



OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 40: 3 September 2013

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 3 September 2013

(1) A US attack on Syria: implications for Israel

Amos Yadlin and Avner Golov, Institute for National Security Studies, 1 September 2013

Washington continues to deliberate with its allies the strategic objectives of an attack and consider the military option that will achieve the most benefit at the lowest cost and with the fewest risks. Of several options for strategic objectives, it appears that the US has chosen punishment for the sake of deterrence.

<http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=11991>

(2) The Israeli Spring

Victor Davis Hanson, National Review, 29 August 2013

The Arab Spring has thrown Israel's once-predictable adversaries into the chaotic state of a Sudan or Somalia. The old understandings between Jerusalem and the Assad and Mubarak kleptocracies seem in limbo.

<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/357011/israeli-spring-victor-davis-hanson>

(3) The Palestinian Authority's "Israeli Affairs Committee"

Khaled Abu Toameh, Gatestone Institute, 28 August 2013

What is really needed is a "Palestinian Affairs Committee" that would go to every mosque, school, university, village and refugee camp in the West Bank and Gaza to talk about peace and coexistence with Israel. To win the support of the Israeli public for peace, it should start by showing the Israelis that it is making every effort to convince Palestinians to support peace.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3952/palestinian-israeli-affairs-committee>

(4) Palestinian children: The invisible workers of Israeli settlements

Dina Almuti, The Daily Beast, 28 August 2013

The PA prohibits children from working in the settlements, and under Israeli law employing minors is illegal, which results in a workforce that is invisible under the law and not

guaranteed basic protections and rights.

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/08/28/palestinian-child-laborers-in-israeli-settlements.html>

(5) Egypt's revolution must support Syria and Palestine

Nader Fergany, Ahramonline, 28 August 2013

Egypt's special connection with Palestinians and Syrians, which was sabotaged under the previous regime, must remain at the heart of revolutionary Egypt's revised Arab policies

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/4/79026/Opinion/Egypt's-revolution-must-support-Syria-and-Palestine.aspx>

(6) Who should clean up the mess?

Ali Salim, Gatestone Institute, 27 August 2013

I understand why America lost its deterrence and its ability to fight, but why should Americans die for us? I understand why no one takes America seriously, and I can only come to the conclusion that it is time for us, Arabs and Muslims, to take our fate into our own hands.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3950/middle-east-chaos>

(7) Threats facing Israel: A map of the Middle East geopolitical reality

BuzzFeed Community, 27 August 2013

As attention in the Middle East jumps from one hotspot to another, the public is losing sight of the greatest threat to international peace and security: Iran's military nuclear program. Iran is developing its breakout capacity by stockpiling large quantities of low enriched uranium, expanding its ability to swiftly enrich uranium, and advancing a parallel plutonium track

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/israelinusa/threats-facing-israel-explained-in-one-sort-of-t-dwmv>

(8) Choosing the right options in Syria

Anthony Cordesman, CSIS, 26 August 2013

The key challenge in Syria is scarcely to end the use of chemical weapons. The real challenge is some 120,000 dead, another 200,000-plus wounded, and as many as 20% of its 22.5 million people have been displaced inside the country or are living outside it as refugees. The nation has lost some three years of economic development, become a country of polarized factions, and seen many – if not most – of its children lose much of their schooling and learn to live in fear and anger in a country where more than a third of the population is 14 years of age or younger.

<http://csis.org/publication/choosing-right-options-syria>

(1) A US attack on Syria: implications for Israel

On Wednesday, August 28, 2013, President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron affirmed that a chemical weapons attack had taken place in Syria the previous week and "there was no doubt that the Assad regime was responsible." Despite the decision by the British Parliament not to take part in an attack on Syria, President Obama announced on August 31, 2013 that he had decided to take limited military action in Syria and although not required to do so, was requesting Congressional approval. Washington continues to deliberate with its allies the strategic objectives of an attack and consider the military option that will achieve the most benefit at the lowest cost and with the fewest risks. Of several options for strategic objectives, it appears that the US has chosen punishment for the sake of deterrence.

Israel is not directly involved in the civil war in Syria or in a potential US strike. However, the threats from Syria, Iran, and Hizbollah demand that an American attack be analyzed as to what it means for Israel's national security. This article will analyze two scenarios for an American attack and what they mean for Israel's short term and long term interests in the Syrian context. The first is the anticipated limited attack intended as punishment, and the second is a broader attack aimed at toppling the Assad regime.

Israel's Short Term Interests

- a. The most important Israeli interest in the context of an American attack is the unequivocal clarification that there is a high price to pay for the use of nonconventional weapons. This interest is important for deterring any Middle East leader considering the possible use of nonconventional weapons against Israel.
- b. From a broader perspective, it is important for Israel that the United States re-establish its strategic influence in the Middle East and improve its credibility and deterrence in the region, including against conventional behaviour by its adversaries. US credibility and deterrence have eroded over the past three years during the Arab uprisings, and public statements by senior administration officials have called for a reduction in American involvement in the region and even a change of strategic focus in the direction of East Asia. Restoring American deterrent power would strengthen the standing of the US and that of its allies, including Israel, in the struggle between the region's moderates and radicals.
- c. Israel has a supreme interest in maintaining quiet on its borders and preserving a calm security situation with Lebanon and Syria. Maintaining a normal routine as much as possible is a moral, security, and economic interest. To the extent possible, Israel must avoid getting dragged into the Syrian civil war. If Israel is attacked, the decision on an Israeli response must not be automatic, and as long as there is no significant damage to Israel, the attack can be contained.
- d. A related Israeli interest has to do with the issue of Iran's military nuclear program. Iran is watching events in Syria closely and examining the American response. It is very important for Israel that when Tehran considers its policy toward President Obama's red lines on Iran, i.e. preventing Iran's military nuclearization, Iran sees that Washington is determined to uphold the President's promises. President Obama's actions and the cooperation he achieves with Western and regional allies will have implications for the Iranian nuclear issue.

