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[Article 1.](#)
NYT

What Is Russia's Aim in Ukraine?

Editorial

Feb. 28, 2014 -- President Vladimir Putin of Russia played the genial host at the Olympic Games in Sochi, but his dangerous approach to geopolitics could be his true legacy.

On Friday, Ukraine's ambassador to the United Nations, Yuriy Sergeyev, said that Russian troops had taken control of two airports in Crimea and that the Russian Navy was blocking the Ukrainian Coast Guard.

Moscow denied that it had sent troops in. But the fact is, Russia was outrageously provocative when it put 150,000 troops on [high alert](#) on Wednesday for war games near Ukraine's border and then on Friday allowed the deposed Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, to give a news conference when he showed up in the Russian city Rostov-on-Don. The [situation](#) has now gone from chaos to the verge of military confrontation. The pro-Russia region of Crimea is seething, and the new central government that took over in Kiev after Mr. Yanukovich fled is barely functioning.

President Obama, speaking at the White House, was right to warn Russia against any military move and to indicate that the United States would join the world in condemning a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. He also said that "there will be costs" for any intervention in Ukraine, though it was not clear what, if realistically anything, that might involve.

Mr. Obama spoke after armed men of uncertain allegiance took up positions at two airports in Simferopol, the regional capital of Crimea. Their military uniforms bore no insignia, and it was not obvious who they were or who was commanding them.

There were no immediate signs of confrontations or panic, but The Times reported that armored personnel carriers with Russian markings appeared on roads outside Simferopol, sometimes alone but at other times in long columns of military vehicles. It was unclear whether the movement was a Russian push to occupy the city, a show of strength or simply a routine rotation of Russian military equipment.

Russia has many military facilities in Crimea, where its Black Sea fleet is based, and the area has stronger historical ties to Russia than to Ukraine's central government in Kiev. While promising to defend the interests of Russian citizens in Ukraine, Moscow has said it will not intervene by force.

But whether Mr. Putin will abide by that promise is unclear. In 2008, he sent Russian forces into neighboring Georgia, ostensibly to protect the secessionist Georgian enclave of South Ossetia; the real goal was to weaken the pro-Western government in Tbilisi.

Russia and the West both have legitimate interests in Ukraine and its future. Fomenting more tension in a country that is already in upheaval is not in anyone's interest. Nor is encouraging a permanent break between Crimea and the rest of Ukraine.

Russia and the West need to work together to help stabilize the country politically and develop an economic and trade package that will begin to resolve the economic crisis.

Mr. Putin's dangerous tactics are sure to backfire and do more to alienate Ukrainians than to encourage them to accept any Russian role in their nation's future.

[Article 2.](#)

The Washington Post

Iran deal could encourage rather than limit nuclear activity

Yuval Steinitz

A [final deal](#) that allows Iran to retain centrifuges for uranium enrichment ultimately would allow the development of nuclear weapons in Iran, encourage a Sunni-Shiite arms race in the Middle East and weaken [counterproliferation efforts worldwide](#).

Iran already possesses ballistic missiles suited to carry nuclear warheads and advanced knowledge of weaponization. Given that the production of fissile material — whether by enriching uranium in centrifuges or extracting plutonium from nuclear reactors — is the principal stage in the process of making a nuclear weapon, acquiescing to Iranian enrichment is tantamount to legitimizing Iran's status on the nuclear threshold. Proposals for the final agreement to restrict the number of centrifuges are almost irrelevant. Even if Iran were forced to reduce its number of centrifuges to only 3,000, its stockpile of uranium enriched to 3.5 percent would allow the production of enough fissile material for a nuclear bomb within six

months. If forced to start from scratch with 3,000 centrifuges, Iran could still produce enough fissile material to make a nuclear weapon within one year. The chances of Iran developing the bomb as a “threshold country” are considerable: [North Korea](#) did so after signing a [similar deal in 2007](#). Becoming a nuclear power was the ayatollahs’ initial objective and the reason Tehran invested around \$50 billion in this project. Yes, there are other countries on the nuclear threshold, but unlike Germany and Japan, Iran is unlikely to maintain its threshold status. The ayatollahs’ regime poses a threat to its Sunni neighbors. Tehran calls for the annihilation of the Jewish state and sponsors terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad, all of which sparks fear in other countries. Sooner or later, Tehran’s anxiety over potential retaliatory actions against its regime, including its nuclear project, would increase pressures within Iran to dash toward a fait accompli nuclear weapon. As for the Sunni-Shiite arms race, the critical reaction to an international agreement would be not in Washington but in [Cairo, Ankara and Riyadh](#). Even if the Western powers express confidence in Iran’s commitment and pledge a vigorous economic and military response to any Iranian violation, regional players will render their own judgments. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani’s “charm offensive” has had a dramatic effect in the West, but no one in the Middle East buys Iran’s projection of pacifism. Indeed, Tehran’s direct involvement in Sunni-Shiite carnage in [Syria](#), Lebanon and [Iraq](#) has sharpened its image. Iran’s breakout capability will be pivotal in regional assessments, with most governments likely to conclude that if the deal leaves Iran only a year or two away from the bomb Tehran ultimately will go nuclear. Any deal that legitimizes Iran as an unpunished, sanctions-free country on the nuclear threshold might spark a nuclear arms race in the region, as [Saudi Arabia has hinted](#). Some Sunni states might seek to develop the bomb in a bid to achieve parity with Iran or to ensure their ability to join the nuclear club if Tehran does. Paradoxically, such an arms race might provide Tehran the ultimate excuse to produce the bomb: to keep pace with the rivals its own actions drove to go nuclear. Even if Iran kept its commitment to avoid the bomb, allowing it to retain centrifuges could have grave global implications. Should the final compromise include de facto recognition of Iran’s “right to enrich,” the international community would find it difficult to insist later that other problematic regimes concede that

“right.” Unfortunately, [the interim agreement](#) has already linked Iran’s hypothetical future enrichment to its civilian “practical needs.” Practical needs is interpreted mainly as enrichment needed to fuel nuclear power stations. Such a civilian purpose demands more centrifuges than are in Iran’s inventory. In other words, it seems to allow for even more centrifuges than are militarily needed for the annual production of several nuclear bombs.

