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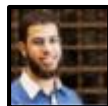
Mohamed A. Fouad

Random Observations on Egypt's Referendum

"A key determinant of the success of the referendum was always going to be the turnout rather than the actual percentage of Yes votes. To secure some sort of a mandate, Egypt army-backed transitional government needed to get a turnout which supersedes that of the December 2012 referendum, held under the rule of then President Mohamed Morsi." [...] ***"Looking ahead, the political chatter suggests that presidential elections will come ahead of the parliamentary election. All eyes now are on Army Chief General Al-Sisi, who is expected to make an announcement regarding his intentions to run for the election. The results of the referendum indicate, by and large, that if he chooses to run, not only will he win, but he will potentially run uncontested"***



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Nader Bakkar

Egypt's Referendum: A Defining Moment Once Again

"Voting no in the referendum will lead to a great unknown, possibly taking us back to the 2012 constitution in its first draft or even further back by ratifying the 1971 constitution which was annulled after the January 2011 revolution. This would deepen the crisis and possibly open the door to all-out chaos which will drown the entire country"



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Ziad A. Akl

We The People

"Between the state's euphoria and the Muslim Brotherhood's drama, there are those who believe in the absurdity of all this. They are neither terrorists nor traitors. There are those who believe that the whole process lacks logic. There are those who are very perplexed by the idea of putting people in prison for protesting and at the same time asking people to participate in a democratic referendum. There are those who know that they themselves aren't powerful enough to induce real change, but are also honest enough to refrain from participating in bringing about false change. There are those who believe that this country deserves much more than an "only option". There are those who believe that Egypt's future should not be decided through option reduction or through mass manipulation. There are those who believe that it is not a matter of "yes" and "no", and when it boils down to a yes-no process, neither will represent them. There are those who believe that making the same mistakes and expecting different results is outright insanity. And they are the very people who will very soon find themselves besieged by radicals from all possible directions"

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Salamamoussa

Misreading Egypt's Referendum

"The referendum is conducted in a nation unsettled by violent protests and hyper-nationalism. Egypt has two modes of political mobilization: nationalist and religious. Egyptians tired quickly of the short rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, and now nationalism is pitted against the Brotherhood's religious discourse in an increasingly brutal manner" [...] *"The Muslim Brotherhood retains sufficient support to selectively disrupt but not effectively govern. The regime's mandate is more than offset by this very simple fact. Any hope for a brighter future in Egypt is hostage to the Brotherhood, and to a much lesser extent the regime, taking 'Yes' for an answer"*

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Bassem Sabry

The Meanings of Egypt's Referendum

***This new constitution is not perfect — its evolutionary process was controversial — and at least a few amendments would be welcome. But it is also arguably substantially more progressive than its predecessors and provides a good base to move forward** upon in the coming period, especially if its articles of rights and freedoms are taken seriously and hopefully become manifest and entrenched. **I don't think this will be the way it was in 2010 or 2005, or even in the 1950s or 1960s, as some might argue.** I believe this will be — for better or worse — the new experiment of 2014, whose outcome is yet to unfold and become clear"*

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Amr Hamzawy

The Collapse of the Phrase 'Constitutional Pragmatism'

"Some of the political groups, parties and public personalities that raised the banner of democracy and supported the constitutional draft issued by the appointed Committee of 50 worked to encourage participation in the recent referendum, calling on citizens to vote 'yes.' As part of this campaign, they employed a hollow and misleading phrase: 'constitutional pragmatism.' Today, these groups are engaged in numerous endeavors, from directly participating in the measures that followed the removal of former president Mohamed Morsi on July 3, to indirect alliances with the regime and its center, the military security apparatus—whether out of the conviction that this apparatus will save the nation from its current crisis, or out of fear that there is no alternative" [.....] **"To escape this dilemma, these political and party groups and public personalities employ the phrase 'constitutional pragmatism.' This is an effort to distinguish themselves from the mouthpieces of the military security apparatus, as well as to salvage something of the credibility of their support for democracy without moving away from open support for the current measures and the constitution coming out of the Committee of 50.** For them, this phrase "constitutional pragmatism" has three main components: falsification, cherry picking, and deception"

