



OPINION and ANALYSIS

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

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Opinion and Analysis: Week ending 20 August 2013

(1) The Sunni Divide

Harold Rhode, inFOCUS Quarterly, Summer 2013

The Arabic-speaking Sunnis may loathe Assad, but they also hate each other

<http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/4399/sunni-divide>

(2) New threats to the Israel-Egypt peace treaty

[Col. \(ret.\) Dr. Jacques Neriah](#); Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, 19 August 2013

Since the ousting of Mubarak, the Sinai Peninsula has become a haven for *ihadists* who are threatening Israel as well as the Egyptian regime. Many Egyptians claim that the Israel-Egypt peace treaty limits Egypt's sovereignty to the point that the army is unable to fight back against the *ihadists* in Sinai.

<http://jcpa.org/new-threats-to-the-israel-egypt-peace-treaty/>

(3) It's not about Israel

Editorial, NY Post, 19 August 2013

Benjamin Netanyahu delivered an obvious but oft-denied truth about the Middle East: It ain't all Israel's fault.

http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/editorials/it_not_about_israel_AXznFwBOiCcTRDdnbQq5gN

(4) Jews deserve terror, not us

Jonathan Tobin, Commentary magazine, 16 August 2013

While the Swedes and the Norwegians probably think they are speaking without prejudice, their views display how deep the roots of anti-Semitism run in European culture.

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2013/08/16/scandinavia-jews-deserve-terror-not-us/>

(5) Israel and the United Nations

Irwin Cotler, Jerusalem Post, 15 August 2013

Before UN human rights chief Sergio de Mello was killed in Iraq in 2003, he spoke to me about his advocacy for Israel's inclusion in the Western group. Mr. Ban should announce that he will continue this mission, and call also for the removal of the biased agenda item.

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Israel-and-the-United-Nations-323252>

(6) America's problems in the Middle East are just beginning

David Goldman, Middle East Forum, 15 August 2013

The American response to the events in Egypt show the utter pointlessness of American security guarantees in the present negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Authority. Even in the extremely unlikely event that Mohammed Abbas chose to make peace with Israel, he would face a high probability of civil war.

<http://www.meforum.org/3583/america-problems-middle-east>

(7) How Israel's changing demographics could disrupt the world

Yury Barmin, Polycymic, 10 August 2013

The rapidly growing Arab community in Israel is accompanied by increasing numbers of Jews who leave the country for over a year and do not return. The explanation for this is that the safe haven that Israel was supposed to create for Jews did not actually turn out to be so safe.

<http://www.polycymic.com/articles/54175/how-israel-s-changing-demographics-could-disrupt-the-world-mm>

(1) The Sunni Divide

Watching the Syrians kill each other, one can get the impression from the media that there are two sides - the Assad regime and "the opposition." The latter would be comprised of Arabic-speaking Sunnis who want to overthrow the Alawi-controlled regime, giving the subtle impression that there is a united Sunni opposition. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Arabic-speaking Sunnis may loathe Assad, but they also hate each other.

Much - maybe even most - of the Syrian opposition is made up of Sunni Islamists who hate not only the Alawi-run regime, but also others such as Christians and Shi'ite Muslims, of which the Alawis are supposedly an offshoot. But even more important, the Sunnis hate each other. There are many divisions among the Sunni Islamists and they are spending a lot of effort, not only killing the regime's forces, but also killing fellow Sunnis. It would be prudent if we took advantage of the differences among the Sunni fundamentalists, who in the long run pose much more of a danger to the non-Muslim world than does the Assad regime.

The Saudi-Qatari Rivalry

Qatar and Saudi Arabia, both fantastically wealthy, fanatical Sunni Muslim countries, passionately hate each other and support different groups within the Islamic opposition groups in Syria. Roughly speaking, the Qataris, along with the now only nominally secular Turkish Republic, support the Muslim Brotherhood. The Saudis

support Salafi, i.e., other radically anti-Western fanatical Sunni fundamentalist groups. They disagree on the nature and theological principles of the future Muslim Caliphate that they believe will rule the entire world.

And to be very clear, all of these Sunni fundamentalist groups, whether supported by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, or Turkey, are passionately and aggressively anti-Western, anti-Russian, anti-Chinese, and anti-Israel. All of the non-Sunni world has a huge stake in their defeat and might even consider ways to help them fight each other.

Syria

Regarding Syria, not every Arabic-speaking Sunni is an Islamic fundamentalist. Many, especially a significant portion of Syria's business elite and the tribal sheikhs, have as much to fear from the Sunni fundamentalists as do the non-Sunni groups. Nevertheless, it appears that the vast majority of these non-fundamentalists still believe in *noblesse oblige*, i.e., Islam must rule and Sunni Islam is the only correct form. Others must know their place, which is politically and socially inferior to the Sunnis. That does not leave much breathing room for Syria's non-Sunnis, who view the fundamentalist opposition as an existential threat, but at the same time realize that the regime has created a situation which could destroy them.

