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NYT

The Limits of ‘Special K’

[Roger Cohen](#)

April 10, 2014

Poof.

Poof. Poof.

The word Secretary of State John Kerry used before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is a good one. Nine months of Israeli-Palestinian negotiation and, faster than you can say Holy Land, everything goes up in smoke. Or rather, everything descends into a pre-K schoolyard squabble that amounts to proof that neither side is serious today about a two-state peace settlement.

Worse than unedifying, the squabbling, grandstanding and horse-trading of the past couple of weeks has been pathetic. Kerry should leave the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, his Snapchat name and go home. “Hasta la vista, Baby,” might be an appropriate adieu.

This is what transpires when an intense diplomatic effort brings a changed style — Kerry’s energetic shuttling — but no changed ideas. The “Special K” effect is not enough. It falls short when you have a 66-year-old conflict and a 47-year-old Israeli occupation of the West Bank during which the two sides have grown progressively more estranged, and the gap between the maximum potential Israeli offer and minimum Palestinian demand keeps growing.

Time for a “reality check,” Kerry says. In reality, meaningful negotiations stopped some months ago (Senator John McCain is right at least about this). In reality, the recent Israeli decision to move forward with plans to build 700 new settlement units in Jerusalem reflects a widespread view within Netanyahu’s governing coalition (and quite likely in his heart of hearts) that not an inch of land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River should be surrendered.

In reality, Abbas has zero democratic legitimacy; he leads a divided Palestinian national movement whose talk of reconciliation has proved as much hot air as promises of elections. In reality, both Israel and the United States have turned a blind eye to widespread corruption and nepotism within the Abbas-led Palestinian Authority, hoping Abbas will deliver if not peace then at least quiet. In reality this cynical attitude amounts to an investment in the status quo.

In reality, Netanyahu's insistence on up-front Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state (not a demand made of Egypt or Jordan) amounts to so much bloviation designed to undermine any talks by placing at the front of the agenda an issue that can be resolved with minimal drafting skills if the two sides are ever close enough to a deal for it to matter.

In reality, for domestic political reasons, the Obama administration has lacked the courage to state again what the president said almost three years ago — that any territorial settlement should be based on the 1967 lines with agreed land swaps (the only possible foundation for a two-state peace). In reality current attempts to prolong the negotiation amount to attempts to extend a non-negotiation without even an American framework for peace, an idea that has gradually vanished as the gulf between the sides (on everything from Jerusalem to refugees) has grown.

Salam Fayyad, the former Palestinian prime minister, made a speech last month in Britain in which he said: "To us Palestinians, the Israeli occupation has certainly been oppressive enough for us to want to see it end yesterday. But just as the occupation is oppressive to us, it cannot but be corrosive to our Israeli neighbors. Evidently though, it has not been, and still it is not corrosive enough to bring about the transformation needed to bridge the expectations gap. For how else can one explain, inter alia, the insatiable appetite of Israel's settlement enterprise for more and more expropriation of, and building on, the very territory where the Palestinian state is supposed to emerge, and at a time when many, including in Israel itself, clearly see how damaging this is to whatever remains of the viability of the two-state solution concept?"

There is not a more reasonable voice among Palestinians than Fayyad's. If the West Bank has begun to resemble a state, it is thanks to him. He believes, passionately, in two states living side by side in peace, security, freedom and prosperity. But Fayyad sees no chance of that being achieved in negotiations with the current leaders in the current political situations. Kerry should take a break. Prolonging failure only demonstrates weakness. His commitment deserves better than the shallow maneuvers of weasels. The secretary of state does not wield a "twig," as McCain suggested, but American clout can only be demonstrated if there is a limit to the accommodation of unserious people.

Let the impasse fester for a while (it has for decades), focus on securing a lasting nuclear deal with Iran, and demonstrate thereby that the United States is capable of acting in its own interests when necessary, irrespective of the views of even its closest allies.

More than a few people in the Middle East would then sit up, and — poof — drop their posturing and playacting.

[Article 2.](#)

Bloomberg

Can Kerry Get Netanyahu to Go Big?

[Jeffrey Goldberg](#)

Apr 10, 2014 -- John Kerry is waiting for Benjamin Netanyahu to nail himself to a very large cross.

Unfortunately, you're going to have to keep reading to find out what I mean by this.

First, here are four assumptions about the Middle East peace process:

1. It's dead.
2. John Kerry, the U.S. secretary of state, is the Captain Ahab of the two-state solution, a vainglorious and delusional man devoting too much time to a peace plan that won't work.
3. [Mahmoud Abbas](#), the president of the Palestinian Authority, is an old and weak man who will never acknowledge the validity of the Jewish narrative, and therefore never be able to make a historic compromise with the Jewish state.
4. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, is a small and cowardly man who will never accede to the creation of a Palestinian state.

The first assumption, as we're learning today, isn't true.

The death certificate for the process was issued last week, when Israel failed to deliver -- in line with a previously determined schedule -- on a promise to release a fourth set of Palestinian prisoners from its jails. This failure was followed by a Palestinian decision to [seek membership](#) in various international conventions, a move that violated a previously made promise to avoid "internationalizing" the negotiations. Then came the

issuance of an Israeli tender for more housing units in a suburb of Jerusalem that offended the Palestinians.

But the parties are actually working through their differences on the prisoner release issue. There is a decent-to-good chance they will succeed in pushing through the current bottleneck. It wouldn't surprise me if one of the many moving parts in this latest negotiation (to [my chagrin](#)) is Jonathan Pollard; the release of this American spy could be part of a deal to end the current crisis.

Which brings me to John Kerry -- and the second assumption. Kerry is many things, but he is not delusional. He believes that Israel is heading down a dangerous path, and that it will not survive as a Jewish-majority democracy if it continues to occupy and settle the West Bank. Now, I know that every iteration of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process over the past 21 years has been called the last chance for peace. But the cliché feels truer now than it has in the past.

Israel is tipping into broad isolation, and Palestinians -- those who may be predisposed to a two-state solution -- are giving up hope. Kerry, one of the last of a generation of intuitively, emotionally pro-Israel Democratic leaders, is not delusional to think that Israel is in trouble. Nor is he delusional to believe -- as he does -- that the average Palestinian on the West Bank is made miserable by the policies of Israeli occupation authorities. Nor is he delusional to believe that Palestinians already inclined to hopelessness might rise up in the absence of a Palestinian state and begin a third uprising.

Is Kerry spending too much time on this issue? Maybe. Syria is a charnel house. The South China Sea is boiling. Putin is Putin. But it is difficult to argue, especially for supporters of Israel, that the two-state solution isn't worth pursuing.

