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Article 1.

NYT

U.S. Suspects Iran Was Behind a Wave of Cyberattacks

[Thom Shanker](#) and [David E. Sanger](#)

October 13, 2012 -- American intelligence officials are increasingly convinced that [Iran](#) was the origin of a serious wave of network attacks that

crippled computers across the Saudi [oil industry](#) and breached financial institutions in the United States, episodes that contributed to a warning last week from Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta that the United States was at risk of a “cyber-Pearl Harbor.”

After Mr. Panetta’s [remarks on Thursday night](#), American officials described an emerging shadow war of attacks and counterattacks already under way between the United States and Iran in cyberspace.

Among American officials, suspicion has focused on the “cybercorps” that Iran’s military created in 2011 — partly in response to American and Israeli cyberattacks on the Iranian nuclear enrichment plant at Natanz — though there is no hard evidence that the attacks were sanctioned by the Iranian government.

The attacks emanating from Iran have inflicted only modest damage.

Iran’s [cyberwarfare](#) capabilities are considerably weaker than those in China and Russia, which intelligence officials believe are the sources of a significant number of probes, thefts of intellectual property and attacks on American companies and government agencies.

The attack under closest scrutiny hit Saudi Aramco, the world’s largest oil company, in August. [Saudi Arabia](#) is Iran’s main rival in the region and is among the Arab states that have argued privately for the toughest actions against Iran. Aramco, the Saudi state oil company, has been bolstering supplies to customers who can no longer obtain oil from Iran because of Western sanctions.

The [virus that hit Aramco](#) is called Shamoon and spread through computers linked over a network to erase files on about 30,000 computers by overwriting them. Mr. Panetta, while not directly attributing the strike to Iran in his speech, called it “probably the most destructive attack that the private sector has seen to date.”

Until the attack on Aramco, most of the cybersabotage coming out of Iran appeared to be what the industry calls “denial of service” attacks, relatively crude efforts to send a nearly endless stream of computer-generated requests aimed at overwhelming networks. But as one consultant to the United States government on the attacks put it several days ago: “What the Iranians want to do now is make it clear they can disrupt our economy, just as we are disrupting theirs. And they are quite serious about it.”

The revelation that Iran may have been the source of the computer attacks was reported earlier by The Washington Post and The Associated Press. The attacks on American financial institutions, which prevented some bank customers from gaining access to their accounts online but did not involve any theft of money, seemed to come from various spots around the world, and so their origins are not certain. There is some question about whether those attacks may have involved outside programming help, perhaps from Russia.

Mr. Panetta spoke only in broad terms, stating that Iran had “undertaken a concerted effort to use cyberspace to its advantage.” Almost immediately, experts in cybersecurity rushed to fill in the blanks.

“His speech laid the dots alongside each other without connecting them,” James A. Lewis, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, [wrote Friday](#) in an essay for [ForeignPolicy.com](#).

“Iran has discovered a new way to harass much sooner than expected, and the United States is ill-prepared to deal with it.”

Iran has a motive, to retaliate for both the American-led financial sanctions that have cut its oil exports nearly in half, and for the cybercampaign by the United States and Israel against Iran’s nuclear enrichment complex at Natanz.

That campaign started in the Bush administration, when the United States and Israel first began experimenting with an entirely new generation of weapon: a cyberworm that could infiltrate another state’s computers and then cause havoc on computer-controlled machinery. In this case, it resulted in the destruction of roughly a fifth of the nuclear centrifuges that Iran uses to enrich uranium, though the centrifuges were eventually replaced, and Iran’s production capability has recovered.

Iran became aware of the attacks in the summer of 2010, when the computer worm escaped from the Natanz plant and was replicated across the globe. The computer industry soon named the escaped weapon [Stuxnet](#). Iran announced last year that it had begun its own military cyberunit, and Brig. Gen. Gholamreza Jalali, the head of Iran’s Passive Defense Organization, said the Iranian military was prepared “to fight our enemies” in “cyberspace and Internet warfare.” Little is known about how that group is organized, or where it has bought or developed its expertise.

The United States has never acknowledged its role in creating the Stuxnet virus, nor has it said anything about the huge covert program that created it, code-named Olympic Games, [which was first revealed earlier this year by The New York Times](#). President Obama drastically expanded the program as a way to buy time for sanctions to affect Iran, and to stave off a military attack on the Iranian facilities by Israel, which he feared could quickly escalate into a broader war.

In advance of Mr. Panetta's speech in New York on Thursday, senior officials debated how much to talk about the United States's offensive capabilities, assessing whether such an acknowledgment could help create a deterrent for countries contemplating attacks on the country. But Mr. Panetta carefully avoided using the words "offense" or "offensive" in the context of American cyberwarfare, instead defining the Pentagon's capabilities as "action to defend the nation."

