



Middle East Mediterranean

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Ali Sonay

Middle East Mediterranean

Editorial Team

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Editorial Office

Hellenic Foundation for European and foreign Policy - ELIAMEP
49, Vas. Sofias str., Athens, 10676, Greece
T.: (+30) 210 7257110
Email: mideast@eliamep.gr; venetis@eliamep.gr

Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) is an unbiased bimonthly report of the *ELIAMEP Middle East Research Project*, focusing largely on geopolitical and economic developments, debates as well as policies, affecting the future of the Middle East. Having a global outlook MEM hosts analyses, commentaries, interviews and news, conducting research in the fields of politics, economics and culture in the Middle East and adjacent areas, such as the Eastern Mediterranean.

NOTICE: The views expressed in the articles of the *Middle East Mediterranean* do not reflect the point of view of the Hellenic Institute for European and Foreign Policy and the Editorial Team.

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Analyses

Roads to Escalating Conflict or a Path to Peace: Can the US Make the Right Choice on Iran?

Prof. Hooshang Amirahmadi,
Rutgers University, USA
*Founder and President of the American-Iranian Council**

The US policy is at risk of going astray by emphasizing sectarian Sunni-Shia conflicts and siding with radical Islamists, repeating the pitfalls of Afghanistan in the 1980s. To avoid such a prospect, US must engage in a meaningful and sustained dialogue to build mutual confidence and trust through gradual establishment of relations within a framework of trade and diplomacy.

With the American presidential elections settled, space has opened for progress on the Iranian nuclear issue and broader US-Iran relations. However, the policy options on the table for the United States range from the disastrous to the auspicious. Each of the paths, from full-scale war to diplomatic engagement, rest on different assumptions about the regime in Tehran and its behavior. Although engaging Iran presents many challenges, it is the best path for the Obama administration. While an imperative exists for engagement, the US policy is at risk of going astray by emphasizing sectarian Sunni-Shia conflicts and siding with radical Islamists, repeating the pitfalls of Afghanistan in the 1980s.

The most catastrophic choice, argued for by neoconservatives, is a

military attack on Iran. This policy rests on the assumptions that sanctions will never work, that the Iranian regime is menacingly pursuing a nuclear weapon, and that a nuclear-armed Iran would be uncontrollable and dangerous. Although some claim that a 'targeted' strike on Iran's nuclear facilities could be limited in scope and would not create a broader war, this can prove to be a myth. It is clear that any military intervention by the United States or Israel would be retaliated by Iran's diverse asymmetric arsenal in the region. This policy will fail because it will not prevent Iran from building a nuclear capability if it intends to do so. Iran's nuclear facilities are spread across a huge geography, fortified underground, and are shielded by human and defense forces. Beyond

that, it will lead to catastrophic consequences including casualties on both sides, destabilization of the Strait of Hormuz, skyrocketing oil prices, a surge in anti-Americanism, and complications in the pending withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The second approach, espoused by hawkish Democrats and Republicans as well as their Iranian oppositional allies, is to use sanctions and pressure to foster regime change. This view is based on the arguments that the Islamic Republic is not capable of reform, is corrupt, and that there is no hope to work with it. Indeed, they argue that the problem is the regime's nature not its nuclear program. Therefore, destroying the nuclear facilities and infrastructure is not sufficient to meet American goals. According to this approach, it is best to destabilize and overthrow the regime by creating economic and diplomatic pressure as well as galvanizing minority ethnic groups and the opposition. However, the historical record suggests that achieving regime change via this course is very unlikely. The case of Iraq demonstrates that in the absence of the war, Saddam's regime could have survived for many more years even under strict international sanctions. Ironically, isolationism and sanctions often increase the staying power of anti-American regimes, as they can use 'American meddling' as

a scapegoat for their domestic problems.


The third path, which has been undertaken by the Obama administration since 2008, focuses on using sanctions as a tool to bring the regime to the bargaining table. The basis for this 'dual track' policy, which previously emphasized carrots and sticks but has now become purely sticks, is the belief that pressure works with Iranian leaders and that it is still possible to mend relations with Tehran. This group is divided between those who argue for blanket sanctions on the Iranian economy and those who argue for so-called 'targeted sanctions,' 'smart sanctions,' or 'discriminate sanctions.' This policy will fail because it underestimates Iran's national pride and the Islamic ethos of resistance to Western pressure.

