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21 May, 2014

Article 1.	Agence Global <u>We Should Applaud US Pragmatism on Hamas</u> Rami G. Khouri
Article 2.	Al Monitor <u>Hamas, Fatah near deadline on new government</u> Adnan Abu Amer
Article 3.	NYT <u>The Limits of Armchair Warfare</u> Jacob Wood and Ken Harbaugh
Article 4.	Now Lebanon <u>US targets Hezbollah's wallet</u> Ana Maria Luca
Article 5.	NYT <u>Syrian Fighting Gives Hezbollah New but Diffuse Purpose</u> Ben Hubbard
Article 6.	The Washington Institute <u>The Muslim Brotherhood Thinks It's Winning Again</u> Eric Trager
Article 7.	The Washington Post <u>A Finland model for Ukraine?</u> David Ignatius
Article 8.	NYT <u>A Critical Election in Ukraine</u> Editorial

[Article 1.](#)
Agence Global

We Should Applaud US Pragmatism on Hamas

Rami G. Khouri

May 21, 2014 -- Beirut—A potentially important diplomatic development underway in the Middle East, according to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz Monday, is that Washington is “tending towards cooperating with the soon-to-be-formed Palestinian unity government, even if Hamas as an organization does not accept the conditions of the Mideast Quartet to recognize Israel, honor previous agreements and abandon violence.” Such a development would be a valuable step for the three concerned peoples. It would signal a more rational American policy that could start to dampen America’s self-generated lack of credibility and respect around the entire Middle East. It would force Israelis to react to the reality of how isolated they have become, as their closest ally separates from them in this area at least; and, it would allow the Palestinians to show a united face to the Israelis and the world, anchored in a commitment to a negotiated, permanent and fair resolution of the conflict with Israel. Such an American move would also be a major blow to Israel’s sustained and largely successful attempts to keep Washington tightly tethered to the ideological views of rightwing Zionist extremists who now dominate both Israel and the battalions of pro-Israeli lobbies in the United States. Haaretz quoted a senior White House official saying that as long as the platform of the future Palestinian government meets the conditions of the Quartet — the United Nations, the United States, the European Union and Russia — the United States will be satisfied. The official was quoted as saying: “We want a Palestinian government that upholds those principles. In terms of how they build this government, we are not able to orchestrate that for the Palestinians. We are not going to be able to engineer every member of this government.” This is a significant change from the situation eight years ago when Hamas won the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections and headed the new government, which promptly elicited an Israeli-American boycott of that government. This time, the Palestinians have been more diplomatically astute by announcing clearly and often — as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas did with recent meetings with top

US officials John Kerry and [REDACTED] Rice — that the new government will be committed to Abbas’ diplomatic program and will abide by the Quartet’s three conditions. The United States wisely seems to have decided to separate its distaste for Hamas from the criteria it uses to determine whether or not to engage with a Palestinian national unity government supported by Hamas and virtually all other factions. This suggests that Washington may be defining the legitimacy of the Palestinian interlocutors it deals with on the basis of American values and interests, rather than on the basis of frenzied Zionist hysteria that has shaped such American decisions in the past and made a laughing stock of American diplomacy in the world. The European Union announced a similar position last week, saying it would continue to support a Palestinian government composed of independent figures that met the Quartet’s three criteria. In contrast, the Israeli government announced it would not negotiate or cooperate with a Palestinian government “backed by Hamas.” The much more realistic American-European position acknowledges a widespread political reality — including in Israel — that sees a government’s policies contradicted by the separate positions of some of its members. A similar situation exists in Lebanon, where Hizbullah’s positions sometimes contradict the policies of the Lebanese government in which it serves. If the United States and EU do practice pragmatic diplomacy and engage with the new Palestinian unity government, this will severely isolate the Israeli government internationally, which would likely lead to one of three options. Israeli public opinion could force a new general election to validate or throw out the current rightist government, or Israel could provoke some new military crisis with the intention of showing the world that Hamas’ inclusion in the Palestinian government only leads to violence. The third option is for Israel to “punish” the Palestinians for abiding by the Quartet conditions, by squeezing the occupied territories even more than usual in the areas of finance, travel, construction, water and other such vital realms. All three options would lead to a similar result, which is to shake up the stalled diplomacy and force all players to probe for more effective ways to resolve this long-running conflict between Palestinian Arabism and Zionism. The Palestinians are right to keep exploring any opportunity for a fair, negotiated peace agreement and to clarify for the world that Israel’s colonization and Apartheid-like Jewish supremacist ideology in Palestine

are the main reasons for the lack of diplomatic movement. It will be fascinating now to see whether the United States and EU will make any gestures towards demanding that Israel similarly comply with the Quartet criteria, which Israel blatantly has not done in some areas, like continued colonization and use of violence.

Rami G. Khouri is Editor-at-large of The Daily Star, and Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, in Beirut, Lebanon.