Assumption three may be true. Kerry appears to believe that Abbas has it in him to reach a historic compromise with his enemy. This compromise not only would mean that he has to make peace with the idea that Zionism is the movement of a people returning to its ancestral homeland, rather than a form of neo-colonialism, but it would also compel him to sell this idea to his people.

Many Israelis have accepted the inevitability of some sort of Palestinian state coming into existence on the West Bank. Many Palestinians have not

yet come to realize that Israel has a right to exist in at least part of Palestine. It will take a bold leader to convince Palestinians of this. Kerry, like U.S. President Barack Obama, believes Abbas is the best leader the Palestinians have, or will have. This may be true, but it doesn't mean that he's strong enough to deliver. Obama and Kerry are experts on the subject of Netanyahu's flaws. They might not have an adequate handle on Abbas's.

The fourth assumption possesses elements of truth. Kerry believes that Netanyahu is the only Israeli leader strong enough to make peace and divide the land. Like Obama, he is unimpressed with Israel's light political bench. He also believes that Netanyahu is applying himself in good faith to the peace process. But he thinks that Netanyahu is torn between two roles - - world-historical peacemaker and mayor of Israel. Kerry's frustration with Netanyahu (a frustration he shares with Obama) is that Kerry believes the prime minister is often more interested in preserving his political coalition, and his hold on power, than in making the bold push for peace. So long as Netanyahu acts as a long-serving mayor, and not as a prime minister, there will be no breakthrough.

Which brings us to the prime minister's cross. U.S. Vice President Joe Biden has often argued to Netanyahu that it would be best for him to nail himself to one large cross, rather than to a thousand small ones. (Only Biden would use crucifixion imagery to describe an Israeli prime minister's dilemma, but there you have it.) Kerry, Obama and their negotiators believe that Netanyahu will, sooner or later, have to stop nailing himself to a series of small crosses (prisoner releases, minor settlement compromises) and move to the big cross: Endangering, and possibly breaking apart, his right-wing coalition in order to advance to final-status negotiations with the Palestinians. In these broad negotiations, Israel would have to dismantle dozens of settlements in the West Bank: This is the biggest cross.

It's an open question whether Netanyahu has this in him. Intellectually, he knows the price Israel must pay for a two-state solution. The question is whether this man of inaction can bring himself to risk his political career for a final deal. Kerry believes that Netanyahu is capable of taking a momentous step. Which is why he is sticking with the peace process,

despite all the criticism. Kerry may be wrong about Netanyahu, and he may be wrong about Abbas. But he is not wrong to keep trying.

Jeffrey Goldberg is a columnist for Bloomberg View writing about the Middle East, U.S. foreign policy and national affairs. He is the author of "Prisoners: A Story of Friendship and Terror" and a winner of the National Magazine Award for reporting.

[Article 3.](#)

The Weekly Standard

The Tinkerbelle Effect

Elliott Abrams

April 21, 2014 -- In his Senate Foreign Relations Committee testimony last week, Secretary of State John Kerry blamed Israel for the breakdown in peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. He argued that an Israeli announcement of 700 new housing units for a neighborhood in Jerusalem were what did in the talks. "Poof, that was sort of the moment," Kerry said. "We find ourselves where we are." This is an amazing claim, especially when the housing units are not in a settlement—but are in Jerusalem, Israel's capital, in a location that every Israeli and every Palestinian knows will be part of Israel in any possible peace agreement. In fact, Kerry's actions during his 15 months as secretary of state are why "we find ourselves where we are." The only surprise here is the total lack of introspection or comprehension he exhibits. Kerry jumped into these negotiations, secure in the belief that he could deliver success—and therefore not even thinking about the damage that could be done if the talks blew up. But why—why was he so confident? What was his analysis of world affairs, of events in the region, or of the politics of the two sides that led him to conclude this was the moment—2013 and 2014—when a deal was at hand?

The answer is found in his speech last December to the Saban Forum, a gathering of Israeli and American officials and former officials at the Brookings Institution in Washington. Here are the key passages:

Late last night I got back from my eighth visit to Israel . . . my eighth visit as secretary of state. Now, I am not a masochist. (Laughter.) I am undertaking this because I believe in the possibilities. And as many of you know, I have spent almost 30 years in the United States Senate, and I am proud of my 100 percent voting record for Israel, but I am proud also that I built up relationships in the Mideast with leaders in Arab countries and elsewhere who learned that they could come to trust me. And I believe that I approach this great challenge with a huge sense of responsibility about building trust and ultimately building a process that will test and provide guarantees to people about this concept called peace. I will tell you point blank, and I've read all of the history of these negotiations and I've lived part of the history of these negotiations. I was on the lawn when the famous handshake took place. And I've had many, many a meeting over the course of time as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and as a senator. But I believe that if you indeed care about Israel, and everybody here does, if you care about its security, if you care about its future, if you care about Palestinians achieving their legitimate aspirations for self-determination, which we do also, we need to believe that peace is possible. And we all need to act on that belief.

This is a combination of faith-based diplomacy and personal vanity. The argument seems to be that peace is possible because Kerry has relationships with leaders, Kerry is trusted, Kerry was in the Senate for 30 years, Kerry chaired the Foreign Relations Committee, and Kerry was on the White House lawn when Rabin shook hands with Arafat. So our job is to have faith in him, and if we believe that peace is possible, it will come. This latter is known as the Tinkerbell Effect, based on the passage in Peter Pan where the fairy Tinkerbell has taken poison but can be revived if people believe in her.

Peter flung out his arms. There were no children there, and it was night time; but he addressed all who might be dreaming of the Neverland. . . . "If you believe," he shouted to them, "clap your hands; don't let Tink die." Apparently it didn't work with the Palestinians, who failed to clap. Kerry's casting of blame at Israel was rebuffed sharply by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: An official in his office told the New York Times, "Secretary Kerry knows that it was the Palestinians who said 'no' to continued direct talks with Israel in November; who said 'no' to his

proposed framework for final status talks; who said ‘no’ to even discussing recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people; who said ‘no’ to a meeting with Kerry himself; and who said ‘no’ to an extension of the talks.” And remember, this comes after various bribes were paid to the Palestinians to get them to come to the negotiating table after four years of refusal—Barack Obama’s entire first term. One of those bribes was the release of 78 murderers from Israeli jails—Palestinian terrorists who were granted a hero’s welcome upon returning home. This is the rebuttal to those who believe Kerry’s 15 months of efforts have produced nothing at all: Seventy-eight killers are free, anyway. It is also the rebuttal to those who think that efforts like Kerry’s may of course fail but come at little cost: Freeing killers is a cost. Failure for the United States is a cost. And now, blaming Israel and thereby damaging U.S.-Israel relations is another cost. Kerry gets an A for effort, to be sure, and was sincere and dogged throughout these 15 months of exertion. He displayed a deep desire to help both sides move forward. But his own vanity got in the way of a sober assessment of the chances for success, and the failure of the effort—even if sooner or later the two sides do sit down together again—diminishes his own prestige and effectiveness as our top diplomat. It’s past time for the administration to keep him home and spend a while rethinking five years of failed Middle East policy. “Clap your hands; don’t let Tink die” doesn’t make the grade.

