

# The Shimon Post



Presidential Press Bulletin

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Article 1.

Washington Post

# **How the Syrian regime is ensuring its demise**

Peter Harling and Robert Malley

July 2 -- Desperate to survive at all costs, Bashar al-Assad's regime instead appears intent on digging its own grave. It didn't have to be this way. The protest movement is strong and getting stronger but has yet to reach critical mass. Many Syrians dread the prospect of chaos and their nation's fragmentation. But the regime is behaving like its own worst enemy, cutting itself off from key pillars of support: its social base among the poor, Syria's silent majority and possibly even its security forces. Syrian authorities allege that they are fighting criminal gangs, an Islamist insurgency and a global conspiracy. There is some truth to these claims. Criminal groups abound, and the uprising has an Islamist undercurrent. But, far more than the creation of regime enemies, these are products of decades of socioeconomic mismanagement. Most deadly clashes have occurred in border areas where trafficking net works have prospered with the knowledge — and complicity — of corrupt security forces. Meanwhile, the rise of religious fundamentalism reflects the state's gradual dereliction of its duties in areas that historically had embraced the Baath Party. For the most part, the regime has been waging war against its original social constituency. When Hafez al-Assad, Bashar's father, came to power, his regime, dominated by members of the Alawite branch of Islam, embodied the neglected countryside, its peasants and exploited underclass. Today's ruling elite has forgotten its roots. Its members inherited power rather than fought for it, grew up in Damascus, mimicked the ways of the urban upper class with which they

mingled, and led a process of economic liberalization at the provinces' expense. Some protesters display thuggish, sectarian and violent behavior. But given the Alawite security services' own thuggishness and violence — sweeping arrests, torture and instances of collective punishment have been repeatedly reported since the uprising began this spring — what's striking is the restraint of the popular reaction. Young protesters highlight this by circulating footage in which they pose as terrorists armed with eggplants and with makeshift rocket-propelled grenade launchers firing cucumbers. The regime hopes to rely on Syria's "silent majority": minorities, notably Alawites and Christians, alarmed about a possible takeover by Islamists; the middle class (typically state employees); and the business community, whose wealth stems from proximity to the regime. None would gain from the rise of a provincial underclass, and they can see in neighboring Iraq and Lebanon the price of civil war in a confessionally divided society.

Yet the longer unrest endures, the less the regime will represent the promise of order. Its claim to guarantee stability is belied daily by its actions — a confusing mix of promises of reform, appeals for dialogue and extreme, erratic repression. As instability spreads, the economy is being weakened, alienating the business classes.

The regime's core asset, many observers believe, is its security services — not the regular army, which is distrusted, hollowed out and long demoralized, but praetorian units such as the Republican Guard and strands of the secret police known as the mukhabarat. All are disproportionately composed of Alawites. The regime seems to believe this, too, and it is relying on them to contain the crisis.

This could be self-defeating. The violence has not stemmed the rising tide of protests and, even to those who commit it, it has had neither a defensible purpose nor visible effect. Crackdowns on armed Islamist groups are a task security forces could carry out possibly forever. But

being asked to treat fellow citizens as foreign enemies is altogether different and far more difficult to justify.

The Assad regime is counting on a sectarian survival instinct, confident that Alawite troops — however underpaid and overworked — will fight to the bitter end. The majority will find it hard to do so. After enough mindless violence, the instincts on which the regime has banked could push its forces the other way. Having endured centuries of discrimination and persecution from the Sunni majority, Alawites see their villages, within relatively inaccessible mountainous areas, as the only genuine sanctuary. That is where security officers already have sent their families. They are unlikely to believe that they will be safe in the capital (where they feel like transient guests), protected by the Assad regime (which they view as a historical anomaly) or state institutions (which they do not trust). When they feel the end is near, Alawites won't fight to the last man in the capital. They will go home. The regime still has support from citizens frightened of an uncertain future and security services dreading the system's collapse. But the breathing space this provides risks persuading a smug leadership that more of the same — half-hearted reforms and merciless efforts to break the protest movement — will suffice. In fact, that will only bring the breaking point closer. It is, even now, hard to assess whether a clear majority of Syrians wish to topple the regime. What is clear, however, is that a majority within the regime is working overtime to accelerate its demise.

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Article 2.

