

# The Shimon Post



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Article 1.

NYT

## **Financing Questions Shadow Tunisian Vote, First of Arab Spring**

David D. Kirkpatrick

October 22, 2011 -- TUNIS — As Tunisians prepare to vote on Sunday in the first election of the Arab Spring, the parties and their supporters have ramped up a bitter debate over allegations about the influence of “dirty money” behind the scenes of the race.

Liberals, facing an expected defeat by the moderate Islamist party Ennahda, charge that it has leapt ahead with financial support from Persian Gulf allies. Some Islamists and residents of the impoverished interior, meanwhile, fault the liberals, saying they relied on money from the former dictator’s business elite. And all sides gawk at the singular spectacle of an expatriate businessman who made a fortune in Libyan oil and returned home after the revolution to spend much of it building a major political party.

In the first national election since the ouster of the strongman Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in January, voters will choose an assembly that will govern the country while writing a new constitution. The vote is a bellwether for the Arab world, and the debate over the role of political spending is a case study of the forces at play here and around the region.

But the debate also illustrates the mixture of elation and worry that has accompanied Tunisia’s progress toward democracy: freed from the overt coercion and corruption of Mr. Ben Ali’s government, many now fear that more subtle forces are trying to pull the strings from behind the scenes, in part though political money.

In a country with virtually no previous grass-roots political participation, where more than a hundred new or little-known political parties have raced to introduce themselves to the public, “it is a very fast track, and whatever means they have at their disposal is going to make a big difference,” said Eric Goldstein, a researcher with Human Rights Watch who has tracked Tunisia’s steps since the revolt.

Ennahda, which had a long history of opposition here before Mr. Ben Ali eviscerated it a decade ago, is widely expected to fare the best, and no one pretends that it owes its popularity only to its financial clout. Its moderate and modern brand of Islamic politics has struck a chord with many Tunisians.

But for months, it has been at the center of attacks from liberal rivals and liberal-leaning election officials who accuse it of taking foreign money, mainly from the Persian Gulf. Islamist groups from Egypt to Lebanon are widely believed to rely on such support from the wealthier and more conservative gulf nations, but the charges have resonated especially loudly in Tunisia, in part because regulators have sought to stamp it out.

“Everybody says that Ennahda is backed by money from the Arabian gulf,” said Ahmed Ibrahim, the founder of the liberal Democratic Modernist Pole coalition, calling the outsize influence of foreign money a threat to Tunisia’s “fragile democracy.”

Though Ennahda’s sources of financing have not been disclosed, its resources are evident. The first party to open offices in towns across the country, Ennahda soon blanketed Tunisia with fliers, T-shirts, signs and bumper stickers. Unlike other parties here, it operates out of a gleaming high-rise in downtown Tunis, gives away professionally published paperbacks in several languages to lay out its platform, distributes wireless headsets for simultaneous translation

at its news conferences and hands out bottled water to the crowds at rallies.

Ennahda party members have sponsored local charitable events like a recent group wedding for eight couples in the town of Den Den, or giveaways of meat for the feast at the end of Ramadan.

Alarmed at the flood of money, the commission overseeing the political transition sought last June to impose rules limiting campaign spending, banning foreign contributions and even barring candidates from giving interviews to foreign-owned news media, a move thought to be aimed mainly at thwarting the potential of the Qatar-owned network Al Jazeera to favor Ennahda candidates.

In response, Ennahda withdrew its representative on the commission. Party officials have variously said that they pulled out because the commission was overstepping its authority, or that the restrictions curtailed their ability to reach Tunisians in expensive precincts abroad. But members of the commission say Ennahda objected only to the restrictions on foreign fund-raising.

“I believe it was because they rely on foreign funds,” Latifa Lakther, vice president of the commission, who acknowledged a personal bias against the party. “It is logical. They have a lot of money, and they left because of that law concerning financing.”

