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Subject: April 24 update
Date: Thu, 24 Apr 2014 12:54:51 +0000

24 April, 2014

Article 1.	NYT <u>Palestinian Rivals Announce Unity Pact, Drawing U.S. and Israeli Rebuke</u> Jodi Rudoren and Michael R. Gordon
Article 2.	The Council on Foreign Relations <u>The Fatah-Hamas Gaza Palestinian Unity Agreement</u> Robert M. Danin
Article 3.	Al Monitor <u>Hamas reconciliation last straw for Palestine critics in Congress</u> Julian Pecquet
Article 4.	New Statesman <u>Tony Blair's speech on the Middle East</u> Tony Blair
Article 5.	Al Monitor <u>Get ready for the next Erdogan decade</u> Mustafa Akyol
Article 6.	The Diplomat <u>US-Japan Relations and Obama's Visit to Japan</u> Yo-Jung Chen

[Article 1.](#)

NYT

Palestinian Rivals Announce Unity Pact, Drawing U.S. and Israeli Rebuke

[Jodi Rudoren](#) and [Michael R. Gordon](#)

April 23, 2014 -- The [faltering Middle East peace process](#) was thrown into further jeopardy on Wednesday, with Israel and the United States harshly condemning a new deal announced by feuding Palestinian factions, including the militant group Hamas, to repair their seven-year rift.

Israel canceled a negotiating session scheduled for Wednesday night shortly after leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization joined hands with their rivals from Hamas at a celebratory ceremony in the Gaza Strip. “Whoever chooses Hamas does not want peace,” the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said in a statement, describing the group as “a murderous terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of Israel.” The unity pact, coming days before the April 29 expiration date for the American-brokered peace talks that have been the mainstay of Secretary of State John Kerry’s tenure, surprised officials in Washington, which, like Israel, deems Hamas a terrorist group and forbids direct dealings with it. After months of intensive shuttle diplomacy in which Mr. Kerry [relentlessly pursued the peace process](#) and even dangled the possibility of [releasing an American convicted of spying](#) for Israel to salvage the lifeless talks, his spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, called the Palestinian move “disappointing” and the timing “troubling.”

The Hamas prime minister, Ismail Haniya, center, and Azzam al-Ahmad, left, a senior Fatah official who headed the P.L.O. delegation to Gaza, at a news conference on Wednesday in Gaza City. Credit Wissam Nassar for The New York Times

“Any Palestinian government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to nonviolence, recognition of the state of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations between the parties,” Ms. Psaki said, citing conditions Hamas has repeatedly rejected. “It’s hard to see how Israel can be expected to negotiate with a government that does not believe in its right to exist.”

Hamas and Fatah, the faction that dominates the P.L.O., have signed several similar accords before that were not carried out, so it remained unclear whether Wednesday’s deal promised a real resolution or a replay of an old movie.

Some analysts saw the step primarily as a tactic by President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority to pressure Israel to make concessions as the clock winds down on extending the [fraught negotiations](#). He said in statement that “there is no contradiction at all” between reconciliation and negotiation, adding, “We are totally committed to establishing a just and comprehensive peace based on the two-state principle.”

Other experts noted that Palestinian political conditions have drastically changed since the signing of previous agreements, which could lead both parties to make the compromises necessary to put this one into action. Hamas has been in a deep political and economic crisis since the military-backed government took over Egypt last summer and largely cut ties with Gaza. Mr. Abbas, at 79, is looking for a legacy and an exit strategy. Reconciliation is deeply resonant among Palestinians and could revive the president's sagging popularity.

"It's not bad for both sides — it is bad for the peace process," said Shimrit Meir, an Israeli analyst of Palestinian politics and editor of The Source, an Arabic news website. "It is simply rude, in diplomatic language, when Kerry is doing his last heroic effort to save the peace process, to reward it with reconciliation with a terrorist group. I think this is a message, and it's very blunt."

Something like this is a prerequisite to peace, as a practical matter. Or do negotiations with an entity that effectively represents only a fraction of the people and territories involved make any sense?

Beyond the damage to the peace talks, joining forces with Hamas could cost the Palestinians millions of dollars in financial aid from the United States and Europe, and prompt a host of retaliatory actions by Israel.

Even as the deal was being announced, there were other signs of tension. An Israeli airstrike hit northern Gaza, apparently missing the militant on a motorcycle it was aiming for and wounding 12 Palestinians, including two children, according to Gaza health officials. Later Wednesday evening, two rockets fired from Gaza landed in open areas of southern Israel.

The schism between Hamas and Fatah began in 2007, with a brief but bloody civil war that followed a failed unity government after Hamas's victory in 2006 Palestinian elections. It left Palestinian territory divided, with Hamas ruling Gaza, the impoverished and isolated coastal expanse, and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority governing the larger and more populous West Bank.

Dreams of reconciliation have been repeatedly dashed, after much-trumpeted agreements signed in [Cairo in 2011](#) and [Doha in 2012](#) were never carried out.

"Sorry to say that we are familiar with such celebrations," said Talal Okal, a Gaza political analyst. "I hope that this time will be more serious, but to

be more serious is to go directly and quickly to the first step, to let the people touch and see, not to hear only.”

On Wednesday afternoon, after two days of meetings at the home of the Hamas prime minister, Ismail Haniya, in Gaza City’s Beach refugee camp, the Palestinian leaders vowed to form a government of technocrats within five weeks that would prepare for long-overdue elections six months later. “I announce to our people the news that the years of split are over,” Mr. Haniya said triumphantly.

Azzam al-Ahmad, a senior Fatah official who headed the P.L.O. delegation to Gaza, said he hoped the deal would be “a true beginning and a true partnership.”

Ziad Abu Amr, deputy prime minister of the Palestinian Authority and a close aide to Mr. Abbas, said the new deal came about because “the situation has become more demanding and the pressures are rising.” He cited Egypt’s frequent closing of the Rafah border crossing, Gaza’s gateway to the world, which he said a technocratic government could reverse, as well as domestic political concerns.

“It’s a psychological and national issue that Palestinians feel they are united,” Mr. Abu Amr said. “This split is hurting them.”

Ultimately, what we have here are two distinct peoples contesting ownership of essentially one land, from the Jordan to the Mediterranean. ... He and other Palestinian leaders dismissed Israel’s threats and said reconciliation was an internal matter, noting that the presence of extreme right-wing members in Israel’s governing coalition had not stopped Palestinians from participating in the peace talks. They also pointed out that some Israeli leaders had questioned Mr. Abbas’s ability to deliver a peace deal with Hamas controlling Gaza.