Elliott Abrams served as an assistant secretary of state in the Reagan administration and deputy national security adviser to President George W. Bush.

[Article 4.](#)

Al Monitor

Islamic Jihad gains support in Gaza as Hamas declines

Rasha Abou Jalal

April 10, 2014 -- Gaza City -- Despite the general harmony between Hamas and Islamic Jihad on political positions involving the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict, a rivalry exists behind the scenes. The two compete to attract Islamist supporters and appear to the public as the group best suited to achieve the aspirations and hopes of the Palestinian people.

These Islamist movements use various methods to garner support, such as mass mobilizations, donating food and money to the poor, proselytizing and insisting on such Palestinian constants as the importance of Jerusalem and the right of return of the refugees. In general, they aim to fulfill the public's wishes.

Although [Hamas](#) is more popular than Islamic Jihad, a recent poll by the Watan Center for Studies and Research in the Gaza Strip suggests [increased support](#) for the Islamic Jihad movement amid reports of [declining popularity for Hamas](#) . Among Gazans, 23.3% expressed support for Hamas, while 13.5% preferred Islamic Jihad. Fatah, however, was more popular than the Islamist movements individually, with the support of 32.9% of Gazans. Backing for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine stood at 4.2% and 1.5% for the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Of all those surveyed, 24.6% had no opinion.

Because Islamic Jihad has not participated in elections, it is difficult to determine its popularity in that respect. This latest poll suggests a rise in the group's popularity compared to the results of previous polls conducted by local research centers in recent years. In a [2010 poll](#) , for example, Islamic Jihad registered only 1% in terms of popularity vis-a-vis other Palestinian factions. The Watan Center survey consisted of interviews with 467 people of both sexes and was conducted throughout the Gaza Strip on Feb. 9-17. The results were picked up by various media outlets at the end of March.

The poll also revealed that the public largely supports armed resistance to obtain Palestinian rights. Of those surveyed, 60.3% believe that armed resistance is the most appropriate way to attain the rights of the Palestinian people if negotiations fail, while 6.5% support continuing negotiations. The burden of governance has cost Hamas popularity on the ground as it struggles to steer Gaza through the hardships associated with the Israeli-Egyptian siege and a series of [economic and political crises](#) . Political analyst Iyad Atallah explained, "Hamas suffers from declining grassroots popularity due to growing discontent caused by the lack of success in

resolving livelihood crises for citizens, such as providing electricity and fuel, and solving the problem of the Rafah crossing.” He also explained to Al-Monitor, “ Hamas came to power in Gaza and started running civil affairs for the citizens. That distracted the movement on many occasions from [confronting Israel militarily](#), thus leaving the pro-armed resistance public to the Islamic Jihad movement, which still conducts organized retaliations against Israeli attacks.”

On March 12, the Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of Islamic Jihad, launched 130 locally made rockets at Israel as part of a military operation dubbed [Breaking the Silence](#). The attack was in response to the killing of [three Islamic Jihad fighters](#). The group threatened that the response “will be of the same size as Zionist violations if they continue.”

Khader Habib, an Islamic Jihad official, told Al-Monitor that the movement has become more popular because it has stuck with armed resistance, has not granted legitimacy to Israel’s existence anywhere on Palestinian soil and has stayed away from governance and participation in the Palestinian Authority, which stems from the 1993 Oslo Accord. “We are a movement that refuses to let Israel go unpunished when it attacks our people, and we believe that becoming part of the ruling authority would be catastrophic. That’s the secret behind why more people are supporting us,” Habib asserted.

The results of the Watan Center poll were in line with those of a survey by Alam wa Sinaa, an Iranian university, involving 1,263 Gazans after March 2012 clashes between Islamic Jihad and Israel. The Iranian poll showed a clear [change in attitudes](#) among Gaza residents in revealing a rise in popularity for Islamic Jihad at the expense of Hamas, because the former adhered to the option of resistance to the occupation.

Islamic Jihad's Habib said his movement was closely following opinion polls about its support among the Palestinian street and asserted that it reinforces its leadership’s conviction that armed struggle is the only way to fully obtain Palestinian rights.

The analyst Atallah explained Hamas' situation, stating, “ Hamas has more elements and more hardware compared to Islamic Jihad, but it doesn’t want continuous conflict with Israel,” he said. “A new military confrontation will cause material losses that would include the homes of citizens and possibly factories and iron workshops, resulting in more unemployed and

people in need of shelter. This would increase the material burden on Hamas.”

Political analyst Hassan Abdo said that Islamic Jihad's decision to stick with armed resistance and immediately respond with attacks against the occupation are the main reasons for its increased support. He contended that immediately responding to the occupation inspires people, earns their admiration and fulfills their desire not to let Israel's actions go unpunished, leading to increased popular support.

Abdo also noted that Islamic Jihad has stuck to its political principles, despite the local and regional changes around it. This is evidenced by the group sticking with its allies in Syria and Iran despite their current crises. Abdo believes this adds to Palestinians' impression that Islamic Jihad is more consistent in its positions as opposed to Hamas.

According to Atallah, Islamic Jihad's continued alliance with Syria and Iran forces the movement to resist being silent in the face of Israeli attacks. “Islamic Jihad sticking to the Syria and Iran axis is a source of strength for it, especially in light of the lack of Arab funding sources for [the movement],” he said. On the other hand, he noted, Hamas' alliance with Qatar has not been warmly received by locals. “[The Qatar-Hamas alliance] is something the Palestinians don't want. ... The Palestinians respect Qatar for its assistance and funds, but they fear a political role by [Qatar] because of its good relations with America and Israel.”

[Rasha Abou Jalal](#) is a writer and freelance journalist from Gaza specializing in political news and humanitarian and social issues linked to current events.

[Article 5.](#)

[The American Interest](#)

Can the Egyptian-American Relationship Be “Reinvented”?

Daniel C. Kurtzer

April 8, 2014 -- For more than thirty years the Egyptian-American relationship has been at the heart of U.S. policies in the Middle East. Because of its depth and breadth, it was able to withstand the normal

differences of opinion and policy that divide global and regional powers. That relationship, based on peace between Egypt and Israel but extending to every one of America's engagements in the region, is broken, and merely tinkering around the edges will not repair it. The decline of understanding between the United States and Egypt has jeopardized our image in Egypt and our ability to influence Egypt's domestic order. Without a strong U.S.-Egyptian relationship, the United States cannot achieve its many objectives in the region.