Ennahda officials say they have followed the rules, which apply only to the final weeks of the campaign, and they deny any foreign financing. The accusations about gulf money are “completely baseless,” the party’s founder, Rachid Ghannouchi, said last week at a news conference. After supporting itself for 40 years of oppression and exile, he said, his party now counts members of the Tunisian elite among its donors. Moreover, he added, his moderate and democratic Islamic politics have hardly endeared him to the gulf autocracies; he is barred from Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Other party officials, though, have acknowledged that party members directed contributions from the gulf to charitable efforts, like helping Libyan refugees. “Ennahda is a social phenomenon before it is a political party,” said Said Ferjani, a member of its political bureau, adding that in the future the group planned to divide its social service work more clearly from its political activities to clear up any impression of a benefit to its candidates.

Ennahda’s supporters, for their part, point to Slim Riahi, founder of the Free Patriotic Union party, which election officials say has been another one of the biggest spenders here. An expatriate businessman who made an oil fortune in Libya, Mr. Riahi has no history in politics, scant history in Tunisia and no discernible ideology. His party’s best-known candidate is the former soccer star Shokri Waa. Asked whether the party was better described as center-left or center-right, a spokesman said, “Center-center.”

“There was a political void that Ben Ali left, and we saw that many political parties were going to take advantage of this to manipulate the Tunisian people,” said Fouad Maatook, a co-founder of the party, explaining its creation.

In an effort to shake his party’s reputation as a rich man’s plaything, Mr. Riahi recently dropped by a Tunis slum in his chauffeured Porsche Cayenne, making a videotaped visit to the home of Aouiha Mimouni. Elderly, nearly deaf and unable to remember her own age, she was sitting on a frayed mattress on the cement floor of her dark, unheated room.

After he left the building, Ms. Mimouni said she had no idea who he was or why he had come.

Ennahda’s main rival, the Progressive Democratic Party, has also advertised heavily on billboards around the country in a full Western-style political campaign rivaling Mr. Riahi’s. In the final rallies, the

party's leaders publicly thanked but did not name the Tunisian businesspeople who it said had paid for its lavish campaign.

But Tunisian radio programs have carried testimonies of former party members who said they defected because of its financial reliance on people who profited under Mr. Ben Ali's corrupt government. And as the party's lead candidate, a lawyer in a well-worn glen-plaid suit, tried to hand out fliers on the streets of the hard-pressed town of Kasserine, some said they doubted the party's credibility.

"All these guys are ex-R.C.D.," Hasan Guermit, 24 and unemployed, referring to the former governing party. "They come to the martyrs' neighborhood to get out votes, but then they will turn against us." He said he was leaning toward Ennahda.

Article 2.

Wall Street Journal

## **Leaving Iraq Behind**

Editorial

October 22, 2011-- Visiting the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul in 2003, we remember a brigade commander who explained his mission this way: He was fighting in Iraq so his son or grandson didn't have to do the same. That colonel, who is perhaps now a general, can't be reassured by President Obama's announcement yesterday that he plans to pull all but about 160 American troops out of Iraq by the end of this year.

"As promised, the rest of our troops in Iraq will come home by the end of the year," Mr. Obama said yesterday, almost as a note of triumph. "After nearly nine years, America's war in Iraq will be over."

Bret Stephens on President Obama's announcement that he will withdraw all U.S. troops from Iraq by the end of the year.

No doubt this will be politically popular—at least in the short-term. Mr. Obama can say he honored a campaign pledge, Congress will move to spend the money on domestic programs, and a war-weary American public will be relieved to carry fewer overseas burdens. Or at least Americans will feel such relief as long as this total withdrawal doesn't cost the hard-fought political and strategic gains that our intervention has won.

There are serious risks in this complete withdrawal. Iraq has made great progress in providing its own security, with some 600,000 Iraqi troops gradually taking the handoff from U.S. forces. But the Iraqis still lack vital military assets in intelligence and logistics, not to mention naval and air power. Mr. Obama said the U.S. will continue to discuss "how we might help Iraq train and equip its forces," but

this is no substitute for a more robust, long-term presence of the kind we retain in South Korea and Japan 60 years after the end of the Korean War.