“Mr. Netanyahu and his government were using Palestinian division as an excuse not to make peace,” said Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator. “Now they want to use Palestinian reconciliation as an excuse for the same purpose. This is utterly absurd.”

Israel’s cabinet planned to meet Thursday to plan its next steps. Dore Gold, a senior adviser to Mr. Netanyahu, called the Palestinian deal “a real game changer,” and said, “You cannot have a serious peace process with Hamas inside.”

Tzipi Livni, Israel's chief negotiator, said the reconciliation was a "very problematic development."

Some Washington-based Middle East experts, who had long thought Mr. Kerry's efforts to be an uphill struggle given the yawning gaps between Israeli and Palestinian positions on fundamental issues, said Wednesday's developments boded ill.

Aaron David Miller, a former State Department peace negotiator, said Mr. Abbas had "bought peace at home in exchange for significant tensions with the Israelis" and called the move "one more nail to a peace-process coffin that is rapidly being closed."

Dennis B. Ross, another former American peace envoy, said that the move could make Mr. Abbas "less susceptible to a domestic backlash for continuing the process with the Israelis," but that "the timing is very problematic — when the process is already faltering, this could be a body blow."

Tamara Cofman Wittes, director of the [Saban Center for Middle East Policy](#) at the Brookings Institution in Washington, said the implications depended on the precise terms of the reconciliation, which have yet to be revealed.

"If, and it is a big 'if,' Hamas comes under the P.L.O. umbrella in such a way that it accedes to the P.L.O.'s recognition of Israel and the P.L.O.'s signed agreements with Israel," she said, "that would be historic."

"What would make it horrible is if Hamas were to join the P.L.O. without those kinds of commitments," Ms. Wittes added. "Then it calls into question the P.L.O.'s commitments that it has already made."

Jodi Rudoren reported from Jerusalem, and Michael R. Gordon from Washington. Fares Akram contributed reporting from Gaza City, and Isabel Kershner and Said Ghazali from Jerusalem.

[Article 2.](#)

The Council on Foreign Relations

The Fatah-Hamas Gaza Palestinian Unity Agreement

April 23, 2014 -- Hamas and Fatah have once again reached an agreement to overcome their split, claiming they will form a unity government within five weeks and hold general elections by December. There is little reason to believe that the unity agreement reached today in Gaza between Hamas and Fatah is any more credible, or stands any better chance of implementation, than the previous failed unity agreements between the two parties penned in Cairo and Doha. The fundamental issues that divide them remain: Hamas is interested in an Islamist agenda while Fatah opposes it. Hamas opposes a two-state peace solution to the conflict with Israel while Fatah supports it. Moreover, Hamas is loath to relinquish control of Gaza, and Fatah has no interest in sharing the West Bank with its political adversary.

Both Fatah and Hamas have an interest right now in demonstrating efforts to seek unity, even if they never implement such an agreement. The idea of unity is very popular with a Palestinian public largely disenchanted with both Hamas and Fatah. That Palestinian elections have not been held since 2006 erodes both parties' legitimacy and reinforces a popular image of Fatah and Hamas as more interested in power and its benefits than in delivering political or economic benefits to their people. For Hamas, unity efforts may give the group a political bounce at a time when the organization (and all of Gaza) is hurting from unprecedented Egyptian efforts on the ground to squeeze Hamas.

Yet with Islamist parties on the defensive throughout the Middle East right now, why would Abbas agree to share power with his arch rivals and risk alienating potential Arab patrons who seek the destruction of the Muslim Brotherhood and their offshoots such as Hamas? For Abbas, talking to Hamas about unity when it is unlikely to be implemented is tactically attractive. In addition to its popularity, focusing on domestic politics right now by talking to Hamas can help deflect attention from negotiations with Israel that are likely to collapse by the end of this month.

Abbas knows that moving forward on his stated intention to seek further international recognition for Palestine should the peace efforts fail could prove painful to him and the Palestinian people. Israel is likely to take punitive actions on the ground, and many international donors will

probably withhold financial assistance as well as political support.

Pursuing unity talks with Hamas can pivot Palestinian politics towards a domestic agenda away from the international one. When Hamas later fails to sign on to Abbas' terms for unity or rejects allowing the PLO to retake control of Gaza, the Palestinian president can blame Hamas for thwarting efforts and Palestinian elections.

At the same time, Abbas may also calculate that flirting with Hamas puts pressure on Israel to compromise in Secretary of State Kerry's last-ditch efforts to keep negotiations going past the April 29 expiration deadline. Abbas may think that Netanyahu will want to keep the Palestinians from moving to a rejectionist stance in the absence of peace talks.

If that is Abbas' intention, it is likely to backfire. Rather than prompting Israelis to make endgame concessions to reach a deal right now, Abbas' flirting with Hamas is more likely to provoke Netanyahu to point a finger at Abbas and say that the Palestinians are to blame for thwarting Kerry's efforts, and that Abbas is really no partner for genuine peace. Netanyahu could choose to ignore the unity talks and diminish their significance while betting on their likely failure. But that would provide further ammunition to his political critics on the right. Moreover, Palestinian unity efforts make it all the more certain that Abbas will not budge on the one issue of primacy to Israeli negotiators—that the Palestinians recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

It remains theoretically possible, though highly unlikely, that this time will be different, and that Hamas and Fatah will both see enough benefit in making fundamental compromises that would produce a mutually acceptable interim government leading to new elections. Failing that, the ensuing talks to cobble together a unity government will likely replace one set of fruitless talks—those between Israel and the Palestinians—with another set of negotiations with similarly poor prospects for realization.

Robert M. Danin - Eni Enrico Mattei Senior Fellow for Middle East and Africa Studies.

[Article 3.](#)

Al Monitor

Hamas reconciliation last straw for Palestine critics in Congress

Julian Pecquet

April 23, 2014 -- Wednesday's announcement of a reconciliation between the rival Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah triggered an instant call for retaliation on Capitol Hill.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., the author of the [Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act](#), called for an immediate suspension of US aid to the Palestinian Authority. The 2006 law, passed after [Hamas](#) won that year's legislative elections, prohibits support for a "Hamas-controlled Palestinian Authority."

"The Administration must halt aid to the Palestinian Authority and condition any future assistance as leverage to force Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas] to abandon this reconciliation with Hamas and to implement real reforms within the PA," Ros-Lehtinen, who chairs the House Foreign Affairs panel on the Middle East, said in a statement. "U.S. law is clear on the prohibition of U.S. assistance to a unity Palestinian government that includes Hamas, a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, and President Obama must not allow one cent of American taxpayer money to help fund this terrorist group."

