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The Council on Foreign Relations

Time Ripe for Iranian Nuclear Accord?

Interview with Suzanne Maloney

October 18, 2013 -- *It's "very much possible" for world powers and Iran to achieve an agreement on the latter's nuclear ambitions, says Suzanne Maloney, a longtime expert on the Islamic Republic. "But it's also not inevitable." In addition to concerns about enrichment levels, Maloney says that negotiators from the so-called P5+1 (United States, Britain, France, Russia, China, and Germany) will focus intensely in the coming months on Iran's development of advanced centrifuge technology and a heavy-water reactor set to come online next year. Meanwhile, she says that talks could be sidetracked by additional U.S. sanctions, which are due up for Senate debate in the near future.*

The major powers and Iran just concluded two days of what from all accounts were very positive talks. This was a continuation of the constructive atmosphere during the UN General Assembly when the newly elected Iranian president Hassan Rouhani and foreign minister Javad Zarif were in New York. Where do you think we go from here? The nuclear talks will continue in early November.

It's very much possible to get a deal between the United States, its international partners, and Iran on the nuclear issue within the span of a year, but it's also not inevitable. What we saw this week was an important and constructive beginning that has been a long time in the making. The international community has been talking to Iran about its nuclear ambitions and activities for well over a decade, and the United States has been prepared to be a participant in those dialogues since 2006. And yet never before have we had what took place over the course of the past few days in Geneva, which was apparently a very serious, technical discussion about how Tehran can meet the concerns of the international community for greater transparency and greater assurance that the Islamic republic cannot break out and achieve nuclear weapons capability.

The Iranians have made it clear, though, that they want to continue to enrich uranium. We don't know whether they are willing to stop at this 20 percent figure. What does the magic figure mean?

There are both qualitative and quantitative constraints that the international community is looking to see Iran apply to its enrichment activities. The UN Security Council resolutions that have been passed over the course of the past seven years all refer to a requirement of a suspension of uranium enrichment, which was of course the condition—the concession—that now President Rouhani negotiated while he was in charge of the talks for Iran

from 2003 to 2005. There has been for some time an understanding among most in the international community that it is no longer viable to achieve a sustained suspension of all of Iran's uranium-enrichment activities. However, there are concerns about enrichment to what is described as medium levels—near 20 percent enrichment—which provides something of a fast track to production of nuclear weapons fuel material. This has been an area where the United States and its partners have been focused for a number of years in hopes of persuading Iran to either forgo that enrichment or to suspend and stop it. It appears that that's an area [in which] the Iranians are at least prepared to make some initial concessions. There is discussion, at least in the reports that have come from Geneva, that Iran may be prepared to suspend that enrichment for a six-month period. Iran has been quite careful to ensure that its stockpile of this medium-enriched uranium does not go beyond what the Israelis and others have described as a red line. That is an area [where], because of the focus of many years, we're more likely to see some quick progress. The bigger issues may be some of the technical areas of concern that have grown more urgent as Iran's program has expanded over the course of these many years.

Like what?

In particular, the development of more sophisticated centrifuges and the heavy-water reactor based in the Iranian city of Arak, which is due to come online sometime next year. I think these are two particular issues [that] the international community is going to be looking at very closely for significant Iranian concessions in order to build up confidence that we can keep Iran significantly far from nuclear weapons capability.

There was some talk about Iran agreeing to this so-called "additional protocol" that allows UN inspectors to come in without any real warning. Can you talk about that?

This is a form of enhanced transparency, and something that has been the focus of interest for many years. The Iranians agreed to implement the "additional protocol" while Rouhani was the nuclear negotiator, but the treaty was never ratified by the Iranian parliament; and that level of transparency has not been in place in Iran for many years. And so, it is of considerable importance that Iranian negotiators appear to have said publicly that they are prepared to implement the terms of that protocol, even if they are unable for either legal or political reasons to get

parliamentary ratification of the treaty addition itself. That is an important confidence builder, but, in effect, transparency is not enough. We would like to see greater transparency and cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency from Iran. But, I believe that the more important considerations from the international community are caps on the number of centrifuges and on the extent of enrichment in Iran. While the Iranians have suggested they are prepared to talk about it, it's not yet clear if there is any real meeting of the minds between the two sides on what kinds of numbers would be acceptable.

Of course, there are several parties who are not terribly happy about the improvement in the atmosphere. There are many members of Congress who would like to have additional sanctions put on Iran now, as well as the Israelis who are very nervous about this progress.

There are still many who have not yet been convinced that there is a real deal on the table at this point, and that's perfectly justifiable in some quarters, given that this is a significant shift from much of what we've seen and heard from Iran over the course of the past eight years with former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. There are many in Congress who believe that pressure has worked, and so it should be intensified in order to ensure that we get the very best deal possible. And while I understand the logic behind that sort of an argument, I think it is a dangerous presumption to assume that simply because pressure has worked that more is always better. In fact, it's quite likely that if we were to see the proposed sanctions bill—which has passed the House and intended to go before the Senate over the course of the next few weeks—passed by overwhelming veto-proof majorities of the U.S. Congress, it would likely create real difficulties for the prospect of maintaining the momentum and seeing some early fruit from these talks in the form of an interim confidence-building measure, which I believe is the objective of the U.S. negotiators.

