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The Washington Post

Kerry in Middle East to talk Jordan Valley security proposals with Israelis, Palestinians

[William Booth](#) and Anne Gearan

12 December -- The Obama administration is struggling to convince Israel and the Palestinian Authority to accept a security arrangement that could leave Israeli troops stationed inside a future Palestinian state, on that state's border with Jordan.

Neither side is on board with what people familiar with the proposals describe as a limited Israeli defensive presence along the Jordan River for a period of five to 15 years.

Secretary of State John F. Kerry returned to the region Thursday night — his [second visit in a week](#) — to try and convince them. Kerry is hoping for some public sign of progress as his first year as the chief U.S. diplomat draws to a close, and an unofficial [April deadline for a peace agreement](#) looms.

For Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, limiting the number of Israeli troops in the Jordan Valley, and how long they can be there, would not guarantee safety.

For Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, who has promised his people they would not see a single Israeli soldier on Palestinian land in a future state, any army presence would be too much.

Joint presentations to Netanyahu and Abbas last week by Kerry and retired Marine Gen. John R. Allen, the Obama administration's special envoy, do not appear to have been well-received. Neither leader spoke in support of the proposals. Spokesmen and critics on both sides trashed the ideas in news media interviews, though they did not reject the proposals outright. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki denied that Kerry's speedy return to the region means that the talks are bogging down.

A generation of Israeli generals has considered the Jordan Valley a crucial eastern flank against a land invasion of the Jewish state from the east. But where they once worried about columns of Iraqi tanks, they are now more concerned about asymmetrical warfare from terror groups seeking to infiltrate the West Bank and use it as a platform to attack.

Since 1967, the valley has been under the control of the Israeli military, which operates checkpoints and bases. The area bristles with covert listening stations, radar sweeps and thermal- and night-vision cameras. On the mountain tops that rise steeply from the valley floor, Israel maintains a series of early-warning stations. Troops are on constant patrol along the river and the passes.

In a meeting last month with members of his Fatah political party, Abbas claimed that Israel wants to stay in the sparsely populated valley for another 40 years to maintain its profitable date palm groves, fish ponds and greenhouse farming.

“They say they need the Jordan Valley to protect themselves against the Iranian threat or whoever comes from the eastern border,” Abbas was quoted in local news reports as saying. “Rather, it is a matter of investment The claim that they want to protect their eastern border from Iran and others is all lies.”

Israel explains its security concerns by pointing to the Gaza Strip, on its southern border. Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005. The militant Islamic organization Hamas came to power two years later. Now, rockets and shoulder-fired missiles are routinely smuggled into Gaza from Egypt, Israeli officials say. They note that no such weapons have been found in the tightly-controlled West Bank.

“The Israeli government is concerned that the Palestinian side will not be interested or not be able to carry out its part of the deal,” said Giora Eiland, a retired major general in the Israel army and former head of Israel’s National Security Council. “What happens if this deal is signed tomorrow, Israel withdraws and a day later Hamas takes over the West Bank?”

“This is the Israeli concern, and this creates a lot of suspicions and agitation on the Israeli side,” he said.

Kerry and his team have tried to help Israel overcome its fear with offers of U.S.-provided intelligence and technology — but Israel already has sophisticated drones, surveillance technology and [some of the best “smart fences”](#) in the world.

At one point, U.S. diplomats discussed placing international troops in the Jordan Valley. But Israeli hawks pointed to failures by ██████ forces in demilitarized zones along the Lebanon and Syrian borders.

Another proposal calls for a combination of Palestinian and Israeli security forces at border crossings and a strip of territory along the Jordan River.

“The question now is, for how long will the Israelis be there?” Eiland said.

“Will it mean a permanent Israeli presence or for a limited period of time? Does that mean two years, five years, 15 years or 50 years?”

Gearan reported from Washington. Ruth Eglash in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

[Article 2.](#)

Al Monitor

Allen security plan stuck in start

Geoffrey Aronson

December 12, 2013 -- Many have long wished for a US plan to challenge Israel's power and end the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. They should watch what they wish for, because it just may come true. The findings of the US security team headed by [Gen. John Allen](#), who has recently presented US ideas on how to address and solve Israel's security concerns east of the 1967 line — the so-called Eastern Front — give the most recent example of the promise and the peril of US intervention.

There is still no public or authoritative detailing of the ideas Allen, and now Secretary of State John Kerry himself, have briefed to Israeli and Palestinian leaders. They reportedly include continuing US support for Palestinian security forces but no international monitoring or enforcement “boots on the ground,” an “invisible” but controlling Israeli presence at Palestine's border crossings to Jordan, Israel's long-term control of both the [Jordan Valley](#) and the Jordanian-Palestinian frontier including early warning stations and a continuing Israeli role in Palestine's electromagnetic spectrum and sovereign airspace. We can only infer by the responses of Palestinians and Israelis — and here the news is entirely predictable, and not good.

The US effort can usefully be evaluated in terms of the substance of the ideas themselves and their place on the diplomatic playing field. Allen, it appears, has committed the United States to a security framework that leaves Israeli forces stationed in sovereign Palestinian territory for years if not decades beyond the secure and recognized borders Kerry hopes to establish. Or has he? The [State Department](#) insists that Allen's effort was “never meant” to be a “proposal,” much less a conclusive US plan. So what's the problem? Everyone has ideas. The real question, the one that the Barack Obama administration has yet to answer, is to what extent Washington is committed to realizing the implementation of Allen's far-from-perfect findings.

Allen's non-proposal can now be added to the role of US officials as “facilitators” in the parallel process of discussions — negotiations is far too

generous a word — underway since August. Kerry has also mentioned potential “bridging proposals” and even a “framework agreement” now that the nine-month period for discussions due to end in April has officially lost its deadline. President Obama himself has suggested that Gaza be excluded from an anticipated agreement, at least at first, and that the West Bank serve as a model to convince Gaza and Hamas of the folly of rejection. Obama here is channeling former President George W. Bush, who said much the same thing years ago. Since then, both parts of Palestine have been engaged in a race to the bottom.

Contrast this lack of clarity and simplicity to the single-minded and well-defined pursuit of an agreement that characterizes [negotiations with Iran](#). Strategic clarity is the diplomatic watchword with Tehran. Strategic confusion threatens to define Washington’s approach to Palestine.

Palestinians, who, despite bitter experience, have long depended upon Washington to rebalance the diplomatic scales in their favor, are irate with the recent US ideas. Israel is also less than impressed.