[Article 2.](#)

Al Monitor

Hamas, Fatah near deadline on new government

Adnan Abu Amer

May 20, 2014 -- GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Palestinians are looking forward to the day when the Fatah and Hamas [reconciliation government](#) is finally formed, despite fears that this formation might face last-minute roadblocks, as the scheduled end of May date for its completion approaches.

Questions abound about the reasons for the delay: Who will head the new government? Will it be President Mahmoud Abbas, or someone else? How will it receive its vote of confidence? Will the oath of office be taken before Abbas, or will the Legislative Council be convened to grant it confidence? Questions that the reconciliation agreement did not provide answers to, nor the [shuttle diplomacy visits](#) between Fatah and Hamas. The second deputy speaker of the Legislative Council, Hassan Khreisheh, [appeared to answer](#) some of these questions. "If Fatah and Hamas agree on the formation of a government, then this government will take its oath before the president alone. Despite the fact that, from a constitutional standpoint, the cabinet cannot assume its duties prior to obtaining a vote of confidence from the Legislative [Council], the reality on the ground dictates otherwise."

In contrast, Hamas leader [Mahmoud al-Zahar said](#): “The Cabinet will appear before the Legislative [Council] for a vote of confidence. The government will be subject to oversight and accountability. Yet, this issue remains unresolved in the ongoing bipartisan negotiations.”

A high-ranking Fatah official in the West Bank told Al-Monitor that patience was required. “It is in every Palestinian’s interest that the formation of the new government takes place at a deliberate non-rushed pace. Various steps must be readied to market that formation,” alluding to Abbas’ regional and international consultations meant to guarantee the political and financial cover required for such a formation.

Wafa, the official Palestinian news agency and mouthpiece for the Palestinian Authority (PA), said, “The government should be [formed without haste](#), as its agenda is different than that of its predecessors, and requires that it be endowed with the capabilities necessary to deal with foreign policy matters.”

Hamas sources, speaking to Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity, noted that the current delay in the formation of the cabinet by Abbas’ camp may not be caused by internal local concerns, and may be tied to the outcome of Egypt’s presidential elections and the desire to announce the formation from Cairo. This is to grant the probable winner, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, a measure of regional legitimacy.

Al-Monitor also obtained reliable information from officials who took part in recent negotiations in the Gaza Strip regarding issues such as the number of cabinet ministers and their geographical distribution between Gaza and the West Bank, and the manner by which the cabinet would be convened if Israel refused to allow some Gaza ministers entry into the West Bank, or vice versa, and whether that can be done through video conferencing or by Abbas’ ministers all going to the Gaza Strip [via Egypt](#). The last hurdle standing in the way of the government’s formation revolves around agreeing on the names of candidate ministers, as that requires additional time for negotiations between Fatah and Hamas, as was evident during Fatah’s [Azzam al-Ahmad’s](#) last visit to Gaza on May 14.

Al-Monitor obtained a [list of names proposed by Fatah and Hamas](#) from a high-ranking Hamas source in Gaza, which still must be agreed upon. Most of those nominated are considered specialists in their sectors, yet both parties nominated people close to them, at least from an intellectual and

ideological standpoint, without them actually being members of either organization.

During his last visit to Gaza, [Hamas requested](#) from Ahmad that, after the formation of the consensus government, current employees of its government would not be fired, and no dramatic changes would be made to the composition of its administrative and security apparatuses.

Subsequently, Al-Monitor learned that immediately after the reconciliation agreement was announced, [Hamas' government](#) began intensive efforts to fill leadership positions in ministries that would be vacated, in anticipation of the arrival of new ministers who are officially affiliated with Abbas.

This was done by granting promotions to its government officials, as a preemptive measure prior to the formation of a new cabinet. Toward that end, Hamas' cabinet held successive meetings to promote dozens of senior employees, some to high-ranking posts, whereby ministers submitted lists of high-level promotions in their ministries.

Despite the fact that Hamas maintained extreme secrecy about these measures, the topic quickly spread through social networking sites and became fodder for debate among Hamas activists.

Yousef Farhat, a Hamas leader in the Central Region of the Gaza Strip and the director of counseling at the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Gaza, used his [personal Facebook page](#) on May 13 to criticize the Hamas move: “The promotions under way in the ministries lack professionalism and are devoid of any nationalism. They increase the level of hatred, and must be objected to by free thinkers and submitted for review before any future government,” which resulted in boisterous reactions either supporting or opposing the Hamas decision.

Al-Monitor asked a Gaza official, who wished to remain anonymous, about the subject, to which he replied: “The affair was blown out of proportion, because the small number of promotions that took place were objective and necessary to balance the future composition of any government. Fatah undertook similar measures after Hamas' 2006 elections victory, to erect roadblocks that would hinder it performing its duties. As a result, this does not mean that Hamas wants to control key government functions in any of the ministries and institutions during the coming phase.”

Faisal Abu Shahla, a Fatah leader in Gaza, [described the promotions](#) given to Hamas employees as “childish, irresponsible and undisciplined behavior

that is self-centered and indicative of a lack of commitment to cooperative undertakings. And I reject taking such pre-emptive measures.”

