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Article 1.

Spiegel

## **Divided States of America: Notes on the Decline of a Great Nation**

11/05/2012 -- The United States is frittering away its role as a model for the rest of the world. The political system is plagued by an absurd level of hatred, the economy is stagnating and the infrastructure is falling into a

miserable state of disrepair. On this election eve, many Americans are losing faith in their country's future.

The monumental National Mall in Washington, DC, 1.9 miles (3 kilometers) long and around 1,586 feet wide at its broadest point, is a place that showcases the United States of America in its full glory as a world power. A walk along the magnificent swath of green space, between the white dome of the Capitol to the east and the Lincoln Memorial, a temple erected to honor former president Abraham Lincoln, at its western end, leads past men in bronze and stone, memorials for soldiers and conquerors, and the nearby White House. It's a walk that still creates an imperial impression today.

The Mall is lined with museums and landscaped gardens, in which America is on display as the kind of civil empire that promotes the arts and sciences. There are historic sites, and there are the famous steps of the Lincoln Memorial where Martin Luther King once spoke of his dream, and of the dreams of a country to be a historic force, one that would serve the wellbeing of all of mankind. Put differently, the National Mall is an open-air museum for an America that, in 2012, is mostly a pleasant memory. After a brilliant century and a terrible decade, the United States, in this important election year, has reached a point in its history when the obvious can no longer be denied: The reality of life in America so greatly contradicts the claim -- albeit one that has always been exaggerated -- to be the "greatest nation on earth," that even the most ardent patriots must be overcome with doubt.

This realization became only too apparent during and after Hurricane Sandy, the monster storm that ravaged America's East Coast last week, its effects made all the more devastating by the fact that its winds were whipping across an already weakened country. The infrastructure in New York, New Jersey and New England was already in trouble long before the storm made landfall near Atlantic City. The power lines in Brooklyn and Queens, on Long Island and in New Jersey, in one of the world's largest metropolitan areas, are not underground, but are still installed along a fragile and confusing above-ground network supported by utility poles, the way they are in developing countries.

No System to Protect Against Storm Surges

Although parts of New York City, especially the island of Manhattan, are only a few meters above sea level, the city still has no extensive system to protect itself against storm surges, despite the fact that the sea level has been rising for years and the number of storms is increasing. In the case of Sandy, the weather forecasts were relatively reliable three or four days prior to its arrival, so that the time could have been used to at least make improvised preparations, which did not happen. The only effective walls of sandbags that were built in the city on a larger scale did not appear around power plants, hospitals or tunnel entrances, but around the skyscraper of the prescient investment bank Goldman Sachs.

Large parts of America's biggest city and millions of people along the East Coast could now be forced to survive for days, possibly even weeks, without electricity, water and heat. Many of the backup generators intended for such emergencies didn't work, so that large hospitals had to be evacuated. On the one hand, these consequences of the storm point to the uncontrollability of nature. On the other hand, they are signs that America is no longer the great, robust global power it once was.

Europeans who make such claims have always been accused of anti-Americanism. But now Americans themselves are joining the chorus of those declaring the country's decline. "I had to catch a train in Washington last week," New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, whose columns are read worldwide, wrote last April. "The paved street in the traffic circle around Union Station was in such poor condition that I felt as though I was on a roller coaster. I traveled on the Amtrak Acela, our sorry excuse for a fast train, on which I had so many dropped calls on my cellphone that [REDACTED] have thought I was on a remote desert island, not traveling from Washington to New York City. When I got back to Union Station, the escalator in the parking garage was broken. Maybe you've gotten used to all this and have stopped noticing. I haven't. Our country needs a renewal." Such everyday observations are coalescing into a new, tarnished image of America. Screenwriter Aaron Sorken, the creator of many legendary television series, has come up with a new, brutal look at America. The 10-part drama, "The Newsroom," tells the story of a cynical news anchor who reinvents himself and vows to do everything right in the future. In the show's brilliant premiere, he is asked at a panel discussion to describe why America is the greatest country in the world. After a few tired jokes, the

truth comes gushing out of him. "There's absolutely no evidence to support the statement that we're the greatest country in the world," he says. "We're seventh in literacy, 27th in math, 22nd in science, 49th in life expectancy, 178th in infant mortality, third in median household income, number four in labor force and number four in exports. We lead the world in only three categories: Number of incarcerated citizens per capita, number of adults who believe angels are real, and defense spending, where we spend more than the next 26 countries combined."

### A Land of Limited Opportunities

In the show, the audience reacts with shock, just as a real-life American audience would. But the truth is that America has transformed itself into a land of limited opportunities. In fact, that was the way SPIEGEL referred to the United States in a 1979 cover story, when the US economy had been hard-hit by the oil crisis.

But today's crisis is far more comprehensive, extending to the social, political and spiritual realms. The worst thing about it is that the country still refuses to engage in any debate over the reasons for its decline. It seems as if many Americans today no longer want to talk about how they can strengthen their union. Criticism is seen as a betrayal of America's greatness.

But that notion of greatness leaves much to be desired. Other numbers can be readily added to those rattled off by the protagonist in Sorkin's "The Newsroom," and the results are sobering. For instance, the United States is no longer among the world's top 10 countries when it comes to the state of its infrastructure. In fact, it spends less than Europe to maintain its roads and bridges, tunnels, train stations and airports.

According to the US Federal Highway Administration, one in four of the more than 600,000 bridges in the world's richest country are either "inadequate" or outdated. According to some studies, the United States would have to invest some \$225 billion a year between now and 2050 to regain an adequate, modern infrastructure. That's 60 percent more than it invests today.

### A Lack of Strength

It isn't hard to predict that this won't happen. The hatred of big government has reached a level in the United States that threatens the country's very existence. Americans everywhere may vow allegiance to the nation and its

proud Stars and Stripes, but when it comes time to pay the bills and distribute costs, and when solidarity is needed, all sense of community evaporates.

Then the divides open up between Washington and the rest of the country, between the North and the South, between the East and the West, between cities and rural areas, and between states whose governors often sound as if the country were still embroiled in a civil war.