New Republic

## **Why Hezbollah Had a Really Bad Week**

David Schenker

July 1, 2011 -- Back in 2006, the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah was riding high. Having fought the Israeli army to a standstill, the organization's leader Hassan Nasrallah declared "divine victory." The war was a public relations coup for the militia, which emerged from the campaign as the most favorable personification of Shiism in the largely Sunni Muslim world. So impressive was the alleged victory that the campaign sparked a widely reported trend of conversion to Shiite Islam in the region. But if 2006 was a divine victory, this week's Special Tribunal on Lebanon (STL) indictments of four Hezbollah officials and affiliates in connection to the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese premier Rafiq Hariri may prove a divine defeat.

While the first reports of a Hezbollah role in the assassination of Hariri surfaced some two years ago, the formal announcement of the indictments will likely serve as an exclamation point to a longer process of depreciation in the group's reputation that started in 2008, when the organization invaded and occupied Beirut, turning the weapons of "the resistance" on the Lebanese people. That depreciation continued through 2009, when the organization's chief financier was arrested in a Bernie Madoff-like Ponzi scheme. More recently, in an ironic twist, Hezbollah -- which at one time was known as the "Party of the Oppressed" -- has emerged as the strongest regional backer of Syria's murderous Assad regime. Straining credulity, Nasrallah himself has now given two speeches vouching for Assad's pro-reform bona fides.

Now, for an organization that has long described itself as "the Resistance" to Israel, the revelation that it also specializes in killing Sunni Muslims will, at a minimum, be problematic. Although Nasrallah has spent the better part of the past two years trying to discredit the tribunal, few in the largely Sunni Muslim Middle East will question the court's accusation that the militia played a central role in the murder of Hariri, the leader of Lebanon's Sunni community. Indeed, the Arab Spring has contributed to a spike in Sunni-Shiite tensions. Pro-democracy demonstrations in Bahrain, for example, were largely seen by Gulf Arabs as an attempt by the Shiite theocracy in Iran to subvert the Sunni monarchy. In Syria, meanwhile, the rallying cry of the largely Sunni Muslim opposition to the Alawite Assad regime has been "No to Iran, No to Hezbollah!" Given these sentiments -- and despite the residual respect for the accomplishments of the organization -- the indictment will likely be seen through a largely sectarian prism.

Moreover, the accusations are bound to foment discontent within Nasrallah's organization, and potentially result in some diminished support for the militia in Lebanon. While they will not come as a shock to anyone, of course, they will reopen old wounds, enraging Lebanon's Sunni Muslims and, perhaps, disillusioning a few of Hezbollah's Christian allies. At the same time, some Shiites -- Hezbollahis and the organization's constituents -- will likely view the indictments as a liability and may seek to provoke another conflict with Israel, a la 2006, to distract attention from the tribunal. But regardless of Nasrallah's bravado, Shiites in south Lebanon do not crave another costly war with Israel or a return to civil war at home. To be sure, notwithstanding the indictment of four of its lieutenants, Hezbollah will remain firmly in control of Lebanon, both politically and militarily. But the organization's stature in the wider Muslim world will be irrevocably diminished, and the change in status of this

once seemingly holy Shiite organization will likewise further undermine the position of Iran and Syria in the region. It could also undermine Hezbollah in the eyes of Europe, where the militia has long benefitted from the Continent's inexplicably tolerant view of the group's "political" wing. Indeed, given the European Union's expressed disgust with the ongoing atrocities perpetrated by the Assad regime and its growing frustration with the clerical regime in Tehran, the EU might be inclined to shift its views and finally lump Hezbollah in with these irredeemable regimes.

Until then, despite United Nations Resolutions calling for Lebanon to render the indicted individuals, it is all but certain Hezbollah won't cooperate with the Special Tribunal. But while the trigger men themselves may slip the noose and be tried by the STL in absentia, the Shiite militia and its sponsors that ordered the Hariri hit will pay a steep price. Indeed, there may or may not ultimately be a conviction in The Hague, but in the Middle East court of public opinion, the verdict on Hezbollah will be guilty.

*David Schenker is the Aufzien fellow and director of the Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute.*

Article 3.

Foreign Policy

## **Tahrir's journey to Palestine**

Helena Cobban

July 1, 2011 -- The moment that Hosni Mubarak stood down from the Egyptian presidency and it was apparent that his hastily appointed vice-president, the long-time intelligence chief Omar Suleiman, would not be succeeding him, it was clear that much would be changing in Middle Eastern politics -- including for Palestinians. Easily the most populous Arab state, and one with a central location abutting Israel/Palestine, Egypt has always had the potential to play a huge role on the Palestinian issue. That role was lessened after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat split with the PLO leaders after the 1978 Camp David accords. But in recent years, Mubarak had become a linchpin in U.S. and Israeli efforts to steer Palestinian politics in a direction amenable to them.

