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[Article 1.](#)

The Washington Post

As the U.S. retreats, what will fill the vacuum?

[Michael Gerson](#)

March 7 -- With the facts on the ground now established in Crimea — several thousand facts in the [form of Russian troops](#) — the question now becomes: Will sustained economic, political and military isolation of

Russia work? Will it reverse Vladimir Putin's adventurism and deter future aggression?

Here there is a recent historical precedent. President Obama's "[reset](#)" with Russia was designed to end the economic, political and military isolation of Putin's Russia after the invasion of Georgia in 2008. The Kremlin did not keep the terms of the cease-fire ending that conflict. But Obama was determined to unfreeze the post-Georgia relationship, particularly since cooperation was needed on issues of mutual concern such as Iran and Syria.

The appropriate signals were sent. Normal diplomatic relations and military-to-military engagement with Moscow were resumed. Obama would not emphasize possible NATO membership for Georgia or Ukraine. Missile defenses were canceled in Poland, indicating that the Russian relationship was more important to the United States than was the one with Eastern Europe. Putin took these signals, naturally and accurately, as U.S. movement toward recognition of a Russian sphere of influence along its borders.

Putin has long believed that Russia is being purposely encircled and dismembered. One of his primary foreign policy goals is to relitigate the end of the Cold War. His intervention in Ukraine will press toward that objective until serious resistance is met. Like international aggressors before him, Putin would prefer the fruits of war without its costs.

Does he have reason to believe the resulting isolation of Russia will be sustained? The history of the "reset" says no. The weariness of Congress and the American public with conflict — which Obama emphasizes and encourages in his own rhetoric — says no. America's humiliating [dependence on Russian influence in the Syrian crisis](#) says no. The desire for Russian help in the Iranian nuclear negotiations says no. The dependence of Europe on Russian natural gas says no. European Union vacillation and disunity say no.

It is, perhaps, this confidence that has led Putin not only to intimidate but also to humiliate. To sponsor Edward Snowden. To follow a [90-minute telephone conversation](#) with Obama with troop movements. Many Russian goals in Crimea might have been achieved by intelligence assets and paramilitary forces. The use of Russian troops was intended as a broader

message to Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East: Don't waste your hopes on the West.

Criticisms of the Obama administration's foreign policy are now coming in waves. Its policy is improvised and [feckless](#). Or it consists of cliches (“[an interdependent world](#)”) and condescension (“[19th-century behavior](#)”).

But Obama deserves more credit for good intentions and intellectual consistency. His foreign policy does have a theory. He believes that as U.S. power retreats from the world, a variety of good things will fill the vacuum. Allies and international institutions will take more responsibility. The United States will be better able to promote liberal norms, unburdened by discrediting military power.

This vision gives permission for drastic defense cuts, abandoned “red lines,” a scramble for the exits in Afghanistan and the ceding of leadership in crises such as Syria. It dovetails with domestic political imperatives — for Obama to be the ender of wars, focused on [nation-building at home](#). Over the years, polls have often favored Obama's global disengagement. They also reflect five years of his arguments for retrenchment.

The problem is this: When enlightened liberal norms are divorced from U.S. power, liberal norms do not win out. The vacuum is filled by:

- Radical Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra, which prosper in chaos. In an atmosphere like Syria, the most brutal are the most successful, and eventually become regional and global threats.
- Despots such as Syria's Bashar al-Assad, who still believe in military solutions — such as using chemical weapons and “barrel bombs,” filled with oil and metal shards, on civilians — because these solutions are working for them.
- Nationalist powers such as Russia and China, which is now throwing its military weight around East Asia. Japan is experiencing an upsurge in nationalism.

In the 20th century, the United States was both unique and irreplaceable because it exercised great power without the blood-and-soil nationalism of Russia, Germany or Japan. It stood for universal, liberal, democratic ideals. We should not expect those humane ideals to thrive in the vacuum left by a retreating America.

The Washington Post

The wages of weakness

[Charles Krauthammer](#)

March 7, 3:01 AM -- Vladimir Putin is a lucky man. And he's got three more years of luck to come.

He takes Crimea, and President Obama says it's not in Russia's interest, [not even strategically clever](#). Indeed, it's a sign of weakness.

Really? Crimea belonged to Moscow for 200 years. Russia annexed it 20 years before Jefferson acquired Louisiana. Lost it in the humiliation of the 1990s. Putin got it back in about three days without firing a shot.

