To: jeevacation@gmail.com[jeevacation@gmail.com]
From: Office of Terje Rod-Larsen
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Article 1.

NYT

Heading Into Talks With Iran, U.S. Sees Hopeful Signs

Mark Landler

May 18, 2012 — American negotiators, heading into a crucial round of talks with Iran over its nuclear programnext week in Baghdad, are allowing themselves a rare emotion after more than a decade of fruitless haggling with Tehran: hope.

With signs that Iran is under more pressure than it has been in years to make a deal, senior Obama administration officials said the United States and five other major powers were prepared to offer a package of inducements to obtain a verifiable agreement to suspend its efforts to enrich uranium closer to weapons grade.

These gestures, the officials said, could include easing restrictions on things like airplane parts and technical assistance to Iran's energy industry, but not the sweeping sanctions on oil exports, which officials said would go into effect on schedule in July.

The oil sanctions, which the Iranians are seeking desperately to avoid, are one of several factors that

American officials believe may make Tehran more amenable to exploring a diplomatic solution. In addition, the recent decline in oil prices has magnified the pain of the existing sanctions on Iran; a new government coalition in Israel has strengthened the hand of its hawkish leader, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; and Americans believe that recent blustery statements from Iranian officials are laying the groundwork for concessions by Tehran.

None of this guarantees success. Several officials played down the prospect of a major breakthrough from the meeting on Wednesday, which will include Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China, in addition to the United States. Mr. Netanyahu on Friday repeated his skepticism that there would be any progress.

But American officials said that at a minimum, the Baghdad meeting should be a genuine test of Iran's willingness to do more than talk. "They're nervous enough to talk," said a senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the delicacy of the negotiations. "Whether they're nervous enough to act, we don't know yet." Another senior official said, "We have a tail wind going into this."

For President Obama, the stakes are huge. A successful meeting could prolong the diplomatic dance with Tehran, delaying any possible military confrontation over the nuclear program until after the presidential election. It could also keep a lid on oil prices, which fell again this week in part because of the decrease in tensions. Lower gasoline prices would

aid the economic recovery in the United States, and Mr. Obama's electoral prospects.

In a sign of the increased diplomatic efforts, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Friday that its director general, Yukiya Amano, would travel to Tehran on Sunday to try to negotiate access to a military site where Iran is suspected of having conducted tests on nuclear-weapons triggers. It would be the first visit by the agency's head to Iran since 2009, and it could add to the momentum in Baghdad.

"The Iranians are in the position of needing to pursue diplomacy, if anything, even more than they did before," said Dennis B. Ross, one of Mr. Obama's senior advisers on Iran until last year and now at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "It's not like they have any other good news right now."

Moreover, Mr. Ross said, Iran's recent statements signal that its leaders are preparing their domestic audience for concessions. Iranian officials have declared that the West has effectively endorsed Iran's right to enrich uranium, a step they portrayed as a major strategic coup. American officials insist the United States has not done that and has been deliberately ambiguous about whether it would ever grant Iran the right to enrichment.

Still, as Mr. Ross said, "if you're looking for a way to present a compromise, you want to present it as a victory."

Like other experts, he added a cautionary note. After an initial meeting in Istanbul last month that served mainly to test if Iran was willing to talk seriously

about its nuclear program, the United States and its partners must now get into the kinds of nitty-gritty issues that torpedoed previous negotiations with Iran. The major powers' initial goal is to halt the activity that most alarms Israel: the spinning of thousands of centrifuges to enrich uranium to 20 percent purity, which is within striking distance of the level needed to fuel a nuclear weapon. That would buy time for negotiations over the ultimate fate of a program that Iran claims is for peaceful energy purposes, but that the United States and Israel fear is in pursuit of at least a nuclear weapons capability.

In addition to halting enrichment, officials said, Iran must agree to ship out its stockpiles of 20 percent uranium and to cease operations at an enrichment facility buried in a mountainside near the holy city of Qum, which Israel says could soon be impregnable to an airstrike.

If Iran agrees to those interim steps, officials said, the talks could shift from high-profile meetings once a month to more regular meetings, at working levels, where officials could delve into technical details, like how to ship out the uranium or monitor Iran's suspension of operations at the plant near Qum, known as Fordo. European Union and Iranian officials have already met in Geneva to prepare the agenda for the meeting in Baghdad.

"You could really use the summer to have weekly, if not daily, meetings to get to the point where the U.S. could say, 'We think there is a deal out there to avoid war,' " said R. Nicholas Burns, who led talks with Iran

under President George W. Bush and is now a professor at Harvard. But, he added, the Obama administration "has also got to be willing to walk away from it."

On Tuesday, the American ambassador to Israel, Daniel B. Shapiro, sought to reassure an Israeli audience that the United States not only was willing to use military force to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, but had made preparations to do so. And Mr. Netanyahu's public position on the negotiations has remain unchanged, while his ability to order military action may actually be enhanced by his new, broader coalition, analysts said.

In his comments on Friday, Mr. Netanyahu reiterated his demand that Iran cease all enrichment, even to 3.5 percent purity; ship out all stockpiles of enriched uranium; and dismantle, rather than simply switch off, the Fordo facility. "When this goal is achieved, I will be the first to applaud," he said during a visit to Prague. "Until then, count me among the skeptics."

Analysts said it was hard to gauge what kinds of concessions from the Western nations, Russia and China would draw a positive response from Iran, beyond lifting the oil embargo. European officials have suggested that the European Union could suspend a ban on insuring oil tankers that has had a far swifter effect on Iran's sales elsewhere in the world than originally intended.

The major powers, officials said, are also likely to offer a variation on an earlier proposal to enrich uranium removed from Iran and ship it back into the

country for use in medical research.

Article 2.

The Washington Institute

Prospects for Success in the Iran Nuclear Negotiations

Patrick Clawson and Mehdi Khalaji

May 18, 2012 -- While Tehran may be preparing the ground for an interim agreement on terms the West would accept, any deal-in-principle would have to be finalized, put into practice, and followed by fuller agreements. Both Tehran and Washington are downplaying expectations for the May 23 Baghdad negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 (the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany). Indeed, the prospects for eventual success are uncertain. If Iran is truly prepared to deal, and if the parties find appreciable overlap between what they are willing to concede, they may be able to forge an interim agreement, though the value and durability of such a deal may not be clear.