The country has forgotten the days when former President Franklin D. Roosevelt courageously told his fellow Americans that a collectively supported social welfare system didn't translate into socialism but freedom, a "New Deal" that would strengthen America in the long term. Gone are the days when former President Dwight D. Eisenhower launched bold government programs to cover a country 27 times the size of Germany with a network of interstate highways. Gone are the years when former President Lyndon B. Johnson declared war on poverty and enacted federal laws declaring that there could be no second- or third-class citizens, regardless of skin color. And gone is the spirit of renewal after former President John F. Kennedy's visionary promise to send Americans to the moon within a decade, a program that would cost taxpayers billions. Today America lacks the financial strength, political courage and social will to embark on such large-scale, government-directed programs. The United States has long been drawing down its savings, writes Fareed Zakaria, another American critic of his own country and a respected columnist with Time. "What we see today is an American economy that has boomed because of policies and developments of the 1950s and '60s: the interstate-highway system, massive funding for science and technology, a public-education system that was the envy of the world and generous immigration policies."

### Two Hostile Camps

Zakaria's words resonate with the questions that have dominated this long election year, and have long sharply divided the country into two hostile camps, roughly equal in size: Does America need more or less government? Are higher taxes the right approach to fairly distributing collective tasks, or are they infernally un-American?

For a time President Barack Obama, 51, and his Republican challenger Mitt Romney, 65, made this question a key theme in their respective

campaigns. The Democrat invoked the helping hand of government while the Republican demonized it. The fact that this old dispute has returned with such vehemence says a lot about the declining cohesion of a nation that runs the risk of losing its way in a changing world.

This rift between the two opposing views of the role of government helps to explain America's current weakness. The deep cultural divide that took shape 150 years ago in the bloody battles of the American Civil War has returned, awakened by the multiple crises of our time. It seems that it was only buried and concealed by consistent economic success during the 20th century, when the United States became the dominant power in the West. For the longest time, Americans were buoyed by the certainty that their children would be better off than they were.

At the beginning of the 21st century, this American dream, which consisted mainly of confidence and optimism envied the world over, is failing. It began to fail around the turn of the millennium, with the crash landing of the New Economy, and it imploded altogether in 2008, when Wall Street became the epicenter of a global financial meltdown, and when millions of Americans lost their homes and jobs. In some polls, almost half of Americans today say that the country's best days are gone.

"Americans are tired after the war in Iraq and also after Afghanistan," says Obama advisor and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. This exhaustion, when combined with the traumatic terrorist attacks of 2001, has weakened the social glue that held America together in the 20th century. This is only too apparent in the absurd squabbles between Republicans and Democrats during the Obama years.

The president didn't keep his promise to unite the country politically, but for that to happen, the participation of both parties would have been required. Instead, the more Obama sought to accommodate the Republicans, the more extreme their positions and the more hysterical their criticism became, eliminating any prospect of compromise. The three most important pieces of legislation Obama pushed through Congress since his inauguration in January 2009 were achieved with the votes of his fellow Democrats, even though they incorporated key Republican demands.

Obama's biggest economic stimulus package, which provided for government investments of \$787 billion, contained substantial tax cuts that the Republicans had demanded and to which the Democrats were in fact

opposed, and yet only three Republicans in the Senate and none in the House of Representatives voted for the legislation. All Republicans in both houses of Congress rejected the healthcare reform that will be viewed as a historic achievement one day. And the financial reform legislation, which turned out to be far more moderate than the Democrats had hoped, received the votes of only three Republicans in each house of Congress.

### A Systematic Crisis

Does this sort of stonewalling already signify the collapse of a representative democracy? Naturally, an opposition party's role must be to fight the government's policies. Nevertheless, such deep-seated opposition as there has been in the Obama years is unprecedented in the last few decades of American politics. Many bills were never even put to a vote in Congress, because the Republicans, more frequently than ever before, threatened to use or did in fact deploy the so-called filibuster, a delay tactic with which votes on legislation can be completely obstructed. In the last five years, Republicans in Congress have used the filibuster a record-breaking 385 times, or as much as it was used in the seven decades between World War I and the end of the administration of former President Ronald Reagan in 1989.

According to a current study, since 2007 Republican lawmakers have tried to torpedo more than 70 percent of all bills before they were even put to a vote. This applied to only 27 percent of proposed legislation in the 1980s, and only 8 percent in the 1960s. "This level of obstruction is extremely unusual," Norman Ornstein, a congressional scholar with the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank, told [Newsweek](#). "And the core of the problem is the GOP."

The claims that Republican leaders agreed, on the day of Obama's inauguration, Jan. 20, 2009, to rigidly block his policies, are now well-supported by credible reporting. In the last four years, it seems as if one half of America -- the Republicans -- has been determined to spoil everything for the other half -- the Democrats -- regardless of the issue and whether or not these obstructive tactics have helped or harmed the public good. This is hardly anything less than a systemic crisis.

This obstructionism is largely attributable to the group within the Republican Party known as the Tea Party. As filmmaker Sorkin claims, the coalition of ultraconservatives has developed into the "American Taliban."

They view Darwin's Theory of Evolution as the stuff of the devil, homosexuals as diseased and women as subordinate to men. They oppose contraception and are so filled with hate in their efforts to ban abortion that they don't seem to object when violent anti-abortion activists burn down the offices of liberal doctors.

They claim that according to the American Constitution, the United States is a Christian country, which isn't true, and their platform contains demands to eliminate all taxes or even get rid of the central government altogether. All of this could be dismissed as some marginal aberration if the Tea Party were not such a driving force behind the Republicans, shaping the tone and superficial content of the entire political discourse.

### 'Dropout Factories'

And when there is also a lack of perseverance on the part of the government -- an accusation that does apply to the Obama administration -- and when important proposals are abandoned in the face of the slightest resistance, the work to shape the future of the United States, which its founding fathers saw as a "work in progress," becomes gridlocked in a very fundamental way.

This gridlock applies to all political spheres. America's schools, for which the country spends more than any other nation on earth, are more like "dropout factories" in big cities like Chicago and the capital Washington. Some 1.3 million students drop out of high school each year in the US before they have the chance to graduate.

Although many American universities are still among the world's top institutions, they have become unaffordable for many Americans. Every year, universities are forced to raise their already outrageously high tuition levels, partly because of declining government support. In fact, states like California now spend more money on prisons than universities.

American college and university graduates owe a total of \$1 trillion in student loan debt, which exceeds total American consumer credit card debt. The prospect of incurring such massive debts deters prospective students, especially those from poorer families, from attending colleges and universities in the first place. A person's socioeconomic background now plays a stronger role in America in determining his or her social and educational opportunities than it does in Europe, whose class society the founders of the United States once set out to leave behind.

