

From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen <[REDACTED]>
Subject: November 8 update
Date: Fri, 08 Nov 2013 16:39:10 +0000

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Foreign Policy

[Is Israel Doomed?](#)

Aaron David Miller

November 7, 2013 -- Israel's future is grim. Internal and external challenges abound. And like Scrooge in Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol, Israel has been forewarned by both its friends and enemies of a dire fate if it doesn't do more to change its ways.

The latest prophet of doom and gloom is the inestimable Yuval Diskin, former head of Israel's Shin Bet and a man who surely knows what he's talking about. In a widely circulated [article](#) last July in the Jerusalem Post and [another](#) on Ynet last week, Diskin argued that unless Israel reached an agreement with the Palestinians, he wrote, "we will certainly cross the point of no return, after which we will be left with one state from the river to the sea for two peoples. The consequences of such a state for our national identity, our security, our ability to maintain a worthy, democratic state, our moral fiber as a society, and our place in the family of nations will be far-reaching."

Others have made similar points. In the mid-1980s, author and activist Meron Benvenisti opined that it was almost already too late -- [five minutes to midnight](#) to use his notion, largely because of Israeli settlement activity. And Secretary of State John Kerry repeatedly talks about "last chances" for a two-state solution, a fate seemingly validated by scant progress made on his latest Middle East trip.

And yet the beaches of Tel Aviv are packed; the cafes and hotels full; and 2012 was the first year in 40 that not a single Israeli was killed in a terrorist attack emanating from the West Bank. But don't be fooled, the doomsayers warn. Israel is living an illusion or existing on borrowed time, or both. It sits atop a volcano of internal contradictions and conflicts between religious and secular, rich and poor. It is a society that has become increasingly less democratic. It's lost its mission, mandate, and soul. An angry and aggrieved Arab world, a putative nuclear Iran, and a Palestinian challenge completes the Dorian Gray-like picture. If left unresolved, say the Chicken Littles, that latter issue will undermine what's left of Israel's internal cohesion, Jewish majority, and democratic character.

After all, remember the Crusader kingdoms -- powerful but short lived. Time is the ultimate arbiter of what endures. And time will indeed have the last word unless Israel sees the error of its ways and acts before it's too late. This narrative -- like the Dickens tale itself -- assumes that if Israel, like Scrooge, makes the right choices, then a conflict-ending solution to the

Palestinian issue and Israel's acceptance in the region can be assured. And then everyone will live -- more or less --happily ever after. But there's another narrative too. That Israel, despite all the challenges it has confronted and the odds arrayed against it, has managed to cope, survive, and prosper. Political Zionism, this story goes, was always a defiance of history, and will continue to be. This narrative suggests that it's a cruel and unforgiving world when it comes to Israelis and Jews -- and a complex one, too. It posits the notion that there are no truly happy endings, only imperfect ones: That ending the conflict with the Palestinians will be hard if not impossible to do; that at best only a temporary solution to the Iranian nuclear issue can be found (and even that could lead to military confrontation); and that the Arab world -- far from turning into a land of functioning democracies -- will be filled with dysfunction and uncertainty for many years to come. So, while Israel's actions make a difference, solutions to all these problems may well prove elusive and imperfect, regardless of what Israel does or doesn't do. So far from prophesying happy endings, this line of thinking holds out the possibility that what's in store for Israel is a difficult path of maneuver in a harsh world. But by no means is it a course that will lead to its ruin. Indeed, so far, even with all its failings and imperfections, the modern Israeli state has exceeded the expectations of its founders and managed to become one of the most dynamic nations in the international system.

So which narrative will prevail? Will Israel endure? That, I suppose, depends on your time horizon. Will the State of Israel be here in 2113 or in 2213? And what kind of state will it be?

Well, as John Maynard Keynes maintained, in the long run we'll all be dead. So here's a more realistic metric for you. Will the State of Israel celebrate its 100th Independence Day in 2048 -- a prosperous and secure state recognizable to those who live there today?

Three powerful factors offset the doomsayers' warnings. And they aren't reflective of a momentary snapshot. The trend lines have been deepening for some time now. They do not eliminate the bad news nor the challenges -- particularly the demographic ones -- ahead. But they do provide a powerful advantage in coping with them. I'd bet that Israel will live to see its 100th anniversary. And here's why.

Israeli Capacity

Whether you see Israel as a friend, enemy, or frenemy, it's hard not to accept the reality that what the country has done in 65 years, particularly given their internal and external challenges, is nothing short of extraordinary. Put aside for a nanosecond if you can Israel's policies toward the Palestinians -- and I know it's impossible for some to get beyond the occupation -- and just focus on Israel proper. For a tiny state, in a tough neighborhood, the accomplishments in the fields of science, technology, agriculture, economic development, art, literature, and music have been remarkable.

Consider these impressive accomplishments:

1. Israeli [GDP per capita](#) is \$32,800, 44th in the world, and 29th overall if you exclude countries with populations below 100,000 (and count the European Union as separate states). Israel ranks just ahead of Saudi Arabia and New Zealand and behind South Korea and France.
2. Israel is the world leader in [startups](#) per capita (1 per 1,800 Israelis).
3. It's [No. 3](#) in companies traded on NASDAQ after the United States and Canada (65 companies).
4. It's [17th](#) in total number of Nobel laureates (with the 96th largest population)
5. Israel holds [more patents](#) per capita than any other country in the world.
6. Israel has the third-highest rate of [entrepreneurship](#) and highest rate among women and people over 55 in the world.
7. It is the only country that entered the 21st century with a net gain in the [number of trees](#). (my personal favorite).
8. Israel leads the world in the number of [scientists and technicians](#) in the workforce, with 145 per 10,000 as opposed to 85 in the United States.

