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Article 1.

Wall Street Journal

## **Engaged to Hamas - The cost of the Palestinian Authority's 'unity' with terrorists**

Editorial

MAY 11, 2011 -- Before the ink dries on last week's deal to bring Hamas into the Palestinian government, the Obama Administration is trying to suggest it's no big deal. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the door remained open to continued U.S. support. Other officials suggested that Hamas might change—or in any case the accord will prove to be short lived.

So some things haven't changed in the post-bin Laden, Arab Spring Middle East. A Palestinian leadership that lives off outside aid continues to think that hostile actions carry few consequences. And the West sounds willing to indulge them, fearing that any other response could jeopardize their near religious pursuit of the peace process.

By agreeing to form a "unity government" with Hamas, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas may think he can boost his popularity in the West Bank and regain some control over Gaza. Many Europeans and some Americans will buy the argument that Israel's reluctance to negotiate peace forced Mr. Abbas's hand.

Yet the engagement won't be easy to ignore. Pending agreement on a new cabinet—one of several obstacles to consummating the deal—the terrorist group that's now confined to the Gaza strip will have access to billions in foreign aid. There's no way for any donor or for Israel, which transfers customs and other receipts to the Palestinian Authority, to ensure that money won't be used by Hamas to launch more rockets on Israeli school buses. Hamas leader Khaled Meshal

makes no secret of its intentions. Several times since the accord was signed in Cairo last Wednesday, he passed up the opportunity to renounce violence or its commitment to Israel's destruction. He said on Sunday that Hamas may continue to fight Israel even after the formation of a Palestinian state. Speaking to the New York Times last week, Mr. Meshal said that the goal was "a Palestinian state in the 1967 lines with Jerusalem as its capital, without any settlements or settlers, not an inch of land swaps and respecting the right of return" of all Palestinian refugees and their offspring to Israel itself. This leaves little room for discussion.

One casualty may be Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, the competent technocrat who cleaned up some of the corruption in the authority, revived the West Bank economy and clamped down on violence. No wonder Hamas wants him out. They've turned the Gaza strip into a failed terror haven since gaining control after a brief Palestinian civil war in 2007. Mr. Abbas says he would like to reappoint Prime Minister Fayyad to reassure foreign donors.

Even if Hamas did let Mr. Fayyad keep his job, donors will have to reassess support. Twenty-nine Senators, in a letter organized by two Democrats, have called on President Obama to cut off aid to any Palestinian government that includes Hamas. The U.S. provides \$550 million a year.

The Palestinians aren't going to get their state as long as their leaders include committed terrorists. Israel tried this route with Yasser Arafat in the 1993 Oslo accord, and Hamas was one result. If Palestinians renounce violence and build a democracy to go along with the vibrant economy of the West Bank, their aspirations for statehood will be impossible to deny—least of all by Israel. But the marriage with Hamas takes the Palestinian cause far in the other direction.

Article 2.

The Weekly Standard

## **Why the Hamas-Fatah Deal Is Bad for the Palestinians**

Jonathan Schanzer

May 10, 2011 -- The Palestinians zealously celebrated last week's unity deal between Hamas and Fatah. Young men in both the West Bank and Gaza cruised around in their cars, honking and flashing the victory sign out of their windows. There was dancing, singing, and firecrackers. Indeed, the civil war between the two most powerful Palestinian factions appears to have ended.

But the deal should nonetheless concern Washington. This deal with Hamas – which recently criticized America for killing Osama bin Laden – signals that Fatah no longer believes U.S. recognition and support are essential to their national aspirations.

For five years, Palestinian diplomats have been quietly and successfully lobbying Latin American, Muslim, and European nations to recognize an initiative for a unilateral declaration of independence. The Palestinians envision that state occupying the West Bank and Gaza territories outside Israel's pre-1967 borders. The plan is to declare that state at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2011, where some 140 states will (presumably) recognize it.

Until last week it appeared that the Palestinian Authority, led by Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas, was eager to secure U.S. approval for this bold initiative. It also appeared that President Barack Obama supported the plan, in spite of half-hearted statements to the contrary by State Department officials. Beginning in the spring of 2010, Obama found numerous opportunities to upbraid the Israelis for

building in the disputed territories that Palestinians sought to claim for their future state. He even upgraded the Palestinians' diplomatic mission, apparently in anticipation of the move.

Yet, the Hamas-Fatah reconciliation is a blow to U.S. policy, and makes it more difficult for Washington to support a Palestinian state. Washington rightly regards Hamas as a terrorist organization, and has banned official recognition of the group for its decades-long involvement in attacks against Israeli civilians. This effectively prevents Washington from endorsing any government that involves Hamas, and further sets back decades of Palestinian efforts to rehabilitate their global image.