TEHRAN MAY BE PREPARING IRANIANS FOR A DEAL

To enable serious compromise, Iran must take two actions: prepare public opinion and include more-skilled diplomats in the negotiating team. Regarding the first item, Iranian officials consistently deny the

impact of sanctions on both the nuclear program and economy. This fact suggests that if Tehran decides to make a concession, it will not want the move to be publicly perceived as a capitulation to economic pressure. Instead, the regime would need to present any nuclear accord as a victory for Iran. On May 9, an editorial in Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's newspaper, Keyhan, asserted that, for the first time since 2003, the P5+1 had agreed to take action if Iran takes action: "This means that the West has prepared itself for giving up to Iran's demands...This is why the Istanbul talks were successful." The author concludes that May 23 will be an ordinary day for Iran, but one of the last chances for the P5+1 and Washington to reach an agreement with the Islamic Republic. On Thursday, another Keyhan editorial about the talks stated, "If in early days Iran took a step backward, today Iran has made dozens of steps forward...Iran welcomes agreement and success in the negotiations, but it does not believe that negotiation necessarily should lead to agreement at any price." Many other newspaper and web articles have argued along similar lines, trumpeting Iran's success in its principled stance of resistance to Western pressure. The regime tightly controls media coverage of the nuclear issue and sanctions, providing strict guidelines about what themes to use, so the triumphalist tone of recent articles should be seen as an indication that Tehran is preparing the public for a deal.

To be sure, there are negative signs as well. As indicated above, the media coverage includes

assertions that the West needs a deal more than Iran does -- for instance, the May 9 Keyhan editorial also stated, "The Obama administration is in a situation that continuation of the talks is much more important to him that anything else, even [closing of] the Fordow facilities or [shipping out] 20 percent enriched uranium...because Obama has no priority beyond succeeding in the presidential election. Therefore he has to first prevent the Zionists from getting mobilized against him...and second stabilize the world oil market." The author continues, "If Americans need these talks to be continued, why should Iran respond to their demands?...What is Iran's benefit in getting involved in talks?" Similarly, in his May 17 speech at Iran University of Science and Technology, chief nuclear negotiator Said Jalili criticized Western officials for remarks made after the Istanbul talks, saying they should be "more careful in their statements and not miscalculate because what is going to end is not the time for negotiation but the pressure on Iranian people." He continued, "Undoubtedly, more pressure on the Iranian nation would lead to more resistance." The second prerequisite for an agreement is that Iran field a negotiating team that is skilled at making a deal rather than resorting to the previous team's tactic of just saying no. On one hand, there are few if any signs that the former team, which was pushed out in 2005, has been assimilated into the current team. On the other hand, members of the former team have recently resurfaced after years out of the limelight, almost certainly at Khamenei's order. Hossein Mousavian and

Hassan Rouhani have traveled to Europe to meet with officials behind the scenes, and Rouhani broke his public silence and spoke with the Tehran-based Mehr Nameh journal for its May issue. In that interview, he revealed that President Bush sent a message to Iran in April 2004 through International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director Mohamed ElBaradei, offering to personally lead negotiations to resolve all outstanding differences with Iran. Yet according to Rouhani, "The regime [nezam, typically used to refer to the Supreme Leader] basically decided that we would not have negotiations with America." He also portrayed President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as ignorant and naive about the nuclear issue, and implied that Iran had missed opportunities to resolve the nuclear crisis with Washington and its Western allies due to Khamenei's uncompromising attitude and Ahmadinejad's lack of skill and wisdom. Rouhani would never be allowed to make such remarks unless someone in authority approved.

ZONE OF POSSIBLE AGREEMENT

Various intriguing signs suggest there may a "zone of possible agreement" -- in which the least that one side will accept overlaps with the most the other side will offer -- enabling an interim deal. Whether such an agreement would be good for U.S. and Western interests is another question. The two sides have been dancing around a "freeze for freeze" arrangement for years, and the terms for such a deal have become clearer. 20 percent enrichment cap. Iran would agree to freeze uranium enrichment at 20 percent, a level

that puts the regime closer to a breakout capability if it decided to quickly develop nuclear weapons. Some Iranian officials state that the government has all the 20 percent uranium it needs for the Tehran Research Reactor, and that additional production would be for future reactors or sale abroad. The P5+1 would ask Iran for three additional steps: (1) shipping the existing stockpile of 20 percent uranium abroad for fabrication into fuel plates for the research reactor, since such plates are very difficult to convert for use in a bomb; (2) suspending 20 percent enrichment at the underground Fordow facility, a measure aimed at reducing Israel's concern that it may have to attack soon or lose the ability to curb the nuclear program altogether; and (3) pledging to accept the IAEA Additional Protocol, which gives the agency enhanced inspection rights to verify Iranian compliance. The latter step could also require Iran to answer the IAEA's questions about past activities. At this stage, the P5+1 seem less likely to push on the issue of 3.5 percent enriched uranium -- either the stockpiles or ongoing enrichment -- although they will probably point out that this issue must be dealt with at some point. Presumably, Tehran will negotiate hard on each of these issues. Sanctions relief. The P5+1 would agree to freeze some of the most onerous sanctions on Iran. In particular, Tehran may demand relief from headline-grabbing sanctions such as the incoming EU oil embargo (scheduled to begin July 1), the U.S. and EU ban on transactions with the Central Bank, or some of the UN's high-profile restrictions. Yet action on these

items is unlikely unless Iran does much more than seems probable so any such demands could be a deal breaker. Just as the West has offered Iran face-saving terms, so too must Tehran offer a compromise that does not make the West appear weak. Perhaps the P5+1 could offer benefits other than sanctions relief, as some U.S. officials have hinted, though it is difficult to see what other measures Iran would find sufficient. Another possibility is to convince Iran that it could extract significant benefits from less high-profile tweaking of the sanctions. For instance, while the main Iranian banks have been excluded from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), the system used for nearly all global financial transfers, smaller private banks can still access it. If the EU permitted those banks to act as intermediaries for the larger state banks, then the SWIFT sanctions would have much less impact, becoming an inconvenience rather than a ban without forcing the EU to publicly climb down. Other examples include the very tough EU restrictions on property and indemnity (P&I) insurance and reinsurance, which are important for shipping. These restrictions have had much more impact on Iran's oil sales than the July 1 embargo will have. The EU could modify the P&I ban in ways that appreciably improve Iran's finances but have little effect on public opinion. In particular, the EU could postpone its May 3 ruling that ships cannot get P&I insurance or reinsurance in Europe if even one drop of the fuel they are using comes from Iran -- a requirement that could force most

large refineries worldwide to stop buying Iranian oil.