Mubarak and Suleiman had two major ways to exert direct influence over Palestinian politics. First, Egypt has the only land border with the Gaza Strip other than the Strip's much longer border with Israel. The sole legal crossing point on that border, at Rafah, years ago became the only way that most Gaza Palestinians could ever hope to travel between the Strip and the outside world. (Goods, by contrast, are not allowed through Rafah. Under the 1994 Paris Agreement between Israel and the PLO, all goods going into or out of Gaza must go through crossings that go to Israel.) Cairo's control over Rafah has given it a huge ability to put pressure on Gaza's 1.6 million people and the elected Hamas mini-government that administers the Strip. In addition, in recent years, Egypt got the full backing of the United States and Israel to play the role of primary interlocutor in all efforts to heal the rift between Hamas and its main rivals in Mahmoud

Abbas's Fateh. But as Suleiman and Mubarak had long been firmly in Abbas's camp, it surprised no one to see the reconciliation efforts that Suleiman periodically launched come to nothing -- and Fateh and Hamas remained deeply divided.

So the departure of Mubarak and Suleiman from power in Cairo was huge for the Palestinians -- especially those trapped for many years inside Gaza, which has been described by many as an open-air prison.

Egypt's first post-Mubarak foreign minister was veteran diplomat Nabil el-Araby. He promised to take Egypt's diplomacy into several new directions, especially on the Palestine issue. On May 3, with ranking leaders of Fateh and Hamas standing at his side, he announced that the two movements had agreed to the terms of a new reconciliation agreement. It laid out the terms for the reunification of the two Palestinian Authority (PA) mini-governments that had been functioning in parallel in Gaza and the West Bank, for the integration of Hamas for the first time ever into the structures of the broader Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and for the holding of elections "within one year" for leadership positions within both bodies.

El-Araby announced that the Rafah crossing would be opened. He also declared his intention of restoring diplomatic ties between Cairo and Tehran -- an announcement that reportedly ruffled some feathers among members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the shadowy military body that is exercising presidential functions in Egypt pending the election of a new president early next year.

Around June 20, El-Araby was moved -- apparently at the behest of SCAF head Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi -- to become the new secretary-general of the Arab League. He was replaced as Foreign Minister by Mohamed El-Orabi, described by some Egyptian

observers as more easygoing and less "confrontational" than El-Araby.

But even before the new man took over as foreign minister, it was clear that much of what El-Araby had promised regarding the opening of the Rafah crossing had not happened.

When El-Araby announced the May 3 agreement, he promised that Egypt would speedily open up the Rafah crossing to all passengers except men of military age. But this was not the state of affairs I discovered during a mid-June visit to Cairo and Gaza. On June 16, the day I crossed back into Egypt after three days in Gaza, just 140 Gazans made it through Rafah. As this article in the Financial Times noted, that was "far fewer than in the months before the reconciliation pact was signed." The FT reporter also noted that "At least 12,000 Gazans have registered to use the crossing so far, and seats on the shuttle bus between the terminals on either side of the border are fully booked until August."

The claims that government officials in Israel and Washington have made, that the Rafah crossing has now been fully re-opened -- and therefore, that the efforts of the international flotilla now headed to Gaza are quite superfluous -- are erroneous. The parallel claims that some in the mainstream media have been making (including here), to the effect that agriculture and everything else is booming in Gaza are equally misleading. All the Gazans I talked with say that their key demand is not to get "better" treatment as a charity case, but to be allowed to live normal lives, conduct normal economic relations with the world market -- exports, as well as imports -- and to have the freedom of travel they so desperately crave, given the wide scattering to which every Gazan family has been subject. As for the claims by the New York Times and elsewhere that "thousands of new cars" are now plying Gaza's roads, those looked seriously overstated. The Strip still has just as many creaky donkey carts as it does automobiles -- a

legacy of the systematic de-development it has suffered under 44 years of Israeli occupation and many years of siege.

Regarding the situation at Rafah -- and Egypt's role in that -- a number of obstacles still seem to stand between the good intentions of people in Egypt's nominally civilian, post-Tahrir government and the reality of the situation at Rafah. It is not Egypt's civilian government, as such, that determines what happens on the ground in Rafah, but rather Egypt's still-powerful military and intelligence services. The new government in Cairo and the still-fluid political elite that brought it to power have many other large challenges they need to address -- in domestic governance, economic affairs, and foreign policy -- before they can easily turn their attentions to the Palestine question. Ultimately, Gaza and Rafah are simply very distant from Cairo.

