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The Washington Post

Obama's signal to Iran

[David Ignatius](#)

April 6 -- President Obama has signaled Iran that the United States would accept an Iranian civilian nuclear program if Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei can back up his recent public claim that his nation “will never pursue nuclear weapons.”

This verbal message was sent through Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, [who visited Khamenei last week](#). A few days before traveling to Iran, Erdogan had held a two-hour meeting with Obama in Seoul, in which they discussed what Erdogan would tell the ayatollah about the nuclear issue and Syria.

Obama advised Erdogan that the Iranians should realize that time is running out for a peaceful settlement and that Tehran should take advantage of the current window for negotiations. Obama didn't specify whether Iran would be allowed to enrich uranium domestically as part of the civilian program the United States would endorse. That delicate issue evidently would be left for the negotiations that are supposed to start April 13, at a venue yet to be decided.

Erdogan is said to have replied that he would convey Obama's views to Khamenei, and it's believed he did so when he met the Iranian leader on Thursday. Erdogan also met President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and other senior Iranian officials during his visit.

The statement highlighted by Obama as a potential starting point was made on state television in February. Khamenei said: “The Iranian nation has

never pursued and will never pursue nuclear weapons. . . . Iran is not after nuclear weapons because the Islamic Republic, logically, religiously and theoretically, considers the possession of nuclear weapons a grave sin and believes the proliferation of such weapons is senseless, destructive and dangerous.”

The challenge for negotiators is whether it's possible to turn Khamenei's public rhetoric into a serious and verifiable commitment not to build a bomb. When Obama cited this statement to Erdogan as something to build on, the Turkish leader is said to have nodded in agreement.

But the diplomatic path still seems blocked, judging by recent haggling over the meeting place for negotiations. Istanbul was expected to be the venue, but the Iranians last weekend balked and suggested instead that negotiators meet in Iraq or China. U.S. officials see this foot-dragging as a sign that the Iranian leadership is still struggling to frame its negotiating position.

The Erdogan back channel to Iran is the most dramatic evidence yet of the close relationship Obama has forged with the Turkish leader. Erdogan, who heads an Islamist party that is often cited as a model by Muslim democrats, has been a key U.S. partner in handling Syria and other crises flowing from the Arab Spring uprisings.

A sign of Erdogan's role as intermediary is that he was accompanied, both in the meeting with Obama and on the trip to Iran, by Hakan Fidan, the chief of Turkey's intelligence service. Fidan is said to have close relations with Qassem Suleimani, who heads Iran's Quds Force and is probably Khamenei's closest adviser on security issues. Also joining Erdogan was Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish foreign minister.

Syria was another big topic in Erdogan's discussions with Obama and his subsequent visit to Iran. The Turkish leader told Obama he would press Iran to reduce its support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whom Erdogan once championed but is now determined to oust. Erdogan said he planned to tell Khamenei that Syrian attacks on Muslim opposition forces must stop. The Turks have been trying, meanwhile, to bolster the opposition so that it can provide a credible alternative to Assad's rule.

Some Arab analysts see a weakening of support for Assad in recent days from Iran and its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, whose leader Hasan Nasrallah last week called for a “political solution” with the opposition. The key player in any such managed transition would be Russia’s president-elect, Vladimir Putin. U.S. officials hope he can broker a Syria deal before he meets Obama at the G-8 summit next month.

As Iran’s leadership debates its negotiating stance, the squeeze of Western sanctions is becoming tighter. Nat Kern, the editor of Foreign Reports, a leading oil newsletter, forecasts that Iran will lose about a third of its oil exports by mid-summer. It may get even worse for Iran after July 1 if China and the European Union follow through on recent warnings that [they might stop insuring tankers](#) carrying Iranian crude.

U.S. officials believe that if Iran refuses to negotiate, it will be easier to tighten sanctions even more.

Article 2.

The National Interest

Syria's WMD Threat

[James P. Farwell](#)

April 5, 2012 -- Buoyed by the loyalty of his Alawite community, Bashar al-Assad has acted ruthlessly to crush dissent in Syria. His brutality has outraged the international community, but that has not deterred Assad. And the worst may lie ahead. Will Assad employ his weapons of mass destruction to quell dissent? And what will happen to his WMD arsenal should—President Obama [now says](#) “when”—Assad’s regime collapses?

Although fears of Iraq's chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRNE) capability were also questioned, the Syria situation is different. No one doubts that Syria possesses a modern chemical-weapons capability and thousands of rockets capable of downing passenger aircraft. In contrast, Desert Storm crippled Iraq's chemical-warfare capability; it never reconstituted that capacity, although the Iraqi Intelligence Service maintained a set of undeclared covert laboratories to research and test chemicals and poisons. Iraq was planning to produce chemical-weapons agents, but coalition forces discovered no stockpiles in the aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In the case of Syria, credible assessments suggest that capabilities already exist.

Syria's past behavior is disturbing. It is a non-nuclear-weapon state, party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and it has a comprehensive nuclear-safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Yet after Israel destroyed what was probably a plutonium-production reactor at al-Kibar in 2007, an IAEA investigation [found](#) Syria had breached its obligations under the NPT.

More recently, Lt. Abdulsalam Abdulrezzak, who once worked in Syria's chemical-weapons department, made (unverified) [claims](#) that chemical weapons were employed in Bab Amr against protesters.