## One Dead End after Another

In the fall of 2012, America is a country filled with such dead ends.

The fight against climate change is one of them. Impending environmental threats were a major theme in Obama's first election campaign, but then they were dropped at the first sign of Republican resistance and remained a non-issue in the current campaign -- until Hurricane Sandy inundated New York City and parts of New Jersey. Since then, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a Republican, has endorsed Obama for reelection, citing the dangers of climate change and the incumbent's positions on the environment. And as a result of the storm, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie suddenly became the only Republican governor to find himself working side-by-side with the president.

Such political reversals don't change the fact that important projects have turned into failed undertakings, while visions have been put on the back burner. The sad fight for more high-speed rail in America is a case in point. High-speed trains only travel on a few routes in the United States at the moment, at an average speed of 70 miles per hour (112 kilometers per hour), which is much slower than Europe's ICE and TGV trains.

Obama recognized this as a problem and asked Vice President Joe Biden, a railroad buff who used to commute by train to Washington when he was a senator from Delaware, to improve the situation. As a result, the government announced a plan to invest \$53 billion in new, modern trains and routes.

But Republican governors in states with routes where high-speed rail would make sense simply refused to accept the government funds. Once again, their refusal reflected the desire to thwart a plan by "Socialist" Obama, and the determination not to be accused by their supporters of having accepted money from the agents of "big government."

The failing project coincides with the image, already a worldwide cliché, of the United States as a country that doesn't understand the signs of the times and has almost willfully -- flying in the face of all scientific knowledge -- chosen to be backward.

## America Falls Behind

This now seems to be dawning on many of those who used to come to the United States because it was the country of their dreams. According to new studies, highly qualified immigrants from India and China are increasingly

turning their backs on the country after finishing their studies there, secretly hoping for better opportunities back home. America is no longer as attractive a magnet as it once was. And, of course, China and India, the native countries of many potential immigrants, have become significantly stronger.

America will feel the effects of this trend. Immigrants made America great and have kept it great. Immigrants, who make up about 12 percent of the current US population, founded more than half of all Silicon Valley companies and filed one in four patent applications between 1995 and 2005. Almost half of all doctoral candidates in engineering and science do not speak English as their first language.

The most talented American students will not be filling the resulting gap, because ■■■■■ rather work on Wall Street than in technology and engineering fields. About a third of the students in every graduating class at Harvard University accept jobs in investment banking and consulting, or with hedge funds -- that is, industries that produce one thing above all: fast money.

In Today's America, Long-Term Goals Stand No Chance

Obama proposed several projects to improve the country's schools, raise education levels and promote equal opportunity for all children. But instead of supporting his efforts, governors obstructed them. Some even blocked guidelines to bring healthier food into school cafeterias, merely because they were created by people in Washington. In this environment, long-term goals don't stand a chance.

Obama's major economic stimulus package, which critics claim is more of a crisis management program than the blueprint for a new beginning, set aside \$90 billion to promote renewable energy. This is a lot of money, but because the "green jobs" the program promised didn't materialize right away, the president's adversaries ridiculed the entire project and cited it as an example of his failure. Obama's search for a green future was nothing but a money pit, scoffed the Republican front men, who want nothing to do with environmental protection and ecological progress, because they assume that electricity comes from an outlet and gasoline from a pump. Solyndra, a promising startup company in the sunny town of Fremont, California, which had a seemingly brilliant idea to make more effective solar panels, became a symbol of the fight over Obama's allegedly failed

environmental policy. In March 2009, Energy Secretary Steven Chu, a Nobel laureate in physics, awarded the company a \$535 million loan. "The promise of clean energy isn't just ... some abstract possibility for science fiction movies," Obama said. But that was wrong, at least when it came to Solyndra. The company went bankrupt in 2011, 1,100 employees lost their jobs, the government's money was gone and the Republicans had fodder for the election campaign.

Solyndra was in fact the exception to the rule. Of 63 companies that received government assistance under Obama's green economy programs, 58 were successful and only five went bankrupt -- a 92-percent success rate. But none of that mattered. Obama's opponents, or about half of the American population, ignored the underlying goal of the "green" offensive, which is ultimately to make the entire country more competitive.

Within a few years, major competitor China has increased its share of the global solar market from 6 to an impressive 54 percent. Less than two decades ago, the United States was still making more than 40 percent of solar technology sold worldwide. Today it's just over 5 percent.

Even as America falls behind, some of its more enlightened citizens sometimes return from abroad to report on all the things they have learned in other countries. For instance, while campaigning for Obama, former President Bill Clinton often cited the "German model" as one worth emulating. In "a country where on average the sun shines as much as it does in London," he told an audience, "the Germans have netted 300,000 jobs out of their commitment to a solar future." America, he suggested, could create a million such jobs if it wanted to. But in 2012, this is a goal that no more than half of the people in the United States would support, which is why the country is beginning to lose its edge.

### Losing Ground

Nevertheless, "decline" is a big word, especially for a nation that is still the world's number one economic and military power, and will remain so for at least the next decade. It's also a country whose innovative energy seems unbroken in many fields, and one that, unlike Europe, has balanced population growth and enormous mineral resources. In fact, when it comes to the demise of former world powers, Europe's decline is much more evident than that of the United States.

But America is losing ground: as a model, as a driving force and as an old and bright beacon for the West. It's been half a century since a US president last promised to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty." These were the words of John F. Kennedy, but even his direct successors were much more selective as to which tasks they were willing to take on to defend liberty after US withdrawal from Vietnam.

Ronald Reagan, whose fans credit him with having disarmed the "Evil Empire," sent Marines into Lebanon, and brought them home again after 241 soldiers died in the bombing of the USS Cole. Otherwise, Reagan only captured tiny Grenada in the name of liberty. Bill Clinton recalled US troops from Somalia after images of a dead US soldier's body being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu were broadcast on television. He chose not to intervene in the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda. And, like the Europeans, he spent years watching the wars of succession in Yugoslavia until he ordered the bombing of the troops of then Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic.

Even George W. Bush, who, at least during his first term, was convinced that the United States had to defend freedom and democracy, with military force if necessary, did so under the delusion that major successes were possible with a relatively small commitment of troops and equipment. But he was mistaken. Annual costs of between \$100 billion and close to \$200 billion for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars were a key determining factor in the US's current financial plight.

