

From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen <[REDACTED]>
Subject: March 10 update
Date: Tue, 13 Mar 2012 14:15:26 +0000

10 March, 2012

Article 1.	The Washington Post <u>How to sink Iran's regime? Sanctions, not bombs</u> David Ignatius
Article 2.	The Economist <u>What might Ayatollah Ali Khamenei be making of America's noisy Iran talk this week?</u>
Article 3.	The Christian Science Monitor <u>Attack Iran or more sanctions? A third option: Israel and Iran forsake nukes</u> Boaz Atzili
Article 4.	The Washington Post <u>Syria's Bashar al-Assad firmly in control, U.S. intelligence officials say</u> Greg Miller and Karen DeYoung
Article 5.	The National Interest <u>The New Palestinian Realism</u> Alexander Joffe , Asaf Romirowsky
Article 6.	Al-Ahram Weekly <u>US-Egyptian strategic relations: Too much at stake</u> El-Sayed Amin Shalabi
Article 7.	The Washington Post <u>The promise of Russia's urban middle class</u> Condoleezza Rice

Article 1.

The Washington Post

How to sink Iran's regime? Sanctions, not bombs.

[David Ignatius](#)

March 10 -- After another week of near-constant talk about war with Iran, here's one counterintuitive possibility: The Obama administration, in its eagerness to deter an Israeli strike, has committed itself to a [pressure campaign](#) that, if pursued vigorously, could eventually lead to regime change in Iran.

President Obama's pledge of escalating economic, political and other pressure on Iran goes to that regime's weak link. For the mullahs' greatest vulnerability is their political structure, which is divided and unpopular, rather than their [nuclear program](#), which appears to have fairly broad domestic support. And this political foundation may be shaken by the campaign under way.

The clerical regime isn't an explicit target for the United States, but it's at growing risk because of the forces in motion. Month by month, sanctions and other activities will undermine the regime's political and financial base — squeezing the Iranian leadership and tempting it to take rash actions that would trigger a devastating response.

The situation resembles a hunting trap that gets tighter as the prey tries harder to escape. [Defense Secretary Leon Panetta](#) made that explicit when he said Thursday that the United States was preparing military options should non-military pressure fail.

Ironically, the worst option in terms of regime change would probably be a unilateral [Israeli military strike](#). Given [Israel's capabilities](#), a strike would do enough damage to rally political support behind the Iranian leadership (and deflect the Arab Spring) but not enough to cripple the nuclear effort. An Iranian opposition leader told me last week that such an attack would be “a gift from God for the mullahs,” enhancing their political position rather than weakening it.

What has emerged from last week's U.S.-Israeli discussions is a sort of tag team: The West is moving toward what it describes as [crippling sanctions](#), while Israel waits restlessly outside the ring, apparently eager to jump in and strike a military blow. This combined pressure has already brought Iran back to the [negotiating table](#), which is welcome but hardly a reason for the West to back off.

As the sanctions bite deeper into Iran's oil exports and revenue, further enfeebling the regime, Tehran may have to contemplate the kind of

negotiated settlement that Ayatollah Khomeini once likened to drinking from a “cup of poison.” Or, the regime may lash out with military action of its own — a dangerous course, given America’s overwhelming retaliatory power and the ability of Israel and Saudi Arabia to absorb Iran’s initial punch.

For Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, it’s a double bind: If he offers on the nuclear program a deal that would be acceptable to the West, he risks undermining what he sees as the regime’s legitimacy. But if he doesn’t offer a deal, the steady squeeze will continue. Eventually, something’s got to give.

[Karim Sadjadpour](#), an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace whose views are closely studied at the Obama White House, argues that the Iranian regime is gradually bleeding itself to death for the sake of its nuclear program. He likens the process to the demise of the Soviet Union, which bankrupted itself in an arms race with the United States.

Sadjadpour likes to invoke an old saying about dictatorships: “While they rule, their collapse appears inconceivable. After they’ve fallen, their collapse appeared inevitable.” Iran, he argues, is “at the crossroads of that maxim.”

Now that the squeeze on Iran has begun, there’s a potential risk if it stops too quickly, leaving a damaged but still potent Iran seething for vengeance. That early termination could happen through a quick ██████ cease-fire after a unilateral Israeli strike or because the West calls off sanctions prematurely, leaving Iran’s nuclear toolkit still largely intact.