Nevertheless, as I discovered during numerous conversations in Cairo, a large number of Egyptians still care very deeply about the Palestine issue. There have been calls from several important voices in Egypt's people-power movement for Egypt to reconsider its adherence to its 32-year-old peace treaty with Israel. Abrogation of the treaty is not likely to happen any time soon, but there are many steps short of abrogating the treaty that the emerging government in Cairo seems intent on taking to bolster the position of the Palestinians in their lengthy conflict with Israel. Certainly, in the event of any big Palestine-related crisis like the one ignited by Israel's Cast Lead operation against Gaza in late 2008, Israel and Washington can no longer count on Cairo's power structure to give them 100% backing in the way Mubarak did.

For now, however, the members of Egypt's newly dynamic political elite are focusing nearly all their energies on the urgent constitutional challenges they face at home. (They still have not agreed on the rules

for their next parliamentary election, though this is scheduled for September).

The biggest longer-term challenge Egyptians face over the next few years is to redefine the role that their country's large and always powerful military will play in its politics. How that gets resolved will help to determine Cairo's policies on Palestine going forward. The leading generals are thought to be considerably less pro-Israeli in their sentiments than Mubarak-- but they also have large institutional interests that for decades now have tied them to Washington's purse-strings. In the civilian realm, meanwhile, all the main forces that were active in Tahrir Square, from the leftists to the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists, are united in saying that supporting the Palestinian cause is a key matter of national dignity for Egyptians. The Arab Spring has affected Palestinian politics in many ways. But many of the biggest effects -- including those related to Egypt's always-crucial role -- may only become evident after Egyptian politics settles down at home.

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Article 4.

Wall Street Journal

## **The Future Still Belongs to America**

Walter Russell Mead

July 2, 2011 -- It is, the pundits keep telling us, a time of American decline, of a post-American world. The 21st century will belong to someone else. Crippled by debt at home, hammered by the aftermath of a financial crisis, bloodied by long wars in the Middle East, the American Atlas can no longer hold up the sky. Like Britain before us, America is headed into an assisted-living facility for retired global powers.

This fashionable chatter could not be more wrong. Sure, America has big problems. Trillions of dollars in national debt and uncounted trillions more in off-the-books liabilities will give anyone pause. Rising powers are also challenging the international order even as our key Cold War allies sink deeper into decline.

But what is unique about the United States is not our problems. Every major country in the world today faces extraordinary challenges—and the 21st century will throw more at us. Yet looking toward the tumultuous century ahead, no country is better positioned to take advantage of the opportunities or manage the dangers than the United States.

Geopolitically, the doomsayers tell us, China will soon challenge American leadership throughout the world. Perhaps. But to focus exclusively on China is to miss how U.S. interests intersect with Asian realities in ways that cement rather than challenge the U.S. position in world affairs.

China is not Germany, the U.S. is not Great Britain, and 2011 is not 1910. In 1910 Germany was a rising power surrounded by decline: France, Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary were all

growing weaker every year even as Germany went from strength to strength. The European power system grew less stable every year. In Asia today China is rising—but so is India, another emerging nuclear superpower with a population on course to pass China's. Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia and Australia are all vibrant, growing powers that have no intention of falling under China's sway. Japan remains a formidable presence. Unlike Europe in 1910, Asia today looks like an emerging multipolar region that no single country, however large and dynamic, can hope to control. This fits American interests precisely. The U.S. has no interest in controlling Asia or in blocking economic prosperity that will benefit the entire Pacific basin, including our part of it. U.S. policy in Asia is not fighting the tide of China's inexorable rise. Rather, our interests harmonize with the natural course of events. Life rarely moves smoothly and it is likely that Asia will see great political disturbances. But through it all, it appears that the U.S. will be swimming with, rather than against, the tides of history.

Around the world we have no other real rivals. Even the Europeans have stopped talking about a rising EU superpower. The specter of a clash of civilizations between the West and an Islamic world united behind fanatics like the unlamented Osama bin Laden is less likely than ever. Russia's demographic decline and poor economic prospects (not to mention its concerns about Islamic radicalism and a rising China) make it a poor prospect as a rival superpower.

When it comes to the world of ideas, the American agenda will also be the global agenda in the 21st century. Ninety years after the formation of the Communist Party of China, 50 years after the death of the philosopher of modern militant Islam Sayyid Qutb, liberal capitalist democracy remains the wave of the future.