The point is not to trumpet Israel's accomplishments or to suggest they will cancel out the challenges Israel faces in the future. It's to drive home the obvious: this is a serious country both in relative and absolute terms. It's not going away. Indeed, as the Arab Spring threatens to redefine or at least decentralize the Sykes-Picot territorial map, an Arab state or two may well go the way of the dodo well before the Israelis do.

Arab Incapacity

An Arab friend once argued that Israel was a mirror for their region. And every time the Arabs looked into that mirror, they saw their own incapacity

and weakness reflected in Israel's strength in military, economic, and technological power.

As Israel has chalked up accomplishments, the nations that surround it seem to grow weaker and more dysfunctional. And that's the case now more than ever in the wake of the Arab Spring. The so-called confrontation states that share contiguous borders with Israel have either made their peace with Israel (Egypt and Jordan) or grown fundamentally weaker (Syria). It's stunningly ironic that the threats to Israel today come from national movements lodged within the non-states -- Hamas and Hezbollah, or from a non-Arab state: Iran. Simply put, the Arab world has diminished in consequence as a serious military or technological threat to the Israeli state.

At the same time, the gap between Israel and Arabs on issues of trade, economy, innovation, and technology continues to grow. Read any ██████████ Human Development Report on the Arab region to get a sense of the staggering asymmetries. Just consider these unhappy realities:

1. Middle Eastern [companies are globally uncompetitive](#). The region as a whole makes up less than 1 percent of global non-fuel exports, versus 4 percent from Latin America, which has a similar population.
2. Red tape, poor infrastructure, and other non-tariff barriers, add 10 percent to the value of [shipped goods](#) in the region. Shipping goods from the Middle East to America is cheaper and quicker than shipping between two Middle Eastern ports.
3. Foreign direct investment into 20 of the Arab League states (excluding Comoros and Syria) in 2012 totaled \$47.1 billion. [Israel alone](#) attracted around \$10 billion in 2012.
4. Transparency International's [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) -- which measures how much citizens perceive their leaders to be abusing power -- gave Israel a score of 60 (the best score was 90) in 2012. By comparison, the average score of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran was 30.3.
5. A [UNDP statistic](#) that assesses the amount and duration of education citizens of given countries are expected to receive gave Arab states a .5 versus .7 for Latin American and Caribbean states. That's roughly the difference between expected education in Cambodia and Russia.
6. Reporters Without Borders' [Press Freedom Index](#) gives the Middle East

and North Africa the worst rating of any region in the world. The regional average is [equivalent to Pakistan](#), where 7 journalists have been killed for their reporting in 2013 alone.

7. The Middle East/North Africa region has a greater gap in employment by gender than any other region in the world. Employment is also unequal between age groups -- with [youth unemployment](#) above 25 percent.

8. The [adult literacy rate](#) in Arab states in 2009 was 73.4 percent, compared to [93.3 percent](#) in developing Latin American and Caribbean states.

None of this is to say the Arab Middle East cannot become more competitive or more integrated into the world economy. Or that its citizens cannot become more productive too. It's just that the trend lines, particularly in the wake of the turbulence sweeping the region, don't look good. And the gap with the Israel in just about every field is widening. If the hope and dream of Arab nationalists 50 years ago was to close that gap, to bring the formidable power of the Arab world to bear in the struggle with Israel with the goal of enhancing Arab state capacity and weakening Israel's, that project lies in ruins.

U.S. Support

That brings us to the third reason why the gloom-and-doom story or the "settle with the Palestinians or else" narrative loses some of its punch. With the possible exception of the 1973 war, at no point could you make the argument that American support was vital to Israel's immediate survival. But it is critical to the long-term health, well-being, security, and prosperity of the Israeli state. From America's efforts to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge; to the billions in military and economic aid; to the latitude and support the United States gives Israel on protecting its security; to Washington's willingness to shield and defend Israel from political isolation, sanctions, and criticism; America's support is indeed vital. And despite the tensions in that relationship it's only gotten stronger on an institutional level and in terms of public support. I've explored those [reasons elsewhere](#) but essentially they come down to a perception of common values and identity -- endorsed or acquiesced to by millions of non-Jewish Americans and a pro-active, affluent, and highly influential Jewish community that lobbies effectively on Israel's behalf.

And Israel's neighborhood validates that bond. From Hamas to Hezbollah, from al Qaeda to the Muslim Brotherhood, from Assad's regime using

Scuds and chemical weapons against his own people to the U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, there's a perception that the entire region is inherently undemocratic and violent. This not only diminishes Israel's own bad behavior, it validates a pro-Israeli narrative. Indeed, there's a case to be made that the U.S.-Israeli bond will weaken when -- and only when -- the image of Israel fundamentally changes in the minds of Americans. The violent and extreme behavior of states and groups in the Middle East have delayed or even prevented that from happening. Still, even without Arabs behaving badly as perhaps Israel's best talking points in Washington, it's hard to imagine any U.S. administration trying to force Jerusalem to accept a peace deal and or imposing severe consequences if it did not.

But what about the demographic argument? Surely that spells disaster for Israel, a fate that cannot be avoided. Under the pressure of having to manage or control -- with or without the Palestinian Authority -- millions of unhappy, angry, and potentially violent Palestinians, Israel's image in the United States will only deteriorate as the democratic Jewish state is undermined. Demographics might mean that, absent some sort of Israeli-Palestinian agreement, Israel could reach such a state sometime in the next 20-30 years, right around its 100 birthday. It's a [powerful argument](#) that cannot be ignored.

Still even the demographics aren't necessarily determinative. Nobody can rule out an Israeli-Palestinian agreement to defuse the problem. And even if one fails to materialize, life is not necessarily that stark or binary in terms of the choices and decisions offered up. Nor is it easy to determine when the point of no return is crossed or the moment of truth and reckoning appears.