Israel's Long Term Interests

- a. In the long term view, it is very important to Israel that the fighting in Syria not end in a victory for the Tehran-Damascus-Hizbollah alliance. A victory by Assad would strengthen Israel's enemies in the region, mainly Hizbollah, and would encourage Hamas, currently isolated, to minister once again to its Iranian patron. Israel has a clear interest in maintaining the trend toward weakening these terrorist organizations.
- b. When the civil war in Syria ends, it is important for Israel that a liberal, pro-Western state be established that abandons the Iranian patron and ceases its support for terrorist

organizations. Israel has in the past considered returning parts of the Golan Heights in order to ensure the latter component. The civil war provides a strategic opportunity for a similar result without Israel's having to pay an immediate price in territory.

- c. If jihadi organizations such as al-Nusra grow stronger to the point where they have freedom of action in the Golan Heights, Israel's interest will be to ensure that the terrorist threat remains a local and not a strategic threat, even if it cannot ensure total success in preventing a terrorist attack.

Israel's Interests and US Strategic Options

These sets of interests can be assessed against the two alternate US strategic objectives and the military action required to realize them. An American attack that seeks to punish the Assad regime for using chemical weapons and demonstrate US determination to respond to a crossed red line would include a pinpoint strike on several military targets or regime assets. On Wednesday, August 28, 2013, the *New York Times* wrote that the American plan includes a two-day attack on fifty military targets connected to the units that took part in the chemical attack. Since this is symbolic punishment, success is critical for conveying the American message. A limited but successful attack that is backed up by US determination to prevent the use of nonconventional weapons would restore some American deterrent power against the use of chemical weapons and to a certain extent would enhance American standing in the region. Such an attack could also influence decision making in Tehran. Thus, the expected scenario regarding an American attack would promote some of Israel's interests, especially those connected with US deterrent power in the region, albeit to a limited extent only.

On the other hand, an unsuccessful American attack, such as that in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon in 1983, or the Tomahawk missile attacks in Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998, could weaken American deterrence against the use of nonconventional weapons and cause even further damage to US standing in the region. Assad will see that the price for using chemical weapons is small, even when the US is pushed to act, and will have no reason to hesitate to continue using these weapons for local needs. An ineffective American strike could encourage jihadi rebel organizations to gain control of chemical weapons in order to improve the balance of power with Assad's army. Such weapons in the possession of terrorist organizations would be a direct threat to Israel. Other Middle East leaders too, including those in Iran, would understand that the strongest superpower in the world is fearful of using its power to promote its interests.

The danger to Israel from this scenario is minimal. Assad will be guided in his response by the issue of regime survival and his ambition to continue to keep the conflict with the opposition an internal conflict. By expanding the conflict to Israel, Assad would risk his regime, and therefore it is likely that he would not respond. Even with the attacks on Syria attributed to Israel in 2007 and 2013, Assad did not respond for the same reason: regime survival.

If in the punishment scenario Assad reasons that there is little danger to him or to his regime and that he can focus on a war against the rebels, in the event of a US attack intended to incapacitate the ruler, Assad's confidence would be shaken. In this scenario, the US would attack regime assets and seek to destroy Syria's strategic military capabilities in order to leave Assad without forces to protect him. In such a scenario, the US would restore its deterrent power and its status in the region. Such a move would also be a serious blow to the Tehran-Damascus-Beirut alliance and would convey a clear message of American determination to Tehran.

At the same time, such a move involves two main risks for Israel. The first and immediate risk is that Assad might decide to launch ground-to-ground missiles at Israel, and perhaps even arm them with chemical weapons. However, given Israel's deterrent power and the limited effectiveness of

chemical weapons, there is little likelihood of this scenario taking place, although it is more likely here than in the punishment scenario described above. Moreover, despite the low probability, its severity requires that the Israeli government prevent such an attack, or if it fails, that it limit its consequences.

The second threat if the Assad regime is weakened or disappears is that the terrorist threat to Israel from Syria will intensify. Since the terrorist organizations in Syria, which are funded mainly by Qatar, are the strongest and most organized part of the rebel organizations, there is a high probability that they would exploit the damage to Assad in order to take control over areas in the country and strengthen their power in Syrian society. In such a situation, they could operate freely against Israel. If the US fails to act in cooperation with its allies in order to create a strong, pragmatic alternative, Syria could become a failed state controlled by terrorist organizations, and would be a threat to Israel.

Conclusion

“What happened in Syria is a tragedy and a terrible crime,” declared Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the opening of the August 25, 2013 cabinet meeting. Although the moral obligation of a state may sometimes not match its interests, this is not the case for Israel vis-à-vis Syria. Stopping the slaughter in Syria and the use of nonconventional weapons, reconstructing the country, and establishing a regime controlled by the people are basic moral demands that match Israeli interests. However, the major risk to Israel is that in an extreme scenario, Assad would use chemical weapons against Israel as well.

Israel has the power to cope with the potential challenges discussed above, and in particular, the nonconventional threat and the threat of terrorism from Syria. To this end, Israel should adhere to a policy in which it is not a party to the turmoil in Syria and does not plan to intervene in the civil war. The government of Israel has maintained this posture thus far, and it is very important that this continue, even if there is some provocation on the northern border. If Israel is required to respond to provocations, moderation, an emphasis on defence and prevention, and an attempt to avoid escalation into all-out war should dictate the nature of the response.

In addition, Israel should continue to declare that Assad must be punished for using chemical weapons in order to restore deterrence and strengthen the taboo on the use of such weapons. In addition, there is a critical need for Jerusalem and Washington to continue to coordinate their actions on Syria from an overall perspective of a joint strategy for stopping the Iranian nuclear program. Indeed, the recent developments in Syria may also be seen as an opportunity in regard to Iran.

(2) The Israeli Spring

Israel could be forgiven for having a siege mentality - given that at any moment, old frontline enemies Syria and Egypt might spill their violence over common borders. The Arab Spring has thrown Israel's once-predictable adversaries into the chaotic state of a Sudan or Somalia. The old understandings between Jerusalem and the Assad and Mubarak kleptocracies seem in limbo.

Yet these tragic Arab revolutions swirling around Israel are paradoxically aiding it, both strategically and politically - well beyond just the erosion of conventional Arab military strength.

In terms of realpolitik, anti-Israeli authoritarians are fighting to the death against anti-Israeli insurgents and terrorists. Each is doing more damage to the other than Israel ever could - and in an

unprecedented, grotesque fashion. Who now is gassing Arab innocents? Shooting Arab civilians in the streets? Rounding up and executing Arab civilians? Blowing up Arab houses? Answer: either Arab dictators or radical Islamists.