The Qataris and Saudis, whose ruling families are distantly related, hate each other, even though they are both Wahhabi fundamentalists. Qatar continually looks for ways to poke the Saudis in the eye; for example, establishing the wildly popular al-Jazeera. It chose the name because in Arabic it means the entire Arabian Peninsula, which the Saudis, because of their size, clearly dominate. Qatar is a relative pinpoint in size, but the name of its international TV station subtly tells the Arab world it is more important than the Saudis. Saudi Arabia, in unending battle, established its own TV station which broadcasts out of Dubai - al-'Arabiya - meaning the Arab, or Arabness - which is meant to counter al-Jazeera. [Author's Note: There are two TV stations named al-Jazeera, one broadcasting in Arabic and the other in English. Both owned and operated by the Qatari government, they have completely separate staffs and editorial policies. Al-Jazeera in English is not particularly anti-Western and has interesting content. Al-Jazeera in Arabic is viciously anti-American, anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, and incites its viewers to fight the West. Al-Jazeera English was created to pacify Western governments, who are lulled into believing that since both stations have the same name, they must air the same material.]

The Qatari-Saudi animosity plays itself out in many ways, most interestingly in Egypt, Syria, and Turkey. In general, Qatar supports the Muslim Brotherhood, having announced a \$3 billion loan/grant to Egypt, which is now ruled by the Brotherhood. The Saudis oppose the Brotherhood, and support the Salafists in Egypt, who received the second largest number of votes in the previous election there. These Salafists are theologically much closer to the Saudi view of the world. Both, remember, are inimical to Western interests.

In Syria the same is true. Qatar and the Saudis support different groups, because neither wants the other to have sway over a future fundamentalist Sunni-ruled Syria. Qatar by and large supports the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, while the Saudis support other Salafist-Wahhabi-oriented groups.

Sadly, that leaves out two of the most important local Sunni factors in Syria - the traditional tribal sheikhs and the Sunni-dominated business community. This situation is somewhat similar to what happened in Sunni-dominated Western Iraq before the American Surge in 2006. Before the Surge, foreign Sunni fundamentalists associated with groups like al-Qaeda came in and imposed their rule on that area, disrupting the local social structure that was dominated by tribal and notable family rulers. Among other things, the outsiders demanded

that the locals give their daughters in marriage to the al-Qaeda types, infuriating the Iraqi leaders. When the Americans demonstrated that they were serious and prepared to do whatever necessary to remove or destroy al-Qaeda in Western Iraq, the locals rejoiced and joined the American side. Locals began referring to the American Marines as "the strongest tribe." Middle Easterners gravitate toward "the strong horse" (see Lee Smith's excellent book of the same name), which is the major reason the Surge succeeded.

Just as the outsiders were then imposing their will on the Iraqi Sunnis, outsiders are doing the same in Syria today. The local Syrian tribal leadership bitterly opposes these foreign Sunni fundamentalists, but is helpless to do much about it. Elder Saudis, for example, are taking young Syrian Sunni brides, some as young as 12 years old, whom they "import" or "buy" from the Syrian refugee camps in Jordan and elsewhere. Just as in Iraq, Syrian non-fundamentalist Sunni fighters who oppose the Assad regime see the handwriting on the wall and want to be on the winning side. They are therefore abandoning the Free Syrian Army - which roughly includes many Syrian anti-regime groups, and joining the Wahhabis and Muslim Brotherhood fundamentalists. These fighters sense that their traditional leadership is helpless. Interestingly, early in the Syrian civil war, this could have provided the West with an opportunity to help these non-fundamentalist locals, as we did in Iraq, but we chose not to, and it seems to be too late to do so now.

The Turkish Connection

Turkey is also deeply involved in Syria, supporting, along with its Qatari allies, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Until Prime Minister Erdogan and his AKP fundamentalist party took over Turkey in 2002, Turkey had largely stayed out of the Middle Eastern political quagmire. But since Erdogan came to power, Turkey has involved itself more and more in Middle Eastern politics, clearly hoping that as the strongest Sunni power in the area, it could resume the dominating role played by its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire. Turkey at first allied itself with the Saudis, who poured money into both business investments and funded religious instruction and new mosque construction throughout Turkey. The Turkish government - with Saudi funding - began constructing new mosques in Alevi towns and villages. This amounted to Sunni imperialism because Alevis are not Sunnis and do not pray in mosques; they do not want or need the Sunni Wahhabi religious texts that preach a faith unlike theirs and contradict basic Alevi religious principles.