However, Hamas government spokesman [Ihab al-Ghoussein said](#), “The changes made by the government resulted in administrative benefits, and were made to address problems in some of those posts, such as redundant responsibilities. They also took the form of a reshuffling of jobs without the need for new appointments.”

A Palestinian financial official in the West Bank told Al-Monitor the Hamas move was unlikely to succeed. “Hamas’ measures lack realism in the practical sense. They were rash, not subject to fair competitive procedures and will be reviewed by the future government. I think it likely that they will be subjected to further discussions, and will not be immediately approved,” the official said.

The official warned of serious ramifications if Hamas is permitted to promote its members to senior ministerial posts.

“If the PA’s ministries and institutions are restructured, Hamas will seek to use these measures to control all important institutions and posts — something that is legally not allowed — thus causing grave problems between PA employees from Fatah and new Hamas employees.

Furthermore, they cannot form the basis for true reconciliation, but will engender new forms of division through government administrations. As a result, jurisdictions will overlap, and new hurdles will rise to block the path toward reconciliation. This requires that this [these measures] be reconsidered as soon as the government is formed.”

Adnan Abu Amer is dean of the Faculty of Arts and head of the Press and Information Section as well as a lecturer in the history of the Palestinian issue, national security, political science and Islamic civilization at Al Ummah University Open Education.

[Article 3.](#)

NYT

The Limits of Armchair Warfare

Jacob Wood and Ken Harbaugh

May 20, 2014 -- Both of us have a deep appreciation for the work of drone pilots. Whether patrolling the Helmand Valley with a sniper team or relying on drone-driven intelligence to plan manned aerial missions, we often prayed that the drone operators supporting us were cool, calm and collected.

But neither of us ever imagined that drones would do anything more than augment the manned systems that provide aerial reconnaissance and close air support for troops on the ground. We took for granted that humans on the front lines would always play the lead role.

That is why a series of proposed measures over the last year and a half by the Pentagon have us concerned. It is increasingly clear that our military leadership has become so enamored of the technological mystique of drones that they have lost touch with the realities of the modern battlefield. Perhaps the most glaring example, especially for former snipers and pilots like us, is the Pentagon's recent decision to scrap the A-10, a heavily armed close-air support plane officially nicknamed the Warthog but known to troops as the Flying Gun. This battlefield workhorse flies slow and low, giving pilots a close-up of what troops on the ground need. Those pilots are an aerial extension of the units below them, working in a closer relationship than a drone and its operator ever could. But the A-10 is not sleek and sexy, and it doesn't feed the brass's appetite for battlefield footage delivered to screens thousands of miles away, the way a swarm of drones can.

True, the A-10 fleet is more expensive than a drone program, and in this era of budget consciousness, it's reasonable to argue for cutting it as a cost-saving measure. The problem is, the decision also fits a disturbing pattern. In February 2013, the Pentagon announced plans to create a new award — the Distinguished Warfare Medal — for drone pilots and “cyberwarriors,” which would rank above the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. In other words, a drone pilot flying a mission from an armchair in Nevada might be afforded greater recognition than a rifleman wounded in a combat zone. That is ridiculous. As much as we both came to appreciate the work of drone teams, we never once prayed that they be brave. Those on the front lines require real courage because they face real danger. But if a drone overhead gets hit, a monitor somewhere might go fuzzy, and its operator might curse his poor luck for losing an expensive piece of equipment.

After a public outcry, and under criticism from Congress, the Pentagon relented, and the award was canceled.

Still, these two episodes raise troubling questions about how policy makers view the longest wars in American history. Our most senior leaders in the Pentagon, civilian and military alike, increasingly understand warfare through the literal lens of a drone camera. And this tendency affects decisions much closer to the front lines than awards ceremonies.

If the secretaries and flag officers responsible for the Distinguished Warfare Medal spent as much time (or any time) in a sniper hide or an A-10 cockpit as they did monitoring drone feeds, they would not consider elevating a “Nintendo” medal above those awarded for true heroism and sacrifice.

These leaders deserve some of the criticism, but they are not the only ones to blame. The American public, which has largely absolved itself of responsibility for sending nearly three million of its citizens to fight, neither knows nor cares to know the real price of war.

The controversy surrounding the A-10 retirement and the Distinguished Warfare Medal should be a wake-up call, a reminder that after over 10 years of fighting, we still need to educate the broader American public about the true cost of the wars fought in its name. Lost in all the allure of high-tech gadgets is the fact that, on the ground and in the air, thousands of men and women continue to risk their lives to promote America’s security and interests.

When Americans venture into harm’s way, the last thing we should want is a fair fight. We both owe a great deal to the drones and operators that cleared routes ahead of us or provided intelligence for a manned flight. But while we appreciate their role, we know that they can never provide the kind of truly connected battlefield support that a well-trained pilot can. And when we recognize them, we do so for their skill, not their courage. The moment we conflate proficiency and valor, we cheapen the meaning of bravery itself. Without a true appreciation of the cost of war, more sons and daughters will be sent to fight without the consideration such a decision deserves.