All this points to a shared international interest in containing Assad's CBRNE arsenal. Using these weapons against his own citizens would constitute a war crime. And the weapons falling into the hands of terrorist groups would enlarge the threat.

A Lethal Arsenal

The nonpartisan Nuclear Threat Initiative [assesses](#) that Syria has one of the most sophisticated chemical-warfare capabilities in the world. It has mustard gas and sarin, possibly the VX nerve agent and Scud-B and Scud-D ballistic missiles capable of being fitted with chemical warheads. [Some estimate](#) it holds between one hundred and two hundred Scud missiles already loaded with a sarin agent and has several hundred tons of sarin agent and mustard gas stockpiled that could be used for aircraft bombs or artillery shells. It is one of only eight nations that is not a member of the

Chemical Weapons Convention outlawing the production, possession and use of chemical weapons. Its agents are weaponized and [can be delivered](#). Although most believe that the arsenal is in working order, we should not presume that is true. It could possibly be in a significant state of deterioration, which would intensify the hazard and suggest it must be dealt with sooner rather than later.

[Reports](#) differ as to Syria's biological-warfare capability. German and Israeli sources believe it possesses bacillus anthracis (which causes anthrax), botulinum toxin and ricin. American sources believe the capability is "probable." In 1972, Syria signed the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, but it has never ratified it.

The international community seems prepared to act. Russia, which values Syria as an arms customer and worries Assad's fall would reduce its influence in the Middle East, has taken pains to separate itself from Assad's possible use of WMDs, [strongly denying](#) that it has helped Syrian forces use chemical weapons against the opposition. Even while aiding Syrian efforts to crush the protests, Iran denies transferring chemical weapons to any third party.

The U.S. State Department has sent a diplomatic [démarche](#) to Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia warning against the possibilities that WMDs may cross their borders. In August, the Wall Street Journal [revealed](#) that the United States and its Mideast allies were intensifying surveillance of Syrian chemical and biological depots through satellites and other equipment. The United States has [offered](#) to help any post-Assad government secure Syria's stockpiles of chemical weapons and anti-aircraft missiles.

The Fallout

Potential loss of control over WMDs may pose a threat, considering the terror groups that would like to get their hands on them. Col. Riad al-As'ad, head of the opposition Free Syrian Army, [says](#) al-Qaeda is not operating in Syria. But al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri has [reportedly](#) ordered followers to [infiltrate](#) the Syrian opposition. Sunni radicals associated with the Islamic State of Iraq, an umbrella group that includes

al-Qaeda, have [urged](#) fighters to go to Syria. And one should not doubt al-Qaeda's determination to acquire WMDs—Osama bin Laden once [professed](#) that acquiring chemical or nuclear weapons is “a religious duty.”

WMDs could be smuggled into Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank or elsewhere. In the past, Hamas, [Hezbollah](#) and Palestinian Islamic Jihad have all attempted to acquire chemical or biological weapons. In a sign of precisely how destabilizing some view this threat, Israeli officials have warned that Syria transferring chemical weapons to Hezbollah would constitute a declaration of war.

An Agenda

The Friends of Syria, a [coalition](#) of over fifty nations that has met in Tunis to discuss forming an international peacekeeping force backed by U.S., EU and Gulf-nation airpower, should ratchet up pressure on Assad to step down. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and other Islamic nations have [clamored](#) for ousting Assad. That's a promising sign. Arab nations, not the West, should take the lead in dealing with Assad's brutality.

Securing Syria's CBRNE arsenal poses a uniquely serious challenge. NATO, Russia and China should join these Arab nations in demanding that Assad immediately secure his stockpile, then show he has done so.

President Obama has said the United States won't commit troops to a military intervention. But there are other options. Allied partners could mount coordinated special operations to secure or destroy Assad's arsenal. That may not be easy, but it can be done. And should the Syrian regime collapse, it will be essential.

Whether it is better to mount such an operation before or after Assad falls is a decision for military and political experts. But international leaders must think through the options and be prepared to act. All nations—but particularly those in the neighborhood—have a vital stake in containing these instruments of death and destruction. Now is the time for them to exert the leadership to ensure that happens.

James P. Farwell is the author of [The Pakistan Cauldron: Conspiracy, Assassination & Instability](#) and a senior research scholar in Strategic Studies at the Canada Centre for Global Security Studies (Canada Centre), Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto.

Article 3.

The Washington Institute

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Pursues a Political Monopoly

[Eric Trager](#)

April 4, 2012 -- On Saturday, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) announced the nomination of Deputy Supreme Guide Khairat al-Shater for president, cementing a critical shift in its political strategy. Although the group initially tried to manage Egypt's post-Mubarak transition by cooperating with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and secularist parties, it is now pursuing outright political dominance. The MB's reversal of its oft-repeated pledge not to run a presidential candidate also suggests that it cannot be trusted if it decides there is an advantage to be won. More broadly, the Brotherhood's pursuit of a political monopoly undermines prospects for democracy in Egypt and threatens to intensify political instability -- a scenario that should deeply alarm U.S. policymakers.