The West has an additional hidden capability in this crisis, between sanctions and open military conflict. It’s a way of increasing the cost of Iran’s actions, short of war. Officials don’t usually talk about this terrain of “covert action,” for obvious reasons, but it’s easy to imagine what might be possible: Defense-related research facilities could be disrupted; financial and other commercial records could be scrambled. These may sound like extreme options, but they’re just the non-lethal ones.

“You can cause a lot of mischief inside Iran,” says one foreign official. The pressure campaign under way may not force Iran’s current leadership to make a deal, this official notes, but it increases the chance that the regime will sink as a result of its own defiant behavior.

The Economist

What might Ayatollah Ali Khamenei be making of America's noisy Iran talk this week?

Mar 10th 2012 -- HERE in Iran I have been finding it hard to make sense of all the strident utterances about the Islamic Republic emanating from America's capital this week. Being Supreme Leader, I need to understand what my enemy is thinking. Being an ayatollah, I can modestly say that I am something of an expert in textual exegesis. Nonetheless, I confess that ████ puzzled.

The first thing we need to know is whether America or Israel intends to attack our nuclear facilities, and if so when. So I decided to read first what Barack Obama told Israel's visiting prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, and the 13,000 delegates to the annual policy conference of the mighty American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), as the Zionist lobby is known.

From the beginning of his presidency, Mr Obama has pronounced himself determined to prevent our revolution from acquiring nuclear weapons. This week he seemed to sharpen things up. He told AIPAC that prevention meant prevention. Contrary to some reports, he did not intend merely to "contain" a nuclear-armed Iran but to make sure that we never got a bomb in the first place. Moreover, stopping it was in America's national interest, not just in Israel's, and to this end all options, including military ones, were on the table.

So far, so clear: Mr Obama may attack if we proceed towards nuclear weapons. He seems utterly unimpressed by my assurances that we do not want one. On the other hand, he is not thirsting for a fight. His main point this week seemed to be that the sanctions he imagines to be "crippling" should be given time to work and that this was therefore not the moment for "bluster". Too much "loose talk" of war had already helped Iran, by

driving up the price of oil. He said it would be better right now to heed Teddy Roosevelt's advice to speak softly and carry a big stick. From here in Tehran it looked as if the intended recipient of Mr Obama's strictures was the leader of the Zionist entity, which the American hegemon does so much to prop up. It was therefore a little startling to see Mr Netanyahu, speaking to AIPAC a day later and only hours after visiting the White House, pay almost no heed to what his American patron said. Far from speaking softly, this Zionist upstart presumed to mimic the roar of Winston Churchill, the unlamented British imperialist. Israel, he said, could not give diplomacy and sanctions much longer to work. As prime minister, he would never let the Jewish people live "in the shadow of annihilation". Those who argued against stopping Iran from getting a bomb were like those who in 1944 refused the Jewish plea to bomb the alleged death factory in Auschwitz. "We deeply appreciate the great alliance between our two countries," he said, "but when it comes to Israel's survival, we must always remain the masters of our fate."

Though ayatollahs are well versed in subtle distinctions, I am not quite sure how to interpret this apparent rift between the Greater and Lesser Satans. Mr Netanyahu sounds seriously reckless. It is even possible—and this is a worry—that he is not altogether rational. Will little Israel, with its 8m people, really dare to go to war alone against our 80m? Perhaps this is just a bluff, to goad Mr Obama into further sanctions, or make him take the military action he plainly wants to avoid. On the other hand, what if Israel does launch an impetuous attack, in defiance of Mr Obama's plea for time? Would the American president still feel obliged to defend Israel from the consequences of its own folly?

Maybe not. I am looking now at a transcript of a press conference in the White House on March 6th, the day after Mr Netanyahu's speech to AIPAC. Mr Obama says here that Israel is a sovereign nation that has to make its own decisions about its national security. But then he adds this: One of the functions of friends is to make sure that we provide honest and unvarnished advice in terms of what is the best approach to achieve a common goal—particularly one in which we have a stake. This is not just an issue of Israeli interest; this is an issue of US interests. It's also not just an issue of consequences for Israel if action is taken prematurely. There are consequences to the United States as well.

That can surely mean only one thing. Mr Obama will be incandescent if Israel provokes a war which he has said is not yet necessary, and on the eve of an election. And now that I have agreed to let my nuclear experts start talks again with the Europeans, Americans, Russians and Chinese, the Zionists will find an attack even harder to justify. True, the sanctions are hurting, but while these talks continue (we know how to spin them out), and for as long as Mr Obama continues to call the war talk “bluster”, it is tempting to conclude that our programme is safe from bombing.