Obama can be credited with having finally admitted that his country's options in foreign policy are not unlimited. "We can no longer afford troop-heavy interventions, unless our national survival is at stake," he said. But in the toxically divided United States, his detractors interpreted this realization to mean that the commander-in-chief was personally preaching that the country should abandon its leadership role.

#### Economic Crisis Forces Foreign Policy Rethink

But it was the economic crisis and the crisis within the political system that forced the president to rethink his options in foreign policy. And it would be an illusion to believe that the outward expression of political strength has nothing to do with the economic, domestic state of a country. But it is

precisely this adjustment to reality that raises the anger of those who have always seen America as the country that could tell everyone else what to do.

In fact, the more palpable and undeniable the country's economic and political weakening, the louder the nationalist bluster coming from Tea Party leaders becomes. And even as it indiscriminately demands cost cuts, especially in social and educational budgets, the Republican Party, the Grand Old Party, wants to make an exception for the defense budget. In fact, if the Republicans had their way, the defense budget would grow to historically high levels.

The Republicans paint their agenda as a commitment to a "strong America," while portraying the Democrats and, most of all, Obama, as cowards. That's why, during the campaign, there were billboards along America's highways that showed Obama bowing subserviently to oil sheikhs. And that's why the Republicans have outrageously characterized Obama's trips to the Arab world and his major speech in Cairo, offering reconciliation to the Muslims, as an "apology tour."

But foreign policy rarely decides elections in the United States. The legendary words "It's the economy, stupid" were coined by an advisor to Clinton during his successful 1992 presidential campaign. But the economy and foreign policy have never been as closely connected as they are in today's world, in which the United States faces serious competition for economic dominance. When there is talk of the Chinese challenge in the State of Ohio, whose 18 electoral votes could be critical in determining who wins the election, it relates directly to local jobs in the domestic automobile industry, so that no candidate can afford not to have an opinion on Washington's China policy.

The Mother of all Austerity Measures

In the 2012 campaign, many Americans have realized for the first time that the US's role as a global power is no longer uncontested, something the Republicans blame on their enemy Obama, arguing that he hasn't been aggressive enough in places like Libya, Syria and Iran. "We can neither retreat from the world nor try to bully it into submission," he said before coming into office, a statement that Republicans interpret as a sign of weakness, a conviction they feel is only reinforced by the military withdrawals during Obama's term.

Obama wanted to withdraw US troops from Iraq and, by 2014, from Afghanistan, but he also had no choice. Both cost considerations and the dramatic failure of both operations spoke in favor of withdrawals. Contrary to what many a global strategist at the Pentagon may have envisioned, Iraq has not turned into a nucleus for new democracies in the Arab world. Instead, the country continues to stagnate today as a new dictatorship in disguise, and it remains plagued by terrible bombing attacks. After 10 years of war, and despite the collaboration between NATO and the United Nations, Afghanistan, a major global project, remains a failure for the United States, which has already lost 2,144 soldiers and has brought home tens of thousands of troops with physical and emotional injuries, without being able to celebrate a tangible success.

The upheavals in the Arab world took America's diplomats by surprise, and they ended Obama's offensive in the Islamic world. But they also showed how poorly connected and, ultimately, uninfluential the United States is in the region today. A member of the Muslim Brotherhood is now Egypt's president, Iran apparently remains undeterred in advancing its nuclear program and the situation in Israel is more precarious than ever. These are all signs that America has far less influence than many Americans still want to believe.

This is not solely attributable to an American decline, but also has to do with various shifts in the global power structure. The unique role the country enjoyed for a short period after the collapse of the Soviet Union is gone. There was a moment, at the time, in which the apologists for American greatness had already declared the end of history, because they felt that there was now proof that there could only be one model of governmental organization: the Western, economically liberal democracy based on freedom. But that moment is over.

#### The Beginning of the Post-American World

Romney's campaign speeches sounded especially empty when he proclaimed the 21st century as an "American century," once again. In fact, there is much more to be said for the notion that, as Time columnist Zakaria believes, the "age of the post-American world" is beginning. In his new book "In No One's World," Washington political scientist Charles Kupchan writes that there are apparently "multiple paths to modernity," even if this isn't what the old West wants to hear. The world, says Kupchan,

is not getting more homogeneous and more American, but rather more diverse and less American.

China is a case in point. For the time being the country, with its authoritarian government, has apparently managed to enable a sufficiently large middle class to take part in its economic success, so that a majority of Chinese citizens are not as likely to challenge Communist Party control. Some 80 percent of respondents to a survey in China said that they were satisfied with the country's direction, compared to less than 30 percent of respondents to a similar survey in the United States. Many developing countries are now looking to China instead of the US as a role model on how to structure a country. They are no longer seeking the light of the American beacon on the horizon. And unless a miracle occurs after the election, specifically by Dec. 31, 2012, that light could go out soon, or at least be reduced to a flicker.

That's when an ultimatum expires that is known as the "fiscal cliff," which Democrats and Republicans set for themselves, after the dramatic failure of their budget negotiations in the summer of 2011, so as not to drive the world's largest government budget against a wall. If both sides can't agree to a joint solution, budget cuts and tax increases will automatically take effect on Dec. 31 that will massively reduced the deficit by \$900 billion. So far, both sides have shown little willingness to compromise. The Democrats insist on tax increases for the rich, which the Republicans reject, arguing that the budget should be consolidated through spending cuts alone. President Obama, who will remain in office until at least Jan. 20, 2013, regardless of the election outcome, has announced that he will veto any proposal that doesn't include higher taxes for the rich.

The automatic emergency savings package would reduce the budget deficit by \$607 billion. This would translate into cuts for doctors and hospitals, schools and day care, theaters and museums, train stations, airports and universities. Purchasing power would be reduced and investments would not be made, all because, in today's America, political compromises and the reasonable balancing of interests no longer seem possible.

An austerity program of this magnitude would cost the economy about 5.1 percent of the gross domestic product. Not even the crisis-ridden countries of the euro zone have instituted such drastic austerity programs.

According to official government sources, the country could face a "significant recession" unless it finds a solution to its budget problem. The economy, which is predicted to grow by at least 2.5 percent next year, could shrink instead, leading to an unemployment rate of more than 9 percent. It's a nightmare scenario that even the International Monetary Fund, normally a proponent of drastic austerity programs, warns against. Behind the fiscal cliff is a gaping abyss into which all hopes for America's future could disappear.