More to the point, a smart Israeli leadership could try to defuse the demographic challenge by breaking it into pieces. With regard to the 1.7 million Palestinians who are citizens of Israel, the government could make a concerted effort to eliminate discrimination and ensure that they are treated equally as citizens with their fair share of jobs, access to housing, and educational benefits. As for Gaza's 1.6 million Palestinians, as long as Hamas rules there, Israel will likely treat the problem as a security issue; and there will be little pressure from many other quarters to take Hamas's side and do otherwise. Jerusalem's 300,000 Palestinians seem to be in no great hurry to join up with the Palestinian Authority, and the vast majority

have no interest in claiming Israeli citizenship or fighting. With greater attention to improving services and eliminating the barrier, Israeli could go quite a way in defusing tensions there too.

That leaves the 2.3 million Palestinians in the West Bank either living under some form of Palestinian Authority jurisdiction or under Israel's control. And that is a huge problem, particularly should the PA collapse or a third intifada erupt. Indeed, it would create a situation in which more than two million Palestinians would exist without hope, increasingly angry and radicalized. If the past is any guide, the most likely outcome of this unhappy situation wouldn't be a Martin Luther King-like non-violent movement to demand citizenship in an Israeli state; but an uprising marked by violence and terror. And we know where the last Intifada lead. Let's be clear. Israel has bad options on the demographic front. But Palestinian options(and their future) look much worse.

All these factors have afforded Israelis and their leaders the time and space to survive tough years, to strengthen their state, and to prosper. Some believe these assets have also permitted Israel not to make choices, to abdicate responsibility, particularly when it comes to settling up the Palestinians. But the asset triad also provides flexibility for Israeli leaders to make wise and intelligent choices. Some have; others have not.

The choices at hand, however, aren't only Israel's to make -- as if only Israel would do A, B, and C everything would simply fall into place. Israel has missed many opportunities and so have its neighbors. Neat and definitive solutions are hardly the norm. In the end, what is more likely to emerge isn't rebirth and renaissance of the dreamers nor the catastrophe foretold by the pessimists, but the muddle-through envisioned by realists. At least in the years ahead, the Israelis will keep their state and even prosper. But their neighbors will most assuredly never let them completely enjoy it.

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Palestine's Self-Inflicted Wounds

[Grant Rumley](#)

November 8, 2013 -- About six months ago, I sat in a coffee shop in al-Tireh, a suburb of Ramallah, and interviewed a senior official within Fatah. The official, wanting to talk about the internal dynamics within the Palestinian leadership, wished to remain anonymous. In between flowery anecdotes about his meetings with Dick Cheney (“He always asked about my family”) the official began to shed some light on the Palestinian UN bid of 2011 and 2012. True to perception, various fault lines and rifts began to emerge between his description of how the UN campaign was formed and how other senior officials had described the process. Was Abbas pressured into the UN? Did close advisors convince him? Did he always have it in the back of his mind? If there was one thing the collective Palestinian narrative could agree on, it was that everyone was convinced their explanation was the only explanation for what would become the largest unilateral policy decision in the post-Oslo years.

In his new book, [State of Failure: Yasser Arafat, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Unmaking of the Palestinian State](#) [3], Jonathan Schanzer attempts to unravel these narratives and provide insight into how the Palestinian leadership navigates the rough seas of pseudostatehood. It’s a daunting task—as Schanzer acknowledges early on, the field is crowded with literature on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, much of that literature is written in a comparative light; it’s usually the Palestinians in relation to Israel, or in relation to the peace process, or the Arab League, and etc. In putting the internal dynamics of the Palestinian leadership as the focal point, “State of Failure” reveals some truly unsettling facets of how the Palestinians craft and implement their policies. In covering the recent tremors in the political structure, the book focuses on former prime minister Salam Fayyad and his rather inglorious fall from grace in the leadership. The internal disputes, the well-documented rifts and disagreements between Fayyad and the Fatah leadership, all are laid out cogently in the book.

The book isn’t likely to be on the PLO’s reading list anytime soon. And most certainly, if there’s one specific area of the book where Schanzer is

likely to reach an impasse with the Palestinian leadership, it's the description of the UN campaign. In the book, Schanzer takes a contemporary approach, detailing the roots of the campaign in 2005, when Palestinian diplomats began working in earnest with Latin American nations, developing a diplomatic strategy that would eventually lead to 2011. This diplomatic strategy was at times viewed as almost antagonistic to negotiations by some within the leadership, but by 2008 and 2009, when Tzipi Livni had failed to form a negotiation-centric government and Benjamin Netanyahu had ascended instead, the idea of this comprehensive and unilateral diplomatic campaign began to take hold. By 2010, with talks breaking down over settlement moratoriums and varying preconditions, the campaign became the predominant driving force of Palestinian policy. This is where things get murky.

If his approach is a pragmatic analysis of a clear-cut policy evolution, the history being touted by the Palestinian leadership is a little more holistic, a bit more nationalistic, and certainly much more paradigm-driven. In other words, Schanzer's approach neglects a pre-Oslo history the Palestinian officials are incredibly defensive of. In a [report](#) [4] I released this past summer, I interviewed nearly twenty Palestinian officials in search of some clarity on the campaign. Of the myriad narratives that emerged, one thing was clear: the UN campaign was not a recent phenomenon. In the historical waxing and waning of the methods of preference in Palestinian policy, internationalization at the UN has a history that precedes negotiations. Indeed, Palestinian officials described a process that had roots as far back as the 1970s. One [official](#) [5] has even written that the Palestinians first considered the UN track in 1969, at the suggestion of President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia. By 1974, this track's foundations were laid in the PLO's Ten-Point Program, a political manifesto that, among other things, called for Palestinian autonomy of lands "liberated," and didn't explicitly rule out other forms of resistance. For a resistance-based liberation movement, the acknowledgment of partial territorial control in Palestine and alternative means of resistance was precedent-setting.