As events in Eastern Europe force us to rethink military assumptions and post-Cold War diplomacy, we will soon face the reality that future conflicts cannot be won by joystick alone. War is ugly, and attempts to lessen its

horrors will put yet more distance between the American public and the men and women fighting on its behalf.

Jacob Wood, a former Marine Corps sniper team leader, and Ken Harbaugh, a former Navy pilot and mission commander, served in Afghanistan and now work for a disaster-relief organization.

[Article 4.](#)

Now Lebanon

US targets Hezbollah's wallet

[Ana Maria Luca](#)

May 20, 2014 -- A new bill recently brought before the US Congress aims at curbing Hezbollah's financial activities around the world. The Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act of 2014 was introduced last week to the US Senate after a similar draft reached the House of Representatives in April.

Both drafts seek to impose sanctions on individuals or institutions that knowingly do business with Hezbollah, or companies or individuals who have been designated by the US as Hezbollah financiers. Central banks targeted by the act would be forbidden from conducting any financial activities in the US. The Congress has not yet discussed the bills, but they have already generated considerable support among politicians and Washington-based experts.

"This is a very opportune time to try to curb Hezbollah's financial activities abroad," said Matthew Levitt, director of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "Iran is not in good financial shape; the money from Tehran doesn't come as it used to." Although the negotiations over Iran's nuclear program are still ongoing, a deal that would entirely waive the economic sanctions on Tehran is not really on the horizon, Levitt explained.

Other American think tanks also hailed the drafts. "This important bipartisan legislation is critical to disrupting Hezbollah's global networks and limiting its ability to finance terror attacks, spread its extremist message, and recruit new members," Mark Dubowitz, executive director of

the Washington-based Foundation for the Defense of Democracies said in a statement sent to NOW. “Hezbollah remains one of the most dangerous global terrorist organizations, operates as the long arm of Iranian terror, and is deeply involved in the slaughter of innocents in Syria.”

In 2009, the Department of the Treasury blacklisted the Lebanese Canadian Bank (LCB) as a primary money laundering concern, alleging that it is part of a drug trafficking network that profited Hezbollah by moving approximately \$200 million per month. Two years later, after the US law enforcement agencies filed a law suit against the LCB, several other companies in the United States, and two money exchange offices in Lebanon, the bank in Beirut was dismantled and its assets sold.

As far as the US lawmakers are concerned, Hezbollah hasn’t stopped organizing international attacks against Israeli civilians. The most recent alleged plot was uncovered over Easter in Thailand, where according to local media, French-Lebanese national Daoud Farhat and Filipino-Lebanese Youssef Ayad were arrested in Bangkok. Police were additionally searching for a third suspect, Bilal Bahsoun. Thai police were tipped by the Israeli intelligence that the two Lebanese were planning an attack against tourists coming from Israel. Ayad apparently confessed to the plans. But what convinced the US lawmakers of Hezbollah’s continued plans to bomb targets abroad was the case of Housam Yaacoub, a Hezbollah agent tried in Cyprus last year. As mentioned in the bill, Yaacoub wrote a statement read aloud in court about how he had been hired by Hezbollah, how he dealt with his handler, and what his missions were – to transport packages across Europe and to survey Israeli tourists and their hangouts in Cyprus and Turkey.

Another important dimension, according to Levitt, was the European Union’s designation of Hezbollah’s military wing as a terrorist entity. “This made people in the US wonder how to enforce [these designations] and how to follow up with their enforcement,” he told NOW. He also didn’t rule out Hezbollah’s involvement in the Syrian conflict on the side of the Assad regime: “[The Syrian] conflict is threatening to thrust the region in turmoil. Of course, there is Al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra, but Hezbollah also plays an important role in the conflict,” Levitt stressed.

Sources in the Lebanese banking system – who asked to remain anonymous for security reasons – told NOW that they expect the bill might

have multiple repercussions on the Lebanese banks. However, though a number of officials are worried about the bill, it's not clear what the consequences would be since it has yet to be discussed in Congress, the source said.

“Nobody wants to undermine the Lebanese banking system,” Levitt pointed out. “The bills are meant to curb Hezbollah’s use of the international financial system.” He also underscored that neither of the bills refer to the political activities of Hezbollah, but rather focus on money laundering activities, logistic operations, as well as weapons or drug trafficking activities that the US authorities linked to the Party. Both Hezbollah and the Lebanese Central Bank have yet to officially respond to the matter.

[Article 5.](#)
NYT

Syrian Fighting Gives Hezbollah New but Diffuse Purpose

Ben Hubbard

May 20, 2014 -- Hermel, Lebanon — For many months, Shiite communities across Lebanon lived in fear as car bombs tore through their neighborhoods, punishing Hezbollah and its supporters for sending fighters to aid President Bashar al-Assad in the civil war in neighboring Syria. But Hezbollah succeeded on the Syrian battlefield in chasing rebels from the border towns where many of the attacks originated. The bombings have since stopped, leaving Lebanon’s Shiites grateful for Hezbollah’s intervention and luring a new wave of aspiring young fighters to the group’s training camps.