The U.S. commander in Iraq, General Lloyd Austin, had requested between 15,000 and 18,000 troops, before reducing it to 10,000 under pressure. Such a U.S. presence would reassure Iraq and its neighbors of our continuing commitment to the region. It would help play the role of honest broker among Iraq's ethnic factions as it continues to build a more durable political system.

And above all it would reduce Iran's ability to meddle in Iraq, building local militias on the Hezbollah model with a goal of making its neighbor a Shiite vassal state. Iran's Quds force—the same outfit that wanted to assassinate a Saudi ambassador on U.S. soil—is the biggest winner from Mr. Obama's pullout.

It's true that Iraq's feuding politicians, especially Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, are also responsible for this U.S. decision. Mr. Maliki wants the U.S. to stay but had to manage a coalition that includes allies of Iran who want the U.S. out. The Obama Administration says Iraq refused to grant U.S. troops immunity from Iraqi prosecution beyond December 31. But it's hard to believe some kind of compromise couldn't have been worked out that didn't offend Iraq nationalists while protecting U.S. soldiers. Such issues are always a matter of political will.

Which is why we wonder how hard Mr. Obama and his advisers really tried to persuade the Iraqis. In his almost-celebratory remarks yesterday, the President went out of his way to "note that the end of war in Iraq reflects a larger transition. The tide of war is receding." The U.S. is also leaving Afghanistan, he said, cutting foreign deployments in half from the 180,000 when he took office. "And make no mistake," he said. "It will continue to go down."

Every normal American wants to see the end of war, but only after achieving the goal of preparing for a long peace. The U.S. left 300,000 troops in Germany for decades after World War II, and it still retains 28,000 troops in Korea, to ensure that the gains of costly wars would not be squandered the way they were after World War I. Let's hope that America's risky decision to leave Iraq behind in its dangerous neighborhood won't require that colonel's son to return to put down a security threat we could have prevented if we stayed longer to consolidate the peace.

Article 3.

The Weekly Standard

## **Retreating With Our Heads Held High**

Frederick W. Kagan and Kimberly Kagan

October 21, 2011 -- Today, President Obama declared the successful completion of his strategy to remove all American military forces from Iraq by the end of the year. He said: “[E]nsuring the success of this strategy has been one of my highest national security priorities” since taking office. “Over the next two months, our troops in Iraq, tens of thousands of them, will pack up their gear and board convoys for the journey home. The last American soldier will cross the border out of Iraq with their heads held high, proud of their success, and knowing that the American people stand united in our support for our troops. That is how America’s military effort in Iraq will end.” In other words, our efforts in Iraq end neither in victory nor defeat, success nor failure, but simply in retreat. The humiliation of this retreat is compounded by the dishonesty of its presentation. Today, President Obama claimed that the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq was the centerpiece of the strategy he has been pursuing there since taking office. But that was not the sole or even primary objective of the strategy he announced five weeks after becoming president. At Camp Lejeune in February 2009, to an audience of Marines, he declared:

This strategy is grounded in a clear and achievable goal shared by the Iraqi people and the American people: an Iraq that is sovereign, stable, and self-reliant. To achieve that goal, we will work to promote an Iraqi government that is just, representative, and accountable, and that provides neither support nor safe-haven to terrorists. We will help Iraq build new ties of trade and commerce with the world. And we will forge a partnership with the people and government of Iraq

