



OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 36: 17 June 2013

**A selection of some of the more challenging and thought-provoking
local and international writings on the Middle East**

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*American Thinker, 16 June 2013***

Israel is losing the internet war for chiefly the same reason that France and Poland fell early in World War II. Israel is fighting a new war using old methods. The end results are predictable and devastating.

**(2) *Evelyn Gordon, A teachable moment for American Jews?*
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The opposition to the plan to build an egalitarian section at the Western Wall could provide a genuine teachable moment in the trade-offs Israelis face every day dealing with the Palestinian, to which liberal American Jews have lately grown increasingly unsympathetic

**(3) *Irwin Cotler and Mark Kirk, Sounding the alarm on Iran's human rights violations*
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No-one in the coalition is happy with Benjamin Netanyahu's status quo. Not Eitan Cabel of Labor, who sits in the opposition; not Yoni Shetbon from Jewish Home, or Ofer Shelah of Yesh Atid, who sit in the coalition; and certainly not the newlywed Tzipi Hotovely, a member of Netanyahu's very own Likud-Beiteinu. These members of parliament agree with the Kerry

line: the Netanyahu status quo is unsustainable, and they agree something must be done about it.

**(5) *Khaled Abu Toameh, The Palestinian Authority's reign of terror*
*Gatestone Institute, 13 June 2013***

The Fatah thugs are regularly sent by the Palestinian Authority, which is funded by the West, are regularly sent to threaten and batter university students, journalists, writers and political opponents, driving them into the open arms of Hamas and other extremist groups.

**(6) *Lt Col (ret.) Michael Segall, Who brought Iran close to a nuclear bomb?*
*JCPA, 12 June 2013***

Whoever is elected, the influence of the next president of Iran on the conduct of the nuclear negotiations will be meagre. The issue is in the hands of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guard. It is also clear that Iran's nuclear negotiating strategies in the different periods have brought it to a threshold where, if it so chooses, it can attain nuclear capability.

**(7) *Sorab Ahmari, Egypt's summer of Jew hatred*
*The Wall Street Journal, 11 June 2013***

In 2011 in Egypt a popular vote swept away Hosni Mubarak pharaonic dictatorship, only to replace it with a Muslim Brotherhood-led theocracy. Through it all, one element of Egyptian culture has remained constant: its virulent anti-semitism.

**(8) *Global views of Iran are overwhelmingly negative*
*Overview: Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, 11 June 2013***

Majorities in most of 39 countries surveyed have an unfavourable opinion and Iran, citing the fact that the country has no regard or respect for the personal freedom of its citizens.

**(9) *Bret Stephens, The Muslim civil war*
*The Wall Street Journal, 3 June 2013***

Today we are at the brink of a Shi'ite-Sunni war, one that was imminent in 2006 but was stopped by the military might and diplomacy of the USA. Now the USA isn't there, and what the world has to figure out is whether this megawar, from a Western viewpoint, isn't a very good thing.

***Why Israel is losing the internet war*
*Mike Conrad, American Thinker, 16 June 2013***

http://www.americanthinker.com/2013/06/why_israel_is_losing_the_internet_war.html#Ub5225Kuu_0.facebook

Israel is losing the internet war for chiefly the same reason that France and Poland fell early in World War II. Israel is fighting a new war using old methods. The end results are predictable and devastating.

The first alarm bells should have gone off in the mid 90's. What struck me at that time was the number of Neo-Nazi websites that sprung up like weeds. It was not until a few years later that the ADL was offering filtering software. By then the battle had been lost; the damage had not yet been fully appreciated.

In 1999, Hollywood was having conniptions that Napster's file sharing software was robbing them of royalties. What was ignored was that, simultaneously, regurgitated Nazi propaganda was being remastered and traded as well.

By 2000, Israel should have acted, but it didn't. With the ease of purchasing domains, anyone with an anti-Israel bias could open up a site. Cross-linking got them a high presence on Google. It wasn't until *Jew Watch* -- a vicious anti-Semitic site -- punched a number one rating for searches of the word, "jew" ("Joseph Turow and Lokman Tsui wrote in 2008 that the Wikipedia page [*Jew Watch*] on Jews had become the number one result for the search word "Jew".) that a realization of how far things had deteriorated had finally set in.

But again, old methods were tried to fight the flood. Hate crime laws were applied to shut down sites, and punish their authors, such as happened with Ernst Zündel and his Zündelsite. There were requests to delist *Jew Watch* from Google. A Remove *Jew Watch* Campaign was started.

Apart from the fact that such methods are authoritarian, and only added to the criticism of Jews -- "What were the Jews trying to hide?" -- they did not work. The Canadian-resident Zündel merely transferred ownership of his site to his American wife -- and it is on an American server to this day, putting it outside the jurisdiction of Canadian hate crimes laws. Zündel would be deported to Germany under suspiciously political circumstances, which gave a foolish holocaust-denying clown the opportunity to redefine himself as a champion of free speech. Worst of all, Muslims used these very same hate crime laws to prevent criticism of Islam. All of this response was old school; and all of it backfired.

Jew Watch is still up and running; and still running rather high on Google, even though far worse anti-Semitic sites have sprung up.

So what were the mistakes?

A) Israel and the World Jewish Community sought to suppress anti-Semitism. The internet does not allow suppression. Getting court orders to shut down a site takes time. In the interim, a hundred new sites can spring up, some no more than mere mirror replications of the old site being suppressed. The Jewish response was that of an old world East European autocracy trying to shut down dissident printing presses. Given the history of the Jews, many of whom came from Eastern Europe, and some of whom ran those dissident presses, they should have known better. You can't stop a rebellion shutting down one press at a time.

B) Israel and the World Jewish Community did not fully appreciate the fluid and transnational nature of the internet. While Europe, with its hate crime laws, could be persuaded to shut down anti-Semitic websites, there is nothing stopping a European from opening up his

website on an American server, under American First Amendment protections.

RadiolIslam.org is a notorious website set up by a former Moroccan, with connections to a Swedish Nazi, both of whom have spent time in Swedish jails for hate crimes. However, the website is hosted in the USA, and a WHOIS search shows it to be administered under a semi-anonymous cover with a Pennsylvania address. The Europeans can't touch the site.

C) YouTube is a game changer. Anybody with a camera can photograph some IDF abuse -- and it does happen -- and have it up on YouTube in a matter of minutes. Of course, all balancing context and information will be edited out.

D) Finally, all too often Israeli apologists tried to defend Israel by logic and appeals to reason. Dr. Martin Sherman of Tel Aviv might give an hour-long well-reasoned defense of a Jewish state, but it is meaningless on the internet, which has the attention span of a *Sesame Street* commercial for the letter Z. Jews might appreciate Talmudic logic, but Generation Y, thanks to our educational system, is technically brilliant, but functionally illiterate. Any appeal above the level of a lurid comic will be ignored. If it can't be reduced to a tweet, forget it.

Authoritarian media control will not work in an age where websites sprout like dandelions. Enforcing hate laws will not work when websites can move offshore. Reasoned discussion will not work when our education systems have dumbed down the constituencies.

Israel must fight back with a counter-blitz.

A) Hundreds of videos of Muslim outrages should be distributed daily. Fortunately, these are not hard to find. Many times, the Muslims upload the offensive boastful videos themselves. Millions of emails should be sent out daily linking to these videos.