Moreover, when Abdullah Gul, a stalwart of the AKP, became Turkey's President, Saudi King Abdullah paid a visit to Ankara. Very shortly after his arrival, Gul went to visit King Abdullah at his hotel. Turks and other Middle Easterners understood this as Turkish grovelling at the feet of the Saudis. Moreover, Middle Easterners understood this visit as signalling that the Turks agreed with Saudi Arabia's goals regarding the Islamic world and the non-Muslim world.

At some point, however, the Turks changed sides. They now work more closely with the Qataris, who are heavily invested in a Muslim Brotherhood victory in Syria. The current Turkish leadership has long had strong ties with the Arab Muslim Brotherhood, but why Turkey appears to have abandoned its close partnership with Saudi Arabia remains unclear. What is clear is that the Turks and the Qataris are now on the side of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and the Saudis support Salafi or Wahhabi groups which oppose the Muslim Brotherhood.

Russian and Chinese Support for the Assad Regime

Russia has many reasons for making sure that the Assad regime remains in power. The one most often cited, but not necessarily the most important, is that the Russians have access to only one port in the Mediterranean Sea, Tartus, along the Syrian coast.

But Russia reportedly has access to just two piers there that serve its aging fleet. As noted by the BBC, "The base is just a point on the map to replenish food and water and carry out some occasional repairs." There are also many Russians living in Syria, and these Russians have a lot of money invested in the country.

But there is a much more important, long-term reason for Russia to support Bashar Assad. Russia sees Assad's Alawi (i.e., non-Sunni) regime as a bulwark against its own restless Sunni Muslim population. Russia's population is shrinking. Life expectancy for males is 59 years and declining. Slavic (i.e., non-Muslim) women are having very few children and a great many abortions. Russia's Muslims - almost exclusively Sunni - on the other hand, are having many more children. That means that if present trends continue - and there is now no reason to believe that they won't - Russia might end up having a Muslim majority long before the end of this century. A Sunni victory in Syria would embolden Russia's Muslims. Russian President Vladimir Putin needs to avoid this at all costs.

That is why, when Putin visited Israel and the Palestinians in 2012, he went out of his way to be photographed with Christian leaders in Bethlehem. He was making the point, "I am a Russian Orthodox Christian, and Russia is and will remain Russian Orthodox Christian."

Russia, of course, is locked in a battle with the Sunni fundamentalist Turkish government over AKP support of Sunni fundamentalists opposing Assad. But in addition, Turkey is by far the most ethnically and religiously similar to Russia's Muslims, as most of Russia's Muslims are Sunni Turkic peoples or Caucasians who have relatives in Turkey and/or have some feeling for Turkey. At some deep level, do Russia's Muslims see Turkey as a model of a modern Islamic state? The last thing Russia needs is a Sunni victory in Syria, which will strengthen Turkey's Islamist agenda and encourage Muslim dissent and terrorism inside Russia.

All of the above makes Russia a natural ally of all of the non-Sunni forces in the Middle East. It explains Russia's support for Assad, Iran, and, for that matter, it explains Putin's relationship with Israel. Even though he shares common goals with the Shi'ite countries, Russia does not support the destruction of Israel by Iran, nor does Putin support an attack by the Assad regime on Israel.

As for the Chinese, they prize stability above all and follow a pragmatic foreign policy. They are almost completely uninterested in whether a regime is dictatorial or kills its own citizens. The Arab Spring frightened the Chinese, who saw how brittle Middle Eastern countries were, with the exception of Israel. China had worked easily with Mu'ammar Qaddafi in Libya and lost investments there with his overthrow. Since then, China has engaged in much soul-searching about lessons it must learn from the disaster.

Though China prizes stability, it prefers a divided Middle East where it can play various countries off against one another.

But China also has an additional very serious reason to back Assad; the same reason the Russians have. China's northwestern Province - Xinjiang - is populated by a restive Sunni Turkic Muslim group - the Uyghurs - at least some if not most of whom want independence from China. The Chinese have been very concerned about the population in that province, which borders on the Uyghurs' fellow Turkic Muslim Republics of Central Asia. Given how easily information travels today, a Sunni victory over non-Sunnis could, from the Chinese point of view, embolden the Uyghurs and threaten the stability of China.

Sunni fundamentalism, in the end, is much more dangerous than Shi'ite fundamentalism, because about 85% of the world's approximately 1.4 billion Muslims are Sunni. Any Sunni

fundamentalist victory would give its cohorts throughout the world a strong shot in the arm. Shi'ite fundamentalism, though a more immediate danger because of Iran's terrorist regime, can much more easily be handled should the West decide to confront the Iranian government. With that immediate danger out of the way, we could focus our attention on the Sunni fundamentalist threat, which in the long run is much more dangerous to the West, China, Israel, and Russia.