What about from the Iran side? Are there still many political prisoners that the world would like to see released?

We've seen a lot of progress since the election of Hassan Rouhani in June 2013, but Iran is certainly not a free and fair country. It is a country in which there are ongoing human rights abuses, including the imprisonment of many for simply participating in the political process or voicing their opinions through the media. It's also a country with one of the highest

levels of prisoner executions per capita in the world. All of these issues are ongoing concerns for the United States. The most high-profile political prisoners in Iran today are the two candidates, Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, and their wives from the 2009 election in which Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's reelection victory was contested by millions throughout the country. The pair who had run against him and spearheaded the rejection of the official outcome has been under house arrest for two-and-a-half years under incredibly draconian circumstances. They're in homes, not behind bars, but effectively their homes have become prisons. There are bars on the windows. They're limited in the contact they can have with the outside world. It is truly an area that the international community ought to be focused on. There are small signs of progress even here within Iran. There has been official discussion of a review of their status, and I think that this is going to be a barometer for many Iranians, if not for the world, of how far President Rouhani can and is prepared to go in terms of changing the political climate in Iran.

And, of course, he's constrained by what Ayatollah Khamenei will allow, right?

Rouhani is limited by the hard-liners and in the sense that he is not a reformer by any stretch of the imagination. He is very much a pragmatist who has come to this position, in a way, to lead a national unity government, to lead Iran out of the crisis that it has found itself in with the international community, and to begin to rebuild the legitimacy of the regime within Iran itself. And so he's got a very difficult balancing act and a lot of different constituencies to try to manage as he goes about this process of moderating both at home and internationally.

What do you think will happen over the next six months? Any breakthroughs?

Predictions with Iran are incredibly dangerous, as I think you know. But I'm very optimistic. I'm not irrationally exuberant. There has been just a little bit too much adoration of the new tone that we've heard from Iran, and I think that it's important to remember that we're only beginning to see the first real tangible signs of change within the country. But it's quite clear that Rouhani was elected with a mission and a mandate to find some way out of the nuclear mess and rehabilitate Iran's role in the world and fix its economy. The only way that he can do this is to come to an agreement

with the international community. The negotiators and the officials that we have seen in New York and Geneva have made very clear that they are empowered, prepared, and willing. I think it's also clear that the [Obama] administration sees the opportunity before it and is attempting to seize that opportunity.

Suzanne Maloney, Senior Fellow, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution.

[Article 2.](#)

The Washington Post

What a nuclear deal with Iran could look like

Michael Singh

18 Oct 2013 -- With the [first round of nuclear talks](#) with Iran's new, and [newly pragmatic](#), negotiating team in the books, the Washington policy debate about Iran has shifted from whether a deal is possible to what sort of deal is acceptable. While such discussions can often seem a miasma of centrifuge counts and enrichment levels, there are, in fact, two distinct paths to a nuclear deal with Iran.

The first path is one in which Tehran would receive relief from sanctions in exchange for putting strict limits on its nuclear activities, such as restricting uranium enrichment to low levels. The success of such an agreement would depend on ensuring that Iran could not use declared nuclear activities as a cover for covert activities aimed at developing a nuclear weapon. It would also depend on ensuring that the deal was not easily reversible, so Tehran could not renege once pressure had been alleviated. There are ways that sanctions relief could be made more easily reversible — for example, channeling oil payments to Tehran through a single mechanism that could be blocked in the event of noncompliance — but none of these is fail-safe. The efficacy and durability of a deal over limited enrichment would rest on Iranian transparency. To be meaningful, transparency measures would have to include allowing inspectors unfettered access to sites of their choosing, not just those declared by Iranian officials, and a comprehensive accounting of Iran's past and present nuclear work, including the military elements of its nuclear program, such as weaponization research. Coming clean in this manner is a prerequisite

for the success of any deal that leaves in place dual-use nuclear capabilities. Countries that have divulged their nuclear secrets, such as South Africa, have proceeded to cooperate peacefully with the international community on atomic energy. Those that continued to obfuscate despite agreements, such as [North Korea](#), experienced deeper isolation and external tensions.

Iran appears to prefer the latter model. While its officials profess a desire for cooperation, they continue to dismiss as “unfounded allegations” evidence deemed “credible” by the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran has engaged in nuclear work related to weapons. Iran continues to deny inspectors access to suspected nuclear sites and key personnel, and it seeks to constrict their activities within the bounds of its declared nuclear program.

