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Article 1.

Newsweek

Bibi In a Box; After months of bluster on Iran, the Israeli leader is losing steam

Dan Ephron

October 8, 2012 -- Benjamin Netanyahu was fuming. For the first time in months, the Israeli leader had allowed a discussion in his security cabinet about Iran's nuclear program and it wasn't going well. Several cabinet members were questioning the wisdom of defying the United States, Israel's ally and protector, by weighing a strike on Iran before the American election in November, according to a source familiar with the details. The grinding back-and-forth went on for seven hours. When it came time for the security chiefs to weigh in, at least two of them disputed the premise Netanyahu had been advancing--that Israel's window for an attack would last only through this year, before Iran moves its nuclear components to hardened sites underground. "You can interpret the intelligence in different ways ... and some people were saying the time frame is longer," the source told Newsweek. The next morning, leaks from the Sept. 4 meeting appeared in the Israeli press, prompting Netanyahu to cancel a second parley. Discussions at security-cabinet meetings are highly classified and the leak was unusual. For Netanyahu, the message was clear: members of his own government had reservations about his direction on Iran and wanted the public to know it. Netanyahu is in a box. After hinting for months that he would attack Iran if the Obama administration didn't do more to stop its uranium enrichment, he now seems unable to marshal enough domestic support for military action. The setback could be temporary. His critics appear to be opposed more to the idea of disobeying Washington than going to war over Iranian nukes. (Some are deeply troubled by the public bickering between Washington and Jerusalem in recent weeks.) But the sheer scope of resistance at home--by members of the public; the military's senior echelon; and now, apparently, Netanyahu's defense minister, Ehud Barak--seems for the time being, at least, too vast to overcome. Barak's shift marks the most significant change over the past few weeks. For much of the summer the defense chief had been Israel's most aggressive proponent of quick military action. "Barak is even more hawkish than Netanyahu on this issue," a former official who witnessed his decision making from up close told me in June. The source said Barak liked to tell people how, in the 1990s, he heard top American leaders pledge repeatedly to Israel that Washington would prevent Pakistan from crossing the nuclear threshold. When Islamabad did eventually break out, testing its first nuclear devices

in 1998, the Clinton administration condemned the action and then went about quietly adjusting itself to the new reality in South Asia. The lesson Barak absorbed, according to the former official: even ironclad American assurances are never truly ironclad.

But the Obama administration has put in its time with Barak. At least a half-dozen times in the past year, he has made trips to Washington, where he usually meets with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Between the visits, U.S. military officials are on the phone with him almost every week. Though Barak denied in a recent Israeli newspaper interview that he and Netanyahu have moved apart on Iran, people who know him detect a change. "He was pressing on the Americans, and at some point he came to believe that they're serious [about preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons]," says Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli diplomat who worked alongside Barak for years and is now a contributing fellow with the left-leaning Israel Policy Forum in New York. "I think he also came to believe that the price Israel would pay in the relationship [with the United States] would far outweigh the advantages" of an attack on Iran. Without support from Barak, who was an army general and one of Israel's most decorated soldiers before turning to politics, it's almost impossible to imagine Netanyahu undertaking an attack. Israelis tend to trust military figures more than politicians. In the past year, several retired security chiefs have come out against military action and gained wide public attention (former Mossad director Meir Dagan called it "the stupidest idea I've ever heard"). Any decision to go to war requires the approval of the security cabinet, where current military and intelligence chiefs would weigh in. With Barak arguing against an operation, the already-reticent military brass would likely do the same. "Barak holds the key to any military action," the former official told Newsweek.