Perhaps it is already merely a question of controlling the problem and making preparations for the post-American age.

That would require changes to the National Mall in Washington, DC. Memorials for the soldiers killed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan would be needed, memorials that are still missing in the open-air museum of imperial American greatness. One day, a statue would also have to be erected for the first black president of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama. The plaque could very well read that he had the misfortune of coming into office when the American empire was just turning into a beautiful memory.

Article 2.

TIME

## **Five Countries Where the U.S. Election Matters Most**

[Tony Karon](#)

Nov. 05, 2012 -- Superbarrio Gómez ran the most underreported campaign of the 1996 U.S. presidential election. The masked Mexican wrestler turned social activist showed up in [New Hampshire](#) during the primary season and declared himself a "candidate" even though his foreign citizenship rendered him ineligible. Decisions affecting the lives of Mexicans are made in the White House, he reasoned, so Mexicans should have a say in choosing its occupant. It's a sentiment that's widely shared: two-thirds of the 26,000 respondents from 32 countries in a recent

[poll](#) believe that the White House has an important impact on their lives, and for that reason, almost half believe they should have a vote in the U.S. presidential election. (If they did, President [Barack Obama](#) would be a shoo-in, according to almost every poll.)

The level of interest in this U.S. election, however, is considerably lower than that of 2008. One reason for this may be that any global citizen tuning in to the campaign's foreign policy debate would have struggled to find substantial differences between what Governor [Mitt Romney](#) advocated and what the White House is doing. There is also a growing sense of the relative decline of U.S. global power. The U.S. remains the world's most militarily powerful country and its largest economy, but its ability to shape economic and geopolitical events in distant climes has steadily declined over the past decade — whether it's Afghanistan or Iraq, the rapidly changing Arab world or Europe's debt crisis, Washington struggles to impose its will.

That said, the Oval Office remains the world's strongest single center of power, and the outcome of Tuesday's vote will be closely watched. Here are five places where the stakes are particularly high:

### **1. Syria: Breaking a Stalemate?**

Syria's civil war has killed upwards of 20,000 people, but the country remains locked in an effective stalemate: the regime of President Bashar Assad is unable to destroy the rebels, and the rebels are unable to destroy the regime. Given the sectarian stakes and the danger of igniting a wider regional conflict, as well as a fear of the growing influence of extremist elements among the rebels, the U.S. has held back from direct intervention, and even from enabling the rebels to receive heavier weaponry that could neutralize some of the regime's military advantages. Both Obama and Romney say they oppose any direct deployment of U.S. military force in Syria, even if limited to enforcing a "no-fly zone" or protecting a rebel-controlled enclave — much to the frustration of allies such as Turkey and France. The Obama Administration is currently focused on [forging](#) a single opposition leadership structure based on a moderate consensus, in order to enable greater foreign support to the rebel cause. Many opposition activists and rebel fighters have expressed dismay and anger at what they see as the relative passivity of the Obama Administration in the face of the increasingly bloody impasse. As a result, the fact that Romney has publicly

declared a greater willingness to consider arming the rebels — together with the fact that some of his advisers have expressed more hawkish policies toward Assad and his regime's key backers, Iran and Russia — may give many in the rebel camp reason to hope the Republican candidate prevails on Tuesday.

## **2. Israel: A Jewish 'Red' State?**

President Obama won the votes of 78% of Jewish Americans in the 2008 election, and despite the GOP's best efforts to erode that advantage by painting the incumbent as somehow hostile to the state of Israel — a charge vehemently rejected by the Democrats as well as by a number of top Israeli officials — polls [suggest](#) Obama will again secure close to 70% of the Jewish vote, compared with around 25% for Romney. If anything, those numbers indicate that Israel is not the primary issue on which most Jewish Americans vote, since polling suggests that a clear majority of Israelis (around 52%) favor a Romney victory, compared with just 25% for Obama.

Israel, nonetheless, appears to be among the very few countries in the world whose citizens would prefer a Romney victory, perhaps as a result of tensions between Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the President's 2009 efforts to restart the peace process with the Palestinians. [Comments](#) made by Romney in a secretly recorded address to donors in Tampa earlier this year (he expressed doubt that any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is imminent, blamed the impasse on the Palestinians and vowed to kick the can down the road) certainly accord with mainstream Israeli thinking. But Romney later expressed his desire to see a two-state solution negotiated by the two sides. It remains unclear what either candidate would do to restart the moribund peace process if elected. On the Israeli government's primary concern, Iran, Romney has used more forceful language, but his effective policy commitments — sanctions backed by the threat of military action — appear [broadly similar](#) to Obama's. Still, Romney's drawing the line at Iran having the capability to build nuclear weapons rather than at actually starting the process, and a statement by one of his top aides that the GOP candidate would respect an Israeli decision to use force against Iran are deemed more pleasing to Israeli hawks. Then again, it's generally understood in the Israeli strategic establishment that Israel's optimal scenario is not a U.S. green light for an

Israeli attack on Iran but for the U.S. to do the job. And on that front, Romney has also made clear that he does “not believe that in the final analysis we will have to use military action” against Iran.

It’s widely assumed, however, that efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the increasingly dangerous impasse will resume after the U.S. election, and Israel’s hawkish government will likely see a Romney Administration as more open to Israeli persuasion to adopt a hard line in any talks with Iran.

### **3. China: Big Change? No, Thanks**

On his first day in the White House if elected, Romney has vowed, he would declare China a “currency manipulator,” threatening a potential trade war. The Obama Administration, for its part, has tried to make containing China the top U.S. strategic priority. But the Chinese leadership is not particularly fazed. While polls find a strong preference for Obama in Chinese public opinion, the leadership has confined itself to castigating both candidates for China bashing on the campaign trail. And Beijing isn’t taking Romney’s currency threat especially seriously. “Significant parts of the U.S. economy are in trouble, and you need to find a scapegoat, and China happens to be the one,” Chinese analyst Jia Qingguo recently [told](#) the Council on Foreign Relations. “But if the past experience serves as a guide, a new President will not significantly change the U.S. policy toward China because the relationship between the two countries has become so close and the interests have become so intertwined. It’s very difficult for a new Administration to significantly change its China policy without bringing a lot of damage to [the] U.S. economy and U.S. national interest.” Beijing’s preference for stability may lean it toward hoping for an Obama victory, because relations with any new Administration usually start on awkward footing. On the other hand, Fudan University’s Shen Dingli [argues](#) that a Romney victory would allow the consummate geopolitical Etch A Sketch moment:

“If Romney wins in November, both he and presumably Xi Jinping will likely shake hands and forget what candidate Romney has said thus far, in much the same manner as both Beijing and Washington have moved beyond the rhetoric of the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign. But China has reason to be concerned that a second term for Obama — and the continuation of present policies — would present continuous challenges to the relationship. A new President would allow for a clean slate, one that

wouldn't push the United States in a harmful direction with regard to China. And, frankly, the quiet truth is that even if President Romney were to intend irrationally to hurt China, there's little chance he would actually be able to chart a path to do so in which the United States remained unhurt by its own actions."

