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Article 1.

The Daily Beast

How President Obama Should Handle Iran

Leslie H. Gelb

January 30 -- The United States, Israel, and Europe are [inching closer to war with Iran](#) because of what they're doing and what they're not doing. What they are doing is squeezing Iran with unprecedented economic sanctions (which is good); but Western leaders know full well the penalties won't cause Tehran to abandon its nuclear program. What the West is doing is drawing "red lines" that are backing its leaders into untenable and dangerous corners, as well as cornering Iran. What they are not doing is leveraging these economic and military pressures with a negotiating proposal that can curtail Iran's nuclear-bomb-making capabilities without war.

As Western leaders back Iran into a corner and as they are locking themselves into a war policy they haven't seriously contemplated and don't really want, now is the time to offer a deal. The peace package is simple: Iran keeps its uranium facilities but with capabilities to enrich, reduced to levels fit only for civilian use. Tehran also agrees to the tightest international verification procedures. The West lifts sanctions gradually as Iran complies with both reconfiguring its nuclear plants and accepts the necessary verification. For sure, neither I nor anyone else knows whether Iran will accept. But I do know this: if we don't at least try the negotiating track, a war of untold uncertainties and dangers can come upon us.

To see why economic sanctions alone won't lead to Tehran's capitulation, try to look at the situation through Iranian eyes. Here's what they see: Pakistan, a country that has already given away nuclear secrets to terrorist and renegade states and which itself could be heading toward a Muslim extremist takeover, got the bomb. We did nothing about it. North Korea, one of the nuttiest states around, which has also given nuclear knowledge to Syria and Pakistan (among others), also acquired nukes. We did nothing about that either. Washington accepted India's nukes and even made special verification arrangements with New Delhi that expressly contradicted the Non-Proliferation Treaty. And of course, Israel has long had substantial nuclear strike capability, and Washington secretly applauds that, as do I, openly.

Washington and Israel say Iran is a special case. One reason is that Tehran is supposedly more likely to [use its nukes](#). But why? North Korea and Pakistan are even less predictable than Iran. Another reason is that Iran's

nukes will cause its neighbors, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to go nuclear. But just as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have restrained themselves regarding North Korea, so too can Iran's Arab neighbors. What should calm the waters in the Mideast, as in Asia, is confidence in the U.S. deterrent power. If Pyongyang so much as twitched a nuclear finger, its existence would be a thing of the past. Iran would face the same fate. As Iranians see it, the real reason they are made the only exception to America's no-nukes wall is this: Israel. The Netanyahu regime is convinced that Iran actually will go to nuclear war against the Jewish state, no matter Tehran's certainty that it will be utterly destroyed in return. Tel Aviv thinks the mullahs are Hitlers bent on the destruction of Jews, no matter the cost to themselves. Besides, they reckon that Israel's options to use force against its neighbors will be dangerously limited if Tehran possessed nukes and made nuclear threats.

These Israeli judgments have to be taken seriously. At the same time, it needs be said that many if not most Israeli intelligence officers and key senior military officers have taken nearly the opposite point of view. Of course, they worry about such an Iranian threat. But they believe that Israel's powerful nuclear deterrent will work, that the Iranian leaders are not crazy Hitlers. And they further argue that war would solve nothing and could have grave consequences. Nothing would be solved, they say, because Iran's nuclear march would be set back only by a year or two, then go further underground and be even harder to destroy. And they contend that the adverse reaction to an Israeli attack around the world would be devastating politically, to say nothing of the prospect of a wave of anti-Israeli terrorism.

Faced with these circumstances and prospects, Washington has decided to toughen its stance rhetorically. The good old formulation that "all options are on the table" is no longer sufficient. Now, with full White House support, Defense Secretary [Leon Panetta](#) has gone much further in reducing ambiguity about what the U.S. would do if Iran proceeded with its nuclear development. He didn't define that "red line," but the inevitable neoconservatives are doing it for him and for President Obama. They're maintaining that almost any further moves by Tehran along the nuclear path should trigger U.S. strikes against all possible nuclear targets. Along

these lines, some U.S. military leaders seem to think red lines make sense; most military leaders decidedly do not.

■ like to see President Obama show the courage of offering a solid peace proposal instead of just drawing chest-thumping red lines.

International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors arrived in Iran on Sunday for a three-day inspection tour. Most recently, that agency, charged with checking what's going on within suspect nations, issued a report saying it could not attest that Iran's program was peaceful, and that it could be headed toward nuclear weapons. The agency didn't say so in its report at that time, but most analysts now predict that Iran could have usable nukes within one to two years. Such precision belies their intelligence capabilities as well as America's. But there we are.

And here we Americans are in a [presidential election year](#). At these times, the straps of restraint on tough talk and tough action are almost always loosened. That's especially true when Democrats hold the White House—Democrats who are quadrennially scared stupid by the prospect of Republicans accusing them of being lily-livered liberals and selling out the nation's security. ■ like to see President Obama show the courage of offering a solid peace proposal instead of just drawing chest-thumping red lines. Meantime, he doesn't have to withdraw any sanctions or any "red lines." Just cut the usual diplomatic and political baloney, and try. With so much pressure now being applied on Iran, it might work.

Article 2.