Fourth, there is the containment option argued for by former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, which recommends treating the Islamic Republic much like the Soviet Union. This policy presupposes that Iran is steadfastly pursuing a nuclear capability and that neither war nor sanctions can stop this fait accompli. Proponents argue the best approach is to avoid war by building an international coalition against Iran and to limit its power by cutting its relations with Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Assad dictatorship. This analogy is inapplicable to Iran.

Containment may have helped destroy the Soviet Union, but the main cause was the communist system's inherent contradiction and static nature. The system failed to provide the people with their growing aspirations for a better life, while at the same time the Soviet Empire expanded globally, incorporating people and geography by force. In contrast, Iran is a nation state of diverse ethnic groups in a voluntary union, and is a relatively small capitalist country without global ambitions.

The final path, which has been espoused by the American Iranian Council for more than two decades, elaborated in my White Paper for the AIC, is to engage Iran in a meaningful and sustained dialogue to build mutual confidence and trust. This engagement could include discussions on a range of regional issues where they share common ground from Afghanistan, to Iraq, to drug trafficking. Importantly, the two nations must engage with mutual respect and within a win-win framework, requiring courageous compromises. For this option to succeed, the current "no war no peace" status quo must be removed and replaced by a clear peace or war option. The US should then offer Iran a grand peace that the Islamic Republic must take as otherwise it would be choosing the war option – which it cannot. This option is certainly more productive than a

policy that emphasizes war, sanctions, and destabilization, which has so far produced nothing but more spinning centrifuges.

Opponents of this approach have maintained that engagement leading to diplomatic ties, economic interactions, and the like will indeed legitimize the regime and will strengthen its staying power. The historic experience in the last two hundred years refutes this argument as it indicates that while sanctions and isolation fatten undemocratic states, trade and diplomacy melt them. Indeed, the experience also indicates that anti-American governments that have no diplomatic ties with the US have a stronger staying power than those without such relations. What the opponents also do not recognize is the fact that the more the Islamic Republic is delegitimized, the harder it becomes for Washington to engage Tehran, leading to a complete breakdown of communication, leaving the conflict unresolved. From my perspective, a US policy that emphasizes gradual establishment of relations within a framework of trade and diplomacy would work better. 

*Prof. Amirahmadi's latest book on *The Political Economy of the Qajars: Society, Politics, Economics and Foreign Relations, 1796-1921* was published by I.B. Tauris (London and New York) in 2012.

The New politics of US-Egypt Relations

Ali Sonay,
The University of Bamberg, Germany

In spite of ambiguities concerning the Muslim Brotherhood, Washington is not willing to put too much pressure on Morsi. In the short term financial and military dependence on the US will force Egypt to adapt a pragmatic stance in regard to the US.

Since the fall of the formerly reliable US ally Hosni Mubarak, a central open question has been the future US-Egypt relations, one of the most crucial connections of the Middle Eastern subsystem. The election of the new president Mohammed Morsi in June 2012, the subsequent end of the transitional phase governed by the Egyptian Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, and the reelection of Barack Obama, have prepared the ground for a new start between both sides. Particularly, the last war in the Gaza strip (November 14-21 2012) and the salient role of Egypt, in negotiating the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and the Israeli government, revealed valuable insights along which patterns into how US-Egyptian relations might develop.

In terms of the US, fundamental interests in Egypt would not be altered by Obama's second term. As has been the case for the last decades, the US is particularly interested in Egypt's

stable and predictable condition within the Middle East and North Africa. Especially the abidance by international agreements, first and foremost the Camp David Accords of 1978 between Egypt and Israel, is of significance. Additionally, as the Egyptian writer Issandr El Amrani succinctly puts it, "*in Egypt, Washington sees many things: an influential power in the region; a military partner that can help reduce logistical headaches for the US military (for instance by granting overflight rights and refueling facilities, as it has done throughout the occupation of Iraq), [...] [and] the host of the Suez Canal*" (El Amrani 2011). Regarding Morsi's origins in the Muslim Brotherhood, uncertainties to preserve these interests have been worrying the US administration. However, Morsi underlined from the very beginning namely in his inauguration speech that he will continue the Muslim Brotherhood's pragmatic politics and thus, will respect the above

mentioned agreements (Abdel-Ati 2012). Concomitantly, owing to the still politically unstable circumstances, Obama would also have to cooperate with the Egyptian power holders and encourage both democratic transition and socioeconomic reforms (Salem 2012). To this end there have been regular conventions between Muslim Brotherhood and US officials to discuss common grounds (Abdel-Ati 2012).