Clearly the Chinese, Israelis, and Russians understand what is at stake. Does the United States?

(2) New threats to the Israel-Egypt peace treaty

U.S.-Egypt relations have soured since the Egyptian military ousted President Mohamed Morsi on July 3. The anti-Morsi factions in Egypt have condemned the United States for expressing support for the Muslim Brotherhood as the democratically elected representatives of Egypt.

Throughout the summer, the U.S. tried to find a middle ground between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood that would have allowed Morsi to return to the presidency. However, neither the Muslim Brotherhood nor the military were willing to share power. When it became clear that the army was about to crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood's sit-ins in Cairo and other cities, U.S. envoys (Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham) warned the army's chief, Gen. Sisi, to restrain his forces. In addition, Obama administration officials made telephone calls to their counterparts in Egypt, but to no avail.

The U.S. government was willing to refrain from calling the Egyptian military's disposing of Morsi a "coup," which according to U.S. law would have forced the cancellation of annual U.S. military aid to Egypt. After the Egyptian army's violent crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood began, President Obama responded by cancelling a planned U.S.-Egypt joint military exercise, but stopped short of announcing a halt in U.S. military aid to Egypt.

Ever since the ousting of President Mubarak in 2011, there has been discussion that U.S. aid to Egypt could be halted. American lawmakers and media frequently pointed out that U.S. aid was a means to pressure Egypt to respect its peace treaty with Israel. While Morsi was president, this fact was repeatedly emphasized to him by the Americans and likely encouraged the Muslim Brotherhood to tone down its rhetoric about freezing or revoking the peace treaty.

In recent weeks, the Egyptian army has been frustrated because it perceives that the United States does not understand the danger posed by the Muslim Brotherhood. When the Obama administration withheld the delivery of four F-16s and canceled the joint military exercise, the Egyptian army felt that its frustrations were validated. Many in Egypt were also upset because they did not feel that the U.S. firmly condemned the Muslim Brotherhood for burning dozens of Coptic churches, torching police stations, and killing more than 50 members of Egyptian security forces. On top of all this, if some U.S. leaders were going to hint that U.S. aid to Egypt was in jeopardy, then Egyptian officials were equally comfortable in suggesting that the Israel-Egypt peace treaty is not sacrosanct.

There are other factors that threaten the peace treaty. Since the ousting of Mubarak, the Sinai Peninsula has become a haven for *jihadists* who are threatening Israel as well as the Egyptian regime. Many Egyptians claim that the Israel-Egypt peace treaty limits Egypt's sovereignty to the point that the army is unable to fight back against the *jihadists* in Sinai.

With this in mind, Israel has allowed an increase in Egypt's military presence in Sinai, judging that it is better to acquiesce to the changes on the ground rather than renegotiate the entire treaty. In the past two years, with the Egyptian army increasingly losing control of Sinai, Israel allowed Egypt to introduce ten new battalions, armored units, and combat helicopters into Sinai.

One recent controversial event, when a group of *ihadists* was hit inside Egyptian territory by either an Israeli drone or an Egyptian helicopter gunship, was instrumental in developing the new rhetoric.

It did not help matters when the *New York Times* reported on August 17 that "the Israelis, whose military had close ties to General Sisi from his former post as head of military intelligence, were supporting the takeover....Western diplomats say that General Sisi and his circle appeared to be in heavy communication with Israeli colleagues, and the diplomats believed the Israelis were also undercutting the Western message by reassuring the Egyptians not to worry about American threats to cut off aid. Israeli officials deny having reassured Egypt about the aid, but acknowledge having lobbied Washington to protect it."

Due to the *ihadists'* increasing attacks on the Egyptian army in Sinai, some Egyptians have begun to mobilize and have urged the government to cancel the peace treaty. The Tamarod movement (Arabic for "rebellion"), which succeeded in mobilizing millions of Egyptians in the streets and backed the military's overthrow of Morsi, is now leading a petition campaign asking for the peace treaty to be renegotiated. Such a move, they say, would allow Egypt to exercise its full sovereignty in Sinai and increase the size of its forces there, without needing Israel's permission. Tamarod and its supporters have justified their stance by saying that renegotiating the treaty would remove the threat of blackmail from the United States about annual military aid. Tamarod notes that substantial financial assistance could be received from other Arab sources (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain) with no strings attached.

Tamarod's initiative has momentum. Because of the strained relationship between the United States and the interim government in Egypt, Tamarod could exercise meaningful pressure on the government to call for some sort of changes to the treaty, simply by claiming that it is time to update the 34-year-old document to reflect changing realities. With U.S. influence in Egypt waning, Tamarod's petition, if successful, would weaken U.S. and Israeli deterrence toward Egypt.

