From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen <[redacted]>
Subject: April 5 update
Date: Fri, 06 Apr 2012 10:35:46 +0000

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Article 1.

The National Interest

Egypt's Muddy Waters

Nathan J. Brown

April 4, 2012 -- The decision of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood to nominate Khairat al-Shater to the presidency plunges Egypt's transition—always a seemingly unsteady affair—into complete uncertainty. For all the day-to-day gyrations to date, there had been some consistent trends as Egypt moved gradually from the politics of demonstrations to those of the polling place. The country's revolutionary youth groups have slowly lost their hold on the society, the interim military rulers have seen parts of their monopoly on decision making wither, and Islamist movements have watched their fortunes rise from one election to the next. But al-Shater's entrance into the race makes a leap into the unknown.

One year ago, when I met him shortly after he was released from prison, I pressed al-Shater on the Brotherhood's electoral ambitions. He was clearly haunted by the experiences of Algeria's Islamists (FIS) and Palestine's Hamas. (In his mind, both groups were denied the fruits of their electoral victory by domestic and international actors who preferred a coup to

democracy.) Thus, the Brotherhood's path to power would be gradual, he said. Yes, they might seek an electoral majority in a decade, but by that time he anticipated being in retirement. But now, merely twelve months later, al-Shater is running for his country's top job.

The problem for Egypt is not al-Shater personally. Since the Brotherhood is still a fairly closed organization with a strong sense of discipline, it is difficult to state with precision very much about individual leaders. But my personal impression—formed in a series of meetings with al-Shater over the past year—is that he stands out among his colleagues for his practical focus, sense of responsibility and ability to listen carefully to other points of view. It is certainly those characteristics that endeared him for a while to many young mavericks within the movement (before he showed that he expected them ultimately to toe the line); it has also led him to take the lead in finding ways to reassure visiting foreign leaders anxious about the implications of the Brotherhood's rise.

An Unpredictable Environment

For all his talents, al-Shater's candidacy throws Egyptian politics into a state of complete uncertainty. First, there is the question of whether the presidential election will take place as planned. While there has been no move to cancel or postpone it, the announcement of al-Shater's candidacy comes as the Brotherhood finds itself in the midst of bitter feuds with almost every other political actor and some key institutions: in recent weeks, the movement has publicly (if only verbally) clashed with liberals, the Coptic Church, the Islamic university of al-Azhar, Salafis, the military, the media and the judiciary. At this point, the movement seems to have picked a fight with everybody except the U.S. Department of State and Senator John McCain.

The Brotherhood's political isolation, combined with its popularity and legions of loyal foot soldiers, may make for an unsteady mix. A full coup would not be necessary to disrupt the process. It might be possible for Brotherhood opponents to disrupt things through various legalisms, such as lawsuits or by finding al-Shater legally ineligible because of his past (highly political) convicitions. The Brotherhood clearly fears such a path, since it has criticized the Presidential Election Commission (whose

decisions cannot be appealed) and implied its head is in the military's pocket.

A second source of extreme uncertainty is the election itself. Assuming al-Shater's candidacy and the balloting move forward, Egypt simply has no experience in competitive presidential campaigns, making it very hard to predict how people will vote. After the 2011 parliamentary elections, we have some sense that in those elections, organizational presence and local reputation are critical to mobilizing supporters, likely far more than specific program or ideology. But what of presidential balloting? The campaign and the balloting could be quite different. Who will vote, and how much will name recognition, individual reputation, personal charisma, program, organization and ideology count?

Yet another source of uncertainty stems from the fact that the rules of the political game are not yet written. The process of drafting a new constitution is in complete shambles as a result of the Brotherhood-led parliament having elected an Islamist-dominated body, provoking most non-Islamists (at this point, more than one quarter of those designated) to refuse to take their seats. The interim constitution--in operation until the permanent one is approved--is full of gaps and ambiguities, and even when it is comparatively clear, its operation is unpredictable. Consider one example of the many possible political paths: right now, the Brotherhood's political party holds about 40 percent of the seats. That is enough to dominate the parliament with some parties in an electoral alliance with the Brotherhood and others in disarray. But an elected Brotherhood president might provoke most of the other deputies to line up against the Brotherhood, leading to gridlock.

Finally, one of the underappreciated uncertainties is the long-term effect of the current situation on the Brotherhood. Long accustomed to being a social movement with a broad agenda, ambiguous legal status, and oppositional pose, the Brotherhood is having to turn itself into a governing political party. The best minds in the movement have shifted from the Muslim Brotherhood organization to the movement's political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party. The nomination of al-Shater forced his resignation from the top decision-making bureau of the Brotherhood, but it

also makes him the most prominent Brotherhood figure (possibly eclipsing the more bashful Mohammed Badie, the formal leader). Offered the opportunity to participate, the Brotherhood seems to be shifting the logic of its decision making—from a former focus on religious values and long-term transformation of Egyptian society to new short-term political tactics.

Called to explain its decision to abandon its pledge not to run a presidential candidate, the Brotherhood has tried to respond. A fair summary of the justification would be: "In order not to endanger the revolution and democracy, we agreed not to run a candidate. But things have changed. We now see that the revolution and democracy are in danger. So we feel called upon to run a candidate." There is no better indication of the Brotherhood's conversion to a fully political logic.

Nathan J. Brown is professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University and nonresident senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Article 2.