that contributes to the peace and security of the region. Have any of these conditions been met? Such sovereignty as Iraq has is gravely marred by the continuous efforts of Iran to direct the course of its internal politics through armed means and otherwise. Iraq is not stable. The Iraqi government has still not been completely formed, and the parties contesting the parliamentary election of early 2010 have not yet come to an agreement on how the state will be run or who will run it. Iraq is not self-reliant. In fact, it will not be able to protect its territory or its airspace. Its government is not “just, representative, and accountable,” but rather heading toward a new authoritarian structure at a time when many Arab states are convulsed by resistance to authoritarianism. The U.S. has not helped Iraq build ties of trade or commerce. Above all, today’s announcement is the definitive renunciation of any attempt to “forge a partnership with the people and government of Iraq.” In other words, the president has failed to achieve any of the objectives that he established as his own policy in February 2009—apart, of course, from withdrawing U.S. military forces. This failure was not inevitable. When President Obama took office, the U.S. had more than 100,000 troops in Iraq who had just completed, together with the Iraqi Security Forces, driving off Iranian militias and clearing the last bastions of al Qaeda in Iraq and Sunni resistance forces. As he noted in that February 2009 speech, Iraq had just completed provincial elections that were, in fact, “just, representative, and accountable,” and that laid a solid foundation for the transition to a successful Iraqi parliamentary democracy. And, in fact, the parliamentary elections of early 2010 were also in many respects remarkably successful—they were peaceful, heavily-contested, with high participation, and produced the potential for a new political balance in which forces of secularism and cross-sectarianism might well have succeeded. Had the U.S. pursued a determined strategy, using all of the considerable leverage

at our disposal, to support the formation of an Iraqi government harnessing that potential, then Iraq's path could have been very different. But the Obama administration did not focus on helping Iraq move forward to seize this opportunity, but rather focused on prodding the Iraqis to form a coalition government as rapidly as possible—in order to negotiate a new agreement that would allow American forces to remain in Iraq after the end of this year. In other words, the administration threw away the chance of political progress in Iraq in pursuit of something it has now decided it never wanted to begin with.

Observers of U.S. policy could have been excused for finding all of this rather confusing, but today's speech resolves any lack of clarity. The president has enunciated the Obama Doctrine: American retreat. Iraq is the exemplar of this doctrine, but he was at pains to demonstrate its applicability across the board. Indeed, the president boasted that NATO is closing out its Libya mission, success declared with the death of Muammar Qaddafi—the U.S. having abandoned that effort some time ago. He boasted of the reductions of U.S. forces already underway in Afghanistan. And he promised: “make no mistake, [U.S. force levels in Afghanistan] will continue to go down.” Gone is any language about conditions, objectives, goals, American interests, or any of the fundamental principles that Americans have fought so hard to achieve in these wars and throughout our history. American strategy is simply to go home.

*Frederick W. Kagan, a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard, is director of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute. Kimberly Kagan is president of the Institute for the Study of War.*

Article 4.

The National Interest

## **Good Riddance to a Woebegone War**

Paul R. Pillar

October 21, 2011 -- Imagine if, as public and Congressional discussion about the prospect of going to war against Iraq reached a peak in the autumn of 2002, it somehow could have been foreseen that nine years later there would still be debate about U.S. troops in Iraq, and about whether to keep them there even longer than nine years. The prospect of U.S. involvement in a war in the Middle East dragging out that long would have killed the possibility of neocons being able to conduct their great experiment in trying to inject democracy through the barrel of a gun—notwithstanding even the post-9/11 militant mood of the American public that, in the real world of 2001-2003, made it politically possible for the neocons to launch their experiment. The war would never have happened. Recreating our own thoughts from a decade ago, free of the political and emotional baggage accumulated during the course of this long expedition, provides necessary perspective in assessing what is being said today about keeping U.S. troops in Iraq or finally bringing them home.

With President Obama's announcement Friday about Iraq, we can look forward to an extra reason to celebrate during the year-end holidays. This long national nightmare will finally be ending. The return of the last combat troops from Iraq will be a good time to reflect on the nature and broader consequences of what future historians will regard as one of the biggest blunders in U.S. history. That reflection can consider how a small number of determined advocates of war were able to use the post-9/11 political milieu and scary themes about dictators giving weapons to terrorists to get

enough people to go along with their idea. The reflection also can consider the full range of costs and damage to U.S. interests, from the more than four thousand Americans dead and tens of thousands wounded, to the trillions of dollars of direct and indirect fiscal and economic losses, to the tarring of America's standing abroad and the boost the war gave to America's extremist enemies.