B) Be brutal! This horrific photo [*be warned*] of a female genital mutilation procedure done to an Egyptian girl should be sent to every female in the Western world. The email headline should read: This is What Defending Islam Means. This could be done in a matter of days. Be sure to point out that it does occur in Gaza and the contested areas. Point out that this crime is rare outside proximity to Islam. Make no apologies for the email. Half the pro-Palestinian campus activity will cease within a month.

C) Hammer home the total lack of freedom, especially religious freedom in Islam. Every outrage must be mass mailed to millions of people.

D) Get rid of the hasbara activists, who are often quite dull, and annoying, even to supporters of Israel. Ten million emails sent out every day about Islamic outrages will do more good than any number of awkward hasbara activists in chatrooms fighting a propaganda war with tired slogans no one believes anymore.

E) Hire spammers to set up mailing campaigns. The West should be inundated daily with anti-Islam messages. The Arabists fight dirty. So should you. Assemble massive email lists, sorted by constituency Change servers to avoid blocking.

F) This is not about reason. The Jewish world abhors images as a foundation of logic, due to the Second Commandment. Forget that! You are trying to win the hearts of us Goyim. We need images, not the musings of Rashi. Graphic images! Lots of them! Daily! Hammer the point home! When the media screams foul, redouble the effort.

Finally, and this will be controversial: The ancient Israelites could not advance into the land until they dealt with the sin of Achan. Israel does tolerate some abusive settlers; and use

some oppressive or prejudicial legal wranglings when dealing with Arabs, even Israeli Arabs. Until Israel deals with these issues, be assured the Arabists will make effective hay of Israel's sins to cover up Islam's far greater crimes. For the time being Israel must reign in violent settlers, and give the Arabs as much justice as is possible, if only to deprive the other side of ammunition in the propaganda war.

The first thing New York's Mayor Giuliani did when he started his war on crime was arrest crooked cops. Israel should do likewise.

Israel must change its tactics in the Internet War. Appeals to reason will not work with a generation which has been taught illiteracy. Israel must abandon its old methods, and fight hard and furious with the weapons of the internet. Images, videos, and cartoons. If done rightly, the battle can be won in short order, if Israel stops being polite.

A teachable moment for American Jews?

Evelyn Gordon, Commentary Magazine, 14 June 2013

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2013/06/14/a-teachable-moment-for-american-jews/>

As Jonathan Tobin noted yesterday, the Palestinian Authority has voiced vehement opposition to Natan Sharansky's plan to build an egalitarian prayer section at the Western Wall. But I think it's too soon to call this an "impassable obstacle," as he does; there's an important step that needs to be taken first: a thorough survey of American Jews asking whether, in light of this opposition, they favor proceeding with the plan. By this, I don't just mean a telephone poll of 500 or 1,000 random Jews; ideally, I'd like every Reform or Conservative congregation in America to discuss this question with its membership—for two reasons.

One is that the new egalitarian section seems to matter more to American Jews than to Israelis, since Israel's Reform and Conservative movements are so much smaller (about 7 percent of all Israeli Jews). Therefore, it's only fair to get their input before making any decision. The more important reason, however, is that this could provide a genuine teachable moment in the kind of trade-offs Israelis face every day in dealing with the Palestinians, to which liberal American Jews—i.e. the majority of the American Jewish community—have lately grown increasingly unsympathetic.

Most liberal American Jews have two main demands of Israel: They want it to recognize the non-Orthodox denominations, and they want it to make peace with the Palestinians, right now. The latter demand isn't confined to fringe anti-Israel activists; it's routinely voiced by long-time Israel supporters like Rabbi Eric Yoffie or Leon Wieseltier. So I'd like all these Jews to seriously consider this question: When these two primary demands conflict, what do you do—capitulate to the PA in the interests of "peace" and give up on being able to pray at the Western Wall in your own fashion, or insist on your rights at the Wall at the cost of further antagonizing the Palestinians, for whom modifications of the Western Wall Plaza are no less objectionable than new outposts in the heart of the West Bank?

Dilemmas no less wrenching confront Israel every day in dealing with the Palestinians, but because they don't affect American Jews directly, the latter are often too quick to accuse Israel of being intransigent over a trivial point it should just concede in the name of peace. They deplore Israel's refusal to agree to a border roughly along the 1967 lines, not understanding the enormous security risks this creates; they deplore Israel's refusal to release murderers to woo the Palestinians to the negotiating table, not understanding the

major role freed prisoners have repeatedly played in fomenting new terrorism; they deplore Israel's reluctance to redive Jerusalem, not understanding how unlikely it is that the city would remain open afterward, or how devastating a repartition would therefore be.

American Jews won't understand the details of these issues any better after confronting their own Palestinian dilemma over the Western Wall. But just maybe, they'll understand that dealing with the Palestinians isn't quite so simple as they seem to think it is. And if so, the Palestinians will have done a great service to Israel's relationship with American Jewry.

Sounding the alarm on Iran's human rights violations

Irwin Cotler and Mark Kirk, Jerusalem Post, 13 June 2013

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Sounding-the-alarm-on-Irans-human-rights-violations-316465>

In the run-up to the Iranian presidential election, Canadian parliamentarians and their American counterparts have been focusing attention on the Tehran government, sounding the alarm on massive domestic repression and the Iranian nuclear and terrorist threat to international peace and security.

We are witness to state-sanctioned assaults that are tantamount to crimes against humanity, including the highest per capita rate of executions in the world; the imprisonment and silencing of more journalists and bloggers than any other country; the persistent and pervasive assault on women's rights; the targeting of religious and ethnic minorities, particularly the Baha'i and the Kurds; the criminalization of fundamental freedoms of speech, association and assembly; and the imprisonment of opposition leaders, human rights defenders, and the lawyers who would defend them.

As it happens, the Iranian election – fraught with fraud and fear – is taking place against the backdrop of dark moments of remembrance – the fifth anniversary of the imprisonment of the Baha'i leadership in Iran, known as the Yaran; the 25th anniversary of the supreme leader's fatwa-ordered 1988 massacre of thousands of political dissidents; and the recent report of 2,600 political prisoners in Iran. The regime has only been ramping up its crackdown on dissent in advance of the presidential election.

Accordingly, we have launched the Iranian Political Prisoners Global Advocacy Project, where parliamentarians "adopt" Iranian political prisoners and advocate on their behalf. While the Iranian government seeks to silence dissenters, we are determined to make their voices heard. Each victim of repression must be recognized as a real person enduring mental and often physical anguish in a society where human rights and democracy itself have been imprisoned.

To that end, each parliamentarian participating in this project will endeavor to make known the story of his or her adopted prisoner as part of the struggle to set them free.

We will be advocating on behalf of Nasrin Sotoudeh, as well as the seven imprisoned leaders of the Iranian Baha'i community. As a lawyer, Ms.

Sotoudeh represented political prisoners – including women, lawyers, journalists and children sentenced to death – until, while visiting one of her clients in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison in 2010, she was arrested on trumped-up charges of "propaganda against the regime" and became one of Evin's inmates herself.

On May 30, this extraordinary woman – who embodies the struggle for human rights in Iran and symbolizes the regime’s massive domestic repression – spent her 50th birthday in one of the bleakest places on earth. Her 11-year sentence has already been reduced to six as a result of advocacy on her behalf, and that advocacy must continue.

