

From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen <[REDACTED]>
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Article 1.

NYT

Palestinians at the U.N., Again

Editorial

November 4, 2012 -- With peace negotiations at an impasse since 2008 and unlikely to resume any time soon, the Palestinians have only one diplomatic card left — their status at the United Nations — and once again they are trying to play it.

[Last year](#), the Palestinian Authority toyed with submitting an application for full United Nations membership, but backed off in the face of overwhelming opposition from the United States and Israel. Instead, it won membership in an affiliate, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, where Washington does not have veto power. Now the Palestinians plan to seek admission as a ‘nonmember’ observer state in the General Assembly. The 193-member Assembly is dominated by developing nations that are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and are expected to approve the application next month.

It is not a move that will do anyone any good. It will not change facts on the ground, and it will come at a cost. After last year’s initiative, Israel withheld millions of dollars in tax transfers to the [Palestinian Authority](#); the United States halted funding for Unesco, and Congress is withholding \$495 million in assistance for the Palestinians, the State Department says. Both countries are likely to react the same way again, although there is a danger in bankrupting the Palestinian Authority, which has begun to build the institutions of a state, including a police force, that also contribute to Israel’s security.

Israel and the United States say unilateral moves like these by the Palestinians violate the 1993 Oslo accords, which were intended to pave the way to a “final status agreement” within five years. And it is clear that a negotiated deal is the only way to ensure the creation of a viable Palestinian state and guarantee Israel’s security.

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has refused to make any serious compromises, and the two-state solution seems to have a diminishing chance of ever happening. Mr. Netanyahu’s recent decision to jointly field a slate of candidates with the ultranationalist Yisrael Beiteinu Party in parliamentary elections in January suggests his approach could become even more hard-line.

Whatever chance exists of a new American peace initiative after the election is likely to vanish if Mitt Romney wins; at a private fund-raising

event, he said the Arab-Israeli conflict was “going to remain an unsolved problem” and seemed unconcerned about it.

Israel, the United States, the Palestinians and the entire region will pay a high price if Israel merely settles more firmly into the role of occupier over a growing Palestinian population that is left indefinitely without any hope of statehood and self-rule.

Article 2.

The Wall Street Journal

I Didn't Leave the Democrats. They Left Me

[Sheldon G. Adelson](#)

November 4, 2012 -- When members of the Democratic Party booed the inclusion of God and Jerusalem in their party platform this year, I thought of my parents.

They would have been astounded.

The immigrant family in which I grew up was, in the matter of politics, typical of the Jews of Boston in the 1930s and '40s. Of the two major parties, the Democrats were in those days the more supportive of Jewish causes.

Indeed, only liberal politicians campaigned in our underprivileged neighborhood. Boston's Republicans, insofar as we knew them, were remote, wealthy elites ("Boston Brahmins"), some of whose fancy country clubs didn't accept Jews.

It therefore went without saying that we were Democrats. Like most Jews around the country, being Democrat was part of our identity, as much a feature of our collective personality as our religion.

So why did I leave the party?

My critics nowadays like to claim it's because I got wealthy or because I didn't want to pay taxes or because of some other conservative caricature. No, the truth is the Democratic Party has changed in ways that no longer fit with someone of my upbringing.

One obvious example is the party's new attitude toward Israel. A sobering Gallup poll from last March asked: "Are your sympathies more with the

Israelis or more with the Palestinians?" Barely 53% of Democrats chose Israel, the sole liberal democracy in the region. By contrast, an overwhelming 78% of Republicans sympathized with Israel. Nowhere was this change in Democratic sympathies more evident than in the chilling reaction on the floor of the Democratic convention in September when the question of Israel's capital came up for a vote. Anyone who witnessed the delegates' angry screaming and fist-shaking could see that far more is going on in the Democratic Party than mere opposition to citing Jerusalem in their platform. There is now a visceral anti-Israel movement among rank-and-file Democrats, a disturbing development that my parents' generation would not have ignored. Another troubling change is that Democrats seem to have moved away from the immigrant values of my old neighborhood—in particular, individual charity and neighborliness. After studying tax data from the IRS, the nonpartisan Chronicle of Philanthropy recently reported that states that vote Republican are now far more generous to charities than those voting Democratic. In 2008, the seven least-generous states all voted for President Obama. My father, who kept a charity box for the poor in our house, would have frowned on this fact about modern Democrats.