COOPERATIVE FACADE CRUMBLES

Following President Hosni Mubarak's February 2011 ouster, the MB sought to allay secularist fears of an Islamist takeover by adopting a cooperative political approach and tempering its pursuit of power. Specifically, the Brotherhood made two promises: that it would contest fewer than half of the seats in eventual parliamentary elections, and that it would not run for the presidency. In June 2011, it emphasized its commitment to cooperation by joining the secularist Wafd Party in creating

the National Democratic Alliance for Egypt, an electoral coalition that, at its height, included forty-three parties.

This cooperative approach was a facade, however. In October, the MB reportedly insisted that 40 percent of the Democratic Alliance's parliamentary candidates come from its own ranks, catalyzing the defection of thirty parties, including the Wafd. Shortly thereafter, the Brotherhood backtracked on its first promise, ultimately running for at least 77 percent of the seats in parliamentary elections that concluded this January. Then, after winning a 47 percent plurality in those elections, the MB ensured its dominance over the legislature by appointing Brotherhood-aligned chairs to fourteen of nineteen parliamentary committees. Last month, the MB further alienated secularist parties by monopolizing the legislatively appointed Constituent Assembly, which will write Egypt's next constitution. MB political leader and parliamentary speaker Saad al-Katatni was named chairman of the assembly, and approximately 65 of the body's 100 members are affiliated with Islamist parties, including 27 Brotherhood and 12 Salafist parliamentarians. By contrast, only 16 seats were reserved for secularists, 5 for Christians, and 6 for women.

The Brotherhood's actions have catalyzed a significant political crisis. When the Constituent Assembly's first session opened on March 28, twenty-five members had already resigned in protest, and representatives from al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox Church resigned shortly thereafter. The MB has shown little willingness to make the body more inclusive of non-Islamists. Indeed, Brotherhood parliamentarian Subhi Saleh lashed out at the resignations, declaring that the assembly would not "fall hostage to the dictatorship of the minority." Meanwhile, prominent lawyers filed suit against the assembly, arguing that the inclusion of parliamentarians in such a body is unconstitutional; a verdict is due April 10. If the current Constituent Assembly is not invalidated, Egypt's next constitution will lack legitimacy with a significant portion of the voting public -- a situation that will undermine attempts at establishing a culture of legal rationalism.

THE DEMISE OF BROTHERHOOD-SCAF DETENTE

The MB's cooperation with the SCAF proved only slightly more durable. The group's February 2011 promise not to run a presidential candidate was,

in part, a vow not to contest the junta's executive authority, which the Brotherhood feared might invite an Algeria-like crackdown. The MB further reassured the SCAF by helping to draft proposed constitutional amendments that contained the council's program for political transition, and by endorsing those measures in a March 2011 referendum. When pro-democracy activists later stepped up their protests against the SCAF's repressive rule, the Brotherhood mostly stood aside and minimized its own criticisms of the junta.

This detente seemingly solidified following the Brotherhood's parliamentary victory, when the group appointed a former general to chair the sensitive Defense and National Security Committee. The MB also used its legislative preponderance to discourage criticism of the council, such as by investigating a secularist parliamentarian for allegedly insulting SCAF chair Field Marshal Muhammad Hussein Tantawi. The relationship soured last month, however, when parliament demanded the dismissal of the SCAF-appointed government for lifting travel bans on American pro-democracy NGO workers. By implicitly challenging the council's executive power, which includes the power to appoint the government, the legislature exceeded its constitutional authority; in response, rumors surfaced that the SCAF might challenge the parliament's constitutional legitimacy. A war of words soon broke out: the MB accused the SCAF of trying to "abort the revolution," while the council insinuated that it might crack down on the Brotherhood as the military did under Gamal Abdul Nasser in 1954. The MB's nomination of Shater for president is a further escalation of this conflict, since it openly contests the SCAF's executive power. In a statement announcing the decision, the Brotherhood accused the council of disrupting the parliament's work, pressuring parties to leave the Constituent Assembly, and attempting to run a presidential candidate who would resurrect autocracy. Given the SCAF's political and economic stake in the dispute and its record of repressing other critics, the confrontation threatens to destabilize Egypt's already tenuous political environment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

By reneging on two oft-repeated political promises, the Brotherhood has exposed its true aims. Its foremost priority is dominating Egyptian politics, and any assurances that it makes to the contrary cannot be trusted.

Moreover, Western observers were not alone in being surprised by Shater's nomination -- even midlevel MB officials were caught off guard, which suggests that decisionmaking remains concentrated in the hands of a relatively small group of top Brotherhood leaders. Three potential scenarios show the danger inherent in the MB's dictatorial internal structure and power-hungry ambitions. First, if Shater wins the presidential election currently scheduled for late May, an emboldened Brotherhood would likely push harder for the military to relinquish many of its perquisites (e.g., budgetary autonomy and control over major industries), which could set the stage for a violent showdown. An MB political monopoly would also invite intensified protests from secularists, who are already accusing the Brotherhood of behaving like Mubarak's former ruling party. Meanwhile, the group would no doubt use its dominant position to carry out an oppressive theocratic agenda (e.g., repealing the ban on female genital mutilation, as one female MB parliamentarian recently advocated), which would exacerbate domestic tensions.

Alternatively, if Shater loses to a SCAF-backed candidate, the Brotherhood would likely contend that the voting was fraudulent (in fact, the MB is already accusing the council of planning to steal the election). In this scenario, the group could use its parliamentary dominance to undermine the legitimacy of both the presidency and the military, causing an extended political crisis.