The old nexus of radical Islamic terror of the last three decades is unravelling. With a wink and a nod, Arab dictatorships routinely subsidized Islamic terrorists to divert popular anger away from their own failures to the West or Israel. In the deal, terrorists got money and sanctuary. The Arab Street blamed others for their own government-inflicted miseries. And thieving authoritarians posed as Islam's popular champions.

But now, terrorists have turned on their dictator sponsors. And even the most ardent Middle East conspiracy theorists are having troubling blaming the US and Israel.

Secretary of State John Kerry is still beating last century's dead horse of a "comprehensive Middle East peace." But does Kerry's calcified diplomacy really assume that a peace agreement involving Israel would stop the ethnic cleansing of Egypt's Coptic Christians? Does Israel have anything to do with Assad's alleged gassing of his own people?

There are other losers as well. Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan wanted to turn a once-secular Turkish democracy into a neo-Ottoman Islamist sultanate, with grand dreams of eastern-Mediterranean hegemony. His selling point to former Ottoman Arab subjects was often a virulent anti-Semitism. Suddenly, Turkey became one of Israel's worst enemies and the Obama administration's best friends.

Yet if Erdogan has charmed President Obama, he has alienated almost everyone in the Middle East. Islamists such as former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi felt that Erdogan was a fickle and opportunistic conniver. The Gulf monarchies believed that he was a troublemaker who wanted to supplant their influence. Neither the Europeans nor the Russians trust him. The result is that Erdogan's loud anti-Israeli foreign policy is increasingly irrelevant.

The oil-rich sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf once funded terrorists on the West Bank, but they are now fuelling the secular military in Egypt. In Syria they are searching to find some third alternative to Assad's Alawite regime and its al-Qaeda enemies. For the moment, oddly, the Middle East foreign policy of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the other oil monarchies dovetails with Israel's: Predictable Sunni-Arab nationalism is preferable to one-vote, one-time Islamist radicals.

Israel no doubt prefers that the Arab world liberalize and embrace constitutional government. Yet the current bloodletting lends credence to Israel's ancient complaints that it never had a constitutional or lawful partner in peace negotiations.

In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak's corrupt dictatorship is gone. His radical Muslim Brotherhood successors were worse and are also gone. The military dictatorship that followed both is no more legitimate than either. In these cycles of revolution, the one common denominator is an absence of constitutional government.

In Syria, there never was a moderate middle. Take your pick between the murderous Shiite-backed Assad dictatorship or radical Sunni Islamists. In Libya, the choice degenerated to Moammar Qaddafi's unhinged dictatorship or the tribal militias that overthrew it. Let us hope that one day westernized moderate democracy might prevail. But that moment seems a long way off.

What do the Egyptian military, the French in Mali, Americans at home, the Russians, the Gulf monarchies, persecuted Middle Eastern Christians, and the reformers of the Arab Spring all have in common? Like Israel, they are all fighting Islamic-inspired fanaticism. And most of them, like Israel, are opposed to the idea of a nuclear Iran.

In comparison with the ruined economies of the Arab Spring - tourism shattered, exports non-existent, and billions of dollars in infrastructure lost through unending violence - Israel is an atoll of prosperity and stability. Factor in its recent huge gas and oil finds in the eastern Mediterranean, and it may soon become another Kuwait or Qatar, but with a real economy beyond its booming petroleum exports.

Israel had nothing to do with either the Arab Spring or its failure. The irony is that surviving embarrassed Arab regimes now share the same concerns with the Israelis. In short, the more violent and chaotic the Middle East becomes, the more secure and exceptional Israel appears.

(3) The Palestinian Authority's "Israeli Affairs Committee"

Instead of preparing Palestinians for peace with Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership has decided to focus its efforts on winning the support of the Israeli public for a peaceful settlement based on the two-state solution.

In the context of its efforts to "convince" Israelis to accept the two-state solution, the PA recently established a special "Israeli Affairs Committee" with the goal of promoting the idea among the Israeli public.

The committee's main task, in fact, is to scare Israelis that failure to accept all Palestinian demands would plunge the region into another cycle of violence and bloodshed. The PA is hoping that to avoid another intifada, intimidated Israelis would put pressure on their government to comply with Palestinian demands.

Over the past few weeks, in a bid to "influence" public opinion in Israel, this committee organized a series of meetings between Palestinians and Israelis. Palestinian sources told the London-based *Al-Hayat* newspaper. The Palestinian committee, formed by Mahmoud Abbas, includes top PLO and Fatah officials Yasser Abed Rabbo, Nabil Sha'ath, Jibril Rajoub, Hanan Ashrawi and Mohamed Madani.

Last week, the committee organized visits by Israeli parliamentarians to Ramallah, where they held talks with Abbas and other Palestinian officials to discuss prospects for peace in the Middle East.

One of the committee members explained, "Those we are meeting are the leaders of Israeli society and they will decide its fate. The Israeli public no longer knows what is happening here in the Palestinian territories."

It is always nice, of course, to see Israelis and Palestinians meeting and talking to each other. But instead of devoting its efforts and energies to trying to persuade the Israeli public to support peace, it would be more helpful if the Palestinian leaders in the West Bank also tried to win the backing of their own people for the peace process.

Why should any Israeli believe the A when most Palestinians appear to be opposed to the resumption of the peace talks?

Abbas does not even have the backing of the PLO and Fatah leaderships for his recent decision to return to the negotiating table with Israel, and returned to the peace talks with Israel against the advice of the PLO leadership. Instead of inviting Israeli parliamentarians to Ramallah, Abbas might have tried to persuade the PLO and Fatah to support his efforts to achieve peace with Israel.

The Israeli parliamentarians who met with Abbas in his office last week already support the two-state solution and the peace process. But most PLO and Fatah leaders remain opposed to the resumption of the peace talks.

As Abbas was meeting with the Israeli parliamentarians, thousands of Palestinians in the streets of Gaza City were demonstrating against the peace talks and two-state solution. These are the people with whom Abbas needs to work to change their hearts and minds. These are the people who need to be told that peace with Israel will only do good for the Palestinians.