Her Democratic counterpart on the subcommittee, Ted Deutch of Florida, issued a similar warning.

"President Abbas now stands at a pivotal crossroad — does he want peace with Israel or reconciliation with Hamas?" Deutch said. "Be certain that the Palestinian Authority will face significant consequences if a unity government is formed that includes terrorist members of Hamas."

Rep. Nita Lowey, D-N.Y., the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, flatly said the move "jeopardizes US assistance."

The statements follow [reports out of Gaza](#) that Hamas and the PLO, which runs the PA in the West Bank, have agreed to form a unity government within five weeks. Such a government would then prepare for elections within the next six months.

"I announce to our people the news that the years of split are over," Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh was quoted as telling reporters in Gaza.

The announcement comes on the heels of the Abbas's decision to sign 15 UN treaties, a move that had already triggered congressional ire. [House appropriators warned](#) earlier this month that they could revisit aid requests as a result of that decision, which the Palestinians said was in response to Israel's failure to release a fourth and final batch of prisoners under the terms of US-brokered peace talks.

The White House requested \$440 million for aid to the West Bank and Gaza in 2014.

The president's [fiscal year 2015 budget request](#) includes \$370 million in Economic Support Funds that the State Department says "creates an atmosphere that supports negotiations, encourages broad-based economic growth, promotes democratic governance, and improves the everyday lives of Palestinians, thereby creating an environment supportive of a peace agreement and contributing to the overall stability and security of the region." It also sets aside \$70 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement funding aimed at "reforming the Palestinian Authority (PA) security sector, and sustaining and maintaining the capabilities that the security forces have developed."

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said joining forces with Hamas could put aid to the PA in jeopardy.

"Well, obviously, there would be implications," she told reporters on April 23. "I don't have those all in front of me ... but what we're going to watch and see here is what happens over the coming hours and days to see what steps are taken by the Palestinians."

The Palestinian envoy to the United States had no immediate comment. The 2006 anti-terror law bars aid to a Hamas government unless the group recognizes Israel, dismantles terrorist infrastructure in its jurisdiction and ceases anti-Israel "incitement." Early reports suggested that's unlikely to happen, with the Palestinian Information Center quoting Hamas parliamentarian Hassan Youssef as declaring that Hamas would neither recognize Israel nor "[give up the resistance](#)."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Abbas would have to choose between Hamas and peace talks with Israel.

"Does he want peace with Hamas, or peace with Israel?" [Netanyahu said](#).

"You can have one but not the other. I hope he chooses peace. So far he hasn't done so."

"A unity government with Hamas, within the frame of reference of where Hamas's position is, turns that government effectively into a terrorist government," Hillel Frisch, a senior research fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University, said in a conference call with reporters organized by The Israel Project. "Because it's a government where a principal member of that government — maybe even the leading member of that government — advocates terrorism against a sovereign United Nations member state. In that sense it would certainly be considered a terrorist entity and might legally be sanctioned with congressional cuts."

Ironically, Frisch suggested Israel would welcome a unity government — if Hamas turned over a new leaf.

"In fact," he said, a unity government "would be much better, because any peace talks could possibly result in a peace agreement with all the Palestinians, rather than half the Palestinians."

"Until now," he said, "any process that ends up with a peace agreement with Abbas, we know with 100% certainty that come the next day Israel will be attacked with rockets from Gaza."

Ros-Lehtinen said she'd hold hearings on the PA soon.

"In the coming weeks, I will convene a subcommittee hearing on this issue and many more regarding the PA, Israel and the peace process," she said.

"It's long past time the US reassess its relationship with the corrupt Abu Mazen and his cronies."

Her panel is scheduled to [hold a hearing](#) next week on President Barack Obama's fiscal year 2015 budget request for the Middle East and North Africa. Slated to testify are Anne Patterson, assistant secretary of state for near eastern affairs, and Alina Romanowski, deputy assistant US Agency for International Development administrator.

Julian Pecquet is Al-Monitor's Congressional Correspondent. He previously led The Hill's Global Affairs blog.

[Article 4.](#)

New Statesman

Tony Blair's speech on the Middle East

23 April, 2014 - 08:45 -- It is unsurprising that public opinion in the UK and elsewhere, resents the notion that we should engage with the politics of the Middle East and beyond. We have been through painful engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 2008, we have had our own domestic anxieties following the financial crisis. And besides if we want to engage, people reasonably ask: where, how and to what purpose?

More recently, Ukraine has served to push the Middle East to the inside pages, with the carnage of Syria featuring somewhat, but the chaos of Libya, whose Government we intervened to change, hardly meriting a mention.

However the Middle East matters. What is presently happening there, still represents the biggest threat to global security of the early 21st C. The region, including the wider area outside its conventional boundary – Pakistan, Afghanistan to the east and North Africa to the west – is in turmoil with no end in sight to the upheaval and any number of potential outcomes from the mildly optimistic to catastrophe.

At the root of the crisis lies a radicalised and politicised view of Islam, an ideology that distorts and warps Islam's true message. The threat of this radical Islam is not abating. It is growing. It is spreading across the world. It is de-stabilising communities and even nations. It is undermining the possibility of peaceful co-existence in an era of globalisation. And in the face of this threat we seem curiously reluctant to acknowledge it and powerless to counter it effectively.

In this speech I will set out how we should do this, including the recognition that on this issue, whatever our other differences, we should be prepared to reach out and cooperate with the East, and in particular, Russia and China.

The statement that the Middle East 'matters', is no longer uncontested. Some say after the shale revolution, the region has declined in significance for energy supplies, at least for the USA. Others say that though they accept that it continues to be a relevant and important region, there are other more pressing problems, most particularly now with Eastern Europe facing a resurgent, nationalist Russia. For the most part, a very common

sentiment is that the region may be important but it is ungovernable and therefore impossible and therefore we should let it look after itself.

I would say there are four reasons why the Middle East remains of central importance and cannot be relegated to the second order.

First and most obviously, it is still where a large part of the world's energy supplies are generated, and whatever the long term implications of the USA energy revolution, the world's dependence on the Middle East is not going to disappear any time soon. In any event, it has a determining effect on the price of oil; and thus on the stability and working of the global economy.

Secondly, it is right on the doorstep of Europe. The boundary of the EU is a short distance from the Levantine coast. Instability here affects Europe, as does instability in North Africa, in close proximity to Spain and Italy.