The Baha’i leaders – Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Vahid Tizfahm – were arrested in 2008. At a trial that violated every international legal norm, they were convicted of “espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic,” and sentenced to 20 years in prison. This is a virtual death sentence for Mr.

Khanjani and others, given their advanced age.

Baha’i institutions have been outlawed in Iran since 1983, and the human rights of the Baha’i are systematically violated from cradle to grave. They are barred from many jobs and are not allowed to attend university. Hundreds have been imprisoned over the past decade, while the regime’s state-sanctioned culture of hate has resulted in arson attacks, the desecration of Baha’i cemeteries and assaults on school children.

We will also be advocating on behalf of Pastor Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-born US citizen who converted to Christianity as a teenager. During a visit to Iran last September to see his family and build an orphanage in the city of Rasht, he was arrested for undermining national security through Christian evangelical activities and sentenced to eight years in prison. He has been denied medical treatment for several serious health problems – including internal bleeding due to abuse in prison.

Earlier this month, Abedini was placed in solitary confinement for one week where he spent his 33rd birthday. While he was in what the American Center for Law and Justice has called “a small, dark hole,” more than 50,000 birthday messages were sent to his prison. Pastor Saeed has a wife and two young children.

To secure the release of these and other human rights heroes, Iranian political prisoners must become household names, and their cause must become our cause.

The government of Iran sponsors terrorism, seeks nuclear weapons, spews hateful rhetoric, and tramples the human rights of its own people.

The regime is afraid of the power of its citizens, and has created a culture of fear whereby everyone who speaks out is targeted. For the remarkable and courageous individuals who dare to challenge the regime, telling their stories is the very least we can do.

No peace with the Palestinians, no peace inside the Israeli coalition
Elisheva Goldberg, The Daily Beast, 13 June 2013

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/06/13/no-peace-with-the-palestinians-no-peace-inside-the-israeli-coalition.html>

The one area of consensus during last night's debate at Hebrew University was that no one in the coalition is happy with Benjamin Netanyahu's status quo. Not Eitan Cabel of Labor,

who sits in the opposition; not Yoni Shetbon from Jewish Home, or Ofer Shelah of Yesh Atid, who sit in the coalition; and certainly not the newlywed Tzipi Hotovely, a member of Netanyahu's very own Likud-Beiteinu. These members of parliament agree with the Kerry line: the Netanyahu status quo is unsustainable, and they agree something must be done about it. But that's where the agreement ends and the mixed messages of the 19th Knesset coalition begin. Last night's debate, organized by Molad: the Center for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy (where I work) and co-sponsored by Labor and Likud student groups, demonstrated why it's hard to envision how such a fragmented coalition might accomplish anything at all.

The topic of conversation was meant to be the Arab Peace Initiative, and a good chunk of the evening was, in fact, dedicated to the topic. But the underlying conversation, the conversation that kept breaking through the surface, was the basic question that's bedeviled Israeli politics since 1967: what to do about the occupied Palestinian territories.

On that question, the debate between Tzipi Hotovely and Ofer Shelah was undoubtedly the most riveting. Hotovely, as rhetorically powerful and deeply ideological as ever, laid out her four options for the territories at the start. First, the two state solution, which she pegged to the left. This meant, she said, a binational state based on the API's provision for the right of return of Palestinian refugees; in other words, the unacceptable end of the Jewish state. Second, the status quo, which she compared to Akamol (an Israeli version of Tylenol): a quick but temporary fix. And finally, her solution: the gradual annexation of the West Bank, beginning with Area C, in which Israel would give Palestinians full citizenship ("instead of five Ahmad Tibis [in the Knesset], we will have some more"), and simultaneously—yes—recruit one million Jews from the Diaspora to live in Israel, presumably to balance to the demographic threat enfranchising Palestinians would bring.

This last element of Hotovely's plan—importing American Jewish demography—sounds fairly deluded to an American Jewish ear and deserves a quick digression: The Nefesh b'Nefesh website will tell you that in the last 10 years, some 30,000 Americans have made *Aliya*, or emigrated to Israel. That's 3 percent of one millionr Hotovely wants to come in the next ten years. And yet somehow Hotovely thinks Jews will begin to come in droves. Why? She has the answer: they already are, on Birthright trips. On this point the moderator, a well-known TV personality and journalist who recently made a film about Birthright, quizzically argued back: "That's not what Adelson said when I sat with him." In his rebuttal later, Ofer Shelah asked Hotovely what her plan was once all the American Jews moved to Israel; where would her lobbyists come from, he asked.

To have the conversation focus on American Jews—an absent body and (apparently) mere theoretical concept—take hold of a political discussion between Knesset members seemed bizarre and, moreover, uncomfortable. American Jews are not Tzipi Hotovely's constituency. They did not vote her into office (nor likely would they). What right has she to use them for her own demographic wandwaving?

The students, at least, were less interested in American Jewry and more interested in Israeli Jewry. At some point, a student clearly affiliated with the Likud sector of the audience, asked the progressive MKs a galling question: "What is *our* interest in making peace now?" And before any of the MKs could answer, another student almost leapt out of his seat screaming, "The occupation corrupts!"—a common mantra of the Israeli left. It was then that Ofer Shelah, a former paratrooper who lost an eye in the first Lebanon War and made his career as a journalist, made his case.

"Come on, I'll tell you how the occupation corrupts," Shelah said. And he did, giving specifics and eventually arguing that a "political settlement with the Palestinians is [Israel's] top

interest." It was a rousing speech, garnering momentous applause, about what the occupation is doing to Israel and why a Palestinian state is so necessary—for Israel. He spoke of settlements as a "barrier to peace," about the South African direction Israel is headed and how Israel's international standing continues to sink. "We'll always have Micronesia," he lamented, "but we've gotten to the point where at the U.N. vote only nine countries vote with us. The world has informed us that they're sick and tired of our situation as an occupying country."

The Israeli coalition's schizophrenia has been a hot topic since the government formed in January. Danny Danon's "slip" to the *Times of Israel* was merely the latest intra-party clash. But Yair Lapid can be just as bad. In the *New York Times* earlier this year, he described the two-state solution as "crucial" and expressed a desire for negotiations. And yet would not back down from his stance for an "undivided Jerusalem," nor would he change settlement policy; both are fundamental Palestinian demands for talks. These kinds of tensions, too, may not break up the coalition, but they very well may prevent it from getting anything done.

The Palestinian Authority's reign of terror

Khaled Abu Toameh, Gatestone Institute, 13 June 2013

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3761/palestinian-authority-terror>

Until recently, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank used to arrest Palestinians who criticized its leaders, especially Mahmoud Abbas.

But now the Palestinian Authority has resumed using thugs to break the bones of its critics.

It is an easy and quick way to deal with the critics and deter others from speaking out against Palestinian Authority leaders.

The thugs are often members of Abbas's ruling Fatah faction. However, they do not hold any official position in the Palestinian Authority; they do not belong to Palestinian Authority security forces or any government-related agency in the West Bank.

This allows the Palestinian Authority to distance itself from the thugs each time they perpetrate a crime.

But the thugs, who are referred to by Palestinians as "Shabbiha," are known to act on instructions from top Palestinian Authority leaders.