The Republican angle

That said, I did not become Supreme Leader by being naive about America. It is a flighty country, whose policies chop and change as presidents come and go. As Supreme Leader, I’ve already seen out two Bushes and one Clinton. Next year a Republican may be president, and they too have been rude about Iran this week. One, Newt Gingrich, thinks that he can magically cut the price of gasoline to \$2.50 a gallon. The man is an eejit, as we say in Farsi.

Mitt Romney seems a bit more serious. My aides have translated his article this week in the Washington Post and the message he sent to AIPAC. On the face of it, he sounds like a warmonger. He says that Mr Obama has “dawdled” on sanctions, and that if he were president he would send more warships and carriers to our coast. But ■■■ not convinced. Our intelligence people point out that this Romney is just a businessman from an unloved minority sect. Our own bazaaris tend not to like war. He is probably just pandering to the Zionists, as they all do. Still, it is hard to be sure. I would feel a lot safer if we already had that bomb.

Article 3.

The Christian Science Monitor

Attack Iran or more sanctions? A third option: Israel and Iran forsake nukes

[Boaz Atzili](#)

March 9, 2012 -- For half a century now, [Israel](#)’s regional nuclear monopoly has been its “Samson option,” the one weapon it can threaten to use if all else fails and Israel faces a real existential threat. As a scholar

concentrating on the [Middle East](#) conflict, and also as a native of Israel, I am not comforted by the nuclear security blanket under which I was born. Now that this monopoly is facing an increasingly possible challenge from [Iran](#), Israel should reconsider its nuclear supremacy – as far fetched as this may sound. The argument in favor of such a radical shift is not moral, but strategic. Israel may well be better off in a Middle East with no nuclear powers than in one with – potentially – several of them. Iran, too, would have its own reasons to support such an arrangement. And a secure path to a “no nukes” zone may be found not in dismantling Israel’s arsenal, but in relocating it.

In the face of an apparently fast-advancing Iranian nuclear project, the two options mostly discussed are sanctions and military attack. Neither is very appealing. The first is unlikely to halt the Iranian program and the second will only postpone it temporarily while possibly creating a regional conflagration on a large scale.

When Israel developed its own nuclear program, apparently in the late 1950s, it made much strategic sense. Israel was a small country, with very limited human and material resources, surrounded by hostile neighbors. Nuclear arms could provide the ultimate guarantee of security. But Israel is no longer so vulnerable. True, much of the region is still hostile (despite peace agreements with [Egypt](#) and [Jordan](#)). Yet Israel holds a profound conventional superiority over any potential rivals – a superiority that makes a nuclear-free Middle East a strong and effective second-best option after a nuclear monopoly.

Moreover, it’s unclear that Israel would sacrifice much in a nuclear-free Middle East. Its nuclear arsenal has not deterred Arab countries from launching conventional attacks against it (as in 1973) and it has not deterred asymmetric campaigns by nonstate actors.

The only role Israel’s nuclear arsenal may have played so far has been to deter attack from unconventional weapons, as in [Iraq](#)’s nonuse of chemical weapons against Israel during the 1991 Gulf War. But Israel’s air superiority and precision weapons could do that just as well.

A regional denuclearization agreement is in Iran’s interest, as well. Even if it succeeds in building a nuclear bomb, Iran is unlikely to develop a nuclear arsenal even remotely on par with Israel’s. Moreover, Iran’s nuclear developments are exacerbating its political and economic isolation.

But [Ayatollah Khamenei](#) and [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) have staked their reputation on defiance in the face of American and Israeli pressure. They are too invested in the nuclear project to turn back without a significant achievement. A regional denuclearization agreement would relieve sanctions pressure and allow them to save face. They could argue to their constituencies (with a degree of truth) that they alone were able to force Israel to give up its nuclear weapons.

The practical obstacles to a deal are formidable, but not impossible. The level of distrust is such that both sides will be extremely reluctant to give up anything before being assured of the other side's compliance.

Deeply affected by the legacy of the Holocaust and suspicions of the external world, Israel has always insisted on self-help – on developing and keeping capabilities to defend itself. This tendency would make it loath to destroy the arsenal it spent so much building without ironclad guarantees of verification.

One element that could alleviate Israeli fears of cheating would be an agreement to deposit its nuclear weapons in a third country instead of destroying them, to be released back to Israel in case Iran broke the rules. The agreement could include, moreover, an American assurance to Israel to retaliate against any nuclear attack on Israel if that happened before Israel got its arsenal back. Such a promise would guarantee that Israel would not be vulnerable should Iran indeed defect. The agreement, moreover, would have to include an unfettered right of inspection in both countries to verify implementation.

