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[Article 1.](#)

NYT

**If Not Now, When?**

[Roger Cohen](#)

October 17, 2013 -- It is possible to imagine a scenario more favorable to Israel than the current one, but it is not easy. Syria is giving up its chemical weapons. In the civil war there, Hezbollah and Iran are bleeding. The Egyptian Army has ousted the Muslim Brotherhood, restored a trusted interlocutor for Israel, and embarked on a squeeze of Hamas in Gaza. In Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the prime minister, has overstretched; the glow is off his aggressive stand for Palestine.

Saudi Arabia is furious with President Obama over his policies toward Egypt, Syria and Iran. It has scant anger left for Israel. Sunni-Shiite enmity, played out in a Syrian conflict that could make the 30-year religious war in Europe seem short, feels more venomous today than the old story of Arabs and Jews. The power and prosperity of Israel have seldom, if ever, looked more sustainable in its 65-year history.

Of course things can change in the Middle East — of late very fast — but if Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, is inclined to take risks from strength, the present looks propitious. As he wrote in an open letter to Israelis in July, “We have built a wonderful country and turned it into one of the world’s most prosperous, advanced and powerful countries.”

This is true. Israel is a miracle of innovation and development. Tel Aviv, at once sensual and vibrant, is a boom town. Go there and smile.

For almost three months now Israelis and Palestinians have been negotiating peace in U.S.-brokered talks. They have been doing so in such quiet that the previous sentence may seem startling. Nobody is leaking. Because expectations are low, spoilers are quiescent. There is a feeling nobody opposed to a resolution need lift a finger because the talks will fail all on their own. This is good. Absent discretion, diplomacy dies.

Ample cause exists for skepticism. The Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, insists that not one Israeli soldier will be allowed in Palestine; Netanyahu wants Israeli troops in the Jordan Valley for decades. There are hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers in the West Bank with no plans to go anywhere. Several members of the Israeli government scoff at the notion of Palestine; Netanyahu has become a liberal Likudnik, of all things. The Palestinian national movement is split, incitement against Israel continues, and the idea of a two-state outcome is losing favor. All this before Jerusalem and the Palestinian right of return are even broached.

Still, with scarcely a murmur, the talks continue. They are almost a third of the way into the allotted nine months. Well before that time is up, the two sides' final positions will have become clear. There will be gaps. That will be the moment for the United States to step forward with its take-it-or-leave-it bridging proposal. That will be the time of the leaders — Netanyahu, Abbas and Obama — and the test of their readiness for risk in the name of a peace that can only come with painful concessions. Israel is strong today for many reasons. A core one is the resilience and stability of its democratic institutions. There is, however, a risk to this: No democracy can be immune to running an undemocratic system of oppression in territory under its control.

To have citizens on one side of an invisible line and disenfranchised subjects without rights on the other side does not work. It is corrosive. A democracy needs borders. It cannot slither into military rule for Palestinians in occupied West Bank areas where state-subsidized settler Jews have the right to vote as if within Israel. If Israel is to remain a Jewish and democratic state — and it must — something has to give. Netanyahu knows this.

Palestinians must also make painful choices. They are weak, Israel is strong — and getting stronger. The world is never going back to 1948. In Jerusalem's Old City I was walking this year down from the Damascus Gate. Crowds of Palestinians were pouring out of a Friday service at the Al Aqsa Mosque. A large group of Orthodox Jews was moving in the opposite direction, toward the Western Wall. Into this Muslim-Jewish melee, out of the Via Dolorosa, a cluster of Christians emerged carrying a large wooden cross they tried to navigate through the crowd. It was a scene of despair for anyone convinced faiths and peoples can be disentangled in the Holy Land. Looked at another way it was a scene of hope, even mirth.

Netanyahu has recently taken to quoting Hillel: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" Of course it was Hillel who said: "That which is hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah, the rest is just commentary."

And Netanyahu's chosen quote, in this time of strength, ends with four words he has omitted: "If not now, when?"

# Why the Middle East is less and less important for the United States

Aaron David Miller

October 17, 2013 -- Does the Middle East really matter anymore? I'm just kidding. Of course the Middle East matters. Just look at the headlines: Not a day goes by without a new crisis in Syria, Iraq, or Egypt or a statement by an Israeli politician or Iranian mullah predicting that we're headed either to war or peace. This week, world leaders met in Geneva to discuss Iran's nuclear capability. Last month, President Barack Obama gave a [speech](#) to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) devoted entirely to the Middle East. Then there are the petroleum reserves, the iconic Suez Canal, and the all too narrow Straits of Hormuz. There's also the never-ending saga of the Arab-Israeli conflict and, of course, September 11. That terrible event -- the second bloodiest day in U.S. history, exceeded only by a day during the Battle of Antietam -- came from the angry, grievance-producing, broken Middle East.

But, with all that said, the Middle East is not nearly as important as it used to be. The traditional reasons for U.S. involvement are changing. Once upon a time, it was all about containing the Russians, our dangerous dependence on Arab oil, and a very vulnerable Israel. Then it was all about the threat of Islamic extremism and terrorism, and the desire to nation-build in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Much of that is now gone. Some of what remains has gotten more complex and limited the role the United States can and should play in the Middle East. On other matters, the fact that some situations have gotten simpler may actually be further limiting what America wants and needs to accomplish there.

Could it be that, in coming years, we're going draw back even more from the place? Perhaps. And here's why.

## **(1) There's no new cold war or bogeyman.**

It was the famous trio of Russians, oil, and Israel against the backdrop of a declining British empire that brought the United States to the Middle East in there first place, and some would like to believe there's still a cold war

on. After all, Putin loves to stick it to America every chance he gets, and he's seen the United States remove Russian clients one by one (Saddam Hussein, Muammar Qaddafi) and even threaten unilateral action against Bashar al-Assad, Moscow's last man standing in the Middle East. But Putin is not interested in an expanded proxy war with Washington in a region he knows is rife with Islamic extremism and a messy trap for Russia to boot. He would like to preserve the influence and assets he has, some of which involve billions in unpaid Syrian debt and contracts with Assad's name on them, as well as the naval base at Tartus. Putin also opposes a Pax America. However, as the recent U.S.-Russian framework agreement on Syrian chemical weapons reveals, Putin's aims can involve cooperation as much as competition. As part of the P5 +1, I also suspect Putin would sign on to a deal on the Iranian nuclear issue, rather than risk Israeli or U.S. military action.

