----- Original Message -----
From: Walter Kemp
To: Terje Rod-Larsen
Cc: Andrea Pfanzelter
Sent: Thu Dec 20 14:27:12 2012
=ubject: FW: Situation in the Middle East - FINAL

The centre of gravity in the region is currently the Syrian crisis. Beyond =he civil war there is a regional war in a global context being fought on S=rian territory. In addition to the tragic and ongoing humanitarian crisis =ith now proably more than forty thousand dead and millions of refugees and=displaced, a new Great Game of geostrategic importance is being played out=

On the one side there is a regional axis of allies going from Teheran throu=h Baghdad to Damascus and to Hezbollah in Lebanon, with the diplomatic pro=ection of Moscow and Beijing. On the other side there is a block of count=ies in full political and military confrontation with the axis, running fr=m Turkey through Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan and to =rance, United Kingdom and the United States. Both The Block and the Axis a=e providing financial resources and weaponry to respectively the rebels an= the regime. Hezbollah has fighters on the ground and there are daily ship=ents of weapons and ammunition to the regime from Teheran through Baghdad.=On the other side weapons and money are flowing to different rebel groups =cross the borders from Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. A double chess game is =eing played; on the table and under the table. On the table western powers= Russia, China, Iran and the UN are calling for a diplomatic and political=solution, spearheaded by UN envoy Brahimi. Under the table a vicious milit=ry escalation is being conducted by both sides with close intelligence co-=peration at the highest level through the services of the Block. The calls=of the UN Security Council to demilitarise the conflict stands in stark an= inconsistent contrast to the actions of the same parties on the ground. T=ough the three key western powers are not providing lethal hardware, they =re fully privy to the shipments of such equipment from their allies.

On the ground the situation is complicated by any standard. The Free Syrian=Army is a loose coalition of fighters with a broad spectrum of colours and=stripes: from Al Qaida affiliated groups to liberal secularists, united on=y by one common goal: the fall of the House of Assad.

All actors, internationally, regionally and locally, seem to agree that the=end of the regime is inevitable. Some think Bashar Al Assad can prolong hi= regime way into 2013. Others think he will fall within weeks, pointing to=the fact that rebel forces are inching forward in a ring inside the capita=.

For Assad there seems to be in principle three options: leave into exile; f=ght to the last stand; or being pushed aside in a coup d'etat. The first i= not a viable option: the Alawite elite would never let him leave, abandon=ng them. A coup is a remote possibility: the rebels would not accept any a=ternative regime figure as a counterpart in negotiations for a peaceful se=tlement.

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The most likely scenario is that the regime will fight to the bitter end, t= the last bullet and drop of blood.

This leads to two questions: when Assad realises that he will fall, will he=then try to drag with him as many enemies as he can? And: what will a post=Assad Syria look like?

An acute worry has risen from reliable intelligence reports that he has arm=d up to forty warheads of Scud missiles with a variety of chemical weapons= The question is whether he is seriously contemplating using them as a las= resort against his own people or launching them against his enemies in ne=ghbouring countries. His repeated utterings of "putting the region into fl=mes from the Mediterranean to the Caspian" if he is touched does not to ma=y ring as hollow as before. This could have possible detrimental consequen=es to Kazakhstan's oil and gas interests in the Caspian.

The opposition and the rebels are so diverse and split that a likely scenar=o for the post-Assad era with high likelihood will produce a second civil =ar. The geostratigic importance of Syria can not be underestimated. The lo=s of Syria for Iran will consitute a major blow to it's aspirations of bec=ming a hegemonic regional power, and it will fight for new allies in Syria=to keep it's grip on the country. The west and the Gulf countries will hav= to do the same for their allies. The fact that different countries of the=Block are backing different groups are also complicating matters for a pos= regime situation.

In conclusion: Syria will for years to come be unruly and a centre for the =eostratigic struggle of the region.

Above all this looms Iran's ambition to be the regional hegemon. It's nucle=r ambitions underpin the worries of the west, Israel and the Gulf states. =n the current Israeli leadership there is a strong belief that Iran is hel=-bent on acquiring a nuclear capacity, and that negotiations are only thea=rics playing to the gallery. The Israeli leadership believes they have the=military capacity to strike effectively, and are countering objections tha= it will only delay the program by pointing to the fact that both Iraq and=Syria abandoned their programs after Israeli strikes.

However the composition of the Israeli cabinet after January election might=change the outlook on these matters. The role of Zipi Livni, Lieberman (w=o is fighting an indictment), and Ehud Barak (who is not running for the K=esset, but might be asked by the PM to fill a prominent position related t= both the Iranian and Palestinian issues) will be critical.

Vis a vis Iran some are of the opinion that the president would be willing =o strike the Iranian facilities if negotiations fail. However the question=of who will fill the posts of State and Defence might influence such a dec=sion. Both front runners for these positions are considered dovish on the =ssue.

In the broader context of the region, unpredictability is the order of the =ay. Tunisia and Egypt seems to be roughly split in two with regimes leanin= to conservative Islam on one side and moderate, secular and liberals on t=e other. In Egypt, who's geostratigic importance is undisputed, the new co=stitution gives worrying signals of new authoritarianism which will give n=w impetus to solidify and unify the opposition.

Yemen is equally unpredictable. Jordan and Kuwait are shaky and face uncert=inty. Bahrain seems slowly to cope adequately with its issues. Lebanon is =haking under the spill-over of the conflict in Syria, brought to a peak th=ough the assassination of its intelligence chief as well as street battles=in Tripoli. The Palestinian issue will be frozen until after Israeli elect=ons and the formation of a new cabinet, although the Europeans, and predom=nantly France, are working on new initiatives to be launched after the ele=tions.

In Saudi Arabia two younger and forceful figures have taken the reigns of b=th the intelligence agency and the powerful Ministry of the Interior. The =ountry is again playing a major role in the region, particularly in the Sy=ian theatre. However the succession issue will be of paramount importance =or the long term of the country.

Overall conclusion in a nutshell: uncertainty is the only certainty for the=region. And importantly: these are the only conflicts on the planet which =re not only of a local and regional character - they have serious implicat=ons for global security. A major new war in the Middle East will shake the=very financial and political foundation of world order.

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