More than 20 countries produce electricity in nuclear reactors, and dozens more are planning to do so. If Iran were ultimately allowed to enrich, how would the United States justify its demand that, say, Egypt, Jordan or South Korea eschew uranium enrichment for peaceful civilian purposes? How would U.S. officials argue that what the deal concedes to the ayatollahs’ regime, after a decade of flagrant violations of six U.N. Security Council resolutions and their commitments under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, is forbidden for more responsible countries? How could the United States cast greater legitimacy on the [previously clandestine centrifuge facilities in Qom](#) and [Natanz](#) than on those that would be aboveboard from the outset? Inevitably, multiple countries, including some rogue states, would insist on their own enrichment facilities. With centrifuges equally capable of enriching uranium for nuclear energy or nuclear bombs, such a deal might generate many new threshold states.

Under such circumstances, local disputes or changes in government eventually would push some countries across the threshold. Ironically, a deal intended to prevent the nuclear armament of one dangerous country, Iran, could plant the seeds for the wholesale sprouting of many nuclear powers.

Yuval Steinitz is Israel’s minister of intelligence.

[Article 3.](#)

The Washington Institute

Netanyahu and Obama to Review Progress on Iran

[Patrick Clawson](#)

February 28, 2014 -- The March 3 meeting between President Obama and Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu will likely focus on the U.S. framework proposal for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. But another issue sure to come up is Iran's nuclear program.

In November, when Iran and the P5+1 (Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States) announced the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) in Geneva, Netanyahu called the first-step nuclear agreement a "historic mistake." He added, "Today the world has become a much more dangerous place because the most dangerous regime in the world has taken a significant step toward attaining the most dangerous weapon in the world." On February 22, he reiterated his concerns: "The combination of enrichment, weapons, and launching abilities means that Iran is getting everything without giving practically anything." Others in Israel have also expressed concern that the JPOA may trigger erosion of the sanctions and create pressure to reach a comprehensive agreement with Iran even if the deal is weak.

What Netanyahu will say at the Monday summit is beyond the scope of this Policy Alert, which only looks at how the U.S. government views its own record at implementing the JPOA. The Obama administration believes it has taken strong actions on two fronts that should address Israeli concerns: enforcing sanctions and staying firm on key JPOA provisions. On the first front, the Treasury Department has continued to designate additional actors regarding Iranian support for terrorism and proliferation even when these designations are politically risky. Its February 6 proliferation designations included actors from U.S.-allied countries in Europe (Germany, Spain, Switzerland) and neighboring Iran (Turkey, Georgia, the United Arab Emirates). In the administration's view, these measures show its willingness to continue pressing allies to sustain sanctions.

Washington also believes the new designations show its readiness to target important Iranian officials despite the potential reaction from Tehran. This month, three officers from the elite Qods Force were designated for "Tehran's use of terrorism and intelligence operations as tools of influence against the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan." In addition, Treasury believes it has shown that it will target actors based on intelligence that flies in the face of common perception. The designation of

Olimzhon Adkhamovich Sadikov (also known as Jafar al-Uzbeki and Jafar Muidinov) described him as "a key Iran-based [al-Qaeda] facilitator who supports [the group's] vital facilitation network in Iran, [which] operates there with the knowledge of Iranian authorities...The network also uses Iran as a transit point for moving funding and foreign fighters through Turkey to support...affiliated elements in Syria, including the al-Nusrah Front." Given how much publicity has been given to Iran's support of those fighting against al-Qaeda in Syria, Treasury received much skepticism about its judgment that Tehran was also helping al-Qaeda elements. Yet the department did not flinch from pointing out that in Syria, as in other situations, Iran often bets on every horse in the race -- it will work with every anti-American actor, even those who are killing Iran's own agents. In short, Treasury believes it has been making a strong effort to enforce sanctions.

On the second front, the administration believes it has taken a tough line on what the JPOA covers. In particular, it continues to note that the comprehensive solution envisioned by the JPOA will include limits on missiles. This point is tied to a key Israeli concern -- on February 22, Netanyahu complained about Tehran's plan "to build intercontinental missiles," arguing that the regime is currently engaged in such plans "without hindrance." On February 17 at the Vienna talks, Undersecretary of State Wendy Sherman cited the JPOA's provision about "addressing the UN Security Council Resolutions," then quoted paragraph 9 of Resolution 1929, in which the council "decided that Iran shall not undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches." On this basis, she said Tehran had agreed in the JPOA that talks aimed at reaching a comprehensive solution will include negotiations about Iran's ballistic missile program. The Iranian delegation complained about this issue, with Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, declaring that the talks "will be about Iran's nuclear program and nothing else." In response, White House spokesman Jay Carney reiterated, "Per the Joint Plan of Action agreed to by Iran, Iran must address the UN Security Council resolutions related to its nuclear program before a comprehensive resolution can be reached. In other words, they have to deal with matters related to their ballistic missile program that are included in the United Nations Security Council resolution."

The administration appears to believe that it being equally strict about other issues broached in the JPOA. For instance, while the interim agreement states that a comprehensive solution will "involve a mutually defined enrichment programme with mutually agreed parameters consistent with practical needs," the U.S. view is that Iran will not be in a situation where its practical needs require uranium enrichment any time soon. According to that view, the JPOA provision is consistent with a U.S. demand that Iran not enrich for years to come.

In short, the Obama administration believes it is taking a tough stance on implementation of the JPOA. Whether Israel agrees with that assessment should become clearer after Monday's summit.

Patrick Clawson is director of research at The Washington Institute.

