

Strategic ASSESSMENT

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Strategic ASSESSMENT

The purpose of *Strategic Assessment* is to stimulate and enrich the public debate on issues that are, or should be, on Israel's national security agenda.

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Abstracts

Turkish-Hamas Relations: Between Strategic Calculations and Ideological Affinity

Gallia Lindenstrauss and Süfyan Kadir Kivam

While the deterioration in Israel-Turkey relations over the past decade is rooted in many factors, perhaps what exemplifies the deterioration most are the good relations forged between the Justice and Development Party-led government and Hamas. This article explores the developments in recent years in Turkey-Hamas relations and analyzes Turkey's primary motivation in strengthening its relations with Hamas. The article looks into the strategic, ideological, and domestic considerations behind Turkish policies vis-à-vis Hamas, and claims that the *Mavi Marmara* crisis and its aftermath have to a large degree cemented this relationship, even if with limitations. Consequently, Israel will find it very hard to distance these two actors one from another.

Keywords: Turkey, Hamas, Israel, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, AKP

Public Legitimacy as a Necessary Condition for a Peace Process: A Test of the Third Netanyahu Government

Roei Kibrik and Gilead Sher

The article discusses the necessary connection between progress in a peace process and the existence of public legitimacy. It reviews the roles of different actors in reshaping the boundaries of legitimacy in the transition from a state of conflict to a peace-oriented situation, emphasizing the role and the power of the leader and the political leadership. The authors examine the conduct of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the third Netanyahu government in the 2013-14 US-sponsored talks with the Palestinians, as well as their (in) actions to mobilize public legitimacy for the benefit of the peace process. The article concludes that not only was there no deliberate and coordinated action to mobilize public legitimacy, but that actions were taken that were intended to delegitimize the negotiations and the entire peace process.

Keywords: public legitimacy, peace process, negotiations, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, third Netanyahu government

Stability in the Kingdom of Jordan

Oded Eran

This article evaluates the stability of the regime in Jordan and its ability to cope successfully with the challenges it faces. Unique circumstances have enabled the Kingdom of Jordan to fare better than its Arab neighbors in dealing with the challenges of the upheaval underway in the Arab world since late 2010. At the same time, the regime's economic vulnerability threatens to undermine this success. Because stability in Jordan is a strategic asset for Israel, Israel should take action in several areas, especially in the economic sphere, to help strengthen the regime and bolster its survivability.

Keywords: Jordan, regime stability, Arab Spring

Immortal Monarchies? Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and the Arab Spring

Yoel Guzansky

At first glance it appears that the Gulf monarchies were unaffected by the Arab Spring, and were instead blessed with greater endurance and survivability than the "republican" Arab regimes. However, the Arab Gulf monarchies were not exceptions because they were monarchies. To a large extent, they have so far withstood the tidal wave of popular uprisings because most of them enjoy material capabilities that enable them – up to a point – to buy off internal opponents and acquire outside support. Meantime, the failure to date of the revolutions to fulfill the expectations of the Arab peoples has weakened the momentum of the Arab Spring, and has consequently removed this threat to most of the Gulf monarchies, if only temporarily.

Keywords: monarchies, Arab Spring, oil, rentier states, regime stability

Nuclear Negotiations Revisited: Challenges and Prospects toward a Final Deal with Iran

Matej Drotar

This article discusses what might follow the interim deal on Iran's controversial nuclear program. With the July 20, 2014 deadline passed and a four-month extension approved, the accord adopted in Geneva in November 2013 and referred to as a Joint Plan of Action may be approaching its final stage. Little wonder, therefore, that an evaluation process of what

has already been achieved is underway, with various policy-oriented recommendations for the next phase debated thoroughly. At the same time, all parties are aware that Iran's nuclear program is one issue among many in a dynamic and turbulent Middle East, and that considerations beyond the nuclear issue are driving many of the involved parties. Against this background, the article offers a view about what provisions should not be omitted from the very wording of a final deal, and assesses the likelihood that both sides will ultimately insist on the adoption of a balanced agreement.

Keywords: Iran, nuclear program, Joint Plan of Action, final agreement

The Ukrainian Crisis and the Middle East

Zvi Magen, Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, and Sarah Fainberg

The Ukrainian crisis has become a critical event in the global competition among the major powers, threatening international stability and figuring as one of the most important issues affecting the Middle East. Russia, threatened by developments in Ukraine, has responded aggressively, though with controlled use of force. Its goal has been to restore the status quo ante, i.e., reintegrate Ukraine in the circle of Russian influence and prevent it from joining Western organizations. It seems that as a temporary solution, Russia will try to arrive at international understandings regarding Ukraine, even at the expense of some of its influence. To ease the pressure currently exerted on it, Russia has launched some initiatives in which the Middle East plays a key role, and has increased its activity in the region in order to shift international attention away from Eastern Europe to the Middle East. This has implications for the region's future and Israel's interests. For its part, Israel has thus far chosen to remain neutral, while monitoring and assessing the course of events.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, Middle East, Israel, superpowers

Turkish-Hamas Relations: Between Strategic Calculations and Ideological Affinity

Gallia Lindenstrauss and Süfyan Kadir Kivam

Introduction

While the deterioration in Israel-Turkey relations over the past decade is rooted in many factors, perhaps what exemplifies this deterioration most is the closeness forged between the Justice and Development Party-led government and Hamas. The *Mavi Marmara* incident of May 2010, which sparked the deep crisis in Israel-Turkey relations that has persisted since, should be seen against the backdrop of this relationship. Hence, understanding the dynamics underlying Turkey-Hamas relations and the strengths and weaknesses of this relationship is extremely important from an Israeli perspective.

Since the fall of Mohamed Morsi's government in Egypt in July 2013 and the cooled relations between Hamas and Iran in context of the Syrian civil war, Turkey, joined by Qatar, has been heralded as a primary funder of Hamas. While there is some debate over the exact sums, it seems as though Turkey has at least pledged to provide Hamas between \$250-300 million annually.¹ Still, the unity deal between Hamas and Fatah from April 2014, and the attempts by Hamas to lure back Iran² have shown that Turkey and Qatar are not strong enough partners from the perspective of Hamas and cannot by themselves help Hamas grapple with the difficult conditions it faces. In order to assess the future prospects of Turkish-Hamas relations, the article first explores the developments in recent years in Turkey-Hamas relations and then analyzes what were the main causes that drove Turkey to strengthen its relations with Hamas.

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Historical Overview

Despite the fact that it was already Necmettin Erbakan from the Islamist Welfare party, who served as Turkish Prime Minister from 1996 to 1997, who called for increased ties with Hamas, it was not until the rise of the Justice and Development party (AKP) in the 2000s that this vision materialized. During the period until 2009 in which Ahmet Davutoglu served as chief foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister, and from 2009 when he was appointed Foreign Minister, Turkey grew more sympathetic toward Hamas.

In the 2006 Palestinian national elections Hamas received 44 percent of the votes (over Fatah's 41 percent), which meant it won 74 seats in the 132-seat Palestinian parliament.³ In the wake of these elections, a unity government with Fatah was formed, but in 2007, in light of the difficulties encountered by the unity government and after a violent struggle, Hamas gained control of the Gaza Strip. Following these developments Turkey tightened its links to Hamas and launched direct contacts with the organization.⁴ In these meetings Hamas was represented primarily by Khaled Mashal, the leader of the Hamas Political Bureau, along with Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, both of whom visited Turkey in 2012. Many of these meetings were hosted by the highest level in Turkey, i.e., Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Foreign Minister Davutoglu. The main issues raised in these meetings were Turkish economic aid and the recognition of a Palestinian state by the United Nations, along with Turkey's assistance to Hamas in its efforts to be removed from the lists of terrorist organizations in the United States and Europe. As a result of these meetings, Turkey sent aid to Gaza through the Turkish Business and Coordination Agency (TIKA),⁵ assistance that included aid for construction of a hospital in Gaza and equipment for water purification.

Following Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, the Turkish criticism of Israel, especially by Prime Minister Erdogan, grew particularly virulent. During the Davos World Economic Forum in January 2009, Erdogan angrily walked out of a joint panel with Israeli President Shimon Peres, after charging that Gaza is an "open air prison" and indicting Peres with, "When it comes to killing, you know well how to kill."⁶ While there is some debate to what degree the AKP supported and assisted the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) in the Gaza Freedom Flotilla in May 2010,⁷ in the aftermath of this incident, the Palestinian question came to be referred to as simply "Gaza" in much of the public opinion discourse in Turkey. In a speech in parliament in July 2011, Erdogan made it clear that his three conditions for normalization

with Israel include an Israeli apology, compensation, and a “lift of the embargo on Gaza.”⁸ Whereas Erdogan hasn’t yet fulfilled his promise to visit the Gaza Strip following the *Mavi Marmara* incident, Davutoglu and Erodgan’s son Bilal visited Gaza while joining an Arab League delegation of Foreign Ministers in November 2012 in the wake of the Israeli operation Pillar of Defense.⁹

Turkey’s Strategic Ambitions and Novel Ways to Achieve Them

Contrary to its policy during the Cold War, when it sought to distance itself from Middle East politics, in recent years Turkey has attempted to gain more influence in the Middle East. There are several reasons for this shift. First, Turkey is no longer satisfied with the status quo, but rather seeks to have a greater standing in the region. Second, Turkey’s neo-Ottoman inclinations reflect its desire to reassert its influence in the territories that used to be part of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ Third, Turkey’s growing economy and mounting energy needs can be at least partially fulfilled through stronger trade relations with Middle East countries. Fourth, as Turkey’s EU accession process seems to be going nowhere, it is tempted to look for alternatives. In this context, resistance to Israel was considered an easy way to gain popularity in the Arab world, and was part of Turkey’s growing emphasis on employing soft power measures to increase its influence in the regional and international system.¹¹ As Turkey currently puts more emphasis on value-driven policies, standing against Israel’s alleged human rights violations, specifically with regard to the situation in Gaza, is seen as a way to present Turkey as a moral actor.

The harsher criticism vis-à-vis Israel can also be seen as a way to reflect a more independent stance in international politics.¹² While Turkey joined NATO in 1952 and overall has been a loyal member of the alliance since then, there has always been concern on the Turkish side about whether the alliance will truly stand by it in its hour of need. Turkey thus wants to reduce its dependence on the West, both in the economic and military realm. Confronting the West and specifically the US on its policies toward Israel can be seen as way to use this growing independence as a warning to its current allies (“don’t take us for granted”) and as a way to develop new partnerships

Turkish support cannot compensate for the loss of support by the Morsi regime in Egypt, nor can it replace Iran as a bulwark for Hamas. In this respect, Turkish-Hamas relations also point to the limits of Turkey’s influence in the Middle East.

with other actors that are trying to confront the West (Russia, China, Iran). While Turkish positions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are not necessarily that distant from those of certain European states, the fact that it highlights Hamas as a legitimate political actor (and not as a terrorist organization) and its more provocative style in recent times (the “one minute” episode in Davos; the *Mavi Marmara*) can be utilized to project its more independent stance and demonstrate that it does not shy away from challenging the US on certain issues.

From a regional point of view, while it would perhaps be an overstatement to claim that Turkey cooperates with Hamas as a direct challenge to Iran or Egypt over regional influence, it can be claimed that certain power struggles are at play. Thus, while the Turkish criticism vis-à-vis Israel regarding the situation in Gaza was by far more vocal, during the Mubarak era and following the overthrow of Morsi the Turks from time to time also voiced criticism of the restrictions Egypt put on the movement to and from Gaza, and specifically the repeated closures of the Rafah border crossing.¹³ The fact that Erdogan did not visit Gaza during Morsi’s tenure is perhaps also an indication of the tensions between Turkey and Egypt on the issue of Gaza.¹⁴ In addition, Turkey’s claim that it can encourage moderation of Hamas is a tacit criticism of the direction in which Iran is trying to pull Hamas.

Ideological Reasons

With both Hamas and the Justice and Development Party seen as linked to the global Muslim Brotherhood movement, there also seems to be an ideological affinity between the two. Some leading Muslim Brotherhood figures question whether the Justice and Development Party can indeed be seen as a “true” follower of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, because it does not altogether reject the notion of laicism and in fact prefers to portray itself as a conservative democratic party rather than an Islamist party.¹⁵ Nonetheless, it is clear that the AKP shows more sympathy toward Islamist parties in other countries than did most previous governments in Turkey. Also, contrary to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, it does not seem that Hamas questions the Islamist dimension of the Justice and Development Party. Recently, it appeared as if Hamas even viewed the AKP victories in the Turkish local elections as a boost and a counter-trend after “losing” Egypt with the fall of Morsi.¹⁶ The Justice and Development Party may well find it more desirable to have interactions with Hamas rather than Fatah, because it has difficulty with the more secular tradition of Fatah.

Moreover, Erdogan may have drawn some similarity between the fact that Hamas's victory in the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Elections was not accepted as legitimate and the fact that the AKP's victory in the 2002 parliamentary elections was in some respects also contested in the early years after it came to power. In an interview to the *Washington Post* in January 2009, Erdogan explained this position by saying, "Hamas entered the elections as a political party. If the whole world had given them the chance of becoming a political player, maybe they would not be in a situation like this after the elections that they won. *The world has not respected the political will of the Palestinian people.*"¹⁷ As such, Turkey has taken upon itself the role of facilitating meetings between representatives of Hamas and Western states in order to upset the policy of no formal contacts with Hamas because of its involvement in terrorist acts.¹⁸

In addition, in recent years Turkey has stressed the fact that it sees itself as the representative of the Muslim civilization, and as such should not be silent in the face of Israel's violent actions against the Gaza population during events such as Operations Cast Lead (2008-9) and Pillar of Defense (2012). In this respect, during a speech at Cairo University in 2012, Erdogan stated:

Just as Mecca, Medina, Cairo, Alexandria, Beirut, Damascus, Diyarbakir, Istanbul, Ankara are each other's brothers, so, let the world know and understand that Ramallah, Nablus, Jericho, Rafah, Gaza and Jerusalem are these cities' brothers and our brothers. Each drop of blood spilled in these cities is the same blood that flows in our veins...Each tear is our own tear... Let everyone know that sooner or later, the innocent children massacred in Gaza with inhumane methods shall be accounted for.¹⁹

Domestic Considerations and Lobby Groups

From a domestic perspective, the Justice and Development Party's close relationship with Hamas reflects the affinity that a majority of the voters for the party feel for some of the Islamic-Arab actors as a result of their religious conservative views. Among the general public is the fact that as one of the last standing territories of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine has much significance for them. One can find sympathy for the Palestinian issue across the Turkish political spectrum, including the least religiously identified (such as the leftist groups).²⁰ Thus, the Turkish public's sympathy toward Palestinians requires the political actors to follow closely and react to developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Another reason why Turkey formed a close relationship with Hamas is the influence of Turkish Islamist non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and more specifically the IHH, which plays an active role in Turkish politics. This organization, founded in 1992 in the context of the Bosnian war and formally registered in Turkey in 1995, now sends humanitarian aid to more than 120 countries. It is a Turkish-centered NGO with strong Islamic ideological tendencies. Israel claims that IHH is part of the Hamas fundraising network, and since July 2010 Germany has also banned the organization's Frankfurt affiliate because of its links to Hamas.²¹ Beyond the religious-ideological roots shared between the AKP and IHH, many senior IHH figures were appointed to high ranking positions in the AKP.²² For example, Zeyid Aslan, who was one of the founders of IHH, was later an AKP parliamentary representative from the city of Tokat. During the time he served in parliament, Aslan was elected president of the Turkish-Palestine Inter-parliamentary Friendship Group and was the very person who criticized Israel most harshly. While the government stopped AKP parliamentarians and officials from boarding the *Mavi Marmara* before it left the port in May 2010, AKP deputies did join the third Viva Palestina land convoy (in which IHH was also involved) to bring aid to Gaza through Egypt in December 2009-January 2010.

