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The Washington Post

For Putin, a possible Pyrrhic victory

[David Ignatius](#)

March 13, 2014 -- It's still possible to imagine a fuzzy, face-saving compromise in Ukraine: Crimea would have a new, quasi-autonomous administrative status blessed by Moscow and Kiev. The problem is that few

analysts think Russian President Vladimir Putin will swallow this diplomatic pill.

Secretary of State John Kerry will make one more try, [seeing his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov](#) in London on Friday; Kerry hasn't ruled out traveling on to see Putin himself. But that's unlikely to stop the [planned referendum](#) Sunday in which Crimeans are almost certain to vote to break away from Ukraine.

What happens next, if Putin doesn't take Kerry's "offramp"? That's quite literally a guessing game for the Obama administration. Officials can't be sure how the Russian leader will move; they hope the West will stay united in imposing punitive sanctions, but that unity can't be guaranteed. Above all, U.S. officials are assessing whether the Ukraine crisis will mean a real breach in U.S.-Russian relations — [one that could torpedo joint diplomatic efforts over Syria and Iran](#) — or whether common interests can prevail.

You hear two strains of opinion about Putin from administration officials and other foreign policy analysts. For simplicity's sake, let's summarize these two views as "Putin is strong" and "Putin is weak."

Those who see the Russian leader playing a strong hand argue that he has been readying such a military intervention for more than a decade. He [invaded Georgia in 2008](#) and faced little Western opposition. He has now used military force to protect Russia's interests in Ukraine and, perhaps, other neighboring states — prompting talk of sanctions but no serious military response. He has shown that a dictator's bullying tactics can be successful.

The alternative view of a weak Putin begins with the fundamentals: Russia is in political, economic and social decline. Putin's abrasive tactics, far from intimidating Ukraine, [led its people to depose](#) Russian-backed President Viktor Yanukovich last month and form a new government. By his truculent behavior, Putin has driven Russia's neighbors closer to NATO. A weak Putin, in this view, has stumbled into the very situation he most fears.

My guess is that Putin will be a winner only in the short run. The negatives for Russia have probably increased because of the events of the past month. Russia has likely lost most of Ukraine as a buffer state, even if it claims Crimea as a consolation prize. The world simply isn't moving Russia's way.

A small sign of Putin's long-term problem is that both China and Japan have pulled back from Moscow, thanks to the Crimea adventure. China [fears](#) that the Crimean secessionist movement could be a model for Tibet; [Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe](#), who had been warming to Putin, has shown solidarity with America and Europe.

Will the Ukraine crisis prove a major turning point, tipping the world toward a new Cold War? Despite the obvious dangers of confrontation, many analysts say that's unlikely. Should Crimeans endorse independence as expected, the Russian parliament may raise the ante by voting to annex the region. But what may follow is a period in which the region's status is legally undefined and the United States continues to seek a compromise between Kiev and Moscow. Putin could disrupt that by encouraging unrest in Russian-speaking cities of eastern Ukraine, such as Donetsk and Kharkiv — and threatening further intervention. But that risky course is unlikely.

U.S. officials also doubt that Russia will sabotage the chemical-weapons disposal agreement in Syria or the international negotiations to limit Iran's nuclear program. Putin has a personal stake in both, and they are symbols of Russia's influence. If he were to scuttle such diplomacy, it would deepen Russia's isolation.

Putin must also be careful about the domestic consequences of his Crimea putsch. Yes, it has brought him popularity in Russia as a tough, nationalistic leader. But it may also encourage secessionists in Dagestan, Chechnya and other potential breakaway regions.

The Ukraine showdown, in a sense, has been a confrontation, [as Kerry argues](#), between a 19th-century worldview and a 21st-century approach. Putin's moves on the ground have been decisive, with immediate impact. The U.S.-led response has been collective, deliberative and slower to emerge. The world was impressed initially by the "shock and awe" of America's military intervention in Iraq in 2003. One thing on which Putin and President Obama can agree is that the benefits of that military intervention didn't last.

[Article 2.](#)

The Atlantic

Why It's So Hard for Obama to Be Tough on Russia

[Norm Ornstein](#)

Mar 13 2014 -- It is not uncommon for second-term presidents to turn more of their attention and focus to foreign policy. Domestic politics and policy become increasingly frustrating, as the president's partisans in Congress hunker down in preparation for a lousy midterm election, the party's ideological base becomes more belligerent, and the opposition party gets bolder. The president has had five years or more of engaging in foreign affairs and with foreign leaders. And the freedom to act without the constraints set by domestic politics and the powers of Congress, to move chess pieces on the international stage, is highly tempting.

