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The Washington Post

[Barack or Bibi?](#)

David Ignatius

November 17 -- Three decades ago, a congressional test of wills over Middle East policy between an American president and an Israeli prime

minister was dubbed “Reagan or Begin.” This week, the showdown on Iran negotiations might be described as “Barack or Bibi.”

Despite Obama administration opposition, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been lobbying Congress to enact a new round of sanctions to squeeze Iran for additional concessions in the nuclear talks. “Iran is under economic pressure and continuation of this pressure, or increasing it, can lead to a much better result of a diplomatic solution in a peaceful manner,” Netanyahu said Sunday.

President Obama disagrees. He thinks that if Congress imposes additional sanctions now, it could torpedo the negotiations at a crucial stage. Iran’s supreme leader might conclude that hard-liners are seeking Iranian capitulation and regime change; in that case, U.S. officials suspect, the Iranians might decide their best option is to abandon the talks, press ahead with their nuclear program and ride out any Israeli or American attack that follows.

The 1981 “Reagan or Begin” battle involved congressional approval of airborne early warning and control (AWAC) radar-surveillance planes for Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia now is Israel’s de-facto ally against Iran, but back then it was a bitter foe. The Israeli government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin tried to block the sale despite President Reagan’s advocacy. Reagan won the test, and the AWAC sales went forward. The Iran bargaining will resume this week in Geneva, as Iranian negotiators meet again on Wednesday and Thursday with representatives of the P5 + 1 coalition, which is made up of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council — United States, Russia, China, Britain and France — and Germany.

The trickiest issue probably will be Iran’s demand for some recognition of what it claims is its “right” to enrich uranium for civilian purposes, as some other signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty(NPT) have done. The United States insists that there’s no such right under the NPT. But negotiators have explored language that might provide Iran with a face-saving assurance that under a comprehensive deal to halt nuclear-weapons capability, it could have limited domestic enrichment for civilian use.

Diplomats often resolve such delicate issues through ambiguous language that each side can interpret as it chooses. Sometimes, they write side letters to the parties offering the desired assurances outside the formal text of an

agreement. But in this case, U.S. officials appear convinced that language on enrichment must be clear and undiluted, with no winks or nods to convey subtle signals. The wording must be straightforward enough that both sides can go home and sell the agreement to their respective publics. The issue has great symbolic importance to Israel, just as it does to Iran. Netanyahu fundamentally wants Iran to abandon any possibility of developing a nuclear weapon, which means dismantling its enrichment capability rather than codifying a supposed right to it.

U.S. negotiators believe that history shows the capitulation approach doesn't work with Iran. Back in 2003, when President Hassan Rouhani was his country's nuclear negotiator, Iran offered concessions to the West to limit its program. At that time, Iran had about 164 centrifuges. The United States and Israel refused that deal and decided to squeeze harder. Today, Iran has 19,000 centrifuges.

Now, U.S. officials fear a similar process will repeat itself, as Netanyahu's push for the best possible deal sabotages the good deal that could freeze the Iranian program.

One interesting footnote is that a key player in the 1981 AWACs fight (and, indeed, the man who popularized the "Reagan or Begin" phrase) was Saudi Arabia's Prince Bandar bin Sultan, then a diplomat in Washington and now Saudi intelligence chief.

Bandar's erratic behavior in recent months has infuriated U.S. officials — and this anger is leading to some important new moves to consolidate U.S. policy with Gulf countries on Egypt and Syria (and in the process frustrate Bandar's machinations).

On Egypt, the State Department is sending a team soon to the Gulf to work with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on financial and political assistance to help Egypt's transition to civilian democracy. On Syria, the United States is beginning to explore the possibility of creating a protected "safe zone" inside the country to aid humanitarian relief. That would be an important boost for the Syrian opposition and a check on the suffering of Syrian civilians during what could be a brutal winter.

[Article 2.](#)

Bloomberg

Kennedy Showed How to Contain Iran

Kenneth M. Pollack

Nov 17, 2013 -- It may seem like a stretch, but the Cold War crises that President [John F. Kennedy](#) faced hold important lessons for the nuclear impasse with [Iran](#). Newly released historical files on the confrontations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the early 1960s can help us better understand what to expect if the current negotiations with Tehran fail and we are soon confronted with a nuclear-armed Iran.

Kennedy faced an unpredictable, risk-taking and at times aggressive opponent in Soviet leader [Nikita Khrushchev](#). Yet he frustrated Khrushchev's ambitions and helped the U.S. avoid war through a combination of American nuclear superiority, firmness in defending national interests and a willingness to resist alarmist thinking.

The first observation from Kennedy's Cold War experience is that if you assume the worst, you may get the worst. If any one lesson emerges from the documents, memoirs and [research](#) published in recent years, it is that the U.S. and the [Soviet Union](#) wasted billions of dollars and rubles guarding against a surprise nuclear attack that neither country ever seriously contemplated launching. The obsession with this worst-case scenario made many crises far more dangerous than they needed to be -- and even caused some of them.

During both the Berlin crisis and the Cuban missile crisis, however, Kennedy [chose](#) not to assume the worst regarding Soviet motives and likely behavior. Instead, he saw the Russian leadership as driven by a range of different goals and emotions, including fear and uncertainty.