Foreign Policy

[A real debate about Iran](#)

Shlomo Brom, Shai Feldman, Shimon Stein

January 27, 2012 -- Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak suggested recently that Israel's moment of decision on Iran would come not when it obtained nuclear weapons but, instead, how close Iran is to entering what he called "a zone of immunity." Barak's concern was that beyond this threshold it would no longer be possible to halt Iran's nuclear program.

What would comprise such a threshold? Increasingly, this means Iran's shifting of its enrichment activities to the underground facility in Qom as well as with the moving to Qom of more of the uranium previously enriched in Natanz. Barak seemed to imply that a military operation designed to abort Iran's nuclear efforts after the facility in Qom becomes fully operational would be meaningless or irrelevant -- it will be either impossible physically or so costly as to render it prohibitive. Yet the focus on these issues illustrates the limits of public debate. Judging whether Israel can destroy Iran's nuclear installations from the air is difficult without access to classified information. It requires knowing, for instance, the operational capabilities of the Israeli Air Force to fly the distance carrying the required ordnance, to ascertain optimal (operationally and politically) flight paths that avoid a possible activation of other countries' air-defenses, and to bomb simultaneously multiple facilities scattered in various locations in Iran. None of the data relevant to addressing these issues is available in the public domain. A specific example of this problem relates to the aforementioned concept of "a zone of immunity."

Ascertaining the real meaning of this concept requires classified intelligence regarding the pace with which Iran is developing the facility in Qom, the rate and quantities of enriched uranium being moved from Natanz to Qom, the physical properties of the facility in Qom -- namely how well dug in the mountain it actually is and what other measures Iran has taken to protect it from air bombardment. It also requires relevant classified operational data about the capacity of the air forces of Israel and the United States to penetrate such fortified targets. Again, for obvious reasons, what exists in the public domain relevant to these questions is only an approximation of real data -- not accurate enough to reach a judgment about these critical issues. Nevertheless, given the huge stakes involved, such questions must be debated if the United States and Israel are to avoid mindlessly stumbling into a costly military confrontation with Iran or an equally risky decision by default to avoid effective measures to arrest Iran's nuclear efforts. There are six important questions that fall under two big topics: the implications of Iran's possible acquisition of nuclear weapons and the ramifications of an attempt to prevent such acquisition by launching a military strike against Iran's nuclear installations. The fundamental question is whether Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons will

actually amount to an "existential threat" to Israel. This might refer to the technical-physical capacity to destroy Israel, in much the same manner that the Soviets' possession of 26,000 nuclear warheads at the height of the Cold War implied the physical capacity to destroy the United States many times over. However, that would imply that once acquired, Iran would launch such weapons in efforts to end Israel's existence. Some suggest the actual threat is that such a hair-trigger environment would make Israel hostage to any small change in Iranian moods. As former Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh warned some years ago, that could breed such extreme Israeli anxieties as to induce its citizens to emigrate, also threatening Israel's existence. The central question is about deterrence. If efforts to arrest Iran's quest for nuclear weapons fails and Iran obtains them, will it be possible to deter it from using these weapons? Will Iran's leaders behave as rational actors so that deterrence -- which is based on leaders' ability to process and be sensitive to potential related costs -- could be applied effectively? Taking into account not only their rhetoric but more importantly their past behavior, what is the evidence suggesting that the "rational actor" assumption will not apply to Iran's leaders, therefore raising serious questions as to whether in this case a "deterrence fall-back" actually exists? Clearly, the policy implications of the first two questions are considerable because if a "deterrence fall-back" does not exist in the case of Iran, Israel will have no choice but to prevent it from obtaining nuclear weapons at all cost. A second question is whether Iran's possible acquisition of nuclear weapons will lead to a nuclear cascade. For example, would Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt feel compelled to respond by developing nuclear capacities of their own, thus leading to a proliferation cascade? Having tolerated Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons, would Egypt and Saudi Arabia be able to ignore a similar step by another non-Arab country in the region?

Another facet of this broader proliferation issue is what changes in Israel's nuclear posture Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would require. Would Israel continue to adhere to its present policy of nuclear ambiguity or will it sharpen its deterrent messages by adopting a more overt posture? And if so, would such a change further accelerate the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region? Thus, if Iran's possession of nuclear weapons will lead Israel to feel that it must make its nuclear deterrence posture more

overt, will this further press Egypt and Saudi Arabia -- and possibly Turkey -- to follow suit?

At the same time, should Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons lead the United States to move quickly to prevent a proliferation cascade by offering its allies in the region a nuclear umbrella (otherwise referred to as "extended deterrence") how would these countries react? If Israel faces a choice between sharpening its deterrent message or accepting a U.S. nuclear guarantee, what are the pros and cons of the two possibilities? If Saudi Arabia and Egypt needs to choose between the costs and risks of attempting to develop an indigenous nuclear capacity or to accept a U.S. nuclear umbrella, is it self-evident that they would prefer the former over the latter? And how would their decision affect Israel's choice between accepting a U.S. nuclear guarantee and adopting a more overt nuclear deterrence posture?

In this scenario, how would Israel react if following Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons other countries in the region follow suit to acquire their own, and Iran would announce that it is willing to implement nuclear arms control and disarmament measures as long as such measures are applied equitably "in a regional context?" Should Israel adopt the position that if disarmament measures could be credibly verified it would be better to have the two countries disarm their nuclear capabilities than to allow Iran to possess such weapons?

