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Endgame in Gaza

Israel needs an exit strategy. It cannot choose its enemies

As the relentless assault on Gaza approaches the end of its third week, it is beginning to look as though the Israeli government is flirting with the possibility of regime change – the eradication of Hamas from Gaza and the occupied territories. That is a delusion. What is needed now is an exit strategy to end the current crisis.

The need for a ceasefire to end the humanitarian disaster engulfing 1.5m Gazans is paramount. In order to secure one, both Israel and Hamas also need to be able to show that ceasefires have a purpose.

It is difficult to exaggerate the damage to Israel's (and America's) reputation among Arabs, Muslims and vast swathes of international opinion who increasingly see what is happening as more a war on Gaza than a campaign against Hamas. How could it be otherwise? After (by Israel's count) 2,300 air strikes and daily pounding from land and sea, Gaza lies in ruins and around 1,000 Palestinians, more than 300 of them children, have been killed.

Mosques, schools and police stations, the finance, education, interior, foreign, justice, public works, labour and culture ministries, the parliament and every public building of significance, have been pulverised. Gaza is being reduced to Somalia, with no institutional basis left for *anyone* to be able to govern.

It is also a fantasy that Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president whose Fatah party was routed at the polls by Hamas and driven violently out of Gaza, can be restored to power there by Israeli tanks.

Hamas is still there, its popular support going up, even if the number of rockets being fired into southern Israel is sharply down. Now is the time to stop the fighting.

Israel's leaders, who face off against each other in elections next month, need to be able to show they have dealt with the rocket threat. Hamas needs Israel to lift the long blockade of Gaza. The Franco-Egyptian plan to halt the fighting offers a way forward. A truce would be followed by a ceasefire, internationally monitored (possibly by Turkey) to stop Hamas from replenishing its arsenal. Israel would reopen Gaza's border crossings and lift the siege.

After that, Fatah and Hamas need to enter national unity talks, or to fight it out at elections, to decide who speaks for the Palestinians in the next stage: final status talks with Israel on a Palestinian state to put an end to this conflict once and for all. That places huge responsibility on Palestinian leaders who have yet to show themselves worthy of the name. But also on Israel to cease this disproportionate violence against people it will still have to live with once the shooting stops.

The Global Edition of The New York Times
Friday, January 16, 2009

War in Gaza I • Yossi Alpher

Stop starving the Gazans

As prospects for a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas increase, it is vital to ensure that the issue of economic warfare against Gaza is not neglected.

For the past year and a half, Israel, with the full backing and encouragement of the quartet of Middle East mediators (the European Union, the United States, the United Nations and Russia), as well as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and even the West Bank-based PLO, has maintained an economic blockade on the Gaza Strip.

Generally it has allowed into Gaza only the equivalent of the UN minimum number of calories required daily for subsistence, multiplied by the 1.5 million or so population of the Gaza Strip, along with minimal medical supplies and fuel.

This economic-warfare strategy against Gaza has failed totally; indeed, it has proven counterproductive. Now is the right time for all involved to reconsider its usefulness and thereby raise a major contribution to long-term cease-fire efforts.

The purpose of Israel's economic blockade was to persuade Gazans, by reducing their lives to subsistence level, to somehow depose Hamas and join the peace process with Israel. It was paralleled by a program of accelerated economic investment in the West Bank, spearheaded by the quartet's emissary, Tony Blair, which was intended to persuade West Bankers of the benefits of peace. Sticks for Gazans, carrots for the West Bank.

Over the past 42 years, Israel has periodically invoked collective economic punishment and incentives toward Palestinians on the theory that empty or full stomachs — impoverishment or development — would effectively alter Palestinian political behavior.

There is not a shred of evidence that this has

worked. Both intifadas broke out at times of economic prosperity; the impoverishment of Gaza only pushed the Strip's population further into the hands of Hamas. In particular, Gaza's merchant class — arguably a force for moderation — became embittered and penniless, while imports were taken over by Hamas cadres that managed hundreds of tunnels that turned the Gaza-Egypt border into a huge and expensive mall, supplying both ordnance and consumer goods.

Israel has bombed those tunnels, and justifiably demands that they go out of existence so that Hamas terrorists can no longer smuggle in rockets that threaten a growing radius of Israeli civilians. This is an issue to be decided between Egypt, Israel and interested third parties capable of supplying sophisticated engineering know-how.

But certainly if the tunnels are closed, the crossings should be opened. Removal of the economic blockade was a major demand of Hamas during the cease-fire that ended in mid-December and is a major Hamas cease-fire demand today.

Arguably, the current military campaign might have been avoided had the economic war ended. Even if the Israeli bombing and invasion were unavoidable, open land crossings between Gaza and Israel would have allowed Gazans to stock up with emergency provisions rather than be caught by this war with empty shelves, thereby avoiding at least part of the current humanitarian crisis.

From Israel's standpoint, if Hamas wants to Islamize Palestinian society, that's the Palestinians' business, not ours. There is no border dispute with

Hamas in Gaza; most Israelis just want to be left alone to live their lives peaceably. Now, as a cease-fire looms, we might stand a better chance of achieving this objective if we, and our moderate Arab neighbors and friends in the West, stop starving Gazans.

Israel is currently in a position of strength, having dealt Hamas and Gaza a heavy blow that will hopefully have the effect of deterring future terrorist rocket attacks. Now is the time to rectify our strategy.

We must respond to any future Hamas terrorism by striking militarily at the perpetrators, not invoking economic warfare.

One key issue in discussing, through Egypt's good offices, Hamas' demand to reopen the crossings is Israel's counter-demand that they be manned on the Palestinian side by the PLO, as undertaken in 2005.

While this would be a constructive contribution to peace and reconciliation (among Palestinians as well as between them and Israel), Hamas' rejection of this condition must not be an excuse for reinstating a regime of collective economic punishment of the entire Gazan population that has produced no political or strategic benefit for anyone.

Because Israel's neighbors and the international community have been complicit in this counterproductive economic blockade and the widespread humanitarian suffering it has generated, it is incumbent upon them as well as Israel to reconsider it.

**The current fighting
might have been avoided
if economic-warfare
had not been used.**

Yossi Alpher, former director of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, co-edits bitterlemons.org.

Defeating Terrorists

For all those who argue that there's no military solution for terrorism, we have two words: Sri Lanka.

This week, the Sri Lankan army said it had captured the last piece of the northern Jaffna Peninsula, one of the few remaining strongholds of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a terrorist organization that has waged a 26-year civil war that's claimed tens of thousands of lives, including those of a Sri Lankan President and an Indian Prime Minister.

That's a huge turnaround from only three years ago, when the Tigers effectively controlled the bulk of the Northern and Eastern Provinces and were perpetrating suicide bombings in the country's capital, Colombo.

Credit goes to the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who has made eliminating the Tigers a priority and invested resources to make it happen. Military spending has surged to \$1.7 billion for fiscal 2009, roughly 5% of GDP and nearly 20% of the government's budget.

The expanded Sri Lankan army is now equipped to employ sophisticated counterinsurgency strategies—such as a multifront attack and quick raids behind Tiger lines. In 2007, the army won its first significant victory by pacifying the Tamil Muslim-majority Eastern Prov-

ince, historically a Tiger stronghold. Local and provincial elections were held there last year. The military offensive will now turn to Mullaitivu, the last district controlled by the Tigers in the Northern Province.

* * *
This string of victories is a shock to those who thought this conflict, which has political origins, could have only a political solution. The violence started in 1983, ostensibly over Tamil grievances with a Sinhalese-majority government that made Sinhala the country's official language and doled out economic favors to the Sinhalese, who are Buddhist, including preferences for government jobs and schooling. Devolution of power to the provinces has long been floated as the best political fix.

But the Tigers always had other ideas. To wit: They wanted the Tamil homeland to be an independent state with the Tigers at its head. Like other terrorist outfits, the Tigers never accepted the legitimacy of any other group to speak on behalf of their supposed constituents. They were unwilling to accept any negotiated settlement that wouldn't entrench their own power.

That's why earlier efforts to negotiate away Sri Lanka's terror problem failed. In 1987, then-President Junius Jayewardene offered the Tamils a homeland in the north and east that would have given them wide powers, although not a sepa-

rate state. In the 1990s, another President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, offered another devolution plan. The Tigers refused both offers and the terrorism continued.

In 2002, Norway orchestrated a peace process that resulted in a cease-fire. This time, the Tigers themselves concocted a proposal for a form of regional autonomy in Tamil areas, and the government agreed in principle. Then the Tigers nixed their own deal, betting they could do better with violence after all. They spent the next four years violating the cease-fire.

Repeated negotiations made a settlement harder to achieve. The Tigers gladly murdered moderate Tamil leaders open to genuine negotiations with Colombo. The European Union dithered on declaring the Tigers a terrorist group for the sake of encouraging the peace process, hindering efforts to cut off funding and allowing the killing to continue.

Meanwhile, occasional efforts to subdue the Tigers by force failed through lack of political will or because of outside interference. In 1987, Mr. Jayewardene gained ground in the north, only to be undermined by Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who airlifted food to the militants to curry favor with his country's own Tamil population. Then the Indians changed tack, and an Indian peacekeeping force managed to quell the Tiger insurgency for a time between 1987 and 1989. But that operation was derided as a "quagmire" by some Indian politicians. The

force was withdrawn prematurely in 1990. Another Sri Lankan military effort, begun in 1995, collapsed in 2000 due to insufficient troop numbers and political meddling in military decision-making.

Mr. Rajapaksa appears to have learned from all this, which is why he has insisted on military victory before implementing a political solution. It helps that India has stayed out this time around and other countries—including the EU—are now tracking and thwarting Tiger financing.

* * *
Peace still will not be easy or, despite recent good news, immediate. The Tigers may still be able to carry out some terror attacks, though they no longer pose a wide-scale threat. And Colombo faces questions about its commitment to a permanent political settlement. It has taken some steps, such as a 1987 constitutional amendment again making Tamil an official language, and in 2006 it convened an all-party conference to recommend further pro-devolution constitutional changes. It is dragging its feet on implementing other constitutional measures that would pave the way for devolution. But a political settlement is something to discuss after the Tigers have been subdued.

We recount this history at length to make a simple point: Colombo's military strategy against Tamil terrorists has worked. Negotiations haven't. That's an important reminder as Israel faces its own terrorism problem and as the U.S. works to foster stability and political progress in Iraq. Take note, Barack Obama.



Mahinda
Rajapaksa

Sri Lanka is
beating the
Tigers through
military force,
not negotiation.

Enough to put off a multi-tasker



HUGH
CORTAZZI

London

President-elect Barack Obama assumes power (Tuesday) at a time when the United States faces huge problems at home and abroad. Americans and people all around the world are looking to him for leadership and a return to the ideals set out in the U.S. Constitution.

The problems he faces are so numerous and difficult that it is inevitable that some of his supporters will be disappointed. Even the president of the world's only superpower has limited authority. Congress will need to be convinced that his proposals are appropriate.

His first task will be to kick-start the economy. His initial proposals are ambitious, but may not be enough and Congress will not be rushed. International confidence in the dollar and U.S. Treasury bonds has so far remained reasonably stable not least because there are doubts about the strength of alternatives. Recovery of the U.S. economy will be crucial to America's ability to deal effectively with the challenges facing the country abroad.

If U.S. unemployment and corporate bankruptcies continue to increase, protectionist pressures are bound to grow, leading inevitably to trade friction.

Foreigners hope the new U.S. president will refurbish the American democratic image and ensure that America is again seen as the champion of freedom and human rights. This means closing the detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and ensuring that unconstitutional practices end and that perpetrators are punished. The worthy aim of halting terrorism never justifies torture.

The appointment of Hillary Clinton as secretary of state was bold, but in the primaries she criticized Obama on foreign policy. If they cannot agree on specific issues, the U.S. ability to exercise a decisive role will be reduced.

The first issue for the new administration will be how to stop the fighting in Gaza. Obama so far has been reticent on foreign policy issues, but on Jan. 11 he expressed dismay over the human suffering in Gaza and said his first priority on taking office would be to seek a way to end the conflict.

Israeli actions are generally viewed in

Europe as disproportionate, and there is much sympathy in the West for the sufferings of the Palestinian population. Yet, Israel was sorely provoked by rockets fired at Israeli towns and by the intransigence of Hamas leaders, who still demand the destruction of Israel.

The new administration may be more willing than the Bush administration was to put pressure on Israel to accept compromises essential to concluding any settlement. The new president and secretary of state cannot renege on assurances of U.S. support for Israel. Nor can they accept Hamas' intransigence over the future of Israel.

Obama may choose to accelerate the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. Since the handover of power to the Iraqi administration at the end of 2008 and the apparent success of the U.S. troop "surge" implemented by the Bush administration, the main issue has been the timing of withdrawal.

Obama wants to see a surge of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, a move that has been anticipated by the Bush administration. The biggest problems will be instability in Pakistan and the continuing friction between Pakistan and India, particularly over terrorism and Kashmir. Major changes in U.S. policy in this area are unlikely.

Iran's threat to develop nuclear weapons poses particular problems. Obama has said he is willing to open a dialogue with Iran, but he won't start that unless a realistic chance exists that Iran can be persuaded to drop its call for the destruction of Israel and agree to adequate safeguards against the development of nuclear weapons.

Relations with China will be high on the

agenda. The Chinese economy may still be growing, but the pace has slackened and the fall in demand for Chinese manufactured goods has led to factory closures and increased unemployment, which could cause social unrest.

Relations with Taiwan could become a flash point while Chinese treatment of Tibet and regions in central Asia could increase friction over human rights.

Japan will be particularly interested in the new administration's policies toward North Korea. It is unlikely that there will be sudden policy changes with regard to Northeast Asia or to security policy, but we can expect scrutiny of all aspects of U.S. interests in the Far East.

In Europe the first priority is likely to be relations with Russia and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. This will involve not only energy supplies but also the U.S. nuclear shield in Eastern Europe as well as NATO policies toward Ukraine and Georgia.

Kenya and Indonesia will be much on Obama's mind because of his family ties. Africa will be a priority because of concerns about regional conflicts such as those in the Sudan, Somalia and Central Africa and about poverty in developing countries.

Obama cannot afford to neglect America's neighbors in Latin America and the Caribbean. Policy toward Cuba and President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela remain problematic. Narcotics policy needs to be rethought.

We must all wish Obama well in the difficult tasks he faces.

Hugh Cortazzi, a former British career diplomat, served as ambassador to Japan from 1980 to 1984.

Peace at last for Sri Lanka?

Could the end be near for the Tamil Tigers? A military offensive by the Sri Lankan government has made historic gains against the rebel force and appears set to conclude the bloody civil war that has lasted a quarter of a century and devastated the country. This vicious insurgency has claimed far too many lives, but a military victory, no matter how crushing, will not end the violence. A political settlement is the only solution to an enduring peace in Sri Lanka.

For over 25 years, Tamil rebels have fought the Sinhalese majority, charging that the government in Colombo discriminates against the Tamils who make up 12 percent of the island's population of 20 million. The Tamils have demanded a homeland in the northeast of the island; their sophisticated and vicious attacks have kept the government on the defensive and permitted the Tamil Tigers to carve out an enclave that they used as a sanctuary. Over the course of the conflict, it is estimated that 70,000 people have been killed and the island is today better known for the savage fighting than its tropical splendor.

Tamil successes owe a great deal to the ruthlessness of their leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran. With financial support from the Tamil diaspora, he transformed the Tamil Tigers into a fearsome, disciplined militia with its own air force and navy. Suicide attacks that deployed women wearing explosive wreaths — victims of which include Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi — were especially horrific and successful.

To its credit, the government in Colombo did not share that appetite for mayhem and destruction. Its policies vacillated between waging war and suing for peace. The result was a war that dragged on, yielding a bloody stalemate and claiming thousands of lives.

The situation changed, however, with the election of Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa as president of Sri Lanka in 2005. Mr. Rajapaksa, a conservative, ended the six-year ceasefire with the rebels, ignored the subsequent international outcry and committed his government to all-out victory. The country's defense budget reached a record \$1.6 billion and military recruitment jumped 40 percent. Some charge that the government has adopted the same tactics as the rebels — a disregard for casualties, especially among civilians — but its strict control over the media has allowed it to maintain public support and minimize international criticism.

In recent weeks, the government has had a string of

successes, overrunning rebel territory and seizing much of its sanctuary in the northeast of the island. The group lost its political headquarters at Kilinochchi earlier this month and the army has seized the main highway in the northern Jaffna Peninsula. On Wednesday, it took full control of the area for the first time in 23 years. The insurgents have been driven into the jungle and the Sri Lankan military now can bring the full weight of its strength to bear on a small area.

It is too early to count the rebels out. Estimates of the number of Tamil soldiers range from 2,000 to 10,000, with perhaps another 10,000 reservists. If the army defeats the rebels, most observers expect hard-core supporters to take off their uniforms and fight as guerrillas.

More significant, however, is the fact that the Tamil insurgency, bloody and misguided though it may have become, is rooted in real grievances. The Tamil population of Sri Lanka has been discriminated against and many Sinhalese politicians make no apologies for that. Mr. Rajapaksa has said that he would seek a political resolution to the problem once the Tamil Tigers are defeated, but other nationalist leaders see no reason to embrace power sharing, which is the only enduring solution to Sri Lanka's problems. If institutionalized inequality continues, then another outbreak of violence is inevitable.

A telling indicator will be the treatment of Tamil refugees. Hundreds of thousands of Tamils have been uprooted by the fighting. Many have been forced to fight by the Tigers. Others fear that the government will view them as sympathizers, which could provide yet another rationalization for unequal treatment.

Mr. Rajapaksa should take the long view. The end of this conflict will open the door to substantial aid and assistance to help repair the battered Sri Lankan economy. There will be ample funds for the entire country. Rather than seek to punish the Tamils, he should try to win them over. A genuinely inclusive government in Colombo can garner the support of the Tamil population. Freed from the fear of retribution by Tamil hardliners, moderates will be able to respond to the government's blandishments.

It will take years, if not generations, to heal the scars created by a two decades of fighting. But the victories of the last few weeks make possible a genuine peace in Sri Lanka. Other nations need to be prepared to help — Japan among them. But the first test is a real commitment to reconciliation, peace and prosperity for all Sri Lankans.

America abroad I

William Luers, Thomas R. Pickering and Jim Walsh

Iran, Iran, Iran

Three of the most pressing national security problems facing the Obama administration — nuclear proliferation, the war in Iraq and the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan — have one thing in common: Iran.

All three challenges are, in principle, amenable to diplomatic solution, but only if we give it a try. Success on any of the three will not be possible without serious engagement with Iran.

We propose coordinating and integrating policies on these three security challenges with a regional diplomatic strategy that includes Iran.

The United States should seek to open talks with Iran without preconditions. On the nuclear dispute, we propose that the United States and its European allies present a plan for Iran's current uranium enrichment program to be reorganized as a multinationally owned, operated, and managed program with enhanced international monitoring and verification.

Sanctions and threats have failed to force Iran to abandon its enrichment program and by themselves are unlikely to do so even with Iran's recent economic problems.

Iran has expanded its centrifuges from none to roughly 5,000 over the past three years of UN Security Council sanctions. To believe that a proud country like Iran is simply going to dismantle all its centrifuges is wishful — and ultimately dangerous — thinking.

Agreement on the multinational enrichment option would lead to greater assurance about Iran's nuclear activities, and it would open the door to serious discussions with Iran on other issues of great importance to the U.S.

On Iraq and Afghanistan, direct U.S. engagement with Iran and other key regional and international players, including the United Nations, will be necessary if the United States hopes to draw down its forces and bring stability to these war-torn nations.

This process must be truly multinational and cannot be seen as another, purely American initiative.

Diplomatic discussions must focus on support for Iraq's territorial integrity; national reconciliation; ending military support for non-state groups in Iraq and Afghanistan; the resettlement of millions of refugees; and the

establishment of confidence-building measures that include Iran's neighbors.

Achieving serious commitments from the relevant governments will not be easy and will take time, but such an approach will be essential to provide stability as U.S. troops are drawn down. No such regional arrangement is possible, however, without the inclusion of Iran.

Preparing the ground for negotiations with Iran on these critical issues will take time and patience. This process could include a series of steps such as changing the tone of public discourse, working to build confidence that a new, positive approach has been adopted and establishing direct, official contacts with Tehran to explore reciprocal actions and responses while working to avoid misunderstandings.

More formal direct negotiations with Iran should then begin late this summer following the Iranian elections with whomever is elected president of Iran.

As General David Petraeus, commander of the U.S. Central Command, recently observed, Iran has many common interests with the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both the United States and Iran support the Iraqi and Afghan central governments, seek to establish stability, oppose Sunni terrorists such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban, want to reduce drug trafficking, and, perhaps most importantly, need to prevent these countries from descending into chaos and civil war.

Of course, there are issues on which Washington and Tehran disagree, such as Hamas, Hezbollah and human rights. But treating Iran as a donkey that must be dealt with carrots and sticks is unlikely to work.

It is time to begin dealing with Iran as a serious, proud and influential nation with a deep culture and history, one whose common interests with the U.S. and other countries in the region should be recognized and acted on before events make success impossible.

William Luers is president of the UN Association-USA. Thomas R. Pickering is a former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. Jim Walsh is a research associate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A longer version of this article appears in the current issue of the New York Review of Books.

**It's time to begin dealing
with Iran as a serious
and influential nation.**

America abroad II

Joseph S. Nye Jr.

Get smart

In her confirmation hearings to become secretary of state, Hillary Clinton said: "America cannot solve the most pressing problems on our own, and the world cannot solve them without America... We must use what has been called 'smart power,' the full range of tools at our disposal."

Smart power is the combination of hard and soft power. Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payments.

The resources that produce soft power for a country include its culture (where it is attractive to others); its values (where they are attractive and not undercut by inconsistent practices); and policies (where they are seen as inclusive and legitimate in the eyes of others).

Public opinion polls show a serious decline in American attractiveness in Europe, Latin America and, most dramatically, across the entire Muslim world. But when poll respondents are asked why they report a decline in American soft power, they cite American policies more than American culture or values.

