a bit of respect, even if not fully deserved—while the cost of insisting on Russia's impotence and secondary place in the global hierarchy could be high. Russia can be troublesome even when it is not helpful.

Finally, even as to Snowden, Putin has insisted that he make no statements that would harm Russia's "partner," the United States. Far from embracing a fugitive with an unexpected trove of his adversary's security secrets, former KGB officer Putin wavered for more than a month before providing temporary asylum. Russia probably stripped his computers and may now have secrets that it can use against us, but still there will be no more public disclosures of such secrets while Snowden remains in Russia, and Wikileaks will be ingratiated to a regime less tolerant of its sanctimonious posturing. If Snowden gets to South America, the torrent of embarrassing and problematic disclosures might resume.

So without doubt, any meeting would have been tense for both Putin and Obama, but it might have served U.S. interests and would have been gracious and inexpensive. It is too late now to change the summit cancellation. Putin will no doubt survive the snub. But U.S.-Russian relations are ongoing, and this incident will complicate them.

Future meetings, if any, between the two presidents should be a matter of mutual national interests. They should not be seen, publicly or privately, as a generous gift dispensed by the U.S. president to a Russian supplicant.

The U.S. president should decide about whether or not to meet the Russian president as a calculation of U.S. interests, including positive and negative optics, potential cooperation, threat reduction, and the like. At the very least, reset or not, the two countries thought the United States would bear little cost in treating Russia with the same level of respect for its standing (including strong, vocal disagreement) as it did at the height of the Cold War, when Russia's nuclear and other capabilities were more threatening, but not more real, than they are today.

*Gerald F. ("Jerry") Hyman has been a senior advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and president of its Hills Program on Governance since 2007. He held several positions at USAID from 1990-2007, including director of its Office of Democracy and Governance from 2002-2007.*

[Article 7.](#)

[The Washington Post](#)

## **Israeli proposal detailed in talks**

Mohammed Daraghmeh and Josef Federman

Sep. 4, 2013 -- RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — Israel has proposed leaving intact dozens of Jewish settlements and military bases in the West Bank as part of a package to establish a Palestinian state in provisional borders, a Palestinian official told The Associated Press on Wednesday, in the first detailed glimpse at recently relaunched peace talks.

The official said the proposal is unacceptable to the Palestinians, underscoring the tough road ahead as the sides try to reach an agreement ending decades of conflict.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because Israel and the Palestinians have pledged to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry not to discuss the content of their talks with the media — a pledge that has largely held up until now.

For their future state, the Palestinians seek the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza Strip, territories captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war.

With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opposed to a return to the pre-1967 lines, the idea of a Palestinian state in temporary borders has gained appeal with the Israelis.

Such a deal could give the Palestinians independence, while leaving the thorniest issues, such as the fate of Jerusalem and the status of millions of Palestinian refugees and their descendants, to later negotiations. The Palestinians reject any notion of a provisional agreement, fearing that a temporary arrangement that falls short of their dreams will become permanent.

Talks resumed in late July after a nearly five-year break stemming largely from Israeli settlement construction. The Palestinians have objected to Israeli construction in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. The Palestinians say these settlements, now home to more than 500,000 Israelis, make it increasingly difficult to partition the land between two people.

After months of U.S. mediation, the Palestinians agreed to resume talks. Although Israel did not pledge to freeze settlement construction, U.S. officials have said they expect both sides to avoid provocative moves. Negotiators have been quietly meeting once or twice a week for the past month or so.

The Palestinian official said formal talks on borders have not yet started, and that negotiations have focused on security matters. He said the Israelis want to retain control of the West Bank's border with Jordan, keep early-warning stations on hilltops, and retain military bases near the Jordanian border.

"Israel is using the issue of security to take land," he said. "From the general discussions we had in the last couple of weeks, the Israelis have shown no intention to dismantle any settlement." He said the current proposals indicated that Israel would seek to retain control over about 40 percent of the West Bank.

"They said, 'Let's discuss a state with provisional borders.' We said, 'Let's agree on a state based on the 1967 borders first, and then we can agree on having this state in phases.'"

In the previous round of talks, conducted in 2008 under then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Israel offered to withdraw from roughly 94 percent of the West Bank, and compensate the Palestinians with the equivalent of 6 percent through a "land swap" that would allow Israel to keep major

settlements. Olmert also proposed international administration of Jerusalem's holy sites.

The official said the Palestinians have proposed resuming peace talks from the point they broke off. Netanyahu has said he is not obligated to accept Olmert's proposals.

A senior Israeli official refused comment on the Israeli proposal, citing the commitment to keep the talks secret.

"It was agreed between the sides that all public discussion about the negotiations would be through the Americans," the Israeli official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media about the issue.

Netanyahu's office declined comment, citing the pledge not to discuss the negotiations in public. Likewise, there was no immediate U.S. comment.

In a statement released for the Jewish new year holiday that began Wednesday evening, Netanyahu said he hoped the talks would succeed.

"We seek to advance peace with the Palestinians while maintaining our security and ensuring that the peace will be a real and enduring peace. Not a ceremony, not an agreement that we celebrate for two minutes and then collapse," the statement said. "We want a real, genuine and enduring peace and this must be anchored in recognition of Israel as a Jewish state and in our security. This is what ultimately is needed."