Why should any Israeli believe Abbas when his own supporters continue to wage a campaign to combat "normalization" with Israel?

While Abbas feels free to receive Knesset members in his Ramallah office, other Palestinians continue to receive threats for talking to, or doing business with, Israelis.

What is needed is a special "Palestinian Affairs Committee" that would work toward preparing Palestinians for peace with Israel. The committee members should be asked to go to every mosque, school and university in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to talk about peace and coexistence with Israel.

The members also need to visit every village and refugee camp to talk to as many people as possible about the importance of peace. They should also meet with representatives of all Palestinian factions to try to win their support for the peace process.

It would also be a good idea if such a committee would ask the PA to "lower the tone" and stop rhetorical attacks against Israel that drive Palestinians towards more extremism.

Inciting Palestinians against Israel through the media and mosques only serves the interests of Hamas and other radical Palestinians. Moreover, the anti-Israel rhetoric eventually undermines Abbas and anyone who conducts peace talks with Israel.

The PA has chosen to "educate" Israelis about the significance of peace while it has done almost nothing to persuade its own people to move towards moderation and pragmatism. If the PA really wants to win the support of the Israeli public for peace, it should start by showing that it is making every effort to convince Palestinians to support the peace process.

(4) Palestinian children: The invisible workers of Israeli settlements

The summer air grew considerably hotter as we drove down to the Jordan Valley. Its red fertile soil radiated heat beneath our feet as we walked toward the lush agricultural field dotted with young boys picking vegetables.

Wearing a red hoodie over his baseball cap, Omar, 17, quickly jumped off a tractor to greet us. He appeared thin and sun-burned and his hands felt calloused from picking vegetables bare-handed. Omar's younger brother, Fouzi, 16, wearing a baseball cap and carrying his plastic bucket, followed close behind. Beads of sweat trickled down their faces as they proudly displayed the eggplants and peppers they had collected over the past five hours.

Four years ago, Omar became the primary breadwinner for his eight member family after his father passed away. In significant debt due to medical bills, Omar began picking, cleaning and packaging fruits and vegetables near the agricultural fields of the Israeli settlement of Hamra in the Jordan Valley.

When balancing work and school became exhausting, both Omar and Fouzi left school to work full time in the fields. Depending on the season, around 10,000 to 20,000 Palestinian labourers work in Israeli agricultural settlements in the Jordan Valley. Approximately 5-10% of these workers are child laborers, according to the Maan Development Centre..

One of the most restricted places on earth, the Jordan Valley is home to vast swaths of rich agricultural land used by Israeli settlements. Since 1967, Israel has implemented systematic measures to ensure absolute control over the region, depriving Palestinians of their right to their own resources.

While Israeli settlers make up 13% of the population, they effectively control 86% of the land. The annual value of agricultural production in the Jordan Valley settlements is estimated at about \$132.6 million, according to a report by the Palestinian human rights organization, Al Haq.

Omar and Fouzi are from the West Bank village of Duma, 13 miles southeast of Nablus. During the months they work, they stay in storage units near the Hamra settlement sleeping on tiny cots for months at a time.

"We work up to 10 hours or more and we don't get many breaks to drink water and rest throughout the day," says Fouzi. "The units we sleep in are very cramped and humid; sometimes it feels like we're choking, but we're used to it."

At the end of each week, they send their money home to their mother. Child labourers earn an average of 40 to 60 NIS (\$12 to \$18) per day. This is not even enough to buy a bag of flour to feed her family, Omar and Fouzi's mother, Muntaha, says.

Palestinian children as young as 11 work up to 12 hours a day, in temperatures that can reach up to 122 degrees Fahrenheit and drop to 32 degrees Fahrenheit.

Child labourers can suffer from injuries and chronic pain due to long hours, poor working conditions and the harsh physical nature of the work. The use of inorganic pesticides and fertilizers is widespread and unregulated in the Valley, creating highly polluted runoff water with high levels of chemicals to which children are exposed.

Exposure to these chemicals can have grave long-term consequences including hormonal, renal and nervous system abnormalities, and cancer.

Palestinian child labourers are undocumented, meaning no records of their hours worked are kept. They are paid in cash so that there is no proof of them working on settlements, and

they have no official status, health insurance, or rights as employees. Settlers that employ them are well aware of this.

"Last year, one boy fell off the tractor and injured his back. He's nearly paralyzed and didn't have insurance so he can't work," says Omar, eyeing the tractor he was riding.

Undocumented child labourers are more vulnerable to exploitation, fearful of complaining or exposing any rights abuse that may jeopardize their source of income and safety.

"Cases of sexual assault and abuse are very common in settlements," according to Amjad Jaber, director of the PA Ministry of Labor office in Jericho. "I hear horrific stories from many women and children, who are most vulnerable to the abuse."

Limited vocational training or other alternatives forces many Palestinian families to turn to waseets. Families trust waseets to find work for their children in Israeli settlements. Many waseets were child labourers themselves.

Waseets generally take commissions from the wages of the child labourers they recruit. Some also collect fees for housing and transportation. Israeli settlers pay higher wages to waseets because their services make running the entire agricultural settlement enterprise affordable and profitable.

The PA prohibits children from working in the settlements, and under Israeli law employing minors is illegal, which results in a workforce that is invisible under the law and not guaranteed basic protections and rights.

"I view the use of child labour inside settlements as a form of human trafficking," said Khaled Quzmar, an attorney at Defence for Children International Palestine, who was involved in drafting the Palestinian Labour Law that went into effect in 2000. (Disclosure: I am a consultant with DCI Palestine.)

"Child labour is a very complicated issue," says Quzmar. "The fractured legal system in the West Bank makes it easy to exploit child labour because Palestinian Labour Law only applies to children working in areas under PA jurisdiction, not Israeli settlements."

Sitting down with Omar and Fouzi's mother, Muntaha, in Duma, the sound of distress in her voice over her dependency on her children's work is clear.

"No mother wants to send her children to work in a settlement. Of course not," Muntaha sighs. "But what choice do we have?"

(5) Egypt's revolution must support Syria and Palestine

There is a historic agenda after the momentous second wave of Egypt's revolution that rose up against the rule of corruption and tyranny in January 2011, and once again in June/July 2013 against the so-called Islamist right when Egyptians called on the Armed Forces to be their defender and backer.

