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NYT

As Obama and Netanyahu Meet, Ukraine Becomes a Focus of Conversation

[Mark Landler](#) and [Anne Barnard](#)

March 3, 2014 -- President Obama welcomed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to the White House on Monday to discuss a litany of familiar problems and confront a new one: the Ukrainian crisis, which threatens American policies throughout the Middle East.

The West's standoff with Russia over its seizure of Crimea, analysts and former administration officials said, could complicate American efforts to curb Iran's nuclear program, resolve Syria's civil war and, even in the short run, broker peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Russia is a pivotal player on Syria, an influential member of the negotiating group with Iran and a symbol of resistance to the West throughout the region. A long-lasting dispute with Moscow, experts said, would inevitably spill over into these other issues, transforming Russia from a truculent partner into a potentially disruptive force. "The Russians will look for ways to show us the consequences of pressuring or trying to isolate them," said Dennis B. Ross, a former adviser to Mr. Obama on the Middle East. "But they will also have to consider where that may or may not make sense for their own interests."

The most obvious target is Syria, experts said, where President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia would be even less likely to abandon President Bashar al-Assad. Mr. Putin, most of the experts agreed, would probably follow through on the agreement with the United States to remove Mr. Assad's chemical weapons, if only to preserve Russia's national prestige.

But the Russians would most likely drop any pretense of negotiating a political settlement. Fears of that possibility resonated throughout Syria and its growing diaspora on Monday, with opponents of the government questioning whether any future Russian-American cooperation on Syria would fall victim to the clash in Crimea.

For Mr. Netanyahu, the biggest threat involves Iran, which has embarked on negotiations for a comprehensive nuclear agreement with the United States, Russia and other major powers. While the Russian government shares America's qualms about a nuclear-capable Iran, the experts said, a failure of diplomacy would almost certainly block American attempts in the United Nations to punish Iran with new sanctions.

"Russia could play a critical role in helping us convince Iran to accept the tight constraints on its nuclear program necessary to produce an acceptable nuclear deal," said Robert J. Einhorn, a former Iran negotiator at the State

Department who is now at the Brookings Institution. “A confrontation over Ukraine could make such cooperation on Iran more difficult.”

Cliff Kupchan, an Iran expert at the Eurasia Group, said that without a nuclear deal, “the Crimean invasion makes it more likely that Russia would lead an effort to let Iran out of the penalty box.”

In the Oval Office, Mr. Netanyahu acknowledged that Mr. Obama was probably distracted by events outside the Middle East. “I know you’ve got a few other pressing matters on your plate,” he said to Mr. Obama.

But Mr. Netanyahu reaffirmed the primacy of Iran as a threat to Israel and insisted that Iran be denied the ability to produce a weapon. “That goal,” he said, “can be achieved if Iran is prevented from enriching uranium and dismantles fully its military nuclear installations.”

The Israeli leader thanked Secretary of State John Kerry for his “tireless efforts” to push a peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians. But Mr. Netanyahu sounded a pessimistic tone, condemning “just incessant Palestinian incitement against Israel.”

Mr. Obama, in his remarks, noted that the “time frame that we have set up for completing these negotiations is coming near, and some tough decisions are going to have to be made.” But his tone was mild, and he praised Mr. Netanyahu for taking the talks seriously.

With a major crisis in Europe, several Middle East experts said that now was not the right time for Mr. Obama to lean too hard on Mr. Netanyahu. “Who is going to understand the president opening up a significant new difference of opinion with a close ally when Putin is doing this?” asked Aaron David Miller, a former Middle East peace negotiator. “It does give the prime minister additional room to maneuver.”

Administration officials insisted that they could pressure Russia while continuing to work with it on Iran and Syria. “That’s not going to somehow lead us to not tell the truth and not support Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” a senior official told reporters on Sunday.

In the Arab world, people see Russia’s roles in Ukraine and Syria as deeply intertwined. Russia has opposed Western policy precisely because of its antipathy to foreign-backed, pro-democracy demonstrations in its own sphere of influence, whether in Kiev or even Moscow.

As the Ukrainian crisis mounted, Russian officials framed it in terms strikingly similar to those they have used to describe the insurgency against

Mr. Assad, referring to the Ukrainian protesters as foreign-backed terrorists interfering with a legitimate sovereign government.

“President Putin has consistently suggested that the reason for opposing any further sanction on the Assad regime is respect for territorial integrity, sovereignty of Syria,” a senior American official said. “So there’s an extraordinary amount of Russian hypocrisy in what we see in Ukraine today.” Some antigovernment Syrians even contend that the Ukrainian crisis is rooted in theirs: They contend, with dismay, that Mr. Obama’s failure to strike the Syrian government after chemical attacks in August emboldened Russia to act in Ukraine. Others, angry at what they see as Russian complicity in Syrian state violence against civilians, have cheered on defiant Ukrainians; demonstrators in the northern Syria town of Kafranbel posted a picture of themselves with the Ukrainian flag.

