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The Wall Street Journal

The Ayatollah Always Says No

Editorial

February 8, 2013 --The Farsi word for "no" is na h, which is easy enough to remember. Maybe even [Joe Biden](#) won't forget it the next time the U.S. tries to reach out diplomatically to Iran.

We're speaking of the Administration's latest effort to come to terms with Tehran over its nuclear programs, which Mr. Biden made last weekend at the Munich Security Conference. The U.S. offer of direct bilateral talks, he said, "stands, but it must be real and tangible." Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi, who was also at the conference though he refused to meet with U.S. officials, called Mr. Biden's comments "a step forward."

Mr. Salehi's remark set the usual hearts aflutter that Iran is finally serious about a deal. But the optimism was brief. On Thursday, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei flatly rejected direct talks with the U.S. "The U.S. is pointing a gun at Iran and wants us to talk to them," he said. "Direct talks will not solve any problems."

This isn't the first time Mr. Khamenei has played chaste Daphne to President Obama's infatuated Apollo. Just after becoming President in 2009, Mr. Obama sent the Ayatollah two private letters and delivered a conciliatory speech for the Persian new year of Nowruz. Mr. Khamenei's answer: "They chant the slogan of change but no change is seen in practice." He told a crowd chanting "death to America" that "if a hand is stretched covered with a velvet glove but it is cast iron inside, that makes no sense."

That was in March 2009. In October of that year the U.S. and its allies tentatively worked out a deal with Iranian negotiators to move some of their enriched uranium outside Iran. Western analysts were confident that Mr. Khamenei would give his blessing, given the international pressure he was said to be under following the fraudulent elections and the bloody crackdown that followed.

The Ayatollah quashed that deal too: "Whenever they [Americans] smile at the officials of the Islamic revolution, when we carefully look at the situation, we notice that they are hiding a dagger behind their back."

It was the same in January 2011, when diplomacy also collapsed. Ditto in 2012, when negotiations in February, May and June each ended in failure. Washington went into those talks thinking they were going to succeed on the theory that Tehran desperately wants relief from the supposedly crippling pressure of economic sanctions.

Why does the Ayatollah keep saying no? The conventional wisdom is that previous U.S. offers weren't generous enough, or that the wrong President was in the White House, or that Iran wants only to deal directly with the U.S. and not in multilateral forums. Each of these theories has been tested and shown to be false.

A more persuasive explanation—get ready for this shocker—is that Iran really wants a bomb. The regime believes, not unreasonably, that Moammar Gadhafi would still be in power had he not given up his nuclear program in 2003. Mr. Khamenei also fears a "velvet revolution" scenario, in which more normal ties with the West threaten the ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic. Confrontation with America is in this regime's DNA.

Meantime, the pretense of negotiations has allowed Tehran to play for time to advance its programs. When Mr. Obama took office, Iran had enriched 1,000 kilos of reactor-grade uranium. In its last report from November, U.N. inspectors found that Iran has produced 7,611 kilos to reactor grade, along with 232 kilos of uranium enriched to 20%, which is close to bomb-grade. Last month, Iran declared that it would install 3,000 advanced

centrifuges at its Natanz facility, which can enrich uranium at two to three times its current rate.

As for the sanctions, they may hurt ordinary Iranians but this regime is famously indifferent to the suffering of its own people. The Ayatollah also doesn't seem to take the Administration's talk about "all options being on the table" seriously. Mr. Obama's nomination of Iran dove Chuck Hagel to be Secretary of Defense reinforces that impression, as do reports that the White House blocked Pentagon and CIA plans to arm the opposition that's fighting to overthrow Iran's client regime in Damascus. An America that won't help proxies in a proxy war isn't likely to take the fight directly to Iran's nuclear facilities.

In rejecting Mr. Biden's offer, the Ayatollah said frankly, "I'm not a diplomat; I'm a revolutionary." Another round of multilateral talks with Iran is set to resume this month, but maybe Joe Biden and his boss should start taking no for an answer.

Article 2.

Foreign Policy

Let's face it: Obama's Iran policy is failing

James Traub

February 8, 2013 -- There is no better example of an Obama administration initiative that has succeeded on its own terms, and yet failed as policy, than Iran. By engaging the regime in Tehran, and being rebuffed, the White House has been able to enlist China, Russia, and the European Union in imposing tough sanctions on Iran. By steadily ratcheting up those sanctions, the administration has been able to gradually squeeze the Iranian economy. By insisting that "containment" is not an option, Obama has

persuaded Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he need not launch an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities -- at least not any time soon.

Obama has done everything right, and yet his Iran policy is failing. There is no evidence that the sanctions will bring Iran to its knees and force the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to accept the humiliation of abandoning his nuclear program. But neither is there any sign of new thinking in the White House. "I don't see how what didn't work last year is going to work this year," says Vali Nasr, who served in the Obama State Department before becoming dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He might not get much of an argument from White House officials, who, the New York Times recently [noted](#), "seem content with stalemate."