Now Russia looms over the rest of eastern and southern Ukraine. Putin can take that anytime he wants — if he wants. He has already destabilized the nationalist government in Kiev. Ukraine is now truncated and on the life support of [U.S. and European money](#) (much of which — cash for gas — will end up in Putin's treasury anyway).

Obama says Putin is on the [wrong side of history](#), and Secretary of State [John Kerry says](#) Putin's is “really 19th-century behavior in the 21st century.”

This must mean that seeking national power, territory, dominion — the driving impulse of nations since Thucydides — is obsolete. As if a calendar change caused a revolution in human nature that transformed the international arena from a Hobbesian struggle for power into a gentleman's club where violations of territorial integrity just don't happen.

“That is not 21st-century, G-8, major-nation behavior,” [says Kerry](#). Makes invasion sound like a breach of etiquette — like using the wrong fork at a Beacon Hill dinner party.

How to figure out Obama's foreign policy? In his [first](#) ██████ [speech](#), he says: “No one nation can or should try to dominate another nation.” On what planet? Followed by the assertion that “alignments of nations rooted in the cleavages of a long-gone Cold War” — like NATO? — “make no sense in an interconnected world.”

Putin's more cynical advisers might have thought such adolescent universalism to be a ruse. But Obama coupled these amazing words with even more amazing actions.

(1) Upon coming into office, he initiated [the famous “reset”](#) to undo the “drift” in relations that had occurred during the George W. Bush years. But that drift was largely due to the [freezing of relations](#) Bush imposed after Russia’s invasion of Georgia. Obama undid that pushback and wiped the slate clean — demanding nothing in return.

(2) [Canceled missile-defense agreements](#) with Poland and the Czech Republic. Without even consulting them. A huge concession to Putin’s threats — while again asking nothing in return. And sending a message that, while Eastern Europe may think it achieved post-Cold War independence, in reality it remains in play, subject to Russian influence and interests.

(3) In 2012, Obama assured Dmitry Medvedev that he would be [even more flexible](#) with Putin on missile defense as soon as he got past the election.

(4) [The Syria debacle](#). Obama painted himself into a corner on chemical weapons — threatening to bomb and then backing down — and allowed Putin to rescue him with a promise to get rid of Syria’s stockpiles. Obama hailed this as a great win-win, when both knew — or did Obama really not know? — that he had just conferred priceless legitimacy on Bashar al-Assad and made Russia the major regional arbiter for the first time in 40 years.

(5) Obama keeps cutting defense spending. His latest budget will reduce it to [3 percent of GDP](#) by 2016 and [cut the army](#) to pre-Pearl Harbor size — just as Russia is rebuilding, as Iran is going nuclear and as China announces yet another [12-plus percent increase in military spending](#). Puzzling. There is no U.S. financial emergency, no budgetary collapse. Obama declares an end to austerity — for every government department except the military.

Can Putin be faulted for believing that if he bites off Crimea and threatens Kiev, Obama’s response will be minimal and his ability to lead the Europeans even less so?

Would Putin have lunged for Ukraine if he didn’t have such a clueless adversary? No one can say for sure. But it certainly made Putin’s decision easier.

Russia will get kicked out of the G-8 — if Obama can get Angela Merkel to go along. Big deal. Putin does care about financial sanctions, but [the Europeans are already divided](#) and squabbling among themselves.

Next weekend's [Crimean referendum](#) will ask if it should be returned to Mother Russia. Can Putin refuse? He can already see the history textbooks: Catherine the Great took Crimea, Vlad (the Great?) won it back. Not bad for a 19th-century man.

[Article 3.](#)

The Economist

Kidnapped by the Kremlin

Mar 8th 2014 -- AS YOU read this, 46m people are being held hostage in Ukraine. Vladimir Putin has pulled Russian troops back from the country's eastern border. But he has also demanded that the West keep out and that the new government in Kiev should once again look towards Russia. Don't be alarmed, he says with unambiguous menace, invasion is a last resort. Some in the West will argue that the starting point for policy is to recognise reality, however unpalatable. Let Mr Putin keep the Crimean peninsula, which he occupied just over a week ago. It has a Russian-speaking majority and was anyway part of Russia until 1954. As for Ukraine as a whole, Russia is bound to dominate it, because it cares more about the country than the West does. America and the European Union must of course protest, but they would do well to avoid a useless confrontation that would harm their own economies, threaten their energy supplies and might plunge Ukraine into war. Mr Putin has offered a way out and the West should grasp it.