Yasser Abd-Rabbuh, secretary of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), has spoken of a “crisis with the United States” precipitated by the Allen ideas. He told Palestinian state radio, “The crisis is caused by the US secretary of state, who wants to please Israel by meeting all its demands for expansion in Al-Aghwar [the Jordan Valley] under the pretext of security. In addition, Israel’s expansion greed is highlighted through its settlement activities in Jerusalem and the West Bank. “Who said that we want an agreement framework that defines the principles of the solution outside the framework of international legitimacy and international laws and resolutions? All this will cause the efforts of the US secretary of state to hit a dead end and a complete failure. ... The talk about interim solutions is in complete contradiction with the promises that the US secretary of state had made at the beginning of the political process.” It is Israel, however, not the Palestinians, whom Kerry intends to be the real audience for Allen’s effort. Here, too, the Iran analogy is instructive. On both fronts, Kerry has announced the laudable aim of increasing Israel’s security (along with everyone else’s) through an agreement. In this context, and notwithstanding official declarations, Allen’s work on the Eastern Front becomes not merely a set of interesting ideas but a proposal, even the basis for a conclusive security plan. Ideas,

you can take or leave at your pleasure. A US plan is something else indeed. Israel, confident that its security needs have been recognized by Washington and the PLO, will — the thinking goes — then be prepared to take the next big step, evacuate its settlers from all but small bits of the West Bank and for the first time, take pen to paper and draw secure and recognized borders.

If only it were true.

US expectations along these lines are bound to be disappointed by the current government headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and very probably by its successor as well. Here, too, the Iran analogy offers an important insight. As with Iran, Netanyahu is less interested in a diplomatic solution on Palestine that by its very nature requires concessions and a willingness to acknowledge the benefits of mutual security. As with Iran, Netanyahu wants to impose a framework for Israel's absolute security — a destabilizing policy that precludes the kind of diplomatic achievement Kerry seeks.

Israel, according to published reports, has informed Allen of the need to “[leave Israeli military forces](#) along the length of the Jordan River for an extended period, as well as the need for an Israeli presence at the border crossing at the Jordan River, continued Israeli control of the air space over the West Bank, the stationing of Israeli early warning stations at several strategic points in the West Bank and an extensive series of other security demands.”

These demands reflect less a technical assessment of Israel's security requirements than a representation of Israel's lack of interest in what is typically understood as a diplomatic solution to the conflict. The Americans are good-naturedly attempting to play on the field Bibi has established — addressing how to solve his problems in a manner that will not fatally compromise Palestinian prospects. This attitude reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how Netanyahu frames the issue — he is not about negotiating as such, but rather demands a Palestinian (and Iranian, for that matter) surrender, which even should it occur, would not be enough. For Netanyahu, Allen's well-meant suggestions miss the mark entirely. In fact, by suggesting the possibility of a US plan, they all but guarantee a hostile Israeli response. Another Israeli government, one even under Netanyahu's leadership, might pocket the real advantages the Allen

plan offers and proceed to negotiate the borders of Palestine. This outcome is probably the best that Kerry can hope for under the current conditions. It's possible but also unlikely, as long as Washington is content to permit Israel to draw the picture of Palestine's future.

*[Geoffrey Aronson](#) is the author of *From Sideshow to Center Stage: US Policy Towards Egypt, 1945–1955*.*

[Article 3.](#)

Al-Ahram Weekly

An Arab Mandela

Abdel-Moneim Said



11 December, 2013 -- By the time this goes to print, several days will have passed since the announcement of the death of the African leader Nelson Mandela at the age of 95, of which years he spent 27 in prison and 23 in freedom as a political activist, a president, a leader, an inspiration to the African continent, a Nobel Prize laureate and a symbol of the humanitarian struggle for a better world. During the 24 hours after his death, newspapers and television stations around the world discussed the details of Mandela's life, from birth through adolescence to his fight for freedom from prison and after his release. They assessed the period he spent in power and his relationship with other world leaders, especially American ones, some of whom, such as Ronald Reagan, branded him as a terrorist, others of whom, such as Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, regarded him as a beacon of freedom and hope. There is little that one can add to the information about this man's life that has not have already been furnished by the huge media knowledge machine during the week after his death. But there still remains the question as to why this type of man is so rare.

With respect to the Arab people, this question is of particular urgency at this time of sweeping change in their region. In fact, it is surprising that not a single Arab nation has produced a leader we can point to. What we have are old leaders who took centre stage. There was not much about them that we had not known before and they had nothing new to offer apart from some repackaging of Arab Spring and autumn revolutions in old

wrappings. The revolutionaries, themselves, had only opposition and rejection to offer, and the transition from one revolution to another or, in cases such as Libya and Syria, the transition to proliferating militias and all-engulfing violence and warfare. South Africa stood apart from the usual cases of Third World colonised countries that clamoured for liberation in the post-World War II era and eventually won independence. South Africa was the object of a massive settler drive in which thousands of people of Dutch, French and British origin seized control over large tracts of land and established their settler government. The phenomenon was not all that different to that which occurred in Palestine as well as elsewhere in Africa, such as Zimbabwe. Those settlers were not there to colonise on behalf of their countries of origin. They wanted a state of their own and that state was founded on the vilest of the reactionary ultra-rightist ideas to emerge in Europe. This gave rise to South Africa's notorious apartheid system based on total racial segregation and the systematic reduction of the indigenous people to poverty and weakness, as the architects of this system had thought was the state suited to "backwards" peoples.

It was an environment that inherently bred resistance and violence, as well, as occurred in other African and Third World countries. Mandela took part in various revolutionary activities for which he had received a lengthy prison sentence. This was the story of the birth of a freedom fighter against a formidable enemy: a powerful reactionary colonialist settler government endowed with vast wealth and resources and the support of many major international powers. But another Mandela was born in prison. This was the Mandela who inspired millions of oppressed and persecuted peoples across continents and who became part of that small club that includes such figures as Gandhi and Martin Luther King whose ideas of resistance and liberation were framed in a larger humanitarian conception that envisioned not only the emancipation of the oppressed but of the oppressors as well. Because of its more embracing nature, this type of vision enables hearts and minds to encompass the psychological aspects of the dilemma on both sides of the conflict and, hence, to approach it in a spirit of tolerance and inclusiveness and through the search for solutions and opportunities that would promote peaceful coexistence. This is not to suggest that Mandela was ever prepared to surrender his principles. He