In other words, the Russians and the Americans are hardly allies in the Middle East -- but they're not quite enemies either.

So, if the Russians aren't the principal threat to draw the United States into the region anymore, who or what is? In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a lot of smart people had questions about what new organizing paradigm for U.S. foreign policy would replace the Cold War. After a decade, the answer came literally out of the blue on a beautiful but deadly fall day in September 2001.

The attacks on the Pentagon and the Twin Towers generated a frenzy of activity, much of it focused on the Middle East. This would come to include two of the longest and among the most profitless wars in U.S. history, a global war on terrorism, an industrial-size homeland security complex, and a continuing struggle to find the right balance between America's security and the rights, privacy, and civil liberties of its citizenry. But, another decade later, the signs of retrenchment and withdrawal from the hot wars that replaced the cold one are pretty clear. We're out of Iraq, and, by 2014, we'll be heading for the exits in Afghanistan, too. As for the so-called war on terrorism, we are getting smarter and more economical. The United States has been quite effective in dismantling al Qaeda's central operations and keeping the homeland safe from another sensational attack. We've been lucky for sure, but effective, too. The danger now appears to be more from extremist-inspired, lone wolf episodes like we saw at Fort Hood

and in Boston. In any event, Americans dying in terrorist attacks remains an unlikely situation: [Last year](#), only 10 Americans died in terrorist attacks. You're more likely to die in a car accident.

Meanwhile, drones are hardly an ideal counter-terrorism strategy from a legal, moral, or political point of view, but, along with the use of U.S. Special Forces, they do reflect a much lower-profile approach to dealing with terrorists than invading nations and trying to rebuild them. Ideal or not, these kinds of tactics reflect the sort of retail approach to terrorism that the United States is likely to continue pursuing in the future.

To be sure, the threat from Islamic extremism has not gone away. But the notion that the Islamists and their Sunni or Shiite arcs are poised to take over the Middle East and require some new grand interventionist strategy is another example of threat inflation. Osama bin Laden is dead. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is a shadow of its former self. Hamas is contained in its tiny Gaza enclave. Nasrallah and Hezbollah have been weakened by Assad's travails. And the prospect that a small al Qaeda offshoot is going to take over and govern large parts of Syria is fanciful at best.

Indeed, the problem for many of the lands visited by the Arab Spring isn't that some new ayatollah or mullah is going to create a modern day Caliphate, but that there will continue be weak and ineffective governance in the region, with those in charge incapable of coming up with truly national visions for their countries or leading in a way that addresses the basic political and economic needs of their people.

## **(2) Nobody wants America to play Mr. Fix-It.**

One thing is clear: We've likely seen the last of the big transformative-interventionist schemes to change the Middle East from the outside in the name of U.S. security, a freedom agenda, or anything else. I say this knowing that there's little historical memory here, that the military gives a willful president all kinds of options, and that the world is an unpredictable place. But watching the public, congressional, and even expert reaction to the prospects of a limited U.S. strike against Syria, there's clearly zero support for intervening militarily in somebody else's civil war.

The alliance of the liberal interventionists and neocons who bemoan the Obama administration's lack of will, vision, and leadership and its abject spinelessness in the face of 100,000 dead (a full half of whom are

combatants belonging to one side or the other) is simply no match for a frustrated public promised a reasonable return on two wars who instead got more than 6,000 American dead, thousands more with devastating wounds, trillions of dollars expended, a loss of American prestige and credibility, and outcomes more about leaving than winning.

To believe anyone in the United States is ready to invest additional resources in tilting at windmills in the Middle East is utterly fantastical. Who can blame them? Last week in Libya, the one successful example of U.S. intervention in the Arab Spring, militias kidnapped the prime minister. Car bombs kill scores weekly in Iraq. And, in Afghanistan, one can only despair about the gap between the price we have paid there and what we can expect in terms of security and good governance in the years ahead.

### **(3) An energy revolution is coming.**

Energy independence isn't around the corner. But there's a revolution brewing in North America that will over time reduce U.S. dependence on Arab oil. U.S. oil production is increasing sharply for the first time in almost a quarter century. And natural gas output is rising, too. Some people even predict that, within a decade, America will become the world's largest producer of oil and gas. Indeed, Saudi Arabia currently produces 10 million barrels a day, while the United States churns out six million. If you add another two million in natural gas liquids, you can -- without straining the bounds of credulity -- see the potential. According to Council on Foreign Relations oil guru [Michael Levi](#), even the cautious U.S. Energy Information Administration predicts that, by 2020, U.S. production could get close to 10 million barrels a day.

The point is not that the United States is becoming [the new Saudi Arabia](#). As Levi points out, we're not in a position to manipulate and play politics with our oil production to affect supply and price. But we are going to become less reliant on Middle East energy. In 2011, we imported 45 percent of our energy needs, down from 60 percent six years earlier, and the share of our imports from Western Hemisphere sources is increasing. Between new oil in Brazil, oil sands production in Canada, and shale gas technology at home, by 2020, we could cut our dependence on non-Western Hemisphere oil [by half](#). Combine that with the rise in national oil production and greater focus on fuel efficiency and conservation, and the trend lines are at least running in the right direction.

As long as oil trades in a single market, we're still vulnerable to disruptions, and the security of the Middle East's vast oil reserves will continue to be a key U.S. interest. But our own independence and thus freedom of action as it relates to the Saudis and other Arab producers will only increase. Given the fact that this month is the fortieth anniversary of the 1973 oil embargo, that's a good thing to contemplate.