Of course, what presidents want to do on the world stage is move those chess pieces and shape outcomes to make history through great accomplishments. That is what President Obama has in mind with the negotiations over Iran's nukes, the attempt to forge an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and, to a lesser degree, the Syrian chemical-weapons agreement.

In foreign policy, the president will spend most of his time trying to avoid a catastrophe rather than working to create a triumph.

But the harder reality is that most of the time the president will spend on foreign policy in coming months will focus on risk mitigation—trying to avoid a catastrophe more than working to create a triumph. That is true in Afghanistan, as Hamid Karzai continues to careen out of control; in Syria, as Bashar al-Assad vies with Kim Jong Un for status as the world's most brutal butcher; in Venezuela, as Nicolás Maduro descends from authoritarian rule into sheer thuggery; in Turkey, as a thoroughly corrupt Recep Tayyip Erdogan strips his country of its hard-fought and hard-won democratic institutions and principles; in the potential for serious conflict between China and Japan over the Senkaku Islands.

Then there is Ukraine. The challenges to the president are formidable, and they start with a larger reality: Dealing with a lion's share of the other crises above—Syria and Iran, especially—requires trying to reach agreement with Russian President Vladimir Putin, either to help resolve

them or at least to refrain from making them much, much worse. Putin saved the president from a huge embarrassment with the intervention to resolve Syria's chemical-weapons stockpile, just before the Senate would have voted down his request for authorization to use force to punish Assad for using the weapons repeatedly against Syrians. Russia is a key player in the delicate negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program. Moscow can make the U.S. transition out of Afghanistan more painful and disruptive, and can be a positive or negative player in negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.

For those who immediately began calling for the harshest sanctions we can apply against Russia after its outrageous behavior in Crimea, those considerations were nowhere evident. Of course, one can make the case—and it is a powerful one—that Putin's Russia will act in its cold, hard self-interest no matter what we do to try to appease it or cushion any reaction. But it is also likely that the harder we push, the more Russia will respond in a hard and negative way in every other area of our interest, at least in the short run. And when it comes to Russia and Syria, the short run is absolutely crucial.

Nonetheless, it is clear that Putin believes in power and power only. If there is no tough response to his takeover of Crimea, it will signal to him that there is an open field for further aggressive moves, starting with, but not likely ending with, Eastern Ukraine.

But here comes the second major challenge for the president: Serious moves against Russia begin with tough actions against the corrupt oligarchs, Putin and his cronies, who run the show, and with severe economic sanctions against Russia's weak economy. Those are doable—but only with the cooperation of our EU allies. And the Europeans have little stomach to do much at all. In London, where a booming real-estate market has been fueled by Russian billionaires buying houses and flats for up to a hundred million pounds (!), and where there is real fear that bursting the housing bubble will sink an already precarious economy, there is no chance that the Brits will crack down on travel by the oligarchs or hit them hard in other ways.

Throughout Europe, where trade with Russia is robust, economic sanctions would be painful—much more painful than they would be for the United

States. Much of Europe also depends heavily on Russian oil and natural gas.

The third dilemma for the president has domestic implications. A declaration from Obama that the U.S. will begin significant exports of natural gas, along with ramping up natural-gas production, would be painful to Russia. To be sure, liquefying the gas and shipping it by container is no equivalent to the pipelines bringing the gas to European countries from Russia. But the combination of increased exports and increased production would hit Putin right in the wallet.

Formidable forces at home oppose more U.S. gas exports, however. Some fear a short-term increase in domestic prices, and others worry about the increase in fracking that would come with the policy change. And the latter group, especially the environmental activists already agitating against the possible approval of the Keystone XL pipeline and deeply opposed to any expansion of oil-and-gas exploration and drilling, are a serious thorn in the president's side.

With a new [NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll](#) showing a sharp decrease in enthusiasm among Democrats heading into the crucial midterm elections, there is a price to be paid for a presidential move on this front. Putin running rampant, headaches around the world, headaches from allies, headaches from his own base. All of these come with the territory for a second-term president. Obama and his secretary of state, the formidable John Kerry, may well navigate through this. But first they will earn many more gray hairs and endure many more sleepless nights.

*[Norm Ornstein](#) is a correspondent for *The Atlantic*, a contributing editor and columnist for *National Journal*, and a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.*

[Article 3.](#)

NYT

Working With Iran on Syria

Jonathan Stevenson

March 12, 2014 -- For almost three years, America's approach to Syria has revolved around pushing Russia to use its influence on President Bashar al-Assad to drive a political transition in the country. Even before the crisis in Crimea put Washington's diplomatic relationship with Moscow on ice, this was a failed strategy.