A major question is whether Russia and the United States could make some kind of grand bargain “to exchange Syria for the Ukraine, whereby the Kremlin will abandon Assad in return for Washington and Brussels’ abandoning their allies in Kiev, or vice versa,” as Uraib al-Rintawi, a commentator at the Jordanian newspaper Al Dostor, put it. But, he added, “such a deal seems impossible,” given that Russia and the United States rank Ukraine much higher in importance than Syria. In the short term, supporters and opponents of the Syrian government agree, it is hard to imagine the United States or Russia devoting much attention to Syria, Iran or the peace talks.

The sense of slipping beneath the radar has added to the despair among the many Syrians who want to see the war end and who believe an international deal is the only way out.

“If the West and Russia end up bogged down in Ukraine, Assad will still have Iran, while we have no one,” Shakeeb al-Jabri, a Syrian antigovernment activist in Beirut, said on Twitter.

Mark Landler reported from Washington, and Anne Barnard from Beirut, Lebanon.

[Article 2.](#)

The New Republic

How Ukraine will Shape the Future of the Middle East

Dennis Ross

March 2, 2014 -- Vladimir Putin has done it again. Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, and now Crimea; wherever there are potentially ethnic Russian areas in former Soviet republics that are not prepared to toe the Russian line, there will be separatist movements that will break away as in the case of Moldova, Georgia, and now Ukraine -- and Russia will support them. It matters not that there is an international agreement -- in this case the Budapest Memorandum -- in which Russia, along with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine are all signatories and that Russia has pledged its respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine; that was 1994 and Russia, in Putin's eyes, was weak, and now it is 2014, and it is not, and it can impose its will with little concern for the consequences.

It is ironic that Putin, who worries so much about the territorial integrity of Syria -- and who rails against external intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states -- appears so quick to disregard such concerns when he determines that Russia's interests are involved. It seems that his principles are situational, and where he has the power to impose his will, he does.

The implications for the United States and Europe should be clear. There needs to be a price. No one is going to war over the Crimea, including the Ukraine. But there should be a political and economic price. Not going to the G-8 Summit in Sochi will not impress Putin. He will say he is protecting ethnic Russians and if President Obama and European leaders choose not to go, he will be defiant -- and most likely garner substantial domestic support in the process. But why not say that if Russia remains in Crimea, or moves to incorporate it, the Russians will forfeit their membership in the G-8? How about boycotting all financial and trade meetings with the Russians? I would favor going further and imposing targeted sanctions on the Russians. To be sure, some may worry that if we and the Europeans impose economic sanctions on the Russians, they will withhold natural gas supplies to Europe and Ukraine and/or cease their cooperation as part of the P5+1 on Iran. Such responses are certainly

possible. But Putin, too, needs to consider the consequences of such moves at a time when he is presiding over negligible growth, can ill afford to lose the revenues, and runs the risk of losing critical natural gas markets at a time when other suppliers, including the U.S., are becoming increasingly important. Similarly, does Putin really want Iran to become a nuclear weapons state?

The point is that we are not without leverage in imposing consequences, and President Obama, having stated there will be a cost, must be certain that there is one. That is especially important for those in the Middle East watching the events in Crimea unfold. Presently, they see another example of Russia's readiness to defy international norms and act in the service of its power -- a currency that is often the only one that matters to most Middle Eastern leaders. They are acute observers of the balance of power. Many of our Middle Eastern friends believe that the U.S. is increasingly reluctant to act in the face of regional challenges that are shifting the balance of power against its friends and its interests in the area. Listening to Saudis, Emiratis, and Israelis these days can be an excruciating exercise in hearing criticism of America in retreat. One can challenge their perceptions and their conclusions but one cannot deny that these fears exist. No doubt that is perhaps the major reason that the President is now going to go to Saudi Arabia and will see not only the Saudis but other Gulf leaders as well.

This week the President will see Prime Minister Netanyahu, and while Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will form the centerpiece of their discussions, Ukraine, Crimea, and Russian behavior will be a sub-text. Will Iran see in Russian behavior an example that international norms mean little? They certainly mean nothing in Syria. Will they welcome the potential for a crisis between the U.S. and Russia assuming that this will permit them to exploit division within the Perm 5+1 in the negotiations? No doubt our need for a firm response on the Crimea and the possibility of fall-out on the Iranian issue will come up for discussion between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu. Israel's prime minister and his Middle Eastern counterparts will favor a strong response on Crimea precisely because they are looking for signs that the U.S. will exercise power and leadership. Regardless of how Iran may seek to exploit any divisions at this juncture, most leaders in the Middle East will take comfort

from signs of American decisiveness in responding to what is seen as a Russian provocation.