Either way, regardless of what the candidates have said, Beijing appears not to be overly concerned about how their rhetoric would translate into governance decisions.

#### **4. European Union: Austerity or Stimulus?**

Yes, yes, the European Union isn't a country. But the interlinked financial and debt crises of the past four years have demonstrated just how closely tied the fortunes of its 27 member states have become — and also how closely their collective economic fate is tied to that of the wider global economy, first and foremost that of its largest player (and consumer), the U.S. Anemic consumer demand in America is a major problem for European economies looking to revive growth through exports, while the state of U.S. debt has an impact on financial markets everywhere.

Obama is the overwhelming favorite of most European electorates, and the likes of France's President François Hollande see him as a vital ally in the European debate between the more Keynesian growth-oriented policies of the center-left and the austerity orientation of the center-right led by Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel. Romney's laissez-faire approach to economic challenges may put him well to the right even of Merkel, and officials in Berlin and other European capitals see the Republican as an unknown quantity, whose policy choices are far from clear. His hawkish talk on Russia and Iran makes most European governments somewhat uncomfortable, while his greater resistance to the regulation of financial markets is unlikely to be greeted with much enthusiasm among the E.U.'s power players.

The relative decline of the U.S., of course, means that Europe is no longer inclined to take a lead from Washington on issues ranging from the size of its military budget and share of NATO commitments to the management of its economies — as Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner found a year ago, when European finance ministers simply [ignored](#) his exhortations to act more decisively to address their debt crisis. On Tuesday, Europe's primary concern, like that of most American voters, is to see the U.S. get its own

economic house in order as rapidly as possible. A robust American economy, after all, is vital for a global recovery.

### **5. The (Rapidly Shrinking) Arctic**

Of course, the Arctic is even less of a country than is the E.U., but its [rapidly shrinking](#) ice cap may give it a more urgent stake in the outcome of Tuesday's election than any other territorial entity on the planet. The shrinking ice is a symptom of a warming planet — a phenomenon the scientific consensus attributes primarily to the effects of carbon-gas outputs resulting from human activities. But restricting those outputs hasn't been considered a crowd-pleaser by either candidate in an election race strongly focused on job creation — at least, that is, until Hurricane Sandy's [brutal intervention](#).

Scientists warn against reducing Sandy to a symptom of global warming, but at the same time note that climate change is a measurable and alarming phenomenon not being addressed by political leaders, to whom it will fall to both curb and change human behaviors that exacerbate the problem, as well as to develop strategies to mitigate the impact of the predictable nasty changes under way in global climates. Rather than an aberrant catastrophe, Sandy may be a harbinger of a new normal.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, originally elected on a Republican ticket, last week [endorsed Obama](#) for President on the grounds that he had already taken significant policy steps toward curbing carbon-gas outputs, while Romney had backed away from his previous positions in support of climate action. Bloomberg was essentially backing Obama as the candidate more likely to take the necessary action, even though the President has disappointed many environmentalists. If polar bears could vote, the Arctic might not be thrilled by the choices on offer on Tuesday. But like Bloomberg, ████████ probably choose the candidate they believe would be less likely to ignore or evade their plight.

Article 3.

Foreign Policy

## **Middle East Lost**

Shadi Hamid

November 5, 2012 -- One of the great mysteries of the past four years is how Barack Obama -- who rose to the presidency, in part, on his promises to fundamentally re-think and re-orient U.S. policy in the Middle East -- has instead spent his term running away from the region.

It is difficult to remember it now, but the prospect of an Obama presidency was initially greeted in the Arab world with a mixture of relief and guarded optimism. His name and Muslim origins certainly helped. But there was something else: For the first time, many Arabs believed, here was an American president who seemed to have an intuitive grasp of Arab grievances. This grasp extended, perhaps most importantly, to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israelis may have been victims, but so too were the Palestinians. In short, Obama seemed to "get" the Middle East. This didn't sound like someone who wanted to spend three years "pivoting" to China. To look back at Obama's various statements before becoming president is somewhat jarring. At a 2003 farewell party for the scholar Rashid Khalidi, a fierce advocate for Palestinian rights, Obama told the audience that his conversations with Khalidi had been "consistent reminders to me of my own blind spots and my own biases ... It's for that reason that ■■■ hoping that, for many years to come, we continue that conversation." Palestinian-American journalist Ali Abunimah [recounted](#) Obama telling him in 2004: "■■■ sorry I haven't said more about Palestine right now, but we are in a tough primary race. ■■■ hoping when things calm down I can be more up front." (The campaign denied that Obama made such remarks.)

It is easy to make too much of these comments, as many already have. But there is little doubt that Obama stood apart from past presidents in the way he thought and spoke about the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, he understood the conflict's centrality in the broader Arab narrative. As he [told](#) the Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg in 2008, "this constant wound...this constant sore, does infect all of our foreign policy." Even after becoming president, Obama would go out of his way to acknowledge America's checkered and sometimes tragic history in the region. In his 2009 Cairo address, he noted that tension between the West and the Muslim world "has been fed by colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims, and a Cold War in which Muslim-majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations."

The question isn't whether such sentiments are good or bad. Whatever his prescriptions, Obama evidently believed in restoring American leadership in the Middle East and, by extension, that U.S. leadership mattered and could be used for good. In the subsequent years, however, Obama seems to have gradually lost faith in America's ability to impact the course of events. In the wake of the Arab uprisings, senior U.S. officials insisted both privately and publicly that this was "not about America." Too much U.S. involvement went against the very spirit of this moment of self-determination, they said. This was wishful thinking: Of the five Arab revolutions and the one near-revolution in Bahrain, external actors have played a decisive role in at least four. Yet, in the absence of anything resembling a grand strategy, the Obama administration seemed, and still seems, primarily animated by a desire to reduce its footprint in the Middle East.