"We won't succeed in preventing a cyber attack through improved defenses alone," Mr. Panetta said. "If we detect an imminent threat of attack that will cause significant, physical destruction in the United States or kill American citizens, we need to have the option to take action against those who would attack us to defend this nation when directed by the president. For these kinds of scenarios, the department has developed that capability to conduct effective operations to counter threats to our national interests in cyberspace."

The comments indicated that the United States might redefine defense in cyberspace as requiring the capacity to reach forward over computer networks if an attack was detected or anticipated, and take pre-emptive action. These same offensive measures also could be used in a punishing retaliation for a first-strike cyberattack on an American target, senior officials said.

One senior intelligence official described a debate inside the Obama administration over the pros and cons of openly admitting that the United States has deployed a new cyber weapon, and could use it in response to an attack, or pre-emptively.

For now, officials have decided to hold back. "The countries who need to know we have it already know," the senior intelligence official said.

Al-Monitor

Egypt's Morsi Gets Marks for Speed, Not Style in Foreign Policy

Nabil Fahmy

(Translated from: Al-Masry Al-Youm – Egypt)

Oct 13, 2012 -- President Mohammed Morsi did not list Egyptian foreign policy as one of the five issues that would be prioritized during the first 100 days of his presidency. He specified these priorities to be: providing citizens with bread, energy stability, security and cleanliness, as well as solving [the problem of traffic jams](#). These priorities bewildered us, and through them, Morsi hit and missed at the same time.

It confused us, because he included issues that are impossible to solve in 100 days. He put himself into a dilemma, and it was inevitable that the public's assessment concerning his ability to solve these issues would be negative.

The president did well, because it is only natural to give priority to the internal Egyptian situation, led by finalizing new Egyptian state institutions, and on [the basis of a constitution](#) that brings us all together, guarantees us equal rights and provides a civilized foundation for the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, and between citizens in general, to ensure that democracy is achieved and remains.

Morsi also made a mistake, because you cannot separate our foreign relations from our internal affairs or vice versa. Egypt's regional status in Africa and the Arab world is a part of its identity, and Egypt's regional and international weight serves our internal projects.

Furthermore, regional and international parties and events will not wait for Egypt to organize itself internally, and whoever doesn't participate in these events becomes subordinate to them and those driving them.

Then President Morsi surprised us by the fact that his actions during the first 100 days did not correspond to what he had said. On the international front, he set out actively and with force.

Foreign relations enjoyed the largest part of his attention at the expense of other issues, with one exception: He regained his authority as the president of the republic, ending an era of military rule in the country that had lasted

since 1956. He visited approximately 10 foreign countries, which is more than the number of Egyptian governorates he visited in this period. He gave an important speech at the [Non-Aligned Movement \(NAM\) summit](#), and participated in the annual session of the United Nations General Assembly, leaving the prime minister and his cabinet to implement his domestic electoral program.

It is not logical or fair to assess general policies — whether they be domestic or foreign — on such a short period of time. It's too early to assess President Morsi's domestic and foreign policy, it is imperative that we allow for enough time for these policies to be translated into reality. We must allow for these policies to have reverberations among public opinion, even if a candidate was overly excited prior to the [elections](#) and made unrealistic promises for his first 100 days to attract voters, by appealing to their emotions and hopes rather than their minds and realities. Naturally, this applies to Morsi's foreign policy and his first 100 days, especially given that he didn't promise to achieve anything relating to these matters during this period.

But it is our right — rather our duty — to assess the performance of the president up until now when it comes to foreign policy in order to decide whether we support it or not, and in order to maintain Egyptian national interests after the 2011 revolution.

The practice of democracy is an ongoing political process between the ruler and the ruled, and does not end with the election of the president, nor is it merely delayed until the next electoral process. Otherwise, we would just be electing autocratic regimes for given periods of time between one election and the next.

Morsi's performance related to foreign policy has been characterized by rapid movement and activity, and that in itself is a positive development to his credit. This movement in itself reflects the availability of energy and enthusiasm to enable the state — if all the necessary elements exist — to be effective or influential regionally or internationally.

Moreover, President Morsi's movement was characterized by diversity — he visited countries in Asia, the Arab world, Africa and Europe, in addition to the United Nations — which is also a good thing.

If he seriously uses this to his advantage, this can open the door to diversification and plurality in the options available to Egypt at the

international level. This would remove us from being aligned with the East or the West, at a time when we boast about the fact that we make decisions for ourselves and are a non-aligned state.