Fascism, like Franco, is still dead. Communism lingers on life support in Pyongyang and a handful of other redoubts but shows no

signs of regaining the power it has lost since 1989 and the Soviet collapse. "Islamic" fanaticism failed in Iraq, can only cling to power by torture and repression in Iran, and has been marginalized (so far) in the Arab Spring. Nowhere have the fanatics been able to demonstrate that their approach can protect the dignity and enhance the prosperity of people better than liberal capitalism. The heirs of Qutb are further from power than they were during the first Egyptian Revolution in 1953.

Closer to home, Hugo Chavez and his Axis of Anklebiters are descending towards farce. The economic success of Chile and Brazil cuts the ground out from under the "Bolivarean" caudillos. They may strut and prance on the stage, appear with Fidel on TV and draw a crowd by attacking the Yanquis, but the dream of uniting South America into a great anticapitalist, anti-U.S. bloc is as dead as Che Guevara.

So the geopolitics are favorable and the ideological climate is warming. But on a still-deeper level this is shaping up to be an even more American century than the last. The global game is moving towards America's home court.

The great trend of this century is the accelerating and deepening wave of change sweeping through every element of human life. Each year sees more scientists with better funding, better instruments and faster, smarter computers probing deeper and seeing further into the mysteries of the physical world. Each year more entrepreneurs are seeking to convert those discoveries and insights into ways to produce new things, or to make old things better and more cheaply. Each year the world's financial markets are more eager and better prepared to fund new startups, underwrite new investments, and otherwise help entrepreneurs and firms deploy new knowledge and insight more rapidly.

Scientific and technological revolutions trigger economic, social and political upheavals. Industry migrates around the world at a breathtaking—and accelerating—rate. Hundreds of millions of people migrate to cities at an unprecedented pace. Each year the price of communication goes down and the means of communication increase.

New ideas disturb the peace of once-stable cultures. Young people grasp the possibilities of change and revolt at the conservatism of their elders. Sacred taboos and ancient hierarchies totter; women demand equality; citizens rise against monarchs. All over the world more tea is thrown into more harbors as more and more people decide that the times demand change.

This tsunami of change affects every society—and turbulent politics in so many countries make for a turbulent international environment. Managing, mastering and surviving change: These are the primary tasks of every ruler and polity. Increasingly these are also the primary tasks of every firm and household.

This challenge will not go away. On the contrary: It has increased, and it will go on increasing through the rest of our time. The 19th century was more tumultuous than its predecessor; the 20th was more tumultuous still, and the 21st will be the fastest, most exhilarating and most dangerous ride the world has ever seen.

Everybody is going to feel the stress, but the United States of America is better placed to surf this transformation than any other country. Change is our home field. It is who we are and what we do. Brazil may be the country of the future, but America is its hometown. Happy Fourth of July.

*Mr. Mead is a professor of foreign affairs and humanities at Bard College and editor-at-large of the American Interest.*

Article 5.

Project Syndicate

## **Arab Spring, Western Fall**

Shlomo Ben-Ami

2011-07-01 -- The old vocation of what Rudyard Kipling called the “White Man’s Burden” – the driving idea behind the West’s quest for global hegemony from the days of imperial expansion in the nineteenth century to the current, pathetically inconclusive, Libyan intervention – has clearly run out of steam. Politically and economically exhausted, and attentive to electorates clamoring for a shift of priorities to urgent domestic concerns, Europe and America are no longer very capable of imposing their values and interests through costly military interventions in faraway lands.

US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was stating the obvious when he recently lambasted NATO’s European members for their lukewarm response to the alliance’s missions, and for their poor military capabilities. (Ten weeks into the fighting in Libya, the Europeans were already running out of munitions.) He warned that if Europe’s attitude to NATO did not change, the Alliance would degenerate into “collective military irrelevance.”

Europe’s reluctance to participate in military endeavors should not come as a revelation. The Old Continent has been immersed since World War II in a “post-historical” discourse that rules out the use of force as a way to resolve conflicts, let alone to bring about regime change. And now it is engaged in a fateful struggle to secure the very existence and viability of the European Union. As a result, Europe is retreating into a narrow regional outlook – and assuming that America will carry the burden of major global issues.

But America itself is reconsidering its priorities. These are trying economic times for the US, largely owing to imperial overstretch

financed by Chinese credit. Admiral Mike Mullen, the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently defined America's colossal fiscal deficits as the biggest threat to its national security. Indeed, at a time of painful budget cuts – the US is facing a \$52 trillion shortfall on public pensions and health care in the coming decades – the US can no longer be expected to maintain its current level of global military engagement. But the fiscal crisis is not the whole story. The dire lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will shape future debate about America's international role in the twenty-first century. At an address in February to cadets at the US Military Academy at West Point, Gates said that “any future defense secretary who advises the president to send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should have his head examined.”