By 1988, the Palestinian position had evolved into two clear schools of thought regarding the UN. On the one hand, elements within the leadership argued against the UN track, insisting that applying for statehood status on the 1967 lines would jeopardize the PLO's claim of representation over the

Palestinian refugee diaspora. This group was led by Farouk Kaddoumi, and was also concerned over the potential hindrance international recognition would place on a resistance group. The second group, championed by Riyadh Mansour (and supported by Mahmoud Abbas), argued for full engagement at the UN, claiming that statehood would not delegitimize the PLO's standing, but rather enhance it. By the time the dust had settled, the former had won, and a hybrid option was implemented, with the Palestinians opting for an upgrade to 'observer entity' status. In the coming years, the US and PLO would open the lines of communication, the Madrid talks would commence, and the Oslo period would start shortly thereafter. The UN track, in short, would be sidelined.

Here, too, is where a historical background would have benefited the book. For even in its brief respite from the fore of Palestinian policy, the UN campaign was never far. Indeed, in 1999, as the end of the 5-year interim Oslo period neared, Yasser Arafat dispatched two deputies, Nabil Sha'ath and Saeb Erekat, to Europe in order to begin gauging support for a unilateral declaration of statehood at the UN. The US promptly countered this campaign, and pressured the Palestinians back to the negotiating table. At the time, President Clinton had managed to dissuade Arafat through several key areas: first, leveraging the well-known fact that a Palestinian unilateral action outside of the Oslo framework would threaten the peace camp in the upcoming Israeli elections, and second, that the US would be willing to host further negotiations if Arafat held off. After a frenetic diplomatic campaign, the US was able to stave off the Palestinian action and set the stage for the Camp David negotiations.

Acutely aware of this bit of history was one of its primary actors: Mahmoud Abbas. So when, in 2011, Abbas was faced with a similar moribund peace process and a lack of suitable alternatives, the UN bid was again moved to the fore. Here's where the discrepancy in motivations arises within the Palestinian narrative. Was Abbas motivated out of a hope for renewed US brokerage of negotiations? Or was he always convinced of the merits of a UN campaign? Perhaps we'll never know. But President Obama was not able to offer anything similar to Clinton, and Abbas had no choice but to pursue the UN.

Where does that leave the UN bid in the grand scheme of things now? The Palestinians have halted their campaign in lieu of recent negotiations, a

compromise they made with John Kerry in order for talks to be restarted. Should the talks break down, however, or fail to yield an interim agreement by March, the Palestinians can be expected to again gear up for engagement at the international body this coming year. Their engagement, and specifically which entities to engage and to what degree, will be known only to the man at the top, Abbas.

Such is the clouded area of taseography in the Palestinian Territories that State of Failure deftly interprets. Schanzer discards the rhetoric and nationalist storylines in lieu of the pragmatic, describing the recent leadership's myopic nature in zero-sum terms. His prognosis is clear: the Palestinian leadership is struggling on two fronts: in negotiating a state's existence and governing a state entity. In order to do the former, it must improve on the latter. It is not likely to win him many friends in the West Bank. But it is, however, a workman's analysis of how Palestinian officials form policy and govern in one of the longest and most intractable conflicts of the modern era.

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[Article 3.](#)

The Financial Times

America will not easily escape the Mideast fires

Philip Stephens

November 7, 2013 -- The [Middle East](#) is burning, and the US is getting out. There is an element of exaggeration in this observation, but only an element. The dynamics of rising conflict and US disengagement have become mutually reinforcing. The higher the fires burn, the more Washington seems intent on turning away.

A former European leader with strong connections in the Arab world talks of a regional "mutiny" against the US in particular and the west in general. Saudi Arabia's decision to snub the UN Security Council – directed more at the US than at the international community – was a straw in the wind.

Another has been the reluctance of Arab states to bankroll the [Palestinians](#) as the US seeks to broker a peace deal with Israel. Disenchantment has spread to Turkey. Abdullah Gul, its president, said the other day that the absence of US resolve had allowed Syria to become a haven for jihadis – an Afghanistan on the Mediterranean.

This part of the world is the home of wild conspiracy theories. One of the Gulf's English-language newspapers recently reported an alleged American-Iranian plot to weaken Arab states by fanning the flames of Sunni-Shia sectarianism. Beyond fanciful? Of course. But not, I learnt during a few days in Bahrain, beyond the suspicions of many Sunni Arabs. Another widely circulated rumour, one top official told me, had posited a conspiracy between Israel and Iran. Many had believed it.

America has opened fresh talks with [Iran on its nuclear programme](#). The US deal with Moscow on the disposal of [Syria's](#) chemical weapons has left President Bashar al-Assad free to kill his country's Sunni majority. Nouri al-Maliki, Iraq's (Shia) president, has been received at the White House. What additional proof was needed that Barack Obama's administration now stands on the Shia side of the sectarian chasm? Such is the talk that fills the space left by a non-committal US.

The thread of truth here is that the US has indeed decided to step back. Mr Obama says he was elected to end America's wars, not to start new ones. The pivot to Asia was a first signal of the change in direction, even if it has been blurred by the Arab uprisings. So was the admission of defeat in Afghanistan. Elsewhere, disengagement has been iterative – leading from behind in removing Libya's Muammar Gaddafi and, after much hesitation, abjuring military involvement in Syria.

To the extent these decisions have evolved into a strategy, it was set out in [Mr Obama's speech to the UN](#) General Assembly. The speech was overlooked in the maelstrom of events in Syria and a government shutdown in Washington, but history may yet record it as the moment the US gave up more than half a century of leadership in the Middle East. The president, of course, did not put it quite like that. The US, he said, would use all the instruments of its power, including military might, to defend its core interests in the region. These included protecting allies from external aggression, confronting terrorists set on attacking the US and preserving the free flow of energy. US foreign policy would remain sharply

focused on preventing Iran from securing a nuclear weapon and seeking peace between [Israelis and Palestinians](#).