On the Egyptian side, Morsi surely will display a new self-perception following a more assertive approach to achieve a central position in the Arab world, also due to public expectations for a more independent foreign policy from a democratically elected government (Abdo 2012). However, although foreign policy is important place in current public opinion, the revolutionary narrative about domestic issues is more significant at the moment. While during the revolution Egyptians were articulating their opposition to the system Hosni Mubarak was representing, foreign policy was not at the center of attention. Instead, demands as freedom, human dignity, social justice and problems as poverty and unemployment, have been of priority. Pertaining to these issues, Morsi has to present immediate solutions to the

population. In order not to further burden the country politically and economically, Morsi will approach the US very pragmatically. Thus, he will imply the very important role played by the Egyptian Armed Forces in US-Egyptian relations, as the army obtains an annually US-aid of 1, 3 billion dollars. Furthermore, taking the mentioned socioeconomic difficulties and consequently, the dependence on loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) into account, Morsi will not risk a confrontational stance towards the US, which is highly influential within the IMF (Abdel Ati 2012).

To conclude, the recent Gaza crisis reminded the US of Egypt's importance for maintaining regional stability. As a consequence, although ambiguities concerning the Muslim Brotherhood remain, the US is not willing to put too much pressure on Morsi. The reaction to the current constitutional crisis has made that clear (Hanna 2012).

Likewise, Egypt will try to deal more independently, for instance in the Israel-Palestine conflict or will be aiming for reviving relations with Iran point out. The latter could indeed create tensions between both sides. But in the short term, financial and military dependence on the US will force Egypt to adapt a pragmatic stance in regards to the US.

Comments

Obama's Re-Election and the Middle East

Pavlos Efthymiou,
University of Cambridge

Under Obama's second term, a good degree of continuity will be observed. American leadership and action will be required to ensure stability, democracy and peace. The future of Syria and the Kurdish Question may generate major dilemmas for the re-elected President.

Under Obama's second term, a good degree of continuity – in terms of policy approach – will be observed. Due to the rapid ongoing developments in the region, it is very likely that American leadership and action will be required to ensure stability, democracy and peace. In the next four years America will retreat from the region (Afghanistan and Iraq) in terms of military presence, but due to the Arab Spring and its far-reaching implications, US diplomatic, political and economic presence might even be stepped up to respond to challenges such as post-conflict, post-'revolution' or post-withdrawal for that matter instability. Questions like the future of Syria and the future of the Kurdish Question (post-withdrawal from Iraq and post-Assad) may generate major dilemmas for the re-elected President.

Obama, for a series of reasons including his personality and profile,

his name and color, his policy of reconciliation and image-management in the ME, his more moderate stance re the 'Middle East Question' is better fitted to complete the process of image reconstruction that he launched in his first term to soothe the frustration and anxieties that were so dominant in the region following the G.W.Bush Administration. Moreover, Obama, will not require a long period of preparation with briefings on all the main issues, nor will he feel the sudden urge to substitute key individuals in all the relevant teams and offices. In short, Obama's re-election promises higher degrees of continuity and efficiency (in the short run at least). Simultaneously, Obama, free from anxieties regarding the need to secure a second term (hence having to give in to the demands of particular interest/pressure groups) he may have a greater capacity for such

actions and initiatives that would be otherwise unthought-of given the power of particular lobbies (e.g. the Jewish Lobby).

If there an Obama doctrine for the Middle East, it includes: a) greater use of multilateral diplomacy coupled with a drive to share more evenly the burden and cost(s) associated with the exercise of global leadership - as well as maintaining regional balance and stability (e.g. working more with/via regional organizations such as the Arab League and the GCC); b) strategic escalation of pressures in order to achieve the desired aims (e.g. Iran: diplomatic pressures, robust warnings, sanctions, cyber-attacks and other sabotage attacks, the explicit threat of potential use of force); c) preference of diplomatic solutions over other options, coupled with a readiness to circumvent international laws when required to achieve key objectives – an approach characterized by realism, pragmatism and at times a hawkish mixture of diplomacy, politics and strategic exercise of military force (e.g. systematic use of UAVs in Pakistan, but also in Iran; the cyber-war conducted using *stuxnet* against Iran’s nuclear program; as well as the operation to capture Bin Laden). Overall, Obama will pursue in the Middle East, as elsewhere, stability and balance trying to multilateralize issues, mobilizing and engaging greater numbers of regional and

international actors, seeking, overall, greater coordination with (and contribution by) the more responsible members of the international community.