The weight of public opinion is also pressing on Netanyahu. Former prime minister Ariel Sharon used to tell people that to start a war, an Israeli leader needs broad public backing and an understanding with Washington (he learned the lesson from his disastrous invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which Ronald Reagan criticized and many Israelis opposed). Netanyahu has watched the polls move steadily against him for the past year. One of them, conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute in

August, showed just 27 percent of Israelis support a unilateral strike--that is, an attack on Iran without a green light from the United States. If it were earlier in his term, those poll numbers might not have been critical, but Netanyahu will be facing voters soon. His government has so far failed to pass a budget proposal for 2013, a sign that his coalition won't last much longer. Though elections are scheduled for a year from now, analysts believe Netanyahu will be forced to bring up the date, possibly to March. A war between now and then--with fighting on several fronts and civilian casualties in Israel's big cities--could well hurt Netanyahu in the ballot box. Netanyahu "reads polls for breakfast and he knows the Israeli public is not behind him [on Iran]," says Martin Indyk, a former ambassador to Israel and now director of the Foreign Policy Program at the Brookings Institution in Washington. "If Tel Aviv is under rocket attack and he's at war with Lebanon, and he's strained the relationship with the United States, that's a very different context for him to be going to elections. Netanyahu is not an adventurer. He's never started any war." Of course there's always a first time--that's the fear in Washington. Even if some of Netanyahu's war rhetoric is explicitly designed to goad the U.S. into action against Iran, the perception of a nuclear Iran as a dire threat to Israel is real--and the military option remains very much alive. When President Obama phoned Netanyahu in early September to paper over the latest tensions between the two men, the Israeli leader sounded defiant, according to a source familiar with details of the call. He pressed for the U.S. to impose ultimatums on Iran over its uranium enrichment, but Obama refused. Like many of their other interactions, the conversation underscored the extent to which Netanyahu is more comfortable with Republicans in Washington. The rub for the Israeli leader is that even some Republicans are now thinking an Israeli strike before the U.S. election is a bad idea. Karl Rove, the GOP's aminence grise, said on Fox News in August that a war now would cause Americans to rally around the president and likely clinch the election for him. The recent riots in the Middle East in response to an anti-Muslim video posted on the Internet seem to bear Rove out. Far from hurting Obama, they may have shored up his lead. "It's the kind of event that allows Obama to seem presidential, while [Mitt] Romney just looks politically craven," says Jim

Gerstein, a Democratic pollster. For Netanyahu, that's one more obstacle--in a long list of them--to getting what he wants on Iran.

Article 2.
TIME

How Many Civilians Would Be Killed in an Attack on Iran's Nuclear Sites?

Azadeh Moaveni

September 27, 2012 -- For Iranians these days, life under economic sanctions is a crescendo of hardships. With the Iranian currency at an all-time low against the dollar, shortages of essential medicines and quadrupling prices of basic goods like shampoo and bread, a sense of crisis pervades daily life. Now Iranians are worrying about one more thing: imminent death from an American or Israeli military strike.
With talk of an attack growing more feverish by the day, the mood in Iran is unsettled as never before. In their fear and worry, Iranians say they feel alone, stuck between a defiant government that clings to its nuclear ambitions and a world so unattuned to their suffering that the fatal consequences of a strike on the Iranian people has so far been totally absent from the debate. "We are close to reliving the days of the Iran-Iraq war, soon we will have to wait in line for everyday goods," says a 60-year-old, middle-class matron from Tehran. "Things are getting worse by the day," says a 57-year-old Iranian academic preparing to emigrate to North America. "It is better to get out now while it's still possible."
While Iranians are increasingly fretful of an imminent attack, they remain broadly unaware of just how devastating the human impact could be. Even a conservative strike on a handful of Iran's nuclear facilities, a recent report predicts, could kill or injure 5,000 to 80,000 people. The Ayatollah's Nuclear Gamble, a report written by an Iranian-American scientist with expertise in industrial nuclear-waste management, notes that a number of Iran's sites are located directly atop or near major civilian centers. One key site that would almost certainly be targeted in a bombing campaign, the uranium-conversion facility at Isfahan, houses 371 metric

tons of uranium hexafluoride and is located on the city's doorstep; toxic plumes released from a strike would reach the city center within an hour, killing or injuring as many as 70,000 and exposing over 300,000 to radioactive material. These plumes would "destroy their lungs, blind them, severely burn their skin and damage other tissues and vital organs." The report's predictions for long-term toxicity and fatalities are equally stark. "The numbers are alarming," says Khosrow Semnani, the report's author, "we're talking about a catastrophe in the same class as Bhopal and Chernobyl."