In setting out the priorities, though, Mr Obama drew tighter boundaries. Spreading democracy was in the US interest but could not be imposed. The US would respect the sovereignty of states. It would not take sides in Egypt nor seek to dictate the terms of any settlement in Syria. It understood that sectarian conflicts could not be settled by outsiders. Liberal interventionism has been replaced by tough realism. The US has swapped its role as the Middle East's pre-eminent power for that of an offshore balancer.

You can see how Mr Obama got here. The fall of authoritarian regimes in Iraq, Egypt and Syria has exposed deep Sunni-Shia cleavages. Few would claim the US invasion of Iraq a success. "Intervention-light" in Libya has fed the migration of jihadis into the Sahel. The US has failed to shape events in Egypt, and Russia has exploited the war in Syria to reassert its power in the region.

The west has never had a record to boast about in the Middle East and has always been vulnerable to the charge of double standards. Now, the price paid in blood and treasure for the recent war years has drained America's will to act beyond immediate defence of its citizens. Even those whose heart is on the side of intervention struggle to come up with strategies that would not simply draw the west into the fires.

For all that, I suspect Mr Obama will find it easier to articulate his new approach than to implement it. The opening gambits in the nuclear negotiations with Hassan Rouhani, Iran's president, have been encouraging but no more than that. If Washington and Tehran fail to reach a deal that allows Iran civilian nuclear power while denying it the capacity to build a bomb, then all bets in the region are off.

At the heart of the divide in the Middle East lies the deep enmity between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Without America's restraining hand it could well run out of control. If the experience first of Iraq and then of Libya shows the dangers of varying types of intervention, then Syria has revealed the awful perils that can accompany inaction.

Last month [Susan Rice](#), Mr Obama's national security adviser, told The New York Times that the shift in US policy had been driven by a conviction that America "can't be consumed 24/7 by one region, important

though it is”. This seems an eminently reasonable proposition. It is also one, I suspect, that owes as much to hope than to realpolitik.

[Article 4.](#)

Asharq Al-Awsat

The Story of US–Egyptian Relations

Abdel Monem Said

November 8, 2013 -- I recently finished reading the memoirs of Dr. Saadeddine Ibrahim, professor of political sociology at the American University of Cairo, former president of the Arab Organization for Human Rights, former chief of the Arab Council for Childhood and Motherhood and of the Arab Thought Forum in Jordan, and founder of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies.

The man’s history includes a lot more achievements. Reading his memoirs reminded me of an incident that happened in February 1981, when a seminar was organized on Egyptian–American relations by the American Enterprise Institute. During this seminar, Ibrahim presented a document, the analytical model of which I think may be useful in understanding the current relationship between the two countries.

The model was based on comparing relations between countries with relations between people, particularly between men and women.

Relationships pass through phases. This begins with courtship, during which time each party seeks to know the other’s limits and capabilities. This is where interest and psychological consensus is specified and where each person’s responsibilities are made clear. If things are positive, the couple takes the relationship to the next level—that is to say, engagement. This phase includes an amount of commitment that requires more disclosure. In addition to that, mutual ambitions that may reach the extent of dreams emerge. This phase is followed by marriage, accompanied by the honeymoon phase where it appears that the couple has become one in terms of vision and opinion. But since things change, it’s only a matter of time before the couple discover each other’s defects which were previously

diminished. This causes small arguments that quickly turn to open quarrels, thus leading to divorce.

At the beginning of 1981, Saadeddine Ibrahim applied this model on American-Egyptian relations. Back then, a new administration led by Ronald Reagan, the Republican with the conservative vision, was born. The courtship phase began in the wake of the October 1973 War. Henry Kissinger, whom late President Anwar Sadat referred to as “my friend” became a permanent visitor to Cairo. After Kissinger, Jimmy Carter also became Sadat’s friend. The two parties cooperated to reach the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

The Egyptian-American connection paved the way for a honeymoon which Reagan’s administration ultimately ended short for several reasons. Perhaps the most important of these reasons is that Reagan no longer viewed the Middle East with the same importance as his predecessors (Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter.) Although this model is somewhat light-hearted, it appears appropriate when it comes to understanding American-Egyptians relations, whether before or after 1981. Somehow, the relationship between Washington and Cairo passed through the precise same phases between 1952 and 1956.

During this time, there was optimism with the eruption of the July revolution followed by divorce when the proposal to help build the Aswan High Dam was withdrawn. Following this there was the Eisenhower project and the clash in Lebanon in 1958. The latter led to a divorce that lasted until Kennedy’s administration noticed the importance of rebuilding bridges. This was some form of courtship that ended in a clash following America’s withdrawal of the wheat aid shipments in 1965 and the severance of diplomatic ties with the eruption of the 1967 June War.

Reagan’s administration cut the Egyptian-American honeymoon short. The 1980s witnessed many diplomatic scuffles and arguments, but relations lasted due to Egypt’s political and diplomatic activity. This period also saw Egyptian-Soviet relations being restored, in addition to American aid to Egypt, which at that time reached USD 1.3 billion in military aid and USD 815 million in economic aid. In any case, the US-Egyptian relationship endured but turned somewhat cold. The situation remained like this until the time came to restore this to previous levels. That moment was when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Amidst this flagrant threat against the

region's security, Egyptian-American relations were ready for a new honeymoon that lasted throughout the entire 1990s. During this period, Kuwait was liberated, the Arab-Israeli peace process began and produced the Jordanian-Israeli peace and the Oslo Accords. Egypt, and particularly Sharm Al-Sheikh, was a center for negotiating and dealing with crises and obstacles. Egypt was also a passage for American forces in the East. Were it not for the argument over Israeli nuclear weapons during the mid-1990s, this decade would have been characterized by the closest relations between Cairo and Washington.