BAGHDAD AND BEYOND

The most important measure of success for the Baghdad talks is whether they conclude with plans for accelerated, detailed follow-up discussions. If the next high-level meeting is another five weeks away, that would be a very bad sign, as would any failure to set up technical working groups. Reaching a full agreement will probably take dozens more meetings, and a leisurely pace would suggest that Iran is using the talks to stall while its nuclear program progresses. The first step toward compromise may be an agreement-in-principle on an interim deal. But that alone will not guarantee success -- much bargaining will be needed to turn it into a formal agreement. Given the Iranian regime's record of spotty implementation and quick suspension of past agreements, the United States (and, perhaps, Europe) will want clear evidence of commitment before permitting Tehran to reap many rewards. Moreover, any interim deal will ultimately fail unless it leads to further accords. The history of the Middle East suggests that nothing is as permanent as an interim deal. Indeed, the grave risk is that an interim agreement with Iran will become the de facto final deal, with nothing more achieved despite protracted negotiations. Once the P5+1 have accepted such an agreement, it will be difficult to explain why its terms are insufficient. Iran could gain much traction by arguing that so long as it observes the deal's terms, then there is no nuclear crisis, and therefore no basis

for additional sanctions, much less military action. Yet any interim deal would cover only the most urgent issues, leaving Iran free to pursue many other problematic nuclear activities. To forestall this possibility, the P5+1 should ensure that any sanctions relief offered under an interim deal is temporary: for example, the West could agree that certain sanctions will be suspended for six months, then revert to their original level unless further agreements are reached. A related, equally grave risk is that once a diplomatic process is under way, diplomats often have difficulty recognizing when it has failed. All too often, the process trumps the results. Therefore, unless all parties feel the time pressure, the Baghdad negotiations and subsequent talks will become a sideshow to the main act: Iran's continued nuclear progress.

Patrick Clawson is director of research at The Washington Institute. Mehdi Khalaji is a senior fellow at the Institute.

Article 3.

Foreign Policy

How Obama Missed an Opportunity for Middle East Peace

Steven White, P.J. Dermer

"We were fond together, because of the sweep of the open places, the taste of wide winds, the sunlight, and the hopes

in which we worked. The moral freshness of the world-to-be intoxicated us. We were wrought up in ideas inexpressible and vaporous, but to be fought for. We lived many lives in those whirling campaigns, never sparing ourselves: Yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took our victory to re-make in the likeness of the former world they knew." – T.E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom

MAY 18, 2012 -- There aren't many reasons for optimism regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict these days. But amid the failed negotiations, diplomatic maneuverings, and occasional spasms of violence, one unsung initiative has been an unalloyed success: The mission of the U.S. Security Coordinator (USSC) for Israel and the Palestinian Authority. This hodgepodge staff of military and civilian advisors, working together in the spirit of Lawrence's words, has trained more than 5,000 members of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF), rebuilt Palestinian security institutions, and fostered a renewed sense of relevance in the Palestinians' nascent moves toward statehood.

The achievements of the USSC, which began operations in 2005 and commenced training Palestinian security forces in 2007, have formed the foundation of every claim of progress made by successive U.S. administrations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The mission has been integral to the re-establishment of stability and security in the West Bank for Palestinians and Israelis alike -- militias are off the streets, crime is down, and basic

order has largely returned.

The mission has been lauded by such leaders as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. But it is perhaps the opinion of Palestinian citizens themselves that is most telling. A community leader in the Balata refugee camp in the West Bank, once a center of conflict, compared the period before 2007, when "the camp was controlled by militias and thugs who partially financed their regime through theft and extortion," and after new security forces' return, when "life changed for the better."

The work of the team headed by Lt. Gen. Keith W. Dayton, who was its second coordinator and guided the USSC from December 2005 to October 2010, continues to reap dividends to this day. The efforts of a professional, motivated, and well-trained Palestinian security establishment have allowed West Bank business enterprises to flourish and local economies to boom. These successes have facilitated Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's efforts to reconstruct government and local institutions. Perhaps the greatest mark of its success is that, even as the political impasse between Israel and the Palestinians widens, security coordination between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Palestinian security forces continues at levels unseen since before the Second Intifada, which raged from 2000 to 2004. This development was unimaginable just a few years ago.

While the accomplishments of Dayton's team were

recognized and celebrated by Europeans, Israelis, Palestinians, and our regional partners alike, its significance seems largely lost on those in Washington. President Barack Obama's Middle East team has particularly failed to grasp the importance of this effort: It has not only failed to exploit the progress for political gains, but has in fact scaled back the mission's key role as an interlocutor between the parties. It's a fact well understood, and at times lamented, by our Israeli and Palestinian counterparts. "The USSC bought critical time, time for the politicians," said former IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Amnon Lipken-Shahak in a meeting with Dayton in 2009, "which, sadly, those on all sides have wasted." While not explicitly stated, the USSC was created by President George W. Bush's administration as part of the overarching peace process. Given Israel's neuralgia with the concept of armed and organized Palestinian groups in the wake of the Second Intifada and the Palestinians' anxiety about lacking a security patron, the organization was meant to give the Israeli political and defense establishment confidence that an individual was in place who would do nothing to jeopardize Israel's security, while simultaneously giving the Palestinians someone they could point to as their "big brother" within the whole of the process. The USSC was thus never just about "training and equipping" the Palestinian security forces, nor achieving institution-building goals. It was, first and foremost, a U.S. confidence-building measure between both parties.

Why was this concept lost? The course taken by former special envoy George Mitchell and his team, which began its mission with the unrealistic belief that negotiations were the one and only key to success, was emblematic of the Obama administration's entire approach. Members of his team explicitly told us that focusing on anything other than negotiations -- such as security or other bottom-up economic and institution building efforts -- would be seen as an admission that their efforts were lackluster by comparison.

Their actions were even worse than their rhetoric. Mitchell's team consistently excluded and bypassed the USSC, then Washington's most trusted agent, including on issues that clearly dovetailed with his security purview.

Mitchell and his team failed to understand that the top-down negotiations process had to be augmented by a bottom-up institution building process. Beyond being saddled by the president's own misguided pronouncement on Israeli settlements, Mitchell also failed to supervise the activities of the senior members of his team, whose views were both out of tune with the realities of the ground and the perspectives of key Israeli and Palestinian players. None seemingly understood the importance of Israel's defense establishment as a gateway to energizing their own politicians to exploit the security progress, nor valued the critical relationships the USSC possessed upon their arrival.

Since Mitchell left his post, however, he seems to have recognized the error of his ways -- too late. At a

January 2012 event sponsored by The Atlantic, he laid out a plan that joined a top-down process with a bottom-up institution building effort -- identical to the approach advocated by the USSC, and ignored by his office when he had the power to actually implement them. (When Dennis Ross re-inherited his de facto role as the president's lead man on peace-process issues after Mitchell's departure, he also ignored his own proclaimed lesson that there should not be a disconnect between those sitting at the negotiating table and events on the ground.)

