

From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen <[REDACTED]>
Subject: September 3 update
Date: Tue, 04 Sep 2012 16:42:34 +0000

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Article 1.

The Washington Post

Understanding Obama's and Romney's foreign policy differences

[Jackson Diehl](#)

September 3 -- This presidential election will likely determine whether the United States and Russia undertake a major new reduction of nuclear weapons; whether U.S. arms are supplied to Syrian rebels; whether more U.S. troops are withdrawn from Afghanistan next year; and whether Washington renews pressure on Israel to accept terms for a Palestinian state. It could significantly lower the threshold for a U.S. military strike against Iran.

You wouldn't know any of that from listening to the conventions, of course. Mitt Romney and Barack Obama appear determined to avoid serious debate. The GOP convention last week echoed with vague slogans about "American leadership" and Obama's "weakness." This week, expect to hear lots from Charlotte about the killing of Osama bin Laden and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

That doesn't mean, as some in the foreign policy world like to argue, that this presidential election won't change much, even if Romney wins. It's true that U.S. interests and the pursuit of them tend to remain broadly consistent across presidencies. [Obama has fought al-Qaeda](#) just as ruthlessly as George W. Bush; if Romney is elected, he will surely drop his threats to [start a trade war with China](#), just as Bush and Bill Clinton did. There nevertheless are some big and bright differences in this election on foreign policy. More even than those on the economy, they are likely to have practical consequences within months of the election — since, for the most part, action by Congress won't be necessary. Though the candidates don't talk about them, they are easy enough to find in their position papers, or in Obama's case, his first term record.

Start with Russia. Never mind Romney's much-reported claim that Russia is "our [number one geopolitical foe](#)," or Obama's [oversold "reset"](#) with Moscow. The significant difference is that if Obama is reelected, he will seek to strike a new deal with Vladimir Putin to significantly cut the U.S. and Russian nuclear stockpiles. To do that, [he acknowledged last March](#), he will have to compromise with Putin on U.S. and NATO plans for missile defense; in what he thought was a private aside, he told then-President Dmitry Medvedev that "[after my election, I have more flexibility](#)" on that. Romney's policy would be close to the opposite. In 2010, he [strongly opposed](#) Obama's [New Start treaty](#) with Russia, which made a modest trim in nuclear warheads. Romney meanwhile has promised [to boost spending](#)

[on missile defense](#), which has been a pet GOP cause for three decades. So there's one clear choice: less nukes, or more missile defense.

Next come U.S. military engagements, present and potentially future. Both Obama and Romney support NATO's plan to withdraw combat forces from Afghanistan [by the end of 2014](#), which has provoked some lazy commentary suggesting they don't differ on the war. In fact, they likely disagree on an urgent question — whether American forces should be reduced next year. Obama is likely to order a cut; Romney has said he will follow the advice of U.S. generals, who will probably recommend that the post-September force of 68,000 be maintained through next year.

In Syria, Obama has repeatedly rejected proposals that the United States [help establish safe zones for civilians](#) or supply weapons to the rebels. But Romney has come out for [arming the opposition](#). And what of Iran? Both men have indicated they would use force as a last resort to stop Tehran's nuclear program. But there is a significant difference: While Obama has said he has [“a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon,”](#) Romney [said in Israel](#) this summer that he would not tolerate an Iranian nuclear “capability.” In other words, Obama probably would use force only if Iran actually tried to build a bomb, while a Romney attack could be triggered if Iran were merely close to acquiring all the means for a weapon — which it is.

Last but not least comes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Obama came to office with a burning ambition to broker Palestinian statehood; that and the reduction of nuclear arms seem to be the foreign policy issues that engage him emotionally. The statehood push was one of the administration's biggest busts, largely because of Obama's own missteps, and during the election year it has been on hold. Yet it seems likely that a reelected Obama will try again, notwithstanding his poor relations with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Romney, in contrast, has made it clear that he, like George W. Bush in his first term, will put Palestinian statehood on a back burner.

To be sure, these differences may not mean as much to voters as the future of Medicare, or of the Supreme Court. But they do matter — which is why it's a shame that neither campaign is talking about them.