The rule of so-called Islamists was just another phase of corrupt authoritarian that was concealed behind a veil of superficial Islam to deceive simple Egyptians and seduce them with religion. Meanwhile the apparatus of backwardness, oppression and corruption continued to

gnaw at Egypt's esteem, the prosperity of its people, and plummeting regional and international standing. This meant a continued strategy of borrowing and begging from overseas.

Egypt's world standing plummeted, so much so that Egypt's president was habitually met by junior officials during failed overseas trips. They had insisted on these trips for reasons that had nothing to do with the interests of Egyptians or Egypt. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, one might think they "lost their quest in life in the belief they were doing good" (Al-Kahf; 104), but the truth is their deeds showed much more sinister intentions.

I believe the main objective of the second transitional phase is to reverse domestic and foreign policies by the so-called Islamist right that were almost identical to the essence of policies by the rule of tyranny and corruption that the great people's revolution rose up against – and has yet to succeed.

The roadmap announced to the people by the Armed Forces on 3 July is sufficient to rectify the path of democratic transformation, after so-called Islamist right wing currents had veered off by allowing religious parties to establish a religious state and subjected society to an Islam of hardship and extremism.

I am primarily concerned with Arab policies by the so-called Islamist regime that was evidently dominated by the international Brotherhood organisation and its directives. Egypt's dignity, the prosperity of Egyptians or independence of the Arab nation and raising its stature, were never a priority.

I am mostly interested in Egypt's Arab policies because I strongly believe the only chance for Arab revival is through effective Arab integration. Egypt, despite its human resources and heritage of soft power, can never rise on its own; neither can Saudi Arabia, despite its wealth that will not last forever, achieve this historic goal by itself. And thus, one cannot talk about any possibility of ascent alone.

Accordingly, Syria and Palestine have always held a special place in Egypt's Arab policies for reasons pertaining to Egypt's national security and because the Palestinian cause is central to Arabs, and Israel is the most serious threat to the national security of Arabs in general, and especially Egypt. The special bond between Egyptians and Palestinians fuelled many wars by Egypt against Israel; every home in Egypt has lost a martyr in the conflict with Israel.

Meanwhile, throughout history, guaranteeing Arab national security, Egypt's especially, required a level of unity or at least coordination between Egypt and Syria – the first Eastern Gate of Egypt's national security. Mohamed Ali understood this and annexed Syria to Greater Egypt; even Napoleon understood his rule in Egypt would be unstable if he did not annex Syria – but he failed to conquer Acre and returned from the Levant crestfallen and defeated. Neither should we forget the peoples of Egypt and Syria were once briefly united in one international entity not too long ago.

These special bonds give Palestinians and Syrians a unique position in Egyptian conscience. Therefore, the special connection with the Palestinians and Syrians must remain at the heart of revolutionary Egypt's revised Arab policies.

But the rule of the so-called Islamist right in Egypt has sabotaged most ties with Syria and Palestine; it declared good intentions but its actions were sinister, adopting the outlook of the Brotherhood's international organisation and its forever shady relations with dominant powers on the Arab and international stages.

The Palestinian cause was diminished to cooperating with Hamas as a member of the Brotherhood's international organisation, but under the umbrella of friendship with Israel and serving US interests. One need only recall the letter by the ousted president to his Israeli counterpart.

Sabotaging Egypt's ties with Arab countries was shocking when dealing with Syria. While public declarations by that regime focused on support for the Syrian people and forming committees for Syrian conciliation, the ousted president rashly, infatuated by the enthusiasm of his mob supporters in the so-called Islamist right without consulting those responsible for Egypt's foreign relations, decided to sever ties between Egypt and Syria. He allowed his mob supporters to brazenly send weapons and volunteers for what they described as a jihad, which further fuelled the civil war in Syria.

Thus, the president of the so-called Islamist right forced Egypt to sever eternal close ties between the southern and northern regions of the United Arab Republic, and fanned the civil war among our Syrian brothers. This is an unforgivable political and historic crime. This hostile position against the Syrian people was another reason behind the position of the Egyptian people's Armed Forces against the so-called Islamist right before the momentous second wave of the great people's revolution. Senior military officials described it as a threat to Egypt's national security.

Individual incidents, such as arresting a Syrian national for shooting demonstrators in Egypt and his confession that he was paid by the wayward Brotherhood group to commit this heinous crime, poisoned the outlook of Egyptians towards Syrians. This is a terrible mistake, a crime committed by one individual and not all his kin. It is an even bigger crime by those who exploited the wretch's desperation and instructed him to commit such a crime, instead of helping him and being kind to him like true Muslims.

There were also rumours that Hamas, or jihadists cells under its umbrella, were brazenly interfering in Egypt's domestic affairs to prop up the so-called Islamist right before it reached power and unleashed its unjust reign of tyranny. Some of these issues are still being litigated in court and we should wait and see what the courts have to say. If these accusations are true, it is the fault of those who hired rogue individuals and those who compromised Egypt's national security by facilitating a non-Egyptian group to carry out acts that threaten the security of the country, its people and intervene in Egypt's domestic affairs.

One must never forget that Hamas is not the Palestinian resistance, nor is it our beloved Palestine or the Palestinian cause – the banner of the Arabs.

Revolutionary Egypt must rectify relations with all Arab people, especially the Palestinians and Syrians. This requires support for the Palestinian resistance in general, and promoting the will of Syrians to decide their fate freely.

(6) Who should clean up the mess?

Many people repeatedly ask why "the West" -- meaning European countries, the European Union and the United States -- sits by idly and does not lift a finger to intervene to end the war crimes and crimes against humanity now being committed against Arab and Muslim people.

The present chaos [*fitna*] now includes the slaughter in Syria, the endless attacks in Iraq, the terrorism in Afghanistan, the bloody confrontations in Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, the Sudan and everywhere else there are Muslims.

The reluctance of the West to participate in these disputes has enraged many people, who continually harp on the failures of "the West." We Arabs have become spoiled, self-indulgent, accustomed to the good life -- and slightly delusional: we really do think that someone else has to do our dirty work. Since the West continually attempts to bring order and democracy to the people of Islam, we tend to forget that this is not the West's job.