The United States is not negotiating directly with Iran but rather doing so through the P5+1, which consists of the five permanent Security Council members and Germany. The P5+1's current position is that Iran must stop enriching nuclear fuel to 20 percent purity -- a point from which Iran could quickly move to weapons-grade material -- transfer its existing stock of such fuel to a third country, and shut down one of its two enrichment facilities, known as Fordow. In exchange, the parties will help Iran produce such fuel for medical purposes, which the regime claims is its actual goal. Iran has refused, saying it will not shut down Fordow.

But the current state of play masks the larger issue, which is that the ayatollah and those around him believe the United States wants to make Iran cry uncle -- which happens to be true. The next round of P5+1 negotiations, now scheduled for Feb. 25 in Kazakhstan, are almost certainly not going to go anywhere unless the United States signals that it is prepared to make what the Iranians view as meaningful and equivalent moves in exchange for Iranian concessions. Arms-control experts say that both British Prime Minister David Cameron and Catherine Ashton, head of foreign affairs for the European Union, favor offering Iran a reduction in sanctions; but there's a limit to what they can do without the United States.

Of course, such flexibility would be pointless if Iran is simply hell-bent on gaining the capacity to produce a nuclear weapon. The signals, as always with Iran, are cryptic. Iranian authorities have [told](#) nuclear inspectors that

they plan to install a new generation of centrifuges in order to accelerate enrichment. And yet Iran also chose to convert some of its stockpile of highly enriched uranium for medical use rather than approach the amount needed for a bomb, leading Israeli authorities to [predict](#) that Iran wouldn't be able to build a bomb before 2015 or 2016. Last week, Ali Akbar Velayati, Khamenei's foreign policy advisor, publicly [criticized](#) officials who have treated the negotiations dismissively. Presumably, he was thinking of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has compared Iran's nuclear program to a train without brakes.

Iran is now at the outset of what promises to be a raucous presidential election, and may be no more capable of serious negotiations between now and June than the United States was in 2012. But what is clear is that the sanctions have moderated Iranian behavior and rhetoric. At the same time, as the Times also noted, the economic pressure is not nearly great enough to compel concessions that the regime would view as a blow to national pride. In short, Iran might -- might -- be more willing to accept a face-saving compromise than they were a year or two ago, but will need serious inducements to do so.

What would that entail? Virtually all the proposals that have come from outside experts suggest that the P5+1 begin with modest confidence-building measures, especially in the period before the election. A recent [report](#) by the Arms Control Association enumerates several of them. Western diplomats, for example, could take up Ali Akbar Salehi, Iran's foreign minister, on his proposal to limit the "extent" of enrichment -- i.e., well below 20 percent -- in exchange for fuel rods for the research reaction and a recognition of Iran's "right to enrich," a notional concept the United States already supports under specified conditions. Or Iran could suspend 20-percent enrichment in exchange for a suspension of new sanctions. But Iran is unlikely to accept even such small steps unless it felt that additional moves would win additional explicit concessions.

Beyond that, the outlines of what in Middle East peacemaking is known as "final status" are clear enough: Iran agrees to verifiable inspections to ensure that it does not enrich uranium beyond 3.5 percent and does not pursue a nuclear weapons program, while the West accepts Iran's "right to

enrich" and dismantles sanctions. Of course, the outlines of a Middle East peace deal are clear enough, too. But in both cases, neither side trusts the other, and each demands that the other go first. Instead, nobody goes anywhere.

U.S. officials have very good reason to be wary of Iran's bona fides. In 2009, they reached a deal with Iranian negotiators to send the stockpile of highly enriched uranium out of the country -- only to see the ayatollah repudiate it. As Ray Takeyh, an Iran expert with the Council on Foreign Relations puts it, "Khamenei has created a politics where it's hard for him to compromise." But so has the United States. Anyone who watched Chuck Hagel's confirmation hearing knows that it is an article of faith in Congress -- and pretty much a bipartisan one -- that Iran is a faithless, illegitimate terrorist state that will be deterred from building a bomb only by the threat of massive attack. Had Hagel been foolish enough to suggest that the United States offer to reduce sanctions in exchange for Iranian concessions, the White House would have had to find a new candidate for defense secretary.

It's the U.S. Congress that arguably holds the high cards, though the White House put them in its hands. The most potent sanctions are legislated, and have been written in such a way that they will be very hard to unwind. Obama can waive them for up to six months. But the ayatollah is not about to make irreversible decisions in exchange for six months of relief.