It's always difficult to determine the exact time when relations began to deteriorate. As the new century began, Egypt first thought that the George W. Bush administration would be the same as the Bush senior administration. But that did not prove to be the case. The new president was not just thoughtless he was also surrounded by a group of obsessed neo-conservatives. The 9/11 attacks ignited a wave of new aggression in America's approach. This can be seen in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and accusing Arab countries, particularly Egypt, of being responsible for terrorism due to a lack of democracy.

During the last phase of the Bush administration, relations reached their nadir over the second Palestinian intifada and the American behavior towards Iraq and the Islamic world. Egypt has suffered at the hands of terrorism, like all other countries, but the American approach of dealing with this phenomenon is based on a twisted methodology that has produced poor results.

Bush's second presidential term failed to soothe relations between Cairo and Washington, and it appeared as though Barack Obama's presidency could pave way for a new era of relations.

What's strange is that Cairo, during George Bush's presidential term, was subject to right-wing's criticism because it was considered undemocratic. But now during the Obama era, the criticism comes from the left-wing which believes that democracy will not exist in the Middle East, and particularly in Egypt, except via the Muslim Brotherhood. This logic is crooked and the movement collapsed after the June revolution. America subsequently filed for divorce after it suspended aid. What's left is a thin line of aid and sporadic phone calls between Egypt and America's ministers of defense. The current relations are thus in a phase of separation

and divorce is usually the natural result of a separation that lasts for an extended period.

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[Article 5](#)

Project Syndicate

Asia's Middle Eastern Shadow

Shlomo Ben-Ami

Nov 5, 2013 -- In 2010, then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced America's eastward shift in global strategy. The United States' "pivot" to the Asia-Pacific region was required not only because of the security threats posed by the rise of China, but also as a consequence of America's long and costly obsession with the Middle East.

The Middle East has long confronted the US with formidable challenges, which ultimately exceeded America's imperial capacities and sapped public support. But the real question now is whether America is still able and willing to uphold its global pretensions. After all, Asia is no less a demanding theater than the Middle East. Indeed, dealing with it might require reconciling the pivot to Asia with an ongoing presence in the Middle East, if only because the two regions have much in common. For starters, in a region replete with territorial disputes and old rivalries that are as bitter as the Arab-Israeli conflict, America faces a geopolitical environment with no security architecture and no agreed conflict-resolution mechanism. The division of the Korean Peninsula, the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir, and the question of Taiwan (which by 2020 the US will no longer be able to defend from a Chinese attack, according to a [2009 study](#) by the RAND Corporation) appear as intractable as the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

Moreover, like the Middle East, Asia is home to an uncontrolled arms race that includes both conventional capabilities and weapons of mass destruction. [Four of the world's ten largest militaries are in Asia](#), and five Asian countries are full-fledged nuclear powers.

Nor does the Middle East have a monopoly on Islamist extremism, ethnic tension, or terrorism. China's restive Muslim Uighurs, the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India, the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, the secessionist Muslim insurgency in the Philippines, and the ethnic separatist insurgency in southern Thailand all highlight Asia's complex tapestry of unresolved religious and ethnic trouble spots.

Moreover, America's Asian pivot is occurring at a time when its international credibility has been badly eroded by domestic political dysfunction and disappointing performance in the Middle East. This, for example, explains Japan's fear that the US might eventually reach an accommodation with China over the disputed Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands in Chinese). Indeed, Japan's quest to re-establish its own military capability is a vote of limited confidence in its US ally.

Obama's recent wavering on the use of force in Syria has left many in Asia doubting whether they can rely on America not only if China forcibly asserts its maritime claims, but also if North Korea carries out its threats to attack the South. Conspicuously, South Korean President Park Geun-hye's "Trustpolitik" – a soft-power approach to North Korea that calls for deeper cooperation with China, the North's most important ally – is particularly popular.

As in the Middle East, America's bilateral military relationships in Asia are often with "frenemies," countries that share an alliance with the US while deeply mistrusting one another. US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel's agreement in early October with his South Korean counterpart on a [Tailored Deterrence strategy](#) became untenable a few days later, when the US promised Japan a massive upgrading of its military capabilities. South Korea views this as tantamount to outsourcing China's containment to an unrepentant imperial power.

In any case, an American withdrawal from the Middle East is hardly a recipe for countering China's rise in East Asia, given that the two regions are increasingly intertwined. While the US is pivoting to the East, leaving old allies like Saudi Arabia and Egypt deeply resentful, China is pivoting westward.

China's exports to the Middle East are already more than twice those of the US. Its annual exports to Turkey total \$23 billion, and now include military supplies, such as a missile-defense system that is not compatible with those

of Turkey's NATO allies. If China's penetration into the Middle East persists at the current pace, it might even be able to obstruct the flow of energy resources to America's Asian allies.

In a global competition, a superpower's competitors are bound to exploit its weaknesses. The 2008 financial crisis, which destroyed the mystique of Western economic prowess, led to a marked a shift in China's global strategy. The Chinese began toying with the idea of abandoning their "peaceful rise" in favor of what then-President Hu Jintao defined at a July 2009 conference of Chinese diplomats as "the democratization of international relations" and "global multipolarity."

The US, as hegemon in the Middle East for many years, could not solve any of the region's major problems single-handedly. If its pivot to Asia is to be credible, the US will eventually have to agree to be one among a number of great powers in Asia, a co-equal partner with China, Japan, and India in shaping the region's strategic environment.

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[Article 6.](#)

NYT

Notes From Egypt's Show Trial

Sarah El Sirgany

November 6, 2013 -- Cairo — During a court recess on Monday, I approached the floor-to-ceiling, webbed-metal cage confining Mohamed Morsi, the deposed president of Egypt, and seven other defendants.