For now, however, there is the immediate subject of bringing home those remaining troops. In response to any doubt that this is the right thing to do, the main question to ask is: if not after almost nine years, then when? Given that the troops' return merely fulfills an agreement that the previous U.S. administration reached with Iraq, one could also ask: if not George W. Bush, then who? Yet another question is: if the purpose of being in Iraq is supposedly to help another nation in need, why would we want to stay if the other country doesn't want us? Iraqi preferences have varied, of course, but being unwelcome is a very large part of what the misery of this war has been about, including the stimulation of armed resistance to what was seen as a foreign occupation. Discussions in recent months about possibly extending the U.S. military presence beyond this year took the odd form of the United States doing most of the asking and Iraq doing most of the resisting.

This is hardly the first war that exhibits the common tendency to think that just a little more persistence will make the difference between a win and a loss. But this tendency is no more logical than a gambler on a losing streak doubling down on his bets. There is no reason to believe that the next year or two of war will be more productive than the previous year or two or three. As with other lights that have been seen at the end of other tunnels, this kind of incremental thinking is a prescription for winding up with far greater costs than would justify even something that could be described as a win. We are dealing in the realm not of logic but of psychology,

especially with the common but mistaken human inclination to treat sunk costs as investments.

The president's announcement will set off a new round of recriminations and debating points. Opponents of the president and proponents of the war will stake out positions to enable them to say, in response to anything nasty that happens henceforth in Iraq, that the problem was we withdrew too soon. Republican presidential candidates are of course among the first out of the blocks in doing this. Mitt Romney fired off a strongly worded statement [3] that referred to the president's "astonishing failure to secure an orderly transition in Iraq." (What transition are you referring to, governor? From Maliki to someone else? How long will that take? And what could U.S. troops do about it?) Michele Bachmann said, "In every case where the United States has liberated a people from dictatorial rule, we have kept troops in that country to ensure a peaceful transition and to protect fragile growing democracies." (Kept them there how long? And which countries are you referring to, Ms. Bachmann? Will we be stationing troops in Libya?)

Then there are the intellectuals who have had the biggest professional and psychological investments in the Iraq War. Only some of them have acknowledged the war was a mistake. There is a lot of cognitive dissonance to relieve. We already saw the relief process begin several years ago, when the war first went unambiguously sour and the scapegoating began. Some of those outside government who had been the most fervent proponents of the war also became the harshest critics of how the war was conducted, with the Bush administration as a whole and Donald Rumsfeld in particular being scapegoats. The message was that the war wasn't a bad idea; it was just executed poorly. Now there will be the added message that the war was still supposedly a good idea, but it just wasn't waged long enough.

Frederick Kagan has fired an early shot [4] along this line under the

heading of “Obama abandons Iraq.” The most noteworthy thing about Kagan's shot is that it is centered around the notion that withdrawing U.S. troops will undermine containment of Iran—noteworthy because the Iraq War itself has provided the single biggest boost to Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf region.

President Obama inherited multiple messes, at home and abroad, from his predecessor. Some of those messes, especially the lingering effects of the Great Recession, are proving hard to clean up. But congratulations, Mr. President, for bringing to a conclusion the biggest overseas mess you were given.

Article 5.

The Daily Beast

## **Who's The Next Saudi King?**

Bruce Riedel

October 22, 2011 -- The death of Saudi Crown Prince Sultan after a long illness begins the kingdom's royal succession process, a family affair with major implications for the stability of the nation and the region.

Sultan was an institution. He became minister of defense and aviation for the kingdom in 1962 when Bob McNamara was John F.

Kennedy's secretary of defense. Every President since JFK has dealt with him. He built an extremely expensive army and air force with billions of dollars of purchases from America and Europe, but he was always reluctant to use it in combat. For Sultan, wars were better fought by your allies than by your own troops.