It is in Syria that the puzzling absence of American leadership has served to confirm just how important the United States still is. Without U.S. leadership -- at this point, many Syrians would gladly take "leading from behind" -- the 19-month conflict has spiraled out of control. Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have argued for doing more to back the Syrian rebels, but they will not do it without American cover and support. The Obama administration has even actively [discouraged](#) its allies from giving rebels the very weapons they say they need to defeat President Bashar al-Assad's regime. As a member of one town's revolutionary council [said](#): "We read in the media that we are receiving things. But we haven't seen it. We only received speeches from the West."

The record elsewhere is not much better, and Arabs have taken note. Remarkably, U.S. [favorability ratings](#) in several Arab countries are lower under Obama than they were in the final years of the George W. Bush administration.

Instead of offering clear, consistent support for the Arab uprisings, the Obama administration's response has been characterized by what I [call](#) "aggressive hedging." As a result, the United States has somehow managed to alienate both sides of the Arab cold war: Dictators think we're naively pro-revolution, and Arab protesters and rebels worry we're still siding with the dictators.

To be sure, this particular problem predates the past four years. Candidate Obama, being the anti-Bush option, had never been a proponent of a more aggressive pro-democracy posture in the region. But, even as the uprisings unfolded, capturing the imagination of millions of Americans, the Obama administration remained unwilling to come to terms with new realities. In the third presidential debate in Boca Raton, Obama said that the United States stood with the Tunisian people "earlier than just about any other country." This is not quite true: As late as January 12, two days before Tunisian strongman Zein al-Abidine Ben Ali fell, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton [asserted](#) -- twice -- that the United States was "not taking sides." It would be nearly impossible, considering the debacle of the Iraq war, to argue that Obama's record on the Middle East is worse than that of his predecessor. But it is just as clear that the transformational presidency that Obama hinted at as a candidate -- and in his Cairo speech -- has barely made an appearance. The Arab Spring presented just that transformational moment, offering the United States a second chance to align its interests and values with the aspirations of ordinary Arabs. Just as the 9/11 attacks seemed to jolt Bush, giving him a greater sense of purpose (for better or worse), one could have imagined the Arab revolts moving Obama in a similar way. But it doesn't seem like the remarkable events of the past two years have had any profound impact on the president's worldview. For these reasons and many more, a second Obama term is unlikely to diverge considerably from the cautious and deliberate blueprint of the first. And in the Middle East, the basic thrust will likely continue -- engage where we must, disengage when we can. And what of the Arab-Israeli conflict? If there's one area that Obama appeared particularly passionate about, it was this. On his third day in office, the president appointed former Senator George Mitchell as special envoy -- a decision that was hailed as a sign of the administration's seriousness in making a breakthrough. If the conflict poisoned everything, as Obama said, then the only way to truly forge a "new beginning" with the Arab world was through a just peace. But the administration's approach soon ran aground: Its single-minded focus on halting settlement construction backfired, arousing the ire of the Israeli government while distracting from the core Palestinian concerns of borders, right of return, and the status of Jerusalem.

Once again, the Obama administration somehow managed to alienate the Israelis and Palestinians in almost equal measure. Even after Obama pulled back and [increased security cooperation](#) with Israel to unprecedented levels, the damage had already been done. Too many Israelis simply couldn't bring themselves to trust Obama; they suspected that he, in his heart of hearts, was sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Oddly enough, this was also what Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas thought -- leading to a feeling of betrayal. In a revealing Newsweek [interview](#), he seemed to be asking the same question on the minds of many Arabs: What exactly had happened to Obama? "We knew him before he became president. We knew him and he was very receptive," Abbas said.

In a second term, there is little reason to think that Obama would have any greater success on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The two sides are as far apart as ever. It is difficult to imagine the new alliance between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the far-right Avigdor Lieberman ever making the kinds of concessions that the Palestinians would require to seal a final status agreement. Focused more on his legacy than on re-election, might Obama be willing to put more pressure on the Israelis in a second term? Probably. But, by now, neither side has much interest in a repeat of 2009 and 2010. The trust has already been lost, the political capital squandered.

As unpopular as Obama is in the Arab world, Mitt Romney is even [more unpopular](#). The preference, however, is usually for neither. Deep within all of this apparent anti-Americanism, however, there remains a slight glimmer of hope. There is still a hunger for U.S. leadership in the Arab world, some of it out of a lingering belief in America's better angels, some of it because there is no one else to turn to. In their time of need, Egyptians, Bahrainis, Libyans and now Syrians have asked -- sometimes [pleaded](#) -- for America to do more to support their struggles. But they will not wait forever.

The rise and fall of Obama, and what he seemed to stand for, has a tinge of sadness about it. Perhaps the job transformed him, rather than the other way around. As the Atlantic's Garance Franke-Ruta [put it](#): "Whoever Obama was when he was elected president has been seared away by two active wars, the more free-ranging fight against al-Qaeda, the worst

economic crash since the Great Depression, and the endless grinding fights with Washington Republicans."

Whatever the reasons, the conclusion is largely the same. An opportunity was lost. There is room, as there always is, to tinker around the margins, to adopt "incrementalism" as the best of a set of bad options in a complex, messy world. But that's not what we needed four years ago. And it's not what we need now.

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Article 4.

Ahram Online

## **The absurd notion of Jewish 'refugees' from Arab lands**

Khalid Amayreh

4 Nov 2012 -- Attempts to draw a comparison between the voluntary emigration of Jews from the Arab world after 1948 and the forced expulsion of Palestinians in the Nakba is ludicrous and doomed to failure. The right-wing Israeli government of Benyamin Netanyahu is trying to revive demands for international recognition of a "Jewish refugee problem." A few weeks ago, Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon held a meeting at the UN to discuss the so-called "plight of Jewish refugees from the Arab world." The meeting, publicised by the pro Israel media in Europe and North America, was widely seen as a propagandistic effort aimed at offsetting the Palestinian Nakba or 'catastrophe,' the deliberate and premeditated extirpation and subsequent expulsion of the bulk of the Palestinian people from their ancestral homeland at the hands of western-backed Jewish invaders from Eastern Europe. Indeed, referring to Arab Jews – who were urged, terrorised and even bombed by Zionist agents in order to make them leave their original homelands in order to fulfil the aims of Zionism – is nothing less than the distortion of truth, history and

even language. It also reflects a mendacious which seeks to create "virtual truths" based on lies. But we should not be surprised at or baffled by the odious audacity of psychopaths and pathological liars like Ayalon, his boss Avigdor Lieberman or, indeed, their Prime Minister Netanyahu. Needless to say, these people, like most other Israeli leaders, adopt mendacity – even in its most brazen form – as their modus operandi. I know many conscientious Jews who would dismiss Ayalon's gambit as a brash lie from A to Z. His efforts in this regard go beyond the pale of human decency and simple rectitude.