Democrats would reply that taxation and government services are better vehicles for helping the underprivileged. And, yes, government certainly has its role. But when you look at states where Democrats have enjoyed years of one-party dominance—California, Illinois, New York—you find that their liberal policies simply don't deliver on their promises of social justice.

Take, for example, President Obama's adopted home state. In October, a nonpartisan study of Illinois's finances by the State Budget Crisis Task Force offered painful evidence that liberal Illinois is suffering from abject economic, demographic and social decline. With the worst credit rating in the country, and with the second-biggest public debt per capita, the Prairie State "has been doing back flips on a high wire, without a net," according to the report.

Political scientist Walter Russell Mead summed up the sad results of these findings at *The American Interest*: "Illinois politicians, including the present president of the United States, have wrecked one of the country's potentially most prosperous and dynamic states, condemned millions of

poor children to substandard education, failed to maintain vital infrastructure, choked business development and growth through unsustainable tax and regulatory policies—and still failed to appease the demands of the public sector unions and fee-seeking Wall Street crony capitalists who make billions off the state's distress."

At times, it seems almost as if President Obama wants to impose the failed Illinois model on the whole country. Each year of his presidency has produced unsustainable deficits, and he takes no responsibility for his spending. Worse still, unemployment has become chronic, and many Americans have given up on looking for work.

Whenever President Obama deplores the wealthy ("fat-cat bankers," "millionaires and billionaires," "at a certain point you've made enough money," and so on), it tells me that he has failed to learn the economic lessons of Illinois, and that he still doesn't understand the vital role entrepreneurs play in creating jobs in our society.

As a person who has been able to rise from poverty to affluence, and who has created jobs and work benefits for tens of thousands of families, I feel obligated to speak up and support the American ideals I grew up with—charity, self-reliance, accountability. These are the age-old virtues that help make our communities prosperous. Yet, sadly, the Democratic Party no longer seems to value them as it once did. That's why I switched parties, and why I'm now giving amply to Republicans.

Although I don't agree with every Republican position—I'm liberal on several social issues—there is enough common cause with the party for me to know I've made the right choice.

It's the choice that, I believe, my old immigrant Jewish neighbors would have made. They would not have let a few disagreements with Republicans void the importance of siding with the political party that better supports liberal democracies like Israel, the party that better exemplifies the spirit of charity, and the party with economic policies that would certainly be better for those Americans now looking for work.

The Democratic Party just isn't what it used to be.

Mr. Adelson is an entrepreneur and philanthropist.

Article 3.

The Wall Street Journal

Israel Under Fire

Editorial

November 4, 2012 -- As the U.S. Presidential campaign races to the finish, the Middle East continues to boil. Not that the world seems to notice. Last week, Palestinian terrorists operating from the Gaza Strip fired 21 rockets and mortars into Israel. That followed a three-day, 77-shell barrage, in which two civilians were seriously injured and thousands of people were forced into bomb shelters. More than 800 rockets and mortars have been fired into Israel from the Strip in 2012.

If this incoming fire were landing in Texas from Mexico—or in southern Spain from North Africa—it would be a major story. Instead, the world has largely ignored the attacks while obsessing over a possible Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. Iran is a principal arms supplier to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which operates out of Gaza and is responsible for many of the recent attacks. Iran's war against Israel, in other words, has long been underway.

Gaza has been governed for over five years by Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has done little to restrain the fire. In July, former Hamas leader Khaled Meshal met Egypt's new President in Cairo. "We have entered a new era in Palestine's relationship with Egypt," Meshal said after the meeting. "We were happy with what we heard from President Mohamed Morsi and his vision to handle all these issues."

Israel has been fortunate to suffer few fatalities so far from the Gaza attacks. Some of that owes to Israel's deployment of the Iron Dome air defense system, which recently intercepted eight rockets aimed at larger Israeli cities. But no defensive system is perfect and at some point a Palestinian barrage may take a large toll in lives, forcing Israel to respond in a major way.

When that happens, Israel will be urged to show "restraint" by the usual diplomatic suspects. We're writing this as a reminder of how much restraint Israel has already shown.