Nuanced Strategy

Kennedy rejected the prevailing assumption that the Soviets were only interested in amassing power and only understood the language of force. A more [nuanced approach](#) led him to opt for a blockade of Cuba rather than the airstrikes and invasion recommended by virtually all of his advisers. His strategy gave the Soviets the chance to realize they had made a mistake and back down without causing a war.

This precedent doesn't mean we should think that Iran's leaders are benign or well-intentioned toward us. But it would be a bigger mistake to assume

that they are hellbent on destroying us, the Israelis or other U.S. allies in the region, and that they are willing to invite their own obliteration to do so.

Although Iran is often caricatured as a nation of irrational, would-be martyrs, its behavior has been ruthlessly rational for the most part. Even [Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini](#) -- a far more committed ideologue than his successor, [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei](#) -- agreed to end the Iran-Iraq War in 1988 when his subordinates told him that continuing the conflict would only result in further Iraqi victories and could threaten the Islamic regime itself. With Iran, as with the Soviet Union, succumbing to our worst fears would likely produce a wildly inflated estimate of the real threat and lead to needlessly dangerous (and ruinously costly) gambits in response.

Another lesson of the Cold War is that military superiority, particularly nuclear superiority, matters. During the Kennedy and Dwight Eisenhower administrations, the Kremlin's thinking was dominated by the knowledge that the U.S.'s arsenal could obliterate the Soviet Union. In those days, the U.S. could launch hundreds of bombers and dozens -- soon hundreds -- of intercontinental ballistic missiles against Russia, while the Soviets had fewer than a half-dozen unreliable missiles that might theoretically hit the U.S.

At most, the Russians could have done horrific damage to a few American cities. That was more than enough to deter U.S. leaders from a first strike, but the Soviet leadership thought that the U.S. would be willing to accept such a disproportionate exchange and so would be willing to go to war with the USSR.

Nuclear Edge

As a result, when the Soviets overstepped themselves and provoked crises over Berlin and then Cuba, they panicked when the Kennedy administration showed a willingness to go to war rather than give in to their demands. In both cases, Moscow quickly sought to defuse the [situation](#) as fast as possible, even accepting humiliating conditions to avert a war they knew they would lose.

Like the Soviet Union early on in the [Cold War](#), even a nuclear-armed Iran would be vastly outmatched by the U.S. strategic arsenal. Unlike the Soviets, the Iranians can't ever hope to match the U.S. Thus, in any crisis, American negotiators will have the upper hand and should be able to

compel the Iranians to back down quickly, even accepting significant reversals to avoid a war.

On past occasions when Iran crossed an American red line and was at risk of a U.S. military response -- during the Tanker War in 1988, after the Khobar Towers [attack](#) in [Saudi Arabia](#) in 1996 and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 -- the Iranians have backed down quickly and even made humiliating concessions of their own (such as ending the [Iran-Iraq War](#) and agreeing to suspend [uranium enrichment](#)) to avert an American attack.

A third observation from the Kennedy era is that communication is critical. Misperceptions are inevitable in international relations, and the [fear](#) conjured by nuclear weapons only adds to that risk. Kennedy resisted demonizing Khrushchev, seeing him instead as a mercurial leader prone to taking big gambles to try to address the challenges he faced. Although Kennedy's sense of Khrushchev was broadly correct, he and the U.S. government in general still tended to misunderstand the Soviet leader's goals and thinking.

Khrushchev was no better at understanding Kennedy's motives or political circumstances, even though he too resisted malevolent caricatures of his rival. His belief that Kennedy was a pawn controlled by hard-liners and the U.S. military fed into the various crises of the early 1960s. Yet the wider understanding of the complexities faced by the other helped both leaders avoid disaster.

Acute Differences

Kennedy helped institutionalize direct, reliable U.S.- Soviet communications, [famously](#) handled at tense moments during the Cuban missile crisis by John Scali of ABC News and Aleksandr Feklisov of the KGB. The growing realization of the importance of this channel led to the "hotline" between the White House and the Kremlin.

The U.S. and Iran have a distressing habit of misunderstanding the other, and in far more fundamental ways than the Americans and Russians did, because the differences in culture are much more acute.

No hotline or other such communications links exist between the U.S. and Iran. If the Iranians ever cross the nuclear threshold, we and they would do well to learn from all of JFK's [experiences](#) in nuclear crises -- especially his efforts to keep the lines open.

Kenneth M. Pollack is a senior fellow of the [Brookings Institution](#) and the author, most recently, of "Unthinkable: Iran, the Bomb and American Strategy.")

[Article 3.](#)

Politico

Obama's Fight with Israel: This Time It's Serious

Robert Satloff

November 17, 2013 -- America and Israel are in uncharted waters. Just eight months since President Barack Obama visited Israel on the first foreign trip of his second term in an attempt to patch things up with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the two close allies are at odds once again -- this time over a proposed "first step" nuclear agreement with Iran.

Washington and Jerusalem eventually will find a way to move beyond this titanic clash, but no kiss-and-make-up effort can erase the scars that will be left behind.

The current crisis is already one of the biggest U.S.-Israel blowups, ever -- and it could get worse before it gets better.

Not since Menachem Begin trashed Ronald Reagan's 1982 peace plan has Israel so publicly criticized a major U.S. diplomatic initiative. In a rousing speech in Jerusalem on Nov. 10, Netanyahu even called on leaders of American Jewry to use their influence to stop what he called a "bad" Iran deal.