TIME

Why the U.S. May Be Secretly Cheering a Muslim Brotherhood Run For Egypt's Presidency

Tony Karon

April 4, 2012 -- Liberals and secularists are furious at the decision this week by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood to name Khairat al-Shater as its

candidate next month's presidential election. Even many members and leaders of the Brotherhood itself are livid at the decision, an eleventh-hour reversal of a longstanding undertaking to stay out of the race to elect a successor to President Hosni Mubarak. Curiously enough, though, the New York Times reports that U.S. official are "untroubled and even optimistic about the Brotherhood's reversal of its pledge not to seek the presidency".

In a vignette of just how much the political landscape has changed since the days when the U.S. pinned its hopes on a Mubarak regime that imprisoned the likes of Shater, the Times reports that the Brotherhood's candidate is in regular contact with U.S. Ambassador Anne Paterson, and that U.S. officials have praised his moderation, intelligence and effectiveness. The 62-year-old millionaire financier seen as a pragmatist and modernizer, dedicated to reviving Egypt's moribund economy rather than seeking confrontation with Israel or the U.S. And, of course, the Brotherhood represents an attractive alternative in comparison to the more extreme Salafists who have emerged as the wild-card in post-Mubarak politics. The Salafist Nour party ran the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party a close second, finishing with 28% of the vote (against the FJP's 38%) in the parliamentary elections that concluded in January.

Without a Brotherhood candidate in the race, some officials fear that Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, the charismatic Salafist presidential hopeful who talks of emulating Iran's theocratic political system and of ending the peace treaty with Israel, could produce an upset — particularly if the election goes to a head-to-head run-off between the two leading vote-getters if no candidate wins an outright majority.

An Al Ahram poll conducted before Shater entered the race gave the Salafist candidate around 22% of the vote. Another, more liberal Brotherhood figure, Abdel Moneim Abdoul Futouh — who had been expelled from the movement when he threw his own hat in the ring — is polling far behind Abu Ismail with around 8%, while another moderate Islamist, Mohammad Salim al-Awa had around 4%. The leading candidate in that poll, with 33%, was a secular nationalist, Mubarak's former Foreign Minister Amr Moussa (who remains popular for his legacy of publicly challenging Israeli and U.S. conduct in the Middle East, sometimes to the

annoyance of his then-boss). More significant, though, is the fact that the poll also found that 58% of the electorate would prefer an Islamist candidate: If the field without Shater went to a runoff, as the numbers seemed to indicate, the Salafists would be in pole position. And that's an outcome as unpalatable to the Brotherhood as it would be to Washington and to the SCAF.

The Brotherhood had previously promised to stay out of the presidential race in order to reassure other players on the post-Mubarak political landscape that it would not seek to translate its popularity into a monopoly of power. But its leaders — or least a majority of them — may have come to believe that decision was a recipe for snatching defeat from the jaws of victory in the Brotherhood's chief political contest, which is not with the secularists or the Salafists, but with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces — the military junta that has sought to maintain its political primacy in the post-Mubarak order.

Many in Egypt saw the Brotherhood's decision as a panicky response to fears that the generals might use the election as an opportunity to put one over their most powerful challenger — rumors have abounded lately in Cairo about the possibility of a presidential run by Omar Suleiman, Mubarak's former intelligence chief and figurative "Hand of the King." Alternately, the generals could throw the military's not inconsiderable weight behind a more popular nationalist candidate such as Moussa.

"They think that the SCAF is preparing something for them," says Abdel Rahim Akl of the Arab Center for Islamic Movements Studies. The Brotherhood fears "that the elections will lead to one of the SCAF's close candidates to win," and that the junta would rely on the legitimacy of an elected president to rejig the political system through new elections to weaken the Brotherhood.

Still, not even all of the Brotherhood's own leadership is convinced, with the vote in its ruling council that made the decision having reportedly been sharply split. One member of parliament of the movement's Freedom and Justice Party, Mohammed al-Beltagi, even used his Facebook page to publicly question the nomination of a presidential candidate, warning that it "harms the Brotherhood and the nation, to have one faction assume all

the responsibility under these conditions." But a rival legislator, speaking on condition of anonymity, told al-Jazeera that if the movement failed to secure the presidency and left it to a contest between the Salafists and a SCAF candidate, the Brotherhood's majority in the legislature would quickly be rendered meaningless. A case could be made that forcing the Brotherhood to take responsibility for governance would have a sobering and moderating effect, reinforcing its move towards the political center — as opposed to having the hedge available if it remains the largest party but declines to accept executive power. That's cold comfort to the movement's critics, however, who fear the concentration of power in its hands will allow the Brotherhood to impose a more socially conservative and sectarian vision on Egypt. Coptic Christians recently withdrew from Constitutional Assembly, following liberal groups that had already done so, to protest the Brotherhood's heavy-handed domination of that body.