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Sisi: The Naked Emperor



Belal Fadl

The Political Marshal of Egypt

"The people have generally been fully appreciative of the Armed Forces thus far, but the military's intervention in politics could deepen political rifts in society, freezing democratic development and returning Egypt back to repressive times; a move that is supported by state media, its resources and its intellectuals" [...] "I don't need to remind you of the "naksa," which took place only one month after Montgomery's visit, which was in May 1967. Only the policies of Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser and Marshal Abdel Hakeem Amer are to be blamed"



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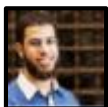


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On Means and Ends

"The irony that those who love Al-Sisi the most are the ones who want him to have the worst job in Egypt is not lost on many of us, for it's the same irony that those who desire a strong-man state are the ones voting Yes on a constitution that will not give them that at all. President Al-Sisi will have all of the responsibility, yet neither the tools nor the power to execute decisions the way he does now, something every presidential hopeful knows. Therefore, they are all collectively promoting Al-Sisi to run: pushing him to be president is the only way to destroy his popularity (and the idea of a strong military ruler) once and for all, and that is their end"

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Nader Bakkar

Presidential Elections: The Key Step in Egypt's Roadmap [Part I]



"When it comes to Sisi's candidacy, this conviction is multiplied by specific factors. Whether due to statements by journalists or businessmen in the media, there is an entrenched belief that Sisi is the only candidate able to address Egypt's economic and security needs. The belief that charisma, a firm hand, and an ability to make decisions are qualities sufficient for a leader disregards key factors: a political and economic vision or a leader's ability to present creative solutions to Egypt's ongoing troubles. A diverse presidential team assisting him is also key, within a democratic system that values institutionalism and reduces individualism. On the contrary, expectations of Sisi have been raised to an unrealistic level, with people hoping for dramatic changes from day one of his possible presidency. This makes his likely decision to run for president akin to gambling"

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Egypt's Presidential Elections: From the Outside Looking In [Part II]

"The clearest international signs of support for the possible presidential nomination of General Sisi, recently promoted to the highest military rank of Field-Marshal, have come from the Gulf regimes, led by Saudi Arabia. **Saudi Arabia's stance is significant, being one of the first and biggest supporters of the current regime.**

It would appear, however, that Saudi Arabia has started to harbor concerns related to Sisi's ability to succeed, when facing the unreasonable expectations his supporters in Egypt have. The sweeping enthusiasm supporting the new president, however, will not last long. It is very likely, that with the first obstacles he faces, the Brotherhood will lead a new wave of protests, attempting to disrupt any political stability. Additionally, revolutionary movements will also likely join these protests, if a candidate with a military background does in fact win the elections"

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Nervana Mahmoud

What to watch in Sisi's run for president of Egypt

"By deciding to run for the presidency, Field Marshal Sisi has earned the enmity of many inside and outside Egypt. Moreover, the

current crackdown on journalists has already made Sisi reviled by some in the foreign media. Sisi's enemies will scrutinize his every move and decision and home in on any mistakes. **He may come to think in hindsight that the coup was probably his easiest mission. Ahead are even more difficult tasks for this novice politician who has, it seems, voluntarily decided to take over the unenviable task of governing Egypt"**

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Hamza Hendawi

Abdel-Fattah El-Sissi, Egypt's Military Chief, Has His Eye On Presidency

If el-Sissi runs, most observers expect him to win by a landslide, becoming the latest in a line of military men who became president since the monarchy was toppled in the early 1950s. He would be the first from the armed forces to be freely elected. **As president, el-Sissi would face daunting problems: a terrorist campaign by Islamic militants and a veritable insurgency in the Sinai desert; high unemployment; soaring food prices; low worker productivity; rising crime; and a feared reduction in Egypt's water supply by a dam still under construction on the Nile in Ethiopia**" [...] "A national project was needed to rally the people behind its leadership, just like the construction of the Aswan Dam did in Egypt's socialist days in the 1960s. Such a project, the insiders said, would most likely be building at least one nuclear reactor to generate electricity "