Never has a U.S. secretary of state taken to a podium in an Arab capital, proclaimed his pro-Israel bona fides and then specifically cautioned the prime minister of Israel to butt out of ongoing U.S. diplomatic efforts and save his critique for after a deal is inked. That is what John Kerry did in a remarkable Nov. 11 news conference in Abu Dhabi, standing next to the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates.

And not in recent memory has the spokesperson for the president of the United States, knowing that Israel and many of its American friends have criticized the administration's Iran policy, accused detractors of leading a "march to war," thereby opening a Pandora's box of hateful recrimination

that will be difficult to close.

Israel's critique of U.S. Iran policy has three key aspects.

First, in terms of strategy, Israel worries that the administration quietly dropped its longtime insistence that Iran fulfill its U.N. Security Council obligation to suspend all enrichment activities, and that an end to enrichment is no longer even a goal of these negotiations.

Second, in terms of tactics, Israel cheers the administration's imposition of devastating sanctions on Iran but fears that the near-agreement in Geneva would have wasted the enormous leverage that sanctions have created in exchange for a deal that, at most, would cap Iran's progress without any rollback of Iran's uranium enrichment capabilities and no commitment to mothball the worrisome Arak plant, which could provide an alternative plutonium-based path to a nuclear weapon.

And third, operationally, Israel has complained that it was kept in the dark on details of the proposed Geneva deal -- what was being offered to Tehran and what was being demanded of it -- despite commitments from Washington to keep Jerusalem fully apprised.

These are weighty concerns and serious accusations. They deserve a full accounting. It is shameful to suggest that anyone who raises these questions prefers war to diplomacy. That is especially because each of these charges appears to have merit.

One would be hard-pressed, for example, to find a senior administration official saying that securing Iran's full implementation of U.N. Security Council resolutions remains the goal of these negotiations, let alone an American "red line." Instead, officials have termed the pursuit of suspension a "maximalist" position and prefer to cite the president's commitment to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, a far looser formulation that could allow Iran a breakout capacity. Rejecting the Iranians' claim to a "right to enrich," as the administration apparently did in Geneva, is important, but it is not the same as demanding that they suspend enrichment.

In terms of the details of the "first step" agreement, administration officials argue that early sanctions relief for Iran will be marginal and limited, and that the core oil and banking sanctions will remain in place until a comprehensive accord is reached. This, however, is a promise that no administration can guarantee since sanctions are only as strong as their

weakest link. No one can predict how other countries, some greedy for trade with Iran, will react to the imagery of a "first step" deal, but it is not fanciful to suggest that the sanctions regime may begin to erode once the interim agreement is reached. That underscores the wisdom of demanding the maximum possible concessions in the "first step" -- i.e., a stoppage at Arak -- and of countering the image of fraying sanctions by giving Iran tangible evidence that they will become tighter and more painful.

As for whether Israel was kept in the dark about Geneva, an inconsistency in Kerry's comments suggests there is something to it. After all, he and other officials have said that Israeli leaders have been continually and fully briefed and that Israel's critiques were unwarranted, since the Israelis didn't know the details of what actually was on the table in the talks. Both statements cannot be true. Moreover, it is patently disingenuous to ask Israel or domestic detractors of a "first step" deal to withhold their criticism until after the agreement is signed, which is the administration's position, since there would then be zero chance to affect an outcome already reached.

It didn't help matters that Washington and Jerusalem had a parallel crisis of confidence on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process amid the Iran imbroglio. Kerry -- who has justly earned praise for his persistence and creativity in pursuing this Sisyphean diplomacy -- inexplicably lost his cool when Israel announced construction approval for 1,900 new apartments in disputed territory, itself a political response to Palestinian jubilation at Israel's release from prison of 26 hardened terrorists. One doesn't have to support Israeli settlement policy to note that 90 percent of those apartments are to be built either in existing Jewish neighborhoods within Israel's capital, or on land on the "Israeli side" of the West Bank security barrier that is likely to end up in Israel's control in any agreement. Kerry's surprisingly ferocious reaction was to lump all construction together and denounce it, publicly question Israel's commitment to peace, rhetorically ask whether Israel prefers a third intifada and wonder aloud whether Israel will ever get its troops out of the West Bank -- troops that have worked with Palestinian security forces to fight terrorism and prevent the spread of Hamas influence. If the Obama administration wanted to raise the blood pressure of even the least paranoid Israelis, the combination of the rush to a deal in Geneva and an attack on Israel's peacemaking

credentials was a sure way to do it.

For its part, Israel has sent Washington some mixed signals of its own, especially on the question of urgency in nuclear talks. In recent months, Israelis kept up a steady drumbeat about the Arak plutonium reactor, continually reminding Americans that once it goes "hot," the radiation hazard will make it immune to military attack. Their message was: "Time is not on our side." This Israeli reasoning provided the administration a powerful rationale (some would say "excuse") for a "first step" deal -- if such a deal included a shutdown of Arak. Since the Geneva talks, however, Israelis have told a different story, i.e., that "time is on our side." America has much more leverage than it recognizes, Israelis have said, because the Iranians are desperate to gain relief from the devastating impact of sanctions. Again, both arguments -- time is and time isn't on our side -- can't be true.

It is clear that the current crisis could have been avoided. The question now is whether it can be remedied.

