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4 December, 2013

Article 1.	NYT **Bibi and Barack, the Sequel** Thomas L. Friedman
Article 2.	The Atlantic **The Case for Giving Iran's Scholar-Diplomats a Chance** Moisés Naím
Article 3.	The Washington Post **Iran accord in Geneva followed by new violence, new diplomacy for Mideast** Liz Sly
Article 4.	Bloomberg **Six Reasons to Worry About the Iranian Nuclear Deal** Jeffrey Goldberg
Article 5.	Foreign Policy **Don't mistake Egypt's calm for stability** Eric Trager
Article 6.	National Review Online **The World's New Outlaws** Victor Davis Hanson
Article 7.	WSJ **Arafat's Death and the Polonium Mystery** Edward Jay Epstein

Article 1.

NYT

Bibi and Barack, the Sequel

Thomas L. Friedman

December 3, 2013 -- Could Bibi Netanyahu and Barack Obama share the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize?

The thought sounds ludicrous on its face, I know. The two do not like each other and have radically different worldviews. But as much as they keep trying to get away from each other, the cunning of history keeps throwing them back together, intertwining their fates. That will be particularly true in the next six months when the U.S.-led negotiations to defuse Iran's nuclear bomb-making capabilities and the U.S.-led negotiations to reach a final peace between Israelis and Palestinians both come to a head at the same time. If these two leaders were to approach these two negotiations with a reasonably shared vision (and push each other), they could play a huge role in remaking the Middle East for the better, and — with John Kerry — deserve the Nobel Prize, an Emmy, an Oscar and the Pritzker Architecture Prize.

Let's start with the Iran talks. After his initial and, I believe, wrongheaded outburst against the U.S.-led deal to freeze and modestly rollback Iran's nuclear program in return for some limited sanctions relief, Netanyahu has quieted down a bit and has set up a team to work with the U.S. on the precise terms for a final deal with Iran. I hope that Bibi doesn't get too quiet, though. While I think the interim deal is a sound basis for negotiating a true end to Iran's nuclear bomb-making capabilities, the chances of getting that true end are improved if Bibi is occasionally Bibi and serves as our loaded pistol on the negotiating table.

When negotiating in a merciless, hard-bitten region like the Middle East, it is vital to never let the other side think they can "outcrazy" you. The Jews and the Kurds are among the few minorities that have managed to carve out autonomous spaces in the Arab-Muslim world because, at the end of the day, they would never let any of their foes outcrazy them; they did whatever they had to in order to survive, and sometimes it was really ugly, but they survived to tell the tale. Anyone who has seen the handy work of Iran and Hezbollah firsthand — the U.S. Embassy and Marine bombings in Beirut, the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in Lebanon, the bombing at Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, and the bombing of the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires — knows that the Iranians will go all the way. Never negotiate with Iran without some leverage and some crazy on your side. Iran's leaders are tough and cruel. They did not rise to the top through the Iowa caucuses.

While you need some Obama "cool" to finalize a deal with Iran, to see the potential for something new and to seize it, you also need some Bibi crazy — some of his Dr. Strangelove stuff and the occasional missile test. The dark core of this Iranian regime has not gone away. It's just out of sight, and it does need to believe that all options really are on the table for negotiations to succeed. So let Bibi be Bibi (up to the point where a good deal becomes possible) and Barack be Barack and we have the best chance of getting a decent outcome. Had Bibi not been Bibi, we never would have gotten Iran to the negotiating table, but without Barack being Barack, we'll never get a deal.

Just the opposite is true on the Israeli-Palestinian front. Had Kerry not doggedly pushed Bibi and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to the negotiating table, Bibi would not have gone there on his own. As Stanley Fischer, the widely respected former Bank of Israel governor, told a New York University forum on Tuesday: "The approach that we have to be strong, because if we're not strong we will be defeated, is absolutely correct but it is not the only part of national strategy. The other part is the need to look for peace, and that part is not happening to the extent that it should," the Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported.

I believe Europeans, in particular, would be more sympathetic to a harder-line Israeli position on Iran if they saw Israel making progress with the Palestinians, and if some of them did not suspect that Bibi wants to defuse the Iranian threat to make the world safe for a permanent Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Moreover, if Israel made progress with the Palestinians, it could translate the coincidence of interests it now has with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Arabs — which is based purely on their having a common enemy, Iran — into a real reconciliation, with trade and open relations.

On the Iran front, Netanyahu's job is to make himself as annoying as possible to Obama to ensure that sanctions are only fully removed in return for a verifiable end to Iran's nuclear bomb-making capabilities. On the Israeli-Palestinian front, Obama's job is to make himself as annoying as possible to Netanyahu. Each has to press the other for us to get the best deals on both fronts.

This is a rare plastic moment in the Middle East where a lot of things are in flux. I have no illusions that all the problems can be tied up with a nice bow. But with a little imagination and the right mix of toughness and

openness on Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the Israeli prime minister and American president could turn their bitter-lemon relationship into lemonade.

Article 2.

The Atlantic

The Case for Giving Iran's Scholar-Diplomats a Chance

Moisés Naím

Dec 3 2013 -- Hassan Rouhani, Iran's president, has more cabinet members with [redacted]. degrees from U.S. universities than Barack Obama does. In fact, Iran has more holders of American [redacted] in its presidential cabinet than France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, or Spain—combined.