Gates's recent statements are by no means those of a lonely isolationist in an otherwise interventionist America. He expressed a widely perceived imperative for strategic reassessment.

In 1947, in a landmark article, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” which he signed as “X,” George Kennan defined America's foreign-policy strategy for the Cold War as one of containment and deterrence. It is difficult to imagine a more marked departure from Kennan's concepts than a report recently released by the Pentagon – A National Strategic Narrative – authored by two active-duty military officers who signed as “Y.”

The report can be dismissed as just the musings of two senior members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff writing in their “personal capacity.” But its real power stems from the degree to which it reflects America's mood in an era of declining global influence and diminishing expectations regarding the relevance of military power to sustaining US global hegemony.

Just as Kennan's “X” article was fully reflective of the mood in America at the time, so the Narrative expresses the current American

Zeitgeist. Thus, the idea that “Y” might turn out to be a latter-day “X” – defining the nature of America’s international role in the twenty-first century – may not be far-fetched.

Conspicuously, there is much in the Narrative that coincides with Europe’s emphasis on soft power. The authors call for a shift from outdated Cold War strategies of “power and control” to one of civic engagement and sustainable prosperity. Security, they maintain, means more than defense. It means engagement whereby America should not seek “to bully, intimidate, cajole, or persuade others to accept our unique values or to share our national objectives.”

America, “Y” argues, must first put its own house in order if it is to recover credible global influence as a beacon of prosperity and justice. This would require improving America’s diplomatic capabilities, as well as regaining international competitiveness through greater investment in education and infrastructure at home. The message emanating now from the US is not one of non-interventionism, but a strategy of restraint that assumes that there are limits to American power and seeks to minimize the risk of entanglement in foreign conflicts. As Gates put it in his West Point address, the US Army would no longer be “a Victorian nation-building constabulary designed to chase guerrillas, build schools, or sip tea.”

The bad news is that Europe’s feebleness and America’s fatigue might also signal the limits of noble ideas such as the obligation to interfere in order to protect populations being brutalized by their own rulers. America’s reluctance to be drawn into the Libyan quagmire, and the West’s failure to intervene in order to stop the Syrian army from massacring civilians, now looks like a sad, and fairly accurate, guide to the future.

Article 6.

Washington Post

## **Obama campaign to go on the offensive against conservative critics of Israel stance**

Greg Sargent

07/01/2011 -- Obama's top presidential campaign advisers are putting together a plan to go on the offensive against critics of his stance on Israel, █████ told, and are assembling a team of high profile surrogates who are well respected in the Jewish community to battle criticism in the media and ensure that it doesn't go unanswered.

Obama's supporters say the plan is in effect an acknowledgment that conservative attacks on Obama's Israel stance have made defections among Jewish voters and donors a possibility they must take seriously. Obama's advisers see a need to push back even harder on the attacks than they did in 2008, in part because Obama now has a record on the issue to defend — a record that even Obama's supporters concede has not been adequately explained.

A group of well-known figures in the Jewish community has been in discussions with senior Obama adviser David Axelrod about how to respond to the criticism, which is expected to intensify as the campaign heats up. Among them: Alan Solow, the former head of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; former Congressmen Mel Levine and Robert Wexler; and executive Penny Pritzker.

“We will have highly credible spokespeople and surrogates speak out in a general manner in support of what this administration has done, and articulate it in a way that we think will resonate with voters who care about this issue,” Solow said in an interview. “We will meet

with supporters who have expressed concerns or want to be briefed on these issues on a one-on-one basis.”

“We got close to 80 percent of the vote among Jewish Americans in 2008, but we had to aggressively bat down efforts to divide the community and to inflame,” David Axelrod told me. “Plainly we have to be at least as assiduous about it this time. If we’re passive in response it would be a mistake.”

Politico reported this week that many Jewish Dems and donors are privately expressing doubts about Obama’s Mideast policies. But the piece was largely anecdotal, and a recent Pew poll found that a plurality of Americans who identify themselves as sympathetic to Israel think his Mideast policies get the balance right between Israelis and Palestinians. And pundits have been predicting that Obama is perpetually on the verge of losing Jewish support since before the 2008 election.