[Article 4.](#)

The Council on Foreign Relations

President Obama's March Summit with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu

[Robert M. Danin](#)

February 28, 2014 -- President Barack Obama hosts Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington on Monday. The last time the two leaders met together—September 30, 2013, in the same Oval Office—Obama had big news for the Israeli leader: his administration had been engaged in secret high-level negotiations for the previous seven months with Israel's most menacing adversary, Iran.

The upcoming Israeli-American summit will surely lack such drama. While their conversation will focus on the same two issues that have dominated their nearly five year long dialogue—Iran and peace with the Palestinians—the discussion now will be over major negotiating tactics, not fundamental strategy. President Obama will not spend time trying to keep Israeli aircraft from attacking Iranian nuclear facilities nor will he push Netanyahu to stop settlement activity.

For now, the Obama administration is in the driver's seat, leading negotiations both with Iran and between Israel and the Palestinians.

Netanyahu is largely a bystander to one process and a reactive participant in the other. Differences between the United States and Israel have not been removed so much as deferred. Netanyahu will react to Obama; he is not positioned to advocate a wholly different approach on either front.

Iran: The fundamental gap between Obama and Netanyahu's objectives regarding Iran remains: the American leader's goal is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, the Israeli objective is to see Iran deprived of the capability to develop a nuclear weapon. But the United States has signed an interim nuclear accord with Tehran in the period since Obama and Netanyahu last met, and negotiations on a comprehensive deal between the P5+1 and Iran are ongoing.

Given the now open U.S.-Iranian channel, the Israeli leader will settle, for now, on trying to affect Obama's negotiating behavior. Israel's declaratory position is to demand no Iranian enrichment. In recent talks with Israeli officials, lead U.S. negotiator Wendy Sherman suggested that position, while desirable, is unattainable. While Netanyahu will adhere to his public position, in private he is more likely to focus on the types of constraints on Iranian enrichment activity necessary to both detect and prevent an Iranian breakout attempt. Should the negotiations with Iran produce an agreement with ample safeguards, Israel's planes will likely remain grounded.

Israeli-Palestinian peace: With the Obama administration's self-imposed deadline of April 2014 for a comprehensive, conflict-ending Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement rapidly approaching, Middle East peace will once again feature prominently in the two leader's discussions. But expect no dramatic fireworks on this front either. The Obama administration, recognizing that a comprehensive peace treaty will not be signed over the next few months, is now reportedly preparing a "framework agreement" that it will soon present to the Israelis and Palestinians.

While this remains a work in progress, with details yet to be outlined publicly, Secretary of State John Kerry is apparently preparing an outline that largely meets Netanyahu's objectives on two issues of paramount concern to him: recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, and robust security arrangements for Israel as part of a peace agreement. On the area most likely to prove difficult for Netanyahu to agree to at this time—the final status of Jerusalem—the United States is reportedly preparing formulas

sufficiently vague so as to be unobjectionable to the Israeli leader or his coalition partners.

This effort to remove Israeli negotiating objections is likely to achieve its intended result. The word out of Jerusalem late this week is that Netanyahu will probably accept the U.S. formula, or at least not reject it outright. The prime minister's coalition partners most likely to oppose significant concessions seem to prefer a U.S. approach that keeps Israeli-Palestinian negotiations going while allowing them to keep their ministerial posts. Hence, the upcoming Obama-Netanyahu Oval Office meeting is likely to end in public professions of friendship and comity.

However, such an encounter would then set the stage for a potentially more difficult tete-a-tete when President Obama hosts Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas on March 17. White House officials backgrounded the press this week saying "now is a very timely opportunity for [the president] to get involved." Yet according to the Palestinian daily al-Quds, Abbas reacted angrily to the American proposals when he met recently with Secretary Kerry in Paris. To be sure, much haggling will likely continue behind the scenes. The March summits with Netanyahu and then Abbas will test whether or not this is indeed a "timely opportunity" for President Obama.

[Robert M. Danin](#) - Eni Enrico Mattei Senior Fellow for Middle East and Africa Studies

[Article 5.](#)

NYT

Why Israel No Longer Trusts Europe

Clemens Wergin

Feb. 28, 2014 -- In February, the German politician Martin Schulz, the president of the European Parliament and the Social Democratic candidate for European Commission president in the coming European Union elections, traveled to Israel to address the Knesset.

The idea of a German politician speaking before the Israeli Parliament is newsworthy enough. But it was what he said that caused an uproar: Mr.

Schulz quoted a young Palestinian he met in the West Bank, who had asked him: “How can it be that an Israeli is allowed to use 70 liters of water a day but a Palestinian only 17?”

Though Mr. Schulz didn’t elaborate, his implication was clear: Israel is purposely depriving Palestinians of their basic needs. But if his comments drew immediate condemnation in the Israeli press, they attracted little attention in Europe, perhaps because he was simply expressing what has come to be conventional wisdom there: Israel, many Europeans believe, is capable of almost anything in its treatment of Palestinians.

The feelings of distrust are mutual: According to the Global Attitudes Project at the Pew Research Center, only 41 percent of Israelis had a favorable view of the European Union in 2013, down from 56 percent in 2009 (even the United States, which under President Obama has been more critical of Israel than under his predecessor, was viewed favorably by 83 percent of Israelis).

Europe and Israel have hit rough spots before. But the rancor of the last few years is different — more vituperative, more widespread. If it remains, the hopes for a European role in a final peace deal will be dashed.

European animosity toward Israel goes beyond the public. The European Union recently adopted guidelines forbidding its agencies to send money to Israeli companies and organizations in the West Bank; this and other similar steps apply a double standard it doesn’t use in other conflicts. And it seems aimed to increasingly push Israel into a corner.

Israel, with its dogged commitment to expanding settlements, has brought some of that on itself. But Europe has also lost the measure of how one-sided its approach has become. European officials have a habit of aggrandizing obstacles for peace put up by Israel and minimizing those put up by the Palestinians.

To understand Europe’s Middle East complex, one has to go back to the days when the Continent started to forge a common foreign policy. The first joint declaration in foreign affairs emerged in 1973 as a response to the Gulf states’ oil embargo against the West after the Yom Kippur War. Its aim was to appease Arab states and to lift the embargo’s pressure on European economies.