The Egyptian president took a strong stance when he participated in the Non-Aligned Movement summit despite all of the pressure, as well as when he announced his strong position in Tehran, saying that he was an opponent of the Syrian regime and stood firmly with the Syrian people. These are positions that I fully support.

The president's performance at the foreign level was characterized by movement and had positive aspects, however there were also quite a few negative points and errors made.

The first error was that he rushed to take action without giving himself the opportunity to prepare a general assessment of the international situation, or to envision the configuration of the international community and Egypt's neighboring region in the Arab world and Africa over the next five or 10 years. This would have allowed him to specify goals and priorities, and to determine opportunities and challenges ahead of us in the near future, in order to develop the necessary plans and foreign policies to achieve specific goals and preserve our interests.

How can we implement a policy without having a basic vision for the political arena or the circumstances that we are operating in? Foreign policy always faces the challenge of reconciling between our interests and priorities on the one hand, and the visions of other countries on the other. This policy requires serious consideration, proper planning and deliberate action — things which we have yet to see.

The second error relating to President Morsi's performance at the international level is that he acted without explaining his philosophy or goals, not even to the Egyptian people who participated in the 2011 revolution.

If he aspires to participate in the present administration of the country and to help plan for its future, the Egyptian president must explain his philosophy relating to foreign policy to both the Egyptian and foreign public before continuing forward with his actions. This will ensure that he involves the people and gains their support.

I think that he will find the required support — regarding Arab and African relations — very quickly. An explanation of this philosophy is also

required so that the people can warn him of any unexpected inclinations that the people may not agree with, as we saw recently regarding the idea of [sending Egyptian forces to Syria](#).

Moreover, this is necessary so that every foreign move we make is not explained as being based on already existing Egyptian relations. This is a claim that was repeated in the US, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates at the announcement of presidential visits to China and Iran. The third mistake relating to the president's performance is that he still looks at the world from the perspective of a representative of the Egyptian Islamic movement, not from the perspective of Egypt's president and a representative of all Egyptians.

His foreign policy speeches always begin with religious approaches at the beginning. His reference to the companions of the Prophet Muhammad at the onset of his speech in front of the NAM summit is an example of this. Furthermore, Morsi's comments during his recent visit to New York were largely defensive, focused on reassuring the audience of the moderateness of the political approaches of the Egyptian Islamic movement. He also gave a traditional speech in front of the UN General Assembly, the largest of the world's political theaters.

In this address he reiterated traditional positions expressed by former Egyptian presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, rather than adding any new notions regarding perspectives of "revolutionary Egypt," "future Egypt" or "democratic Egypt."

Another indicator that political Islamic perspectives would continue to dominate was the fact that the Egyptian president canceled his visits to Brazil and to attend the Arab-South American Summit in Peru in order to attend the Turkish [Justice and Development Party's annual conference](#).

This is despite the fact that in the near future — before the end of this year — Egypt and Turkey will exchange presidential visits once again.

My fourth objection relates to a lack of transparency. Reasons for foreign action are not explained before action is taken. Moreover, no one gives an explanation for the cancelation of planned visits — such as the visit to Brazil — and no official statements are released following interviews with the president regarding the content of these meetings.

This places the presidency in a constant state of self defense, denying or correcting what is published in papers and attributing it to a foreign

element.

There are many examples of this, such as the when the Egyptian president exchanged messages of congratulations and thanks with Israeli president Shimon Peres, or regarding the content of the president's meetings and phone calls with Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

There was an announcement that President Obama had invited President Morsi to attend the UN General Assembly meeting, which was later corrected. It was also announced that the British prime minister had promised to return all of the Egyptian money smuggled into Britain, when in fact all that he promised was to provide technical expertise that would enable Egypt to meet the requirements that will allow proper progress related to the return of smuggle funds.

In addition to all of this we have repeated the practices of the past, relating to exaggeration and inaccuracy in statements regarding the president's international contacts.

This is particularly true regarding talks involving foreign aid to Egypt — whether they be in China, the European Union, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey or the US. This aid is frequently characterized by loans, short-term deposits or memorandums of understanding, rather than grants or foreign investment in Egypt. Furthermore, there is uncertainty regarding our negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, something we support at times and oppose at other times.

Concerning foreign policy, Morsi's performance has somewhat succeeded in attracting the attention of the Egyptian public, as he is looking to restore Egypt's role regionally and internationally. He also succeeded in announcing Egypt's desire and willingness to take action on the international front, because this action has thus far not benefited from the momentum of the Egyptian revolution.