That thinking is mistaken. In the past week Mr Putin has trampled over norms that buttress the international order and he has established dangerous precedents that go far beyond Ukraine. Giving in to kidnappers is always dangerous: those who fail to take a stand to start with often face graver trials later on.

In another world

The Ukrainian citizens who protested in Maidan did not drive out a home-grown autocrat only to become beholden to the one next door; many of the youths on the streets of Donetsk and Kharkiv, in the Russian-speaking east, are as eager to belong to a sovereign Ukraine as are their compatriots in Kiev and Lviv. They know that under Russia's sway Ukraine would be weak and dependent. They look westward to Europe, which offers their

country its best hope of overcoming chronic corruption and bolstering the economy.

Crimea seems inclined to turn eastward instead; and if its people voted for an orderly secession, it might well get the backing of the outside world. But the referendum that has been announced for March 16th is being held at the point of a Kalashnikov. Moreover, the justification Mr Putin claims for sending in troops is not Crimea's unique history, but the principle that the Kremlin has a duty to protect Russians and Russian-speakers wherever they may be—the logic that Hitler used when he seized parts of Europe in the 1930s. If the West implicitly accepts this line, Mr Putin will have a pretext for intervening to protect Russians scattered across the former Soviet Union, from Central Asia to the Baltic.

Many powers, not least Britain, France and the United States, have sometimes broken international law. But Mr Putin has emptied the law of significance, by warping reality to mean whatever he chooses. He has argued that fascists threaten the safety of Russian-speakers in Ukraine; that the elite troops surrounding Ukrainian bases are not Russian, but irregulars who bought their uniforms in the shops; that the Budapest memorandum, which Russia signed in 1994 and guarantees Ukraine's borders, is no longer valid because the government in Kiev has been overthrown. Such preposterous claims are not meant to be taken at face value. Instead they communicate a truth that ordinary Russians understand only too well: the law is there not to restrain power, but to serve it. Unchallenged, this is a licence for Russian aggression.

So do not bet on Mr Putin being content to stop at Ukraine. In 2008 he fought Georgia to assert control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He has said that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the 20th century's greatest geopolitical catastrophe. He is armed with a self-proclaimed mission to rebuild the Russian empire and now with a pretext to intervene abroad. Unconstrained by law or the fear that the West will stand up to him, Mr Putin would pose a grave threat to his neighbours.

You say Kiev, I say Kyiv

The West is not about to go to war over Ukraine, nor should it. Not enough of its interests are at stake to risk a nuclear conflict. But the occupation of Crimea must be punished, and Mr Putin must be discouraged from invading anywhere else.

Mr Putin expects a slap on the wrist. Sanctions must exceed his expectations. Shunning the G8 summit, which he is due to host in June, is not enough. It is time to impose visa bans and asset freezes on regime-connected Russians (the craven parliamentarians who rubber-stamped their army's deployment should be among the first batch); to stop arms sales and cut Kremlin-friendly financial firms from the global financial system; to prepare for an embargo on Russian oil and gas, in case Ukrainian troops are slaughtered in Crimea or Russia invades eastern Ukraine. And the West should strengthen its ability to resist the Kremlin's revanchism: Europe should reduce its dependence on Russian gas; America should bin restrictions on energy exports; NATO should be invigorated.

Ukraine needs aid, not only because it is bankrupt, but also because Russia can gravely harm its economy and will want to undermine any independent-minded government. America and the EU have found some billions in emergency funds, but Ukraine also needs the prospect, however distant, of EU membership and a big IMF package along with the technical assistance to meet its conditions. A vital start is a monitored election to replace today's interim government and the parliament, which is for sale to the highest bidder.

As things stand, mindful of their fragile economies, and with the Kremlin hinting at revenge against sanctions, many Europeans worry about the cost of all this. But Mr Putin will gauge whether the West is resolute about its eastern borders partly by the price it is prepared to pay. Others argue that the West needs Russia to help deal with Syria and Iran's nuclear programme. But Russia is fuelling the war in Syria, and it has just torn up the deal that promised Ukraine security after it surrendered its nuclear weapons—a terrible precedent. For too long Western leaders have hoped that their countries' economic ties with Russia could be impervious to the Kremlin's belligerence. This week Mr Putin proved them wrong.