The White House is thus stuck between Tehran and Capitol Hill. And it can't live long with the current stalemate. After all, Obama has said that "containment" is not an option. He is hoping that the combination of economic pain and fear of military action will bring Tehran to its senses. If it doesn't, the president has said that he is prepared to use force. Perhaps he feels that just as spurned engagement served as the predicate for tough sanctions, so would failed negotiations lay the predicate for a broadly supported strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. Iran left us no choice, he might say, as the bombers fly.

That would constitute a diplomatic triumph ... if a strike against Iran's nuclear facilities is a good idea. If in fact it's a dreadful prospect -- worse, perhaps, even than containment -- then it would constitute a failure that

would obliterate the record of adroit diplomacy of the last four years. Obama understands very well -- even if many members of Congress do not -- that even our worst adversaries have interests of their own, that those interests feel as legitimate to them as ours do to us, and that we at least have a chance of settling disputes with them if we can find the place where our interests overlap. The time has come for him to apply that wisdom to Iran.

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Article 3.

[The National](#)

An uneasy courtship as Iran and Egypt test the waters

[Alan Philps](#)

Feb 8, 2013 -- There is a consensus among commentators that the visit of the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to Egypt - complete with red carpet and kiss on both cheeks from President Mohammed Morsi - does not amount to a breakthrough. The view of US think-tanks is that it does not amount to very much at all, and certainly not worth getting anxious about. Such a consensus is always dangerous, and it is worth looking more closely at what it is based on.

Mr Ahmadinejad is the first Iranian leader to set foot in Cairo since the deposed Shah of Iran was given refuge in Cairo, where he died and received a state funeral. The two countries have not had diplomatic relations since 1979.

The Iranian president's visit has deep historical significance, even if he came as a guest of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference summit. The

picture of the two presidents embracing says to the world: Egypt is released from the US straitjacket and is free to resume its position as a regional power.

There are plenty of reasons, however, to dismiss the visit as just show. Mr Ahmadinejad is a lame duck, banned by the constitution from running for a third term in the June elections. As Iran moves into a period of war economy under the pressure of sanctions designed to curb its nuclear programme, Mr Ahmadinejad is engaged in a furious struggle to ensure that his rival, the parliamentary speaker, Ali Larijani, does not succeed him. The corruption allegations levelled by Mr Ahmadinejad against the Larijani family are deeply damaging to the Iranian regime.

Mr Morsi, meanwhile, has little to show Egyptians that he has improved their lot. Cairo is the scene of near-constant street battles and the economy is tanking. Egypt's currency reserves have just sunk to \$13.6 billion (Dh50 billion), below the critical level needed to cover three months of imports. The country is staring bankruptcy in the face, but cannot access emergency funds from the International Monetary Fund without implementing unpopular reforms that would further raise social tensions.

Both leaders need to show that they have "friends" abroad. The reality is a little different. Egypt and Iran appear to be divided by the Syria conflict, which is symptomatic of the wider split between the Sunni Muslim powers, led by Saudi Arabia, and Iran's faltering "axis of resistance" that, with Syria in play and Hamas having defected, now looks increasingly like a Shia Muslim axis.

If we look more closely, then the story of Egypt resuming its role as a regional power looks premature. At this stage, Egypt is trying to find some space to manoeuvre between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Given that Saudi Arabia has the money that Egypt needs, and Washington has a lock on the actions of the IMF, that space is limited.

But what does Washington think? Not very much at the moment. With President Barack Obama's second term team still being assembled, it is not surprising that there is something of a vacuum in Middle East policy. But the issue is deeper than that. The Obama administration has declared it

wants to focus on the Asia-Pacific region and, surprisingly, it means what it says.

Only a year after troops withdrew from Iraq, that country is not talked about in Washington, like an embarrassing relative. In North Africa, the US military has taken a back seat while the work of toppling Colonel Muammar Qaddafi and driving back the jihadists in Mali has been left to Franco-British forces. Syrian policy is one of drift, where the administration finds all options unpalatable. In Egypt, Washington has set a red line for the Muslim Brotherhood leadership: it must adhere to the peace treaty with Israel. Everything else is negotiable.

This week the Pentagon revealed that it would no longer be stationing two aircraft carriers in the Gulf region, as it has done for most of the past two years, due to cuts in the defence budget, and the possibility of even more stringent ones if Congress fails to agree on raising the US debt ceiling.

The Iranian nuclear programme remains a priority in Washington, but the carrier decision indicates a less warlike stance. One cannot say that US power is ebbing, but there is a clear lack of political will in Washington for decisive action in the Middle East. For now, the logic is that regional powers will have to take more responsibility. Egypt, although impotent at the moment, will have to find its role. The US needs to talk to Iran if there is ever going to be a compromise on its nuclear programme. Maybe Egypt could help.

Both Egypt and Iran have denied a report that General Qassem Suleimani, commander of the Quds force, a division of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the man responsible for Iran's military operations in Syria, visited Cairo in January. There was no reaction in Washington to this report.