Many in the region now believe that the Russians (and the Iranians) act while we only warn. The answer is not for us to be mindless in responses and to make rash statements that we cannot fulfill. But it is to stake out meaningful positions and follow through on them. For now, the U.S. should be seen mobilizing a broad set of political and economic sanctions - - and material support for Ukraine. Helping Ukraine stabilize its economy will be a huge task but becomes all the more important now -- and sacrifices may be far easier to justify now in Ukraine than at any other time. Helping Ukraine will also be one answer to the Russians and a reminder of U.S. leadership, and that will be observed in the Middle East.

Knowing the Saudis have concerns about our decisiveness at this point does not mean we cannot challenge them as well. They want us to do more to change the balance of power in Syria, and to counter the Iranians there and in the region. And the Saudis -- who so oppose what the Russians are doing in Syria -- are doing very little practically to express that opposition. True, they will argue they cannot be a substitute for the United States, but this is hardly the time for the Saudis to be financing a \$3 billion package of Russian arms for Egypt. Few things more clearly signal that the Russians pay no price with the Arabs for helping to sustain Assad's war crimes against Syrian civilians.

Ironically, showing leadership now in our response to the Russian intervention in the Crimea is likely to get the attention of our friends in the Middle East. It cannot be a substitute for what we do in the Middle East, but it can open a new conversation with the Saudis and others. One in which we focus on what we can both do in Syria; how we can both act to ensure that Egypt does not become a failed state; and what we do if there is a nuclear deal with Iran and what we do if there is not. But launching a new conversation will be far harder if the U.S. does not appear to come up with an effective strategy that imposes consequences for Putin's act of aggression against Ukraine.

Ambassador Dennis Ross is the William Davidson Distinguished Fellow and counselor at The Washington Institute.

Al Jazeera

AIPAC: American watchdog or Israel's attack-dog?

Marwan Bishara

March 03, 2014 -- The annual "schmooze Israel" convention that opened in Washington this week has been overshadowed by two issues: the US administration's preoccupation with the Ukraine crisis and its insistence on negotiations with Tehran and on Palestine.

Neither, however, seems to have diminished AIPAC conventioners' optimism regarding the future of the US Israel relationship. And for a good reason.

If all politics are more or less local, the upcoming mid term Congressional elections should provide AIPAC with a huge "carrot or stick" leverage over the makeup of Congress, especially the Senate, and the legislative agenda in Washington for the next two years.

Netanyahu to attend AIPAC meeting in Washington

AIPAC is in a good position to influence the hotly contested races throughout the country. As its outgoing president, Michael Kassen told AIPAC's members on Sunday, while party politics "divides America", it "unites" the Jewish lobby.

After all, AIPAC is focused on one issue, one cause: Israel. President Obama knows that all too well. That's why he decided to dispatch his Secretary of State to the convention, and to meet at the White House with Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu (whom I suspect he detests).

Behind AIPAC's success

Created in the 1950s and empowered by Israel's 1967 war victory, the American Israel Public Action Committee, better known as AIPAC, has grown evermore influential since the mid 1970s. Known in Washington all too simply - and tellingly - as The Lobby, AIPAC's power has historically stemmed from two major sources: Domestically, from the influential and organised Jewish communities - all 49 leaders of major Jewish organization have seats on AIPAC's executive committee; and

internationally, it stems from Israel's regional utility to the United States in the context of the oil-rich Middle East and Cold War rivalry.

Eventually, these two factors have paved the way for greater political alignment between the Jewish lobbying group and various interest groups, ranging from Christian Evangelicals to ideological militarists, to make up the larger "Israel lobby" in America.

AIPAC's influence over Congress and its legislative agendas are paramount for its overall lobbying effort in the capital, on the White House and America's foreign policy in the Middle East and beyond. AIPAC's strategy is one of barter, pure and simple.

AIPAC helps congressmen and women get elected - financially and otherwise – in return for their support of its legislative agenda. Likewise, AIPAC helps US presidents pass their various agendas through Congress in return for White House support for Israel.

And that has worked quite successfully over the past few decades as the US poured more money and arms to Israel than any other country in the world. And thanks to AIPAC, and other like-minded lobbying groups, Israel's status continued to improve in Washington despite its many strategic failures and political fiascos since the 1973 October War.

Expect the Obama administration - like its predecessors - to prod the weaker Palestinians to make more concessions towards another framework agreement than to nudge the intimidating Israelis ahead of midterm elections.

In fact, regional experts argue rather convincingly that the Israel utilitarian argument fell short on accomplishments - at least - since the end of the Cold War. So much so, they argue, that strategically for America, Israel has been more of a burden than an asset.

But while AIPAC's record on behalf of Israel has been astounding, the overly confident group has overreached on a number of occasions leading to major crises in the relations. AIPAC has generally succeeded when it functioned as an American watchdog over Israel's immediate interests and its tight relationship with the United States.