#### **(4) Arab Allies are estranged.**

Part of the reason the United States is losing interest and influence in the Middle East is that we're sort of running out of friends -- or, perhaps more to the point and to quote Franklin Delano Roosevelt's reported description of a Nicaraguan president, our own SOBs. America is watching a region in profound transformation. The old authoritarians with whom we fought (Saddam, Qaddafi, Assad the elder) and those on whom we relied (Yasser Arafat, Hosni Mubarak, Ben Ali, Abdullah Saleh) are all gone. It's true the kings remain. But the most important ones -- the Saudis -- have serious problems with our policies. They can't abide the fact that, as a result of our doing, a Shiite prime minister rules in Baghdad; they loathe our policy on acquiescing to Mubarak's ouster; they resent our interest in reform in Bahrain; and they can't stand our refusal to get tough with Israel on the Palestinians.

We've just suspended a chunk of military aid to Egypt, another of our other Arab friends, and managed to alienate just about every part of the Egyptian political spectrum, from the military to the Islamists to the liberals to the business community. The Jordanians still want to be our friend largely because King Abdullah's vulnerabilities require it. Likewise for Mahmoud Abbas, who has no chance of getting a Palestinian state without U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's peace process lifeline.

The fact is, for the first time in half a century, Washington lacks a truly consequential Arab partner with whom to cooperate on matters relating to peace or war. Part of the reason is surely because our own street cred is much diminished. But most of our predicament derives from regional deficits -- the weakness of the Arab leaders and states themselves, and the turbulent changes loosed in the region in the past several years.

You might even go so far as to suggest that, today, the three most consequential powers in the region are the non-Arabs: Iran, Turkey, and Israel. All are serious, stable countries, with strong economies and

militaries. Too bad we can't forge a partnership among that triad. The Middle East might become a serious and functional place.

**(5) Israel is stronger and more independent than ever.**

As matters have gotten worse for America in the Arab world, the U.S.-Israeli relationship has only grown stronger. Israel's own situation has also improved dramatically. Indeed, three factors -- Israel's formidable capacity; steadfast support from the United States; and stunning Arab incapacity -- have created a situation where Israel is stronger and more secure than it's ever been.

Iran's nuclear pretensions remain an acute challenge, and an unresolved Palestinian problem holds longer-term worries, too. But the notion that the Jewish state is a hapless victim, the Middle East's sitting duck, has been an illusion for some time now. Indeed, that image infantilizes the Israelis and creates a sense that they don't have freedom of action vis-a-vis their friends and enemies -- which they do. (Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself projects this image sometimes: His use of Holocaust imagery when describing the Iranian nuclear challenge seems to accord the mullahs great power. I've seen the picture of Churchill that Netanyahu has in his office, and I know he admires him. But Churchill would never, even in the darkest days of the blitz, have ever suggested that Hitler had the power to destroy Britain.)

Israel is a dynamic, resilient, and sovereign nation, and the United States needs to realize that, even while the Israelis take our interests into account, their own matter more -- particularly when it comes to their security and weapons of mass destruction. Where you stand in life is partly a result of where you sit, and as the small power with little margin for error, Israel is going to make its own decisions on the threats it faces and act unilaterally if necessary to deal with them.

Israel was never America's client. On the contrary, we helped enable and empower its independence of action. If Israel acts militarily against Iran because diplomacy can't address its concerns on the nuclear issue, it will be another indication that, as much as would we like to shape what goes on the Middle East, we really can't. We don't live there, and we are clearly unable or unwilling to dictate to those who do.

**(6) Diplomatic agreements could be on the horizon.**

The speech Obama gave at the UNGA last month doesn't sound like a guy who's getting ready to disengage from the Middle East. After all, he committed to making resolutions of both the Iranian nuclear issue and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the key foreign policy priorities of his second term. Given his risk-aversion, America's diminished credibility, and the sheer difficulty of the substance, it's by no means clear that the administration has the resolve and skill to succeed.

Even if he is serious, it's not as if Obama can just will solutions. These two problems are the most intractable ones in the region. Not to mention the fact that the Israelis, Palestinians, and Iranians will have a few things to say about these matters. Moreover, unlike the Syrian chemical weapons affair, it's very unlikely there's a Vladimir Putin who's going to make either of these issues easier for the United States. (Although, admittedly, we should withhold judgment. Had you told me at the end of August that the United States and Russia would be cooperating on Syria and ██████. inspectors would be busy eliminating Assad's chemical weapons stocks, I wouldn't have believed a word.)

Still, should Obama overcome these hurdles and deliver on these two issues -- and when I say deliver, I mean limited agreements, not conflict-ending ones -- not only will he have earned his Nobel peace prize, he will have freed the United States from two awful burdens, made the Middle East a much friendlier and more secure place, and validated the basic premise of this column. Sure, we'd be involved in monitoring and helping to implement new agreements, particularly on the two-state solution. But, on balance and over time, agreements might free us from getting stuck and enmeshed any deeper in the middle of the mess we'll likely be facing in the Middle East if solutions to both issues can't be found.

The Middle East hasn't been kind to America. Nor we to it. The sooner we can reduce our profile in these unhappy lands, the better. Nothing would make me happier.

*Aaron David Miller is vice president for new initiatives and a distinguished scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. His forthcoming book is titled *Can America Have Another Great President?**

## **In the Middle East, the prize of peace is now there for the taking**

[Hans Christof von Sponeck](#), [Miguel \[REDACTED\] Brockmann](#) and [Denis J Halliday](#)

17 October 2013 -- In February 1972, US president Richard Nixon made a "surprise" visit to China, recognising Mao Zedong's communist regime and opening the door to the more or less peaceful relations that have prevailed ever since between the two countries. Although Nixon had built his political career on the anticommunist campaigns that were in part a reaction to the "loss of China" in 1949, he was then following in the footsteps of General Charles de Gaulle, who had established diplomatic relations with China eight years earlier, in 1964, because, as De Gaulle said, one must "recognise the world as it is", and "before being communist, China is China".