A nuclear-free Middle East is the best compromise for the current conditions, and it is the strategically rational move to take for both Israel and Iran. A deal like this would require brave, outside-of-the-box thinking in the region – as well as leadership by outside actors. Those qualities may be in short supply, but the danger of the current standoff should encourage it.

Boaz Atzili is an assistant professor at the School of International Service of [American University](#) in [Washington DC](#). He is the author of [“Good Fences, Bad Neighbors: Border Fixity and International Conflict”](#) ([University of Chicago Press, 2012](#)).

The Washington Post

Syria's Bashar al-Assad firmly in control, U.S. intelligence officials say

[Greg Miller](#) and [Karen DeYoung](#)

March 10 -- A year into the uprising in Syria, senior U.S. intelligence officials described the nation's president, Bashar al-Assad, on Friday as firmly in control and increasingly willing to unleash one of the region's most potent militaries on [badly overmatched opposition groups](#).

The officials also said Assad's inner circle is "remaining steadfast," with little indication that senior figures in the regime are inclined to peel off, despite efforts by the Obama administration and its allies to use sanctions and other measures to create a wave of defections that would undermine Assad.

Assad "is very much in charge," said a senior U.S. intelligence official responsible for tracking the conflict, adding that Assad and his inner circle seem convinced that the rebellion is being driven by external foes and that they are equipped to withstand all but a large-scale military intervention. "That leadership is going to fight very hard," the official said. Over the long term, "the odds are against them," he said, "but they are going to fight very hard."

The comments, provided by three intelligence officials on the condition of anonymity to share candid assessments, were the most detailed to date by U.S. analysts on the status of the uprising, which began last March.

The officials said the regime's tactics have taken a more aggressive turn, and newly [declassified satellite images](#) released Friday show what officials described as "indiscriminate" artillery damage to schools, mosques and other facilities in the [beleaguered city of Homs in recent weeks](#).

Overall, they described Syria as a formidable military power, with 330,000 active-duty soldiers, surveillance drones supplied by Iran and a dense network of air defense installations that would make it difficult for the United States or other powers to establish a no-fly zone.

“This is an army that was built for a land war with the Israelis,” said a second senior U.S. intelligence official. After the regime hesitated to attack civilian population centers earlier in the conflict, its “restraint . . . has been lifted,” the official said.

Diplomatic visits

Syrian forces continued their month-long shelling of the opposition stronghold of Homs, in the west-central part of the country, on Friday, according to news reports. Thousands demonstrated in other parts of the country ahead of a visit by Kofi Annan, the special envoy of the United Nations and Arab League. Annan, who arrived in Damascus on Saturday, met with Assad later in the day to press for a political solution to the crisis. ■■■ humanitarian chief Valerie Amos, who visited Homs this week, said she was “devastated” by what she saw in the ravaged city. “There are no people left,” she said.

Amos, speaking in Turkey after visiting refugee camps along the Syrian border, said the Assad government had agreed to a “limited assessment” of humanitarian needs but had refused “unhindered” access for aid organizations and “asked for more time” to consider ■■■ proposals for extended assistance for civilians.

In Washington, the intelligence officials cited a number of factors protecting the regime from collapse. Not least among them is the level of motivation in an inner circle convinced that yielding power will mean death or life imprisonment.

U.S. intelligence has also detected an escalation in [lethal support from Syria’s closest ally, Iran](#). Officials said that Iran had previously been supplying mainly training and equipment to suppress opposition forces but has recently begun sending small arms and sophisticated equipment for monitoring and penetrating rebel groups.

Iran has shared equipment and expertise developed during its efforts to put down its own internal rebellion in 2009. Syria also has a small fleet of unarmed drones that appear to have been supplied by Iran before the uprising began, the officials said. They portrayed the political opposition to Assad as disorganized and hobbled by a lack of experienced leadership. The officials described efforts to unify and attract a broader following among Syria’s minority groups — another objective of U.S. policy — as having limited success. The Syrian National Council, dominated by exiles

who are mainly Sunni Muslims, has been trying to attract Christians, Druze and Kurds away from Assad. Fears that the opposition will oppress minorities or worse have been regularly stoked by the regime, which is dominated by Alawites, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Opposition forces

The intelligence officials also echoed concerns expressed by U.S. military leaders in congressional testimony this week about providing weapons to the armed elements of the opposition. They are equipped mainly with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades, giving them little firepower compared with Assad's formidable forces.