While not downplaying AKP-IHH close contacts, IHH is also linked to the more conservative Felicity party that splintered off from the Virtue party after it was banned by the Turkish constitutional court in 2001 (the more reformist members of the Virtue party formed the AKP).²³ Regarding certain current and possible future tensions between the AKP-led government and IHH, representatives of the government have tried to pressure the families of the *Mavi Marmara* victims to drop their civil lawsuits (a legal battle that is orchestrated by IHH) against high ranking former IDF officers, but still to no avail.²⁴ A question arises what will happen if Erdogan decides to intervene in this issue, and how that will affect AKP-IHH relations. There were also accusations of IHH personnel cooperating with al-Qaeda (including a police raid on a local IHH office in Kilis in January 2014).²⁵

The influence of the IHH on Turkey's foreign policy is described as follows in an interview in *Anlayış* Magazine on February 11, 2010 with Bulent Yildirim, the president of the IHH:

Turkish foreign practices were based on only ethnic considerations for a while. Right now there are multi-faceted practices and everyone concurs that we have much influence on this....

Also, it is very evident that recently Turkish foreign practices have had a positive influence on our work as well. *Because in a lot of the topics, we have similar views and we act in a similar fashion.* There are a lot of issues where we act together in the field. While formal and semi-formal organizations have to pay attention for the balances between various things, NGOs are able to move fast...*In short, as much as the NGOs are more active, the countries where the NGOs are based will become more powerful in the world.*²⁶

Conclusion

As Turkey gave its support to Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza,²⁷ the fact that its ties with Hamas have intensified should also be seen in the context of the negative consequences and the mistakes made in handling this withdrawal. As the withdrawal was not coordinated with the Palestinian Authority, it strengthened Hamas, and following the takeover of Gaza by Hamas, the many restrictions put by Israel on the movement of people and supplies in and out of Gaza sparked criticism abroad in general and in Turkey in particular. Moreover, Israel has failed to convince Turkey under Erdogan that Hamas is a terror organization, and it is Turkey that is putting a lot of effort in convincing Western leaders that Hamas is a legitimate political actor.

As Hamas is now at a low point, it is quite clear that Turkish support cannot serve as compensation for the loss of support by the Morsi regime in Egypt, nor can it replace Iran as a bulwark for Hamas.²⁸ In this respect, Turkish-Hamas relations also point to the limits of Turkey's influence in the Middle East. This is both a result of the fact that some of the Arab/Muslim states are trying to curb Turkey's attempts to gain more influence, and the fact that Turkey is not willing to "go all the way" in its relations with Hamas because the price to its relations with the Western bloc might be too high. Thus Turkish emphasis on "independence" in its foreign policy in fact leads it to contradictory policies that at times are unsustainable in the long run. Still, the *Mavi Marmara* incident and its aftermath have to a large degree cemented the Turkey-Hamas relationship, and it will be extremely difficult for Israel to try and pressure Turkey to change paths in this respect.

Turkey responded positively to efforts by Hamas and Fatah in the spring of 2014 to form an interim unity government. The Turkish Foreign Minister congratulated the sides on once again reaching a reconciliation agreement and offered humanitarian aid,²⁹ and a subsequent press statement by the

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the elections expected in the forthcoming period will strengthen the “democratic legitimacy in Palestine.”³⁰ Already in previous years, Turkish leaders stressed the importance of reaching a unity deal,³¹ and have tried to mediate in this direction.³² While it does not seem that Turkey was actively involved in the current negotiations, Turkey has in the past emphasized to its Western allies that it has a moderating role vis-à-vis Hamas and that it is trying to push Hamas to accept a two-state solution. Turkey has also emphasized in the past that in such a unity deal, Fatah must adopt a tougher stance toward Israel.³³ Thus Turkey can claim it has an indirect role in the present Fatah-Hamas reconciliation process, which has occurred in the context of the suspension of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

If the current reconciliation attempts fail there is fear that the situation in Gaza will continue to deteriorate, and hence will also continue to serve as a major point of contention between Turkey and Israel. Added to this is the suspension of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, which can also be seen as a serious cause of concern regarding Turkish-Israeli relations in general, after these only recently began to somewhat improve. Thus, it can be argued that the divide among the Palestinians is not only poisonous to the ability to reach a comprehensive peace agreement with them, but also to some of Israel’s external relations.

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Public Legitimacy as a Necessary Condition for a Peace Process: A Test of the Third Netanyahu Government

Roe Kibrik and Gilead Sher

Public Legitimacy and Peace Processes

The life span of any government is determined in part by the public legitimacy it enjoys.¹ This argument seems self-evident with a democratic regime, in which the public chooses the government directly and has the power to replace it. However, even authoritarian regimes need public legitimacy in order to function and maintain their status.² Indeed, public legitimacy is not equivalent to political support. Legitimacy links a certain action with the norms, values, laws, and identity of a given society, and conversely, places a boundary to distinguish between actions that are consistent with the society's system of values and norms and actions perceived as being outside this framework. Within the totality of activities that the society permits as legitimate, various sectors can give political support for different actions, even when they are contradictory. For example, in Israel there are those who support the idea of increasing child allowances or drafting ultra-Orthodox Jews into the military, and those who espouse opposite ideas. There are supporters of the free market and supporters of the welfare state. To some extent these ideas contradict each other, but they are all deemed legitimate – even if not universally supported – in Israeli society today.

The connections between granting legitimacy and providing political support are complex. It is easier to mobilize political support for an idea or an action whose legitimacy is not contested, and vice versa: one of the ways to undermine political support for a particular action is to render it

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illegitimate. Similarly, the granting of far reaching political support can legitimate an action that was until then perceived as illegitimate.

In order to advance a peace process, the government and its leaders need both political support and legitimacy at every stage, albeit in differing configurations and degrees at various points. More specifically, the government's pursuit of a peace process comprises several stages that differ in times, partners, goals, and objectives, although there is some overlap and interface between them. This complex process can be presented schematically in simplified fashion as a linear progression that begins with a decision to engage in negotiations and presumably continues with the negotiations themselves, the signing of an agreement, and the implementation of the agreement. The political process of peacemaking takes shape through interaction with a social process that reflects the connection and relations between the societies in conflict. A process of reconciliation between the societies and a change in basic attitudes and beliefs toward the other side will enable progress in the political process, while a social process laden with lack of trust, stereotypes, fears, and the absence of familiarity and mutual recognition, and characterized as a struggle instead of a partnership, will hinder progress.

A peace process is not an isolated, short term event, and society does not bestow legitimacy on its leaders to advance this process in a unidirectional, continual, or autonomous fashion. Public legitimacy empowers leaders during the various stages of negotiations – not to mention enables the implementation of an agreement the moment it is achieved.³ The range of possible actions by the leader is limited by the range of actions that have received public legitimacy.

If the decision making and policy shaping process was ever the exclusive province of the leader, this is no longer the case, as there are now partners – among them critics, opponents or supporters, and partners in actual practice – and many other contributing elements, including public opinion, the media, and the leader's political party. Consequently, leaders find it more difficult than in the past to mobilize the political support they desire. During the preliminary stages of the process of negotiating for peace, the leader must obtain legitimacy, and throughout the entire process, must act to influence the public's perception so that the other side is perceived as a potential partner and not only as an enemy.

Without such a change in perception, society and its leaders will have a difficult time overcoming obstacles and crises that arise during the process

because of actions by opponents of an agreement or as a result of difficulties finding an agreed formula for the issues under discussion.⁴

Reshaping the Boundaries of Legitimate Action: Lessons from the Past

Experience shows how leadership can lead to a change in public legitimacy and thereby encourage political support for a change in policy. It also shows how broad political support for a leader enables him to bring about a reshaping of the boundaries of legitimacy and as a result, a change in policy. The political act of peace is a major deviation from the boundaries of the dominant discourse established during the years of clashes and wars, and the leader's ability and actions are critical for implementing such a change. For example, French President Charles de Gaulle took advantage of the blank check he received from the public and pursued a course opposite to the public's conventional premises, in order to create public legitimacy and eventually mobilize political support for France's pullout from Algeria. Throughout the process, he worked within the boundaries of the legitimacy granted to him by the French public. By force of leadership, he used the political support he received in order to redraw those boundaries and to work within them for a drastic change in his country's policy.⁵

A closer and perhaps even clearer example are the actions of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who consciously and intentionally led to a change in Egyptian public legitimacy to enable him to negotiate a peace agreement with Israel after several wars and years of hostility. Although his government, unlike Western democracies, did not depend on the direct political support of the public, Sadat recognized the need to effect a change in public legitimacy in order to allow a change in policy. His historic visit to Israel served as a key measure in changing the legitimate rules of the game. However, he did not stop there, and despite an opposition that worked to deny the legitimacy of the peace process, he launched an extensive media campaign to change the Egyptian public's position so that it would support peace and reconciliation.⁶

In other instances, it is not the political leadership that leads the effort to redraw the boundaries of legitimate action, but rather, other actors in the political-social-public sphere. In turn, the official and authorized leadership may be compelled to accept the new boundaries, sometimes even supporting them and eventually adopting them. For many years, for example, it was illegitimate and illegal for Israelis to hold contacts with

the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Social and political actors, originally from the political and media fringe, began to hold contacts with the PLO, and some even went to jail for this. However, the political leadership subsequently began to adopt the contacts that were fostered through think tanks and civil society, authorizing them post factum and joining in the effort to create legitimacy for such actions among the Israeli public.

A leader does not need public legitimacy from a society with which he has no contact. However, a peace process is not a unilateral process, and entering into negotiations with the leaders of another society opens another circle in which legitimacy plays a role. A leader and his government would do well to recognize the needs of the leader with whom they are holding negotiations to receive legitimacy for the peace process from his respective constituents. Moreover, the leadership of one side can play a role in mobilizing or damaging public legitimacy for the leadership of the other side and for the peace process. Sadat's visit to the Knesset was a major step in mobilizing public legitimacy among the Egyptian people to support the peace agreement, and at the same time, it also mobilized public legitimacy in Israel, and as a result, political support for the leadership and the peace process.

In the history of relations and negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, there are also many examples of actions by a leader or the leadership from one side damaging the public legitimacy of the peace process in both societies. One instance is Yasir Arafat's comments to his audience and to the Muslim world in which he compared the Oslo Accords to the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. While one can argue about whether it prepares Muslim hearts for an agreement or damages the legitimacy of that agreement, either way this comparison was damaging to the legitimacy given by the Israeli public to the country's leadership to hold negotiations with Arafat.⁷ On the other hand, not only has Israel's continued construction in the settlements over the years not been in keeping with an effort to mobilize domestic public legitimacy for the peace process; it has also damaged the PLO leaders' public legitimacy to hold negotiations with the Israeli leadership. Also relevant are the dozens of dismissive or threatening statements made by leaders of both sides toward the other side, meant to gain the sympathy of their public and political support at home. These statements were destructive in terms of building legitimacy for a process of rapprochement.

The Test of the Netanyahu Government

In terms of public legitimacy for the peace process, the third Netanyahu government, which entered a round of talks with the Palestinians in late July 2013, was on shaky ground. The government began the negotiations when neither the Israeli nor the Palestinian public was hopeful about the success of the peace process, trusted one another, or lent domestic political support for progress in the process.⁸ In order to advance in the various stages of the peace process from this point, the third Netanyahu government ought to have invested efforts and resources in mobilizing public legitimacy for the move. Based on this premise, what follows is a review of the government's related activities and decisions and statements by central government figures. It examines steps taken – and steps not taken – by the government and its efforts in the context of mobilizing public legitimacy for the peace process.

The Decision to Enter Negotiations

The Netanyahu government's entry into negotiations with the Palestinians meets the theoretical framework at the basis of this article, namely, that there was legitimacy and a great deal of political support among the Israeli public for entering into negotiations with the Palestinians and attempting to find a political solution. The Prime Minister both responded to and benefited from this legitimacy. Support for this direction was reflected in the election results and in the demand by political parties to hold negotiations as a precondition for joining the coalition.⁹ It was also evident from general polls carried out over a long period among the Israeli public, which has consistently – since the Oslo process and to the formation of the government – supported negotiations with the Palestinians.¹⁰

However, this is only the first stage in a peace process. A government that is genuinely interested in promoting an agreement based on two states for two peoples must work to achieve legitimacy for continuing negotiations, for the issues discussed, for the solutions proposed, and for a basic change in attitudes toward the other society as part of the process of peace and reconciliation.