Calculations of the political class notwithstanding, the Muslim Brotherhood's own voter base seem enthused by the decision. "There aren't any better options on the field now, many are good but this is the best option so far," says 30-year-old engineer Mohammed Fekri of Shater's candidacy. "He is a great business man and trusted by the leadership. He can help Egypt in this rough economical situation." Fekri also stressed the candidate's credibility: "He has struggled with all the dictatorships that have ruled Egypt, went to jail ten times because he would not be silent for the injustice the rest of the Egyptians endured during the time of Mubarak and those who were before him." Analyst Issandr al-Amrani sees the Brotherhood's decision to seek the presidency as an uncharacteristic act of brinkmanship in its battle for supremacy with a junta loathe to accept the unalloyed verdict of the electorate. "It remains quite possible that the Brotherhood will pull off this winner-takes-all approach," Amrani writes, "gaining the legitimacy of having been elected to both parliament and the presidency, having a constitution that reflects its beliefs, and ending up in a better position to negotiate the retreat of the generals from the civilian sphere. But it's a serious gamble."

Given the competitive Islamist field and the likelihood that Shater joining the fray could rally secular and nationalist voters behind a figure like Amr Moussa, the Brotherhood's decision has certainly made the election

outcome difficult to predict. And that, of course, is a hallmark of democracy.

Article 3.

Foreign Policy

Five Reasons Americans Should be Happy (In a Very Unhappy Middle East)

Aaron David Miller

April 4, 2012 -- Bad news abounds. The purveyors and prophets of doom and gloom proclaim the broader Middle East to be Dickens on steroids: It's the worst of times squared.

In Iran, the centrifuges spin ever closer to acquiring enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon. In Egypt, Islamists crowd out the liberals and the Google generation. In Syria, the Assads maintain their bloody grip on power, defying the international community and the will of their own people. As for the Israelis and Palestinians, well ... they don't even pretend there's a negotiation in sight, let alone an end to their conflict.

And in the middle of this muddled mess sits the United States. Like some modern-day Gulliver, America seems tied down by small powers whose interests are not its own, and tied up by its illusions.

[redacted] here to tell you: Cheer up. It's really bad. But all's not lost. Without too much whistling past the graveyard, here are five reasons Americans can smile -- at least for a while -- in a region where things usually get worse before they get worse.

1. We're out of Iraq and soon out of Afghanistan.

It's not pretty, but America is out or getting out of its untenable combat role in the two longest wars in its history, neither of which now seems worth the

terrible price we have paid in American lives, crushing traumatic injuries, resources, and credibility.

Winning -- defined as two cohesive stable countries with legitimately elected and accepted governments, the end of sectarian violence and a semblance of respect for democratic principles, human rights, transparency, etc. -- was never possible.

But leaving is. Staying in Afghanistan in significant numbers beyond the decent interval for extrication President Barack Obama has created makes little sense. Honor those who made the sacrifice and respect the good fight they waged. Don't rush for the exits. But do not let anymone guilt you into believing that the current glide path toward the exits will fundamentally betray the Afghans or diminish our credibility.

The notion that we'll be less secure if we don't stay longer is absurd logic. We can't fix Afghanistan -- not in a year or 10. The future of this so-called graveyard of empires will be determined less by anything we've done while there, and far more by events after we depart. But who ever thought otherwise?

The tipping point for extrication has been crossed. The American public rightly senses all too clearly -- as evident in recent polling -- that we can't win or even tie there. The purpose, urgency, and clarity of this war disappeared long ago. The president wants out, and even the Republicans increasingly sense that the game is up. We should be looking forward to the day when no more brave Americans need be killed or injured there, and be happy that soon America will be freed from the consummate great-power conundrum of the past decade: being stuck in places we can neither fix nor leave.

2. America and Middle East oil: the way of the dodo?

Don't say it too loudly: We don't want to jinx it, but the United States is slowly weaning itself off Arab oil.

That doesn't mean we're not still drunk on liquid hydrocarbons. (I have two SUVs, and am still trying to figure out why.) And even if we can free ourselves from Middle East oil, there's still the problem of energy security.

For all practical purposes, the price of oil is determined in a single market, vulnerable to global disruptions; nor can we afford all those Middle East reserves falling into unfriendly hands.

But I'll take what I can get. In 2011, the United States imported 45 percent of the liquid fuels it used, down from 60 percent just 6 years earlier. As energy guru Daniel Yergin points out, a new oil order is emerging. And for America, that means the rise of Western Hemispheric energy at the expense of the Middle East. Between new oil in Brazil, oil-sands production in Canada, and shale-gas technology here at home, by 2020 we could cut our dependence on non-Western hemisphere oil by half. Combine that with the rise in national oil production and greater focus on fuel efficiency and conservation, and the trend lines are at least running in the right direction.

Don't get too excited: It's not time to pack up the bases and troops in the Persian Gulf quite yet. But as we become less dependent on Arab oil, those who still are (China, Japan, South Korea, the Europeans) ought to shoulder more of the financial burden for keeping that area stable and secure. Lucky for our fledgling economic recovery that the Arab kings and oil producers, namely the Saudis, have (so far) fared much better than the Arab presidents in weathering the Arab Spring and Winter.

Oil still reigns supreme. But at least be happy that Middle East oil is slowly being dethroned. If we're dedicated, disciplined, and lucky, it will be become less of a lubricant for why we act in this region. And hopefully as a result our own relationships and diplomacy will become a little less greasy too.

3. The Arab Spring did America a big favor.

I have many worries about the Arab Spring, which, in places like Bahrain, Syria, and even Egypt looks too much like winter.

But there's one thing we should be celebrating. In taking to the streets, Arabs did something for us [redacted] never be able to do for ourselves: Break the devil's bargain we cut with Arab authoritarians decades ago.