In 1988, then-PLO leader Yassir Arafat recognized ██████. Security Council Resolution 242, which acknowledged Israel's sovereignty and its right to exist. This opened the doors for the Oslo Process, in which the Palestinians assembled the bureaucratic building blocks for their national project. A decade later, in 1998, the Palestinians amended the PLO charter, erasing all calls for the destruction of Israel. This put the Palestinians one step closer to statehood.

When Arafat chose war with Israel over President Bill Clinton's far-reaching peace deal in 2000, statehood seemed a distant dream. But after Arafat died in 2004, the Palestinians again appeared eager to restore their image. Fatah leader Abbas, alongside Palestinian prime minister Salaam Fayyad, began rebuilding the institutions the war had destroyed. Abbas and Fayyad looked even more worthy of U.S. support after Hamas wrested control of Gaza from Fatah in a brief but brutal civil war in 2007.

The resulting split with Hamas made it easy for the West to cast Fatah as peaceful and pragmatic. Though Fatah maintained its own terror apparatus (the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades) and continued to incite hatred for Israel via their official media, the U.S.-Palestinian relationship thrived. Washington stood up a Palestinian military force

in the West Bank and the U.S. contributed more taxpayer funds to the Palestinian Authority than ever – some \$600 million – even as Americans were climbing out of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Now, the Obama administration has little choice but to cut ties with the new Palestinian interim government. The State Department lists Hamas as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, barring all formal diplomatic engagement with it. The Treasury Department also lists Hamas as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity, banning direct U.S. aid all institutions in which Hamas is involved.

Abbas knows this. So, his decision to embrace Hamas was a deliberate choice to run around Israel and the United States. Rather than slog through thorny issues with Israel under American-led negotiations, he will unite the West Bank and Gaza under a symbolic umbrella government of technocrats, then pursue a unilateral declaration of independence, followed by an international legal campaign to “reclaim” land that was never in history a self-governed Palestinian polity.

Abbas likely feels that he has little to lose. For all of Obama’s talk of settlement cessation, he has not been able to deliver any of the disputed lands that Palestinians claim for their own. Meanwhile, Obama has not been able to bring about his stated desired outcome in a host of neighboring countries: Libya, Iraq, and Egypt are obvious examples. Hamas appears to be on the ropes, with its sponsor Syria in crisis. In addition, Hamas doesn’t want Fatah to declare a state without its inclusion. This was at least part of the calculus behind Abbas’s decision to reconcile with Hamas.

Abbas, however, appears to have made three critical miscalculations: First, Fatah’s partnership with Hamas simply cannot last. Apart from their enmity toward Israel, the two factions agree on almost nothing. Even at the heralded unity conference, Abbas and the Syria-based

Hamas leader, Khaled Meshal, refused to sign their names to the deal; proxies signed for them. The two factions also continue to arrest and obstruct loyalists from opposing parties.

This brings us to the second point. Israel has been defending the West Bank from Hamas advances since the civil war in 2007. With Hamas now a political partner to Fatah, Israel's leadership could refuse to come to Fatah's defense. Thus, Israel's military, intelligence, financial, and civic support to the West Bank may soon dry up. At the very least, the Palestinians should brace for a significant drop in support.

Finally, even if the [REDACTED] recognizes a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood, a lack of U.S. support will create political and financial challenges that may smother the state in its cradle. Already, 29 senators have asked Obama to turn off the spigot of aid to the Palestinians. And even in the Obama era, with the United States showing less assertiveness on the world stage, the Palestinians need America and its robust foreign policy assistance.

Though Fatah and Hamas may have temporarily reconciled themselves to one another, the Palestinians will eventually need to reconcile themselves to Washington. As long as Hamas is in the picture, it won't be easy.

*Jonathan Schanzer, a former intelligence analyst at the U.S. Treasury, is vice president of research at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and author of Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine (Palgrave Macmillan 2008).*

Article 3.

TIME

## **Signs of Fatigue and Unease as Europe Struggles with Libyan and Syrian Crises**

Bruce Crumley

May 10, 2011 -- Despite intensified NATO bombings and important gains made by the rebels who are fighting loyalists of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi on Tuesday, it seems increasingly clear that the clock is ticking on the international community's involvement in Libya's civil war — and that doubts about the outcomes of other Arab Spring uprisings are spreading in European capitals. Allies are not only divided over the best way to aid Libya's opposition fighters; they're wondering how long they can provide assistance to a ragtag ground offensive that is largely bogged down. Perhaps more troubling still, the difficulty of North African societies to quickly replace toppled authoritarian regimes is starting to weaken Western enthusiasm in what once seemed an irrepressible populist rejection of the Arab world's dictatorships. Now doubts grow about whether all the blood, sweat and tears will ever amount to lasting, positive change.