Even in the best circumstances, it would take time to establish confidence that Iran had truly given up its nuclear weapons aspirations. Allies such as Israel and the Gulf states would distrust Iranian intentions, while Iranians would bristle at the intrusiveness of inspections. Absent a strategic shift by Iran, a deal on limited enrichment is more likely to increase those tensions than to defuse them: Iran would seek to hide or deny activities for which the United States and its allies have convincing evidence; Iran’s adversaries would seek to match its nuclear capabilities; and erstwhile allies such as Russia and China would drift away from the unlikely coalition currently led by Washington. The unlikelihood of a change of heart by Iranian leaders suggests a second, more straightforward path to an agreement: requiring Iran to dismantle its nuclear program in exchange for any relief from sanctions, which would be increased should Tehran refuse to yield. In this model, Iran would have to suspend enrichment- and reprocessing-related activities as demanded by the ██████ Security Council, dismantle its underground enrichment facility at Fordow and export its stockpiles of enriched uranium, among other steps. The obvious objection to such a deal is that it may be too difficult to achieve; even U.S. negotiators have characterized this stance as “maximalist.” But any deal must be evaluated in comparison to plausible alternatives, not in isolation, and Iran’s alternatives are bleak. Iran’s economy is under severe strain because of the sanctions. If Iran tried to “break out” for a nuclear weapon,

the United States and Israel have made clear that they would strike a devastating military blow.

And contrary to conventional wisdom, time is not on Iran's side. With each passing day, Iran's economic predicament deepens and its nuclear program expands. But while the former threatens Iran's well-being, the latter does not improve it. Adding to its centrifuge inventory and uranium stockpile merely edges Iran closer to Western "red lines" while making it no less vulnerable to attack.

The United States possesses powerful leverage in the nuclear talks: Its negotiating position is eminently reasonable. The West is offering Iran something it desperately needs — sanctions relief — in exchange for something it has little ostensible use for — enrichment and reprocessing — given its disavowal of nuclear weapons. That's hardly a maximalist position.

It is commendable that the United States and its allies hope earnestly that Iran would take the path of true transparency and cooperation; indeed, President Hassan Rouhani's "[charm offensive](#)" is so beguiling because it appeals to those hopes. But we, and perhaps even Rouhani, cannot compel Iran to make such a fundamental change in course. We can, however, with firmness at the negotiating table and confidence in our leverage make plain the alternatives and force Tehran to confront, rather than evade, the consequences of its choices.

Michael Singh is managing director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

[Article 3.](#)

[Hürriyet Daily News](#)

Turkey sees Israel behind campaign against spy chief

Murat Yetkin

October/19/2013 -- "We see this media campaign as an attack and there might be an Israeli effort behind it," a Turkish intelligence source said on

the phone yesterday. “Especially after the Washington Post story on Oct. 17 and the follow-ups with Jerusalem bylines.”

This is a bold claim and the source was referring to a story by seasoned [journalist](#) David Ignatius who claimed that Turkey’s National Intelligence Organization (MIT) had given Iranian intelligence the names of 10 Iranians who had been in contact with Israel’s intelligence service, MOSSAD, upon the orders of Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan.

The story was based on “knowledgeable sources,” without giving any details about the leak while noting that [Israel](#) had seen Hakan Fidan, the head of MIT, as someone who had “friendly links with Tehran.”

There is a background to all of it. Ignatius was the moderator at the World Economic Forum panel in Davos on Jan. 29, 2009, when Erdoğan had his “One minute” storm against him for failing to give a chance to reply to Israeli President Shimon Peres who was also a panelist. And Israelis started to accuse Fidan almost at the same time as he was the Turkish sherpa during the ██████-sponsored efforts on Iran’s nuclear program, before becoming MIT’s head.

Ankara thinks the WP story is part of a campaign that started with a Wall Street Journal story printed on Oct. 9 saying Fidan was acting “independently” on Syria operations, jeopardizing Western interests there. The story also noted that the discomfort of the U.S. administration was increased during a May 16 lunch at the White House put on by U.S. President Barack Obama for Erdoğan in the presence of Fidan, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Obama’s national security adviser, Tom Danilon. The WSJ story said Fidan was responsible for Turkey’s soft stance regarding al-Qaeda-affiliated opposition groups in the Syrian civil war.

Both of the stories were refuted by Davutoğlu on Oct. 17. “The claims attributed to Hakan Fidan are both untrue and an example of very bad, black propaganda. Fidan is doing his job,” he said.

But the feelings in the Turkish government regarding the “campaign” are stronger than those on-the-record words of Davutoğlu. One government official pointed to the timing of the media reports “targeting” Fidan. The official said the campaign coincided with approaching Syria talks in Geneva, which are expected to take place in late November, and a dramatic

change in Iran's relations with the West under its new president, Hassan Rouhani.

Since a telephone conversation between Obama and Rouhani on Sept. 27 during ██████. General Assembly talks, the top diplomats of both countries have officially met for the first time since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The discussion led to the quick restart of diplomatic efforts for direct talks on Iran's nuclear program with the P5+1 countries.

Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) did not hide his unease at the rapprochement, immediately flying to Washington ██████. to warn Obama on Sept. 30 that [Iran](#) was a “wolf in sheep's clothing.”

When asked about the WP story on the claim of “revealing the Israeli spy ring in Turkey to the Iranians,” U.S. State Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki did not make any comment but said the U.S. had been working with the Turks as an ally on a range of issues and that the report had not changed relations with Turkey.