Take, for example, Rouhani's chief of staff, Mohammad Nahavandian. He spent many years in the United States and has a [redacted]. in economics from George Washington University. Or Javad Zarif, the foreign affairs minister and chief negotiator in the recent nuclear deal between Iran and six global powers. He studied at the University of San Francisco and completed his doctorate at the University of Denver. For five years, he lived in New York and was Iran's ambassador to the United Nations. Ali Akbar Salehi, head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, has a [redacted]. in nuclear engineering from MIT. Mahmoud Vaezi, the communication minister, studied electrical engineering at Sacramento and San Jose State Universities and was enrolled in the [redacted]. program at Louisiana State University (he ultimately earned a doctorate in international relations at Warsaw University). Other cabinet members have advanced degrees from universities in Europe and Iran. Abbas Ahmad Akhoundi, the transportation minister, has a [redacted]. from the University of London, while President Rouhani got his from Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland. The new government in Tehran, in other words, might well be one of the most technocratic in the world.

Does this matter? On the surface, perhaps not much. We all know how often the governments of the "best and the brightest" disappoint. And it's important to keep in mind that many of these highly credentialed cabinet

members were also active participants in former Iranian administrations and backed policies that earned Iran's theocracy its bad name.

And let's not forget that it is Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader, who really reigns supreme. He can initiate or stop any initiative. There's also Major General Qassem Suleimani, who offers a sober counterpoint to the scholarly crowd in the cabinet. Suleimani is a product of a rural town in Iran's interior and acquired a vast education in the battlefields and the dark alleys of terrorist plots, rather than in classrooms. He is enormously respected by his allies, admirers, and staunchest enemies both in and outside Iran. For the past 15 years, he has commanded the Quds Force, a division of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that answers directly to the supreme leader. The group's official mission is to export the Islamic revolution and take care of "extra-territorial operations." Among other achievements, Suleimani is recognized for successfully turning Hezbollah into a feared military force, for organizing the armed resistance that killed thousands of American soldiers in Iraq, and for his effective support of the forces loyal to the Syrian government as they sought to regain ground lost to the armed insurgency. Former CIA officer John Maguire told New Yorker journalist Dexter Filkins that "Suleimani is the single most powerful operative in the Middle East today."

Like that of all other countries, Iran's foreign policy is the outcome of the complex interaction of multiple actors with differing backgrounds, ideologies, interests, and power. Who, then, is driving Tehran's policy these days: the theocrats or the technocrats? The generals or the diplomats? These are the crucial questions that feed the intense speculation about Iran's real intention in signing the Geneva accord on its nuclear program. Is this just one more trick by the Iranians to buy time for their continued race toward the bomb while also getting some relief from economic sanctions? Or is this really a momentous strategic change in the Iranian foreign policy of past decades? It is too soon to tell, and nobody can say for certain what will arise from this process. Nobody, except of course Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other neighboring countries in the Persian Gulf. Or members of the U.S. Congress who are keen to boost Iran sanctions while negotiations are ongoing. They're all certain that the Geneva accord is a huge—indeed historic—mistake. Then there are the skeptics who, while wary and unsure

of Iran's intentions, know that the status quo is far more dangerous than seeking change, despite the risks involved.

The probability that the Geneva accord—called a "first step"—will derail because of the actions of extremists on both sides is high, and the deadline is only six months away. After that, there is the option of extending the talks for another six months in the hopes of attaining the big prize: permanent limits on and reliable verification of Iran's nuclear program.

For critics, such a prize does not exist. They believe the hope that Rouhani and his team can fend off fundamentalists is naive, and that Iran is bent on getting nuclear weapons and continuing to use terror as a tool to mold the Middle East and eventually achieve its oft-stated aim of destroying the state of Israel. Tehran's reformists have a similar worry: Will Barack Obama and his international allies be able to limit the bellicose positions of radicals in their midst?

For now, the answers are speculative. But the big strategic question is whether testing Iran's intentions through negotiations is riskier than continuing to sanction and threaten to bomb it. As naive as assuming that everyone in the Iranian government is ready for a more peaceful integration of their country with the rest of the world is to assume that the status quo—the combination of stringent economic sanctions, sabotage, and the threat of military action—is sustainable and desirable. The latter strategy is as risky, if not more, as one of giving a controlled and cautious chance to Tehran's doctors to change Iran's dangerous and ruinous policies—and redefine the politics of the Middle East. They deserve that chance. Let's hope they succeed.

Moisés Naím is a contributing editor at The Atlantic, a senior associate in the International Economics Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the chief international columnist for El Pais and La Repubblica, Spain's and Italy's largest dailies. He is author of more than 10 books, including, most recently, The End of Power.

Article 3.

The Washington Post

Iran accord in Geneva followed by new violence, new diplomacy for Mideast

Liz Sly

December 3, 2013 -- Beirut — A surge of diplomacy and an outburst of violence in the days since world powers reached a deal with Iran illustrate both the promise and the peril of what could be the start of a more peaceful era in the Middle East — or the beginning of a new round of bloodletting.

The announcement of the six-month accord on Iran's nuclear program, hailed by President Obama as an opportunity to reverse decades of hostility between Washington and Tehran, has quickly been followed by indications of the deal's potential to unlock other regional conflicts.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif traveled this week to the Sunni Arab states of Qatar, Kuwait and Oman; his counterpart from the United Arab Emirates visited Tehran last week. The trips are the first signs of a thaw in relations between Persian Gulf Arab states and Iran's Shiite government since the ongoing revolt against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad polarized the region along sectarian lines.

Zarif appealed for cooperation between Arab states and Iran, and he expressed hope that he will soon be able to visit Saudi Arabia, Iran's main rival. "We believe we need all of us to cooperate with each other to contain the spread of sectarian divide in this region," he told the Al Jazeera English network in an interview that aired Tuesday.

Turkey, a staunch backer of Syria's rebels, has joined Iran, Assad's firmest ally, in calling for a cease-fire in Syria. A Jan. 22 date has been set for a peace conference in Geneva aimed at launching direct talks between Syria's warring factions.