While both countries can survive the parting of ways that appears increasingly likely, there is no reason to consummate the divorce without one more effort to renew vows according to a revised set of mutual interests and a clearer understanding of where we differ. The American administration and the Egyptian government have an opportunity to reinvent the bilateral relationship to mutual advantage. The tumult since the 2011 ouster of President Hosni Mubarak has obscured the fact that at least three of the four pillars on which the decades-old relationship between the two countries was built still remain in place. Egypt has as great an interest today as it had in 1979 in maintaining the peace treaty with Israel, which is perhaps the primary anchor for the relationship. Insecurity is growing in the Sinai, and Egypt requires the intelligence and security cooperation it enjoys with Israel. Radical Islamists from Gaza now represent as much of a threat to Egypt as they do to Israel, and Egypt has seen fit to aggressively act to shut down tunnels used for smuggling. The preservation of the peace treaty and the strengthening of Egyptian-Israeli ties are still important to the United States as well, especially as the Administration actively pursues a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

No less important is the strategic military and intelligence cooperation Egyptians and Americans have fostered over more than three decades. Egypt faces a number of significant security challenges, all of which are also important to the United States, including the peaceful resolution of disputes over Nile waters, managing the chaos in Libya, and focusing on counterinsurgency so as to push back against the efforts by terrorists to establish a base of operations in Sinai. Egypt needs the tools to fight terrorism, and this is where U.S. and Egyptian interests continue to coincide. Moreover, Egypt's political and security interests extend far

beyond its own borders. Our friends in the Gulf regard Egypt as a key component in their security and judge the quality of the U.S.-Egypt relationship as a part of their security ties to the United States.

A third pillar of the relationship relates to Egypt's economic well-being, a matter of deep concern more than thirty years ago that has returned to the fore since the 2011 revolution. It is in no one's interest for the Egyptian economy to remain reliant on the largesse of the Saudis and other Gulf states. Economic growth rates before the revolution demonstrate that Egypt has the means to advance economically with less foreign assistance.

The fourth pillar of the relationship has created a wide chasm of mistrust and misunderstanding on both sides: the degree to which Egypt remains a military-dominated authoritarian state or begins moving toward a more open, democratic society in which there is respect for diversity, human rights, and basic freedoms. Astonishingly, Egyptians believe the United States is responsible for all the ills that have befallen their country since the revolution. They even believe that the United States installed the Muslim Brotherhood in power in order to dominate Egyptian society. Equally astonishing, some in the United States believe that the only metric by which to measure the value of relations with Egypt is the degree to which Egypt meets their democratization standards.

To be sure, the direction of Egyptian internal politics does not lend itself to optimism or complacency with regard to the prospects for democratization. The brutal crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood and some liberal opponents of the military-backed government have closed off Egypt's political space in ways reminiscent of the worst periods of repression in the past. The prospect that General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi will be the next President is not in itself a danger, but the military's tone-deafness regarding the balance between stability and openness is a bad sign. Al-Sisi's decision to resign as Defense Minister and to declare his candidacy just a day after more than 500 Muslim Brotherhood members were sentenced to death could not have been more ominous or poorly timed.

Egyptian-American relations have always been fractious, even during periods that appeared calm on the surface. The two countries do not share a common political culture or a common view of the region or the world. In the 1950s and 1960s, Egypt guarded its professed neutrality in the Cold War, even as it opened its doors to thousands of Soviet military advisors

and adopted strident anti-American positions in public. For the Eisenhower Administration, which demanded that countries make a choice between the Soviets or the United States, Egypt was considered part of the opposition, notwithstanding Egypt's formal non-aligned status. President Kennedy and to some extent President Johnson tested the waters for improved U.S.-Egyptian ties, but the gaps were too deep and wide. Indeed, it wasn't until Gamal Abdel Nasser passed from the scene in 1970 and was succeeded by Anwar Sadat that a real opportunity presented itself to change the nature of bilateral relations.

Sadat held to a strategic view that the United States was and would remain the dominant power in the Middle East. He was frustrated with the stagnation in the peace process, which he attributed to Israeli obstinacy; upset over the American preference for "standstill diplomacy" and its growing strategic ties with Israel; and angry at the Soviets for withholding arms and support he required to break the diplomatic logjam. His strategy for the 1973 war was designed to deal with all of these frustrations, to change the regional balance of power and alignments. His goals were to build a U.S.-Egyptian partnership that would unlock the stalled peace process and recover Egyptian territory, and to help Egypt escape from its pressing economic crisis.

The forging of the strategic relations between Egypt and the United States during the 1973–79 period resulted from the convergence of three critical factors. First, the interests of the two countries coincided far more than they diverged, including replacing the Egyptian-Soviet alliance with an Egyptian-American relationship; starting (and ultimately concluding) a peace process in which Egypt would recover the Sinai; and building a bilateral military and economic relationship fueled by American assistance. Second, the degree to which these goals were translated into action resulted from the growing trust and mutual admiration between Sadat and senior American officials. Third, the United States was seen, and acted, as the dominant power in the region, acting with diplomatic agility and determination that was backed up by strong presidential leadership. This common strategic vision provided the foundation for the policy goals of the emerging Egyptian-American relationship—namely, peace between Egypt and Israel, supported actively by the United States, as evidenced by the American role in negotiating the treaty and its ongoing role in treaty

compliance; Egyptian-American military partnership which, through 2012, was fueled by \$41.85 billion in U.S. military aid; and the transformation of the Egyptian economy, assisted by \$31.3 billion in U.S. economic assistance.

On the eve of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, therefore, Egypt and the United States could point to a strategic relationship that had accomplished many of its major goals, weathered some significant storms, and appeared resilient and flexible. Indeed, one could not help but recall the story, probably apocryphal, of the Soviet General who was asked to reflect on Sadat's 1972 decision to kick the Soviets out of Egypt. "Yes, we are disappointed," said the General, "but we did get seventeen good years, not bad for a big power-small power relationship." By 2011, the United States could point to more than thirty good years of strategic partnership. No reasonable analyst of the Egyptian-American relationship should overlook the huge contributions Egypt made directly and indirectly during the Gulf War and later in sustaining U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Today, the relationship is hanging by a thread, with accumulating anger in both Cairo and Washington over real and perceived policy differences. The Egyptian military may feel less dependent on the United States for modernization; Washington may place less value on military relations; Egypt's economy is in a free fall from which the United States, with limited resources and even less will, cannot extricate it; and the promising 2011 road to democracy is now strewn with the bodies of Muslim Brothers, Coptic Christians, and some liberals.