But when the lobby acted like an Israeli attack dog aggressively going after any and all American detractors of a narrow Israeli security agenda or a colonial agenda, the results have been mixed at best.

AIPAC has started every decade since the early 1980s by picking a fight with the White House on behalf of Israel. In 1981, it was the AWACS sales to Saudi Arabia, in 1991 it was the loan guarantees to Israel, after 2001 it was Bush's anti-terror Arab coalition, and since 2011 it has been negotiations with Iran. Ronald Reagan was the first presidential candidate to garner more Jewish votes than his Democratic rival, and became the staunchest supporter of Israel upgrading its relationship to major international strategic ally.

And yet, there was little or no hesitation at AIPAC when the group launched a political assault against the Reagan administration and especially on the likes Secretary of Defense Weinberger for supporting the \$8 bn Airborne Warning and Control System surveillance planes to Saudi Arabia. AIPAC dragged the issue but lost the battle with complete [humiliation](#).

The lobby, however, took the offensive once again in 1991, after the Bush administration had made a \$10 bn of loan guarantees contingent on Israel freezing its illegal settlement building. This was a small price to pay if the Bush administration was to introduce a new regional Pax Americana after its Cold War and Gulf War victories. Alas, AIPAC and its Israeli patron couldn't see the larger picture.

Soon after his election for a second time in 1992, Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin's first challenge was to restrain AIPAC. A dress down soon followed when Rabin, himself a former ambassador to Washington, scolded the lobby for unnecessarily straining Israel's relationship with Washington. In no time, Washington had provided the loan guarantees as settlement building picked like never before. The number of settlers increased by 50 percent during Rabin's rule from 1992 until his assassination in 1995. Again in October 2001, AIPAC echoed Ariel Sharon's warning to the United States that it risked appeasing Arab nations the way European democracies appeased Hitler on the eve of World War II. The nasty provocation could've easily escalated into an all out political confrontation between the US and Israel if it weren't for the stanchly pro Israeli stance of the Bush administration and W Bush's willingness to follow in Israel's footsteps in his "war on terror".

This was to be repeated again after 2010/2011, as AIPAC began to confront the Obama administration over the peace process and Iran's nuclear

program. Tensions escalated earlier this year after AIPAC tried to get Congress to impose new sanctions against Iran in contravention with the interim deal signed between the US and the World powers with Iran. Undermined by popular support for the deal and deterred by a presidential veto, AIPAC has put its sanctions on hold. Meanwhile, the real opposition to AIPAC is coming not from the White House but rather from the American Jewish community that has been generally supportive of Israel but not necessarily AIPAC's way. New Jewish voices critical of AIPAC and of Israel's colonial policies are on the ascendance even if they remain a minority within the organised Jewish groups. And relatively new Jewish groups like [J street](#) are also making their imprint on the political scene in Washington. During a recent Jerusalem meeting with Netanyahu, according to the Jewish daily Forward, the members of the conference of presidents of major Jewish organisations were essentially [told](#) to "renew their confrontation with the White House over increased sanctions, just 11 days after the effort was publicly abandoned by AIPAC". It remains to be seen whether this proves counterproductive and backfires against Israel or simply works in favor of Netanyahu's ongoing bargaining with Obama over Iran and Palestine. Israel would backtrack on Iran for now, only if Washington let go of Palestine. Expect the Obama administration - like its predecessors - to prod the weaker Palestinians to make more concessions towards another framework agreement than to nudge the intimidating Israelis ahead of midterm elections.

Judging by the mute reactions of the Obama administration to recent insults against Secretary Kerry by Israeli defense minister, Ya'alon, Netanyahu has a good reason to be confident about Israel and AIPAC's capacity to get their way with the Obama administration on a host of issues.

As Netanyahu told some Israelis during 2001 elections [campaign](#): "America is a thing you can move very easily, move it in the right direction. They won't get in their way."

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is widely regarded as a leading authority on the Middle East and international affairs.

[Article 4.](#)

The Washington Post

What is to be done? Putin's aggression in Ukraine needs a response

Zbigniew Brzezinski

March 3, 2014 -- Regarding the [Russian aggression against Ukraine](#), much depends on what Vladimir Putin does next. But what Putin does depends on not only his calculation of the likely NATO (and especially the U.S.) response but also his estimate of how fiercely the Ukrainian people would respond to any further escalation by Russia. And, to complete the circle, the Ukrainian response would be influenced by citizens' reaction to any further repetition of Putin's Crimean aggression and by whether the nation believes that the United States and NATO are truly supportive.