This is because we have yet to announce new titles for our foreign policy programs, and haven't even proven that Egypt is capable of regaining its full role. We are still [strongly dependent on foreign states](#) both financially, militarily and politically, and there are many sensitive and complex issues we have yet to deal with.

One of these issues is our relationship with other Middle Eastern states. The president [hasn't mentioned the word "Israel"](#) in any of his speeches,

yet official contacts with Israel — regarding both military and security issues — have continued and intensified since his election.

Where are we in all of this? It is imperative that Morsi harmonize relations between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, and work to reignite Egypt's relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

It is notable that officials from these countries have not visited Egypt — even after the elections — despite the fact that Morsi visited Saudi Arabia multiple times, and was invited to visit the Emirates. Furthermore, the president did not visit Sudan, despite the importance of this relationship to Egypt historically, as well as in the present and future.

No progress has been made on issues relating to the Nile River Basin, despite resounding statements regarding the opening of a new page in these relations.

How can Egypt preserve its political independence at a time when it needs to borrow furiously from abroad, and will soon need to import power, as it is already doing for food?

This has made us consider resorting to Iran, despite what that would involve in terms of violating the sanctions that have been imposed on it. The president must reconcile between Egypt's desire to restore its role and its independent position, with the continuation of our important relationship with the US, despite the sensitivity of issues relating to the Middle East, and we must continue to cooperate with them in matters relating to terrorism, as well as on other issues.

All of this is possible if Egypt continues with its active movement, and this is done in the framework of an integrated plan and transparent study to maintain Egypt's national interests.

Nabil Fahmy is the dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the American University in Cairo. He served as Egypt's ambassador to the United States from 1999 to 2008, and as envoy to Japan between 1997 and 1999.

Article 3.

Asharq Alawsat

American election: It is not the economy, stupid!

Amir Taheri

12 October 2012 -- Seduced by catchy formulae, American punditry is often a prisoner of clichés. One such is: “It’s the economy, stupid!”, initially circulated by Bill Clinton’s first presidential campaign. For decades the meaningless phrase has cast a shadow on American politics. Uttering it clinches an argument, presenting the utterer as a man of wisdom.

Thus, the current presidential election is presented as a clash of rival economic programs.

A closer look reveals a more complex picture.

More than ever, this presidential race might be about rival visions of America.

Until Barack Obama appeared on the scene, all those who aspired after the presidency agreed on a number of beliefs, or foundation myths if you prefer, regarding the United States.

Obama has questioned those beliefs with a mixture of annoyance and humor.

The first belief is that of American special-ness. From George Washington to George W Bush all US presidents were convinced, or pretended to be, that the United States is a special nation, an unprecedented and so far unique phenomenon in history.

Obama has tried to de-bunk that by suggesting that other nations, for example the Greeks, could also claim “special-ness”. If “special-ness” is a sentiment all nations share, claiming it for the US is meaningless. If everybody is somebody, then nobody is anybody.

The second belief questioned by Obama is that the United States’ manifest destiny is to provide leadership. By its very creation the US led humanity away from arbitrary rule. The War of Independence, dubbed “the Revolution” by Americans, inspired the French Revolution and, thence, the revolutionary experiences of all other nations. US leadership in two world wars and the Cold War saved humanity from domination by totalitarian powers.

Obama has challenged that belief with his “leading from behind” strategy. He has apologized for America’s “past behavior” and indicated that the US does not even aspire to be *primus inter pares*. All US presidents since

James Monroe developed a “doctrine” to define American leadership. Obama has not done so.

The third belief challenged by Obama is that of American individualism based on the myths of pioneers, frontiersmen and, yes, the Lone Ranger. According to that belief it is the individual that makes scientific and technological discoveries, creates art and culture, and produces wealth. American states are full of commemorative icons celebrating individuals of exceptional achievement in all walks of life.

Obama has questioned that belief by asserting that without social support, including the government, individuals could achieve very little. For example, Michael Phelps who won six gold and silver medals in the London Olympics would have achieved nothing without the help of coaches and sponsors. Beyond the role of parents, one needs “a whole village to raise a child”.

In this regard, Obama’s views are close to those of Western European Social Democrats who claim that without state support, guidance and regulation the individual would not only achieve less than he could but might even harm himself and society. Obama’s healthcare initiative is the most dramatic example of the belief that individuals need state chaperonage even to cater for their health needs.