Though political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic say their resolve to support the Libyan rebels with NATO-led air strikes has not waned, wider signals suggest that a significant degree of careful and contrasting rethinking is afoot among the partners. On the one hand, the kind of heavy bombing on Tuesday that targeted Gaddafi's military assets in Tripoli and elsewhere in Libya — and which coincided with major gains by opposition fighters in western cities like Misratah — supports contentions by allied officials that progress is being made. But while those advances — coupled with evidence

that Gaddafi's reserves of money, arms and supplies may finally be running low — offer reasons for hope, some observers acknowledge that demonstrative gains will be needed soon to prove to concerned European publics that the current deadlock has been broken.

“The absence of body bags and daily death counts of Western soldiers reduces the risk that public-opinion support of the Libyan operation will suddenly give way to demands it be ended, but it's also true that if significant progress isn't made in the coming weeks, we could face a problem,” says one French diplomat who is following the situation closely. “We think Gaddafi's forces are weakening, and rebel advances will enable a negotiated truce or force Gaddafi to flee before too long. And we hope that's how it goes. We really don't want to see the summer coming to an end and this thing still grinding on as 2012 looms on the horizon.”

Meanwhile, questions of how to aid the Libyan opposition is also splitting its international supporters. Although a summit in Rome last week of so-called contact group nations backing the Libyan opposition agreed in principle to free up funds to assist the struggle, getting finances flowing is proving more difficult and divisive than some had expected. Calls by rebels for Western nations to just hand over money from Gaddafi's frozen accounts “simply isn't legal,” the French diplomat says. Meanwhile, not all capitals recognize the Benghazi regime as Gaddafi's legitimate successor, creating even more legal questions about handing Libyan government money abroad to rebels.

Elsewhere, partners are still at odds over whether to supply arms to the rebels — or how to ensure that providing funds won't amount to the same thing. There's also disagreement as to whether the [REDACTED] mandate that the NATO operation is working under allows for regime change or not. Clashing positions like these — paired with the likelihood of the Libyan conflict becoming an open-ended slog — is

also starting to color thinking about how to respond to other clashes in the Arab world. On Monday, for example, European Union members steered clear of adopting any truly muscular measures in response to the Bashar Assad regime's bloody repression of pro-reform demonstrations in Syria. Instead, the E.U. agreed to impose an arms embargo and slap a travel ban and assets freeze on 13 Syrian officials.

“How can you intervene to stop the murderous efforts of one Arab regime to crush popular movements yet respond to another one with warnings: ‘Don't you dare come here and try to spend your money?’” the French diplomat asks incredulously. “And the worst thing is, we're not just seeing Europeans getting lazy and cynical in starting to change their earlier bets against authoritarian regimes in the face of popular revolt. Now we're seeing them look at places like Tunisia and Egypt — where dictators have already been toppled by the people — and figuring we'll probably wind up dealing with new authoritarian regimes once democracy fails to pan out. Just look at the difference with the way political leaders, commentators, the media and European publics reacted to the popular revolt in Tunisia and the current uprising in Syria. It's night and day!”

That attitude, and the apparently waning commitment to Arab democratic movements, is evident elsewhere, the diplomat says. In contrast to its support of the European-American call for intervention in Libya, the “Arab League has been utterly silent in response to these other uprisings — apart from warning us not to interfere,” the French diplomat says. That's yet another sign that doubts seem to be surging all around about just how willing Western countries that have long lectured emerging societies about embracing democracy are when the efforts to nurture that pluralism appears messier and more time consuming than expected. “In January, people were starting to wonder whether they may not watch a democratic domino effect

across the entire Arab world," the French diplomat says. "Now the question seems to be whether Western nations that struggled to react to those uprisings will prove more responsive in protecting and promoting the democratic ambitions that drove them."

*Bruce Crumley is Paris bureau chief for TIME.*

Article 4.

The Christian Science Monitor

## **What can rescue the Arab Spring?**

Fadi Hakura

May 10, 2011 -- Spring has come early this year to the Arab world. Climate change has awakened the once comatose Middle East from the stupor of singular leaderships. A new dawn of democracy and freedom is sprouting from Morocco to Oman. Or so we are told. Weather forecasting is a tricky business. Future projections can be horribly inaccurate. Despite sophisticated models and satellite imagery, deciphering weather patterns is an inexact science. Fortune telling the Middle East is no less an illusive mirage in the squelching heat of the Arabian desert.