National Review

Wasted Years

Hillel Fradkin & Lewis Libby

September 3, 2012 -- Years from now, when the world knows how events have turned out, historians will inevitably ask: What unnecessary risks did our presidents foolishly run? President Obama's Iran policy will be high on this list. His misconceptions about Iran will be judged to have stifled, in his first years, timely, non-violent methods that, by his own later assessments, had the best chance to head off the looming prospect of Iranian nuclear weapons. There is value in future historians' holding leaders to account for failed policies, but the harsh, concrete consequences may be borne by many others much sooner.

It didn't have to be this way. When candidate Obama ran for the presidency in 2008, there was a lively debate about Iran policy. Obama maintained that reaching out to Iran and acknowledging its interests was the best way to persuade it to abandon its nuclear-weapons programs, which he came to call an "unacceptable" and "hugely dangerous path." In his inaugural address, the president offered his hand to those who would unclench their fist. In his first months in office, he acknowledged past wrongs done to Iran and declared his resolve "to overcome decades of mistrust" by moving forward "without preconditions." He built our policy to meet his assessment of an Iran ready to abandon its nuclear program and embrace a new era.

Others warned Obama in 2008 and 2009 that no amount of bending to Iran would induce its hard-core leadership to abandon a nuclear program it considered so integral to its regional ambitions and its hold on power. Do not be deluded, these others warned, about the sincerity of Iranian hostility, the risks they will run to keep power, or the scope of their ambitions, for these things had lain close to the heart of Iran's revolution since its inception. And so some urged the president: Aim for harsh, even crippling sanctions on Iran now, for even the best sanctions take years to grab hold of a regime. If there is any chance of a peaceful solution, these students of Iran asserted, it lies in a concerted, forceful policy implemented sooner, not

later. If Iran gets close to having nuclear weapons, they argued, changing its course will only be harder.

Regional powers contested Obama's assessment of Iran, too. They knew Iran well and saw no prospect that it could be easily deterred from its ambitions. Arab leaders enjoined us to take Iran's ambitions seriously; the Israelis said they could not wait very long. When Obama claimed to see an Iran eager to respond to an open hand, our regional allies held their heads in disbelief.

Obama rejected these cautions. He claimed to know better. In the summer of 2009, Obama did his best to overlook a widespread rebellion in Iran and the regime's brutal repression of it. In his quest to keep his policy of engagement on track, he downplayed Iranian provocations. Shocked by Obama's efforts to minimize revelations about Iran's nuclear duplicity, French president Nicolas Sarkozy was driven to say, "We live in the real world, not in a virtual one." Sarkozy continued: "I support America's 'extended hand.' But what have these proposals for dialogue produced for the international community? Nothing but more enriched uranium and more centrifuges. . . . What conclusions are we to draw? At a certain moment hard facts will force us to make decisions." Undeterred, Obama chased the Iranians to enter talks, then conceded critical points in advance and raised American hopes, only to find that the Iranians were somehow, mystifyingly to him and his diplomats, no closer to meaningful change. Obama's failures were both predictable and predicted. Yet, head down, he trudged forward.

Now even Obama declares that harsh economic measures are the only peaceful means that might deter Iran. He has abandoned his prior reliance on Iran's good nature. But instead of seeking tough measures early in his administration, when their bite might have had years to work, he delayed to the point where his sanctions are only now becoming serious, with sterner measures still to be tried. Unfortunately, we are now by some estimates only a year or so from the time when Iran could have enriched enough uranium for a nuclear weapon. We have entered the phase where the taste of success is on Iranian lips. Iranian hard-liners have seen us vacillate in our demands, and now they need only hold out a little longer, not the years that might have faced them before weapons were within reach. We totter on the brink of the "hugely dangerous path" that Obama proclaimed.

Now President Obama fears that Israel, with its own, more acute sensitivity to the risks of a nuclear Iran, may act before sanctions can, in Obama's eyes, succeed. But whose policies drove Israel to the edge of its tolerance? Had Obama listened to others years ago, Israel would have had that lost time as a margin of safety. Now those years are gone.

To shield his misconceptions from the glare of public rebuke, Obama's defenders resort to arguing that the world would not have accepted harsh sanctions years ago. But the truth is different: When President Obama declared that Iran could be persuaded through reason to abandon its program, he sapped the strength from more pessimistic views and undercut any Iranians opposed to the hard-liners' nuclear course. Just as his early pronouncements on Israeli settlements delayed prospects for progress in Palestinian-Israeli talks, his misconceptions about Iran delayed progress on nuclear arms. Had he pushed for sanctions earlier, we could have exposed the problems associated with that route and dealt with them earlier. Instead, we are dealing with them now, in the shadow of disaster.