Don't get me wrong: Those deals -- you support our policies and we'll support you (and look the other way on bad governance and human rights

abuses) carried American policy quite far. We got some Arab-Israeli peace agreements, continued access to Arab oil, sold a lot of military hardware, and procured stability.

But it proved a false stability. Like so much in the world of power politics, these arrangements were made with extractive regimes that were out of touch with their publics and simply couldn't endure. The Middle East may have warranted low expectations in the good-government department, but at some point the same forces of change that were transforming the rest of the world were bound to visit there as well. There was no way the United States would ever have pushed meaningful reform, let alone broken our ties with the authoritarians, unless the street did it for us.

Great powers don't pivot, or in this case let go easily. Indeed, we haven't yet in Egypt, where we're trying to maintain some influence with the military; nor in Bahrain where we tread carefully on regime change and human rights so as not to anger the Saudis or destabilize them. And we may need the Gulf autocrats' help not only to keep prices low at the pump, but also for the looming confrontation with Iran.

Let's be clear: There will be no revolutionary epiphanies here, no transformations in American policy. Our commitment to genuine democratic reform, particularly if we don't like the new democrats, will be slow and gradual. More likely, America will be dragged along and forced to deal with the new realities that emerge, particularly the rising power of the Islamists. If we're lucky, it will produce a more honest conversation between the Arabs and the United States, and just maybe an opportunity to bring America's values into greater alignment with its policies. But we also shouldn't kid ourselves: The process will be long and messy and may well not turn out the way we want.

4. We can't fix everything. Be happy.

America may be the world's indispensable nation, but these days it's with a small "i." Expectations for American power in this region have always run fantastically high. We've had moments of dramatic success, against the backdrop of decades of unspectacular or even failed diplomacy. The good news -- even though it's come at the expense of popping this inflated

bubble -- is that the Arabs (and Israelis) too may be finally getting it: We can't, won't, and have no intention of saving them.

The jury is still out on the Iranian nuclear issue. If Israel doesn't bomb, we might. But on almost every other issue -- fixing Iraq and Afghanistan, promoting democratization, solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, bailing out the Arab economies with American dollars -- we really lack leverage and motivation to do much.

The Israeli-Palestinian issue is the poster child for how we have infantilized the Middle East and how it has become too dependent on us. I must have drafted scores of "next steps" memos in the peace process when there really were no next steps, truly.

We clearly still have an important role to play in maintaining security ties with the Gulf states, encouraging political and economic reform, and yes even on the peace process. But that role will depend on a good deal more ownership and responsibility on the part of the locals.

There will be no more 911 calls to save the peace process. And it's about time. We should have long ago tired of whining Israelis, Palestinians, Arabs, and Europeans asking us to do things when they wouldn't or couldn't do their fair share. The two-state solution isn't dead, but the good news is that at least there's an honest recognition now that America alone can't deliver it.

5. We're learning (maybe).

Failure is one of life's great teachers. I know from personal experience, dealing with the Middle East for a few decades. And the United States has encountered plenty in recent years. Much of it has been heartbreaking.

The Middle East is still a mess. Lately, to be sure, it's also seen a great deal of rare promise and hope. But it continues to be marred by violence, economic misery, sectarian strife, religious extremism, conspiracy theories, and leaps of logic and rationality that should worry us all.

Still, I think we're learning a few things. The Obama administration has done pretty well in this regard. No spectacular successes, but no galactic

failures either. Our approach is steady and deliberate. It's focused on getting priorities straight: seeing the threats and opportunities clearly and thinking matters through before throwing American military or diplomatic resources at a problem when there's no real strategy to guide it. If that's "leading from behind," so be it, particularly if leading from the front gets you Iraq and Afghanistan.

America doesn't need prophets, ideologues, or geniuses to run its Middle East policy. Just give me a smart president, an empowered secretary of state, and a lot of folks to help them who know history, can find their way around an atlas, and have common sense and good judgment about how American power can be best utilized. It may not guarantee a lot of success, but it will reduce our failures. And that, to be sure, is something to be happy about.

Aaron David Miller is a distinguished scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. His new book, Can America Have Another Great President?, will be published this year.

Article 4.

Foreign Policy

Dear Abu Mazen: End This Farce

(An open letter to the Palestinian leader)

Yossi Beilin

April 4, 2012

To:
Mahmoud Abbas

President, Palestinian Authority
Muqata, Ramallah

I admit that I never believed the moment would come when I would have to write these words. I am doing so because U.S. President Barack Obama has convinced you not to announce, at this point in time, the dismantling of the Palestinian Authority's institutions and the "return of the keys" of authority for the Palestinian territories to Israel. Because there have never been serious negotiations with the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the last three years, and because you did not want to perpetuate the myth that a meaningful dialogue existed, you have been sorely tempted to declare the death of the "peace process" -- but the American president urged you to maintain the status quo. It is a mistake to agree to Obama's request, and you can rectify this.

The Oslo Accords were a tremendous victory for the peace camps on both sides. And this agreement did not fail. It was thwarted. The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Palestinian terrorism, and the political victories of the opponents of the agreement -- both on the Palestinian side and on the Israeli side -- have turned the agreement into a device that has allowed the parties to block a two-state solution.