Obama's Middle East team to date has sought to diminish Dayton's role rather than build on the USSC's successes in the field. By 2010, unnamed administration officials were holding forth that he was "very difficult to deal with" and "excessively deferential toward Israeli security assessments."

Based on our own experiences working closely with the general from 2005 to 2010, these views are deeply misinformed. These negative assessments were primarily based on Dayton's increasing calls for more concerted action to reach a diplomatic breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. As his tenure progressed, he came to realize that security gains alone -- no matter how emotionally satisfying for his team -- would not resolve the conflict.

Dayton was not overly deferential to the Israelis. However, he realized early on that without their buy-in on every initiative, nothing could progress. Had the Israelis not come to trust and respect the general, we would not be writing this article -- there would be no

successes to report.

Dayton departed the USSC in October 2010 after five years at the helm of the organization without so much as an exit interview with President Obama, although he had met three times with Bush in the Oval Office to review progress of the mission. (After numerous requests, he did eventually meet with Secretary Clinton and then-National Security Advisor James Jones.) He was also not afforded a final congressional testimony -- which, according to a senior congressional staffer who wishes to remain anonymous, was blocked not by Congress but by the State Department's Office of Near Eastern Affairs. Finally, he was not asked for either an after-action report or an assessment of the five years he worked to advance successive U.S. administrations' peace-process efforts in the region.

These political schisms within the U.S. government are not lost on Israelis and Palestinians. They privately lament that those in the administration charged with dealing with Israeli-Palestinian issues appear to have little real interest in understanding what goes on outside of Washington or how changing developments on the ground can fit into the greater scheme of resolving one of the world's most intractable problems. Officials in Washington concerned with Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking should see the USSC's hard-won victories as an integral part of the peace process that should be built on, not ignored or discarded.

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When Dayton took over the security mission in 2005 from Gen. Kip Ward, who initiated the effort and successfully led it through the complicated political hazards surrounding Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, progress of any sort was far from assured. Palestinian security institutions had to be built from scratch while its territory remained under Israeli occupation, and Palestinian political actors were embroiled in simmering civil conflicts.

All this had to be done at first without dedicated operational funding -- prior to Hamas's takeover of Gaza in 2007, no U.S. funds were allocated to the mission. The USSC also answered to the more risk-averse and top-down State Department, rather than the Defense Department. Furthermore, falling under the State Department's control meant that the USSC was constrained by not one, but two, local "chief of mission" authorities in the field -- the Consulate General in Jerusalem and the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, whose own relations were fraught with petty intrigues and turf battles.

The Dayton mission was further hobbled by the diplomatic missions' restrictive local travel and contact policies. The Pentagon was not the address to seek relief from these restrictions, no matter how valid the need. During the Bush administration, "relief" would come from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice when Dayton could make the case that amid the intensely polarized atmosphere of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as that which existed between the local U.S. missions, the USSC stood out as the one

American entity that was not perceived as taking either side.

One internal weakness was the USSC's staff, which was comprised mostly of individuals on six-month to one-year assignments who had never been to the Middle East. Further complicating the mix was the multinational composition of the team, which featured major contributions from Britain and Canada.

Because of the highly charged political environment and emotional nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the USSC's every move was under a microscope -- from the Israelis, Palestinians, U.S. government bureaucracies, Congress, international actors, and political advocacy groups alike. Success was far from a given; a long line of failures by distinguished international envoys was the historical norm.

To complicate matters further, Israeli-Palestinian dynamics were as unpredictable and combustible as ever upon Dayton's arrival in late 2005. Abbas's Palestinian Authority was in disarray following the end of the brutal Second Intifada, the chaotic security situation after the death of Yasir Arafat, and the unsure political and security wake of Israel's historic disengagement from Gaza.

Meanwhile, the security relationship between the IDF and the PA security services was nonexistent. It wasn't hard to see why: Israeli citizens were being killed by suicide bombers, while Palestinian militants were operating openly and frequently launching rocket attacks on Israeli cities and towns; meanwhile, IDF

units were conducting an intensive campaign of daily incursions and raids throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In the aftermath of Israel's historic Gaza disengagement, neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians appeared to be serious about forging a constructive relationship, as many in Jerusalem and Washington had hoped. PASF veterans appeared more concerned with maintaining access to power and personal wealth from the traditionally corrupt avenues established by Arafat. Israelis, on the other hand, remained intent on achieving improved security largely through unilateral means as they had always done. The result was that little to no trust -- the primary component for real cooperation -- existed between the two sides in any sphere.

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Things did not begin well for Dayton's tenure. Hamas won a majority in parliamentary elections held in January 2006, within the first month of his term. Due to Washington's direction to bypass Hamas, which assumed control of the Ministry of the Interior in a coalition government, the USSC could only work with Abbas's inner circle and security elements directly subordinate to his office. As a result, the USSC partnered with Abbas's Presidential Guard on Gaza's southern border at Rafah and the major Gaza-Israel commercial border crossing at Karni, while ignoring the Palestinian Civil Police and its closest natural counterpart and largest body, the Palestinian Authority's National Security Force (NSF), which

were under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. Bedeviled by these political constraints and restricted to doing the majority of its business from within the walls of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv and the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem -- a situation akin to operating within Iraq's Green Zone -- the USSC dutifully tinkered away from a safe distance. But this distance ensured we were largely blind to the internal intrigues within the PA, as well as its brewing conflict with Hamas in Gaza, which was directly relevant to the mission's initial efforts. As such, the rapid fall of Gaza in the summer of 2007 not only came as a surprise, but also put the mission at risk.

Paradoxically, however, the loss of Gaza provided the first significant opportunity for the USSC's endeavors. It brought Israeli and Palestinian strategic interests in synch for the first time since the Oslo Accords -- Israel, the United States, and the PA all wanted to roll back Hamas at any cost. Since any security cooperation with Hamas remained off the table, its takeover of Gaza caused the USSC to redirect its efforts toward the West Bank, which remained in the "friendly" hands of Israel and Abbas's Palestinian Authority.

Jolted by the events in Gaza and without a clear idea of how to proceed, the Bush administration had no choice but to allow the USSC significantly more room to maneuver. Dayton, moreover, was now more seasoned and savvy on the ways of all the parties involved -- including the United States -- and assumed a role more befitting a military commander in the

field. And, with the appointment of the Western-friendly technocrat Salam Fayyad to the post of prime minister, the way was now cleared for cooperation with all West Bank security forces, not just the Presidential Guard.

In short order, the USSC team saw a unique opportunity in a Jordanian training facility previously used to train Iraq's security forces. In 2007, the team commenced negotiations between Israel, Jordan, and the PA to repurpose and retool the structure to begin to train nascent Palestinian forces. Jordan now became another critical regional player contributing to the effort.