Shater could also lose to Salafist presidential candidate Hazem Abu Ismail. In this case, Egypt would effectively become a competitive theocracy, alienating non-Islamists and spurring them to either challenge the new regime's legitimacy or emigrate. To be sure, other scenarios are possible. Yet it is difficult to imagine one in which the Brotherhood's pursuit of political monopoly enhances the country's prospects for stability, given the group's exclusivist ideology and determination to dominate. Egypt is facing a severe economic crisis and could go bankrupt later this year. A perpetual MB-SCAF power struggle might therefore turn the impoverished country of 80 million people into a failed state. For Washington, this would be the

worst scenario, endangering efforts to achieve America's three primary interests in Egypt: strategic cooperation, political pluralism, and regional peace. At the same time, consolidating legislative and executive power will make it increasingly difficult for the Brotherhood to escape domestic political responsibility. This presents an important policy opportunity for Washington. As the MB inevitably looks abroad for help, Washington can condition its willingness to ensure Egypt's economic future on the Brotherhood's behavior. Specifically, the Obama administration should work with international allies to develop a credible economic aid package that would be dispersed incrementally, and only so long as the Brotherhood acts responsibly and helps in developing more-inclusive political institutions. Washington should use military aid in a similar fashion to hold the SCAF accountable.

Eric Trager, The Washington Institute's Ira Weiner fellow, is a doctoral candidate in political science at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is writing his dissertation on Egyptian opposition parties.

Article 4.

The Daily Star

Five possible scenarios for Syria, and their impact on Iraq

Safa A. Hussein

April 06, 2012 -- Iraqis celebrated the Arab Spring that changed the regimes of Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. But they are divided about the protests and uprisings in Bahrain and Syria. On the surface, it seems that this is merely a reflection of the sectarian divide in Iraqi society and politics, or of external influence on Iraq's politicians, be it from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey or wherever. But there are more important factors that are

shaping Iraq's position on the Syrian crisis. In view of increasing popular discontent in Syria, its divided opposition, the loyalty of the bulk of the security forces, and the divided international community, the Syrian trajectory remains highly unpredictable. We can identify a variety of possible scenarios, some with implications that present substantial risks to Iraqi national security. The first scenario is an Assad regime without President Bashar Assad. Like what happened in Tunisia and Egypt, the regime saves itself by sacrificing the leader or leaders. This scenario is possible but not highly probable, given rising tensions between the Sunni majority and the Alawite minority that dominates the regime. In a second scenario, the regime attempts to manage the protests by force as was the case in Iran after the 2009 elections. Yet there are hardly any similarities between the two political systems, their popular support, and their security apparatuses. The Syrian regime has tried the security approach since the beginning of the protests, without success. Given the past year's developments, one might expect the violence to become bloodier and more prolonged. Yet the international community would not tolerate such bloodshed, nor would such a regime fit into the post-Arab Spring Middle East. Thus this scenario would metamorphose eventually to one of the scenarios below. A third scenario assumes military intervention like the NATO operation in Libya. But Syria is not Libya. Syria has a population density more than 30 times greater, leverage over Hezbollah in Lebanon, and far stronger military forces. Hence military intervention would require a far more advanced operation than was the case in Libya and would risk high civilian casualties.

In addition, should intervention take place, Iran and its allies would undertake potentially destabilizing action inside and outside Syria reminiscent of the cycle of violence in Iraq in the wake of the United States invasion. Intervention would also be welcomed by Al-Qaeda in the hope that it would in turn incite popular uprisings that would open the way for the jihadists eventually to take power. In scenario No. 4, the United States., NATO and other allies create humanitarian corridors or designate safe havens guarded by the Free Syrian Army, or both, to provide relief to the Syrian population and dissident groups. The Turkish prime minister has suggested creating buffer zones for similar purposes. The problem is that

the FSA is not capable of confronting coordinated attacks by the loyal Syrian army. If NATO sends peacekeeping troops, they can either be held hostage by the Syrian army or would eventually have to engage them in battle. International forces were sent to Bosnia during the mid-1990s, but this did not prevent the massacre of thousands of Bosnian Muslims and eventually developed into a much larger military intervention. The fifth scenario is arming the opposition, as Saudi Arabia and Qatar have suggested. Though this may be the easiest course of action, it could cause regional spillover into Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan, and fracture Syria along sectarian lines. A divided Syria would become an arena for an Iranian-Saudi struggle (reflecting Shiite-Sunni tensions). Syria would slide to the edge of civil war as Iraq did in the period between 2004 and 2007. But with no decisive third-party forces in the country as was the case in Iraq, escalation to full-scale civil war similar to Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s seems very probable. The main side effect of such a scenario is that the majority of the rebels would become increasingly radical, allowing Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups to gain a foothold in Syria. This in turn would determine the shape of post-Assad Syria.

The United States, Saudi Arabia and other countries are weighing whether they can weaken Iran geopolitically by weakening Syria – via military intervention, arming the rebels, or creating secure zones. The consequences of such policies would be disastrous for Syria's neighbors and specifically for Iraq. The most significant regional jihadist presence lies across the Syrian border in Iraq. Syria supported these insurgents from 2003 to 2007. The consolidation of Iraqi government power has greatly weakened but not eliminated them. If extremists dominate the post-Assad government, or if Syria becomes a failed state, then the risk of a jihadist revival in this area threatening the stability of Iraq would be very real. That is why Iraq hopes to find a solution in which reforms lead to peaceful transformation of the regime in Syria without a security vacuum or prolonged violence. The current effort by Kofi Annan, the U.N.-Arab League envoy on the crisis, could be the basis of such a solution. It would save thousands of Syrian lives during the transformation process and save more lives of Syrians, Iraqis and others in the aftermath.