As of this writing, it appears that the administration opposes the obvious compromise solution on sanctions -- approval now of additional sanctions that would only go into effect if no "first step" deal is reached or when a definitive deadline on negotiating a comprehensive arrangement expires. It also would be useful for the administration to put in place new mechanisms for real-time consultation with Israel so there is no chance even swiftly moving developments will surprise the Israelis. And because the White House's canard about its warmongering critics has had the effect of tarnishing the credibility of America's military threat against Iran, already weakened by the Syria chemical weapons episode, the administration needs to take urgent steps, both on its own and with regional allies, to make the threat more believable.

More than anything, repairing the torn fabric of U.S.-Israel relations -- including the fundamental question of whether the world should allow Iran any independent enrichment capacity -- will require a renewed meeting of the minds between Obama and Netanyahu. As the president said in Jerusalem last March, "Because of the cooperation between our governments, we know that there remains time to pursue a diplomatic resolution [of the Iran nuclear problem]." If his formula is accurate, the absence of cooperation means that time really might be running out.

Robert Satloff is executive director of The Washington Institute.

[Article 4.](#)

The Wall Street Journal

Is Rouhani the New Gorbachev?

Natan Sharansky

Nov. 17, 2013 -- Where have I seen this play before? The plotlines of what is happening with Iran today are familiar to me and should be to others.

They go like this:

Thanks to firm and resolute measures by Western democracies, a fierce and aggressive dictatorship has been brought to the edge of bankruptcy and collapse. Suddenly a new leader arises. He looks different from his predecessors: warmer, more human. He speaks and acts differently. And, sure enough, he elicits warmth in Western capitals, especially Washington. We mustn't forfeit this opportunity, politicians and pundits declare. We must help this promising leader to achieve for his country—and for the sake of world peace—the difficult transition from confrontation to cooperation. The path he travels is perilous; he is surrounded at home by figures who want him to fail. If he seems unprepared to meet our demands today, we must meet him more than halfway so he can meet them tomorrow. We must not let the promise of this moment slip from our fingers.

Such are the voices giving the benefit of the doubt to Hasan Rouhani, the new president of Iran, and branding those less trustful of the regime's intentions as shortsighted enemies of peace. They remind me of the voices I heard—that we all heard—in the first years of Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure in the 1980s as the new leader of the ailing Soviet Union.

As with Iran today, the economic and political crisis in the Soviet Union was real; so was the pressure exerted on the system from both within and without. Faced with the roiling frustration of its people, Moscow was desperately trying to preserve itself in power at home while simultaneously maintaining its status as a superpower abroad. Mr. Gorbachev, who understood the parlous circumstances in which his country stood, loosened some restrictions on speech and other forms of expression. He released a

number of political prisoners and made vague promises of allowing free emigration.

Sure enough, these moves—instituted not to reform the communist system, but to rescue it from collapse—were met with near-ecstatic cheers from Western pundits and politicians, followed by calls for reciprocal "confidence-building" measures: most prominently, the cancellation of economic sanctions and an immediate halt to missile-defense programs like the Strategic Defense Initiative. Anyone urging a contrary policy was branded a warmonger.

Fortunately, one of those alleged warmongers was Ronald Reagan, who along with knowledgeable and tough-minded senators like Henry Jackson (who died in 1983), had long understood that lifting sanctions without any concrete evidence of Soviet reform was precisely the wrong way to proceed. Under the policy known as linkage, famously embodied in the so-called Jackson Amendment of 1974, the U.S. government tied economic concessions to real, verifiable reforms.

There were other alleged warmongers. In 1987, I and others in the movement for Soviet Jewry were planning a massive demonstration in Washington timed to coincide with Mr. Gorbachev's first visit to this country. We were warned not to go ahead. Mr. Gorbachev had become popular in the United States—admired not least for having released the Nobel physicist Andrei Sakharov from exile and some "Prisoners of Zion," myself included, from imprisonment. Mounting a huge demonstration against him would surely be deemed in poor taste by Americans and received by Mr. Gorbachev and his people as an insult.

Yet far from considering the demonstration an irritant, those welcoming it included the American president, who two months beforehand had assured me of his tacit approval, and Vice President George H.W. Bush, a featured speaker at the event itself. It gave President Reagan an opening: You see, he could explain to Mr. Gorbachev, my people will not allow me to ask anything less from you than to open the iron gates.

Nor did many Soviet citizens perceive the rally as an insult. To the contrary, it gave heart to tens of millions. While Western elites regarded Mr. Gorbachev as a reformer, many in his country knew he was already working to retard or reverse the reforms he himself had initiated. Genuine Soviet reformers feared that "free emigration" would mean only the token

release of a few hundred famous individuals, under cover of which the Communist Party would retain its political monopoly and its chokehold on the USSR's restive national republics. Until the end of his life, Sakharov himself struggled with Mr. Gorbachev over the preservation of the one-party Communist system. In his conversations with me, Sakharov stressed how only continued Western pressure could, over time, "help" the Soviet leader and the Soviet system reform themselves out of business.

The U.S., to its eternal credit, held firm. The Americans were not ready to accept a bad ballistic-missile deal like the one proposed by Mr. Gorbachev in Reykjavik. They were not ready to cancel the sanctions. And they continued to support public pressure. Four years later, the evil Soviet empire collapsed without a shot having been fired.