Since it is easier for a country to change its policies than its culture, this implies that President-elect Barack Obama will be able to choose policies that could help to recover some of America's soft power.

Of course, soft power is not the solution to all problems. Even though North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il likes to watch Hollywood movies, that is unlikely to affect his nuclear weapons program. But other goals, such as the promotion of democracy and human rights, are better achieved by soft power.

A little more than a year ago, a bipartisan commission on smart power concluded that America's image and influence had declined in recent years, and that the United States had to move from exporting fear to inspiring optimism and hope.

The effects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks threw America off course. Terrorism is a real threat and likely to be with us for decades. But over-responding to the provocations of extremists does us more damage than the terrorists ever could. Success in the struggle

against terrorism means finding a new central premise for American foreign policy to replace the current theme of a "war on terror." A commitment to providing for the global good can provide that premise.

The United States can become a smart power by once again investing in global public goods — providing things people and governments in all quarters of the world want but cannot attain in the absence of leadership by the strongest country.

Development, public health and coping with climate change are good examples. By complementing American military and economic might with greater investments in soft power, and focusing on global public goods, the United States can rebuild the framework that it needs to tackle tough global challenges.

Style also matters. For example, when a Bush administration official told the 2007 UN conference on climate change at Bali, "The U.S. will lead, and we will continue to lead, but leadership requires others to

fall into line and follow," that statement set back our diplomatic efforts.

It illustrates how insensitivity to style and the perception of others can undercut the soft power efforts of an administration even when they are directed at producing global public goods.

The Obama administration will have to generate soft power, and relate it to hard power in smart strategies.

The bad news is that Obama and Clinton face a difficult international environment. The good news is that previous presidents have managed to employ hard, soft and smart power in equally difficult contexts, and Clinton showed in her testimony that she understands this.

In 1970, during the Vietnam War, America was viewed as unattractive in many parts of the world, but with changed policies and the passage of time, we managed to recover our soft power. If it has happened before, it can happen again.

Joseph S. Nye Jr., professor of international relations at Harvard University, was cochairman of the CSIS Commission on Smart Power. A Global Viewpoint article distributed by Tribune Media Services.

Clinton: 'We must use what has been called smart power.'

Search urgently for a way out of Gaza

We agree that Israel had to defend itself against Hamas's rocket attacks. But we fear the assault on Gaza has passed the point of diminishing returns. It is time for a cease-fire with Hamas and a return to the peace negotiations that are the only real hope for guaranteeing Israel's long-term security.

We are encouraged that a cease-fire finally seems to be gaining traction. Although not much detail is known, reports have focused on an Egyptian proposal for a phased-in truce, followed by a pullout of Israeli forces and the reopening of border crossings to ease the economic blockade of Gaza.

The sudden diplomatic activity came as Israel unleashed its heaviest shelling of Gaza neighborhoods, including a hit on a UN compound where hundreds of Palestinians had taken shelter.

Israeli officials acknowledge the 20-day offensive has not permanently crippled Hamas's military wing or ended its ability to launch rocket attacks. It is unlikely that Israel can achieve those aims militarily any time soon. The cost in human life and anti-Israeli fury would be enormous. Already more than 1,000 Palestinians have died in the densely populated Gaza strip, where an always miserable life has become unbearable. Thirteen Israelis have died.

We also fear that the war is further weakening the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, and his Fatah faction — Hamas's sworn enemy.

We know Abbas's limitations, but he believes in a two-state solution.

If there is going to be a negotiated peace, he is the best hope.

As part of a cease-fire deal, Israel is right to demand a permanent halt to Hamas's rocket fire. Israel is also right not to rely on Hamas's promises. Hamas used the last cease-fire to restock its arsenal with weapons ferried in through tunnels dug under the Egypt-Gaza border.

The best protection would be to place monitors on the Egypt-Gaza border to stop the smuggling that is Hamas's lifeline. The Israelis also must be ready to ease their blockade of Gaza to allow more food and normal economic activity.

The Israeli foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, is expected in Washington on Friday where she will sign a hastily arranged deal to accept U.S. equipment and technical assistance to help monitor the Israeli-Gaza border.

U.S. and Israeli officials say that Israel would never accept a cease-fire without that help and both are eagerly praise Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for making it happen. But Washington could have provided that assistance years ago — just as it should have been pressing harder on every aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

President-elect Barack Obama says he will work for a peace deal from Day 1. We hope Israel picks a new leader in elections next month who is truly committed to a two-state solution. With the support of the new American president, he or she must make an early down payment on peace by ending settlement construction, cooperating seriously with Abbas and improving the lives of all Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza.

**The assault on Gaza
has passed the point
of diminishing returns.**

Obama as a war president

If World War I was to be “the war to end all wars,” President George W. Bush’s so-called war on terror was conceived as a war without end. Just days after al-Qaida’s suicide airliner attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, Bush declared that he would “rid the world of evildoers,” and Vice President Dick Cheney warned that the United States would fight indefinitely: “There’s not going to be an end date when we’re going to say, ‘There, it’s all over with.’”

Under this rubric, and with substantial international support, the administration prosecuted the war first in Afghanistan, where al-Qaida enjoyed the hospitality of the Taliban regime. But then Bush turned his sights on Iraq and Saddam Hussein’s alleged weapons of mass destruction and contacts with al-Qaida. This time, the world was not persuaded, and the president had great difficulty finding allies.

Like Bush, Obama may well have to

decide whether or when to take the United States to war, and there are lessons for him in Bush’s war on terror. The so-called Bush doctrine was articulated in a 2002 National Security Strategy, which stated that the U.S. would act against threats before they were fully formed: “We will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists. . . .” In fact, the doctrine conflated two very different concepts: preemptive war and preventive war.

A preemptive war is a first strike against an enemy when an attack is believed to be imminent, a deterrent widely accepted as a form of self-defense. A preventive war, on the other hand, is one launched when a conflict appears to be inevitable but an attack is not necessarily imminent. This is far more controversial, seen by many as an act of

aggression, which explains why Bush had trouble finding partners to go to war in Iraq. In fact, as the world discovered, there were no weapons of mass destruction, and it wasn’t until after the invasion that Iraq became another base for al-Qaida — a new arena for terrorism.

The first lesson for Obama is that a war against a concept, such as evil, or a tactic, such as terrorism, is going to be endless. The U.S. cannot afford and cannot win endless wars. It is true that for seven years the country has been spared another attack, and we assume the U.S. pursuit of al-Qaida is at least partly to thank for that. But terrorism hasn’t been defeated; it is as widely used as ever.

Second, Obama should reject the idea of preventive war, which is morally and legally questionable and opens the door for any powerful state to invade a weaker one.

Los Angeles Times (Jan. 16)

The long-term security threat to Arab states

Barry Rubin
Jerusalem

In Iran, elements from within the regime are reportedly offering a \$1 million reward for the assassination of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak because of his opposition to Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In Lebanon, the leader of Hezbollah, backed by Iran and Syria, merely calls for the Egyptian government's overthrow.

In response to this, Tariq Alhomayed, a Saudi who is editor in chief of the newspaper *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, describes Hamas as Iran's tool, and argues that "Iran is a real threat to Arab security."

Egypt's foreign minister, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, agrees — and he is not alone. When Arab states met to discuss the Gaza crisis, Saudi Arabia vetoed any action. Even the Palestinian Authority (PA) blames Hamas for the fighting. Activists in Fatah, Hamas' nationalist rival that runs the PA, make no secret of their hope that Hamas loses the war.

Welcome to the new Mideast, characterized no longer by the Arab-Israeli conflict, but by an Arab nationalist-Islamist conflict. Recognizing this reality, virtually all Arab states — other than Iran's ally, Syria — and the PA want to see Hamas defeated in Gaza.

Given their strong self-interest in thwarting Islamist revolutionary groups, especially those aligned with Iran, they are not inclined to listen to the "Arab street" — which is far quieter than it was during previous conflicts, such as the 1991 war in Kuwait, the 2000-2004 Palestinian uprising, or the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war.

Today's Middle East is very different from the old one in many significant ways. First, the internal politics of every Arab country revolves around a battle between Arab nationalist rulers and an Islamist opposition. In other words, Hamas' allies are the regimes' enemies.

An Islamist state in the Gaza Strip would encourage those who seek to create similar entities in Egypt, Jordan and every other Arab country.

Already, a tremendous price has been paid in lives and treasure for this conflict. The violence has included civil wars among Palestinians and Algerians; the bloodshed in Iraq; and terrorist campaigns in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

In the Palestinian case, after winning an election victory and making a deal with Fatah for a coalition government, Hamas turned on its nationalist rivals and drove them out of Gaza by force. In return, the PA has been repressing Hamas in the West Bank. In Lebanon, Hezbollah has been trying to bully its more moderate Sunni Muslim, Christian, and Druze rivals into submission.

Second, because Arab states confront an Iran-Syria alliance that includes Hamas and Hezbollah, in addition to internal conflicts, there is a regional battle between these two blocs. An aspect of this is that the largely Sunni Muslim-led states face a largely Shiite Muslim-led competitor for regional hegemony.

These two problems pose far greater dangers to existing states than does any Israeli threat. The region's rulers know it.

On the other side of the divide, Iran and its allies have put forward the banners of jihad and "resistance." Their platform includes: Islamist revolution in every country; Iran as the region's dominant state, backed up by nuclear weapons; no peace with Israel and no Palestinian state until there can be an Islamist one encompassing all of Israel (as well as the West Bank and Gaza); and the expulsion of Western influence from the region.

This is a very ambitious program, probably impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, it is a prescription for endless terrorism and war: Both pro- and anti-Iranian revolutionary Islamists

believe that, because God is on their side and their enemies are cowardly, they will win, and they are quite prepared to spend the next half-century trying to prove it.

While this seems to be a very pessimistic assessment of the regional situation, the radical Islamist side has many weaknesses. Launching losing wars may make Islamists feel good, but being defeated is a costly proposition, for their arrogance and belligerence antagonizes many who might otherwise be won over to their cause.

In addition, the situation provides a good opportunity for Western policymakers. The emphasis should be on building coalitions among the relatively moderate states that are threatened by radical Islamist forces, and on working hard to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons — a goal that is in the interests of many in the region.

The worst mistake would be to follow the opposite policy — an inevitably futile effort to appease the extremists or seek to moderate them. Such a campaign actually disheartens the relative moderates who, feeling sold out, will try to cut their own deal with Tehran.

The current crisis in Gaza is only one aspect of the much wider battle shaking the region. Helping Hamas would empower radical Islamism and Iranian ambitions, while undercutting the PA and everyone else, not just Israel. Arab states don't want to help their worst enemy. Why should anyone else?

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Reciprocal self-destruction



WILLIAM
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Paris

The guarded remarks by Sen. Hillary Clinton on Tuesday have produced equally guarded hope that there will indeed be change in American Middle Eastern policy under an Obama administration.

Such is tragically overdue, as the reciprocal self-destruction of Palestine and Israel continues in a bewildering and savage concatenation of decisions that have no rationally achievable purposes. One of them is the objective that Israel has itself set as its priority in Gaza.

Many Israelis themselves have observed that the announced purpose of the assault on Gaza is to stop Hamas from firing rockets into Israel. This would seem to have little chance of success, since rockets are plentiful and the number of young Arab men determined to fire them has no practical limit.

If this actually is the measure by which the success of the operation will be judged by Israel's citizens and the international community — as if the international community's opinion counted for much in Israel today — the operation is guaranteed to fail.

The Israeli military commentator Martin Van Creveld has observed to the

European press that if stopping the rockets — which continue — is the sole criteria of victory, it remains and will remain unachieved.

In the days following the end of Israeli army operations in Gaza, the first in a new series of rockets will be fired at Israel. This is as certain as anything can be. Such Hamas militants as survive the Israeli attack will be applauded as the victors in parts of the world where international opinion does count for a lot. Remember that in 2006, for much of the world, Hezbollah "defeated" Israel's invasion of Lebanon.

Hamas in Gaza will have its victory, according to the official account, despite having broken the truce that had prevailed in the months leading up to this crisis. Yet, in view of the catastrophic results for Gaza's people, resuming rocket attacks on Israel was even more stupid and useless than what Israel's leadership has done.

Even if it were true, as widely claimed, that it was the Israelis who for their own reasons deliberately first broke the truce, the Hamas leaders are doubly stupid for having reacted like automatons to the provocation. Their reaction has caused the destruction of their community and the deaths of hundreds, possibly thousands — when the count is made — of their guiltless people.

The people of Gaza are much worse off now, but so are the Israelis. The poison of hatred has spread even further in both camps, and in much of the non-Western world, and particularly in Western Europe.

A member of the European Parliament

asked a few days ago how many times Israel was going to expect the European Community — chief furnisher of funds to the United Nations' and the nongovernmental aid agencies supporting the Palestinian population — to rebuild the Gaza and Palestine (or Lebanese) infrastructures for Israel to destroy once again.

A loaded question, but so are most of the questions that are being asked these days — everywhere except in Israel and the United States.

There, the idea still prevails that what this is all about is a morbid and racist Palestinian passion to destroy Israel. No one any longer seems to recognize that now, with the two-states Israel-Palestine solution seemingly dead of a thousand wounds inflicted by the Bush government, Palestinian militants are engaged in what has become a desperate effort to take revenge on the Israeli expansionists, the fanatical settler movement, and the Israeli government for having robbed the Palestinians of some 40 percent of the land still legally belonging to them after the 1967 war.

The Palestinian militants are what remains of what used to be called a national resistance movement — an unsuccessful one, now driven by failure and the encouragement of Iran, into self-destructive acts.

Israel gains nothing from this. Only peace can save the two of them.

Visit William Pfaff's Web site at

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The 9/11 Presidency

Long after George W. Bush boards Marine One Tuesday bound for Texas, the enduring image of his epochal eight years will be the September 20, 2001 evening a relatively new President stood before a nation traumatized and in mourning.

"We will direct every resource at our command—every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war—to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network," Mr. Bush told a Joint Session of Congress. "I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people."

In that moment, he set the standard for the Bush Presidency: To protect Americans from another 9/11 and hit Islamist terrorists and their sponsors abroad. Whatever history's ultimate judgment, Mr. Bush never did yield. Nearly all the significant battles of the Bush years—the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, Guantanamo and wiretapping, upheavals in the Middle East, America's troubles with Europe—stemmed directly from his response to the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon that defined his Presidency.

By his own standard, Mr. Bush achieved the one big thing he and all Americans demanded of his Administration. Not a single man, woman or child has been killed by terrorists on U.S. soil since the morning of September 11. Al Qaeda was flushed from safe havens in Afghanistan, then Iraq, and its terrorist network put under siege around the world. All subsequent terror attacks hit soft targets and used primitive means. No one seriously predicted such an outcome at the time.

The Administration's achievement goes beyond lives saved to American confidence restored. Memories fade fast. Recall the fear about imminent strikes, the anthrax panic and the 98-1 Senate vote for the Patriot Act in the weeks after 9/11. Americans yearned for leadership that this President provided. He calmed the fears and urged tolerance at home, saying on that memorable evening, "We are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them."

A measure of the Administration's suc-

cess is the criticism it has drawn as the threat has seemed more remote. Bush-bashing, whether from the netroots, David Letterman or the French, would have no resonance in a country that still feared a terrorist attack. Mr. Bush made a conscious choice to take no chances with American lives, and to live with the liberal backlash over waterboarding Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

The U.S. is safer today than on September 10.

His most controversial and difficult decision, the war in Iraq, was consistent with his post-9/11 doctrine to regard "any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism . . . as a hostile regime" and pre-empt threats to America from rogue regimes and proliferators. The failure to discover WMD gave opponents the opening to claim the war was fought on false premises, but Bill Clinton, Democrats on Capitol Hill and every major intelligence service also believed Saddam had WMD.

Other mistakes were inevitably made, and not merely that "Mission Accomplished" banner aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln. Persuasion matters in politics, and Mr. Bush lacked the communication skills to explain his policies well. The Administration botched the early job in post-Saddam Iraq, taking too long to empower Iraqis and failing to anticipate the insurgency. But the successful "surge"—a decision made against almost universal opposition in Washington—prevented a U.S. defeat and leaves to Barack Obama a democratic ally gaining strength in a crucial region.

The slow but indisputable emergence of a free Iraq also shook up an untenable status quo in the Middle East, the root source of the terrorist threat. Though Saddam bluffed about his WMD, the U.S. intervention signaled its seriousness to other proliferators. A.Q. Khan's nuclear network, which flourished in the 1990s, was rolled up in the wake of Iraq. Moammar Gadhafi gave up Libya's nuclear program, which was far more advanced than previously thought.

Mr. Bush's Afghan campaign started brilliantly, toppling the Taliban despite warnings in Washington that such "regime change" was dangerous. The ability of al Qaeda to reconstitute itself to some degree along the Afghan-Pakistan border is mainly due to unstable governance in Pakistan—and will be no easier for Mr. Obama. Mr. Bush's engagement with Is-

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Islamabad did ease Indian-Pakistan tensions, helped to capture KSM and others, and has allowed U.S. Predators to strike at terror targets inside Pakistan.

In his second Inaugural, the President declared the U.S. would "seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." Lebanon's Cedar Revolution came a month later. But the "freedom agenda" ran aground against the Hezbollah, Hamas and Iraq setbacks of 2006 and has never recovered. Still, the idea that freedom and Islam are compatible has been planted and will not be forever contained in the region.

On his own post-9/11 terms, Mr. Bush's biggest failure has been Iran. He outsourced diplomacy to the Europeans and U.N.—despite his caricature as a go-it-alone cowboy. But these efforts merely gave the mullahs cover and years to build their bomb. The President also indulged Condoleezza Rice's illusion that some grand bargain could be found with Tehran's revolutionary regime. The same could be said for his diplomatic dead end in North Korea.

The President tried smooth talk on Vladimir Putin, with equally poor results. His famous misreading of the man gave the Kremlin confidence to repress its own people and intimidate its neighbors without fear of serious U.S. rebuke. Mr. Bush did stay a stalwart ally to the young democracies in that region, helping keep Ukraine and Georgia, so far, out of Moscow's reconstituting empire.

For a President charged so often with tarnishing alliances, the state of America's friendships is also worth revisiting. The world didn't gang up against the "unilateral" U.S., Jacques Chirac's efforts notwithstanding. On the contrary, though you won't hear this from the media, relations with Europe are stronger than at the beginning of the Bush years.

France, Germany and the U.K.—aware of the rising threat from Russia and their own shortcomings—are eager for U.S. support and leadership, out of self-interest if not any deep love.

In Asia, the Bush Presidency began with a crisis with China over an aircraft shootdown, but U.S.-China ties have since been friendly and stable. Mr. Bush's biggest achievement, also overlooked, is the new alliance with the continent's leading democracy, India. This relationship will help future Administrations

check Chinese ambitions—as will strengthened friendships with Japan, South Korea and Australia.

* * *

The postmortems on Mr. Bush's foreign policy inevitably note his comment in the 2000 Presidential debate about "a humble nation," disinclined to act abroad, to paint him as the unlikely revolutionary.

The future President's more tell-

ing statement in that debate came in response to a question about what principles would guide him. He said he'd ask himself: "What's in the best interest of our people?"

A clear conception of national interest shaped his response to the great security challenge of the early 21st century. After the Clinton decade in which al Qaeda and proliferation went unchallenged, the Bush Presidency had to scramble to defend against a terror threat that with WMD could kill millions of Americans. His decision to fight this as a "war," and to marshal the means attendant to war, has been controversial and expensive. But like Harry Truman's decisions at the onset of the Cold War, we suspect more of his policy will survive than his many critics now admit.

The world remains a very dangerous place. Yet thanks to Mr. Bush's post-9/11 willingness to act decisively, and at the risk of his own popularity, Americans are safer today than on September 10, 2001.



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Engaging North Korea Didn't Work for Japan

By Melanie Kirkpatrick

In her confirmation hearing last week, Secretary of State-designate Hillary Clinton said the Obama administration would use the six-party talks with China, South Korea, Japan and Russia to press North Korea to give up its nuclear program. With U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill reportedly staying on at State, it looks like déjà vu for U.S. policy.

Somewhere in Pyongyang, a little man in a boiler suit must be smiling—and marveling at how often Washington falls for his negotiating legerdemain. Dictator Kim Jong Il's latest diplomatic coup came in October when he got the U.S. to take North Korea off the State Department's list of terror-sponsoring countries. What did Pyongyang do in return? The six-party talks collapsed last month when the North said it wouldn't abide by the verbal commitments it had made on verification of its nuclear program. Thus ended Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's attempt at engagement with the North.

Since Mrs. Clinton is promising to pursue much the same policy, perhaps it's a good moment to review an even longer-running negotiation with dictator Kim Jong Il that has also faltered: Japan's attempt to get information about its citizens who were abducted by North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s. Most of the victims, including a 13-year-old girl, were grabbed by North Korean agents on the streets or beaches near their homes in western Japan, hidden in ships bound for North Korea, and pressed into service training the North's spies to pass as Japanese nation-

als. The North also kidnapped South Koreans; several hundred are still missing.

The fate of their countrymen is understandably an emotional issue for the Japanese. The names of the 12 people on the official list of the still-missing are well known throughout the country. Prime Minister Taro Aso is often spotted wearing a blue-ribbon pin in their honor. Virtually every political leader supports Japan's longstanding policy: No aid for North Korea unless it releases information on the abductees.

Kyoko Nakayama, special adviser to the prime minister on the abduction issue, was in the U.S. earlier this month to gain support for Tokyo's stance. "The abduc-

tions are a state-sponsored crime," she says. "One of the keys to resolving the abduction issue is for the U.S. and Japan to work together." She uses the word "disappointed"—Japanese understatement for "outraged"—in reference to President Bush's decision to take North Korea off the terror list.

Tokyo first raised the issue of the abductions with Pyongyang in 1991, Ms. Nakayama says. "We had had our suspicions for years but we couldn't prove [them]." In 2002, when then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi was in Pyongyang, "Kim Jong Il acknowledged they [the abductees] existed, and apologized." Kim's admission "opened a door and we could really start negotiating."