Yasser Abed Rabbo, a top aide to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, would not discuss the specifics of the talks. But speaking on the Voice of Palestine radio station, he said, "Until now, there are no signs of progress. The Israeli position has not changed. It's the one that we know on the ground, through daily settlement expansion."

He urged the U.S. to put pressure on Israel. Otherwise, he said, "there will be no progress."

Earlier Wednesday, Israeli police arrested seven Palestinians after clashes between stone-throwing demonstrators and Israeli security forces in Jerusalem's Old City.

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said the clashes erupted when about 300 Palestinians tried to block a group of visitors from reaching a sensitive hilltop compound revered by both Jews and Muslims. He says masked demonstrators began to throw stones, prompting security forces to move in.

He says some demonstrators sought refuge inside the nearby Al Aqsa Mosque. Police did not enter the mosque, and no one was injured. The compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount, is the holiest site in Judaism. Known to Muslims as the "Noble Sanctuary," it is Islam's third-holiest site. Rosenfeld said security has been heightened for the Jewish New Year holiday.

[Article 8.](#)

Nature

## **[A Multitasking Video Game Makes Old Brains Act Younger](#)**

[Alison Abbott](#)

4 September 2013 -- Sixty-five-year-old Ann Linsey was starting to worry about how easily she got distracted from whatever she was doing. "As you get older, it seems harder to do more things at once," she says. Then she enrolled in a study to test whether playing a game could improve fading cognitive skills in older people — and was impressed by what it did for her. "I was frustrated because I felt I was losing my faculties. Now I've learnt how to focus my attention."

Commercial companies have claimed for years that computer games can make the user smarter, but have been criticized for failing to show that improved skills in the game translate into better performance in daily life<sup>1</sup>. Now a study published this week in Nature<sup>2</sup> — the one in which Linsey participated — convincingly shows that if a game is tailored to a precise cognitive deficit, in this case multitasking in older people, it can indeed be effective.

Led by neuroscientist Adam Gazzaley of the University of California, San Francisco, the study found that a game called NeuroRacer can help older people to improve their capacity to multitask — and the effect seems to carry over to tasks in everyday life and is still there after six months. The study also shows how patterns of brain activity change as those cognitive skills improve.

NeuroRacer is a three-dimensional video game in which players steer a car along a winding, hilly road with their left thumb, while keeping an eye out for signs that randomly pop up. If the sign is a particular shape and colour, players have to shoot it down using a finger on their right hand. This multitasking exercise, says Gazzaley, draws on a mix of cognitive skills just as real life does — such as attention focusing, task switching and working memory (the ability to temporarily hold multiple pieces of information in the mind).

Gazzaley and his colleagues first recruited around 30 participants for each of six decades of life, from the 20s to the 70s, and confirmed that multitasking skills as measured by the game deteriorated linearly with age. They then recruited 46 participants aged 60–85 and put them through a 4-week training period with a version of NeuroRacer that increased in difficulty as the player improved.

After training, subjects had improved so much that they achieved higher scores than untrained 20-year-olds, and the skill remained six months later without practice.

Improved mental skills that come from playing a video game are mirrored by increased brain activity.

The scientists also conducted a battery of cognitive tests on the participants before and after training. Certain cognitive abilities that were not specifically targeted by the game improved and remained improved — such as working memory and sustained attention. Both skills are important for daily tasks, from reading a newspaper to cooking a meal.

That is significant, says Gazzaley. “NeuroRacer doesn’t demand too much of those particular abilities — so it appears that the multitasking challenge may put pressure on the entire cognitive control system, raising the level of all of its components.”

The team also recorded brain activity using electroencephalography while participants played NeuroRacer. As their skills increased, so did activity in the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which is associated with cognitive control, in a manner that correlated with improvements in sustained-attention tasks. Activity also increased in a neural network linking the prefrontal cortex with the back of the brain.

The industry that has grown around selling brain-training computer games has polarized opinion about the effectiveness of brain-training packages,

says cognitive neuroscientist Torkel Klingberg of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. “Some companies are not based on real science, and have made unrealistic claims,” he says. “On the other hand, some psychologists have claimed that working memory and attention are fixed and can’t be trained up.”

But Gazzaley’s study confirms that cognitive function can be improved — if you design training methods properly, says Klingberg, who is a consultant for Cogmed, a company he founded in 1999 to market computer-based training methods, particularly for people with attention-deficit disorders<sup>3</sup>.

Last year, Gazzaley also co-founded a company, called Akili, for which he is an adviser. It is developing a commercial product similar to NeuroRacer, which remains a research tool, and will seek approval from the US Food and Drug Administration to market it as a therapeutic agent. A ‘games’ approach might also help people with particular cognitive deficits, such as depression or schizophrenia, adds Daphne Bavelier, a cognitive neuroscientist at the University of Geneva in Switzerland, who develops computer games to improve brain function and who also advises Akili. Gazzaley cautions against over-hyping: “Video games shouldn’t now be seen as a guaranteed panacea.” But Linsey, for her part, is happy with what the game did for her and about her own contribution. “It’s been exciting to discover the older brain can learn — and ■■■ glad my own brain helped make the discovery.”