Legislation

During this period of negotiations, there was no coordinated and consistent attempt to generate public support through legislation for the negotiations or for peace with the Palestinians. On the contrary: coalition members

and government ministers proposed laws and government decisions that were explicitly meant to hamper the negotiations and portray them as illegitimate. These included the bill approved by the Ministerial Committee on Legislation to annex the Jordan Valley,¹¹ or bills sponsored by coalition members, but eventually rejected, such as the bill to impose Israeli law over all settlements in Judea and Samaria,¹² or the bill to require the government to receive Knesset approval for entering into negotiations over Jerusalem or the issue of Palestinian refugees.¹³ In the consciousness of the Israeli and Palestinian public, any such bill places another obstacle on the already narrowed chances of a resolution of the difficult core issues. Moreover, these bills undermine not only the discussion of the substantive components of a possible solution, but also – and perhaps primarily – the symbolic elements of a solution to the core issues of Jerusalem and the refugees. The complementary side of these legislative initiatives can be seen in the rejection of opposition-sponsored bills intended to send a message to strengthen the peace process or to promote reconciliation between Jewish and Palestinian society.¹⁴

The most prominent example is promotion of the law requiring a referendum in the event of a government decision to hand over sovereign Israeli territory to another entity. In the context of building public legitimacy, the framing of the law and the context of the legislation are no less important than its content. After all, any such decision will require broad public legitimacy on the basis of a referendum or elections. In other words, a referendum could be a high point in mobilizing public support for the peace process. However, as a result of the framing of the law that was enacted, it is perceived by its initiators, by the opposition, and by the general public as intended to place restrictions on the peace process and undermine it. Furthermore, the basic message that this law and its explanatory material convey to the public is that those working to achieve an agreement do not have legitimacy to sign an agreement.¹⁵

Government Ministry Decisions

Government ministers and ministries, particularly the Defense Minister and the Minister of Construction and Housing, have also helped convey a message that undermines any potential change in basic positions toward negotiations and the other side that is needed to ensure the success of a peace process. These ministers have continued to promote construction in the settlements, which is perceived by all the parties involved in the

conflict – excluding the official position of the current government – as one of the main obstacles to the peace process.¹⁶ This message is also conveyed by the government decision on national priority areas, which includes settlements in Judea and Samaria, particularly small, new, and isolated settlements, and enables ministers to grant them additional benefits. The decision conveys a message to both the Israeli and the Palestinian public that is contrary to the peace process.¹⁷ Other ministries promulgated regulations or made statements that were contrary to the spirit of the peace process and reconciliation, and conveyed negative messages to the Arab minority in Israel. Examples are the Education Minister, who wished to cut back on the study of Arabic;¹⁸ the Finance Minister, who worked to provide a VAT exemption to those purchasing a first apartment, but excluded Arabs, among others, from this benefit;¹⁹ and the Interior Ministry, which changed its procedure for providing residency status to a foreign spouse married to a permanent resident so that it would be possible to deport Palestinians even during handling of their petitions.²⁰ This legislation and these decisions have an impact on the deeper level of the reconciliation process between Israeli and Palestinian society: they reflect a general trend toward a non-conciliatory discourse, which alienates and excludes the Arab minority within Israel rather than mobilizing its support for a process of dialogue for peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Public Statements

Statements by the Prime Minister and other leading ministers to the Israeli public similarly rebuffed the opportunity to mobilize public legitimacy. When Justice Minister Tzipi Livni and Yitzhak Molcho began the most recent round of negotiations with the Palestinians, Netanyahu and Economy Minister Naftali Bennett competed for credit for continuing construction in the settlements.²¹ In the United States, in a speech in English, Netanyahu expounded on the anticipated fruits of peace.²² However, in the Knesset, at cabinet meetings, and in his Hebrew speeches, he has painted a picture of the future, the day after a peace agreement, which is fraught with dangers. Using particular historical events that are scorched in the Jewish people's narrative, he has described the Arabs in negative terms, stating that they wished to destroy and not to build;²³ he has highlighted their recalcitrance in negotiations and their attempt to close their eyes to reality;²⁴ he has described the Palestinians as enemies and adversaries; he has tied the Palestinian nationalist movement to the Nazi effort to exterminate the

Jews; and he contends that Israel does not need peace in order to be safe and to continue to develop and grow.²⁵

Minister Bennett, who heads the Bayit HeYehudi party, which represents the settlement enterprise, is not alone in working to undermine the legitimacy of the negotiations, a possible peace agreement, the Israeli negotiators, and the Palestinian leader, describing the future after peace as an economic, social, or security disaster.²⁶ Other major figures in the government share this sentiment, for example Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon, who has spoken out against negotiations with the Palestinians, against the Palestinians' good faith, and against the actions and personality of the US mediator, claiming that there is no partner on the Palestinian side for the idea of two states for two peoples and no chance to reach an agreement in this generation.²⁷

Like Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has declared that he is in favor of a peace agreement with the Palestinians. He has stated that he would be prepared to leave his home in a settlement and that he supports the continuation of talks. However, he asserts that he does not see any prospects for an overall agreement with the Palestinians at this time;²⁸ minimizes the power or the desire of the other side to make progress in the process; describes the day after the agreement as a situation full of dangers, not opportunities; proposes an exchange of territory and populations so that Israeli Arabs will find themselves within the borders of a Palestinian state; and does not leave any opening to discuss any kind of implementation of the return of Palestinian refugees. These statements reinforce Israeli society's concerns regarding its existence and identity as a Jewish state. They also intensify fears of a peace agreement with the Palestinians that includes, inter alia, recognition of their full sovereignty over their territory, and perhaps even symbolic, limited recognition of the right of return.²⁹ In addition, they place major obstacles in the path of the negotiations.

The Minister Leading the Negotiations

Minister Tzipi Livni, who was in charge of leading the negotiations with the Palestinians on behalf of the Prime Minister, does not serve in one of the three key positions in the government. In addition, her ministry has no direct contact with shaping the situation in the conflict. This is another message about the importance that the government and the Prime Minister attribute to the process. Moreover, coalition members treat Livni in a way that mocks her, weakens her further, and damages the legitimacy of her

actions in the negotiations.³⁰ Yitzhak Molcho's appointment as the Prime Minister's special emissary to the negotiations has been perceived by commentators as an attempt by Netanyahu to keep an eye on Livni so that as the official envoy to the negotiations, she does not deviate from the boundaries marked out by the Prime Minister.³¹

Steps Not Taken

There were several necessary steps that the Netanyahu government chose not to take in the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and the mobilization of public legitimacy for negotiations and a full peace process. The first step is a meeting with Abbas, which would convey a message that there is a partnership geared toward building trust. The next step is a halt to construction in the settlements, at least those that are east of the security barrier, which would convey both to the Israeli public and to the Palestinians that Israel is moving seriously and sincerely toward peace. Other such steps are acquainting the Israeli public with the Palestinian narrative; encouraging meetings and social and economic collaboration; and emphasizing the fruits of peace. This is a partial list, and does not exhaust the measures that could have been taken to mobilize public legitimacy for the peace process and convey to the entire world that when it comes to a political settlement, Israel means business.

Palestinian Activity

This article has focused on the actions of the Netanyahu government and its contribution – or lack thereof – to mobilizing public legitimacy for the peace process and reconciliation. However, Abu Mazen and the Palestinians also played a role in shaping the boundaries of legitimate action among the Israeli public. Along with many other actors that are partners in the political struggle, the Palestinian leadership has a considerable opportunity to contribute to a change in Israeli public legitimacy.

Palestinian officials joined Israeli figures in expressing a lack of confidence in the success of the talks throughout the period of the negotiations.³² Furthermore, Abu Mazen has refused to recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people, and he has thus missed a major opportunity to influence the Israeli public's positions on the negotiations and the peace process. He threatened to approach United Nations institutions and international tribunals as a means of achieving the release of prisoners and a freeze on construction in the settlements.³³ He thus undermined the degree of

public legitimacy given by the Israeli public to the peace process and the continuation of talks. He ultimately did appeal to UN organizations and conventions, and with this primarily symbolic act and the subsequent reconciliation with Hamas, contributed a great deal to the stalemate and to further erosion of the legitimacy given by the Israeli public to the peace process.³⁴

Conclusion

Mobilization of public legitimacy is a necessary, albeit not sufficient condition for the success of the peace process. While public legitimacy is not identical to political support for a given position, without public legitimacy, it will be difficult to mobilize political support for a peace process. In addition, public legitimacy is not absolute, and often a political struggle among various actors ensues over the amount of legitimacy for certain actions. There is no agreed, objective index for measuring the degree of legitimacy of a particular action, and any action is judged in retrospect by the public's response to it. This lack of clarity, which makes it difficult for social analysts and researchers, is also what makes the historic change in the boundaries of legitimate action possible.

When actors are interested in changing the existing situation and pursuing a process of peace between former enemies, this involves a reshaping of the boundaries of legitimate action, which is generally also accompanied by a political struggle and a movement for change. The government and its leaders have much power in reshaping the boundaries of legitimate action so that they will support a peace process. Their actions must complement the prior release of information regarding the other side's character and intentions to turn the former enemy into a potential partner; efforts to make the foreign and the alien into the familiar; and a transition from a conflict-directed discourse to a discourse directed at peace and building trust. Their actions must be addressed not only to their public, but also to the other society's public.

In the Israeli-Palestinian context, actions by the Netanyahu government are in keeping with the many polls conducted in different stages of the negotiations, which indicate that a majority of Israeli Jews favor a resolution of the conflict on the basis of a negotiated two-state solution, but also show that there is more limited support for many particular components of other elements and stages in the peace process. Over 60 percent support peace negotiations with the Palestinians. However, more than 80 percent

do not believe they will succeed, and they oppose the return of Palestinian refugees to Israel, even in token numbers, or the Israeli assumption of partial responsibility for creation of the refugee problem. Most Jewish Israelis continue to see the Palestinians as enemies and not as neighbors. They do not have confidence in Palestinians, either personally or as a collective; they are cognizant of the absence of trust on the part of the Palestinians in Israel; and they find it difficult to see how this trust can be built.³⁵

A leader and his government can have great impact on shaping the boundaries of public legitimacy. De Gaulle and Sadat not only responded to what was expected to be legitimate; they also worked and even led the struggle to change and redefine the boundaries of legitimate action. Therefore, the argument that the Netanyahu government acted only within the existing boundaries of public legitimacy is not convincing. Not only did Netanyahu and his government not work to establish legitimacy for the various stages of the peace process; they often worked to delegitimize the peace process and future reconciliation, as well as the negotiations themselves, even while they were underway. The government and Prime Minister, consciously or inadvertently, worked to draw boundaries for public legitimacy that would limit in advance their possible range of actions and their ability to progress in the peace process.

Yet in the absence of a genuine desire by leaders to promote a peace process – whether because of their world view or a lack of political ability to do so, or because their position and power rely on the existing framework of legitimate actions and a change in the discourse could hurt this standing – there is still hope for other forces interested in achieving peace. There is no hard and fast status quo for the boundaries of public legitimacy, and there is an ongoing struggle over these boundaries among various elements in Israel society. The events and the discourse on the other side, and in other circles in which Israeli society takes part, such as international and regional ones, have an impact on the domestic discourse as well. Actors outside the formal leadership can thus at times succeed in leading the process of redrawing the boundaries of legitimate action. The success of other actors in establishing a process of peace and reconciliation as a legitimate act, and establishing refusal to engage in a peace process as illegitimate, contains the seeds of change in the policy even in a government that did not necessarily intend to lead to a peace process.

Notes

- 1 This article was written before Operation Protective Edge and relates to the 2013-14 US-sponsored Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.
- 2 See Melvin Richter, "Toward a Concept of Political Illegitimacy: Bonapartist Dictatorship and Democratic Legitimacy," *Political Theory* 10, no. 2 (1982): 185-214.
- 3 Tamar Hermann, "Changes in Official Defense Policy and the Positions of Israeli Jews toward Conduct of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (2000-2004)," in *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from a Peace Process to Violent Confrontation, 2000-2005*, ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2006), p. 193.
- 4 Tamar Hermann and David Newman, "A Path Strewn with Thorns: Along the Difficult Road of Israeli-Palestinian Peacemaking," in *The Management of Peace Processes*, ed. John Darby and Roger MacGinty (New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 108; Peter F. Trumbore, "Public Opinion as a Domestic Constraint in International Negotiations: Two Level Games in the Anglo-Irish Peace Process," *International Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (1998): 545-65.
- 5 John Talbott, "French Public Opinion and the Algerian War: A Research Note," *French Historical Studies* (1975): 354-61.
- 6 Ibrahim Saad Eddin, "The Vindication of Sadat in the Arab World," *Policy Focus Series* 22, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 1995.
- 7 Ephraim Lavie and Henry Fischman, "Strategic Decisions Taken During the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process as Barriers to Resolving the Conflict," in *Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute Studies, 2010).
- 8 For illustration, see the public's attitudes as reflected in the Israel Democracy Institute's Peace Index from the time when the new government was formed, on the eve of the talks led by US Secretary of State John Kerry in June 2013. Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, Peace Index – June 2013, <http://en.idi.org.il/media/2587522/Peace%20Index-June%202013%282%29.pdf>.
- 9 On Yesh Atid's conditions, see Yuval Karni and Tzvika Brodt, "Lapid: These Are My Red Lines," *Ynet*, January 24, 2013, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4336518,00.html>. See also Hatnua's conditions. Jonathan Lis, Yair Ettinger, and Yossi Verter, "Livni to Haaretz: Netanyahu Realizes We Must Start a Peace Process," *Haaretz*, February 20, 2013, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/elections/1.1933770>.
- 10 The consistently high support for negotiations with the Palestinians among the Israeli public is reflected in repeated polls carried out by Yaar and Hermann for the Israel Democracy Institute's Peace Index. See <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMainEng.aspx>.
- 11 Moran Azulay, "Ministers Approve Bill to Annex the Jordan Valley; Appeal is on the Way," *Ynet*, December 29, 2013, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4470875,00.html>.

- 12 Decision 697 of the Ministerial Committee on Legislation of February 9, 2014, which received the mandate of a government decision, number 1383, on February 26, 2014.
- 13 Decision 606 of the Ministerial Committee on Legislation of January 12, 2014, which received the mandate of a government decision, number 1261, on January 29, 2014.
- 14 For example, rejection of the bill to condition construction beyond the 1967 lines on a majority of 80 MKs, in government decision 1223; rejection of the bill to bring Jews and Arabs closer in the educational system, in government decision 995; rejection of the bill to commemorate the Kafr Qassem massacre, in government decision 904; rejection of the bill to require public bodies to publish their materials in Arabic, in government decision 903; and rejection of the bill to consider "price tag" attacks as terrorist acts, in government decision 1290.
- 15 See the government decision to approve the referendum law, decision 639 of July 28, 2013, at the start of the talks, and the passage of the Basic Law: Referendum in its second and third reading in the Knesset, while the opposition was absent from the plenum. To illustrate the framing of the bill as undermining the government's legitimacy to engage in a peace process that includes concessions of territory, see the opposition proposals to amend the law to a "Law to Destroy Representative Democracy in Israel" in the framework of reservations presented in the plenum, http://knesset.gov.il/laws/data/PunchBanana/Files/488358/488358_4.pdf.
- 16 For example: Itamar Fleischman, "More than 1,000 Housing Units in Territories Nearing Approval," *Ynet*, July 16, 2013, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4405719,00.html>; announcements by the Ministry of Housing and Construction, August 11, 2013, <http://www.moch.gov.il/Spokesman/Pages/DoverListItem.aspx?ListID=5b390c93-15b2-4841-87e3-abf31c1af63d&WebId=fe384cf7-21cd-49eb-8bbb-71ed64f47de0&ItemID=513> and November 4, 2013; Itamar Fleischman, "Netanyahu Blocked Construction in E1 Planned by Ministry of Housing," *Ynet*, November 12, 2013, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4452625,00.html>; Attila Somfalvi and Elior Levy, "Lapid Attacks Tenders Published for Housing in Territories," <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4475284,00.html>; Elior Levy, "Huge Jump of 123% in Construction in Territories," *Ynet*, March 3, 2014, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4494615,00.html>; Haim Levinsky, "Despite Cancellation of Plans, Uri Ariel Promises to Continue Momentum of Construction in Territories," *Haaretz*, November 27, 2013, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.2177080>.
- 17 See government decision number 667 of August 4, 2013, <http://www.pmo.gov.il/Secretary/GovDecisions/2013/Pages/des667.aspx>. See also the cabinet discussion in January 2014: Omri Nahmias, "Livni to Livnat: Criticism of Settlements is Not Anti-Semitic," *Walla News*, January 26, 2014, <http://news.walla.co.il/1minute/?w=/20/2715404>.