Sources in [Ankara](#) believe that besides trying to defame Turkey in U.S. eyes as a country tolerating terrorists like [Iran](#) – and because of its “independent tack” on Syria, amid an effort to try and corner it in a possible move in the U.S. Congress – [Israel](#) might have had another motivation. That might be, according to those sources who asked not to be named, an attempt to avoid paying compensation for the nine Turks killed by Israeli commandoes on May 31, 2010, on board the Mavi Marmara on its way to carry humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

After the official apology from Netanyahu (which was brokered by Obama) on March 24, talks started for compensation to the families of the victims, albeit with no result, as [Israel](#) does not want to make the payments in the form of “compensation,” according to Israeli diplomatic sources talking to HDN.

Also, Erdoğan's close relations with Hamas are another source of disturbance between the two. By coincidence, Khaled Mashaal, the leader of Hamas, was received by Erdoğan in his office in [Ankara](#) on Oct. 9, the same day that the WSJ story published.

On Syria, Turkey has been taking more careful steps regarding al-Qaeda-affiliated groups fighting in the civil war there. Turkish intelligence sources have [admitted to HDN](#) that there were a number of operative and

diplomatic steps taken in parallel with the demands of the U.S., the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia since Erdoğan's May 16 meeting with Obama. Davutoğlu said subsequent telephone conversations on Oct. 16 with Kerry and [French](#) counterpart Laurent Fabius that Turkey was going to be part of the Geneva talks (which have mainly been a U.S.-Russian matter until now) for the future of Syria and the Bashar al-Assad regime there. Erdoğan had condemned al-Qaeda in Syria during an Oct. 2 speech in Istanbul and Davutoğlu had, again on Oct. 9, said Turkey neither supported nor tolerated al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in Syria, the al-Nusra Front, the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) and others. Turkish officials may not be ready to acknowledge a "tactical mistake" yet, but those statements might be the cost of underestimating the rise of radical Islamist movements within the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Perhaps as another belated and defensive move, the Turkish General Staff said Oct. 16 that Turkish artillery had shelled ISIS positions near the al-Qaeda-seized border town of Azaz in response to a shell fired from there – the first event showing the changing Turkish stance. This change of stance may help the Turkish government in its dialogue with the outlawed [Kurdistan Workers' Party](#) (PKK) in the search for a political solution to the Kurdish problem, too. It is unclear whether an Israeli "plot" is behind the obvious campaign against Turkey's intelligence chief and whether it is aimed at Erdoğan's foreign policy choices, especially regarding the greater Middle East. Turkey is criticized at home and abroad for being distanced from the [European Union](#) and getting too involved with the uncertainties of the Middle East. Both the recent EU Progress Report, which calls for Turkey to foster higher standards of democracy to keep up with its European venture, and the Geneva Conference on Syria might be chances to fine-tune Turkish foreign policy.

[Article 4.](#)

The Washington Post

America's not in decline — it's on the rise

Ely Ratner and Thomas Wright

18 Oct 2013 -- It's been a banner month for the oracles of American decline. The shutdown of the federal government, the prospect of a default on the country's debt, and the political dysfunction that made the United States seem rudderless on Syria and forced the cancellation of President Obama's trip to Asia seemed to confirm that the end of American preeminence is finally upon us.

Council on Foreign Relations President [Richard Haass](#) argued that Washington was "hastening the emergence of a post-American world." The Guardian's [Timothy Garton Ash](#) wrote that "the erosion of American power is happening faster than most of us predicted — while the politicians in Washington behave like rutting stags with locked antlers." And the financial Web site [MarketWatch](#) declared: "This is what decline of a superpower looks like."

The idea that such a moment was coming has [dominated U.S. foreign policy circles](#) since the late 2000s. The declinists warn that in light of American difficulties at home and abroad, and the rapid rise of new powers such as Brazil, India and China, we should prepare for a global order no longer dominated by the United States. Some argue that the United States should retrench and do less. Others that it should share the burden of leadership with the emerging titans.

But predicting the decline of the United States has always been risky business. In the 1970s and late 1980s, expectations of waning power were followed by periods of geopolitical resurgence.

There's every reason to believe that cycle is recurring today. Despite gridlock in Washington, America is recovering from the financial crisis and combining enduring strengths with new sources of influence, [including energy](#). Meanwhile, emerging powers are running into troubles of their own. Taken together, these developments are ushering in a new era of American strategic advantage.

Emerging economies were the darlings of the past decade, growing at an average of roughly 7 percent annually between 2003 and 2012. By some calculations, [China was poised to surpass the United States](#) in GDP by 2016.

Today, the picture couldn't look more different. Brazil's growth rate has fallen from more than 7 percent in 2010 to just under 1 percent. Likewise, Indian growth tumbled to about 3 percent in 2012, down from double digits

as recently as two years earlier. Perhaps most pronounced, China's government is revising down its official growth targets. Analysts are no longer asking whether there will be a Chinese economic slowdown but rather how hard the landing will be.