Later that year "we were able to get five people back." Of the remaining 12 kidnap victims on Japan's list, Ms. Nakayama says, "the North Koreans told us that eight

had passed away and four had never entered the country." Pyongyang sent a funeral urn containing what it said were the remains of one: Megumi Yokota, the 13-year-old girl. DNA sampling showed the remains not to be Megumi's, Ms. Nakayama says. When Tokyo confronted Pyongyang on the deception, "first of all they said they wanted the bones back. . . . Then they said the DNA test had been trumped up." Since that time "there has been no progress."

Given that background, what is Ms. Nakayama's view of dealing with Pyongyang? "Our experience with negotiating with the North Koreans is that they denied [that they had] abducted citizens for years, and they were very comfortable doing so," she says. "Our experience with agreements with the North Koreans is that they'll make excuses for not fulfilling them."

If that sounds familiar, consider the North's denials and obfuscations on its uranium-enrichment program, which it trumpeted in 2002 and subsequently denied. In 2007, the Bush administration backed off its claims about the North's uranium program. Now, in a valedictory speech this month, National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley warned of "increasing concerns" in the U.S. intelligence community that the North has "an ongoing, covert uranium-enrichment program."

Like the Japanese abductees, the North's uranium program was not a priority of the Bush administration at the six-party talks. Both belong high on Mrs. Clinton's to-do list when she opens her North Korea file.

Ms. Kirkpatrick is a deputy editor of the Journal's editorial page.

Memo to Hillary Clinton: Kim will break agreements.

Obama 'panda-huggers' alarm Japan

Bradley K. Martin and Sachiko Sakamaki
BLOOMBERG

When Prime Minister Taro Aso telephoned to congratulate Barack Obama on his November election, he told the president-elect that strengthening the alliance with the United States was his "top" foreign-policy priority.

Japan's leaders are afraid Aso's sentiments aren't reciprocated.

Paralyzed by a political stalemate that has given it three prime ministers in two years and enmeshed in the first recession since 2001, Japan is now suffering from an attack of angst over what is widely perceived to be a greater U.S. focus on China. No matter that it's still the most powerful American ally in the region and home to the Seventh Fleet, Japan isn't feeling the love.

"Japan may face a difficult situation with the Obama administration," said Kohei Ohtsuka, 49, author of "Japan Missing" and the opposition Democratic Party of Japan's vice policy chief. "Japan-U.S. ties may be at risk."

Columnist Hiro Yuasa of the Sankei newspaper, using a derogatory term for a Sinophile, said: "There may be even more panda-huggers under new Secretary of State Hillary Clinton."

To Japan, U.S. regard matters. Under an American security umbrella after defeat in World War II, Japan rose from a nation struggling to feed its people to the world's second-largest economy. Growth depends on exports to the U.S., its top customer. U.S. Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer says a change in that postwar hierarchy is difficult to accept.

"The U.S. is still No. 1 but Japan worries about who's No. 2 or No. 3," Schieffer, 61, told reporters on Jan. 8. "It's this business about who's going to project power in the 21st century that worries everybody."

So far, this century in Asia has belonged to China, whose economy last

week passed Germany's to become the world's third-largest after the U.S. and Japan, expanding 13 percent from a year earlier.

Japanese gross domestic product, by contrast, may have shrunk as much as 12 percent on an annualized basis last quarter, Barclays Capital predicts. Exports fell 26.7 percent in November, the sharpest decline since at least 1980.

Ohtsuka says he is worried about what he calls a "shift to the right among people trying to elevate Japan's power by other than economic means. I'd like to ask the Obama administration to understand the delicate emotions and sentiment among Japanese and Chinese people."

From the U.S. vantage point, Japan's concerns are misplaced. Ties are likely to remain strong under the new administration, said retired Admiral William Fallon, who met frequently with both Japanese and Chinese officials during his 2005-2007 tenure as head of the U.S. Pacific Command.

"It's in our best interest to maintain our relationship with our No. 1 security partner in the region," Fallon said in an interview. "While at the same time we would like to strengthen our relations with China, there is no reason we can't do both. This is not a zero-sum game."

That isn't the way Japan sees it. National anxieties were further fueled by the selection of Clinton: In an article in Foreign Affairs a year ago, she wrote that the U.S. relationship with China "will be the most important bilateral relationship in the world" this century. To the Japanese, that evoked memories of Mike Mansfield's assertion more than 20 years ago, when he was the American ambassador, that the U.S.-Japan rapport was "the world's most important, bar none."

Aso's Liberal Democratic Party is doing all it can to bolster the partnership as Obama's inauguration nears,

including proposing new laws that would let Japan send ships to the Gulf of Aden to battle pirates off the coast of Somalia.

The postwar Constitution prohibits the use of force to settle international disputes.

Even before Obama's election, Japan was reaching out to its Asian neighbors to repair relations strained under former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who left office in 2006. Koizumi alienated China and South Korea with visits to Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo, where Class-A war criminals are among those memorialized.

Koizumi's successor, Shinzo Abe, made his first state visit to China, and then went to South Korea. Aso, 68, who angered Japan's neighbors with inflammatory comments before becoming prime minister, traveled to South Korea on Jan. 11 and 12, and met with counterpart Lee Myung Bak. Five years ago, he said Koreans forced to take Japanese family names during Japan's brutal 1910-1945 occupation had actually done so by choice.

"Aso has turned down the anti-China, anti-Korea volume on his iPod," said Richard Samuels, a professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In Clinton's Senate confirmation hearing Tuesday, she named China six times, saying it is "critically important" and will change the "global landscape." She mentioned Japan twice, stressing its role in six-party talks on North Korea and calling it "a cornerstone of America policy in Asia."

"There's concern the U.S. will have to dedicate more time to China," said Taro Kono, 45, chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the Lower House for the LDP. "It's a fact that the personal connections between the U.S. and Japan are weakening."

With reporting by Ken Freeman in Washington

The calculations of rage in Gaza prove elusive to sum up

GAZA, From Page 1

that was given on condition of anonymity. "They are the regime and feel very connected to the people. They do not want to lose that connection to the people."

The Israeli theory of what it tried to do here is summed up in a Hebrew phrase heard across Israel and throughout the military in the past weeks: "baal habayit hishtageya," or "the boss has lost it." It evokes the image of a madman who cannot be controlled.

"This phrase means that if our civilians are attacked by you, we are not going to respond in proportion but will use all means we have to cause you such damage that you will think twice in the future," said Giora Eiland, a former national security adviser.

It is a calculated rage. The phrase comes from business and refers to a decision by a shop owner to cut prices so drastically that he appears crazy to the consumer, even though he knows he has actually made a shrewd business decision.

The Palestinians in Gaza received the message on the first day, when Israeli warplanes struck numerous targets simultaneously in the middle of a Saturday morning. Some 200 were killed instantly, shocking Hamas and indeed all of Gaza, especially because Israel's anti-rocket attacks in previous years had been more measured.

When Hamas's prime minister, Ismail Haniya, appeared on Hamas

television from his hiding spot last Monday, he picked up on the Israeli archetype, referring in Arabic to the battle under way as "el harb el majnuna," the mad or crazy war.

For most, of course, feeling abused like this has created deep rage at Israel.

"If you want to make peace with the Palestinians, they are tired of bombs, drones and planes," said Muhammad Abu Muhaisin, a 35-year-old resident of the southern city of Rafah who is affiliated with Fatah, the rival to Hamas that rules in the West Bank and was ejected from Gaza in June 2007. "But a guy whose child has just been killed doesn't want peace. He wants war."

There are, however, limited indications that the people of Gaza felt such pain from this war that they will seek to rein in Hamas.

Halima Dardouna, 37, from the northern city of Jabaliya, whose house was destroyed by an Israeli shell, said both Fatah and Hamas were to blame because of their rivalry, "and we are the victims."

She added, "I will never vote for Hamas. They are not able to protect the people, and if they are going to bring this on us, why should they be in power? If I thought they could liberate Jerusalem, I would be patient. But instead they bring this."

For Israel, Hamas's rule here is anathema. But the fact that the group controls all facets of Gazan society gave Israel a rationale for attacking a wide range of institutions.

As an example, Eiland, the former national security adviser, noted that Israel "can destroy the infrastructure of the regime, and that is much more painful than only hitting military targets."

"The regime will be under pressure to stop the violence and will be careful not to repeat this experience again," he said. "Due to the terrible devastation on the ground, there will be a lot of political pressure."

Israel is counting on the idea that with the heavy damage to smuggler

'We stayed back. Israel said it felt like it was fighting ghosts.'

tunnels from Egypt and a mix of technology and policy to prevent further smuggling, Hamas will not again become the scourge it has been recently.

Still, the actual damage to Hamas appears to have been limited, partly because it acted so cautiously. There is irony in this, that Israel, the state with the well-trained army, wildly pressed the attack, while Hamas, the Islamist militia that supposedly embraces death, shied from the fight.

The group was by all accounts able to preserve a substantial portion of its force. Hundreds of Hamas fighters were reported killed, but general

estimates put the entire force well into the thousands.

Israeli military officials said they saw very few fighters on the battlefield. They came out mostly in ones and twos and only a few attempted suicide bombings.

Those who know Hamas in Gaza say this was carefully calculated.

"In previous times, the fighters would confront and throw themselves at Israeli attacks," said one man close to Hamas who declined to be identified further. "It was a kind of suicide. It was love of martyrdom. You go and confront the tanks, and many were killed, 80 in a few days."

"This time it was different," he added. "They have more experience and they have training from Syria and Iran. They helped them rethink their strategy. They fired rockets in between the houses and covered the alleys with sheets so they could set the rockets up in five minutes without the planes seeing them. The moment they fired, they escaped, and they are very quick."

A Hamas man interviewed on this question quoted a verse in the Koran that one should not throw himself into death in vain. "Hamas has not shown all its strength," he said. "We have to maintain our strength. Israel did not want to fight face to face, so we stayed back. Israel said it felt like it was fighting ghosts."

An Israeli military official involved in the operations said Hamas had three main goals: harming Israel, ruling in

Gaza and extending its rule to the West Bank.

"He understands that he needs to get bloodshed and delegitimize us in the international arena," the official said of Hamas. "So he cynically used people and hit us from within schools and mosques and inside civilian places. If our army wants to hit back, it has to hurt the civilian population."

Still, he and others said, Hamas was a pretty impressive and disciplined force. "I would say they are very professional — yes, absolutely," the operations officer said.

"In each city they have a commander and brigades and battalions; they are very organized. They have mostly lost a lot of their simple fighters, but not their top men."

Shlomo Brom, a researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University and a retired brigadier general, said it was a mistake to consider Hamas a group of irrational fanatics.

"I have always said that Hamas is a very rational political movement," he said. "When they use suicide bombings, for example, it is done very consciously, based on calculations of the effectiveness of these means. You see, both sides understand the value of calculated madness. That is one reason I don't see an early end to this ongoing war."

Taghreed el-Khodary and Sabrina Tavernise contributed reporting.

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Obama and Asia

By Nicholas Eberstadt

Outgoing President George W. Bush faced many challenges—from September 11 to North Korea's nuclear test—that his administration never anticipated. President-elect Barack Obama can't see into the future, either. But his team can start to plan for possible problems in an area that he hasn't talked much about: Asia.

It would be smart to start with China. In academia, the business community and governmental circles, the received wisdom is that China's dazzling economic ascent will continue, the current world recession notwithstanding, perhaps for decades. Consequently, the thinking goes, Chinese economic success will be the dominant factor altering the international equation in Asia over the years ahead.

This scenario may indeed turn out to be the case—but then again, it may not. There are a great many ways in which China might instead “fail.” The country's very real, looming demographic troubles and rapidly slowing economy raise concerns of resource shortages or environmental crises. It is not beyond the scope of possibility that China's brittle, authoritarian

and increasingly corrupt political system could suddenly unravel. American policy makers must of course deal with China as it is, but they would also be well advised to devote attention to what such seemingly low-probability alternatives for the Chinese future might portend.

The Korean Peninsula is another area where Mr. Obama might get an uncomfortable “surprise.” A central question here, of course, is the future of the North Korean state—a political construct that appears particularly ill-suited for gradual political adjustments or reforms. Pyongyang's success in staving off sudden systemic change thus far does not in itself guarantee continued and indefinite success in this effort.

Big changes in North Korea could raise the specter of dangerous new humanitarian challenges and security threats, including destabilizing refugee flows, military conflict and possible nuclear proliferation. Alternatively, the fall of North Korea could also set the stage for a Korean unification—an eventuality that might possibly alter Asia very much for the better, just as German unification did in Europe. U.S. policy makers are likely to deal better with sudden change in North Korea if they have thought about the issues it would raise in advance.

Then there is Japan, to which Mr.

Obama has paid little, if any, attention. His advisors may think that Tokyo's policy makers will do little more than incrementally tinker with the “Yoshida doctrine”—whereby Tokyo has implicitly traded its right to self defense for U.S. military protection for over half a century. Yet

The new President can't afford to ignore the region.

Japanese international policy in the past has tended to make sudden, and monumental, shifts—and the current gap between Japan's economic might and her instruments of international influence is perhaps more conspicuous than for any other major actor in the contemporary international arena. The current Liberal Democratic Party coalition, too, looks weak, and for the first time in over a decade, may be voted out of office.

It's not beyond the realm of possibility that Japan might suddenly arrive at a national consensus to make the leap at last to being a “normal nation”: a country unashamed of identifying its national interests, and willing moreover to defend these interests. How would such a seismic shift affect Asia—and the American security architecture in Asia?

* * *

Mr. Obama and his team will have to address immediate foreign-policy challenges, such as Israel's conflict with Hamas, India-Pakistan tensions and the looming specter of a soon-to-be nuclear Iran. But that

shouldn't stop him from planning for problems elsewhere. Asia hasn't figured much on Mr. Obama's agenda so far. Changing that now may stave off bigger problems in the future.

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Obama and the alliance



KAZUO
OGOURA

Under the Bush administration, the Japan-U.S. alliance has undergone a quiet but important transformation in the eyes of most Japanese people: It has become a global alliance instead of a regional or bilateral one.

Such a transformation can be witnessed in at least two aspects: the strategic and the ideological. The strategic aspect was most clearly manifest in the role of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces in Iraq and in the Indian Ocean. Though they were not involved in military operations in combat areas, their role cannot be said to be limited to "peace building" in the narrow sense of the term.

The more important change in the alliance, though it was more subtle and invisible, was the alliance's bearing a more ideological tinge. The ideological aspect of the alliance has been much emphasized under the Bush-Koizumi-Abe period, particularly by the catchword of "sharing values," which later crystallized into Taro Aso's expression of the "arc of freedom and prosperity," which was assumed to stretch from Japan to Australia.

This development or transformation became possible mainly because both Japan and the United States were deeply aware of the strategic merits of the alliance to them. Indeed, we have noticed in recent years that not only a convergence of U.S. and Japanese interests, but also the closeness of the political ideologies of the conservative governments of both countries, have strengthened the alliance.

From the American strategic perspective, Japan is a key player, an important provider of the sites and services for American bases in the Far

East, making it possible for the U.S. to deploy its military forces around the world, including the Indian Ocean. Japan has also been a valuable partner for the U.S., one of the few important coalition partners outside Western Europe that has joined hands with the U.S. in its "war against terror."

Viewed from the Japanese angle, the alliance has also had a strategic importance in coping with the nuclear threat from North Korea and with China's ever-growing military strength.

Such a balance of strategic interests is likely to have some sway in the Obama administration. The withdrawal of troops from Iraq and the emphasis on dialogue with North Korea, together with a possible realignment of troops in the Korean Peninsula, are likely to tip the delicate strategic balance of interests of the alliance unless they are very cautiously handled.

There is also the question of ideology. The Bush administration has emphasized "right and wrong" in its international politics and introduced a religious tinge in dealing with its foes. This was not only because of the "neocon" philosophy or Bush's personal character, but also because of the underlying political trend of "conservatism" that characterized American society over the past decade.

It should be noted that U.S. conservative ideas were echoed in the minds of the conservative party in Japan, which had been searching for its "true" identity. The Bush-Koizumi alliance and the subsequent solid relations between the American leader and his Japanese counterpart were based on the sense of sharing a conservative philosophy. This aspect of the alliance is not simply an ideological question but touches upon the delicate problem of burden-sharing in the alliance.

Under the shared values of conservatism, both the U.S. and Japanese governments did not have to emphasize the need for Japan to share more of the "responsibility" shouldered by the U.S. because the conservative government in Japan was more than willing to

strengthen this alliance with the U.S., not only for diplomatic or strategic purposes, but also for domestic political reasons for redefining more clearly the political identity of the Liberal Democratic Party.

Now, however, conservative ideology is definitely receding in the U.S., which is one of the important factors that helped Obama's victory. In addition, one might even say that the long-standing ideological debates are now almost irrelevant in U.S. politics, particularly under present economic difficulties.

In these circumstances, it may not be easy for the Japan-U.S. alliance to proceed further along the road of "globalization" because, as mentioned above, both the strategic and the ideological basis for consolidating the alliance are likely to be weakened unless military tension rises dramatically in the Far East or the Japanese conservative party scores a dramatic victory in the coming election.

It is very symbolic that Japanese political circles have started debating military deployment in the Indian Ocean not for "military" purposes but for coping with piracy in the area. Unlike the war against terror or the idea of democratization in the Middle East, the prevention of piracy has not, in itself, any "ideological" tinge.

In any event, it is now all the more important for Japan to carefully watch the attitude of the new American administration on issues such as past abductions of Japanese nationals by the North Korean government and the strategic approach toward China, not to mention its policy toward the Middle East, including Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Obama's policy on these problems will directly or indirectly affect Japanese perception of the balance sheet of the merits of the Japan-U.S. alliance and the willingness to share "responsibility."

Kazuo Ogoura, a political science professor at Aoyama Gakuin University, is president of the Japan Foundation.

A new start for America

World needs Obama to succeed

Barack Obama, son of a black African father and a white American mother, today becomes the 44th president of the United States. His assumption of the office is an inspiring moment for the US and the world. In part this is because he is a remarkable man with the makings of a great president. More than that, it is because the new leader of the most powerful country on earth bears witness to a momentous and distinctively American principle: that all men are created equal.

For years, black Americans saw Thomas Jefferson's pledge in the Declaration of Independence mocked by legal impediment and lingering prejudice. As the new president has often pointed out, his election does not build the colour-blind society dreamed of by Martin Luther King; still less does it perfect the union that the founders of the United States envisaged. Nonetheless it is a huge and historic advance. It stands as a challenge to other nations to live by the principles they espouse. The world, as much as the US, is not just impressed by this inauguration, it is moved – and it is right to be.

One might wish that the celebrations were less encumbered by an underlying sense of crisis. History has decreed otherwise. President Obama replaces a failed predecessor and faces tests as great as any since the time of Franklin Roosevelt and the Great Depression, and they are on many fronts.

The economy is deep in recession and, as in the 1930s, it is no ordinary recession. The government has spent hundreds of billions of dollars on rescue efforts, but the US financial system is far from repaired. The danger of a prolonged slump is still real. The new president must deal with Iraq and Afghanistan, turmoil in the wider Middle East and Pakistan, tensions with Russia and India. He must lead an effective global response to the prospect of accelerated climate change or else the problem may soon run out of control.

At home Mr Obama must reaffirm the rule of law and restore the constitution's balance of separated powers, while confronting grave threats to the nation's security. As if that were not enough, he has promised comprehensive reform of US healthcare – an undertaking that is long overdue, and large enough in its own right to consume any ordinary presidency.

He faces tests as great as any since the time of Franklin Roosevelt and the Great Depression

Can he succeed? The new president appears to have the character and temperament that the times demand and the country is expressing vast confidence in its new leader. Yet every president is at the mercy of events, and is circumscribed by Congress, especially on domestic policy. In getting his way, not least with his own party, Mr Obama will need continued strong public support. If he retains that, with the right policies and priorities we believe he can speed the recovery and return the country to its rightful place in the world's esteem.

The most pressing need at home is for action on the economy. The new team must look afresh at the financial system and make a clean break with the muddled efforts of the Bush administration. Mr Obama's officials must urgently investigate and expose the full extent of the system's impaired assets. Values must be written down, insolvent banks nationalised outright, and solvent ones recapitalised with an equity stake for taxpayers. The cost of this unflinching reappraisal will be large, but vital if the system is to play its part in financing the recovery.

Alongside a more determined approach to stabilising the financial system, Mr Obama must win public support for a big new fiscal stimulus. If anything, his current proposal of \$825bn over two years is too modest. Even so, he is facing resistance. Sceptics disinclined to study the evidence point to the failure of previous efforts and deplore additional public borrowing on principle. The new president must win the argument, and quickly. Without a powerful new fiscal stimulus, the outlook for demand in 2009, and hence for output and employment, is bleak – not just for the US but for the world.

Perhaps Mr Obama's most difficult test will come if he succeeds in those initiatives. He must prepare the public for the longer-term consequences of rescuing the financial system and injecting new demand into the economy – namely, higher taxes and cuts in public spending. It would be tempting to stay silent on this. But citizens and foreign investors need to know plans are afoot to bring the budget back into balance.

If this is done, a further requirement is a strong new emphasis on international co-operation. That is painfully obvious in foreign and security policy but applies just as much to the economy. When the time comes for fiscal consolidation in the US, and preferably long before, policy in countries with current-account surpluses must become much more expansive. New institutions are needed for this kind of co-operation. It falls to Mr Obama to create them. For now, just as he commands the confidence of his people, the new president inspires admiration worldwide. If he offers a new spirit of co-operation on these questions, he must receive a generous response. Barack Obama is the US president the world said it wanted. Making a success of his presidency – which is in the world's interests – will be as much its responsibility as his.

International co-operation, crucial in foreign policy, is needed just as much on the economy

Torn asunder

Israel and the Palestinians After the Gaza onslaught, a two-state solution is further off than ever but, for all its problems, it may be the only route to lasting coexistence, write **Tobias Buck** and **Roula Khalaf**

As the guns fell silent in the Gaza Strip after three weeks of war, both sides - Israel and the Islamist Hamas - claimed a victory of sorts, the first for having demonstrated that it can strike repeatedly and powerfully, the second for having survived the battering.