Paradoxically, however, the respective interests of Egypt and the United States continue to converge and, in some respects, may call for further cooperation. Strategic, mutual interests are evident in the need to prevent the Sinai Peninsula from becoming a lawless haven for criminal and terrorist activity; in the imperative of resolving Nile water disputes between Ethiopia and Egypt amicably in an increasingly water-challenged region; in the continued instability in South Sudan and the acute possibility that internal differences there will revive cross-border fighting with Sudan; and in the U.S. requirement, at least for several more years, of a stable, secure transportation and logistics route as U.S. forces transition out of Afghanistan.

The divide between these two partners thus comes down almost entirely to the future direction of Egypt's political system. For a majority of the Egyptian population, the military's role in politics promises stability and normalcy missing from Egyptian life since Mubarak's overthrow. The liberal opposition in Egypt, now affected by the military-backed government's crackdown on all forms of opposition, may not sit as still in the future as it did under Mubarak. For the foreseeable future, however, its demands for political inclusiveness and respect for the rule of law will likely not have resonance among the masses. NGOs and outsiders, including the United States, have been relegated to the sidelines; even the threat or reality of aid cutoffs seems to leave little impression on Egypt's rulers. Still, it is unwise to write off Egypt's revolution as a lost cause and to conclude that Egypt has returned permanently to the repression of the past. Egypt is just emerging from a time of crises and chaos. The end of the story has not yet been written. All of Egypt's leaders, military and civilian, agree on one point: They can no longer take the Egyptian public for granted. When aroused, it can destroy any offending political order. This disparity between the two countries' hard interests and the "softer" issues of democracy and respect for human and civil rights is being driven largely by deep debates within both societies. In Egypt, the army and its allies are vying with the Islamists for influence and power, each pretending to speak for the nation while protecting and advancing its own narrow interests. The liberal opposition is a new political force and a potent check on absolute power, but has yet to organize politically or develop a positive agenda for change. Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmy has said that "the outlook for the new Egypt...[is] a country whose future will be driven increasingly by the absolute imperative of sustained economic growth; increased resource and demographic pressures; and all of this against the backdrop of greater pluralism and political openness." Strong and positive words, but they have yet to be backed up by a serious political commitment to an open, pluralist system.

In the United States, liberals have joined forces with neoconservatives to oppose further assistance to Egypt, while some realists and traditional conservatives have argued for the strategic importance of maintaining ties with Egypt. No one argues the case against Egypt's continued importance in strategic terms, but the question is whether American political values

can coexist with an Egypt that is likely to exhibit strong authoritarian tendencies into the future.

Will shared strategic interests—largely unchanged over the past thirty years—be able to withstand the political and emotional roller coaster of Egyptian politics and the vagaries of American policy preferences? Since almost all of the longstanding shared interests remain substantially the same, a new “social contract” between the United States and Egypt will need to be nuanced and textured, encompassing areas where agreement includes joint action, as well as areas where there is no agreement but a willingness to engage in dialogue.

First, Egypt and the United States should recommit not only to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty but also to coordinating policy with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. It is important to reconstitute this dialogue and this arena of cooperation if any progress is to be made in resolving the underlying conflict in Palestine.

Second, Egypt and the United States should reinvigorate the moribund strategic dialogue and invest it with meaning. Senior officials should meet semi-annually to share analysis and try to concert approaches on issues such as Nile waters, Iran, Libya, Syria, Sudan, and the like. This dialogue needs to be institutionalized and invested with meaning.

Third, a high-level dialogue must yield a fundamental reorientation of American military assistance. Egypt needs equipment and training related to Canal transit protective equipment and training and for counter-terrorism, the principal threat Egypt now faces.

Fourth, a high-level dialogue must also yield a fundamental reorientation of American economic assistance. American aid to Egypt has been more successful than most Egyptians are prepared to admit, but it is now accomplishing little, as Egypt’s economy (hopefully) recovers from the downslide of the past three years. One of Egypt’s most pressing problems in the years ahead will be job creation, as the population surpasses 100 million and 750,000 Egyptians enter the workforce annually. The newly established U.S.-Egypt enterprise fund is a creative way for the United States to use assistance funds for the purpose of economic growth and employment. The United States can make a special and lasting contribution through support for education, such as assured annual funding for the American University in Cairo (where I serve as a member of the Board),

and substantial funding for scholarships for Egyptian students to study in American universities. This will help prepare Egyptians for the jobs so desperately needed and provide exposure to the American educational system and its values of democracy and freedom.

With these important areas of cooperation and partnership reaffirmed, and with American assistance reconfigured and continued, Egypt must be ready to embark on a path to pluralism and openness. The United States cannot expect to dictate the terms of this transition; the pace and scope of change must be decided in Egypt. But Egypt must be open to American thinking, and must make a convincing case that change is more than cosmetic. An important start and sign will be an end of the brutal repression of the Muslim Brotherhood and the liberal opposition. A second step must be a serious national reconciliation process, to include young and old, Muslim and Copt, military and civilians. After all, national reconciliation is in Egypt's interests, and respect for human rights, freedom of expression, judicial independence, religious tolerance, and the rights of women should be included in Egypt's newly-drafted and approved constitution. Surely these issues can be part of a reasoned, respectful bilateral dialogue. None of these steps, individually or collectively, is assured to rebuild trust. But the failure to take these steps assuredly will allow for the continued erosion of trust. Trust is built on facts, and these will take time to accumulate. It is late, but not too late to recreate the basis for a serious strategic relationship between two longstanding allies.

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[Article 6.](#)

The Wall Street Journal

Here's What I Would Have Said at Brandeis

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

April 10, 2014 -- *On Tuesday, after protests by students, faculty and outside groups, Brandeis University revoked its invitation to Ayaan Hirsi Ali to receive an honorary degree at its commencement ceremonies in May.*

The protesters accused Ms. Hirsi Ali, an advocate for the rights of women and girls, of being "Islamophobic." Here is an abridged version of the remarks she planned to deliver.

One year ago, the city and suburbs of Boston were still in mourning. Families who only weeks earlier had children and siblings to hug were left with only photographs and memories. Still others were hovering over bedsides, watching as young men, women, and children endured painful surgeries and permanent disfiguration. All because two brothers, radicalized by jihadist websites, decided to place homemade bombs in backpacks near the finish line of one of the most prominent events in American sports, the Boston Marathon.

All of you in the Class of 2014 will never forget that day and the days that followed. You will never forget when you heard the news, where you were, or what you were doing. And when you return here, 10, 15 or 25 years from now, you will be reminded of it. The bombs exploded just 10 miles from this campus.