Ultimately, the issue will depend on the stance of the Egyptian military and how the generals understand what an abrogation of the peace treaty would mean for Egypt-Israel relations and Egypt's strategic interests during a period of high domestic political instability.

(3) It's not about Israel

Benjamin Netanyahu delivered an obvious but oft-denied truth about the Middle East: It ain't all Israel's fault. During a visit from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Israel's prime minister put it this way:

"I think today everybody understands that the root cause of the instability in the Middle East and beyond has to do with the convulsion that is historic and cultural in nature — of which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is merely one of many, many such manifestations."

Talk about an understatement. Here's what we see around the region:

* In Egypt, hundreds have been killed in the few weeks since President Mohammed Morsi was deposed in a fight over whether Egypt's future will be secular or Islamist.

* In Syria, tens of thousands have died in a civil war between dictator Bashar al-Assad and an opposition that includes everyone from democrats to Islamists.

* In Iraq, with America now gone, Sunni-Shiite violence — sparked by a resurgent Al Qaeda in Iraq — has flared anew. More than 1,000 were killed in July alone — the highest one-month total since 2008.

* And in Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is out, succeeded by “elected” Hassan Rouhani. But the nation remains on the path to becoming a nuclear power, and still sows terrorism through proxies such as Hezbollah.

So with Prime Minister Netanyahu, we'd just say it's a long time the world retired the myth that Israel is the root cause of all the misery and fighting in the Middle East.

(4) Jews deserve terror, not us

In the view of many Europeans, and in particular Scandinavians, not all victims of terror are alike. If, for example, you are an innocent Norwegian child who is gunned down by a deranged right-wing fanatic, you are deserving of compassion and your killer must be punished to the fullest extent of the law. However, if you are a Jew who is gunned down or bombed by a Palestinian, you had it coming and your killer should be released and honored.

That's the only possible way to interpret the anger being expressed in the region this week in response to remarks made by Israel's Ambassador to Sweden Isaac Buchman. The ambassador is under fire for asking listeners on Swedish Radio to think about how they would feel if Anders Breivik, the perpetrator of the Utoya Island massacre, were released. Buchman complained that Israel wasn't getting credit for its freeing of 26 Palestinian terrorist murderers in order to entice the Palestinian Authority back to the negotiating table. But rather than sympathize with the families of Israelis victimized by Palestinian murderers, people in Norway and Sweden are angry about any comparison between their sorrow and that of Jews killed by Arabs. Indeed, as one Swedish paper put it, the families of the Utoya incident are “seething” about the ambassador's analogy.

In other words, there seems to be some sort of consensus that Breivik's crimes are beyond the pale while the Jews have it coming when Palestinians kill them. While the Swedes and the Norwegians probably think they are speaking without prejudice, their views display how deep the roots of anti-Semitism run in European culture.

As the Swedish paper *The Local* reports:

“I think it is ridiculous to compare this with a mass murderer from Norway,” Trond Blattmann, whose son Torjusdatter was killed when Breivik opened fire on Utøya, told *The Local*. “There's no similarity at all. This is a ridiculous way to talk.”

“The comparison does not make sense,” added Bjørn Ihler, who survived the massacre by hiding on the southern tip of the island. “Breivik was a solo terrorist whose actions were based purely on an unreal situation. The situation in the Middle East is very different. There is a real fight for Palestinian freedom going on.”

Middle East expert Per Jönsson with the Swedish Institute for International Affairs (Utrikespolitiska institutets – UI) also slammed Bachman's Breivik comparison.

"The comparison with Breivik is insane in several ways. Breivik is very special. These people that Israel is now releasing are freedom fighters, murderers, and in some cases terrorists, but they are nevertheless rather normal people," he told the Aftonbladet newspaper.

Contrary to the belief of the Utoya families, the blood of the Jews slaughtered in cold blood by the Palestinians that were acclaimed as heroes this week after their release was no less red than that of Breivik's victims. The grief of their families was no less profound. The outrage of the people of Israel - and all decent people everywhere - about these wanton acts of murder carried out by Palestinians was no less justified.

The Utoya families view Breivik's actions as "unreal" and therefore a random act of madness that must somehow be seen as on a different moral plane from Palestinian killings of Jews. But the rationale of each of those Palestinian murderers - some of whom were personally embraced by Israel's peace partner, Palestinian Authority head Mahmoud Abbas - was no less mad or random. Most simply seized any opportunity to find a Jewish victim to kill and claimed the blood they shed was in the name of "freeing Palestine." Perhaps they should read the accounts of some of these released prisoners to understand the brutality of their crimes and how divorced they were from any rational political struggle.