An estimated 10,000 to 20,000 soldiers have defected and form the bulk of the Free Syrian Army. It is organized loosely, without effective command and control, and it has few links to the political opposition, according to U.S. intelligence accounts. Protecting those forces would be a daunting task. One of the officials said that Syria's air defenses include hundreds of surface-to-air missile sites and thousands of anti-aircraft artillery installations.

Describing the dimensions of the challenge, this official said that Syria, barely one-tenth the size of Libya, has an army four times as big with five times the air defense assets, most of it supplied by Russia.

So far, the officials said, the bloodiest attacks against the regime appear to have been carried out by al-Qaeda elements seeking to slip unannounced into opposition groups that do not seem eager to have any affiliation with the terrorist network.

The U.S. officials said that al-Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq has reversed the flow of a pipeline that once carried fighters and weapons through Syria to battle U.S. forces at the height of the Iraq war.

"That network is still there," said the first U.S. intelligence official, who acknowledged that the size and composition of the al-Qaeda presence in Syria is unclear. Some al-Qaeda members may be Syrian, others Iraqis. The officials said their judgment that AQI — as the Iraq affiliate is known — was behind vehicle bombings that killed dozens of people in Damascus and Aleppo in December and January is based more on the nature of the attacks than independent evidence of al-Qaeda involvement. The greatest damage done so far to Assad's regime has been economic, intelligence officials said. Sanctions imposed by the United States and the Arab

League, as well as European curbs on importation of oil, have caused spikes in unemployment, fuel prices and budget deficits in Damascus. Over the long term, the officials said, economic hardships may be the most effective tool for unseating Assad. Still, the first U.S. intelligence official said, “to this point, we have not seen that having an effect on the regime’s ability to prosecute the war.”

Article 5.

The National Interest

The New Palestinian Realism

[Alexander Joffe](#), [Asaf Romirowsky](#)

March 9, 2012 -- In a recent interview in Ramallah, Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad warned that the fragile calm that prevails between Israel and the Palestinian Authority could be shaken at any moment. Several recent incidents have underscored Fayyad’s concern. The killing of a Palestinian protester during a riot at the Qalandia refugee camp and the injury of several others during his funeral were among the most violent. Fayyad seemed genuinely surprised and disturbed that the Palestinian issue is “more marginalized than ever” thanks to the attention being given to the Arab Spring. He noted that security cooperation with Israel was good but asked why there were no Israeli concessions regarding Palestinian “sheriff-like” security arrangements in the West Bank. These, he said, would not cost Israel anything and would strengthen the Palestinian Authority in practical and symbolic ways.

Fayyad expressed concerns that what he deemed Israeli violence toward nonviolent protesters at checkpoints and “settler violence” could spark a major incident. But other recent clashes have included a major incident of stone throwing down onto Jewish worshippers at the Western Wall and Christian tourists attempting to visit the Temple Mount, prompted by reports regarding an extremist Jewish website that called for Jews to exercise sovereignty over the area. A visiting group of U.S. Congressmen was also attacked by Palestinian stone throwers as they inspected vandalism at the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives.

After the latest violence, Fayyad has warned ominously of a “new intifada,” a term that he carefully avoided during our interview with him only a week earlier. Fayyad’s frustration with Palestinian marginalization was palpable, but he refrained from commenting on the unity deal between Fatah and Hamas that would, if passed, remove him from his job.

The New Fayyad?

The Palestinian political scene and increasing tensions with Israel are leading Fayyad to more agitated language that seems out of character for the soft-spoken economist. When Israeli forces closed two Palestinian TV stations in Ramallah whose broadcasts had been interfering with transmissions at Ben Gurion Airport, Fayyad called the move “oppressive and monstrous,” alleging that it violated “all international laws.” It was not immediately clear which frequencies these stations were broadcasting on, but as far as international law goes, the Oslo agreements carefully specified which parts of the broadcast spectrum would be allocated to Israel and which to the Palestinian Authority.