remained firm and unyielding on the need for a new South Africa ruled by the majority of its people, which is to say the native African majority. He rejected all compromises of the sort that would officially eliminate apartheid but keep whites in power or grant them a permanent majority in parliament. But at the same time, he knew that the new South Africa — if it was really to be new — had to be able to accommodate all that lived there. This is the spirit that made the South African national struggle a path for construction rather than revenge, a means to move away from hatred and rancour and toward love and understanding, a way to uproot the fear instilled by the oppressive past and to look forward with hope. Mandela did not serve as president for more than one term, thereby surpassing George Washington on this score. Washington stepped down after two terms as America's first post-colonialist president, thereby setting the convention of a maximum of two terms. He had refused to stand for a third term even though he could have at the time since the constitutional amendment limiting US presidents to two terms was only introduced after World War II. After serving that one event-packed term, Mandela continued to devote himself to the major issues of concern to his country and the world. The many details regarding this are being discussed by others. Here I would like to focus on that urgent question of concern to the Arab world. This region has produced quite a few national liberation leaders but none with a vision that extended beyond ending colonial rule. Yes, they had some vague ideas about construction and development, but no broader conception for historical reconciliations with the existing diversity in their societies. They failed to appreciate that development and progress requires different modes of education and different values. It is impossible to explain the explosions of ethnic, religious and regional violence in the Arab world today without taking into account the fact that the Arab liberation wars and revolutions not only failed to generate mutual understanding and modes of peaceful coexistence between ethnic and religious communities, but also laid the foundations for conflict between them. Otherwise put, the societies that had been shaped by fear of foreign occupiers and colonial rule remained societies based on fear, whether of the ruling authority or of the Other in society, both of which, when given the opportunity, have proven more brutal than the colonialist in the past or even than some post-colonialist authorities. In societies of fear there is

very little scope for hope. The little optimism that exists is artificial, confined to public displays or celebrations. In fact, rare is the Arab leader who smiles, especially that genuine type of smile for which Mandela was famous and which was one of his most important weapons in his struggles against apartheid and for construction and change. Far and few between are the occasions when Saddam Hussein, Hafez Al-Assad, Muammar Gaddafi, Ali Abdallah Salah or other Arab dictators were caught in the act of smiling. Apparently, they consciously avoided the smile, as though it would betray weakness or an ease-up in the grip of power and authority. I wonder whether we will ever see the birth of an Arab Mandela now that the Arab Spring has prematurely segued into an autumnal nightmare while the youth of that spring appear little different from their revolutionary forefathers. Still, history packs many surprises.

Abdel Moneim Said is the chairman of Al-Masry Al-Youm. He has written numerous books and academic papers and also written extensively about Egyptian affairs.

[Article 4.](#)

The Council on Foreign Relations

Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Security

[Zachary Laub](#)

December 12, 2013 -- Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, envisioned by the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli treaty as a buffer zone to build trust and ensure peace, has become a haven for transnational crime and Islamist militancy. Poverty and political alienation among the region's native Bedouins, combined with political dislocations since former president Hosni Mubarak's government was toppled in 2011, have allowed nonstate armed groups to thrive, posing new threats to global trade and the peace on the Egypt-Israel border. After the Egyptian military reasserted its authority in July 2013 and cracked down on Islamists nationwide, militant groups escalated their attacks on peninsular security forces and expanded their reach to cities along the Suez Canal and even Cairo.

The Sinai Peninsula is a strategically significant triangle bounded by Gaza, Israel, and the Gulf of Aqaba to its east, the Mediterranean to its north, and the Suez Canal to its west. Some [8 percent of global trade](#) transits through the canal, including 3 percent of global oil supplies. The Gulf of Aqaba gives Israel its only outlet to the Red Sea.

The area contains five of Egypt's twenty-seven governorates. The sparsely populated North and South Sinai are home to 550,000 people, or 0.7 percent of Egypt's population, on a landmass comprising 6 percent of Egyptian territory. Much of the North's population is concentrated along the coast, while many inhabitants of the mountainous interior are nomadic. Three smaller, more densely populated governorates straddle the Suez Canal.

Though the peninsula is a land bridge connecting Africa and Asia, historically it has separated as much as joined them. The region's majority Bedouin population shares closer historical and cultural ties to the Levant and Arabian Peninsula than the Egyptian mainland. The Bedouins were stigmatized as collaborators of Israel's fifteen-year occupation of the peninsula after the 1967 war, and some complain that Cairo continues to view them as a "[potential fifth column](#)," writes Economist reporter Nicolas Pelham. Palestinians and Egyptians from the Nile Valley make up smaller portions of the peninsula's population.

Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai under the [1979 peace treaty](#) codified its status as a buffer, leaving Cairo with only partial sovereignty over the territory. The treaty's military annex [restricts](#) the personnel and matériel deployed there.

This map indicates treaty zones designated by the 1979 Israel-Egyptian peace treaty. Zone C, which spans the Sinai's eastern flank, has the most stringent force restrictions; under the treaty's military annex, only civil police are allowed there. Circles indicate peacekeepers' bases and offices. (Courtesy Multinational Force & Observers)

Second-Class Citizenry

The peninsula's native Bedouins bear longstanding grievances stemming from economic deprivation and political alienation. Since 1979, tribal chiefs have been appointed by the region's governors, military officers chosen by the central government. But the capital's drive to centralize control was never fully realized.

Bedouins were excluded from tourism and energy development projects championed by Hosni Mubarak, experts say. The North was starved of investment while Mubarak sought to establish a Red Sea Riviera in the more sparsely populated South, particularly Sharm el-Sheikh, where he had his summer villa. Cairo encouraged labor migration to the Sinai from the Nile Valley, Pelham writes, offering these internal migrants preferential access to land, irrigation, and jobs, while denying native Bedouins such basic services and rights as running water and property registration. They were blocked from jobs with the police, army, and the peninsular peacekeeping force, the [Multinational Force & Observers](#) (MFO), which is one of the region's largest employers. In North Sinai, schools and hospitals were left unstaffed.

"The U.S. and Israel were telling Mubarak for years that neglect of the Sinai was going to come back to haunt them," says CFR Senior Fellow [Steven Cook](#). High-profile bombings of resorts between 2004 and 2006, which had a combined death toll of about 130, as well as a spate of clashes between Bedouins and police, tourist kidnappings, and other smaller attacks occurred after two decades of what were seen as malign policies. Under the three-decade-long emergency law that was in place until 2012, security forces under the Ministry of the Interior responded to the emerging terrorist threat with [dragnet arrests](#), detaining and torturing thousands, human rights observers say. The indiscriminate state response fed a cycle of political violence and further alienated Sinai's Bedouins from Cairo.

Lawlessness

A smuggler works inside a tunnel beneath the Egypt-Gaza border in Rafah that has been flooded by Egyptian forces. (Ibraheem Abu Mustafa/Courtesy Reuters)

Black markets and transnational crime have flourished on the Sinai Peninsula since the late 1990s, Egyptian diplomat Amr Yossef wrote in Foreign Affairs, as Bedouins, excluded from the formal economy, found opportunities for economic survival in cannabis and narcotics production, gun running, and smuggling of goods as well as people. "Tracking skills, tight kinship bonds, and high mobility across the desert," abetted by corrupt police, allowed the Bedouins to [skirt state efforts](#) to eliminate illicit activity, Yossef wrote. The scale of [human trafficking](#) picked up in the mid-2000s as sub-Saharan refugees, facing increasing hostility in Egypt, began

streaming across the Sinai en route to Israel. [Migrants](#) have been abducted, raped, and extorted under torture [for ransom](#).

Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007 created more opportunities for Sinai's illicit economy after Israel and Egypt effectively enforced a blockade. Traders smuggled staples such as food, fuel, and construction materials, as well as weapons and cars, through a burgeoning network of tunnels that contributed [\\$230 million](#) to the enclave's economy each month, according to Hatem Owida, deputy economic minister for the Hamas government. Goods exchanged underground circumvented the restrictive, slow-moving Rafah border crossing and the steel barrier Egypt erected in 2009, providing income for Sinai's Bedouins as well as revenue for Hamas, which regulates and taxes the tunnel trade.

Many Bedouins saw Mubarak's regime as complicit with Israel in inhibiting smuggling, and Hamas was able to project power into the peninsula—a relationship solidified by economic interdependence, analysts say.

While tribal leaders have abjured violence, radicalized Bedouins make up the majority of the violent actors that have emerged in recent years and recruited local youth. They include Salafi jihadis opposed to Israel, the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, and the secular Egyptian state upholding it; and homegrown takfiris, who believe insufficiently pious Muslims are permissible targets of jihad. Palestinians and other foreign militants comprise a smaller portion of some fifteen groups Israeli intelligence has identified as [affiliated with al-Qaeda](#), Haaretz reports; Ansar Beit al-Maqdis is predominant among them.

After Mubarak

As protesters flooded Tahrir Square and other urban centers in January 2011, the security state dissolved. Police withdrew from their postings in the Sinai, and the military focused on maintaining order in the Nile Valley. Tourism industry revenues declined rapidly while Gaza tunnel owners, unimpeded, invested newfound profits in upgrades.

Fearing an eventual return of the security forces, many Bedouins began stockpiling the weapons that had become ubiquitous since the start of the Arab uprisings. Libyan arms supplemented already plentiful Sudanese supplies, as [caches left unguarded](#) after the 2011 NATO Libyan bombing campaign made their way to the peninsula, according to Egyptian security

officials. Some military-grade weapons were trafficked into Gaza, posing new threats to Israeli surveillance aircraft in Gaza.

The trans-Sinai natural-gas pipeline, which carried gas to Israel and Jordan, was repeatedly attacked by militants who saw it as a vestige of Mubarak-era corruption, as were police and border guards. The military bargained with Bedouin leaders in a bid to assert control over the territory.

Separatist group Takfir wal-Hijra declared the establishment of a sharia-governed emirate in August 2011, when the military deployed with Israel's acquiescence more than one thousand troops. Operation Eagle was the first [large-scale operation](#) on the peninsula since the Camp David Accords were signed in 1978.

A cross-border incursion that month left six Egyptian border guards dead after Israeli troops [pursued](#) the militants back into Egyptian territory, stoking [nationalist fervor](#) in Cairo. The military cited the renewed violence in the Sinai to restore nationwide the emergency law that was a hallmark of Mubarak's rule and a chief objection of the Tahrir Square protesters.

After his election to the presidency in June 2012, the [Muslim Brotherhood's](#) Mohammed Morsi took a conciliatory approach to the Sinai. He held out the promise of a new start in Sinai's relations with the central government, taking the unprecedented step of visiting North Sinai and encouraging its development.

After Islamist militants killed sixteen Egyptian soldiers near the Rafah border crossing in August 2012, Morsi purged the military's leadership. He replaced Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi with General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in an attempt to assert his civilian government's authority over the military, which was largely filled with Mubarak-era holdovers. Morsi pledged to "impose full control" over the peninsula, and Egyptian authorities cracked down on the tunnels.

Morsi was reluctant to authorize the use of force, however, despite deploying troops with heavy weaponry. In this climate of insecurity, the kidnapping of seven soldiers in the Sinai in May 2013 helped [catalyze](#) the following month's protests in the rest of the country and the coup that returned the military, headed by Sisi, to power.

Violence [escalated further](#) as some of the Sinai's armed groups rejected the military's ouster of Egypt's first Brotherhood president and subsequent

crackdown on Islamist opponents of the new regime, while others sought to exploit the security vacuum. Scores of police and soldiers have been killed in near-daily attacks in the Sinai since Morsi's government was toppled in July 2013.

Egypt's military responded by waging what it calls its "war on terrorism," launching [Operation Desert Storm](#) after Morsi's ouster. Many reporters and analysts describe the offensive as a scorched-earth campaign with echoes of Mubarak-era heavy-handedness. The military also shut down all but a handful of tunnels, which has raised the price of goods in neighboring Gaza and [exacerbated electricity shortages](#) there.

Curfews and an army-enforced [media blackout](#) have made independent verification of official reports of terrorist attacks and counterterrorism operations difficult; for example, Ahmed Abu Deraa, a reporter for the daily Al-Masry Al-Youm, [faced charges](#) after publishing an account of airstrikes in September [at odds with the military's own account](#). Some journalists suggest that security forces have [exaggerated threats](#) in the Sinai for political ends.

Securing the Peninsula

Violence from the Sinai has expanded from the periphery inward. The al-Qaeda-inspired Ansar Beit el-Maqdis claimed responsibility for an [assassination attempt](#) on Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim in September 2013—the first car-bombing in Cairo in years—as well as the [assassination of a senior counterterrorism official](#) in November. Analysts say militants have not cohered into a unified insurgency, however.

Some militants in the peninsula who see the Egyptian regime as illegitimate seek to provoke a clash between Israeli and Egyptian forces. But military-to-military cooperation by late 2013 was stronger than ever, CFR's Cook says. Over the course of a week in August 2013, Israeli officials briefly [shut down the Eilat airport](#) based on Egyptian intelligence, and five suspected militants were killed in North Sinai, reportedly by an Israeli drone operating with Egyptian permission.

Some analysts say that the Israeli-Egyptian treaty created the space for crime and terrorism to flourish and is too brittle to adapt to the contemporary reality of nonstate threats. But Israel has shown flexibility with respect to force restrictions in recent years, the Century Foundation's [Michael Wahid Hanna](#) notes, though he adds that amending the treaty

could buy Israel goodwill with the Egyptian public. A more pressing concern is that the Egyptian military is oriented toward conventional fighting and ill-prepared to wage a counterinsurgency, Hanna says. The Multinational Force & Observers (MFO), the treaty's guarantors, has come under insurgents' fire, but the 1,700-strong force—which includes nearly 700 American troops—has neither the mandate nor the resources to address militants. States that contribute troops, experts say, would oppose any expansion of the peacekeepers' mission that exposes them to increased risk.