Morgan Stanley has identified five particularly fragile emerging-market currencies: Brazil's real, India's rupee, Indonesia's rupiah, South Africa's rand and Turkey's lira. Those countries are vulnerable to high inflation, large deficits, low growth and a downturn in China. And they may soon face problems in international financing.

The political systems in emerging powers are fraying, too. There have been [huge protests in Brazil](#) over wasteful government spending and inadequate social programs. Russia looks more authoritarian by the day. And the Chinese Communist Party is stepping up efforts [to crack down](#) on journalists, academics and bloggers in what seems to be an attempt to control the discontent that accompanies slower growth and painful economic reforms.

These "rising powers" are hardly faring better collectively. The international institutions they established — BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and IBSA — continue to disappoint. At the same time, the United States is experiencing a turnaround of fortunes. The unemployment rate has fallen to just over 7 percent from an October 2009 peak of 10 percent. By contrast, euro-zone unemployment remains stuck at around 12 percent.

The U.S. fiscal picture is also looking up. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that the annual budget deficit will drop below \$650 billion in 2013, the smallest shortfall since 2008 and approximately half the size it was in 2011. Meanwhile, the dollar remains the world's top reserve currency.

Even more transformative, the United States is experiencing an energy revolution that the McKinsey Global Institute estimates could add as much as 4 percent to annual GDP and create up to 1.7 million new jobs by 2020. America is poised to overtake Russia as the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas, and there are signs that low-cost and abundant energy is driving [a revival of the U.S. manufacturing industry](#). Although the United States will have an enduring interest in stable global energy prices, it will

no longer rely on direct and [uncertain access to Middle Eastern oil](#), in sharp contrast to energy-starved countries in Asia.

In terms of hard power, the U.S. military is at the forefront of next-generation technologies, including unmanned systems, robotics and lasers. Even more superior than its hardware is its software: the command and control systems to conduct highly advanced joint operations and major wars.

The United States also remains the linchpin of the international community. Through hard-nosed diplomacy, economic pressure and the specter of military action, Washington has retained its ability to marshal effective multinational coalitions, bringing down Libya's Moammar Gaddafi, getting weapons inspectors on the ground in Syria and embarking on serious negotiations [to curb Iran's nuclear weapons program](#). You can quibble with process and style, but it's hard to argue that any of these would have happened without the United States.

More broadly, and most important, the United States is blessed with a superior combination of sound fundamentals in demography, geography, higher education and innovation. That ensures it has the people, ideas and security to thrive at home and on the world stage. There's a reason elites around the world remain eager to send their fortunes, and often their families, to the United States.

Of course, the economic recovery is incomplete, and much remains to be done on the debt and growth, but as [Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr](#) aptly noted in July 2012, "America is just one budget deal away from ending all talk of America being in decline." Easier said than done, but still easier to address than the mammoth challenges facing the emerging powers.

As partisan as Washington is today, the United States has overcome episodes of far greater social discord and political turmoil. The recent souring of public opinion on the obstructionists in Congress is a healthy reminder of America's propensity for political renewal.

In this dawning era of strategic advantage, the United States will confront foreign policy challenges largely associated with weakness and instability abroad. Washington will wrestle with the consequences of a fragile China and its implications for the economics and politics of East Asia. The Middle East will continue its painful and bloody revolution. And Europe

appears increasingly unable to move beyond protracted stagnation, eroding its ability to play a constructive role in world affairs.

But being lonely at the top will also engender huge opportunities to build the kind of liberal order that the United States failed to consolidate in the 1990s. Rather than simply reengineering the existing system, this will require U.S. leadership to build international norms, rules and institutions from the ground up. Washington will have new leverage to renegotiate its relationships and engagements with the Middle East; the success of U.S. sanctions on Iran is only the first manifestation of America as an energy powerhouse.

The United States can also lead in knitting together historic trade pacts across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, reenergizing a first-rate global trade agenda long sabotaged by protectionism and low standards. And Washington can use its newfound strength to exercise restraint and develop international rules around emerging security issues such as drone warfare and offensive cyber-capabilities. All of this will contribute to a more prosperous and secure United States.

The principal risk to these efforts is that Americans could choose to wall themselves off from the world after a difficult decade. According to a survey by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 38 percent of Americans want to stay out of world affairs, the highest share since 1947, and the figure rises to a majority among young Americans who came of age during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

But retrenchment would be a huge mistake. America's domestic revival provides all the necessary tools to facilitate American leadership abroad. Being humble about the United States' ability to shape foreign societies, particularly through military means, is no excuse for a lack of ambition to continue advancing U.S. interests and universal values overseas.

Rather than bracing for American decline, Washington should prepare to lead the world anew.

Ely Ratner is deputy director of the Asia-Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security. Thomas Wright is a fellow with the Managing Global Order project at the Brookings Institution.

[Egyptian military's pact with Islamists](#)

[Amir Taheri](#)

October 17, 2013 -- Sometime next week, Egypt's military-run government will publish the "first draft" of a new constitution to replace the one worked out by the government of the ousted President Mohamed Morsi. The coup that returned the military to power after a year-long interval was presented as an attempt to prevent the Muslim Brotherhood from imposing an Islamist dictatorship with a constitutional facade. Highlighted were two articles in the Morsi constitution that identified the Islamic sharia as the source of legislation in Egypt and gave Al-Azhar, the official seminary, a virtual veto on certain issues.