At the same time, however, a sharp uptick in violence along some of the region's most pronounced sectarian fault lines, including the beheading of three members of the Shiite Hezbollah movement by al-Qaeda-linked rebels in Syria and a revival of apparent death-squad activity in Iraq, points to the risks inherent in the realignment that is underway.

Although the threat of a war involving Israel and Iran and drawing in the United States has abated for now, many fear that the rapprochement is just as likely to exacerbate existing conflicts as it is to heal them, by putting

U.S. allegiance into play and raising the stakes in the long-standing struggle for influence between Shiite Iran and Sunni Arab states.

"There will be small wars," predicted Mohammed Obeid, a Beirut-based analyst who is close to Iranian-backed Hezbollah and familiar with the thinking of its leaders. "There won't be a big war, but there will be more small wars, and they will intensify."

Sunni Arab states don't object to a deal that could curb Iran's nuclear ambitions, but they worry about the ramifications of warming ties between Tehran and Washington, said Mustafa Alani, the Dubai-based director of security and terrorism studies at the Gulf Research Center. The big worry, he said, is that a long-term deal normalizing ties between Iran and the United States would come at the expense of Sunni influence.

"We have concerns about what sort of concessions the Americans will give. Will they anoint Iran as a regional superpower?" Alani asked. "The idea of Iran having hegemonic power is an absolute red line for all the Arab states."

The concerns are rooted in ancient Arab fears of Persian domination and predate Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution — and even the much older Sunni-Shiite divide. With a population of nearly 80 million, Iran far eclipses in size all of its Arab neighbors except for turmoil-racked Egypt. If the contentious nuclear issue were resolved, Iran would be in a strong position to revive its Cold War-era status as Washington's most powerful regional ally.

With international sanctions easing, Sunnis fear, Iran may feel emboldened to increase assistance to the widespread network of allies it has cultivated over the decades, including Lebanon's Hezbollah, numerous Shiite groups in Iraq and others across a wide arc of territory from Afghanistan to Yemen and Lebanon.

And Iran is unlikely to match its compromises on the nuclear issue with concessions on other fronts, Obeid said. "Absolutely not," he said. "Iran will not leave Hezbollah, it will not leave Assad, and it will not leave Iraq."

Saudi Arabia, likewise, won't stop pushing back against Iranian efforts to expand its influence, Alani said.

The potential for increased violence had become apparent in the weeks leading up to last month's nuclear accord, as Washington's Arab allies began digesting the prospect that the United States and Iran might soon

become friends and the realization that the Obama administration was unlikely to intervene militarily in Syria.

Saudi Arabia announced that it would break with Washington and strike out on its own to arm Syria's rebels. A suicide bombing at the Iranian Embassy in Beirut by Sunni radicals the day before the Geneva nuclear talks began, and the subsequent announcement by an Iranian-backed Shiite militia in Iraq that it had fired rockets into Saudi Arabia, offered a glimpse of the kind of reciprocal attacks that may arise should the proxy war intensify.

As Sunni Arabs push back against a reordering that they suspect will leave them marginalized and a newly confident Iran asserts its gains, "this is more likely to play out in a manner in which everyone is fighting with everyone else to secure their interests," said Hussein Ibish of the Washington-based American Task Force on Palestine. "There would be intensified campaigns of spoiling, more proxy conflicts, more waves of bombing."

Since the Geneva accord, sectarian sentiments seem only to have hardened. The execution of 18 Sunni men in a Baghdad neighborhood last week echoed the sinister killings that signaled the start of sectarian war in Iraq in 2005, and it suggested that Shiites are gearing up to fight back against a wave of al-Qaeda bombings that has killed more than 8,000 Iraqis this year.

A fresh outbreak of fighting in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, between local Sunnis and Alawites drawn from Assad's minority sect, has proved unusually intense, killing more than a dozen people since Friday. And the beheading of three fighters from Hezbollah, among more than a dozen killed during a rebel offensive east of Damascus, underscored the extent to which the sectarian divide is playing out on the ground in Syria. The al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra, which receives funding from a shadowy network of sponsors in the Persian Gulf region, posted pictures on the Internet boasting about the decapitations.

"One of the dogs of Hezbollah," said the slogan imprinted on a photograph of one of the dead fighters. "We are coming to behead them . . . and what will come will be only more bitter for them."

After more than 120,000 deaths on both sides of the Syrian conflict, hatred is so deeply rooted that it is unclear whether the nuclear accord or other

diplomatic efforts could roll it back, said Salman Shaikh, director of the Brookings Doha Center in Qatar.
“I don’t see it,” he said. “This war is taking on a life of its own, and it will be very difficult to switch it on or off.”

Article 4.
Bloomberg

Six Reasons to Worry About the Iranian Nuclear Deal

Jeffrey Goldberg

Dec 3, 2013 -- The interim nuclear agreement between the Great Powers (such as they are) and Iran is creating a lot of anxiety for people who support the deal, because not much proof has been offered to suggest that it will actually work. And by “not much proof,” I mean, “no proof.”
Why support it, then? Because, so far, the remote possibility that this agreement will lead to the denuclearization of Iran beats the alternative: military action by the U.S. or, worse, by Israel. All options should be on the table, but, really, the military option could be disastrous.
Here are six reasons to be worried about the strength of this interim deal. These worries have to do with the particulars of the agreement, but also with the reality of the Iranian nuclear program, which is already quite well developed.
1. The deal isn’t done. Remember the photos from Geneva of smiling foreign ministers slapping backs and hugging in celebration of their epic achievement? Well, nothing was actually signed. The deal is not, as of this moment, even operational.
U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki was asked a question last week about when the deal might actually take effect. “The next step here is a continuation of technical discussions at a working level so that we can essentially tee up the implementation of the agreement. So that would involve the P5+1 -- a commission of the P5+1 experts working with the Iranians and the IAEA," she said, referring to the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany and the International

Atomic Energy Agency. "Obviously, once that's -- those technical discussions are worked through, I guess the clock would start."