Fayyad’s increasingly dire warning about another intifada track with Israeli intelligence estimates. A leaked Foreign Ministry report warned that the Palestinian Authority could unilaterally decide to launch another intifada or one could break out spontaneously as part of the Arab Spring phenomenon. The Palestinian Authority is ratcheting up pressure on Israel from outside the West Bank. The International Conference on Jerusalem held recently in Doha repeated accusations that Israel was “Judaizing” Jerusalem from Arab and Muslim leaders, as well as Mahmoud Abbas. Even given Fayyad’s fears about Palestinian marginalization, mobilizing Arab and Muslim public opinion in this way is unlikely to help maintain calm. Fayyad emphasized to us that European states had continued to maintain their donations to the Palestinian Authority despite their own financial crises. The construction throughout Ramallah testifies to the massive expansion of the Palestinian economy that has taken place thanks to that aid and thanks to Fayyad himself. But Arab Knesset member Ahmed Tibi also noted in an interview after the Doha conference, that following an Arab Summit in Sirte, Libya in 2010, Arab states had promised \$500 million to combat “Judaization” of Jerusalem, only \$37 million of which he claims was received.

Palestinians and the Arab Spring

The lack of international attention for the Palestinian cause noted by Fayyad also applies to Arab and Muslim states, but it is understandable. Consider the radical changes in the region in just the last few years. Sirte was Muammar Qaddafi's hometown and the place he met his end. Today, it lies in ruins, along with the old Arab-nationalist system of strongmen who held disparate ethnic and religious states together. The emergence of the new Sunni-Shia divide and the rise of Islamists are profound challenges to the fragile gains that Fayyad has achieved.

In our interview, Fayyad spoke with a certain pride about the lack of any Palestinian protests comparable to those that have rocked the Arab world, that is to say, against the government. The clear implication was that the Palestinian Authority was avoiding the types of gross abuses of human and civil rights that have been widespread throughout the Arab world.

Fayyad seemed puzzled about Israel's unwillingness to make security gestures in the West Bank. He also complained that nightly Israeli raids were undermining the Palestinian Authority and resulted in minimal security gains for Israel. This is difficult to assess, but Fayyad was certainly correct in stating that the Israeli public is largely unaware of these activities, or indeed the details of the security situation in the West Bank as whole.

To judge from discussions with Israeli officials and the media, Gaza, Hamas and the continuing low level of rocket fire are the immediate security preoccupations, along with general foreboding about the darkening Arab Spring. Fayyad's sense of isolation is very real; with nearly eight thousand civilians already killed in Syria, it is clear that world attention has shifted away from the Palestinians and that, in a sense, the conflict with Israel has assumed a more realistic proportion.

The Palestinians are unaccustomed to having to compete for attention, and threats to the security situation are a strong line of argument. Indeed, Fayyad stressed to us that he had made precisely the same points earlier that morning to the Swedish deputy foreign minister. As with many Palestinian warnings about violence, the danger is that there is an element of self-fulfilling prophecy at work, not from Fayyad himself in this case but from other Palestinian factions anxious to regain the spotlight by whatever means necessary.

Alexander Joffe is a historian and writer based in New York. Asaf Romirowsky is an adjunct scholar at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and Middle East Forum.

Article 6.

Al-Ahram Weekly

US-Egyptian strategic relations: Too much at stake

El-Sayed Amin Shalabi

8 - 14 March 2012 -- There was a time, following the 1952 Revolution, when Egypt's young leaders placed great hopes on the United States. With Washington's help, they thought, they would rebuild the Egyptian army and figure out a way to improve the standards of living in the country. With hindsight, it is ironic.

Disappointment set in on both sides. First, US diplomats were shocked that Egypt wouldn't join the regional defence arrangements NATO had designed for the region. Then the Egyptians were horrified when the US declined to join the international consortium that was supposed to finance their biggest project, the High Dam. The Cold War story that followed led to the 1967 defeat and left lingering bitterness that can still be felt to this day. Anwar El-Sadat turned Nasserist policies around, first by distancing himself from the Russians and then, following the 1973 War, by signing the Camp David Accords. Sadat's mending of fences with the US came at a price, for Egypt ended up being estranged from other Arab countries. Coming to power after Sadat's assassination in 1981, Mubarak tried to steer a middle way. To placate the Russians, he invited some of their experts back into the country for work in the High Dam and the Helwan steel factories. Meanwhile, he followed up on the implementation of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty. Despite the close relations Mubarak's Egypt maintained with the US, Cairo was not always prepared to toe the US line.