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Andrew Hammond

If Sisi runs, and if he does not

"If he runs, Sisi will see opposition to the military's blatant interference in the public sphere increase and opinion slowly change on the Muslim Brotherhood, which hopes he will make this mistake in order to regain the sympathy it lost because of its disastrous year in power. If he does not run, the group will find itself forced to review its mistakes and consider serious reforms. If he runs, the Brotherhood will remain a powerful anti-modern political force some factions of which could succumb to resistance politics and obsession with injustice" [...] **"If he runs, Egypt is doomed to long-term instability. If he does not, Sisi may realize his wish to be seen one day as the saviour his sycophantic, opportunistic admirers claim he is today. Egypt may have a chance"**

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Egyptian Revolution: An Alternative More Sober More Realistic Narrative



Salamamoussa

An Alternative History of the Egyptian Revolution

"Anger is justified at those who urged revolution with eyes closed, ears plugged and mouths screaming at full volume, and especially at those who paraded to satiate the media's appetite for reality entertainment. **Anger is justified but useless. The task now is to clean up the wreckage after the revolutionary ball. It will not be easy, or pleasant. Revolution, like new love, is a heady business. Governing, like parenting, involves the regular setting of limits, administration of justice, demand for peace and rectification of errors.** All are tasks that demand tolerance, compromise and patience; virtues once common in Egypt but now in short supply. It is too late to alter the last three years, but the future can be made brighter by a sober realization that a new system, more liberal and plural, must be built in the shadow of authoritarianism and under constant attack from religious fascism. **Nation builders are not those who imagine themselves too pure for politics"**



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Wael Gamal

Revolutionary Realists

"The very elements of the structural crisis are putting restrictions on the Egyptian capacity for reform in front of supporters of gradual solutions and adjustments (from realists and others), thus hindering them from presenting an alternative. **The reformists present themselves as an alternative to the "unrealistic" revolution on the basis that while what they display isn't everything, it is achievable.** However, the reformists collided, within the Beblawi government and before it, with the fact that the structural crisis and the governing and intransigent interests don't permit such flexibility that reform requires — especially when reformists lack a social backing that provides them with negotiating leverage at the ruling table"

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H.A. Hellyer

Dogged Determination – A More Sober Jan25

*"The reality of all of this is clear. The "zero-sum" nature of this current political crisis, which has already taken hundreds upon hundreds of lives and led to thousands of arrests and truly damaging social polarisation, sees no sign of being drawn back. On the contrary, it seems the main protagonists are actually quite comfortable in this zone where everyone but your close allies must be the enemy" [.....] **"Hope hasn't been replaced by despair. Instead, it's just become more sober. Those who truly supported the 25 January Revolution in 2011 and didn't turn to partisan self-interest know what they're up against – and they know how few friends they now have.** The best of them, though, know that actually, they always had few friends, and that it was never about popularity – it was about what was right. It still is. It always will be"*

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Egypt's Youth: Feeling Stuck, Apathetic and Depress

The Big Pharaoh

On Egypt's Youth and the Possibility of another Revolution

***"If the coming president, no matter who he might turn out to be, continues the current repression and police brutality, there will most probably be another generation of young revolutionaries who might be willing to join the Brotherhood in its demonstrations and clashes with the state.** I am talking about 18 and 19 year olds who will not remember the Brotherhood's betrayal of the January 2011 revolution. **These young revolutionaries will not be Brotherhood members or even Islamists, they will be like Sayed Weza, young independent activists who will not mind joining forces with the Brotherhood, the only opposition till now, to fight the existing regime.** However, the activists and the Brotherhood will still not be sufficient to tilt the balance; they will need another force with them, namely the poor. If the next president did not fix the economy, if he did not meet today's high expentations, the poor might join whatever the new revolutionaries and the Brotherhood will trigger and we might end up with the third mass revolt in Egypt in 6 or 7 years. However, if that scenario happened, Egypt will officially become a failed state and decent into a far darker abyss"*