Yet it is only when the dust settles on this conflict that the full extent of the damage wreaked will become evident. After Israel's relentless pounding of Gaza and all the Hamas rockets lobbed at nearby Israeli towns, the question left by this war is whether it has dealt the last blow to the peace process and the prospect of a two-state solution to six decades of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

For many Palestinians, the offensive was proof that Israel was determined to seek security through military means rather than peace agreements. For the wider Arab world, the war provoked suspicions that perhaps Israel's intention was to split the West Bank from Gaza for good - pushing responsibility for the Strip on to Egypt and for the West Bank on to Jordan.

For Israelis, Hamas's rockets have fed fears that withdrawal from a territory - Israel moved its troops out of Gaza in 2005 - increases rather than lessens the security threat. Michael Oren, an Israeli historian and senior fellow at the Jerusalem-based Shalem Centre, says the Gaza crisis shows that "if you hand back territory it becomes a launchpad for rockets".

Amid widespread disillusionment, many in the region are looking to the Barack Obama administration in the US to inject new hope and rescue the peace process. With Arab regimes divided and European states lacking sufficient leverage, the burden is falling on the new team in Washington. "The Gaza war will make it more difficult to revive a peace process - but this could change if the new US admin-

istration comes in with an active and decisive plan," says one Arab League diplomat.

American policy analysts, however, warn that despite the stated commitment of Obama officials to Middle East peace, it will be difficult to place the Arab-Israeli conflict high on the list of priorities. With Israel facing a general election next month and Palestinians still as divided as they were before the Gaza war, US analysts say the new administration will tackle the conflict cautiously.

"If the train is moving, the Obama administration will jump on board, but there is so much else going on in the world that the administration is unlikely to start the train," says Jon Alterman at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think-tank.

The problem for the Middle East, however, is that time is running out on the two-state solution. The formula of "two states for two people" was, after all, in crisis long before the first air strikes hit the Gaza Strip last month.

True, public opinion on both sides has long been in favour of the two-state solution. Ehud Olmert, the prime minister who launched the Gaza assault, has himself argued repeatedly that the Jewish state will live in peace and security only once an independent Palestinian state is born. Yet since the Oslo peace accords between Israelis and Palestinians were signed in 1993, setting the stage for the two-state solution, Israeli policies have made the application on the ground gradually impossible.

To understand why, leave Gaza aside for a moment and consider the short drive along road 60 from Jerusalem to the northern West Bank city of Nablus. As the road winds its way through the Judean Hills, it passes one Jewish settlement after the other. Fenced in and heavily protected, often strategically placed on hilltops and above water reservoirs, the settlements of Geva, Binyamin, Bet El, Ofra, Shilo and Yizhar are among more than 120 scattered all over the West Bank.

Illegal under international law, some of these Israeli implants have developed into sprawling towns and suburbs. Since Oslo, the settler population in the West Bank has more than doubled from 116,000 to 275,000. Another 180,000 settlers live in occupied east Jerusalem, a particularly contested slice of Palestinian territory. But even the 455,000 total underplays the impact the settlements have on the lives of the 2.5m Palestinians in the territory.

Citing security concerns and the wish to control the border with Jordan, Israel has imposed stringent restrictions on the freedom of movement for Palestinians in the West Bank. For the past few years, Palestinians have also had to contend with the Israeli-built barrier - a network of fences and walls that lops off almost 9 per cent of the West Bank and cuts off thousands of villagers from their land.

Israel says it is in principle willing to uproot settlements, but only as part of

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a final peace deal with the Palestinians. It is a logic – born not least out of the experience of the country's withdrawal from Gaza – that has locked the two sides into a vicious circle. For the Palestinians, the settlements are evidence of Israel's unwillingness to make peace. At the same time, Israeli mis-

275,000

Israeli settlers in the West Bank
(up from 116,000 in 2003) plus ...

180,000

in occupied east Jerusalem

trust of the Palestinians makes it all the harder to create an environment where a government will have the courage to abandon even a small part of the West Bank.

Back in Gaza, when Israel removed its settlers and troops in 2005, it did so without any peace agreement with the Palestinians, insisting that it had no peace partner on the Palestinian side. Fearing suicide bombers that militants had been sending into Israel, it opened the doors and closed them based on its security perceptions. Israel, meanwhile, won a commitment from the administration of George W. Bush that it could keep control of some West Bank settlements in any peace deal, thereby weakening the negotiating position of Palestinians in the peace process.

Over the past year, scores of Palestinian intellectuals and analysts have been writing about the demise of the two-state solution – and a raft of opinion polls last year showed that more and more Palestinians were calling for a single, binational state shared by Israelis and Palestinians, a concept that is vehemently opposed by Israel.

Even Ahmed Qurei, chief negotiator with Israel in the pre-Gaza crisis peace talks, joined the chorus. "The Palestinian leadership has been working on establishing a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders [the West Bank and Gaza Strip]. If Israel continues to oppose making this a reality, then the Palestinian demand for the Palestinian people and its leadership [will be] one state, a binational state," he declared in August.

Yet the Palestinians also share part of the blame. The launch of the intifada in 2000, the wave of suicide bombings and the targeting of civilians within Israel's borders raised Israeli anxieties that a state on land occupied in 1967

would not be enough. Since June 2007, more than a year after a parliamentary election that saw the Islamists of Hamas win a majority of seats, the Palestinians have also seen one of their proudest achievements – the unity of their national movement – crumble.

After days of bloody clashes, Hamas took control of Gaza, ousting the Palestinian Authority and the rival Fatah party from one half of the Palestinian territories. As Ghassan Khatib, director of the JMCC think-tank and a former minister in the Palestinian Authority, explains: "It used to be only or mainly the fact of Israeli settlements [that undermined the two-state solution] but now it is also the split between the West Bank and Gaza and between Fatah and Hamas."

But however threatened the two-state solution, and however distant its prospects, there is no viable alternative. Neither Cairo nor Jordan is willing to take responsibility for the Palestinians or deprive them of their dreams of statehood. A binational state, meanwhile, is almost universally opposed by Israelis. Thanks to high Palestinian birth rates and a sharp decline in Jewish migration to Israel, Palestinians would soon outnumber Jews in such a state, spelling the end to the Zionist dream of a homeland.

No one made this clearer than Mr Omert, who famously predicted in a 2007 interview that the collapse of the two-state solution would mean that "the state of Israel is finished".

Israelis and Palestinians will find it increasingly hard to split the land over which they have so long fought, says Menachem Klein, a former government adviser who now teaches at Bar Ilan University. He argues that the two peoples already live in a binational reality, albeit one in which one population is politically disenfranchised and suppressed.

The conflict, he adds, has moved from a fight about borders into something more menacing: "We live in an ethnic conflict between Arab Palestinians and Israeli Jews. One ethnic group is weak and the other is overwhelmingly powerful."

Perhaps the only glimmer of hope radiating above the ruins of Gaza is that the death and destruction visited on this miserable sliver of land will prompt a more active US-led international intervention to rescue the two-state solution. Left to their own devices, as the three weeks of bloodshed have shown with grim clarity, Israelis and Palestinians will find it hard to escape the cycle of hatred, war and suppression that has marked the region for generations.

MEANWHILE ■ Alex Beam

The real money's in piracy

Somali pirates, we hardly knew you! Consider this a premature obituary for the most enjoyable media story of the past six months — the pirates of Puntland, one of many destitute provinces of the lawless Horn of Africa.

Captain Jack Sparrow struck the colors, interest-wise, around the time of the first "Pirates of the Caribbean" sequel, but the Evinrude-enabled Somalis maintain their purchase on our imagination.

Not for long, I fear. A motley band of international revenooers is converging on the Horn, bent on putting our freebooters out of business.

Taken individually, the navies of India, China, Canada, Malaysia, the United States and France terrify no one. But collectively they may achieve their aim, the eradication of piracy off Africa's northeast coast.

Somali pirate futures have been trading at all-time lows. If they were a stock, you would sell them.

Middle-class morality insists that we condemn the pirates. Of course, middle-class morality chooses to ignore the salubrious role of piracy, a.k.a. "privatizing," in America's glorious revolution, and chooses to hail John Paul Jones as the father of the U.S. Navy rather than as the pirate king he really was.

Perhaps middle-class morality is too quick to judge. The Somali pirates are not particularly bloodthirsty. They keep their hostages alive and well-fed, all the better to ransom them. Whom do they victimize? 1) Insurer Lloyd's of London (who cares?). 2) The oil-shipping brigands of OPEC (see previous).

If anything, the pirates have been helping the world's oil cartel by taking supply off the market at a time when the oil-producing nations lack the discipline to cut back production.

Some say the pirate boom is payback for so-called civilized countries' rape of Somalia's coast. Because Somalia lacks what most people would call a government, countries like Spain, France and Taiwan haven't hesitated to invade the country's territorial waters and extinguish their fishing stocks. The pirates know those waters intimately, because many of them are displaced fishermen.

More shockingly, Johann Hari of the London Independent reports that European nations have been dumping toxic, radioactive medical waste into offshore Somali waters for several

years. "Did we expect starving Somalis to stand passively on their beaches, paddling in our toxic waste, and watch us snatch their fish to eat in restaurants in London and Paris and Rome?" Hari writes. He concludes that the pirates "have some justice on their side."

A few weeks ago, a friend and I wondered if we could find a way to invest in the pirates. At a time when purportedly respectable businesses like Lehman Brothers and insurance mammoth AIG — talk about pirates! — are cratering, the Somali gangs looked like a good place to put our money.

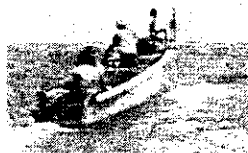
They run a low-overhead business, with fixed costs limited to such essentials as an open-water skiff, a 250-horsepower outboard, cast-off Soviet weaponry and "ghetto" do-rags. The risk-reward ratio is quite favorable. For an investment of, say, \$2,000, you could end up with \$10 million in ransom and payoffs, after taxes. Oh, wait. There are no taxes in Somalia.

Digging deeper, as they say in econ-lingo, we observe the "pirate multiplier effect." The pirates, like Paula Abdul, spread their booty around. According to the BBC, a core group of about seven to 10 pirate/entrepreneurs usually launches an operation, then recruits 50 more pirates to baby-sit their catch, and 50 more to mind their interests onshore.

In a town such as Eyl, a Drambuie-esque pirate den in Somalia, "it's like the California gold rush," terrorism expert Peter Lehr of Scotland's University of St. Andrews explained to me. "There are new streets, new hotels, and new restaurants all catering to this pirate industry. There's no other business in Somalia, except possibly the black market in weapons. Piracy is the only economic show in town."

Lehr thinks I am writing off the marauders of the Horn prematurely. "You Americans are so optimistic," he chides. (No, pessimistic; I like the pirates!) Yes, the world's navies are closing in, "but you are talking about patrolling 3,000 miles of coastline," Lehr says. "You can't just start shelling them the way America did with the Barbary Pirates in the 19th century. For one thing, you don't know who they are. They aren't sitting around with wooden legs and parrots squawking on their shoulders."

Hmmm. Maybe I will invest, after all.



Reuters

Global View / By Bret Stephens

Israel Scored a Tactical Victory

On the Gaza border

Atop a little hill near the beleaguered Israeli town of Sderot, a gaggle of TV crews train their cameras on the Gaza Strip, sentinels to a unilateral Israeli cease-fire that's barely 12 hours old. Earlier the same day, Sunday, Hamas fired 20 rockets into Israel, raising questions about its intentions but causing little serious damage. Later, a pair of Israeli F-15s streak over Gaza City, releasing bursts of chaff but dropping no bombs.

And then comes word that Hamas has declared its own conditional, week-long cease-fire. The TV people clear out. All wars eventually end. The question most Israelis are asking is whether this one has merely gone on vacation.

So why are the top echelons of Israel's political and military establishment delighted by the war's result? Long answer: They think that Israel has re-established a reputation for invincibility tarnished in the 2006 war with Hezbollah; that they bloodied and humiliated Hamas while taking few casualties; that they called overdue international attention to the tunnels Hamas uses to smuggle its arsenal; and, with the unilateral cease-fire, that they put the onus to end the violence squarely back on Hamas's shoulders.

Short answer: They think the war may be a regional game changer.

In a wide-ranging interview, a senior military official offers perhaps the most authoritative explanation of his government's war aims and his interpretation of its effects. "We have no desire to go back into

Gaza," he says. "We decided we're not going to spend five years [in Gaza] like the five years Americans spent in Iraq."

On the contrary: Far from seeking regime change in Gaza, the official seems at ease that the Palestinians will remain bifurcated between Hamastan and Fatahland for many years more, the way Germany was divided during the Cold War. The idea is that a Hamas state in Gaza—somehow deterred from mischief—could become a kind of useful negative example to the Palestinians of the West Bank, somewhat in the way East Germany served West Germany as a monument to everything that was wrong with communism.

This leads the official to his second remarkable comment, after I ask whether Israel deliberately chose *not* to kill Ismail Haniyeh, the elected Palestinian prime minister and Hamas's political leader in Gaza. "Israel tried to target people from the security apparatus and military wing," he answers. "At this moment, we prefer that the less-radical wing will take over."

The current divisions within Hamas are not the only ones the official sees as a consequence of the war. Palestinians, he says, no longer look to Hamas as the party of clean and competent government. Instead, they see a group whose leaders needlessly provoked a ruinous war they didn't have the courage to fight themselves. No wonder the third *intifada* in the West Bank, on which Hamas had counted, never materialized.

Elsewhere, Hamas's former patrons in the Arab world have split with the group ever since it became a client of Tehran. A dozen Arab states, along with the Palestinian Authority, boycotted an emergency summit of the Arab League, which had been intended as a show of support for Hamas supremo Khaled Mashal.

Then there is Egypt. For years, it took an ambivalent view of Hamas: partly worried by the threat it poses to its own secular regime, partly delighted by the trouble it causes Israel. Now the Mubarak government at last understands that Hamas is also a *strategic* threat to Egypt. "An Iranian base can play against Egypt the same way it played against Israel," says the official. Almost as an aside, he adds that the timing of Isra-

el's operation in Gaza was dictated in part by the assessment that Hamas was just months away from obtaining longer-range missiles that could reach Cairo as easily as Tel Aviv.

Now the Israeli government is prepared to believe that the Egyptians will finally clamp down on the smuggling. Israel might even allow Egypt to deploy its army in

greater force in the Sinai, despite the provisions against it in the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

Finally there is Iran. "They have drawn a lesson," says the official. "Once again, they saw that Israel has a good

air force and good intelligence, and that the combination of the two can be deadly. Unlike in 2006, they saw a well-trained ground force. They found that asymmetrical warfare does not always play for them; that we can use asymmetrical approaches to overpower an asymmetrical threat."

All this, of course, could be overturned the moment Iran goes nuclear and attempts to thwart Israel's freedom of action. Nor is it foreordained that Israel will enjoy the relatively favorable international circumstances that facilitated the past three weeks of war, or that Hamas will perform poorly the next time. "Usually, the one who loses does his homework better," observes the official.

Bottom line: Israel has scored an impressive tactical victory. But it has missed the strategic opportunity to rid itself of the menace on its doorstep. In the Middle East, opportunities don't always knock twice.

Write to bstephens@wsj.com

THE JAPAN TIMES WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2009

Extending the calm in Gaza

Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire Sunday in the 22-day offensive against the Gaza Strip controlled by the Islamist group Hamas. Hours later, Hamas declared a separate ceasefire. Since both parties refused to talk and weigh each other's demands, the calm is tentative. Israel, Hamas and other parties concerned, including Egypt and the United States, are urged to work out a permanent truce as soon as possible.

To counter rocket attacks by Hamas, Israel launched air raids against Gaza on Dec. 27 and poured ground forces into the area on Jan. 3. In mid-December, Hamas had decided not to renew a six-month ceasefire brokered by Egypt, thus sowing the seeds for conflict this time around. But that decision had been in response to the strengthened blockade of Gaza by Israel.

The conflict has killed 13 Israelis. But the Palestinian death toll tops 1,300, including some 410 children. About 5,300 Palestinians have been injured. Israel's offensive has caused an estimated \$1.9 billion worth of damage to 22,000 buildings and has worsened humanitarian conditions for Gaza residents, who

had suffered from the blockade. Allegations that Israel used white phosphorus shells should be investigated.

By inflicting serious damage to routes used to smuggle weapons into Gaza, Israel declared that it had achieved its military goal. But as expected, Hamas declared victory, saying its military struggle had forced Israel to stop its offensive.

An agreement signed by Israel and the Bush administration of the U.S. helped Israel declare a ceasefire. Under the agreement, the U.S. will provide technical assistance to destroy tunnels used to smuggle new weapons to Hamas from the Egyptian Sinai. Monitoring forces also will be deployed.

Stabilization of the Gaza situation is unlikely unless the blockade against it is loosened to the degree Hamas desires. But as long as Hamas sticks to its position that it does not recognize the existence of Israel, this will not happen. Hamas should rethink its basic stance toward Israel. New U.S. President Barack Obama can help bring peace between Israelis and Palestinians, first, by listening closely to each side's assertions.

U.S. chance to make fresh start in the Muslim world

Maleeha Lodhi
Cambridge Mass.
SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

President Barack Obama was the world's favored candidate in what was America's first global election. The key question is how the Obama administration will tap this rare good will to re-establish U.S. credibility and repair its reputation. How Obama manages issues in the Muslim world will determine the success or failure of his foreign policy because it is here that the greatest challenges lie, especially in dealing with the two U.S. war fronts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Relations between the United States and the Muslim world have long been deteriorating. People in the Islamic world ascribe this to U.S. policy over the years. Perceptions have been shaped by decades of an uneven approach that placed the security of Israel and the need for cheap oil above and beyond the concerns of others and justice for the Palestinians.

The challenges the new U.S. administration faces are daunting. But it can begin by changing the tone in which it engages with the Muslim world to establish a relationship based on respect. It should signal that it cares about what others think and say. This can convey paradigm shifts in approach, even if it takes time for policy changes to be effected.

The U.S. should also consider discarding that unfortunate phrase "war on terror," which has had so many unintended consequences in the Muslim world, where such rhetoric has led to the widespread impression that this is a war on Islam. The declaration of a global war on terror has mischaracterized the challenge and misdirected the response. It has shaped a strategy primarily military in its character whereas counter terrorism requires a combination of hard and soft power.

Turning to policy, the most important first step is to transform the psychological climate in the Middle East, which has been further vitiated by the brutal war in Gaza. This can be done by an early effort to address the issue of Palestine, which galvanizes Muslims everywhere and symbolizes their sense of historical grievance and injustice. The key question is whether Obama will be prepared to press Israel toward an accommodation that provides justice to the Palestinian people.

Obama has promised a realignment of strategic priorities, winding down from Iraq and switching focus to Afghanistan. This aims to correct the blunder of the Bush administration that diverted its

attention from Afghanistan to give strategic priority to an unnecessary war in Iraq, and reinforced the perception that Muslim nations were being targeted by Washington's aggressive unilateralism.

Having promised to give top priority to Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Obama administration's most urgent foreign policy challenge will be to fundamentally overhaul strategy in Afghanistan, where the situation is widely judged to be in a "downward spiral."

Obama has promised a troop surge in Afghanistan. But without a radical change in strategy, this will not reverse the collapse of security. Moscow, after all, deployed over 115,000 troops at the height of its occupation of Afghanistan and could not avert defeat.

Washington should cease unilateral strikes into Pakistan's tribal areas. Its aggressive approach has inflamed public opinion, undercut Islamabad's own counterinsurgency efforts, and risked destabilizing an already fragile country.

Washington and its allies have tried to do several things in an inchoate way with no prioritization of objectives. This has resulted in the fusion between Pashtun nationalism and Muslim radicalism that has fueled the growing insurgency and risks turning this into a "Pashtun war of liberation." Over-reliance on military force has led to high civilian casualties and has become a potent factor behind support for the Taliban.

A new strategy must start with redefining U.S. goals to distinguish between what is vital (disruption of terrorist networks) and what is best left for Afghans to undertake (building democracy, transforming society). Such an approach must seek to decouple al-Qaida and the Taliban, by engaging the Taliban in a reconciliation process and by holding out the offer for an eventual withdrawal of foreign forces in return for a cessation of attacks and support for the creation of a viable Afghan Army.

Such a plan must have regional backing and that includes Iran and Russia.

With Pakistan, the most significant first step should be to address the trust deficit that now characterizes relations with the

U.S. Reversing this should be among Obama's pressing priorities, because on that will depend the quality of cooperation between Washington and Islamabad.

Washington should cease unilateral strikes into Pakistan's tribal areas. Its aggressive approach has inflamed public opinion, undercut Islamabad's own counterinsurgency efforts, and risked destabilizing an already fragile country. Instead, Washington should help strengthen Pakistan's capacity to contain militants.

The Obama administration should also break decisively with the Bush legacy of treating Pakistan as hired help rather than as a valued ally. Pakistan has paid a heavy price — both human and in terms of its socioeconomic stability — for being a frontline ally of the U.S. Thousands of people, including 3,000 law enforcement personnel, have been killed in terrorist violence since 2001. The economic cost is estimated to be around \$34 billion.

The U.S. should make a preferential trade deal for Pakistani textiles — the lifeblood of its economy — the centerpiece of economic assistance. It should consider waiving tariffs altogether for a specified period. Trade creates jobs and durable income which are much more effective antiterrorism tools than bombs and bullets.

Obama has already acknowledged the need to resolve the long running Kashmir dispute to enable the Pakistan Army to switch focus from a conventional threat from India to counter-insurgency. To help bring this about, Washington should launch a diplomatic initiative aimed at reaching an accommodation between Pakistan and India. This is all the more urgent in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai.

The main policy changes the U.S. needs to signal for a fresh start with the Muslim world are: a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; a broad accommodation with Iran to give Tehran a stake in regional stability; ending the U.S. occupation in Iraq by an orderly withdrawal; a new, more realistic strategy in Afghanistan that separates al-Qaida from the Taliban and focuses on building an effective Afghan Army and security apparatus to enable foreign forces to eventually pull out from Afghanistan; and help to promote stability in Pakistan.