Democratic pluralism is never a foregone conclusion. Challenges to the old order cannot guarantee linear outcomes. Although Egypt's Hosni Mubarak is past tense, the state apparatus he built is certainly not. Yemeni and Libyan tribalism will not disappear with regime change. Sunni-Shiite sectarianism will remain a defining feature of Bahrain, Iraq, and Lebanon. Religious minorities will fret about governance by Islamist parties, moderate or otherwise. Factionalism will continue tearing Palestinian unity apart.

### **The missing puzzle piece in Arab society**

History teaches us that free and fair elections alone will not cure the steep divisions in Arab societies. Indeed, they will probably exacerbate them. Shorn of feelings of national solidarity, narrow sectional interests may dictate voting patterns. A crucial piece of the puzzle is missing. Without it, the Arab countries will have the edifice of democracy but not genuine representative institutions.

That crucial (missing) piece is secularism, a principle that girds most vibrant democracies; the belief that the state should exist separately

from religion or religious beliefs. Governments should not privilege one religion over another nor derive policy from a particular religious source. They should be equidistant from all religions, effectively blind to someone's religious persuasion.

Secularism is a misunderstood concept in much of the Middle East, a legacy of the cold war. Arabs confuse secularism with atheism, understanding it to mean freedom from religion rather than freedom of religion. More damaging is secularism's association with the past regimes in Egypt and Tunisia, both known for their containment of Islamist movements. However, those very regimes mobilized religious fervor through state propaganda and lavish budgets to maintain favor with electorates.

### **Debate over role of religion in society**

Egypt is debating the role of religion in society as it considers a new Constitution. Article 2 of the current Constitution, introduced in 1980, defines Islam as the state religion and "the principal source" of law. While Coptic Christians demand its abrogation, the overwhelming Muslim opinion supports its retention. Copts see this article as exclusionary and divisive. They want a civil state based on citizenship, not on affiliation to a specific religion. Lebanon and Iraq institutionalize confessional politics to new heights. Their sectarian-rooted democracy reserves the highest offices for representatives from certain religious communities. Naturally, it has achieved a fragile social peace at the expense of nationhood. In the timeless words of Kahlil Gibran: "Pity the nation divided into fragments, each fragment deeming itself a nation."

### **Benefits of separating religion and state**

The Pew Research Center, a respected international pollster, provides ample evidence for the benefits to separation of religion and state. It showed in a 2009 survey that liberal, secular democracies exhibited the least government restrictions and public hostility to minority

religions. Arab countries, as well as Iran and Turkey, demonstrated the diametric opposite. Secularism protected minority beliefs; the integration of religion and government is a harbinger of civil strife and discrimination.

This study also revealed that many types of secular democracies preserved religious diversity. Secularism is flexible enough to accommodate different national circumstances. Take France. It traditionally opposes any state religion or overt displays of religious symbols. Nevertheless, religious minorities are allowed to flourish in a permissive environment. Or take England. Even though the Church of England is the established church, a wide array of faiths enjoy near unlimited freedom. There is, in other words, no single model of democratic secularism provided tolerance is respected.

Flexible or not, nurturing secularism in the Arab world is a tall order. Like democracy, it is a process not an event. Secular democracy requires a transformation of cultures and mentalities. This will not be easy even in the best of times. Yet, it is the only ideal that can prevent the onset of a severe Arab winter.

*Fadi Hakura is manager of the Turkey project at Britain-based Chatham House.*

Article 5.

NYT

## **Bad Bargains**

Thomas L. Friedman

May 10, 2011 -- So Osama bin Laden was living in a specially built villa in Pakistan. I wonder where he got the money to buy it? Cashed in his Saudi 401(k)? A Pakistani subprime mortgage, perhaps? No. I suspect we will find that it all came from the same place most of Al Qaeda's funds come from: some combination of private Saudi donations spent under the watchful eye of the Pakistani Army. Why should we care? Because this is the heart of the matter; that's why. It was both just and strategically vital that we killed Bin Laden, who inspired 9/11. I just wish it were as easy to eliminate the two bad bargains that really made that attack possible, funded it and provided the key plotters and foot soldiers who carried it out. We are talking about the ruling bargains in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, which are alive and well.

The Saudi ruling bargain is an old partnership between the al-Saud tribe and the Wahhabi religious sect. The al-Saud tribe get to stay in power and live however they want behind their palace walls, and, in return, the followers of the Wahhabi sect get to control the country's religious mores, mosques and education system.

The Wahhabis bless the Saudi regime with legitimacy in the absence of any elections, and the regime blesses them with money and a free hand on religion. The only downside is that this system ensures a steady supply of "sitting around guys" — young Saudi males who have nothing other than religious education and no skills to compete — who then get recruited to become 9/11-style hijackers and suicide bombers in Iraq.