[Article 4.](#)

The Council on Foreign Relations

Ukraine's Crisis and the Middle East

Interview with Dennis Ross

March 6, 2014 -- *Dennis Ross, a veteran Middle East negotiator, believes that the U.S. response to the Ukraine crisis will have [strong reverberations across the Middle East](#). "Signs that the United States is prepared to be decisive and show leadership go to the heart of [allies'] concerns," he says. Regarding the Middle East "framework" negotiations, Ross says Russian cooperation could facilitate Palestinian agreement. However, "if the Russians decide to respond to pressures in Ukraine [vis-à-vis the negotiations], there is a potential danger there," he says. As for the P5+1 talks with Iran and the ongoing crisis in Syria, Ross does not see the situation in Ukraine changing the calculus for Russian president Vladimir Putin in any meaningful way.*

Is the current crisis in Ukraine going to help or hinder the future of the Middle East "framework" negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians, which the United States is actively mediating?

It won't have a direct impact on the negotiations except in one respect—and that is if the Russians decide to support whatever the United States presents to the Israelis and the Palestinians at the end of April. That would, I think, be a benefit. Success is more likely if the Russians and Europeans get behind what the United States presents to the two sides, and this is particularly true on the Palestinian side. If Palestinians have qualms about the plan but sense there is very strong international support for it, then it makes it more difficult for President Abbas to not go along with it. If there is a lack of international consensus and Abbas has questions or doubts, then he may well choose to cite the absence of an international support.

Conversely, if the Russians decide to respond to pressures in Ukraine [vis-à-vis the negotiations], there is a potential danger there.

And what about the other outstanding Middle East issues like Syria and the Iran nuclear talks?

Putin likely wants to demonstrate that if you pressure him, then you're going to pay a price. But on certain issues, [his self interests overlap with those of the United States]. Putin's support of the P5+1 talks with Iran is not a favor he's doing us. He has his own interests in not wanting the Iranians to have a nuclear weapon. So while there's potential for him to play upon some differences or for the Iranians to exploit these differences, Putin really has to think about his own longer-term strategic interests as well. On Syria, Putin has not exactly been a reliable partner, so I would say

this is a very good candidate for him to continue to adopt what is an extremely unhelpful position.

This week, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu seemed to ignore the sharp comments President Obama made in a recent interview, in which he told journalist Jeffrey Goldberg that Israel must "seize the moment" and make a deal with the Palestinians. Where do we stand on that?

The president was saying that there's a moment now and [Netanyahu] can't be so confident that he's going to have other moments in the future—and that message, I think, is just as important for Abbas [to hear]. So I hope the president's public messaging was meant for both sides. On the issue of the settlements, he was trying to make a point that this is a neuralgic issue for the Europeans and many others in the international community, and it's something that the Israelis have the ability to affect.

The other issue concerning Palestinians seems to be security in the Jordan Valley. Are the Israelis really locked in on having their own forces there after a settlement?

It is a very important position for Israelis. Go back to the speech that then prime minister Yitzhak Rabin made after an interim agreement in 1995. He went to the Knesset afterwards and laid out what was strategically important to the Israelis as they looked to go into permanent status negotiations. And he emphasized the importance of the Jordan Valley from a strategic standpoint for Israel. This is not a new position for the Israelis. Obviously there's a question of duration regarding an Israeli presence. The Israeli position, given all the uncertainty in the region, is that having a presence reassures them. They want to know that they won't need to withdraw until circumstances make it very clear that it's okay for them to do it from a security standpoint. And I think what Secretary Kerry has been trying to do is come up with a way to try to address their concerns.

Whether that's something that the two sides can agree upon at this point remains to be seen. Abbas seems to have a pretty strong position on it, saying that he doesn't want Israelis there past a certain point. What is that point? How is it determined? Is it condition-based? Who determines the conditions? These are questions that need to be thought through. It is worth keeping in mind that the kind of presence the Israelis are talking about is actually quite small, and it's also not a presence that is designed to interfere

with Palestinian economic activity or with the Palestinians having the ability to cross the border. Creative minds ought to be able to find a way to bridge this gap.

Will President Obama's show of challenging Russian aggression in Ukraine help him on his trip to Saudi Arabia later in the month?

There is a prevailing view in Saudi Arabia that there is a shift in the balance of power against their interests [and U.S. interests], and they believe, fairly or not, that somehow the United States is not active enough in terms of redressing this situation. So signs that the United States is prepared to be decisive and show leadership go to the heart of the concerns that they have.