But gaining the trust of both Israelis and Palestinians was even more important than rebuilding physical infrastructure. Dayton needed to convince both sides they had vested interests in his mission's success. To do so, he needed to challenge the deeply engrained beliefs of both parties. He had to convince Palestinians they were not being trained to substitute for Israeli security efforts nor facilitate a more streamlined Israeli occupation. At the same time, he had to convince the Israelis that his mission enhanced, not undermined, their security interests. Senior Israeli policy and security officials made it no secret from the outset they were more than skeptical of the USSC concept. Acting accordingly in the early days, they resisted even the most minor initiatives, such as allowing the entry of non-lethal equipment into Gaza or the West Bank or approving alternate entry points into the territories for USSC team members to execute

their tasks.

The first step Dayton took to build this trust was having his team live in the region -- a major break with the tradition of previous U.S. envoys. Dayton and his team did not parachute in for a few days, make the proverbial rounds of office calls, and return home filled with "first-hand observations." Instead, the British component of the USSC, led by a serving brigadier general, actually took up residence in the Palestinian capital Ramallah, while the Americans and Canadians lived in Jerusalem. The continuous presence of a small but dedicated team that worked directly with all sides allowed the USSC to understand the realities on the ground and the complicated human terrain -- crucial for getting anything done in the Middle East.

Second, Dayton and key members of his staff created and continually nurtured private and informal relationships with Israeli, Palestinian, regional and international interlocutors, particularly the invaluable EU mission to the Palestinian civil police. We cultivated genuine partnerships in Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority, spending significant face time with all levels of their respective hierarchies. This is something few in Washington officialdom will ever countenance, for fear of diminishing their standing both in their own minds and among peers. The cornerstone of the USSC's success, on any given day, resided in these hard-won personal relationships.

Still, the mission was not without its critics. In a 2010 report, the International Crisis Group noted

erroneously, "With the improvement of Palestinian capacity ... the security reform project has gone on autopilot." Nothing could have been further from the truth. Throughout the entirety of Dayton's tenure, the general and his team spent countless hours in consultations and negotiations, maneuvering through byzantine bureaucracies -- the U.S. bureaucracy included -- and against long-standing local biases. Major issues were resolved via informal get-togethers rather than formal meetings, notably with IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, at his home, or with other key Israeli commanders in relaxed settings and far from the view of eager diplomatic note takers. It was often at these meetings where resolutions to longstanding issues -- such as the opening of the a new West Bank crossing site, elimination of longstanding checkpoints, and facilitation of the Palestinian Authority's 2008 Bethlehem Investment Conference -- were hashed out.

Establishing these relationships was fraught with complexity. Palestinian politicians, as well as many within the State Department, overly concerned themselves with the USSC's close relationship with Israel's security apparatus -- behaving as though Israel's presence in the West Bank was solely something to decry rather than something to be mitigated through intense work with both sides. As former U.S. ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer pointed out in a meeting with the authors, "The USSC was started to get someone in the door who could work both sides of the street; the training aspect was

secondary."

The USSC argued that it had to deal in reality -- not the situation everyone wished existed. As such, it worked with senior IDF planners and commanders in the field to gain their confidence and ultimately convince them to take risks in support of their new Palestinian security partners. Dayton's team took advantage of multiple opportunities to "midwife" the renewal of substantive trust between the IDF and PASF -- not just superficial top-level collaboration, but genuine security coordination on the ground.

This burgeoning trust paid off in initial Palestinian security campaigns to get militias off the streets in the West Bank cities of Nablus and Jenin. These nascent campaigns were marked examples of bold Palestinian security initiatives and the IDF's newfound willingness to support the test-case enterprises. The campaign, as one unclassified IDF document noted, helped to "create positive momentum, particularly among the Palestinian leadership and population ... despite inherent security risks [toward Israeli citizens] this may create."

In the West Bank, success begot success: These initiatives created confidence among Israeli security officials that Palestinians could be trusted to maintain law and order, and led to the implementation of similar programs in other Palestinian cities. The reality was of real benefit to the civilian populations on both sides, allowing for a reduction of major fixed checkpoints in the West Bank from 42 in 2007 to 14 in 2009. If the IDF had not been a full partner in this

effort, none of the USSC's labors would have worked.
The third element of Dayton's strategy was allowing for decentralization within the team and freedom of maneuver in the daily operation of his organization. The complicated environment required staff to be creative and flexible, and to be in a position to make things happen in short order. USSC staff was given latitude to act quickly on opportunities, so long as all were informed.
This organizational method, however, was counterintuitive to our very hierarchic and cautious counterparts at the State Department, who preferred to make a decision only when every option had been thoroughly examined or exhausted, and only upon final written permission from Washington. British and Canadian contributions to the USSC would become seminal to the mission's success, as their members were allowed to perform functions that the U.S. diplomatic corps prohibited its own military personnel from conducting, such as unaccompanied travel into the West Bank.
Authority within the USSC was not commensurate with rank, but rather background, experience, and utility. As a mere reserve major in a sea of lieutenant colonels and colonels, Steven White served as the USSC's senior Middle East advisor. Based on his previous background in Israel and his longstanding relationships with IDF officers, he was granted the trust and confidence to liaise directly with senior Israeli officials and address their concerns. Dayton intuitively realized early on that Israelis prized and

respected experience and judgment over the trappings of rank, and altered his organizational hierarchy accordingly.

Fourth, Dayton deftly lobbied and coordinated actions with international partners, primarily the British and Canadians, for both financial and personnel contributions. He allowed the British and Canadians on the team a wide degree of autonomy. As such, trust was reciprocated by international capitals, which in turn fostered crucially needed funding from a variety of allied sources to fill Washington's initial funding deficit. Ironically, as a result, the USSC eventually had more Canadian members than Americans.

Lastly, Dayton embarked on an intensive lobbying campaign at home and abroad. His first major accomplishment was attaining direct congressional funding for his mission following the fall of Gaza, almost two years into his tenure. The Bush administration reprogrammed State Department funds from USAID and other State Department bureaus to meet Palestinian security needs early on, and Congress, not wanting the West Bank to follow Gaza, unlocked its coffers.

This strategy ultimately allowed the team to effectively provide security assistance to the Palestinian Authority in a manner that built up its own confidence, while at the same time creating an atmosphere that obliged Israel to understand and appreciate the tremendous strides being made on the other side of their security barrier. While the USSC played a critical role in facilitating this

accomplishment, the critical point remains -- the lion's share of the credit for the renewal of Israeli-Palestinian security coordination belongs to the parties themselves.

