

The Shimon Post



Presidential Press Bulletin

14 April, 2012

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Article 1.

Spiegel

Iran Nuclear Talks

04/13/2012 -- Oil exports are sinking, foreign exchange is absent and the country's own currency is sagging. Tough international sanctions are putting Iran under increasing pressure. Meanwhile, Israel seems to be on the verge of a military strike and United States President Barack Obama is keeping all options open. But what does Tehran do? It continues stoically pursuing an atomic program that could make the production of a nuclear bomb possible.

Still, there is a sliver of hope. For the first time in more than a year, new talks will begin on Saturday in Istanbul between Iran and the group of five veto powers in the United Nations Security Council, plus Germany. The international community is primarily urging an end to the uranium enrichment currently underway in Iranian bunkers, a process that could result in material for potential nuclear weapons. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's regime, on the other hand, has threatened to destroy Israel while simultaneously insisting that its nuclear ambitions are peaceful.

The next round of negotiations will probably be the last chance to solve the long-running conflict diplomatically. For nearly 10 years, the West has had the sense that Tehran was giving it the run-around, and the Israelis, in particular, are losing patience. If there is no progress in the coming months despite the new talks, Israel could increase pressure on its allies to support taking military steps. This is clear to leaders in Washington and in Europe's capitals.

Still, a rapid solution is unlikely. The Iran negotiations have become a power struggle between leading countries because every key player is following their own interests, intent on gaining an advantage.

SPIEGEL ONLINE presents an overview of what the different participants hope to achieve.

US President Obama has two aims: First, stopping Iran from building a nuclear bomb. And second, hindering unilateral military action by Israel. The president has frequently said the United States would not tolerate atomic weapons in the hands of the Tehran regime. His Iran policy is not one of so-called "containment," but of prevention, he says. The primary US interest is ending the production of highly enriched uranium, in addition to shutting down the recently established underground atomic facility in Fordo. The US hopes that the Istanbul meeting will set a diplomatic process in motion. At the same time, Obama has signalled to Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei that he would tolerate a civilian nuclear program if the country "will never pursue nuclear weapons," the Washington Post reported last week.

But Iran wants to achieve just one thing by renewing negotiations -- more time. As long as there are ongoing talks between Iran and the UN Security Council veto powers plus Germany, an Israeli attack is unlikely and the regime can continue its nuclear program.

Additionally, Iran's leadership is interested in international recognition from the West, which they feel ought to respect Iran's right to pursue a civilian nuclear program after the country signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. They also want a guarantee of existence, whereby Washington would shelve any plans for a regime change in Tehran and recognize Iran as an important power in the Middle East.

Iranian senior nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili has said he will present "new initiatives" in Istanbul. His country could potentially forego enriching uranium past 20 percent, the level at which the substance can easily be further enriched to beyond 80 percent, which is approaching nuclear weapons grade. But for every compromise it

makes, Iran will expect concessions. A suspension of the European Union's oil embargo, set to begin on July 1, tops their list.

At the negotiating table for Europe will be France, Great Britain and Germany. All three agree that a military conflict should definitely be avoided, as they fear incalculable consequences for the entire region. The Europeans will play a decisive role in the talks, with EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton leading the dialogue in an effort to change Tehran's course.

With a combination of discussions, incentives and sanctions, Brussels hopes to continue pressuring Iran. They are counting on the planned oil embargo to increase Tehran's willingness to negotiate. There is talk in Europe's capitals that the regime could be convinced to back down with an upgrade to their outdated Bushehr nuclear power plant or an offer to help with their anti-drug efforts.

The possibility that the talks could drag on for months is actually seen as an advantage in Berlin, Paris and London. Leaders anticipate that if they stretch beyond the US election in November, President Obama (assuming he wins) will have more freedom to maneuver without domestic campaign pressures.

As far as Israel is concerned, 2012 is "a critical year" in which Iran must be stopped, as Defense Minister Ehud Barak described the situation in early April. In Jerusalem's view, Iran should take the initiative in making progress at the upcoming meeting.

Israel has several things in mind. First, Iran should move its inventory of some 120 kilos of uranium enriched at up to 20 percent into another country. Additionally, the lion's share of five tons of uranium enriched at 3.5 percent should also be moved abroad, leaving only the amount necessary for energy production in Iran. Israel also wants the Fordo underground enrichment facility to be shuttered. But Barak has not expressed confidence that Iran will meet

Israel's demands. "I do however look forward to being surprised if the talks with Iran succeed," he said earlier this month.

Meanwhile Israel has not ruled out an attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. The Israeli government is skeptical that Tehran will give up its nuclear ambitions in response to sanctions. The deadline for a preemptive strike currently being discussed in Jerusalem is 2013. After that, there are fears that the Iranian facilities could be moved so far below ground that they would be beyond the range of bunker buster bombs.

With China, Iran has found a true ally in the international arena. There are a number of reasons for this. For one thing, China -- unlike the US and Europe -- isn't certain that Iran's scientists are even in a position to produce a nuclear weapon. They also insist on the internationally documented right to pursue nuclear power for peaceful purposes.

Beijing advocates a Middle East without nuclear weapons, but sanctions won't be effective, the country's politicians argue. Instead, they say that success would be more likely if Iran were dissuaded from its plans. Chinese diplomats charge both Washington and Brussels with hypocrisy for wanting to punish Iran with sanctions while tolerating Israel's atomic bomb arsenal for years without complaint.

But it is primarily China's economic boom that is bringing the two countries closer. To maintain growth, China must import energy, and Iran is a willing and important supplier. China is the world's second-largest consumer of crude oil, now buying around one-fifth of Iran's entire exports. The Chinese are also buying Iranian gas, recently signing a \$3.2-billion supply contract.

But it's not just oil and gas that keep the Chinese close to Iran. They see Tehran as a power devoted to independent foreign policy that stands up to the Americans and Europeans. The two countries have a

shared goal -- reducing Washington's influence on the Middle East and Central Asia. They are united in the suspicion that the US supports Arab Spring-style political revolutions for their countries as well.

When Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad travelled to Russia three years ago following his re-election, a vote accompanied by widespread protests, he was received with the highest of honors at the Kremlin. Since then, however, the relationship has cooled noticeably. Unlike the regime of Bashar Assad in Syria, Tehran can no longer depend on unconditional support from Moscow.

Russia wants to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power, but not at any price. Moscow rejects a military strike against Iran. The incoming president, Vladimir Putin, stresses that nothing should be solved militarily when it comes to Tehran's nuclear program. Russia is concerned that a war against Iran may not only destabilize the Middle East, but also the Caucasus, a region that it considers as belonging to its sphere of influence.

The example of Azerbaijan -- which serves as a base of operations for Israeli intelligence service commandos and also hopes for benefits from a military strike against its neighbor Iran -- shows that Moscow's concerns are not unfounded. Moscow has long been quick to emphasize Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Indeed, it is in the interest of the Kremlin: Russian engineers are working at the reactor in Bushehr and Tehran has indicated to the Russian firm Rosatom that it is interested in five additional reactors, the total value of which would be \$40 billion. Still, Russia is not unconditionally supportive. If Tehran refuses to back down, Moscow could join in on the West's sanctions.

Turkey is interested in a solution to the atomic deadlock with Iran for two reasons. For one, Ankara is hoping to further increase its role as a regional power and peace broker. For another, Turkey is intensely

interested in a peaceful end to the conflict with its neighbor. A nuclear-armed Iran would fundamentally alter the power structures of the region, to the disadvantage of Turkey, which does not possess nuclear weapons. Furthermore, a military strike on Iran would have negative consequences for Turkey as well. The neighboring country of Syria has already become significantly destabilized. Were Iran to follow suit, it would mean more refugees in Turkey and a further weakening of the country's economy and its trade with Iran.

As such, Ankara has sought for years to help mediate between Iran and the West in hopes of ending the standoff. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has in the past emphasized Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear program. At the same time, however, he has demanded more transparency from Tehran in its dealings with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Furthermore, as a member of NATO, Turkey has allowed radar facilities to be stationed on its territory to help detect possible missile attacks from Iran.

India, which isn't a participant in the negotiations, is also interested in avoiding an escalation of the standoff with Iran. Due to its rapidly growing economy, the country is in desperate need of energy sources and is dependent on oil deliveries from Iran. India, along with China, is among the largest buyers of Iranian crude oil. Indeed, were India and China to decline imposing sanctions on Tehran, it seems likely that they would fail to have the desired effect.

Indian oil imports from Iran are worth roughly \$10 billion per year, about an eighth of India's consumption. In addition, Iran is an important geo-strategic partner for New Delhi. Both countries support Taliban opponents in Afghanistan and, due to the large number of Shiite Muslims living in India, it has traditionally enjoyed good relations with Iran.

On the other hand, India has no interest in turning its back on the US. Both countries want to strengthen their economic ties and pressure on

India from Washington to cease doing business with Iran is growing. India has continued to emphasize that sanctions as they currently stand do not target the oil market. Just recently, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh rejected EU requests to reduce his country's trade with Iran.

Article 2.

Slate

Why Israel may feel pressure to attack Iran before the U.S. presidential election

Fred Kaplan

April 12, 2012 -- Negotiations over Iran's nuclear program resume in Turkey this weekend, attended by delegates from the five permanent members of the ██████ Security Council plus Germany. Not much is likely to happen.

The big obstacle is this: The Iranians want a pocketful of nuclear weapons. Or, more to the point: The Iranians have always aspired to be the major power in their region. Several of the region's powers—Israel, Pakistan, and India—have nukes, so Iran wants some too. What many people are reluctant to admit is that Iran would want these nukes even if the country weren't run by mullahs. Back in the early 1970s, when President Richard Nixon stepped up foreign arms sales (in part to spread American influence in the Third World, in part to shore up the trade balance), Henry Kissinger told the Shah of Iran that he could buy any weapon in the U.S. arsenal. The Shah asked for a Polaris submarine, which carried 16 nuclear missiles. (Kissinger had to tone down the offer: any weapon except nukes.) Still, if Iran's leaders were Western-leaning democrats, their nuclear program would be less worrisome. In 2006, when India was openly seeking to expand its nuclear arsenal, President George W. Bush not only declined to protest, he sold Delhi the supplies (as part of a "global partnership" pact) and declared it to be "a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology" and thus eligible for the same benefits as a state that had signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Treaty (even though India was one of just three countries in the world that hadn't).

Iranian leaders no doubt followed this story closely and drew from it the lesson that the United States was troubled not so much by Iranian nukes as by the Iranian regime.

This being the case, if the Iranians' nuclear program has a military dimension (as it almost certainly does), one motive driving it is the old-fashioned doctrine of deterrence: They want a nuclear arsenal in part to deter their enemies, chiefly the United States and Israel, from launching an attack on their regime.

None of this is to say that Iran's nuclear ambitions are purely defensive—or defensible. The danger, in large part, is the regime. It's not a good thing for weapons of mass destruction to wind up in the hands of messianic fundamentalists.

Even so, it's extremely unlikely that a nuclear-armed Iran would one day, out of the blue, start dropping bombs or firing missiles at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. For one thing, whatever the status of Iran's nuclear-enrichment program, they are probably years away from turning an explosive device into a weapon, miniaturizing it to fit inside a warhead, and installing the warhead on top of a missile heavy enough to deliver it over a long distance with accuracy.

For another thing, Israel is believed to possess up to 200 nuclear weapons. It's a reasonable guess that they are dispersed, heavily protected, some of them mobile, perhaps at sea, and connected to redundant command-control networks so that, even if the capital is destroyed, the surviving weapons can still be launched. In other words, if Iran lobbs some nukes at Israel, Israel can be counted on to blow Iran to smithereens. The Iranian leaders surely know this: They may sponsor suicide bombers, but they're not suicidal themselves. Some have inferred from this argument that an Iranian bomb is nothing to worry about. This inference is wrong, for several reasons.