If there is going to be a resolution of the Syrian crisis without a decade of Lebanon-style war, then allies of the US will have to speak to someone of the calibre of Gen Suleimani, a far more important figure than Mr Ahmadinejad. Could this lead to a historic compromise between the Muslim Brotherhood and the ayatollahs to create a new Islamic front spreading revolution?

That is out of the question. Egypt is too reliant on foreign finance, which Iran cannot offer at the moment, for it to swing into Tehran's orbit. And there is far too much domestic opposition.

What is clear is that while the US is reluctant to take direct responsibility, other countries must find ways of resolving the regional contradictions that have become unmanageable in the era of American tutelage. That will lead to some unlikely meetings taking place. The Morsi-Ahmadinejad embrace may not be a breakthrough, but it does show one thing: what was unthinkable a few years ago may one day be the norm.

Article 4.

Al-Monitor

Hamas Weighs Options For Recognizing Israel

Adnan Abu Amer

February 8 -- Recently, a lot has been said — and a lot of denials have been issued — about [Hamas](#) recognizing a [two-state solution](#) . It appears that Hamas is still vacillating between explicitly and implicitly recognizing Israel. Hamas realizes that recognizing Israel would open up the world's doors to the movement. At the same time, Hamas knows that such a move would be seen as a betrayal by the movement's supporters, both inside and outside Palestine. As Hamas well knows, its legitimacy derives from its vocal support for armed struggle within the complicated Palestinian reality. Hamas also knows that it will pay a heavy price if it is seen to be agreeing to international conditions. The cost will not only be political, but also ideological. Hamas has spent many years talking and writing about its notion of the state, its identity, borders, concept, constitution and the role of Islam within it. Generations of Hamas members were raised on those

ideas. But those ideas have remained part of the imagination and heritage, and of the nostalgic dream of restoring the [Islamic caliphate](#).

The concept of the state

Today's debate within Hamas over the concept of the state is more concrete than theoretical. The political conditions in the Palestinian territories do not allow for dreaming about unrealistic grand theories being promoted by some Islamist movements. Hamas is facing real-world problems that require real-world solutions. The Palestinian state being envisioned by Palestinian, Arab, and world politicians is based on the June 1967 borders. But does that fit Hamas's political vision and intellectual orientation? Generations of Islamists have been raised on the concept of the "Islamic state," which is synonymous with the Islamic caliphate. But Hamas's situation is a little different. Israel's occupation of all Palestinian territories is a political and concrete obstacle to the dream of an Islamic state and it forces the consideration of more realistic options. So we have started hearing, from Hamas, statements about establishing a Palestinian state on the June 1967 borders. There is no doubt that this development is an intellectual and political shift by Hamas. More than 20 years ago, Hamas founder Sheik [Ahmed Yassin](#) proposed a long truce with Israel. But today, such a proposal is more realistic and is attributed to Hamas's current leader [Khaled Meshaal](#). Hamas in 2013 is different than Hamas in 1993. Hamas is now an influential player and its statements and stances are taken into account by regional and international decision-making circles.

Recognition and commitment

The shuttle diplomacy by Western officials between Gaza, where Hamas's domestic leadership is located, and the Arab capitals of Doha, Cairo and Amman have only one objective: getting Hamas to agree to the conditions that would allow it to be embraced by the international community. In other words, they want Hamas to agree to the [two-state solution](#). And that, explicitly or implicitly, essentially means that Hamas has recognized Israel's right to exist! Those who have been following Hamas's course since it was founded 25 years ago notice that every once in awhile there is international pressure to make Hamas agree to those conditions. But Hamas is afraid to fall into the same trap that others, like Fatah, have fallen

into without getting anything in return except loss of popular support, as was demonstrated in the elections seven years ago. In light of the demands that the movement should recognize the two-state solution and make political commitments, some influential circles within the Hamas leadership think that the movement is being drawn into going beyond its rational political discourse and how it deals with the reality on the ground, and into recognizing Israel and exchanging messages with it. However, the siege has made the Palestinian territories miserable. So decision-makers in Hamas are forced to issue hints and signals that do not affect the movement's general principles. Those signals, however, may be misunderstood. And this is where the problem lies. No one thinks that Hamas supporters will make a big deal of those signals, but any concrete steps toward recognizing Israel will cost Hamas dearly, something which I don't think Hamas wants during this dangerous phase. At the external level, Hamas's enemies and opponents may think that the siege has finally paid off, albeit a little late, and that Hamas's current declarations are signals that, if the siege and the Palestinian suffering continue, the movement may explicitly [recognize Israel](#), which would open the "appetite" of Hamas' opponents for more breakthroughs in its ideology and principles.

Not an existential conflict, but a border dispute.