Beyond those initially killed in a potential strike, the Iranian government's lack of readiness for handling wide-scale radiation exposure could exponentially raise the death toll, Semnani says. His study, published by the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics and the nongovernmental organization Omid for Iran, outlines Iran's poor record of emergency response and notes that its civilian casualties from natural disasters like earthquakes have been far greater than those suffered during similar disasters in better prepared countries like Turkey. With virtually no clinical capacity or medical infrastructure to deal with wide-scale radioactive fallout, or early warning systems in place to limit exposure, Iran would be swiftly overwhelmed by the aftermath of a strike. The government's woeful unpreparedness remains unknown to most Iranians. "This issue is a redline, the [Iranian] media can't go near it," says Jamshid Barzegar, a senior analyst at BBC Persian. "To talk about this would be considered a weakening of people's attitudes. The government only speaks of tactics and resistance, how unhurt Iran will be by an attack."

But if the aftermath of a war remains murky to most Iranians, their anticipation of its inevitability is growing. The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Mohammad Ali Jafari, told Iranians last week that "we must all prepare for the upcoming war." His warning, the bluntest yet by a senior official, that Iran and Israel would enter a "physical conflict," has raised expectations of an attack among Iranians, who are typically accustomed to dismissing such talk. When reformist MP Mohammed Reza Tabesh criticized Jafari's remarks in parliament, the hard-line majority shouted him down with cries of "Allahu Akbar." "When people see their top military commander and officials speaking of the inevitability of war, the belief sinks in," says Barzegar.

Whether Iranian officials actually think Israel is closer to launching an attack than it has been in the past, or their readiness rhetoric is meant to convey their own unflappability, the Iranian public is left with greater uneasiness and less real information than ever. Sterile media speculation in Israel and the U.S. ignores the question of civilian casualties, portraying an attack on Iran as a tidy pinpoint strike like those Israel has carried out against Iraq and Syria. Iran, for its part, claims the number of casualties it might sustain will be tolerable. "Hawks on both sides, Israel and the United States, and Iran, want to underplay the level of casualties," says Ali Ansari, an Iran expert at Scotland's University of St. Andrews. "But both sides are wildly wrong, there will be quite devastating consequences. It will be a mess."

Azadeh Moaveni is an Iranian-American journalist and writer. For three years, Azadeh Moaveni worked across the Middle East as a reporter for Time, before joining the Los Angeles Times to cover the war in Iraq.

Article 3.

New York Post

Palestinian Spring?

Amir Taheri

September 28, 2012 -- The Arab Spring may finally have reached the Palestinians.

Protests against the rival authorities in Gaza and the West Bank haven't become the kind of full-scale revolts that hit Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria. But there is a growing sense that the leaderships of both Fatah (in charge in the West Bank) and Hamas (which controls Gaza) have lost much of their legitimacy.

Mired in corruption and addicted to repression, neither has been able to develop a credible strategy for the 4 million Palestinians caught in a limbo created by post-colonial history and the Cold War.

The first sign that things might be changing came this week with the announcement that top Hamas leader Khalid al-Meshaal is to step down after 16 years, triggering a succession race.