- 18 Yaara Barak, "Education Minister Shai Piron Cuts Back on Arabic Studies," *Galei Zahal*, January 23, 2014, <http://glz.co.il/1064-34809-HE/Galatz.aspx>.
- 19 Uri Hudi, "Lapid Program Will Paralyze Real Estate Market in Short Term," *Globes*, March 18, 2014, <http://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000925058>.
- 20 Amira Hass, "Interior Ministry Could Expel Foreigners while Handling their Petitions," *Haaretz*, November 17, 2013, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/education/.premium-1.2167061>. See the updated procedures of the Population and Immigration Registry, which exclude the Palestinian population and complicate the conditions of the family unification process, <http://piba.gov.il/Regulations/1.6.0001.pdf> and <http://www.piba.gov.il/Regulations/5.2.0011.pdf>.
- 21 Yitzhak Ben-Horin, "An End to a Rift Lasting Years: Negotiations Restarted," *Ynet*, July 30, 2013, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4411367,00.html>.
- 22 See the Prime Minister's comments at the AIPAC conference, March 4, 2014, <http://www.pmo.gov.il/MediaCenter/Speeches/Pages/speechaipac040314.aspx>.
- 23 See, for example, "Prime Minister Netanyahu's Speech at the Special Meeting of the Knesset Plenum in Honor of the French President," Foreign Ministry, November 18, 2013, http://mfa.gov.il/MFAHEB/PressRoom/TopEvents/Pages/PM_Netanyahu_Speech_at_the_Knesset_for_President_of_France_181113.aspx.
- 24 See, for example, Netanyahu's speech in "The 129th Session of the 19th Knesset," *Proceedings of the Knesset* (Jerusalem: Knesset, March 19, 2014).
- 25 See, for example, "Prime Minister's Remarks at Begin-Sadat Center Conference on 'Israel Towards 2020,'" November 6, 2013, http://mfa.gov.il/MFAHEB/PressRoom/TopEvents/Pages/PM_Netanyahu_speech_at_Bar_Ilan_University.aspx.
- 26 Interview with Naftali Bennett by Rino Tzror on Galei Zahal, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgkmNI_sx5M, posted on Naftali Bennett's Facebook page, November 7, 2013, <https://he-il.facebook.com/NaftaliBennett/posts/650095255012146>; Naftali Bennett, "Palestinian State Will Crush Israel's Economy," Meeting of Jewish Home Knesset Faction, January 20, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwW9k48ySm4>.
- 27 For example, Barak Ravid, "Ya'alon: Even without Agreement with the Palestinians, We'll Manage," *Haaretz*, February 2, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.2233135>; Barak Ravid, "Ya'alon to Businessmen: Don't Delude Yourselves, There is No Palestinian Partner for Two-State Agreement," *Haaretz*, December 27, 2013, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/.premium-1.2201301>.
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Stability in the Kingdom of Jordan

Oded Eran

The upheaval pervading the Arab world since late 2010, reflected in the fall of regimes and the effective dissolution of a number of countries in the region, gives rise to many questions, including whether the stability of regimes can be assessed analytically (as opposed to intuitively), and consequently, whether dramatic changes in the regimes under evaluation can be anticipated. Any attempt to add policy recommendations to the analysis requires minimizing the subjective element and assigning the correct weights to the various causes of stability or instability. The general and theoretical literature is extensive, as are analyses of stability by international institutions and organizations. At the Institute for National Security Studies, for example, Amos Yadlin and Avner Golov proposed a complex model for this purpose, composed of four key parameters: the internal arena, the regional-international arena, the economic situation, and the power of the opposition.¹

Clearly even an analytical approach is not free of subjective elements, given differing assessments of the relative weight of the various elements in the total picture, and the assessment of each of these elements itself. In the absence of completely precise tools, the existing models are the lesser evil. At the same time, the shelf life of the various findings, and even of the models themselves, is narrowing. The validity of the various conclusions is liable to expire within a few months, and frequent examinations of the basic knowledge base used for the assessment of the life expectancy of the regimes in such a volatile region as the Middle East are therefore essential.

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Parameters Affecting Stability in Jordan

The Internal Arena

Jordan differs from other countries in the region in a number of key elements that greatly affect its current and future stability. Jordan was founded as an independent country at the same time that Syria and Lebanon were founded, but its original population is relatively “new,” and Jordan lacks the collective national memory present in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, which extends back to ancient times. Its ethnic and religious groups have no territorial claims to Jordan’s current physical area. In addition, Jordan is a perpetual target for regional immigration and has experienced several massive waves of immigration during key events, led by the 1948 war (which prompted the mass exodus of people from the western side of the Jordan River to Jordan); the Six Day War in 1967; in 1991, following the expulsion of Palestinian and Jordanian workers from the Gulf states as a result of support by King Hussein and Yasir Arafat for Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait; in 2003, following the US invasion of Iraq; and since 2010, when refugees began fleeing en masse from Syria to the neighboring countries.

From a purely demographic standpoint, these waves of immigration have made the original population, i.e., the Bedouin tribes from the Arabian Peninsula, a minority ruling Jordan through its control of the governmental and political system and the security forces. The fact that the Jordanian military in its ethnic composition and command staff is in effect a military of the Bedouin tribes ensures its absolute loyalty. The army is an existential interest of the Bedouin-Hashemite minority, which will accept no alternative that would materially change the status quo. It is well-trained and well-equipped by the United States, and the Jordanian royal family wants the army to feel that they see themselves as part of the army. Most members of the royal family study in military colleges and go through officer courses. At the same time, the regime understands that even among the retired senior officers, there is a sense of discrimination, given the inability of many of them to find places in the private economic sector, which is controlled almost entirely by the Palestinians.

The events in Jordan since the onset of the Arab Spring have revealed breaches in the Jordanian regime’s wall of legitimacy. In contrast to his father, King Hussein II, who was generally admired, especially since Black September of 1970, when he sent the Jordanian army into action against the PLO forces in Jordan and no one attempted to question his authority and

leadership, King Abdullah II is subject to criticism. This criticism has been fed by two sources, one involving his behavior, which the people regard as ostentation on the part of the royal family, and the other consisting of those seeking to reform the ruling system in Jordan. Significantly, elements of the Hashemite-Bedouin population, which constitutes the essential base of support for the current regime, are among both sets of critics.

At the same time, even those supporting governmental reforms have not challenged the royal family's existence. They have proposed, however, the British model of a constitutional monarchy, which the King regards as unacceptable, because it would eliminate Hashemite control of the governmental establishment in Jordan. When the Jordanian constitution was revised in 2011, the royal house controlled and managed the process. The process did not affect Section 28 of the constitution, which states that the monarchy passes from father to son within the family of the founding King, Abdullah I. The amendments to the constitution that were accepted made no substantial change in the King's control of state institutions. The change in the election law loosens the King's absolute control of the Jordanian parliament, but not enough to jeopardize the royal house's supremacy in all matters pertaining to decision making in areas that appear essential to the King.

The King is right to be disturbed by the charges of corruption among the ruling elite in the royal family, and he will likely have to take steps that are perceived by the Jordanian public as a serious, ongoing campaign against corruption, not mere lip service. The fact that some of the demonstrations on this issue occurred in cities in southern Jordan, where the Palestinian population is extremely small and where the King's power base is located, will require the allocation of greater financial resources to the region, which suffers from unemployment and poverty rates far above the national average.

Although the Arab Spring events were not ethnically based, the upheaval in the Middle East is closely related to the Shiite-Sunni divide. Because there are few Shiites in Jordan, this aspect is irrelevant, but the weight of fundamentalist extremism is rising among both the veteran Jordanian population and the new population that arrived in the recent waves of immigration.

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The Regional-International Arena

Bloody political struggles are underway in three of Jordan's four neighboring countries. The regimes in Syria and Iraq face the threat of collapse, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is liable to ignite another violent chapter on the West Bank, beyond the current escalation in Gaza. Jordan is directly affected by these events, first, as a result of the wave of refugees coming from Iraq and Syria, which threatens its economic stability and is liable to inject active and dormant subversive elements. Because of the large Palestinian demographic element in Jordan, any change in relations between Israel and the Palestinians, however minor, is felt in Jordan immediately. The failure of the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as any escalation into a violent conflict between them, is liable to have a significant effect on the stability of the regime in Jordan. In addition, Jordan is to a large extent dependent on the capability and good will of the US and other parties, such as NATO, in taking decisive action to counteract factors affecting stability in Jordan.

The absence of direct military intervention has helped the Syrian regime survive. It is also likely to contribute to the fall of the current regime in Iraq, and to accelerate the dissolution of the country and the establishment of an autonomous political entity in eastern Syria and western Iraq. Furthermore, there are a number of patterns of external intervention, usually without any

significant military element, that significantly affect the chances of survival of regimes in the Middle East.

In any case, possible undermining of the regime in Jordan has other consequences that may be even more ominous than those accompanying the fall of other regimes in the region. For this reason, the weakening of the central government in Jordan may well lead to direct military action by external parties, such as the US and perhaps NATO as well. This scenario is also liable to cause a form of Israeli involvement different than the largely passive behavior regarding Syria. Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ya'alon have openly commented on the need to assist

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Jordan. While Jordan's military strength is likely to be sufficient to handle any attempt at open invasion, it will be difficult for external parties, including Israel, to aid Jordan in coping with penetration by subversive cells inciting large part of the Jordanian population over an extended period.

Despite the great interest of the Gulf states in preserving the regime in Jordan, it is doubtful whether these countries will deviate from their traditional pattern of providing economic aid and employ military force. More likely, they will apply heavy pressure on Washington to use the means at its disposal to protect the Jordanian regime. To be sure, financial aid is no less critical for Jordan than military aid, and the oil producing Arab countries play a key role in this aspect. They have already granted financial aid to Jordan, but increasing it now would help protect the Jordanian regime, and reduce the chances that elements seeking to exploit economic distress in various sectors in Jordan will succeed, be they Jordanian citizens or refugees from Syria and Iraq.

The Economic Arena

In analyzing the stability of the Jordanian regime, it is hard to overestimate the importance of the economic factor. Since the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan was established, it has relied on external financial aid, without which it will not survive in the long term. The waves of immigration have only aggravated the need for a steady stream of financial aid. Most of the refugees in Jordan arrived without means and have imposed a heavy burden on the Jordanian regime, which has had to deal with their absorption. Other than the 2003 wave of Iraqi refugees, many of whom were wealthy and some of whom returned to Iraq, all the other refugees, starting in 1948, have become permanent residents; the Palestinians have also become Jordanian citizens. The working assumption about the Syrian refugees must be that they will be in Jordan for many years, with all the economic and political consequences incurred by their stay. The US, the European Union, the oil-producing Arab countries, and the international financial organizations have all enlisted in the effort to aid Jordan, but it is necessary to ensure that this aid continues to flow for many years.

Jordan's economic vulnerability is also due to events in the neighboring countries. The flow of natural gas from Egypt to Jordan has been disrupted a number of times, causing suffering among the population in Jordan and the loss of 2 percent of Jordan's GDP. The deteriorating situation in the Gulf region, and even worse, in the friendly Arab regimes helping Jordan, is liable to reduce Jordan's sources of financial aid. The Jordanian regime is already under pressure from international economic institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, to cut its subsidies for certain goods and services. As in the past, even before the Arab Spring, the Jordanian regime

has had to confront violent demonstrations in the Bedouin-dominated outlying southern area by sending army forces to suppress them. This violence was partly caused by a rise in prices for basic commodities.

The economic gaps in the population and the awareness of these gaps among disadvantaged groups regularly spark unrest. These enormous gaps span the divisions between the two main population sectors: the Palestinians and the Hashemite Bedouins. On the one hand, the Bedouin tribes owe absolute loyalty to the royal family, which is an existential interest for them as a decisive factor in Jordan. On the other hand, the royal family's greedy behavior, the rumors of corruption among those closely associated with it, and the deteriorating economic situation, following the rise in unemployment and the cuts in subsidies, have increased incitement against the regime, especially among the younger generation. The entry of nearly 1.5 million refugees from Iraq and Syria has had a double effect. Many of them flock to the large cities in search of work, where they cause a drop in wages and deprive the local population of jobs. However, in the long term, absorbing the refugees will require investment in permanent infrastructure, thereby creating economic momentum in the initial critical years.

Joining the problem of the economic gaps is the fact that the private economic sector is entirely controlled by a Palestinian economic elite. This elite has an interest in maintaining the current political stability, which grants them both local and international economic stability. Any undermining, and certainly the elimination, of the current regime is liable to have destructive results for this economic elite. On the other hand, there is still alienation between the upper levels of the two main populations in Jordan, the Hashemite Bedouins and the Palestinians. Senior Jordanian officials of Hashemite-Bedouin origin hesitate to look for work in Palestinian-owned businesses and companies after leaving their positions. This phenomenon highlights the feeling of economic inferiority among large sections of the Hashemite Bedouin population. Thus the economic factor has great destructive potential, and from the regime's perspective, finding long term sources of financial aid to enable it to cope with 1.5 million refugees without massive tumult, especially of an internal political nature, is of crucial importance.

Weakness of the Opposition

The opposition to the Jordanian regime is fueled primarily by the economic distress affecting the two main sectors of the Jordanian population, anger at

the regime's leaders because of corruption, and the desire for constitutional change, which for many favoring those changes conceals a desire to be rid of the Hashemite royal regime, even if only gradually.

All this has so far failed to create a critical mass opposing the regime's continued existence. The Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood is among the leaders of protest in Jordan and the demand for reforms in the governmental structure. Most of the demonstrations since 2010 were initiated by this organization. Even though the organization has not called for the elimination of the monarchy, the Muslim Brotherhood constitutes the center of the monarchy's opposition. A series of tactical errors by the organization and judicious action by the regime in suppressing the demonstrations caused the Muslim Brotherhood's efforts to fail, and enabled the government to meet the challenge successfully. The Muslim Brotherhood's call for an election boycott and demonstrations drew no significant support. The regime's avoidance of the use of live ammunition in dispersing demonstrations gave it calm authority and security as it dealt effectively with pockets of opposition. In the short term, relations between the organization and the regime will be affected by the ongoing confrontation in Egypt between the central government and the Muslim Brotherhood; developments in Syria and Iraq, especially the degree of success enjoyed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in consolidating itself as a political entity in the long term; and developments in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. The failure of the parent organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, to retain power in Egypt, along with reports of murderous behavior on the part of ISIS, has lessened the Muslim Brotherhood's chances in Jordan of gaining support and becoming a significant political force there. Any attempt by ISIS to openly invade Jordan will force the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan to decide how to respond, and any response will damage its standing. On the other hand, a conflict, especially a violent one, between Israel and the Palestinians will strengthen the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, especially among ethnic Palestinians in Amman and the outlying areas.

In the parliamentary theater, the January 2013 elections, which allowed nationwide representation for the first time (albeit for only a small proportion of those elected), did not bring any significant political force to the fore. Although members of parliament tried to show independence on some issues and to differentiate themselves from the King, Abdullah II has thus far succeeded in imposing his will on the parliament. At this stage, it appears that with the help of minimal amendments to the constitution

and the election law, the regime has succeeded in preserving an election system that perpetuates the situation. Looking ten years into the future, the problem of minority rule is liable to reemerge if the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Iraq and Syria do not return to their countries of origin, and the question of their political rights is raised. On the other hand, if this question becomes an important issue, it is by no means certain that this will weaken the regime headed by the Hashemite minority, since granting citizenship to refugees from Iraq and Syria will dilute the weight of the Palestinians in the electorate. However, every country in the world now accepts Jordan's electoral system, which has so far ensured the King's control of parliament. The Jordanian royal house will have to make great efforts in these countries to convince them to ignore this system's distortion of the principle of majority rule.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A society that has experienced traumatic events that included massacre or destruction and chaos will hesitate to support another uprising that

Five to fifteen years from now, a situation in which the refugee-settler population accounts for 25-35 percent of the total population but has no civil or political rights, is liable to prove extremely problematic for maintaining the Hashemite regime in Jordan.

would be accompanied by similar events. The collective Jordanian memory has a trauma engraved on it from more than four decades ago, namely, Black September. Black September brought with it formative events in Jordanian political history, and to this day they affect both the opposition organizations and the regime in their considerations of what steps to take. Both sides seek to avoid the bloodshed that accompanied the conflict between the PLO and the regime in September 1970. This refraining from the use of force is obviously helpful to the regime, which does not have to deal with the byproducts of funeral processions of demonstrators shot dead by the security forces. The electronic media and social networks transmitting the suffering of the average Iraqi, Syrian, or Libyan undermine any desire on the part of the embittered population in Jordan to

take to the street and stay there until the desired change is achieved. In addition, several factors unique to Jordan will help the regime slow the dynamic that overthrew regimes or subverted their absolute control of

the political system elsewhere in the Arab world. The Jordanian regime obviously can exploit these factors to strengthen its standing.