We have become accustomed to seeing Americans killed for us in Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan. When you look at the Arab states, paralyzed by the catastrophe in Syria, it is hard to understand why the Arabs expect the Americans to clean up this mess.

I am happy that the West does not interfere, and instead makes do with criticism and threatening sanctions. We have to bring ourselves a genuine Arab Spring, without foreign help. We have to plant and water the tree of democracy in the lands of Islam with our own hands, independently.

I am happy that the Western world, led by US President Barack Obama, has not lifted a finger. It is clear the problem is not that he doesn't want to, but that he cannot. American public opinion will not stand for more massive loss of American life and economic damage in wars other people should be fighting, even if those wars will seriously influence the fate of the West. For that reason at least, Obama made the right call when he said he would direct the battles from the rear: he had no other choice.

We are all lucky he had no other choice. This is the only way the affairs of the Middle East will resolve themselves on their own. Authentic revolutions take place on the front lines, not in the rear. If the desire to rule the roost really were the uncomprehending, hypocritical and condescending world view of the current US administration -- because of which we lost the Egypt of Mubarak, and because of which Iran and Turkey are now Islamist countries -- we would not accept the revolt of Egyptian General Abdel Fattah el-Sissi, which saved the world from radical Islam. The revolt was successful only because it was our good fortune that Sissi did not surrender to the infantile dictates and blackmail of America and the European Union.

It is the *lack* of American action that will cause the situation to right itself in Egypt, Syria, North Africa and other centres of unrest in the Arab-Muslim world. The naive fantasies of American and European advisors must not be allowed to interfere with real and necessary processes in the Middle East. We watched, uneasily, as the West -- because of its crude and bungling interference, mistakes and amateurishness -- helped bring radical Islam to our region. It is a genuine shame that because of Western weakness the forces of darkness and even reaction in China, Iran, North Korea and Russia gained the upper hand and harmed soldiers and innocent civilians.

When I see Obama stand behind the podium in the White House delivering yet another speech, I am convinced that words, or perhaps a few inconsequential strikes, like President Bill Clinton's

retaliation for the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, are the most a weak president is capable of. When I hear the US call on the seething Arab-Muslim world to take stock of itself, in the name of an imaginary democracy which can never be implemented in our corner of the world, and when I hear it spout condescending ideological nonsense not only divorced from local reality but harmful to American interests, I am reminded of one of the early Muslims, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.A.S), a man named Bilal bin Rabah

Bilal bin Rabah was Muhammad's (S.A.A.S) loyal black slave. He freed Bilal and appointed him as a *muezzin*; and Bilal called the faithful to prayer from the minaret of the mosque of the Kaaba in newly-conquered Mecca. As opposed to Bilal, however, the *sahaba*, Muhammad's faithful companions, who like Bilal accompanied Muhammad (S.A.A.S) in his prophetic mission, were appointed to high positions as Caliphs and district governors. Bilal with his hoarse voice called the faithful to prayer five times a day, but few answered the call. Both Muslims and infidels in Mecca made fun of him, saying he brayed like a donkey, and many of them paid no attention to his calls to prayer.

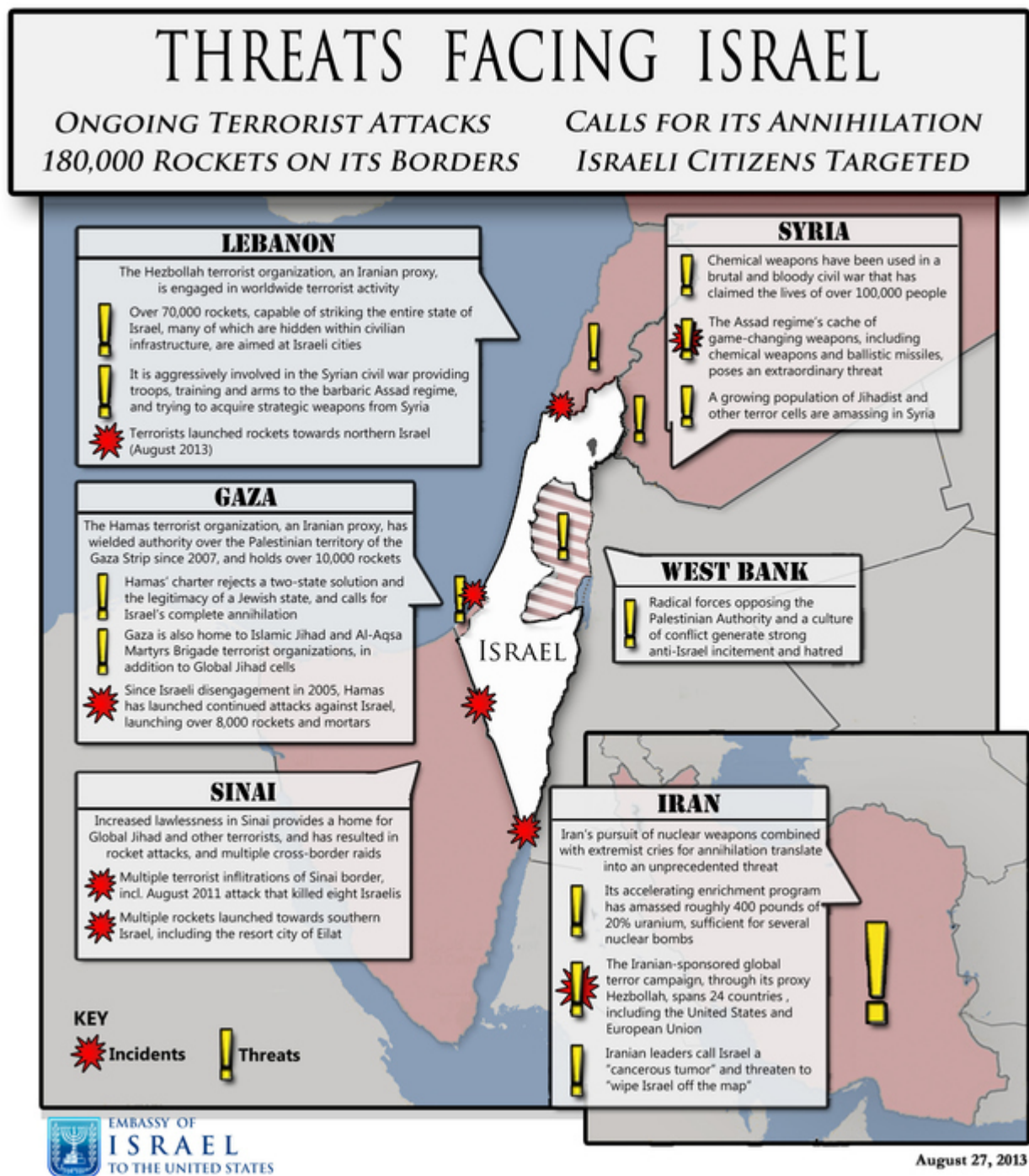
I cannot help asking myself if the Muslim Brotherhood's dream were to come true today, and the followers of Mohamed Morsi, America's darling, did actually take over the world with their radical Islamic agenda, would they elevate Obama to some high office? Sadly, if radical Islam actually managed to realize its goal and take control of America and Europe, the Muslims who follow the tradition of Muhammad would appoint Obama to a post no higher than muezzin of the Chicago mosque.