Third, what about the expectation that Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons will embolden its allies in the region, encouraging them to behave more aggressively and to posit more dangerous challenges to Israel. This expectation requires thorough airing because it is not clear what Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas would do that they are not doing already once Iran acquires nuclear weapons. If these parties take more bold actions because they assume that Iran's nuclear weapons will constrain Israel's responses to their more daring activities, the relevant scenarios should be simulated and explored. For example, is it realistic to expect that Iran's possession of nuclear weapons will affect the manner in which Israel will likely react to a Hezbollah cross-border attack and its abduction of an Israeli soldier?

As noted earlier, a second set of issues that require exploration and debate concern the possible implications of an attempt to abort Iran's nuclear efforts with a military strike on its nuclear installations. The first of these

concerns is the possibility that such a strike would lead Iran's allies and other Arab states to react strongly to the attack, possibly engulfing Israel in a regional war. The former head of Israel's Mossad, Meir Dagan, saw this scenario as quite likely but it is not clear on what evidence this is based. Syria is now overwhelmed by its domestic problems, if not civil war, and Hamas is increasingly disassociating itself from Iran's Syrian allies and is relocating its leadership in exile from Damascus to Cairo and Doha. In this scenario, Hezbollah would be left alone to escalate, thus risking the likelihood that Israel would bring against it the full wrath of its military capacity, now restored in the aftermath of the summer 2006 debacle. Would Hezbollah risk its political survival to execute a Tehran-inspired retaliation? Similarly, it is not clear why other Arab states would play along with an Iran-inspired escalation and risk a confrontation with Israel when they did not react that way to Israel's 1981 bombing of Osiraq -- Iraq's nuclear reactor -- and to Israel's destruction of Syria's nuclear facility in 2007.

The second question associated with a possible Israeli military strike concerns its likely effects on Iran's domestic scene. Many observers expect such a strike to result in a "rallying around the flag" and a closing of the ranks behind its ruling regime. Thus, a military strike may stifle any prospects of "regime change" in Iran -- a change that some opponents of a military strike seem to regard not only as possible given the degree of discontent prevailing in Iran, especially among its large minorities, but also as the only long-term way of rendering Iran's nuclear efforts benign. But is it self-evident that the Iranian public would necessarily "rally around the flag" in reaction to a military strike against the country's nuclear facilities? Could such a reaction be avoided by limiting the strike to facilities specifically associated with Iran's efforts to manufacture nuclear weapons -- thus minimizing civilian casualties -- by fully acknowledging Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear program, and by excluding from the bombing Iran's new energy-generating civilian nuclear power reactor in Busher?

A critical issue associated with a military strike is whether it would be wise for Israel to attack Iran's nuclear installations while the United States continues to oppose it arguing that such a step should be taken only after all other measures have been exhausted. The main question is not whether from a technical-operational standpoint Israel can conduct such a strike

without U.S. permission given that it would require flying through or close to an area still defined as a "U.S. Theater of Operations." By early 2012 this issue has been somewhat reduced with the end of U.S. military presence in Iraq. More important is whether given Iran's threat to retaliate against an airstrike by targeting U.S. forces and assets in the region, Israel can ignore the costs that the U.S. may incur for such a strike. Indeed, even if Iran does not target U.S. forces in the region directly, any reaction by Iranian forces could ignite and pull the United States into a broader violent conflict in the Middle East. Would such unintended U.S. involvement in another war in the region invite U.S. anger directed at Israel?

And even more broadly, given the growing intimacy of U.S.-Israeli defense cooperation, can Israel afford to ignore U.S. priorities and concerns?

Addressing this issue on November 1, 2011 Defense Minister Ehud Barak reportedly told the Knesset Committee on Finance that there are times when a nation is required to defend itself even at the displeasure of its closest allies. But would it be responsible to do so in this case? Given that Israel will continue to face serious challenges in an ever-changing Middle East, and will continue to require U.S. assistance at almost every level, can Israel discount the U.S. will? Conversely, would Israel be able to diminish the expected negative U.S. reaction to its self-interested measures by meeting U.S. priorities in other fronts? For example, by doing its share to mend fences with Turkey -- a member of NATO and a close and important ally of the United States?

Much of the discussion of the prospects of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons, and of the efficacy of the efforts to prevent it from doing so, continues to focus on operational dimensions of this issue. Yet judgments regarding these dimensions cannot be rendered in the absence of relevant classified data. Instead, the public debate must focus on the strategic dimensions of the issue -- a realm in which civilian strategists have much to contribute. Indeed, airing these dimensions is an absolute imperative. Without it we are condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past or to commit worse ones. More important, without such airing we are doomed to step mindlessly closer and closer to a military confrontation with Iran or, possibly just as dangerous, to accept and accommodate its nuclear ambitions and designs.

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Article 3.

NYT

Hamas Leader Takes Rare Trip to Jordan

[Stephen Farrell](#)

January 29, 2012 -- AMMAN, Jordan — [Khaled Meshal](#), the leader of [Hamas](#), made a rare and pointedly low-key visit to Jordan on Sunday, days after Hamas officials signaled that he had effectively abandoned the group's base in Damascus, the Syrian capital.

Mr. Meshal and a delegation from Hamas's political bureau, including his deputy, Mousa Abu Marzook, arrived in Amman with the crown prince of Qatar, Sheik Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, and met with the king of Jordan, Abdullah II.

It was the first official visit to Jordan by Hamas's leader since the group's former headquarters in Amman were shut down by the Jordanian government in 1999, forcing the group to relocate to Damascus. Moves toward reconciliation are a delicate issue for both sides.