In the Arab world, "Shabbiha" are known as groups of thugs and militiamen who are used by the government to crack down on critics and political opponents.

The Palestinian Authority's "Shabbiha" are not as ruthless as Syrian President Bashar Assad's thugs. They do not go around slaughtering innocent women and children, and they do not rape young girls.

The Palestinian "Shabbiha" -- most of whom are on the payroll of the Western-funded Palestinian Authority -- have managed to impose a reign of terror and intimidation on the Palestinian public.

The last time the Palestinian Authority used its thugs was last weekend at Bethlehem University.

During a conference to promote boycott and sanctions against Israel on campus, a Palestinian activist asked Palestinian Authority Minister of Economy, Jawad Naji, a provocative question: How come the Palestinian Authority talks about promoting the boycott of Israel while at the same time it continues to conduct security coordination with Israel, and some of its leaders hold secret meetings with Israelis?

At the end of the conference, as he was driving home, the activist, 34-year-old Nizar Banat, was intercepted by seven thugs, who dragged him out of his car and beat him severely.

Fatah later issued a leaflet justifying the assault on Banat -- apparently carried out by its own thugs -- and threatened to use an "iron fist" against anyone who dares to criticize a Palestinian Authority leader.

The use of Fatah thugs by the Palestinian Authority is not a new phenomenon. The thugs are often recruited from refugee camps and their mission is to do the "dirty work" for the Palestinian Authority leadership.

The thugs are regularly sent to threaten and batter journalists, writers, university students and political opponents in the West Bank. Another of their preferred methods is the torching of vehicles.

With the help of the thugs, the Palestinian Authority leadership was able to suppress what appeared to be the beginning of a "Palestinian Spring" in the West Bank two years ago.

Then, Fatah thugs recruited by the Palestinian Authority attacked dozens of Palestinian protesters who had set up tents in the center of Ramallah. The protesters were beaten and their tents set on fire as Palestinian Authority policemen stood on the side and refused to interfere.

By resorting to this policy of terror and intimidation against its critics and political opponents, the Palestinian Authority leadership in the West Bank is once again showing that it is not much different from other Arab dictatorships. It is these measures that have driven many Palestinians away from the Palestinian Authority and straight into the open arms of Hamas and other extremist groups.

Who brought Iran close to a nuclear bomb?

Lt Col (ret.) Michael Segall, JCPA, 12 June 2013

<http://jcpa.org/article/who-brought-iran-close-to-a-nuclear-bomb-the-focal-point-of-rowhanis-and-jalilis-election-propaganda/>

With a few days remaining before the June 14 presidential elections in Iran, the most fraught, sensitive issue in the campaign concerns Iran's foreign policy – its relations with the West in general and the nuclear talks in particular. Whereas the "principalist" [hard-line] candidates take a dogmatic, uncompromising line on Iran's foreign relations and its stance on the nuclear issue, the "pragmatic" candidates show a readiness to open a new chapter in Iran's dealings with the world and conduct the nuclear talks in a calmer atmosphere.

- The "nuclear debate" is mainly being waged between two presidential candidates: current nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and, from the "pragmatic" camp, Hassan Rowhani, who served as nuclear negotiator while Mohammad Khatami was president. Jalili disparages Rowhani for the fact that, while he was nuclear negotiator, Iran agreed to suspend its

uranium-enrichment activities and indeed its nuclear program came to a halt. Rowhani charges that it was Jalili's (and Ahmadinejad's) aggressive, uncompromising, defiant approach that led to sanctions, Iran's isolation in the international arena and a series of UN Security Council resolutions against it, and that during his own tenure the nuclear program actually progressed.

- Overall, Jalili and Rowhani reveal the two sides of Iran's nuclear negotiating tactics. These tactics complement each other and are derived from the geostrategic circumstances under which they are pursued. Rowhani conducted negotiations after the U.S. campaign to liberate Iraq, when caution was necessary. In Jalili's period (2007 to the present), Iran has felt greater self-assurance as the anti-terror endeavor has been distanced from Iran, the United States' regional status has weakened, and Iran's ally, Syrian President Bashar Assad, has been able to survive in power despite a two-year long revolt.
- In any event, whoever is elected, the influence of the next president of Iran on the conduct of the nuclear negotiations will be meager. The issue is in the hands of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guard. It is also clear that Iran's nuclear negotiating strategies in the different periods have brought it to a threshold where, if it so chooses, it can attain nuclear capability.

Lackluster Candidates

With just a few days remaining before the June 14 presidential elections in Iran, election propaganda is in full swing. The removal of high-profile candidates Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, who could have injected some interest into the dull campaign, left only anemic candidates in the arena. These are more or less divided into three contending forces. The first is Saeed Jalili, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and head of Iran's nuclear negotiating team; the second is the principalist 2+1 group comprising Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Ali Akbar Velayati, and Gholam Ali Haddad Adel; and the third or "pragmatic" faction includes Hassan Rowhani, who is considered similar to Rafsanjani and formerly headed the nuclear negotiating team; Mohammad-Reza Aref, Mohammad Gharazi, and Mohsen Rezaei, a former commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The candidates held a series of televised debates leading up to the elections. The first focused on the economic sphere, with the different candidates dispensing promises for a better future for the Iranian economy along with harsh criticism of the previous government's performance in this domain. The second debate focused on social and cultural issues and the third on foreign affairs with a heated discussion on the sensitive nuclear topic. With the citizenry in growing distress, the economic issue has played a central role in the elections. Candidates have presented far-reaching economic programs, promising to salvage Iran "if I am elected." An even more fraught, sensitive issue in the campaign, however, concerns Iran's foreign policy – its relations with the West in general and the nuclear talks in particular. Whereas the conservative candidates, including Jalili, take a dogmatic, uncompromising line on Iran's foreign relations and its stance on the nuclear issue, the "pragmatic" candidates show a readiness to open a new chapter in Iran's dealings with the world and conduct the nuclear talks in a calmer atmosphere.

Nuclear Negotiators Collide

The debate is mainly being waged between Saeed Jalili and Hassan Rowhani (who got some surprising help during the third debate from Ali Akbar Velayati, former Foreign Minister and the current senior advisor on international affairs to Khamenei), who served as

nuclear negotiator while Mohammad Khatami was president. Both criticize Iranian nuclear negotiating strategy with the West, and each uses a far-flung network that includes theme-based websites, social networks (Twitter and Facebook), and YouTube channels. Jalili also makes use of the semi-official Fars News Agency, affiliated with the Revolutionary Guard to present and promote his positions.

Jalili and his deputy disparage Rowhani – who has been seen as the hope of the pragmatic camp since Rafsanjani's removal from the race by the Guardian Council – for the fact that, while he was nuclear negotiator, Iran agreed to suspend its uranium-enrichment activities, and indeed its nuclear program came to a halt. Jalili contends that Rowhani, along with the reformist governments of Rafsanjani and Khatami, displayed willingness for compromise with the West and harmed Iran's regional posture and resolve toward the West. Jalili claims that while he heads the nuclear negotiating team under the government of Ahmadinejad (who has now lost favor in Khamenei's eyes) and the ultimate leadership of Khamenei, Iran has steadily been strengthening its regional status as the only actor challenging the West. He cites as evidence the nuclear program's dramatic progress.