Oslo's opponents, on both sides, were initially startled by a process that promised to lead to a partition of the land in a few years. They later turned Oslo into a tool to prevent partition by prolonging the interim agreement, claiming that, as long as it is not replaced by a permanent agreement, it must continue and be binding to both sides. Oslo's adversaries have turned the interim agreement, which was supposed to last not more than six years and serve only as a pathway to a final solution, into an arena where they can continue to build settlements or spin their dreams of an Islamic empire, without the world putting serious pressure on them to put an end to the conflict.

The extremists' gutting of the Oslo agreement has been complete. They have uprooted the permanent-status negotiations -- where the two sides pledged to tackle core issues such as the status of Jerusalem, the fate of

Palestinian refugees, and the future of Israeli settlements -- from the peace process. They have succeeded in preventing the creation of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 lines with land swaps, the establishment of two capitals in the current area of Jerusalem, the formulation of appropriate security arrangements, and a fitting symbolic and economic resolution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees -- as was proposed in the Geneva Accord, in which you were involved in all of the details. Their aim is to perpetuate the interim process indefinitely, and every single day that passes plays into their hands.

One simply cannot continue with an interim arrangement for almost 20 years. This was not the intention when we spearheaded the Oslo process in late 1992 -- you from Tunis and I from Jerusalem -- or when we assiduously worked on what subsequently became known as the "Beilin-Abu Mazen Agreement" between 1993 and 1995.

You and I both understand that the current situation is a ticking time bomb. From my point of view, what is at stake is the loss of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. From yours, it is the loss of the chance for an independent Palestinian state. And from both of our points of view, the failure of the two-state solution risks a renewal of terrible violence.

Anyone who believes these things must take action. You can do it, and for this step you do not need a partner. A declaration of the end of the Oslo process -- justified by the fact that the path to a permanent-status agreement is blocked -- is the most reasonable, nonviolent option for putting the subject back on the world's agenda, with the aim of renewing genuine efforts to reach a conclusive solution.

Dissolving the Palestinian Authority and returning daily control to Israel would be an action nobody could ignore. It is not at all similar to a demonstration in front of the Municipality of Ramallah, nor is it similar to appealing to the United Nations for member-state status. This is a step that only you can take, and a step that will demand a response.

I know how difficult it is. I know how many tens of thousands of people depend on the Palestinian Authority for their livelihoods. I am able to appreciate all that you and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad have

accomplished -- establishing Palestinian institutions, growing an economy in impossible conditions, and fostering security in the West Bank.

After all these endeavors, however, you still need to beg the government of Israel to release your money from customs, you still need to beg the Republicans in the U.S. Congress to transfer funds to the Palestinian Authority, and you still need to stand, day after day, before your Palestinian critics and explain why your political efforts are failing. Please don't let this be the way you end your political mission -- a mission that seeks to achieve Palestinian independence without the use of violence.

Do not hesitate for a moment! Do not accept the request of President Obama, who merely wants to be left undisturbed before election day. Do not let Prime Minister Netanyahu hide behind the fig leaf of the Palestinian Authority -- impose upon him, once again, the responsibility for the fate of 4 million Palestinians. Remain as the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which will give you the authority to lead the political negotiations if and when they resume.

But for the sake of your own people, and for the sake of peace, you cannot let this farce continue.

It is possible, of course, that Oslo's demise will not be followed by the birth of more substantive peace talks. But if that occurs, then at least it will not be you -- the man who stood beside the cradle of the Oslo process -- who is responsible for failing to prevent the complete and utter distortion of that process by its Palestinian and Israeli opponents.

Yossi Beilin served as a minister in the cabinets of Israeli Prime Ministers Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and Ehud Barak. He initiated the Oslo peace process in 1992, worked on the Beilin-Abu Mazen talks between 1993 and 1995, and launched the Geneva Accord with Yasser Abed Rabbo in 2003.

Article 5.

Foreign Affairs

God, Bush, and Obama

Andrew Preston

April 3, 2012 -- Until very recently, scholars theorized that the advent of modernity would inexorably lead to a less religious world. Simply put, modernization equaled secularization. In Europe, that assumption was common to the theories of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Sigmund Freud. In the United States, too, social scientists with policymaking influence, among them Walt Rostow and Daniel Bell, predicted the inevitable decline of religion as modernity marched forward.

The world today disproves that thinking. In the rapidly industrializing BRIC countries, Brazilians, Russians, Indians, and Chinese are turning increasingly to religious faith. The same is true in some ultramodern nations that are changing under the pressures of globalization, such as South Korea and even constitutionally secular Turkey. Africa, which as a whole is making significant economic gains, is also home to some of the world's fastest-growing Christian and Muslim communities. When the people of the global South turn to religion, moreover, they are adopting some of the most intensely devout and pious faiths, such as Protestant evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, and conservative forms of Catholicism and Islam. Rather than disappearing, these supposedly premodern worldviews are thriving in our postmodern world.

At least in theory, the United States should be well poised to navigate a world of faith-based geopolitics. Its two most recent presidents, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, are by all accounts deeply religious and well versed in many of the tenets of Christianity. They have differed in their approaches to foreign policy, but both have made overt references to faith. In reacting to 9/11 and the crisis over Iraq, Bush portrayed the United States as a chosen nation. "We Americans have faith in ourselves, but not in ourselves alone," he said in his 2003 State of the Union address. "We do

not know -- we do not claim to know all the ways of Providence, yet we can trust in them, placing our confidence in the loving God behind all of life and all of history. May He guide us now."