"What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility," President Obama proclaimed in his inaugural address. With responsibility comes accountability.

On the Iranian nuclear program, Obama did not lead from behind; he led in the wrong direction. That is clear from how completely his earlier policies are now acknowledged to have failed. He has piloted us into ever riskier waters. The only uncertainty is the price we will ultimately pay.

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Article 3.

NYT

To Calm Israel, U.S. Offers Ways to Restrain Iran

[David e. Sanger](#) and [Eric Schmitt](#)

September 2, 2012— With [Israel](#) openly debating whether to strike at [Iran](#)'s nuclear facilities in the coming months, the Obama administration is moving ahead with a range of steps short of war that it hopes will forestall an Israeli attack, while forcing the Iranians to take more seriously negotiations that are all but stalemated.

Already planned are naval exercises and new antimissile systems in the Persian Gulf, and a more forceful clamping down on Iranian oil revenue.

The administration is also considering new declarations by [President Obama](#) about what might bring about American military action, as well as covert activities that have been previously considered and rejected.

Later this month the United States and more than 25 other nations will hold the largest-ever minesweeping exercise in the Persian Gulf, in what military officials say is a demonstration of unity and a defensive step to prevent Iran from attempting to block oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz. In fact, the United States and Iran have each announced what amounted to dueling defensive exercises to be conducted this fall, each intended to dissuade the other from attack.

The administration is also racing to complete, in the next several months, a new radar system in Qatar that would combine with radars already in place in Israel and Turkey to form a broad arc of antimissile coverage, according to military officials. The message to Iran would be that even if it developed a nuclear weapon and mounted it atop its growing fleet of missiles, it could be countered by antimissile systems.

The question of how explicit Mr. Obama's warnings to Iran should be is still a subject of internal debate, closely tied to election-year politics. Some of Mr. Obama's advisers have argued that Israel needs a stronger public assurance that he is willing to take military action, well before Iran actually acquired a weapon. But other senior officials have argued that Israel is trying to corner Mr. Obama into a military commitment that he does not yet need to make.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared to criticize Mr. Obama for being too vague about how far Iran can go. "The international community is not setting Iran a clear red line, and Iran does not see international determination to stop its nuclear project," he told his cabinet. "Until Iran sees a clear red line and such determination, it will not stop the

progress of its nuclear project — and Iran must not be allowed to have [nuclear weapons](#).”

None of the steps being taken by the Obama administration addresses the most immediate goal of the United States and its allies: Slowing Iran’s nuclear development. So inside the American and Israeli intelligence agencies, there is continuing debate about possible successors to “Olympic Games,” the covert cyberoperation, begun in the Bush administration and accelerated under Mr. Obama, that infected Iran’s nuclear centrifuges and, for a while, sent them spinning out of control. An error in the computer code alerted Iran to the attack in 2010, and since then many of the country’s nuclear sites have been modified to defend against such attacks, according to experts familiar with the effort.

All of these options are designed to buy time — to offer Israeli officials a credible alternative to a military strike that would almost certainly trigger an Iranian reaction and, the White House and Pentagon fear, could unleash a new conflict in the Middle East. While Mr. Obama’s national security team has been very closed-mouthed about the tense discussions with Mr. Netanyahu, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, gave voice to the concerns in London on Thursday.

General Dempsey repeated the familiar American position that an Israeli attack would “clearly delay but probably not destroy [Iran’s nuclear program](#).”

But then he went beyond any warning that Mr. Obama has given to Israel in public, saying that the international coalition of countries applying sanctions against Iran “could be undone” if the country was attacked “prematurely.” He added: “I don’t want to be accused of trying to influence, nor do I want to be complicit if they choose to do it.”

United States intelligence officials have said they have no evidence that Iran’s top leaders have decided to take the final steps toward a weapon. Iran’s intentions remain unclear, intelligence officials say.

Last week, the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) reported an increase in the number of centrifuges that Iran has installed in an underground enrichment plant that is largely invulnerable to Israeli attack, but also indicated that Iran has converted some of its most highly enriched fuel to a form that would be difficult to use in a weapon.