In 1973 Nixon and Henry Kissinger signed the [Paris accords](#) that put an official end to the US war in Vietnam. A decade before that, John F Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev resolved the Cuban missile crisis by, on the Soviet side, [withdrawing missiles from Cuba](#), and, on the US side, by promising not to attack Cuba and withdrawing missiles from Turkey. These events changed the course of history away from endless confrontation and the risk of global war. It must be remembered that neither China nor the Soviet Union nor North Vietnam met western standards of democracy, less so in fact than present-day Iran. De Gaulle, Kennedy, Nixon and Kissinger were no friends of communism and, on the other side, neither Khrushchev, Mao nor the Vietnamese had any use for capitalism and western imperialism.

Peace is not something to be made between friends but between adversaries. It is based on a recognition of reality. When countries or ideologies are in conflict, there are only two issues: total destruction of one side, as with Rome and Carthage, or peace and negotiations. As history shows, in the case of the Soviet Union, China and Vietnam, peace was a precondition that made the internal evolution of those countries possible.

During recent decades, when it comes to the Middle East, the west has forgotten the very notion of diplomacy. Instead, it has followed the line of "total destruction of the enemy", whether Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, the Assad regime in Syria or the Islamic Republic of Iran. That line has been based on ideology: a mixture of human rights fundamentalism and blind support for the "only democracy in the region", Israel. However, it has led to a total failure: this policy has brought no benefit whatsoever to the west and has only caused immense suffering to the populations that it claimed to be helping.

There are signs that the situation is changing. First, the British and then the American people and their representatives rejected a new war in Syria. Russia, the US and Syria reached an agreement over Syria's chemical weapons. US president Barack Obama is making moves towards honest negotiations with Iran, and the EU's foreign policy chief and Iran's foreign minister judged talks just concluded in Geneva as "substantive and forward-looking".

All these developments should be pursued with the utmost energy. The planned second Geneva conference on Syria must include all internal and external parties to the conflict if it is to constitute an important step towards finding a solution to the tragedy of that war-torn country. The unjust sanctions against Iran, as in the earlier case of Iraq, are severely punishing the population and must be lifted as soon as possible.

Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and his supporters are staunchly opposed to these moves towards peace. But they must realise that we might start asking questions about the biggest elephant in the room: Israel's weapons of mass destruction. Why should that country, alone in the region, possess such weapons? If its security is sacrosanct, what about the security of the Palestinians, or of the Lebanese? And why should the US, in the midst of a dire financial crisis, continue to bankroll a country that superbly ignores all its requests, such as stopping settlements in the Occupied Territories?

The west must understand that before being Ba'athist or Islamist, or communist in the past, countries are inhabited by people possessing common humanity, with the same right to live, regardless of ideology. The west must choose realism that unites over ideology that divides. It is only then that we will move towards achieving our real interests, which

presuppose peaceful relations between different social systems and mutual respect of national sovereignty.

Ultimately, our interests, if well understood, coincide with those of the rest of mankind.

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[Article 4.](#)

Al-Monitor

## **Saudi Arabia Shifts to More Activist Foreign Policy Doctrine**

Nawaf Obaid

October 17 -- RIYADH — Something quite significant, yet little reported, occurred at the annual UN General Assembly in September. The Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, had been scheduled to address the assembly on Oct. 7, but on short notice he announced that he would not be delivering his country's message. The reasons were clearly the kingdom's shock at the weak global response to the enormous tragedy unfolding in Syria, due to a dysfunctional and inept UN Security Council, as well as the continued inattention to the issue of Palestinian statehood.

What few seem to understand is that such a powerful gesture is not merely symbolic. Rather, it will be accompanied by concrete policy changes and rectifications in the coming months and years that are going to set the tone for a completely transformed Saudi foreign policy. Saudi Arabia, the world's energy superpower, and the economic engine and last remaining political heavyweight in Arab world, will continue for a variety of reasons to take a far more proactive and assertive role in maintaining stability and security in the Middle East and North Africa and the broader Muslim world.

First and foremost, the Syrian tragedy clearly represents a turning point in the historical practice of the West in intervening in the Arab and Muslim worlds. As has been shown during the last two and a half years, the United States, United Kingdom and France no longer have the political and economic stomach to unilaterally engage their militaries in the region. While the so-called Arab Spring brought about a host of revolutions and significant transformations, leading to varying degrees of instability and opportunity in numerous Arab countries, the West's disengagement is going to trigger even more important implications as regional realignments of sovereign borders and military alliances usher in a transition period from which only the largest and wealthiest states will emerge intact or strengthened.

Second, while many in the West are hailing the statements of the new Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, as indicating his nation's interest in a rapprochement after years of tension and sanctions, the Saudis have welcomed Rouhani's sensible rhetoric but are in no position to simply trust that change is imminent from Iran and therefore ease their vigilance and engagement. Saudi Arabia and Iran are on opposite sides of the Syrian conflict and various other regional complexities. In order to meet this daunting challenge successfully, the kingdom will have to be more proactive, but also develop a new national security framework to increase its capacity to successfully handle crises across the Muslim world.

Growing Iranian involvement in Syria will lead to increasing the Saudis' stake in the situation, as the two leading regional powers seek predominance in resolving that conflict and emerging as the most influential arbiter post-conflict. Considering the shift in Western and regional international priorities — as well as the current political climate and regional stakes in the Syrian conflict — there is a realization in Riyadh that it is time for the major Arab powers to prepare a response for maintaining order in the Arab world and to counter Iran's expanding infiltrative policies. The kingdom and its regional allies will increase their support to the Syrian rebels and prevent the collapse of collateral nations, such as [Lebanon](#) and Jordan. The removal of the tyrannical regime in Damascus is simply too important for the future of the Arabs.

Saudi Arabia has recently proven its growing political strength in regional affairs, having successfully spearheaded resolution of the situations in

Bahrain and Yemen. In spring 2011, the Bahraini monarchy realized that what had begun as a genuine popular plea for reform in their country was being hijacked by Shiite [theocratic revolutionary movements](#). As Iranian intentions became more apparent, the Bahraini leadership activated the [Gulf Cooperation Council](#) (GCC) joint defense treaty, in effect since 2000, inviting a Saudi-led GCC force to assist in securing the vital and critical infrastructure of the state.