The fourth belief challenged by Obama is that of the necessity of a “big stick” to ensure American security. With the exception of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 the US had never experienced an invasion since 1812. Yet, fear of foreign aggression and a quest for military supremacy have been major themes of American politics. The American collective mental landscape is filled with images of conflict, from the War of Independence to Civil War, Indian wars, wars with Mexico and Spain, two world wars, and the wars in the Korean Peninsula and Indochina, not to mention more recent campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Obama has tried to shift the emphasis to “soft power”, including his own powers of persuasion, to ensure American security. He has presided over massive cuts in the defense budget with promises of more to come, if re-elected. Obama hopes that, under his leadership, America would be loved rather than feared. After all he attracted 200,000 people in Berlin before becoming president and won the Nobel Peace Prize even before he had done anything.

Perhaps without knowing it, Obama subscribes to Wittgenstein's dictum: "The possibility of a thought ensure its truth!"

Obama is also uneasy with a fifth traditional American belief, that of the primacy of English language and literature as vehicles for national self-expression. Along with European post-modernists, Obama believes in the equal value of all languages and literatures as expressions of cultural diversity. Also like European post-modernists he rejects any hierachization of cultures in the name of respect even when the object of respect is not respectable.

There is a sixth belief that Obama implicitly rejects, that of a national history seamlessly traced back to the Founding Fathers. For him, the United States is a constantly changing reality, or, in Hegelian jargon, a "becoming" not a "being". The original WASP founders have been in constant retreat since the massive arrival of black slaves from Africa. In the 19th century the US absorbed millions of immigrants from Europe, and since the 1970s it has been the destination of some three million immigrants each year, not to mention wetbacks. In the past three decades, the overwhelming majority of new immigrants have come from "developing nations" in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. In the three most populous states of California, New York and Texas WASPs are either already in a minority or will be within a decade. The "melting pot" has evolved into a "salad bar" of parallel communities with individuals claiming double-barrel identities. By underlining his African, as opposed to African-American, identity mixed with his Islamic background and Asian childhood experience, and a possible conversion to Christianity, Obama casts himself as the new homo Americanus.

Not surprisingly, strongest support for Obama comes from minorities notably African-Americans, Latinos, Jews, Arabs, Muslims, and native Americans along with social minorities such as gays and lesbians and feminists.

Aristotle taught that, in a democracy, leaders should resemble the people they represent. Thus the real question in this American election is whether Barack Obama or Mitt Romney, not physically but culturally and philosophically, more resembles a majority of the new America that has emerged in recent decades.

The question is what America believes itself to be and what it hopes to become. It is not the economy, stupid!

Amir Taheri was born in Ahvaz, southwest Iran, and educated in Tehran, London and Paris. Taheri has published 11 books, some of which have been translated into 20 languages. Taheri's latest book "The Persian Night" is published by Encounter Books in London and New York.

Article 4.

The Daily Star

New hope, and fears, in the Arab world

Rami G. Khouri

October 13, 2012 -- It has been almost 22 months now since the Arab uprisings erupted in rural Tunisia, triggering dramatic events and structural changes across much of the Arab world, though the outcomes of the historic transformations under way remain largely unclear. Some of the pressing issues still to be decided include the outcome of the struggle for Syria, whether North African countries creating new governments can establish credible and stable political systems, and whether most Arab countries can create enough new jobs to stave off new uprisings.

A common question around the region and the world is whether the Islamist groups that are doing well in most new elections will consolidate their democratic legitimacy, or in some cases use their power to force an Islamization of society.

The widespread realization has set in that we may not have definitive answers to these and other key questions for some years. It is useful nevertheless to step back a bit from day-to-day events, or even short-term trends, and try to identify some of the changes that are apparent in both political realities and the mindsets of ordinary people. The latter issue – how ordinary Arab men and women feel about themselves, their societies and their future prospects – now matters more than it did during recent decades, because we have seen the consequences of mass action by such people.

I learned something about this matter when I had the pleasure this week in Washington, D.C. of being on a panel at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The session discussed a report on Arab youth produced by the institute that I direct at the American University of Beirut – the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs – with the support and cooperation of the Unicef regional office for the Middle East and North Africa. My fellow panelist was Dalia Mogahed, a senior analyst and executive director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, who has tracked and analyzed attitudes of citizens in Muslim majority countries for the past decade. Her observations on some of the changes in the past 22 months are worth noting, because they point to both the positive developments in our region as well as some of the continuing vulnerabilities. Among the points she made were the following:

Broadly speaking, people across the region in countries where democratic transitions have started to occur are more optimistic than before about their country and themselves. They expect that the changes under way will eventually lead to better governance systems and improvements in their own sense of well-being. People also feel more empowered, in the sense that they feel they have the ability to improve conditions when those conditions are unsatisfying to them.

This mood coincides with the general increase in trust in government institutions. People's faith in the honesty of elections has risen from 20 percent to over 90 percent in some countries.