TIME

Hamas Makes a Stately Move

[Karl Vick](#)

Nov. 04, 2012 -- The pomp in the Gaza Strip last month was significant. [Hamas](#), the militant Palestinian group long known for parading in the streets wearing black ski masks and suicide belts, had turned out an honor guard in dress uniforms. They stood smartly alongside the red carpet rolled out for a portly man in flowing robes, the Emir of Qatar, who had arrived for a few hours on Oct. 23 in what was made very much to look like a state visit. The sultan arrived carrying \$400 million to invest in the Palestinian coastal enclave, a sizeable sum even for a government that doesn't lug suitcases of dollars into its jurisdiction through tunnels, as Hamas does. But if money was all that mattered, Mahmoud Abbas would still rule Gaza. His [Palestinian Authority \(PA\)](#), based in the [West Bank](#), sends money each year into Gaza [at least four times](#) the amount from the Emir. The PA is still paying the salaries of the 70,000 teachers and other bureaucrats who stopped going to work when Hamas kicked Abbas' Fatah party out of the place five years ago. Gaza's skeletal economy would collapse without that money, but it's not the currency that matters most. Hamas craves legitimacy.

A few months ago, Hamas' Foreign Ministry announced it was going to begin training diplomats. This was an act either poignantly hopeful or nakedly deluded, because no one has diplomatic relations with Hamas. "We met with the Swiss!" an official once told me over lunch. "Europe is talking to us." He had a limo waiting outside. But until Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani [showed up](#), the wish remained unfulfilled.

"The visit of the Emir announces officially the breaching of the political and economical siege imposed on Gaza for more than five years," Ismail Haniyeh said in receiving the honored guest. Haniyeh holds the title of Prime Minister in Gaza. In the West Bank, the same title is held by Salam Fayyad. They could scarcely be more different. Haniyeh lives in a refugee camp and delivers sermons at Friday prayers. He has a politician's touch, but a tin ear: when Osama bin Laden was killed, he lamented the fall of "a Muslim and an Arabic warrior." Fayyad got a Ph.D. from the University of

Texas and worked at the International Monetary Fund, a pedigree that keeps money flowing from Europe and Washington and keeps him in his job despite protests across the West Bank. He is the closest thing in the Palestinian territories to an indispensable man. When Hamas negotiated the release of 400 Palestinian prisoners last year in exchange for a single Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, the prisoners released to Gaza were put up in a luxury hotel on the beach, at the invitation of Hamas. But Fayyad quietly paid the tab.

None of this may have mattered when the two factions were on a trajectory toward reconciliation. More than a year ago, Islamist Hamas and secular Fatah agreed to bury the hatchet — not because they no longer [loathed](#) and [distrusted](#) one another but because the winds of change known as the Arab Spring [were suddenly unsettling Palestinian politics too](#). In both Gaza and the West Bank, what ordinary people wanted most was an end to the division in their political leadership. The youth took to the streets. Office holders trembled.

But after a series of smiling promises and fulminating proclamations that a unity government would soon be announced, followed quickly by fresh elections, neither event has materialized, while the rivalry has resumed. Those in Hamas who favored making peace with Abbas, led by chairman Khaled Meshaal, lost out to those in Hamas who argued to remain on their own, not least because the Arab Spring is delivering governments into the hands of political Islamists like themselves.

Significantly, the most recent unity deal was brokered by [none other than](#) the Emir of Qatar, a fact that lent specific import to his arrival. A year ago, Abbas had the field of statecraft all to himself, a bookish moderate transformed by his U.N. bid for Palestinian statehood into an almost popular leader — last year at least. In 10 days, he visited seven countries in four continents, lobbying for support in the Security Council, where the bid for full U.N. membership would die (to be replaced this year by a bid for a lesser, but [still potent status](#)). At each airport, the pageantry on the tarmac doubled as code. The presence of an honor guard signaled full recognition for Palestine as a state. In the capitals of the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Venezuela, as well as Casablanca, Abbas reviewed troops with swords held high — nearly scraping the clouds in Caracas, where a cue-ball bald Hugo Chávez laid it on thick. (Abbas' aides credited him with