Maleeha Lodhi served as Pakistani's ambassador to the U.S. (1993-96, 1999-2002) and Britain (2003-2008) served as editor of The News, Pakistan's leading English newspaper. A longer version of this article appeared in the Harvard International Review.

Can Hamas leaders win the peace?

Mohammad Yaghi
Washington

For generations to come, the Palestinians will remember the horrific war in Gaza with pain and bitterness. But what cannot yet be seen is how Palestinians will view Hamas. Whether Hamas can claim a victory — and whether Palestinians will believe them — will be determined by the type of ceasefire that is eventually agreed, if a formal one is eventually agreed. The endgame — for both Israel and Hamas — is thus crucially important.

For the moment, Hamas is perceived by the majority of Palestinians as the victim of a war intended to gain its surrender. After all, Hamas was democratically elected, but was forbidden from ruling and besieged in Gaza. At the same time, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is accused of siding with Israel in order to restore his lost authority in Gaza.

The war exposed flaws in Hamas' judgment. Hamas apparently did not envision a full-scale confrontation with Israel when it refused to renew a six-month truce. With Gaza suffering under a lengthy siege, Hamas leader Khalid Mashal said that there was no point in a new truce, since the old one had "failed to lift the siege on Gaza." Other leaders were quoted as saying that Hamas would "lift the siege by force."

If Hamas is to survive the war, it must demonstrate that its resistance resulted in a permanent opening of Gaza's border crossings, especially in Rafah. For Palestinians, these are signs of victory. With open borders, Hamas would secure its regime in Gaza and build its popularity in the West Bank, putting enormous pressure on Abbas, the leader of the rival

Fatah movement, to accept a national unity government on terms set by Hamas.

Members of Fatah's Central Committee are already accusing Abbas of supporting Israel in the fighting, of wanting to "return to Gaza on an Israeli tank." Radical groups within Fatah are leaning toward an open alliance with Hamas.

If Hamas comes out ahead, Abbas' allies in other Palestinian factions will press him to accept Hamas and Islamic Jihad within the PLO. Egypt will have to backtrack on its rejection of Hamas in order to recover its image among the Arabs and to reduce tensions within Egyptian society. Pressure to integrate Hamas into Palestinian politics is also likely in some European capitals, particularly Paris and London, where some expressed opposition to isolating Hamas even before the war.

But if Israel forces Hamas to accept its conditions for border controls and a formal ceasefire, Hamas' image as the guardian of Palestinian resistance will be severely damaged. Palestinians will ask if it was really necessary to fight this war and pay such a high price. Abbas will be able to argue that he advised Hamas to renew the truce and to end its missile fire on Israeli towns, but that Hamas insisted on exposing Palestinian civilians to devastation.

One indicator to watch for: the length of that ceasefire. Palestinians will recognize Hamas' acceptance of a multiyear truce with Israel as a sign of defeat, which would also underscore Palestinian feelings of humiliation and abandonment. Hezbollah, despite its rhetoric, has taken no steps to support Hamas, and the Arab states seemed more than willing to support its defeat.

It is in rebuilding Gaza that the stakes of the competition will increase. Abbas, supported by the United States and the

European Union, may have control over significant funding. The test for him will be to deliver quickly. Hamas will also have resources for reconstruction. Qatar, a Hamas supporter, has already announced an investment fund for Gaza and contributed \$250 million.

Hamas will have to make a convincing case that Gaza's near destruction is a price that had to be paid. Many Palestinians believe that Israel attacked Gaza to drive a wedge between the people and the "resistance." There is a precedent for this argument: Hezbollah described the destruction of Beirut's southern suburbs in these terms at the end of the Lebanon war in July 2006. More importantly, Hamas can demonstrate that its leaders have been on the front lines during this war, sharing Palestinian suffering; many have been killed, along with their families.

The biggest question is whether the war will alter Hamas' political goals. Two weeks ago, Musa Abu Marzouk, a senior Hamas official, praised Jimmy Carter in the Los Angeles Times as the only American president who had brought true peace in the Middle East.

This is a radical departure from Hamas rhetoric, which has always portrayed the Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt as a betrayal of the Islamic world. It remains to be seen whether Abu Marzouk's view is merely a tactic intended to encourage the Obama administration to reach out to Hamas, or whether the war convinced Hamas that the two-state solution is the only viable option to settle the conflict with Israel.

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Who's in charge in the U.S.?



WILLIAM
PFAFF

Paris

The sea change often comes at night, its signals to the sailor subtle ones, but sometimes large and sudden. It was a pre-inaugural period of extravagant speculation by Barack Obama supporters, with an unprecedented investment of hope — and also of anxiety, as if, after this, there might not be another chance. More than one Obama supporter warned himself, or secretly assumed, in the aftermath of the celebration of Obama's victory, "now prepare to be disappointed."

The man has luck, but it has been earned luck, the best kind. For that reason, the most heartening news item I saw during the entire pre-inaugural period was published in the International Herald Tribune on Jan. 14, six days before the presidential inauguration. It reported that the president-elect "has signaled to top military commanders that he is not satisfied with their timetable for a reduction of American troops in Iraq and has asked for options to accelerate the withdrawal."

Obama campaigned on a promise to have all American combat troops out of Iraq by May 2010, 16 months after he takes office. Last month, a Pentagon delegation discussed the matter with the president-elect, and afterward its members said they had told him that his schedule was not realistic. The Iraq government had to be protected, American troops were needed for security, the future was uncertain...

This was not the first instance of military defiance. Under President George W. Bush, there were calculated leaks from the military to the press that the deadlines for

departure agreed by the Bush administration in its negotiation of an Iraq status-of-forces agreement were unsatisfactory.

That document required all U.S. combat troops out of Iraq's cities by May of this year, and the rest of American troops gone by the end of 2011.

After it was signed, there were off-the-record comments to the press that "combat troops" is an elastic category; removing equipment would take much longer than provided; and after all, this deal was with a fragile Iraq government facing elections, and agreements can be renegotiated.

The status-of-forces agreement was presented off the record as something to keep Iraqi politicians happy and give Bush the exit he wanted, but in fact the United States would remain in control of Iraq, as it had meant to do from the beginning.

Shortly afterward, the biggest American embassy ever built, or even ever imagined, was opened with pomp and ceremony in the (fortified) Green Zone.

When Pentagon officials met Obama last month, there also were winks and nods to the press. Obama was a naive and inexperienced politician from Flyover Land. He could and would be "handled."

Now Obama has handled them. He has said, no doubt very politely, that he is the president, and the military services are constitutionally required to carry out his policy, not their own. This naturally has produced journalistic murmuring of "clashes" between Pentagon and White House. If there should be clashes, the Pentagon will lose. The military have become accustomed to getting whatever it wants from presidents and Congress. That must end, and it is essential that the new president and his military advisers make this clear, however politely.

I began with a comment on luck. That referred to the plunge into the political abyss of the Israeli rightist forces accustomed to claim that they "own" the U.S. Congress. Israel's useless, senseless

and self-destructive assault on the people of Gaza, and upon the U.N.'s headquarters and warehouses of food and medicine, has proven globally devastating to the reputation and moral credit of Israel. Even in the U.S., there has been a precipitous drop in support for what Israel has been doing, and for Israeli policy in general.

In international political circles, there is disbelief that Israel could imagine that this attack on Hamas, with its civilian casualties and physical destruction of Gaza, would "strengthen" the position of the Palestine Authority and of Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah Party. It is a death blow to them. Israel behaves as if it has completely lost touch with reality.

Thus Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's arrogant utterance that he personally caused the U.S. to reverse its position on the U.N. Security Council resolution on Jan. 9 demanding a Gaza ceasefire. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had helped organize support for that resolution and had committed the U.S. to vote in its favor.

Olmert told an Israeli audience that, Jan. 9, upon hearing of Rice's position, he immediately telephoned Bush. Told that Bush was delivering an address in Philadelphia, Olmert replied, "I'm not interested," demanding to speak to Bush. Bush then left his Philadelphia podium, and according to Olmert, the Israeli prime minister instructed the American president that "the U.S. cannot possibly vote in favor of this resolution." Bush then telephoned Rice and ordered her to abstain from the vote.

That's Olmert's story, or Israeli megalomania, presented to the Israelis with pride, but unlikely to be received by Americans with pleasure.

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China plays maritime chess



BRAHMA
CHELLANEY

New Delhi

The start of Chinese patrols in the pirate-infested Gulf of Aden is intended to extend China's naval role and presence far from its shores while demonstrating, under United Nations rules of engagement, a capability to conduct complex operations in distant waters.

Today, taking on pirates under the placard of internationalism offers China a welcome opportunity to add force to its global power ambitions. The antipiracy plank earlier made it handy for Beijing to agree to joint patrols with Pakistan in the Arabian Sea and extend cooperation to ASEAN. Another Chinese objective is to chip away at India's maritime dominance in the Indian Ocean — a theater critical to fashioning a Sino-centric Asia. If China can assert naval power in the Indian Ocean to expand its influence over the regional waterways and states, it will emerge as the preeminent Asian power.

The geopolitical importance of the Indian Ocean today is beginning to rival that of the Pacific. Much of the global oil-export supply passes through the Indian Ocean rim region, particularly through two constricted passageways — the Strait of Hormuz between Iran and Oman, and the piracy-plagued Strait of Malacca.

In addition, the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the nuclear standoff with Iran undergird the critical importance of the Indian Ocean region. Asserting naval presence in the Indian Ocean and expanding maritime power in the Pacific are part of the high-stakes game of maritime chess China is now ready to play. Its buildup of naval forces directly challenges Japan and India and impinges on U.S. interests.

China, undergirding its larger geostrategic motives, says it is "seriously considering" adding to its navy fleet a first aircraft carrier — a symbol of "a

nation's comprehensive power," as a military spokesperson put it.

Now, with Chinese President Hu Jintao publicly calling for rapid naval modernization and the last defense White Paper disclosing that "the Navy aims to gradually extend its strategic depth," naval expansion and greater missile prowess are clearly at the core of China's force modernization. Since 2000 alone, China has built at least 60 warships. Its navy now has a fleet of 860 vessels, including at least 60 submarines.

There is a clear strategic shift under way in China on force planning. Historically a major land power, China is now putting the accent on building long-range maritime power to help underpin geopolitical interests, including winning new allies and safeguarding its energy and economic investments in distant lands. China has been in the lead in avariciously acquiring energy and mineral assets in Sudan, Nigeria, Iran, Venezuela, Burma, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and other states that have a record of showing scant respect for international contracts. Through naval power-projection force capability, Beijing intends to dissuade such states from reasserting control over Chinese-held assets.

More significantly, rising naval power arms China with the heft to pursue mercantilist efforts to lock up long-term energy supplies, assert control over transport routes, and assemble a "string of pearls" in the form of listening posts and special naval-access arrangements along the great trade arteries.

Just as China's land-combat strategy has evolved from "deep defense" (luring enemy forces into Chinese territory to help garrote them) to "active defense" (a proactive posture designed to fight the enemy on enemy territory, including through the use of forces stationed in neighboring lands or seas), a shift in its sea-warfare posture has emerged, with the emphasis on greater reach and depth and expeditionary capability.

And just as Beijing has used its energy investments in Central Asia as justification to set up at least two offensively configured, armor-heavy mechanized corps — with Xinjiang as

their springboard — to fight deep inside adversarial territory and secure strategic assets, China's growing oil imports from the Persian Gulf and Africa have come handy to rationalize its growing emphasis on the seas.

Chinese naval power is set to grow exponentially. This will become evident as Beijing accelerates its construction of warships and begins to deploy naval assets far from its exclusive economic zone. In fact, Chinese warships inducted in recent years have already been geared for blue-sea fleet operations. China is on track to deploy a fleet of nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines (known as SSBNs). It has already developed its new Jin-class (Type 094) SSBN prototype, with satellite pictures showing one such submarine berthed at the huge new Chinese naval base at Sanya, on the southern coast of Hainan Island. Within the next 25 years, China could have more nuclear assets at sea than Russia.

Against that background, it is no surprise that the Chinese Navy is extending its operations to a crucial international passageway — the Indian Ocean. China indeed has aggressively moved in recent years to build ports in the Indian Ocean rim, including in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Burma. Besides eyeing Pakistan's Chinese-built port of Gwadar as a naval anchor, Beijing has sought naval links with the Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius and Madagascar.

India, with its enormous strategic depth in the Indian Ocean, is in a position to pursue a sea-denial strategy, if it were to adopt a more forward-thinking naval policy designed to forestall the emergence of a Beijing-oriented Asia. It has to start exerting naval power at critical chokepoints, in concert with the Japanese, U.S. and other friendly navies. In essence, that entails guarding the various "gates" to the Indian Ocean. More broadly, Japanese-Indian naval cooperation and collaboration have become inescapable.

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President Barack Hussein Obama

There was no shortage of powerful imagery on Barack Obama's Inauguration Day, starting with the confident man who defied all political conventions — that he was too young, too inexperienced, too black or not black enough — to stand on the steps of the Capitol and take the oath of office in a city and a country that are still racially divided in many shameful ways.

And there was the crowd that for a day, and we hope much longer, defied those divisions. By the hundreds of thousands they came from every part of a nation that has rarely been in such peril and yet is so optimistic about its new leader.

In his Inaugural Address, President Obama gave them the clarity and the respect for which all Americans have hungered. In about 20 minutes, he swept away eight years of President George W. Bush's false choices and failed policies and promised to recommit to America's most cherished ideals.

With Bush looking on (and we'd like to think feeling some remorse), Obama declared: "On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics."

The speech was not programmatic, nor was it filled with as much soaring language as FDR's first Inaugural Address or JFK's only one.

But it left no doubt how Obama sees the nation's problems and how he intends to fix them and, unlike Bush, the necessary sacrifices he will ask of all Americans.

The American story "has not been the path for the faint-hearted, for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame," he said.

After more than seven years of Bush's using fear and xenophobia to justify a disastrous and unnecessary war, and undermine the most fundamental American rights, it was exhilarating to hear Obama reject "as false the choice between our safety and our ideals."

Instead of Bush's unilateralism, Obama said the United States is "ready to lead once more," by making itself a "friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity."

He said "our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please." Obama told the Muslim world that he wants "a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect."

Obama was steely toward those "who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents." He warned them that "our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you."

But where Bush painted this as an epochal, almost biblical battle between America and those who hate us and "who hate freedom," Obama also offered to "extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist."

As the day continued with a parade and parties and balls, the image that stayed with us was the way the 44th president managed to embrace the symbolism and rise above it. It filled us with hope that with Obama's help, this battered nation will be able to draw together and mend itself.

**'America
is ready to lead
once more.'**

Roger Cohen

The age of responsibility

WASHINGTON President Barack Obama made a responsible speech for "a new era of responsibility" that is set to include a "responsible" withdrawal from Iraq. Standing at the West Front of the Capitol, he was not at his most uplifting, nor his most inspiring, as he called in sober tones for a new "spirit of service" that will renew America and, through it, the world.

I sat 30 feet away and felt stirred but not transported. Perhaps that was the point. There's too much work to do for high rhetorical flourish.

The day was bright but freezing. The trombones of the Marine Band glinted in the unforgiving light. The sun proceeded in its slow arc to noon, yet it seemed to grow colder, as if nature itself were stilled.

Globalist

A shivering crowd of more than one million stretched back across the National Mall toward the Lincoln Memorial. But the Great Liberator, freer of slaves in a terrible war, was passed over in silence. So, too, was the throng.

The symbols, like the national catharsis, could speak for themselves, just as the 21-gun salute to an African-American president contained its own eloquence. This was a spare inaugural speech, devoid of allusion to setting, almost disembodied.

Still, there were powerful phrases and signals that together amounted to an attempt to re-imagine a nation in crisis.

The word "peace" appeared four times, as in "America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace." His predecessor did not like the word "peace," which somehow smacked to him of weakness. He rarely used it.

But engaged in two wars, its Treasury bare, the United States has a pressing strategic interest in furthering peace where it can. Hence Obama's little phrase to the Muslim world that should echo in Tehran: "We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist."

The United States was defined anew as "a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus — and

non-believers." A kind of Christian assumption has inhabited American politics these past eight years — from the ex-president's born-again hotline to God, through his unfortunate talk of a "crusade," to his fundamentalist positions on issues like stem-cell research. Obama's allusion to atheists returned religion to its proper station, as a personal choice rather than political credo.

As for speaking of Muslims before America's more numerous Jews, this seemed an appropriate political gesture after the many sleights since 9/11 toward America's Muslim community.

Another little phrase — "We will restore science to its rightful place" — also appeared aimed at halting the religious invasion of public life and circumscribing the anti-Darwinian lunacy of the extreme Christian right.

As the Dow plunged another 400 points, or more than 4 percent, Obama spoke in far more guarded terms about the free market than is typical from an American leader. "Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill," he said, calling for a "watchful eye" over the marketplace.

This is an admission of facts: Massive state intervention has occurred and an \$825 billion stimulus package of tax cuts and public-works projects is coming. But it was also a signal that a far less ideological United States will emerge under Obama, one that will speak less of a global mission to spread liberty, democracy and free markets. Call it the new American humility.

Obama vowed to defeat those who "seek to advance their aims by inducing terror." Note how terror has shifted here from an amorphous jihadist ideology — "the war on terror" — to an emotion (what you feel when a suicide bomber detonates himself.) We are not going to hear the phrase "global war on terror," or its awful GWOT acronym, too often, if at all, from the Obama administration.

There is no point flattering America's adversaries by inflating their vile methods into an ideology and then

declaring an unwinnable war against it.

America is returning to its Constitution: "We reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals." With that little sentence, Obama bid farewell to renditions, torture, the trampling of Habeas Corpus, Guantánamo and other stains on the nation's conscience. This work will not be complete until Guantánamo is closed and those wrongly imprisoned, often for more than five years, are compensated.

The personal convictions of a constitutional lawyer are allied to strategy here: American ideals remain among the most powerful tools in its diplomatic arsenal. As Obama said, "Our power alone cannot protect us; nor does it entitle us to do as we please." Rather, "Our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint."

Responsibility, restraint, humility, peace: This is not the habitual vocabulary of America's heroic narrative. It constitutes a new lexicon of American power. Are Americans ready to die for responsibility?

Perhaps not, but they may well seek dialogue in its name. "The world has changed — and we must change with it," Obama said. Even change has changed now: No longer a clarion call, it is a responsibility.

Readers are invited to comment at my blog: www.ihb.com/passages

Hamas and the Taliban ■ Olivier Roy

Islamists you can talk to

From Gaza to Kandahar, the new Obama administration is confronted with two kinds of Islamist movements: the ones with a global agenda (Al Qaeda and its local subsidiaries) and the others with a territorial and national agenda (Taliban, Hamas, most of its Iraqi opponents).

There is nothing to negotiate with the global jihadists, but the Islamo-nationalist movements simply cannot be ignored or suppressed.

Hamas is nothing else than the traditional Palestinian nationalism with an Islamic garb. The Taliban express more a Pashtu identity than a global movement. The Iraqi factions are competing not over Iran or Saudi Arabia, but over sharing (or monopolizing) the power in Iraq.

The "war on terror" during the Bush years has blurred this essential distinction by merging all the armed opponents to U.S.-supported governments under the label of terrorism. The concept of a "war on terror" has thwarted any political approach to the conflicts in favor of an elusive military victory.

Where a political approach has been tried, it has worked. The relative success of the surge in Iraq is based on the implicit rejection of the official doctrine of the "war on terror": Local armed insurgents were recognized as political actors with more or less a legitimate agenda, thus separating them from the foreign-based global militants who did not give a damn about Iraqi national interests.

Could the same approach be applied to the Taliban and Hamas? The appointment of General David Petraeus as chief of the U.S. Central Command suggests that this is the idea for Afghanistan.

As far as Hamas is concerned, the issue rests with the leaders of Israel, not those in Washington. (Forget about U.S. pressure on Israel. Such pressure could force a temporary agreement but not a long-term solution.)

Nevertheless, for both Afghanistan and Palestine, the issue is the same: If the nationalist dimension supersedes the global jihad — which I think it does — how can a solution be found based on recognizing the legitimacy of nationalist aspirations?

For Palestine, the Oslo agreement defined the framework that still guides the common policy of the West: the two-state solution.

A positive side effect of such a solution, which makes it even more desirable for Washington, is that it could open the space for a new strategic alignment against Iran. For all the Arab states, except Syria, the greatest threat today comes from Iran, not Israel.

The problem is the political reality on the ground. No Arab state can impose such an open strategic shift on its public as long as there is no agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. In short, the two-state solution is dead on the ground even if it remains on the diplomatic agenda.

Beyond this reality, the expanded settlements and the security requirements of Israel imply that a Palestinian state will never be viable.

By making security a prerequisite for any political move, Israel plays against its potential allies, Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah (who are deprived of the wherewithal to deliver), and in favor of the radicals, who consider negotiations useless.

Adding even further to the conundrum, Israel and the West have tried to impose on the Palestinians both elections and the outcome of the elections.

In the view of the West, the Palestinian people should not have chosen Hamas by democratic means, but rather the Palestinian Authority — even though the PA has been systematically deprived of concrete means of governing. The option of negotiating with Hamas has never been really taken into consideration.

It is time to consider that option.

Whatever the justification of the Gaza military operations (to punish the inhabitants for supporting Hamas or to free them from the control of Hamas), it will not work. Dismantling Hamas' military capacity can only buy time, not solve the issue.

Under the logic of the current military scenario, either the PA must be reinstated in Gaza — only to face political and military guerrilla warfare with Hamas — or the Israeli Defense Forces must maintain control, perhaps with the involvement of foreign troops. In either case, the military "solution" will prevent the emergence of a Palestinian state.

Palestine is thus doomed, in the best case, to be either under a permanent Israeli occupation or under

some sort of an international mandate.

The suggestion that Gaza could be handed over to Egypt and what remains of the West Bank to Jordan will just contribute to extending the conflict. Such an eventuality would nullify the only positive result of the Oslo negotiations, which was to transform an Israeli-Arab conflict into an Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The issue is also complex for the Taliban. The Taliban do not embody "Afghan" nationalism but Pashtu identity. There are almost no Taliban in the center and the north of Afghanistan.