Focus on those last words for a second: "I guess the clock would start." Do words like those make you worried, or is it just me? What this means is that Iran, at this moment, is still not compelled to freeze any of its nuclear program in place. [redacted] not sure why American negotiators would leave Geneva without having a fully implemented agreement. I understand that the technical hurdles to implementation are daunting. But equally daunting is the realization that the Iranians are going about their business as if they've promised nothing.

2. Momentum for sanctions is waning. It's true that the economic relief the Iranians will receive in this deal is modest, but it is also true that many nations, many companies and the Iranians themselves are seeing this agreement as the beginning of the end of the sanctions regime. Iran is already making a push to recapture its dominant role in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. U.S. officials believe they can hold the line on sanctions, but it is reasonable to assume that they will come under increasing pressure from countries such as South Korea, Japan, India and China, which could very easily convince themselves that Iran is preparing to act in a more responsible manner (after all, it replaced its snarling, Holocaust-denying president with a smiling, savvy president) and should be reopened for business.

3. The (still unenforced) document agreed upon in Geneva promises Iran an eventual exit from nuclear monitoring. The final (theoretical) deal, the document states, will "have a specified long-term duration to be agreed upon," after which the Iranian nuclear program "will be treated in the same manner as that of any non-nuclear weapon state" that is part of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. From what [redacted] told, the U.S. hopes this eventual agreement, should it come to pass, would last 15 years; the Iranians hope to escape this burden in five. After the agreement loses its legal force, Iran could run however many centrifuges it chooses to run. This is not a comforting idea.

4. The biggest concession to the Iranians might have already been made. Although it is the West's position that it has not granted Iran the so-called right to enrich, the text of the interim agreement states that the permanent deal will "involve a mutually defined enrichment program with mutually

agreed parameters." Essentially, Barack Obama's administration has already conceded, before the main round of negotiations, that Iran is going to end up with the right to enrich. Realists would argue that Iran will end up with that "right" no matter what, but it seems premature to cede the point now.

5. The Geneva agreement only makes the most elliptical references to two indispensable components of any nuclear-weapons program. The entire agreement is focused on the fuel cycle, but there is no promise by Iran in this interim deal to abstain from pursuing work on ballistic missiles or on weaponization. A nuclear weapons program has three main components: the fuel, the warhead and the delivery system. Iran is free, in the coming six-month period of the interim deal, to do whatever it pleases on missiles and warhead development.

6. The Iranians are so close to reaching the nuclear threshold anyway -- defined here as the ability to make a dash to a bomb within one or two months from the moment the supreme leader decides he wants one -- that freezing in place much of the nuclear program seems increasingly futile. When asked this week by al-Jazeera about the impact of sanctions, the very smart Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, said, "When sanctions started Iran had less than 200 centrifuges. Today Iran has 19,000 centrifuges so the net product of the sanctions has been about 18,800 centrifuges that has been added to the Iran's stock of centrifuges, so sanctions have utterly failed."

Zarif is wrong in one regard: Sanctions placed the Iranian economy under enough pressure to force its negotiators to Geneva. But he is right when he asserts that Iran moved closer to nuclear breakout at the same time it was suffering under what Obama has long called "crippling sanctions."

One of Israel's most prominent experts on the Iranian nuclear program, a former military intelligence chief named Amos Yadlin, said this week that "Iran is on the verge of producing a bomb. It's sad, but it's a fact." Yadlin suggested that no one, and no agreement, can stop Iran from reaching the nuclear threshold. I fear he is right.

There are, of course, compelling arguments to be made -- and ones that have already been made -- by the Obama administration and its foreign partners in favor of this deal. Because I am both fair and balanced, I will do my best to represent those arguments in a coming post.

Article 5.

Foreign Policy

Don’t mistake Egypt’s calm for stability

Eric Trager

December 3, 2013 -- That might seem surprising, especially given the reemergence of hundreds-strong protests following the military-backed government's passage of a law restricting demonstrations last week, and the ongoing power struggle between the government and the Muslim Brotherhood, in which over 1,000 Morsy supporters have been killed. Just last week, Islamist protesters reached Tahrir Square for the first time since Morsy's ouster this summer. But this is also the way most of Egypt has been for the past three years: Like the old Microsoft Windows computer game Minesweeper, the most explosive tumult typically occurs in small pockets, leaving the rest of the country safe, tranquil, and at times eerily quiet.

Egypt's relative calm, however, should not be mistaken for stability. Far from representing the first step toward the better future that the "Arab Spring" once promised, it is an interlude -- one that might endure, even if somewhat unsteadily, for a while, but which cannot last forever. That's because Egypt's emerging regime is trying to preserve this measure of peace by reestablishing the status quo ante -- putting power back in the hands of the clans that supported Mubarak for decades, and which chafed mightily under Morsy's rule. But the new regime has done nothing to address the factors that catalyzed the first uprising almost three years ago: It has no answer for Egypt's still-dwindling economy and no strategy for incorporating or appeasing Egypt's Islamists, who tasted power once and are unlikely to accept the current crackdown indefinitely.

The attempt to restore the Mubarak-era way of doing business reflects the nature of the coalition that backed Morsy's removal in July. The most critical opposition to Morsy's rule outside Cairo came from the large families and tribes in the Nile Delta and Upper Egypt, which comprised the Mubarak regime's base and benefitted from its clientelist approach to politics.