Although Hamas is aware of all that, it should be noted that in a few months it is facing elections during which the movement's signals that it may accept a two-state solution will be used in a fierce anti-Hamas campaign. Even though the movement has provided a different administrative performance than before, the fundamental change in the movement's political program may be a decisive factor for the Palestinian voters. As Hamas is being smothered, with a few breaches here and there, the demands that it should recognize Israel are ongoing and without letup. In other words, Hamas must choose between recognizing Israel to stay in power, or losing what it has achieved democratically as punishment for having to refused to bow to the world's conditions. In reality, the international community has not significantly changed its relationship with the Palestinians, including Hamas, over the past months and years. There has only been some cosmetic and tactical changes. Washington, the

European Union and the UN have not only signaled to Hamas that it should join the “broken and paralyzed” peace process, they have also insisted that the Palestinians explicitly recognize Israel. But this time, those powers are armed with an “Islamic religious cloak,” which would make a recognition of Israel more meaningful, especially since Hamas considers its conflict with Israel to be an ideological “existential conflict, not a border dispute.” That pressure is accompanied with a financial and [economic blockade](#), which is increasing the pressure on Hamas, especially since those carrying out the blockade are blocking anything that would alleviate Palestinian suffering. It is clear that they want to punish the Palestinians for electing Hamas and warn them against reelecting them; that is if the reconciliation succeeds and the elections happen on time. It should be noted that certain Israeli and Western research institutions have estimated the timeframe that Hamas will need to explicitly recognize Israel. They may accept from Hamas certain rhetorical signals for a while before the movement officially recognizes Israel. Since Hamas was founded in late 1987, it has been conducting an ideological and political campaign for its members and supporters against recognizing Israel. Hamas’ constitution says that Israel is a “cancer that must be eradicated,” and that “its demise is a Quranic inevitability.” Those and other slogans have been a key component of Hamas’s political discourse. It is therefore not easy for Hamas to change overnight due to political realism and suddenly tell its supporters: We shall recognize Israel, but it’s under duress!

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Article 6.

NYT

An Assassination in Tunisia

Editorial

February 8, 2013 -- Tunisia is where the Arab Spring began just over two years ago. Until now it has set an encouraging example of progress toward democracy and pluralism. Free elections brought to power a coalition government pledged to pragmatic cooperation between a moderate-led Islamist party, Ennahda, and smaller, secular coalition partners.

Progress has not always been smooth. But just as Tunisians inspired people in neighboring countries like Egypt and Libya to rise up against their corrupt and repressive dictators, they also seemed, for many, to point the way toward a democratic future accommodating both religious beliefs and the rights of the secular under the rule of law.

Those hopes have been severely shaken by the murder on Wednesday of Chokri Belaid. Mr. Belaid, a human- rights activist and one of Ennahda's most outspoken critics, had publicly challenged the party's failure to investigate or prosecute violent acts of intimidation carried out by shadowy gangs of religious extremists. Mr. Belaid's killers have not yet been identified. But suspicion now falls on those same extremist groups, which had issued public threats against Mr. Belaid and other prominent secular leaders — without any serious government response.

Thousands gathered for Mr. Belaid's funeral on Friday amid a nationwide general strike called by his trade union supporters. Tensions are high. What is urgently needed is a credible, independent investigation of Mr. Belaid's murder, followed by prosecution of the killers.

Given Ennahda's record of selectively ignoring Islamist violence, that investigation cannot be left to its appointees alone. A preferable alternative would be to reconstitute the broad-based, multiparty commissions that successfully oversaw Tunisia's free elections in October 2011 and investigated the crimes of the fallen dictatorship.

Ennahda, which captured 41 percent of the vote in the elections, promised to cooperate with secular parties and show respect for pluralism. Instead, it is sending muddled messages. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Hamadi

Jebali made a conciliatory gesture by proposing a temporary nonpolitical cabinet and new elections. Unfortunately, hard-line party members quickly repudiated him.

Tunisia's revolution, which has overcome past crises, can overcome this one if Ennahda and all other Tunisian parties recommit themselves to nonviolence, mutual tolerance and upholding the rule of law.

Article 7.

The Washington Post

Iraq's return to bloodshed

Kimberly Kagan and Frederick W. Kagan

February 8, 2013 -- Eighteen days of protests in Egypt in 2011 electrified the world. But more than twice that many [days of protest in Iraq](#) have gone almost unnoticed in the United States. Iraqi army troops [killed five Sunni protesters in Fallujah](#) on Jan. 25, after a month of anti-government [protests](#) in Anbar, Nineveh and Salahuddin provinces and elsewhere for which thousands turned out. Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Iranian-backed Shiite militias are re-mobilizing. Iraq teeters on the brink of renewed insurgency and, potentially, civil war.

This crisis matters for America. U.S. vital interests that have been undermined over the past year include preventing Iraq from becoming a haven for al-Qaeda and destabilizing the region by becoming a security vacuum or a dictatorship that inflames sectarian civil war; containing Iranian influence in the region; and ensuring the free flow of oil to the global market.