The administration has already quietly proposed a “stop the clock” agreement to get Iran to halt production of the fuel that is closest to bomb-grade — and to ship it out of the country, according to diplomats from several countries involved in the discussions. But Iranian officials have rejected those calls, insisting on a lifting of all sanctions, and there has been no talk of a broader, more permanent deal.

Mitt Romney, Mr. Obama’s Republican challenger, has taken a harder line, saying he would never agree to allow Iran to enrich uranium at any level — a restriction even many Republicans, including some of Mr. Romney’s advisers, say there is virtually no chance Iran will accept, since it has a legal right to peaceful enrichment.

One option the administration has already approved is the military exercise, scheduled for Sept. 16-27, in which the United States and its allies will practice detecting and destroying mines with ships, helicopters and robotic underwater drones. The ships will stay out of the narrow Strait of Hormuz, to avoid direct interaction with Iran’s navy.

In advance of the exercise, the United States Navy earlier this summer doubled the number of minesweepers in the region, to eight vessels. The deployments are part of a larger series of military reinforcements into the Persian Gulf in recent months, all described by the United States as defensive.

That is also the explanation for the American efforts to create a regional missile defense system across the Gulf to protect cities, oil refineries, pipelines and military bases from an Iranian attack. The latest element is a high-resolution missile defense radar in Qatar, meant to stress that Iran’s Arab neighbors are as concerned about Tehran’s abilities as is Israel. Military specialists said offensive military options, including strikes against Iran’s refineries and power grid, could also be telegraphed to the Iranians.

“The United States does not have to threaten preventive strikes,” Anthony H. Cordesman, a longtime military analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, wrote in a recent paper, “Iran: Preventing War by Making It Credible.” “It simply has to make its capabilities clear in terms of a wide range of possible scenarios.”

But there is concern among American strategists that Iran could interpret these actions as encirclement, and that the actions could encourage those

elements in the country that want to move faster to a nuclear “capability,” if not a weapon itself. Even one of the options that many Democrats and Republicans advocate to shake Iran — to help topple President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, Iran’s only real friend in the region — could have the same effect.

Inside the Obama White House, there has also been debate about whether Mr. Obama needs to reshape his negotiating strategy around clear “red lines” for Iran — steps beyond which the United States would not allow the country to go. Earlier this year Mr. Obama said he believed that the United States and its allies could not simply accept a nuclear Iran, largely because of the high risk that other Arab states would seek weapons. Even if Mr. Obama set a clear “red line” now, its credibility may be questionable. According to a tally by Graham Allison, the Harvard expert on nuclear conflict, the United States and its allies have allowed Iran to cross seven previous “red lines” over 18 years with few consequences. That leaves one other option that officials are loath to discuss: new covert action.

The “Olympic Games” attack on Iran’s centrifuges was chosen over another approach that the Bush administration explored: going after electrical grids feeding the nuclear operations. But Mr. Obama has rejected any attacks that could risk affecting nearby towns or facilities and thus harm ordinary Iranians. Other plans considered in the past, and now reportedly back under consideration, focus on other targets in the nuclear process, from making raw fuel to facilities involved in missile work. One missile plant blew up last year, and Israeli sabotage was suspected, but never proven. American officials say the United States was not involved. One other proposal circulating in Washington, advocated by some former senior national security officials, is a “clandestine” military strike, akin to the one Israel launched against Syria’s nuclear reactor in 2007. It took weeks for it to become clear that site had been hit by Israeli jets, and perhaps because the strike was never officially acknowledged by Israel, and because its success was so embarrassing to Syria, there was no retaliation.

But Iran’s is a much higher-profile program. “At best this would buy you a few years,” one administration official said, without acknowledging such a strike was under consideration by the United States or Israel. Even if an

explosion at an Iranian facility was accidental, the official said, “the Iranians might well see it as a provocation for an attack of their own.”

Article 4.

Guardian

Barack Obama: the president who fell to earth

Editorial

2 September 2012 -- [Barack Obama](#) has a foe more potent than [Mitt Romney](#). It is the younger version of himself. Scaremongering about a Republican candidate who will send America back to the age of black and white television will not be enough. Whining about the economic hand he was dealt will not do it either. George W Bush is history. His legacy – two wars and an global economic crash – may indeed have been so toxic that it would have taken all four of his successor's years to overcome, no matter who he was, but as we have charted in these columns, that is not the whole truth either. In important areas – Afghanistan and the drone war against al-Qaida to name but two – Obama continued all too consciously in Bush's footsteps.