Putin's [thuggish tactics in seizing Crimea](#) offer some hints regarding his planning. He knew in advance that his thinly camouflaged invasion would meet with popular support from the Russian majority in Crimea. He was not sure how the thin and light Ukrainian military units stationed there would react, so [he went in](#) masked like a Mafia gangster. In the event of serious Ukrainian resistance, he could disown the initiative and pull back. His initial success may tempt him to repeat that performance more directly in the far eastern provinces of Ukraine proper. If successful, the conclusive third phase could then be directed, through a combination of political unrest and increasingly overt use of Russian forces, to overthrow the government in Kiev. The result would thus be similar to the two phases of Hitler's seizure of the Sudetenland after Munich in 1938 and the final occupation of Prague and Czechoslovakia in early 1939.

Much depends on how clearly the West conveys to the dictator in the Kremlin — a partially comical imitation of Mussolini and a more menacing reminder of Hitler — that NATO cannot be passive if war erupts in Europe. If Ukraine is crushed while the West is simply watching, the

new freedom and security in bordering Romania, Poland and the three Baltic republics would also be threatened.

This does not mean that the West, or the United States, should threaten war. But in the first instance, Russia's unilateral and menacing acts mean the West should promptly recognize the current government of Ukraine as legitimate. Uncertainty regarding its legal status could tempt Putin to repeat his Crimean charade. Second, the West should convey — privately at this stage, so as not to humiliate Russia — that the Ukrainian army can count on immediate and direct Western aid so as to enhance its defensive capabilities. There should be no doubt left in Putin's mind that an attack on Ukraine would precipitate a prolonged and costly engagement, and Ukrainians should not fear that they would be left in the lurch.

Meanwhile, NATO forces, consistent with the organization's contingency planning, should be put on alert. High readiness for some immediate airlift to Europe of U.S. airborne units would be politically and militarily meaningful. If the West wants to avoid a conflict, there should be no ambiguity in the Kremlin as to what might be precipitated by further adventurist use of force in the middle of Europe.

In addition, such efforts to avert miscalculations that could lead to a war should be matched by a reaffirmation of the West's desire for a peaceful accommodation with Russia regarding a joint effort to help Ukraine recover economically and stabilize politically. The West should reassure Russia that it is not seeking to draw Ukraine into NATO or to turn it against Russia. Ukrainians themselves can define the depth of their closeness to Europe and the scope of their economic cooperation with Russia, to the benefit of peace and stability in Europe. And after their [May elections](#), they can revise some of the arrangements for a special status for Crimea, but they should not do so under duress or attack from a neighbor driven by imperial or personal ambitions.

Zbigniew Brzezinski was national security adviser from 1977 to 1981.

[Article 5.](#)

The Daily Star

Jordanian jihadists are on the rise

March 04, 2014 -- Jordanian fighters have come to play an important role in the protracted Syrian conflict. Unlike the previous generation of Jordanian jihadists – Al-Qaeda leaders from a decade earlier who professed their belief in a global jihad – this new generation currently fighting in Syria is prioritizing regional and local causes. The outcome of their engagement in Syria will define the vision and goals of this rising generation of Jordanian fighters. Perceived success in Syria will embolden them and likely lead them to seek a more active political role in Jordan – and perhaps to draw attention to the needs and grievances of their communities through violence.

Estimated to number about 5,000 members, Jordanian Salafist-jihadists are only one part of Jordan's broader Salafist population, unofficially estimated to total 15,000 individuals (according to local journalist and Salafist specialist Tamer Smadi). Jordanian jihadists exist alongside traditional Salafists and Salafist reformers. Until 2011, Jordanian Salafists and the jihadists among them were largely underground, but the protests the country witnessed that year allowed them to surface and gain more visibility by participating in demonstrations.

The war in Syria was another turning point; they witnessed an ideological shift with a new focus on the “near enemy” and are thus attempting to create what they refer to as a “fortified house” (Diyar al-Tamkeen) in Syria. In other words, they are seeking to secure a fortress from which they could expand their activities to other countries by building on the training they acquired.

Today, the Salafist-jihadist movement is a loose group with several influential leaders such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi, a prominent sheikh who encouraged Jordanians to fight in Syria in 2012. “I called for any man able to go for jihad in Syria; it is the responsibility of any good Muslim to stop the bloodshed perpetrated by the Nusayri regime,” Tahawi said in June 2012, referring to the ruling Alawite regime in Syria.

The Jordanian Salafist-jihadist community is among the biggest contributors of fighters to Syria. Salafist-jihadist experts believe that about

700 to 1,000 Jordanian jihadists are currently fighting there, roughly comparable to the number of Tunisian jihadists, who make up about 800 of those fighting alongside the rebels in Syria.

The majority of Jordanian jihadists in Syria have joined the Nusra Front, in which two Palestinian-Jordanians, Iyad Toubasi and Mustafa Abdul-Latif, occupy leading positions. Toubasi (Abu Gelebeb) is the emir of the Nusra Front in Damascus and Deraa; he is also the brother-in-law of one of Jordan's better-known Salafist-jihadists, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and is believed to have fought with him in Iraq.