Obama has emphasized religion in similarly strong terms. He has described the United States as a Judeo-Christian country and said in February that the great reformers in U.S. history acted "because their faith and their values dictated it, and called for bold action, sometimes in the face of indifference, sometimes in the face of resistance." Religious ethics has implications for foreign policy, too: As Obama continued, "When I decide to stand up for foreign aid, or prevent atrocities in places like Uganda, or take on issues like human trafficking, it's not just about strengthening alliances or promoting democratic values or projecting American leadership around the world . . . It's also about the biblical call to care for the least of these, for the poor, for those at the margins of our society."

Strangely, however, neither Bush nor Obama has been particularly successful in harnessing religion's authority in support of the United States' diplomatic and strategic goals. Bush relied too much on the exceptionalist belief that the United States was uniquely virtuous. In doing so, he alienated those who did not share that vision. By contrast, Obama has not always matched his soaring rhetoric with action on the ground.

Many of Obama's most important foreign policy speeches have placed religion front and center. In several significant addresses in 2009, he used religious ideas and values to support the promotion of democracy, human rights, and the war on terror. In China, he declared that true democracy and social stability would not be possible without respecting "freedoms of expression and worship." Accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, he invoked Reinhold Niebuhr's theology of irony to warn that the United States would sometimes have to use armed force to bring about peace and justice in a sinful world. And most notably, in Cairo, he admonished the region's Muslims, Jews, and Christians that peace and prosperity would never come unless they learned to tolerate one another's faiths, saying, "Freedom in America is indivisible from the freedom to practice one's religion. . . . That is the spirit we need today. People in every country should be free to

choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind and the heart and the soul." That was the way of peace.

Rhetoric is important, but direct action grounds real diplomacy. And on that front, the White House has not kept up with the issue. It took 18 months for Obama to appoint a director of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, which monitors the extent to which other nations respect the religious liberty of their own citizens. He has also been slow to follow up the religious liberty objectives he laid out, most notably in his Cairo speech, for the Middle East.

But while faith is important, some caution is warranted. As diplomatic history shows, U.S. leaders must tread carefully on religious matters. Not everyone shares the United States' religious worldview, which has two basic components that do not always sit easily with each other: an exceptionalist conceit of the United States as God's chosen nation and an embrace of religious liberty historically grounded in the separation of church and state. In the past, when U.S. policymakers preached the former, they quickly ran into trouble, such as when President William McKinley justified the seizure of the Philippines in 1899 -- and the brutal war that followed -- in the name of Christian uplift. In a telling slip that did not augur well for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, George W. Bush similarly erred when he spoke of launching a "crusade" against Islamic fundamentalist terrorism shortly after 9/11.

Yet doing nothing comes at a cost. Administrations that neglected, underestimated, or sidelined religion found themselves blindsided. President John F. Kennedy's foreign policy, for example, never recovered from his ignorance of the Buddhist monks who upset the equilibrium of South Vietnam's politics. The Buddhist crisis, which erupted in May 1963 and continued for months, undermined the U.S.-backed regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. "How could this have happened? Who are these people? Why didn't we know about them before?" an exasperated Kennedy asked about the Buddhists -- who merely represented 90 percent of South Vietnam's population -- after the outbreak of their revolt. Diem, of course, was overthrown, and the resultant political instability led directly to the escalation and Americanization of the war in Vietnam. In the late 1970s,

Jimmy Carter, another president who wanted to bleach politics of faith, similarly underestimated the rise of political Islam in Iran. For both Kennedy and Carter, the problem was not triumphalist religion but an unrealistic desire to view international relations through a purely secular lens.

In fact, U.S. presidents and policymakers have been most effective when they have argued that religious liberty is a fundamental -- indeed, foundational -- human right to be protected and promoted around the world, not only as a good in itself but as a way to safeguard U.S. national security. Consider the case of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Several years before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt wanted the United States to take a more proactive role in resisting Nazi Germany and imperial Japan. He did not call for outright military intervention, but as early as 1937, he identified Germany and Japan as threats to the United States.

Still, Roosevelt faced two obstacles: first, a predominantly isolationist U.S. public that was opposed to playing a world role; and second, the impression that neither Germany nor Japan seemed capable of mounting an attack, let alone an invasion, against the continental United States. To overcome both these obstacles, [redacted]. turned to the issue of religious liberty. Religion, he argued at the start of his 1939 State of the Union address, was the foundation of all civilization, because it provided the source of democratic politics; in turn, democracy made international peace possible. Without religious liberty, he said, there could be no democracy. And without democracy, there could be no world peace.

Roosevelt returned to this faith-based democratic peace theory countless times in the years before and after U.S. entry into the war, most notably in his 1941 State of Union, when he outlined the Four Freedoms (including freedom of worship). By portraying the Nazis as a menace to religious liberty -- and to all religions, not just Judaism -- he solved both his problems at one stroke: It enabled him to use a common language and imagery, familiar to almost all Americans, to explain the threat to a public wary of intervention. In an increasingly interconnected world, it allowed him to argue that the Nazis were a danger to U.S. national security because

they threatened certain values that underpinned international openness and world order. By conflating U.S. interests and ideals, Roosevelt built a powerful case for an anti-Nazi policy that allowed him to extend lend-lease aid to United Kingdom and the Soviet Union and do battle with the German navy even before December 1941. Once the United States entered the war, religion was an important part of the ideology that spurred the United States to victory.