No one explains it better than the Saudi writer Mai Yamani, author of “Cradle of Islam” and the daughter of Saudi Arabia’s former oil minister. “Despite the decade of the West’s war on terror, and Saudi Arabia’s longer-term alliance with the United States, the kingdom’s Wahhabi religious establishment has continued to bankroll Islamic extremist ideologies around the world,” wrote Yamani in *The Daily Star* of Beirut, Lebanon, this week.

“Bin Laden, born, raised and educated in Saudi Arabia, is a product of this pervasive ideology,” Yamani added. “He was no religious innovator; he was a product of Wahhabism, and later was exported by the Wahhabi regime as a jihadist. During the 1980s, Saudi Arabia spent some \$75 billion for the propagation of Wahhabism, funding schools, mosques, and charities throughout the Islamic world, from Pakistan to Afghanistan, Yemen, Algeria and beyond. ... Not surprisingly, the creation of a transnational Islamic political movement, boosted by thousands of underground jihadist Web sites, has blown back into the kingdom. Like the hijackers of 9/11, who were also Saudi-Wahhabi ideological exports ... Saudi Arabia’s reserve army of potential terrorists remains, because the Wahhabi factory of fanatical ideas remains intact. So the real battle has not been with Bin Laden, but with that Saudi state-supported ideology factory.”

Ditto Pakistan. The Pakistani ruling bargain is set by the Pakistani Army and says: “We let you civilians pretend to rule, but we will actually call all the key shots, we will consume nearly 25 percent of the state budget and we will justify all of this as necessary for Pakistan to confront its real security challenge: India and its occupation of Kashmir. Looking for Bin Laden became a side-business for Pakistan’s military to generate U.S. aid.

As the Al Qaeda expert Lawrence Wright observed in *The New Yorker* this week: Pakistan’s Army and intelligence service “were in

the looking-for-Bin-Laden business, and if they found him [REDACTED] be out of business.” Since 9/11, Wright added, “the U.S. had given \$11 billion to Pakistan, the bulk of it in military aid, much of which was misappropriated to buy weapons to defend against India.”

(President Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan plays the same game. He’s in the looking-for-stability-in-Afghanistan business. And as long as we keep paying him, he’ll keep looking.)

What both countries need is shock therapy. For Pakistan, that would mean America converting the lion’s share of its military aid to K-12 education programs, while also reducing the U.S. footprint in Afghanistan. Together, the message would be that we’re ready to help Pakistan fight its real enemies and ours — ignorance, illiteracy, corrupt elites and religious obscurantism — but we have no interest in being dupes for the nonsense that Pakistan is threatened by India and therefore needs “strategic depth” in Afghanistan and allies among the Taliban.

Ditto Saudi Arabia. We are in a ménage à trois with the al-Sauds and the Wahhabis. We provide the al-Sauds security, and they provide us oil. The Wahhabis provide the al-Sauds with legitimacy and the al-Sauds provide them with money (from us). It works really well for the al-Sauds, but not too well for us. The only way out is a new U.S. energy policy, which neither party is proposing.

Hence, my conclusion: We are surely safer with Bin Laden dead, but no one will be safe — certainly not the many moderate Muslims in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan who deserve a decent future — without different ruling bargains in Islamabad and Riyadh.

Article 6.

Asia Times

## **Hezbollah caught in vortex of chance**

Nicholas Noe

11 May -- BEIRUT - With unrest and violence growing daily in Syria, the Shi'ite movement Hezbollah now confronts a strategic challenge whose negative effects have been magnified by the sheer suddenness of it all.

Just three months ago, Hezbollah confidently precipitated the collapse of the Lebanese government led by prime minister Saad Hariri and rejoiced over the fall of president Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt. Together with its "Resistance Axis" allies Iran, Syria and Hamas, Hezbollah openly touted the climax of several years of hard-fought victories that had successfully cut into the preponderance of power held by the United States, Israel and most of the Sunni Arab regimes.

But that trajectory, on course since at least the start of the insurgency in Iraq and accelerated by Israel's disastrous July 2006 war that was vigorously encouraged by the George W Bush administration, has now suddenly come to a dead halt. Worse still for Hezbollah, the Party of God, reasonably predicting the future course that the balance of power in the region is likely to take has become a far more complicated, perhaps impossible, task. Indeed, for all the commentary and analyses of Hezbollah as a thoroughly radical and (obtusely) totalitarian project, the reality is that the one thing Hezbollah hates perhaps as much as Zionism is the prospect of chaos - the unpredictable, the unintended consequences lying in wait - with the leadership usually preferring to pre-empt such scenarios via pragmatic concessions and the broadening of alliances that together can stabilize their understanding of the future.