Yet here we are again. Today, the Iranian economy is on the verge of bankruptcy. Today Iranian dissidents are rotting in prison by the hundreds or thousands, while a restive populace continues to writhe under the tyrannous yoke of a regime that has abandoned none of its aggressive aims, none of its terrorist machinations, none of its genocidal intentions. Is the Free World, led by Washington, so fixated on a short-term deal with the latest media-hyped dictator as to miss altogether the real opportunity held out by the present moment?

Can Rouhani be the new Gorbachev? Hardly. But if it will happen, it can only happen if we help him as we helped Mr. Gorbachev—if, by fidelity to our principles and by steady, determined statesmanship, we help him to eliminate himself, his regime, and the evil they have visited upon their people and set loose in the world around them.

Mr. Sharansky is chairman of the executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the author of "The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror" (PublicAffairs, 2006).

[Article 5.](#)

[Los Angeles Times](#)

Israel's policy of erasure

Saree Makdissi

November 18, 2013 -- The revelation last week that Israel wanted to plan for 20,000 new settlement housing units received the usual outraged responses from around the world. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mindful of a backlash in the midst of the Iran nuclear negotiations, walked the revelation back, but not very far.

Just a few days earlier, Secretary of State John F. Kerry, in Israel trying to keep peace talks afloat, reiterated the U.S. view in an interview: "We do not believe the settlements are legitimate. We think they're illegitimate." Settlement expansion, we are constantly told, is the stumbling block to the fragile negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. The settlements are eating up the territory that is supposed to provide the basis for the creation of an independent Palestinian state. If only there were a settlement freeze, some say, one last chance for peace might be salvaged.

All of that may be true enough as far as it goes. But in fact, Israeli settlement expansion is meaningless when it's considered in isolation. And that is how it is usually considered, given how much media attention the word "settlement" garners every time it comes up.

There are, however, other, individually quieter, smaller, less visible — but collectively far more significant — events taking place on a daily basis. Indeed, the settlement program is only one component of a broad complex of Israeli policies that has come to define the rhythm and tempo of life for Palestinians, not only in the occupied territories but inside Israel itself. These policies express Israel's longstanding wish to erase the Palestinian presence on land it considers its own.

Consider, for example, this stunning statistic from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA: On average, every week so far this year, Israel has demolished about 13 Palestinian-owned structures in the occupied territories (up from a weekly average of about 12 last year). The structures include water cisterns, barns and family homes that Israel claims violate the draconian rules it imposes on Palestinian life.

Sometimes these demolitions effectively obliterate entire communities at once.

On Aug. 19, according to OCHA, Israel destroyed all the structures in the East Jerusalem Palestinian community of Tel al-Adassa. The same week, Israel re-demolished the Palestinian village of Araqib, in southern Israel, as

it has done more than 50 times since 2010. On Sept. 11, Israel bulldozed almost all the structures in the West Bank herding community of Az Zayyim, rendering dozens of people homeless. Days later, Israel demolished all the homes of the village of Mak-hul in the Jordan Valley, and declared its ruins a closed military area, preventing the villagers' return.

And so it goes — a litany of catastrophes occurring on a small scale, in communities you have never heard of, all the year round.

These acts of eradication are a matter of routine practice, so routine that they rarely attract international media attention. Neither does the regular vandalizing, bulldozing or burning of Palestinian-owned olive trees, either by Jewish settlers — who generally act with legal impunity — or by the Israeli army.

According to the U.N., settlers cut down 100 trees Nov. 9; they damaged 400 trees from Oct. 29 – Nov. 4, and 30 the week before that. And, again, so it goes—week in, week out. More than 38,000 trees have been destroyed in the last four years, a devastating loss for Palestinian farmers.

Individually, these acts of violence affect only a dozen people or a single tiny community. But they add up. If I may borrow a phrase from Charles Dickens, it is like being stung to death by single bees. Slowly, methodically, deliberately, Israel is attempting to grind an entire people into the dust.

The expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories is part of Israel's project to gradually suffocate the Palestinians. But it's only one indicator, and a misleading one at that. Because even if no new settlements are built, Palestinian homes will still be bulldozed and Palestinian olive orchards will still be uprooted; Palestinian water wells will run dry and Palestinian fields will brown and crack for lack of irrigation (Israel denies Palestinians access to water from the Jordan River and makes it almost impossible for them to dig new wells, even as it uses, according to a World Bank estimate, more than 80% of the West Bank's groundwater).

Palestinians will still be held up at Israeli army checkpoints and harassed or arrested by Israeli soldiers; they will still be prevented from tending their crops or getting to their schools and clinics, or even to the ruins of their bulldozed homes.

Finding a path to a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians, such that both peoples truly live side by side rather than one living at the expense of the other, requires not simply dealing with the settlements but with the whole complex of displacement, suffocation and erasure. And the first step is noticing its very existence.

Saree Makdisi, a professor of English and comparative literature at UCLA, is the author of "Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation."

[Article 6.](#)

The National Interest

Why Pakistan Won't Sell Saudi the Bomb

[Zachary Keck](#)

November 18, 2013 -- Much of the soul-searching since the Iraq War has focused on the intelligence failures that produced the faulty WMD assessment. Less attention has been paid to the more puzzling question of why so many people readily accepted the argument that Saddam would arm Al Qaeda with nuclear weapons, despite the obvious absurdity of the claim.