President Obama needs to do everything he can to put Syria on a path to peace quickly. That requires rethinking his approach to the region and reaching out to a country that he has so far kept at a guarded distance from the negotiating table: Iran.

The problem with Russia is that it is a bad-faith partner on Syria: Its president, Vladimir V. Putin, is bent on thwarting Washington in the Middle East, disdains what he considers American naïveté about the opposition's growing jihadism, and may not even have the leverage to sign up Mr. Assad for meaningful change.

Iran is likewise adamant that Mr. Assad not be forced out, but its broader attitude toward the United States is cautiously warming, as demonstrated by productive talks on nuclear issues. Furthermore, Syria's strategic and operational dependence on Iran and its proxy, Hezbollah, afford Tehran immense influence over Mr. Assad.

This puts America and Iran somewhat closer on Syria than they may appear: The United States and its European partners seem to have nudged the expatriate Syrian opposition toward a transition agenda that does not explicitly entail Mr. Assad's departure. The Syrian National Coalition's Statement of Basic Principles, issued last month, does not mention it. The Obama administration should consider discreetly and frankly discussing possible power-sharing scenarios with Iran — including those under which Mr. Assad might stay in office for some finite period. Iran might even welcome such a diplomatic opening, particularly after the United States forced the United Nations to revoke the country's invitation to the recent talks on Syria in Geneva.

At least at first, an American approach to Iran should take place outside the formalities of the Geneva negotiations. It need not be strictly bilateral — Britain or France could also be involved — and could be facilitated by the Swiss government.

Before getting to what power-sharing in Syria might actually look like, the parties would try to establish a sustainable cease-fire. The United States

and Europe could probably get the opposition and its supporters from the Sunni Gulf states to stand down; Iran could do the same with Mr. Assad. The next step would be to speed the delivery of civilian aid. Given that Iran and Hezbollah have personnel on the ground in Syria, their cooperation on such an effort would be much more effective than Russia's. Aid delivery would not only help Syrians in need, but such a good-faith effort on Mr. Assad's part would improve the climate for substantive negotiations on the actual transition plan.

A diplomatic approach to Iran would not sit well with many in the Syrian opposition. But they also have to face facts: With or without Iran, the United States and its allies will remain wary of any political deal unless the moderate opposition substantially purges its ranks of jihadists, who are infiltrating Syria in increasing numbers.

Even partial success in these endeavors would make Russia — which is genuinely concerned about transnational terrorism — more inclined to urge Mr. Assad toward a power-sharing deal, and possibly a graceful exit. Beyond that, it would address the regime's purported sticking point, namely the opposition's perceived subordination of "terrorism" to political transition.

Iran, of course, would prefer the status quo. So what, realistically, could we expect out of this approach?

Support for the Assad regime is stretching both Iran's resources and Hezbollah's, and Tehran may see value in signaling conciliation to improve the mood for nuclear negotiations. Accordingly, Tehran could probably accept a framework under which a rump element from the Assad regime retained a meaningful degree of political power.

That, in turn, would be consistent with longstanding American and allied policy, which calls for the retention of key state institutions in order to avoid the hazards that were encountered with de-Baathification in Iraq. If an American-Iranian channel bore fruit, Iran could then be brought into the Geneva process as a full participant alongside Syria, the Syrian opposition, the United States and Russia. In view of its geopolitical rivalry with Iran, at that point Saudi Arabia could also be given an equivalent role to ensure its cooperation in implementing an eventual transitional framework.

One thing Washington should not do is condition progress toward a long-term nuclear deal with Iran on its willingness to cooperate on Syria. These must be two separate tracks.

At the same time, they're complementary. If the United States can seal a nuclear deal and reset relations with Iran, Tehran will face much higher economic and political costs to doing anything destabilizing or provocative with regard to Syria or Lebanon.

Syria continues to present Mr. Obama with one of the knottiest foreign-policy problems of his presidency. Mr. Assad has proved far more resilient than anyone expected. But a realistic solution may lie in a principle that the president has espoused since he was on the campaign trail in 2008: To avoid the risky use of force, sometimes you have to talk to your enemies.

Jonathan Stevenson, a professor of strategic studies at the Naval War College, was the director for political-military affairs for the Middle East and North Africa on the National Security Council from 2011 to 2013.

[Article 4.](#)

NYT

Lift the Mideast Roadblocks

Ephraim Sned

March 12, 2014 -- As President Obama prepares to meet in Washington next week with the Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas, Israeli opponents of a peace deal keep asserting that four issues pose insurmountable stumbling blocks: Palestinian recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, the "right of return," Jerusalem and security arrangements.