In a world defined in large part by the growth of global faith, Obama would be wise to do so as well. Democracy promotion is important, but it would be far more effective if tied explicitly to the spread of religious liberty. Just as countries are penalized, diplomatically and economically, for undemocratic practices or human rights abuses, so, too, should they be subject to pressure, and perhaps even sanctions, if they violate their citizens' freedom of religion. It is clear which direction today's modernizing states are heading. Now, it is just a matter of Washington adjusting the way it interacts with them, because being able to speak the language of faith has served the United States well in the past. Should the White House start practicing what it preaches, it will win the United States a very large, and very important, audience.

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Article 6.

The Economist

China’s military rise

Apr 7th 2012 -- NO MATTER how often China has emphasised the idea of a peaceful rise, the pace and nature of its military modernisation inevitably cause alarm. As America and the big European powers reduce their defence spending, China looks likely to maintain the past decade's increases of about 12% a year. Even though its defence budget is less than a quarter the size of America's today, China's generals are ambitious. The country is on course to become the world's largest military spender in just 20 years or so (see article).

Much of its effort is aimed at deterring America from intervening in a future crisis over Taiwan. China is investing heavily in "asymmetric capabilities" designed to blunt America's once-overwhelming capacity to project power in the region. This "anti-access/area denial" approach includes thousands of accurate land-based ballistic and cruise missiles, modern jets with anti-ship missiles, a fleet of submarines (both conventionally and nuclear-powered), long-range radars and surveillance satellites, and cyber and space weapons intended to "blind" American forces. Most talked about is a new ballistic missile said to be able to put a manoeuvrable warhead onto the deck of an aircraft-carrier 2,700km (1,700 miles) out at sea.

China says all this is defensive, but its tactical doctrines emphasise striking first if it must. Accordingly, China aims to be able to launch disabling attacks on American bases in the western Pacific and push America's carrier groups beyond what it calls the "first island chain", sealing off the Yellow Sea, South China Sea and East China Sea inside an arc running from the Aleutians in the north to Borneo in the south. Were Taiwan to attempt formal secession from the mainland, China could launch a series of pre-emptive strikes to delay American intervention and raise its cost prohibitively.

This has already had an effect on China's neighbours, who fear that it will draw them into its sphere of influence. Japan, South Korea, India and even Australia are quietly spending more on defence, especially on their navies. Barack Obama's new "pivot" towards Asia includes a clear signal that America will still guarantee its allies' security. This week a contingent of

200 US marines arrived in Darwin, while India took formal charge of a nuclear submarine, leased from Russia.

En garde

The prospect of an Asian arms race is genuinely frightening, but prudent concern about China's build-up must not lapse into hysteria. For the moment at least, China is far less formidable than hawks on both sides claim. Its armed forces have had no real combat experience for more than 30 years, whereas America's have been fighting, and learning, constantly. The capacity of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for complex joint operations in a hostile environment is untested. China's formidable missile and submarine forces would pose a threat to American carrier groups near its coast, but not farther out to sea for some time at least. Blue-water operations for China's navy are limited to anti-piracy patrolling in the Indian Ocean and the rescue of Chinese workers from war-torn Libya. Two or three small aircraft-carriers may soon be deployed, but learning to use them will take many years. Nobody knows if the "carrier-killer" missile can be made to work.

As for China's longer-term intentions, the West should acknowledge that it is hardly unnatural for a rising power to aspire to have armed forces that reflect its growing economic clout. China consistently devotes a bit over 2% of GDP to defence—about the same as Britain and France and half of what America spends. That share may fall if Chinese growth slows or the government faces demands for more social spending. China might well use force to stop Taiwan from formally seceding. Yet, apart from claims over the virtually uninhabited Spratly and Paracel Islands, China is not expansionist: it already has its empire. Its policy of non-interference in the affairs of other states constrains what it can do itself.

The trouble is that China's intentions are so unpredictable. On the one hand China is increasingly willing to engage with global institutions. Unlike the old Soviet Union, it has a stake in the liberal world economic order, and no interest in exporting a competing ideology. The Communist Party's legitimacy depends on being able to honour its promise of prosperity. A cold war with the West would undermine that. On the other hand, China engages with the rest of the world on its own terms, suspicious of

institutions it believes are run to serve Western interests. And its assertiveness, particularly in maritime territorial disputes, has grown with its might. The dangers of military miscalculation are too high for comfort.

How to avoid accidents

It is in China's interests to build confidence with its neighbours, reduce mutual strategic distrust with America and demonstrate its willingness to abide by global norms. A good start would be to submit territorial disputes over islands in the East and South China Seas to international arbitration. Another step would be to strengthen promising regional bodies such as the East Asian Summit and ASEAN Plus Three. Above all, Chinese generals should talk far more with American ones. At present, despite much Pentagon prompting, contacts between the two armed forces are limited, tightly controlled by the PLA and ritually frozen by politicians whenever they want to "punish" America—usually because of a tiff over Taiwan.

America's response should mix military strength with diplomatic subtlety. It must retain the ability to project force in Asia: to do otherwise would feed Chinese hawks' belief that America is a declining power which can be shouldered aside. But it can do more to counter China's paranoia. To his credit, Mr Obama has sought to lower tensions over Taiwan and made it clear that he does not want to contain China (far less encircle it as Chinese nationalists fear). America must resist the temptation to make every security issue a test of China's good faith. There are bound to be disagreements between the superpowers; and if China cannot pursue its own interests within the liberal world order, it will become more awkward and potentially belligerent. That is when things could get nasty.