This predilection means that the current situation the party faces all around it - but especially vis-a-vis its only open land border, ie Syria - is likely the main subject consuming the time of its secretary general, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah.

You wouldn't guess this by Nasrallah's public speeches of late. Just as Hezbollah avoided almost any public discussion of the post-election crisis in Iran - its leading patron and ultimate guide (on some occasions) when push comes to shove - Nasrallah has almost completely avoided talking about the deepening instability and brutal government crackdown in Syria.

Though a pragmatic choice not to interfere in its vital allies' internal business, Nasrallah's unwillingness to publicly explain the party's stance - to explain the apparent contradictions between his vocal criticism of the Tunisian, Libyan, Bahraini, Egyptian and Yemeni governments and his different (non-)positions on Syria and Iran - is helping to effectively undermine one of Nasrallah and Hezbollah's most important and effective weapons to date: their appeal to reason, especially when it comes to regional matters.

Although the party's many critics have long fought this notion - preferring instead to argue that it only dissimulates (it does, in part) and only bases its power on fear (it does, in part) - Hezbollah has in fact gone to great lengths to reason with a wide range of constituencies around the world that its cause, its case and its methods are essentially rational and in the interests of Lebanese, Arabs and indeed all Muslims (and perhaps even the United States!). In this Nasrallah has been a gifted narrator able to inject self-criticism into his discourse.

This effort has been capped over the last few years by Nasrallah's argument that the strengthening of the Resistance Axis actually makes sense for both those who would like to see a negotiated regional settlement (two-staters) and those who would like to see the

outright end of the Jewish state of Israel (one-staters).

After all, he asserts, Israel will only negotiate minimally reasonable terms for peace if it is compelled to by the balance of power around it. Without that kind of credible, sustained pressure, Israel will simply never give up on the expansionist vision of Zionism - at least, that's what the post-Oslo period of declining Arab power has taught the region, he says.

On the other hand, as Nasrallah emphasized only last year, those who would like to peacefully promulgate a single democratic state of Palestine (which Hezbollah claims it supports, although it is vague on the idea of possibly expelling Jewish "settlers"), also rationally benefit from the growing power of the Resistance Axis since its own members' internal contradictions tick down at a far slower rate than Israel's many "existential" flaws.

"Syria is getting stronger with time," Nasrallah claimed last May.

"Iran is getting stronger with time, Hezbollah is getting stronger with time. The Palestinian resistance factions are getting stronger with time. "The arc of history is on the side of a Resistance Axis", he said, which will steadily surround Israel and, with its military power (possibly with nuclear weapons) growing, thereby exacerbate Israel's vulnerabilities to a breaking point.

Over time, Nasrallah assured, demographic factors would intervene, the Israeli economy would decline, the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF's) ability to strike its enemies hard, and at will, would be voided by mutually assured destruction and enough Jews would leave Israel out of pure self-interest and fear - or agree to democratic power sharing - that a new, unified state of Palestine would come into being.

In such conditions of de-hegemonization, de-legitimization and perpetual suffocation, Zionism would be effectively finished, Nasrallah argued, with ample reference to a long litany of Israeli thinkers, leaders and intellectuals (not to mention US Secretary of

State Hillary Clinton's own warning last year to the annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference).

While his argument has indeed seemed reasonable to a great many Middle Easterners who have witnessed the steady collapse of the "Peace Process", a key problem with it is now sharply evident: the internal contradictions of the Resistance Axis, even at home in Lebanon, are stark and they are ticking down to a defining moment at a far faster rate than Israel's own bevy of contradictions.

Hezbollah therefore stands today with the potential of losing its strategic depth, it's on the wrong side of reason when it comes to the domestic turmoil in Syria and Iran and its worst nightmare of chaos surrounding it (and possibly bleeding over into Lebanon itself) is becoming more likely by the day.

Suffice it to say then, the Party of God finds itself suddenly at a very down-to-earth fork in the road.

Will Nasrallah and Hezbollah make the same mistakes now that the US, Israel and their local allies made at critical moments during the 2006-2010 period when their real power was actually in decline, but they nevertheless pushed aggressively as if their overall strategic position was actually improving - a move that produced extended violence and an eventual reversal of fortunes?

In attempting to answer this, one must first acknowledge that Hezbollah as a Lebanese party cum army does have a degree of choice.

Although Hezbollah's most important relationship with Iran constrains (and may even at certain junctures determine) its actions, Nasrallah has evidently helped move the party towards a degree of independence from both Syria and Iran that would have been unthinkable a decade ago (a view mostly buttressed by statements from top US officials in the recent past).