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To be sure, using the term "success" to describe the USSC's efforts is a fraught business. There are many Israelis and Palestinians who are still convinced that the effort will meet the disastrous fate that similar initiatives did in 2000, when highly touted post-Oslo security cooperation efforts unraveled amid the bloody Second Intifada. Many Palestinians observe that, although they fulfilled their part of the bargain by improving local security conditions, the Israeli occupation not only remains in earnest but Israeli settlement construction is booming and Israeli settlers are becoming even more radicalized.

In light of the political stalemate, former militia members and PA elites are beginning to claim that U.S.-trained forces are working more for Israel's interests than Palestine's. These claims put a lot of pressure on the new PASF, particularly the younger members, the majority of which, unlike their predecessors, come from within the territories. On the other side, some Israelis fear that the newly minted professional Palestinian security forces will one day turn their arms against Israelis, as occurred in the recent past.

Doubters and detractors aside, the most ardent supporters of continued security cooperation are IDF senior leadership and their counterparts in the Shin

Bet, Israel's domestic security agency. These officials, who include those who fought in the Second Intifada, have come to see a rebuilt PA as aligned -- but not subordinate to -- Israeli security interests. As Gen. Nitzan Alon, the Israeli commander with responsibility for security in most of the West Bank, told the New York Times, "Stability in the region includes the ability of the Palestinian Authority to pay its salaries... Reducing the Palestinians' ability to pay decreases security. American aid is relevant to this issue."

The USSC, in concert with its Israeli and Palestinian partners, also upended previous conceptions of how effective policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is made. In his last meeting with Dayton in 2010, the head of Israel's Civil Administration, Yoav Mordechai, told us, "When it comes to policymaking, most people think all the decisions are made at the top and then implemented at the operational level." But with security cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians, "most of the important things and strategies have been envisioned and birthed at our level, then we've pushed them to the top for a decision ... The bottom is now largely driving the top."

Many of the "important things and strategies" pushed and fought for within the Israeli political system by very senior officers within the IDF leadership were doubted by the officials within the State Department and Obama's Middle East team. Regardless, the IDF's ability to affect larger changes on the ground essentially ended in September 2010, when

negotiations with Abbas failed and the United States had nothing else to offer in its place. Without a negotiations process, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government has labeled every action in the West Bank as "political," demanding a quid pro quo for every move, thus handcuffing the IDF Central Command, which for decades enjoyed the autonomy to make local security concessions on issues such as road block removal and the transfer of security responsibilities to the PASF.

Although the State Department and administration officials deny it, Palestinian and Israeli officials report that in the aftermath of Dayton's departure, the role of his successor, Lt. Gen. Michael Moeller, has been maneuvered to focus more formally on the traditional "train and equip" model, with an eye toward establishing of a more detached Department of Defense Office of Defense Cooperation. This is a far cry from the involved, personal trust- and consensus-building roles played by Dayton.

This modification is a mistake. Security issues represent a critical bridge to a political solution, and need the dedicated attention of an American "constant gardener" who tends to the concerns of both parties -- at least until other approaches can yield progress. U.S. policymakers should also recognize that security progress can't stand on its own -- it must be buttressed by an approach that emphasizes governance and economic issues, and overseen by an official who has been empowered to coordinate the entire effort. No such leader exists today.

This current course must be reversed if the United States wants to maintain what little success it has achieved and what little leverage it has left in the Middle East peace process.

Steven White is former senior advisor to the United States Security Coordinator to Israel and the Palestinian Authority (USSC). P.J. Dermer is a retired U.S. Army Colonel and Middle East Foreign Area Officer who served as an Army attaché to Israel. They are currently co-authoring a history of the USSC.

Article 4.

The New Republic

Obama's Cult of Complexity—and How It's Hurting Syria

Leon Wieseltier

May 18, 2012 -- The problem with a moral vocabulary about politics and policy is that it not only makes politicians and policymakers feel bold, it also demands that they act bold. Eloquence creates expectations; and so in Washington, even for America's first black, Jewish, and gay president, the goal is often to separate the high ground from its practical imperatives, so that an aura of rectitude may be acquired without recourse to significant action. Washington is the capital of idle

talk about justice. In Washington now almost everybody wants Bashar Al Assad to fall and almost nobody wants Barack Obama to bring him down. This discrepancy is called realism, though it is less a philosophy than a mood, the on dit of the geopolitical swells, who wish that statesmen would behave like bankers. The banker's view of economic policy, after all, is the one that strips it of moral considerations. (I remember Paul Desmond's sublime joke: "This is the way the world ends/Not with a whim but a banker.") In Obama's Washington it is bad form to say that American foreign policy should be driven by moral ideals, except of course when the president says so and suddenly idealism is admirable again. But it passes, it passes. In recent weeks I have been conducting a local and anecdotal study of the likelihood that the United States will take decisive action in Syria—which would serve not only our tenderhearted values but also our hard-hearted interests—and I have concluded that the likelihood is close to zero. What follows are some observations on the alibis for the inconsequential action—some nonlethal aid is getting through!—and the absence of alacrity that is our policy.

COMPLEXITY. This is what one hears all the time: it is complicated. Tough talk, designed to sober moralists up. The very mention of complication can make a special assistant feel like Talleyrand. The appeal to complexity is intended to inhibit the appeal to freedom, and make it seem crude and unworldly. But I have yet to meet a single critic of our policy in Syria who believes that the situation in Syria is simple.

Simplicity is almost never the case, in the Middle East or in health care, which means that the appeal to complexity is almost always selective, tendentious, driven by prior assumptions and preferences. I yield to nobody in my affection for nuance, but the paralyzing effect of nuance, its exploitation as a warrant for passivity, is a kind of decadence. It is certainly the enemy of historical ambition. In the case of Syria, Obama is disguising a refusal to act—a refusal that dissuades other powers from acting—with the sophistication of an analysis. About the incoherence of the Syrian opposition, there can be no doubt; but we can help them to cohere. About the ethnic and religious complexity of Syria, there can be no doubt; but this has not impeded us in other crises in other countries, and the longer Assad remains in power the greater grows the probability of sectarian cataclysm, and the appearance in Syria of Iranians and jihadists. And about the desirability of an international consensus in the overthrow of Assad, there can be no doubt; but the fact is—let us be realists—there will be no international consensus, no mandate from the Security Council, for forceful action in defense of the Syrian people. Everything we know about Putin suggests that he will never acquiesce in a popular uprising against an authoritarian government. The Annan mission is plainly futile, except in making us complicit with the Russian plan to thwart concerted action against the Syrian atrocities; and Annan is playing in Syria the despicable role that he played in Bosnia, which is to run suave interference for

murderers.