First, nuclear weapons are good not just for deterring but also for brandishing. They can provide cover for conventional aggression or intimidation. For instance, if Saddam Hussein had possessed some nukes before invading Kuwait, it's unlikely that President George H.W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker could have assembled or sustained the vast coalition that pushed Iraq's army out of Kuwait. Or, during that same war, when Baker declared that a chemical or biological attack on Israel would be treated the same way as a nuclear attack against the United States, his threat might have been less credible if Saddam had had his own nukes to bargain with. Similarly, a nuclear-armed Iran may push or condone the more militant factions within Hezbollah and other proxies to step up their aggression and take greater risks.

Second, the United States and the Soviet Union were able to maintain a "balance of terror" for several decades of Cold War tensions, without pushing the button, in part because both sides learned—and applied—the lessons of deterrence as they went along. They put missiles in blast-hardened silos and untargetable submarines. They set up early-warning radars and a hotline for managing crises. They installed coded locks ("permissive action links" or PALs) on their missiles, to minimize the chance that some loony general might launch a first-strike on his own. There is no assurance that the Iranians will do any of these things with their arsenal.

Third, there is the matter of geography. Moscow and Washington are 5,000 miles apart. If they were 900 miles apart (as Tehran and Jerusalem are), there probably would have been a nuclear war at some point in the last 50 years. It takes a half hour for an ICBM to fly from Moscow to Washington; that's just barely enough time for the president to decide what to do if a blip on the radar screen suggests an attack is underway. It takes about five minutes for a short-range missile to fly from Tehran to Israel. That's probably not enough time.

There were several times during the Cold War when America's finely tuned radars mistook a flock of geese for a flight of Soviet missiles or when a software glitch produced a false warning of an attack. In all these instances, the leaders could afford to wait a bit to see how the signals panned out. According to David Hoffman's frightening book *The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and Its Dangerous Legacy*, there was an incident in 1983 when a Soviet early-warning satellite picked up signals of an American missile attack. The signal in this case was never straightened out; the system kept warning of an attack all the way until the point when the warheads would have exploded, had there really been an attack. Luckily, the Soviet lieutenant colonel at the monitoring station, thinking that this couldn't really be happening, decided—on his own authority—to tell his commander that it was a false alarm and, therefore, there was no need to launch the Soviets' own ICBMs. He was lying: According to the warning system, the attack was real. But by lying, he probably prevented World War III. It's not at all clear that an Iranian or Israeli officer would keep his cool under similar circumstances (or that ■■■ be so laid back to begin with)—especially if the false warning coincided with a diplomatic crisis or a military exercise or some other moment of extraordinary tension. I don't think the Iranian nuclear program constitutes an urgent danger. But if there is a way to nip this whole panoply of nightmare scenarios in the bud—if there's a diplomatic route to keeping Iran from going nuclear—then it's worth pursuing, at some effort and cost. The good news is that the sanctions have been taking their toll on the Iranian economy and its international standing. If the Supreme Leader really does think nuclear weapons are immoral (as he has said), or if there are factions within the government that think the pursuit of a bomb is costing too much, then maybe this weekend's talks will bear fruit. The bad news is that, for the Iranians to give up

such a high-profile trump card, they need to get something in return—a suspension of sanctions, a guarantee of security, something that’s tangible and valuable. Is there some deal—even hypothetically—that is, at once, worthwhile to the Iranians and acceptable to the Israelis? That’s the key question; it’s hard to envision such a thing. In fact, if the Israelis really are intent on attacking the Iranian nuclear facilities, they’re likely to do so before this November’s American presidential elections. If they started an attack and needed U.S. firepower to help them complete the task, Barack Obama might open himself up to perilous political attacks—for being indecisive, weak, appeasing, anti-Israel, you name it—if he didn’t follow through. It could cost him the votes of crucial constituencies. If the Israelis tried to pressure the United States into joining an attack after the election, Obama would have (to borrow a phrase from another context) more flexibility. So, to the extent the Israeli leaders have decided to attack (and it’s not at all clear they have), they are probably thinking: much better sooner than later. One thought worth considering is that the Iranians have probably contemplated this scenario as well. They certainly do worry about an Israeli attack, and for good reason. The fact that they’ve buried some of their facilities so deeply underground, at great cost, attests to this. If they think the Israelis are serious, maybe they will come up with a deal to avert a strike, at least for the next several months. The question, then, is whether their offer—whatever it is—seems authentic and sufficiently tempting for the Israelis to accept. Maybe the negotiations will be worth following, after all.

Fred Kaplan, Slate's "War Stories" columnist and a senior Schwartz fellow at the New America Foundation, is writing a book on the group of soldier-scholars who changed American military strategy.

Article 3.

The Moscow Times

How Moscow Is Helping to Solve the Iran Problem

Avi Jorisch

12 April 2012 -- Though news reports generally give a very different impression, Russia is actually playing a constructive role in dealing with the multifaceted issue of Iran's nuclear program. One hint came last month, when Russia's second-largest financial institution closed the accounts of Iran's embassy in Moscow. While given little attention by the media on either side of the Atlantic, this move signals the Kremlin's willingness to confront Iran on its march toward nuclearization.

Russia's irritation with Iranian policy was underlined by the manner in which the management of VTB 24 — the retail banking arm of the state-controlled behemoth, VTB — dismissed these particular clients. Teheran's diplomats were reportedly given three hours to physically withdraw or wire out their funds or their "accounts would be blocked and money confiscated." Explaining itself, the bank's top management is said to have informed Iranian Ambassador Seyed Mahmoud-Reza Sajjadi that the embassy's business was no longer profitable and that his credit card would also be blocked.

What moved Russia to take action at this particular juncture?

The answer most likely lies in Moscow's appreciation that what once passed as business as usual is becoming an increasingly risky bet. Since the Soviet collapse, Russia and Iran have had very strong industrial and military ties, which have included financial aid and technical assistance on nearly all nuclear-related issues.

The implicit understanding until now appears to have been that Iran

would not further fan the flames of Islamic radicalism across its vast southern belt and that both countries would collaborate selectively in frustrating aspects of U.S. foreign policy in their shared neighborhood.