Third, in the centre of this maelstrom, is Israel. Its alliance with the USA, its partnership with leading countries of Europe, and the fact that it is a Western democracy, mean that its fate is never going to be a matter of indifference. Over these past years, with considerable skill, the Israelis have also built up relationships with China and with Russia. These aren't the same as their long standing Western alliances but they have significance. Were the Israelis to be pulled into a regional conflict, there is no realistic way that the world could or would want to shrug it off. For the moment, Israel has successfully stayed aloof from the storm around it. But the one thing the last few years has taught us (and them) is that we can expect the unexpected.

Finally and least obvious, is a reason we are curiously reluctant to admit, in part because the admission would throw up some very difficult policy choices. It is in the Middle East that the future of Islam will be decided. By this I mean the future of its relationship with politics. This is controversial because the world of politics is uncomfortable talking about religion; because some will say that really the problems are not religious but political; and even because – it is true – that the largest Muslim populations are to be found outside the region not inside it.

But I assert it nonetheless. I do so because underneath the turmoil and revolution of the past years is one very clear and unambiguous struggle: between those with a modern view of the Middle East, one of pluralistic societies and open economies, where the attitudes and patterns of

globalisation are embraced; and, on the other side, those who want to impose an ideology born out of a belief that there is one proper religion and one proper view of it, and that this view should, exclusively, determine the nature of society and the political economy. We might call this latter perspective an 'Islamist' view, though one of the frustrating things about this debate is the inadequacy of the terminology and the tendency for any short hand to be capable of misinterpretation, so that you can appear to elide those who support the Islamist ideology with all Muslims.

But wherever you look – from Iraq to Libya to Egypt to Yemen to Lebanon to Syria and then further afield to Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan – this is the essential battle. Of course there are an array of complexities in each case, derived from tribe, tradition and territory. I would not for a moment suggest that these conflicts do not have their own individual characteristics. And the lack of economic opportunity is without doubt a prime proximate cause of the region's chaos. But there is something frankly odd about the reluctance to accept what is so utterly plain: that they have in common a struggle around the issue of the rightful place of religion, and in particular Islam, in politics.

It is crucially important in this description not to confuse the issue of religion and politics, with the question of religiosity. Many of those totally opposed to the Islamist ideology are absolutely devout Muslims. In fact it is often the most devout who take most exception to what they regard as the distortion of their faith by those who claim to be ardent Muslims whilst acting in a manner wholly in contradiction to the proper teaching of the Koran.

Neither should this be seen in simplistic Sunni/Shia terms. Sometimes the struggle is seen in those terms and sometimes it is right to see it so. But the real battle is against both Sunni and Shia extremism where the majority of people, Sunni or Shia, who are probably perfectly content to live and let live, in the same way that nowadays most Catholics and Protestants do, are caught in a vicious and often literal crossfire between competing exclusivist views of the 'true' Islam. Where the two views align, whatever their mutual antagonism, is in the belief that those who think differently are the 'enemy' either within or without.

The reason this matters so much is that this ideology is exported around the world. The Middle East is still the epicentre of thought and theology in

Islam. Those people, fortunately not a majority, in countries like, for example, Indonesia or Malaysia who espouse a strict Islamist perspective, didn't originate these ideas. They imported them.

For the last 40/50 years, there has been a steady stream of funding, proselytising, organising and promulgating coming out of the Middle East, pushing views of religion that are narrow minded and dangerous.

Unfortunately we seem blind to the enormous global impact such teaching has had and is having.

Within the Middle East itself, the result has been horrible, with people often facing a choice between authoritarian Government that is at least religiously tolerant; and the risk that in throwing off the Government they don't like, they end up with a religiously intolerant quasi-theocracy.

Take a step back and analyse the world today: with the possible exception of Latin America (leaving aside Hezbollah in the tri-border area in South America), there is not a region of the world not adversely affected by Islamism and the ideology is growing. The problems of the Mid East and North Africa are obvious. But look at the terror being inflicted in countries – Nigeria, Mali, Central African Republic, Chad and many others – across Sub Saharan Africa. Indeed I would argue that that religious extremism is possibly the single biggest threat to their ability to overcome the massive challenges of development today.

In Central Asia, terrorist attacks are regular occurrences in Russia, whose Muslim population is now over 15%, and radical influences are stretching across the whole of the central part of Northern Asia, reaching even the Western province of Xinjiang in China.

In the Far East, there has been the important breakthrough in resolving the Mindanao dispute in the Philippines, where well over 100,000 people lost their lives in the last decade or so. But elsewhere, in Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Indonesia, there remain real inter-religious challenges and tensions. In the recent Indonesian elections, the Islamic parties received a third of the vote.

The Muslim population in Europe is now over 40m and growing. The Muslim Brotherhood and other organisations are increasingly active and they operate without much investigation or constraint. Recent controversy over schools in Birmingham (and similar allegations in France) show

heightened levels of concern about Islamist penetration of our own societies.

All of this you can read about.

However for the purposes of this speech, two fascinating things stand out for me. The first is the absolutely rooted desire on the part of Western commentators to analyse these issues as disparate rather than united by common elements. They go to extraordinary lengths to say why, in every individual case, there are multiple reasons for understanding that this is not really about Islam, it is not really about religion; there are local or historic reasons which explain what is happening. There is a wish to eliminate the obvious common factor in a way that is almost wilful. Now of course as I have said, there is always a context that is unique to each situation. There will naturally be a host of local factors that play a part in creating the issue. But it is bizarre to ignore the fact the principal actors in all situations, express themselves through the medium of religious identity or that in ideological terms, there is a powerful unifying factor based on a particular world view of religion and its place in politics and society.

The second thing is that there is a deep desire to separate the political ideology represented by groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood from the actions of extremists including acts of terrorism. This stems from a completely laudable sense that we must always distinguish between those who violate the law and those we simply disagree with.

But laudable though the motives are, which lead us to this distinction, if we're not careful, they also blind us to the fact that the ideology itself is nonetheless dangerous and corrosive; and cannot and should not be treated as a conventional political debate between two opposing views of how society should be governed.

It may well be the case that in particular situations, those who follow a strictly Islamist political agenda neither advocate nor approve of political violence. There are of course a variety of different views within such a broadly described position. But their overall ideology is one which inevitably creates the soil in which such extremism can take root. In many cases, it is clear that they regard themselves as part of a spectrum, with a difference of view as to how to achieve the goals of Islamism, not a difference as to what those goals are; and in certain cases, they will support the use of violence.