Related Video

Associate books editor Bari Weiss on Brandeis University's decision to withdraw its offer of an honorary degree to women's rights activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Photo credit: Associated Press.

I read an article recently that said many adults don't remember much from before the age of 8. That means some of your earliest childhood memories may well be of that September morning simply known as "9/11."

You deserve better memories than 9/11 and the Boston Marathon bombing. And you are not the only ones. In Syria, at least 120,000 people have been killed, not simply in battle, but in wholesale massacres, in a civil war that is increasingly waged across a sectarian divide. Violence is escalating in Iraq, in Lebanon, in Libya, in Egypt. And far more than was the case when you were born, organized violence in the world today is disproportionately concentrated in the Muslim world.

Another striking feature of the countries I have just named, and of the Middle East generally, is that violence against women is also increasing. In Saudi Arabia, there has been a noticeable rise in the practice of female genital mutilation. In Egypt, 99% of women report being sexually harassed and up to 80 sexual assaults occur in a single day.

Especially troubling is the way the status of women as second-class citizens is being cemented in legislation. In Iraq, a law is being proposed that lowers to 9 the legal age at which a girl can be forced into marriage. That same law would give a husband the right to deny his wife permission to leave the house.

Sadly, the list could go on. I hope I speak for many when I say that this is not the world that my generation meant to bequeath yours. When you were born, the West was jubilant, having defeated Soviet communism. An international coalition had forced Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. The next mission for American armed forces would be famine relief in my homeland of Somalia. There was no Department of Homeland Security, and few Americans talked about terrorism.

Two decades ago, not even the bleakest pessimist would have anticipated all that has gone wrong in the part of world where I grew up. After so many victories for feminism in the West, no one would have predicted that women's basic human rights would actually be reduced in so many countries as the 20th century gave way to the 21st.

Today, however, I am going to predict a better future, because I believe that the pendulum has swung almost as far as it possibly can in the wrong direction.

When I see millions of women in Afghanistan defying threats from the Taliban and lining up to vote; when I see women in Saudi Arabia defying an absurd ban on female driving; and when I see Tunisian women celebrating the conviction of a group of policemen for a heinous gang rape, I feel more optimistic than I did a few years ago. The misnamed Arab Spring has been a revolution full of disappointments. But I believe it has created an opportunity for traditional forms of authority—including patriarchal authority—to be challenged, and even for the religious justifications for the oppression of women to be questioned.

Yet for that opportunity to be fulfilled, we in the West must provide the right kind of encouragement. Just as the city of Boston was once the cradle of a new ideal of liberty, we need to return to our roots by becoming once again a beacon of free thought and civility for the 21st century. When there is injustice, we need to speak out, not simply with condemnation, but with concrete actions.

One of the best places to do that is in our institutions of higher learning. We need to make our universities temples not of dogmatic orthodoxy, but of truly critical thinking, where all ideas are welcome and where civil debate is encouraged. ■ used to being shouted down on campuses, so I am grateful for the opportunity to address you today. I do not expect all of you to agree with me, but I very much appreciate your willingness to listen. I stand before you as someone who is fighting for women's and girls' basic rights globally. And I stand before you as someone who is not afraid to ask difficult questions about the role of religion in that fight.

The connection between violence, particularly violence against women, and Islam is too clear to be ignored. We do no favors to students, faculty, nonbelievers and people of faith when we shut our eyes to this link, when we excuse rather than reflect.

So I ask: Is the concept of holy war compatible with our ideal of religious toleration? Is it blasphemy—punishable by death—to question the applicability of certain seventh-century doctrines to our own era? Both Christianity and Judaism have had their eras of reform. I would argue that the time has come for a Muslim Reformation.

Is such an argument inadmissible? It surely should not be at a university that was founded in the wake of the Holocaust, at a time when many American universities still imposed quotas on Jews.

The motto of Brandeis University is "Truth even unto its innermost parts." That is my motto too. For it is only through truth, unsparing truth, that your generation can hope to do better than mine in the struggle for peace, freedom and equality of the sexes.

Ms. Hirsi Ali is the author of "Nomad: My Journey from Islam to America" (Free Press, 2010). She is a fellow at the Belfer Center of Harvard's Kennedy School and a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

[Article 7](#)

The Washington Post

The tension between global norms and national interests

[Fareed Zakaria](#)

Russia's [aggression in Ukraine](#) has unified Western democracies, at least in their robust condemnation of the action. But farther afield, one sees a variety of responses that foreshadow the great emerging tension in 21st-century international life: between global norms and national interests. Consider the response of India, the world's most populous democracy. New Delhi was mostly silent through the events of February and early March; it refused to support any sanctions against Russia, and its national security adviser declared that Russia had "legitimate" interests in Ukraine — all of which [led Vladimir Putin to place a thank-you phone call to India's prime minister](#).

India's reaction can be explained by its deep ties with Russia. From 2009 to 2013, 38 percent of major weapons exported from Russia went to India, far more than to any other country (and more than triple the next-highest recipient, China, at 12 percent). And 75 percent of the [major weapons imported to India](#) came from Russia (just 7 percent came from the United States). Over the same period, Russia delivered to India an aircraft carrier and a nuclear-powered submarine — the only one in the world exported anywhere in those years.

In addition, [as the United States withdraws troops from Afghanistan](#), India knows that Pakistan will try to fill that vacuum, using as its proxy the Taliban and other such groups that have often engaged in terrorism against Indian citizens. In this great game in northwestern Asia, Russia has historically sided with India, and China (and the United States) with Pakistan. Things are different now. The United States is the sworn enemy of the Taliban and has clashed with Pakistan on terrorism issues repeatedly, but old habits die hard.

More curious has been the reaction of Israel, the most pro-American nation on the planet. Israel, which has tended to support almost all U.S. foreign policy initiatives, has been determined not to do so on this issue. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was uncharacteristically circumspect: "[I hope the Ukrainian thing is resolved, quickly, amiably, but I have enough on my plate, which is quite full.](#)" Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman was more explicit, describing the United States and Russia in equal terms. "[We have good and trusting relations with the Americans and the Russians, and](#)

[our experience has been very positive with both sides. So I don't understand the idea that Israel has to get mired in this,](#)" he said.

Israeli officials say privately that they don't want to alienate Russia because they need Moscow in their efforts to deal with myriad threats — chiefly Iran but also those emanating from the Syrian civil war. Some believe, though, that Israel can forge a special relationship with Moscow, fueled by the connection between the hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews who immigrated to Israel and have been gaining political power there. Lieberman [said this week](#) in Brooklyn that in the near future a prime minister of Israel would be Russian-speaking. (When Lieberman meets with Putin or Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, they speak in Russian, which is Lieberman's first language.)