Egypt made it clear that it opposed the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and was appalled when the Americans forced its plane down in Italy during the Achille Lauro affair. The US bombing of Benghazi in 1986 strained relations between Cairo and the Reagan administration. Still, Egypt and the US managed to stage the 1992 peace conference in Madrid, an event that set the tone for a decade of close Egyptian-US relations. Yet Cairo and Washington had divergent points of view on a number of issues. The Egyptians often criticised the US for its unquestioning support of Israel, and the Americans kept pushing for economic and security cooperation between Egypt and Israel, something that Cairo was hesitant about. The big boost to US-Egyptian relations came during the 1991 Gulf War, when Egyptian troops took part in the liberation of Kuwait. To show gratitude for the Egyptian role in this war, Washington wrote off \$7 billion of Egypt's military debts.

During the presidency of George W Bush, tensions resumed over the issue of democratisation in the Arab world. And yet Cairo and Washington continued to cooperate in many fields, leading to the QIZ (Qualified Industrial Zones) agreement and to Egypt's export of natural gas to Israel. Consequently, Cairo allowed US navy vessels to pass through the Suez Canal on their way to the Gulf during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. And Egyptian officials also kept Tehran at arms length throughout the crisis over the Iranian nuclear programme.

For several decades, security matters has been at the core of US-Egyptian relations, with the joint manoeuvres known as Bright Star cementing ties between the military outfits of both nations. Obama's election brought new hope for improved ties. One of Obama's first actions in office was to commit to a two-state solution in Palestine, a decision that was greeted with satisfaction in Cairo but produced no tangible results. Egypt's 2010 parliamentary elections sowed discord in bilateral ties. A US spokesman said that the White House was disturbed by the numerous reports of fraud, the obstruction of foreign observers, and the muzzling of the press. With the 25 January Revolution, things got better. The revolution seemed to validate the Obama administration's position on democracy and human rights. Still, the US initially hedged its bets. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in one of her earlier statements, said that the Egyptian regime was "stable" and that the Egyptian president (Mubarak) was an "ally" of the

US. As protests escalated, a spokesman for the White House said that the Egyptian government should "listen" to the aspirations of the people, respect their democratic rights, and introduce political, economic and social reform. Then Obama stated that the time for change had come in Egypt. Hillary Clinton confirmed this statement, pointing out that a transfer of power to an elected civilian authority was advisable. The deputy secretary of state, William Burns, urged Egypt to hold fair and free elections and encourage the emergence of an independent civil society. For a while, it was smooth sailing, with both countries holding close consultations over various points of policy. Then came the surprise raids on civil society organisations in Cairo to spoil the mood. Following the raids, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said that US assistance to Egypt may be affected because of Cairo's handling of the crisis. Egypt's foreign ministry shot back, saying that Egypt doesn't tolerate "foreign interference".

Minister of International Cooperation Fayza Abul-Naga said that the whole matter was but a lawful procedure conducted by the judiciary. This prompted Jeffrey Feltman, assistant secretary of state for near eastern affairs, to travel to Cairo in an attempt to defuse the situation. While discussing the situation with Egyptian diplomats, Feltman said that Egypt remains America's top ally in the Arab world.

Another factor that impacted on Egyptian-US relations was the sweeping victories by Islamists in the parliamentary elections. Washington made it clear that it was prepared to cooperate with the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) as well as other Islamist currents. Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, visited the Muslim Brotherhood headquarters in Cairo to discuss, among other things, the group's intentions regarding the peace treaty with Israel.

During a visit to Cairo on 11 January 2013, William Burns met the deputy leader of the FJP and promised economic support to Egypt. On 4 February, Hillary Clinton warned that the security campaign against civil society organisations could hamper US aid to Egypt. Feltman, for his part, said that the US must be more sensitive to Egyptian public opinion, because the Egyptian government, being democratically elected, will be increasingly influenced by public opinion. The civil society crisis is the first test of post-revolutionary Egyptian-US relations. Throughout this crisis, American

officials made it clear that maintaining good relations with Egypt was a top priority. The US chief of joint staff said that hints that the US may discontinue assistance to Egypt were unhelpful, as both countries have something to gain from their bilateral cooperation.

Summarising the situation, the US State Department spokeswoman said that the US is still committed to strong bilateral relations with Egypt, adding that these relations are still strong despite recent tensions. What the recent crisis teaches us is that future US- Egyptian relations are likely to be strewn with differences, but that both countries will strive to resolve these differences in a pragmatic matter. Too much is at stake, and both Cairo and Washington are aware of the mutual benefits they obtain from their continued cooperation.

The writer is executive director of the Egyptian Council for foreign Affairs.

Article 7.