To stave off a budding insurgency, The Economist's Pelham writes that Cairo must distribute resources and power more equitably, and integrate the Bedouin into all aspects of public life: the security services, bureaucracy, provincial councils, and the private sector. Adding Gaza to the pipeline, he says, would give Hamas incentive to further rein in militants. "The developmental side of this has been neglected," Hanna says. "This is in the military's hands. Until there's some semblance of stability, it's unlikely we'll see movement in this area."

[Article 5.](#)

BBC

Arab Spring: 10 unpredicted outcomes

Kevin Connolly

13 December 2013 -- Three years on from the start of the upheaval which became known as the Arab Spring, the Middle East is still in a state of flux. Rebellions have brought down regimes, but other consequences have been far less predictable. The BBC's Middle East correspondent Kevin Connolly sets out 10 unintended outcomes.

1. Monarchies weather the storm

The royal families of the Middle East have had a pretty good Arab Spring so far - rather better than some of them might have feared. That's been as true in Jordan and Morocco as it's been in the Gulf. The governments that have collapsed or wobbled were more or less modelled on Soviet-style one-party states propped up by powerful security establishments.

There's no one single reason for this of course. Bahrain has shown itself [ready to use heavy-handed security tactics](#) while others have deployed

subtler measures - Qatar hiked public sector salaries in the first months of upheaval. And of course the Gulf Kingdoms effectively have exportable discontent - most lower-paid jobs are done by migrant workers and if they start chafing about conditions of work or political rights they can be sent home.

It's also possible that people feel a degree of attachment to royal rulers that unelected autocrats can't match - however grand a style they choose to live in.

2. US no longer calls the shots

The United States has not had a good Arab Spring. At the outset it had a clear view of a rather stagnant Middle East in which it had reliable alliances with countries like Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia. It has [failed to keep up with events in Egypt](#) which has elected an Islamist, Mohammed Morsi, and then seen him deposed by the army.

No-one can blame the Obama administration for failing to keep up. It likes elections, but didn't like the result - a clear win for the Muslim Brotherhood. And it doesn't like military coups (not in the 21st Century at least) but is probably comfortable enough with a military-backed regime which wants to keep the peace with Israel.

America is still a superpower of course but it doesn't dictate events in the Middle East anymore. It's not alone in that failure - Turkey failed to pick the winning side in Egypt too and is struggling with problematic relationships with rebels in Syria.

3. Sunni versus Shia

The speed with which unarmed protests against a brutal authoritarian government morphed into a [vicious civil war with sectarian overtones](#) in Syria has shocked everyone. There are rising tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims in many parts of the region, and Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia are now effectively fighting a proxy war in Syria.

The deepening schism between the two branches of Islam has led to startling levels of sectarian violence in Iraq too - it may yet turn out to be one of the most important legacies of these years of change in the Arab world.

4. Iran a winner

No-one would have predicted at the beginning of the Arab Spring that Iran would gain from it. At the beginning of the process, it was marginalised

and crippled by sanctions imposed because of its nuclear ambitions. Now it's impossible to imagine a solution in Syria without Iranian agreement, and with [its presidency under new management](#) its even talking to the world powers about that nuclear programme.

Saudi Arabia and Israel are both alarmed by America's readiness to talk to Tehran - anything that puts those two countries on the same side of an argument has to be pretty historic.

5. Winners are losers

Picking winners and losers in all this is tricky. Look at the fate of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. When elections were held after the toppling of Hosni Mubarak, it swept into power and after 80 years in the shadows it finally appeared poised to remake the largest country in the Middle East in its own image. Now its been [swept back out of power again](#) by the army and forced underground, with its senior leaders facing long prison sentences. A year ago the Brotherhood looked like a winner. Not any more. That was bad news for the tiny, politically ambitious Gulf Kingdom of Qatar which had backed the Brotherhood in Egypt's power struggle. In the early stages of the Arab Spring, with Qatar backing the Libyan rebels too, it appeared to have hit on a strategy for expanding its regional influence. Not any more.

6. Kurds reap benefits

The people of Iraqi Kurdistan are starting to look like winners though - and may even be on their way to achieving a long-cherished dream of statehood. They live in the northern region of the country which has oil and is developing independent economic links with its powerful neighbour, Turkey. It has a flag, anthem and armed forces too. [The Kurds of Iraq may be a beneficiary](#) of the slow disintegration of the country which no longer functions as a unitary state.

The future won't be trouble-free (there are Kurdish populations in neighbouring Iran, Syria and Turkey too) but in Kurdish cities like Irbil, people think the future looks brighter and freer. That process began before the Arab Spring of course but the Kurds are taking advantage of the mood of change sweeping the region to consolidate changes that were already under way.

7. Women fall victim

Some of the outcomes of the Arab Spring (so far at least) have been downright depressing. In the crowds in Tahrir Square at the beginning of Egypt's uprising there were plenty of brave and passionate women demanding personal freedoms alongside the political rights which were the focus of the protests.

They will have been bitterly disappointed. [Stories of sexual assaults in public](#) are frighteningly common and a Thomson-Reuters Foundation poll said Egypt was the [worst place in the Arab world to be a woman](#) - behind even Saudi Arabia. It scored badly for gender violence, reproductive rights, treatment of women in families and inclusion in politics and the economy.

8. Overrated power of social media?

At the beginning of the protest movements, there was a lot of excitement in the Western media about the role of innovations like Twitter and Facebook, partly because Western journalists like Twitter and Facebook themselves.

[Those new social media have an important role](#) in countries like Saudi Arabia, where they allow people to circumvent the hidebound official media and start some kind of national debate.

They had a role at the beginning of the uprisings too, but their use was confined largely to a well-educated and affluent (and often multilingual) liberal elite and their views may have been over-reported for a time. Those secular liberals after all were trounced at the ballot box in Egypt. Satellite TV remains more important in countries where many people can't read and write and don't have access to the internet.

The story of [Bassem Youssef, the Egyptian heart-surgeon turned TV satirist](#), sums it up. He did start by putting his material out on the internet but became an international phenomenon when he switched to a TV channel. He became known as the "Egyptian Jon Stewart".

An important difference is that Mr Stewart plies his trade in the United States - Mr Youssef is going to have to tread rather carefully under Egypt's new rulers just as he did under their Islamist predecessors. Egyptians like to laugh; their leaders don't like to be laughed at. Mr Youssef is currently off the air again.

9. Dubai property bounces back

The ramifications of events in the Middle East are still felt far beyond the frontiers of the countries where they happen. There is a theory that the [property market in Dubai has spiked](#) as wealthy individuals from

destabilised countries like Egypt, Libya, Syria and Tunisia seek a safe haven for their cash - and sometimes their families. The effects could be felt further afield too in property markets like Paris and London.

10. Back to the drawing board

A map of the Middle East that was drawn up by Britain and France in a secret carve-up half way through World War One [looks like it's unravelling](#). That's when states like Syria and Iraq were created in their current forms, and no-one knows whether they'll still exist in their current forms as unitary states in, say, five years from now.