Ironically, this has happened while daily economic conditions have worsened in most countries, and at a time when more citizens feel that security conditions are worse now than they were before the uprisings. Citizens' fear of crime has increased in countries where regimes were overthrown, even though the formal crime rate based on reported attacks or robberies has not changed significantly.

Despite these economic and security problems, Mogahed noted, majorities of citizens in countries in transition (Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya) still feel that conditions and their own well-being will improve in coming years. People's faith in their ability to bring about changes for the better through peaceful means has also increased broadly, which parallels their increased confidence in state institutions such as the judiciary, parliament and constitutional systems.

The danger here, though, she noted, is that the stubborn expectations of better days ahead may not be fulfilled in all cases. And if today's high expectations are dashed, we might face unpredictable responses or even new threats.

One fascinating new trend she pointed out has been the increase in criticisms of American policies in the region. For example, about 60 percent of Egyptians before the uprising felt the United States was not serious about promoting democracy and opposed receiving American aid. Both those figures have risen to 80 percent today.

Looking beyond the transitioning countries, she noted appreciable differences between the views of their publics and the views in countries that have not experienced uprisings and regime changes. Countries that did not experience uprisings mostly looked with anxiety at countries in the midst of often messy transitions, which they saw mainly in terms of difficult economic, political and security challenges, and even chaos. They also tended to see a foreign hand in some of the uprisings, while the citizens in transforming countries saw their changes as a consequence of indigenous action and will.

This divide between these two groups of Arab countries may grow in the future, Mogahed suggested, and this may have unpredictable consequences.

Rami G. Khouri is published twice weekly by THE DAILY STAR.

Article 5.

The Washington Post

A preemptive strike on the foreign policy failures of the next administration

Daniel Byman

Question: Is the following a critique of U.S. foreign policy during [Mitt Romney](#)'s first term or [President Obama](#)'s second term?

October 2016

To say that the administration has dropped the ball on foreign policy would be a gross understatement.

The full list of disasters resulting from neglect and inaction is too long to recount, but we can highlight the most damning: Israel and the Palestinians are further from peace than ever. Egypt's once-promising move toward democracy has stalled as the Muslim Brotherhood government has become more authoritarian. Narcotics continue to flow north into American cities while a drug war bleeds our southern neighbor. And of course, the Europeans still have not gotten their economic house in order.

Yet, the administration's greatest failures came about in those key moments when it lacked decisiveness, ignored complexity and relied on flawed analysis. In Syria, it refused to deploy the U.S. airpower that had been so effective in Libya. Instead, it embraced an effort to arm the self-evidently ineffective and incoherent opposition in its doomed effort to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. The administration said Assad's fall was inevitable but refused to make it so. Thousands died as Washington fiddled; instability and violence spread into Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan; and U.S. weapons leaked into terrorist hands. Now civil war has virtually engulfed the most strategic region in the world, making it a playground for al-Qaeda and Iran's Quds Force.

The administration's effort to get tough on China also backfired. Rather than seek to integrate a power whose unstoppable rise was clear to all who cared to look, the administration built up the U.S. military presence in Asia, criticized China's human rights abuses and increased trade restrictions on Chinese goods. Beijing responded with predictable wrath and flexed its new muscles, slowing its purchases of U.S. Treasury bills and restricting U.S. goods coming into China, which plunged the United States back into recession. China is now doubling its defense budget, demanding that Washington end military assistance to Taiwan and making grandiose claims about extending its territorial waters — leaving us with the miserable choice of abandoning our allies to a bully or risking military conflict.

The chaos in Syria and the setbacks in China, however, are nothing next to the looming war between India and Pakistan, which threatens to be the first war between two nuclear powers. The administration focused on the

problems of the past, wasting its energy on East Asia, Europe and the Middle East, and missed the obvious crisis in South Asia.

Despite repeated acts of terrorism sponsored by Pakistan against India, somehow the administration failed to heed its own intelligence predicting the brutal [Lashkar-i-Taiba](#) attacks on hotels and tourist sites in Mumbai last month — attacks that paralleled strikes in 1993, [2006](#) and [2008](#). (Just see today's Washington Post column by [David Ignatius](#), in which he quotes intelligence warnings about the risk of a terrorist attack emanating from Pakistan and describes the heroic but unsuccessful efforts of senior military and counterterrorism officials to get the administration to listen.) Policy toward the subcontinent before the attacks consisted of drone strikes, troop withdrawals from Afghanistan and neglect — no wonder Pakistan thought it could act with impunity.

This time, however, India is not turning the other cheek. Nationalistic politicians are calling for blood, and India is massing troops along the border. Had the administration not spent the past four years obsessing about [a possible Israeli strike on Iran](#) — a transparent bluff — it might have prevented the escalation toward nuclear war that now confronts us.