Now clearly in the case of Saudi Arabia, there are other concerns. They are uneasy about our approach to Iran, and they have a very different view of what's going on in Syria and what should be done. They have a different view about what they see as a kind of existential struggle between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. So there are real perception gaps, but they're placed in the context of a larger question: Is the United States prepared to take the necessary steps to protect its friends and its interests? That's one of the concerns that the president's going to have to address, and he'll need to address it in concrete terms, not just with some general signs of reassurance.

Where does the United States currently stand with Egypt?

The Egyptian military believes it's locked in an existential struggle and feels that the United States is not being forthcoming with aid regarding military needs. In particular, they see themselves fighting a daily battle with terror in the Sinai and increasingly throughout the rest of the country, and they feel that certain things are being withheld. The Obama administration's feelings on the critical counterterrorism support that we provide are that we're not holding back, but there's clearly a difference of perception. The fact that the Egyptians were prepared to go to Moscow to get arms is an indication of their feeling that they can't put themselves in a position where they're dependent on U.S. military support. What is troubling, aside from them thinking they can go to the Russians as an alternative, is that the Saudis are promising to pay for this. So I think that's an important topic of conversation for the president to have with the

Saudis. They have some concerns about us; we have some concerns about them.

Dennis Ross - William Davidson Distinguished Fellow and Counselor, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

[Article 5.](#)

NYT

Defining the Jewish State

Ali Jarbawi

March 6, 2014 -- Ramallah, West Bank — Secretary of State John Kerry is preparing a “framework” for peace and Palestinians are worried. They know it will define the American position and set the new parameters for resolving the conflict. When published, this document — whether Palestinians accept its contents or not — will become the reference point for all future negotiations.

Each American document that has been published in the past has represented a step back from the one that preceded it. Following this logic, the starting points of the Kerry document will be better than anything any future American proposal could offer. Such is the Palestinian predicament. Palestinians need a mediator who is simultaneously capable and equitable. The problem is that the only capable mediator, the United States, is not a fair one. Appeasing Israeli concerns, securing its safety and meeting its demands are central tenets of the American approach to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From a Palestinian perspective, Israel often takes advantage of the passage of time in order to impose new facts, not only on the ground, but also upon the mediator.

Palestinians believe that the United States does not treat them fairly, despite the fact that they have lost their homeland and are forced to live under a bitter, oppressive occupation. They see themselves as the party that is forced to capitulate over and over again, offering concessions and backing down in order to meet Israeli demands. Palestinians also have concerns, fears and demands.

One example is the current Israeli demand that Palestinians recognize the Jewishness of the Israeli state. This demand has met with automatic

American approval, and will likely become one of the focal points of Mr. Kerry's framework. This demand did not exist in past talks; in fact, it didn't exist until the thought occurred to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, most likely because he was looking for a way to sabotage the peace process, which he could then blame on the Palestinians while continuing to usurp our land.

It has become both an Israeli precondition of sitting at the negotiating table, and a demand taken up by the American side, which has begun to pressure the Palestinians into accepting it.

But what exactly does the Jewish nature of the Israeli state mean? What are the de jure and de facto definitions of this term? What are the defining lines of this term, so that it does not remain open-ended, free-floating and elastic, allowing Israel to use it in the form and manner it chooses to in the future? And how can the United States, which claims to be unbiased, impose an undefined, nonspecific demand on one side of the conflict? Palestinians have legitimate concerns and fears over the issue of the Jewish nature of the Israeli state. These should be taken into consideration and addressed before they are strong-armed into accepting it or blamed if they reject it.

First, is the acknowledgement of the Jewishness of the Israeli state an implicit acceptance of the Jewish-Israeli narrative, and a rejection of the Palestinian one? In the interests of justice and fairness, will Israel be asked to acknowledge the Palestinian Nakba, or "catastrophe," of 1948 and its responsibilities regarding that event?

Second, what will happen to Arab-Israelis, who make up a fifth of Israel's population, if Palestinians concede that the Israeli state is a Jewish one? What will happen to their citizenship and their rights inside the country that they lived in before the British mandate and the creation of the Israeli state? Could the acceptance of this demand become a legal basis for Israel — as a Jewish state — to purge itself of non-Jews and transfer its Palestinian citizens to a forthcoming Palestinian state?

Third, if Kerry's document were to include safeguards of minority rights within the Jewish state of Israel in exchange for safeguarding minority rights in the future Palestinian state, would the settlers currently occupying Palestinian land in contravention of international law be given new rights that Palestinians would have to accept?