During the last 40 years, Pashtu identity has been expressed through non-nationalist ideological movements (the Khalq faction of the Afghan communist party, the numerous mujahideen movements and now the Taliban).

Thus, if the Obama administration truly seeks to change the equation in the Middle East and Afghanistan, it must recognize the real motives and aspirations, not imagined ones, that actually drive groups like Hamas and the Taliban.

Such a recognition would lead the United States to talk to the Taliban in Afghanistan and look

for a political instead of military solution that responds to legitimate Pashtu aspirations.

It would lead the United States to refrain from endorsing the Israeli delusion that it can eliminate Hamas by force while frustrating Palestinian statehood.

Closing Guantánamo, as Obama has promised to do as soon as he takes office, is a powerful symbolic act that signals the United States has changed course.

But a new departure that leaves behind the wrong-headed mind-set that casts Hamas and the Taliban with the wholly different phenomenon of Al Qaeda in the "war on terror" would do far more to enhance security for the United States and peace and stability in the region stretching from Gaza to Kandahar.

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U.S.-China relations may test Obama

While ties between the countries appear to be the most stable in years, several thorny issues are expected to arise

By IAN JOHNSON

BEIJING—As the Obama administration wrestles with trouble spots around the world, it is likely to see China as an oasis of calm. That could be deceptive.

Although ties with China have arguably never been more stable in the 30 years since the two countries resumed diplomatic ties, a host of economic and political issues are likely to surface in the coming months. In China, a deteriorating economic situation could increase pressure to further widen the record trade surplus with the U.S.; while in Washington, the trade deficit, as well as lingering concerns about food and product safety, could spur calls for action against China.

"The evidence is overwhelming that there will be a problem," says Derek Scissors of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank in Washington. "I would be shocked if Congress didn't take action targeting China by the summer."

That isn't to say that the two countries face a full-blown crisis. Under former President George W. Bush, U.S.-China relations were relatively smooth compared with Washington's troubles in the Middle East and Europe. Even so, Mr. Bush's ad-

ministration did create friction with Beijing by ratcheting up trade enforcement actions, under U.S. law and at the World Trade Organization in Geneva. During the recent presidential battle, China wasn't a major campaign issue—a sharp change, for example, from 1992, when candidate Bill Clinton accused President

George H.W. Bush of "coddling" Beijing's leaders.

"In the big picture not too much separates us," says Shen Dingli, a professor of international relations at Fudan University in Shanghai. "But there are many little issues that could become serious if they are not managed properly."

The main problem is economic. Over the past few months, China's trade surplus with the U.S. has continued to grow, spurred in part by new measures in China to boost exports. In addition, the Chinese currency is no longer appreciating against the dollar—something seen in Washington as a measure that could reduce the surplus—and talk in Beijing, if anything, is for a devaluation of its currency.

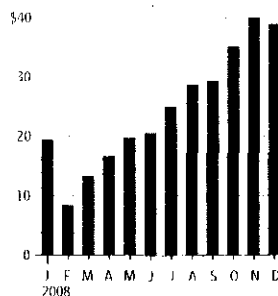
Trade skeptics remain powerful in the U.S. Congress. Critics of China are threatening to push legislation that would toughen enforcement of trade rules, amid concerns that American companies are at a disadvantage in the global marketplace.



Hu Jintao

Future friction

China's trade surplus, in billions



Source: Thomson Reuters

There's also wide concern about the safety of consumer products made outside the U.S., especially in China.

How that translates into U.S.-China relations isn't yet clear. But Mr. Obama ran for office in 2008 as a trade skeptic, and his administration is expected to be less supportive of unfettered free trade than the Clinton and Bush administrations.

Chinese media have begun warning about this risk, with the *Securities Times* Tuesday saying that China must "stay on the alert" against protectionism.

Overall, public discussion in China about the new administration has been upbeat. Chinese media

have said President Obama will follow a pragmatic policy toward China and few expect major confrontations. On Wednesday, the government-run *China Daily* said stronger ties with China were the most "precious legacy" of the Bush years and warned the new president not to discard it by following a "whatever-not-Bush" policy.

China's military had already expressed this sentiment Tuesday, with officials saying in a news conference that they hope to restore ties with the U.S. military—severed since U.S. arms sales to longtime rival Taiwan.

"In this new period we hope that both China and the U.S. could make joint efforts to create favorable conditions and improve and promote military-to-military relations," ministry of defense spokesman Col. Hu Changming told reporters. But, in an apparent reference to the arms sales, he added, "We call on the U.S. to remove the obstacles to the growth of military relations between the two countries."

Although Taiwan is likely to remain a sticky area, Washington and Beijing could become partners in solving other global problems, says Scott Kennedy, a professor at Indiana University. Unlike the Bush administration, the new team in Washington is

likely to be less skeptical of global initiatives, such as combating global warming. In doing so, it is likely to call on China to take a more active role.

Obama aides say the new White House will likely continue the Bush administration's "strategic dialogue" with China, which focuses on economic and security issues. They say Mr. Obama's team will press China on promoting human rights and democratic freedoms.

"The Obama administration will seek to expand areas of cooperation with China, while also managing our differences and strengthening our ability to compete in the 21st century," Hillary Clinton, Mr. Obama's secretary of state designate, said in written testimony to Congress last week.

Senior Bush officials say one piece of unfinished business is developing regular contacts with the People's Liberation Army to discuss North Korea and China's military doctrine. They say U.S. overtures have been largely rebuffed.

"On military-to-military cooperation, we haven't found the formula" for success, said Dennis Wilder, the Bush White House's senior director for Asian affairs. "We're not there yet."

—Shai Oster in Beijing and Greg Hitt and Jay Solomon in Washington contributed to this article.



Barack Obama

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 2009

A New Government for Burma

By Sein Win

DUBLIN—The Burmese junta's disgraceful nonresponse to Cyclone Nargis last year called international attention to the direct human consequences of repressive rule in the Southeast Asian country. Since then, Burma's economic plight has only worsened. It is time for the political opposition abroad to present a broader, more coherent alternative for the Burmese people.

To this end, the legitimately elected representatives of the people of Burma—the Members of Parliament from the 1990 elections—are meeting in Dublin over the next few days to elect a new government-in-exile. The convention delegates are motivated by a sense that change in the culture of Burma's exiled opposition is needed. All are aware that the plight of Burma's people can no longer be tolerated; the status quo cannot be continued.

This move is a huge step forward for the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural Burmese people, who have never enjoyed a government that gave all groups an equal voice. A new government-in-exile should also provide comfort to Burma's neighbors, who worry about civil unrest when the junta falls.

We sketched out our core beliefs in this month's edition of the Far Eastern Economic Review, a sister publication of this newspaper. In Dublin, we call for an inclusive process that will lead to an interim constitution, taking into account

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the interests of all stakeholders in Burma. We also call for the release of all political prisoners; for the lifting of restrictions on liberties such as free speech and free association; and for an agreement on a realistic timetable for free and fair elections in Burma.

We have a vision of a nation-building process for Burma that will create a federal union with an appropriate relationship between the central government and the states and regions, ensuring, for example, the equitable distribution of revenue from natural resources. We support free trade.

We will also be good regional and global citizens. Our Asian partners need to become involved in solving Burma's myriad problems by urgently and effectively pushing for increased dialogue and national reconciliation. We look to the United Nations to forge a path by which such a dialogue can take place.

We call on the U.N. Secretary-General to conduct a goals-oriented tour of Burma as soon as the Burmese generals are prepared to compromise. We suggest enacting a regional strategy to democratize Burma perhaps through the Association of South East Asian Nations, overseen by the United Nations.

Burma desperately needs a liberal, open regime. Even before the global economic crisis landed, the Burmese economy was being run into the ground by the current regime's mismanagement and corruption.

Now, the global financial crisis is making a bad situation even worse. Natural gas revenues—which account for around 40% of Burma's total export income—fell

28.5% in the first nine months of 2008, compared to the same period last year. Tourism has slowed to a trickle. Unemployment is spiking.

This isn't just a problem for our country, but for our neighbors, too. Burma is Asia's second largest opium producer—behind Afghanistan—and a major exporter of

synthetic drugs such as amphetamines. Our refugees—who are fleeing in droves—are carrying HIV, drug-resistant tuberculosis and malaria abroad. Today, over 3.5 million Burmese are displaced with some 10% of the population currently living overseas, one of the highest proportions in the world.

Our country needs major economic and social reforms that only a government with popular support can deliver. Yet the national elections scheduled for 2010 will be a parody of democracy. The tricks and thuggery of the military were instrumental in the passage of the 2008 constitution that legitimizes military rule in Burma. The same constitution, which mandates that 75% of the parliament will be civilian—with the remainder reserved for the military—will also ensure a rigged outcome of the elections in 2010.

The nominally civilian Union Solidarity and Development Association and the Swan-ah-Shin—pseudo-independent political groups backed by the government—are already working behind the scenes to fill the civilian seats with military lackeys. The resulting government will have little inclination to address the political or economic concerns of the Burmese people.

The Burmese government-in-exile has already initiated steps to enable clusters

of Burmese, as well as foreign experts in political, economic, and other fields, to work on a blueprint for a transition to democracy in Burma. This presents better, clearer, options for the Burmese people. The interests of the military are included in this blueprint as well. We do not want the military to be what stands in the way of Burma's progress.

We look forward to working together in an inclusive new government to show that Burma can have a better future for its people. And when we return home, we'll show the international community what Burma should be: engaged abroad, prosperous and free.

Sein Win is prime minister of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, based in Washington D.C., and a delegate to the Dublin convention.

Exiled
democrats
are planning
a better future.

The ruins of Gaza

Obama's chance may be the last for a two-states solution

Much of Gaza lies in ruins. Hamas vaingloriously claims victory. Two fragile and unilateral ceasefires are in place. They do not amount to a truce. But they do offer a brief window for reflection – just as Barack Obama takes office in Washington.

Israel's refusal to treat with Hamas is understandable, if futile. The destructive fury of its assault on Gaza was not only intended to get over the relative failure of its 2006 war on Hizbollah in Lebanon. Israel was also determined not to repeat the outcome to its 1996 Lebanon war, which ended with codified and internationally underwritten rules of engagement with Hizbollah.

But Israeli unilateralism is a blind alley. Its unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 has resolved nothing. The existence of organisations such as Hamas and Hizbollah – which both arose as responses to Israeli occupation – cannot simply be wished away.

These Islamist amalgams of politics and paramilitarism enjoy power and prestige well beyond their natural constituencies because of a catalogue of failure in the Middle East that has, at its heart, the failure honestly to seek a comprehensive settlement based on land-for-peace.

Israel's (and the Bush administration's) pretence that Iran is behind every leaf that stirs in the Middle East is also deliberately misleading.

Hamas would exist if Iran did not. The failure of the Oslo peace process to produce a Palestinian state on the lands occupied by Israel in 1967, the corruption of the ruling Fatah party, and Israel's physical destruction of the Palestinian Authority in 2002, finally issued in Hamas's electoral triumph in 2006.

But if Israel needs to reflect on how its militarist tactics and continuing occupation strengthen its most militant enemies, Hamas should recognise how its attacks on Israeli civilians have enabled Israel to change the subject: from the occupation to threats to its existence.

The deadly paradox is that while Hamas has nothing but failure to show for its tactics, the conciliatory strategy of President Mahmoud Abbas and Fatah has failed too, allowing Israel to expand its occupation of the West Bank and presenting the Islamists with an alibi.

The only way to end this infernal dynamic is through final status talks to create a Palestinian state on nearly all the land occupied in 1967. For that to happen, the Palestinians need a unified leadership dedicated solely to that aim, the Israelis need to want peace more than settlements, and President Obama needs to come out forcefully for probably the last chance at a resolution based on two states, living side by side in security.

'Middle East ■ Muammar Qaddafi

The one-state solution

TRIPOLI, Libya

The shocking level of the last wave of Israeli-Palestinian violence, which ended with this weekend's cease-fire, reminds us why a final resolution to the so-called Middle East crisis is so important. It is vital not just to break this cycle of destruction and injustice, but also to deny the religious extremists in the region who feed on the conflict an excuse to advance their own causes.

But everywhere one looks, among the speeches and the desperate diplomacy, there is no real way forward. A just and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians is possible, but it lies in the history of the people of this conflicted land, and not in the tired rhetoric of partition and two-state solutions.

Although it's hard to realize after the horrors we've just witnessed, the state of war between the Jews and Palestinians has not always existed. In fact, many of the divisions between Jews and Palestinians are recent ones. The very name "Palestine" was commonly used to describe the whole area, even by the Jews who lived there, until 1948, when the name "Israel" came into use.

Jews and Muslims are cousins descended from Abraham. Throughout the centuries both faced cruel persecution and often found refuge with one another. Arabs sheltered Jews and protected them after maltreatment at the hands of the Romans and their expulsion from Spain in the Middle Ages.

The history of Israel/Palestine is not remarkable by regional standards — a country inhabited by different peoples, with rule passing among many tribes, nations and ethnic groups; a country that has withstood many wars and waves of peoples from all directions. This is why it gets so complicated when members of either party claims the right to assert that it is their land.

The basis for the modern State of Israel is the persecution of the Jewish people, which is undeniable. The Jews have been held captive, massacred, disadvantaged in every possible fashion by the Egyptians, the Romans, the English, the Russians, the Babylonians, the Canaanites and, most recently, the Germans under Hitler. The Jewish people want and deserve their homeland.

But the Palestinians too have a history of persecution, and they view the coastal towns of Haifa, Acre, Jaffa and others as the land of their forefathers, passed from generation to generation, until only a short time ago.

Thus the Palestinians believe that what is now called Israel forms part of their nation, even were they to secure the West Bank and Gaza.

And the Jews believe that the West Bank is Samaria and Judea, part of their homeland, even if a Palestinian state were established there.

Now, as Gaza still smolders, calls for a two-state solution or partition persist. But neither will work.

A two-state solution will create an unacceptable security threat to Israel. An armed Arab state, presumably in the West Bank, would give Israel less than 10 miles of strategic depth at its narrowest point.

Further, a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would do little to resolve the problem of refugees. Any situation that keeps the majority of Palestinians in refugee camps and does not offer a solution within the historical borders of Israel/Palestine is not a solution at all.

For the same reasons, the older idea of partition of the West Bank into Jewish and Arab areas, with buffer zones between them, won't work. The Palestinian-held areas could not accommodate all of the refugees, and buffer zones symbolize exclusion and breed tension.

Israelis and Palestinians have also become increasingly intertwined, economically and politically.

In absolute terms, the two movements must remain in perpetual war or a compromise must be reached. The compromise is one state for all, an "Isratine" that would allow the people in each party to feel that they live in all of the disputed land and they are not deprived of any one part of it.

A key prerequisite for peace is the right of return for Palestinian refugees to the homes their families left behind in 1948. It is an injustice that Jews who were not originally inhabitants of Palestine, nor were their ancestors, can move in from abroad while Palestinians who were displaced only a relatively short time ago should not be so permitted.

It is a fact that Palestinians inhabited the land and owned farms and homes there until recently, fleeing in fear of violence at the hands of Jews after 1948 — violence that did not occur, but rumors of which led to a mass exodus. It is important to note that the Jews did not forcibly expel Palestinians. They were never "un-welcomed." Yet only the full territories of Isratine can accommodate all the refugees and bring about the justice that is key to peace.

Assimilation is already a fact of life in Israel. There are more than 1 million Muslim Arabs in Israel; they possess Israeli nationality and take part in political life with the Jews, forming political parties. On the other side, there are Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Israeli factories depend on Palestinian labor, and goods and services are exchanged. This successful assimilation can be a model for Isratine.

If the present interdependence and the historical fact of Jewish-Palestinian co-existence guide their leaders, and if they can see beyond the horizon of the recent violence and thirst for revenge toward a long-term solution, then these two peoples will come to realize, I hope sooner rather than later, that living under one roof is the only option for a lasting peace.

Muammar Qaddafi is the leader of Libya.

The subtext of Bin Laden's message

A new audio tape from Osama bin Laden was posted recently on a jihadist Web site. News reports featured him taunting America, calling for Muslims to wage holy war in defense of Gaza and pleading for donations to Al Qaeda. Overlooked was something he did not mention.

In his oratory about the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, Bin Laden never mentioned Hamas. The reason for this omission is well known to Hamas and much of the Arab world.

It reflects the lethal enmity between Al Qaeda and like-minded

Salafi extremists on the one hand, and the Palestinian Hamas movement on the other.

Salafis are purists who believe that Sunni Muslims must establish an Islamic caliphate under the severe version of Islamic law, or Sharia, that they associate with the Prophet Mohammed and his early followers.

Having these aims, they denounce Hamas for participating in elections and other democratic practices and for failing to impose a strict form of Sharia in Gaza. Al Qaeda and its Salafi fellow travelers also castigate Hamas for preventing non-Palestinian jihadists from going to Gaza to organize for holy war.

There have been shoot-outs in Gaza between Hamas security forces and a Salafi group known as Jaysh al-Islam, or Army of Islam. In one recent clash, nine Army of Islam members were killed, and the group swore revenge against

Hamas for the killings.

This deep-seated hostility between the Al Qaeda current of Islamism and the more nationalist tendency represented by Hamas suggests that Israel, the United States, and others might do well to shape policy with these distinctions in mind.

If Hamas acts as a barrier against something much worse — the undeterrable fanatics of Al Qaeda — then the political eradication of Hamas might not be a desirable goal.

In his latest message, Bin Laden did mention some figures in the Muslim world, whom he called “enemies of the Islamic Ummah,” or the worldwide Muslim community. One was the Grand Imam at Egypt’s Al-Azhar University, Sheikh Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi. He was denounced because of his association with the secular Egyptian government of President Hosni Mubarak. But the more telling denunciation was of Iraq’s Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most respected religious authority in Shia Islam.

Bin Laden’s derogation of Sistani as an enemy of Muslims reflected not merely a theological or historical rift between Sunnis and Shiites, but echoes Al Qaeda criticisms of Hamas for praising the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah and accepting money and weapons from Shiite Iran.

The enemy of one’s enemy might not be a friend, but it is usually a mistake to ignore the differences among one’s enemies.

— The Boston Globe

It's a mistake to ignore
the lethal enmity
between Bin Laden
and Hamas.

International Herald Tribune
Friday, January 23, 2009

U.S.-Japan ■ Richard J. Samuels and James L. Schoff

An alliance in need of attention

Recently declassified Japanese documents have disclosed that after Beijing's successful nuclear test in October 1964, Japan's prime minister urged the United States to use nuclear weapons against China in the event of hostilities. "If war breaks out [with China], we expect immediate nuclear retaliation from the United States," Prime Minister Eisaku Sato told Defense Secretary Robert MacNamara.

After some discussion about the logistics of a retaliatory U.S. strike, McNamara asked Sato to increase Japan's defense budget in response to regional security threats, suggesting that a 500 percent spending hike might be necessary.

At first glance, little seems to have changed. North Korea has tested a nuclear device; Japan is still seeking and receiving reassurance that the United States will defend it; the United States is still demanding greater Japanese defense spending without notable success.

But there have been changes in the security alliance. Cracks have emerged that require attention by the Obama administration and the government in Tokyo.

For example, despite Washington's reassurances, Japanese strategists openly debate their own nuclear option. Now that China has risen and the nuclear facts on North Korean ground have changed, some worry that the U.S. nuclear umbrella might be developing a few holes.

Japan is increasingly concerned about being bullied in the region by a stronger China, or blackmailed by North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, while the United States is focused on nuclear proliferation and terrorist attacks on American territory.

Much to Tokyo's chagrin, Washington has taken North Korea off the list of state sponsors of terrorism and ceded leadership in multilateral talks about North Korea to Beijing.

Meanwhile, much to Washington's dismay, the long-negotiated "road map" for transforming the unequal U.S.-Japan alliance into a more jointly operational security partnership has run into political roadblocks in Japan. With an election looming — and with the increasingly unpopular Liberal Democratic Party likely to lose power — it seems that Tokyo has allowed domestic interests to tie its diplomacy in knots.

Just when Washington is trying to coax Tokyo into playing a larger security role, Japan is shying away from international missions. It ended its Iraq ground mission in 2007 and concluded its Iraq-Kuwait air cargo shuttle last month. Tokyo has spent months deliberating while Somali pirates seize Japanese

and others' ships with valuable cargoes and more than a dozen other nations — including China — dispatch naval vessels to the Gulf of Aden to protect the sea lanes. The Japanese overseas aid program, once the largest in the world, has been cut back by 40 percent.

These days, despite talk about Tokyo stepping up to provide public goods, there seems to be no opportunity too obvious for Japan to miss in international affairs. The government has even abandoned its efforts to reinterpret the constitution to allow its military to protect U.S. forces under fire outside of Japanese territory. Should such protection not be forthcoming in an emergency, the alliance will surely collapse.

In 1965, it was relatively easy for both countries to reaffirm their alliance. Talk was cheap and, it

seemed, sufficient. After all, the Cold War threats were colossal but limited in number, and the two countries' wealth and power were growing. The United States had its unsinkable aircraft carrier and Japan had its nuclear umbrella.

Although the shared goals of preserving stability, openness and security in Northeast Asia has not changed, today there are more — and more disparate — threats to each nation. Neither the thresholds for intervention nor the scope and nature of military action are very clear. Strategic ambiguity has its virtues, but ambiguity between strategic partners is a recipe for disaster.

We have allowed alliance symbols, like the nuclear umbrella and common democratic values, to stand as a surrogate for alliance value and a clear division of responsibilities. The United States and Japan are still stronger together than apart, and the mantra of shared interests and values remains true, but we need a recalibration of how alliance burdens are shared and decisions are made, lest one or both of us lose interest.

Greater Japanese contributions to global order are needed, be it in maritime security, helping failed states, or bolstering UN peacekeeping missions. In return, Washington should cede proportionate decision-making power, be prepared for Japan to decline to be entangled in U.S. wars, and truly welcome Japan as a security partner. Under current conditions, what we actually accomplish together is far more important than what we say to each other.

Richard J. Samuels is professor of political science and director of the Center for International Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. James L. Schoff is associate director of Asia-Pacific studies at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**The U.S. and Japan
need to recalibrate
how alliance burdens
are shared.**

Gaza war may force U.S. hand on Hamas

Can militants be kept on the sidelines?