While tensions have risen over the past two years, the triggers for recent eruptions are clear. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite, had the [bodyguards of Finance Minister Rafie al-Issawi, who is Sunni, arrested](#) for

alleged terrorist activities on Dec. 20 — almost exactly one year after he ordered the arrest of Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi's security detail. Hashimi fled to Turkey and is unlikely to return soon to Iraq, where he was sentenced to death after Maliki demanded his trial in absentia for murder and financing terrorism.

The threat to Issawi, a moderate technocrat from Anbar, galvanized Iraqi Sunnis, who rightly saw Maliki's move as sectarian and an assault on government participation by Sunnis not under the prime minister's thumb. Three days after the arrests, demonstrations broke out in Ramadi, Fallujah and Samarra. Three days after that, a large [protest closed the highway](#) from Baghdad to Syria and Jordan. The popular resistance spread to Mosul on Dec. 27.

These [protests](#) erupted during a constitutional crisis and as an expanding Arab-Kurd conflict has become increasingly militarized. Iraqi President Jalal Talabani was [incapacitated by a stroke](#) on Dec. 17 and [has been out of the country](#) for treatment. Iraq's constitution specifies a line of succession — but with one vice president in exile and the other a Shiite and obvious Maliki proxy, Iraq has been, in effect, operating without a president. Political processes that require presidential involvement have been paralyzed, including moving forward with long-standing efforts by Sunnis and Kurds to hold a parliamentary vote of no-confidence in Maliki.

Talabani had been the critical link holding Baghdad and Kurdistan together since tensions rose following a 10-day standoff between Iraqi army units and Kurdish pesh merga troops in October, after Maliki sent the army toward the disputed city of Kirkuk. That move followed a series of skirmishes and mobilizations along the “Green Line” separating Kurdistan from Arab Iraq and a series of attacks in the area by al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The recent protests underscore the collapse of the inclusive political accommodation reached in 2007, which had been reconfirmed by the formation of a grand Sunni-Shiite-Kurd coalition government after parliamentary elections in 2010. By November 2012, Maliki had evolved to openly discussing his intention to form a “majoritarian government” that would exclude the most important Sunni representatives. In mid-December

he participated in creating a Shiite grand alliance as the launching pad for that government. The principal Sunni political leaders, including Issawi, parliamentary speaker [Osama al-Nujaifi](#) and Anbari tribal leader [Ahmed abu Risha](#) announced their intention to form their own coalition. In short, Iraqi politics was re-fragmenting along sectarian and ethnic lines even before the protests began.

Understood in this context, the Iraqi army's killing of protesters in Fallujah last month is a watershed event similar to the destruction of the [Askariya shrine in Samarra](#) in February 2006, though the crisis will not escalate as quickly. Sunni-Shiite tensions have hitherto played out in political forums. The key actors in today's crisis are not the Sunni political leaders but, rather, Anbari tribal leaders, including Ali Hatem Ali Suleiman, one of the most powerful leaders of Iraq's largest Sunni tribe. Suleiman and fellow leaders of the [Dulaim tribe](#) were essential to engineering the Anbar Awakening in 2007 and Sunni participation in the government, for which [they rejected al-Qaeda in Iraq](#) and renounced violence against the state. They responded to the killings of protesters last month by threatening open war against the state for the first time since 2007. So far at least, they have restrained protesters and resisted violent confrontation.

For his part, [Maliki has sought to deescalate the conflict](#) and to mollify protesters. Tehran has also been working — to persuade Iraq's Sadrists, whom Maliki has alienated in his consolidation of power, to abandon their support for their Sunni brethren. Their combined efforts appear to be working: The Sadrist Bloc, which had refused Maliki's request for suggestions to replace Issawi and other Sunni politicians, has put forth a substitute finance minister.

These efforts, ostensibly toward political resolution, actually increase the likelihood of sectarian war by continuing the marginalization of Sunni political leaders without addressing Sunni tribes' core grievances — and by re-creating a Shiite front that had splintered.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq has already taken advantage of this situation through its front group, the Islamic State of Iraq, which deployed combat teams in Fallujah last month that targeted Iraqi army positions and killed several soldiers. The jihadists' black flags have appeared at Sunni protests and

memorial ceremonies for the fallen. The group is back in the havens it held in 2006. If Maliki does not allow proper Sunni representation in government, al-Qaeda will gain greater popular tolerance and foreign support.

Over the past year, the situation in Iraq has become explosive while sectarian sentiment and armed violence in neighboring nations have escalated dramatically. Americans have become accustomed to watching Iraq approach the precipice and draw back. But circumstances have changed with the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and Maliki's year-long efforts to intimidate his opponents through political, judicial and military maneuvers. If Maliki does not accept many of the protesters' reasonable demands and allow meaningful Sunni participation in government, prospects for stopping Iraq's descent into sectarian conflict are grim.