Read through the darkest lens, this relationship has been a profitable one for Russia, with Iran's pursuit of the bomb boosting the price of the Kremlin's principal cash export, oil, while encouraging states in the region to purchase ever larger amounts of its military equipment. A more benign view is the one offered by the Russians themselves: By staying engaged with the Iranian program, Moscow retains influence no one else possesses while keeping a significant part of its potentially footloose cadre of Cold War-era nuclear engineers employed.

Until now, Iran's supporters in the Kremlin have been able to make a persuasive argument for continuing, if not strengthening, ties with Iran, perennially ranked as one of Russia's top 10 trading partners. But in fact the relationship is starting to demonstrate diminishing returns. As the international community ramps up the sanctions regime, pushing Iran ever closer to pariah status, countries that continue to do business with it are getting shut out of lucrative markets. The United States and Europe are now systematically identifying companies, financial institutions and individuals doing business with Iran and are aggressively cutting them out of their home markets.

Having finally completed a torturous 19-year journey to accede to the World Trade Organization, Russia has no wish to be subject to robust new third-party sanctions. Despite periodic rhetoric to the contrary, its entrenched leadership has followed a consistent course of deepening the once-isolated country's integration into the global economy. This commitment comes despite the reality that

the architecture of global governance was designed by, and is still substantially dominated by, the United States.

Indeed, the move against Iran's embassy in Moscow followed a series of international decisions: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929 in 2010 that imposed further sanctions on Iran after it failed to comply with previous resolutions concerning its nuclear program; Iran's blacklisting as a "high risk and noncooperative jurisdiction" by the Financial Action Task Force, which Russia is a member of; and U.S. President Barack Obama's signing, in February, of an executive order tightening existing sanctions.

The gloomiest estimates are that Iran may get its nuclear bomb within 18 months. For Russia, the risks of that threshold being crossed are growing more starkly clear, and they include even greater instability among its nearest neighbors, emboldened radicals within its own borders and new barriers to the investment and trade vital to maintaining Russia's economy. While Iranian possession of nuclear weapons would likely lead to higher prices for oil, the additional volatility liable to occur in commodities markets would complicate the Kremlin's task of restructuring Russia's economy and restoring predictability to management of the federal budget. To help itself and support the efforts of the international community, Russia can take two more steps within the financial industry. First, VTB has traditionally maintained a correspondent-banking relationship with the Export Development Bank of Iran, a state institution that has been blacklisted for its alleged role in proliferating weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. Second, the Bank Melli Iran, which has been sanctioned by the UN and European Union and cited by the U.S. Treasury Department for involvement in money laundering, continues to finance Iranian and Russian business through its Moscow branch. Russia should shut down both of these banking operations now. This would not only protect its own banking

system from illicit activity, but would also signal Russia's determination to head off Tehran's gambit for a nuclear weapon. Helping Iran in its march toward nuclearization puts Russian companies, individuals and financial institutions squarely in the crosshairs of the international sanctions regime. As Russia tries to negotiate the delicate dance of short- versus long-term financial gain, continued close relations with Iran will almost certainly have an economic cost and loss of face that the Kremlin is unwilling to bear. Doing business with a state that is increasingly becoming both a political and a financial pariah will have consequences.

Avi Jorisch, a former U.S. Treasury Department official, is senior fellow for counterterrorism at the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington.

Article 4.

Asharq Al-Awsat

Talk with Muslim Brotherhood **presidential hopeful Khairat El-Shater**

Abdul Sattar Hatita and Ahmed Imbabi

Friday 13 April 2012 -- *Khairat El-Shater is one of the Muslim Brotherhood's top strategists and a chief financier who has now taken up the mantle as the Freedom and Justice party's presidential candidate. Educated as an engineer, El-Shater is a multi-millionaire, reportedly owning a network of businesses in Egypt, including investment companies, manufacturers and a furniture chain. He spent 12 of the past 20 years in prison under former president Mubarak's crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. He was released from prison following the 25 January Revolution, being granted a full pardon by the ruling military. El-Shater is touting his "Renaissance Project", aimed at modernizing corrupt and incompetent institutions, including education, agriculture, transportation and health care. In an exclusive interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, El-Shater discussed his presidential nomination, the current situation in Egypt and his hopes for the future of the country. The interview is as follows:*

[Asharq Al-Awsat] You have announced your candidacy for the Egyptian presidency. Why do you think the Egyptian electorate should vote for you?

[El-Shater] Firstly, I did not nominate myself; rather the Freedom and Justice party and the Muslim Brotherhood have taken the decision to nominate me for the presidency. This is very different than any other figure thinking of standing for the presidency [as an independent], because as the candidate of the [Freedom and Justice] party, I have embraced the management of the programs and views that the party

has put forward to create a new renaissance for modern Egypt. The [Freedom and Justice] party and the [Muslim Brotherhood] organization are behind me, as well as all the political forces that have adopted the [renaissance] project...therefore this is something that distinguishes me from any other candidate at the presidential elections.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] You mean to say that voters will be voting for the Muslim Brotherhood as much as for you personally?

[El-Shater] It is not about electing the Muslim Brotherhood or Khairat El-Shater, rather electing the Renaissance project...to build a modern Egypt, politically, economically, socially, culturally and indeed in all other areas of life. We are talking about two points...firstly, there is the [renaissance] project, and secondly there is the conviction that this candidate – and the party behind him – can truly implement this project.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] The constitutional requirements call on the President of Egypt to avoid political or partisan affiliation. In this case, isn't it true that the electorate should be more concerned about the presidential candidates themselves, rather than the parties supporting them?

[El-Shater] Our program is based on transforming the presidency into a general framework institution; this will harmonize the operations between the government, parliament and the presidency...and which in the end will form a political regime whose ultimate goal is to develop Egypt.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Have you revealed this project, and your intentions, to the concerned parties in Egypt?