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Stuck

"We have two distinct disenfranchised large groups of the population: the youth and the Islamists, and each are getting more radicalised every day, thanks to the antics of the Ministry of Interior. If you shoot a student in the head in the middle of his university, it's bound to have an undesirable effect on his friends and fellow students, no matter what his political affiliations may be. Add to it that it is now obvious that the interior ministry intends to arrest anyone they dislike by charging them of being Muslim Brotherhood members (see also Mohamed Adel Fahmy), the jig will be up very quickly. The inevitable conclusion: generations upon generations of enemies of the interior ministry. Many of them are newly created and above regular suspicion of having an Islamist background. They should have fun anticipating their moves"

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Ziad A. Akl

On Revolutionary Depression

"This kind of depression begins with an overall state of rejection, a sudden loss of interest and a general feeling of political fatigue. It is not a matter of political orientation, class association or even personal interest. In fact, it is rather a matter of common plight, collective loss and one-sided episodes of mourning" [...] "Those who took to Tahrir Square on Tuesday, 25 January 2011 could hardly be found in the same square last week during the third anniversary festivities. Last week was the point where those who occupied Tahrir Square in 2011 realised they had nothing at all" [.....] "Revolutions take long years before they're able to change state structures, and even longer years before they change economic performance"

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Hariri Assassination Trial



Michael Young

Great expectations: The biggest risk in the Hariri assassination trial

*"It's a relief after nine years to see the trial begin. But it's difficult to identify very much that is encouraging in it. None of the suspects are in court; the individuals indicted, if guilty, are only a small part of a much larger conspiracy, most of whose members are unknown; the indictments don't offer a clear motive; and many Lebanese have lost the interest they had in 2005 and 2006 to uncover the truth. The trial will doubtless reveal information deeply embarrassing to the perpetrators. But it will not end impunity for political crimes. **The danger today is that the Lebanese may await too much from an institution that was never able to meet their great expectations**"*

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Diana Moukalled

The Special Tribunal for Lebanon sets judicial standards

"This STL is the first serious and professional judicial path for a crime described as terrorism. The Lebanese and the Arabs have never followed up on trials that are professional to this extent. To be more accurate, public opinion here has never followed up with any professional trial at all because the idea of justice, in its procedural and judicial meaning, and not in its spiritual meaning, is not that common in our regimes." [...] *"The Lebanese people's story with this tribunal has not ended yet. And it will certainly witness more upcoming chapters. Everything that happened in Lebanon during the past nine years is directly or indirectly linked to the STL. **The tribunal may not bring security quickly to Lebanon, but it's certainly a proper entrance to the concept of accountability**"*

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Lebanon's Next Government: The 8-8-8 and the 6-9-9 Cabinet Formulas ?!?



Moulahazat

Is There a Tripartite Alliance in the Making?

8-8-8? The first set of 8 ministers is M8's share. The second set of 8 ministers is M14's share. And the third set is the centrists' share: The president that has to sign the decree, the designated prime minister who won't accept to form a cabinet in which there is no one on his side but himself, and the kingmaker Walid Jumblatt" [...]

*"Hezbollah succumbed to fear: The fear that if Tammam Salam's attempt (of forming an independent cabinet) failed for lack of parliamentary confidence, GMA would name Saad Hariri as new Prime Minister (the same way Jumblatt was supposed to name M8's candidate in 2013 but named Salam instead). That's probably why M8 is trying to please Aoun by giving him important ministries in the government such as the Foreign ministry. **Because of the war in Syria, Hezbollah needs a strong Christian ally on his side more than ever, and both Hariri and Aoun realize that. And that is how and why a deal pleasing the three parties might eventually see light: Hezbollah wants to keep his ally, Aoun wants the presidency, and Hariri wants to go back to the Grand Serail"***