But the difference now, Obama’s supporters say, is that conservatives are having some success in distorting his record. Obama supporters do in fact worry about the concerns conservatives have succeeded in sowing among Jewish Democrats, and they expect conservatives to invest substantial resources in continuing that effort.

“I can’t deny that people express to me concerns about the president’s policies,” Solow said. “But when I run through the record with them, they are by and large convinced that the president’s policies are correct.”

The effort to make this point, ■■■ told, will also be proactive, with surrogates publishing op ed pieces that represent the White House’s point of view. And it will include a renewed effort to highlight other aspects of Obama’s record that have gone under-discussed, like increased military cooperation between Israel and the United States. Two of the primary conservative arguments against Obama are that he called for Israel to return to 1967 lines and that he has not publicly

stated with enough clarity that Israel will not be expected to negotiate with a government that includes a Hamas that has not recognized Israel's right to exist.

The first point is false, though reasonable people can debate whether Obama was right to go public with a call for talks around 1967 lines with swaps or whether his timing was sound. Pushed on whether there's anything to the second point, Axelrod flatly denied it.

"The president does not believe that any country can be asked to negotiate with a terrorist organization that is sworn to its destruction and unwilling to abandon that goal or embrace a peaceful settlement of the conflict," he said. "He could not have been clearer about that."

Article 7.

BLOOMBERG

## **Rising Turkey Is No Neo-Ottoman Threat to West**

Pankaj Mishra

Jul 1, 2011 -- Like many of Asia's antique cities, Istanbul is a palimpsest, continuously inscribed by new movements of people and ideas, even as older writings on its parchment remain faintly visible. Few Istanbul neighborhoods manifest a multilayered identity as much as Kuzguncuk, which lies on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus. Legend has it that Jews expelled from Spain in the late 15th century first settled here. Their neighbors were Greeks, Armenians and other Christians, part of the Ottoman Empire's extraordinarily cosmopolitan mix of merchant and trading communities. The local population is almost entirely Muslim now. Strolling through the neighborhood's dappled streets one afternoon last week, I came across a synagogue and an Armenian Orthodox church. Both seemed permanently shut. The man who opened the door to the Greek Orthodox church only to wave us away had the sullenness of a minority under perpetual siege.

My companion remarked that the few remaining Greeks in Istanbul have little reason to be bon vivants. She is right. It has been nearly half a century since Istanbul lost the last of its non-Muslim minorities, driven out by a vengeful (and secular) Turkish nationalism. Rural migrants from the Black Sea region moved into the houses vacated by the Jews, Greeks and Armenians.

### **A Trendy Enclave**

Ethnically cleansed Istanbul is now one of the port cities -- Shanghai and Kochi, India are among the others -- to be self-consciously, and

profitably, recovering their multicultural past. Kuzguncuk, too, is being gentrified, helped by Istanbul's creative class of architects, artists, journalists and designers, as well as visitors like myself, looking for a glimpse of old Istanbul in the neighborhood's renovated Ottoman houses with overhanging wooden balconies.

Even as it frantically re-establishes its links with "old" Europe, Istanbul demonstrates how a city's exotic past can be enlisted into a high-end consumption of culture -- without any sustained national reckoning with a painful history of pogroms and expulsions.

Kuzguncuk itself reveals how Turkish identity today is being revised through careful negotiations and compromises with the past and present.

For all its gentrification by latte-sipping liberals, this old working-class neighborhood is still dominated by socially conservative middle-class Muslims, constituting a solid vote bank for the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, which just won a third consecutive national election by a landslide.

### **Rivalling the Founder**

It would have seemed inconceivable to Turkey's hard-line secular elites just two decades back that a devout Muslim like Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who comes from a hardscrabble background in Istanbul, would one day be Turkey's most powerful leader since the nation's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and the spokesman for the country's long-ignored and now upwardly mobile Muslims in the great Anatolian hinterland.

Erdogan has of course been helped by an economy that is growing at a pace rivaling those of India and China, enabling Istanbul to reinvent itself. And he has nimbly modified his economic policies since his early political days, when he was mentored by the former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, a critic of global capitalism.

Still, as a comprehensive report in Bloomberg Businessweek pointed out, Erdogan has “managed the delicate political trick” of pleasing Turkey’s business elites “while still looking like a populist.” This is a rare feat, and perhaps the only other Muslim leader to have pulled it off was Malaysia’s authoritarian former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

### **A Muslim Model**

Erdogan’s success has fueled much talk of Turkey providing an attractive model of political Islam, particularly to Arab countries stumbling out of harsh secular dictatorships. Indeed, Turkey’s influence in the Muslim world has not been greater since the early 20th century, when Muslims from India to Java looked up to the Ottoman sultan as caliph, hoping he would save them from European imperialists. Later, secularist post-colonial leaders such as Egypt’s Gamel Abdel Nasser, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran and Pakistan’s Muhammad Ali Jinnah would try to build their nation-states on Ataturk’s model.