Simultaneously, one must not doubt America’s support (military if required) of Israel regarding the challenge posed by *Iran*. Obama will continue to apply, and escalate if necessary, the existing diplomatic, political and economic pressures on Iran. New cycles of sabotage attacks should not be ruled out either. However, under Obama’s watch, America will try to prevent unilateral military action against Iran by Israel or any other actor in the region. This however does not mean that Obama’s commitment to prevent an Iranian nuclear warhead is feeble; force is on the table, but as a very last resort and with knowledge that it is neither a ‘permanent fix’, nor will it come at a light cost. Suggestions by key US officials that the Regime in Tehran is a rational actor, coupled with the ease of some restrictions also allude to a more moderate, cautious and balanced US approach to the issue.

As for the Arab Spring there will be continuous targeted support of efforts towards democratization and reform. This does not mean however that the US will be more ready to contribute, even indirectly, to the destabilization of states in the region (especially those allied with or friendly to Washington). Countries

like Saudi Arabia (that will be seriously affected by America's policy of energy autonomy) will require the President's attention and, potentially, support. In *Egypt*, Obama will continue to support all efforts aimed at stabilizing the state and will use to that end America's influence on the Egyptian military. The same applies on restraining potential attempts by President Morsi to maximize his powers – as the American intervention demonstrated last November¹. In *Libya*, the efforts to contribute to the country's reconstruction and stability will continue. A greater effort to preventing radicalization, fundamentalism and terrorism is also very likely.

Syria is a serious dilemma as the figures suggest that 'something must be done' when informed analysis suggests that 'doing something' that involves force may prove costly, while it now seems that a massive commitment to the reconstruction of the country post-conflict to prevent a rollback into new rounds of violence or chaos will be necessary². This is a major dilemma for an international community (led by the US) that wants to seem responsible but

chooses its interventions not on the basis of the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis but on the basis of cost-benefit calculations. The most likely scenario is the escalation of the diplomatic, political and military (in terms of resource and hardware provision), until the civil war comes to a close - when America, the EU and other responsible actors will probably invest massively in the reconstruction of the state. *Turkey* will continue to enjoy Obama's support who still sees Turkey as an example of a functional, secular democracy, of an overwhelmingly Muslim population.

Under Obama's second term, a good degree of continuity – in terms of policy approach – will be observed. Due to the rapid ongoing developments in the region, it is very likely that American leadership and action will be required to ensure stability, democracy and peace. In the next four years America will retreat from the region (Afghanistan and Iraq) in terms of military presence, but US diplomatic, political and economic presence might even be stepped up to respond to challenges such as post-conflict, post-'revolution' or post-withdrawal for that matter instability. The future of Syria and that of the Kurdish Question may generate major dilemmas for the re-elected President.

¹ New York Times, 2012 (Available online from: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/27/opinion/president-mohamed-morsis-power-grab-in-egypt.html?_r=2&).

² Efthymiou, 2012 (Available online from: http://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Briefing-Notes_37_December-2012_Efthymiou-Pavlos1.pdf).

Obama's Policy toward Israel

Dr. Evangelos Venetis
Middle East Research Project - ELIAMEP

The real challenge for Obama's second term remains addressing anti-US sentiment in the Muslim world. In order to secure US interests in the region Obama needs to take the big step and implement a balanced policy toward Israel and the Palestinians, and the Muslims as a whole.

In most of the postwar period the US-Israel alliance has been an axiom of the US foreign policy in the Middle East. In this context every US administration has been promoting and supporting the role of Israel as the key-state for US interests in a volatile region. Yet the traditional US-Israeli alliance has been a source for disaffection between Washington and the Muslim world with regard to the Palestinian Issue, Israel's Arab neighbors and the status of Islam in the Muslim countries. Perhaps a future key task for the re-elected US president is balancing the US-Israel relations and the image of the US in the Muslim world.

In his previous term, Obama made some preliminary attempts to explore ways to balance the well-established alliance between Washington and Tel-Aviv with an improved active US role in important issues of the Muslim world, e.g. the Palestinian issue, the regional role of


Iran and the emergence of Islamists in Turkey and the Arab world in the context of the so-called "Arab Spring."