It is this latter question that also seems most relevant amidst new concerns about a Saudi nuclear weapon. Earlier this month, in the run-up to the Iran-P5+1 talks, the BBC's Mark Urban [\[3\]wrote a lengthy piece \[3\]](#) claiming that Pakistan has built nuclear weapons "on behalf of Saudi Arabia [that] are now sitting ready for delivery."

The article attracted considerable attention and alarm, although it's not clear why. Concerns about a secret Saudi-Pakistani nuclear pact date back to the 1970s and 1980s, and have become especially prevalent over the past decade.

Nonetheless, despite decades of suspicions, the existence of a Saudi-Pakistan nuclear pact is based almost entirely on speculation. Moreover, like the alleged Saddam-AQ nuclear nexus, the notion that Pakistan would supply Saudi Arabia with nuclear weapons defies common sense.

As noted above, concerns about a Saud-Pakistan nuclear pact emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as Saudi aid to Pakistan increased rapidly. Many in

Western foreign-policy circles feared that some of the Kingdom's aid was being used to fund Pakistan's nuclear program, with Riyadh expecting some of the final products in return.

However, the increase in Saudi aid during the 1980s was due to other factors, [\[4\]such as \[4\]](#) Pakistan basing some fifteen thousand troops in the Kingdom, and the Saudi government financing of over half of the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union. If Saudi money directly funded Pakistan's nuclear program, it was almost certainly because, as a Saudi advisor once explained, "We gave money and [the Pakistanis] dealt with it as they saw fit."

Similar [\[5\]Western speculation centers on \[5\]](#) Saudi defense minister Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz's trip to Pakistan in 1999. During the trip, Pakistani prime minister Sharif gave Sultan a tour of the Khan Research Laboratories, which produce highly enriched uranium, and an adjacent ballistic missile factory. He was believed to be the first foreign dignitary to view the highly secretive, military-run KRL, although he denied being given access to the secret parts of the complex.

It's not exactly clear why giving the Saudi defense minister a tour of the facilities would be necessary for the two sides to forge a nuclear pact, or even how it would advance it. Furthermore, if the tour was part of a covert nuclear deal, it seems unlikely the two sides would have publicized it. Instead, the highly publicized nature of the tour suggests it was intended to symbolize the closeness of the Saudi-Pakistani relationship.

The timing of the trip supports this view. Specifically, after India's nuclear tests the year before, Riyadh empowered PM Sharif to respond with his own nuclear tests by assuring him the Kingdom would help offset the international sanctions that were almost certain to follow.

Beyond pure speculation, suspicions of a Saudi-Pakistan nuclear pact also stem from the testimony of Mohammed Khilewi, the number two at the Saudi UN Mission until he defected in 1994. In seeking asylum in the U.S., Khilewi made a string of allegations to FBI agents, including that Saudi Arabia had a secret nuclear-weapons program and had helped fund Pakistan and Iraq's nuclear programs. According to the UK Sunday Times, Khilewi claimed that in return for this funding, the two sides had signed a pact pledging that "if Saudi Arabia were attacked with nuclear weapons,

Pakistan would respond against the aggressor with its own nuclear arsenal.”

The FBI agents who debriefed Khilewi did not put much stock into his claims. As his lawyer later complained, the two FBI agents “dismissed them as marginal and walked out of the meeting, refusing to take Khilewi into custody or give him protection.”

They were almost certainly right to do so. To begin with, Khilewi had a clear motivation for lying, given that his livelihood depended on being granted U.S. asylum. The U.S., however, had little reason to strain its alliance with Saudi Arabia on Khilewi’s account, unless of course he could be useful to U.S. interests.

His testimony all around appeared aimed at demonstrating his usefulness to the United States. Unfortunately, a central part of it would be proven unfounded a decade after he gave. Specifically, although Khilewi mentioned the Pakistani program, the overwhelming majority of his allegations were about the Kingdom’s alleged funding of Saddam Hussein’s nuclear weapons program in the 1980s. In Khilewi’s telling, Saudi Arabia gave Saddam at least \$5 billion from 1985 through the Gulf War, in return for promises that it would receive nuclear weapons in return. Khilewi also claimed that Saudi nuclear scientists were regularly trained by their Iraqi counterparts in Baghdad. These allegations were seen as particularly damaging in the U.S. because of the still recent Gulf War. After toppling Saddam Hussein in 2003, however, the U.S. gained extensive access to Iraqi documents and nuclear scientists, and conducted a large investigation into the history of Saddam’s nuclear-weapons program. None of what they found appears to have corroborated Khilewi’s claims about Saudi funding and scientific training. Nonetheless, he continues to [6]be cited [6] by [7]reports claiming [7] that there is a secret Pakistani-Saudi nuclear pact.

Khilewi’s allegations are notable, however, in demonstrating that he understood how deeply the U.S. fears nuclear weapons spreading, particularly to the Middle East, and his willingness to use this to his advantage. Whatever other differences Khilewi may have with the Saudi family, they share this in common. Indeed, for years now Saudi rulers [have](#) [8] [repeatedly](#) [9] [threatened](#) [10] [to go nuclear](#) [11] if the U.S. doesn’t stop Iran from gaining nuclear weapons.

But for their threat to be effective, it has to be credible. And to be credible, Riyadh has to be capable of making good on it. This puts Saudi officials in a difficult bind as it would take decades for them to build a nuclear weapon from scratch, if they were ever able to do so at all. [12][As Jacques Hymans has noted](#) [12], of the ten states that have begun dedicated nuclear weapons programs since 1970, only three have been successful, with the jury still out on Iran. Of the three success stories, building the bomb took an average of 17 years. Not counting the Shah's nuclear activities, the Iranian case has stretched 30 years and counting.