Jordan wants to restore relations with Hamas, the militant [Palestinian](#) group that controls Gaza, because the group is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose Islamist allies are forming new governments around the Arab world, and because Jordan wants to remain an influential go-between in the region, especially in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But Jordan does not want to damage its relationship with Hamas's chief rival, President Mahmoud Abbas and his [Fatah](#) party, nor to anger Jordan's allies, [Israel](#) and the United States, which consider Hamas a terrorist group. Hamas, likewise, is eager to distance itself from the increasingly bloodstained government of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, but does

not want to provoke Syria or its powerful political and financial patron, Iran.

After the Hamas delegation led by Mr. Meshal met with King Abdullah on Sunday, the royal palace issued a statement repeating Jordan's nuanced positions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, supporting a negotiated solution based on two states and citing "the importance of unity among the Palestinians groups."

In turn, Mr. Meshal issued a statement welcoming the visit as a "good start" and saying that Hamas was mindful of Jordan's "security and stability, as well as its interests."

A wholesale return to Amman by Hamas does not appear to be on the table. Some analysts believe the group will disperse its leadership around the region: Mr. Meshal perhaps to Qatar, where he has a residence; Mr. Marzook to Egypt, where he can be closer to his family in Gaza; and other leaders to Amman or Beirut, or in Damascus — where they would remain individually.

Khaled Hroub of Cambridge University, who studies Islamist movements, said leaving Syria fit with a "paradigm shift" in Hamas — led by Mr. Meshal, over some resistance from hardliners in Gaza — away from an armed campaign and toward less violent popular resistance to Israel.

"They have decided for the time being that nonviolence is the strategy," Dr. Hroub said of the Hamas leaders. "The whole nonviolent strategy has shown its effectiveness: the Arab Spring has proved this with the fall of strong governments in Egypt and Tunisia.

"With newly emerging governments in the post-Arab-Spring era, many of them Islamist, Hamas wants to be hosted and embraced and have offices in these countries, so they want to establish a distance from the old Hamas. This will make it easier for countries like Egypt and Tunisia to deal with them, without having problems with the Americans and the West."

Dr. Hroub and others are not persuaded by reports that Mr. Meshal plans to step down from leadership of the political bureau, perhaps to move to a post at the Muslim Brotherhood or even in the Palestinian National Council, the legislative body of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which is now headed by Fatah, the more secular of the two main Palestinian factions.

Instead, they suggested that Mr. Meshal might be trying to prompt grass-roots appeals to stay on, which would renew his legitimacy after 16 years in the leadership role.

“I know the man very well,” said Labib Kamhawi, a Jordanian political analyst. “The fact that Khaled says, ‘I might not be running for office, blah blah,’ means he is running for office. He wants to see demonstrations in the streets — people asking for Khaled.”

Mr. Kamhawi noted that Mr. Meshal would have to stay on as head of Hamas if he wants to become the head of the [Palestinian Authority](#).

In Jordan, which has two million registered Palestinian refugees, there is widespread admiration for Mr. Meshal, who survived an assassination attempt here in 1997. Palestinians interviewed in Amman said they were happy he was coming.

“Of course he will have more influence here, because there are more Palestinians here than in Syria,” said Mahdi Mahmoud, 26, a refugee from Jerusalem. ■■■■ Jamil, 52, said she saw him not as a party chief, but as a Palestinian leader. “Everybody loves him, he’s very dear to us,” she said. “He’s a distinguished figure, he has stature.”

In Israel, Brig. Gen. Shalom Harari, a former adviser to the defense ministry on Palestinian affairs, said it had become impossible for Hamas to remain based in Damascus while the Assad government, dominated by Syria’s Alawite Muslim minority, was killing fellow Sunni Arabs.

He said it made sense for Hamas to lower its profile at a time when its Islamist allies want to be seen in a better light in the West. He said the clearest sign of Hamas’s sensitivity to changing regional winds was that it had bowed to pressure last year from the new Egyptian government to release [Gilad Shalit](#), a captive Israeli soldier it held for more than five years.

“The decision is to smother themselves in low profile,” General Harari said of Hamas, though he warned that the group would resume “the armed struggle, guns and bombs, when the time is right — and the time could be right within months.”

Arab Spring breeze swaying Hamas too

Cihan Çelik

January 30 2012 -- Seeking a new host for the politburo of his Islamist Palestinian resistance movement, Hamas' supremo has made a Qatar-mediated rare visit to Israel's key ally Jordan, where he survived an assassination attempt in 1997 and was banished in 1999, amid mounting speculation hinting that his group wants to relocate its base from unrest-hit Syria's capital to elsewhere in the region.

Along with Qatar and Jordan, [Turkey](#) is also among would-be hosts with Turkish President Abdullah Gül neither denying nor confirming that his country would soon welcome Hamas on its soil as Turkey's relations with its once-ally [Israel](#) hit historically low levels.

The recent regional efforts of Khaled Mashaal, the leader of Hamas-in-exile, have signaled a historic breakthrough for the militant group, proving that it was also not "immune" to the so-called "Arab Spring" in the near neighborhood.

Unfazed over its worsening ties with Israel, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government seems more defiant in its intention of having closer ties with Hamas since the Islamist-led movements in the Middle East and North Africa are gaining more ground in local politics thanks to the ongoing "wind of change" in the region.