Abdul-Latif (Abu Anas al-Sahaba) is also a commander in the Nusra Front. Jordanian representation in the Nusra Front is more prominent than that in the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) – “due to ideological differences,” says Abu Sayyaf, a leading jihadist figure in Jordan, in reference to ISIS's extreme views on minority rights and relationships with other Islamist factions.

Syria's significance for the rising generation of Jordanian jihadists currently fighting on the plains and hills of “Bilad al-Sham” (Greater Syria) is threefold. First, the war in Syria against an Arab despot embodies the recent shift in the jihadists' priorities, who instead of targeting the West are now focusing their efforts on the “near enemy,” or regional rulers, which could well expand to Jordan. Although those who have returned home to Jordan have yet to organize, the country's security services have been cracking down on Salafist-jihadists since the beginning of the war in Syria, fearing this very possibility.

Nationwide arrests have targeted between 150 and 170 jihadists as of January. This past December, Jordan's intelligence services arrested Raed Hijazi, known as Abu Ahmad al-Amriki, who is believed to have ties with Al-Qaeda, as part of efforts to prevent further coordination between local jihadists and Al-Qaeda's international network.

Second, the concept of jihad emerging in Syria has slowly taken on a Sunni versus Shiite sectarian dimension, reflecting the escalation in hostility between the two branches of Islam since the region's Shiites have backed the Assad regime. “This jihad is to defend Ahl al-Sunna [the Sunni people]. It became obligatory when the war turned sectarian, especially after Hezbollah and Iran interfered. Hezbollah is the enemy of the Sunna,” Abu Sayyaf says.

According to Smadi, this new rivalry was crystallized in January when local media reported that an attack targeting the Syrian Embassy by ISIS had been foiled (this information was later denied by state agencies). This hostility might also lead Jordanian jihadists to participate in other nearby theaters and across the region in an overall sectarian fight that fits in with their new regional focus. Abu Qatada, a prominent figure within Jordanian Salafism-jihadism who is currently on trial for terrorism in Amman, seems to have endorsed this strategy by justifying suicide bombings targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon. The Nusra Front has claimed several of these attacks.

The third important aspect is the plan to build what they refer to as a Diyar al-Tamkeen. This would serve as a first step in the holy war to achieve and expand their transnational Islamic state based on Shariah. A starting point to achieve that is winning in Syria and then turning back to Jordan to reunify “Bilad al-Sham,” of which Syria is a key part; securing a Syrian base is likely to continue to be a long-term goal. Recent clashes on Feb. 17 pitted an armed group entering from Syria with Jordanian border guards. “These clashes are erupting in the area spreading between Ramtha in Jordan and Deraa in Syria, in a sector known as the Old Custom,” Smadi points out. While military statements only confirmed that the armed group came from Syria, no mention was made of the nationality of the fighters. There are fears among the Jordanian security agencies that these fighters might be comprised of Jordanian nationals, which would have negative implications for the Hashemite Kingdom’s stability.

Like Zarqawi before – whose experience in Iraq inspired his triple hotel bombing in Amman in 2005 – the new generation of Jordanian jihadists will be shaped by Syria. Any successes there could embolden this new generation and encourage them to adopt a more aggressive stance at home. However, unlike during Zarqawi’s time, Jordan has been plagued in recent years by worsening economic conditions, political protests and the influx of a massive Syrian refugee population, which according to the UNHCR totals about 600,000.

Al-Qaeda franchises have always been known to take advantage of situations of political turmoil, and Jordan is no exception. Whether local jihadists decide to exploit the large refugee population and turn these

difficult conditions in their favor will depend to a great extent on the crackdown they face in Syria and at home.

Mona Alami is a French-Lebanese journalist who writes about political and economic issues in the Arab world. This commentary first appeared at Sada, an online journal published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

[Article 6.](#)

Al Monitor

Moscow foresees breakdown in Israeli-Palestinian talks

Vitaly Naumkin

March 2, 2014 -- As the deadline approaches for Israel and the Palestinians to reach a final agreement, [optimism that it will actually happen](#) is fading in Moscow and in many other capitals, despite the energetic though unilateral efforts of Secretary of State John Kerry. Most Russian analysts believe [the parties are not ready](#) to resolve the many complex matters so quickly. In addition to the difficulty of resolving the key issues themselves, one obstacle to reconciliation is the tension between the Palestinians and the Israelis over Israel's very recent demand, as a precondition, that the Palestinians recognize [Israel as a Jewish state](#). I will not reiterate the Palestinian arguments against meeting this demand — they are already well known.

It is appropriate to note in this regard that in his last book, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*, [Ari Shavit](#) called this redefinition of the Israeli nation “a new Jewish Israeli narrative.” My Israeli colleagues have hinted to me recently that, despite his declarations that this narrative is unacceptable, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas nevertheless might be moving toward a recognition of the Jewish character of Israel.