But these naysayers are mistaken. Concurrence on all four issues can be reached if both sides are sincerely committed to a two-state solution, and if both leaderships and the mediator have the courage to tell the truth to one another, to themselves and — most important — to their constituencies. A demand to officially recognize Israel as the Jewish state has never been submitted to any Arab counterpart: not Egypt's Anwar Sadat, Jordan's King Hussein or Syria's Hafez al-Assad. Yet Israel's prime minister, Benjamin

Netanyahu, keeps raising such a declaration as a condition because there is no Israeli — certainly not me — who would not sympathize with it and because he believes that President Abbas cannot provide it, knowing that it could drive a wedge between Mr. Abbas and the Arab citizens of Israel. However, the Palestine National Council, in its Declaration of Independence of Nov. 15, 1988, already acknowledged the definition of Israel as the Jewish state when it referred to the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 of 1947, saying it had partitioned Palestine into two states, Arab and Jewish. In fact, Yasir Arafat reiterated this recognition. The Palestinian leadership just needs to declare that the recognition Mr. Netanyahu is demanding is implicit in that 25-year-old document. Regarding the “right of return,” my 28 years’ experience negotiating and talking with Palestinians taught me that there is no possibility of concluding any agreement about “rights” with them. Such a dialogue always turns into a heated, emotional argument about the past, a futile “comparative victimology.” But when the negotiations are about a practical solution and how to implement it, Palestinians are very pragmatic and agreement is achievable.

Therefore, Secretary of State John Kerry should not mention the “right” of return. Instead, he should negotiate a “return.” No one can prevent the Palestinian state from legislating “The Bill of Return,” as Israel did in 1950. But no one can impose on Israel an influx of Palestinian refugees into its territory that would destroy its demographic identity. The authors of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative understood Israel’s sensitivity and called for a “just and agreed” solution to the return issue, meaning that Israel has to agree. Mr. Kerry’s road map could use a similar formula.

In such a plan, Israel would have to be ready to relocate some 100,000 Israelis who chose the West Bank as the place in which to exercise their “right of return” to the cradle of Jewish legacy. Thus, for the greater good of resolving their conflict, both peoples would have to forgo returning to some of the places they are emotionally attached to.

As to the issue of partitioning Jerusalem, it is already divided. There is no functional interchange between its Jewish part and its Arab part, which is home to more than 300,000 Palestinians. Even those who shout “United Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty” don’t want those Palestinians who now have the status of municipal residents of Jerusalem to be declared full

Israeli citizens. However, there is no chance for legitimacy of Israel's capital if one-third of its population are second-class citizens.

What will actually be divided is East Jerusalem. In the territory Israel annexed in 1967, there are 26 Arab villages that never were part of Jerusalem. Israel has built new Jewish neighborhoods on this vast territory, where 200,000 Israelis reside. What remains after this colossal annexation can be given to the Palestinian state as its capital. This solution was seriously offered by President Bill Clinton toward the end of his second term.

And for the one square kilometer (about 250 acres) encompassing the holy shrines, a Vatican-like status can be a respectful arrangement for the three religions.

Thus these steps can resolve the "Jerusalem problem," which is not as intractable as described by those who think the status quo can be maintained indefinitely.

Regarding the fourth issue, security arrangements, this is an area in which Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority share an existential interest: to prevent Islamist terror organizations from crossing their boundaries and operating inside their territories.

Israel already maintains effective security cooperation with Jordan and with the Palestinian Authority. Future security arrangements should be based on this triple alliance's implementing sophisticated security methods. The precision-guided weaponry of the Israel Defense Forces and its indigenous innovative intelligence technologies enable Israel to defend itself effectively with a modest presence along the Jordan River — one with visibility low enough to avoid embarrassing the Palestinians and compromising their sovereignty. The Palestinian leadership has to accept that these security measures are a vital common interest.

While the gaps on these four issues can be bridged, Mr. Kerry should not expect that both governments will be enthusiastic about it. But he can draft a practical document based on facts, not on the slogans that Palestinians and Israelis have been hearing for five decades.

In Israel, there cannot be such an agreement without a political crisis. In the Knesset, 42 of the 68 members of Mr. Netanyahu's coalition are beholden to the settlers who fiercely oppose any agreement with the Palestinians. Mr. Netanyahu therefore will be compelled to change his

coalition partners, make way for another prime minister or call elections so that a government that is not dependent on settlers' support can take power. But a transient political crisis is better for Israel than the horrible repercussions of a failure of Mr. Kerry's efforts.