The Middle East thus became the subject around which European diplomats continued to press a collective response. For decades they had

no common foreign policy toward any region of the world but the Middle East.

But instead of finding pragmatic solutions, they settled for airy joint resolutions; after having agreed on most subtle wordings, the diplomats in Brussels would fly home exhausted — until the next crisis demanded another declaration. As a result, European talk about the conflict has become terribly cliché-ridden. The “window of opportunity” is always closing fast. The “spiral of violence” is always in danger of spinning out of control. And the Palestinians are usually seen as victims reacting to Israeli measures, and not as authors of their own fate.

To Europe, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the root of all problems facing the region — a view in no way altered by the Arab Human Development Reports published by the United Nations since 2002, which showed that Arab autocracies and cultural backwardness were the root of the region’s woes.

Even after the outbreak of the Arab revolutions revealed that indeed corruption — and lack of dignity, democracy and opportunity — were to blame for the rage of the Arab street, Europe insisted on the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It is striking that Europe always comes to the Israelis with demands for concessions when it has itself such a bad track record at helping resolve problems in the region. After Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the European Union agreed to police the Rafah crossing in order to help prevent weapons smuggling. But it essentially abandoned the mission two years later. After the 2006 Lebanon war, European nations took over large parts of the United Nations mission to prevent weapons smuggling to Hezbollah. On their watch the terrorist group acquired tens of thousands of new and more sophisticated rockets. If the Europeans were honest with themselves, they would admit that some of their long-held assumptions didn’t pass the reality test. Like the idea that Israel should always swap land for peace. It has worked with states like Egypt. But it has failed whenever ideologically driven nonstate actors were involved.

Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon resulted not in the disarming of Hezbollah, as many European experts had predicted, but in a heavily armed Iranian proxy sitting directly at Israel’s border. We’ve seen much the same in Gaza.

Despite these discouraging experiences, every Israeli military action against radicals in Gaza or Lebanon is met with protests in Europe. Which doesn't inspire confidence in Israeli leaders that Europe would accept Israel's right to self-defense if a future Palestinian state in the West Bank became a similar hotbed of extremism and revisionist politics.

It is always comfortable for Europeans to demand that Israel make hard decisions for peace. But Europe must now ask itself some hard questions, too. What guarantees could Europe offer Israel in return for a Palestinian state to protect it if the peace experiment failed and radicals took over the West Bank? Would Europe be ready to offer membership in NATO and the European Union if the Israelis asked for it?

I am not sure there are any promising answers to these questions. But if all Europe has to offer Israel is criticism and disapproval, then it will be part of the problem, not the solution.

Clemens Wergin is the foreign editor of the German newspaper group Die Welt and the author of the blog Flatworld.

[Article 6.](#)

Agence Global

What Are the Motives and Meanings of a Jewish State?

Rami G. Khouri

1 Mar 2014 -- In my discussions on Palestinian-Israeli negotiations with various informed audiences around the United States during the past month, the question that comes up most often is about how the Palestinians can, should or will respond to the Israeli government demand that they must recognize Israel as a "Jewish state." The prevalent Arab and Palestinian demand is to rule out any such recognition, on several valid grounds, such as: The Jewish state concept is not defined, it does not take account of the Palestinian Arab and other non-Jewish Israelis, it does not address the implications of such recognition for the UN-acknowledged rights of the Palestinian refugees, and it does not have any basis in

prevailing international law or diplomatic norms related to how states recognize each other.

These valid points do not seem to impress the Israelis, who have made this more central to their demands for any permanent peace agreement. Israel also seems to have convinced the United States to come down on its side on this issue, as the American president, secretary of state and other senior officials routinely confirm when they refer to Israel as “the Jewish state of Israel” or some other such formulation.

It is not clear if Palestinians will cave in and accept the Israeli-American demand as they usually do, for three main reasons. First, the demand comes in the context of final status negotiations that aim to resolve all outstanding disputes, so there is likely to be some room for give-and-take in any final agreement. Second, the “Jewish state” concept remains undefined, and its clear definition, coupled with agreement on the rights of the Palestinians and non-Jewish Israelis, could pave the way for some mutual acknowledgments that satisfy both sides. Third, a central negotiating demand such as this, which springs up suddenly after over six decades of warfare, seems to be a proxy concept that reflects some deeper issues that must be resolved.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has only broadly commented on why the Palestinians must recognize Israel as the Jewish state or as “the nation-state of the Jewish people.” He recently claimed at a conference by the Institute for National Security Studies that the Palestinians have long had a “basic objection to any Jewish presence,” which he traces back to the Arab-Zionist clashes of the early decades of the 20th Century, before the state of Israel came into being. He sees the Palestinian Arab conflict with Israel as reflecting a “struggle against the very existence of the Jewish state, against Zionism or any geographic expression of it, any State of Israel in any border. The conflict is not over these territories; it is not about settlements, and it is not about a Palestinian state [T]his conflict has gone on because of one reason, the stubborn opposition to recognize the Jewish state, the nation-state of the Jewish people.”

As usual, Netanyahu offers a combination of outright lies and views that widely reflect Israeli and, to a lesser extent, worldwide Jewish sentiments on such core issues. He lies because the Palestinians and other Arabs who rejected the formation of a Jewish state in 1948 have since come to terms

with it, assuming that Palestinian national and individual rights are also implemented in a negotiated accord that both sides accept. The Palestinians have also twice in recent decades recognized Israel and accepted its existence, on the same reciprocal basis that recognizes and implements Palestinian rights.

The current Palestinian and Arab rejection of the Israeli demand should include asking for an authoritative Israeli explanation of the meaning and implications of a Jewish state, and the deeper reasons for why Israelis make this demand now. I suspect that the need for such recognition mirrors profound insecurities and concerns in Israel about three issues: the state's ultimate Jewish character, the sincerity of Arab recognition of Israel in a peace treaty, and the consequences of a peace accord that is likely to include agreement on options for the Palestinian refugees, including a limited number returning to what is now Israel.