Meshaal has had to leave Damascus (after 13 years) because he indicated support for the Syrian uprising. People close to him claim that he's had

“offers of welcome” from Egypt’s new President Mohammed Morsi as well as the emir of Qatar, Sheik Hamad al-Thani.
A native of the West Bank, Meshaal has already ruled out moving to Gaza, where [redacted] be surrounded by rivals and even enemies. He holds a Jordanian passport, but could only settle in Amman with the understanding that he cease all political activity.
But those who hope Meshaal will fade away may be disappointed.
On the surface, three camps are involved in the fight over Meshaal’s succession.
The first consists of Hamas “government” apparatchiks who wish to keep their privileges. They control part of the international aid from the United States and the European Union, and also cash checks from “well-wishers” such as Iran. This mafia also controls the black market and the flow of contraband goods to Gaza.
The apparatchiks’ candidate is Mussa Abumarzouq, who held the post in the 1990s. A US citizen, he was arrested in New York in 1996 on terrorist charges — and was released and deported in exchange for giving up his citizenship.
The second camp consists of mid-level activists. Their candidate is Mahmoud al-Zuhar, who is also supported by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. (His mother is Egyptian.)
To counter that Egyptian influence, Iran is promoting a third candidate: Ismail Haniyeh, who heads the administration in Gaza.
Morsi wants to control Hamas to prevent Gaza from becoming an Iranian base. He also hopes to play the Palestinian card to gain traction in relations with the United States, Israel and the Saudis.
For its part, Iran is doing all it can to keep Gaza as one of the two arms of a pincer (the other being Hezbollah-controlled southern Lebanon) against Israel. If Iran loses its influence with Hamas, it would find it hard to use the Palestinian theme to attract an audience among Arabs.
But Meshaal could upset the burgeoning Irano-Egyptian rivalry for control of Hamas. First, he may promote an alternative candidate, seeking support from Gazans fed up with the Hamas leadership’s corruption and brutality. One name mentioned is that of Salih al-Arouri, a former prisoner in Israel who also hails from the West Bank.

A second, and more intriguing, option: Meshaal could seek the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization as a first step toward melding Fatah with Hamas to create a new united Palestinian movement.
With its chief Mahmoud Abbas anxious to throw in the towel and not a single candidate to replace him, Fatah is in search of a leader.
Meshaal could fill that gap while reasserting the primacy of the West Bankers (a majority of Palestinians) in setting the national agenda. He has the added advantage of access to sources of funding via Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich Arab states.
Such a strategy would enable the Palestinians to transcend the Fatah-Hamas rivalry, which has brought political paralysis.
Fatah has promised peace with Israel without getting an inch closer to achieving it. Hamas is even further from delivering on its promise of wiping Israel off the map.
Worse still for both groups, there is no evidence that a majority of Palestinians, their daily problems notwithstanding, are ready to jettison the status quo to gamble on either a problematic peace or a foredoomed war.

Article 4.

Los Angeles Times

Snubbed by Obama?

Aaron David Miller

September 30, 2012 -- President Obama did not meet with Egypt's Mohamed Morsi or Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu — the leaders of America's two closest Middle East partners — when he was in New York last week to speak to the United Nations General Assembly. There are sound foreign policy and political reasons why.
Rarely have relations between Washington and these nations been more out of whack. The relationships with both are too big to fail. Still, for Washington, managing them will be much tougher in the period ahead as

Israel and Egypt look to their own interests, with much less regard for Washington's.

For almost four decades America's relationships with Israel and Egypt have been the main pillars of its Middle East policies. In the years following the historic Camp David peace process, which ultimately led to the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, these two countries together received annually 45% of America's total foreign assistance.

In matters of peace and war, Washington traditionally looked to Israel and Egypt for support, forbearance and, at times, restraint and understanding. There were periods of tension and disconnect, to be sure. But figuring out where the two stood on any issue was rule No. 1 in Middle East diplomacy. In my travels with both Republican and Democratic secretaries of State over the years, these were invariably our first and second stops.

But there are sound tactical reasons why the president may have decided not to see each leader now. Busy with the election campaign, politics are the priority, unless of course you count the meeting with Barbara Walters et al of "The View" as a bilateral.

Not seeing Morsi was politics plus common sense. There was no point in creating a buddy-buddy image of Obama and Morsi after the Egyptian government's failure to prevent the recent attack on the U.S. Embassy in Cairo over an anti-Islamic video and its slow response once it began. Why give the Romney campaign a free whack at the White House? With nothing to announce on the bilateral side, it was just as well that the meeting not take place. And Morsi is scheduled to visit later in the year.