Today, Erdogan seems even more popular internationally than the sultan or Ataturk -- and not just in the Arab street where he has become a folk hero for his loud criticism of Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. Last year, Anwar Ibrahim, a former deputy prime minister of Malaysia, told me that he had admiringly followed Erdogan’s political trajectory since his election as mayor of Istanbul in 1994. The leader of a Muslim youth organization in a prosperous little Javanese town said that modernizing Muslims like himself had observed the fortunes of the AKP very closely.

### **Friendly-Neighbor Policy**

Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkey’s intellectually ambitious foreign minister, seems intent on vindicating the new Asian regard for his country. He has downgraded Turkey’s cold war alliance with the United States and devised a new foreign policy that aims at, in his phrase, “zero

problems” with such previously hostile neighbors as Syria, Iran, Iraq and Armenia.

These apparently major changes in Turkey’s internal and external politics have set off alarms in some corners of the West. Is Turkey moving away from decades of state-imposed secularism and geopolitical passivity? Is it likely to go the way of Iran? Will it incite and support other Islamic movements in the regions such as the

### **Muslim Brotherhood?**

Harvard historian Niall Ferguson, for instance, is convinced that the West ought to be deeply worried as Turkey creates “a new Muslim empire in the Middle East.” After the AKP’s victory last month, Ferguson warned of Erdogan’s authoritarianism, denunciations of Israel and “adroit maneuvers” to exploit the Arab Spring to his advantage. “His ambition,” Ferguson wrote, “is to return to the pre-Ataturk era, when Turkey was not only militantly Muslim but also a regional superpower.”

### **Decline and Fall**

Ferguson can be excitable on the subject of Muslims -- he once wrote that upon seeing the model for a proposed minaret at Oxford, “the phrase that sprang to mind was indeed ‘decline and fall.’” But his view that Erdogan is planning to restore his country to its pre-Ataturk “vigor” is hardly unique.

It is also hardly sensible. Far from being “militantly Muslim,” the Ottoman Empire had a centuries-long history of tolerance toward minorities and drew on the diversity of its subjects. It was only in its final decades, eroded from within by nationalist minorities and battered without by European powers, that the empire adopted pan-Islamism as a last-ditch defense. Not surprisingly, Ataturk abolished the caliphate as soon as he came to power.

## **Flow of Refugees**

In addition Erdogan is not more -- and is arguably much less -- authoritarian than his predecessors from the military, who in the 1980s were the first to re-introduce Islam into public life in order to combat left-wing radicalism. On Israel, Erdogan is only amplifying longstanding popular disapproval. And far from being adroit, Erdogan, like most leaders, has struggled to respond coherently to the Arab Spring and now faces a potentially destabilizing situation in the flow of refugees to Turkey from Syria's chaos.

Syria's likely collapse into sectarian war may increase tensions between Turkey's own Alawites and Sunnis, not to mention further complicate Ankara's long and bloody conflict with Kurdish separatists.

There are many other problems lurking. The glamour of Istanbul can deceive, for much of Anatolia remains stuck in another century. Rapid economic growth, heavily dependent on short-term capital inflows, is not assured. Notwithstanding all its talk of "turning east," Turkey has arrived very late in the markets of India, China and Indonesia.

## **Ideology and Pragmatism**

Having appeased business elites, Erdogan may find himself vulnerable if economic distress provokes populist anger among his other constituency, the aspirational middle class in Anatolia. Will he then try to reverse his journey from ideology to pragmatism? Or draw on the emotive force of Turkish nationalism, still more potent than Islam or so-called neo-Ottomanism in Turkey?

Much remains to be negotiated about Turkey's identity. And there is much still to be inscribed on the palimpsest of Istanbul, whether or not Erdogan's ambitious new plan to build two satellite cities outside the metropolis comes to fruition.

Turkey is no longer an insular country, and its fate will help determine many other national trajectories in a freshly globalized world. Once again, nearly a century after the Ottoman Empire gave way to Ataturk's secular republicanism, Turkey's political and economic reinvention engages millions of Muslims around the world. And there can be no narrower perspective on it than paranoia about Muslims and a long-defunct Ottoman Empire.

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