"These traditional powers are the critical mass of voters," Abdullah Kamal, a journalist and onetime official in Mubarak's now-defunct National Democratic Party (NDP), told me. These clans, he continued, "had sympathy" for Mubarak, voted for Mubarak's former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik in the 2012 presidential elections, and would likely back Army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi if he runs for president.

For decades, these clans wielded substantial political influence. They were empowered by the Mubarak regime's use of relatively small electoral districts, which allowed them to mobilize their family members and local supporters to win elections. And since Egypt's parliament was largely a mechanism for distributing state resources, the clans typically used their electoral victories to deliver resources back to their districts and thereby entrench their local support. Following the 2011 uprising, however, the new electoral system entailed much wider electoral districts that diluted these traditional powers' support. Meanwhile the Islamist parties rode their internal unity to overwhelming, nationwide victories.

While the details for Egypt's next parliamentary elections will be determined by the government, it is widely anticipated that the next system will feature smaller districts that will re-empower the old tribal networks. Influential players within the Egyptian state are pushing for a system that would shrink electoral districts considerably.

"I participated in some of the discussions, and urged the adoption of an individual-candidacy system, because any other system forces us to have large districts, and we want smaller areas," said retired Interior Ministry Gen. Mohamed Rifaat Qumsan, the man personally responsible for drawing Egypt's electoral districts.

Qumsan, who previously served in the division of Egypt's state security responsible for monitoring -- and thwarting the political ambitions of -- Islamists, admitted that the internal tribal make-up of each district is one of his key considerations when he's drawing districts. "I know very well the geographic and social situation and tribes and families," he said. "For example, if one big village has only one electoral box according to law, but it's unsafe because people [from different tribes] clashed, I can make two boxes so they won't clash."

As a result, tribal leaders are once again key players in Egyptian electoral politics. Egypt's non-Islamist parties are already planning to aggressively

court them: For example, the Conference Party, founded by former Foreign Minister Amr Moussa earlier this year, is essentially a coalition of relatively small parties that managed to win seats in the last parliamentary elections in large part due to their tribal connections. And those parties with barely any popular support, such as the left-of-center Dostour and Egypt Social Democratic parties, are working through their clan-affiliated members to win key tribes' support.

"[The tribes] are renewing their blood," Kamal, the ex-NDP official, told me. "The guy who ran for parliament years ago won't run, but his cousin will." The old way of doing politics, in other words, is back.

By appeasing the old tribal networks, the newly emerging regime looks to promote a level of calm that the Muslim Brotherhood -- which the clans largely view as mortal competitors -- could never achieve. But there are two big reasons why this strategy will falter in the long run.

First, the return of a clientelist system won't resolve the core problems that incited the 2011 uprising and also contributed to the anti-Morsy uprising this summer: high youth unemployment and widespread economic hardship. The current government, in fact, appears to be in total denial that there is even a real problem. "We are least worried about the economics," an official in the Finance Ministry's policy division told me. "The fundamentals are there."

While Egyptian officials correctly attribute the country's economic woes to the political instability of the past three years, their assessment that Egypt is on the verge of an economic rebound appears based on a set of worryingly data-free assumptions. Deputy Prime Minister Ziad Bahaa El-Din told me that once things normalize, the government will be able to fund its ballooning budget without having to rely on oil-producing Gulf states' largesse in part through a tourism resurgence. "We cannot assume that Egypt will continue in the current level of touristic travel," he said. "We must assume that it will get higher."

The math, however, just doesn't add up. The latest data pegs Egypt's cash reserves at just under $19 billion -- and that's despite a massive $12 billion pledge from the Gulf states immediately after Morsy's removal, approximately $7 billion of which has already been delivered. Meanwhile, rather than using that cash to reform the food and fuel subsidies that comprise a significant portion of the government's expenditures, it is being

used to increase government employment, raise the minimum wage for government employees, and complete infrastructure projects. And the new constitution will further handcuff the government's fiscal flexibility: According to the recently circulated draft, the state will be required to spend 3 percent of GDP on healthcare, 4 percent on education, 2 percent on university education, and 1 percent on scientific research.

The present trajectory, in other words, doesn't bode well for a country that cannot count on Gulf generosity indefinitely. And these expansionary policies won't even buy prolonged social peace: As Bahaa El-Din acknowledged, it will take time before the infrastructure investments trickle down to lower-income Egyptians, and the government has struggled to control food prices and implement the minimum-wage raise. So while Egypt's economic cliff is further away than it was during Morsy's last weeks in office, when gas and electricity shortages intensified just as Egypt's summer burned the hottest, a cliff is still waiting in the distance because the current level of spending is simply unsustainable.

The second reason why Egypt's current calm won't translate into longer-term stability involves the Islamist parties who, not too long ago, dominated Egyptian politics. These parties recognize the emerging political system for what it is -- an attempt to limit, if not entirely obliterate, their political influence -- and they might therefore pursue politics via other, more destabilizing means.

This is especially true of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Islamist movement has refused to accept the government's post-Morsy "roadmap," which is the government's condition for ending the crackdown against the Brotherhood, and it continues to believe that Morsy will be reinstated.

"Sisi has on his neck 5,000 dead Egyptians," one Brotherhood leader told me, inflating the reported death count by a factor of five. "So it makes no sense that he'll complete his political life. Bangladesh is now taking its putschists to court, and Turkey did the same thing even without having a revolution against the coup like we have here in Egypt."