At this point it must again be emphasised: it is not Islam itself that gives rise to this ideology. It is an interpretation of Islam, actually a perversion of it which many Muslims abhor. There used to be such interpretations of Christianity which took us years to eradicate from our mainstream politics. The reason that this ideology is dangerous is that its implementation is incompatible with the modern world – politically, socially, and economically. Why? Because the way the modern world works is through connectivity. Its essential nature is pluralist. It favours the open-minded. Modern economies work through creativity and connections. Democracy cannot function except as a way of thinking as well as voting. You put your view; you may lose; you try to win next time; or you win but you accept that you may lose next time.

That is not the way that the Islamist ideology works. It is not about a competing view of how society or politics should be governed within a common space where you accept other views are equally valid. It is exclusivist in nature. The ultimate goal is not a society which someone else can change after winning an election. It is a society of a fixed polity, governed by religious doctrines that are not changeable but which are, of their essence, unchangeable.

Because the West is so completely unfamiliar with such an ideology – though actually the experience of revolutionary communism or fascism should resonate with older generations – we can't really see the danger properly. We feel almost that if we identify it in these terms, we're being anti-Muslim, a sentiment on which the Islamists cleverly play.

Right now in the Middle East, this is the battle being waged. Of course in each country, it arises in a different form. But in each case, take out the extremist views around religion, and each conflict or challenge becomes infinitely more manageable. This is where, even though at one level the ideology coming out of Shia Iran and that of the Sunni Muslim

Brotherhood may seem to be different, in reality they amount to the same thing with the same effect – the holding back of the proper political, social and economic advance of the country.

It is this factor that then can explain many of the things that presently we seem to find inexplicable in a way that fuels our desire to dis-engage from the region and beyond it.

So we look at the issue of intervention or not and seem baffled. We change the regimes in Afghanistan and in Iraq, put soldiers on the ground in order to help build the country, a process which a majority of people in both countries immediately participated in, through the elections. But that proved immensely difficult and bloody.

We change the regime in Libya through air power, we don't commit forces on the ground, again the people initially respond well, but now Libya is a mess and a mess that is de-stabilising everywhere around it, (apart from Algeria partly because Algeria already went through a conflict precisely around the issue of Islamism in which thousands lost their lives.)

In Syria, we call for the regime to change, we encourage the Opposition to rise up, but then when Iran activates Hezbollah on the side of Assad, we refrain even from air intervention to give the Opposition a chance. The result is a country in disintegration, millions displaced, a death toll approximating that of Iraq, with no end in sight and huge risks to regional stability.

The impact of this recent history, on Western opinion is a wish at all costs to stay clear of it all.

Then there has been the so-called Arab Spring. At first we jumped in to offer our support to those on the street. We are now bemused and bewildered that it hasn't turned out quite how we expected.

Even in respect of the MEPP there is an audible feeling of dismay, - that as the world around Israel and Palestine went into revolutionary spasm, and the need for progress seemed so plain, the issue in which we have expended extraordinary energy and determination through US Secretary Kerry, still seems as intractable as ever.

Yet the explanation for all of these apparently unresolvable contradictions is staring us in the face.

It is that there is a Titanic struggle going on within the region between those who want the region to embrace the modern world – politically, socially and economically – and those who instead want to create a politics of religious difference and exclusivity. This is the battle. This is the distorting feature. This is what makes intervention so fraught but non-intervention equally so. This is what complicates the process of political evolution. This is what makes it so hard for democracy to take root. This is

what, irrespective of the problems on the Israeli side, divides Palestinian politics and constrains their leadership.

The important point for Western opinion is that this is a struggle with two sides. So when we look at the Middle East and beyond it to Pakistan or Iran and elsewhere, it isn't just a vast unfathomable mess with no end in sight and no one worthy of our support. It is in fact a struggle in which our own strategic interests are intimately involved; where there are indeed people we should support and who, ironically, are probably in the majority if only that majority were mobilised, organised and helped.

But what is absolutely necessary is that we first liberate ourselves from our own attitude. We have to take sides. We have to stop treating each country on the basis of whatever seems to make for the easiest life for us at any one time. We have to have an approach to the region that is coherent and sees it as a whole. And above all, we have to commit. We have to engage.

Engagement and commitment are words easy to use. But they only count when they come at a cost. Alliances are forged at moments of common challenge. Partnerships are built through trials shared. There is no engagement that doesn't involve a price. There is no commitment that doesn't mean taking a risk.

In saying this, it does not mean that we have to repeat the enormous commitment of Iraq and Afghanistan. It may well be that in time people come to view the impact of those engagements differently. But there is no need, let alone appetite, to do that.

I completely understand why our people feel they have done enough, more than enough. And when they read of those we have tried to help spurning our help, criticising us, even trying to kill us, they're entitled to feel aggrieved and to say: we're out.

However, as the Afghans who braved everything to vote show us and the Iraqis who will also come out and vote despite all the threats and the inadequacy of the system they now live in, demonstrate, those who spurn our help are only part of the story. There are others whose spirit and determination stay undaunted. And I think of the Egyptians who have been through so much and yet remain with optimism; and the Palestinians who work with me and who, whatever the frustrations, still want and believe in a peaceful solution; and I look at Tunisians and Libyans and Yemenis who are trying to make it all work properly; and I realise this is not a struggle

without hope. This is not a mess where everyone is as bad as each other. In other words it matters and there is a side we should be proud to take. There are people to stand beside and who will stand beside us.

But we have to be clear what that side is and why we're taking it. So what does that mean?

It means supporting the principles of religious freedom and open, rule based economies. It means helping those countries whose people wish to embrace those principles to achieve them. Where there has been revolution, we should be on the side of those who support those principles and opposed to those who would thwart them. Where there has not been revolution, we should support the steady evolution towards them. If we apply those principles to the Middle East, it would mean the following.

Egypt. I start with Egypt not because what is happening in Syria is not more horrifying; but because on the fate of Egypt hangs the future of the region. Here we have to understand plainly what happened. The Muslim Brotherhood Government was not simply a bad Government. It was systematically taking over the traditions and institutions of the country. The revolt of 30 June 2013 was not an ordinary protest. It was the absolutely necessary rescue of a nation. We should support the new Government and help. None of this means that where there are things we disagree strongly with – such as the death sentence on the 500 – that we do not speak out. Plenty of Egyptians have. But it does mean that we show some sensitivity to the fact that over 400 police officers have suffered violent deaths and several hundred soldiers been killed. The next President will face extraordinary challenges. It is massively in our interests that he succeeds. We should mobilise the international community in giving Egypt and its new President as much assistance as we can so that the country gets a chance not to return to the past but to cross over to a better future.