Safa A. Hussein is a former deputy member of the dissolved Iraqi Governing Council. He served as a brigadier general in the Iraqi Air Force. Currently he serves in the Iraqi National Security Council.

Article 5.

NYT

Loyalty to Syrian President Could Isolate Hezbollah

[Anne Barnard](#)

April 5, 2012 -- BEIRUT, Lebanon — Mazen, a carpenter who organizes protests against President [Bashar al-Assad](#) in a suburb of Damascus, [Syria](#), has torn down the posters of [Hassan Nasrallah](#), the leader of [Hezbollah](#), that once decorated his car and shop.

Like many Syrians, Mazen, 35, revered Mr. Nasrallah for his confrontational stance with Israel. He considered Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant group and political party, as an Arab champion of the dispossessed, not just for its Shiite Muslim base but for Sunnis like himself. But now that Hezbollah has stood by Mr. Assad during his deadly yearlong crackdown on the uprising against his rule, Mazen sees Hezbollah as a sectarian party that supports Mr. Assad because his opponents are mainly Sunnis.

“Now, I hate Hezbollah,” he said. “Nasrallah should stand with the people’s revolution if he believes in God.”

Mr. Nasrallah’s decision to maintain his critical alliance with Syria [has risked Hezbollah’s standing](#) and its attempts to build pan-Islamic ties in Lebanon and the wider Arab world.

Though Hezbollah's base in Lebanon remains strong, it runs an increasing risk of finding itself isolated, possibly caught up in a sectarian war between its patron, Iran, the region's Shiite power, and Saudi Arabia, a protector of Sunni interests in the Middle East. Its longtime ally, [Hamas](#), the [Palestinian](#) militant group, has distanced itself from the Assad government, moving its headquarters out of Damascus, and Sunni revolutionaries in Syria have explicitly denounced Hezbollah as an enemy. At home, its Lebanese rivals sense a rare opportunity to erode its power.

In a delicate adjustment in the face of these new realities — and the resilience of the uprising — Hezbollah has shifted its tone. [In carefully calibrated speeches last month](#), Mr. Nasrallah gently but firmly signaled that Mr. Assad could not crush the uprising by force and must lay down arms and seek a political settlement. He implicitly acknowledged the growing moral outrage in the wider Muslim world at the mounting death toll, obliquely noted that the Syrian government was accused of “targeting civilians” and urged Mr. Assad to “present the facts to the people.”

Behind the scenes, Mr. Nasrallah personally tried to start a reconciliation process in Syria early in the uprising and is now renewing those efforts, said Ali Barakeh, a Hamas official involved in the talks.

“He refuses the killing for both sides,” said Mr. Barakeh, the Beirut representative for Hamas.

Mr. Barakeh said that Mr. Nasrallah visited Damascus in April of last year and briefly persuaded Mr. Assad to try to reach a political solution, with Hezbollah and Hamas acting as mediators. But as Hamas began reaching out to fellow Sunni Muslims in the opposition, the plan was scuttled by the Syrian government.

Hezbollah rarely allows official interviews and has refused them for months. But supporters and current and former party activists suggest that the situation is fueling fears of an anti-Shiite backlash and is testing loyalists who must explain the party's position to others, and themselves.

Mr. Nasrallah is tempering his position because he wants to avoid asking supporters to endure another war, said a former student activist who spends

hours defending the party on Facebook, arguing, for example, that rogue forces, not Mr. Assad, are responsible for the “mistakes.”

Mr. Nasrallah “doesn’t want supporters to suffer,” said the woman, who works at a Hezbollah foundation, adding that some still feel “broken inside” from the 2006 war with Israel and “don’t want more pressure.”

Syria’s conflict is testing Hezbollah’s longstanding contradictions. It relies on public support, yet sometimes behaves autocratically; it is a national group founded to fight Israel’s occupation of southern Lebanon, but owes its military might — and the funds that rebuilt the south after the 2006 war — to Iran’s desire to project power; and it styles itself pan-Islamic, but it depends on rock-solid support from Lebanese Shiites for whom it won long-denied power as it became the Middle East’s most formidable militant group and Lebanon’s strongest political force.

Most of all, Hezbollah won respect by sticking to its principles, even among rival sects and the leftist cafe regulars in Beirut who are skeptical of its religious conservatism. Now it is paying a price for its politics of pragmatism in Syria.

To a young, college-educated health care worker who is a lifelong supporter of Hezbollah, the party’s support of Mr. Assad keeps faith with the most important principle of all: opposing Israel.

“This revolution is not made in Syria,” she told friends at a seaside cafe in Sidon, Lebanon, after shopping at a shiny new mall. “The real target is Lebanon and the resistance.”

Echoing the party line, she said that the United States and its Arab allies fomented Syria’s revolt to punish Hezbollah for fighting the Israelis in 2006.

But that argument has frayed. Hamas, unable to disown Syria’s Sunni revolutionaries, declared itself neutral, angering Mr. Assad, and then moved its leadership from Damascus. Some Hamas leaders from Gaza went further, praising the Syrian revolution to crowds that shout, “No, no, Hezbollah.”