[El-Shater] Yes...we have a social renaissance project and we have spoken about this on a number of occasions with various political forces in Egypt. This [project] is something that we put forward every now and then, and we are putting this forward now, and are opening

the door to amending and developing this [project]. Following the presidential elections, we will continue in this regard, until this [project] represents the vision of the entire Egyptian people, not the vision of a single party or organization. This is because this [project] will be implemented by the people themselves, not by any single party...therefore we must promote this idea and convince the greatest number of citizens of this, and this can only be achieved by receiving feedback and developing this vision as best we can.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Are you keen to be the new president of Egypt or was your candidacy mandated by the Muslim Brotherhood?

[El-Shater] I am passionate with regards to any mandate.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What about those who say that your candidacy is nothing more than a suicide mission?

[El-Shater] I am aware that this is a suicide mission...however I am approaching this from a religious approach; we – as Muslims – are working to serve our country, because our understanding of religion requires this. Our religion requires us to work to reconstruct and develop the land and meet the needs of the people and solve their problems. For us, that is the entire issue. When a person becomes a decision-maker he must be passionate, otherwise this will [also] reflect on his view of religion.

Personally, I had imposed a limit on myself, namely that I would retire from any administrative work by the age of 60, this is because I began working in public affairs since I was 16 years old, and I am well aware of the importance of providing opportunities to allow a new generation to emerge. I am also aware of the extent of the work that is required in managing or governing Egypt in general. I said that I would retire at 60, however I was in prison when I reached this age, so I could not announce my retirement whilst I was in prison, so that nobody would think that I had retreated or weakened or surrendered as a result of imprisonment. Therefore I took the decision to postpone

this [announcement] until after I was released from prison, and then the revolution took place and the country required everybody with experience in administration or work or the economy or politics...therefore we must all cooperate until we rescue Egypt's sinking ship. We must also work together to implement our new renaissance, and ensure that Egypt is ranked amongst the developed nations, providing an important cultural model; therefore there is no room for retreat or surrender!

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What are the reasons that led the Muslim Brotherhood to withdraw from its initial pledge not to field any presidential candidates?

[El-Shater] The initial decision that was taken was based on particular reasons; a key issue was that the political scene in post-revolutionary Egypt represents a new historic turning point, and we – prior to the revolution – were objective regarding the issue of opposition. This is because there were a number of restrictions imposed upon us whilst they also attempted to distort our public reputation; however this did not convince the people who continued to support us, whether in parliament or employment or student unions etc. This was despite the media campaign against us which was present in most Egyptian and Arab media outlets. This was not just with regards to the general public, but also the elites and people of influence, domestically or abroad, as many institutions would say “the Muslim Brotherhood are dangerous” and “the Muslim Brotherhood are the enemy”, and when someone is told this again and again over 30 years – whether we are talking about the army or security apparatus – then you will require a period of time to win trust and build bridges with the general public. These are all active features [in society], and they must be present in the governing regime.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Some people are calling for a parliamentary

system to be implemented in Egypt, which is different from the system of rule outlined in the 1971 constitution. What is your view? [El-Shater] Our preference, regarding the constitution, would be for a parliamentary system, however it is difficult to transition to such a system in one go...so there must be a mixed system. Simply speaking, as Egyptian, we have had enough of the harsh authorities of the president of the republic...and we reached an unprecedented state of tyranny, which led to corruption and backwardness; therefore we want to minimize the powers of the president. Our view is that it is better to have a place in government than to hold the presidency. We took a strategic decision not to compete on all fronts, but to possess some legislative power to allow us to express our views, as well as to help in drafting laws and regulations that serve the Renaissance project. At the same time, we wanted to have an effective role in a broad-based coalition government so that we would have the capability to implement our programs, because without this the process would remain within parliament. Legislation is very important, however without executive authority one's popularity would be eroded over time, because this means we would not be able to actively engage with and resolve people's problems, nor would we be able to begin our special Renaissance project. Therefore we focused on these two vital parts; namely a presence in the legislative body and a presence in government. However we were ultimately prevented from forming a government – even a coalition government – and we were not given any logical or strong justifications for this. We announced that if we were allowed to form a broad-based coalition government, we would refrain from nominating a presidential candidate...however we did not receive any response to this, therefore we took the decision to change our position and put forward a presidential candidate due to the necessity of our having a presence – even a partial one – in the executive branch. This means

that if the [Ganzouri] government problem had been solved, we would not have changed our position not to nominate a presidential candidate.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Since you have brought this issue up, isn't it true that the idea of a broad-based coalition government was also rejected by the revolutionary youth and other political forces?

[El-Shater] There have been some changes. In the beginning, we stressed that there must undoubtedly be relative security and economic stability during the transitional stage, but there was more security deterioration than expected. The other issue is that we saw that the economic situation was deteriorating further and further, along with the country's cash reserves. More dangerous than this was the fact that following the first round of parliamentary elections, and the Freedom and Justice Party's landslide victory, winning 40 percent of seats, many people in different ministries and government organs sought to contact us. However we are not talking about ministers, but rather those working underneath them, and we received information that indicated that everything was heading in one direction, namely the destruction of our chances – as the majority- to form a new government. At the same time, Egypt's cash reserves were decreasing, and the investors who came to establish projects [in Egypt] were failing to find anybody to help them in any regard; no decisions were being taken, and nobody was taken any action to resolve the problems. Therefore we were facing a very dangerous state. We also uncovered attempts to harm Egypt's relations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the US, via strange incidents. The court case regarding the foreign NGO's took place, which saw us potentially destroying our position with the US. Did Egypt calculate the situation correctly with regards to this case? Were we ready for prosecution, imprisonment, and escalating the situation or not? When asked, Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal Ganzouri said that Egyptian Minister

of International Cooperation Faiza Abu El Naga was not aware of this case, and nor was the prime minister. Then we saw the prime minister attacking Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Gulf States for not helping Egypt, despite the fact that information that we are in possession of says the opposite. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has pledged \$4 billion to support the Egyptian economy, and \$500 million will be sent immediately, and the rest via programs that the [Egyptian] government will implement...although the government has, as of yet, failed to do so.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Can you give us any specific examples about the Egyptian government's failures in this regard?