Just five years ago, the senior officials of the AKP government were reluctant to appear with Mashaal during his official [Ankara](#) visit, which actually put the initial chill into the Turkish-Israeli relationship that reached its peak when the latter killed nine Turkish pro-Palestinian activists in a 2010 Gaza-bound flotilla raid.

However, appearing bolder day by day in its ties with Hamas, the AKP government's gamble of using not only Hamas but the entire Palestinian cause as "a proxy way actor" in its physiological war against [Israel](#) may bear far different results than it imagined.

Still refusing to recognize [Israel](#) and bid farewell to arms, Hamas, which took over the Gaza Strip violently in 2007, has recently taken silent but significant steps toward a more "moderate stance" after seeing its "same-minded but milder" allies' success of driving the waves of popular unrest

against the long-time rulers in its near region.

The so-called “Arab Spring” had a double-barrel effect on Hamas, which on the one hand became more legitimate to those who have been afraid of the rising Islamist threat and, on the other, set sail for more modest waters. Having to become a member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) after decades on the agenda as part of the reconciliation talks with its rival Fatah or mulling the transfer of its headquarters from a country which is under fire to a more Western-friendly country signaled that the Islamist organization is now seeking to move toward a more tolerant stance.

However, for Turkey, Qatar or Jordan – indeed, for whoever becomes the new host – it is crystal clear that it will assume a Herculean task since the longstanding negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis have been jeopardized and the reunification talks between Hamas and Fatah are still struggling on.

Israel, which have been criticizing its “peace partner” Fatah and its leader Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, for both pursuing a unilateral declaration of the Palestinian state and his reconciliation efforts with Hamas, just declared that the hopes for a solution “are looking poor” after the initial talks to spark the negotiations ended in deadlock. Should [Turkey](#) become the new host of the Hamas headquarters, the prospects for even rekindling talks will become dimmer due to the obvious reasons in the former’s relationship with Israel.

A possible decision to leave Syria will also spell more trouble for Hamas if the Damascus regime sees the departure as another message to the Western world that its days are numbered. Losing the support of Syria may seem “an affordable loss” for Hamas today, but in the long term, it may end up losing its main supporter, the powerful regime in Iran, a staunch ally of Damascus amid the looming catastrophe of a sectarian-fueled regional conflict.

Article 5.

Agence Global

Syrian Scenarios

Rami G. Khouri

30 Jan 2012 -- BEIRUT -- Now that the Arab League has decided to ask the UN Security Council to back its plan to resolve the crisis in Syria, the prospects of international involvement in Syria inch forward just a bit more. This adds a new dimension to the already fertile debate on how the mounting violence and expanding political crisis in Syria will end. In the past several months, I have heard dozens of suggested scenarios. Some are plausible, others are fantastic, but all are suggested seriously by usually knowledgeable observers and analysts, and they go something like this. The most common scenario I hear is that tensions and violence will continue to the point in the coming year where economic collapse causes some influential Syrians in the Assad regime to carry out an inside coup, after despairing that Bashar Assad's leadership can find a political solution to the crisis. Such a coup would be led by Alawite and Sunni armed forces officers who would recognize the need to make a deal with the demonstrators and send Syria onto a path of serious political democratization, while sparing the Alawite community from widespread retributions after the fall of the House of Assad. A variation of this sees an inside plot to assassinate the top leaders, and bring an immediate end to the crisis.

Another common scenario sees the Russians recognizing that Assad's approach is doomed to fail and shifting away from their current course of using their veto to prevent any Security Council moves to pressure Damascus. In this script, Russia convinces Assad to step down and leave the country with his extended family and their riches.

A variation on this sees a combination of Alawite leaders, armed forces officers and top businessmen who collectively decide that they are all doomed if the current trends persist, and work together to do one of two things: Either they engineer a coup and force Assad's exit, or they sit him down and make it clear that his three pillars of support all see only doom, death and destruction in their common future and convince him to turn over power to a democratic transition leadership before total collapse ruins the country.

A more dramatic possibility in some people's view is for regional and

global powers to decide to impose no-fly zones and safe havens along the country's northern and southern borders, which would speed up the defection of tens of thousands of Syrian soldiers and civilians and speed up the collapse of the regime from within. This would be hastened by the continued economic deterioration that would impact all sectors of society, as tighter international sanctions -- including bans on aviation and banking links with Syria -- lead to a combination of shortages of basic goods and runaway inflation that makes it impossible for most Syrians to live a normal life. This would also spark massive anti-regime demonstrations in Damascus and Aleppo, which would be the death-knell of the Assad brand. A more drastic possibility in the view of some analysts is that the polarization of Syrian society on ethnic lines and full civil war will reach the point where the unified state that now exists collapses, and the Alawites retreat into their mountains and form their own state in their northwestern heartland. Some suggest that this has been the aim of the crisis all along, with someone from outside provoking civil strife to the point where Syria breaks up into small statelets, including Alawite, Druze, Kurdish and Sunni entities. This would occur at the same time that Iraq similarly disintegrates as a unified country and leaves behind Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish entities of some sort. One culprit behind this scenario it is said, of course, is Israel-America, whose desire for hegemonic control of the Middle East is made much easier by the presence of many smaller, weaker ethnic statelets rather than larger, stronger Arab states. In such a scenario Israel would quickly come to the aid of some of these ethnic statelets -- as it tried to do with some Lebanese sectarian groups in the 1980s -- and thus cement both the fragmentation of the Levant and its dominance of it.