For this reason, when I see black Americans convert to Islam (like Congressman Keith Ellison, who converted to Islam from Catholicism), with their weird empathy and incomprehensible yen for Islam and Hamas, I am amazed and horrified by the ignorance of their choice. Do they not know that Muslims were the slave traders who captured Africans and sold them to America? Do they not know that to this day many Muslims in the Arab world disregard blacks and treat them like slaves? In Arab political circles in the Gulf States, Condoleezza Rice and other black politicians are called *a'bd* or *a'bda*, the Arabic word for slave. In the Muslim Brotherhood scenario, Congressman Keith Ellison would not be a member of the Islamic Council (the Shura) and Secretary Rice would not be allowed to leave the house without a male relative, to say nothing of flying off on diplomatic missions around the world. She would stay at home and look at the world through the square veil in her hijab.

From the heart of the Middle East chaos I ask myself why we accepted such enormous quantities of arms from America without being able to use them. Why can we not unite and ourselves get rid of dictators like Assad? Why do American soldiers have to die for us? Where is Qatar, which relies on the United States for its defence but operates Al-Jazeera TV for the Muslim Brotherhood's jihad and incites the Arabs to internecine wars and creates chaos? Where are Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States? Where is Turkey? Where is Egypt and its glorious army? Because of America's empty declarations, which the Arab-Muslim world scorns like the braying of a donkey, I understand why America lost its deterrence and ability to fight. I understand why no one takes America seriously, and I can only come to the conclusion that it is time for us, Arabs and Muslims, to take our fate in our own hands: the time has come to worry about ourselves.

(7) Threats Facing Israel

Some may say the map is alarmist, but *it is* our geopolitical reality.



Threats and turmoil in the Middle East have collectively reached one of the highest peaks in recent history with no stopping or slowing in sight.

Chemical weapon use was confirmed by the Assad regime in the bloody civil war in Syria. In neighbouring Lebanon, four rockets were launched by terrorists towards Israel. Hezbollah is dirtying its hands in both countries, aggressively participating in the Syrian civil war with

troops and arms, and holding more than 70,000 rockets in Lebanon, all of which are hidden within civilian infrastructure and aimed at Israel.

On Israel's southern border, Iranian-proxy Hamas holds more than 10,000 rockets. Hamas' charter rejects a two-state solution and the legitimacy of a Jewish state and calls for Israel's complete annihilation.

In the West Bank, radical forces opposing the Palestinian Authority and a culture of conflict generate strong anti-Israel incitement and hatred.

Throughout the region, including within Lebanon, Syria and Sinai, the growing presence and threat of global jihad elements is of deep concern.

And, as attention in the Middle East jumps from one hotspot to another, **the public is losing sight of the greatest threat to international peace and security: Iran's military nuclear program.** Iran is developing its breakout capacity by stockpiling large quantities of low enriched uranium, expanding its ability to swiftly enrich uranium, and advancing a parallel plutonium track.

Some may say the map is alarmist. Undeniably, the map is our geopolitical reality, and we will be vigilant in protecting our people and our borders.

It's because of these threats Israel is ever more committed to maintaining our existing peace agreements with Jordan and Egypt, and reaching an historic peace agreement based on the principle of two states for two peoples – Israel the nation-state and homeland for the Jewish people and an Arab Palestinian state as the homeland for the Palestinian people.

Israel and Israelis yearn for a peace that allows Israel to be able to invest in ourselves, building a better society for our children, and creating a prosperous future.

(8) Choosing the right options in Syria

The U.S. has hard choices to make in Syria. Even if the U.S. does intervene militarily, the time window for its best option has already passed. President Obama may have had reason to be cautious and play King Log to President Bush's King Stork, but the U.S. did not intervene when the rebels were strongest, the Assad regime most fragile, and limited U.S. support to the then dominant moderate rebel factions might well have pushed Assad out of power without dividing Syria along sectarian and ethnic lines.

Every option today comes up against the reality that Assad is now far stronger, the country is increasingly being split into Assad and rebel controlled sections, the rebels are fractured and rebel forces have strong Sunni Islamist extremist elements, and the nation is increasingly polarizing into an Alawite and more secular Sunni and minority bloc, a Sunni Arab bloc, and a Syrian Kurdish bloc. In practice, this means there is no way the U.S. can quickly use any amount of force to destroy the Assad regime with any confidence that Syria will not come under Sunni Islamist extremist control, or divide into Alawite, Sunni, and Kurdish blocs in ways that prove to be even more violent and lasting than such sectarian and ethnic divisions have in Iraq.

The U.S. is also now faced with having chosen the wrong red line. No one has accurate estimates, but the key challenge in Syria is scarcely to end the use of chemical weapons. The real challenge is

some 120,000 dead, another 200,000-plus wounded, and as many as 20% of its 22.5 million people have been displaced inside the country or are living outside it as refugees. The nation has lost some three years of economic development, become a country of polarized factions, and seen many – if not most – of its children lose much of their schooling and learn to live in fear and anger in a country where more than a third of the population is 14 years of age or younger.