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[Article 5.](#)

The Washington Institute

Jordan's Energy Balancing Act

David Schenker and Simon Henderson

March 12, 2014 In February, two private Jordanian firms signed a contract with a private U.S.-Israeli consortium to import natural gas from Israel's giant Tamar field, located under the bed of the Mediterranean Sea fifty miles offshore from Haifa. The Arab Potash Company and the Jordan Bromine Company -- both partially owned by the Jordanian government -- will pay Houston-based Noble Energy and its partners \$500 million over the course of fifteen years to supply a power plant at Jordanian industrial facilities by the Dead Sea. At just \$33 million per year, the deal is not financially significant, but it may set a huge precedent in terms of fostering regional economic cooperation and establishing a framework for Jordanian energy security. The political challenges are significant, however, particularly following the March 10 shooting of a Jordanian man at an Israeli-controlled West Bank crossing point.

Background

Unlike its Arab neighbors, Jordan has no oil. Apart from one gas field near the border with Iraq, which is used to fuel a power station, the kingdom is wholly reliant on imported energy. For years, it received oil from Saudi Arabia and then from Saddam Hussein's Iraq, which offered discount prices. After Saddam was toppled in 2003, the Gulf Arab states began to provide Jordan with cheap but sporadic oil deliveries at Washington's urging. While helpful, this discounted supply was unreliable.

In 2004, Amman signed a contract to import gas from Egypt, which provided reliable and cost-effective energy supplies for nearly seven years. But after the toppling of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the Egypt-Jordan gas pipeline -- which helped generate nearly 90 percent of the kingdom's electricity -- was sabotaged on nearly twenty occasions, interrupting the flow. Jordan had been paying Egypt about \$6 per thousand cubic feet of gas, but the stoppage compelled it to purchase fuel oil as an alternative feedstock for its power plants at dramatically higher prices. In 2012, these extra expenditures contributed to a nearly 30 percent budget deficit.

The Israeli Option

With an estimated forty years of gas reserves in Tamar and the larger, as-yet-unexploited Leviathan field, Israel could provide Jordan with an inexpensive and reliable means of meeting all of its domestic gas requirements. Israel is heavily invested in the kingdom's stability and the survival of the moderate monarchy, and it would undoubtedly be glad to fill this need. Reflecting this interest, it has reportedly agreed to sell the gas to Arab Potash and Jordan Bromine at a price comparable to the Egyptian pipeline deal.

Yet King Abdullah has been hesitant to proceed with more Israeli gas deals for fear of domestic backlash. On February 24, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's political party, the Islamic Action Front, described the agreement with the "Zionist entity" as "criminal," "contrary to the best interests of Jordan," and "an attack on the Palestinian cause."

Official Visions

Jordanian sensitivities about buying gas from Israel were apparent in recent comments by Energy Minister Mohammad Hamed, as reported by the Jordan Times on March 2. Headlined with the quote "2018 will be a turning point in Jordan's energy sector," the story failed to mention the new agreement with Noble Energy. Instead, Hamed focused on Jordan's oil shale reserves, some of the largest in the world, though the technology involved in exploiting them is challenging.

Specifically, the minister projected that the Saudi Arab Company for Oil Shale would be producing 3,000 barrels of oil per day from these reserves by 2019, rising to 30,000 b/d by 2025. He also asserted that Royal Dutch

Shell would bring onstream additional oil shale projects in 2022, eventually producing 300,000 b/d. (Current Jordanian oil consumption is around 110,000 b/d, all imported.) Furthermore, he noted, an Estonian-Malaysian consortium has agreed to build a 460 megawatt shale-fueled power plant in the kingdom, while a group of Chinese, Emirati, and Jordanian companies is planning a 600 megawatt plant. (Jordan's current generating capacity is 3,140 megawatts.) He also mentioned that agreements to build twelve solar power plants, with a total capacity of 200 megawatts, would be signed this month.

In addition, Hamed announced a natural gas import facility and potential Iraqi oil refinery at Aqaba on Jordan's small Red Sea coast. Baghdad hopes to build an oil export pipeline to Aqaba, reducing Iraqi dependence on tankers having to transit the strategic Strait of Hormuz. The route could be used for Iraqi gas exports as well, and Jordan would be able to use some of the oil and gas domestically. Yet Hamed did not mention BP's January decision to abandon a gas project near the Iraqi border because of poor prospects, after drilling two exploration wells and spending close to \$240 million.

Indeed, the minister's comments amounted to a very optimistic assessment of Jordan's indigenous energy future bolstered by a range of enticements from other Arab states. Although not stated as such, some of the proposed projects with these Arab neighbors are implicitly intended to reduce or remove Jordan's need to use Israeli gas.