This is not just the old debate about one person's terrorists being another's "freedom fighter." This is about what is, in the words of the so-called Middle East expert quoted in the Swedish paper, defined as "normal." In his view, and apparently in the opinion of most of the Swedes and Norwegians who agree with him, there is something "normal" about an average Palestinian wanting to kill a Jew because it is part of an existential desire to eradicate the Jewish presence in the country. By being in Israel (and most of their victims were not "settlers" even though even the members of that apparently despised group also have a right not to be murdered), the Jew is transformed into prey. Like a deer or other animal during hunting season, Europeans seem to think any Israeli is a legitimate target.

Whatever you may think about where Israel's borders should be drawn, by treating terror carried out by Palestinians against Jews as legitimate, Europeans are signaling not only that they approve of this cause but also that Jewish lives are less precious than their own. The families of the Utoya victims deserve our sympathy in their grief. But they, and other Europeans who are "seething" about any comparison between their children and dead Jews, have crossed the line into anti-Semitism.

(5) Israel and the United Nations

In Jerusalem on Friday, the secretary-general of the United Nations – whose agencies often apply differential and discriminatory treatment toward Israel – will hold top-level meetings with the president, prime minister, senior cabinet members and parliamentarians.

Yet Ban Ki-moon's most significant encounter may come on Friday evening with a group of Israeli students, participants in Rishon Lezion College of Management's Model UN program.

Several such societies have sprung up recently at Israeli universities and colleges, testament – as the UN chief will see himself – to the expanding intellectual curiosity and motivation of bright young Israelis to learn about, engage with, and perhaps one day work for the preeminent world body.

The secretary-general should take away the message that, despite all the selectivity, calumny and hostility thrown their way, a broad consensus of Israelis, and Jews the world over – as I have appreciated – still hope to build bridges with the UN. But they must feel, as former UN chief Kofi Annan once said, “that the United Nations is their home, too.”

While Ban cannot control the actions of member states, he does have the power to give moral leadership and direction. Words matter.

In his public speeches, he should condemn the systematic bias perpetrated against the Jewish state by numerous UN agencies, in gross violation of the UN Charter’s guarantee of equal treatment to all nations large and small.

Mr. Ban should acknowledge that the UN Human Rights Council, meant to embody the organization’s highest principles, is a case study of such bigotry. Examples abound.

First, the council has a standing agenda item against Israel, the only country specifically targeted at every meeting. Not even major abusers like China, Sudan or Syria are subjected to such treatment. Mr. Ban voiced his disapproval after the item’s adoption in 2007, but has stayed silent ever since.

Second, the council adopts more resolutions condemning Israel than it does on the rest of the world combined.

In its March session, there were six one-sided resolutions against Israel – and only four on all other countries. The vast majority of the world’s victims of gross and systematic violations – from China to Saudi Arabia, Cuba to Zimbabwe – failed to merit a single resolution.

Third, Israel is the object of more emergency sessions than any other country in the world, even as the council turns a blind eye to mass killings in Iran, Egypt and elsewhere, a clear denial of international due process. One product of these sessions was the 2009 Goldstone Report, which excoriated Israel and exonerated Hamas.

Fourth, Israel is the only country to be excluded from the council’s regional group system. Annan criticized this “long-standing anomaly,” which prevents Israel from participating fully in the work of the organization. Sir Robert Jennings, former president of the International Court of Justice, said it “places the UN in breach of its fundamental obligations regarding sovereign equality and is thus illegal.”

Finally, while many of the council’s country investigators and experts do important work, when it comes to Israel, politicization reigns.

Richard Falk, investigator on the Palestinian territories – mandated by the council to focus only on Israel’s actions, which are presumed in advance to be violations of international law – is so extreme in his support for the Hamas terrorist organization that even the Palestinian Authority asked him to resign.

And just this week it emerged that Jean Ziegler – a recently retired council expert who justified Hezbollah attacks on Israel while supporting Muammar Gaddafi and other dictators – is set to return.

One important caveat must be made: None of this is intended to suggest or infer that Israel is above the law or is not responsible for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

On the contrary, Israel, like any other state, must be held responsible for any violations. It is not that Israel seeks to be above the law, but that Israel is systematically denied equality before the law in the international arena; it is not that human rights standards must not be applied to Israel, but that they must apply equally.

Last year, after the council announced yet another one-sided inquiry, Israel severed its ties with the council. Discussions are under way to bring it back.

Ardent skeptics might be happy for Israel to stay away, but many Israelis support Israel's full participation in permanent UN bodies, and would support a decision to return – provided the council shows some signs of change.

The secretary-general can help by addressing two areas.