Deprived of Hamas's political cover, Hezbollah has been accused of sectarian hatred, and has been its target as well. Syrian rebels have burned the Hezbollah flag, claimed that its snipers are killing civilians in Syria, and named their brigades after historic warriors who defeated Shiites in Islam's early schismatic battles. Early on, some analysts thought that if a Sunni government would arise in Damascus it might support Hezbollah against Israel. But now, says Michael Wahid Hanna of the Century Foundation, Hezbollah may have missed a chance to hedge its bets.

Hezbollah's supporters, none of whom wished to be identified because the party discourages interviews with reporters, framed their fears in sectarian terms. One worried that if Sunnis came to power in Syria, they would bar Shiites access to shrines there and in Iraq, as prophesied in a Shiite text. Another supporter thought Sunni extremists might bomb Hezbollah areas.

Hezbollah seems in no danger of losing its most hard-core supporters. But some of its loyalists have questions.

In the Sidon cafe, the health worker declared that Syrians, with free education and medical care, had no reason to rebel. Her friend, a Shiite from Hezbollah's heartland in southern Lebanon, disagreed. "They have things," she said, "but they are fighting for their rights."

A supporter in the Dahiya, Hezbollah's Beirut stronghold, said that Al Jazeera, the television news network, was faking atrocities and blaming the government for them. A friend mocked him: Mr. Assad's fall would be bad for Shiites, he said, but he is "slaughtering his people."

A Hezbollah party member said that government shelling had killed many civilians, but it was justified because the victims had let the rebels use their houses "as bunkers." Israel used a similar argument, which Hezbollah condemned, to defend its bombing of Hezbollah neighborhoods in 2006.

Mr. Barakeh of Hamas suggested that Hezbollah's leaders, who prize their reputations for morality, were troubled by the "killing of innocents" on both sides and knew that the government was not blameless. "They are aware," he said.

He said he spoke with Mr. Nasrallah for five hours on March 9, telling him that neither side could win by force. On March 14, Hezbollah again blessed Hamas's efforts to engage the opposition through its contacts in the Muslim Brotherhood, the pro-Hezbollah newspaper Assafir reported.

The next day, as Mr. Assad insisted that the rebels stop shooting first, Mr. Nasrallah called on all Syrians — “people, regime, state, army” — to lay down their arms “simultaneously.”

He later called for “serious and genuine” reforms. Citing religious, “pan-Arab and moral considerations,” he said a political solution was the duty of all “whose hearts are throbbing with sympathy for the Syrian people — men, women, children and elderly.” It was a dig at Saudi Arabia for trying to arm the rebels, but also nodded at regional anguish over the killing.

Even for Hezbollah loyalists who call Syria's revolt foreign-inspired, the idea of revolution has a natural resonance.

“Arab people need to wake up,” the former student activist said at her office. “How do you spend your day, Arab guy? Watching Lady Gaga. Smoking argileh,” the traditional water pipe.

She fantasized about a “clean and pure” revolution in the Arab world. “If it was real, if it was really the people's will,” she said, “it wouldn't just be good, it would be great.”

Article 6.

TIME

[Why Democracy Is Struggling in the Middle East](#)

Apr. 16, 2012 -- One year after it captured the world's imagination, the Arab Spring is looking less appealing by the week. The promise of a new birth of freedom in the Middle East has been followed by a much messier reality, particularly in Egypt, where there have been attacks on Christians, Western aid workers and women. And now, as Egypt's presidential election approaches, we see the rise of two candidates from Islamic parties, Khairat al-Shater and Hazem Salah Abu Ismail. The former is often described as a moderate, the latter as a radical. Much of what we're seeing might well be the tumult that accompanies the end of decades of tyranny and the rise of long-suppressed forces, but it raises the question, Why does it seem that democracy has such a hard time taking root in the Arab world?

As it happens, a Harvard economics professor, Eric Chaney, recently presented a rigorous paper that helps unravel that knot. Chaney asks why there is a "democracy deficit" in the Arab world and systematically tests various hypotheses against the data. He notes that such majority-Muslim nations as Turkey, Indonesia, Albania, Bangladesh and Malaysia have functioning democratic systems, so the mere presence of Islam or Islamic culture cannot be to blame. He looks at oil-rich states and finds that some with vast energy reserves lack democracy (Saudi Arabia), but so do some without (Syria). He asks whether Arab culture is the culprit, but this does not provide much clarity. Chaney points out that many countries in the Arab neighborhood seem to share in the democracy deficit — Chad, Iran, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan — yet they are not Arab.

Then Chaney constructs a persuasive hypothesis based in ancient history — and modern economics. He notes that the democracy deficit today exists in lands that were conquered by Arab armies after the death in A.D. 632 of the Prophet Muhammad. Lands that the Arabs controlled in the 12th century remain economically stunted today. This correlation is not simply a coincidence. Scholars from Montesquieu to Bernard Lewis suggest that there was something in the political development of the Arab imperial system that seemed to poison the ground against economic pluralism. Arab imperial control tended to mean centralized political authority, weak civil

society, a dependent merchant class and a large role for the state in the economy. Chaney documents the latter, showing that the government's share of GDP is 7% higher on average in countries that were conquered by Arab armies than in those that were not. He also finds that countries in the first group have fewer trade unions and less access to credit, features of a vibrant civil society.