Chemical weapons alone are not a reason to use force. Even the most successful cruise missile strikes would not destroy Syria's holdings. There is no credible chance the U.S. can locate or destroy Syria's entire holding without a massive air campaign and some kind of presence on the ground. Even if the Assad regime has not done the obvious, and used the last few months to covertly disperse a large portion of its weapons, cruise missiles simply don't have that kind of destructive power.

Even if the U.S. can somehow stop all future use of chemical weapons, the military impact will be marginal at best. Moreover, anyone who has actually seen wounds from conventional artillery -- or badly treated body wounds from small arms -- realizes that chemical weapons do not cause more horrible wounds. If anything, an agent like Sarin tends to either kill quickly or result in relative recovery. The case for intervening cannot be based on chemical weapons. It has to be based on two factors: Whether it serves American strategic interest and whether it meets the broader humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

Americans also need to remember that the U.S. has chosen bad options in Syria before, and the sheer pointlessness of largely symbolic U.S. strikes. The pointless use of battleships to shell Druze and Syrian forces in Syria in 1983 led to the Marine Corps barracks bombing and a similar attack on French forces on October 23, 1983. U.S. mistakes and debates within the Pentagon then led the U.S. to suddenly halt its part of what might have been a meaningful, large-scale U.S.-French strike plan, have the U.S. halt its strikes without telling its French ally, and result in a totally ineffective French bombing of Syrian targets on November 16, 1983. On December 4, 1983, the U.S. finally did launch 28 airstrikes because of Syrian air defense attacks on U.S. F-14s flying reconnaissance missions. The end result, however, was a pointless attack on Syrian air defense targets, the loss of two U.S. aircraft, one pilot dead, and another held prisoner until he was rescued by the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

If the U.S. is to intervene in Syria, its options must have some strategic meaning and a chance of producing lasting success. They must have a reasonable chance of bringing stability to Syria, of limiting the growth of Iranian and Hezbollah influence, of halting the spillover of the Syrian struggle into nearby states, and helping to deal with the broader humanitarian crisis.

In practice, this requires the following actions:

**** Tie U.S. action to allied support:** Work with Britain, France, Turkey, and key Arab states like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to show that the U.S. is acting with broad international support before the U.S. takes any military action on its own.

**** Focus on targets that go well beyond chemical weapons sites, and that hit at key political and military targets:** Strike at targets like Assad's palace in Damascus, the headquarters of Syrian intelligence and the secret police, Syrian and Al Quds bases and training centers for the Assad militias, and the mix of air bases and ground support facilities that do most to support Syrian military operations. These are targets U.S. cruise missiles can hit, although the U.S. might consider at least limited air strikes to show it can and will escalate if Assad does not show restraint.

***** Set redlines that matter for the future and seek to deter Assad with plans for a limited No Fly, No Move Zone:*** Warn Syria that U.S. will enforce a no fly/no move zone if Assad forces carry out more missile, air, chemical weapons, or ground artillery strikes on rebel-held areas. Make it clear to Assad that there are clear limits to the targets he can strike in the future, and the U.S. is planning a broader effort with its allies that could lead to a no fly-no move zone to protect rebel held areas. Give this option real teeth by openly working with key allies on contingency plans. Make it clear to the world that the U.S. is taking the lead, and that the U.S. will act if Assad continues his attacks and ground offensives, and the U.S. has suitable allied support.

***** Act to provide lasting support for the rebels.*** Finally make good on U.S. announcements about helping moderate rebel factions. Openly back and arm moderate rebel factions with advanced light guided air defense weapons like MANPADS, SHORADS, anti-tank guided weapons, mortars, and artillery. Provide such weapons directly from the U.S. and/or allow friendly Arab states like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to release such weapons in coordination with the U.S. and only to the more moderate rebel elements.

***** But, make U.S. support conditional.*** Test rebel capability, the impact of actively supporting moderate rebel elements, and show Assad the U.S. not only has a tongue but has teeth. Hold the rebel forces that get such support accountable by demanding videotapes and other evidence the weapons are being properly used -- as the supporters of extremist elements are already doing with Islamist factions. Forward deploy a limited CIA and Special Forces presence. Act on the reality that such "sensitive" weapons are already out of tight control, on the market, and in rebels hand in limited numbers.

***** Organize an international humanitarian effort.*** Do not seek to solve the humanitarian or refugee problem alone, but do be far more proactive in organizing a broad international effort to support Syrian refugees inside areas in Syria where moderate rebel factions and NGOs can operate, and work with European allies, Arab allies in the Gulf, and with Jordan, Iraq, the KRG, and Turkey to create a collective effort to reduce the suffering. Treat USAID as a key element of a civil-military effort in Syria. Give it the funds and support it needs to be effective.

None of these options should be open ended, or be chosen and acted upon without getting clear, public commitments to joint action from our key allies. The U.S. should not continue to replace U.S. overreaction in Afghanistan and Iraq with inaction in Syria, but it should take account of the concerns raised by General Dempsey in his letters to Congress. The Obama Administration should also act on a key statement in General Dempsey's August 19th letter to Congressman Engels, "We could, if asked to do so, significantly increase our effort to develop a moderate opposition. Do so, in combination with expanded capacity to-building efforts with regional partners and a significant investment in the development of a moderate Syrian opposition, represents the best framework for an effective U.S. strategy in going forward."

Finally, the U.S. should make it clear that it does not reject negotiations that could lead to some form of agreed solution that would protect Syria's Alawites and Kurds, offer Russia a role in Syria and move towards a UN solution, and give Assad a secure way to leave or even lead to some form of ceasefire that temporarily divides Syria without leaving it without a future. The chances of such negotiations succeeding are now extremely limited, but the U.S. has waited so long that so are the chances of a clear rebel victory based on moderate movements.

An active, high profile U.S.-led effort towards national conciliation can lay the groundwork for some form of eventual agreed national conciliation even if it cannot end or even pause the fighting in the short-term. Above all, the U.S. needs to focus on collective action, and finding a workable compromise among Syrian factions that has some chance of a long-term solution that offers stability

and security to Syrians. There is no point in fighting a war against chemical weapons. There is no point in U.S. military symbolism or massive unilateral military action. There is a point in trying to use force to end the suffering, the fighting, and repression – and serve our national interest while we meet the needs of the Syrian people and our allies.

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