“The situation here has changed 180 degrees,” said Saad Hamade, a scion of one of largest clans here. “The whole story is over for us.”

While the [civil war in Syria](#) remains a grinding battle of attrition, for Hezbollah more than a year of combat has produced a new sense of purpose that extends beyond battling Israel to supporting its allies and Shiite brethren across the Middle East. And although its victories have

come at a great cost in lives and resources, it has also gained the rare opportunity to display its military mettle and earn new battlefield experience.

“The fighting in Syria could change the entire balance in the region, and Hezbollah has intervened to prevent the formation of a new balance of power against it and against Iran and its allies,” said Talal Atrissi, a Lebanese analyst who is close to the movement. “This is its strategic vision.”

But the fighting has also diluted the resources that used to go exclusively to facing Israel, exacerbated sectarian divisions in the region, and alienated large segments of the majority Sunni population who once embraced Hezbollah as a liberation force. Some Sunnis now openly refer to the “the party of God” — Hezbollah’s name in Arabic — as “the party of Satan.” Even Hezbollah’s supporters acknowledge that it is unclear when and how the group will be able to disengage from Syria.

At home, Hezbollah’s political opponents say its role in Syria endangers Lebanon itself. Others accuse it of straying from its mission as a bulwark against Israel. Last year, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, an extremist Sunni group, taunted Hezbollah, daring it to “fire one bullet at occupied Palestine and claim responsibility.”

Hezbollah was founded in 1985 to fight the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and has since evolved into a powerful organization with a political party, a network of social services and a military force stronger than the Lebanese army.

But its intervention in Syria has signaled a series of firsts for the group, whose leaders insist that their primary mission remains “resistance” to Israel and the countries that support it, like the United States.

Never before have Hezbollah guerrillas fought alongside a formal army, waged war outside Lebanon or initiated broad offensives aimed at seizing territory. As a guerrilla force, it employed a hit-and-run approach in the past, bloodying the enemy without being drawn into extended conventional combat with a stronger military force.

It is also the first time, its enemies note, that Hezbollah has dedicated so many resources to fighting other Arabs and Muslims instead of Israel. The group’s leaders dismiss the idea that they have strayed from their mission, characterizing the anti-Assad uprising as an international plot to

undermine Israel's enemies. They have also portrayed all the rebels fighting Mr. Assad as "takfiris," extremists who believe infidels should be killed, and said that they pose a threat to the whole region, not just to Shiites.

At Hezbollah funerals, mourners now follow the traditional chants of "Death to Israel!" and "Death to America!" with "Death to the takfiri!" Reflecting the organization's new focus, its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has spoken of Sunni extremists and Israel as threats of similar gravity.

"Israel is not only a threat to us; it is a threat to the whole region," Mr. Nasrallah said in a recent interview published in the Lebanese newspaper, *As-Safir*. "The takfiri threat is also a threat against the whole region." Analysts differ on whether Hezbollah's intervention in Syria has left it more or less capable of confronting Israel in a war that many on both sides see as a matter of when, not if.

More than a year of continuous military engagement has allowed a new generation of fighters to gain battlefield experience. And to fight in Syria, the group has recruited large numbers of fighters and established accelerated training programs, according to residents of communities where Hezbollah holds sway.

One 21-year-old man from south Lebanon who completed a 45-day training program with Hezbollah in the Bekaa Valley said there were about 70 aspiring fighters in his group, some in their late teens. Previously, Hezbollah relied only on older men and put them through years of military training.

"The younger you are, the more excited you are to join the battles," he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. Lebanese fighters who had been trained in Iran led the group through grueling physical exercises and drills on light arms, the young man said. Only half of his group continued to the next stage, an eight-month program that included training with antitank missiles and other sophisticated weapons. The man left the training program, joining the Lebanese army instead.

Near his training camp, he said, was a camp for pro-government Syrian fighters — reflecting how the war has strengthened Hezbollah's operational ties with its regional allies.

But the war has been costly, too, and shows no sign of ending.

The lampposts on the road leading to Hermel bear faded photos of Hezbollah “martyrs” killed in past wars with Israel. But in town, as in many Hezbollah communities, new banners commemorate fighters who fell in Syria as well as those killed in car bombings.

While Hezbollah has not disclosed how many people it has lost in Syria, Hisham Jabber, a retired brigadier general in the Lebanese army, estimated that a few hundred had been killed. He said the casualties had not significantly diminished the group’s fighting ability.

More important was how Hezbollah’s role in Syria would affect its standing in Lebanon, Mr. Jabber said. While most Shiites supported its campaign against rebels along the Lebanese border who directly threatened their communities, they might resist sending their sons to die farther afield to keep Mr. Assad in power.

“They can’t convince me, and they can’t convince the population in Lebanon nor the families of those young men who will be killed in Qamishli or north of Aleppo,” Mr. Jabber said, naming places in Syria far from Lebanon’s borders.