I sneaked a peek past a security guard. Mr. Morsi stood surrounded by his former aides and fellow defendants from the Muslim Brotherhood. They were dressed in white garments, as required by the authorities. He wore a blue business suit.

Mr. Morsi hadn't been seen in public since early July, when the country's military removed him from power. He looked healthy. He also looked quietly defiant in that dark outfit that inexplicably deviated from the rules.

Twenty minutes earlier, Mr. Morsi had walked into a makeshift courtroom at the Cairo police academy to answer to charges of incitement to murder and torture for casualties resulting from clashes between his Muslim Brotherhood and opposition protesters on Dec. 5-6, 2012. The defense lawyers welcomed his appearance by standing on the wooden benches, chanting in praise of his “resilience” and flashing the four-finger sign that has come to symbolize the military’s deadly crackdown on his supporters last August.

It was an altogether different spectacle from the televised trial of Mr. Morsi’s predecessor, Hosni Mubarak. When Mr. Mubarak was brought into court on a stretcher in August 2011 — six months after he was toppled from nearly three decades in power — he merely affirmed his presence and denied, in the most general terms, being responsible for the deaths of protesters during the 2011 revolution. He wore white.

Mr. Morsi on Monday was all pointed defiance. He rejected the court’s jurisdiction: The proceedings, he said, were simply “a cover for the military coup” that had toppled him. Twice the judge called a recess to maintain order while Mr. Morsi and his co-defendants talked loudly, ignoring his questions about procedure.

Mr. Morsi’s bluster aside, however, the two trials are more similar than not. In less than three years, Egypt has brought two former presidents to the dock. And these cases, both politicized to serve the interests of the authorities of the day, have brought no credit to Egypt’s judicial system, or the rule of law.

On Monday, Mohamed Salim el-Awa, a prominent Islamist lawyer dispatched by the political party of Mr. Morsi to represent him, invoked the 2012 Constitution, the basic law adopted during Mr. Morsi’s brief presidency that has since been suspended. Mr. Awa cited Article 152, which deals with the rules governing impeachment. “This,” he told the judges, “is not a proper court to try a president.”

Lawyers representing other defendants were also blunt. At least 10 people are said to have been killed during the clashes between the Brotherhood and opposition protesters during that December night. But only three of the victims were named in the prosecution’s papers. The rest of the dead were simply identified as “others.”

“How come there is a clash between two sides and only one is brought to court?” one defense lawyer asked me during one of many sideline discussions between lawyers and reporters at the recess.

Another observed that the interim military government was worried that if members the Brotherhood were allowed a part in the trial — as victims, not defendants — “their families would gain access to the court and accuse the incumbent regime.” Other lawyers pointed out that Mr. Morsi had been held incommunicado with no access to counsel until the first court break on Monday.

Standing three feet from the metal fence that separated the judges’ bench from the rest of the courtroom, Ragia Omran, a lawyer for some of the victims, tried to defend the proceedings. The trial wasn’t political, she argued. Yes, the charges were brought many months after the fact, and only after Mr. Morsi was deposed. But, Ms. Omran said, she and other lawyers from the Front to Defend Egypt Protesters had been working on the case since December. “It’s important to note that,” she told journalists, raising an index finger for emphasis.

It’s also important to note that she and other lawyers representing the civilians killed, tortured or injured during Mr. Morsi’s rule are settling for what they can get: an accounting from at least a few of the men they believe to be guilty for the anti-protester violence. Never mind that these men, now fallen from power, are being scapegoated by the current authorities. And never mind that these authorities have carefully fashioned this case so as to remain immune from prosecution themselves: The bloodshed of Dec. 5-6 doesn’t implicate any state institutions or security services.

Yet there are victims on all sides. Hundreds of Brotherhood members have been slain by the military since Mr. Morsi was ousted. And no government prosecutor is speaking for them.

The next hearing in Mr. Morsi’s trial is scheduled for Jan. 8. Whether he recognizes the court’s authority by then is anyone’s guess. It’s already clear, however, that whatever justice this court renders will be partial at best.

[Article 7.](#)

The Washington Post

China's coming challenges

[Fareed Zakaria](#)

Nov 7, 2013 -- Beijing -- “We are all struck by the contrast between Beijing and Washington,” said George Yeo, the former foreign minister of Singapore. He was referring to the quality of governance in the two capitals — in particular, the sense pervasive in Asia that the United States has lost its ability to execute public policy with competence (see Iraq, Obamacare). Beijing, on the other hand, has been carefully and systematically planning a series of reforms that probably will make China the world's largest economy within a decade.

The contrast is particularly striking because [China faces huge challenges](#) and will need to make major economic, political and social reforms as it navigates through the “middle-income trap” that has affected many once-fast-growing developing countries. The United States, on the other hand, remains the world's most innovative economy with a dynamic and growing society. It simply needs some common-sense policies on a range of issues, such as infrastructure, entitlements and immigration. And yet it's hard to foresee progress on any of these fronts in the next few years in Washington.

Yeo and I were among a group of visitors invited to China by the [Berggruen Institute](#), a [global think tank](#), for meetings with the country's top leaders, including President Xi Jinping. They were more confident and relaxed than at any point in the more than 20 years that I have been visiting China. In the past, they talked about China's weaknesses and problems, and always about how their nation was far behind the United States. I heard little of that on this visit. But the country continues to search for ideas and best practices from everywhere. “One of the reasons China has succeeded so far,” Xi told us, “is that we have been willing to learn from others, even small countries like Singapore.”