In Russia, some experts fully share the Palestinians' concern that recognizing Israel as a Jewish state would only enshrine in law discrimination against Palestinians as second-class citizens, and would take

the issue of the return of refugees off the agenda, even in truncated form. Other experts believe that the UN has decided to create two states anyway — an Arab state and a Jewish state, because Israel is by definition a Jewish state, so the creation of an Arab state is long overdue.

Russian analysts also note that both the American and Israeli expert communities are debating the legitimacy of that demand. For example, in an article published on March 9 in *The New York Times*, Josef Levine, a professor of philosophy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, writes about an “unavoidable conflict between being a Jewish state and a democratic state.”

The Palestinian side has made it clear that it will not accept partial, interim solutions and expressed its willingness, if the negotiation process fails, to act independently with an appeal to the international community.

Apparently, the Israeli side is also prepared to take action independently and outside the negotiations. Naturally, Moscow is studying various scenarios of steps the parties to the conflict might take in this context.

Israeli representatives talk about an alternative “Plan B,” which would start a transition period of partial, temporary solutions intended to prepare the soil for a future final resolution based on confidence-building measures. Only certain reconciliation matters would be resolved, in stages, where each new step would be taken only when the prior one is deemed successful. For example, first Israeli outposts would be evacuated, followed by isolated settlements, while simultaneously preparing Israeli public opinion for the drawing of temporary borders, etc.

Under this plan, Israel would give up a portion of the areas surrounding large settlement blocs, but these blocs themselves would remain a part of Israel. The border between them would be considered temporary only if the Palestinians express a desire to continue the negotiations on land swaps. If they rejected these negotiations, Israel would consider these borders permanent. On the settlement issue, it appears that there could be several options for a solution, given the extreme sensitivity of the issue of the potential evacuation of such a large number of residents. There is also the option of preserving some of the settlements within a newly created Palestinian state as autonomous entities, possibly even granting Palestinian citizenship to the residents. Such a bold option would likely be possible only if a final agreement is signed between the Palestinians and Israel.

Analysts in Moscow do not quite understand how Plan B takes into account the factor of intra-Palestinian relations. On the one hand, we see Israel's desire, by linking Palestinian autonomy to the implementation of the plan, to present the plan as the result of efforts by Fatah and thereby bolster its chances in its competition with Hamas. Apparently, this takes into account the fact that Hamas could be an effective “spoiler” in the implementation of the plan. On the other hand, it is possible that Israel is hoping for the further evolution of Hamas, which, compared with the terrorist groups based in the Sinai and Gaza, is looking like a less radical organization. True, we cannot yet say that Israel is ready to accept Hamas as a legitimate negotiating partner. But can we say it is moving in that direction (of course, subject to compliance with certain conditions)?

It is not clear how Israel will react to the problematic yet possible reconciliation of Fatah and Hamas, leading to the formation of a coalition government — if it keeps moving toward a peace process. Will Israel accept such a government? For its part, Moscow, as far as we can tell, is sympathetic to this possibility and may even help bring it about.

As far as we can tell from the information available here, Plan B does not mean that the two key issues will be resolved — the status of Jerusalem and the return of Palestinian refugees. Israeli representatives indicate that Mahmoud Abbas could agree to significant concessions to Israel on these issues, as long as he can “save face,” if the Israelis take very specific steps toward creating an independent Palestinian state.

According to well-informed Israeli sources, the Israeli government could accept Plan B as an alternative to the final bilateral agreement, if movement toward such an agreement has hopelessly stalled. As it appears from Moscow, Israel is using it to demonstrate its willingness to create a Palestinian state, hoping to enhance [Israel's standing in the international community](#) and help President Barack Obama achieve the goals of his Middle East policy.

Evaluating Plan B, analysts in Moscow think Netanyahu may have rejected the concept of preserving the status quo, as was thought here until now. Does this mean that he has come to terms with the need to make an agreement with the Palestinians and even evacuate a significant portion of the Israeli settlements in order to get this done? Some analysts believe he has, but that he will prolong the implementation of the agreement for a

much longer time than the Palestinians have in mind (three to five years). Others do not believe in this possibility and ask themselves: Does the Israeli prime minister really need this? This is the question that one of Moscow's prominent Middle East experts asked Nabil Shaath at the meeting in Moscow.

Of course, the issue of how long Israel will maintain its [military presence in the West Bank](#) is still a highly sensitive issue, an issue that will have to be dealt with in later stages of the peace process.