The crowds that for weeks filled Tahrir Square called on the army to intervene to save the nation from a burgeoning sharia-based dictatorship. Well, when the new draft constitution — written by a 50-man committee appointed by the military — is published, the Tahrir Square crowds are likely to be disappointed. The two controversial articles will still be there, albeit under different numbers and with slight changes in terminology. "Egyptians want to retain their Islamic identity," says Kamal Halbawi, a former Brotherhood member who co-chaired the army-appointed drafting committee with Amr Moussa, a former foreign minister during the earlier military governments.

Thus Islamists, including the Salafist Nour (Light) Party sponsored by Saudi Arabia will have no reason to be unhappy with the proposed draft. The difference this time is that the new constitution also gives the military what the text drafted by Morsi denied it. The armed forces will get recognition for their "special status" and given a virtual veto on key aspects of security, foreign and even economic policies.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the junta formed after Hosni Mubarak's ouster, will be recognized as a constitutionally sanctioned state organ with "special responsibilities and prerogatives," including the appointment of the defense minister and the supervision of the military budget, which will be spared public submission to the parliament.

Put brutally, the proposed draft constitution is a pact between a section of the military led by Gen. Abdul-Fattah al-Sisi and a section of the Islamic movement spearheaded by Salafists.

The faction led by Sisi represents a segment of the officers' corps reluctant to abandon a system under which the army acted as a state within the state and seized control of perhaps 20 percent of the national economy. As always during the past 100 years, the military is using a pseudo-nationalistic discourse full of xenophobic shibboleths.

The Salafist faction hopes to seize the opportunity of its collaboration with the military to build its position within the Islamist constituency. With the Muslim Brotherhood banned and most of its leaders under arrest, the Salafists hope to seduce some of their followers, especially with the help of a deluge of Saudi money.

However, even when they add their respective bases of support, the Sisi faction of the military and the Salafist faction do not represent more than a third of the Egyptian electorate.

The two factions can dominate the organs of the state and exercise power only if they stick together. They hope to do so with the proposed constitution, which is a rehashed version of an old recipe for despotism.

This is the recipe the interim government has followed in a series of incremental moves that include reimposing the 50-year-old state of emergency, enacting new laws on public gatherings and reviving special tribunals acting as star chambers outside the normal legal systems.

It all makes for a diabolical feast in which the likely losers will be the freedom-loving demonstrators who filled Tahrir Square. If so it will mean history repeating itself, given the similar fate their grandfathers suffered in the 1950s when the military and the Muslim Brotherhood also built a tacit alliance against Egypt's democratic

[Article 6.](#)

Agence Global

The Generals Rule Egypt Again

Rami G. Khouri

19 Oct 2013 -- One of the major ongoing debates these days is about the real meaning and consequences of the armed forces' ousting of the elected government of President Mohammad Morsi in Egypt some three months ago, and the subsequent banning and arrests of the Muslim Brotherhood organization. This is an important debate that touches on the heart of the political realities that millions of Arabs have been struggling, sometimes dying, to define in the past nearly three years of uprisings—namely, whether public power and state authority will reflect the will of the majority and the consent of the governed, or instead will continue to be shaped and wielded by small handfuls of men with guns.

The school of thought that I subscribe to holds that the army's populist coup marks a severe but temporary setback to the democratic transition that has been moving erratically since January 2011. Egypt and its democratic aspirations have been grievously wounded by the swift and severe manner in which the armed forces evicted and jailed Morsi, arrested most of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, killed hundreds of pro-Morsi demonstrators, and then started exerting pressure on the mass media to conform to the generals' policies. Not only was this bad enough, but many Egyptians also supported the elimination of the Muslim Brotherhood, including many whom we referred to as liberals in recent years.

I say this is a temporary setback mainly because of how Egyptians behaved several times since January 2011—first evicting Mubarak and his armed forces and crony capitalist regime, and then again insisting in the year to June 2012 that the armed forces turn over power to a legitimately elected civilian government. Those mass and repeated expressions of rejection of military rule were deeply felt political realities that did not reflect momentary whims—they were the result of six decades of military rule that transformed Egypt from a leader of the Arab world and the developing world into a backwater of mediocrity and mass citizen humiliation.

I suspect that in due course we will see the critical reactions of many Egyptians who are now silent or support the armed forces, but who will probably discover that rule by generals was the core of the problems that led so many Egyptians to oust the Mubarak government and start on the path towards democratic and constitutional pluralism. What actually happens in Egypt remains to be seen. It is possible that I am dreaming, and that Egypt's democratic moment is over.