Answer: Either one — take your pick.

Will all the failures described here come to pass in the next four years?

Probably not. But international crises occur during virtually every administration, and a Romney presidency or an Obama second term would be no exception. And when crises happen, opponents and experts will decry Washington's responses as failures. These problems were "inevitable" or "obvious" or "preventable," they'll say.

While the criticisms may ring true in hindsight, they'll be unfair. Presidents must act before history is written, often with incomplete information and uncertain odds. (Imagine perceptions of Obama's foreign policy credentials if [the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound](#) had failed, as it easily could have.)

At times we truly face no-win situations. Syria, no matter what the United States does, will have a grim future. Meanwhile, Washington has tried to engage Beijing, but China is still increasingly aggressive in Asia. A tougher U.S. stance might make China throw its weight around even more; then again, a softer American approach might make the Chinese sense

weakness. Which stance is right? Whichever one happens to work out — and it's very hard to know ahead of time which one will.

Even as we criticize policy failures, we often ignore real achievements. Most victories are subtle and apparent only in hindsight. Peace has prevailed among the great powers for decades. We have avoided nuclear conflict. Democracy has spread, albeit fitfully, across the globe. These are huge successes, but we take them for granted, even as we dissect the problem of the day in exhaustive and damning detail. Our perceptions change only slowly, with the benefit of time. George H.W. Bush, for instance, is increasingly considered a skilled foreign policy president, even though he left office with the Balkans descending into the abyss and Saddam Hussein clinging to power — two “failures” that many thought would forever taint his legacy.

With foreign policy problems, the United States is usually choosing between bad and risky options: For example, do you let Iran go nuclear, or do you conduct or support a military strike that could fail and backfire? Timing, implementation and luck all come into play. Indeed, the United States needs to plan for failure as well as success.

Americans like to think that all problems can be solved and that, if they aren't, incompetence or malfeasance is to blame. Often, however, the challenge is overwhelming and U.S. influence is limited. The problem is not that Democrats are wimps, that Republicans are warmongers or that Washington's halls of power are filled with the greedy and the hapless, but rather that few foreign policy problems can truly be solved. Most can at best be managed, and just getting by is often the best we can do.

This should be the standard by which the foreign policy of the next administration is measured. But one of the few sure predictions we can make is that it won't be.

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China's Uncertain Path

[Jonathan Levine](#)

October 12, 2012 -- With the announcement that November 8 will mark the official Chinese leadership transition, the country brings to a close what has at times been a painful process. The decennial communist ritual has been marred this year by a [series of embarrassing scandals](#) [6], including Bo Xilai's fall from grace and the dismissal of a corrupt railways chief. While China's current lame-duck cadres do their best to mop things up before the big day, their woes of the last few months are only dress rehearsals for the far more consequential difficulties that will face the incoming leadership of president-"elect" Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang. Over the next decade, China will have to grapple with a number of structural dilemmas, and the potential solutions go well beyond the current reforms. Whether the new leadership is up to the task remains an open question, but no one can deny that Mr. Xi will enter office next year with a very full plate.

Islands of Instability

In 1831, the underwater volcano Empedocles erupted off the coast of Sicily and resulted in the emergence of new island, Ferdinandea. But before the lava had even cooled, England, France, Spain and the Kingdom of Sicily had laid claim to the simmering rock, stoking waves of popular nationalism in the press. Conflict was only averted when erosion caused the fiery island to sink back into the sea. It is doubtful that China and its Asian neighbors will be so lucky in their island disputes.

As I have [written](#) before, China's international actions over various disputed islands have caused a balancing coalition to form, which seems likely to become a long-term geopolitical headache for leaders in Beijing. But the islands' effect on China's domestic landscape may prove a much more profound predicament.

As popular protests convulsed the capital and major cities last month, the world saw firsthand one of China's great demons: nationalism. The force of popular anger has toppled more than one government in China's past.

Today, rather than being an organic outgrowth, it has been harnessed by the Communist Party as a tool of statecraft, a straw man on an international scale. If the people's rage can be kept simmering at Japan, the United States or Taiwan, it is less likely to be directed at the Communist Party—and its excesses.

However, nationalism is at best a double-edged sword and at worst puts the party in a straightjacket. China-Japan trade is an extensive \$345 billion [enterprise](#) and recently the two nations marked (quietly) the fortieth anniversary of normalized [relations](#). In short, heeding the angry calls of nationalists for economic [boycott](#) [10] and [worse](#) [11] would be catastrophic for China, especially as mounting evidence of economic slowdown has begun to emerge.