More to the point, the "red lines" - the junctures - that may prompt

Iranian direction or outright control appeared to have been moved farther and farther out.

Indeed, just two weeks ago, Nasrallah asserted:

If someone is angry with us because we toppled his government, Iran has nothing to do with it. I am sincere in saying this. The Iranians knew from the media; we did not ask them or tell them or anything like this. The whole world has seen on television screens the news conference on the resignation of the ministers. The Iranians were just like everyone else. Nobody should hold Iran accountable just because our ministers left the government. Leave this accountability aside. Whether Nasrallah is being truthful or not here - or in his more expansive assertions over the past few years regarding Iran's declining influence over the party - is of less importance than what his approach, his rhetoric, says about the party's willingness, in fact its evident need, to regularly proclaim its relative independence (and in slightly insulting terms no less) – a move generally reflective of the thinking of its vital constituencies without which the party simply could not operate in Lebanon.

Still, even though Hezbollah may have a wider degree of independent action than in the past when it comes to its parent/partner in Tehran, it has nevertheless helped to construct a thick wall of suspicion, resentment and outright hatred (including of a sectarian nature) with many of its adversaries, all of which greatly limits its maneuverability in this next stage.

That it would take an almost "Jumblattian" effort against Syria (exceptional even in Lebanon) to reverse course with actors like Saad Hariri, many Sunnis and others in the country, is no longer really in doubt.

But could the party, in part out of perceived necessity, take this task on effectively and in a timely manner to truly stabilize the country for a sustained period of time as its far larger neighbor descends into

extended unrest? Probably not.

Though Nasrallah on one occasion denied it, the party has on several occasions before called its rivals "traitors" and "agents", only to later join hands in a national unity government, But the chasm dividing the two sides in Lebanon now has never been wider and more bitter - certainly not during the post civil war period, but also not even during worst days of the "Cedar" revolution when Hezbollah and its allies literally fought with the armed supporters of Hariri and his March 14 movement.

Adding to the difficulty in reaching a sustained national accord, Hezbollah faces the prospect of increased intervention and sectarian subterfuge by an angry and wounded Saudi Arabia; perhaps in Syria, certainly in Lebanon via Hariri and evidently in the Gulf and North Africa, all of which makes any bridge building by Hezbollah, even if it wanted to, vastly more challenging, costly and potentially dangerous.

And alongside the re-emergence of this wealthy Islamic enemy that doctrinally hates Shi'ites (and non-Wahhabis in general), there has also been the renewed public push by Israel to pave the way towards a much-anticipated, final destruction of Hezbollah and their supporters.

In fact, with the release three weeks ago of outdated and misleading IDF "maps" of Hezbollah "positions" in civilian areas (as but one example, some of the coordinates are actually bunkers that were abandoned and/or destroyed by Israel during and after the July 2006 war), the clear message to Hezbollah is not, "We have good intelligence on you so don't get into a fight with us" (ie a message of pure deterrence), but instead came across here as, "We don't really care where you are or what you think of our intentions since we are preparing the international ground for a broad strike across Lebanon that will revenge the 2006 defeat and knock you out of the military

balance ... for good. We're just waiting for your optimal moment of weakness."

Given this increasingly hostile environment then, the response by Hezbollah in the near term will likely be to split the difference between a grand rapprochement (impossible at home) or a grand war (not now with its strategic depth in question) and move towards a prolonged period of digging in deeper. This could come with limited tactical moderation (facilitating the formation of a mildly pro-Syrian government able to deal with rising complaints from Damascus, entreaties to dwindling centrist constituencies and further aid and concessions for its allies) and, quite possibly, a partial deceleration in its longstanding efforts to radically challenge Israel's qualitative military edge (perhaps forestalling the "justified" military campaign which so many Israeli leaders seem to want).

In the end, it may be this last point that proves the most important for the future of Lebanon and the region.

Nasrallah well knows that he can lure the Israelis into launching a wide, pre-emptive war (which would bolster the party's domestic and regional standing) by crossing various "red lines" of military capacity. He has said that he actually "craves" this option because he thinks the Israelis won't be able to win - and that a defeat or even another occupation quagmire in Lebanon would swiftly collapse the core of Zionism's strength.

But with Syria (and the predictability of his supply lines) increasingly on fire, the sustainability of this preferred route is also now in grave doubt - just at the point when Nasrallah had most raised and radicalized the expectations of his base over the Resistance Axis's long-term internal strength, the brittleness of the Israeli socio-military apparatus and the closeness by which one could almost taste total victory-revenge ("in the next few years," he promised in 2008).