The task today is huge but no greater than in the past. China's [original market-oriented reforms](#) were announced by its leader, Deng Xiaoping, in 1978. (Imagine creating a market economy from nothing and finding managers for it when the entire national university system had been shut down for a decade!) The second burst of reforms, globalizing one of the

world's most isolated economies, was announced in 1993 by [President Jiang Zemin](#) . The [Communist Party plenum starting this weekend](#) will mark the [third major push for reform in modern Chinese history](#).

In recent years, Beijing has dithered. It has known what to do but has chosen to put off things that would be politically difficult. Instead it has used [cheap credit as a stimulus](#) to boost the economy every time [growth faltered](#). But senior officials have acknowledged this and seem determined to make good on their promises this time. “If we loosen credit, if we expand the fiscal deficit, that would be like an old saying where one carries firewood to extinguish a fire,” Premier Li Keqiang said to the group. China’s leaders have promised “[unprecedented](#)” market-oriented reforms that are “[comprehensive](#),” “[economic, social and political](#).” We will have to wait and watch to see what that means but, for sure, it means no moves toward democracy. It will likely involve administrative changes that make China’s bureaucracy more efficient, effective and honest. Local courts, for example, long dominated by corrupt local politicians, are likely to be streamlined, perhaps with the creation of an American-style federal circuit. In fact, so far, the country has actually moved in the opposite direction politically, [clamping down on the Internet](#) as part of a Maoist campaign against dissent. One participant described this as a strategy that “moves left politically so that you can move right economically.” He said it mirrored Deng’s approach, which is summarized in a joke that he once instructed his driver to turn on the left signal while turning the car to the right.

Many in my group of visitors to China were confident the country would manage this process successfully. “The Chinese ruling elite is fully aware of the rising political and social tensions in the country,” said Yeo, “and they respond to them and allow a good bit of openness in the society and on the Internet. But they will keep intervening to stop these tensions from getting out of hand. They are engineers, and in any system, you need some friction to slow things down. Too much friction will stop the machine, but too little will cause systemic instability.”

It’s a powerful metaphor. But one wonders whether a political system can be run like a machine, full of mechanical parts. A nation, after all, is full of people, who are sometimes animated by passions, expectations, fears and anger. Managing those might prove a tough challenge for even the finest engineers.

Project Syndicate

China's Plenum Test

Minxin Pei

Nov 7, 2013 -- Tokyo – There is something odd and disturbing about the conventional wisdom surrounding the upcoming Third Plenum of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As the November 9-12 conclave draws near, the international community's attention seems to be focused mainly on technocratic policy changes deemed essential to restructuring China's state-dominated economy and reenergizing growth.

Will the government liberalize interest rates or loosen capital controls? How will the fiscal system be revamped? Will land reform be part of the package?

The list of such questions goes on. Outside China, the prevalent view among business leaders is that President Xi Jinping's new administration has consolidated its power and acquired enough authority to push through far-reaching economic reforms. He and his colleagues need only to get the specific policies right.

On the surface, such thinking may seem reasonable. In China's top-down political system, a unified leadership is seen as fully capable of forcing the bureaucracy to comply with its wishes. With Xi's anti-corruption campaign in full swing, and the example of Bo Xilai's imprisonment serving as a warning to the new president's adversaries (no matter how senior they are), Chinese officials at all levels, it is widely believed, are likely to toe the line.

Unfortunately, this view is both too sanguine and naïve. It overestimates the effectiveness of anti-corruption campaigns in contemporary China (there have been many in the last three decades), and it overlooks the political sources of the country's economic slowdown. While Xi's efforts to cleanse the rot inside the Chinese party-state should be applauded, it is no less important to recognize their limits.

So far, Xi's campaign has remained a conventional affair involving selective prosecution. Given the central government's well-known inability to enforce its policies at the local level and the prevalence of tight-knit patronage networks in Chinese provinces and cities, it is unrealistic to expect that the current anti-corruption drive will produce significantly better results than in the past.

Indeed, the fight against corruption is at war with itself, because Xi is simultaneously seeking to buttress one-party rule. But it is precisely the absence of effective checks on the exercise of power that encourages and sustains rampant corruption in the first place.

Optimism about the CCP's ability to push through market-oriented reforms also ignores the real obstacles to future growth and prosperity, which do not include a lack of economic ideas or policy expertise; on the contrary, it is well known – even obvious – what kind of economic reforms are needed.

What prevents China from pursuing these reforms is a combination of opposition from powerful entrenched interest groups – state-owned enterprises, local governments, the economic-policy bureaucracy, and family members of political elites and well-connected businessmen – and flawed political institutions. Unless Xi and his colleagues demonstrate their resolve to overcome such opposition and launch comprehensive reforms, their chances of success are not high.

Compared with the two previous breakthroughs in reforming China's economy, in 1978 and 1992, Xi faces a different environment and a much tougher challenge. Opponents of Deng Xiaoping's reforms were ideologically driven; they had no personal stake in the Maoist political economy. Defeating them required building a winning coalition within the party, discrediting the communist ideology, and rallying public support, all of which Deng did.

Today, by contrast, members of the ruling elite benefit directly and immensely from the state-dominated economy. Market-oriented reform, by leveling the competitive playing field, would hurt their interests and reduce their privileges, making fierce opposition likely. Only by mobilizing pressure outside the party-state can these insiders be forced to accept some of the decentralizing and liberalizing reforms that China's economy needs.

At that point, China will have a better chance of improving its legal institutions, increasing political accountability, strengthening protection of private property rights, and making the government genuinely – in Mao’s words – “serve the people.” Without real and significant political change, technocratic reform proposals will treat only the symptoms of China’s economic malaise, without addressing its underlying institutional causes. In assessing the outcome of the Third Plenum, what observers should really be looking for is evidence of a bold strategy for political reform. If Xi and his colleagues produce no credible sign of such a commitment, everything else will be eyewash – and skepticism about China’s fate under their leadership eventually will be vindicated.

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