The Washington Post

The promise of Russia's urban middle class

Condoleezza Rice

March 9 -- The election of the once and future president of the Russian Federation, [Vladimir Putin](#), tempts one to despair that the brief and inspiring political awakening in Russia over the past year was for naught. He has gotten his way — replacing his protege Dmitry Medvedev and reclaiming the Kremlin to solidify authoritarianism and political stagnation.

But this victory may be both Putin's last and the final one for Putinism. The future turns on the behavior of a rising Russian middle class that is integrated into the world and alienated by the Kremlin's corrupt politics. I first went to the Soviet Union in 1979 as a graduate student. I was immediately struck by how Soviet citizens walked along — looking at their feet. This was a frightened and cowed population, many of whom remembered firsthand the oppression and violence of Stalinism. Repression casts a long historical shadow.

When Putin took office, he reestablished the arbitrary power of the state — destroying the independence of the judiciary; appointing governors rather than voters electing them; and all but closing down independent television. Several journalists who challenged the authorities — such as [Anna Politkovskaya](#) — [paid the ultimate price](#) for doing so.

But Soviet-style repression it wasn't — neither in its brutality nor its reach into the general population. Few now remember those darker days.

Moreover, while television became the Kremlin's mouthpiece, the Internet flourished as a place where alternative voices were heard.

At a meeting with young entrepreneurs during a visit to Moscow as secretary of state in 2007, I voiced concern about the absence of independent media. One young man stopped me, saying, “Who watches television? We're all on the Internet.”

He might have added that all of them had worked outside Russia — in global law, consulting and accounting firms. More than half of them had studied abroad in prestigious business schools in Europe and the United States.

These young people are a relatively small percentage of Russia's population. But look around Moscow, St. Petersburg or even Vladivostok: There is a burgeoning urban middle class who own their apartments, furnish them at Ikea and spoil their children at McDonald's. They, too, have become accustomed to normal lives and have different expectations for the future.

Putin has staked his legitimacy on prosperity and order, but he seemed not to understand that a prosperous population would demand respect, too. In declaring that he would be president again and then [engaging in election fraud](#) during the [December parliamentary voting](#), he insulted the Russian people. Many are fed up with a political system that sometimes behaves more like a natural resources syndicate than a national government.

It is not yet clear whether change will be revolutionary or evolutionary. If the powers that be read the lessons of the past year and make even modest reforms, they might give their people a great gift, one that knows no antecedent in Russian history: peaceful change. If they do not, conflict is inevitable. And Russia's experience with revolution is not pretty.

Much depends on who capitalizes on the thirst for change. As daily protests wane, the hard work of political organizing must begin. In this regard, the

liberal, or “right,” forces (as they are known) need to address the Russian people’s concrete economic and social concerns. Too often movements have rallied around a strong personality with minimal connection to the population’s aspirations. This time the liberals have a ready-made constituency in the rising middle class and its youthful vanguard. They cannot waste this opportunity.

Otherwise, the standard-bearers of change could be radical nationalists, even warmed-over communists who might well tap into the growing dissatisfaction but replace it with xenophobia and, ultimately, a rejection of democratic principles.

Do we have any influence in the outcome? Some, though not much.

Certainly, we should speak even louder for respect for human rights and the rule of law. Undoubtedly, lower oil prices would rob the Kremlin of the easy money that fuels corruption, personal fortunes and authoritarianism. This is yet another compelling argument for developing North America’s significant sources of energy.

A Russia that fully develops its human capital, not just its resources in the ground, has the potential to make a real contribution to a more prosperous world. Medvedev once told me, “Russia has more excellent software engineers and mathematicians than any place in the world.” I held my tongue and didn’t answer, “Yes, but they are working in Palo Alto and Tel Aviv.” If they find work in Moscow and commit to its future, these Russians can make a difference. We can cultivate ties in the public and private sectors with these people. Diversification of the economy can also be assisted by Russian accession to the World Trade Organization, which should be supported.

For centuries Russia’s great-power status has largely rested on military might, natural resources, intimidation of its neighbors and suspicion of the outside world. U.S. foreign policy — “reset” or not — has not changed that reality because its foundation has been the character of Russia’s internal politics. How refreshing it would be if the Kremlin’s power were based on the creativity of its people — a not-so-farfetched idea for a nation that has produced extraordinary achievements in the arts and basic sciences throughout its troubled history.

A new generation of Russians has loudly voiced its insistence on respect from those who would govern — perhaps even demanding that they

consent to be governed. We have a stake in their success and an obligation to help them achieve it.