Not seeing Netanyahu was bit trickier. Straight politics this close to a presidential election might have demanded it. But the relationship between these two leaders is bad. And Netanyahu's recent public challenge to the U.S. to set a "red line" on the Iran nuclear issue didn't make it any better. A detailed discussion on Iran is necessary. But a meeting with Netanyahu on the margins of the [redacted]. gathering was the wrong time and place for that. Not seeing Morsi also helped provide a nice pretext and balance to not seeing Netanyahu. Friday's much-publicized phone call between the U.S. and Israeli leaders (rarely touted this way in the trade) is an effort to patch things up and begin that process.

Still, the meet-or-not-to-meet issue reflects a much deeper dysfunction in each relationship, which may not be so easily or conveniently managed. With the Israelis, the problem isn't structural as much as the personal and policy conflicts between the president and the prime minister. The institutional aspects of U.S.-Israel relationship and cooperation between the two are actually quite good.

The disconnect is on the personality side. Netanyahu sees the president as insensitive to Israel's fears and needs — almost bloodless. Obama looks at Netanyahu as insincere and manipulative, a con man who thinks only about Israeli needs with no reciprocity even while he pretends to be sensitive to U.S. concerns. Combine this with fundamental differences on issues that include the peace process and when and how to deal with Iran's nuclear program and, to paraphrase the Bard, something is rotten in Barack and Bibi land.

With Egypt, the challenge for the U.S. is how to maintain a close relationship with a traditional friend that now sees the world much differently than we do. Unlike U.S. ties with Israel, the bond between the U.S. and Egypt rests less on shared values and more on shared interests. Under Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, America cut a deal with each of these acquiescent authoritarians. We'll stay out of your internal affairs — essentially give you a pass on governance and human rights issues and provide assistance — and you support our interests in matters of war, security and peace.

The election of an Egyptian president from the Muslim Brotherhood has called into question both the values and the interests. Mubarak's Egypt was hardly democratic and had an awful record on human rights. But Morsi is still tied to a party that's exclusionist, spews anti-Semitic, anti-Israel and even anti-American rhetoric, and whose views on gender equality and Egypt's Christian minority are very worrisome. Combine that with policy differences on how to deal with Israel, the peace process, Hamas and the challenge of Islamic militancy, and there's a real possibility that Obama's remark that Egypt is neither an ally nor an enemy will become an enduring reality. It's striking that Morsi's [redacted]. speech didn't even refer once to the U.S.

America has no choice but to try to keep both of these traditional friends close.

But America's role as senior partner in the triangular relationship born in the wake of the Camp David accords is going to erode. Egypt and Israel are likely to be increasingly at odds with each other and with America over issues as diverse as the peace process and Iran. Indeed, Israel and Egypt now say no to America without much cost or consequence.
The days of America's unchallenged preeminence in this particular corner of the Middle East are coming to an end. The days of adjusting to its diminished influence and the renewed assertiveness of its traditional partners have just begun. By the look of things so far, it won't be an easy transition.

Aaron David Miller, a distinguished scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, served as a Middle East negotiator in Republican and Democratic administrations. He is the author of "The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace."

Article 5.
Guardian

Is Jordan heading for chaos?

Samer Libdeh

29 September 2012 ---As the impact of the Arab spring continues to be felt across many parts of the Middle East, the Jordanian regime's unwillingness to heed calls for meaningful political reform, greater press freedoms an d democratisation is antagonising political and civil society activists alike.
While protests and demonstrations in Jordan have been small and relatively peaceful compared with those in other countries in the region, the royal court's continued intransigence could lead to further unrest, including violent clashes with security forces.

In what was widely seen as an effort to stamp out criticism of the royal court, the Jordanian parliament – which consists mainly of conservative pro-regime members – recently passed a controversial press and publications law that requires online media organisations to register and obtain licences from the authorities.