Saudi Arabia acted to affirm that the stability and security of Bahrain was integral to the GCC and its common vital interests. Relying on intrinsic pillars of the Bahraini state, that is, the monarchy, political institutions and civil society, the Saudis used their diplomatic might to lead a collective strategic response to the Bahraini crisis and checkmate Iran's revolutionary intentions. Thus, as the Western powers showed no sign of directly supporting the Bahraini monarchy, the Saudi-supported GCC force was dispatched to create a political environment suitable for dialogue. This allowed the Bahraini government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman, to steer clear of the fate of other failed regional states weathering upheaval.

In a similar vein, Saudi Arabia took on the role of regional problem solver in November 2011, when it spearheaded a solution to mounting civil unrest in Yemen and the resultant political deadlock between President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the popular opposition movement calling for his removal. Although the Yemeni revolution initially looked to reduce the country's unemployment, strengthen the economy and curtail government corruption, like many Arab Awakening movements it quickly escalated into a call for the ruler's resignation. As the revolution spiraled from organized demonstrations to violent clashes, tribal warfare, secessionist movements and the ascendance of terrorist cells, Saudi Arabia and the GCC could no longer consider the situation a local affair. Reintroducing stability in Yemen became imperative for regional security. The Saudis recognized Saleh no longer stood as a protector of stability, but as the opposite. Once Saleh was identified as an obstacle to Yemen's well-being, a Saudi-instigated GCC transition plan removed Saleh in exchange for immunity for him and his family. While both Saleh and the opposition seemed receptive to the agreement, the president began to backtrack and refused to sign. This tug-of-war between Saleh, the opposition and the GCC went on

for months, exacerbating the political and economic chaos and bringing Yemen to the brink of civil war. Ultimately, however, Saudi leaders convinced Saleh to sign the power transfer agreement in Riyadh. The deal, signed by Saleh and the [opposition movement](#), mandated that Saleh relinquish the reins to his vice president, Abedrabbu Mansour Hadi, until a new head of state could be fairly elected. An election held in February 2012 resulted in Hadi remaining in power. Since then, the kingdom has kept a close eye on Yemen as it transitions with a less-corrupt, unity government that has expanded to include a prime minister from the opposition.

The economic, political and military cover that Saudi Arabia and its GCC allies brought to Bahrain and Yemen proved pivotal in returning these countries to stability. A similar, but not identical regional initiative should be considered for significantly expanded action by the Saudis in Syria. It is absolutely vital that a Saudi-led regional project succeed there.

The only way the Arab world can make progress is through a collective security framework initially consisting of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and the GCC nations. It is time for the Arab states, working through a much-needed, reformed Arab League, to assume responsibility for their own region and work together to increase their collective security. Such a shift away from Western dependency and toward more local (and successful) interventionism will take some time. While Saudi Arabia has grown stronger in the last two decades, the other traditionally dominant Arab countries — Egypt, Iraq and Syria — have stalled, derailed or altogether abandoned state-building efforts to prioritize their survival. Despite this, through ever-growing Saudi leadership, a revitalized Arab alliance can and must rise to the challenge and prepare for a new paradigm in the security of the Arab world.

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[Article 5.](#)

The Diplomat

# **An expanding Chinese presence in the Middle East could pose the greatest long-term threat to Iran**

Zachary Keck

October 17, 2013 -- Even as the U.S. considers Iran's nuclear program as its most immediate threat, a consensus has emerged in the U.S. foreign policy establishment that China's rise poses the biggest long-term strategic challenge to the country. There is little indication that a similar consensus has taken hold among Iranian elites. It will.

Indeed, as Iran has been preoccupied with the U.S. and its allies over the past decade, China has quietly established a growing presence along all of Iran's borders. In none of these places are Iran and China's interests perfectly aligned. In some cases, particularly the Middle East, they are starkly at odds. Consequentially, should Iran avoid a conflict with the U.S. in the next few years, it's likely to find China to be its most menacing threat in the future.

## **Modern Iran-China Ties: The Story So Far**

Some may find the prospect of a clash between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the People's Republic of China farfetched. After all, the countries share many similarities. Each can legitimately claim to be the heir of one of the great ancient empires of the world, as well as of a nation that more recently suffered a century of humiliation at the hands of Western powers. The interplay between their divergent ancient and modern histories formed the basis of the revolutions that brought the current regimes to power, and have shaped their worldviews ever since. In the post-Cold War era, this worldview has expressed itself most prominently in their shared hostility to Western cultural hegemony in general, and the U.S. in particular.

Not surprisingly, then, the PRC and IRI have enjoyed friendly and growing relations since the latter came to power. During Iran's war with Iraq in the 1980s, China was one of the only countries to provide Iran with material support. This continued throughout most of the 1990s when Beijing provided Iran with military and nuclear assistance. More recently, China's insatiable appetite for energy has led to a rapid expansion in economic ties,

with Sino-Iranian bilateral [trade rising from](#) US\$12 billion in 1997 to US\$28 billion in 2009, [the same year](#) that China became Iran's largest trading partner. Since then, as sanctions have continued to push Western energy companies out of Iran, Chinese companies have readily filled the vacuum. Consequently, bilateral trade has reached US\$45 billion in recent years.

But this ostensibly friendly relationship masks a level of mistrust that runs particularly deep on the Iranian side. Tehran has long perceived China as playing a double game toward it. For example, although Beijing provided Iran with desperately needed arms during its war with Iraq (1980-1988), [it provided](#) Baghdad with well over double the amount of arms during the same period.