There are less medieval factors. It has long been apparent that the dictatorships of the Middle East form close alliances with religious leaders to crowd out other leaders and groups. Coupled with a historically weak civil society, this has created a one-sided political system in which religious parties enjoy powerful advantages in ideology, organization and, perhaps most of all, lack of competition. Indonesia had religious parties just as Egypt does, but it also had powerful groups that were less religious, more moderate and entirely secular. All these groups competed for influence on an even footing, something that is not happening in the Arab world.

The real problem in a country like Egypt is that the military continues to keep power concentrated, undivided and unchecked. It maintains the central role in the economy. Even when it has liberalized control of the economy, it has done so to benefit a handful of cronies and friends. The chief challenge in the Arab world remains to create a vibrant civil society, which means political parties and also a strong, self-sustaining private sector. The term civil society was coined during the Scottish Enlightenment to describe the activities of private businesses, an independent force that existed between the government and the family. The Middle East today has strong families and strong governments, but everything in between is underdeveloped.

If the dysfunctions in the Arab world have ancient roots — going back over a thousand years! — this does not mean that the region is impervious to change. Chaney does not point to immutable factors such as culture or religion as the causes of the problem. History — and the habits it engendered — are democracy's biggest foes in the Arab world. If political structures and institutional design and its legacies are to blame, then as

these change, things should improve. It is a prescription for the very long term, but at least it is a prescription.

Article 7.

Afro-Middle East Centre

US strategy in the Middle East: Will the South China Sea eclipse the Gulf?

Fred H. Lawson

April 6 -- United States strategic planners are carrying out a fundamental reconfiguration of America's military presence throughout the world. The shift came to light in November 2011, when President Barack Obama announced that some 2 500 US Marines would take up permanent positions at a training base on the northern tip of Australia. It was underscored in January 2012 when the president appeared at the Pentagon for the release of an extraordinary guidance document with the striking title 'Sustaining United States Global Leadership: Priorities for the Twenty-First Century Defined'. The revised strategic posture earmarks more US military resources to East Asia in general and the South China Sea littoral in particular.

Building up naval and air forces in the South China Sea marks a sharp turn away from the focus on the Gulf and Central Eurasia that dominated US strategic planning and military operations during the 1990s and early 2000s. US warships undertook more extensive and more frequent operations in the waters of the Gulf and north-western Indian Ocean during the last phase of the 1980-88 Iraq-Iran war. Such maritime intervention set the stage for a dramatic expansion of army and air force involvement on the Arabian Peninsula in the wake of the 1990-91 Gulf war, including the establishment of a constellation of facilities that could be used for pre-

positioning arms and supplies, refuelling and repairing aircraft and ships and carrying out joint manoeuvres with local armed forces. Large-scale US military installations spread north to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the months leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, even as long-term training and arms supply arrangements were made with Georgia, Azerbaijan and other former Soviet republics.

Whether Washington's turn toward the South China Sea will supplant the massive military infrastructure that the US has created in the Gulf and Central Eurasia is an open question. American military spending can almost certainly not be sustained at current levels, and the inability of the US Congress to formulate a fiscally sound budget has triggered automatic cuts that some policy-makers complain will severely diminish US capabilities. Nevertheless, the Departments of State and of Defense repeatedly affirm that the US intends to pursue initiatives in the Gulf and South China Sea simultaneously. This ambitious project reflects an underlying convergence of security concerns across these two regions that make it impossible for Washington to choose one over the other.

Expanded US military presence in the South China Sea

Measures to augment the US military presence around the South China Sea can be traced to 2005, when Washington concluded a security pact with Singapore. May 2010 saw the first joint naval exercises between the US and Vietnam and a year later Singapore authorised US warships to operate out of the base at Changi on a routine basis. US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton convinced Canberra in September 2011 to allow US forces to pre-position military equipment and use training facilities at bases in Australia. Two months later, President Obama announced the stationing of marines in Darwin and added that the US Air Force would enjoy expanded access to air bases in Australia's vast Northern Territory.

In mid-January 2012, the military commander of Palawan Island in the Philippines told reporters that US warships would carry out joint exercises with the Philippines navy in disputed waters west of Palawan. The Washington Post then reported that Manila had approached Washington with an invitation to return to naval and air bases in the Philippines. The

overture followed the May 2011 delivery to the Philippines navy of a former US Coast Guard cutter and accompanied negotiations over the purchase of two more cutters and a handful of F-16 fighter planes. State Department officials quickly insisted that the US was only interested in long-term access to docks, airfields and training facilities, not actual bases. Meanwhile, arrangements were being made for a pair of P-3C Orion electronic surveillance aircraft to be dispatched to the Philippines to patrol the South China Sea.

East Asia's salience for US military operations is evident in the budget request that the Defense Department submitted to Congress in early 2012. The draft budget seeks funding for a giant floating staging platform which would carry a contingent of naval Special Forces (SEALS), armed drones, vertical and short take-off and landing (VSTOL) aircraft and attack helicopters; the primary purpose of the platform is to counter the use of mines in congested sea lanes. Also slated for development is a new class of nuclear attack submarines designed to engage other submarines and surface ships. The proposed budget provides for the next generation of long-range bombers, while keeping intact the twenty B-2s, 68 B-1s and 94 B-52s currently in service. Funds for short-range, tactical warplanes, on the other hand, are scaled back, as is funding for the army's conventional infantry and armoured divisions.