[El-Shater] For example Saudi Arabia allocated \$750 million to support Saudi exports to Egypt, this means that there is financial support for goods that are imported from Saudi Arabia. Therefore the Egyptian government must provide a clear and precise program to allow businessmen to benefit from this subsidization and the support provided by the Saudi government. The Qatari government also said that it was ready to pump investment into the Egyptian private sector, pledging between \$10 - \$15 billion; the Egyptian government has said that there are preliminary studies on this, but nothing concrete has happened...and then after all this the government said that the Gulf State governments are not helping Egypt! It's enough that the Saudi and Qatari governments pledged specific figures! The third issue is the issue of foreign loans to cover the budget deficit. How can we accept or reject this without more information? Is it logical for an interim government to take out loans and spend this within two months, and then to be replaced by a permanent government that will be responsible for paying off these loans? We propose two solutions, either postponing the loans until a new government is formed on 31 July, or accelerating the formation of a new government so that this decision can be taken now.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] The Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists are always confidently stating that they should hold executive power at this time, whilst also speaking about the executive powers of the presidency. What is your view of this?

[El-Shater] For us, this is not an issue of confidence, and we do not seek to be in charge of the government or the presidency, we know that the country is in a very difficult situation, and it is difficult for anybody to carry the burdens of this alone. This is an extreme situation, for the administration of Egypt today is closer to suicide and failure than it is to success. The issue is not simple, and therefore we are not doing all this because we find power attractive but rather out of duty.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] So you disagree with me there is a sense of confidence regarding the Freedom and Justice party coming to power?

[El-Shater] It is not a question of confidence or rushing [to take power] rather it is a desire, driven by our Islamic background, to save what can be saved. The people chose us, so how can we let them drown...this is our responsibility. On the contrary, we in the Muslim Brotherhood would have preferred to be in the opposition, but how can be the largest political bloc – enjoying 47 percent of all parliamentary seats – and be in the opposition? If we did this, we would be running away from our responsibility, so this is not confidence or rushing to take power...rather we have no choice!

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Some people have raised questions about your ties to Qatar. Is there anything suspicious about your relations with the Gulf State? To what extent did this relationship persuade you to stand for the Egyptian presidency?

[El-Shater] I can honestly state that I do not have a “special” relationship with anybody, rather I deal with all present parties – domestically and abroad – in the same manner, particularly as we

were preparing to participate in the Egyptian government even before the announcement of my presidential candidacy. Since the first moment after I announced my candidacy, I have not travelled abroad or dealt with anybody other than Egyptians, whilst prior to this we were busy participating in establishing the government, and dealing with operational programs. During this period, I would focus on two vial things in every meeting...the first thing was to obtain as much expertise as possible on the issue of establishing a state, because we do not have high levels of experience in certain areas. Therefore we discovered that the Turks succeeded in doubling production 4 times over a period of 10 years, so we must study this experience, and research whether some aspects of this can be implemented in Egypt. We also found that Singapore had achieved unusual success in managing its education and health sectors, and so we sat down with them to see what administrative or technical aspects of this we could appropriate and implement in Egypt. In addition to this, we saw that in post-Apartheid South Africa the people were subject to much suffering, particularly with regards to corruption and an uncertain future. In South Africa we found a model entitled “transitional justice” and this is a comprehensive approach on how to recover rights and push for social peace; they said this was a transitional phase that would last for a number of years. As for the second issue, this is our budget deficit, and so we have talked about urging our private sector to participate in a number of projects, we also spoke to a number of Arab and foreign investors, including Turkish and Syrian investors. I also spoke with officials in Qatar, Kuwait, Libya, Turkey, as well as other officials in Europe and the Gulf...and my primary goal was to promote the idea of investing in Egypt. I have not spoken about any particular projects with anybody, because there are no comprehensive studies, but we are working to carry out preliminary studies. Our relations with all states are taking place in this context.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What about the rumours that the Qataris played a role in convincing you to stand for the presidency?

[El-Shater] This did not happen....when the Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice party took the decision to nominate me, this was the first time that this subject was put forward to me.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What about the reports that you met with Field Marshall Hussein Tantawi, head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces [SCAF], before you officially announced your presidential candidacy?

[El-Shater] There were no meeting or discussions with anybody from SCAF or any government apparatus regarding the issue of my nomination for the presidency, although I have met with a number of officials – domestically and abroad – as part of my studying of the current scene [in Egypt], and as part of our party's preparation to participate in government. I also took part in a number of meetings, at home and abroad. Some people have claimed that I have met with the Americans and the Turks and others, and I have no sensitivity or problem with this, because we are talking about contribution to the management of a state via participating in government or nomination for the presidency...so it is natural for us to communicate with everybody and look for solutions to Egypt's problems. How can you manage a country when you are shy about meeting this figure or that?

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Let us return to the issue of the presidency. Former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser gambled on social justice and an end to feudalism, whilst his successor Anwar Sadat gambled on military rule, and toppled Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak gambled on stability and good foreign relations...what will Khairat El-Shater gamble on?

[El-Shater] I will gamble on the optimum use of resources and fixed assets in Egypt, as well as relying on saving the Egyptians via development programs. Over the past 3 months, the economic

situation in the country has deteriorated significantly and we have discovered that a large part of the current economic problems that we are facing can be traced back to the fact that during the Mubarak era we saw the largest organized looting of our national resources and assets, specifically in late 2002. When Gamal Mubarak began the “bequethment [of power] project”, he began to implement his philosophy which was based on creating a class of businessmen affiliated to him who would serve as an essential component of his project, and he chose some of them and gave them the right to own and manage Egypt’s vital assets and resources, and they sold this at very cheap price. The other issue with regards to the Arab and foreign investors is that these were split into two camps. The first camp, and they are few, was affiliated to the ruling family...whereas the second camp faced many problems and obstacles. Today we are studying the entire file and we understand that we must provide a suitable atmosphere for investment, and I have personally seen many cases – particularly with regards to Arab investors – who have good feelings and love for Egypt, because of our cultural and historic and Islamic ties with the people of the Gulf, Libya, Algeria and others. Therefore we have resources that need good management, and other resource that require good use. In that case, we are relying on the optimum use of our resources and assets. In addition to this, the Egyptian people have been brought up on the songs of Umm Kalthoum and Abdul Halilm Hafez, and so this is cultural value that exists in the hearts of the Egyptian people, even if they do not talk about this!