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Playing the Sectarian Card

"We end up with an all-embracing government that lacks Christian representation and Hezbollah participation. Among the bad scenarios ahead for M14: 1) The government will somehow see light – despite the resignations, but due to the lack of Christian representation, it becomes ethically impossible for the government to assume the powers of the (Christian) president when Sleiman exits in May. This maneuver forces all political factions to elect a president hailing from a Christian political party or face a constitutional crisis. Since the Muslim factions of M8 and M14 would have united the FPM and the LF in the opposition, it becomes harder for the political class to extend the terms of the current president because it would bring the LF and FPM even closer to one another and lead to massive Christian discontent. 2) The government collapses just after its formation. New parliamentary

consultations lead to events similar to the ones leading to Mikati's cabinet, with Safadi – Michel Aoun's favori – being nominated to the post of Prime Minister. One thing is sure though: If you think Michel Aoun is negotiating from a weak spot, don't"

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Elias Muhanna

Lebanon Spent Nearly Two of Last Four and a Half Years Without a Government

"There has been some movement in recent days on the cabinet formation stalemate. Saad Hariri agreed to join a national unity government with Hizbullah, which is a welcome development after many months of deadlock on the question of what kind of cabinet Tammam Salam should form (neutral vs. consensus being the main options considered). How many months precisely? Nearly ten: Salam was appointed PM-designate on April 6, 2013. As you will recall, Lebanon's previous premier Najib Mikati spent five months forming his government in 2011 (which was about how long Saad Hariri took to put together a cabinet after the 2009 parliamentary elections.) In view of these historical trends, I thought I'd tally up the total amount of time that Lebanon has spent since the 2009 election under a caretaker government. All told, in the 1702 days since June 7 2009, Lebanon has spent 625 days (or 37%) under a caretaker government"

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Syria

ISIS: Know Your Enemy



Charles Lister

The Anti-Jihadist Revolt in Syria

"As inter-factional fighting continues in northern and eastern Syria, ISIS increasingly appears to be on the counter-attack. More and more casualties are reported every day. Meanwhile, pressure is building within the wider Western-backed Syrian political opposition – the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) – to attend the talks in Montreux on 22 January, despite the fact that they are destined to fail. A sizeable majority of insurgent actors on the ground maintain a total opposition to the talks and the SNC appears heavily divided on whether to attend at all. It is depressingly ironic that continued Western pressure on the SNC to attend and invest in the talks is in fact directly undermining the opposition structures it explicitly wants to reinforce"[.....]
"ISIS is not going anywhere, and it has already begun a concerted fight back. However, recent developments have injected a much-needed boost of energy and enthusiasm into the more moderate ranks of Syria's armed opposition and have potentially served to entice elements within more hardline groupings back into the fold"

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Syria's New Rebel Front

A new and dangerous front appears to have opened in Syria. Since early January 3, members of three militant fronts -- the largely nationalist Syrian Revolutionaries Front; the moderately Islamist Jaish al-Mujahideen; and the Salafist Islamic Front (IF) -- have engaged in sustained clashes with the extremist Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). Fighting began in Idlib province and has since spread throughout Aleppo province and into the city of Raqqa, the governorate capital under opposition control and a key ISIS stronghold" [...] ***"If ISIS is afforded the opportunity to launch a concerted counter-attack while Syria's opposition remains inherently disunited, one thing is for certain: The conflict in Syria will become even more complex and intractable. ISIS may well be weakened, but the resulting instability could come back to haunt both the region and the West in the years to come"***