In addition, online publishers will be held accountable for comments posted by readers on their website and they will be prohibited from publishing comments that are not strictly relevant to the published article (how this is to be determined is far from clear). This law is clearly designed to limit the dissemination of political commentary that may be critical of the regime.

Although the royal court has in recent months proposed changes to the constitution and the electoral law, these have largely been dismissed as a cosmetic exercise since the king will retain the power to dismiss parliament at will and the proposed new electoral system is still rigged in favour of regime supporters.

In addition, the majority of Jordanians (ie Palestinian-Jordanians) will be significantly under-represented in the parliament. The leading opposition group in Jordan, the Islamic Action Front (IAF – the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood) has vowed to boycott legislative elections planned for early next year and has called for a mass rally to take place in early October. The IAF is demanding meaningful constitutional amendments to reduce the powers of the king and to amend the current electoral system, which mainly benefits regime supporters. Additionally, influential Transjordanian tribes have been calling for anti-corruption measures as well as amendments to the constitution to give further powers to the parliament.

While there have not been calls for the abolition of the monarchy, the royal court's refusal to properly engage with the protesters is likely to increase tension in the kingdom and could ultimately lead to calls for the removal of the king.

The royal court has a difficult balancing act to perform. First, the protesters are divided. Transjordanians, who have been traditionally loyal to the Hashemite regime, are opposed to political reform that challenges their inherited privileged status and position, and are resisting calls to increase the representation of Palestinian-Jordanians in parliament.

While the king will have to respond to the demands of the IAF and the Palestinian-Jordanians, he will also have to remain sensitive to the needs of the Transjordanians. This will not be an easy task.

Second, if the royal court agrees to real constitutional and political reform there is a risk that the IAF will obtain control of parliament and as a result it would be able to challenge the authority and power of the king – for example by introducing further amendments to the constitution.

Third, the Jordanian economy and the royal court's patronage network is largely funded by financial aid from Saudi Arabia, which strongly opposes further democratisation in the Middle East. The royal court is, therefore, coming under pressure from one of its main financial backers to resist calls for political change.

Given the strategic geopolitical importance of the Hashemite kingdom, it is not in the interests of western or regional governments to see Jordan descend into chaos or experience further unrest. So what should be done?

A low turnout in the parliamentary elections scheduled to take place later this year under the royal court's new electoral law will be a disaster for the regime and it will raise questions over the legitimacy of the king's reform agenda. Thus the royal court needs to positively engage with protesters and postpone the elections until agreement is reached with stakeholders on political and constitutional reform.

Jordan has the potential to transition to democracy in a more peaceful and organised way by following the Moroccan example. In 2011, the Moroccan monarchy agreed to transfer more powers to parliament, including the authority to form cabinets. This ensured the survival of the monarchy and averted further unrest and violence there.

Unfortunately, it does not appear as if Jordan's king has the vision or the courage to follow this path – but failure to learn the lessons of the Arab spring may mean that the Jordanian people will make that decision for him.

Article 6.

Project Syndicate

Europe's Trial by Crisis

Joschka Fischer

28 September 2012 -- Some 2,500 years ago, the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus concluded that war is the father of all things. He might have added that crisis is their mother.

Fortunately, war between world powers is no longer a realistic option, owing to the threat of mutual nuclear destruction. But major international crises, such as the current global financial crisis, remain with us – which might not be an entirely bad thing.

Just as in war, crises fundamentally disrupt the status quo, which means that they create an opportunity – without war's destructive force – for change that in normal times is hardly possible. To overcome a crisis requires doing things that previously were barely conceivable, let alone feasible.

That is what has happened to the European Union over the last three years, because the global financial crisis has not only shaken Europe to its foundations; it has assumed life-threatening proportions.