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How will your business operations be affected should you become the next president of Egypt?

[El-Shater] I do not have many business operations, and the picture that is drawn up about me in the media is not true, indeed not even 1 percent is true. I issued my financial disclosure to the Higher

Elections Commission, and if the Egyptian people choose me as president then I will publish this disclosure. At the same time, over the past 19 years I was imprisoned for a total of 12 years during 4 separate occasions, so I could not run my businesses, and every time that I launched a company the authorities would imprison me, and then when I was released I would launch another company. Most of my business was with others, because it is difficult to launch a business that relied on myself, for this would fail when I was imprisoned. Therefore I have shares in several companies. However in the event that I am elected, I will liquidate all of these businesses and give each of my children their share from the resulting funds, because this would be problematic were I president, indeed it would even provide problems that we do not need if my son, for example, were to run a business whilst I was in the presidency.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Let us look at the international Muslim Brotherhood movement; there are studies that claim that the mother organization may fracture with the establishment of local political parties. What is your view of this?

[El-Shater] With regards to my presence abroad, and I have lived in Yemen, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Britain...the term the “international” Muslim Brotherhood organization is the most maligned term with regards to the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, because there is no “international” organization in this regard...rather there are ties between different Muslim Brotherhood associations in different regions, which is akin to the ties of the international Socialist movement. Therefore there are joint-relations and mutual coordination to utilize experience and support...but as for an international organization, in the sense of a leadership that gives instructions and takes action, I swear to God that there is no such thing, for each country has his own circumstances and special nature.

Article 5.

Gulf News

Egypt: Power struggle gains momentum

Ayman Mustafa

April 14, 2012 -- The race for the top job in Egypt is brightening the stagnant political scene, in a country that hasn't yet embarked on the road to real change. The Muslim Brotherhood, thirsty for power after more than eight decades of its inception, decided to field a presidential candidate, reneging on a previous promise not to seek the top job. They put forward powerful businessman Khairat Al Shater. Activists were furious, only to be shocked by the announcement that Hosni Mubarak's spy chief and former vice-president General Omar Sulaiman was also entering the presidential race.

The most popular candidate, the Salafist-backed Hazem Abu Esmail, has to fight a legal issue that could ban him from running for president. A court has ordered authorities to produce evidence of whether his mother has dual Egyptian-US citizenship, something that could disqualify him. The saga surrounding presidential election might help encourage Egyptians to vote, as they just voted enthusiastically in the first elections and then lost interest.

The Supreme Council of Armed Forces (Scaf) wants to hand over power this summer, and according to the temporary constitutional declaration, this needs a president to be elected. The last six months were all about elections, as if Scaf wanted to saturate the country with what it had been deprived of for long — free elections. In autumn, the lower house of parliament (People's Assembly) was elected over a couple of months. Islamists gained a majority, mainly through the Muslim Brotherhood (Freedom and Justice Party) and Salafist parties Al Nour and Al Asala. The upper house (Shura Council) elections came next, where Islamist parties gained again but

there was a far lower turnout this time. Not to mention the referendum over the constitutional declaration earlier last summer, for which Islamists also mobilised their voting bloc.

Recently, the Islamists-led parliament elected a 100-member constitutional assembly with no public vote, so there was no measure of people's trust in that 'election'. A court on Tuesday halted a move to create the constitutional assembly, pending a ruling on its legality. The administrative court did not give the reasons for the ruling to suspend the constitutional assembly, only saying that it had halted "the implementation of the decision by the speaker of parliament" to form it. Several lawsuits to the court asked for that specific ruling: halting the formation of the constitution panel by parliament.

Dominated by Islamists from the parliamentary majority, the panel is not representative of society. Even the advisory council of the ruling Scaf said that the "constituent assembly is unrepresentative of Egyptians". Some non-Islamist members already withdrew from the assembly or suspended their participation from the very beginning. There is a genuine fear that the panel is Islamist-dominated while youth, women, Christians and other factions of society are underrepresented.

Conspiracy theories

Islamists are keen to write the permanent constitution before a president is in place, and under the auspices of Scaf. Before that they launched a campaign to control the executive but the Scaf resisted, as it wanted to keep running things till it hands over power. As they didn't get the cabinet, and found it difficult to write a constitution that was to their liking, the Islamists decided to field a candidate for the presidency. Some anti-Islamist parties and groups talked about a rift, even a struggle, between Brotherhood and Scaf. Others who are sceptical and instead opted for theories that the military and Islamists were conspiring against the revolution and regenerating the Mubarak

regime. With Sulaiman running for president, and many ordinary Egyptians believe that he might be the strongman who can help Egypt regain security and stability. Some secularists prefer him as the antidote to Islamism in politics. The conspiracy theories are mushrooming.

Actually, there's no conspiracy as all that has come to the forefront of politics and power in Egypt since the revolution is reminiscent of the Mubarak regime. That's why ordinary Egyptians have turned indifferent after the parliamentary election. What you see in the political theatre is a power struggle between all parties; the military, Islamists and others. All of them are seeking power almost for opportunistic ends, claiming to lead the 'reform' of the state. The only power that sought real change — revolutionary youth and some veteran patriotic figures — are either killed, wounded, jailed or facing trial while the rest are frustrated and have withdrawn. But at least people are being 'entertained' by the debates and campaigns within the old/new elite. The only true 'politician' among the known and unknown presidential candidates is the former secretary-general of the Arab League Amr Mousa. He is the one who, unfortunately, can lengthen the transitional period until real 'change' starts— rather than just reform. It is not clear what are his chances of being elected, as he's also one of the Mubarak regime's figures. If it's left to popular vote, Abu Esmail is the frontrunner — if his candidacy is not annulled.