China, perhaps less surprisingly, was also unwilling to condemn or sanction Russia. But its position has been more nuanced, refusing to endorse Russia's actions in any way and emphasizing its support for the ["independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity"](#) of Ukraine.

One could argue that in all three cases, the countries are misreading what is actually in their national interests. China shares a long border with Russia and should not want to support Moscow in efforts to "adjust" its borders by force. It would be foolish for Israel to compromise its relations with its closest ally for delusions of an alliance with Moscow. The fact that Lieberman speaks Russian has not stopped Moscow from shipping arms to Iran, Syria and Hezbollah (through Syria). India should want to forge a much tighter relationship with Washington as it confronts a rising China in its neighborhood.

But beyond these narrow considerations is a larger one: Do these countries want to live in a world entirely ruled by the interplay of national interests? Since 1945, there have been increasing efforts to put in place broader global norms — for example, against annexations by force. These have not always been honored, but, compared with the past, they have helped shape a more peaceful and prosperous world. Over the next decade or so, depending on how rising new powers behave, these norms will be strengthened or eroded. And that will make the difference between war and peace in the 21st century.

New Statesman

[Why futurologists are always wrong – and why we should be sceptical of techno-utopians](#)

[Bryan Appleyard](#)

10 April, 2014 -- In his book *The Future of the Mind*, the excitable physicist and futurologist Michio Kaku mentions Darpa. This is America's Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency, the body normally credited with creating, among other things, the internet. It gets Kaku in a foam of futurological excitement. "The only justification for its existence is . . ." he says, quoting Darpa's strategic plan, "to 'accelerate the future into being' ". This isn't quite right (and it certainly isn't literate). What Darpa actually says it is doing is accelerating "that future into being", the future in question being the specific requirements of military commanders. This makes more sense but is no more literate than Kaku's version. Never mind; Kaku's is a catchy phrase. It is not strictly meaningful – the future will arrive at its own pace, no matter how hard we press the accelerator – but we know what he is trying to mean. Technological projects from smartphones to missiles can, unlike the future, be accelerated and, in Kaku's imagination, such projects are the future.

Meanwhile, over at the Googleplex, the search engine's headquarters in Silicon Valley, Ray Kurzweil has a new job. He has been hired by Google to "work on new projects involving machine learning and language processing".

For two reasons I found this appointment pretty surprising. First, I had declined to review Kurzweil's recent book *How to Create a Mind* – the basis for Google's decision to hire him – on the grounds that it was plainly silly, an opinion then supported by a sensationally excoriating review by the philosopher Colin McGinn for the *New York Review of Books* which pointed out that Kurzweil knew, to a rough approximation, nothing about the subject. And, second, I am not sure a religious fanatic is quite the right man for the job.

OK, Kurzweil doesn't say he is religious but, in reality, his belief system is structurally identical to that of the Southern hot gospellers who warn of the impending "Rapture", the moment when the blessed will be taken up into

paradise and the rest of us will be left to seek salvation in the turmoil of the Tribulation before Christ returns to announce the end of the world.

Kurzweil's idea of "the singularity" is the Rapture for geeks – in this case the blessed will create an intelligent computer that will give them eternal life either in their present bodies or by uploading them into itself. Like the Rapture, it is thought to be imminent. Kurzweil forecasts its arrival in 2045.

Kaku and Kurzweil are probably the most prominent futurologists in the world today. They are the heirs to a distinct tradition which, in the postwar world, has largely focused on space travel, computers, biology and, latterly, neuroscience.

Futurologists are almost always wrong. Indeed, Clive James invented a word – "Hermie" – to denote an inaccurate prediction by a futurologist. This was an ironic tribute to the cold war strategist and, in later life, pop futurologist Herman Kahn. It was slightly unfair, because Kahn made so many fairly obvious predictions – mobile phones and the like – that it was inevitable quite a few would be right.

Even poppier was Alvin Toffler, with his 1970 book *Future Shock*, which suggested that the pace of technological change would cause psychological breakdown and social paralysis, not an obvious feature of the Facebook generation. Most inaccurate of all was Paul R Ehrlich who, in *The Population Bomb*, predicted that hundreds of millions would die of starvation in the 1970s. Hunger, in fact, has since declined quite rapidly. Perhaps the most significant inaccuracy concerned artificial intelligence (AI). In 1956 the polymath Herbert Simon predicted that "machines will be capable, within 20 years, of doing any work a man can do" and in 1967 the cognitive scientist Marvin Minsky announced that "within a generation . . . the problem of creating 'artificial intelligence' will substantially be solved". Yet, in spite of all the hype and the dizzying increases in the power and speed of computers, we are nowhere near creating a thinking machine.

Such a machine is the basis of Kurzweil's singularity, but futurologists seldom let the facts get in the way of a good prophecy. Or, if they must, they simply move on. The nightmarishly intractable problem of space travel has more or less killed that futurological category and the unexpected complexities of genetics have put that on the back burner for

the moment, leaving neuroscientists to take on the prediction game. But futurology as a whole is in rude health despite all the setbacks.

Why? Because there's money in it; money and faith. I don't just mean the few millions to be made from book sales; nor do I mean the simple geek belief in gadgetry. And I certainly don't mean the pallid, undefined, pop-song promises of politicians trying to turn our eyes from the present – Bill Clinton's "Don't stop thinking about tomorrow" and Tony Blair's "Things can only get better". No, I mean the billions involved in corporate destinies and the yearning for salvation from our human condition. The future has become a land-grab for Wall Street and for the more dubious hot gossellers who have plagued America since its inception and who are now preaching to the world.

Take the curious phenomenon of the Ted talk. Ted – Technology, Entertainment, Design – is a global lecture circuit propagating "ideas worth spreading". It is huge. Half a billion people have watched the 1,600 Ted talks that are now online. Yet the talks are almost parochially American. Some are good but too many are blatant hard sells and quite a few are just daft. All of them lay claim to the future; this is another futurology land-grab, this time globalised and internet-enabled.

Benjamin Bratton, a professor of visual arts at the University of California, San Diego, has an astrophysicist friend who made a pitch to a potential donor of research funds. The pitch was excellent but he failed to get the money because, as the donor put it, "You know what, I'm gonna pass because I just don't feel inspired . . . you should be more like Malcolm Gladwell." Gladwellism – the hard sell of a big theme supported by dubious, incoherent but dramatically presented evidence – is the primary Ted style. Is this, wondered Bratton, the basis on which the future should be planned? To its credit, Ted had the good grace to let him give a virulently anti-Ted talk to make his case. "I submit," he told the assembled geeks, "that astrophysics run on the model of American Idol is a recipe for civilisational disaster."