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[Article 7.](#)

Al Monitor

The Qatar channel between Gaza and Israel

Shlomi Eldar

March 3, 2014 -- Hamas has already come to terms with the fact that its southern border with Egypt — including its only gate to the outside world, the Rafah crossing — will not open up in the near future. After the initial shock and anxiety over the [anti-Hamas](#) mood prevalent among the new Egyptian regime, the time has come for the movement's leadership to recognize and accept this. In the absence of any other option, vital communication channels with the Israeli side were developed to ensure that [life goes on](#) as normally as possible in the Gaza Strip.

One Israeli security source described the situation thusly: “Hamas realized that if they have any chance of finding a light at the end of the tunnel, it won’t be in the Rafah region, but actually at the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings, which link Gaza to Israel.”

Hazem Balousha, a contributor for Al-Monitor’s Palestine Pulse, gave a very accurate description of the enormous embarrassment felt by the movement’s leaders over the relationship between senior Hamas member [Ghazi Hamad and the Israeli Gershon Baskin](#), a relationship that

emerged out of necessity because there were no other options. It is worth remembering that the private channel between Baskin and Hamad succeeded in the past, when all others failed, in obtaining the release of abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in exchange for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. This channel has continued to operate on occasion, even after the deal was reached, particularly when it became necessary to relay messages rapidly between the two parties to avoid military escalation. But the Baskin-Hamad channel is not the only channel of communication between Hamas and Israel. Another important and even more intricate means has been put together via Qatari representatives who link Israel and Hamas, and even relay position papers between the leaders of the two sides, doing so with the support of senior leaders in the wealthy emirate. Ever since the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in July 2013, Qatar has been accused by the new Egyptian regime of [supporting the Muslim Brotherhood](#). The charge is based mainly on the openly critical position taken by the Qatari news network Al Jazeera toward the overthrow of deposed President Mohammed Morsi by the Egyptian military.

Suddenly, and with no prior collusion, Hamas and Qatar find themselves sitting together in the defendant's chair. They have both been accused of collaborating with the Muslim Brotherhood, arch-nemesis of the new Egyptian regime.

Qatar currently funds several large economic projects in Gaza, such as the establishment of a large hospital. It also funds the building of new infrastructure and the renovation of existing decrepit infrastructure. This includes Gaza's crumbling sewer system, which poses a health risk to Gazans (while threatening Israel's groundwater resources). Qatar also invested tens of millions of dollars to pave Salah al-Din Road connecting the northern Gaza Strip with the south.

Furthermore, Qatari architects, engineers and other professionals, along with some foreign experts representing Qatar, enter Gaza through the Erez Crossing with permits issued by Israel in coordination with Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Economy Ministry.

Additionally, the Qataris have committed to procuring all required raw material from Israel, not only because they have no other choice, but intentionally, out of the belief that this would soften the Israeli position. The purchases are currently valued at tens of millions of dollars, and in the

coming years the total investment could amount to hundreds of millions of dollars. In other words, Israeli corporations benefit from the existence of projects funded by the Qataris in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas also benefits because the projects enliven Gaza's battered economy by providing employment for hundreds of locals. And the Qataris believe it benefits them because they see Israel as a vital bridge to the heart of the US administration.

One of the Qatari intermediaries offered the following cynical description of the emirate's activities in the Gaza Strip: "We are rebuilding the ruins left by Israel in Gaza, while at the same time helping the Israeli economy."

This business collaboration has also resulted in the creation of a "diplomatic" channel of communication between Qatar, Israel and Hamas. Qatar is helping to relay messages between the head of Hamas' political bureau, Khaled Meshaal, and Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh on one side, and Israeli contacts on the other. One of these is a prominent Israeli businessman, known to be a close confidante of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Unlike the Baskin-Hamad channel, which is used to relay messages as quickly as possible in times of crisis (or to prevent an impending crisis), the Qatari channel was created to establish long-term [strategic understandings](#) between Hamas and Israel.

Hamas and Israel, through Qatari mediation, realize now more than ever that neither of them will vanish from the map. This means that they must [reach an understanding](#) that will enable them to live together.

Similar attempts in the past have ended in failure. In the spring of 2006, for example, Meshaal sent messages to Israel through a European intermediary, to no avail. Now the situation is different. The confluence of interests could lead to accommodations that could never have been reached in the past. The Hamas movement is in crisis and suffers from prolonged isolation. Israel is fighting off a wave of [international boycotts](#), and it is obvious to everyone that any new military adventure in Gaza, justified as it might be, would harm Israel's public image.

What remains to be bridged is the psychological barrier. The leaders of Hamas deny, and will probably continue to deny, having any contact with Israel. After many years of [bloody warfare](#) between Hamas and Israel, and with so many ideological red lines set up by the movement, any compromise, indeed even any contact with Israel, could be considered an

act of surrender by the general public in Gaza and elsewhere. Meanwhile, in the eyes of most Israelis, Hamas remains a terrorist organization, which means that there can be no contact with it whatsoever.

But reality inevitably trumps ideology. So far, common interests have managed to bridge even the most impossible of chasms.

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