No-one can do much about it either - Libya showed the limits of Western intervention where British and French air power could hasten the demise of a hated old regime but couldn't make sure that it was followed by democracy. Or even stability.

One old lesson - which the world is relearning - is that revolutions are unpredictable and it can take years before their consequences become clear.

[Article 6.](#)

The New York Review of Books

Turkey: 'Surreal, Menacing...Pompous'

[Christopher de Bellaigue](#)

December 19, 2013 -- Now, more than ever, it is harder to argue for the compatibility of political Islam and democracy. The ejection of the Muslim Brotherhood from the government of Egypt has delivered a heavy blow to the prospects of an accommodation between the two. The Brotherhood came to power democratically, governed dismally and repressively, and was toppled in a bloody military coup. Many Egyptian Islamists now associate democracy with pain, humiliation, and death.

The effects of the Egyptian debacle have been widely felt. Saudi Arabia and Jordan feel more politically secure than at any time since the start of the Arab Spring, although Jordan has the heavy burden of absorbing some 500,000 Syrian refugees. The prospect of a democratic Syria has in any case long since disappeared behind the blood and smoke. But now another nightmare may be emerging in Turkey, the Middle East's most prominent proponent of what might be called Islamic democracy. The stability and

prosperity that Turkey has enjoyed over the past ten years had associated the country with a type of political arrangement known flatteringly as the “Turkish model.” This summer, the model came unstuck.

On May 27, small numbers of environmentalists occupied Gezi Park, in Istanbul’s Taksim Square, protesting against plans to replace the park with a shopping center inspired by the design of an old Ottoman barracks. Over the next few days they were joined by others expressing dissatisfaction with what they regard as the government’s meddlesome Islamist agenda. The police responded violently and the agitation grew; by the time of the brutal eviction of a huge crowd from Taksim Square, more than two weeks later, some 3.5 million people (from a population of 80 million) had taken part in almost five thousand demonstrations across Turkey, five had lost their lives, and more than eight thousand had been injured. Clearly, the “Gezi events” were about more than trees.

The unrest of this summer divided Turks on the same issues that have caused civil strife elsewhere in the region: among them political Islam, ethnic and sectarian divisions (involving the Kurdish and Alevi minorities), and authoritarian rule. Although a meltdown on Egyptian lines is implausible, a transition to Islamic authoritarianism is not. That would do further injury to the idea that Islam and democracy can share the public sphere. It would also be the end of an experiment of which Turks are justifiably proud.

The reforms that Turkey embarked upon in the mid-2000s were long overdue. For decades, the country’s pious majority had been suppressed by a secular elite claiming to uphold the values of the republic’s founding father, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In 1923, Atatürk set up the Republic of Turkey from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire; he spent the rest of his life secularizing institutions and propagating European education, mores, and dress. Atatürk was a visionary and a genius, but Kemalism, the credo built around his memory, had degenerated into ancestor worship long before I was first able to observe it, after moving to the country in 1996. Atatürk’s picture and sayings were everywhere; the country’s leaders made countless pilgrimages to his tomb and used his memory to defend measures such as a ban on the Islamic head-covering in state institutions, which effectively denied millions of young women a university education.

The country's powerful generals were the ultimate Kemalists. They kept the elected politicians to heel by using the threat of a military coup. (The army overthrew four governments between 1950 and 1997.) All the while, a dirty war against Kurdish rebels fostered a sense of beleaguerment that excused human rights abuses. Torture, miscarriages of justice, state-sponsored assassinations—Turkey was a leader in all.

And in little else. The country was an economic basket case. Foreign diplomats saw the capital, Ankara, as a hardship posting. There, amid the brutal architecture of the ministries, under a severe Anatolian sky, one had the sense of a secular elite's loathing for the people it claimed to represent—their Islamic modes of dress, their guileful provincialism, and above all their belief that religion was the answer to the country's problems. "Two-legged cockroaches," some of my secular friends called the fundamentalist women in their black sheets.

Kemalism started to drain away with the victory of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the general election of 2002. In not the least of Kemalism's follies, Erdoğan had been jailed for declaiming a poem that could be interpreted as an Islamist call to arms; but the message he conveyed after he was released and became prime minister was not one of revenge. On the contrary, in the aftermath of September 11 and amid the widening perception in the West that Islam equaled jihadi Islamism, his stress on moderation, democracy, and the rigors of the free market was welcome not only to waverers inside Turkey, but also to the United States and its allies.

Over the next several years, in election after election, the will of the pious majority was reflected at the ballot box; political stability brought investment and wealth creation. At the same time, the AKP pushed through important pro-democracy reforms. Torture and extrajudicial executions declined. The dirty war lost intensity as Kurds were granted some cultural rights, and Kurdish nationalists, long denied parliamentary representation, became a voluble presence in the Ankara assembly. All the while, the army was being stripped of its political authority, a process that concluded this August with the jailing of dozens of retired officers, including a former chief of the general staff, on charges of plotting against the government. The case, known as "Ergenekon" after the mythical Central Asian home of the Turkish nation, was based on the claim that there was a widespread

conspiracy, involving not only the army but also sympathizers in parliament and the media, to destabilize the government and overthrow it in a coup.

Some experts who have scrutinized the relevant court documents believe that the conspiracy was greatly exaggerated and used by the government as a means of destroying the old Kemalist elite and severing its ties with the public.¹ And this is what seems to have happened, as the muted public reaction to the Ergenekon verdicts suggests. Back in the 1990s, polls had shown the army to be the institution most trusted by Turks. Its final humiliation this autumn elicited hardly a murmur from a population that has now rejected the old presentation of the army as embodying a virile, honorable Turkishness essential to the country's survival.

Although Erdoğan came from a political tradition, that of Turkish Islamism, that was hostile to the West, his government pursued good ties with Europe and the United States, notwithstanding some prickliness over the question of Turkey's long-standing application for membership in the European Union. (France and Germany are against, and Turkey's chief negotiator recently acknowledged that the country will probably never join.) Previous Turkish governments had cold-shouldered the Muslim Middle East. No longer; rather than contain neighbors such as Syria and Iran, the AKP government penetrated them using trade and engineered a rapprochement with the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. Erdoğan also pleased many Turks by allowing his country's historically good ties with Israel to deteriorate.

Naturally, the people who benefited most from Erdoğan's rule were his own supporters, not only because specific measures like the headscarf ban fell into partial disuse—universities now admit women in headscarves, as do many courts—but because the tenor of public life became more pious. Erdoğan and his ministers did not conceal their links to religious orders—such as the Nakshibendis—that the Kemalists had regarded as a major threat to the state. God, rather than Atatürk, was invoked at groundbreaking ceremonies; new mosques rose in the big cities. All the while, the prime minister's friends in the private sector—often pious businessmen from the interior of the country who bankrolled his election victories—were rewarded with contracts for building, improving infrastructure, and producing energy. Turkey gained a new elite, both brassy and devout.