Before UN human rights chief Sergio de Mello was killed in Iraq in 2003, he spoke to me about his advocacy for Israel's inclusion in the Western group. Mr. Ban should announce that he will continue this mission, and call also for the removal of the biased agenda item.

If so, the idealistic students who meet the secretary-general on Friday evening will have seen that the principles taught in model UN are upheld by those who lead the real UN.

(6) America's problems in the Middle East are just beginning

It's 2015, and there is a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Hamas), financed by Iran, wins an election on a platform demanding the expulsion of the Jews from Israel. Iran meanwhile smuggles shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles to terrorist cells in Palestine that can take down civilian airlines at Ben-Gurion airport. With backing from the Egyptian military, Fatah throws out the elected Hamas government and kills larger number of Hamas supporters. What will Washington do? Given the track record of both the Obama administration and the Republican mainstream, one would expect America to denounce the use of violence against a democratically-elected government.

Such is the absurdity of both parties' stance towards Egypt: the Egyptian military is doing America's dirty work, suppressing a virulently anti-modern, anti-Semitic and anti-Western Islamist movement whose leader, Mohammed Morsi, famously referred to Israelis as "apes and pigs." It did so with the enthusiastic support of tens of millions of Egyptians who rallied in the streets in support of the military. And the American mainstream reacted with an ideological knee jerk. America's presence in the Middle East has imploded.

As it happens, Iran already is smuggling weapons via Syria to the West Bank to gain leverage against the Abbas government, as Stratfor reports, including surface-to-air and anti-tank missiles. Hamas crushed Fatah in the 2006 West Bank elections parliamentary elections 74-45, and made short work of the supposedly moderate Palestinian faction when it seized power in Gaza in 2007. As Syria disintegrates, along with Iraq and Lebanon, the artificial borders of Arab states drawn first by Ottoman conquerors and revised by British and French colonial authorities will have small meaning. Palestinians caught up in the Syrian and Lebanese conflagrations would pour into a new Palestinian state and swell the ranks of the hard-core Jihadi irredentists. Iran will continue to use Hamas as a cat's paw.

Among other things, the American response to the events in Egypt show the utter pointlessness of American security guarantees in the present negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Authority. Even in the extremely unlikely event that Mohammed Abbas chose to make peace with Israel, he would face a high probability of civil war, just as Ireland's independence leader Michael Collins did when he struck a deal with the British for an Irish "Free State" rather than a republic. Collins killed more Irishmen than the British did in the preceding independence struggle. I do not want to compare Abbas to Collins, and I do not think he has any intention of making peace with Israel. But American blundering in Egypt has closed out the option, for whoever makes peace with Israel will require a free hand with Iranian-backed rejectionists.

America forgets that it corrected the flaw in its founding by killing 30% of Southern men of military age during its own Civil War, so many that the Confederate Army collapsed for lack of manpower. There are numerous wars which do not end until all the young men who want to fight to the death have had the opportunity to do so. And of all of history's conflicts, none was so likely to end with this sort of demographic attrition as the present war in the Middle East. Compared to the young Arabs, Persians and Pakistanis of today, American Southerners of 1861 were models of middle-class rectitude, with the world's highest living standards and bright prospects for the future. The Europeans of 1914 stood at the cusp of modernity; one only can imagine what they might have accomplished had they not committed mutual suicide in two World Wars.

Today's Middle Eastern and South Asian Muslims have grim future prospects. The world economy has left them behind, and they cannot catch up. Egypt was at the threshold of starvation and economic collapse when the military intervened, bringing in subsidies from the Gulf monarchies. The young men of the Middle East have less to lose, perhaps, than any generation in any country in modern times. As we observe in Syria, large numbers of them will fight to the death.

America cannot bear to think about its own Civil War because the wounds are too painful; in order to reunite the country after 1865, we concocted a myth of tragic fratricide. Wilsonian idealism was born of the South's attempt to suppress its guilt for the war, I have argued in the past. That is an academic consideration now. America's credibility in the Middle East, thanks to the delusions of both parties, is broken, and it cannot be repaired within the time frame required to forestall the next stage of violence. Egypt's military and its Saudi backers are aghast at American stupidity. Israel is frustrated by America's inability to understand that Egypt's military is committed to upholding the peace treaty with Israel while the Muslim Brotherhood wants war. Both Israel and the Gulf States observe the utter fecklessness of Washington's efforts to contain Iran's nuclear weapons program.

The events recently have demonstrated that America's allies in the Middle East from Israel to the Persian Gulf can trust no-one in Washington - neither Barack Obama nor John McCain. Those of us in America who try to analyze events in the region will be the last to hear the news, and the value of our work will diminish over time.