Jalili: A Promotional Video That Depicts Him as the “Nuclear Hero”

Jalili produced a promotional video that was shown on Iranian state television and distributed to all types of media including social networks. The clip glorifies his role as head of Iran's nuclear negotiating team and portrays him as resolute, uncompromising, and hence responsible for Iran's achievements in the nuclear domain. During the film, Ali Bagheri – Jalili's deputy in the nuclear negotiations, head of his campaign staff and author of the nuclear negotiation chronicles– asserts that while Rowhani was serving as nuclear negotiator:

We disarmed, that is, we retreated from the [nuclear] progress and success. We held negotiations on our nuclear activity, but what activity? We in fact stopped our nuclear activity at that time and left them no reason or motive to recognize our [nuclear] rights.

Bagheri went so far as to add that Rowhani's negotiating tactics were no different than if “on the first day of the Iran-Iraq War we would have retreated to Tehran.”

Jalili, for his part, says in the video:

[Joschka] Fischer [German foreign minister during the 2003 talks between the EU3 (Britain, France, and Germany) and Iran, when Iran decided to suspend uranium enrichment] spoke precisely this sentence: ‘The decision was that you [Iran] will first suspend, then close down, and then destroy [the nuclear program]’.

Bagheri goes on to claim that “in the Paris talks [which led to the agreement to suspend enrichment] they [the EU3] spoke of objective guarantees and, as they saw it, that meant the absence of a full nuclear fuel cycle.” Later in the film Khamenei is quoted as saying that:

...the Europeans did not settle for a temporary suspension of enrichment, and after we suspended it they urged a full stop. This was a retreat. We retreated. I then already told those in charge that if they wanted to continue a process of ongoing retreat, I myself would enter the arena. And I did that. I told them that we must stop the retreat and turn it into progress.

Further on in the film Jalili says: “They [the EU3] saw a good opportunity to get us to cease our enrichment at a 3.5-percent level and said that in return they would give us fuel rods, not fuel just rods, and even this only two years after the suspension.”

During the campaign, Fars News quoted him as saying, "It is prohibited to suspend the potential within youth [here he is drawing an analogy between the potential of uranium and the potential of young people] and it should be enriched not to the level of 5 percent or 20 percent but to 100 percent enrichment." Fars News omitted the "youth" from its headline that reads: "We Will Raise the Percentage of Enrichment to 100 Percent." The opening sentence also left no doubt: "We must go up to a path that leads us to 100 percent enrichment." Nothing was said regarding "enriching the youth of Iran."

Jalili used the term enrichment in a sophisticated way in order to once again present himself as someone who will further advance the Iranian nuclear program far more than Rowhani, and if he is elected, he will take it to the next level, meaning enrichment for a nuclear bomb. Similarly, the use of the term "suspend" allows Jalili to sting Rowhani, who agreed to a temporary suspension of uranium enrichment during his negotiations with the Europeans between 2003 and 2005.²

Iran Needs to Get Moving toward a 100-Percent Uranium-Enrichment Capability

Jalili and his campaign staff repeatedly attack Rowhani regarding the 2003 suspension and emphasize Jalili's central role and achievements as nuclear negotiator. Jalili's supporters also added to the campaign the family of assassinated nuclear scientist Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan. The scientist's father claimed that if people like Rowhani were to gain power, they would not hesitate to hand the state over to foreigners. The father said that he:

...recalls that at the time enrichment was suspended in the period of [Rowhani], my son, who said he was part of the uranium-enrichment team, was sad and despairing and told me, his father, that they had closed the nuclear sites and installed closed-circuit televisions and we could not even get near to the sites.

He added that after the facilities were closed, his son was in so much despair that he even planned to leave the nuclear program; it was on his father's recommendation that he stayed. After enrichment was renewed, it appeared that Mostafa and his friends could get back to work. They toiled night and day behind the centrifuges to reach 20-percent enrichment. The father recalled that when he would ask his son what was the purpose of attaining the 20-percent level, he would answer, "We want to converse with world imperialism from a position of strength. If they think we can't manage 20-percent enrichment, they won't listen to us."

Rowhani: It's Very Nice for the Centrifuges to Spin, So Long as the State Can Function

Rowhani, for his part, made certain to respond and in a propaganda video of his own (that also was disseminated on websites and social networks) charges that it was Jalili's (and Ahmadinejad's) aggressive, uncompromising, defiant approach that led to Iran's isolation in the international arena, a series of UN Security Council resolutions against it, sanctions, and hence also the deterioration of its economy.⁴ (Ali Akbar Velayati supported Rowhani in this argument during the third debate). Rowhani contends that while during his tenure Iran indeed agreed to suspend uranium enrichment, it was precisely then that the groundwork was laid for developing the country's nuclear capability quietly and secretly, far from the tumult of the international system. Rowhani also rejected attempts during television interviews to portray him as having retreated and compromised when he agreed to suspend the nuclear program, underlining that "Iran did not suspend but rather completed its nuclear program." Rowhani, moreover, criticized the Iranian broadcasting network IRIB, charging that its moderators were instructed to ask certain questions. Rowhani also Tweeted that he and Mir Hussein Mousavi visited the first nuclear facilities "capable of proliferation back in the summer of 2002" meaning the Uranium Conversion Facility (UCF) in Esfahan.

In an interview, Rowhani ardently defended his position on the nuclear negotiations and described himself as an experienced and moderate person who could make good use of his negotiating experience under the Rafsanjani and Khatami governments. Among other things he noted that his tenure as nuclear negotiator saw the development of conversion, enrichment, and centrifuge technology while at the same time Iran was able to avert sanctions and Security Council resolutions and maintain proper relations with the West. Rowhani stressed that Iran completed the nuclear fuel cycle in this period, “but unlike others [such as Jalili] we did not regularly celebrate.” He went on to say:

It’s very nice that the centrifuges are spinning and operating, but only as long as the state is spinning and functioning. If the centrifuges are working but the rest of the country is not, what is the benefit in that? It is not right that we build a production plant in Natanz but hundreds of other plants are in trouble because of the sanctions and lack of raw materials. This approach is not acceptable to us.

He completely rejected claims that Iran had suspended its nuclear program after agreeing to the Tehran Declaration in 2003 (issued jointly by Iran and the EU3) and stressed that during his tenure Iran had accumulated great nuclear knowledge and succeeded to produce yellowcake and UF₆ (uranium hexafluoride, in the conversion facility at Isfahan), advance the building of the heavy water reactor (known as IR-40) in Arak, and increase the number of centrifuges. When he first took the post, he said, Iran had 750 centrifuges; by the time he left it, Iran had 1700. He said Iran must engage with the West and practice intelligent diplomacy so as to remove the Iranian nuclear issue from the Security Council. Rowhani also said that while he served as negotiator the Bush administration did not succeed to isolate Iran.

A Deficit of Understanding

In a Tweet, Rowhani also hinted that Ahmadinejad and the nuclear negotiating team suffered from a deficit of understanding. “Those who lack experience and academic legal knowledge have trouble understanding the difference between resolutions of the General Conference of the IAEA and those of the UN Security Council.” On another occasion Rowhani remarked that in today’s world one cannot build walls around the state or sever one’s relations with the world; instead one must practice constructive relations with the international community.