If this is the case, Israel should articulate honestly and clearly the issues that it needs resolved, so that sincere negotiators can get on with the business of crafting an agreement that meets the critical needs of both sides. The current Israeli strategy of trying to shape an agreement unilaterally while lying to the world about Palestinian sentiments is an embarrassment to Jewish traditions of justice, but seems to be a routine operating system for the extremists and deceit merchants who shape Zionism today. The Palestinians should respond by demanding to know the meaning and motives of this idea, so they can formulate a nuanced response that promotes an ultimate peace that responds to the legitimate rights of both sides, rather than making this impossible, as the Israeli approach does.

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[Article 7.](#)

Al Monitor

US, Saudi still far apart on regional issues

Abdulmajeed al-Buluwi

February 28, 2014 -- As [US Deputy Secretary of State William Burns](#) explained in his Feb. 19 speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, combating extremism and containing its expansion in countries such as Syria and Yemen remain common goals shared by Washington and Riyadh. According to Burns, the United States, in [partnership with Saudi Arabia](#) and other Gulf countries, was trying to manage the transitional process taking place in the Arab world in a manner that would lead to the establishment of responsible, responsive and moderate governments.

Moreover, the United States sought to guarantee that the comprehensive political process in Egypt be welcoming to all, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and offer support to the Iraqi government by embracing Shiite political forces in order to distance them from Iran. This comes in addition to backing the Bahraini national dialogue in a manner conducive to achieving results that would lead to some measure of sustained stability. But the dilemma lies in the fact that Riyadh views the changes taking place around it, and the American vision of the future, as threatening to its interests — or more precisely, the interests of Saudi political elites. As a result, any regional partnership with Washington in this regard would be very difficult to accept. It would entail that Washington, Riyadh or both review their stance vis-à-vis past and present events, or — a more likely scenario — decide to deal with contentious regional issues in a piecemeal manner.

To start with, Riyadh disagrees with Washington's characterization of regional events. While the latter tends to view events as a manifestation of popular aspirations of freedom and dignity, Riyadh describes them as an amalgam of chaos and strife, devoid of any real substance.

And while Washington is of the opinion that political reform is necessary to achieve sustainable stability and safeguard existing regimes, Riyadh sees political reform as the potential root of instability.

In the framework of overall relations with Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia considers the American proposal to transform the Gulf Cooperation Council into a security organization similar to NATO as one that conforms to its own aspirations for the council. But this proposal, which would have

been a major triumph for Saudi policy in the Gulf, was [rejected by smaller Gulf states](#) that saw in it a strengthening of Saudi dominion over them. Furthermore, Riyadh's opinion of the Iranian threat differs from Washington's. Saudi Arabia considers the growing political influence of Iran in the Arab world a threat equal to that of nuclear weapons, while the United States prefers to differentiate between [Iran's nuclear capabilities](#) and its cultural, political or even religious influence in the region.

Riyadh also considers the growing Iranian influence a catalyst for its Shiite minority and an instigator for that minority to demand more political participation and religious equality in the kingdom. This, to Saudi Arabia, is a bigger threat to its security than any Iranian nuclear weapon.

In addition, Riyadh postulates that the Muslim Brotherhood's ascendancy in Egypt would afford the Sunni Islamist movement in Saudi Arabia great impetus by virtue of the great ideological links that exist among all Islamists and would thus threaten Saudi national security.

Saudi foreign policy cannot be understood without first appreciating its internal policies, and new Saudi foreign policies cannot be adopted prior to first adopting new internal policies. Riyadh's foreign policy is an extension of its internal one, predicated on the interests of local Saudi elites. Riyadh's view of external dangers and threats is but a reflection and an extension of its assessment of the internal risks and threats faced by the political elite.

In light of an entrenched conviction not to embark on any political reform programs that would expand popular participation in political life, the greatest internal threat thus remains the Shiite minority in oil-rich areas, and Sunni political Islam in all its forms. This point of view greatly explains prevalent Saudi regional policies.

Moreover, while Iranian influence reinforces the power of the Shiite minority, the ascendancy of political Islam through democratic processes in the region would increase the power of that Islamic movement inside the kingdom. As a result, and according to this perspective, both confronting regional Iranian influence and thwarting the regional ascendancy of the Brotherhood are inevitable, in order to achieve internal political goals. This dichotomy could thus lead to political confusion when a trade-off between the two options becomes necessary.

Saudi Arabia would not have cared much about confronting Iranian influence in the region, had it not been home to a Shiite minority that would become emboldened by that influence and seek to bolster its political role. Similarly, Riyadh would not have been much concerned about thwarting the democratic rise of political Islam had it not been worried that this ascendancy would increase the influence of the Islamist movement internally, and tempt it to demand more power.

Current, Saudi foreign policy is not only the product of concerns about the country's position on the regional scene. It stems mainly from concerns about the role and status of the political elite inside the state. This policy is also linked to the elite's relationships with the two main parties in the stability equation, namely the Shiite minority and political Islamic groups. US-Saudi consensus about the management of change in the Arab world — as Burns envisions it — is predicated on it being preceded by a transformation of the prevailing views about what has and is occurring in the region. This change is to be followed by an agreement about how to best deal with it. Achieving this concordance in views will not be easy as long as Riyadh insists on adopting the same internal policies that view any transformation toward a “quasi-constitutional monarchy” as a threat to its internal security. Any demands for such a transformation, according to the newly adopted [anti-terrorism law](#), subject the perpetrator to [charges of terrorism](#). As a result, Riyadh's insistence on continuing with its current internal policies leaves it no option but to continue following its current foreign policies.

On the other hand, launching internal political reforms would achieve much in the way of foreign gains by facilitating the ironing out of differences with the United States over the region, whether concerning Iran or Egypt. This would also afford the Saudi state a historical opportunity to increase its regional influence, expand its soft power, bolster sustainable stability and perhaps neutralize some of the new players in the region. But it seems that the Saudi elites still have something different in mind.