Perhaps then, the only thing that is relatively easy to discern in this

next period is that Hezbollah will have to forge its course, one way or another, amid an array of different, competing hands stirring the pot, a massive quantity of arms floating around on all sides, more wide open and radicalized constituencies, less certain alliances and, crucially, none of the underlying, longstanding drivers of violence and underdevelopment engaged in any sort of meaningful mitigation process.

In this vortex of chance, impulse, choice and contradiction, Nasrallah may indeed revert to a "lite" version of his (more often than not) pragmatic approach that served the party so well since he became head of Hezbollah in 1992. But like so many involved in this next, defining stage of the post-modern Middle East, he must find particular discomfort - especially for a man dedicated to several radical goals - in one gnawing question: will it be enough?

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Article 7.

The Japan Times

## **Will Islamists rule post-revolution Egypt?**

Ahmed Abd Rabou

May 10, 2011 – CAIRO — For the first time in Egypt's modern history, Islamists, the most organized political group on the ground with a recognizable outreach to every corner of the country, seem close to governing Egypt, after decades of social influence.

Being the most confident, coherent and active group in both social and political spheres of Egypt's post-Mubarak era, Islamists put many actors -domestically, regionally and internationally — on alert.

Domestically, Christians and liberals believe that Islamic rule means their exclusion from public affairs. Regionally, Israel and Arab countries fear that Islamist leadership of Egypt means losing a moderate neighbor that had been working to keep balances intact in the hot Mideast.

As for the world's big powers, which have always depended on Egypt to keep peace and security in the area, they worry that Islamist rule will mark a dramatic change that may lead to a fundamentalist Egypt, one that might introduce a Sunni version of hardline Iran Islamism, which has been suppressed in the Egyptian Republic since its founding in 1952.

In the media, the Muslim Brotherhood, long experienced in public works and the most organized sect of Islamists, now provides regular guests on all talk shows and is covered by private as well as public TV news channels. Moreover, they are preparing to launch their own channel this summer to promote themselves professionally and to fulfill their political agenda among Egyptians.

Salafis, less organized but widely popular in Upper Egypt, the countryside and Cairo, are now regular commentators on Egyptian TV and in the press.

Socially, Islamists are more prominent. Besides their role in organizing and leading in the streets during the 18 days of Egyptian protests that forced Hosni Mubarak to step down Feb. 11, Islamists are the real drivers for at least 40 percent of Egyptians who live in less developed urban cities and villages.

Right after Feb. 11 the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis began organizing public lectures at public places including mosques, public markets, universities and its affiliated dorms, and side and main street venues to explain their vision of what is next for Egypt economically, socially and politically. Days later and after the burning of a church in Helwan province, south of Cairo, in what seemed to be a feud between a Muslim and a Christian family, Salafis, through their public figure Sheikh Mohammed Hassan, convinced Muslims there to let the army rebuild the church.

It was ironic that for long time the entire apparatus of government, civil society and scholars had failed to talk to people there. Yet, in a few hours Sheikh Hassan calmed the situation and got people's approval to prove Islamists' strength in social affairs of the state.

When thousands of Muslims, mostly mobilized by Salafis, protested in the southern Egyptian province of Qina against the appointment of a Christian governor, the government was forced to freeze his post. A few days later the governor had nowhere to go except to resign.

Politically, Islamists are running much better. Utilizing fragile liberal and leftist forces, Islamists set out to form more than one religiously inspired political party. For its part, the Muslim Brotherhood, after struggling to form a legitimate political party for more than eight decades, has recently launched their own "Freedom and Justice"

Party, declaring that they will contest for 50 percent of parliamentary seats in next September elections but will not run for the presidency. Islamists are highly favored to win a slight majority in the parliamentary elections in September. Several factors support this belief:

First, in a religiously inspired society like Egypt, political parties and groups that raise religious slogans can easily reach the public, regardless of their political programs, ideologies or the sincerity of their candidates.

Second, being oppressed for many decades by old regimes, the Muslim Brotherhood as well as Salafis have sympathy and wide support among Egyptians, who see them as victims of a corrupted secular regime that "wanted to exclude religion from society."

Third, Islamists' work with social and economic welfare programs during Egypt's long history of economic hardship gives them wide popularity among the poor.

Last, fragmentation and fragile organization of all other liberal and leftist forces has left a vacuum in the political sphere that Islamists will exploit to further their interests.

In the coming parliamentary elections, and regardless of the system of governance — presidential or parliamentary, electoral plurality or proportional representation — there is no doubt that Islamists can easily gain a slight majority that will enable them to reshape Egyptian domestic and foreign policies.

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