Rowhani added that if he was elected, once he had tended to the economic problems and the citizens’ welfare, his most important program would be to rehabilitate and reorder Iran’s relations with the world’s states. “In today’s world”, he said, “there are no permanent friends and enemies; friendship and antagonism are determined by interests and mutual respect”. In his view, when one is:

...mired in mistaken theories that say the whole world is united against us [an allusion to Ahmadinejad], and we have no option except a confrontational stance, there is no chance of improving relations with the world. No country in today’s world can build walls around itself. No country can develop when it is in isolation. We must not enable the enemy to realize its aim of isolating Iran. We must repair our relations with the world, first and foremost with our neighboring countries.

He also noted that Iran’s relations with the United States are now antagonistic, and Iran should strive at least to lower the level from antagonism to tension.

Rowhani’s Activity—”with the Supreme Leader’s Approval”

Rowhani’s campaign staff reacted sharply to statements by Bagheri, Jalili’s deputy, particularly his insinuations that Rowhani’s agreement to the temporary uranium-enrichment suspension was not coordinated with or approved by Khamenei. As questioned sardonically

in Rowhani's campaign announcement: "Do you, as the ones currently responsible for the nuclear negotiations [with the West], have authority and approval to make important decisions without coordination and approval by the Leader, even though this is what you accuse the previous negotiating team of doing?" It went on to say:

"Bagheri is one of the senior figures involved in the nuclear negotiations and his remarks were unfair. Some of his words implied that the measures enacted by the Supreme National Security Council during the tenure of Hassan Rowhani were taken without the approval of the Spiritual Leader."

Senior conservative figures in the Revolutionary Guard criticize Rowhani's willingness (and that of other "reformist" candidates) for a compromise with the United States and even portray them as enjoying outside support from "enemies of Iran." For example, Ahmad Khatami, a member of the Assembly of Experts, which supervises the activity of the Supreme Leader and determines candidates' eligibility for the elections, criticized claims by some of the candidates, including Rowhani, that improving relations with the West would boost Iran's economy and that the problems with the West did not lie in the nuclear sphere but rather in Iran's revolutionary messages and anti-Western stance.

A Sensitive Issue Involving National Security

The nuclear issue plays an interesting role in Iran's election propaganda and reveals a bit of the behind-the-scenes decision-making process (conducted by the Leader, not the president) and of the nuclear negotiating tactics. Indeed, some have criticized certain contestants, particularly Jalili and Rowhani, for making use of their role as nuclear negotiators in their election propaganda, including disclosures of information. For example, an opinion article on the *Alef* website headlined "The Elections are not a Referendum on the Nuclear-Talks Issue" remarked critically regarding the two nuclear-negotiator candidates ("the former, Rowhani and the latter, Jalili"): "Wow, what would happen if Ali Larijani [chairman of the Majlis, who served as nuclear negotiator after Rowhani and before Jalili], too, was a candidate, what an amazing arena of nuclear and security disputes we'd have then."

Alef acknowledges that there is room to discuss and evaluate the performance of the two candidates—"who advanced the program and who retreated, who stopped the work and who did what." The site asks, however:

Is it good to discuss the most sensitive, basic, and important issue of the state as part of the election campaign? Indeed the sides have to criticize each other directly and indirectly, and to prove they are right, each time they have to remove another part of the screen [that covers Iran's nuclear program] and expose national secrets to the world.

Summing up, the article states:

The nuclear portfolio cannot be turned into one's personal plaything. Particularly because no government has been or will be responsible for the general conduct of this portfolio, and its operative domain is not something that can be publicly revealed. It does not matter who started this lose-lose competition, what is important is to remove this issue immediately from the election-propaganda table. The elections are not a referendum on the nuclear talks.

Different Tactics, the Same Goal

Overall, Rowhani and Jalili reveal the two sides of Iran's nuclear negotiating tactics. These tactics complement each other and are derived from the geostrategic circumstances under

which they are pursued. Rowhani conducted the negotiations after the U.S. campaign to liberate Iraq; caution was necessary because a more defiant policy could have drawn the anti-terror campaign from Iraq to Iran, which Bush had already called part of the “axis of evil” in 2002, a term that has been used to describe Iran and other countries since that time and particularly since the Syrian crisis erupted some two years ago. In Jalili’s period (2007 to the present), however, Iran has felt greater self-assurance as the anti-terror endeavor has been distanced from Iran, the United States’ regional status has weakened under the impact, among other things, of the Arab Spring, and Bashar Assad—a beneficiary of Tehran’s strategic cultivation—has been able to survive in power for two years and stand firm against “Arab and Western enemies,” as was seen recently in *al Qusair*.

In any case, whoever is elected, the influence of the next president of Iran — on the conduct of the nuclear negotiations will be meager. The issue is in the hands of the Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guard. Also clear is that Iran’s nuclear negotiating strategies in the different periods have brought it to a juncture where the decision to build a nuclear bomb is in Iran’s hands alone. Whoever the next Iranian negotiators will be, Rowhani, Larijani, and Jalili managed during a decade of fruitless negotiations with the West, to buy enough time for Iran to reach a threshold where, if it chooses to, it can cross over to nuclear capability.

Regional conditions are apparently playing into Iran’s hands and encouraging its defiance (*al Qusair*...); sanctions are indeed exacting a heavy price, but not heavy enough to induce it to give up its nuclear program and achievements and regional imperial aspirations.

Egypt’s summer of Jew hatred

Sorab Ahmari, *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 June 2013

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324634304578539100627553238.html>

In March, on his first visit to the Jewish state as president, Barack Obama exhorted Israelis to reach out to their Arab neighbors and see that “sometimes the greatest miracle is recognizing that the world can change.”

But consider Egypt, where in 2011 a popular revolt swept away Hosni Mubarak’s pharaonic dictatorship only to replace it with a Muslim Brotherhood-led theocracy. Through it all, one element of Egyptian culture has remained constant: its virulent anti-Semitism.

“Khaybar,” a serial drama set to air during the holy month of Ramadan (starting on July 8), is Egyptian TV’s latest piece of hate-melodrama. It depicts the Prophet Muhammad’s conquest, in A.D. 629, of a Jewish community on the Arabian Peninsula.

“Khaybar, oh Jews!” is an oft-heard chant at Arab anti-Israel rallies. But just in case there was any doubt about the intended political message, the show’s screenwriter, Yousry El Gendy, has gone on the record with the online news outlet Alyoum Alsabea to declare: “This drama will focus on the Jewish community and will show their traits, ideas and their maliciousness. Also, it will show the enmity between Arabs and Jews since the time of Moses.” Ahmed Maher, a popular actor playing one of the Jewish villains, told the *Al-Balad* newspaper that “Khaybar” sets out to depict Jews as “the ugliest slice of humans.”

“The show will be on when most Egyptian families are staying at home for Ramadan doing nothing but watching TV,” Mina Rezkalla, a U.S.-based Egyptian activist told me. “The goal is completely outward anti-Semitism.” Contrary to Mr. Obama’s uplifting Middle East maxims, some things in the world’s least free region never change.

Global views of Iran are overwhelmingly negative

Overview: Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, 11 June 2013

<http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/11/global-views-of-iran-overwhelmingly-negative/>

Overview

As Iranians prepare to elect a new president, the country's international image is largely negative. Majorities in most of 39 countries surveyed have an unfavorable opinion of Iran, and most say Tehran does not respect the personal freedoms of its people. Meanwhile, any nuclear ambitions harbored by the Iranian government continue to draw strong opposition from Western countries, as well as neighboring states in the Middle East.