Continued US military presence in the Gulf

At the same time that the US is expanding its military presence in the South China Sea, American commanders are constructing a network of bases along the north-western littoral of the Indian Ocean to support operations by armed drone aircraft. One such facility in the Seychelles carried out its first missions in the autumn of 2011. Other new drone bases are planned for Ethiopia and an undisclosed site on the Arabian Peninsula. It was reported in February 2012 that the US Navy had joined the US Air Force in operating drones in this region: an advanced, high altitude drone has started to patrol the southern end of the Gulf around the clock and transmit real-time data to the headquarters of the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain.

Shortly after President Obama declared that all US combat forces would exit Iraq by the end of 2011, the US Central Command (CENTCOM)

released plans to keep a sizable number of troops in Kuwait for the foreseeable future. US officials at the same time set out to persuade Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman to accept 'smaller but highly capable deployments and training partnerships' when the war in Iraq came to an end. In mid-December 2011, the Jerusalem Post reported that several thousand US troops based in Europe would be airlifted to Israel in the spring of 2012 as part of an effort to forge operational links between the US European Command and the Israeli Defense Forces.

CENTCOM confirmed in early January 2012 that two aircraft carriers and their associated task forces will continue to operate in and around the Gulf, despite the withdrawal from Iraq. In addition, two US Army brigades, including one from the elite First Air Cavalry Division, and a squadron of attack helicopters are scheduled to take up permanent positions in Kuwait. There are rumours that facilities on Oman's Masirah Island and Yemen's Socotra Island are being upgraded to accommodate US military personnel. More reliable sources report that CENTCOM has authorised the conversion of an amphibious transport vessel into an Afloat Forward Staging Base for use by US Navy commandos in the Gulf.

On the whole, the military presence in the Gulf that US strategic planners now envisage resembles that of the late 1990s. Gone will be the post-2001 air bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; gone too the massive ground forces and cluster of airfields that characterised American-occupied Iraq. Still in place stand sizable army bases in Kuwait, an enlarged naval base in Bahrain and upgraded air bases in Qatar and Oman. It is doubtful that secondary naval and air facilities in Egypt will remain open to US forces in the wake of the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak, while US warplanes no longer frequent the two large-scale air bases that the US Army Corps of Engineers built in north-eastern Saudi Arabia.

Converging US interests in the Gulf and South China Sea

US armed forces poured into the Gulf and Central Eurasia during the 1990s in the context of three trends in the international arena.

1. First, the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan were all importing substantial quantities of hydrocarbons from these regions, and projections showed that imports were almost certain to increase. Any state that could oversee the flow of oil and gas out of these two areas would be able to exercise considerable leverage over energy-deprived East Asia.
2. Second, dynamics of capital accumulation steadily undermined American dominance over the international economy, leaving the US increasingly vulnerable to rival centres of industrial and financial power.
3. Third, economic and military initiatives on the part of China and Japan in the Gulf, the Indian Ocean and Central Eurasia threatened to advance the interests of Beijing and Tokyo to the detriment of the US. Policy makers in Washington responded to the evident deterioration of America's political-economic position in the world by exercising the one resource in which the US retained a comparative advantage: its armed forces.

Heightened US military involvement in the South China Sea is driven by somewhat different dynamics. Much of the impetus for an expanded and sustained US presence comes from Australia, which has embarked on a major military build-up in the face of China's decision to upgrade a key base of the South Sea Fleet on Hainan Island and deploy nuclear submarines in southern waters. Vietnam and the Philippines – along with Japan in the East China Sea – have engaged in a succession of clashes with Chinese vessels, prompting their governments to pursue closer ties to Washington. Even Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono responded to the news that US Marines were going to be stationed in Australia by remarking that he was 'reassured that the US is committed to maintaining peace' in this corner of the world.

Nevertheless, Washington's interests in the South China Sea broadly parallel the ones that propelled the US military into the Gulf. The Straits of Malacca constitute not only a crucial choke point in the sea lanes that connect the Gulf to East Asia, but also a nexus of rivalry between a rising

yet insecure China and an increasingly self-confident and assertive India, whose expanding blue-water navy has turned its attention in the direction of Southeast Asia. In July 2011, warships of the two rising Asian giants clashed off the coast of Vietnam. Such incidents may occur more frequently as China fails to develop alternative overland routes for its burgeoning hydrocarbon imports. US planners are not the only observers to note the growing salience of the sea lanes that pass from the Gulf to the South China Sea. In February 2012, a flotilla of Russian warships, returning from an anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden, paid an unexpected call in the Philippines. The visit coincided with joint naval manoeuvres between the Philippine and the US and the Russian commander told reporters that his officers planned to observe the exercises before sailing on to Vladivostok.

Given the pivotal role of the Gulf in the contemporary global economy, it is unlikely that the US will sacrifice its dominant position in that region in order to augment its military presence in the South China Sea. The two regions in fact form a single security complex, in the sense that developments in one have a direct impact on the other. It is more probable that severe fiscal constraints will force the US to adopt measures that reduce the costs associated with ongoing military activities in the Gulf, even as greater resources get devoted to operations in the South China Sea.

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