Nonetheless, these factors are not enough to eclipse the regime's weak points, which will affect its stability in the future. These are revealed mostly in the macroeconomic sphere and the regime's ability to successfully solve the problems arising from what in absolute terms are huge waves of immigration, and certainly relative to the size of the absorbing population. Five to fifteen years from now, a situation in which the refugee-settler population accounts for 25-35 percent of the total population but has no civil or political rights, is liable to prove extremely problematic for maintaining the Hashemite regime in Jordan. The financial distress has affected and eroded the regime's traditional support base among the Bedouin tribes. At the same time, there are elements of stability in which it is easier for the international and regional community, including Israel, to provide assistance, since no military aid involving deployment on the ground is necessary.

Any significant weakening of the regime in Jordan will almost certainly not occur in a quick process of an attempted invasion by an extremist Sunni entity from Iraqi or Syrian territory, but in a slow process of popular incitement of an economic or religious nature, which is liable to complicate efforts by countries and international organizations to provide security aid to Jordan, leaving the latter to cope virtually on its own in combating sustained attempted internal subversion. Finding a formula that will allow legitimate criticism of faults and a desire for reform, while preventing criticism motivated by a desire to effectively destroy a royal regime that relies on a minority of the population, even if not through direct constitutional change, has been, and will always be, difficult to accomplish. The full significance of Egypt's double revolution, even if no further change occurs in the coming decade, is not yet entirely clear. It is doubtful whether Jordan could withstand governmental vicissitudes like those experienced by Egypt, and it is hard to imagine how the consequences could be confined to Jordan, as occurred in Egypt.

Israel has a clear interest in the survival of the Jordanian regime. In order to promote this objective, Israel would do well to adopt a policy that includes the following elements:

- a. Action behind the scenes to ensure continued financial aid from international agencies.

- b. Provision of economic aid equivalent to money, such as an increase in the quantity of low priced water flowing to Jordan.
- c. Government encouragement for labor intensive projects in Jordan, such as in transportation and energy infrastructure. Aid to Jordan, especially in these areas, should be moderate and judicious, due to the risk, however small at this stage, of a regime change in Jordan that could also lead to a change in relations with Israel. The Jordanian plan to build nuclear reactors for peaceful purposes should also be considered in the light of the assessment of the Hashemite monarchical regime's chances of survival in Jordan. Israel is likely to be an importer of electricity produced in Jordan, but this should be made contingent on the use of bitumen and oil, of which Jordan apparently has an abundant supply, and for whose use Jordan has already signed initial contracts.
- d. Continuation of security aid.
- e. As much consideration as possible for Jordan's concerns in the context of Israel's relations with the Palestinians.

Note

- 1 Amos Yadlin and Avner Golov, *Regime Stability in the Middle East: An Analytical Model to Assess the Possibility of Regime Change*, Memorandum 131 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2013).

Immortal Monarchies? Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and the Arab Spring

Yoel Guzansky

Background

On March 9, 2012, over 100,000 people (one fifth of Bahrain's citizens) took to the streets.¹ In relative terms, this is a much larger crowd than the number of people who demonstrated in the streets of Egypt before the overthrow of Mubarak. The House of Khalifa, however, did not fall. Moreover, while the regional uprisings shook the republics, not one monarchy was toppled. In Qatar, the world's richest country (in terms of per capita GDP), people had no reason to go into the streets. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), what remained of civil society was suppressed with a heavy hand. In Oman, the unrest – which in any case was limited – dissipated, and in Saudi Arabia, the protest was concentrated in the Shiite area and was channeled to the social networks. The ongoing protests in Kuwait, while not insignificant and with all its dangers, reflect a long tradition of civil activism and political protest. Only in Bahrain was there unrest on a large scale, fed by sectarian discrimination. To date, however, military intervention by Saudi Arabia and UAE has put an end to the emergency situation, even if it did not stop the unrest itself.

This article reviews the pressure faced by the royal families in the Gulf, and assesses their ability to withstand it. The main contention is that the relative stability of these states – which is not synonymous with immunity – is better explained through their economic capabilities, and to a lesser extent by cultural and religious factors, as well as factors pertaining to the character of their particular governmental system. Consequently, despite their oil-based wealth, given the range of pressures confronting them, the

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relative stability of several of the Gulf monarchies – especially Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait – is liable to be put to the test in the coming years.

Society versus State

Under the unwritten social contract in these rentier states, the regimes, which enjoy revenues from natural resources, grant goods and services to their citizens and do not impose any taxes whatsoever on them, but also grant them no political rights. Relations between society and state therefore remain subject to a principle in which the ruler takes care of his subjects, who agree not to take part in the government and consent to curtailed freedom of speech. The following statement about this dynamic is attributed to Saudi Arabian King Abdullah:

My people and I know very well what the deal is: they keep their hands off politics and accept my family as rulers, may Allah's blessing be upon them, and we take care of all their material and spiritual needs. All the petrodollars that the United States in its great generosity has paid me over the years for my oil can supply many needs: free education; medical treatment; generous housing subsidies, food, and fuel; and a guaranteed government job after they finish their studies, with a high salary and no need to bear any responsibility.²

The leaders of the Gulf states have distributed billions of dollars since the start of the upheaval in the Arab world precisely for this reason, and in effect are bribing their subjects. In return, they receive, or do not require at all, internal legitimacy for their rule. Arrangements of this type guarantee comfort and prosperity for the population and stability and order for the regimes, as long as the state manages to channel its oil profits into satisfying its people's needs. By the nature of the arrangement, any future disturbance to it could well prompt the people to ask for political rights that thus far have been denied them.

Despite economic and other advantages, several royal families have realized the need to begin implementing gradual changes in the existing political order. For example, a few days before the elections for the local councils (half of whose members are appointed to their positions and responsible for marginal matters only), Saudi King Abdullah granted women the right to vote and be elected in the next local elections, scheduled for 2015. He also decided that women would enter Majlis al-Shura, an exclusive institution founded in 1993, which lacks the authority to criticize

the government or enact laws, and in January 2013 published an order stating that 30 women would join the forum (out of 150 members).³ He remains determined, however, not to hold even partial elections for this council, whose members are appointed by him.

These measures are primarily cosmetic, but they nevertheless signal, both internally and externally, that the monarchs are willing to go a considerable distance in order to adapt to, and even anticipate, the rapid changes occurring in the region. The leaders of the countries themselves are not sure whether, when, and in what way the Arab upheaval will hit the Gulf in full force. For this reason, they are spending enormous sums for the purpose of taking the sting out of any potential popular uprising. Anxiety about more serious unrest in the future is not completely unjustified, since several of the elements behind the uprisings in other places, including the sectarian factor, are also present in the Gulf.

Sectarian Spring

The popular uprising in Bahrain erupted shortly after the revolutions began in Tunisia and Egypt, but media interest faded. Nonetheless, low-keyed protest by the Shiite majority (which constitutes some 70 percent of the population) against the Sunni royal family continues steadily. The demonstrations take place regularly, usually in Shiite villages outside the capital city of Manama, and not infrequently escalate into severe violence.

The Iranian revolution had no substantive impact on the tiny island country, due in part to the fact that the Shiites living in Bahrain are politically far from a homogenous group. Some are of Arab origin, while others identify mainly with the religious establishment in Najaf and not Qom. The House of Khalifa, however, frequently uses the Iranian threat and allegation of a “Shiite plot” in order to postpone substantial governmental reforms. Accusing Iran of attempts to destabilize the country, for example, helps the royal family obtain support and patronage from Saudi Arabia, which also fears Iranian influence over the Shiite population in its territory and the possible consequences of the fall of a Sunni royal house in the Gulf. For its part, the Shiite community accuses the Khalifas of practicing a system of political apartheid and systematic discrimination. Demands by the opposition (which is divided by internal disputes) include a constitutional monarchy, fair elections, separation of powers, and an equal distribution of resources.⁴

Bahrain's geographical proximity to Iran and its delicate ethnic balance have made it an attractive target for Iranian involvement. Difficult periods of tension between Iran and Bahrain since the Islamic Revolution, mainly concerning Tehran's support for opposition Shiite organizations, attempted subversion, and territorial demands, have regularly fueled suspicion about Iran's intentions. Following the violent events in Bahrain in the spring of 2011, armed forces from Saudi Arabia and UAE were sent into Bahrain (Kuwait sent ships to secure Bahraini ports) under the flag of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Some of these forces have remained on the island in order to maintain the tiny monarchy's stability.

Iran continues to attack the Saudi Arabian "occupation," and to undermine both Bahrain's sovereignty and the legitimacy of the "national dialogue." The Khalifa royal family accuses Iran of sending terrorist groups to attack strategic sites on the island, including the King Fahd Causeway connecting Saudi Arabia to Bahrain, and the Saudi Arabian embassy in Bahrain.⁵ In any case, instability in Bahrain has again highlighted the depth of the Sunni-Shiite and Arab-Iranian conflicts and their key role on both sides of the Gulf. This fear of Iran has led the Bahrain royal house to grant citizenship to as many Sunnis as possible (even among the Syrian refugees) in an attempt to even the balance between the two communities in Bahrain.⁶ The West is also concerned that free elections in Bahrain will produce a pro-Iranian

parliament that will oppose the presence of United States military forces on the island and will support Iran's policy. This explains the US administration's relatively mild response to the regime's repressive measures.

Riyadh was concerned that the protest in Bahrain could spread into eastern Saudi Arabia, where the kingdom's Shiite minority is concentrated and where violent incidents have occurred since the spring of 2011. The Shiites remain a security problem for Saudi Arabia, not only because of their geographical proximity and the ideological affinity of some to Iran, but because they are located near the world's largest oil reserves. While still crown prince, King

Abdullah took a number of measures to ease the tension with the Shiite minority, including the announcement of a "national dialogue," and even permitted the entry of a number (six) of Shiite dignitaries into the Majlis

Spouting the narrative in which the Shiites are a fifth column helps the Saudi royal house maintain a large degree of legitimacy and becomes an accepted way of uniting ranks and preventing internal criticism.

al-Shura. The Saudi Arabian royal house, however, did not go so far as to recognize the Shia role in Islam, and refrained from granting the Shiites equal rights. The result is that the basic discrimination against the Shiite population in the kingdom remains unchanged, and surfaces from time to time.

The eastern district remains unsettled, despite the royal house's attempts to use force and economic inducements to keep it calm. The protest movement, which is made up entirely of young people, was invigorated when Saudi Arabian forces entered Bahrain. It held mass demonstrations in which several were killed and hundreds were arrested and imprisoned, many without trial. The funerals of those killed became a show of force not seen in the district since the Islamic Revolution.

Al-Alam, the Iranian Arabic television channel popular among the Shiites in Saudi Arabia, frequently calls for demonstrations, heightening Saudi fears about Iran's intention to destabilize the kingdom. In response to the unrest, the Saudi Arabian authorities declared they would use an "iron fist" to break the protest, and accused "foreign hands" – a code name for Iranian involvement – of exacerbating the tension. Spouting the narrative in which the Shiites are a fifth column helps the royal house maintain a large degree of legitimacy – an accepted way of uniting its ranks and preventing internal criticism.⁷ It is possible that improving the Shiite community's living conditions and arriving at something like a social covenant might help the House of Saud, because other opposition groups, encouraged by the Shiite struggle, are liable to escalate their own protest. The two million Shiites in Saudi Arabia (about 10 percent of the population) have never threatened the kingdom's stability. Continued unrest, however, is liable to lead some of them to become more active and more violent.

Various Manifestations of Protest

The protest in the Gulf is naturally expressed in different ways, depending on the circumstances and the pressures in each country: full scale street riots in the relatively poor Gulf states, Bahrain and Oman; and mostly moderate intellectual opposition via the internet in the wealthier countries, such as UAE and Saudi Arabia. In all these instances, however, the regimes have responded with strong repressive measures, thereby undermining their legitimacy. In some cases, the regimes used mercenaries, carried out preventive arrests, interfered with the legal systems, and interfered in civil society activities. The authorities also resorted to the Quran to justify the ban on protests and the demand that the people obey their leaders. Only

Qatar has so far managed to avoid the use of repression, mostly due to the extreme wealth enjoyed by its 250,000 citizens, and possibly also as a result of its different stance amidst the regional turmoil (i.e., actively supporting extremists in many countries undergoing unrest).

The Gulf monarchies have established police states and sophisticated censorship methods. In that, they do not differ from other Arab regimes. They rely on some degree of indifference on the part of the international community to their systematic violation of human rights for the purpose of obtaining guaranteed regional stability (it is estimated that there are thousands, if not more, of political prisoners in those countries). Reality shows a high percentage of unemployment in the Gulf states. There are concentrations of poverty and dwindling resources, and countries have largely failed in their attempt to diversify their economies in order to reduce their dependence on oil. Furthermore, there is a modern, well-networked and better educated population of young people unwilling to live any longer by the old rules. These young people openly express their repudiation of the status quo, mostly online, and in many cases feel solidarity with the protest movement in the Arab street.

The Key to the Stability of the Monarchies

The Gulf monarchies present favorably in an examination of the situation in the Arab world, as they provide their people with stability and welfare. In comparison to Assad and Qaddafi, even the worst of the Gulf regimes “look good” (though they may present as less attractive if some of the new Arab Spring regimes are successful in the long term). The failure of the revolutions to meet the popular expectations, improve the standard of living, and increase citizens’ participation in the political process has muted the momentum of the Arab Spring, and has therefore removed, if only temporarily, the threat of political upheaval to the Arab monarchies in the Persian Gulf.

The Gulf states are also adept at demonizing their enemies by labeling them a fifth column receiving foreign support, or calling them Islamic extremists and terrorists. This strategy enables the rulers to appear to most of their people and the international observers as supporters of the status quo, and therefore as preferable to any unknown and risky alternative. Despite penetration of the population by the forces of progress and better communication between people, along with better access to education, the Gulf elites remain effective at cooption, and more than once

have marshaled opposing forces under the regime's banner. The future opposition movements, however, are liable to prove a more formidable obstacle. The growing internal pressures (including dwindling resources, soaring unemployment, and controversial subsidies), combined with the rise of new forces not readily subject to cooption (social networks and satellite television), are likely to make many in the Gulf feel strong enough to openly criticize their rulers. The uncontrolled exposure of people to foreign media through the internet and satellite TV is especially difficult for regimes like the Saudi royal house, whose conservative character is essential to its stability.