Unfavorable views of Iran are especially widespread in Israel and much of Western Europe, where at least eight-in-ten in most countries surveyed have a negative opinion of Iran. In the U.S., roughly seven-in-ten express an unfavorable view of Iran.

Majorities in many predominantly Muslim nations surveyed also see Iran in a negative light, including countries such as Jordan (81% unfavorable), Egypt (78%), Turkey (68%), Lebanon (60%) and the Palestinian territories (55%). Only in Pakistan (69%) and Indonesia (55%) do majorities express a favorable opinion of Iran.

Iran's poor reputation for protecting personal freedoms does not help its international image. Majorities in 24 of 39 countries surveyed think Tehran does not respect the rights of its citizens. This includes three-quarters or more who hold this view in Europe and North America, as well as in Israel, Brazil, Australia and South Korea.

Assessments of Tehran's rights record are less black-and-white in the other countries surveyed, with opinion divided in Russia (24% Iran respects personal freedoms, 42% does not respect) and China (33% vs. 37%). Only in Pakistan does a clear majority (57%) say Iran respects the personal liberties of its citizens.

Concern about Iran's nuclear ambitions may be another factor contributing to its widely negative image. Across the E3+3 countries – the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China – which are involved in on-again, off-again nuclear talks with Tehran, at least six-in-ten oppose Iran acquiring nuclear weapons.

In the Middle East, Israelis are nearly unanimous (96%) in their opposition to Tehran developing nuclear weapons. But some Muslim publics in the region also voice strong objections to a nuclear-armed Iran, including roughly six-in-ten or more in Jordan (79%), Egypt (73%), Turkey (69%), and Lebanon (59%).

These are among the key findings of a new survey by the Pew Research Center conducted in 39 nations from March 2 to May 1, 2013. The poll also finds that, despite broad opposition to Iran obtaining nuclear weapons, key publics continue to disagree on policy toward Tehran. Among the E3+3 countries, for instance, at least seven-in-ten among those who oppose Iran's nuclear program in the U.S., Britain, France and Germany back tougher economic sanctions, but the Russians and Chinese are divided on the issue. Meanwhile, only in the U.S. and France are clear majorities of people who oppose a nuclear armed Iran willing to support military action in order to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear arms.

The survey additionally finds that publics in the Middle East vary in their assessment of Iran's regional influence. The vast majority of Lebanese (85%), for example, see Iran as influential in their country. But the Palestinians offer a mixed assessment of Iran's power, and solid majorities in Turkey, Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia say Iran has little or no influence in their respective countries.

Iran's Poor Image Abroad

Iran's image is overwhelmingly negative across much of the world. Unfavorable opinions of Iran are especially pronounced in Europe, with majorities ranging from 88% in France to 59% in Britain saying they have a negative opinion of Iran. Russia is the one outlier in the region, with only a 49%-plurality expressing an unfavorable view of Iran.

In North America, about seven-in-ten in the U.S. (69%) and Canada (70%) have an unfavorable opinion of Iran. To the south, most countries surveyed in Latin America share this negative assessment of Iran, including at least half in Brazil (72%), Chile (55%), Mexico (52%) and Venezuela (51%).

Across the Middle East and North Africa, the prevailing opinion of Iran is also negative. In Israel, roughly nine-in-ten (92%) express an unfavorable view of Iran, while about eight-in-ten share this opinion in Jordan (81%) and Egypt (78%). Tunisia is the one country surveyed in the region where fewer than half (44%) view Iran unfavorably. It should also be noted that, although overall Lebanese opinion of Iran is negative, only 11% of Lebanese Shia share this view (89% are favorable toward Iran).

In sub-Saharan Africa, attitudes toward Iran are mixed, with many respondents offering no definite opinion. The one exception is South Africa, where a 57%-majority expresses a negative view of Iran.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to the only countries surveyed where clear majorities have a *favorable* opinion of Iran: Pakistan (69%) and Indonesia (55%). Elsewhere in the region, attitudes clearly lean in the opposite direction, with at least six-in-ten in Japan (75%), Australia (68%), Philippines (60%), South Korea (59%) and China (58%) holding an unfavorable opinion of Iran.

Compared with six years ago, unfavorable views of Iran have intensified in a number of countries. This is especially the case in the neighboring states of Egypt and Jordan, where negative opinion of Iran increased by 28 percentage points in each country between 2007 and 2013.

Over the past half dozen years, unfavorable opinion of Iran has also increased in the Palestinian territories (+16 percentage points), South Korea (+16), Turkey (+12), Spain (+12), and Russia (+9).

No Respect for Personal Freedoms

Pluralities to majorities in 28 of 39 countries surveyed say the government of Iran does not respect the personal freedoms of its people, a finding that follows well-publicized crackdowns on opposition leaders and other groups since President Ahmadinejad was returned to office in a controversial 2009 election.

Criticism of Tehran's rights record is most pronounced in Europe, the U.S. and Canada, where at least three-quarters of those surveyed say Iran does not respect the personal freedoms of its citizens.

In Latin America, half or more in all seven countries surveyed agree that the government in Tehran does not observe or protect the rights of Iranians, including 82% in Brazil who take this view.

Majorities in most nations surveyed in the Middle East and North Africa are also skeptical of Iran's rights record, with roughly nine-in-ten Israelis (91%) saying Tehran does not respect the rights of citizens, and at least six-in-ten agreeing in Egypt (66%), Jordan (61%) and Lebanon (61%).

Relatively few in sub-Saharan Africa take a strong stand on Iran's observance of personal liberties, with opinion closely divided in most of the countries surveyed and many saying they don't know.

Assessments of Iran's rights record vary in the Asia-Pacific region. Clear majorities in some countries think Tehran does not respect personal freedoms, including Australia (81%), South Korea (75%), Japan (69%) and Philippines (59%). But opinion is mixed in China (33% does respect; 37% does not), as well as predominantly Muslim nations of Indonesia (44%; 35%) and Malaysia (37%; 29%). Pakistan is the one country surveyed where a majority (57%) says that Tehran does respect the rights of its citizens.

Perceptions of Iran's Influence

Publics in the Middle East and North Africa differ about the degree to which Iran's influence extends beyond its borders. Lebanon, where Tehran-backed Hezbollah is a major political and military force, is the only country surveyed in which an overwhelming majority (85%) thinks Iran has either a fair amount or great deal of influence in domestic affairs.

Majorities among each of Lebanon's main religious groups agree that Iran wields considerable influence in their country, with Sunnis and Christians most likely to say Iran has a *great deal* of influence (65% and 63%, respectively), compared with 44% of Shia who say the same.

Palestinians are divided on whether Iran's reach extends to their internal affairs: 48% say Iran does exert influence in their affairs, while 43% say it wields little or no influence. By comparison, majorities in Jordan (66%), Turkey (60%), Tunisia (61%) and Egypt (56%) characterize Iran as having not very much or no influence in their countries.