Controversial Nuclear Ambitions

Additionally, Jordan is still exploring nuclear energy options. In 2013, it reached a tentative agreement with the Russian state-owned firm Rosatom to build two 1,000 megawatt nuclear plants. Slated to be signed in 2015, the contract has Russia contributing 49 percent of the \$10 billion cost, with the rest to be supplied by the kingdom and its investors.

According to the Jordanian Atomic Energy Commission, nuclear power is "a strategic choice." The kingdom envisions that by 2030, nuclear energy will provide 30 percent of its electricity and help alleviate its water deficit (currently 600 million cubic meters per year) through increased desalinization efforts. These ambitious nuclear plans also envision Jordan exporting electricity as well as enriching indigenous uranium to fuel its own reactors and sell abroad. The kingdom has already spent millions in

feasibility studies and funded a nuclear research facility.

Unsurprisingly, the United States and Israel are concerned about these plans, with Washington raising particularly vocal opposition to the uranium enrichment proposal. In 2012, King Abdullah famously accused Israel of internationally undermining Jordan's nuclear program.

Yet Amman's plans have domestic opponents as well. In May 2012, parliament voted to suspend the proposed reactor projects, citing safety concerns and claiming that not all costs had been disclosed. More recently, the "National Committee to Oppose the Nuclear Project" reportedly organized demonstrations in downtown Amman and across the kingdom on February 21 to protest the reactors. The rallies included activists from Jordan's largest tribe, the Bani Sakhr. Although the tribe has traditionally been a leading supporter of the monarchy, some members are apparently concerned about the plan to build reactors in the heartland of their territory. Domestic opposition to the project is partly based on its exorbitant cost. At \$10 billion, the projected cost of the two plants is equivalent to the kingdom's entire annual budget. Safety is also a significant worry given that the kingdom is located along a fault line and periodically experiences earthquakes. Poignantly, when Israeli officials mentioned this concern during a June 2009 meeting -- two years before the Fukushima Daiichi catastrophe -- Jordanian officials responded by highlighting Japan as an earthquake-prone country that builds safe nuclear reactors. Other concerns include terrorist threats (despite Jordan's efficient security services) and environmental risks (both on the Red Sea coast and at the reactors' planned desert location). Also, contrary to official pronouncements from Amman, foreign experts have assessed that mining the kingdom's domestic uranium is not commercially viable.

Conclusion

Jordan's current energy crunch, which was initially caused by the interruption of Egyptian gas supplies, has been exacerbated by the arrival of nearly a million Syrian refugees. Some of the country's economic problems may eventually decline as International Monetary Fund reforms -- most notably cuts to energy subsidies -- take full effect. Amman has already lifted some subsidies on natural gas and petrol, and it is slated to begin rationalizing electricity costs this year. But these steps have been unpopular, so the strategy will continue to pose domestic political risk.

Against this backdrop, Jordan's unprecedented gas deal suggests that King Abdullah appreciates the potential benefits of closer energy cooperation with Israel, deeming it a reliable partner to offset dependence on uncertain promises from Arab neighbors. The deal is also in line with the growing strategic links between the two countries, including Israel's provision of significant water supplies to the kingdom.

The United States should encourage such efforts while helping Amman manage the domestic balancing act entailed by cooperation with Israel. And as a major provider of aid in its own right, Washington should quietly intensify its efforts to convince Jordan to jettison its nuclear ambitions.

David Schenker is the Aufzien Fellow and director of the Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute. Simon Henderson is the Institute's Baker Fellow and director of its Gulf and Energy Policy Program.

[Article 6.](#)

The European

David and Goliath: The advantage of disadvantages

An Interview with Malcolm Gladwell

11 March, 2014 -- *Malcolm Gladwell has written a book about power and the people who challenge it. He sat down with Lars Mensel to discuss if the world is ultimately fair.*

The European: You have written a book about the idea that the strong and powerful are not always what they seem. Was that notion informed by personal experience?

Gladwell: When I moved to America in my twenties, it always struck me, how as a Canadian, you were always terribly impressed with certain examples of American privileges: Elite schools, fancy hospitals, all these things Americans spent expensive money on. But once you are there, you realize that America is not that different from what you had back home.

The European: Can you explain that?

Gladwell: The assumption that America is a magical place, where the quality of everything is way higher, simply does not match your experience. As a Canadian, as an outsider, I probably had a more realistic point of view. I was not so much affected by those symbols of privilege as Americans might be. So in that sense I suppose the book is based on personal experiences.