The most terrible scenario sees the continued deterioration in Syria lead the Assad regime to implement the Samson option, which is to instigate as much strife and chaos across the region as it could, and plunge the entire Levant into a regional conflagration. This option would be based on the assumption by the Assads that if they cannot rule over a unified Syria, then nobody in the neighborhood would be able to live in peace and security either. Such a scenario would involve attacks against, or fomenting strife within, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, perhaps resulting in large-scale, desperate use of chemical and nuclear weapons.

These are only the most plausible scenarios that are widely circulated in

the region these days. The more outrageous ones are left for another day to ponder.

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Article 6.

Guardian

US elections: no matter who you vote for, money always wins

[Gary Younge](#)

29 January 2012 -- Republican [presidential debates](#) are not for the faint-hearted. Last week in Jacksonville, Florida, Rick Santorum warned of the "threat of radical Islam growing" in Central and South America. Newt Gingrich advocated sending up to seven flights a day to the moon, where private industry might set up a colony, and reaffirmed his claim that Palestinians were invented in the late 70s. Mitt Romney argued that if you make things tough enough for undocumented people, they will "self-deport".

Given the general state of the Republican party, such comments now attract precious little attention. Truth and facts are but two options among many. The party's base, overrun by birthers, climate change deniers and creationists, [floats its warped theories](#) and every now and then one makes it to the top and bobs out into the airwaves.

So the oft-touted notion that these debates have been responsible for shifting the trajectory of this primary race would be worrying if it were true. It is difficult to think of anywhere else in the western world where these debates would have any credibility outside of a fringe party (even if the fringes in Europe are now spreading). Far from indicating America's

exceptionalism, it looks more like an awful parody of the stereotypes most outsiders already believed about American politics at its most bizarre.

"Those who follow this race daily may have long since lost perspective on how absurd it is," said the German magazine [Der Spiegel last week](#). "Each candidate loves Israel. They all love Ronald Reagan. Each loves his wife, a born first lady, for a number of reasons."

The good news is, with the exception of Perry's demise, the debates have not been pivotal. The bad news is that the truly decisive element has been something even more insidious: money. Lots of it.

This is not new. But since a 2010 supreme court ruling allowing unlimited campaign contributions by corporations and unions, it has become particularly acute. Moreover, the contributors can remain anonymous. The organisations that are taking advantage of this new law are known as Super Pacs. Even at this early stage of the presidential cycle, their potential for framing the race is clear. In the whole of 2008 individuals, parties and other groups [spent \\$168.8m](#) independently on the presidential election.

This year on Republican candidates alone, where voting started less than a month ago, the Super Pacs have reported [independent expenditures of almost \\$40m](#). In 2008 election spending doubled compared with 2004.

This year industry analysts believe the money spent just on television ads is set to leap by [almost 80%](#) compared with four years ago.

Money in American politics was already an elephant in the room. Now the supreme court has given it a laxative, taken away the shovel, and asked us to ignore both the sight and the stench.

The only real restriction is that there should be no co-ordination between the candidate and the Super Pac. In practice, this is little more than a fig leaf. A few weeks ago one of the ads, funded by the Super Pac supporting Gingrich, was slated for its many brazen inaccuracies. At a campaign stop in Orlando, Gingrich told supporters: "[I am calling on this Super Pac](#) – I cannot co-ordinate with them and I cannot communicate directly, but I can speak out as a citizen as I'm talking to you – I call on them to either edit out every single mistake or to pull the entire film."

Romney is no less compromised. His former chief campaign fundraiser and political director work for the main Super Pac supporting him, which was set up with the help of a \$1m cheque from an ex-business partner. "This

legalism of 'no co-ordination' is a filament-thin G-string," [wrote Timothy Egan](#) in the New York Times recently. "Everyone co-ordinates."

Money alone can't guarantee success. Santorum spent around 74 cents a voter in Iowa and narrowly won; Perry spent around \$358 per vote and came a distant fourth. Debate performances, policy positions, personal histories and retail politics play a role. But the fact that money is not the sole determinant doesn't mean it's not the key one. Two months ago Gingrich's surge in Iowa was halted after Romney's Super Pac ploughed millions of dollars into campaign ads attacking him. Romney's commanding lead in South Carolina was similarly thwarted when Gingrich's Super Pac injected several million dollars.

This is not a partisan point. Almost two-thirds of Americans believe the government should limit individual contributions – with a majority among Republicans, Democrats and independents. The influence of money at this level corrupts an entire political culture and in no small part explains the depth of cynicism, alienation and [mistrust Americans now have for their politicians](#).

The trend towards oligarchy in the polity is already clear. There are 250 millionaires in Congress. Their median net worth is \$891,506, nine times the typical US household. Around 11% are in the nation's top 1%, including 34 Republicans and 23 Democrats. And that's before you get to Romney, whose personal wealth is [double that of the last eight presidents combined](#). All of this would be problematic at the best of times, but in a period of rising inequality it is obscene.

The issue here is not class envy, hating rich people because they are rich, but class interests – cementing the advantages of the privileged over the rest. The problem is not personal, it's systemic. In the current climate, it means a group of wealthy people in business will decide which wealthy people in Congress they would like to tell poor people what they can't have because times are hard. And unless the ruling is overturned there is precious little that can be done about it.