No, Bush is not Obama's problem. His own words and promises are, though. To get re-elected, Obama the president will have to prove how he can still keep faith with Obama the presidential candidate. He will have to make the account of the last four years more than just a [blame game](#). The older and wiser man has several advantages over his younger self. He passed a tepid version of healthcare reform, but a reform nonetheless; he pulled out of Iraq; he prevented another great depression; he saved the car industry in Detroit. These are no mean achievements. But how much paler is the reality of power than the promise of it. As candidate, his rhetorical ambition knew no bounds, promising not just to change politics but energise a new generation. These people are now profoundly [de-energised](#). If they are motivated, the urge is negative. They see, all too clearly, whom they are going to vote against – a rich man who will undo all the modest social democratic gains of the last four years, who as commander in chief

will be drawn into a war with Iran. But they cannot as yet see whom they will be voting for.

The candidate in 2008 was a brilliant electoral device. He was all things to all men – and women. Liberals saw in him a genuine radical. Centrists thought he could break the power of the Washington lobby. Climate change campaigners thought America would lead the search for Kyoto's successor, not block it. Everyone prayed Obama would restore America's tarnished global image, so that it could lead by force of argument rather than force of arms. Of course, this Icarus flew so high he was doomed to crash. But remember, too, the scale of his ambition. He set the bar for his leadership no lower than Abraham Lincoln himself.

It has been such a bitter, personalised campaign that no candidate has even thought of making a major policy speech. It has all been attack ads, and there is much more to come. This week Obama will have to do better. He must provide people with a real reason, other than fear, to vote him in again.

Article 5.

Al-Monitor

Morsi's Trip Reveals Clues to Egypt's Evolving Foreign Policy

Translated from [Al-Khaleej \(U.A.E.\)](#)

Sep 2, 2012 -- Amid a still uncertain Egyptian political scene, Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi recently conducted several official visits to neighboring countries. These visits came in the wake of numerous meetings among Morsi and international officials and organizations in Cairo. Many believe that such visits might help the president define Cairo's foreign policy orientations, which until now remain unclear, given that Egyptian officials have been consumed with the country's domestic affairs. The first step toward delineating Egypt's foreign policy priorities was taken in Cairo. Morsi and Egyptian Prime Minister Hesham Kandil met, [in

the week of Aug. 19], with International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde to request a [\\$4.8 billion loan from the IMF](#). The move has been fiercely criticized by a slew of revolutionary and non-revolutionary political coalitions, who believe that such a loan will subject the country to the IMF's unfair terms. Many fear that Egypt's future will become dependent upon the decisions of foreign countries and institutions. Moreover, popular movements assert that the loan request reflects the fact that the Morsi administration is following the same socio-economic policies of Egypt's former regime. Over the past three decades, such policies have significantly contributed to a decrease in the standard of living and a deterioration of the economic conditions faced by the majority of Egyptians. These were the factors that resulted in the revolution that toppled the regime of Hosni Mubarak.

The meeting between high-level Egyptian officials and the IMF's managing director have led various political forces to question the economic program that Morsi pledged to implement during his electoral campaign. Morsi had promised a program that would generate about \$200 billion in foreign investments. The country's principal political parties have called upon the government to adopt new economic policies and reform the state subsidy program in a way that allows subsidies to reach their targets and be put to practical use, mainly in the energy sector. Egypt's political parties have also pushed for reforms to the fiscal system in order to make it more fair, and have called for a genuine national discussion about the future of the Egyptian economy. These calls came after prominent economic activists and experts made public several effective and practical solutions to the country's economic woes.

Moving eastward, From Cairo to Beijing

Morsi's [second official visit to Beijing](#) has drawn significant local and international attention. According to some analysts, the visit ushers in a new era in Egypt's foreign policies toward the East. Others point to the strictly economic rationale behind Morsi's trip. Although Egypt and China have taken different positions on the Syrian crisis, they have mutual economic interests and political ambitions. China has investments in various African countries and has a tight grip on several African markets, chiefly Sudan. China's economic might surpasses the traditional power of other major economic forces like the US, France, and the UK. Beijing sees

activities in Egypt as contributing to its own economic growth. Moreover, Beijing thinks that, in the long term, Egypt might serve as a platform for the world's most populous country to better exert its political influence over the region.