The European: Interestingly, the book echoes the American Dream: That through hard work and effort, anyone can eventually achieve greatness. Would you agree with that assessment?

Gladwell: It is complicated. For example: One of the effects of the digital revolution is the democratization of certain kinds of hierarchies. But at the same time, you can make an argument that America is more unequal, more hierarchical, more closed, than it has been in a long time. So it seems to me that there are lots of very contradictory and complex things going on right now throughout the world. At some point it strengthens the existing authorities, and at some point it undermines them. We shouldn't generalize.

The European: Recently, a prominent German columnist argued that the NSA spying scandal shattered all his hopes about the internet's role in challenging the authorities.

Gladwell: I wrote an article about that two years ago, after the Arab Spring. I argued that social media was not the engine of social change; that it is even a lousy mechanism for radical social change. At the time, I earned a lot of criticism for that, but now I feel quite justified. So I would agree with him. I think that these tools can have the effect of democratizing and leveling certain social spaces, but they are not the best tools to overthrow dictatorships. Bear in mind that these tools can also easily be used by dictatorships to consolidate and strengthen their own power, but that is not what they are good for. They are good for replacing your PR agency with a Twitter account. They are useful for telling the world how you feel about a certain [REDACTED] star, but they are not engines of social justice in the way we imagined them to be.

The European: By overestimating their utility, have we focussed away from the people who actually use social networks?

Gladwell: Yes. We misjudge the ways in which people overthrow powerful institutions. They build strong ties, find and create tightly knit communities of people who are willing to take risks; people who are committed to a cause, who have a clearly articulated philosophy, who are able to think strategically. None of these things have anything to do with the internet. In fact, in some ways the internet makes some of those tasks harder because you do not have to do the hard work of building communities. Shallow communities are relatively easy to build. Sometimes you will not learn the kinds of community-building skills that had historically been necessary for real change. In the book, I write about the Civil Rights Movement: Those guys spent 20 years building the movement, risking their lives for their cause! They were not merely hitting the like-button on Facebook for a popular cause; they were risking their lives! That is what activism is! Digital activism is an oxymoron...

The European: It has been called ‘Slacktivism’...

Gladwell: Slacktivism is an appropriate description. Not for all internet activism, but for the bulk of it.

The European: Speaking of community building: In your book, you write about a little girl’s basketball team. They were doing terribly until their coach decided that they needed to reinterpret the rules of the game. Are you suggesting we should accept such reinterpretations of the rules?

Gladwell: I do not know whether we want it to become acceptable. If everyone in society behaves like an underdog and is disagreeable, society does not work. These are strategies that are reserved, or I think ought to be reserved, for people fighting for meaningful causes, or have no other options.

The European: Have we as a society perhaps agreed not to use these tactics, because they *shouldn’t* work in principle?

Gladwell: It seems illegitimate to substitute effort for skill. In sports, we want the most skilled player to win. Let’s say I am 15 years old, play tennis at a school league and hit with a really exaggerated forehand, lobbed the ball at every opportunity. I would win a lot of games that way, would drive the opponents so crazy that I will win. But that would be a pretty boring,

obnoxious way to play a match. It would be ‘anti-tennis’. We would not want to watch tennis if everybody did that.

The European: Nevertheless, you do celebrate the hard way towards a goal. Have you found out where people find the courage or willpower to go the extra mile?

Gladwell: A part of it comes from having nothing to lose.

The European: How do you mean that?

Gladwell: Look at the example of IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad and his decision to take his furniture manufacturing to Poland in 1961...

The European: ...his Swedish competitors had launched a manufacturers’ boycott because he was selling his product directly to customers, not through traditional furniture stores. He had to produce somewhere else.

Gladwell: Exactly. This was insanely difficult at that time. In terms of strategy, it was probably the most difficult thing he could have done, practically like trying to set up a factory in North Korea. But he did it! Not only because he was determined and incredibly capable, but he knew that it was either that, or going out of business. So in a sense, you get the strength to do certain things because you have run out of other options. It is an utterly important point, because people tend to forget how freeing it is to have no options.

The European: That is certainly not how we think about it.

Gladwell: Paradoxically, if Ingvar Kamprad had not completely run out of options, if he still had some hope of producing furniture in Sweden, he would not have done it and IKEA wouldn’t be as big as it is today. There is this weird thing where having a little bit of resources is worse than having none. Or: having a few numbers of options is worse than having no options. It can be freeing to be at the very bottom. You see the same with terrorist groups, which have nothing to lose. That is the negative side: In such a position, you simply do not care. It cannot get any worse. You are already an outcast – like Al-Quaida to use that example. It is a fascinating phenomenon that people are empowered by their lack of power.