Kimberly Kagan is president of the [Institute for the Study of War](#). Frederick W. Kagan is director of the [Critical Threats Project](#) and a scholar at the [American Enterprise Institute](#).

Article 8.

[The American Spectator](#)

Islam and Islamism in the Modern World

An interview with Daniel Pipes (By [Tom Bethell](#))

[February 2013](#) -- *Daniel Pipes, one of our leading experts on Islam, established the Middle East Forum and became its head in 1994. He was born in 1949 and grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts. His father, Richard Pipes, was a professor of Russian history, now emeritus, at Harvard. Daniel studied Arabic and Islamic history and lived in Cairo for three years. His PhD dissertation became his first book, *Slave Soldiers and Islam* (1981). Then his interest in purely academic subjects expanded to include modern Islam. He left the university because, as he told an*

interviewer from Harvard Magazine, he has “the simple politics of a truck driver, not the complex ones of an academic.” His story of being harassed through the legal system by a Muslim who later committed suicide was recently told in The American Spectator (“A Palestinian in Texas,” TAS, November 2012). He has been personally threatened but prefers not to talk about specifics except to note that law enforcement has been involved. I interviewed Pipes shortly before Christmas, when the Egyptians were voting on their new constitution. I started out by saying that the number of Muslims in the U.S. has doubled since the 9/11 attacks.

DP: My career divides in two: before and after 9/11. In the first part I was trying to show that Islam is relevant to political concerns. If you want to understand Muslims, I argued, you need to understand the role of Islam in their lives. Now that seems obvious. If anything, there’s a tendency to over-emphasize Islam; to assume that Muslims are dominated by the Koran and are its automatons—which goes too far. You can’t just read the Koran to understand Muslim life. You have to look at history, at personalities, at economics, and so on.

TB: Do you see the revival of Islam as a reality?

DP: Yes. Half a century ago Islam was waning, the application of its laws became ever more remote, and the sense existed that Islam, like other religions, was in decline. Since then there has been a sharp and I think indisputable reversal. We’re all talking about Islam and its laws now.

TB: At the same time you have raised an odd question: “Can Islam survive Islamism?” Can you explain that?

DP: I draw a distinction between traditional Islam and Islamism. Islamism emerged in its modern form in the 1920s and is driven by a belief that Muslims can be strong and rich again if they follow the Islamic law severely and in its entirety. This is a response to the trauma of modern Islam. And yet this form of Islam is doing deep damage to faith, to the point that I wonder if Islam will ever recover.

TB: Give us the historical context.

DP: The modern era for Muslims began with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. Muslims experienced a great shock at seeing how advanced the blue-eyed peoples from the north had become. It would be roughly analogous to the Eskimos coming down south and decimating Westerners, who would uncomprehendingly ask in response, "Who are these people and how are they defeating us?"

TB: So how did they respond?

DP: Muslims over the past 200 years have made many efforts to figure out what went wrong. They have experimented with several answers. One was to emulate liberal Europe—Britain and France—until about 1920. Another was to emulate illiberal Europe—Germany and Russia—until about 1970. The third was to go back to what are imagined to be the sources of Islamic strength a millennium ago, namely the application of Islamic law. That's Islamism. It's a modern phenomenon, and it's making Muslims the center of world unrest.

TB: But it is also creating discomfort?

DP: It has terribly deleterious effects on Muslims. Many of them are put off by Islam. In Iran, for example, one finds a lot of alienation from Islam as a result of the Islamist rule of the last 30-odd years.

TB: Has it happened anywhere else?

DP: One hears reports, especially from Algeria and Iraq, of Muslims converting to Christianity. And in an unprecedented move, ex-Muslims living in the West have organized with the goal of becoming a political force. I believe the first such effort was the Centraal Comité voor Ex-moslims in the Netherlands, but now it's all over the place.

TB: Nonetheless, Islam has lasted for 1,500 years.

DP: Yes, but modern Islamism has been around only since the 1920s, and I predict it will not last as a world-threatening force for more than a few decades. Will Muslims leave the faith or simply stop practicing it? These are the sort of questions I expect to be current before long.

TB: What about Islam in the United States?

DP: In the long term, the United States could greatly benefit Islam by uniquely freeing the religion from government constraints and permitting it to evolve in a positive, modern direction. But that's the long term. Right now, American Muslims labor under Saudi and other influences, their institutions are extreme, and things are heading in a destructive direction. It's also distressing to see how non-Muslim individuals and institutions, particularly those on the left, indulge Islamist misbehavior.

TB: How do they do that?