Syria. This is an unmitigated disaster. We are now in a position where both Assad staying and the Opposition taking over seem bad options. The former is responsible for creating this situation. But the truth is that there are so many fissures and problems around elements within the Opposition that people are rightly wary now of any solution that is an outright victory for either side. Repugnant though it may seem, the only way forward is to conclude the best agreement possible even if it means in the interim

President Assad stays for a period. Should even this not be acceptable to him, we should consider active measures to help the Opposition and force him to the negotiating table, including no fly zones whilst making it clear that the extremist groups should receive no support from any of the surrounding nations.

Tunisia. Here there have been genuine and positive attempts by the new Government to escape from the dilemmas of the region and to shape a new Constitution. Supporting the new Government should be an absolute priority. As the new President has rightly said for a fraction of what we're offering Ukraine – which of course is the correct thing to do - we could put Tunisia on its feet. We should do so. This would be a very sensible investment.

Libya. We bear a responsibility for what has happened. Their urgent need is for security sector reform. We have made some attempts to do so. But obviously the scale of the task and the complications of the militia make it very hard. But Libya is not Iraq or Afghanistan. It is not impossible to help and NATO has the capability to do so. However reluctant we are to make this commitment, we have to recognise the de-stabilising impact Libya is having at present. If it disintegrates completely, it will affect the whole of the region around it and feed the instability in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Yemen. Again the country is trying to make progress in circumstances that are unimaginably difficult. We are giving support to the new Government. There is a new Constitution. But again they urgently need help with security sector reform and with development.

Iran. We should continue to make it clear, as the Obama administration is rightly doing, that they have to step back from being a nuclear threshold state. The next weeks will be a crucial phase in the negotiation. But I do not favour yielding to their demands for regional influence in return for concessions on their nuclear ambitions. The Iranian Government play a deliberately de-stabilising role across the region. Our goals should not include regime change. Their people will, in the end, have to find their own way to do that. However we should at every opportunity, push back against the use of their power to support extremism.

Middle East Peace Process. Since becoming Secretary of State, John Kerry has put immense effort into making the peace process work. As we speak, his efforts hang in the balance. Many people said he should not have given

such priority to this issue. They are wrong. It remains absolutely core to the region and the world. Not because the Israeli / Palestinian conflict is the cause of our problems. But because solving it would be such a victory for the very forces we should support. Now it may be that after years of it being said that solving this question is the route to solving the regions' problems, we're about to enter a new phase where solving the region's problems a critical part of solving the Israeli / Palestinian issue. But the point is that John Kerry's commitment has not been in vain. He has put himself in an immensely powerful position to drive this forward by virtue of that commitment. He needs our support in doing so.

Elsewhere across the region we should be standing steadfast by our friends and allies as they try to change their own countries in the direction of reform. Whether in Jordan or the Gulf where they're promoting the values of religious tolerance and open, rule based economies, or taking on the forces of reaction in the shape of Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, we should be supporting and assisting them.

Finally, we have to elevate the issue of religious extremism to the top of the agenda. All over the world the challenge of defeating this ideology requires active and sustained engagement. Consider this absurdity: that we spend billions of \$ on security arrangements and on defence to protect ourselves against the consequences of an ideology that is being advocated in the formal and informal school systems and in civic institutions of the very countries with whom we have intimate security and defence relationships. Some of those countries of course wish to escape from the grip of this ideology. But often it is hard for them to do so within their own political constraints. They need to have this issue out in the open where it then becomes harder for the promotion of this ideology to happen underneath the radar. In other words they need us to make this a core part of the international dialogue in order to force the necessary change within their own societies. This struggle between what we may call the open-minded and the closed-minded is at the heart of whether the 21st C turns in the direction of peaceful co-existence or conflict between people of different cultures.

If we do not act, then we will start to see reactions against radical Islam which will then foster extremism within other faiths. Indeed we see some evidence of this already directed against Muslims in Asia particularly.

When we consider the defining challenges of our time, surely this one should be up there along with the challenge of the environment or economic instability. Add up the deaths around the world now – and even leave out the theatre of the Middle East – and the toll on human life is deplorable. In Nigeria recently and Pakistan alone thousands are now dying in religiously inspired conflict. And quite apart from the actual loss of life, there is the loss of life opportunities for parts of the population mired in backward thinking and reactionary attitudes especially towards girls. On this issue also, there is a complete identity of interest between East and West. China and Russia have exactly the same desire to defeat this ideology as do the USA and Europe. Here is a subject upon which all the principal nations of the G20 could come together, could agree to act, and could find common ground to common benefit. An international programme to eradicate religious intolerance and prejudice from school systems and informal education systems and from organisations in civic society would have a huge galvanising effect in making unacceptable what is currently ignored or tolerated.

So there is an agenda here in part about the Middle East and its importance; and in part about seeing what is happening there in the context of its impact on the wider world.

This is why I work on the Middle East Peace Process; why I began my Foundation to promote inter-faith dialogue. Why I will do all I can to help governments confronting these issues.

Consider for a moment since 9/11 how our world has changed, how in a myriad of different ways from the security measures we now take for granted to the arenas of conflict that have now continued over a span of years, there is a price being paid in money, life and opportunity for millions. This is not a conventional war. It isn't a struggle between super powers or over territory. But it is real. It is fearsome in its impact. It is growing in its reach. It is a battle about belief and about modernity. It is important because the world through technology and globalisation is pushing us together across boundaries of faith and culture. Unaddressed, the likelihood of conflict increases. Engagement does not always mean military involvement. Commitment does not mean going it alone. But it does mean stirring ourselves. It does mean seeing the struggle for what it is. It does mean taking a side and sticking with it.

Get ready for the next Erdogan decade

Mustafa Akyol

April 23, 2014 -- Last week, Turkish President Abdullah Gul declared to the press, "Under these conditions, I don't have plans for politics." This was widely interpreted as an end to expectations that Gul, somehow, would keep sharing power with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan after the presidential elections in August. Now many believe that [Erdogan will win](#) the elections to become the first popularly elected president of Turkey, and there will be no Gul to balance him.

One may wonder why Gul is so important. As one of the two founders of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Gul has not simply been an ally and "brother" of Erdogan, but also the only name in the AKP universe that could afford to openly disagree with him. It is no wonder a number of differences have emerged between them in the past few years. In the face of the Gezi Park protests, for example, Gul advocated for moderation and dialogue, whereas Erdogan opted for defiance. Gul opposed the recent bans on Twitter and YouTube that Erdogan ordered and defended. In addition, Gul [dismissed the conspiracy theories](#) about foreign plots against Turkey, one of the main themes in Erdogan's new political rhetoric. That is why most of Turkey's liberals had hoped that Gul, a religious conservative with liberal views, would continue either as president, or more likely, as prime minister under Erdogan. The "[Putin-Medvedev](#) model," as some have called it, has now, however, been declared dead upon Gul's remarks.