Saudi Arabia is far less capable of building a nuclear weapon than Pakistan or Iran. Furthermore, threatening to acquire nuclear bombs twenty five years from now is not likely to cause undue alarm among U.S. officials. Thus, Saudi leaders need a way to make their threats seem more urgent. Enter the secret nuclear pact with Pakistan. For the past decade, periodic and often well-timed reports have surfaced claiming that if Iran goes nuclear, Pakistan has nuclear weapons waiting for Saudi Arabia to claim. Alternatively, others suggest that Pakistan might deploy nuclear weapons to the Kingdom under the guardianship of Pakistani troops, much like the U.S. bases nuclear weapons in NATO countries.

The first of these reports [13][was published by](#) [13][The Guardian](#) [13] in September 2003. The article's two reporters—who were based out of Vienna (where the International Atomic Energy Agency's headquarters is based)—said that they had “learned” of a recent strategic review Saudi Arabia had undertaken in which it considered building nuclear weapons or forming a new alliance with a nuclear armed power. The reporters speculated that Pakistan might be the potential new nuclear ally Saudi Arabia would seek out.

This report is one of the only ones that focuses on specific details rather than general speculation. Nonetheless, the authors provide little details about how they learned of the strategic review, though it doesn't appear they saw the alleged document. It's worth noting that Saudi Arabia isn't a government that is particularly well known for (unplanned) leaks of high-level security documents, especially to a London newspaper.

The timing of the report is crucial here. Iran's nuclear program had first been [exposed](#) [14] publicly a year earlier. Then, in March 2003, the U.S. invaded Iraq despite Saudi reservations that it would create a vacuum that

Iran would fall. The Bush administration is believed to have tried to assuage Saudi concerns by suggesting that Saddam Hussein would only be the first regime it would topple. As The Guardian report discusses in great detail, in the months after the invasion, the Saudis had become increasingly concerned about America's commitment to them.

In this context, the leak about the strategic review was almost certainly intended to force the U.S. to renew its focus on Iran and its nuclear program. The timing of the report is also notable because the month after The Guardian article was published, Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz led a Saudi delegation on a trip to Pakistan.

Many are the numerous reports since then, including the one last week, have been based on even more shaky grounds. First, they all seem to surface during times when there is heightened concern about Iran's nuclear program, and/or strains in the U.S.-Saudi relationship. Secondly, almost none add any new kind of evidence, usually just citing a couple unnamed officials. Interestingly, the reports often cite NATO or Western officials who appear to only to be voicing their suspicions about the existence of a pact. The rest of the space is usually filled by reciting the long history of speculation about a secret nuclear pact, conveniently papering over the lack of evidence supporting these fears.

Another flaw that almost all the news accounts share is that they analyze the pact solely from the perspective of Saudi Arabia, and ignore Pakistan's interests almost entirely. They note, for example, that the Kingdom fears a nuclear-armed Iran and point out that Saudi officials have regularly threatened to go nuclear if Iran isn't prevented from building the bomb. Although one can imagine some reasons the Saudis might not want Pakistani bombs, particularly if they were under the command of Pakistani soldiers, it's not altogether difficult to believe Riyadh would accept a readymade nuclear deterrent.

But it's downright preposterous to think that Pakistan would take the unprecedented step of selling Saudi Arabia nuclear weapons, given that it would have nothing to gain and everything to lose by doing so.

To begin with, Pakistani officials are exceptionally paranoid about the size of their nuclear arsenal, and [\[15\]take extraordinary measures](#) [15] to reduce its vulnerability to an Indian or U.S. first strike. Providing the Saudis with their nuclear deterrent would significantly increase Islamabad's

vulnerability to such a first strike. It defies logic to think that Islamabad would accept this risk simply to uphold promises former Pakistani leaders might have made.

It is similarly hard to imagine that past Saudi economic assistance could purchase future nuclear weapons. After all, the U.S. has provided Pakistan with billions of dollars to fight terrorism since 9/11, and it found bin Laden living in an off-campus mansion outside Pakistan's military academy. The Saudis have similarly struggled to use turn their financial assistance to Pakistan into influence. For example, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a time when international sanctions left Pakistan highly dependent on Saudi aid, [\[16\]Riyadh unsuccessfully attempted to persuade \[16\]](#) Pakistan to force the Taliban to hand over bin Laden.

If current aid in the 1990s couldn't buy Saudi Arabia bin Laden, how can aid from the 1980s be expected to purchase a nuclear arsenal in the future? Unlike with bin Laden, Pakistan has compelling strategic incentives not to sell Saudi Arabia nuclear weapons. Such a move would, of course, result in immediate and severe backlash from the U.S. and the West, who would organize international sanctions against Islamabad. They would also use their influence in the International Monetary Fund to end its aid package to Islamabad, which currently serves as Pakistan's lifeline. Pakistan's nuclear sales would also force Washington to end any pretense of neutrality between Pakistan and India, and significantly strengthen ties with the latter. Pakistan's all weather friendship with China would also be jeopardized. In fact, it's quite possible China would be more infuriated than the U.S. because the Kingdom supplies [\[17\]about 20 percent of China's oil imports \[17\]](#), and Beijing's dependence on Persian Gulf oil is expected to grow in the coming years. By opening Saudi Arabia up to a conventional or nuclear attack, Pakistan would be threatening China's oil supplies, and through them the stability of the Communist Party. This is a sin Beijing would not soon forgive.