[Ely Karmon](#), a senior researcher at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Israel, said Hezbollah was overextended in Syria and was in a weaker position against Israel because it must continue to dedicate resources until there is a solid victory for Mr. Assad. And every man killed there gives Hezbollah one more family to support — a further drain on its resources.

Hezbollah appears to be aware that its military commitment could undermine its ability to challenge Israel.

But when a strike in February was determined to be in Lebanon, Hezbollah responded by detonating a bomb near an Israeli army patrol on the Lebanese border — suggesting that the group wished to maintain the current state of mutual deterrence.

“Hezbollah is very happy to play by the rules of the current game,” said [Randa Slim](#), a fellow at the New America Foundation who studies Lebanon. “They are not interested in upending them in any way.”

Hwaida Saad contributed reporting from Hermel, and Jodi Rudoren from Jerusalem.

The Washington Institute

The Muslim Brotherhood Thinks It's Winning Again

[Eric Trager](#)

May 19, 2014 -- Given the Brotherhood's persistent and dangerous delusion, the existential struggle that has defined Egyptian politics since Morsi's removal will likely worsen.

Since the uprising-cum-coup that ousted Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi last summer, Washington has encouraged the Muslim Brotherhood and the military-backed government to pursue "reconciliation." Nearly a year later, however, neither side appears interested in conceding anything to the other. The military fears that a remobilized Brotherhood would quickly win power and seek vengeance. And despite an unrelenting crackdown that has claimed over 2,500 lives and jailed over 16,000 Egyptians, the Brotherhood's demands haven't softened: Morsi must return, at least temporarily, and those who removed him -- particularly General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, who is widely expected to win the presidential election next week -- must be executed. Until then, Muslim Brothers vow to continue resisting the coup, because -- they insist -- they are winning. In other words, forget "reconciliation": The existential struggle that has defined Egyptian politics since Morsi's removal will likely continue, and worsen.

To be sure, there has been ongoing communication -- sometimes direct, but mostly indirect -- between the military-backed government and the Brotherhood since July. But the two sides' demands remain mutually exclusive. While the Brotherhood often downplays its demand that Morsi return to power, it still emphasizes the restoration of "legitimacy," which effectively means the same thing. "The return of Morsi, continuing his rule, is not what we want," Mohamed Touson, a former Brotherhood parliamentarian and a member of Morsi's legal team, told me, before adding: "Morsi should come back just to take the decision for new elections and leave office."

The Brotherhood is also demanding "transitional justice" -- a phrase that Brotherhood leaders deliberately borrowed from post-apartheid South Africa, but then stripped of its conciliatory significance. According to one Brotherhood leader, the Brotherhood wants to appoint an "independent committee" to investigate security forces' deadly crackdown on the Brotherhood's anti-coup protests, "and the results will be compulsory for everyone, with the killings...considered murders" -- meaning that Sisi and many of his colleagues would be convicted of mass murder and put to death. Younger Muslim Brothers are particularly emphatic on this point. "He should be executed when the coup falls," said a Brotherhood student at Cairo University. Of course, the military won't accept a set of demands that entail the generals' deaths.

The military's demands are similarly non-starters for the Brotherhood. According to Emad Abdel Ghafour, a former Morsi adviser who serves as a liaison between the Brotherhood and top generals, the military is willing to release all but 300 of the Muslim Brothers that have been arrested. On paper, this is a major concession, because it would mean that over 10,000 detained Muslim Brothers could go home. But the 300 Muslim Brothers whom the military wants to keep imprisoned are likely top leaders, and given the Brotherhood's hierarchical command-chain, this would mean accepting its own decapitation. The military is also demanding that the Brotherhood participate in the post-Morsi political process -- another non-starter for the Brotherhood, because this would mean recognizing the legitimacy of Morsi's overthrow.

Beyond standing on principle, however, Brotherhood leaders refuse to compromise on their core demands for two reasons. First, they fear an insurrection from rank-and-file Muslim Brothers, many of whom lost friends and relatives in the deadly crackdown on the Brotherhood's main "anti-coup" protests in August. "The youth who saw blood understand only the language of revolution," said Abdullah al-Mehy, a Brotherhood youth who fled to Turkey and now serves as an anchor on the Brotherhood's Istanbul-based satellite television channel. "So they require a settlement that satisfies what they witnessed." Brotherhood leaders are thus keenly aware that pursuing "reconciliation" without holding the current regime accountable will divide their organization. "If we judge who is responsible for blood, then we can have dialogue," said one leader.

Second, Brotherhood leaders believe -- despite all available data -- that they are winning. "The aim of the coup was to eliminate political Islam," said Brotherhood leader Gamal Heshmat, who fled to Istanbul in December. "But the coup in Egypt had the opposite effect...It restored confidence in the Brotherhood, when people compared [their experience] under Dr. Morsi to what happened afterwards." Touson, Morsi's lawyer, was similarly upbeat. "I don't believe there's a coup in the world that faces resistance like this," he said, referring to the ongoing -- and increasingly sparse -- Brotherhood-led demonstrations against Morsi's ouster.