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Politico

The Ambivalent Superpower

Robert Kagan

February 27, 2014 -- The world never really loved America as much as Americans like to think. In the Eisenhower era, to take one period now seen in rosy hues, Latin mobs pelted Vice President Richard Nixon's motorcade with stones, shouting, "Out, dog! We won't forget Guatemala!" Angry Japanese students protested American "imperialism," forcing President Dwight Eisenhower to cancel a "goodwill" visit to Tokyo, and Ike spent his days wishing he could find a way to get people in other countries "to like us instead of hating us." In the late 1960s and again in the 1980s, young Europeans took to the streets by the millions to protest American foreign policy. Even in the 1990s, with Bill Clinton and Al Gore in office, the French foreign minister decried the American "[hyperpower](#)," while leading intellectual Samuel P. Huntington wrote of a "[lonely superpower](#)," widely hated across the globe for its "intrusive, interventionist, exploitative, unilateralist, hegemonic, hypocritical" behavior.

Yes, it's true that throughout the Cold War much of the world watched American movies and was entranced by Jackie Kennedy, but they also saw segregation, poverty, riots, political assassinations, rampant capitalism, Vietnam and Watergate. And they shook their heads at a country that could elect a cowboy and B-movie actor as its president. The popular narrative following the Iraq War that there was once a time when the world looked up to America, wished to emulate it and eagerly sought its leadership, when America wielded immense "soft power" that gained the allegiance of others simply by the force of attraction, is more myth than history.

Yet always there was the other aspect of the United States, the one most valued if least spoken about. This was the America that others counted on, for security against threatening neighbors, as the defender of the oceans and the world's trade routes, as the keeper of the global balance, as the guarantor of an economic and political order whose benefits were widely enjoyed. This was the America whose troops were invited into Europe as

protection against both a resurgent Germany and the Soviets in the late 1940s. This was the America whose movie-actor president Helmut Kohl, François Mitterrand and Margaret Thatcher looked to for trans-Atlantic solidarity, and to whom Polish workers and Soviet dissidents turned for hope and inspiration. This was the America that, for all its undeniable flaws, became indispensable after World War II and whose departure from the scene was usually more feared than its presence.

For much of the past 70 years, in short, the world has been ambivalent about American power, both decrying it and inviting it—sometimes simultaneously. Even as Huntington was penning his screed against American arrogance in 1998, much of the world was expressing an entirely different concern—that the United States might be turning inward. It was the time of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. The American president was hobbled. Suddenly, as the Times of London wrote, leaders “in all the world’s trouble spots” were “calculating what will happen when Washington’s gaze is distracted.” The liberal German newspaper Frankfurter Rundschau, which had been accusing Americans of “camouflaged neocolonialism,” suddenly fretted that the “problems in the Middle East, in the Balkans or in Asia” could not be solved “without U.S. assistance and a president who enjoys respect.” The irony was not lost on some observers. A French pundit took pleasure in noting (in the left-leaning Libération) that those who had only recently been calling the United States “overbearing” were suddenly “praying for a quick end to the storm.”

A decade and a half later, as another U.S. president makes good on his [promise](#) to “focus on nation-building here at home,” the world is again wondering whether the country that has been the principal upholder of the global order for the better part of the postwar era is finally pulling back from that outsized and unusual role. Anxiety about American isolationism is once again matching anxiety about American imperialism.

Over the past year, the World Economic Forum—the same folks who run the annual gathering in the Swiss resort town of Davos—organized a unique set of discussions around the world with dozens of international leaders, from Saudi bankers to Singaporean academics, African entrepreneurs to Latin American economists, seeking unvarnished opinions about the United States and its role in the world. Their ambivalence was

palpable. Whether it is arrogance or incompetence, incoherence or insincerity, the critiques of the United States heard in these conversations are extensive—and often justified. There are old complaints about American “unilateralism” and hypocrisy, and new complaints about drones and eavesdropping. There are regions, like the Middle East, where U.S. policy is regarded as having produced only disasters, and others, like Latin America, where the United States is faulted for its failure to pay enough attention (except when its strategic or economic interests are threatened). American motives are often suspect and regarded cynically. Some see the United States pursuing only selfish interests. Others see confusion, an inability to explain what America wants and doesn’t, and perhaps even to understand what it wants.

Yet what’s striking is not the litany of complaint, but the lament about disengagement one also frequently hears, not the expected good riddance but the surprisingly common plea for more U.S. involvement. Africa wants more U.S. investment. Latin America wants more U.S. trade. The Middle East and Asia just want more: more diplomacy, more security, more commerce. This may come as a surprise to those Americans who are convinced the world not only hates them but also welcomes their decline. But the world, or at least much of it, has moved beyond this post-Iraq narrative, even if we haven’t. These days, many foreign governments fret less about an overbearing America and more about a disappearing America. One way or another, it seems, every region in the world feels neglected by the United States. Setting aside whatever this might say about the effectiveness of Barack Obama’s foreign policy, it says a great deal about America’s role in the world. The problem others see these days is not too much of the United States, but too little.