Finally, what would happen to the right of return guaranteed to refugees by international law? Would admitting to the Jewishness of the Israeli state mean that the Palestinians were conceding this right, that it would be taken out of the negotiations, and that no further attempts could be made to find an acceptable and just solution to the refugee issue?

The Palestinians need an America that is just in its vision and in its demands. It is true that the Palestinians are the weaker party in terms of the balance of power, which makes it easy to pressure them. But peace cannot be bullied into existence.

Ali Jarbawi is a political scientist at Birzeit University and a former minister of the Palestinian Authority. This article was translated by Ghenwa Hayek from the Arabic.

[Article 6.](#)

Al Monitor

Saudi-Qatar tensions divide GCC

Madawi Al-Rasheed

March 6, 2014 -- The fragmentation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is one of the unexpected casualties of the Arab uprisings. On March 5, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced in a joint statement that they have withdrawn their ambassadors from Qatar, thus confirming the country as the enfant terrible of the Gulf monarchies. Vague reasons were given to justify this unprecedented bold move, attributed to ensuring “stability and security,” while sensational details began to emerge in the Saudi- sponsored press about the alleged hidden intrigues of Qatar against its neighbors.

The three GCC states professed to have tried to persuade Qatar to remain within the fold of the GCC in its overall policies toward the Arab region, mainly to withdraw its support for the Muslim Brotherhood and stop being a launching pad for dissidents and activists not only in the wider Arab region but also in the Gulf itself. Saudi Arabia managed to enlist Bahrain and the UAE to back this symbolic break in relations with Qatar, but it

must remain the prime suspect behind ostracizing an old, troublesome neighbor.

Over the last three years, Saudi Arabia tried to be consistent in dealing with the turbulence of the Arab uprisings. But the result was rather chaotic and erratic. Saudi Arabia was most comfortable with the old Arab order in which it had maintained long-term relations with stable regional allies and international partners. With the exception of its historical rivalry with Iran, which dates to 1979, it had in the Arab region several close allies and friends it could rely on in times of crisis. The challenge to this old order originated in the Arab uprisings. The uprisings bewildered Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and eventually led to creating more enemies than friends. The Saudi regime was compelled to resist the uprisings and develop foreign policies that guaranteed first the permanence of the monarchy as a model of government in the GCC countries and in Jordan and Morocco and, second, to support counter-revolutionary military republicanism in Egypt. These two objectives dictated the way Saudi Arabia responded to the uprisings in both the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa.

Only Qatar seemed to challenge the two Saudi objectives. From the very beginning, Qatar presented itself as an ally of revolutionary forces, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, and defied Saudi Arabia in North Africa. Now, it is accused of threatening Gulf security itself as it has become the patron of dissident Islamists who might one day challenge the Gulf monarchies. The joint GCC statement announced that Qatar failed to "implement a November 2013 agreement not to back anyone threatening the security and stability of the GCC whether as groups or individuals — via direct security work or through political influence, and not to support hostile media." This vague statement embodied a subtle accusation that Qatar had become a threat to domestic stability that could no longer be tolerated by its close neighbors. More than Bahrain and the UAE, Saudi Arabia must be the most worried about Qatar, simply because it has a large Islamist constituency that may find refuge in Qatar.

Even before the Arab uprisings, Saudi relations with Qatar continued to be tense despite the semblance of calm and reconciliation. Qatar's historical support for a wide range of Islamist groups remained a source of contention between the two countries. Saudi Arabia was worried about Qatar becoming a platform for Saudi Islamists, in addition to claiming

success in places like Egypt and Tunisia. Saudi Arabia interpreted the success of Islamists as a success of their backer, Qatar, and its hidden agenda to replace Saudi Arabia as the major arbiter of Arab regional politics.

But the situation is different in Saudi Arabia, where not only terrorism but also a peaceful Islamist movement has existed since the 1970s. The Saudi regime feared that its own Islamists would be empowered after the Arab uprisings. King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz was the first to congratulate the interim Egyptian government in July and promise lavish subsidies worth billions of dollars.