coaxing the excitable Venezuelan away from Iran, and by extension Hamas, simply by laying out the moderate position.) In Bogotá, the capital that mattered most, the reception was muted. If anyone failed to notice the absence of an honor guard, the largest lettering on the press badges read “Visita de Trabajo” — working visit, not state. (The president of the Council of Europe had put it this way after an Abbas visit: “It’s hard to be a statesman without a legal state.” But as a council secretary pointed out, while waiting for one to emerge, what you do is play the part. It’s part of being “recognized” as a sovereign: the trappings of statehood matter.) Almost every other Latin American country supported Palestinian statehood, but Colombia, which represented the region on the Security Council, announced it would follow the bidding of the U.S., which has sent more than \$1 billion in military aid to Bogotá over the past decade. So money mattered. But it wasn’t everything: a few days later, [UNESCO voted to admit Palestine](#) as a member state.

“It’s the first time we’re taking the initiative,” said Hayel Fahoum, the Palestinian ambassador to Paris. “You find that you are capable of imposing your identity in the international arena.”

Now, so is Hamas.

Karl Vick has been TIME's Jerusalem bureau chief since 2010, covering Israel, the Palestine territories and nearby sovereignties. He worked 16 years at the Washington Post in Nairobi, Istanbul, Baghdad, Los Angeles and Rockville, MD.

Article 5.

The Telegraph

Inside Israel's nuclear wargames

David Patrikarakos

4 Nov 2012 -- On the 24 September at Israel’s National Institute of Security Studies, an obdurately dull building off a main road in Tel Aviv, three dozen men and women drawn from the top echelons of Israel’s

political and military elite met to play a war-game, the outcome of which could help decide whether Israel goes to war with Iran.

I was in Israel with film director, Kevin Sim, who was making a documentary on the war game for 'Dispatches' on Channel 4.

The notional starting point of the game was 9 November 2012, just after the American presidential elections. Participants were divided into ten groups each representing likely key players in the conflict – Israel, Iran, the US, Russia, Hezbollah, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Russia and the UN. All the teams were made up of Israelis.

The war game is what it says it is – a game. Despite its seriousness, inside the Institute there was an air of make-believe.

The "Netanyahu" who led the Israeli team was an imposter – a former Deputy Foreign Minister of Israel. Two former government ministers took turns to play Obama. Putin was a former Israeli ambassador to Moscow. The war game was designed to explore the likely outcome of an Israeli pre-emptive attack on Iran; it didn't examine the legal or moral arguments for or against any such strike but rather focused on how the Iranians might retaliate and what the wider fallout would be.

The game began when the players were told that just after midnight, in a surprise air raid, Israeli bombers had attacked nuclear installations deep inside Iran. First reports indicated that Israel had acted alone without consent or help from the Americans.

The Iranians responded quickly to the Israeli strike, launching a barrage of Shahab-3 ballistic missiles (based on the North Korean Nodong-1 missile) at Israeli targets, including the country's largest city, Tel Aviv. Then they discussed their political goals.

The most immediate of these was the desire to rebuild the nuclear programme, preferably to a level "beyond what it was on the eve of the strike." Given their newfound status as victims of an attack, another priority was to have the sanctions on Iran lifted; and to have sanctions placed on Israel for its "unprovoked act."

They also decided to offer Jordan and Egypt extensive aid packages to cancel their peace treaties with Israel, before debating a key dilemma: whether or not to attack US targets. With Iran's considerable influence in Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention its huge presence in the Gulf, the Iranians could cause huge problems for Washington.

In the end, though, the decision was taken to refrain; Washington was one more complication they didn't need. Russia (which has been building the Bushehr nuclear power plant) was also approached for immediate help to rebuild the devastated facilities, as well as delivery of S-300 surface-to-air missiles and a consignment of Sukhoi 24 aircraft.

Militarily, Iran tried to get its allies – namely, its proxy militia groups Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza – to enter the conflict on its behalf.

"All our help to you over the years," the Israeli playing Ahmadinejad (a former colonel in military intelligence) declared in a meeting with Hezbollah, "has been for the purpose of this moment."

"There's no such thing as a free lunch," his assistant added. The Lebanese declared they were only too happy to help - in any way that would not bring massive Israeli retaliation down on Lebanon. There was tension in the room.