By "revolution against the coup," the Brotherhood leader meant the mostly small pro-Morsy protests that have continued for months. Still, the Brotherhood's confidence that it will win, however delusional, indicates its motivation to fight the status quo rather than accept it.

While Egypt's other Islamist parties don't share the Brotherhood's eagerness for confrontation, they don't trust the emerging order either. "I won't run," said Amr Gamal, a Qena-based leader for the Salafist Watan Party, which aligned itself with Morsy and protested his ouster. "If they pass the constitution -- and God willing they won't -- it will not be real elections," he said.

Even the Salafist Nour Party, which has participated in the post-Morsy transition and seemingly won the military's acceptance as a political player, mistrusts the forthcoming system. The current regime "is returning back to the time of Mubarak," Sharkiya-based Nour Party leader and former parliamentarian Gamel Metwally, told me. "And the explanations for it are nonsense."

While Metwally said that the Nour Party intends to continue participating in the transition "to preserve the Islamic identity for the Egyptian people," he acknowledged that it -- unlike the Brotherhood -- has no control over its rank-and-file, and therefore could not guarantee that members would vote in the forthcoming political process.

Egypt's new powerbrokers shouldn't count the Islamists out, or expect them to meekly retreat from the political sphere after getting their first taste of real power. While Islamist movements have lost substantial popular support in the past year, they remain extremely well organized and boast ideologically cohesive, motivated bases. That raises the strong possibility that they will take to the streets or embrace violence, both of which bode poorly for Egypt's long-term stability.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that including Islamists isn't exactly a recipe for stability either. During Morsy's year in power, Islamists demonstrated that they are just as willing to manipulate Egypt's political institutions to their own advantage as their Mubarak-era opponents. Moreover, Islamists' explicit desire to control Egyptians' personal lives makes the choice between a stable Egypt that includes Islamists and an unstable Egypt that excludes Islamists a false one, since there is nothing particularly stabilizing about a government that would enforce a ban on bikinis, let alone incite its rank-and-file against Shiites.

Ultimately, Egypt's ideological struggles are a sideshow. The country's fate will be determined by two intertwined power struggles: The narrower fight between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military that removed it from

power, and the broader fight between the old Mubarakist tribal order and the Islamist order that was only beginning to consolidate itself. For both sides in these conflicts, the stakes are existential, which is why Egypt's current calm -- unsteady though it is -- should not be mistaken for progress, let alone stability.

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Article 6.
National Review Online

The World's New Outlaws

Victor Davis Hanson

December 3, 2013 -- The American custodianship of the postwar world for the last 70 years is receding. Give it its due: The American super-presence ensured the destruction of Axis fascism, led to the eventual defeat of Soviet-led global Communism, and spearheaded the effort to thwart the ability of radical Islam to disrupt global commerce in general and Western life in particular.

American military power and bipartisan proactive diplomacy also brought back Japan and Germany into the family of nations and allowed their dynamism to be expressed through economic rather than military power. It protected the territorial integrity of smaller and weaker nations. It guaranteed open seas, free commerce, and reliable and safe global transportation. Without a free-market U.S. economy, NATO, and American military power there would have been no globalization.

In contrast, the world that Hitler, Mussolini, Tojo, Stalin and his successors, and bin Laden and the Islamists envisioned was quite a bit different. Regional enclaves would have their own laws and protocols overseen by local hegemons immune from global scrutiny. Tragically, we are reentering just such an age, not through the defeat of the United States but through its abdication of power.

In the Middle East, Iran in the next decade will become the de facto hegemon, coupling wild threats with private assurances that it not only has

nuclear weapons, but also is more likely than others to use them. In response, the Gulf states will either buy their own nuclear weapons from fellow Sunni Pakistan, or form some sort of de facto alliance with nuclear Israel. At some point when Iran's serial junk talk promising the end of the "Zionists" is supercharged with nukes, it will earn a response. Alternatively, a terrified Arab world may come to some sort of understanding with the Iran/Syria/Hezbollah/Hamas axis. NATO's Mediterranean role for a while longer will be increasingly confined to protecting the southern European coastline, as European leaders assume anything else is outside NATO's protective orbit. That Iran is demographically in crisis, that its economy is in shambles, and that its shrinking contingent of young people despise the mullacracy are long-term worries for Tehran. In the short term, its single-minded effort to obtain nukes and to assume for Shiites the mantle of Islamic resistance to the West is about all that matters. Iran's oil and gas revenues can make up for a lot of fraud, waste, corruption, and inefficiency for a lot of years.

Eastern Europe is falling under the shadow of an ailing Russia. Small nations near the former Soviet Union probably will never again enter into an anti-ballistic-missile partnership with the U.S. or join an American coalition of the willing. The former Soviet republics now accept that Russia not only is the local hegemon, but also is more likely to use its hard power than a distant U.S. or an impotent EU. Russia's European hegemony will even reach the Mediterranean. Greece, Cyprus, Serbia, and to a lesser extent Israel believe they can count more on an active though militarily weak Russia than on a still militarily strong but inactive United States. The Syrian debacle reminded them of that fact. That Russia's demography is as ossified as Iran's, that its economy is as inefficient, and that its politics are as corrupt bode ill for it in the late 21st century. But in the here and now, as for Iran, lots of gas and oil can make up for lots of pathologies.

A third hegemony is emerging in East Asia — analogous to the rise of Westernized Japanese power in the 1930s amid the impotence of European colonial empires and a U.S. mired in depression. The old idea that the free-market democracies of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan — add in as well Australia and the Philippines — were immune from Communist Chinese bullying is vanishing, despite the Obama administration's much-heralded Asian pivot. The latter is mostly a linguistic artifact, not a muscular reality.

Our pivot is something like the vaunted French army of the 1930s, the shipwreck of so many vulnerable democracies' dreams.