Most Americans are probably oblivious to this subtle shift in global sentiment. Foreign policy is not on their minds, except as something to be avoided. Both candidates in the 2012 presidential election went out of their way not to offer any grand—or even not-so-grand—visions of America’s role in the world. To the extent that Obama pitched his foreign policy record at all, he did so around the killing of Osama bin Laden, which today looks like an increasingly symbolic rather than substantive triumph, as jihadists spread across the greater Middle East. Mitt Romney limited his foreign policy pronouncements to sporadic and ill-considered drive-by

shootings at Obama's policies. There was a momentary debate about whether the United States was or was not in decline—Obama said it wasn't; Romney said it was, because of Obama. But since the election, the American people have grown ever more convinced that the United States really is in decline—more than half of them, in recent surveys—and the president has done little to dispel the impression. Little wonder then that much of the world today worries about American staying power. Ironically, no U.S. policy did more to provoke global anxieties than one the Obama administration hoped would calm them. The “pivot to Asia,” this “rebalancing” of U.S. diplomatic and military efforts from West to East, was intended to show that the United States was still capable of sober and rational calculation of its interests and capabilities. There would be no more obsession with the Middle East, no more draining wars in obscure parts of the world when the real game was obviously in a rising Asia. Yet the reaction has been both unexpected and revealing. In a world accustomed to seeing the American superpower wielding influence everywhere at once, the notion of pivoting from one region to another has been deeply unsettling—to everyone. In the Middle East, the “pivot” has been widely (and correctly) understood to be a deliberate turn away from intensive American involvement. But Europeans have also interpreted it as a turn away from Europe, and even Latin Americans, rarely the focus of U.S. attention, have seen it as a turn away from them. In the ultimate irony, for all the apprehension it has unleashed elsewhere, the pivot has not produced an equal degree of reassurance in East Asia. There the promise and rhetoric of the pivot has been measured against tangible realities, like defense cuts that leave the U.S. Air Force scrapping exercises with Asian partners and the Navy cutting back on ship movements in Japan. Nor have Asians failed to note that America's preoccupation with the constantly exploding crises of the Middle East, from Iran to Syria to Egypt to the peace process, has not appreciably lessened, while the president's attention to Asia has not grown nearly as much as advertised. Obama's canceled trip last fall to a Bali summit for the region's major leaders drove home the point. (It didn't help that the cancellation came amid a U.S. government shutdown that stunned foreign observers.) Current and former Obama administration officials all tell the same story, of governments in the Middle East, in Asia and in Europe (especially

Eastern and Central Europe) constantly seeking reassurances, and whenever possible, tangible evidence, that the United States is not leaving them to their fate. Are American troops in Europe going to be reduced? Does the increase in the number of U.S. Marines stationed in Australia, from 250 to 2,500, have any meaning beyond symbolism? Meanwhile, the movement of U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups, those massive, time-honored symbols of American commitment, is constantly scrutinized as they shift from the East Asian theater to the Persian Gulf and back again. One former Obama official denies that there is really any ambivalence at all about America's role, at least in the East. "This is the first time in 50 years that there is a unified desire [outside of China] for an American presence," this former official said—to balance the growing power and influence of Beijing.

Indeed, America's favorability ratings are well up from George W. Bush's second term—another sign the world has moved beyond the post-Iraq narrative. Out of 38 countries the [Pew Research Center polled](#) in 2013, in only eight did a majority of respondents register an unfavorable view of the United States (five of those in the greater Middle East). In 21 of the 38 countries, the United States enjoyed an approval rating of more than 60 percent (a diverse crowd including Brazil, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, Poland, South Africa and, yes, even France). No doubt this is due in part to Obama's widely celebrated election. But only in part, for Obama's personal approval ratings around the world have declined substantially since 2009; in many countries today, America's ratings look better than Obama's. Perhaps this reflects the growing perception that the United States really does have an important role to play.

And besides, whether you like America or not, the real question is: Who would you like to see replace it? America's favorable ratings are a good deal better than China's, for instance. I listened a few months ago as a Chinese professor lectured Americans at a conference in Abu Dhabi about how unpopular the United States had become around the world as a result of its objectionable behavior in Iraq and on other issues. She was somewhat taken aback when informed that, however unpopular the United States might be, China was even less popular, especially among neighbors like Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Australia. Altogether, out of

the 38 countries Pew polled, the United States was viewed more favorably than China in 22.

The attitudes toward China are interesting because they provide a partial answer to the pointed question increasingly asked around the world these days: What would a “post-American world” really look like? Most regard China as the leading candidate to share global leadership with the United States in the coming decades, or perhaps even to surpass it. Yet not many seem to welcome this prospective transition. Even in the Middle East, where Beijing enjoys significantly higher public approval ratings than Washington, few see China as a desirable replacement for the United States. Other possible sources of global stability, meanwhile, have lost some of their luster. Ten years ago, some imagined a new order based on the European model, with the European Union playing a leading role in the world and EU-style institutions being replicated in East Asia. Today, a Europe hobbled by political and economic difficulties seems like a less plausible alternative. Nor is there much enthusiasm for the United Nations, continually stymied as it has been by perpetual Security Council standoff. So while it is easy to be unhappy with American foreign policy, it is harder to imagine a world where the United States does less. If the American-backed order gives way, many fear, there will not be a smooth transition. If America continues to reduce its role in the Middle East, predicts a former central banker from North Africa, “the next quarter century is ... going to be very, very messy,” marked by “disorder more than order.” Kishore Mahbubani, a well-known theorist of a rising Asia, welcomes a multipolar world because, in his view, “the United States is better off being restrained.” But even he does not deny the possibility that as China grows more powerful it could end up undermining a global order that was, after all, devised by the West to serve the interests and values of the West. Others are even more skeptical that the Chinese are likely to take on global burdens if America’s ability to do so fades. As a former high-level Brazilian official put it, “Up until now, China is like a very rich person who goes to the restaurant, asks for a very big table and, when it comes to paying the bill, always goes to the toilet—it doesn’t pay.” To many, the question is not whether the United States can or should continue to play its leading role in the world, but whether the American people and their president even want to. The signals coming from

Washington in recent years are not encouraging. The world, for so long ambivalent about American power, is now confronting an America that is at least as ambivalent about continuing to wield it.