The European: You frequently write about turning disadvantages, such as a learning disability, into an advantage. Was there ever a time when you thought that one of these disadvantages doesn't even sound so bad?

Gladwell: Dyslexia is really interesting to me. An extraordinary number of dyslexics who have done very well for themselves credit their dyslexia with their success. I am fascinated by the extremely productive things these people extract from this "handicap". I was asked the question: Would you wish dyslexia on your child? There are actually circumstances where I would. Particularly now that I have seen so many instances of people who have managed to make the best of it, and become stronger because of it. This is why I really feel uncomfortable using the word disability. It is a condition which makes certain kinds of activities harder. A handicap is something very different. A handicap is like trying to race and you have a ten pound weight stuck to your waist. That is a handicap. There is no way of conceiving this disadvantage.

The European: British author Jon Ronson even wrote a book about the psychopathic traits of really successful people. If disadvantages can be advantages, does it mean that the playing field ultimately evens?

No, I do not think it is even. I think it is just another way of conceptualizing how radically uneven it is. Take someone like Gary Cohn, the president of Goldman Sachs. Here we have someone who is a very tall, handsome, incredibly charismatic man. He has an insane amount of energy; probably an IQ of 150. He was born with a condition that forced him to learn a series of skills and adapt a certain series of traits that proved to be incredibly adaptive in the world of business. That does not make him like everybody else, he is a guy whose specific disability has put him even further ahead of everybody else. If all of these things were perfectly randomly distributed, yes, but they are not, they are distributed as unfairly as anything else. Similarly, dyslexia is giving someone, who is already poor, who does not have a supportive family, a disadvantage, placing them even further behind...

The European: You make the point that a disadvantage is not always what it seems, that something as extreme as the loss of the parents can

turn out to be beneficial – or even correlated with success. You call it a “perverse coincidence”...

Gladwell: The role of parents in the development of children is a lot more complex than we may realize. Parents both foster and inhibit their children's development. For certain kinds of people, the removal of parental constraint is very liberating. I do not think that this is anywhere close to a majority, but there is this weird condition. I talked to a whole series of psychiatrists because I felt that psychiatrists would have encountered people like this in the course of their profession. I talked to probably three or four psychiatrists in New York, and they all told the same story, which was that among their most distinguished and also most troubled patients, the amount who had suffered the loss of a parent in their childhood was well above average. I was having a conversation with this one psychiatrist about a patient of his who was a hugely successful self-made business man who had witnessed the murder of his mother when he was six years old. This was the central trauma of this man's life, because you can never get over something like that. But it had the effect both of crippling him emotionally and liberating him, it made him driven and ruthless, because he was someone who had quite literally seen the worst. He was scared of nothing, which is something beneficial for someone who wants to succeed in a very competitive environment. Now that is something you would never wish on anyone, but it has a fascinating effect. The death of his mother made him profoundly unhappy but it also made him more successful, than he would have been.

The European: Early on I said that parts of the book reminded me of the American Dream. But you seem to suggest that there is coincidence in everything. That randomness can make people more courageous – and sometimes resilient.

Gladwell: This is a book that tries to understand the effects of random variations and experiences. Parental loss is the first example: some random number of children lose their parents by fate. And then this group has some widely disperse responses to that random event. There is randomness in randomness.

The European: We often misunderstand stories about underdogs – such as the tale of David and Goliath – because we *want* to misunderstand them. Are we going to continue overvaluing the underdog?

Gladwell: Romanticize is a better word. People romanticize them – in a sympathetic response to their beleaguered position. There is an important idea in psychology: The “just world theory”, which says that it is very important for us to convince ourselves that the world is just and things happen for a reason. That there is some elemental fairness in everything, which creates the illusion of justice. Our affection for the underdog is a version of this theory. It is very important for us that underdogs win, to believe that they win. If underdogs would not win but the person with the most advantages would do so all the time, then the world becomes deeply unfair – more than that, it becomes profoundly depressive.

The European: Is that perhaps also something that motivates people to ultimately challenge authority, this believe in the just world that if they feel oppressed, they believe in the need to challenge the authorities?

Gladwell: We are powerfully motivated by the desire to make the world conform to a set of principles. And that absolutely motivates people to rebel against authority. If you think of David’s actions against Goliath: he is rebelling against a notion that the big, tall, strong guy should win every battle, right? Does not seem fair to him. Only a handful of people are 6’6”, why do they get to win every battle?

Gladwell is a staff writer at the New Yorker and author of several bestselling books such as “Blink”, “The Tipping Point” and most recently “David and Goliath”.