TIME. A few weeks ago I ran into a friend, a good man, who works at the White House. “You know we disagree about Syria,” he said immediately. I must have had my interventionist face on. After explaining to me that we are exerting diplomatic and economic pressures, and that it is complicated, he sighed and said: “And eventually we may do what you want, after all.” This saddened me, because it represented a misunderstanding of the crisis. In most of the challenges of foreign policy, the ladder of escalation makes sense. If an objective can be accomplished without the use of force, or with only the threat of force, or with the minimal use of force, it should be so accomplished. Life and peace should be respected. But there are places, like Syria, where life is under attack and there is no peace, because a government has decided to slaughter its people, and where its people have risen up against such a government but are helpless and alone. In some of these cases our interests will be implicated, and in all of them are values will be implicated. In all of them, “eventually”—which is Obama’s customary mode of principled response—is a tragic mistake. When a fire is raging, firefighters use massive sprays of water to achieve what they call extinguishment. Escalation, by contrast, would assist the fire. Patience is not a virtue in an emergency. Syria is only the latest example of the accelerated temporality of moral emergencies, and we are being patient with the fire.

FATIGUE. Americans are weary of war, after Iraq,

after (almost) Afghanistan, after Libya. Not again, the polls report. This is a little odd, since the overwhelming majority of Americans have not experienced the effects of these wars. Still, the question of American decline has been succeeded by the question of American exhaustion. I am of the party of American energy, which believes that America can never be tired, because the stakes for the world are too high. And I wonder what can be the relationship between "not again" and "never again." At the Holocaust Museum in April, Obama intoned "never again" five times. "Too often, the world has failed to prevent the killing of innocents on a massive scale," he said. "Awareness without action changes nothing." About Syria, he proclaimed that "we have to do everything we can." Then he re-aligned himself with the spirit of the age and added that "that does not mean that we intervene militarily every time there's an injustice in the world. We cannot and should not." So then we do not have to do everything we can. And if we cannot intervene militarily every time there is an injustice in the world, why are American soldiers searching the African jungle for Joseph Kony? I hope we get him, of course. But Assad matters vastly more. The president is not tired. He is making choices.

Leon Wieseltier is the literary editor of The New Republic.

Article 5.

The American Spectator

Elections on the Nile

George H. Wittman

5.18.12 -- The Egyptian military and organized Islamic political groups came out of the 2011 Cairo Spring as the real power brokers of the country. Gone are the student and youth crowds that dominated Tahrir Square, along with the women of all ages who demonstrated by the thousands seeking political equality. Gone also are the masses of foreign TV and print journalists with their instant analyses of complicated issues. One could say that Egypt is slowly returning to its contentious normality.

The forthcoming elections of May 23-24 should produce two contestants for the second round in June that will determine who will assume the presidency of Egypt on July 1. What happens then is clearly a matter for speculation. Supposedly there was to be a new constitution created before the presidential election. The military commission now running the country demanded it -- but no charter came forth. As the military commission is supposed to dissolve and pass on all its authority to the new president, the question exists regarding under what legal powers the new chief executive will govern the country.

This problem can not be said to be unexpected. The parliament had appointed a 100 person commission to work out the details of the new constitution -- then

disbanded this body when it became obvious that the Islamist-dominated parliament had not surprisingly appointed an Islamist-dominated constitutional commission. What was surprising was that a federal court has dissolved the commission and ordered a new body be created that satisfied the demands for equal representation of women and "other minorities" as well as non-religious lobbying groups. How this all was to be accomplished before July 1 is a mystery of the pyramids.

After first announcing that they would nominate the hard-line Sharia law advocate, Khairat El-Shater, as their presidential candidate, the Moslem Brotherhood went to their second choice, Mohammed Morsi. The election commission disqualified many of the top candidates who had announced their intentions to run and the Brotherhood had been given the tip that el-Shater would be considered a definite reject. In a surprise shift, the more ideologically strict Salafists countered with the comparatively moderate Abdel-Moneim Abolfotoh to head off the new Brotherhood choice. El-Shater, no shrinking violet, openly attacked the military commission for being behind his black ball. He'll be trouble for whomever gets the presidential post.

Enter Amr Moussa, former Mubarak foreign minister and Secretary General of the Arab League. The cigar-smoking Moussa is one of the best known Egyptians on the international scene. Smart, tough and smooth-as-silk, the multi-lingual Moussa has no shortage of financial backers eager to see an experienced

professional assume Egypt's leadership. The deal-making involved with his candidacy includes much behind-the-scenes negotiating with the Coptic Christians and secularist groups. The knock on Moussa is his greatest political strength: He is known as rabidly anti-Israeli -- not a bad thing when you're in Egyptian politics.

Ahmed Shafiq, Mubarak's last prime minister, is said to have strong backing from his old Air Force buddies, but is of course under attack as a Mubarak toady.

There are a total of thirteen candidates, including four minor party aspirants. One well-known individual is not running. Mohammed ElBaradei, of longtime IAEA and Nobel Prize fame, has opted out of the process, preferring to create a new party of his own and seek the presidential post in four years. He didn't have much choice because he earlier had lost his expected moderate Islamist backing.

In the end, however, it will be the heavily American-financed ($1.3 billion) Egyptian military that retains ultimate control of the country. Even the Moslem Brotherhood does not have the strength to override the massive firepower Egypt's army and security forces can put on the streets any time they want. However, the military's power also brings to whatever civilian group that wins the presidency a guarantee that they will ensure its existence as long as it does not run counter to the army's interest in maintaining its predominance. As long as military cohesion exists, the new president and his backers will retain power.

A career in the Army or Air Force has been the

stepping-stone for Egyptian political life since Gamel Abdel Nasser. It was often said that "the best and brightest" could be found in Egypt's young officer corps. One of the reasons, besides anti-dynastic feelings, that Mubarak's son, Gamal, was not acceptable as his successor was his lack of military credentials. It would appear that while the military is willing to defer to a civilian administration as "the choice of the people," they have no intention of losing their grip on the security of the country -- and ultimately its foreign policy.

All of which brings up the prospect of a newly elected Egyptian government continuing a peaceful relation with Israel. The truth is that neither Egypt's nor Israel's leaders really can count on the old 1979 agreements -- though Cairo's military $1.3 billion can be kissed goodbye the moment that status quo is upset!

George H. Wittman writes a weekly column on international affairs for The American Spectator online. He was the founding chairman of the National Institute for Public Policy.

Article 6.

Foreign Affairs

The Not-Quite-Alliance Between Saudi Arabia and Turkey

Meliha Benli Altunisik

May 15, 2012 -- Last month, Saudi Arabia rolled out

the red carpet for Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The visit was yet another example of the degree to which relations between the two countries have improved in recent years.