Similarly, from Tehran's perspective, China has used Iran as a pawn and source of leverage in its dealings with the United States, always willing to sell it out for the right price. Thus, after years of U.S. pressure, China [agreed in 1997](#) to halt its nuclear assistance to Iran and the sale of certain types of arms to reduce Beijing's existing tensions with the U.S. This decision included Beijing [cancelling a US\\$4 billion](#) contract for missiles and nuclear technology. More recently, U.S. concessions in other areas have led China to support five UN Security Council resolutions against Iran over its nuclear program. While China watered these down enough to preserve its own interests in Iran, it was less insistent on preventing Western companies from fleeing the country.

Economic relations have also proved to be a source of tension. Although Chinese oil companies have signed numerous multi-billion dollar contracts to develop Iran's energy industry, Tehran has later terminated many of these over Beijing's repeated delays. As a 2011 Atlantic Council [report noted](#), "Of the \$40 billion in announced China-Iran energy investment deals, less than \$3 billion appears to have actually been provided."

Additionally, Iranian markets have been [flooded with cheap](#) Chinese goods in recent years, further devastating Iran's domestic industry. This [has increasingly angered](#) ordinary Iranians and forced [the government](#) to claim it was taking measures to reduce imports of non-essential goods from Chinese.

The Eastern Theater: Afghanistan and Pakistan

On top of this general mistrust, Iran and China's geopolitical interests are increasingly clashing as Beijing comes to encircle Tehran. On Iran's eastern borders, China has established itself in both Afghanistan and especially Pakistan. Chinese and Iranian interests in these countries are more compatible than in other areas, although there are a couple of possible points of contention.

In Afghanistan, both countries opposed the Taliban's rule during the 1990s and were happy to see it go. Although Iran recently hosted a Taliban delegation in Tehran, China has maintained [much more extensive contacts](#) with the Taliban since it was ousted from power in 2001. Given its strong and growing ties with Pakistan and its desire to protect its investments in Afghanistan, it's not inconceivable that China will ultimately reconcile with the Taliban should it return to power.

By contrast, Iran [has steadily expanded its influence](#) in the anti-Taliban parts of western and central Afghanistan, [and has served as one](#) of India's main access points into Afghanistan, much to China and especially Pakistan's chagrin. Despite the nascent diplomacy, it's extremely difficult to imagine the Taliban and Iran cooperating after NATO leaves Afghanistan. Should the Taliban return to power, and Beijing reconcile with the group, Afghanistan could thus become a point of dispute between Iran and China.

Sino-Pakistani ties have expanded greatly in recent years as Islamabad's relationship with Washington has deteriorated. In some ways, China's growing presence in Pakistan could benefit Iran. For instance, China is particularly active in Pakistan's Balochistan Province, where it is trying to develop and protect its investment in Gwadar Port. The instability in Balochistan has long been a threat to Iran, mainly because it has served as a base for the anti-Iranian terrorist group, Jundallah. If China can bring prosperity to Balochistan (this is a big "if"), then it might help stabilize the region and further weaken Jundallah. Further, greater stability would likely lead to a reduction in the [growing persecution of Shi'a Pakistanis](#) in the area, which Iran would undoubtedly appreciate.

On the other hand, China's growing presence in Balochistan could weaken Iran's ability to influence events there, and an economically prosperous Balochistan could cause unrest across the border in [Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan Province](#). Moreover, should Iranian-Indian ties continue to

prosper, China could see Iran as inhibiting its strategy of using Pakistan to tie down India. [As John Garver has noted](#), China has made it clear that it values its relationship with Pakistan more than its ties to Iran. If forced to choose between them, Beijing will side with Islamabad.

But, as discussed more below, Beijing's control over Gwadar Port is the biggest potential flashpoint for Iran and China in Pakistan. Gwadar is the last port in the long line of China's "string of pearls" to the Middle East. Should China ever convert it into a naval base to project power into the Persian Gulf, Iran would be the only country standing between China in Gwadar and the Middle East. Put differently, Iran would be directly in China's crosshairs.

#### The Northern Theater: Central Asia

Chinese and Iranian interests are more directly at odds in Central Asia. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 offered both Iran and China (as well as Turkey) enormous opportunities to expand their influence in this region. Of the two, Iran was better positioned to take advantage of this given its common historical, cultural, and religious ties to the region, which date back to past Persian Empires. Unfortunately, Iran has thus far largely failed in its quest to expand its influence in Central Asia. Nevertheless, it remains committed to this endeavor. Indeed, it is notable that Hassan Rouhani made his first overseas trip to Central Asia to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit. Additionally, it has been expanding its commercial and naval presence in the Caspian Sea in recent years.

China initially made little effort to supplement Russia in Central Asia. Over the past ten years, however, it has quickly made up for lost time by expanding its economic, political and security ties to Central Asian states. Beijing is now deeply involved in the region through a web of bilateral relationships and multilateral organizations like the SCO. Indeed, many Central Asian experts argue that China has replaced Russia as the region's most powerful external actor. As Carnegie's Martha Brill Olcott [recently explained](#): "China has come to displace both the United States and Russia as the great power with the most influence in Central Asia." This may overstate the current realities slightly, but the trend lines are clear: China is positioned to dominant the region in the decades to come.

This will put it at odds with Iran. Although both China and Iran's involvement in Central Asia is driven primarily by Islam and energy, their

interests in these matters diverge. With regards to Islam, China fears Central Asian Islamist groups could aid or radicalize its own Muslim population in neighboring Xinjiang Province. It therefore has sought to leverage its economic clout in the region to weaken the forces of Islam, or at least ensure that local regimes prevent the export of radical ideology. On the other hand, under the current regime, Iran sees Islam as the surest way to expand its influence in the region. Thus, it on balance seeks to increase religious fervor among Central Asian people and the ruling elite.

China and Iran's energy interests in Central Asia are similarly at odds. Under the Soviet Union and as late as 2005, all of the major gas pipelines in Central Asia ran through Moscow, leaving states in the region highly vulnerable to Russian coercion. Not surprisingly, they have sought to diversify their access to consumer markets in Europe and Asia, and Iran and China have been all too willing to oblige these wishes.