The Gulf monarchies also enjoy support from foreign powers as a result of their strategic geopolitical positioning. The US Fifth Fleet is stationed in Bahrain, and the US Central Command sits in Qatar. The Gulf monarchies are among the world's leading producers of oil and gas, and their territory contains the largest proven oil and gas reserves. The price of instability in the Persian Gulf for the West is therefore far higher than the price of regime changes in Tunisia or Yemen, or even Libya and Syria. The result is that continued repression of the Shiites draws only a weak response from Washington and the West. For the autocratic rulers in the Gulf, the formation of an internal and external coalition of support through the use of oil revenues reduces the cost of repression and the chances of international opposition.⁸ In this context, several of the Gulf states are exploiting their connections in the global energy market to create a web of international connections for the purpose of increasing the number of international companies and countries with an interest in maintaining their stability in the long term.

Oil money is central, but it does not tell the whole story. The monarchies are indeed perceived as a more natural and legitimate form of government in the Arabian Peninsula.⁹ The societies in the Gulf are to a large extent tribal in nature, which makes it easier for the rulers to maintain contact with their subjects. In Saudi Arabia, this is done through the Majlis – tribal councils. A representative of the royal family usually takes part in tribal conferences of this kind, through which people convey their requests. As a rule, an individual's access to the ruler is greater than in a non-tribal society.¹⁰ In general, in a tribal monarchy, loyalty is first of all to the king and the royal family, and only afterwards to the nation state. Some of the monarchies also maintain a distance from the political theater, which contributes to their legitimacy. For example, Sultan Qaboos of Oman can fire one of his

ministers in response to public criticism (in contrast to the Saudi Arabia, where the ruling family holds the majority of important positions). For this reason, the monarchy has become a synonym for stability, and in countries that have undergone upheaval, such as Libya, there is a lively discussion of the possibility of making the country a (constitutional) monarchy.¹¹

The tribal character of societies in the Gulf, the dynastic tradition, and the religious legitimacy claimed by several of the regimes (in the case of Saudi Arabia, it is “custodian of the Holy Places”) make it easier for the royal families to hold the reins of government, even if it does not guarantee it. The size of some of the families and their presence in all spheres of life also facilitate the preservation of stability (although the size of the Saudi Arabian royal family involves many dozens of princes in the struggle for leadership, which also has a negative effect on royal succession and governmental stability).¹² In addition, religious leaders, a potential source of criticism, have been co-opted and operate under the sponsorship of, and subordinate to, the king. The religious establishment serves the state and gives religious legitimacy to its leader. The result is that a religious monarchy finds it easier to cope with radical Islam than a secular republic.

Monarchs thus have a certain advantage in comparison with republics, because they can more easily wrap themselves in Muslim and tribal tradition.¹³ The royal houses themselves, however, are not confident about the continuation of their rule. For this reason, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have spent billions on reforms (from cash grants and wage hikes to development projects and job creation). The logic is simple: people with economic security do not revolt, and those who do revolt can be effectively condemned. Libya can be cited as an example, in which Qaddafi was driven from power, despite the oil riches he enjoyed, perhaps because he did not invest his petrodollars in appeasing sectors that constituted potential opposition.¹⁴ In addition, not all monarchies are oil-rich. Bahrain has exhausted its oil reserves, and Oman’s oil production is relatively modest (about 900,000 barrels of oil per day). However, the other monarchies have come to their aid. It is possible that without the massive assistance flowing to Jordan, in part from the Gulf states, the regime there would have difficulty surviving economically.¹⁵

Conclusion

In view of the continued regional upheaval, the question of the viability of the monarchical regimes remains timely. Even if predictions about the

stability of regimes are difficult, perhaps impossible to make, it can be stated that the greatest threat to the stability of the Arab regimes in the Gulf is disruption of the rentier arrangements, in part by a steep and sustained drop in oil prices. The Gulf monarchies have withstood the convulsion mainly because most of them float on a sea of wealth that enables them (to some extent) to buy off their internal opponents and win external support. Indeed, a monarchical character did not help several Arab monarchies – Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya – survive the second half of the twentieth century.

The Arab monarchies in the Gulf are therefore not exceptions because they are monarchies. They enjoy a geopolitical treasure that earns them the “loyalty” of their people and the strategic attention of external forces. The monarchies have stored substantial reserves for a rainy day (Saudi Arabia’s reserves are estimated at \$700 billion), but a substantial and sustained drop in oil prices (which could result from a significant flow of American oil into the markets, for example), without material reforms in the subsidies granted to subjects, will make it difficult for them to meet the needs of the growing population, keep the promises made since 2011, and preserve their current political structure in the long term.

At first glance, the Gulf principalities appear stable, at least in comparison with the region as a whole. By utilizing a variety of internal and external survival strategies, the regimes in power, which were already labeled anachronisms in the second half of the preceding century, have managed more or less to maintain their stability. The political arrangements behind these autocratic states, however, are coming under growing pressure, with considerable sections of the population challenging the ruling elites. A balanced policy composed on the one hand of willingness on the part of sultans and emirs to open the political system in response to what the times require, and on the other hand the public’s willingness to settle for half of its aspirations, can aid the monarchies in their quest for survival.

The Gulf monarchies have so far demonstrated their ability to weather the winds of change that brought about the upheaval in the region. Except for Bahrain, where the ethnically motivated unrest refuses to fade, the Gulf monarchies have so far not had to face significant threats to their stability, and have not found it difficult to handle the isolated protests in their territory with a combination of repression and benefits. The past four years have proven again that oil wealth remains an effective tool for maintaining stability.

Notes

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Nuclear Negotiations Revisited: Challenges and Prospects toward a Final Deal with Iran

Matej Drotar

Strategic Overview

The deal on Iran's nuclear program reached by the P5+1 and Iran in Geneva in November 2013 was never meant to reflect cooperation based on mutual trust, but was rather almost a unilateral good will gesture by the West comprising strict verification measures that will be guaranteed by the IAEA. At the same time, the interim deal is regarded by some as probably the most visible effort on the matter undertaken through a diplomatic campaign since President Obama took office. The so-called Joint Plan of Action that was adopted in November 2013 and went into effect in January 2014 was intended to create the right atmosphere for halting Iran's efforts to gain nuclear weapons. No sooner was the deal sealed, however, than counter arguments against it began to be sounded. Among the most hawkish were those claiming that continued enrichment should not be permitted in any agreement, and that only harsh sanctions and the eventual dismantlement of Iran's nuclear infrastructure would bring peace for those who are most directly involved, particularly the West and its ally Israel. Prime Minister Netanyahu even reiterated that such a bad deal might lead to war and advocated tightening sanctions, not relaxing them.¹

More broadly, the roots of the well-publicized attempt toward another US-Iranian détente lie in the current state of affairs of the broader Middle East milieu. Put differently, Iran's ongoing quest for nuclear weapons and its grim past of breaching the rules concerning its nuclear program is not

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the only concern. Several other themes must be taken into consideration for a more comprehensive picture. Among the most immediate are the civil war in Syria, the Israeli-Palestinian political process, sectarian insurgency in Iraq, and last but not least the (in)stability of Afghanistan post-2014. Indeed, Afghanistan with its rampant corruption and inability to sustain the Afghan National Security Forces without foreign subsidies, provided mainly by the US Congress, might sooner or later be easy prey for extremist groups, with the Taliban in their lead.

Iran's strategic geopolitical position is very important despite the fact that its ideological sovereignty as an Islamic republic is challenged by religious and ethno-tribal incongruence.² Shaky and unreliable prospects of such a regime notwithstanding, a post-Ahmadinejad Iran might be a viable prospective partner for cooperation with the second Obama administration. Iran matters in all the aforementioned Middle Eastern issues, and the Obama policy in the region is aimed to rebalance the US regional axis toward the Persians, and the Shiites in general, offsetting the US previous geopolitical dependency on Saudi Arabia.³ Washington, it seems, is aware of the momentum the Rouhani presidency has provided, and will therefore be reluctant not to benefit from a unique chance for the long-awaited and authentic détente with Tehran. The road to Geneva is the first result of the diplomatic endeavor undertaken by the sides.

Today, with the benefit of hindsight, the time is ripe to assess the results of the interim deal thus far, debate what constitute reasonable expectations for the future, and propose recommendations for a more comprehensive final agreement.

Remaining Gaps

According to one proverbial saying, diplomacy is considered the art of the possible. Yet while the Joint Plan of Action clearly falls within the scope of such a definition, sometimes even the most noble diplomatic effort may not be sufficient. Moreover, it may easily become ground for overblown – if not frustrated – expectations. Such was the case of the interim deal, and in a sense this was clear from the outset, especially given that the Islamic Republic has proved to be an arch-foe of the West rather than a reliable partner. The interim deal is therefore merely a provisional, if courageous, step that has yet to prove its added value.

Of much concern, for instance, is a gap between what Iran deems it is fully entitled to and what the other side regards as having been successfully

addressed in the Joint Plan of Action – the country’s right to enrich uranium. While UN Security Council Resolution 1696 of 2006 clearly demands that Iran suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities,⁴ the interim deal omits all mention of the Iranian right to enrich, thus implicitly acknowledging it. What one might regard as an eloquent and useful play of words of diplomatic parlance might be interpreted in a totally different fashion by the other side, whose adoption of such logic as an operative mindset might be very dangerous. The point was underscored sharply by Senator Robert Menendez, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, during his introductory remarks at the February 4, 2014 committee hearing on the Iranian nuclear program.⁵

What also merits consideration is the clause about 20 percent enrichment. The current deal allows Iran to retain half of the existing stockpile of uranium enriched to that level for fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor.⁶ According to the White House “Summary,” Iran committed to complete the reduction of half of its stockpile of near-20 percent UF₆ in three months, and complete the conversion of the rest of that material to oxide in six months.⁷ The amount of nuclear material that remained in the form of UF₆ enriched up to 20 percent U-235 on January 20, 2014 constituted some 209.1 kilograms. As of March 15, 2014 Iran reduced 74.6 kilograms of UF₆ enriched up to 20 percent U-235 down to an enrichment level of no more than 5 percent U-235 at the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant.⁸ However, a generous time span of six months means that Iran will still keep possession of some amount of near-20 percent enriched uranium that will remain in various oxide forms.

Another area that was not spelled out explicitly in the interim deal, let alone resolved for good, is Iran’s centrifuge R&D program. Not only is Iran able to replace damaged centrifuges at will during the six month period, but it can also continue its development of the IR-2m centrifuges at the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant in Natanz. Moreover, it can also enrich uranium in a production-scale cascade of 164 IR-2m centrifuges. Once the enriched uranium product is mixed with the waste, obtaining natural uranium, no enriched uranium is deposited into the product tanks. Such a set-up is in accordance with the interim deal. Since the IAEA only has access to the product tank or the natural uranium and does not see the enrichments measurements, it might be easy for Iran to hide results of its progress. Thus, by July 20, when the interim deal reaches its operative deadline, Iran might be likely to be far better positioned either to deploy reliable IR-2m

centrifuges on a mass scale in the enrichment plants at Natanz or to use them in its underground enrichment facility in Fordow.⁹

The six month period has also given Iran precious time, thus giving it an opportunity to advance in the fields where it yet has what to perfect and pause in those where it has already achieved proficiency. Put differently, the current deal does not mandate dismantlement of the centrifuges, an area in which Iran achieved significant success in the past. Moreover, the interim deal does not explicitly address military delivery means, a field necessary for a country to make its nuclear warheads deliverable. Today, Iran and its various prototypes of advanced Shehab ballistic missiles pose a significant threat to Israel. The Shehab 4 and Shehab 5 series under development are especially disturbing since their theoretical range is allegedly approximately 2,000 kilometers, thus capable of reaching even the southernmost parts of Europe. None of these capabilities has proved to be operational so far, and might therefore be only official aspirations or bravado. Yet the US intelligence community has indicated that Iran will likely continue development of intermediate range and even intercontinental ballistic missile systems by initially testing them as space launch vehicle programs.¹⁰

Even a short list of measures for a final deal should include at least the following items. First, the P5+1 should consider close cooperation with Israel and start pondering the possibility that despite efforts, there will be no final deal at all. Moreover, given that creating reliable communication channels is always a sine qua non for further developments, the US should consider being an intermediary between Jerusalem and Tehran and offering Israel a confidence inspiring environment. Of great importance are also strict verification measures accompanied by official re-declarations that Iran will never seek nuclear weapons. Such declarations should be re-stipulated in official documents and voiced by ayatollahs and executive officials, as well as representatives of the Revolutionary Guards. In any event, a final deal should necessarily address the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program. Iran should have to adhere to the requirements of the Additional Protocol and allow access to the Parchin military complex, and any final deal should focus on making the heavy reactor in Arak a light water reactor that cannot be used for military purposes. Iran should embrace strict limitation of the stockpiles of enriched uranium to a level and quantity that is insufficient for creating a nuclear device. Another crucial issue is dismantlement of the uranium enrichment facility near Qom. Last

but not least, the negotiating process should end with presentation of the bill to the UN Security Council where it can be passed under Chapter VII as a binding resolution.

Recommendations

Even a cursory look at the above list gives an impression that adopting the requisite measures will not be an easy task. What follows is a proposal for a final deal that can prove its viability and long term reliability.

First, Iran's ability to deliver nuclear warheads via ballistic missiles should be significantly curtailed, thus observing the stipulations of UNSC Resolution 1929 on Iran in that regard.¹¹ Furthermore, a clear-cut definition of a nuclear capable ballistic missile should be updated and implemented in a final deal. Today, the demarcation between missiles that are nuclear-capable and those that are not is imprecise. In general, the ability of a missile to deliver a nuclear warhead depends on the size and weight of the weapon's physics package, which is determined in large part by the technological sophistication of the nuclear weapon design, and the power of the missile's engine in propelling the warhead a sufficient distance. Such a definition is rather vague. According to the Missile Technology Control Regime, all ballistic missiles with the capability of delivering a 500-kilogram payload 300 kilometers or more are considered nuclear capable.¹² Such might be the red line for Iran in the final deal. Iran should also subscribe to the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation. The charge that none of Iran's key Arab neighbors have yet subscribed to the Code is irrelevant, since none of these neighbors are developing a clandestine nuclear program. According to one of the most famous offensive realism dictums about relative gains, Iran will probably never voluntarily cease its ambition to be militarily more powerful than its allegedly threatening neighbors. But given its unfortunate nuclear program track record and constant enhancement of ballistic missiles, a final deal should thoroughly address the issue of delivery mechanisms.

A comprehensive set of concerns about the so called Possible Military Dimensions of the Iranian Nuclear Program has been stressed in an annex of the November 2011 Report by the Director General of the IAEA. The issues addressed in the Annex remain the core elements of concern vis-à-vis the Iranian nuclear program, primarily its clandestine military aspects.¹³ Especially disturbing is the part of the Annex concerning integration of a nuclear device into a missile delivery vehicle. The so called Project 111

appears to have consisted of a structured and comprehensive program of engineering studies to examine how to integrate a new spherical payload into the existing payload chamber that would be mounted into the Shehab 3 missiles.¹⁴ The Shehab 3 series represents the most advanced operative Iranian ballistic rockets capable of reaching Israel so far. Thus, an Iran possessing the technology to use nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles at the same time is of national concern to Israel, and this fact should be reflected in a final deal.