The Brotherhood's lack of realism is nothing new. Claiming to represent "true Islam," the Brotherhood has long overestimated its popularity within Muslim-majority Egypt, and its leaders therefore cannot believe that Egyptians actually rebelled against an Islamist president. ("On June 30, nothing happened on the streets," Heshmat said, flatly denying that many millions of Egyptians participated in the anti-Brotherhood protests that preceded Morsi's ouster.) And precisely because the Brotherhood believes that it is winning, it sees little reason to compromise.

Yet the Brotherhood isn't winning at all -- in fact, it's at its weakest point in nearly four decades, and its notoriously rigid organization is in total disarray. Within urban centers, the Brotherhood's five-to-eight-member cells, known as "families," haven't held their weekly meetings since Morsi was ousted, and Muslim Brothers say they can only meet each other one or two at a time.

Meanwhile, the Brotherhood's top leadership hasn't met since late July. And although new leaders have been promoted to replace those who have been imprisoned, Muslim Brothers don't actually know who is strategizing on their behalf. "Those who manage, I don't know them and nobody knows them," said Heshmat, the Brotherhood leader exiled in Istanbul. While Mohamed Ali Bishr, a former Brotherhood executive who served as a governor and minister under Morsi, often speaks on behalf of the group within Egypt, Muslim Brothers and their allies are unsure whether top Brotherhood leaders have entrusted him with any actual authority. One Brotherhood leader said that deputy supreme guide Gomaa Amin, who is currently exiled in London and chronically ill, is running the organization. But Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leader Riad al-Shaqfeh, who is based in Istanbul, says that secretary-general Mahmoud Hussein has presided over

the group's international meetings since Supreme Guide Mohamed Badie was arrested in August.

Even without knowing their leaders, however, young Muslim Brothers continue to follow the orders that they receive through Brotherhood-affiliated social media sites. On campuses, for example, Muslim Brothers receive information about upcoming "anti-coup" demonstrations through Facebook, and they promise to continue fighting the current regime despite the significant risk this entails. "Everybody is looking [to be a martyr]," said the Muslim Brother at Cairo University, whose brother was killed during last summer's crackdown. "There are [people] younger than me looking for paradise. And when I did not get that honor, I said God did not let me [become a martyr] because I made many mistakes." Al-Mehy, the Brotherhood youth in Istanbul, was similarly resolute: "We will continue to resist the coup until the last drop," he said. "Because we tasted freedom and we will not accept to go back and taste slavery again."

This is perhaps the main reason why "reconciliation" won't happen: Many Muslim Brothers would rather die fighting the current regime than sit with it.

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[Article 7.](#)

The Washington Post

A Finland model for Ukraine?

[David Ignatius](#)

May 21, 2014 -- After months of war fever over Ukraine, perhaps the biggest surprise is that citizens there will be voting to choose a new government in [elections that observers predict will be free and fair in most areas](#).

This electoral pathway for Ukraine seemed unlikely a few weeks ago, given Russian President Vladimir Putin's [annexation of Crimea](#) and his covert campaign to [destabilize the Russian-speaking areas of eastern Ukraine](#). There were dire warnings of a new Cold War, and even of a ground war in Ukraine. The country seemed at risk of being torn apart.

Putin appears, at this writing, to have decided that Russia's interests are better served by waiting — for the nonaligned government he expects will emerge from Sunday's elections — than from an invasion or some radical destabilization. The Russian leader may be ready to accept a neutral country, between East and West, where Russia's historical interests are recognized. During the Cold War, such an outcome was known as “Finlandization.”

If this Finland-like status is what Ukrainians support (and recent evidence suggests their new leaders may indeed choose this course) then it should be a welcome outcome for the West, too. Ukraine's problems are internal; it needs ideological coherence more than territorial defense. It needs the breathing space that nonalignment can provide. The Ukrainian people can't be barred from seeking membership in NATO or the European Union, but it's unimaginable that either body would say yes, perhaps for decades. So Putin can breathe easier on that score.

Maybe the elections will dull the self-flagellating domestic rhetoric in the United States that Putin's menacing moves were somehow the fault of President Obama and his allegedly weak foreign policy. Obama has made mistakes, especially in the Middle East, but his Ukraine policy mostly has been steady and correct. He recognized that the United States had no military options and fashioned a [strategy that, with German help, seems to have deterred Putin](#) from further recklessness.

If the election goes forward (with Putin maintaining his current “wait and see” stance), Obama deserves credit for crisis policymaking of the sort recommended by the respected [British strategist Lawrence Freedman](#). “The basic challenge of crisis management is to protect core interests while avoiding major war.” Freedman wrote in a March essay on the blog “[War on the Rocks](#).” He argued, even then, that criticism of Obama's allegedly weak stance was “overdone.”