That, indeed, is the view held by those who feel that the last three months mark the definitive end of the democratic transition in Egypt, and the return of rule by the generals, with only cosmetic gestures to civilian rule. They see the severe crushing of the Muslim Brotherhood as a sign of a fascistic moment that also includes some nationalistic hysteria. This line of thinking despairs of a successful democratic transformation in Egypt, given the ferocity of the armed forces' treatment of the Muslim Brotherhood and the apparent widespread support for this move among the Egyptian public. We do not yet have sufficient evidence to know which of these two views of Egypt's direction is more accurate. It is possible that we may see something in between, akin to the liberalizations that the Arab world experienced in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including parliamentary elections, new space for political parties and civil society organizations, and other signs of a peculiar Arab brand of liberalization without democratization. A dashing general may well run for the presidency and win on the strength of having restored order to a land that the Muslim Brothers had driven into disorder and fear.

Millions of Egyptians clearly were humiliated to such a great extent that they rose up in revolt against the Mubarak regime in January 2011. Was the fear of the incompetence and power-grab of the Muslim Brotherhood so great that these same Egyptians would welcome back the rule of the generals, simply to get rid of the Muslim Brothers?

It is very possible that we are seeing how the human need for basic security, jobs, food, gasoline and health and education services is so overwhelming that it takes priority over any issues of rights, freedoms and dignity in the political realm. It is also possible that Egyptians merely want a pause from the chaos of their political transition that the Muslim Brothers mishandled, and they trust the generals to provide that pause, ideally to be followed by a return to the path of forging a real democracy.

Egyptians do not have any other alternative right now. The Muslim Brothers are down for the moment, but they will return in another form. The non-Islamist political forces proved to be as incompetent as the Islamists. The armed forces are the only institution Egyptians trust for basic security. They rule again today, but for how long?

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NYT

Libya's Political Dysfunction

Jason Pack and Mohamed Eljarh

October 18, 2013 -- ON Oct. 5, American Special Forces captured Nazih Abdul-Hamed al-Ruqai, an operative of Al Qaeda living in Libya. Five days later, a group of Libyan militiamen kidnapped their own prime minister, Ali Zeidan. After five hours, having faced no opposition from the police or the army, they [released him](#). The prime minister's captors made no demands for cash, nor did they overtly request any changes in current government policy. Nor was anyone hurt — an aspect that gave the whole affair the air of a vast publicity stunt.

Some have described the kidnapping as a pseudo-coup. But coups usually aim to overthrow one government and replace it with another. Things are different in Libya.

None of the country's competing armed factions are capable of governing alone. Each wishes to protect its special privileges while preventing its opponents from governing. Libya is truly ruled by everyone and no one. In the early days of the anti-Qaddafi rebellion, the rebels' top brass attempted to form a nascent national army, yet various "civilian" (read: Islamist) groups refused to submit to the proposed chain of command. In July 2011, Islamists were suspected in the murder of the national army's leader, Gen. Abdul Fattah Younes. Since then, myriad civilian militias have proliferated. They dwarf the national army and police force combined. The government has tried to co-opt some of the civilian brigades with big salaries and fancy titles, but most remain loyal only to their commanders. Consequently, the Libyan government lacks even 100 armed men who would lay their lives on the line to defend the abstract concept of the state. Conversely, the militias can rely on thousands.

In Western Libya, the most staunchly anti-government forces are a loose alliance of Islamists and certain powerful militias from the city of

Misurata. Counterbalancing them are non-Islamist militias from the city of Zintan. In the East, “[federalist](#)” militias seek to obtain “justice” (meaning more power and money for their region).

As a result of this multipolar struggle, the country has become virtually [ungovernable](#). Each group has its supporters inside the parliament: the Martyrs and the Muslim Brotherhood blocs have worked to [further the influence](#) of the Revolutionaries Operations Room — the group that kidnapped Mr. Zeidan. With the Islamists’ support, Nouri Abusahmain became Libya’s president in June. And he quickly bolstered his power as a counterweight to the prime minister by endowing the Revolutionaries Operations Room with \$700 million.

Prime Minister Zeidan’s various opponents have [long sought](#) to force him out of office. Despite his waning popularity and effectiveness, they failed to oust him via a secret no-confidence vote on Oct. 1. He survived the vote not because he enjoys widespread support but rather because no one can agree on who should replace him.

The American raid that captured Mr. Ruqai, also known as Abu Anas al-Libi, fueled outrage within certain sections of the population. Mr. Zeidan’s opponents tried to capitalize on this by highlighting the prime minister’s alleged complicity with Washington. Upon seizing the prime minister, the abductors proclaimed that they were defending Libya’s honor and sovereignty rather than their own narrow interests.

Their use of political symbolism was astute. Their actions said, in effect, “America came here to Libya and violated Libyan sovereignty by kidnapping al-Libi. In return, we will retaliate by kidnapping someone whom the West cares about.” So they abducted their own prime minister in Tripoli’s Corinthia Hotel, the place most associated in the popular mind with Westerners and their dealings with the regime of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi. By linking Mr. Zeidan to the West and the old regime, the Islamist militias cleverly positioned themselves as the defenders of the revolution. But this symbolism is built on myths, hyperbole and lies. It is an attempt to deflect attention from the militias’ blatant abuse of power.