If the foreign powers with interests in Egypt (US, Israel, and others) are to vote in presidential elections, they will not chose another Mubarak (Sulaiman) or a populist (Abu Esmail). Most of other independent or 'revolutionary' candidates do not have real power bases in society. So, all we will be left with is the Brotherhood candidate or Mousa. Yet, whoever is elected, is not going to be all that powerful —he'll have to keep compromising with the real

powers: the military and the Brotherhood. The true test will be when Scaf hands over power to an elected president and for the majority, the quality of life will either stay the same or get worse. Then, with more workers' strikes, sit-ins and student protests, real change might be sought.

Dr Ayman Mustafa is a London-based Arab writer.

Article 6.

NOW Lebanon

Hezbollah: Warriors of God -- Talking to Nicholas Blanford

Shane Farrell

Nicholas Blanford, the Beirut correspondent for Time Magazine and the Christian Science Monitor, has spent 17 years covering Hezbollah and is considered an authority in the field. He recently released the book "Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah's Thirty-Year Struggle Against Israel," which traces the party's development from its inception in the early 1980s until the present day, with a particular focus on the military aspect of the party. NOW Lebanon asks him about his latest book and how he envisions the conflict between the two enemies unfolding.

■ In other interviews you have given, you say that first-hand information is given to you by Hezbollah members with whom you have built personal relations and only give you a fraction of the information they have. What would be the repercussions for them for speaking to a Western journalist?

Nicholas Blanford: Each Hezbollah member who agrees to chat with me does so based initially on the assurances of mutual acquaintances and his own assessment. After 17 years in Lebanon and focusing my reporting on Hezbollah, it would be strange if I had not cultivated some personal contacts within the organization. At the end of the day, Hezbollah's rank and file are not robots. They are human beings just like everyone else. They remain disciplined and taciturn on details, but speaking to them and getting to know them a little does allow an insight into their thinking and outlook, which is helpful in shaping one's knowledge of the organization. I don't know what repercussions if any they would face, but ■ sure that if they were severe these guys would not talk to me in the first place.

■ Have you received feedback from Hezbollah members on your book?

Blanford: Not yet.

■ You mention a UNIFIL officer who estimated the number of Hezbollah fighters at just 800 to 1,000. Do you think this is an accurate estimate of the current number of Hezbollah fighters?

Blanford: That was the estimate of frontline combatants during the 2006 war. There were many more fighters waiting in villages north of the frontline as well as in the Bekaa, Beirut and north of the Litani River who never saw any action. Today, the total number of fighters within Hezbollah's ranks is anybody's guess. There has been a huge recruitment drive since 2006, which makes all previous assessments of their total strength obsolete.

■ War between Israel and Hezbollah is, you say, inevitable and likely to be of a magnitude not yet seen between the two opponents. You also say Hezbollah fighters may force the Israelis to fight on their own territory. Would the psychological victory for the party really be worth the risk it would be putting its fighters in?

Blanford: Hezbollah fighters slipping into Israel is only one component of Hezbollah's overall strategy for the next war. It's probably not even the most significant, although it would have a tremendous psychological impact. Depending on how the war shapes up, the bulk of the fighting would probably occur on Lebanese soil, as in the past. Don't envision brigades of Hezbollah fighters marching across the border. We are talking about small squads of fighters engaged in sabotage operations. As for the dangers involved, I don't think that would deter Hezbollah fighters. On the contrary, I think Hezbollah fighters would be queuing up to volunteer for combat operations in Palestine in full knowledge that they might not come back.

■ There has been widespread speculation about Israel launching a strike at Iran in response to Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions. You touch on this in your book, but could you give us your views on whether you think this would spark the next war between Hezbollah and Israel?

Blanford: It entirely depends on the extent of the strike against Iran and regional circumstances at the time. All I would say is that it is impossible to predict with 100 percent certainty what Hezbollah would do, and that's part of its deterrence – it keeps those planning a strike on Iran having to second guess Hezbollah's reaction.

■ The book, which gives a far more military insight into the party than others written on Hezbollah, has been praised by many, but some have also argued that it lacks enough analysis – how do you respond to this?

Blanford: ■ not really sure I understand this criticism. There's plenty of analysis where analysis is needed. This is not an academic book and was never intended as such. It's a military history that blends analysis with reportage. There are several other good books on Hezbollah written by academics looking at structure, ideology, etc. But what I could bring to the Hezbollah canon was 17 years of reporting the party's military evolution in the field with all the attendant color, drama, tragedy, etc.

■ Currently, the situation in Syria is undoubtedly posing a challenge to the party. In the event that the Assad regime is ousted and replaced by a government that is opposed to Hezbollah, how significant would this be to the party?

Blanford: The worst outcome for Hezbollah would be an administration in Damascus that better reflects the Sunni majority in Syria, which is friendly with the West, and realigns away from Iran and toward Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Hezbollah would remain politically and militarily strong in Lebanon, and we might even see a

reinforcing of March 8 along the lines of a Shia and Christian [Aounist] front to fend off a resurgent Sunni polity. Next year's parliamentary elections would be critical if this situation was to develop. Mind you, a peaceful transition in Syria looks the least likely scenario for now.

■ Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's charismatic leader who has been at the helm since 1992, has been in hiding for security reasons for many years. How devastating would it be to the party if he was assassinated?

Blanford: It would be a huge blow to morale but not a huge blow to the integrity of the organization. Remember, Hezbollah has been through this before when Israel assassinated Nasrallah's predecessor and mentor, Sayyed Abbas Moussawi. Moussawi was the leader of the Islamic Resistance during most of the 1980s and was widely revered by the cadres. Nasrallah has proved to be even more charismatic and capable. But if he was to die, a new secretary-general would be appointed within a day or two, and life would go on.

■ You mention that you have heard rumblings of discontent from some of the rank-and-file fighters within the party since 2006 as a result of financial investments made by Hezbollah officials. The party has faced other challenges since then, including its decision to stand by the Syrian regime despite accusations that the government is killing its own citizens. As a result of these challenges, do you detect the same levels of commitment to the cause now as they had in 2006?

Blanford: Yes, among the rank-and-file fighters there is no change in their level of commitment to the party. There were some individual mutterings of unhappiness over the financial issue a couple of years ago, but most fighters look to the bigger picture and remain loyal to Hezbollah and its leadership.