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Jamal Khashoggi

Extending hands of allegiance to the ISIS

"ISIS is the "State," so how can a state unite with organizations? Moreover, ISIS believes that these organizations should remain under the umbrella of the "state," pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, "Amir al-Mumineen" or the commander of believers, and staying obedient and submissive in times of fortune and adversity. This simple fact is very expensive; it explains the smaller civil war taking place within the bigger civil war that is currently raging in northern Syria between the alliance of all Islamic forces and ISIS. Indeed, the latter, considering itself the state, became haughty and started randomly arresting and executing individuals in regions that were under its control" [.....] "They are just like their ancestors who dreamt of an Islamic state in the mountains of Algeria, living in an old world of rulings and denominations; for them, Afghanistan is Khorasan, and Pakistan is the Sindh. They copy texts from old books, biographies and jurisprudence and insert them in an unrelated reality. ***They are isolated from reality as they do not believe in any country, government, regulations or international laws, and do not take into account the concept of the balance of power, and therefore do not see anything wrong in declaring anyone as the commander of the believers; not just the organization's commander but the commander of all believers"***

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Pieter Van Ostaeyen

"As Syria's infighting between rebel groups continues after a month of fierce clashes, killing almost 1500 Mujāhidūn, there have been some initiatives trying to reconcile the battling parties. ISIS, the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, however refused all of these peace initiatives" [...] "It is most likely ISIS will reply to this harsh condemnation. But ISIS, stubborn and convinced of its idea of a new Caliphate in the Levant, covering Iraq and Syria, will not leave Syria soon. More infighting is to be expected. Question however remains, how will Jabhat an-Nusra, al-Qaeda's official branch in Syria, respond ..."

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The Failure of Geneva II



Rami G. Khouri

The struggle continues over Geneva II

"The prospects for a negotiated end to the war in Syria are slim, reflecting above all the military balance of power on the ground, which is broadly stalemated right now. It is unlikely that the Syrian government or opposition will muster enough force to defeat the other and prevail in the coming months" [...]

"The very concept of a transitional governing authority with full executive powers to replace the Assad government is also so vague that it is meaningless beyond serving to bring the parties together in Switzerland. Assad understands it to mean a degree of domestic reform and liberalization under his family's tutelage, while the opposition understands it to mean that Assad will step down and allow a more democratic and pluralistic, governing system to take hold. It is possible that the issues of the military balance and the transitional governing mechanism will coincide one day soon"



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Sami Kleib

This Is How Geneva II Will Fail

"There are two options for Geneva II: Either the coalition will agree to initiate the aforementioned urgent measures before discussing Assad's future, or the curtain will come down on one of the most naive plays in modern history. It appears, unfortunately, that failure is inevitable no matter how Brahimi spins it. The regime still believes that military success on the ground will have the final word. The coalition and its fighters still hope that the failure of the conference will convince the world to send more weapons to opposition fighters, allowing the fighting to go on until Geneva III. That is, if anything is left of Syria to negotiate over"

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Aboud Dandachi

It's Time to Save Lives and Stop ISIS by Obliterating Assad's Air force

"The "Geneva II Peace Talks" utterly failed to deliver on peace, and by the time of Geneva III, Geneva IV, Geneva XVI, ISIS will have taken control of those parts of Syria Assad has not turned into rubble. The times demand drastic action, if the world is to be spared a Syria divided between the extremism of the Assad regime, and the extremism of ISIS. For the sake of the country, the region and ultimately the world, Assad's airforce must be obliterated down to the last aircraft and helicopter"

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Tony Badran

Adjusting after Geneva

"Now that the opening round of the Geneva conference for Syria has concluded in spectacular failure, the Obama administration appears to be pursuing a twofold strategy. It has redefined its objectives and priorities while also moving to engage Iran on Syria" [...] "Other than keeping the Geneva process alive, the White House has another reason to enlist Iranian assistance on humanitarian aid in Syria. President Obama has made reaching a deal with Iran the central gambit of his foreign policy. ***Obama's Iran policy elevated expectations for a potentially historic rapprochement with Tehran – expectations that the president has encouraged in order to keep skeptics at bay. Both the deal and any potential rapprochement are directly tied to the notion of Iran moderating its behavior and acting more responsibly as both countries seek to overcome decades of mistrust and hostility.*** The more Iran shows it can play a constructive role in regional affairs, the further it can thaw relations and the quicker it can rejoin the community of nations"

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