Earlier this month, Israeli daily The Jerusalem Post published an article entitled "Jews from Arab land sceptical over refugee status."

The article quoted a group calling itself the 'Committee of Baghdadi Jews,' who live in Ramat Gan, east of Tel Aviv, as saying that "it is wrong to expect Jewish lessons in Iraq to be used to offset the losses the Palestinian suffered in 1948 and 1967." The group's leader said he preferred to remain anonymous for the time being for fear of reprisals from the authorities and right-wing circles. "We are refugees from Iraq, but we know that the government just wants to use this against the Palestinian refugees without trying to give us and the Palestinian refugees compensation for our property," the group spokesman said.

Palestinians and other Arabs don't deny that Jews in the Arab world have suffered, mostly psychologically, as a result of the rise of Zionism and establishment of Israel at the expense of Palestinian Arabs who were banished and dispersed around the globe.

In the final analysis, the transfer of Arab Jews into Israel was considered one of Israel's paramount goals, which serves to expose the utter mendacity and preposterousness of the Israeli feat at the United Nations. Yehuda Shenav, a professor of history at Tel Aviv University, asserted this fact in an article published in Israeli daily Haaretz in 2006. In that article, entitled 'Arab Jews, Palestinian refugees and Israel's folly politics,' Shenav argued that any analogy between Palestinian refugees and Jewish immigrants from Arab lands is folly in historical terms. "Any reasonable person, Zionist or non-Zionist, must acknowledge that the analogy drawn between Palestinians and Arab Jews is unfounded. "Palestinian refugees didn't want to leave Palestine. Many Palestinian communities were destroyed in 1948, and some 700,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from the borders of

historic Palestine. Those who left didn't do so of their own volition. "In contrast, Arab Jews arrived to Israel under the initiative of the state of Israel and Jewish organisations. Some arrived of their free will; others arrived against their will. Some lived comfortably and securely in Arab lands; others suffered from fear and oppression." Shenav noted that past Israeli governments refrained from raising the subject of 'Jewish refugees' from the Arab world for three main reasons:

First, there was a concern that raising the subject would underscore what Israel had tried to repress and forget, namely the Palestinians' right of return. Second, Israel was anxious that raising the subject would encourage property claims submitted by Jews against Arab states and, in response, encourage Palestinians to make counter-claims on lost property. Third, raising the issue would require Israel to alter its school textbooks and devise a new narrative by which Arab Jews journeyed to Palestine under duress, without being motivated by Zionist aspirations. To conclude, the analogy between the Palestinian Nakba, which can only be analogous to genocide, and the mostly voluntary emigration of Arab Jews from their original native Arab countries to the newly-created Zionist state of Israel is – at best – corrupt. It is 'beyond chutzpah,' so to speak, especially from a moral standpoint.

Article 5.

Asharq Al-Awsat

**“The planes were flying in the dark with no lights on”!**

Tariq Alhomayed

5 November 2012 -- A clip of a television interview with the Sudanese Defense Minister is currently being circulated, in which he comments on the Israeli bombing of the Yarmouk weapons factory. During the interview, when asked why his radar systems did not deal with the Israeli assault, Major General Abdel Rahim Mohammed Hussein said “what can we do...

the planes were flying in the dark with no lights on”!

Here I would like to pause for a moment. I am not singling out the Sudanese Defense Minister, nor am I seeking to respond to those who criticized my article last week, entitled “Sudan: Absurdity or confrontation!”, this is merely an attempt to confirm a solitary fact, namely that the bulk of our regions ills come down to adventurism. For example, after the 2006 war in Lebanon, did Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah party, not say that if he knew the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers would lead to the war then he would not have done it? This is the same logic that the Sudanese Defense Minister is speaking of now, who contends that the reason for his defense forces’ failure to respond to an Israeli attack is that the Israeli aircraft were “flying in the dark with no lights on”! If Sudanese defense systems cannot deal with planes with their lights out, then it is in their best interests to abandon weapons factories altogether, along with any links with Iran on their territory. This is not all, for here we must recall the statement of another Sudanese official who said that his country had become a frontline state after the Israeli assault. Yet I do not know how Sudan could live up to such a title if it cannot handle a plane turning off its lights!

It is wrong to laugh at misfortune, but the Defense Minister’s statement is a continuation of the policies that have wasted the region, its resources, and above all that the most precious thing, the lives of its people.

The story does not stop with the statements of the Sudanese Defense Minister or Hassan Nasrallah. We could also cite [Muhammad Saeed] al-Sahhaf on that famous day when American troops were attacking Baghdad by land, sea and air, and as an American tank was parked close by him, when he told reporters: “Look, we have surrounded the infidels”. We could even mention the Bashar al-Assad regime, which has never tired of repeating the mantra of resistance and opposition, even though its forces have ended up fighting the Syrian people instead of the Israelis. Finally, we would have to mention [Mohamed Hassanein] Heikal’s headlines, which, during in the days of Gamal Abdel Nasser, used to read that Israeli planes were dropping like flies... There are many examples and you would need a book to list them all. We are not dealing with an unusual story, or an anomaly, rather it this a systematic defect at all levels. Even today when you talk about the Arab Spring, democracy and reform, the story of the

Muslim Brotherhood immediately comes to mind.

Thus, the intention here is not to advocate peace with Israel, but to say that war has certain requirements, as does peace, and both are difficult. Those who want a war should build states capable of fighting it even if Israeli planes turn their lights out, and those who want peace must also prepare because Israel, unfortunately, surpasses us in economic, educational and technological terms. Here we must remember the words of Hassan Nasrallah in an interview with Al Mayadeen television channel, when he said that Israel had open targets, such as factories and power plants, whilst electricity was sporadic in Lebanon anyway therefore it had nothing to lose! Is there anything more shameful than Nasrallah's words here? Please wake up and look at yourselves, even if the lights are turned off!

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