He was a consummate intriguer who loved to plot and scheme against the House of Saud's many enemies. The CIA was often his partner.

He usually prevailed, but if his plans failed he would not hold grudges. In the mid-1990s he tried to oust Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh in a civil war. Saleh won the war, and Sultan reconciled with his foe.

He could out smart America, too. Sultan sent his son Prince Bandar to China in the 1980s to buy long-range missiles to hit Tehran, but hid the deal from the CIA until the missiles were dug in deep in the desert so Washington could not upset the deal—which broke nonproliferation rules we supported. We protested, and then got over it.

I negotiated with him often, including to build a gigantic air base deep in the desert for U.S., U.K., and French jets, which were named after him. He ensured our total security after pro-Iranian Shiite

terrorists blew up a U.S. barracks in the Saudi city of Khobar. At Prince Sultan Air Base, no terrorist could get anywhere near us. His half brother, King Abdullah, is also ill, so the next crown prince could be king sooner rather than later. Minister of Interior Prince Nayef is the favorite. Abdullah may want the choice ratified by the Allegiance Council he created a few years ago, an assembly of the three dozen heirs (males only) of the kingdom's founder, Sultan's father, King Abdul Aziz. That would signal that Abdullah's efforts to reform the absolute monarchy will continue.

Nayef is much more conservative than either Abdullah or Sultan, and much more suspicious of America—especially after the Arab Spring. He holds grudges forever. But Nayef also hates Iranians and all Shiites, and his son and deputy minister has become a ruthless foe of al Qaeda. Nayef's spies foiled the terror group's plot to blow up two aircraft over Chicago just a year ago. In short, we can work with him like we have with Sultan—with a wary eye.

Nayef is much more conservative than either Abdullah or Sultan, and much more suspicious of America—especially after the Arab Spring. He holds grudges forever.

Nayef's challenge will be to navigate the Arab awakening. The Saudis are counterrevolutionaries and have been for more than a half century. They blame Obama for letting former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak fall from power, and are furious at his trial in Cairo. They sent in their own troops to stop the revolution in Bahrain. They have told Jordan's King Abdullah that they will not allow reforms next door in his kingdom. In Yemen they want another strong man to replace Saleh.

They want America to deal with Iran and al Qaeda, but they don't share our freedom agenda. They are very close to Pakistan—in part to have a nuclear ace just in case they need a bomb for their Chinese missiles. They have ties to the Taliban, the Muslim Brotherhood,

Hamas, and many other Islamist parties—ties Nayef has handled for decades.

In some ways, the kingdom's Nayef era has already begun. Sultan has been too ill for years to run affairs effectively, and Abdullah is fading. America will need to find common ground for continued cooperation with Nayef's kingdom even as we disagree about democracy's future in Arabia.

*Bruce Riedel, a former longtime CIA officer, is a senior fellow in the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution.*

Article 6.

NYT

## **The Saudi Ambassador of Sangfroid**

Maureen Dowd

October 22, 2011 --- There were women who lost their heads over Adel al-Jubeir, back when the Saudi ambassador was a charming playboy. I had the opposite experience. He saved me from losing my head.

In 2002, I was walking around a luxury mall in Riyadh with Jubeir, a cosmopolitan graduate of the University of North Texas and Georgetown University, when the robed, bearded religious police bore down on us, pointing at me and scolding in Arabic.

“They say they can see the outline of your body,” Jubeir translated. It took a surprisingly long time, given his stature as a top adviser to the future King Abdullah, but he talked the mutawwa out of beheading or lashing me, or whatever pound of flesh they wanted to exact because they saw an inch of flesh.

Given that his father was a diplomat too — one of the first Saudis to have a college degree — maybe the 49-year-old’s equanimity is in his genes. He is far more understated than his flamboyant predecessor, Prince Bandar, who was so plugged into the Bush dynasty he was known as “Bandar Bush.”