Nothing drove this point home more than Obama's eleventh-hour decision late last summer to cancel a potential military strike in Syria, cutting a deal with Russia to get the Syrians to give up their chemical weapons. As Prince Turki al-Faisal, the former Saudi intelligence chief, complained this past December, when American red lines become "pinkish" and "eventually end up completely white," it creates an "issue of confidence" among U.S. allies. Nor was this reaction limited to the Middle East. The American decision reverberated across the planet, perhaps nowhere more so than in East Asia, where America's willingness to use force is very much on the minds of allied governments as China voices its territorial claims against assorted neighbors ever more aggressively. As Ravi Velloor, the foreign editor of Singapore's Straits Times, argues, "It's one thing to have enormous power. It's another thing to show you have the will to use it." It is safe to say that most Americans today would not see it that way. In September, when Obama turned to Congress to authorize his Syria strike, the public response was unmistakably negative. Yet the situation in Syria was no more complex, and the efficacy of a military solution no less obvious, than in Kosovo, where President Clinton ordered U.S. participation in a NATO air campaign in 1999. The public did not support that action at first, either, but Clinton didn't seek a vote and Americans quickly came around. Would the public have done the same had Obama gone it alone? Perhaps. But the heated opposition across partisan and ideological lines suggests there were bigger questions involved than the particular dangers of attacking Syria. Americans were not just asking why they had to care what happens when people are killing each other 6,000 miles away. They were also asking a much broader question about America's role in the world.

The American people's expansive impulses have always competed with a strong desire to be left alone, of course. Since the 1890s, when America first emerged as one of the world's strongest countries, defeating Spain and acquiring the Philippines in that "splendid little war," U.S. foreign policy has looked like a sine wave: periods of high global involvement and interventionism followed by periods of disillusion and retrenchment. In

less than two years at the end of World War I, Americans sent 2 million men to fight in France; five years later, they would not keep even 5,000 in place to help prevent the next war. In the Eisenhower years, the United States had nearly a million soldiers permanently deployed overseas. There are currently fewer than 200,000, but Americans, despite a U.S. population nearly twice as large as in Ike's era, feel desperately overstretched.

The sine wave reflects this dualism: Americans periodically seek to reshape the international environment, but then they grow weary of the burden, disillusioned by the imperfections, failures and outright mistakes that inevitably attend such efforts, and resentful of the costs. They then seek to reduce their role in the world, and the cycle begins again. But the inherent expansiveness of the American people, their commercial drive, their immigrant ties to old homelands and universalist ideology, means that they never really withdraw from the world—Americans are quite incapable of genuine isolationism. So, it is only a matter of time before events occur and perceived dangers arise that touch on American interests, or grossly violate American ideals, and which Americans come to decide are intolerable. And the sine wave bends up once more.

Today, there is no doubt, though: Americans are in a trough on that graph. Their ambivalence is easy enough to understand. Two long wars have produced mixed results, to say the least. A painful recession has blunted enthusiasm for costly commitments of any kind, especially those outside our borders. How long and deep will the trough be this time? After World War I, it was very deep indeed and lasted the better part of two decades, until Pearl Harbor. After Vietnam, it lasted less than seven years, until the Iran hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. There is no simple correlation between the state of the economy and Americans' willingness to pursue a vigorous and even costly policy abroad. The increases in defense spending and global activism that began under Jimmy Carter and accelerated under Ronald Reagan took place when the country was suffering from an unprecedented bout of "stagflation." Nor was America any less war-weary after a decade in Vietnam, with 58,000 Americans dead and more than 150,000 wounded, than it is today after more than a decade in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Some of the answer has to do with presidential leadership. Presidents can either reinforce public opinion or push back. In the aftermath of World War

I, when the American public soured on overseas involvement, a series of Republican presidents, from Warren Harding to Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover, tried to give the public what it wanted. In the process, they reinforced and hardened public opposition to overseas involvement. The task, Harding said, was not to settle problems abroad but to make sure “our own house is in perfect order.” He promised to “prosper America first.” In the mid-to-late 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt took a different approach, pushing back, at first tentatively but then ever more vigorously, trying to convince the American public that it was making a mistake. By Pearl Harbor, as a result of his efforts, the United States was already in the fight against Nazi Germany in all but name. The American public had gone from refusing to play any role in Europe to insisting on supporting Britain to the fullest, even at the risk of war. Reagan played a similar role in his campaign for the presidency, warning of the dangers of American weakness just a handful of years after Vietnam.

So far, Obama has been acting more Harding than FDR. Rather than push against the public’s desire to withdraw from the world, he has encouraged it. There has been a synergy between president and people, a mutually reinforcing feedback loop. This, too, is not surprising. Obama ran and defeated both Hillary Clinton and John McCain as the anti-Iraq candidate. He then made rolling back the “[tide of war](#)” the core of his identity as president. The explicit rationale for most of his foreign policies has been the need to dig the nation out of the hole left by the previous administration’s interventions. That has meant, above all, an avoidance of other wars, but also a more modest involvement in the world, a deliberate effort to let other nations play a bigger part in shouldering the burdens of leadership.

Given the degree to which the Obama administration has shaped its policies as a response to the Iraq War, it is little wonder Americans remain captive of the post-Iraq narrative, even as much of the rest of the world has moved beyond it. According to Pew, fully 70 percent of Americans polled believe that “the United States is less respected by other countries than in the past.” This is demonstrably untrue, but the percentage of Americans who believe it is up from 56 percent in the months after Obama took office. More than 50 percent today also believe the United States plays “a less important and powerful role as a world leader than it did a decade ago,” up

from just 20 percent who felt that way in 2004. This is at least part of the explanation why, again according to Pew, an all-time-high percentage of Americans, 52 percent, believe the United States “should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own.” That is up from just 30 percent in 2002.

And so the world is now characterized by a dual ambivalence: the world’s ambivalence toward American power and Americans’ ambivalence toward the world. It is hard to be optimistic about the void this leaves. Americans may believe or hope that other countries will step in to fill the void, or perhaps they are not fully aware that there will be a void. They may not care one way or another. Others, however, have little choice but to care. It is a peculiarity of the international system that for reasons of geography, natural resources, population size and the stable nature of their political system, Americans will be among the last to suffer if the world order does break down as they retreat behind their oceans. Those regions of the world that exist on the front lines will not be so lucky. Which is why today’s ambivalence in those places is already starting to shade over into anxiety.

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