For all the old talk of guaranteeing the sovereignty of these Pacific allies, more likely the Obama administration would come to some sort of agreement with China, as it did with Putin over Syria and Iran over its nuclear development, one widely praised in the West for its idealism, while privately scorned in the region as only empowering aggressors.

In the not-too-distant future, our allies in the Pacific will either cut a deal with China or themselves become nuclear powers. Of course, China, like Iran and Russia, is facing enormous internal pressures. It still cannot square the circle of state-sponsored free-market capitalism with a Communist dictatorship. Its demography is malignant. Its economy is more injurious to the environment than was that of the 19th-century West, and its imbalance in domestic wealth is akin to that of its own pre-revolutionary dynasties.

Again, no matter: In the short term, a billion Chinese with a roaring export industry are making quite enough cash to mask intrinsic contradictions.

We sometimes forget that the rise of German and Japanese power in the 1930s was built on shaky economic assumptions, with both regimes' perceived early military power often more bluster than fact. The Soviets flexed a lot of muscles into the Eighties without many Westerners' realizing that Communism was imploding. Bin Laden did a lot of damage despite a Middle East that was on the brink of disaster. Aggressive regional hegemons historically are not necessarily fueled by economic power, vibrant demography, or long-term stability. Often the reverse is true.

What brought on the growing abdication of U.S. power? The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq — and our unwillingness or inability to guarantee stable postwar governments — turned the American public off the idea of preemptive intervention to thwart future terrorist attacks, let alone the notion that the worst sponsors of terrorism could be replaced by pro-American partners of the Maliki/Karzai sort.

Then there is our $17 trillion in national debt. Somehow also foreign policy has merged with domestic politics in a new symbiosis. It is hard to emulate the protocols of the EU without becoming the EU, and the insidious growth of a huge dependent class — half the American population not paying federal income tax, half on some sort of state help — has created a cultural

climate in which every dollar spent on a jet interceptor is seen as a dollar taken out of the mouths of widows, orphans, and the deserving poor. Thus millions of new recipients of federal help see American retrenchment not as a necessary evil, but as a positive good. When President Obama flipped and flopped in Syria, he sensed rightly that the public did not care very much about hurting the Iranian axis, or helping moderate insurgents, or dealing with the humanitarian crisis of 100,000 dead; what it cared about far more was how much money such a commitment would cost, and whether it would come at the expense of social programs at home. Ensuring Sandra Fluke's state-subsidized supply of birth-control pills becomes a far better collective investment than training a U.S. Marine for foreign deployment.

Critics of Obama's inept foreign policy — the failed response to the Arab Spring, the failed reset with Russia, the failure to reassure allies and to deter enemies — mostly do not grasp that for half the country Obama's weakness is seen as either a wise diversion of resources, or a proper distancing from the foreign version of our own undeserving 1 percent. In this regard, the old alliance with Israel will be especially subject to review. All that is left of it is an assumption that the U.S. will keep selling and resupplying military hardware to Tel Aviv. For the next three years, we should not necessarily count on that 50-year-old fact, should Israel preempt in Iran or find itself in another Lebanese war.

In addition to debt and neo-isolationism, Obama brought a third critical element to the new retrenchment: his own belief that little in American history or in America's current protocols justified its exceptional world role — at least no more so than would a Greek or British version. Barack Obama does not look at an increasingly prosperous world and see the guiding hand of the United States. He instead senses a whole congeries of -isms and -ologies and purported injustices caused by the U.S. policies. American chauvinism, sloppy vocabulary, chest-thumping, and paranoia pushed Islamists over the edge. The pro-American Mubarak caused Egyptian poverty and lack of freedom. The American intervention set back Iraq. Iran is unduly ostracized by American neo-cons. The Arab Spring was caused largely by U.S. client dictatorships. Israel spoiled our relations with the Islamic world. The remedy is to talk abstractly about social justice and

fairness abroad in endless versions of the mythic Cairo speech — and then stay home and be content that we are no longer part of the problem.

What are the consequences of the new hegemonies?

Regional wars are now more likely. Iran's nuclear trajectory, coupled with apocalyptic gobbledy-gook talk, will probably soon ensure an Israeli response to it, or a new Israeli regional war with Iran's appendages in Syria, the West Bank, and Lebanon. Eastern Europe and the former republics of the Soviet Union are less likely to become Western, with assured freedom of national determination. We will see lots more territorial tensions between China and the neighboring democracies, as it tries to play one off against another in the vacuum left by the diminution of U.S. power. Even Western Europe is a mystery. For seven decades U.S. stewardship covered up Europe's postwar anomalies: The EU eventually possessed the world's largest economy and population within its collective borders and one of the world's least impressive militaries. Germany, the strongest economic power, enjoyed no nuclear power and not much in the way of conventional armed forces. The Mediterranean seemed a tranquil European pond, and European leaders displayed little curiosity about how exactly the growing chaos of the Middle East, Asia Minor, and North Africa could be kept from spilling over into their territory. The historical nationalist tensions within Europe were mostly resolved not by the weak and structurally unsound EU but by an American-led NATO; there is no reason to believe that Europeans have evolved to a higher moral and spiritual level than they occupied in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The world as we once knew it is insidiously vanishing amid utopian blather about a new Russia, a new Iran, and a new China. In its place is emerging something like the wild world of 1803–1815 or 1936–1945. If the U.S. is either spiritually or fiscally incapable of exercising its old leadership, others will step into the vacuum. The result will not be an agreed-upon international order, but one of regional hegemons. When the tired federal marshal is three days' ride away, the owners of the local big spreads will decide what is and is not the law — and the vulnerable homesteaders will have to make the necessary adjustments.