Compared to the beginning of 2009, we are now dealing with a significantly different EU – one that has become divided between a vanguard of member states that form the eurozone and a rearguard, consisting of member states that remain outside it. The reason is not evil intent, but rather the pressure of the crisis. If the euro is to survive, eurozone members must act, while other EU members with various levels of commitment to European integration remain on the fringe.

Indeed, almost all taboos that existed after the eruption of the crisis have now been abolished. Most were established at German instigation, but now they have been removed with the German government's active support.

It is an impressive list: national responsibility for bank rescues; the sanctity of the EU treaty's proscription of bailouts for governments; rejection of European economic governance; the ban on direct government financing by the European Central Bank; refusal to support

mutual liability for debt; and, finally, the transformation of the ECB from a copy of the old Bundesbank into a European Federal Reserve Bank based on the Anglo-Saxon model.

What remains is the rejection of Eurobonds, but that, too, will ultimately disappear. The only question is whether that taboo will fall before or after next year's German general election. The answer depends on the future course of the crisis.

Germany, Europe's largest economy, is playing a strange, sometimes bizarre, role in the crisis. At no point since the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949 has the country been so strong. It has become the EU's leading power; but it is neither willing nor able to lead.

Precisely for this reason, many of the changes in Europe have occurred despite German opposition. In the end, the German government has had to resort to the art of the political U-turn, with the result that Germany, though economically strong, has grown institutionally weaker – a dynamic exemplified by its reduced influence in the ECB's Governing Council.

The old Bundesbank was laid to rest on September 6, when the ECB adopted its "outright monetary transactions" program – unlimited purchases of distressed eurozone countries' government bonds – over the objections of a lone dissenter: Bundesbank President Jens Weidmann. And the undertaker was not ECB President Mario Draghi; it was German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The Bundesbank did not fall victim to a sinister southern European conspiracy; rather, it rendered itself irrelevant. Had it gotten its way, the eurozone would no longer exist. Placing ideology above pragmatism is a formula for failure in any crisis.

Currently, the eurozone is on the threshold of a banking union, with a fiscal union to follow. But, even with only a banking union, the pressure toward political union will grow.

With 27 members (28 with the approaching addition of Croatia), EU treaty amendments will be impossible, not only because the United Kingdom continues to resist further European integration, but also because popular referenda would be required in many member states. These plebiscites would become a reckoning for national governments on their crisis policies, which no sound-minded government will want.

This means that intergovernmental agreements will be needed for some time to come, and that the eurozone will develop in the direction of inter-governmental federalism. This promises to be exciting, as it will offer completely unexpected possibilities for political integration.

In the end, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy has prevailed, because the eurozone today is led by a de facto economic government that comprises member countries' heads of state and government (and their finance ministers). European federalists should welcome this, because the more these heads of state and government turn into a government of the eurozone as a whole, the faster their current dual role as the EU's executive and legislative branch will become obsolete.

The European Parliament will not be able to fill the emerging vacuum, as it lacks fiscal sovereignty, which still lies with national parliaments and will remain there indefinitely. Only national parliaments can fill the vacuum, and they need a common platform within the eurozone – a kind of "Euro Chamber" – through which they can control European economic governance.

Federalists in the European Parliament, and in Brussels generally, should not feel threatened. On the contrary, they should recognize and use this unique opportunity. National MPs and MEPs should come together quickly and clarify their relationship. In the medium term, a European Parliament with two chambers could emerge.

This crisis offers a tremendous opportunity for Europe. It has defined the agenda for years to come: banking union, fiscal union, and political union. What remains missing is an economic-growth strategy for the crisis countries; but, given mounting unrest in southern Europe, such a strategy is inevitable. Europeans have reason to be optimistic if they recognize the opportunity that their crisis has created – and act boldly and decisively to seize it.

Joschka Fischer was German Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor from 1998-2005, a term marked by Germany's strong support for NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999, followed by its opposition to the war in Iraq. Fischer entered electoral politics after participating in the anti-establishment protests of the 1960's and 1970's, and played a key role in founding Germany's Green Party, which he led for almost two decades.