By Steven Erlanger

JERUSALEM: With the rule of Hamas in Gaza apparently unchallenged and its popularity growing in the West Bank, the new Obama administration faces an immediate policy choice: support a Palestinian unity government, as Egypt and the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, want, or continue to isolate Hamas and concentrate on building up the West Bank as a political alternative to radical Islam.

The issue is urgent because of the international effort to rebuild a bombed-out Gaza while trying to avoid letting Hamas take credit for the reconstruction, as Hezbollah did in southern Lebanon after the

News 2006 war. But the choice is more fundamental. It goes to the heart of what

Analysis President Barack Obama can accomplish in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process when the Palestinian side remains violently divided.

In a series of calls to Middle Eastern leaders on Wednesday, Obama did not tip his hand, simply calling for a role for the Palestinian Authority in Gaza's reconstruction.

But many Middle East experts are eager to hear whether the Obama administration will try to create a credible, unified Palestinian government that can negotiate and enforce a state-to-state relationship with Israel, the essence of the so-called two-state solution that has dominated peace negotiations.

"This is a moment of very tough choices, with no dominant approach with obvious advantages," said Gidi Grinstein, president of the Reut Institute, a policy research group in Tel Aviv. "Obama is being pushed to go for a Palestinian national unity government, negotiations and a comprehensive settlement. But it would be a mistake to push the two-state solution toward a moment of truth when it is in a moment of weakness, and when there is both a civil war and a deep constitutional crisis on the Palestinian side."

Egypt, Saudi Arabia and even some in Israel favor a national unity government that would enable the Palestinian Authority to be seen as at least notionally in charge of the rebuilding in Gaza. But even if the antipathies between Hamas and Fatah, which controls the West Bank, could be overcome, a deal would almost certainly entail early elections that Fatah might very well lose.

The Gaza war has been bad for Fatah, and its popularity is plunging. Hamas is feeling victorious after surviving the Israeli pounding and is unlikely to allow Fatah to restore its presence, even for an election, in an angry Gaza.

The essential issue, and not for the first time, is whether Israel and the West should engage Hamas as an indisputable fact, in the hope that Israeli military power and political reality will trump Hamas's religious conviction that Israel must be destroyed, or instead continue to confront and isolate Hamas, in the hope that Fatah can somehow be resurrected or some third force be created around Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, seen as a more capable leader.

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France is trying to get ahead of the argument, suggesting that France would deal with Hamas as part of a national unity government that rejects the use of violence. But putting such a government together will not be easy, and Hamas has said its demands will be tougher than before the war. These will include the release of all Hamas political prisoners held in the West Bank and the opening of the crossings into Gaza.

"Hamas feels it has come out unbroken and popular among Palestinians and Arabs," said Khalil Shikaki, a Palestinian analyst and pollster. "French statements also embolden it. Hamas won't accept a government led by Fayyad and would want to lead it," a prospect, he added, that Abbas "would find hard to accept." Part of the deal would be early elections in the next six months, he said.

Hamas no longer recognizes the authority of Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, whose four-year term as president should have run out on Jan. 9, but which he insists has been extended under emergency procedures. Hamas has never recognized the legitimacy of the unelected Fayyad, an independent who was appointed by Abbas.

Abbas has proposed early elections for his office and the legislature, which Hamas won in free elections in 2006. But he also wants to change the electoral rules to benefit Fatah, making the election a straight vote for parties and removing the constituency voting for individual candidates that so benefited Hamas last time.

Hamas rejects the changes and elections for legislators before their four-year terms expire a year from now. Yet if Hamas did accept early elections as part of a negotiated national government or accord, it could

win the presidency, said Zakariya al-Qaq, a political scientist at Al Quds University in Jerusalem, for Abbas is considered a spent force.

His months of negotiation with Israel and the United States have been fruitless, while he has failed to reform Fatah, which many Palestinians still consider to be collaborationist and corrupt. Many Palestinians also think he was too passive and too late in protesting the Israeli war in Gaza and the civilian deaths because he secretly wanted Hamas eradicated, Qaq said.

"Abu Mazen looked weak and had nothing to say, and Hamas comes out looking like the leader," he added. "People think the man is over. It's not a question now of the legality of Abu Mazen, but his legitimacy as a leader."

Mark Regev, the Israeli government spokesman, said Israel believed that Hamas had been damaged politically in the war. "We think it's a very low probability that Hamas will do well in a future Palestinian election," he said. Many analysts disagree.

Yossi Alpher, the Israeli co-director of www.bitterlemons.org, a Web site that promotes Israeli-Palestinian dialogue online, said that if there were a unity government, there would probably be new elections. "Given Hamas's political gains and Abu Mazen's losses, Hamas could win them, and then they'd end up running not just Gaza but the West Bank, too, at least politically," he said.

Obama is not the only new leader on the horizon. Israeli elections are scheduled for Feb. 10, and the conservative candidate, Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud, is expected to win. Netanyahu supported the war and believes that Hamas is an eternal enemy, an ally of Iran, and must be defeated.

Grinstein, of the policy research group in Tel Aviv, said that in the current confusion, it might be better for Obama not to reach for "unobtainable objectives," but instead to explore an older idea: recognition of Palestinian sovereignty while the borders are still being negotiated and Israeli unilaterally pulls out of more West Bank settlements.

Ziad Abu Amr, an independent legislator from Gaza close to both Fatah and Hamas, said he hoped that this time the international community would support a Palestinian unity government and open the crossings. Negotiation will be difficult, he says, but Hamas is a reality, and "maybe this is the time to engage Hamas and the other factions, since Hamas showed a lot of pragmatism and accepted this cease-fire."

With Obama, he said, "this idea may be revived — it requires some wisdom and flexibility, and the international community should respect the choice of the Palestinian people." As for Israel, he said, "we'll just have to see what emerges on the other side."

Control over Gaza Strip in question

Israel, donor nations wary about working with Hamas

ANALYSIS

Brussels/Ramallah West Bank
THE WASHINGTON POST, AFP, JUI

As Palestinians begin thinking about how to rebuild the bombarded Gaza Strip, the biggest hurdle quickly became apparent: Who will be in charge?

European countries, oil-rich Arab kingdoms and the United Nations have all pledged money or aid since Israel declared a ceasefire Sunday in the military offensive it launched Dec. 27. But none of the donors wants to deal with Hamas, the Islamist movement that still controls Gaza but is considered a terrorist organization by Israel, the European Union and the U.S.

Israel's preferred partner is the Palestinian Authority, headed by President Mahmoud Abbas and dominated by his secular Fatah party. Although the Palestinian Authority governs in the West Bank, it was forcibly tossed out of Gaza by Hamas in June 2007.

Abbas' influence has waned since then, even within Fatah. Many Palestinians are angry that he didn't object more loudly to Israel's invasion of Gaza. Instead, the Palestinian Authority's security services effectively bottled up West Bank protests against Israel's actions.

"I don't know what he's thinking," said Qaddura Faris, a Fatah leader based in Ra-

malah. Abbas, he said, should have cut off negotiations with Israel and led protests in the West Bank against the war. "It seems he doesn't understand the Palestinian mentality."

The task of rebuilding Gaza became clearer Tuesday as the Israeli military withdrew most of its troops from the impoverished strip of land along the Mediterranean Sea. Palestinian and U.N. surveyors estimated that more than 4,000 buildings were demolished during the fighting and that it would cost upward of \$2 billion to repair the damage.

In other news Wednesday, EU nations won assurances that Israel would do its utmost to allow humanitarian aid into the war-torn Gaza Strip but no guarantees that border crossings would be opened.

"There are clear assurances from (Israeli) Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni that everything will be done from the Israeli side to have effective humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip," Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg said after the meeting. The Czech Republic currently holds the EU's rotating presidency.

The EU is proposing to bolster its monitoring mission in the Rafah Terminal, the only crossing the Palestinians have to the outside world, on the border with Egypt, to try to help stop Hamas bringing in new weapons.

The bloc already has a team of almost 30 monitors there but it has rarely been unable to work as Israel has often kept the terminal closed, citing security concerns.

"We are ready to monitor, we have said that, but for the moment the gates are shut," said Kouchnier. "That's not possible. You can't just be satisfied that rockets are not fired and pretend that nothing else is happening."

On the political front, the min-

isters rejected suggestions it was time to talk to Hamas even as exiled Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal said the time had come to lift a ban on contacts with the Islamist movement.

Meanwhile, Hamas organized rallies to celebrate what it portrayed as a triumph over Israel, merely by surviving 22 days of pounding by its enemy's vastly superior military force. In Beit Lahiya, north of Gaza City, hundreds marched behind Hamas flags and bullhorns.

Some residents of Gaza said the war had damaged Hamas' standing. Nidal Muhammad, 41, a taxi driver from Gaza City, said he hoped the Palestinian Authority would soon be restored to power in the territory. "I want the Hamas government to end. I want them to go to hell. I want the Palestinian Authority back," he said. "If Hamas serves as the resistance, this is good, but I don't want them to control everything. We want a good life for our families like before."

Hamas leaders have been cool toward the idea of a reconciliation with Fatah. They note that their movement won Palestinian elections in 2006 that were generally seen as legitimate by international observers.

They also question Abbas' continuing to serve as president; his four-year term expired Jan. 9. Abbas and his Fatah supporters say he is entitled to stay in office until Palestinian legislative elections are held in January 2010.

Fatah leaders in the West Bank said they doubted that Hamas would heed international calls to reconcile with other Palestinian factions. But they also said there was no other choice if the Palestinian push for statehood was to survive.

"If in fact, after all of this disaster, what emerges is a Gaza Strip that is viewed as a separate entity, what will be left of our national project?" Salam Fayyad, the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, told a gathering of foreign reporters in Ramallah on Monday. "The issue goes to the core of who we are as a people and the nature of the struggle."

Fayyad said Hamas, Fatah and other Palestinian groups needed to form a national unity government that would control Gaza and the West Bank. He acknowledged that the task would be difficult but added, "Expecting it to be difficult will only make it more difficult."

A multipolar world ■ Mikhail Gorbachev

America's next step

Support for President Barack Obama among Americans, including many who did not vote for him, is unprecedented. Globally, too, there has been deep interest in the election and widespread hope for change in U.S. policy. Practically everyone the world over now wishes Obama success.

The main reasons for this are the pressures of global economic and political tensions that have been piling up for decades. In his inauguration speech, Obama somberly cited these problems. The crisis, he said, is "a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age."

Understandably, the president will focus first on the economic crisis. But solving America's economic problems without cardinal changes in the world will be impossible. The "Washington consensus" that assumed that the global economy could be designed from a single center has been discredited. It was based entirely on the profit motive, over-consumption and failed, outdated institutions.

A new model must recognize the need for multilateral cooperation. In his speech, Obama acknowledged that today's threats demand "even greater cooperation and understanding between nations." I am sure that however strong the criticism and even anger over some U.S. actions has been throughout the world — in Europe, China, India, Russia, Latin America — leaders and the general public understand the importance of America's role and are ready to cooperate with it.

But is America ready? In his speech, Obama said, "The world has changed, and we must change with it." The commitment to those words must be proven by specific deeds and decisions. This will require a realistic analysis of the global situation — the kind of analysis that has been lacking in the United States for nearly two decades. America has been widely seen as almost omnipotent. But arrogance and triumphalism blinded it as a policy-maker; slogans replaced serious thinking.

The 20th century was an American century — let's make the 21st another American century. Those words, spoken by President Bill Clinton, were echoed by those who have guided American policies in re-

cent years. But the world will not agree to play the role of an "extra" in a movie scripted by the United States. Finally, recognition of that attitude seems to be emerging in the United States.

The outcome of the presidential election is an acknowledgement that America's strength does not come from empire-building or military adventures but from its ability to correct its mistakes. A course for foreign policy is not plotted overnight, particularly when what's needed is not a mere adjustment but a full revision. What the president and members of his team have said thus far is not enough to discern the direction they will take.

Obama is getting all kinds of advice. Zbigniew Brzezinski is proposing a focus on relations with China. His recent remarks in Beijing seem to suggest a kind of condominium, a U.S.-China G-2. Of course, China's global economic and political importance will keep growing, but I think those who would like to start a new geopolitical game will be in for a disappointment. China is unlikely to accept; more generally, such games belong to the past. Similarly, Henry Kissinger's proposals for "a new world order" seem to assume a new geopolitical division of the world. What we really need are new, more modern approaches.

A number of European public figures have urged Obama to reconsider past policies that have long been taken for granted. The United States, which in 1990 signed the Paris Charter for a New Europe, could be a natural partner in creating a new European security structure — a project now under discussion.

I also hope the president sees the great potential inherent in relations with Russia, which have been mishandled in recent years. A change for the better could be achieved relatively soon, helping to move toward healthier relations with Russia's neighbors and within Europe as a whole.

In shaping Mideast policy, a real battle is inevitable. If anything should have become crystal clear in recent years, it's that "business as usual" only makes the

Middle East more dangerous. Current U.S. policies have not been good for the region as a whole or, in particular, for Israel, a nation with which the United States has special relations.

Two long-term problems have taken on a special urgency and will require Obama's close attention: nuclear proliferation and the environmental crisis. It will not be easy to disentangle the intricate web of contradictions surrounding these issues.

Reducing nonproliferation to the demand that Iran and North Korea cease their nuclear programs will lead to a dead end. The nuclear powers will not be able to hold on to their monopoly indefinitely, and the nonproliferation treaty does not allow it.

The solution is to move toward a world without nuclear weapons. But this goal cannot be achieved if one country retains an overwhelming superiority in conventional weapons. Without specific steps to reduce these weapons — more generally, without demilitarizing international politics — we will have only empty talk. What's needed is a real breakthrough, like the one achieved in the late 1980s.

Judging by Obama's inaugural speech, he understands that even while he faces the immediate challenges of the economic crisis, he should not push to the sidelines problems like poverty and environmental issues, particularly climate change. Fostering economic development and preserving the planet for future generations can be contradictory; the only way to resolve this clash of priorities is to develop policies multilaterally. This is true of practically every problem, in all areas.

I suspect that many people are pondering Obama's call for a new era of responsibility. Perhaps neither he nor we can yet see what shape it will take.

One thing is already clear, though: We are indeed on the cusp of a new age, on the road to a new world, one we must travel together.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union, is president of the International Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies in Moscow.

Nearly everyone the
world over wishes
Obama success. But
what path will he take?

Silencing Islam's critics

The latest twist in the clash between Western values and the Muslim world took place Wednesday in the Netherlands, where a court ordered the prosecution of lawmaker and provocateur Geert Wilders for inciting violence. The Dutch member of Parliament and leader of the Freedom Party, which opposes Muslim immigration into Holland, will stand trial soon for his harsh criticism of Islam.

Wilders made world news last year with the short film "Fitna." In the 15-minute video, he juxtaposes Quranic verses calling for jihad with clips of Islamic hate preachers and terror attacks. He has compared the Quran to Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and urged Muslims to tear out "hate-filled" verses from their scripture. This is a frontal assault on Islam — but, as Wilders points

out, he's targeting the religion, not its followers. "Fitna," in fact, sparked a refreshing debate between moderate Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands, and beyond.

There are of course limits to free speech, such as calls for violence. But one doesn't need to agree with Wilders to acknowledge that he hasn't crossed that line. Some Muslims say they are outraged by his statements. But if freedom of speech means anything, it means the freedom of controversial speech. Consensus views need no protection.

This is exactly what Dutch prosecutors said in June when they rejected the complaints against Wilders. "That comments are hurtful and offensive for a large number of Muslims does not mean that they are punishable," the

prosecutors said in a statement. "Freedom of expression fulfills an essential role in public debate in a democratic society. That means that offensive comments can be made in a political debate."

The court on Wednesday overruled this decision, arguing that the lawmaker should be prosecuted for "inciting hatred and discrimination" and also "for insulting Muslim worshippers because of comparisons between Islam and Nazism."

This is no small victory for Islamic regimes seeking to export their censorship laws to wherever Muslims reside. But the successful integration of Muslims in Europe will require that immigrants adapt to Western norms, not vice versa.

The Wall Street Journal (Jan. 22)

A return to common sense



KIROKU
HANAI

Attention from all corners of the world is focused on Barack Obama, who was inaugurated as the first African-American president of the United States. As the sole superpower since the Cold War ended in 1989, America has often irritated other countries for choosing to pursue the path of a unilateralist as a result of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the U.S. mainland.

It is my strong hope that under the new U.S. administration, with Obama at its helm, the U.S. will regain humility and work toward promoting multilateralism in international politics.

Problems originating with subprime loans triggered an economic recession in the U.S. that spread throughout the world to create what is regarded as the worst economic crisis in a century. Cooperation among nations is essential for overcoming this crisis, and for that reason, it is far more desirable to have a peace-oriented president in the White House than one like George W. Bush, who was reckless in decisions related to the use of military force. A great deal of hope, therefore, is placed on President Obama, whose slogan is "change."

The first thing I hope the new American administration will undertake is easing tensions with Iran, because strained bilateral ties have been the biggest factor in Middle East uneasiness.

At a confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton testified that she would not hesitate to set up direct diplomatic talks with Tehran to prevent Iran from possessing nuclear weapons. Yet, she did not rule out military intervention as the last resort. From the Iranian standpoint, this must appear tantamount to a diplomacy of intimidation.

Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iran were severed in 1979 when the American Embassy in Tehran was occupied by Iranians. The initial step that needs to be taken is to normalize relations and clear the way for resuming dialogue. Washington may expect Tehran to make the first conciliatory move, but the Iranians hold a completely opposite view based on historical events.

In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower covertly used the Central Intelligence Agency to overthrow the Iranian government of Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq, which had confronted the British government over the proposed nationalization of Anglo-Iranian Oil Co. In other words, the U.S. played a major role in toppling the democratically elected government and restoring a pro-Anglo-Saxon regime under the Shah. During the 1980s, Washington helped Iraq invade Iran by supplying arms to Baghdad, and connived in Iraq's use of poison gases.

In her speech before the American Iranian Council in 2000, Madeleine Albright, who served as secretary of state under President Bill Clinton, admitted that the American policy toward Iran had been shortsighted.

Washington's anti-Iranian policy is said to reflect the position taken by Israel. It is an open secret that Israel possesses nuclear weapons, although its government neither confirms nor denies the allegation. Iran is much displeased with the double standards of American diplomacy in which Washington gives tacit approval to Israel's opacity concerning nuclear arms on the one hand while taking a tough stand against the suspected nuclear development plans of Tehran on the other. It is incumbent upon the U.S. government to follow a more balanced course of action if it is serious about seeking peace in the Middle East.

American policy toward Cuba speaks more eloquently than anything else about the way the U.S. has deviated from international common sense. For half a century, Washington has been hostile to the socialist regime in Cuba and imposed economic sanctions. It has become almost an annual affair for the U.N. General Assembly to adopt a resolution by an overwhelming majority condemning the American economic sanctions against Cuba. But Washington has adamantly refused to take heed.

When Cuba gained independence from Spain at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1902, the U.S. obtained the permanent lease of Guantanamo Bay and the right to establish a military base there. After 9/11, the U.S. took a number of terrorist suspects captured in Afghanistan to Guantanamo and tortured them, in a gesture of derision against Cuba. I cannot understand why the U.S., despite having restored diplomatic relations with former enemies like China and Vietnam, continues to take a hostile attitude toward the

socialist nation of Cuba.

In recent years, leftist regimes have developed in one Latin American country after another, leaving Columbia as about the only pro-American nation in the region. This tendency is not unrelated to the wrongheaded policy that Washington has pursued against Cuba.

Immediately after his inauguration, Obama signed an executive ordering the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, which represents a carry-over of U.S. imperialist policies. He should go a step further by returning Guantanamo to Cuba and ending the sanctions against Havana without delay.

Last, I ask that the new U.S. government under Obama rectify its military policies. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute announced in 2008 that the U.S. had a bigger defense budget than any other country in 2007, with its military spending accounting for 41 percent of the world's total. It is also the biggest supplier of weapons, with sales to other countries accounting for 31 percent of the global arms trade. If the strongest military power in the world took the initiative for disarmament, the whole world would become much more peaceful.

The reality is the opposite, though, as exemplified by U.S. opposition to the so-called Ottawa Treaty prohibiting the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of antipersonnel mines as well as the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Also, the Bush administration rejected the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Washington has disappointed the world by opposing the creation of the International Criminal Court aimed at bringing war criminals to justice and preventing war.

According to the 2008 Global Peace Index released by the Economist Intelligence Unit of Britain, Japan ranked fifth among the 140 countries and regions surveyed, while the United States placed 97th — the lowest among the industrialized nations. These and other data suggest that the U.S. under Bush was a belligerent country.

For the U.S. to regain global trust, I sincerely hope that the Obama administration will lose no time in ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and take the initiative in promoting disarmament.

Kiroku Hanai is a journalist and former editorial writer for Tokyo Shimbun.

Tracking the costs of U.S. nuclear security

Stephen I. Schwartz and Deepti Choubey
Los Angeles
LOS ANGELES TIMES

More than seven years after 9/11 — when government officials and outside experts are expressing growing concern about the prospect of a nuclear terrorist attack — few members of Congress know how much the United States spends on nuclear security or where the money goes.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Energy Secretary Steven Chu face difficult questions about how the U.S. is addressing nuclear dangers. Yet many lawmakers don't have sufficient or comprehensive information to work with.

Our report, the first public examination of open-source data, shows that the U.S. spent at least \$52.4 billion on nuclear weapons and programs in fiscal 2008. This budget, which spans many agencies, not just the Defense Department, does not count related costs for air defense, antisubmarine warfare, classified programs or many nuclear weapons-related intelligence programs.

The 2008 nuclear security budget exceeds all anticipated spending on international diplomacy and foreign assistance (\$39.5 billion) and natural resources and the environment (\$33 billion). It is nearly double the budget for general science, space and technology (\$27.4 billion), and it is almost 14 times what the Energy Department allocated for all energy-related R&D.