No country would be more enraged by Pakistan's intransigence than its western neighbor, Iran. It is this fear of alienating Tehran that would be the biggest deterrent to selling Saudi Arabia a nuclear bomb. To begin with, Tehran would immediately halt natural-gas sales to energy-starved Pakistan. More importantly, it would finally embrace India wholeheartedly, including a large Indian presence along its border with Pakistan.

Thus by selling Saudi nuclear weapons, Pakistan would have guaranteed it is surrounded by India on three sides, given that Delhi uses Iran as its main access point to Afghanistan. India's presence in Iran would also be detrimental to Pakistan, because Iran borders on Pakistan's already volatile Balochistan province. This would allow India and Iran to aid Baloch separatist movements, conjuring up memories of Bangladesh in the minds of Pakistani leaders. Finally, Iran could give the Indian Navy access to Chabahar port, which Delhi has invested millions in upgrading. Aside from being encircled on land, Pakistan's navy would now be boxed in by the Indian and Iranian navies.

For a country as obsessed with strategic depth as Pakistan, this situation would be nothing short of a calamity. The notion that Pakistan would resign itself to this fate simply to honor a promise it made to Saudi Arabia is no less farfetched than believing Saddam would arm al-Qaeda with nuclear weapons. That may be why three decades of speculation has turned up no evidence of a Saudi-Pakistani nuclear pact.

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NYT

A Dangerous Interregnum

[Roger Cohen](#)

November 18, 2013 -- In his Prison Notebooks, Antonio Gramsci wrote: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

The world is once again living an interregnum. It is poised between inward-looking old powers and reluctant emergent ones. The post-9/11 era is over; it has bequeathed an exhausted America.

Morbid symptoms include a dysfunctional United Nations Security Council, a Syria that bleeds, an American economy squeezing its middle class and a Europe that leaves its youth jobless. But does anyone want the superpower's mantle?

According to a survey this year by the Pew Research Center, 83 percent of Americans think the president should concentrate on domestic policy, against 6 percent who believe his priority should be foreign affairs. That is the lowest recorded number for foreign policy concerns since Pew's survey on national priorities began 15 years ago. In 2007, 39 percent thought the president's primary focus should be domestic, as compared with 40 percent for foreign.

This is the national mood behind the withdrawal from Iraq, the looming pullback from Afghanistan, the last-minute retreat from military strikes against Syria, and a possibly imminent (and highly desirable) interim deal with Iran on its nuclear program. If there is a single phrase America has taken to heart it comes from Robert Gates, the former defense secretary: "Any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should 'have his head examined,' as General MacArthur so delicately put it."

The immense toll in lives and treasure of Iraq and Afghanistan — wars the country will try to forget rather than memorialize — explains part of the inward turn. So, too, does a feeling that something is skewed in an economy where for many the relationship between hard work and reward seems lost. But there is something more, a very American pragmatism that has understood the power shift now underway and wants the nation to husband its resources after a reckless decade.

When an exhausted Britain in imperial decline passed the mantle of global power to the United States, the transition was relatively seamless, an affair between cousins. Today America's travails inspire schadenfreude but nobody much wants the keys to the kingdom.

Never have the ambitions of the European Union been so circumscribed. Consumed with internal problems, particularly those of the euro, it has lost coherence. Europe, for the foreseeable future, will spend more time debating its internal architecture than defining its external objectives. The French-German alliance, the motor of integration, is frayed to the point of near rupture. Germany needs France less and has shed many of its complexes, but history and self-absorption mean it will punch below its weight, doing enough to avert European implosion but not enough to give Europe renewed impulsion. America's inward turn finds Europe introverted, unable to take a leadership role on any crisis but its own.

Russia, under Vladimir Putin, is a spoiling power above all, still driven by the notion that, as he once put it, the Soviet Union's collapse was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." Its ambitions lie in turning back the clock.

China, the heir apparent to nobody's world, has scarcely a word to say on Syria, less still on Iran. Stability is its watchword, with an eye on full development by midcentury. It still needs America as an offsetting power in Asia. It is heavily invested in the avoidance of any American economic debacle. Peaceful rise means cautious rise. Neither China nor India shows much interest for now in new organizing principles for the world.

Perhaps, those principles are now defined by technology, social networks and individual empowerment, forces that lie outside conventional notions of geostrategic power. But this is just another way of saying that the world's current interregnum is little understood.

It is just over a decade since President George W. Bush lumped North Korea, Iraq and Iran together in an "axis of evil," an unhappy phrase pregnant with disastrous consequences. The United States has since learned many bitter lessons.

The importance of the now likely deal with Iran, and of the conversations taking place between Tehran and Washington on a range of subjects, goes well beyond the nuclear dossier. The Iranian revolution was an uprising against Western dominance (just as the nuclear program is above all an assertion of technological independence). For more than three decades, antagonism has prevailed. If the United States and Iran can reach some accommodation, it would be the most powerful signal in a long time of an American willingness to rethink its global strategy in the most volatile area of the world.

Interregnums are dangerous — and doubly morbid if unaccompanied by a readiness to think anew about changed power structures.