By constructing a series of pipelines and railways – such as the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran corridor – Iran has tried to position itself as Central Asia's outlet to the Persian Gulf. By gaining access to the Persian Gulf, Central Asian states would be able to deliver liquefied natural gas to Europe and Asia without having to go through Russia. As Iran's official media explained this week: "Iran represents the best route for energy transfer in the region as this route is shorter and less costly than Russia, Turkey and China routes." In return, Iran will collect the transit fees, reduce its isolation, and also gain greater influence and leverage in Central Asia.

Central Asian states are also looking to China as an alternative to Russia. For example, since 2005 Kazakhstan and China have been connected by an oil pipeline whose capacity has been expanded a couple of times.

Meanwhile, when completed the China-Central Asia gas pipeline will start in Turkmenistan, cut through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan on its way to Xinjiang Province and eventually end in China's eastern coast. China views its access to these gas and oil resources as critical to its energy security given that overland routes cannot be blockaded by the U.S. Navy. Although Russia is the biggest loser in all this, China's enormous economic clout ensures that it will easily overshadow Iran in Central Asia. Tehran's Central Asian ambitions will therefore continue to go unrealized, and Beijing will be the culprit Iran holds to account.

## The Western Theater: The Persian Gulf

It is on Iran's western border with Iraq and the Middle East where its clash with China will be most acute, simply because the Persian Gulf is the most important region for both China and Iran. The importance of the region for Beijing is due almost entirely to its rich energy reserves. [According to the Brookings Institution](#), in 2011 China imported 2.9 million barrels of oil per day (bpd) from the region, which accounted for roughly 60 percent of its oil imports. Although Beijing will strive to reduce its reliance on Middle Eastern oil, it will have to continue to rely heavily on the region for decades to come. Indeed, China's oil imports are expected to more than double from 2.9 bpd in 2011 to 6.7 bpd in 2035. At that point the region will provide China with 54 percent of its oil imports.

On the other hand, geography has long ensured that the Persian Gulf consumed the bulk of Iran's foreign policy energy. This is because nearly all of Iran's land borders are ringed with mountain ranges that are difficult to transverse, which has historically served to protect Iran from attack as well as inhibit its ability to project power outwardly.

The one exception to Iran's fortress-like borders is along its southwestern border with Iraq where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers meet to form the Shatt al-Arab waterway. Although the area is a massive swamp and fairly easy to defend, it is also relatively flat. This topographic feature has tied Iran and Iraq closely together historically and culturally; ancient Persian empires, for example, often located their capital in modern day Iraq. It has also served as Iran's greatest vulnerability when in a weakened state, such as immediately after the 1979 revolution when Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces invaded Iran through the Shatt al-Arab. In contrast, during times of strength this region is the most sensible area for Iran to project power. In either case, dominating Iraq and exerting influence in the Persian Gulf has been viewed as essential by Iranian leaders from time millennia.

In the decade since the U.S. invaded Iraq, Iran has therefore devoted substantial energy and resources to bogging down the U.S. military and shaping the post-Saddam political order. By nearly any measure, it has [been widely successful](#) in these pursuits. In fact, Iran became kingmaker in Iraq following the prolonged political crisis after the disputed 2010 parliamentary elections, which ended only when Tehran worked out a

compromise. It used this maneuvering to block U.S. attempts to maintain a residual force in Iraq after 2011.

But the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq poses nearly as many challenges for Iran as its continued presence would have. To begin with, the U.S. withdrawal heightened Sunni insecurity, which – along with the sectarian civil war in Syria – has reignited Sunni resistance to the Shi'a al-Maliki government. Al-Qaeda in Iraq has been strengthened accordingly. Arguably the greater threat to Iranian influence in Iraq is intra-Shi'a squabbling and Iraqi nationalism. As the Iran-Iraq War demonstrated, nationalism trumps sectarianism for Iraq's Shi'a population. With the American occupiers gone Iran has to be on guard lest it come to be seen as foreign and malicious in the eyes of Iraqi Shi'a leaders. In the context of intra-Shi'a squabbling, political factions not tied to Iran could seek to use their political opponents' deference to Iran to undermine their popularity at home. To counter this, the Shia' parties with substantial ties to Iran could seek to pull back in order to restore their domestic credibility.

Iraq's ability to reject Iranian influence will ultimately be tied to its own power. In this sense, China's rapidly expanding presence in southern Iraq poses a nefarious threat to Iranian influence in the country. [By building up Iraq's oil industry](#), China is empowering Iraq's political elites to resist Iranian encroachment. That this isn't Beijing's intention is of little consolation to Iran. Already, Iraq has surpassed Iran as OPEC's second-largest oil producer. Iran's concern was plainly on display this summer when it seized an Indian oil tanker carrying Iraqi crude.

Iraq is not the only Persian Gulf country with which China is deepening its involvement. For the past decade Saudi Arabia – Iran's principle adversary – has been China's top oil supplier. Last year Riyadh provided China with a full 20 percent of its oil imports, and this number has been rising steadily. Both sides see this as a long-term relationship, as was evident when they [agreed to jointly build an oil refinery](#) in Saudi Arabia last year. China also imports oil from the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, and has thus been engaging closely with the entire Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Indeed, there is even talk of establishing a free trade agreement between the GCC and China.

After years of estrangement over Beijing's treatment of its Uyghur population, China and Turkey have also been rapidly expanding ties in

recent years. Last year Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan [became the first Turkish head of government](#) to visit Xinjiang Province in China in 27 years. While there he announced that Turkey would like to build an industrial park in the province, after Turkey and the Xinjiang government had explored the possibility in a joint working group [established the year before](#). Total trade volume between Turkey and China reached US\$24 billion in 2012, and Turkish officials [have recently stated](#) they want to see this increased to US\$124 billion. Ankara is [also expected](#) to purchase an advanced air and missile defense system from China.