The army fought several unsuccessful rearguard actions, including a threat—empty, as it turned out—to launch a coup in 2007, but the secular rebellion that some had anticipated didn't happen. An important reason for this was that other, non-Islamist groups were also benefiting from the dismantling of Kemalism. The old establishment had given protection but no dignity to members of the Alevi sect, who practice a highly eclectic version of Shiism and make up between 15 and 20 percent of the population. Fearing assimilation, the Alevis have long demanded recognition of their separate status; these efforts were stepped up during the 2000s and Alevi organizations increased in size and visibility. Human rights groups had been another bugbear of the Kemalists, who regarded them as special pleaders for the Kurds or, more generally, a carrier of Western values in their dissolute, morally degenerate form. Such groups multiplied under the AKP; Turkey now has the most exuberant feminist, gay, and environmentalist movements in the Middle East. In the new atmosphere it became more possible for people to argue—as did a small but growing number—that the massacre of Armenians in 1915 was a case of genocide. That, too, had been taboo.

Perhaps most important of all, Erdoğan's Kurdish policies marked the end of the state's policy of denying legitimacy to the Kurds. Ministers I had visited in the late 1990s had been unable to utter their name, referring to them as "our brothers in the southeast." Now, no one would dream of denying Turkey's multiethnic, multicultural composition. This March, the Kurdistan Workers Party (or PKK, according to its Kurdish acronym), which began its bloody war against the Turkish state in 1984, announced what may end up being its final cease-fire. A peace process between the government and the PKK has been slowly and fractiously advancing since then.

The most remarkable thing about the diversification of Turkey is that it happened under a socially conservative Islamist. When Erdoğan became prime minister, the question being asked was whether this highly effective and popular leader would use his new authority to impose an Islamist vision. As the 2000s wore on and the economy grew by an average of 5 percent a year, attracting some \$100 billion in foreign investment, Erdoğan felt able to voice a different kind of aspiration: to regional leadership and a level of prestige that Turks had not enjoyed since the Ottoman heyday.

Naturally, many citizens were pleased by the rise in the national fortunes, but others felt unease at the prime minister's increasingly hubristic manner. This unease was strong among the minorities and interest groups that had benefited from Erdoğan's reforms but felt no affinity with the man or his ideals. Together, these people—including members of the Alevi and Kurdish minorities, as well as secular-minded journalists, entrepreneurs, and many young people—made up something Turkey had not had before: a liberal constituency.

It was this liberal constituency that clashed with Erdoğan last May, and that now continues its campaign of opposition and dissent. Small-scale protests have been taking place every week since the beginning of September, some of them violent, and armed police are present in big numbers in the country's big cities. The government continues with its policy of limiting freedom of expression. The government, its media supporters, and the judiciary combine their efforts against people and groups associated with the opposition; the latest target is the Koc Group, a secular-minded conglomerate whose hotel in Taksim Square opened its doors to protesters during the Gezi events. Since then, the Koc Group had to give up a defense contract it had won, and it is being investigated for fraud and plotting against the government.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the government's intolerance of anything it perceives as a challenge to its authority is its repressive treatment of the press. Around sixty journalists are currently behind bars. Most of them have reported favorably on the Kurdish nationalist movement, the PKK, and are victim to the country's draconian terror laws. At least twenty journalists received prison sentences of between six and thirty-four years as part of this summer's Ergenekon verdict. For the most part, they are accused of activities such as gathering news from sources close to the PKK and expressing hostility to the government in telephone conversations, actions that have been interpreted as "aiding and abetting" terrorists or "attempting to change the constitutional order by force." In many cases denied bail and access to the charge sheet that has been prepared against them, these allegedly pro-Kurdish prisoners are presumably being held as political hostages by the government for use as the peace process with the PKK inches forward. But others, writing on non-Kurdish issues, have also been indicted, not least by Erdoğan himself,

who has issued writs against several journalists who have made fun of him. Self-censorship is the result. It is directed from the boardroom, as newspaper owners try to avoid the fate suffered by two antigovernment newspapers, Milliyet and Sabah, which lost control of their well-known publications as a result of government pressure. (A company run by Erdoğan's son-in-law bought Sabah at auction—he was the sole bidder.) Equally insidious is the widespread use of intimidation to pressure newspapers and their employers. Columnist friends of mine have lost their jobs as a result of a phone call from the prime minister's office. One well-known broadcaster and columnist, Nurray Mert, told the Committee to Protect Journalists last year that her career had effectively been ended as a result of the prime minister's criticism of her in a public speech. The huge court case that ended recently with the jailing of the former army chief of staff, along with many other retired officers, journalists, and politicians, was held under similar highly politicized conditions, its fairness compromised by what human rights advocates regard as the misuse of protected and partisan witnesses and the lengthy pretrial detention of many of the accused.

A vindictive authoritarianism is taking hold of Turkey. To the prime minister's supporters this is regrettable but necessary; many I have spoken to think that the protest at Gezi Square was organized by foreign agitators, and that the protesters should have been crushed more harshly than they were. In a democracy, these people believe, the will of the majority is determined at the ballot box and then carried out. This, they say, is what had been happening quite successfully until the liberals, realizing they were too few to win an election, turned to seditious activities instead. The idea that the beliefs of liberal minorities should be legally protected and might actually have an influence on policymaking has not been accepted by the government, which claims to speak for the majority.

But the architect of Turkey's polarization isn't the liberals; it's Erdoğan. He has read into successive election victories a license to involve himself in every aspect of the nation. His abrasive, physical style of oratory betrays no self-doubt. Opening his arms to his audience, bringing his hand over his heart, he criticizes the lives of his subjects, and his views are rarely less than vigorous. All drinkers are alcoholics; every family should have three children; wholemeal flour is best ("our children will be stronger...the

bonds of trust between us will increase”); abortion is murder and Caesarean sections should be avoided. Twitter is a “menace” and those opposed to road-building should go and live in a forest. The prime minister appears to dislike expertise when it disagrees with him. “You have nothing to teach us about sociology,” he told a politely dissenting social scientist. As much as the tear gas, water cannons, and plastic bullets, it was Erdoğan’s contemptuous way of addressing the Gezi demonstrators that hardened feelings against him. Liberals are skeptical of a leader who commands slavish adulation from his followers—a former adviser to the prime minister told me there is no “mechanism of self-criticism” in Erdoğan’s entourage. The government is touched by paranoia; Erdoğan’s chief adviser has accused foreign powers of using telekinesis to try to kill his boss. The government creates an aura that is surreal, menacing, and insufferably pompous. Unsurprisingly, it was the butt of humor during the Gezi protests. “Enough!” ran one graffito after a night of brutality by the security forces. “I’ll call the police.” A gay group unfurled a banner that said: “You have nothing to teach us about sodomy.”