By creating nationalism and then ignoring it, leaders in Beijing open themselves up to charges of weakness. Mao and Deng, secure in their own command, could brush it off, but Beijing's new technocrats are far less secure within China's immature civil-military institutions. They are more vulnerable to the anger of the mob if they seek compromise. The end result is a Faustian choice where the only thing worse than ignoring the mob would be obeisance to it. Xi Jinping will have to navigate through this dilemma if he hopes to name his successor in 2022.

The End of the Miracle

Doomsayers have been predicting the end of China almost since the beginning of China as we know it in the late 1970s. They have been wrong for over thirty years, and those still predicting the elusive “hard landing” and subsequent collapse probably are still mistaken. However, that does not mean China's growth will not slow down, perhaps considerably in the coming years. The last thirty years in China have been described as an economic miracle, and anyone on the ground can attest that this is no exaggeration. Yet it is very likely that we are at the end of the miracle, and that future Chinese growth, like that in all developing countries, will slow to lower and more sustainable levels.

The most salient factor in this slowing growth is China's size. Unlike other nations that have experienced breakneck growth and then slowed—like Japan or Germany—China's uniquely large population presents obvious difficulties. Germany's population of around eighty million is roughly equivalent to the population of Sichuan Province, China's fourth largest.

All normal indicators must be adjusted for China's vastness. As a result, even if China's growth slows to 6 percent a year—still an enviable figure in any absolute sense—it would have the effect of creating a functional [recession](#) for a population long engorged on 10 percent growth and a skyrocketing standard of living.

The Chinese challenge is best summed up in a telling anecdote from *Decision Points*, the memoir of President George W. Bush, who recounted asking Chinese president Hu Jintao “what keeps him awake at night.” The Communist Party chairman did not need to think very hard. “Creating 25 million jobs a year,” he replied.

If Chinese economic growth cannot produce those jobs for the next generation, it will undermine the central argument for the Communist Party's continued existence. The shotgun social contract—economic growth in exchange for one-party rule—could become untenable. Slowing global [demand](#), slowing direct [investment](#), a deflating housing [bubble](#), immature financial [instruments](#) and bloated public [spending](#) are only the most apparent drags that the new Chinese leadership will have to ameliorate or accommodate going forward.

The Devil in Demography

U.S. policy makers look to the soon-to-be-retiring baby-boomer generation with nothing short of terror. Now on the cusp of an entitlement windfall, they are well on track to overwhelm the entire federal budget unless those programs are reformed. Yet as bleak as our situation is, the Chinese soon will confront the same problem on a scale of biblical proportions.

China's one-child policy by some [estimates](#) may have prevented up to four hundred million births, but it has also brought the long-term fertility rate to historic lows. Today it is roughly 1.56, well below the rate of replacement of about 2.1, the size required to keep the population relatively constant. This has generated a vicious phenomenon known as 4:2:1—one child, two parents, four grandparents. Even with thirty years of supersonic growth, China is not wealthy enough to offset the effect of the avalanche of pensions and insurance claims that are on the horizon. As *The Economist* succinctly put [it](#), China will become old before it becomes rich. For the youth, who are culturally enjoined to tend to their elders, it will be an enormous and lasting burden.

Much was made recently when China [surpassed](#) [20] Japan to become the world's second-largest economy as measured by overall GDP. Given China's size, this milestone was inevitable, just as it is equally inevitable that China will one day surpass the United States by this metric. Lost in the weeds, however, was the real number that matters, GDP per capita. Here China is losing big. According to the CIA World Factbook, the United States and Japan, both of whom face rapidly aging societies, have GDPs per capita of \$49,000 and \$35,200. China, by contrast, languishes at \$8,500. This translates to an individual living standard comparable to Bosnia or East Timor. In other words, Japan, despite its perennial hangover from the lost decade and its being on track to [become](#) the oldest society the world has ever known, will be more than capable of managing its aged, as will the United States. For China, this is far from certain.

Since Deng Xiaoping's opening up and reform, the Chinese government and people have been consumed with two missions, undoing the damage wrought by Mao Zedong and making money. But as new generations emerge that have no firsthand recollection of Mao's deprivations, this will not be enough. As Abraham Maslow famously posited in his "Hierarchy of Needs," after food, water, shelter and basic physiological necessities are met, humans will demand more. Things such as safety, clean water and property rights begin to come to the fore. On top of mitigating all of the above challenges, Xi Jinping and his cadres will have to raise quality of life for their people as well, and in ways that are increasingly complicated and intangible.

China's Communists face another long march—and this time it may be one they do not finish.

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