DP: Well, turn on the television, go to a class, follow the work of the ACLU or the Southern Poverty Law Center, and you will see corporations, nonprofits, and government institutions working with the Islamists, helping promote the Islamist agenda. The American left and the Islamists agree on what they dislike—conservatives—and, despite their profound differences, they cooperate.

TB: Presumably some Muslims here deconvert, right?

DP: There are some conversions out of Islam, yes. And the Muslim establishment in this country is quite concerned about that. But numerically it is not a significant number.

TB: The ones who convert don't talk about it very much?

DP: In some cases they do; they take advantage of Western freedoms to speak their minds. They are the exceptions, though.

TB: I suspect that the decline of Christianity has encouraged Islam.

DP: Very much so, as the contrast between Europe and the United States reveals. The hard kernel of American Christian faith, not present in Europe, means that Islamists are far better behaved in the United States. They see the importance of a Christian counterforce.

TB: Earlier, you mentioned Algeria. It is a big Muslim state that we don't hear about today.

DP: Twenty years ago Algeria was a major focus of attention. That long ago ended, although in France coverage is still significant. Algeria is ripe

for the same kind of upheaval that we have seen in other North African states, such as Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. I think it is likely to happen before too long.

TB: What about Syria?

DP: Assad's power is steadily diminishing and I cannot see how his regime will remain long in power.

TB: Should the United States get involved there?

DP: No, Americans have no dog in this fight and nothing in the U.S. Constitution requires us to get involved in every foreign conflict. Two wretched forces are killing each other; just look at the ghastly videos of the two sides torturing and executing the other. Listen also to what they are saying. It's a civil war involving the bad and the worse. I don't want the U.S. government involved. That would mean bearing some moral responsibility for what emerges, which I expect to be very unsavory.

TB: So you are supporting the Obama position?

DP: Yes, though he reaches it with far more angst. Also, there appears to be some serious, clandestine U.S. support for the rebel forces. The September 11 meeting in Benghazi between the Turkish and the American ambassadors was very curious. They are both based in Tripoli, hundreds of miles away. What were they doing in Benghazi? Arranging for American arms going via Turkey to Syria, it appears.

TB: How important has Israel been to the revival of Islam?

DP: It is a major factor in the neighboring states. But elsewhere, in Morocco, Iran, Malaysia, it has minor importance.

TB: Since the "Arab Spring," Israel seems increasingly beleaguered.

DP: Not really, not yet, though I agree that it will be more beleaguered with time. Its neighbors are so consumed with their own affairs that they hardly pay Israel attention. But once the neighbors get their houses in order, Israel will most likely face new difficulties.

TB: You have questioned U.S. support for Islamic democracy, which does seem naïve.

DP: The U.S. has been the patron for democracy for a century, since Wilson's 14 Points, and a wonderful heritage it has been. When an American travels the world, he finds himself in country after country where his country played a monumentally positive role, especially in democratizing the system. We naturally want to extend this to Muslim-majority countries. Sadly, these for some time have offered an unpleasant choice between brutal and greedy dictators or ideological, extreme, and antagonistic elected Islamists. It's not a choice we should accept.

TB: So what should we do?

DP: I offer three simple guidelines. One, always oppose the Islamists. Like fascists and Communists, they are the totalitarian enemy, whether they wear long beards in Pakistan or suits in Washington.

Two, always support the liberal, modern, secular people who share our worldview. They look to us for moral and other sustenance; we should be true to them. They are not that strong, and cannot take power soon anywhere, but they represent hope, offering the Muslim world's only prospect of escape from the dreary dichotomy of dictatorship or extremism.

Three, and more difficult, cooperate with dictators but condition it on pushing them toward reform and opening up. We need the Mubaraks of the world and they need us. Fine, but relentlessly keep the pressure on them to improve their rule. Had we begun this process with Abdullah Saleh of Yemen in 1978 or with Mubarak in 1981, things could have been very different by 2011. But we didn't.

TB: Egypt might be the test case.

DP: Well, it's a bit late. Mohammed Morsi is not a greedy dictator but he emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood, and his efforts since reaching power have been purely Islamist.

TB: What about the recent elections?

DP: I do not believe that a single one of the elections and referenda in Egypt was fairly conducted. It surprises me that Western governments and media are so gullible on this score.

TB: You could say we were supporting the democracy element in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Were we not?

DP: Yes and rightly so. The initial demonstrations of early 2011 were spearheaded by the liberals and seculars who deserve U.S. support. But they got quickly pushed aside and Washington barely paid them further attention.

TB: We gave foreign aid to Mubarak. Was that a bad idea?

DP: That aid dates back to the utterly different circumstances of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty of 1979 and became progressively more wrong-headed. It should long ago have been discontinued. More broadly, I believe in aid for emergencies (soup and blankets) and as a bribe, but not for economic development. That the Obama administration is contemplating aid, including military hardware, to the Morsi government outrages me.

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