On balance, those who believe Iran has substantial influence tend to describe this as a bad thing. More than two-thirds of people who say Iran has a great deal or fair amount of influence take this view in Turkey (73%) and Tunisia (69%), as do majorities in Lebanon (58%) and Jordan (57%). Pluralities in Egypt (44%) and the Palestinian territories (47%) also consider Iran playing a role in their domestic affairs to be a bad thing. Opinion in Lebanon divides along sectarian lines: 87% of Shia who think Iran is having a major influence see it in a positive light, in contrast with 91% of Sunnis and 62% of Christians who consider Tehran's reach into Lebanon a bad thing.

Widespread Opposition to a Nuclear-Armed Iran

International opinion is clearly against Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. Majorities in most countries where the question was asked say they oppose a nuclear-armed Iran, including at least six-in-ten in each of the E3+3 countries: Germany (96%), France (94%), U.S. (93%), Britain (89%), Russia (75%) and China (62%).

In the Middle East and North Africa, Israelis are the most vocal opponents of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons (96% opposed). But they are not the only concerned public in the region. Strong majorities in Jordan (79%), Egypt (73%), Turkey (69%) and Lebanon (59%) also oppose Iran developing a nuclear arsenal. By comparison, opinion is divided in Tunisia (40% favor, 47% oppose), while Palestinians are the only public surveyed where as many as half (51%) support Tehran acquiring nuclear weapons.

Attitudes in most E3+3 countries have changed little since last year except in China where the public is more opposed to a nuclear-armed Iran than in 2012 (62% vs. 54%).

Publics differ when it comes to the use of economic sanctions to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear arms. Roughly three-quarters or more of those who oppose Iran's nuclear program in the U.S. (78%), Germany (77%), Britain (75%) and France (73%) approve of tougher economic sanctions to deter Iran from developing nuclear weapons. But only 47% share this view in Russia, while the Chinese are divided on the question (44% favor; 47% oppose).

Among Iran's regional neighbors, there is a similar lack of consensus about strengthening the economic sanctions aimed at Tehran. Solid majorities of those who oppose the Iranian nuclear program in Israel (91%), Egypt (61%), Jordan (74%) and Lebanon (77%) favor a tougher sanctions regime as a means of reigning in Iran's nuclear ambitions. But majorities in Turkey (66%) and the Palestinian territories (55%) oppose such a strategy. Opinion in Tunisia is divided – 42% favor, while 48% oppose tougher sanctions.

There is deeper disagreement about possible military action to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. On this question, there are even different levels of support among the U.S. and its western European allies. Among opponents of Iran's nuclear program, about two-thirds (64%) in the U.S. and 58% in France would support military action if necessary, but only 50% in Germany and 48% in Britain say the same. Just 28% in Russia and 35% in China back a military option.

Among those who do not want to see a nuclear armed Iran in the Middle East and North Africa, solid majorities in Israel (68%) and Jordan (59%) say it is important to keep Iran from developing nuclear weapons even if it means military action. A plurality holds this view in Lebanon (49%) and Egypt (46%). However, such an option is opposed by 61% in Tunisia, 56% in Turkey, and 46% in the Palestinian territories.

The Muslim civil war

Bret Stephens, The Wall Street Journal, 3 June 2013

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324063304578522133099457480.html>

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the prominent Sunni cleric, said Friday that Hezbollah and Iran are "more infidel than Jews and Christians." Coming from the guy who once lauded Hitler for exacting "divine punishment" on the Jews, that really is saying something.

That the war in Syria is sectarian was obvious almost from the start, despite the credulous belief that Bashar Assad ran a nonsectarian regime. That a sectarian ruling minority fighting for its life would not fold easily was obvious within months, despite happy guarantees that the regime's downfall would come within weeks. That a sectarian war in Syria would stir similar religious furies in Iraq and Lebanon was obvious more than a year ago, despite wishful administration thinking that staying out of Syria would contain the war to Syria alone.

What should be obvious today is that we are at the dawn of a much wider Shiite-Sunni war, the one that nearly materialized in Iraq in 2006 but didn't because the U.S. was there, militarily and diplomatically, to stop it. But now the U.S. isn't there. What's left to figure out is whether this megawar isn't, from a Western point of view, a very good thing.

The theory is simple and superficially compelling: If al Qaeda fighters want to murder Hezbollah fighters and Hezbollah fighters want to return the favor, who in their right mind would want to stand in the way? Of course it isn't just Islamist radicals of one stripe or another who are dying in Syria, but also little children and aging grandparents and every other innocent and helpless bystander to the butchery.

But here comes the whispered suggestion: If one branch of Islam wants to be at war with another branch for a few years—or decades—so much the better for the non-Islamic world. Mass civilian casualties in Aleppo or Homs is *their* tragedy, not ours. It does not implicate us morally. And it probably benefits us strategically, not least by redirecting jihadist energies away from the West.

Wrong on every count.

The aftermath of an April 30 bomb blast in Damascus that killed 14.

Similar thinking was popular in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq War. The war left as many as 1.4 million corpses on the battlefield, including thousands of child soldiers, and caused both countries billions in economic damage. And how did the West benefit from that? It's true that the price of crude declined sharply almost every year of the war, but that only goes to show how weak the correlation is between Persian Gulf tensions and oil prices.

Otherwise, the 1980s were the years of the tanker wars in the Gulf, including Iraq's attack on the USS Stark; the hostage-taking in Lebanon; and the birth of Hezbollah, with its suicide bombings of the U.S. Marine barracks and embassy in Beirut. Iraq invaded Kuwait less than two years after the war's end. Iran emerged with its revolutionary fervors intact—along with a rekindled interest in developing nuclear weapons.

In short, a long intra-Islamic war left nobody safer, wealthier or wiser. Nor did it leave the West morally untainted. The U.S. embraced Saddam Hussein as a counterweight to Iran, and later tried to ply Iran with secret arms in exchange for the release of hostages. Patrolling the Strait of Hormuz, the USS Vincennes mistakenly shot down an Iranian jetliner over the Gulf, killing 290 civilians. Inaction only provides moral safe harbor when there's no possibility of action.

Maybe that's what President Obama is secretly aiming for. Had he armed Syria's rebels early in the conflict, he could have empowered a moderate opposition, toppled the regime, sidelined Sunni jihadists, prevented the bloodbath we now have, stemmed the refugee crisis and dealt a sharp strategic setback to Iran—all without any U.S. military involvement.

Had he moved against Assad after the latter's use of chemical weapons, the president could have demonstrated the seriousness of U.S. red lines—this time with limited and surgical use

of U.S. military assets. (By the way, whatever happened to that U.N. fact-finding mission on Syrian chemical weapons that Mr. Obama promised back in April?)

Yet if Mr. Obama were to move against Assad today, the odds of success would be far longer. He would be going against an emboldened and winning despot, brazenly backed by Russia. And he would be abetting a fractured insurgency, increasingly dominated by radicals answering the call of jihad. The administration has gone from choosing not to take action to having no choice but to remain passive. Thus does global order give way to global disorder.

It's tempting to rejoin that Syria is small and faraway, and that if Vladimir Putin or Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei want to play in the Syrian dung heap they're welcome to it. But these guys aren't dupes getting fleeced at a Damascene carpet shop. They are geopolitical entrepreneurs who sense an opportunity in the wake of America's retreat.

Maybe Americans will feel better after ceding the field to these characters. But we won't be safer. And as a former Chicago friend of Mr. Obama used to say, the chickens sometimes do come home to roost.

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF

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