People wonder why Gul backed off. My understanding is that he realized two bitter facts. First, accepting the prime ministry under Erdogan would imply accepting his unquestionable authority, which Gul is loath to do. Second, challenging Erdogan would be political suicide, because of Erdogan's unshakable popularity among the religious conservatives that also form Gul's base. Thus, it seems, Gul made both an honorable and a rational decision by stepping aside.

With Gul gone, what will Erdogan do? The prevalent expectation is that he will run in this August's presidential elections to become Turkey's first directly elected president. (Previous presidents were elected by the parliament.) Erdogan needs a simple majority either in the first round, in which all the candidates participate, or the second round, in which the two top vote-getters compete. It is not yet known who the other candidates will be — the opposition parties must be working hard on that these days — but it seems likely that Erdogan can win the elections, at least in the second round, given the 45% his party secured in the recent local elections and the possible add-ons: the votes of the Islamist Felicity Party (around 2%) and those of the Kurdish nationalists (around 6%), with whom Erdogan has built an alliance thanks to the "peace process" with Kurdish separatists. If Erdogan is elected president, what will he do? Well, first of all, this will give him a solid five years in power. Then he could win a second term, in 2019, extending his presidency to a decade. He plans to rule, in other words, until 2024, if not beyond. That is why he often speaks of his "goals for 2023," the centennial of the Turkish Republic and, in this context, the ninth year of his upcoming decade.

What about the prime ministry, the post which, according to the current constitution, holds the real executive power? The common expectation is that if Erdogan becomes president, he will appoint a loyalist to this job, someone who would accept his ultimate authority. (Current speculation in Ankara centers on Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and Numan Kurtulmus, a relatively recent import to the AKP.) In this case, Turkey will be heading toward a de facto presidential system in which Erdogan will hold the real power.

Erdogan could, however, move on to a de jure presidential system if he can find a way to change the constitution. For that, he needs at least 330 seats in the parliament. The AKP now has 313, but a new [AKP-proposed electoral law](#) would provide further advantage to the most powerful party and thus hand the AKP even more seats given its current popularity. If the next general elections, which are scheduled for summer 2015 but could always be rescheduled, are held under the new system, the AKP could easily gain enough seats to change the constitution. Needless to say, the pivotal aim in any such AKP-induced constitution will be to further empower the presidency, i.e., Erdogan.

If Erdogan can realize the transformation to the presidential system that his advisers have been advocating, it would amount to the most significant Turkish revolution since Kemal Ataturk's. Erdogan, in fact, would be as powerful as Ataturk, controlling the executive and legislative branches. He would gradually prevail upon the judiciary as well, because the president has the power to appoint members to the Constitutional Court and other key institutions. He would even be able to appoint all the presidents of Turkey's universities, because the universities are controlled by the Supreme Education Board, an institution that a military junta created in the 1980s. (Turkey's generals, who devised a centralized and overarching state, naively believed this huge body would always remain in their hands.) Meanwhile, the media will probably feel the need to become more supportive of, or at least amenable to, the all-powerful president. In short, it seems to be Erdogan's game plan to rule Turkey for at least ten more years under a very centralized, if not personalized, presidential system. Of course, whether he will be able to do that is another question. He is not a dictator, so he needs to win votes. First, he needs to win the presidential elections in August and then consolidate power as president and win again five years later. Can he do all this? He probably can, especially if the economy flourishes and if the opposition continues to be incompetent. We will, of course, see. What is certain is that this will be one of the most impressive — and for some, worrying — experiments in political history.

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[Article 6.](#)

The Diplomat

US-Japan Relations and Obama's Visit to Japan

Yo-Jung Chen

April 23, 2014 -- U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to Japan, which begins today, has been the subject of both excitement and anxiety. For the optimists, the first state visit to Japan by a U.S. president since [Bill Clinton in 1996](#), will serve to reaffirm the strength of the U.S.-Japan alliance as well as of Japan's cherished privilege of being America's best friend in Asia, especially in the context of an [increasingly volatile geopolitical situation](#) in this region. For the less optimistic observers, the mere fact that the strength of the alliance needs to be reaffirmed is in itself a worrying indication, given the unmistakable signs of [glitches and cracks](#) that have begun to appear. The unprecedented difficulty Japan had getting Obama to agree to a stopover in Tokyo during this tour of Asia is cited as a telltale sign of the unease that is beginning to permeate bilateral ties.

Shifting Alliances in Asia

Obama comes to Asia with a vital mission of reassuring both allies and adversaries of Uncle Sam's commitment to maintaining order in this part of the world. That will not be easy, since recent crises in Libya, Syria and Ukraine have only demonstrated how weary America has become of flexing its muscles – even when challenged. And in Asia especially, U.S. resolve is constantly being tested and challenged by China and North Korea. Be it in Northeast or Southeast Asia, Obama will be met with [growing doubt over America's commitment](#). This has led several countries to start reshuffling the cards of existing alliances. America itself, while asking its allies to beef up their defense against China, is at the same time seeking Beijing's cooperation in managing major international issues. South Korea, a traditional U.S. ally, is drawing closer to China in a move that, viewed from Washington, could threaten the solidarity of the U.S.-Korea-Japan alliance, especially when this Sino-South Korean rapprochement is being partly fuelled by their [shared anger at revisionist Japan](#). North Korea, too, has thrown out its traditional alliance with China and has shown signs of warming to Japan in what may jeopardize the outcome of the Chinese-led Six Party Talks over the North Korean nuclear issue. Meanwhile, the Ukraine crisis has raised the possibility of a strategic rapprochement between Russia and China in the developing context of a new Cold War. Taking an ambiguous stand on the Ukraine crisis, China will thus be able to play the "Russian card" to bargain for more U.S. concessions in the management of Asian affairs, for example in its

simmering territorial feud with Japan. In the case of Japan, the uncertainty of U.S. resolve to defend the [disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands](#) against an eventual Chinese assault has been amplified in the past year by the uncomfortable feeling of growing U.S. coldness towards the [rightwing nationalism of Shinzo Abe's leadership](#). This feeling of insecurity has motivated Abe's worldwide diplomatic drive in search of additional allies. Among others, this drive has led the Japanese leader to develop a particularly warm relationship with Russia's Vladimir Putin in the thinly veiled hope of securing Russian support in Japan's feud with China. In this changing geopolitical landscape in Asia, what can Obama and Abe expect from their talks in Tokyo?