In 1997, China and Egypt concluded an agreement that did not end up coming into effect under Mubarak. According to the agreement, a Chinese-Egyptian common industrial zone would be established in the Suez, which would later have been developed into a large agglomeration of high-tech industries. The area would then constitute a transit point for trade across the East, starting from China, Indonesia, and Malaysia and crossing the Port of Suez or Alexandria to western Europe and Africa. The development of such a project laid the groundwork for a strategic cooperation agreement between Egypt and China 12 years ago, which would have mainly covered industry, agriculture and armament.

The agreement was aborted under Mubarak because the leaders of the former regime controlled such lands formerly allocated to the project. Consequently, Chinese investments have remained very limited in Egypt. Cooperation between China and Israel, however, has rapidly expanded in the high-tech sector, and is now estimated at some \$5 billion per year. Politically, the new Egypt needs the support of an important country such as China, primarily when it comes to negotiations and gaining the support of other major forces such as the US and the EU. In addition, China exerts considerable influence over the African countries higher up on the Nile River. China plans to establish new dams that might have a serious impact on Egypt's quota of the Nile waters. Furthermore, China wants to increase its presence in the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] region, primarily because its control over African and Middle Eastern countries like Libya and Syria has been diminished considerably as NATO's influence grows in Libya and the crisis deepens in Syria.

Egypt and Iran: ambitions and reservations

In what signalled to some a shift in Egyptian foreign policy, Morsi visited the [Non-Aligned Movement Summit \(NAM\) in Iran](#) — a controversial move by many standards. This is the first time that an Egyptian leader has visited since mid-1979, when Cairo and Teheran broke off diplomatic relations under Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (Iran's final shah) following the

Iranian Revolution and after late Egyptian President Mohammed Anwar Sadat signed a peace agreement with Israel.

Morsi's visit was admittedly also part of the protocol that the Egyptian president must follow to hand over the NAM summit presidency to the Iranians. However, further to this, the visit addressed several important goals of both parties, and made clear several serious reservations, mainly on the part of Egypt. Tehran welcomed the results of the presidential elections, which helped the Muslim Brotherhood candidate come to power. Tehran also described Morsi's victory as the beginning of an era of "Islamic awakening" in Egypt. Iran today is willing to restore all normal relations with Egypt, and has passed the ball to Cairo to raise the level of its diplomatic representation in Tehran and open an embassy there. Diplomatic representation in both countries is limited, in fact, to a representation office located in Tehran and Cairo which is charged of protecting the countries' mutual interests. However, Iran and Egypt are well aware that Morsi's visit to Tehran does not mean a direct normalization in relations. The visit is just a first step down this path. Furthermore, Cairo is aware that the fence-mending visit to Iran is a matter of considerable concern to the US and Israel. Although Egypt's new regime needs to drum up support from Washington, it is willing to exert pressure on Tel Aviv through diplomatic maneuvers and by taking advantage of its diplomatic relations with other countries on bad terms with Israel. In addition, Egypt's new regime knows that Washington and Tel Aviv are not the only ones objecting to the normalization of relations with Iran. In fact, the Salafists, who are staunch allies of the Muslim Brotherhood, flatly and publicly refuse that Egypt restore relations with Iran. The Muslim Brotherhood cannot take a step that might upset the Salafists, mainly as its relations with civil, liberal, leftist and national forces are deteriorating day after. In fact, Egypt will soon conduct a poll on the new constitution, and parliamentary elections will follow to appoint the MPs for the new Constituent Assembly.

Cairo realizes that there are still unsettled affairs between Egypt and Iran, most importantly regarding Iran's relations with the Arab Gulf countries and its support of the Syrian regime against dissidents there, notably Syria's Muslim Brotherhood. Concerning Iran's relations with the Arab Gulf countries, advisers to the Egyptian President believe that Cairo might

play a role in mending relations between these actors. In fact, Cairo's foreign policy deems relations with the Arab Gulf a top priority. Regarding the mending of relations, Egypt has suggested that a four-member committee be formed — including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey — to settle the matter.

At the present stage, Egypt's new regime will not take major steps to restore relations with Iran. Such positive change in the relations of both countries might usher in the end of the aggressive statements that Iranian and Egyptian officials had grown accustomed to exchanging under Mubarak.