Historically, the two nations have not been friendly, with economic relations only developing in the 1970s. Turkey needed Saudi Arabia's oil. For its part, Saudi Arabia needed Turkey's huge construction sector to build its modern cities. In the 1990s, the arms-length relationship grew more distant. After the Persian Gulf War, Saudi Arabia, along with Egypt and Syria, banded together in hopes of creating a new Arab order. Damascus, no ally of Ankara at the time, was able to frame many of its narrow fights with Turkey as pan-Arab concerns. Down the Euphrates from Turkey, for example, Syria was locked in constant argument with the Turkish government over how much water it would allow to flow downstream. Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria even launched a successful campaign to end World Bank funding for Turkey's dam projects until Ankara signed a water agreement with the states below it.

The United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003 changed all that. The toppling of Saddam Hussein and the subsequent empowerment of Iraqi Shias instilled a fear in the kingdom that Saudi's own Shia population would agitate for change. Beyond that, Riyadh believed that Iran -- through its activities in Iraq, its alliance with Syria, its support for Hamas and Hezbollah, and its nascent nuclear program -- was attempting to become a regional hegemon. In

response, Riyadh began building alliances with states that shared its outlook, a "Sunni axis," so to speak, to combat the "Shia arc."

Jordan and Egypt were natural fits. These predominantly Sunni countries were equally concerned with rising Iranian influence in the Levant and were determined to counter what they perceived as Tehran's outsized influence in the region. Yet Riyadh went a step further and aimed to also enlist Turkey. As an important regional power, a member of NATO, and predominantly Sunni, Saudi Arabia saw Ankara as a valuable bulwark against Iran. Riyadh would normally be worried about a non-Arab power's presence in the region undermining its own position, but it considered Turkey a lesser evil compared to Iran.

Thus, in 2006, Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud became the first Saudi monarch to visit Turkey in decades. That was followed by another visit in 2007. The next year, Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council, which includes Saudi Arabia, started a strategic dialogue about Iran. In the years after, Saudi-Turkish economic relations flourished. In 2011, trade between the two reached approximately $5 billion per year. Turkish construction companies continued to break ground in Saudi Arabia, and the number of Saudi tourists to Turkey reached 84,000 in 2010.

Like Saudi Arabia, Turkey was also interested in the status of Sunnis in Iraq, although less out of sectarian concern than a desire to keep Iraq unified. Turkey believed that the rise of the Shias and spiraling

violence in Iraq would eventually result in the country's division along ethnic lines. And if northern Iraq became a separate Kurdish state, Ankara feared, Turkish Kurds might want to join it. Turkey, too, wanted to tamp down Iran's regional ambitions. Yet, while Ankara was keen to Riyadh's overtures, it had no interest in becoming a central pillar of a new Sunni axis in the Middle East. On the contrary, as part of its "zero problems with neighbors" foreign policy, Turkey wanted to counter Iranian power in the region through soft balancing. Specifically, Ankara would undermine Tehran's influence in Palestinian politics and its dominance in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria by getting closer to those states itself.

So, even as Ankara pursued better relations with Saudi Arabia, it continued to engage Iran, especially on the development of Tehran's nuclear program. Whereas Saudi Arabia saw a potential Iranian bomb as a major threat and wanted to prevent it by any means possible, Turkey believed the matter could be resolved through negotiations. As early as 2009, many in Saudi Arabia were growing suspicious of what they saw as Turkey's double dealing. Although Riyadh continued its policy of cooperating with Turkey, especially on Iraq, it also realized that Turkey would not be a close part of the alliance it had constructed with Egypt and Jordan.

Then came the Arab Spring. Saudi Arabia was uneasy with 2011's outpouring of people power from the start, lest it flow into the kingdom as well. First, when Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fled Tunisia, he and his family were welcomed in Saudi Arabia. Then, Riyadh worked

to prevent the toppling of the Hosni Mubarak regime, its ally in Egypt, but to no avail. It did, however, manage to help put down the Shia uprising against the Sunni government in neighboring Bahrain. It was only Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi's downfall that Saudi Arabia welcomed. Saudi-Syrian relations had been quite problematic under Qaddafi, who was once even accused of trying to assassinate Saudi King Abdullah. Turkey, of course, took the opposite tack, supporting all the uprisings, with some initial hesitation in Libya. Ankara consistently called on the region's beleaguered regimes to respond to the demands of the people, or else step down. The two countries' diverging positions seemed to undermine hope that their strategic relationship could ever be solidified.

Then the Arab Spring reached Syria. The uprising there seemed like it might put Turkish-Saudi rapprochement back on track. Riyadh believes that the toppling of the Bashar al-Assad regime would limit Iran's influence in the Arab world, since Syria is the Islamic Republic's only Arab ally. Thus, last summer, Abdullah became the first Arab leader to criticize the Syrian regime openly; since then, Saudi Arabia has been actively supporting the Syrian opposition, including by advocating that the world arm the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the main opposition military force.

At first, Turkey attempted to convince Assad to reform. Last summer, believing those efforts were at a dead end, Turkey adopted a more critical position.

Ankara called for regime change in Syria, actively backed the opposition, criticized the UN Security Council for inaction, and supported creating buffer zones and humanitarian corridors between Turkey and Syria. Turkey also houses one of the biggest opposition groups, Syrian National Council, as well as the FSA.

Although Saudi Arabia and Turkey share a common goal in Syria, there are some tensions between their positions. First, for Turkey, managing the Syrian crisis is not a way to limit Iranian influence; instead, it is a means of protecting Turkey from chaos on its southern border. Refugees have already started flooding into Turkey -- and the longer the conflict drags on, the larger the burden Ankara will have to shoulder. Further, the influence of the Turkish Kurdish party on some Syrian Kurds is worrisome for Ankara. Moreover, the Saudi and Turkish visions for post-Assad Syria differ. Saudi Arabia advocates a Sunni Islamist regime and is establishing ties with the more radical elements in the country. Turkey, on the other hand, favors the participation of all actors. Ankara is engaging and supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, while also pressuring the group to accept a more participatory and representative Syria to prevent civil war in the post-revolution era.

In the meantime, Saudi Arabia's involvement in Syria threatens to undermine Turkey's "zero problems" foreign policy. Saudi Arabia is already casting the conflict in Syria as a sectarian one. Thus, Ankara's close cooperation with Riyadh -- and the Syrian

Muslim Brotherhood -- places Turkey squarely within the so-called Sunni camp. Such a development would limit Turkey's soft power in the region. In other words, although opportunities for rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Turkey arise from time to time, there are hard limitations to their relationship. They want different things in the region, and have different policies for getting them. On the other hand, as long as there are clear economic benefits in this bilateral relationship, both sides will gloss over their differences as long as they can.

Meliha Benli Altunisik is Professor of International Relations and Dean of the Graduate School of Social Sciences at Middle East Technical University.