Patching up the Alliance

Abe's most pressing concern is a reconfirmation of the solidity of the U.S.-Japan alliance. This is all the more important because this solidity has faced some serious tests following growing U.S. nervousness with the regional tensions enflamed by Abe's display of [overly nationalistic ideology](#). Irritation within the liberal Obama administration against the rightwing Japanese leader has been building ever since Abe returned to power in December 2012. The Japanese leader's visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013 was yet another test of U.S. patience. With the developing cracks in the bilateral relationship, Abe actually risks going down in history as the postwar Japanese leader with the worst ties with America. This can be politically fatal in a country where personal ties with the U.S. president are seen as a critical asset for any leader. Besides the question of personal chemistry between Obama and Abe, the "discordance" surfacing within the alliance risks sending the wrong message to the Chinese, who are watching for any sign of weakness in U.S.-Japan relations which might help them contest Japan's sovereignty over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Tokyo's priority will therefore be a joint declaration by the two leaders in reaffirming the healthy state of the alliance. Obama will no doubt grant this assurance, although it will be carefully worded to avoid the U.S. being automatically dragged into an open conflict between Japan and China over the disputed territory. In exchange, the Japanese leadership will be invited to keep quiet on sensitive matters (such as [comfort women](#), the Tokyo Tribunal, and the Rape of Nanjing) that unnecessarily flame emotions in this volatile part of the

world. Besides the U.S.-Japan relationship, the U.S. president will also be keen to patch up the U.S.-Japan-South Korea alliance, which has been badly damaged by the emotional feud between Seoul and Tokyo over Japan's attitude towards its wartime past. Obama has already used the "bait" of his stopover in Tokyo to force a reluctant Abe to swallow his hawkish nationalism in order to achieve a [superficial show of Japan-South Korea reconciliation](#) prior to his visit to the two squabbling allies. One of his priorities now in Northeastern Asia is to maintain a strong U.S.-Japan-South Korea alliance in the face of both China and North Korea. The last thing he needs is to see is this alliance further damaged by anachronistic obsessions that are [untranslatable outside of Japan](#).

Defense and Security

No U.S.-Japan summit can pass without addressing Japan's role on security matters and its share of defense efforts in its alliance with America. The U.S. president will certainly appreciate the efforts deployed by Abe to shed Japan's Constitutional restraints on taking up a larger role in international security, thus relieving America of some of its burden. But with this appreciation, the U.S. president will also have to temper his Japanese ally's headlong rush to beef up its military capability, so as not to [arouse unnecessary alarm in the region](#). The way Abe has strung the defense effort to an overdose of nationalism that has already caused alarm will make Obama's task all the more delicate. In welcoming Abe's Japan's more active role in international security, the U.S. president also needs to weigh the likelihood of the junior partner in the alliance trying to use this new leverage to emerge as an equal – and therefore more assertive – partner.

Departing from the Postwar Regime?

It is not certain that this topic will be taken up at the April 24 summit, but when meeting Abe, Obama will certainly bear in mind the latter's professed agenda of a "[departure from the postwar regime](#)." Judging from the declarations of many in Abe's inner circle, this could mean a clear denial of the postwar order that America painstakingly built after the last world war, including the indictment of Japan's wartime deeds. The most visible element of this agenda is Japanese conservative politicians' insistence on honoring war criminals indicted by the American occupiers. In this sense, the notorious U.S. "[disappointment](#)" voiced following Abe's

December visit to the Yasukuni Shrine can be seen as a first step taken by the U.S. to counter the revisionist trends in Japan.

A Difficult Deal on TPP

Japan's eagerness to patch up cracks in the sacrosanct U.S.-Japan alliance will be exploited by Obama to force Japanese concessions in the [difficult negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Economic Partnership](#). The economically embattled Obama, facing mid-term elections this year, needs to force Japan to open its protected market for farm products, while Abe had promised Japan's strong farming constituency that he would defend these "[sanctuaries](#)." Both leaders having staked their political survival on this issue, the prospect of a breakthrough now seems hopelessly remote. Here again, Japanese bargaining power has been weakened by Abe's controversial visit to the Yasukuni Shrine and the shadow it has cast over U.S.-Japan relations. Abe finds himself in a position of having to give more on TPP to court U.S. favor and repair the damage done to bilateral ties.

Ukraine Crisis

The two leaders will inevitably discuss the Ukraine crisis and its fallout. Understandably, Obama will press Abe for his unwavering loyalty to the G7 in condemning and sanctioning Russia, and Abe will [attempt to save what he can](#) of his newfound friendship with Vladimir Putin, who is scheduled to visit Japan this fall. Abe will be torn between his new Russian friendship (on which he counts to negotiate the return of the Northern islands occupied by the former Soviet Union as well the supply of badly needed Siberian natural gas) and the imperative of joining the U.S. in condemning the Russian land grab. There is good reason for Japan to fear the way the Russians got away with the annexation of Crimea: The impunity enjoyed by the Russians risks encouraging the Chinese to do the same with the Japanese-administered Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

On this issue, Obama will also have to move with care. Abe is currently the only G7 member to remain on relatively good terms with Putin. If Abe is to be forced to abandon this friendship, an isolated Russia would move towards China, taking the world one step closer to Cold War II.

Reassuring Declarations

The Obama-Abe summit in Tokyo will no doubt produce the anticipated reassuring declarations of undying friendship and rock-solid alliance between the two countries. Besides agreements in areas such as the TPP,

regional security, Ukraine, and scientific cooperation, one of the most important aspects of this summit may be how the two leaders address the evident mutual mistrust that has emerged between them in the past year. On the one hand, Obama will need to understand the Japanese concern of being gradually supplanted by China on America's A-list. On the other, Abe should try to understand that the Japanese "proactive pacifism" he wants to sell to the world would be appreciated and welcomed only if denuded of the hawkish nationalism that has become his trademark and which, in America's view, is nothing more than troublemaking in the delicate politics of Asia.

In this respect, it is worth noting that, during his very short stay, Obama will find time to visit the sprawling Meiji Shrine in Tokyo. Coming after the [conspicuous October visit](#) by his State secretary and Defense secretary to the secular Chidorigafuchi War Memorial, the U.S. president may want to subtly remind his Japanese hosts again what America, at the highest level, thinks of the controversial Yasukuni Shrine.

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