Slow changes between Egypt and Africa

When Morsi took power, it was expected that Egypt would improve its relations with its neighbors in the African continent, mainly countries along the Nile basin, would improve. Although Egypt participated in the African Union Summit - which was recently held in Addis Ababa - and despite Morsi's meetings with several African leaders on the margin of the said summit, Cairo's relations with the African countries are still limited to periodic diplomatic statements. In fact, there are no concrete results or any noticeable improvements in African-Egyptian relations. For instance, the cooperation projects with Sudan — Egypt's most important African ally — are being executed at snail's pace, even though both countries realize the importance of such cooperation.

There are, however, signs that the key highway linking Egypt to Sudan will open soon, a development that may help improve economic relations between both countries. Meanwhile, Egypt and Sudan must play their cards right and be prepared to fight the final and most strenuous battle that could help settle their disputes with the countries of the Nile basin concerning the Nile water-sharing treaty. According to provisions within the treaty, Egypt should, upon the election of a new government, decide whether it will implement the said agreement as is, or make new amendments to it, without prejudice regarding Egypt and Sudan's historical rights to use the Nile waters.

Russia and Islam: The end of peaceful coexistence?

Sep 1st 2012 -- FOR years Tatarstan was held up as a model of stability and tranquillity as the Muslim-majority republics of the Russian north Caucasus became embroiled in a separatist conflict that spawned a still-continuing civil war along religious lines. More than half of Tatarstan's 4m people are Sunni Muslims who have long enjoyed friendly relations with the rest of Russia. Kazan, the regional capital on the Volga river 450 miles (724km) east of Moscow, is a prosperous and attractive city. That sense of calm has changed since July, when assassins shot dead a prominent Islamic leader, Valiulla Yakupov, and nearly killed Tatarstan's chief mufti, Ildus Faizov, with a bomb detonated under his car. The exact motive remains unclear but many in Kazan seem to think it is related to the public campaign of both men to combat the rising influence of Salafism, a fundamentalist form of Islam. In Soviet times, Islam in Tatarstan was largely a means of ethnic identification and had something of a "folk" character, says Akhmet Yarlykapov of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Yet in recent years Salafism, which has gained followers throughout the Muslim world, has made inroads in Tatarstan, especially among the young. Migrants from the republics of the north Caucasus and the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia have also spread more conservative interpretations of Islam. Estimates of the number of Salafists in Tatarstan vary. A local mufti, Farid Salman, says the public figure of 3,000 is probably far too low. The older generation and those in official religious structures are wary of the Salafist groups, seeing them as imports and gateways to radicalisation. After he came to office in early 2011, Mr Faizov started to remove conservative imams and banned religious textbooks from Saudi Arabia, whereas his predecessor had largely left the Salafists alone. Mr Salman warns of a "talibanisation on the borders of historic Europe", but such fears are probably overblown. In many ways Tatarstan does not resemble the north Caucasus at all. The region is

economically prosperous. Oil deposits and a successful manufacturing industry mean that Tatarstan sends more money to Moscow than it receives from the federal budget, unlike heavily-subsidised north Caucasus. Even more important, there is little tradition of the separatist feeling that is strong in Russia's south; most Tatars feel closer to Russians than, for example, do many Chechens.

Worryingly, however, the authorities in Tatarstan have responded to the July attacks with new laws, passed in August, aimed against the Salafi community. These laws are similar to the infamous 1999 law banning Wahhabism in Dagestan, which, combined with aggressive law enforcement, greatly contributed to the growth of the militant underground. The Kremlin is clearly loth to see another Muslim-majority region descend into anarchic violence. On August 28th a suicide bomber in Dagestan killed a respected Sufi scholar. This may well spur a new round of violence in what is already Russia's most conflict-ridden republic. The attack came on the same day that Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, visited Tatarstan to show his support for regional leaders. He declared roundly that "criminals will never achieve their despicable goals". Just how Moscow plans to make sure of this remains an open question. "Sooner or later the state will have to engage in dialogue with the Salafis," says Alexei Malashenko of the Carnegie Moscow Center. But dialogue is not the Russian state's habitual tool for dealing with social forces that it neither understands nor controls. The dual terror attacks of July are unlikely to be the last explosion or the last murder in Tatarstan.