The Israelis, meanwhile, had met with the "US President" (the Israelis deliberately made no comment on who had won the 7 November US Presidential election), who, despite being unhappy at the lack of a "timely announcement" about the "premature" strike, reiterated his support for Israel. Washington's primary concern, it seemed, was to avoid an escalation of hostilities in what it considered to be the world's most volatile region. It raised the status of alert for its forces across the Middle East. The Israelis were clear on what they wanted from their US ally. Most important was for Washington to use its 'good offices' in Lebanon and Gaza to prevent Hezbollah and Hamas inflaming the situation. The Israelis also wanted US ships in the area, armed with Aegis anti-missile systems, to help intercept the Iranian missiles raining down on them.

Finally, they requested that the US maintain pressure on Iran in the UN Security Council, and to help ensure that Israel was not the victim of 'one sided resolutions in the United Nations.'

On the ground, things were tense. As Iran continued shelling Israel, people began to leave Tel Aviv heading to the South. Fearing Israeli retaliation, Hezbollah limited themselves to firing only a few, sporadic Katyusha rockets into northern Israel in an attempt to placate their Iranian patron, and succeeded in pushing the inhabitants of the city of Kiryat Shmona into heading south as well. Israel, in turn, instructed its army not to respond to

the firing from Lebanon without the Minister of Defense's authorization; army reserves were called up.

But the Israelis were also planning – for a second wave of strikes against Iran's uranium enrichment facilities, which they undertook about 24 hours (in game time) after the first. This second strike seemed to encapsulate the war game for Israel. Its boldness rewarded and Iran simply unable to respond in kind: limited to firing missiles at Israel, many of which were intercepted - largely by itself.

By the game's end, Iran's nuclear facilities had been almost totally destroyed. Hezbollah and Hamas had done nothing more than launch a few token rocket salvos at Israel, while Iranian missiles had been of only limited effect. Iran had also failed in its attempts to have the sanctions on it removed and, thanks to US cover in the UN Security Council, it had also failed to have sanctions placed on Israel. It was the game's clear loser.

Yehuda Ben-Meir, the former deputy foreign minister of Israel, who had played Netanyahu, summed the situation up. "The principal insight we gained was that following an Israeli attack the entire world was interested in calming the region down.

"Before the attack everyone had something to say on a possible attack but once it became a fait accompli the world wanted to know what would happen next, and everyone's goal was to contain the situation and to prevent escalation."

I had seen Israel's perspective on a possible attack and now wanted an Iranian view, so I caught a flight to Istanbul to put the game's results to Hossein Mousavian, a former member of Iran's nuclear negotiating team. He believed the game was deeply flawed.

Dismissing the limited nature of Iran's response, Mousavian argued that in reality Iran would respond 'by all means', employing the total power of its armed forces to draw Israel into a long-term war. Perhaps, more importantly, Mousavian argued that Iran would see the US as complicit. Iranians, he said, are convinced that Israel is too small to attack Iran unilaterally. "They see Israeli as just a baby," he said. "One that would never act without US assistance."

The attack would also have huge regional consequences, he continued. Most obviously, Iran would use its status as the symbol of resistance against Israel in the Middle East to stoke the high levels of anti-

Americanism that already exist there. Even groups like Al Qaeda, he argued, who are Iran's enemies, would use "inflamed Muslim sentiment to launch attacks at American citizens across the world and on US soldiers on the many American bases in the region."

At the end of our interview, he leaned forward, took my arm and looked me right in the eyes. He recalled the Israeli strikes on an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 and a Syrian reactor in 2007.

"This is the big mistake that people make," he told me. "To think if Israel attacks Iran, like it attacked Iraq and Syria, the Iranians would not retaliate. "The nation is one hundred percent different. The whole region would be engulfed."

David Patrikarakos is the author of Nuclear Iran: the Birth of an Atomic State.

Article 6.

The Washington Post

Following the Stalinist recipe in Russia

[Fred Hiatt](#)

4 Nov 2012 -- As dictatorships collapsed toward the end of the last century and into this one, many people assumed that history moves in only one direction.