A second crucial area where Iran must relax its inflexible positions comprises its ongoing activities at the Parchin military site. Parchin represents a key outstanding issue to the IAEA in resolving its concerns about Iran's past and possibly ongoing nuclear weapons work and military fuel cycle activities. To be more precise, Iran should allow far broader access to the military complex to IAEA inspectors and stop permanent reconstruction of the site in an apparent effort to disguise its past activities related to high explosive tests.¹⁵ In fact, there has been a lot of clean-up there to cover up such activities.¹⁶ Moreover, under no circumstances are Iran's ongoing efforts to prevent the IAEA from inspecting the site legally justifiable. Once the IAEA is prevented from inspecting the sites, the adoption of a final agreement might be seriously jeopardized. Any thinkable comprehensive agreement that would be tolerable for Israel should therefore ask for broader Iranian cooperation and more IAEA resolve in addressing the Parchin issue.

Third, production of plutonium should be notably reduced in the Arak heavy water reactor near Tehran, and no further installations should be built on the site. According to Iran the reactor is only intended to produce isotopes for cancer and other medical treatments. The truth is that under ideal conditions its annual production of plutonium can even exceed the amount necessary for one atomic bomb. Iran has pledged to cooperate on the Arak issue, and the cooperation between Iran and the six main powers has already achieved certain results, such as halting the construction work on the site.¹⁷ Another promising aspect might be the switch from enriched uranium fuel to natural uranium fuel. While differences remain on the necessary design changes, the two sides' positions on this issue have begun to converge.¹⁸ But given that the final deal aims, at least officially, to produce long term and tangible results, measures should be adopted that would secure that the Arak power capacity be lowered, its plutonium production be cut to less than one kilogram a year, and further construction enhancements be stopped for good. Such measures, once adopted, can

significantly diminish Iran's breakout capacity to use plutonium as weapons-grade material in the future.

Fourth, a final deal should be taken for a vote in the UN Security Council and adopted there under Chapter VII as legally binding. Some important UNSC resolutions concerning the Iranian nuclear program, such as Resolutions 1696, 1737, 1747, 1803, 1835, and 1929, were all adopted. Given the remarkable track record of relatively smooth adoption with only a small number of countries voting either against or abstaining from the vote, the momentum should not be underestimated by those who draft resolutions; quite to the contrary, the fact that all the permanent members have been unanimous in that regard lends a certain hope. Put differently, the interim agreement has demonstrated that the US and Iran are capable of holding sustained and effective high level talks and establishing an ambitious timeline for resolving the dispute as a whole.¹⁹ Such a hope should be translated into a resolved stance with one clear objective in mind – to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons. It is incumbent on the actors to learn from the past and push for as acceptable an outcome for Israel and the West as possible.

Fifth, the US and its allies should be prepared for a Plan B if the talks fail. In such a grim scenario, the international community with the US in the lead should consider drafting more severe sanctions that would, if needed, wreak havoc on the Iranian economy and its political representation. The Obama administration should already start canvassing the US Congress, especially in its lower chamber, where it lacks a majority, and must prepare for a prolongation of the talks at best or an Iranian *volte face* in crucial matters at worst.

If the latter prevails, there is a last resort option that has not been excluded either by the US or Israel. Yet a military attack, either under US or Israeli auspices, bears certain risks that cannot be underestimated.²⁰ First of all, a profound assessment of the extent of damage should be done by the US and Israeli intelligence services. That there would be a response by Iran is a matter of course; the nature of the possible response should be addressed. Provided that the talks do not deliver and a subsequent military intervention fails, the US and Israel should be prepared for waging a protracted proxy war that would imperil allies of the US and Israel. Whether the risk is worth taking deserves further analysis that goes beyond the scope of this article.

Strategic Forecast

The abovementioned recommendations represent critical measures that must be tackled when drafting a final deal. The delicacy of the issue and various interests of the protagonists will, however, have serious impact on the final wording of a more comprehensive agreement. Whereas it might be true that the supreme goal of the six powers during negotiations is preventing Iran from gaining nuclear weapons, it is not their only goal. The EU, for one, is pursuing its own agenda, namely, to achieve regional stability and engage Iran more in the security of the Middle East. Brussels believes that few of the numerous security issues that blight the region can be solved without such a key stakeholder.²¹ Combating al-Qaeda and insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan as a joint venture of the West and Iran might be the game changer of the talks. Such a trade-off might well serve as a base for a broader package and subsequently for a more tolerant deal for Iran. Moreover, the EU looks forward to normalization of economic relations with Iran. In order to avoid the collapse of energy markets and to diversify its energy dependency on Russia, especially after the Crimean crisis, Brussels will look for other suppliers; Iran might be one of them. Nowadays, Iran still suffers from US crippling sanctions imposed on the regime in the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act in 2010,²² as well as from Europe's oil embargo. Iran will therefore surely try to ask for at least more tangible relief against its energy sector in a final deal.

It is highly likely that a final deal will accept the idea of Iran's "inalienable" right to enrich uranium, even if the level of such enrichment is kept to a minimum, in exchange for Iran's help in stabilizing the region. As for ballistic rockets and their use as nuclear missiles, Iran will be very reluctant to limit this dimension of its existing capacity. Such limits, if adopted, would significantly curtail its conventional military capacity. The missile problem will therefore not be closed during the talks. More promising is the Arak issue and adoption of a final deal under Chapter VII in the UN Security Council. Prospects for further enhancement in that regard might give at least some hope. Achieving some progress in certain issues notwithstanding, a final deal that would circumvent any of the recommendations in significant fashion would be a bad deal for Israel.

Provided that the negotiating sides will finally come to terms and sign the deal, there is still a serious risk that the US Congress might block it. If this happens, the EU will probably try to salvage diplomacy and the momentum

of the talks. Put differently, the EU will give President Obama enough time to canvass the House of Representatives where it lacks a majority at the moment, or wait until a new House is convened in November. The Europeans also have enormous interest in keeping the TTIP agreement with the US alive. Thus, the EU will probably not act unilaterally, and will coordinate the next phase of the talks with the US.

There too, some might argue that it will be enormously difficult to imagine the current Iranian regime focusing on something else other than the nuclear issue at the moment, especially due to the persistent grip of potential hardliners from the Majlis on some current burning issues in Iran, particularly political freedom. Of special interest is also Iran's patronage in Assad's Syria, where according to various UNTSO reports thousands of well-motivated and Iran-financed mujahidin soldiers fight for the regime. Such a state of affairs does not boost Iranian credibility as a reliable partner, and any final agreement should bear that in mind. Nonetheless, this will probably not prevent the negotiating sides from signing a final deal.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to underscore that the interim deal adopted by the six world powers and Iran about the Iranian nuclear program is far from an ideal agreement. Quite to the contrary, a lot of remaining gaps, if not intentional loopholes, as well as a lack of resolve punctuate it. An Iran under ayatollahs with hegemonic ambitions should never be trusted, and the West along with Israel should stay alert and ask for more in a final deal. Indeed, negotiations now should encompass comprehensive and visible red lines based on the recommendations provided in the article. There will be no place for any naivete in a final agreement. Its adoption, if it occurs at all, will very probably be marked by difficult and lengthy negotiations, back-channelling, tactical maneuvers, and concessions on both sides. Israel should be given assurances that any concessions adopted by the West will never imperil its security or endanger it in any fashion. Iran should never become a nuclear threshold power. To achieve this objective, enormous resolve and political will should be showed.

Coming to terms with Iran over its controversial nuclear program is a risky business. That any such endeavor always comes at price hardly needs saying. The West should, nonetheless, incur the risk and guarantee for once and all that nuclear weapons in the hands of ayatollahs and in Israel's proximity is an unacceptable danger that will never be tolerated.

The Joint Plan of Action aimed to pave the right path in order to reach that goal. Diplomacy, yet again, was given a chance. But at the end of the day, unless Iran abandons its military nuclear ambitions, the lack of resolve present in the interim deal will very probably prove to no avail.

A long term strategic perspective must frame such a crucial issue. Any final agreement must bear that in mind, and the West should always be prepared to adjust its calculus accordingly.

Notes

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The Ukrainian Crisis and the Middle East

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Introduction

The ongoing Ukrainian crisis grew out of the upheavals in Ukraine and quickly became a major confrontation in the international arena, involving all the major powers. Months following the onset of the crisis, the implications of the chapter remain at the center of the international agenda and threaten global stability. More than 1200 casualties among the Ukrainian civilian population have been reported by the UN, along with the 298 civilians of various countries killed in the crash of the Malaysian aircraft on July 17, 2014, some 40 km west of the border with Russia. From Moscow's perspective, its involvement in the crisis began as a response to a challenge issued by the West, especially the United States, seeking to harm Russia's geopolitical goals, marginalize its position in the former Soviet republics, and obstruct its superpower aspirations.

Behind this conflict of interests lies a history of Russian-Western friction,¹ driven, especially since Vladimir Putin's rise to power, by Russia's desire to restore its image as a superpower. To promote this agenda, Russia's leadership has adopted an assertive foreign policy and authoritarian domestic line, based on the belief that this will ensure Russia's survival in face of the growing internal social and economic instability on the one hand, and the gamut of external challenges threatening Russia's territorial integrity and security on the other. Russia views the West as responsible in part for the latter: the West is seen as exerting pressure for NATO's eastward expansion. This is presented as evidence of the West's deliberate

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global plan designed to refashion the world order in a form convenient to the West, a plan executed through “the color revolutions.”² The current Russian response strives to establish a renewed unification of the former Soviet states that would also include some new neighboring countries in Asia and the Middle East, to be called the Eurasian Union. In the context of these processes, the Middle East assumes an increasingly important role as another front in the conflict. This has important implications for the region and for Israel’s interests.

This analysis points at processes occurring in the international arena as a result of the crisis in Ukraine and suggests what the implications of this crisis are for the Middle East in general and Israel in particular. It focuses on Russia’s considerations and policy on the crisis and their greater connection to Middle Eastern affairs.

The Ukrainian Crisis

The current Ukrainian crisis grew out of the public protests in the country resulting from the refusal of Viktor Yanukovich’s government to join the Eastern Partnership framework of cooperation with the EU along with four other countries in December 2013.³ The fairly violent demonstrations

continued steadily for some four months until the pro-Russian Yanukovich was ousted on February 22, 2014 and a temporary leadership was formed, with Alexander Turchinov as acting President and Arseniy Yatsenyuk as Prime Minister. Elections were held on May 25, 2014, and Petro Poroshenko became President.

Russia, feeling threatened by the developments in Ukraine and seeing them as part of a Western plot to damage Russian interests, felt it had to respond. Its response was meant to prevent deterioration in Russia’s international status and harm to its vital interests, which would become harder to achieve without Ukraine’s participation in Moscow’s geopolitical project.⁴ The Russian response involved a series of fairly effective and rapid steps, including

the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, without overt use of force, and a similar initiation of destabilizing measures in regions with large Russian-speaking populations in eastern and southern Ukraine where separatists –

Russia’s efforts to establish linkage between East European issues and the Middle East is presumably in order to create a locus of tension in the Middle East analogous to the one in Eastern Europe, and thereby present it as another front in the same global power struggle.



Areas of Instability in Eastern Ukraine

with Russia's covert aid – started violent protests that could well deteriorate into an actual civil war. At the same time, Russia massed troops on its border with Ukraine, broadcasting its willingness to engage in military intervention to seize control of separatist and other regions, as needed.

Russia's aim in these moves was to create enough pressure to achieve a negotiated solution. At the core of this solution was restoring Ukraine – striving to assimilate into the West – to the circle of Russian influence, preferably having the country join Russia's geopolitical program or at least keeping it from joining Western associations, i.e., the European Union and NATO. In Russia's eyes, Ukraine's conduct during the Euromaidan upheaval and afterwards was made possibly only thanks to sweeping Western support.

As of the summer of 2014, the Ukrainian crisis, which in practice is a full-fledged global conflict between the Russian Federation and the West, is still at its peak, despite a series of conciliatory steps, such as Russia's promises to honor the outcome of the Ukrainian May 25, 2014 presidential election and a summit of foreign ministers (the United States, Russia, Ukraine, and the EU) in Geneva on April 17, 2014, where the sides did arrive at concrete understandings.⁵ On June 6, 2014, after commemorating the Normandy landings, President Putin and President-elect Poroshenko

met in France. Still, none of these moves has resulted in the hoped-for compromise, though it remains visible down the road.

Currently the conflict is underway through unusual means and methods. According to Ukrainian and Western sources, Russian military and special forces are operating covertly on Ukrainian soil. Aside from the political plane, the main thrust of their activity, joined by mutual pressures of various sorts, is to activate local elements such as field agents, separatists, and collaborators. An important role of the struggle is played by the media and the information war in which the sides attempt to delegitimize and demonize one another.⁶ But the key dimension of the conflict is economic, where the sides tap various pressures at their disposal: the United States and Europe by imposing economic sanctions on Russia in general and leaders of the Russian establishment in particular (so far, more than 30 Russian companies and more than 100 Russian individuals are on the EU and US lists), and Russia by playing the energy supply card against Ukraine and European countries.

At the same time, the disagreement spreading in the West is particularly salient. Beneath the consensus of NATO and EU members with regard to their common challenge lies a growing internal debate about continuing the confrontation with Russia. It seems that the nations of western and southern Europe, led by Germany and France, which have pragmatic economic interests, work to reduce the tensions with Russia, whereas the central European nations – such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic states – are, based on their own geopolitical considerations, determined to deepen the divide between Russia and the West.

In light of these considerations, the crisis may develop according to the following scenarios:

- a. Russia will continue to encourage destabilization in Ukraine, especially in separatist areas, in an effort to divide the country.
- b. The Russian army will invade Ukraine in the guise of humanitarian intervention for the population threatened by civil war. In such a case, one may also expect an attempt at regime change or the annexation of parts of Ukraine.
- c. A compromise allowing the partial preservation of Russia's interests will be reached. In this scenario, the basis for the compromise is similar to the understandings reached in Geneva on April 17, 2014.

It seems that the latter scenario is the most likely for Russia, because, it is in Russia's best interests to promote a compromise to end the conflict.

Clearly, Russia neither desires, nor is capable of, conducting an ongoing political and economic confrontation with the West, which is far better equipped than Russia.⁷

Russia will thus presumably concentrate its efforts on rebuilding its relations with Ukraine and the West, though without conceding its political goals in the disagreement, led by the drive to prevent Ukraine's integration into Western associations. This approach is ultimately meant to turn Ukraine into a neutral country under the banner of "Finlandization," while simultaneously constructing a federalist model of development for Ukraine. Though its implementation is highly unlikely, it could become leverage for threatening Ukraine's integrity, should Ukraine fail to remain neutral. Furthermore, this approach also sends a message to other former Soviet states thinking about crossing Russia's red lines.

This development means that Russia in any event is losing Ukraine, which is turning westwards. Even if Ukraine does not join the EU or NATO, it will not willingly become a possible future partner to Russia's geopolitical plan. Therefore, even if the compromise is reached, it is unlikely that Russia will maintain the status quo in the long run and will, rather, renew its efforts to bring Ukraine back into the fold.