Obama's aforementioned efforts brought him repeatedly at odds with the Israeli leadership in a type of friction which had not been attested two decades. Apparently Obama shares the view of some of his key advisors that the US alliance with Israel can be combined with an improvement of the US image in the Muslim world at a time that Islamism is on the rise. According to this view, the role of Israel for the US can never change and, if so, the US must make efforts to reduce anti-Americanism in the Middle East. In other words an one-sided policy in the region could bring less fruits for US interests. Indeed there are areas of major concern for Washington, issues that cannot be handled in a black and white policy.

A central issue is the deadlock that Washington needs to address with regard to Palestine. Hamas's empowerment and Fatah's weakening has sent alarming signals to Washington and Tel Aviv that Islamism is on the rise in the West Bank too. And the reason for this is - what else?- the frustration of Palestinians as a result of the Israeli policy of settlements. Obama is aware of the fact that the as long as Israeli settlements are expanded, Hamas's ongoing influence in the domestic political scene of Palestine will be increasing. Thus Obama must find a way to convince Israel to halt Israeli settlements and make his way in Palestinian politics in order to balance the struggle between Hamas and Fatah.

By addressing the Palestinian issue, Obama will be able to acquire popularity in Muslim public mind and be able to address the rise of Islamism at the expense of moderate forces in the Muslim world. Once Muslims are convinced that Washington is active in boosting peace and justice in Palestine, regional radicalism is expected to weaken and thus pave the way for

addressing a series of other issues in the Middle East in a more flexible way, including Iran's nuclear issue, the Syrian crisis, and the future political models of Islam that are under formation in Turkey and Egypt.

Apparently an active US involvement in the Muslim world could be implemented, if Tel Aviv is convinced that such a development would not take place at the expense of US-Israel ties. The real challenge for Obama's second term remains addressing anti-US sentiment in the Muslim world. Today Obama is pretty aware of the fact that the traditional US one-sided policy in Palestine and the Middle East is being outdated. In order to secure US interests in the region Obama needs to take the big step to implement a balanced policy toward Israel and the Palestinians, and the Muslims as a whole. By doing so, even on a temporary basis, the Obama administration will be able to test the stamina and will of Muslim public opinion regarding the role of the US in the Middle East amid rising radical movements in an Islamic context. 

Obama's Re-Election and the Palestinians

Dr. Nada Ghandour-Demiris
University of Bristol

The re-election of Obama sends a more positive message to the Palestinians than had Mitt Romney been elected. However, the majority of Palestinians believe that Obama's second term will have no or negative impact on their lives.

Palestinians have monitored the United States (US) presidential elections on November 6, 2012 with scepticism. On the one hand, Barack Obama made a lot of un-kept promises and did not accomplish much during his first term. On the other hand, Mitt Romney, a strong supporter of Benjamin Netanyahu, believes that the pathway to peace is almost unthinkable to accomplish and that Palestinians have no interest in peace. While neither Obama nor Romney seem to be able to advance a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the re-election of Obama sends a more positive message to the Palestinians than had Mitt Romney been elected.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) welcomed Obama's re-election. It expressed the hope that in his second term the American President will support the Palestinian bid in the UN Security Council (something that did not happen on November 29), will end the construction of

Israeli settlements and will assist the Palestinians in reaching a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. Hamas called on Obama to reassess his policy towards the Muslim and Arab world and in particular the Palestinians, since nothing will change in the Middle East if the current US policy is maintained.

In a joint Palestinian-Israeli poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and Israeli Harry S. Truman Research Institute published in Spetember 2012, 51% of the Palestinians thought that if Obama won the US Presidential elections, his victory would have no impact on Palestinian conditions, 32% thought it would have a negative impact, and 9% believed it would have a positive impact. While this survey was done before the elections, it is representative of a general tendency in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. These percentages should not come as a surprise, since many

Palestinians felt deceived from Obama by the end of his first term.

In 2009, while addressing the Muslim and Arab world during his key speech at Cairo University, Obama showed a commitment to take an active role in achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and to promote the two-state solution. Almost a year later, in September 2010, at his speech in the UN General Assembly, Obama expressed hopes that in a year's time (i.e. in 2011), a Palestinian sovereign state will be established. These two speeches were central in Obama's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the steps that he was willing to take. However, in the years that followed, it became obvious that he did not keep his promises and did not take an active role to fulfil Palestinian aspirations. For this reason, there is a great disillusionment among Palestinians about Obama.