Jubeir stayed cool even when American officials informed him several months ago about the latest stunning chapter in the Saudi Arabia-versus-Iran Great Game for supremacy in the Middle East: an outlandish plot by an Iranian-American used-car dealer in Texas who said his cousin was a senior member of the Iranian Quds Force. The car dealer wanted to recruit someone from a Mexican drug cartel for \$1.5 million to kill Jubeir with a car bomb or at a Washington

restaurant — no matter the collateral damage. But the bungler hired a paid D.E.A. informant posing as a cartel hit man instead.

As evidence mounted of money transfers and taped conversations, Jubeir accepted that, as President Obama said, the plot was “paid by and directed by individuals in the Iranian government.” Iran denies that, and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told Fareed Zakaria: “Do we really need to kill the ambassador of a brotherly country?”

“It went from ‘I can’t believe this,’ ” the ambassador said with a dry smile, “to ‘Man, these guys really know how to ruin a man’s day.’ ” He had to force himself to live a normal existence for months, not telling family or staff, until a criminal complaint was unveiled and the Texas car dealer was before a judge.

Gathering his shaken staff in the embassy, he said: “Nothing befalls us except that which God has written for us. If anything, it should reinforce our resolve. Otherwise the bad guys win.”

He got a standing ovation.

His family was “shocked” and his frightened twin 9-year-old daughters called his office to grill him. He reassured them that there was “a bad guy but no danger.” Still, they pressed: “O.K., when are you coming home?”

Over lunch at the embassy in his first interview since then, he told me in his whispery voice that he was surprised the plotters had assumed he’d be hanging at modish restaurants. These days, the slender, smartly tailored ambassador is more of a nester, spending time with the twins and his 9-month-old son.

“I work so much, I enjoy sitting at home doing nothing,” said the diplomat with the rough commute — 12-hour flights to Riyadh several times a month.

I asked if he thought he was targeted because of his tough position on Iran, underscored in a 2008 diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks

quoting him reiterating that King Abdullah wanted the U.S. to “cut off the head of the snake.”

“You should ask the perpetrators, not me,” he said wryly. “We do what we have to do, and we can’t let issues like this deter us.”

For many centuries, the protection of emissaries has been a cardinal principle enshrined in relations between nations, even ones at war. If you kill envoys whose messages you don’t like, you end up with the law of the jungle.

The plot against Jubeir was so bizarre that it spawned a bouquet of conspiracy theories. But many believe that if the plotters had recruited a criminal who was not a U.S. informant, it could have succeeded and people might have assumed that it was Al Qaeda seeking revenge for the killing of Osama.

It shows how little we know about Iran that there are two opposing theories about the motive: One, that Iranians engaged in an act of desperation because they’re weak. Two, that Iranians engaged in an act of bravado because we’re weak. At first, Iran charged the U.S. with fabricating the plot in order to distract from our economic woes. Skeptics assert that Iran, ever more ideological and obsessed with restoring the glory of the Persian Empire, has been emboldened by getting away with murder, literally, for three decades. They suggest that America has let it off lightly on everything from the 1983 U.S. Embassy bombing in Beirut to the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing to Iran’s meddling in Iraq, sending weapons and operatives to kill our soldiers.

Some worry that America spends too much time hoping that Iran will become more reasonable when, in reality, it’s trying to get nuclear weapons so it can become less reasonable.

News of the plot, denounced by the kingdom as “sinful and abhorrent,” has made Saudi Arabia more sympathetic in an enemy-of-my-enemy sort of way. At a recent fete here, Jubeir was thronged

by politicians, diplomats and journalists, all asking how he was bearing up.

Some Saudi commentators demanded immediate measures against Iran. Asked about it, Jubeir said, "You have to be deliberate." The Saudis have asked the U.N. to make sure "the perpetrators are accountable," he said.

As I left, I asked the ambassador about the painting in his office of Arab tribesmen riding horses and camels.

"It's artistic license," he noted with amusement. "Camels don't ride with horses. They ride separately. Horses go faster and camels go longer."