The Ukrainian Crisis and the Middle East

In the course of the crisis in Eastern Europe, there was a notable increase in Russian activity in the Middle East that went far beyond Russia's ongoing efforts to rehabilitate its damaged status following what it sensed was negative fallout from the Arab Spring. As a result, in a region that already suffers from instability, new influential forces have developed and aroused the concerns of all the regional and external players operating in the area.

Russia is a veteran actor in the Middle East, experiencing alternating low and high points, though it never completely conceded its presence and influence in the region. Currently, Russian interests are at least threefold: one has to do with having a presence in the international arena so as to restore Russia's status as a superpower; another has to do with Russian national security, a direct outgrowth of the Islamic threat to Russia that emanates from the Middle East; and the third interest is geostrategic, as the Middle East is located along Russia's southern border and as such lies in the zone of Russia interests.

In the years leading up to the Arab Spring, Russia managed to rebuild its position in the region, which was seriously compromised after the breakup

of the USSR. The Russian government took a fairly assertive stance through its involvement in all the region's crises and its engagement with the radical and anti-Western axis. The revolutions in the region since 2011 undermined most of Russia's successes in the local arena and led to its withdrawal from most of the Sunni states; these trends were heightened by ongoing efforts to oust Russia completely from the region. In its struggle to survive, Russia positioned itself as an active partner on the Shiite axis, at odds with the Sunnis, who are generally supported by the West. Russia's hold on Syria, now in the middle of a civil war, and its backing for the Shiite front against its Sunni enemies provided Russia with a safety net that it has exploited to great effect: buying time for the Assad regime, which protects its own presence in the region, and enhancing its status by, *inter alia*, proposing the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons caches (September 2013). Nonetheless, as of early 2014, the Shiite axis on which Russia leaned had developed some cracks, after Iran's desertion from its alliance with Russia in favor of direct talks with the West.

Given these developments, Russia, in early 2014, renewed its efforts to restore its regional status, while exploiting the rift between the United States and the traditionally pro-Western actors in the region (e.g., the rift with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states) because of America's fostering better relations with Iran, and because of ideological disagreements (e.g., the US and Egypt). In this reality, Russia began an all-out diplomatic outreach to every available state and non-state regional actor, expanding its circle of influence; the policy was backed by weapons-sales diplomacy and intervention in every dialogue and crisis. This has resulted in some achievements relevant to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, and others, all of which are engaged in talks with Russia on a host of issues. Russia's attempts to expand its circle of influence are also meant to challenge the West on regional matters; Russia even expressed its interest in playing a role on the Israeli-Palestinian track and in topics of a geopolitical nature. In this context, Russia expressed its willingness to use its influence to fashion a future regional settlement, which would mean drawing new borders in the region.

Still, none of these has resulted in a new reality, because – at least for now – Russia is incapable of generating a real change in the regional core issues or promoting a shift in the relationship of the aforementioned regional states with the West in a way that would favor Russia. However, since the Ukrainian crisis deepened in the spring of 2014, it is again obvious that

Russia is increasing its activity in Middle East affairs. On the declarative level, a new Russian concept was unveiled at the Moscow Conference on International Security (May 22-23, 2014), to wit, all local revolutions and wars of the most recent vintage are supported by the West, specifically the United States, this constellation being dubbed “the color revolutions.”⁸ The events in Europe and the Middle East including the crisis in Ukraine are all seen within this prism.

On the practical level, and in addition to the steps described above, Russia is expanding its involvement in Syria. Russia is also working hard with Iran, despite the latter’s decision to speak directly with the West. The Russians are formulating economic proposals, primarily connected to oil exports, that would affect the sanctions against Iran. Another realm of Russian involvement is regional geopolitics, characterized by power struggles in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere that threaten to spill over into neighboring countries. Russia is transmitting messages about its ability to exacerbate crises and create a new geopolitical reality in the region.

In addition, Russia is trying to get involved in the core Middle East regional issues, such as attempting to become part of the Israeli-Palestinian track and assume a leading or an equal position with the United States, given the failure of the last round of talks headed by US Secretary of State John Kerry. Furthermore, the issue of Israel’s nonconventional arms is again on the table, an issue Russia is trying to leverage into an international maneuver of a summit under the banner of a nuclear-free zone, preferably under Russia’s leadership. Clearly Russia strives to earn additional dividends from the region’s states.

Taken together, these steps are presumably designed to establish linkage between East European issues – which have turned into a global crisis – with the Middle East, where Russian-Western friction continues. It seems that the point of establishing this linkage is to create a locus of tension in the Middle East analogous to the one in Eastern Europe, presenting it as another front in the same global power struggle. This approach seems to result from several considerations: the Russian strategic constraint to respond to the pressure in Eastern Europe as well as to exploit the situation developing in the Middle East, which the Russians attribute to Western hesitations. A possible goal of the linkage could be to make it easier

After being forced to absorb losses in the Arab Spring, Russia has, since the Ukrainian crisis, turned more of its attention to increased involvement in the Middle East to raise its weakened position.

for Russia to apply pressure in Eastern Europe by diverting attention and activity to another location capable of challenging the West and facilitating a compromise on Ukraine. The added bonus of such a move would be the possibility of Russia scoring points in the global arena, and in particular, in leading Middle East issues.

Significance for Israel

Israel plays a significant role in the political calculations of all the actors in the Middle East, Russia included. The fact that Israel took a neutral stand on the Ukrainian crisis is significant. In terms of the media, Russia points to that as a positive development, while conveying its desire to expand cooperation with Israel, which is in part a hope that Israel will cool its relations with the United States, and hinting that it would like to see Israel become a closer partner of Russia in the future.⁹ The official Russian position is somewhat more restrained, and tries to balance its interests in seeing Israel maintain its neutrality and cooperating with it, and its interests in other regional matters, such as involvement in the Palestinian arena and enhanced activity with old and new regional partners.¹⁰

For its part, Israel has its own opinion on how best to shape the Russian-US-Israeli constellation. Many leading Israeli public, academic, and media figures are quite critical of the government's Ukraine policy, for both ethical and pragmatic reasons, including criticism of Russia's conduct in the crisis and its disregard of international norms, and the negative ramifications for Israel's relations with its allies, chiefly the United States.¹¹ Similarly, doubts are raised about Russian credibility: will it, in fact, keep its promises? If not, what benefit can Israel's neutrality on Ukraine yield? Not to mention the fact that when it comes to the leading regional problems (Syria, Iran, the Palestinians), Israel can hardly expect Russia to take Israel's interests into account.

In contrast, different assumptions support Israel's policy of neutrality on short term, pragmatic grounds,¹² for example: the East European crisis does not directly affect Israel's interests or those of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. In addition, the future of power relationships on the international arena and geopolitical issues in the Middle East, where Russia will continue to play an influential role also in the future, is presumably also a factor. Israel, experienced in unilateral involvement in the Cold War era, would prefer to avoid a similar scenario in the future. Moreover, one may assume that there is a shared Russian-Israeli understanding about mutual interests

in the region, with the goal to avoid crossing any red lines set by the sides.¹³ The supply of game-changing arms is only one example.

Many in Russia, identifying the positive potential for Russian interests, support a closer Russian-Israeli relationship.¹⁴ But there are Russian declarations troubling to Israel made at the most senior levels, especially with regard to two key issues:

- a. The Palestinian issue, often said to be the key issue in the regional reality, with implications for all other processes.¹⁵ Here Russia rarely takes Israel's reservations into account. As a consequence of the crisis in the Israeli-Palestinian talks, Russia has resumed its efforts to have a say in the region, offering clear support to the Palestinian side.¹⁶
- b. Israel's nonconventional weapons, whose very existence – according to Russia – serves as a major locus of tension in the region and as a destabilizing factor. Therefore, Russia has recently renewed its declarations about the need for an urgent solution to this issue as well, and called for an immediate conference on a Middle East weapons of mass destruction-free zone.¹⁷

This trend may reflect the inclinations of Russian policies adapted to the reality created by the Ukrainian crisis, characterized by a growing conflict between the large powers. In that context, Russia's interests in forging closer relations with regional states are clear. One should also view this as part of Russian efforts to position itself as the leader of the anti-Western camp in the global system in general.

However, even though this policy does not deepen understandings and expand cooperation with Israel, one can discern a change in Russia's attitude to Israel. Russia identifies Israel as a desirable partner because Israel is a strong regional player given its military power and international importance, and especially because of Israel's status on the US agenda. Russia seems to assume that Israel, in its current political state, would be more open to changing its policy. To the same extent, it is possible that despite Russia's strident rhetoric and despite Israel's well known unwillingness to cooperate on the nuclear issue (which would lend support to the hypothesis that this is nothing but rhetoric) it may, according to the Russian assessment, cooperate with Russia's integration into the political process with the Palestinians.

The Russian speaking population in Israel (some 1.2 million, 37 percent of which hail from Russia and 38 percent from Ukraine) is divided on the

Ukrainian crisis, but aside from some exceptions, it is not involved in the issue and does not support Israel choosing a side.

Conclusion

The Ukrainian crisis, which began as one of the color revolutions in the former USSR, has evolved into a global crisis involving all the large powers. Russia, feeling marginalized by what it deems a well-orchestrated Western move against its vital interests, responded with a series of assertive moves of its own in Ukraine, though with minimal use of force. Still, it seems that in the end it will have to compromise. The preferred way of reaching a compromise will in all likelihood be based on understandings similar to those reached on April 17, 2014, in Geneva: on the one hand, Ukraine will remain outside Russia's circle of influence, but on the other hand, it will not be able to join Western organizations.

Yet although Russia seems to be succeeding in preventing Ukraine from crossing the line westwards, it is losing the country as a partner in its geopolitical plans for the Eurasian bloc. Thus, the end of the crisis will find Russia at a disadvantage. Moreover, it seems that the compromise on Ukraine in the offing will not bring long term calm to the region, as Russia will remain determined to restore Ukraine to its circle of influence and promote its geopolitical plans.

Since the spring of 2014, the involvement of the major powers in the Middle East has been significant, thanks to Russia's desire that the global confrontation spread as part of this constellation of processes. Russia, a veteran player of great influence in the region, is not about to concede its status in the region. After being forced to absorb losses in the Arab Spring, Russia has, since the Ukrainian crisis, once again turned more of its attention to increased involvement in the Middle East to raise its weakened position. In addition, it is also fomenting unrest in Eastern Europe so as to create another locus of tension in a global superpower showdown. This will have significant implications for the nations of the region, including Israel. Although it has so far not been in Russia's clear interest, one cannot rule out its acting against Israel's interests, causing a deterioration in relations.

In the developing reality, and assuming that the Ukrainian crisis will be resolved soon, it seems that Israel should – despite the lifted eyebrow of its Western allies, especially the United States – maintain its neutral position on the Ukrainian crisis for regional considerations, given the spreading instability in the Middle East, and so as to keep the status quo vis-à-vis

the Russians. A collapse of this status quo is liable to result in increased security cooperation between Russia and Israel's enemies.

Notes

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- 1 In this context, the Russians point to the following incidents: Western military intervention in Yugoslavia (1999); recognition of the independence of Kosovo; the series of "color revolutions" throughout the former Soviet Union, especially the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004); the Russia-Georgia war (2008); the stationing of the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system in Eastern Europe; NATO's expansion eastwards (1999, 2004, 2009) and the expansion of the EU (2004); rising Russian concerns about the US "pivot to Asia."
- 2 The "color revolutions," a term that recently became official and given in Russia to Western and US-led events intended – according to the Russians – to initiate regime changes and promote pro-Western factions in a string of nations. Russia views the Arab Spring upheavals, the revolutions within the former USSR, and the current Ukrainian crisis as manifestations of the same phenomenon, and accuses the West of having planned and executed them all.
- 3 The Eastern Partnership, a program of the EU initiated by Poland in 2009, is meant to create a closer economic and strategic relationship with Eastern European nations. In 2013, it was proposed to six former Soviet states. The rejection of the EU Association Agreement by the Ukrainian President sparked the revolt and resulted in the change of leadership. Ukraine signed the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement in several stages (March 21 and June 27, 2014).
- 4 Fyodor Lukyanov, "Reverting to a Crossroads," *Russia in Global Affairs* 12, no. 1 (2014): 6.
- 5 On April 17, 2014, Geneva hosted a summit of foreign ministers of the nations involved in the Ukrainian crisis (Russia, Ukraine, the United States, and the EU). At the end of the conference, the statement issued called on the sides to dismantle any unofficial armed militias and evacuate seized sites. It also called on Ukraine to reform its constitution so that the country becomes a federation. On the same occasion, the Russians issued a call to Ukraine not to join Western associations (i.e., the EU and NATO).
- 6 The "information war" is the Russian name given to the nature of the conflict of the Ukrainian crisis, which is replete with propaganda and heated rhetoric on both sides and meant to sway international public opinion.
- 7 Russia's ability to manage a long conflict with the West is presumably limited, if only because the US economy is eight times bigger than Russia's and the EU's economy is seven times bigger than Russia's.

- 8 See footnote 2 above.
- 9 Herb Keinon, "Israel is not about to Enter Russia-Ukraine Fray," FM Liberman Says," *Jerusalem Post*, April 22, 2014, [jpost.com/diplomacy and politics/Israel-not-about-to-enter-russia-ukraine-fay-350111](http://jpost.com/diplomacy-and-politics/Israel-not-about-to-enter-russia-ukraine-fay-350111).
- 10 "Russia Concerned about Israeli Plans to Build Settlements," *Voice of Russia*, June 6, 2014, http://voiceofrussia.com/news/2014_06_06/Russia-Concerned-About-Israeli-Plans-to-Build-Settlements-9457/.
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- 12 Amotz Asa-el, "Middle East: Can Israel be Neutral on Ukraine," *Jerusalem Post*, April 19, 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/Features/Front-Lines/Can-Israel-be-neutral-on-Ukraine-349814>.
- 13 An example of mutual Israeli-Russian consideration is the Russian-Georgian war in 2008. Israel then decided to avoid supplying arms (drones and launchers) to Georgia at Russia's request. So far the Russians have avoided supplying game-changing weapons (such as the S-300) to Israel's enemies.
- 14 Itamar Eichner, "Netanyahu and Putin to Get Direct and Secure Hotline," *Ynetnews*, June 1, 2014, ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4526082,00.html.
- 15 Shimon Stein, "The Ukraine Crisis: Preliminary Comments," *INSS Insight* No. 549, May 16, 2014 inss.org.il/index.aspx?+4356&articled+6989.
- 16 "Moscow Pledges Active Contacts with Palestinian Unity Gov't," voiceofrussia.com/news/2014_06_03/Moscow-pledges-active-contacts-with-Palestinian-unity-govt-7443.
- 17 A conference aimed at establishing a WMD-free zone, which cannot be convened without the agreement of all the states in the region. Israel's concern is that such a conference would be used to exert coordinated pressure on it and it alone. Russia recently announced (not for the first time) its intention to work towards the convening of this conference this year. See Russian Institute of Strategic Studies: <http://www.riss.ru/news/2218-blizhnij-vostok-dolzhen-byt-prevrashchen-v-zonu-svobodnuyu-ot-omu#.U6dPYIKKBnE>.



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