(7) How Israel's changing demographics could disrupt the world

A few weeks ago Israel's prime minister discussed a long-term strategic forecast for the country with his cabinet. There was something worrying about the conclusions of this meeting as it predicted that the population of the country will soon have a different face. Although the PM did not elaborate on

what effect this could have on the nation and the world, specialists argue that Israel may soon find itself facing an entirely new and unprecedented set of problems.

The presentation had game-changing charts in it that provide an outlook on what Israel's population will look like in 15 years. According to the projection, by 2029 the population of 25-29-year-olds will climb to 704,000, of whom 202,000 will be Israeli Arabs (almost a 100% increase from 2009) and 127,000 of whom will be ultra-Orthodox Jews, (more than a twofold increase). But what is more worrying is that by 2060, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, Israeli Arabs and the Haredim (ultra-Orthodox Jews) will outnumber non-Haredi Jews. According to other statistics that look at the number of Arabs in the territory of Israel and Palestine taken together, Arabs now represent more than 50% of the entire population.

Israel's ethnic and religious heterogeneity gets reflected in social differences between various Israeli communities. The country's Jewish population itself is not homogeneous, as there are Haredi Jews who oppose Zionism and do not recognize the State of Israel. Most of them do not work, and Haredim are exempt from military service that is compulsory for all Israelis. If the number of Haredi citizens increases greatly it increases the number of people who will not be willing to serve in the army and refuse to be part of the state.

Arab communities mostly concentrate in northern and central Israel and along with the Haredim are less prosperous than non-Haredi Jews. But if ultra-Orthodox Jews are perceived as an important part of the State of Israel, there is huge resentment and racism towards Israeli Arabs. Centre Against Racism showed that 75% of Jews would not live in the same building with Arabs and 59% considered Arab culture primitive, while 50% would support a state policy that would encourage Arabs to emigrate to other countries. Radicalization is vivid, which is proven by multiple surveys showing that Arabs feel more and more marginalized and blame Jews for their hardships. There are concerns that against the backdrop of the widening discrepancy in the living standards among Arab and Jewish communities, Arab Israelis could become increasingly involved in terrorism just like what happened during the Second Intifada, when terrorists reached out to Israeli Arabs to recruit them.

Israeli officials have expressed their concerns over the growing Arab community many times. In 2009 Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren listed this community that is expanding more rapidly than the Jewish one as one of the threats to the State of Israel. According to Oren Israel is predicated on a stable Jewish majority of at least 70%. If this changes the state will need to deal with the problem of self-identification: whether it's a Jewish or a democratic state. If it chooses to remain a Jewish state than Israel risks becoming isolated, which could prove fatal for the country. If it chooses to become a fully democratic state than Israel as a Jewish state will cease to exist. The same position was once expressed by the current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for which he was severely criticized by Arab Members of Knesset.

The rapidly growing Arab community in Israel is accompanied by increasing numbers of Jews who leave the country for over a year and do not return. The explanation for this is that the safe haven that Israel was supposed to create for Jews did not actually turn out to be so safe. Some specialists predict that if the emigration of the non-Haredi Jews gains momentum than the Haredim community with its high birthrate could eventually comprise up to 70% of all Jews in Israel, which means that they will have more representation in the Knesset and the government (even though political participation contradicts their beliefs).

To answer the question of whether such an ethnic composition could lead to a thaw in relations between Israel and the Arab world, I would say it is highly unlikely. The growing Arab community will lead to even more tensions between Arabs and Jews. Ethnic instability within Israel could trigger

even confrontation with neighbours if Israel's treatment of Arabs inside the country becomes even more oppressive. A diplomatic solution to such a conflict would be extremely hard to achieve, and surely Israeli efforts to establish a safe haven for Jews in the heart of the Arab world would fail.

Another important issue to consider here is US-Israeli relations. The US is Israel's biggest export and import partner, and provides over \$3 billion of financial aid annually. Of course the US with its large and influential Jewish diaspora will try to prevent the worst-case scenario from happening. But suppose that there is no Jewish majority in Israel. How would the bilateral relations between the countries change? From a purely strategic point of view it would make sense for the US to maintain good partner relations with whoever is in power in Israel, because any partnership for the US is vital in the Middle East now. Israel allegedly possesses nuclear arms, which makes any confrontation in the region potentially disastrous. However, if Hamas eventually positions itself as a victor in the eyes of Arabs who outnumber Israeli Jews, chances for the US to have a partner in Israel will reduce to zero.

The majority in Israel will not become a minority overnight — it will take 50 years. In this time the government has to adjust to changes by accepting the Arab community as part of the state and making a renewed effort at the peace talks. If this is not done in time, Israel's simmering ethnic tensions could boil over into violent, all-out conflict.

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

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