The Muslim Brotherhood's base in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf in general remains the educated middle classes who combine a certain kind of piety with immersion in modernity and capitalist consumption. This class is destined to widen as a result of the expansion of mass education. Saudi Arabia's overt support for the Egyptian coup inevitably led to abandoning the veneer of accommodation with Sunni Islamist groups and turned the Muslim Brotherhood and their Qatari backers into real enemies after decades of tolerance and precarious coexistence with the Saudi regime. Previously, the Muslim Brotherhood played an important role in helping Saudi Arabia demonstrate its Islamic credentials through its work in Saudi-sponsored pan-Islamic institutions, but after the Egyptian coup, Riyadh lost them as reluctant and suspicious partners who could do business together. In the context of the GCC meetings, the semblance of solidarity was maintained, but tense relations with Qatar over security and economic matters demonstrated that Saudi hegemony over this regional forum was also under stress and could no longer be taken for granted. With the exception of Bahrain, Saudi authority over the rest of the council members was at best tolerated and at worst openly challenged. GCC members resisted several Saudi initiatives: the speedy wish of King Abdullah to move the council from [cooperation to union](#), the [common currency](#) with a central bank in Riyadh, the incorporation of Morocco and Jordan as special partners in the GCC and the 2012 [common security treaty](#). On these proposals, Saudi Arabia was unable to force a consensus among its closest allies in the Gulf region. The UAE resisted financial homogenization; Oman [utterly rejected](#) the union and openly threatened to withdraw from the GCC if it became reality; Kuwait did not welcome inviting Jordan to be

a special GCC member; and Qatar resented Saudi efforts to undermine its Islamist clients in North Africa and promote the Salafists as a countercurrent.

The blow to Saudi GCC hegemony was, however, Gulf differences over the [so-called Iranian threat](#). Saudi Arabia will probably never forgive Sultan Qaboos of Oman for playing a covert role in facilitating dialogue between Iran and the United States, which led to a serious rapprochement and continuous dialogue over Iran's nuclear program. If this rapprochement leads to lifting the sanctions imposed on Iran and its rehabilitation in the international community, Saudi Arabia will no doubt interpret this as a blow to its exclusive position in the region as the main US ally. But Oman does not have the financial capabilities of Qatar or the ambition to rival Saudi Arabia as an arbiter of Arab regional politics. It is this ambition of Qatar that worries the Saudis most. Qatar proved that it is still determined to play that role at the expense of the Saudis, who have spared no opportunity to belittle this small but wealthy state. Qatar used its media empire to shape Arab public opinion through [Al Jazeera](#), playing on emotional national sentiments and its wealth to back those who challenged the old Arab order. Saudi Arabia strived to return to the vanishing status quo ante and maintain the stability of its own position in a turbulent region. For Qatar, perhaps Saudi Arabia rather than Iran or the Muslim Brotherhood is the real threat. Let's not forget that in the 1990s Saudi Arabia tried to undermine Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani by supporting deposed members of his family to regain power after the 1995 coup. Serious economic disputes arose in 2006 when Saudi Arabia objected to the UAE-Qatari Dolphin Undersea Natural Gas Pipeline project. Relations with Qatar improved in 2007, but suspicion persisted between the two countries. Tribal connections on the border between the two countries remain open for manipulation on both sides, but the real threat remains in what Saudi commentators began to allude to immediately after the announcement to withdraw the ambassadors.

Saudi Arabia is obviously not in a position to invade Qatar as Saddam Hussein did in Kuwait, but these commentators are hoping that the Qatari ruling family would have a member who would bring Qatar back into the Gulf domain, meaning accept subservience to Saudi hegemony. During interviews on BBC Arabic television, Saudi commentators appealed to

“wise” members of the Qatari ruling family to come back to the GCC fold. Saudi Arabia does not see Qatar as a state, and reference to it as a family of 250,000-300,000 has already been made by Saudi princes. This is surprising, since differences between oil and gas family corporations may not be that great. Saudi Arabia can ostracize Qatar, but cannot directly punish it. Saudi Arabia can covertly undermine Qatar if it adopts the old British tactics of instigating peaceful coups among Gulf ruling family members. This must remain a worry for Qatar, although it is a remote possibility at the moment.

The Arab uprisings are destined to redraw the map of alliances in the region with regional forums such as the GCC becoming more redundant with time, not to mention the fate of the old Arab League, which seems to exist only in the archives now. But it is certain that neither Qatar nor Saudi Arabia will emerge as the main arbiters of Arab politics. Arabs are no longer seeking salvation by a charismatic hero. Their leaderless revolts promise to undermine any attempt by aging monarchs or aspiring young ones to lead them.

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