The case for “Finlandization” emerges in a monograph prepared recently by the State Department's Office of the Historian. It argues that “Finnish foreign policy during the Cold War successfully preserved Finland's territorial and economic sovereignty, through adherence to a careful policy of neutrality in foreign affairs.” Ukraine's new government may pursue a similar nonalignment, judging from the leading candidate, billionaire

oligarch [Petro Poroshenko](#), who has pro-Western ties but also served in the Moscow-leaning government of deposed president Viktor Yanukovich. The State Department study also noted that nonalignment allowed Finland “to serve as a bridge between the Soviet bloc and the West.” Helsinki became a meeting ground for arms-control and human-rights talks that eventually transformed Eastern Europe. A similar bridging role for Ukraine would be welcome, as it would draw Russia west, away from an atavistic strategy of creating a Eurasian trade bloc to reestablish Soviet-style economic hegemony.

For all the war talk, Ukraine has really been a test of nonconventional forces and covert action rather than military intervention. Putin, the ex-KGB officer, launched a [deniable “stealth” invasion of Crimea in February](#), using troops without insignia. He continued the pressure in eastern Ukraine by working with pro-Russian irregular militias, though their unruly behavior eventually seemed to worry even Putin. He may have threatened invasion but he never seemed eager to roll his tanks across an international border.

What seems to have slowed Putin’s allies in Ukraine is similarly unconventional. It wasn’t Ukrainian government troops that restored order in eastern cities such as [Donetsk](#) and [Mariupol](#). The army’s performance was middling, at best. Stability returned because of the deployment in at least five eastern cities of steelworkers and miners apparently dispatched by Ukraine’s richest man, Rinat Akhmetov, who opposed a breakup of his country.

Obama administration officials stress that this has to be Ukraine’s choice. If Ukrainians seek an accommodation with Moscow, it must be their desire for self-limitation, not a policy imposed by Washington or Berlin. The stabilizing factor here will be an Ukraine that makes its own decisions.

[Article 8.](#)

NYT

A Critical Election in Ukraine

Editorial

May 20, 2014 -- It is risky to see hopeful trends in the Ukrainian crisis. But a degree of calm seems to have settled over the rebellious southeast, which may bode well for the presidential election scheduled for Sunday. There are many things Moscow and its minions in Ukraine can still do to derail the election, of course, but President Vladimir Putin of Russia has refrained from publicly endorsing the “people’s republics” proclaimed by secessionists. His spokesman said on Monday that he had ordered Russian troops to pull back from the Ukrainian border, though NATO has not seen any change yet.

It is crucial for the vote to be accepted by all sides so Moscow can stop referring to the interim administration as the “illegitimate regime in Kiev,” and the elected president can begin to repair the enormous economic and social damage suffered by Ukraine in recent months. But the election itself will not solve Ukraine’s problems unless a new president can also address the deep corruption and cronyism that have been a hallmark of Ukrainian government since independence in 1991. The front-runner in the presidential race is Petro Poroshenko, a 48-year-old tycoon known as the Chocolate King for his candy empire. Mr. Poroshenko has political strengths: he was the first and only Ukrainian oligarch to join the protesters in Kiev that led to President Viktor Yanukovich’s ouster in February; he favors a trade pact with the European Union; and he has been deeply involved in Ukrainian politics almost from the outset.

But the fact is, Mr. Poroshenko is also a member of the clique of very rich businessmen who have been at the root of the corruption of Ukrainian government. So are two of his rivals in the race — Yulia Tymoshenko, the former prime minister who made a fortune in energy deals, and Sergey Tigipko, a banker and member of Parliament.

Two other oligarchs, Rinat Akhmetov, the richest Ukrainian of them all, and Igor Kolomoisky, a banker who was recently appointed governor of Dnepropetrovsk Province, have recently become active in repelling secessionists in southeastern Ukraine — Mr. Akhmetov by sending his steel and mining workers to recover occupied buildings in Mariupol and Makeyevka, and Mr. Kolomoisky by offering bounties for arms and captured “terrorists.”

Like Russian oligarchs, the Ukrainian tycoons made their fortunes in the chaotic privatization of state assets that followed the collapse of

Communist rule. Like the Russians, they hide much of their shady wealth abroad. But, in Ukraine, the oligarchs have been far more closely involved in politics, often changing sides as political winds shifted. Mr. Poroshenko, for example, was foreign minister under the West-leaning Viktor Yushchenko, and then economics minister under Mr. Yanukovich. So the question is whether an oligarch-president, [most likely Mr. Poroshenko](#), will mean business as usual, or whether the new leader can really give Ukraine a clean start.

That cannot be ruled out. Ukraine's tycoons have apparently become aware that coming under Kremlin control is not good for their export-dependent operations and that doing business with the West requires transparency. Besides, crisis does have a way of wiping the slate clean. Mr. Akhmetov's employees — and there are nearly 300,000 of them — evidently heeded his warning that their livelihoods would be uncertain under Russian control. A free and fair election on Sunday is the first step toward stability. The next will be a new president truly willing to break with the corruptions of the past.