The tide of freedom had lifted East Asia and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Indonesia. In an era of global trade and communications, the rest of the world surely would follow. Academics and think tanks studied democratization, often presuming that it could be observed and predicted like any other natural process — that the democratic West didn't have to do much but watch and wait.

Anne Applebaum, a historian and [Post columnist](#), remembered that tides drop as well as rise, and set out in a contrary direction. As Vladimir Putin relentlessly tightens the noose on Russia, her definitive study of how

totalitarianism can be imposed or reimposed looks sadly, usefully, prescient.

[Applebaum's new book](#) is not at all about Putin and only indirectly about Russia. "[Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1945-56](#)" focuses on Poland, Hungary and East Germany. It details the Soviet recipe used to stifle three wildly unlike countries.

The book is richly human, sometimes funny, often heartbreaking and remarkably suspenseful, given that we know how the story ends. It is dedicated "to those Eastern Europeans who tried, as far as was then possible, to think, see, hear and speak the truth," but it is circumspect in passing judgments. Applebaum respects the impossible moral dilemmas that totalitarianism imposed and the many shapes, short of suicidal rebellion, that resistance could take.

The book lays out in riveting detail how Stalin prepared during World War II to dominate Central Europe, even as he was promising the United States and Britain that the region would be allowed to chart its own course. The Bolshevik subjugation of Russia and the other Soviet republics decades earlier provided a useful template. Applebaum's terse chapter headings point to the essential tools and pressure points: Policemen. Violence. Ethnic Cleansing. Youth. Radio. Internal Enemies.

They also bring into jarring relief how faithfully Putin has followed the Stalinist recipe. Like Putin, Stalin's loyalists tolerated, for as long as necessary, certain trappings of democracy. But they made sure from the start to control the security organs — the KGB, by whatever name it took — and they made sure that the organs ultimately controlled everything else.

Like Putin, they also tolerated, for a while, some relatively free media. But the media that mattered — radio, after World War II; the television networks, for Putin — were quickly brought to heel.

Identically to the martinets of Eastern Europe, Putin is quick to [blame Western provocations](#) when things go awry, to exploit ethnic prejudices and nationalist bigotry to cement his power, to point darkly toward internal enemies. ("They rummaged through their files and identified twenty-five categories of 'enemies,'" Applebaum writes of the Polish secret police. "Eventually, this list grew to forty-three categories.") Even the squashing

of [Pussy Riot is unoriginal](#); the Communists 60 years ago were panicked by oddly dressed jazz musicians they couldn't control.

And as in Putin's Russia, those who resisted might be beaten, imprisoned or murdered. Then as now, it was understood that a few cases of shocking violence could silence a multitude.

"The extraordinary achievement of Soviet communism," Applebaum writes, "was the system's ability to get so many apolitical people in so many countries to play along without much protest... If one person in a group of twenty acquaintances was arrested, that might suffice to keep the other nineteen afraid."

Unlike Stalin, Putin has not tried, so far, to infuse ideology into every aspect of daily life; he demands acquiescence, not fervor. His [bare-chested machismo](#) seems a parody of the personality cult that Stalin enforced with deadly seriousness. He enriches cronies and controls the country's natural resources, but he doesn't ban all private commerce.

And one more difference: Poles had reason to feel abandoned as the Iron Curtain descended, but at least the West — beginning with Winston Churchill — acknowledged what was happening. As Putin snuffed one freedom after another, Bush administration officials kept fatuously pointing out that Russia remained freer than it had been in Soviet days. Obama administration officials just as fecklessly beseech Russia for help in promoting Syrian democracy while trying to block Congress from holding [Putin's henchmen accountable](#) for the deaths and imprisonments of dissenters.

For all its tragedy, "Iron Curtain" is in one sense a happy story: The dictators failed to reshape human nature. Europeans rebelled, first in 1956 and again in 1989. Communism crumbled.

But the ending, or at least its timing, might have been different had the West not unequivocally defended freedom, including with the Marshall Plan, NATO, Radio Free Europe and the National Endowment for Democracy. The same kind of determination has yet to be mustered in response to Stalin's imitators in Belarus and Central Asia, not to mention his star pupil in his old Kremlin stomping grounds.

Why Russia Roots for Obama

[Ariel Cohen](#)

November 5, 2012 -- As election eve in the United States approaches, Moscow is hoping for a return of the incumbent.