Nevertheless, there is room for reserved optimism. The second term might offer more flexibility for Obama, since he is now freed from

some political pressures of being re-elected because of term limits (e.g. less dependence on the AIPAC lobby). In addition, the recent appointment of John Kerry as Secretary of State might permit Obama to take a more active stance. Kerry has been outspoken at times in criticizing Israeli policy, particularly during Israel's blockade of goods into the Gaza Strip and is known for his strong stance against Israeli settlements. It also remains to be seen whether Bill Clinton will be appointed as Middle East peace envoy in the near future. Clinton has a long experience in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and is popular among Israelis and Palestinians. Furthermore, this is his chance to "make history" and make a clear mark on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Finally, things are changing on the international arena and Obama will have to adapt his foreign policy accordingly (e.g. the recent UN vote on the Palestinian statehood). 🇺🇸

Monitoring the Middle East

Afghanistan

398 ISAF soldiers killed in 2012 (31, Dec. 2012)

In 2012 International Forces in Afghanistan lost 398 foreign soldiers, including 309 US soldiers and 44 British soldiers.

Panetta arrives in Kabul (12, Dec. 2012)

US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta paid an unannounced visit to Kabul to discuss the proposals for US military force levels to stay after 2014 in Afghanistan.

Bahrain

King of Bahrain meets with UK Foreign Secretary (8 Dec., 2012)

Hamad b. Isa al-Khalifa met with William Hague in Manama amid ongoing anti-government demonstrations. The meeting was held on the sidelines of the 8th International Institute for Strategic Studies Regional Security Summit in Manama.

Comment: The crisis in Bahrain is ongoing.

Cyprus

Cyprus offers mediation between Lebanon and Israel (5 Dec., 2012)

Nicosia has offered to mediate between Lebanon and Israel over a maritime border dispute that is delaying some oil and gas exploration in the Mediterranean. Lebanon and Israel claim a small maritime area of 850 square kilometers. The dispute held up ratification of the 2007 Lebanese-Cypriot agreement, defining Exclusive Economic Zones among the three countries.

Comment: A useful initiative highlighting Nicosia's stabilizing role in the region.

Egypt

New Constitution of Egypt approved (23 Dec., 2012)

The country's new constitution has been approved by about 64% of voters in the two-round referendum.

Comment: Morsi is gearing up in a narrow road...

Greece

Lebanese President M. Sleiman in Greece (7 Dec., 2012)

The Lebanese President Michel Sleiman paid an official visit to Greece meeting with Greek President Karolos Papoulias and Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, discussing issues of mutual interest. In the next day Foreign and Expatriates Minister A. Mansour held a lengthy meeting with his Greek counterpart D. Avramopoulos in Athens, where they discussed means of bolstering bilateral relations.

Iran

Iran starts Naval Drills in the Straits of Hormuz (28 Dec., 2012)

Iran's Navy has started the six-day specialized naval exercise "Velayat 91" in the vast area covering the Straits of Hormuz, the Sea of Oman, north of the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.

Iran launches major petrochemical plant (31 Dec., 2012)

Iran has launched the Kermanshah Polymer Petrochemical Plant with the annual production capacity of 300.000 tones of heavy polyethylene. The project will create jobs for 1500 people and is expected to sell about USD 430 million worth of petrochemical products annually.

Iraq

Maliki slams Turkey for sheltering Hashemi (6 Dec., 2012)

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki slammed Turkey for granting refuge to fugitive Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, stressing that an equal measure by Baghdad would be to offer asylum to the Abdullah Ocalan, Leader of PKK.

Comment: Tense relations between Ankara and Baghdad are not expected to improve anytime soon.

Kuwait

HRW: Kuwait using excessive force on demonstrators (27 Dec., 2012)

Human Rights Watch has accused Kuwaiti security forces of using excessive force to disperse several largely peaceful streets protests since October. Tens of thousands of Kuwaitis have taken to the streets against changes to voting rules for the parliamentary elections on December 1.

Thousand demonstrators calling for the new Parliament's dissolution (6 Dec., 2012)

In the aftermath of the Kuwaiti parliamentary elections Kuwaitis took to the streets in various tribal suburbs with police in some cases using teargas and stun grenades. Dozens of peoples were

arrested. Activists claim that the decision to change the electoral law by Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah is aimed at electing a rubber-stamp parliament.