Article 7.

Spiegel

Controversial Poem about Israel: Günter Grass's Lyrical First Strike

Sebastian Hammelehle

04/04/2012 -- Never in the history of postwar Germany has a prominent intellectual attacked Israel in such a cliche-laden way as Günter Grass with his controversial new poem, "What Must Be Said." The Nobel Prize laureate has delivered a lyrical first strike against Israel.

"What Must Be Said" is the title that Günter Grass chose for his poem. It begins with the words: "Why have I been silent, kept quiet for too long, about what is obvious." The poem, which was published in Germany's Süddeutsche Zeitung newspaper on Wednesday and which has already provoked considerable outrage, deals with Grass's silence on Israel and the threat of military conflict between Israel and Iran. It's also about Germany supplying weapons to Israel, and about the relationship between Germans and Israelis. It's about a subject, where the title alone, "What Must Be Said", implies an unpleasant flippancy: the flippancy of breaking taboos.

"What must be said" is a thinly veiled version of another phrase that Germans who don't hold a Nobel Prize for Literature like to use when they're sitting around in the pub, setting the world to rights. It can be loosely translated as: "There's no law against saying that…"

Yes, there's no law against saying these things -- except that there is an unwritten law in Germany against saying certain things, particularly given the country's difficult history. And so Grass, a few lines after he has posed the rhetorical question about why he has kept quiet, gives an explanation for his previous reticence. He felt under a "constraint," he writes -- a constraint that "promises punishment if it is flouted."

Under a 'Constraint'

Günter Grass has fought many political battles in his life. He was pelted with eggs when he campaigned for Willy Brandt, who went on to become

German chancellor. With his best-known novel "The Tin Drum," he was accused of writing obscenities that were allegedly harmful to minors.

So what constraint did he feel under, and what punishment deterred him, to the degree that he forbade himself, as he writes in his poem, from "mentioning that country by name where a growing nuclear capability has existed for years but is out of control because it is not subject to any inspection?" It is the punishment, he writes, of receiving the "verdict of 'anti-Semitism'".

Grass takes four meandering verses to finally get to what he had foreshadowed with his title. Because if you hear someone in Germany beginning a statement with the words "There's no law against saying that…," you know what is coming next. It's either going to be about foreigners living in Germany -- or about Israel.

Grass makes a remarkable comparison, which is supposed to sound logical, but which is actually not. He implies that criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic. But shouldn't one call such statements "anti-Israeli" or perhaps "anti-Zionist"?

Stereotypes of a Global Conspiracy

And does one actually get punished in Germany for criticizing Israel? Just recently, Sigmar Gabriel, the leader of the center-left Social Democratic Party, wrote on Facebook that he had witnessed "apartheid" in the West Bank city of Hebron. Did he get punished for saying that? No.

When he was chairman of Germany's Central Council of Jews, Ignatz Bubis once complained that people referred to Israel as "his" country when they were talking to him. Bubis was a German citizen. Günter Grass has still not understood that "the Jews" are not the same as "the Israelis."

But in his case, even this realization wouldn't help very much. It doesn't really matter whether one calls the supposed sinister puppet masters who punish any criticism of themselves with social ostracism Jews or Israelis. It's the same stereotype that lurks behind it: the global conspiracy. And yes, at this point one unfortunately has to admit that Grass is right -- it is indeed anti-Semitic.

'Weary of the Hypocrisy'

Grass is such a vain man that, when asked to write for the German weekly Die Zeit on the occasion of prominent German writer Heinrich Böll's death, he wrote almost exclusively about himself. Now he has packed his political opinions into a poem that is almost as simple. What pathos! It might have been better if he hadn't begun his verses with the word "I" at the beginning of each sentence, and instead debated the situation in Israel more thoroughly. Then he very quickly would have gotten an idea about how the people of Israeli must feel in psychological terms, being surrounded by enemies. It will take a crisis before we can really determine whether Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is really just a "loudmouth" -- as Grass apparently believes him to be -- who has "subjugated" his people and forced them to take part in "organized exultation." And at that point, the State of Israel will probably be able to make good use of submarines. Even ones from Germany.

But no, Grass doesn't even have to trouble himself with considerations like that. After all, he is, as he writes, "aligned with Israel". Somebody grab the gong: The cliché is now complete. After all, in society, it is no longer acceptable to use the phrase, "There's no law against saying that…" without also adding a line like, "Some of my best friends are foreigners." Does Israel even need to have friends like this? Grass spent his early years in the Waffen-SS and, now, as he writes, he is at an "advanced age" and, writing with the "last bit of ink," is "weary of the hypocrisy."

It is in poor taste when the Germans, of all people, start telling the Israelis what to do. Never in the history of postwar Germany has an intellectual as prominent as Grass presented such hollow clichés about Israel in such a vain manner. It completely overshadows his reasonable call for both the Israeli and Iranian nuclear capabilities to be monitored by "an international entity."

It is in no way certain that the nuclear attack implied in the poem with which Israel "could annihilate the Iranian people" will even happen in the foreseeable future. But one thing is certain: The lyrical first strike has already been launched -- from German soil.