Erdoğan has encouraged a species of conservatism that is now the dominant mode of life throughout Turkey. The culture is pietistic, implicitly anti-Alevi, and materialistic. This last factor is new, for until quite recently virtue was associated with austerity and self-reliance; now the faithful demand rewards in this world in the form of high-performance cars, iPads, and so forth—acquired using the family credit card.²

Following a pattern that American conservatives would recognize, these Turks are both in sympathy with the conservatives in the government and growing more detached from it in their everyday lives. Private schools and hospitals have proliferated and the middle classes prefer to live in the private housing communities that have sprung up in Istanbul and elsewhere.

One can understand why minorities like the Alevis associate these gated developments with social and sectarian homogenization. While visiting a colossal housing colony in Istanbul, for instance, I met a woman of Alevi origin who had become a devout Sunni through marriage into a Sunni family and vigorously criticized the Gezi protesters. From the AKP’s point of view, however, Istanbul has improved greatly under its rule. The city has indeed boomed, with new infrastructure and a housing price bubble to rival

any in the developing world.³ Among the recent constructions are homes for the poor; the spectacle of unregulated shanties clinging to the hillsides is rarer. Over the next few years Istanbul will have the world's biggest airport, a gargantuan bridge over the Bosphorus, and two cities in the greater metropolitan area of one million inhabitants each. Each day seems to bring a new discovery for the city's taxi drivers. "Lovely," said one as we drove through a tunnel that had opened that very morning. "It's all owing to Tayyip," he went on—"lion of a man!"

By contrast, I have spoken to architects and planners whose relations with the government have broken down over what they describe as the haphazard and unplanned nature of the city's expansion, inadequate oversight, environmental damage, and mass evictions of the poor to make way for the middle class. The new bridge over the Bosphorus, a very senior planner told me, could permit the urbanization of a huge stretch of old forest—on which, he said, the city's fragile ecology depends. Work has now started on an enormous neo-Ottoman mosque that Erdoğan wants to be visible from everywhere in Istanbul, and that will have the tallest minarets in the world. At the same time, his deputy prime minister has hinted that the great domed space of Hagia Sophia, formerly a church, then a mosque, and now a museum, would be reconverted into a mosque. Erdoğan's opponents publicly celebrated the International Olympic Committee's rejection of Istanbul's bid to host the 2020 Olympics. (Tokyo won.) I have heard liberals express satisfaction that Turkey's boom now seems to be slowing—the consequence of falling confidence in emerging markets in general, and the effects of the Gezi demonstrations. (The stock exchange dropped sharply following the unrest.) Anything that tarnishes the prime minister's self-image is welcomed by Turkish liberals.

On September 30, the prime minister announced new pro-democracy reforms. Under these, instruction in Kurdish will be allowed in private schools (though not in state schools) and an electoral threshold that has had the effect of limiting Kurdish representation in parliament will be abolished. A long-standing ban on women in hijab working as civil servants is also to be lifted—except for some judicial and military personnel.

Erdoğan's pro-Kurdish measures were designed to revive the peace process. Politicians close to the PKK have described the new reforms as

inadequate, and thousands of Kurdish nationalists remain in jail under Turkey's anti-terror laws, but Erdoğan is the best Turkish prime minister the Kurds have ever had; a return to violence is unlikely.⁴ An injection of pious women into the civil service will advance the prime minister's plan to make the state more religious. But he will do nothing that would help his opponents. The jailed journalists stay jailed. And there will be no recognition for the Alevis.

To many Sunnis, the Alevis are wayward Muslims who should be encouraged to return to the true faith—not encouraged in their heresies. The Alevis had a prominent part in the protests in Gezi and the prime minister has hardened his tone against them. He has made disparaging asides about them in speeches and the new Bosphorus bridge is to be named for an Ottoman sultan who slaughtered Alevis by the thousands. Erdoğan's Sunni supporters and the Alevis also differ on Syria, the country's main foreign policy challenge.

Turkey's Alevis have only a hazy affinity with Syria's Alawites, but they felt acutely threatened when it looked as though Bashar al-Assad would fall quickly and be replaced by a Sunni regime supported by the AKP government. This is what Erdoğan had in mind when he became an early proponent of regime change in Syria back in 2011, receiving opposition leaders and facilitating the transfer of arms to rebel groups. But Assad did not fall and the price of this policy has been high. Half a million Syrian refugees have arrived in Turkey, the border areas are unstable, and the Erdoğan government has been embarrassed by accusations that it has been helping opposition groups linked to al-Qaeda, accusations it may have been trying to answer when the Turkish army shelled fighters from one such group, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, earlier this month. In May, fifty-three people were killed in attacks, believed to have originated in Syria, on the Turkish town of Reyhanli (The prime minister pointedly noted that the dead were all "Sunni.") Erdoğan has not concealed his frustration at the United States's refusal to topple Assad; but he has been unable to do so on his own. These are all points made by Erdoğan's liberal opponents, Alevi politicians in particular.

Erdoğan is Turkey's most powerful leader since Atatürk, but the Gezi events have been a serious challenge to him, and their effects will continue to be felt. By picking fights with those who disagree with him and

encouraging sectarianism, he is condemning his country to a period of turbulence, while undermining his own reputation as a path-finding democrat in the Muslim world.

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Notes:

1 The Turkey analyst Gareth Jenkins is one of the few outsiders to have studied the Ergenekon case, as it is known, from all the angles, and his 2009 report on the subject depicted it partly as the product of a fevered prosecutorial imagination. “The indictments,” he wrote, “are so full of contradictions, rumors, speculation, misinformation, illogicalities, absurdities and untruths that they are not even internally consistent or coherent.” See Gareth Jenkins, “Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey’s Ergenekon Investigation,” Central Asia–Caucasus Institute and Silkroad Studies Program, July 2009. [↵](#)

2 Erdoğan’s Islamism is nothing if not pragmatic. The economy remains dependent on interest-charging loans that are banned under Islam. Erdoğan insists that a global network of financiers (by which he means Jews) is trying to weaken the country, but he has done more than anyone to expose Turkish consumers to what he calls the “interest rate lobby.” The country’s foreign debt has nearly tripled since the AKP came to power. [↵](#)

3 The flat I bought in 1999 for \$28,000 is now worth around \$800,000. Alas, it is now owned by someone else. [↵](#)

4 The government had been hoping to convince Kurdish nationalists in parliament to support proposed changes to the constitution that would attach new executive powers to the post of the presidency. Erdoğan is expected to run again for president next summer. Kurdish acquiescence in these plans now looks less likely. [↵](#)