During a recent [meeting](#) [3] of the Valdai Discussion Club, a forum for exchanging views on Russia, at least three senior Russian officials announced that the U.S. president's reelection would be good for Russia. This is hardly surprising. Russians respect and get along with power. They know what is good for their country. Some among the elites believe that they can eat America's lunch. Ergo, Obama is good for Russia.

Russians recognize and respect power. President Vladimir Putin developed an excellent relationship with the outgoing Chinese leadership. Until recently he was buddies with the Turkish prime minister Tayyip Erdogan, and is a good friend of the former Italian leader Silvio Berlusconi. Unlike Obama, he gets along with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a former deputy commander of an elite commando unit and by definition a tough guy.

Yet, many times, and in different quarters in Moscow, Russians characterized the current U.S. president as a well-meaning leader who is somewhat weak and naive. While Russians view past Republican presidents as hard-nosed realists, they had their share of troubles with well-meaning Democrats. Kennedy had his Cuban missile crisis; Carter, his Afghanistan invasion; and Obama, his "reset" policy. Every time the Russians perceived a weakness in a Democrat president, they made a move—even though later they may have come to regret it.

The rub is in Russia's view of its own national interest and assessment of a U.S. president's weakness, real or imagined. Under Obama's "reset" policy, Russia got what it wanted: a START ballistic missile reduction agreement that benefited Moscow; U.S. prolonged involvement in Afghanistan, where Americans are killing those who may threaten Russia's allies and its own soft underbelly; the de-facto recognition of Russia's "sphere of exclusive interests" in the former Soviet Union, and a much-coveted membership in the World Trade Organization.

Washington responded meekly to increased domestic crackdown against political opposition and foreign-funded NGOs. As I [wrote](#) [4] recently in The New York Times, Putin is building his “fortress Russia” with barely a squeak of protest from Washington.

Vladimir Putin [minced](#) [5] no words as to why he does not want Republican challenger Mitt Romney to be elected, while opening door for a dialogue with the possible Republican administration:

That Mr. Romney considers us enemy number one and apparently has bad feelings about Russia is a minus, but, considering that he expresses himself bluntly, openly and clearly, means that he is an open and sincere man, which is a plus... We will be oriented toward pluses, not minuses... And I am actually very grateful to him for formulating his position in a straightforward manner... We'll work with whoever gets elected as president by the American people.

Putin [used](#) [6] Romney's tough rhetoric on Russia to justify opposition to American missile defense:

I'm grateful to [Romney] for formulating his stance so clearly, because he has once again proven the correctness of our approach to missile defense problems... The most important thing for us is that even if he doesn't win now, he or a person with similar views may come to power in four years. We must take that into consideration while dealing with security issues for a long perspective.

Putin's view is [shared](#) [7] by a vast majority of Russians, who in a recent poll by the respected Levada Center said that Barack Obama's re-election would better serve Russia's national interests. On the other hand, Russians believe Romney's election would not be in Russia's interests. The Romney campaign may be grateful that Russians do not vote in U.S. elections.

In a nationwide poll that tracked Russians' political attitudes, 41 percent of respondents said they would like to see President Obama reelected. Just 8 percent expressed a preference for Romney. Interestingly enough, a majority of Russian women support Romney for reasons we can only speculate about.

What do the Russians want? The answer is simple: internationally, to dilute America's global clout, at least to the point where Moscow can exercise a veto power (through the UN Security Council or by other means) on significant foreign policy decisions around the world. Exhibit A: the

Russian veto over Syria. Then there were the regrets over the Libya abstention.

Russia also wants to prevent the United States from building missile defense while enhancing its sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union.

Finally, the Kremlin wants stability at home, preventing the opposition from seriously challenging the current ruling elite's grip on power and maintaining the tremendous wealth of the largest country on the planet. These are all significant Russian national interests—as defined by top Russian decisionmakers. They came to the conclusion that a second Obama term would serve them well. This is why—in contrast with the past, when Republicans were the favorites—the Kremlin wants four more years.

Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., is Senior Research Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies and International Energy Policy at [The Heritage Foundation](http://www.heritage.org) [8]. He has attended Valdai Club meetings since 2004.

Links:

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