Bratton is not anti-futurology like me; rather, he is against simple-minded futurology. He thinks the Ted style evades awkward complexities and evokes a future in which, somehow, everything will be changed by technology and yet the same. The geeks will still be living their laid-back California lifestyle because that will not be affected by the radical social

and political implications of the very technology they plan to impose on societies and states. This is a naive, very local vision of heaven in which everybody drinks beer and plays baseball and the sun always shines. The reality, as the revelations of the National Security Agency's near-universal surveillance show, is that technology is just as likely to unleash hell as any other human enterprise. But the primary Ted faith is that the future is good simply because it is the future; not being the present or the past is seen as an intrinsic virtue.

Bratton, when I spoke to him, described some of the futures on offer as "anthrocidal" – indeed, Kurzweil's singularity is often celebrated as the start of a "post-human" future. We are the only species that actively pursues and celebrates the possibility of its own extinction.

Bratton was also very clear about the religiosity that lies behind Tedspeak. "The eschatological theme within all this is deep within the American discourse, a positive and negative eschatology," he said. "There are a lot of right-wing Christians who are obsessed with the Mark of the Beast. It's all about the Antichrist . . . Maybe it's more of a California thing – this messianic articulation of the future is deep within my culture, so maybe it is not so unusual to me."

Bratton also speaks of "a sort of backwash up the channel back into academia". His astrophysicist friend was judged by Ted/Gladwell values and found wanting. This suggests a solution to the futurologists' problem of inaccuracy: they actually enforce rather than merely predict the future by rigging the entire game. It can't work, but it could do severe damage to scientific work before it fails.

Perhaps even more important is the political and social damage that may be done by the future land-grab being pursued by the big internet companies. Google is the leading grabber simply because it needs to keep growing its primary product – online advertising, of which it already possesses a global monopoly. Eric Schmidt, having been displaced as chief executive, is now, as executive chairman, effectively in charge of global PR. His futurological book *The New Digital Age*, co-written with Jared Cohen, came decorated with approving quotes from Richard Branson, Henry Kissinger, Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, indicating that this is the officially approved future of the new elites, who seem, judging by the book's contents, intent on their own destruction – oligocide rather than anthroicide.

For it is clear from *The New Digital Age* that politicians and even supposedly hip leaders in business will have very little say in what happens next. The people, of course, will have none. Basically, most of us will be locked in to necessary digital identities and, if we are not, we will be terrorist suspects. Privacy will become a quaint memory. “If you have something that you don’t want anyone to know,” Schmidt famously said in 2009, “maybe you shouldn’t be doing it [online] in the first place.” So Google elects itself supreme moral arbiter.

Tribalism in the new digital age will increase and “disliked communities” will find themselves marginalised. Nobody seems to have any oversight over anything. It is a hellish vision but the point, I think, is that it is all based on the assumption that companies such as Google will get what they want – absolute and unchallengeable access to information.

As the book came out, Larry Page, the co-founder of Google, unwisely revealed the underlying theme of this thinking in a casual conversation with journalists. “A law can’t be right,” he said, “if it’s 50 years old. Like, it’s before the internet.” He also suggested “we should set aside some small part of the world”, which would be free from regulation so that Googlers could get on with hardcore innovation. Above the law and with their own island state, the technocrats could rule the world with impunity. Peter Thiel, the founder of PayPal, is trying to make exactly that happen with his Seasteading Institute, which aims to build floating cities in international waters. “An open frontier,” he calls it, “for experimenting with new ideas in government.” If you’re an optimist this is just mad stuff; if you’re a pessimist it is downright evil.

One last futurological, land-grabbing fad of the moment remains to be dealt with: neuroscience. It is certainly true that scanners, nanoprobes and supercomputers seem to be offering us a way to invade human consciousness, the final frontier of the scientific enterprise. Unfortunately, those leading us across this frontier are dangerously unclear about the meaning of the word “scientific”.

Neuroscientists now routinely make claims that are far beyond their competence, often prefaced by the words “We have found that . . .” The two most common of these claims are that the conscious self is an illusion and there is no such thing as free will. “As a neuroscientist,” Professor Patrick Haggard of University College London has said, “you’ve got to be

a determinist. There are physical laws, which the electrical and chemical events in the brain obey. Under identical circumstances, you couldn't have done otherwise; there's no 'I' which can say 'I want to do otherwise'." The first of these claims is easily dismissed – if the self is an illusion, who is being deluded? The second has not been established scientifically – all the evidence on which the claim is made is either dubious or misinterpreted – nor could it be established, because none of the scientists seems to be fully aware of the complexities of definition involved. In any case, the self and free will are foundational elements of all our discourse and that includes science. Eliminate them from your life if you like but, by doing so, you place yourself outside human society. You will, if you are serious about this displacement, not be understood. You will, in short, be a zombie. Yet neuroscience – as in Michio Kaku's manic book of predictions – is now one of the dominant forms of futurological chatter. We are, it is said, on the verge of mapping, modelling and even replicating the human brain and, once we have done that, the mechanistic foundations of the mind will be exposed. Then we will be able to enhance, empower or (more likely) control the human world in its entirety. This way, I need hardly point out, madness lies.

The radicalism implied, though not yet imposed, by our current technologies is indeed as alarming to the sensitive and thoughtful as it is exciting to the geeks. Benjamin Bratton is right to describe some of it as anthrocidal; both in the form of "the singularity" and in some of the ideas coming from neuroscience, the death of the idea of the human being is involved. If so, it is hard to see why we should care: the welfare of a computer or the fate of a neuroscientifically specified zombie would not seem to be pressing matters. In any case, judging by past futurologies, none of these things is likely to happen.

What does matter is what our current futurologies say about the present. At one level, they say we are seriously deluded. As Bratton observes, the presentational style of Ted and of Gladwell involves embracing radical technologies while secretly believing that nothing about our own cherished ways of life will change; the geeks will still hang out, crying "Woo-hoo!" and chugging beer when the gadgets are unveiled.

At another level, futurology implies that we are unhappy in the present. Perhaps this is because the constant, enervating downpour of gadgets and

the devices of the marketeers tell us that something better lies just around the next corner and, in our weakness, we believe. Or perhaps it was ever thus. In 1752, Dr Johnson mused that our obsession with the future may be an inevitable adjunct of the human mind. Like our attachment to the past, it is an expression of our inborn inability to live in – and be grateful for – the present.

“It seems,” he wrote, “to be the fate of man to seek all his consolations in futurity. The time present is seldom able to fill desire or imagination with immediate enjoyment, and we are forced to supply its deficiencies by recollection or anticipation.”

Bryan Appleyard is the author of “The Brain Is Wider Than the Sky: Why Simple Solutions Don’t Work in a Complex World” (Phoenix, £9.99)