Libya’s leadership must put an end to the militias’ mythology by finally defending itself in the court of public opinion. In his post-release news conference, Mr. Zeidan pointed out that armed protesters routinely force their way into his office, demanding money or jobs. On the occasions that

their requests are declined, they turn to the media in an attempt to win public support by claiming that Mr. Zeidan is “installing [Qaddafi goons](#) in government.”

How Mr. Zeidan emerges from this crisis will depend on his political savvy. His government might fall because of his public humiliation — or he could muddle through. Either way, Western policy makers should seek not to support Mr. Zeidan or any other politician, but rather to [bolster the rule of law](#) in Libya.

The cancellation of some military aid to Egypt could grant President Obama a novel opportunity to redirect some of the funds withheld from Egypt toward institution building in Libya without the need for [Congressional approval](#). To date, the Obama administration has been hamstrung by Republican obstruction on Libya, which has focused on scoring political points through endless investigations of last year’s attack on the United States diplomatic mission in Benghazi.

Mr. Obama should now seize this opportunity to create a virtuous precedent by switching his financial support from those who have perpetrated a coup to a country that might suffer one.

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Asharq Al-Awsat

A Kurdish State—but where and when?

Samir Salha

October 18, 2013 -- Kurds in the Middle East, according to unofficial statistics, number some 30 to 40 million people in their primary areas: Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Their political demands have historically centered around the right of self-determination-forever related to the Kurdish state and its right to exist.

Their political leaders have tried more than once to achieve this dream. But the price of realizing it has proved beyond their grasp on more than one occasion, after they were trapped between conflicts of interest and the settling of accounts between parties big and small, when maps have been drawn and boundaries settled in the region.

Iraqi Kurdistan president Massoud Barzani repeated this demand again recently. “Greater Kurdistan” is the goal, circumstances permitting. It is not a plan for the near future, but nothing is impossible. The scene becomes clearer still, Greater Kurdistan cannot be realized without revising the map, redistributing land and changing its political, constitutional and geographical makeup—the developments in North Iraq make this very clear. The experiment of the Iraqi constitution of 2005 and the 2007 constitution proclaimed for the Kurdistan region gives the territory the right to separate from federal Iraq whenever it so wishes. The lack of separation, in my opinion, is not due to regional and international pressures but rather the decision to wait for favorable developments in Turkey, Syria and Iran in order to proceed on the bases of such changes. And this is what we understand from Barzani’s own words when he said that it is only natural for the Kurdish people to have their own nation, and that it is necessary to wait for the appropriate time to achieve this goal: “we want this to happen naturally and in discussion with the countries that divide Kurdistan.” It is impossible now to hide the fact that the birth of the Kurdish state means, in the best of circumstances, betting on the continuation and escalation of internal crises in these countries and other crises in the countries bordering Kurdistan. Underlying this is the hope that their bilateral relations will worsen, and lead to these countries clashing—which in turn will open the door for the creation of the Kurdish state. Today is the day of federations, tomorrow the day of confederations, and after that separation, and the declaration of nationhood.

Barzani, the most powerful Kurdish leader (as he became following the recent regional elections), knows that what he is waiting for is extremely difficult, but he will not back down so as to avoid being accused of shirking this historic responsibility before his people. His statement that the expected alternative in Syria must take into account the rights and demands of the Kurds—“We have trained young Kurdish Syrians to fight, and we will fight alongside them if necessary”—can be explained with reference to

the fact that the fight they have been trained for is not Syria's civil war. So why all these preparations, and when and how will they be used?

Barzani warned those assaulting the Kurds in Syria, but the real message was for Iran and Turkey as well. So are we surprised by the Erbil conference expected to modify the proposals and positions it launched three months ago, discussions with Baghdad, Damascus, Ankara and Tehran on a new road map for Kurdistan, or the announcement that Greater Kurdistan is the new strategic aim, or by the calls for self-governance following the failure of the Iraqi experiment.

Massoud Barzani's comments had the way prepared for them by Prime Minister Nechervan Barzani's noting that communications with Baghdad were almost entirely cut off, and that the person threatening the unity of Iraq is in fact Al-Maliki himself and that Iraqi Kurds have a historic chance to declare independence. But there are important objections, not least from Ankara which has always held the creation of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq as a red line.

Barzani has reminded everyone that the region is experiencing events that make it impossible to ignore Kurdish ambitions. We know that geopolitics is available to the Kurds and that what they now need is a geo-strategy. But Erbil also knows that circumstances in Iraq are different from 2003, and that the fronts are overlapping, intertwining and becoming increasingly complex.

The Kurds have made strides in evolving an identity and there is now regional and international recognition of it, with some ready to redraw the map, but they also know how difficult it will be to get these four countries to agree to redress their constitutional and political makeup.

Barzani knows more so than anyone else the difficulties of playing the game of duplicity and seeking to take advantage of the contradictions and conflicts of interest between the countries of the region. And it is perhaps for this reason he has decided to make his move now, but many of his recent speeches need to be clarified and examined, for they are far too important to just be directed at Syria and those trying to target and strike at the stability of security in Iraqi Kurdistan.