Last week in a Massachusetts Senate race, both the Republican incumbent and his likely Democratic challenger signed a pact agreeing not to use third-party money. The trouble is that the agreement is completely unenforceable. Already at least one pro-Republican group has refused to commit to it.

Downplaying money's central role at this point merely buys into the illusion of participatory democracy, where ideas, character and strategy are paramount, while others are actually buying the candidates and access to power. The result is a charade. Fig leaf, G-string – name the scanty underwear of your choice. The emperor is butt naked. Whoever you vote for, the money gets in.

Article 7.

TIME

Are Companies More Powerful Than Countries?

[Rana Foroohar](#)

January 27, 2012 -- In 2008, after Lehman Brothers fell and the financial crisis and global recession began, the conventional wisdom was that we were entering an era in which government would take back power from business. In fact, just the opposite has happened.

The high profile political figures here at Davos disappointed — Merkel was angry and depressed by turns, and Geithner was defensive. Europe remains a mess, the U.S. vulnerable, and emerging markets — the only bright spot in the last three years — are slowing down. Politicians have few solutions to the huge problems of the day — labor bifurcation, debt, and inequality. Markets want answers, but leaders can't give them — in part because for them, nearly any sort of action poses political risk.

Meanwhile, the top companies seem to exist in a world apart — they are booming, and their executives are prospering. If there is a meta theme to this year's World Economic Forum in Davos, it is that the world's largest companies are moving on and moving ahead of governments and countries that they perceive to be inept and anemic. They are flying above them, operating in a space that is increasingly disconnected from local concerns, and the problems of their home markets. And if the conversations here are any indication, they may soon take over much of what government itself does.

The problem was nicely captured in this week's New York Times piece on Apple, looking at why the iPhone is mostly made outside America. As one of the company's executives put it, "We don't have an obligation to solve America's problems." It's a sentiment that was echoed on Time's Board of Economists' panel, where business leaders blamed for not sharing the \$2 trillion in wealth sitting on corporate balance sheets argued that they did create jobs and prosperity — just not in this country.

It's an argument that has more moral weight that you might think. You can argue that creating jobs in China and India, for example, actually increases total global well-being more than creating them in the U.S. would, since per capita GDP in those countries is so much lower. Nitin Nohria, dean of the Harvard Business School, told me that, as an Indian immigrant to the U.S., he has some sympathy with that argument. Yet, he says, "companies are also becoming aware that if everyone feels the way Apple does, there will be a tragedy of the commons — we do rely on the health of our home markets, and multinational firms can't turn their back on them." Labor economist Clyde Prestowitz pointed out as much in an article in Foreign Policy this week where he noted that while Apple may not think American economic issues are its "problem," it certainly depends on the Seventh Fleet to keep Asian waterways safe and clear so that it can deliver its products.

It's a problem that will only deepen. President Obama tried to stoke enthusiasm for a U.S. manufacturing revolution in the State of the Union speech. But a new and very sobering HBS study surveying 10,000 high powered alumnae put the nascent in-sourcing renaissance into perspective — most of the firms that are bringing jobs home aren't doing that because Americans have superior skills. It's because energy costs have gone up, and it's cheaper to do just in time manufacturing at home. Those are factors that can quickly change.

Conversely, many firms sending jobs abroad aren't doing it because it's cheaper — but because skills are better (at least in relation to wages) in other countries. It's a scary trend, and one that speaks to the growing bifurcation in Western labor markets. A lot of people here in Davos — people like Nobel laureate Chris Pissarides, and a number of high level investors I spoke with — say that we can't innovate or educate our way out of this problem. It's only going to get worse, particularly as a coming

automation revolution starts to hollow out white collar jobs in rich countries.

So, where does that leave us? Do the people running the world's largest companies, which are growing fast and hold plenty of cash, have any responsibility to their home markets? Should they even take on certain roles that beleaguered and indebted states can't handle any more — things like education, health care and infrastructure development? Here at Davos, there are unlikely alliances being made over these issues; people ranging from Bangladeshi micro finance founder Mohamed Yunus to financial titans say yes, what we need isn't less capitalism, but more. Let companies pick up the slack from the state. The ideas being floated are radical — GE and Microsoft should run education in America, making it more efficient and insuring U.S. workers have the skill set they need to get jobs in the future. (Yes, everyone also agreed that such solutions were freighted with social and political problems.)

America should get serious about industrial policy (traditionally a third rail word) and start subsidizing and pushing strategic industries as hard as China does, as well as slapping tough tariffs on competitors' goods (the central bankers in attendance are wringing their hands about coming trade and currency wars that might result). Some say we should radically raise minimum wages for the 90 percent of people in rich countries who'll end up working service jobs catering to a small upper class of global rich. A two-tier class system is inevitable, they say. We just have to make it palatable. Others, including a number of university presidents, believe we need to take a "by any means necessary" approach to keeping high-end jobs, particularly tech oriented ones, at home.

On that, at least, politicians would agree. In her keynote opening speech at Davos, Angela Merkel said that unless the eurozone crisis was solved, Europe risked becoming "just a nice place to take a vacation." The same could be said of all rich countries. One thing that's becoming clear at Davos is that the core idea of the Enlightenment — that capitalism and democracy go hand in hand to create the best society — is under fire. And the struggle to create a new model may well pit nation against nation, corporations against government, poor against rich. The world, it turns out, isn't flat — and it's becoming bumpier all the time.