Notably, the rapid improvement in Sino-Turkish ties has coincided with a steep deterioration in Turkey's relationship with Iran over the Arab Spring and Syrian civil war. As the past few years have underscored, Turkey and Iran are the regional states most likely to play a leadership role in the Middle East over the long-term. This will naturally put them at odds with one another. Iranian leaders understand this, and likely are following Turkey's growing ties with China closely.

Ultimately, the biggest potential threat for Iran is that China's dependence on Middle Eastern energy will force it to establish a military presence in the region. Whether that threat is actually realized is, of course, unknowable. But Beijing's string of pearls strategy and plans to build multiple carrier strike groups are clearly geared towards giving future Chinese leaders the option, and if the decisions of past great powers are any guide, China may very well exercise it. After all, the U.S. was once content with dominating the Caribbean and was a leading opponent of European colonialism. Few would have expected it to become a perceived hegemon in the Persian Gulf.

If China does establish a military presence in the Middle East it will find itself directly at odds with Iran on one of the latter's core interests – from long before the Shah through the present day, Iran has always harbored regional ambitions. Given its size, relative stability and coherence, in modern times Iran has always seen the presence of external powers in the Middle East as the main obstacle to it achieving these ambitions. Operating from Gwadar Port in southern Pakistan, a PLA Navy presence in the Persian Gulf would find itself even more in the crosshairs of Iran than the United States currently is. By necessity, Iran as a rising regional naval power and China as a global one would be destined to clash.

## Conclusion

In short, Iran rightly considers the U.S. as its greatest security threat in the near-term. Given America's desire to scale back its presence in the Middle East, and the possibility of an U.S.-Iranian rapprochement on the horizon, China's expansion in the Middle East ultimately poses the greatest threat to Iran over the long term. The U.S. will undoubtedly share Iran's concern with Beijing's more assertive Middle East policy, and this could be an additional impetus for them to put aside their bitter rivalry.

Regardless if that occurs or not, it is clear that as China seeks to deepen its presence in the Middle East, it will increasingly have to contend with Iran.

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The National Interest

## **Is Antisemitism Back in Europe?**

[John Allen Gay](#)

October 18, 2013 -- The status of Jews in Europe remains a delicate one. At least that is what a new survey by the EU's Agency for Fundamental Rights suggests. The survey, to be released in full in November, found that nearly one quarter of European Jews [avoid](#) doing things or wearing symbols that could allow others to identify them as Jewish. And the numbers are worse in some places: Forty-nine percent of the Swedish utopia's Jews avoid recognizably Jewish clothing and symbols in public. Eighty-eight percent of French Jews said antisemitism has become worse in the last five years. Thirty percent of Hungarian Jews have experienced an antisemitic incident in the past twelve months. And around Europe, two-thirds said reporting assaults and other antisemitic incidents to the police wasn't worth it, or wouldn't make a difference.

Surveys like this cast doubt on the belief that the history of the West has been one of steady progress. Sure, the Europeans seem to have finally been civilized, with their bloody, multicentury stream of wars and revolutions supplanted by social democracy and multinational union. But in 2012,

reports Tel Aviv University's Kantor Center, France [led the world](#) in violent antisemitic incidents.

Who is to blame? The media would have you believe it's the far right—Greece swarming with Golden Dawn blackshirts and cryptofascists flexing their muscles almost everywhere east of the Elbe. And the Kantor Center documents plenty of far-right violence. But participants in the EU survey, many drawn from Western Europe, saw it differently—just 19 percent pinned it on the extreme right. Twenty-two percent faulted the extreme left. But Europe's Muslims are cited by 27 percent.

This brand of antisemite has imported the hatred of Jews to countries where it was historically less severe, such as Denmark. Tablet, a Jewish online magazine, relates the [tale](#) of Martin Krasnik, a journalist and a liberal Jewish Dane who decided to take a long walk through the immigrant neighborhood of Nørrebro with a yarmulke perched atop his head. He's quickly harassed—flipped off, told to “go to hell, Jew,” told to remove his cap, and so forth. There were plenty of threats—men tell him that “we have a right to kick your ass,” that his religion may tell him to wear the yarmulke but that it doesn't tell him to get killed, that “my cousin killed a guy for wearing a ‘Jewish hat.’” Krasnik was extremely uncomfortable, telling Tablet's Michael Moynihan that he thought, “If I keep doing this for an hour or two, something will happen. And if I did this everyday, I would get my ass kicked around.”

The rise of Muslim antisemitism in Europe is well documented—and widely ignored. Krasnik told Moynihan that the press and other elites give the phenomenon little attention and little energy—“The mayor of Copenhagen says ‘we will not accept antisemitism, but that we shouldn't overdramatize the situation. We should breathe calmly, he said.” Moynihan noted that some school principals in heavily immigrant areas have begun warning Jewish parents away. Europe's multiculturalists prefer to apologize for their more troublesome charges—and to bend native society to accommodate foreigners' prejudices. Moynihan, again:

At a recent government-sponsored “multicultural festival” in Nørrebro, intended to promote cultural “diversity,” a Jewish group was barred from displaying the Israeli flag. TaskForce Inclusion, one of the Orwellian-named organizers of the event, claimed that the measure was taken as a “safety precaution” (a precaution that applied, it seems, only to Jewish

groups and a tacit admission that the mere sight of a Star of David would drive certain other attendees into spasms of violence). One government official later said that, initially, the Jewish group was to be completely excluded for fear of offending Muslim participants.

Modern liberality veils Europe's history—and it's the same veil behind which some of Europe's less pleasant impulses lurk. There is a fatal flaw, after all, in European claims of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism really can enrich societies. And there is no better testament to this than the history of the Jews in Europe. They gave Europe Einstein and Kafka, Freud and Arendt. They made Europe the world's intellectual center of gravity—until the Europeans killed them and drove them out. So why would Europe's self-proclaimed multiculturalists sweep their shining example under the rug, unless something more unsavory were at play?

*John Allen Gay is an assistant managing editor at The National Interest. His book (co-authored with Geoffrey Kemp) [War with Iran: Political, Military, and Economic Consequences](#) was released by Rowman and Littlefield in early 2013.*