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Article 7.

WSJ

Arafat's Death and the Polonium Mystery

Edward Jay Epstein

Dec. 3, 2013 -- The mystery over the death of Yasser Arafat deepened on Tuesday, when the results from a French forensic lab that had tested his remains were leaked. Last month, a Swiss lab reported finding evidence of polonium in Arafat's body fluids and saliva—buttressing claims by the Palestinian Authority since his death in 2004 that the Palestinian leader had been poisoned. A later Russian forensic examination was reportedly inconclusive.

Now the French have found no evidence that polonium caused his death, attributing Arafat's demise to natural causes, according to Reuters. His widow, Suha Arafat, told reporters in Paris that she was "upset by these contradictions." But Mrs. Arafat's own lawyer and a Palestinian Authority official dismissed the report, signaling yet more chapters to come in the posthumous Arafat saga.

Arafat died from a hemorrhagic cerebrovascular failure at age 75 on Nov. 11, 2004, at the Percy Military Hospital in Clamart, France. He had become violently ill in his compound in Ramallah on the West Bank one month earlier.

He was flown to France for treatment and examined by teams of French, Swiss and Tunisian doctors. While family members prohibited an autopsy, hospital officials found, according to a report leaked to the French journal Canard Enchaine, lesions of Arafat's liver which indicated cirrhosis, a condition often associated with alcohol consumption.

Since alcohol use is not condoned in Arafat's Muslim religion, such a medical finding could mar his image. In any case, at the request of Palestinian officials, his 558-page medical record was sealed and turned over to his family.

But the cause of his death remained a subject of continuing speculation with Suha Arafat asserting that he had been murdered. To support this charge, she asked scientists at the Institute of Radiation Physics in

Lausanne, Switzerland, to examine the contents of a gym bag, which contained the clothing and sneakers Arafat wore at the time of his illness, as well as his tooth brush.

Institute scientists found traces of polonium—specifically polonium 210, an extremely rare radioactive isotope that can be lethal if ingested—on the contents of the gym bag. Because it emits a steady stream of alpha particles as it decays, one of polonium's principal uses is to trigger the detonation of early-stage nuclear weapons. Since detection of the isotope can be a sign of clandestine nuclear bomb-building, its distribution is closely monitored.

At the time of Arafat's death, only five individuals were known to have been contaminated by lethal doses of polonium—all of them scientists accidentally exposed to it through their work. But Arafat was not known to have visited any facilities where could have accidentally come into contact with the substance.

After the Institute of Radiation Physics report, Suha Arafat authorized the exhumation of Arafat's body from its grave in Ramallah. Different parts of his remains were sent for analysis to forensic labs in France, Russia and Switzerland. On Nov. 5, the University Center of Legal Medicine in Lausanne reported that Arafat's saliva (taken from his tooth brush), blood and other body fluids had abnormally high levels of polonium. If so, Arafat had been exposed to a substantial amount of the isotope before his death.

There are at least three different theories that might account for how Arafat might have come in contact with polonium 210. The first theory, and the one that has attracted the most attention, was that he was poisoned by his enemies. Suha Arafat accused the Israel intelligence service Mossad of killing her husband by adding polonium to his food or beverages.

There is no doubt that Israel has produced a supply of polonium for its nuclear program. Droh Sadeh, an Israeli physicist at the Weizmann Institute in Tel Aviv, died from accidental exposure to the isotope in the late 1950s. But the drawback is that there is no medical evidence that Arafat died of radiation poisoning.

Polonium 210, because it emits alpha particles that do not penetrate the skin, can contaminate individuals without causing medical harm. To result in radiation poisoning, it must be ingested, and, if that occurs—as happened in the 2006 death of Alexander Litvinenko, an ex-KGB officer, in London—there are observable symptoms, such as hair loss and skin

discoloration. But Arafat did not exhibit any symptoms of radiation poisoning to the teams of medical specialists who examined him before his death.

In addition, a review of Arafat's sealed medical records by forensic scientists and doctors at the Institute of Radiation Physics in Lausanne showed that the "symptoms described in Arafat's medical reports were not consistent with polonium-210." If the medical evidence is to be believed, Arafat did not die from any contact he may have had with polonium.

So what accounts for the polonium 210 signature that the Swiss researchers said they found on Arafat's person and clothing?

A second theory is that Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah had been contaminated by a surreptitious listening device planted by an adversary intelligence service. Polonium 210 can be used as a source of energy for an electronic device, such as a transmitter—just one gram can produce 140 watts of power. Such an alternative use of polonium 210 was claimed by Iran when it was questioned by the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2001 about the isotope found on Iranian gear. Iran said that it had produced the polonium to power instruments on a space craft (even though Iran did not have a space program).

Since polonium 210 generates pressure as it decays, it can also leak from its container and, attaching itself to dust, contaminate a large area. So it is possible that Arafat was accidentally contaminated—in a detectable but not fatal way—as the result of an espionage operation.

A third possibility is that the polonium 210 came from North Korea, which had been acquiring the material in 2004 in preparation for nuclear tests. Yasser Arafat, designated a "Hero" of North Korea by President Kim Il Sung in 1981, made six trips to North Korea, and Arafat's associates received covert military assistance from the regime. Such trafficking might have brought members of Arafat's entourage in contact with polonium 210.

There are no doubt other ways in which Yasser Arafat's quarters could have been tainted by polonium. But however the contamination might have happened, there is no reason to conclude that it was the result of a murder plot. The news on Tuesday threw more cold water on an already implausible theory.

Mr. Epstein's most recent book is "The Annals of Unsolved Crime" (Melville House, 2013).