BLOOMBERG

Why Singapore Has the Cleanest Government Money Can Buy

The Editors

Jan 24, 2012 -- [Singapore](#)'s prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, isn't often taken publicly to task. But when you make S\$3.1 million (\$2.4 million) annually to run a country, people tend to expect results. When they don't get them, the aggrieved masses turn to that lowest-of-common-denominator gripe: Hey, how much are we paying this guy?

Lots compared with, say, [Barack Obama](#), who as U.S. president gets \$400,000 a year. Lee's compensation will fall 36 percent, and that of Singapore's president will drop 51 percent, to S\$1.54 million. The cuts were based on the [recommendations](#) of an advisory committee formed three weeks after last May's elections, when opposition party candidates made hay with the pay issue -- and the ruling People's Action Party won with the narrowest margin since independence in 1965.

Such still-fat paychecks may give pause. Yet let's applaud Singapore for what it's trying to achieve by paying top salaries to leaders and ministers: attracting the best and brightest to public service and reducing the temptation to engage in graft. Done properly, such initiatives can make government more efficient and economies more vibrant. Transparency International has ranked Singapore among the world's top five least-corrupt governments since 2001, and according to [Worldwide Governance Indicators](#), an index supported by the [World Bank](#), it has also been among the best governed.

Asia's Mixed Record

Since the 1997 Asian crisis, the region's other governments have had a mixed record in holding public servants to account, making growth more efficient, and creating the institutions -- independent judiciaries, central banks and media as well as freer watchdog groups -- needed to clean up political and economic systems. One way for Asian countries, home to a big share of the world's households living on \$2 per day, to boost their economies is to increase the pay of their civil servants.

Take Cambodia, which ranked at the bottom of a [recent](#) regional Transparency International corruption survey. Its government workers pad their paltry, sporadic pay by demanding bribes for everything from birth certificates to school grades. One oft-cited [International Monetary Fund working paper](#) argues that paying civil servants twice the wages of manufacturing workers is associated with a reduction in corruption. In Cambodia, civil servants make less than half what a garment worker makes.

In China, corruption is the common link between state-owned banks doling out billions of dollars to cronies; land grabs by local government officials; and the negligence that killed 40 people in a high-speed rail crash last July. If Beijing paid higher salaries, it might reduce the incidence of graft and rent-seeking that aggravates the lopsidedness of China's development. Its [Gini \(DFIGCN\)](#) coefficient, an income-distribution gauge, has climbed to almost 0.5 from less than 0.3 a quarter-century ago.

[Japan](#) should consider fattening public paychecks, too. Although Japan's best and brightest are still drawn by the prestige of a government career, over the past two decades the differential between private and public salaries has grown. Ministerial slush funds help make up the difference, and in recent years, numerous scandals have arisen involving bureaucrats using such money for limousines, louche excursions, and golf-club memberships.

More fundamentally, Japan's economic model encourages dangerous collusion between the public and private sectors. The root of the problem is "amakudari," or "descent from heaven." It's the main gravy train for public servants; when they retire, ministers and bureaucrats get cushy jobs in industries they oversaw while in government. The incentive is to look out for your future employer, not taxpayers.

Japan's Rotten Example

Japan's nuclear crisis, for example, was made worse by power-industry regulators focused on their post-government careers, not Japan's 126 million people. Pledges by Japan's ruling [Democratic Party](#) of Japan to abolish amakudari have gone unfulfilled. But for the sake of its citizens' welfare, Japan needs to end the practice, perhaps in return for better salaries and pensions.

Of course, throwing money at corruption won't make it go away. If it did, countries such as [Kenya](#), which pays its members of Parliament handsomely -- more than \$13,000 a month -- would be paragons of virtue instead of cellar-dwellers in [Transparency International's](#) annual [Corruption Perceptions Index](#). Decent salaries are just one incentive that can tilt the cost-benefit analyses of potential bribe-takers toward probity: More important than reducing the potential financial benefits of corruption is increasing the probability of detection and meaningful punishment.

Singapore isn't exactly a hotbed of anti-corruption muckraking. According to the 2010 U.S. State Department Human Rights Report, journalists in Singapore practice "self-censorship," the level of public debate is "moderate," and opposition parties face "formidable obstacles." Yet the city-state does have an aggressive Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau; professional courts; a ramrod political will inculcated by its first prime minister, Lee Kwan Yew (father of Lee Hsien Loong); and a ruthless, relentless emphasis on efficiency and results.

Not every country can follow that recipe, especially those with larger, more diverse populations. Still, countries like [Cambodia](#) can start by auditing its public services to get a sense of how bad corruption really is -- something that it will have to do in any case to comply with the [United Nations Convention Against Corruption](#). Civil-society groups can help greatly in that process: We think the UN would be wise to let them take part in the process it has created to review a country's anti-corruption efforts.

Japan could benefit greatly from an independent watchdog agency to investigate corruption; given its global influence, we also don't understand why it is one of only 35 countries yet to ratify the UN convention. And even if the huge internal challenges of fighting corruption in [China](#) risk tampering with the prerogatives of Communist Party control, the government could crack down on the pervasive bribe-mongering of Chinese companies overseas, which presents a huge global challenge.

There's an old saying in [Asia](#) that the real money is in government. Not the paychecks, but the kickbacks. Isn't it possible that a bit more capitalism at the highest levels of public service will make capitalism itself more efficient and equitable? We think Singapore proves it can.