Comment: Kuwait is another example of the Shiite revival, this time in the context of the “Arab Spring.”

Lebanon

Fresh clashes erupt in Tripoli (5 Dec., 2012)

New clashes have broken out between supporters and opponents of the Syrian government in Tripoli, Lebanon. Gunshots could be heard in the city and a school was set ablaze. Security in the city remains unstable with army units still tracking down gunmen and seizing machine guns, ammunition and military equipment.

Libya

Libya closes borders with four neighbors (17 Dec., 2012)

Due to upsurge in violence, drug trafficking and presence of armed groups, the National Assembly of Libya has ordered the temporary closure of the country's borders with Algeria, Niger, Chad and Sudan on the passage of peoples and goods. Libya's border provinces with the aforementioned countries will be ruled under emergency law.

Comment: A puzzling development regarding Libya's stability.

Palestine - Israel

Meshaal visits Gaza after 45 years of exile (7 Dec., 2012)

Hamas Political leader Khaled Meshaal was received as a hero upon his arrival in Gaza, marking ending 45 years of exile from Palestinian land. He called for unity of Palestinians and the unifications of Palestine, stating that his visit marked a new era in the pursuit of Palestinian independence.

Israel approves new settlements (19 Dec., 2012)

Tel Aviv has decided the construction of 2.610 new settlements in the occupied Palestinian lands in defiance against international criticism. The new units will be constructed near Jerusalem.

Comment: Constructing settlements by Israel boosts Hamas's popularity ...

Qatar

Qatar develops petrochemical industry (30 Dec., 2012)

Doha started up two world-scale plants at Mesaieed (LDPE 3 and Qafco 6), thus scaling up the country's production of low density polyethylene and urea and enabling its entry to the elite global club of major petrochemical exporters.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia warplane crashes in the Persian Gulf, pilot missing (3 Dec., 2012)

A Saudi F-15 fighter jet has into the Persian Gulf waters while on a training mission over Eastern Province. The pilot is missing and the Saudi authorities are investigating the cause of the crash.

Somalia

Al-Shabab fighters move into Puntland (9 Nov., 2012)

Somalia's al-Shabab Islamist fighters moved into the semi-autonomous Puntland region in the north of the country after foreign-backed government forces seized their strongholds in the south.

Comment: Trying to live to fight another day...

Syria

Militants blow up gas pipeline in eastern Syria (31 Dec., 2012)

The explosion was carried out near the city of Deir al-Zour in the oil-rich eastern region of Syria and resulted in the loss of 1.5 million natural gas cubic meters.

Russia invites Syrian opposition to negotiations (28 Dec., 2012)

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov invited the head of the Syrian National Coalition for Revolutionary and Opposition Forces to join negotiations over the unrest in Syria. He denied the existence of any plan with the United States that would see Bashar al-Assad out of power in 2014.

Tunisia

Tunisia demonstrators pelt President (17 Dec., 2012)

Tunisian demonstrators have hurled stones at President Moncef Marzouki in the town of Sidi Bouzid, considered the birthplace of the 2011 revolution of Tunisia. Demonstrators have demanded that Bouzid steps down.

Turkey

Turkey accuses Iran of supporting PKK (31 Dec., 2012)

According to Turkish Interior Minister Idris Naim Sahin to daily Zaman, “Iran offers logistics support to PKK, which uses Iran for accommodation transit, training, medical care, recruiting, financing, propaganda and weapons transfers. Iran is not paying enough attention to security measures in border regions.”

Turkey supports upgrading Israel status in NATO (23 Dec., 2012)

NATO has agreed to increase Israel’s participation in the Alliance’s activities in 2013 after Turkey eased its opposition to this move in the aftermath of NATO approval for deploying Patriot missiles to Turkey.

Comment: Intriguing developments in the background of the Syrian crisis


United Arab Emirates

UAE arrests Al-Qaeda group members (27 Dec., 2012)

According to the UAE security forces, they have dismantled an Al-Qaeda group plotting to carry out attacks in the country, Saudi Arabia and other countries in the peninsula. Members of the group are allegedly Emirati and Saudi citizens.

Yemen

Blast hits gas pipeline in S. Yemen (16 Dec., 2012)

Unidentified assailants blew up a section of a gas pipeline in the al-Zahira area of the southern province of Shabwa. Yemen’s economy depends on oil and gas production with petroleum exports reaching 60% of the country’s budget. 



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