Although the size of the overall budget is troubling, another concern is that we spend so little on initiatives to minimize the risk of nuclear and radiological attacks. More than 17 years after the end of the Cold War, it may come as a surprise to Americans that the U.S. still spends relatively large annual sums upgrading and maintaining

its nuclear arsenal (\$29 billion), developing ballistic missile defenses (\$9.2 billion) and addressing the deferred environmental and health costs associated with more than 50 years of unconstrained bomb building and testing (\$8.3 billion).

More alarmingly, the government spends relatively little money locking down or eliminating nuclear threats at their source before they can reach U.S. shores (\$5.2 billion), or preparing for the consequences of a nuclear or radiological attack on U.S. soil (\$700 million).

As Obama's team heads into an enormously difficult budget season, it will need to propose expenditures that match policy goals and economic realities. How, one might ask Chu, can a Department of Energy that devotes 67 percent of its budget to nuclear weapons-related programs meet Obama's plan to develop new and cleaner forms of energy?

Clinton is already on the right track by reportedly seeking to expand the State Department's role and fighting for a larger budget. State is the frontline agency tackling proliferation concerns with Iran and North Korea, shoring up a rocky relationship with Russia and pursuing cooperation with other states to secure nuclear materials and address the growing threat of nuclear terrorism. Clinton is right to insist that her agency receive more than half a percent (\$241.8 million) of the total nuclear security budget.

As both proliferation dangers and fiscal concerns grow, taxpayers will want to know that their government is getting the best return on its nuclear security investments. But effective oversight of government nuclear security programs is impossible without complete and reliable scrutiny of their cost and impact, and such an accounting has never been available to decision-makers.

Congress can remedy this by requiring the executive branch to submit, as part of the annual budget request, an unclassified and classified accounting of all nuclear weapons-related spending. A senior White House official, perhaps within the congressionally mandated office to coordinate nuclear proliferation and counterterrorism efforts, or the National Security Council, should be responsible for overseeing this exercise, in conjunction with key officials of the Office of Management and Budget and senior budget officials of key departments and agencies.

Working outside of government and using publicly available data, we've proved that it is possible to provide a more comprehensive accounting of our nuclear security dollars.

Implementing these recommendations would increase understanding and accountability, which would in turn lead to greater public support for crucial nuclear security programs and a more effective allocation of public resources.

When combined with a new focus on nuclear issues, including the Obama administration's forthcoming Nuclear Posture Review, these efforts would help ensure that political and financial priorities are properly aligned.

The nuclear threat is changing, and as long as it grows, the U.S. needs to be prepared to address it — even in a time of austerity. That starts with knowing where the dollars go.

Steven I. Schwartz is editor of the Nonproliferation Review at Monterey Institute of International Studies; Deepti Choubey is deputy director of the nonproliferation program at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

We must learn to do better in Afghanistan

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer
Washington
THE WASHINGTON POST

It has been seven years since Afghan forces supported by the United States toppled the Taliban and denied al-Qaida the terrorist haven, training ground and launch pad that Afghanistan had become.

Since then, there has been clear, substantial progress, including democratic elections, the liberation of growing numbers of Afghan women to take their place in public life, and clear improvements in health care and education. But an honest assessment of Afghanistan must conclude that we are not where we might have hoped to be by now. While the country's north and west are largely at peace and improving, the south and east are riven by insurgency, drugs and ineffective government.

Afghans are increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress in building up their country. And the populations in countries that have contributed troops to the NATO-led mission are wondering how long this operation must last — and how many young men and women we will lose carrying it out.

In April, to mark the 60th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's founding, the member nations' heads of state and government will meet in Strasbourg, France, and Kehl, Germany. This meeting is to be part of Barack Obama's first visit to Europe as U.S. president, and it will present an opportunity for alliance leaders to discuss the way forward. Five key lessons from recent years should help shape the path of this mission:

- Afghan leadership is not some distant aspiration — it's something that we need as soon as possible and on which we must insist. The basic problem in Afghanistan is not too much Taliban; it's too little good governance. Afghans need a government that deserves their loyalty and trust;

when they have it, the oxygen will be sucked away from the insurgency.

The international community must step up its support of the elected government, and, through it, the Afghan people. But we have paid enough, in blood and treasure, to demand that the Afghan government take more concrete and vigorous action to root out corruption and increase efficiency, even where that means difficult political choices.

- NATO, too, needs a more cohesive approach. Our operations are still too much of a patchwork, with individual countries assigned to specific geographic areas. The advantage of this approach is that specific countries get experience with the terrain and the locals and are able to link development and military operations.

The drawback: Multiple approaches to military operations and development assistance within one mission reduce effectiveness and can strain solidarity.

We should have more common approaches to our efforts, including fewer geographic restrictions on where forces can go in support of each other.

- Afghanistan's problems cannot be dealt with exclusively within its borders. The challenges faced by Pakistan are organically linked to those of Afghanistan; so, politically, are Pakistan's relations with India. Indeed, all neighboring countries have a stake, and an interest, in what happens in Afghanistan.

The international community must have a regional approach. All of the relevant neighbors need to be engaged in addressing Afghanistan's challenges. While NATO should not necessarily be in the lead, the alliance has a clear interest in playing its part.

- We cannot just pay lip service to the comprehensive approach. We have repeatedly said that force alone cannot solve Afghanistan's problems. But we are obliged to keep ramping up the military operation partly because of insufficient

resources and coordination on the civilian side. There must be a stronger effort to support the police; coordinate development assistance; and beef up the U.N. mission in Afghanistan.

Crucially, Afghan officials must make the difficult choices necessary to create an efficient and corruption-free government in which its people can believe. The longer progress takes in these areas, the longer the military operation will be required, at real cost in lives.

- Communications are a strategic battleground. This is no secondary task for spokesmen. There is a general perception in the West that Afghans do not want foreign soldiers on their territory. In fact, polls find that more than 70 percent support the NATO mission.

Great attention is rightly paid to occurrences of civilian casualties accidentally caused by our forces; much less attention is paid to the deliberate killings of civilians by the Taliban, which happens five times more often.

The international community must prioritize strategic communications. We must do better in showing that there is tangible, steady progress in reaching our goal — and in reminding the world that the Taliban remain the ruthless killers and abusers of human rights they have always been.

Addressing these challenges will require fresh approaches, political courage and new resources. But the cost of failure — instability in a highly unstable region; a haven for international terrorism; and massive suffering for the Afghan people — is much higher. The world simply cannot afford to fail in Afghanistan.

Within the NATO alliance and the international community more broadly, we must absorb the lessons from the past as we chart the way forward.

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer is secretary general of NATO.

North Korean crisis heating up

Michael Richardson
Singapore

SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

Will North Korea be the Obama administration's first Asian crisis? Pyongyang has recently been cranking up its bellicose rhetoric, declaring that it would maintain its "status as a nuclear weapons state" and "smash" South Korea's government in an "all-out confrontation" for tying aid to disarmament.

Of course, this is vintage North Korean saber-rattling and a tactic it has often used in the past. But is it designed this time especially to raise the stakes and improve Pyongyang's bargaining leverage as it prepares to open negotiations with the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama?

Or does it represent a defiant resetting of the North's negotiating terms, based on its determination to keep nuclear arms until the regime feels secure?

After the latest of a series of visits to North Korea, Selig Harrison, director of the Asia program at the Center for International Policy in Washington, said in Seoul on Jan. 17 that senior North Korean officials had told him enough plutonium for four or five nuclear bombs has been "weaponized." He said the officials had not defined what "weaponized" meant, but the implication was that they had built nuclear arms.

If this is not a bluff, it would mean that Pyongyang plans to hold onto nuclear weapons despite an agreement it signed with China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the United States in 2005 in which it promised to abandon them in exchange for economic and political incentives.

This deal was worked out in the framework of the six-party negotiations chaired by China. They have made only fitful progress and stalled toward the end of last year. Some analysts concluded that Pyongyang was hoping for a better deal from Obama than it could get from the outgoing Bush administration.

There is no sign of this happening. The U.S., under Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, insisted that North Korea give up its pursuit of nuclear weapons before Washington would agree to diplomatic ties.

In her Senate confirmation this month,

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the Obama administration would maintain this position. She also indicated that diplomatic relations would not be established with North Korea until it ended serious human rights abuses and a clandestine uranium-enrichment program, which the U.S. alleges has been run in parallel with its more advanced plutonium program to make nuclear weapons.

Pyongyang denies such activity. But outgoing U.S. national security adviser Stephen Hadley told the Financial Times in an interview published Jan. 19: "We strongly believe that there is an undetermined amount of highly enriched uranium in North Korea."

In dragging out the six-party talks, Pyongyang may have bought sufficient time to make nuclear warheads small enough to fit on the cones of some of its missile arsenal.

He said the material, which can be used to make the fissile core of nuclear bombs, had either been produced in the North or imported, adding that "either way, it has to be explained."

Meanwhile, William Lynn, chosen by Obama to be deputy defense secretary, declared at his confirmation hearing that North Korea posed a serious threat to the U.S. and rest of the world through its ballistic missiles, nuclear and other deadly weapons programs, and its "proliferation of associated technologies, materials and systems."

The U.S. has clearly not blinked in the face of North Korean threats. However, Pyongyang may have bought sufficient time, in dragging out the six-party talks, to make nuclear warheads that are small enough to fit on the cones of some of its missile arsenal.

For more than a year, the U.S., Japanese and South Korean intelligence communities have been worried that North Korean scientists and engineers were developing techniques to do this. The North's nuclear-tipped missiles — many of which are mobile and can be hidden, moved around and fired quickly — could then strike South Korea and Japan, as well

as U.S. forces based in both countries.

North Korea conducted an underground nuclear explosion in October 2006. Although the test appeared only partially successful, the head of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, Gen. Michael Maples, told Congress last February that North Korea could have stockpiled several plutonium-based nuclear weapons and "may be able to successfully mate a nuclear warhead to a mobile ballistic missile."

Analysts say North Korea has deployed about 800 truck-mounted ballistic missiles, with most in underground facilities ready to move. Several hundred of these missiles could reach as far as Tokyo. Gen. Burwell Bell, commander of U.S. forces in South Korea, warned in July that the North was upgrading its arsenal to make the missiles more mobile and easier to launch.

A solid-fuel missile, the KN-02, was successfully flight-tested by North Korea in 2005, according to South Korean and U.S. military officials. They said the KN-02 appears very accurate, has a range of 120 kilometers and could carry a 500-kg warhead. While other North Korean short- and medium-range missiles may remain liquid-fueled, they are still mobile.

North Korea has outlined a much harder negotiating line recently. It said on Jan. 17 that normal relations with the U.S. would not be enough to persuade it to give up its nuclear weapons. Instead, its "status as a nuclear weapons state" would be maintained as long as there was a nuclear threat from the U.S.

Pyongyang said in a statement Jan. 13 that ending this threat meant removing South Korea from the protection of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, introducing a verification mechanism to ensure that no U.S. nuclear weapons were deployed in or pass through South Korea, and simultaneous nuclear disarmament talks among "all nuclear states," including itself.

Is this nothing more than a prelude to the resumption of talks that started in 2003? Quite possibly. But the nuclear backdrop to this political psycho-drama is more menacing than ever.

Michael Richardson is a visiting senior research fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore.

Palestine and Israel ■ Scott Atran and Jeremy Ginges

How words could end a war

As diplomats stitch together a cease-fire between Hamas and Israel, the most depressing feature of the conflict is the sense that future fighting is inevitable. Rational calculation suggests that neither side can win these wars. The thousands of lives and billions of dollars sacrificed in fighting demonstrate the advantages of peace and coexistence, yet still both sides opt to fight.

This small territory is the world's great symbolic knot. "Palestine is the mother of all problems" is a common refrain among people we have interviewed across the Muslim world: from Middle Eastern leaders to fighters in the remote island jungles of Indonesia; from Islamist senators in Pakistan to volunteers for martyrdom on the move from Morocco to Iraq.

Some analysts see this as a testament to the essentially religious nature of the conflict. But research we recently undertook suggests a way to go beyond that. For there is a moral logic to seemingly intractable religious and cultural disputes. These conflicts cannot be reduced to secular calculations of interest but must be dealt with on their own terms, a logic very different from the marketplace or realpolitik.

Across the world, people believe that devotion to sacred or core values that incorporate moral beliefs — like the welfare of family and country, or commitment to religion and honor — are, or ought to be, absolute and inviolable. Our studies, carried out with the support of the National Science Foundation and the Defense Department, suggest that people will reject material compensation for dropping their commitment to sacred values and will defend those values regardless of the costs.

In our research, we surveyed nearly 4,000 Palestinians and Israelis from 2004 to 2008, questioning citizens across the political spectrum including refugees, supporters of Hamas and Israeli settlers in the West Bank. We asked them to react to hypothetical but realistic compromises in which their side would be required to give away something it valued in return for a lasting peace.

All those surveyed responded to the same set of deals. First they would be given a straight-up offer in which each side would make difficult concessions in exchange for peace, next they were given a scenario in which their side was granted an additional material incentive, and last came a proposal in which the other side agreed to a symbolic sacrifice of one of its sacred values.

For example, a typical set of trade-offs offered to a Palestinian might begin with this premise: Suppose the UN organized a peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians under which Palestinians would be required to give up their right to return to their homes in Israel and there would be two states, a Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Second, we would sweeten the pot: In return, Western nations would give the Palestinian state \$10 billion a year for 100 years. Then the symbolic concession: For its part, Israel would officially apologize for the displacement of civilians in the 1948 war.

Almost everyone we surveyed rejected the initial solutions we offered — ideas that are accepted as common sense among most Westerners, like simply trading land for peace or accepting shared sovereignty over Jerusalem. Why the opposition?

Many of the respondents insisted that the values involved were sacred to them. For example, nearly half the Israeli settlers we surveyed said they would not consider trading any land in the West Bank — territory they believe was granted them by God — in exchange for peace. More than half the Palestinians considered full sovereignty over Jerusalem in the same light, and more than four-fifths felt that the "right of return" was a sacred value, too.

In general the greater the monetary incentive involved in the deal, the greater the disgust from respondents. This strongly implies that using the standard approaches of "businesslike negotiations" favored by Western diplomats will only backfire.

Many Westerners seem to ignore these clearly expressed "irrational" preferences, because in a sensible world they ought not to exist. Diplomats hope that peace and progress on material and quality-of-life matters will eventually make people forget the more heartfelt issues. But this is only a recipe for another Hundred Years' War — progress on everyday material matters will simply heighten attention on value-laden issues of "who we are and want to be."

Fortunately, our work also offers hints of another, more optimistic course.

Absolutists who violently rejected offers of money or peace for sacred land were considerably more inclined to accept deals that involved their enemies making symbolic but difficult gestures. For example,

Palestinian hard-liners were more willing to consider recognizing the right of Israel to exist if the Israelis simply offered an official apology for Palestinian suffering in the 1948 war.

Similarly, Israeli respondents said they could live with a partition of Jerusalem and borders very close to those that existed before the 1967 war if Hamas and the other major Palestinian groups explicitly recognized Israel's right to exist.

Remarkably, our survey results were mirrored by our discussions with political leaders from both sides. For example, Mousa Abu Marzook (the deputy chairman of Hamas) said no when we proposed a trade-off for peace without granting a right of return. He became angry when we added in the idea of substantial American aid for rebuilding: "No, we do not sell ourselves for any amount."

But when we mentioned a potential Israeli apology for 1948, he brightened: "Yes, an apology is important, as a beginning. It's not enough, because our houses and land were taken away from us, and something has to be done about that." This suggested that progress on values might open the way for negotiations on material issues.

We got a similar reaction from Benjamin Netanyahu, the hard-line former Israeli prime minister. We asked him whether he would seriously consider accepting a two-state solution following the 1967 borders if all major Palestinian factions, including Hamas, were to recognize the right of the Jewish people to an independent state. He answered, "O.K., but the Palestinians would have to show that they sincerely mean it, change their textbooks and anti-Semitic characterizations."

Making these sorts of wholly intangible "symbolic" concessions, like an apology or recognition of a right to exist, simply doesn't compute on any utilitarian calculus. And yet the science says they may be the best way to start cutting the knot.

Scott Atran, an anthropologist at the National Center for Scientific Research in Paris, John Jay College and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, is the author of the forthcoming "Talking to the Enemy." Jeremy Ginges is a professor of psychology at the New School for Social Research.

Religious and cultural
disputes cannot be
reduced to calculations
of realpolitik.

Daniel Williams

Letter from Egypt

Gaza crisis threatens outlook for Mubarak

CAIRO

Egypt's efforts to broker a cease-fire between Israel and Gaza have brought it no peace at home.

Its restive population has taken to the streets by the thousands in protest, blaming President Hosni Mubarak for his inability — or unwillingness — to help Palestinians in the coastal enclave, more than 1,300 of whom died in the three-week conflict. Taxi drivers replace Arab pop with Palestinian martial music on their cassette radios, businessmen in central Cairo sport checkered Palestinian scarves, and art galleries produce instant antiwar exhibits.

If negotiations fall apart, Egypt's credibility as a self-declared regional stabilizer and leader of the Arab world will be damaged. Mubarak's popularity was already low among Egyptians because of the country's increasing economic problems. Turmoil even threatens a smooth transition to new leadership — with Mubarak's son, Gamal, as heir-apparent to his 80-year-old father.

"This is a nightmare for Egypt," said Abdel Monem Said, director of the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo. "It's hit from all sides."

He said the problem with Egypt's mediation is its desire to be all things to all people: peaceful associate of Israel, ally of the United States, backer of the Palestinians, standard-bearer of Arab nationalism — at a time when its citizens want Mubarak to take the Palestinian side.

Egypt has been involved for more than a year in indirect talks between Israel and Hamas, the Islamic party that rules Gaza and whose erratic rockets into southern Israel provoked the Jewish state's attack on Dec. 27. These discussions focused mainly on efforts to free an Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, whom Hamas captured in June 2006.

In trying to broker a cease-fire, Egypt is on a bigger stage. It played this role before, refereeing a truce between Israel and Hamas that went into effect in June 2008 and expired Dec. 19, just eight days before Israel launched its latest Gaza offensive.

This time, Mubarak's endeavors so far have been mainly window dressing: Israel ended its military operation Jan. 18 not as a result of negotiation but because of a unilateral decision. This was followed hours later by a similar declaration by Hamas.

"When you pretend to be the Arab leader and can get nothing done, you become a laughingstock," said Diaa Rashwan, a political analyst and an expert on Islamic political movements.

Egyptians and Arab countries complained that Mubarak kept the official border crossing between Egypt and Gaza closed before and during much of the war. The most populous Arab country — and the first to sign a peace treaty with Israel, in 1979 — Egypt has been subject to scorn in Yemen and Lebanon, where mobs have marched on its embassies in the past few weeks. It has also been the target of criticism from the tiny Gulf oil state of Qatar, as well as Syria and Iran. All support Hamas.

At the same time, Israel complained that the Egyptian police turned a blind eye to arms smuggled through hundreds of tunnels beneath the Gaza border.

On Jan. 17, Mubarak took the unusual step of defending his government's policy on television, saying Egypt had a long history of supporting Palestinian nationalism.

"I certainly can't remember Mubarak having to justify his policies, ever," Said said.

Egypt's delicate role coincides with a period of domestic commotion exacerbated by the Gaza crisis.

Secular pro-democracy movements — as well as the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic party that is both Egypt's largest opposition force and a political ally of Hamas — defied Mubarak's restrictions on free speech and sent thousands of demonstrators into the streets of Alexandria, Minya, Arish and other cities during the war. Only a massive show of strength by the police kept demonstrations in Cairo, the capital, small.

Widespread labor strikes over privatization, layoffs and high food prices have closed government-run factories off and on during the past two years and forced the Mubarak government to raise state wages at a

time when Egypt's budget deficit ballooned from about 7 percent of gross domestic product to almost 10 percent.

"With few peaceful outlets for dissent, more than 40 percent of the population living below the poverty line and a government increasingly unresponsive to its citizens' most basic needs, Egypt is sinking into turmoil," wrote Jeffrey Azarva, a research fellow at the Washington-based American Enterprise Institute, in a report released in December.

And that was before Gaza exploded. "Mubarak didn't need this crisis," Rashwan said.

The aging president is nearing the end of his reign after 27 years in power, having taken over after the 1981 assassination of Anwar Sadat. He has

'This is a nightmare for Egypt. It's hit from all sides.'

ruled under emergency laws that prohibit assembly and limit the speech and activities of opposition groups.

His son Gamal, 45, has positioned himself as successor in the presidential election, scheduled for 2011, by virtue of a high position in the ruling National Democratic Party.

Egyptian analysts conjecture that Gamal's lack of military and security experience will disqualify him in uncertain times. Analysts say a likely option would be for the military to step in and rule. Hosni Mubarak is Egypt's third military leader since 1952.

Meanwhile, talks continue in Cairo. So far, Israel and Hamas have used Egypt not to negotiate with each other but rather to cut separate deals to get what each wants out of the war: Israel, a pledge from Egypt to tightly close the Gaza frontier to arms smuggling; Hamas, to have Egypt open Gaza's borders to the outside world through the Sinai Peninsula.

"Egypt is being asked to deliver victory to both sides," said Said of Al-Ahram. "That's very hard to do."

Bloomberg News

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Obama brings new tone to Mideast

President's interview with Arab TV could be turning point

President Barack Obama's first call to a foreign leader was to Mahmoud Abbas, the beleaguered Palestinian president. His first interview, on Monday, was with Al Arabiya, a Dubai-based Arabic satellite television station. A new tone has entered American policy towards the Middle East. Not before time.

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of this, after a Bush administration that thought public diplomacy was a bolt-on that could be supplied by Madison Avenue, which would rebrand America and win back market share from the jihadis.

Mr Obama, more grounded in reality, has long realised one of his main tasks as president would be to restore America's reputation in the world at large, and in the Arab and Muslim worlds in particular. He has made a good start.

The Al Arabiya interview was, to a remarkable degree, almost explicitly about tone. Mr Obama repeatedly used the words "respect" or "respectful", saying the US had to drop many of its preconceptions, learn from its mistakes, and listen. The first US president able to say "I have Muslim members of my family" emphasised he wanted a measured political conversation with the region as a whole: "the language we use matters," he said.

While emphasising that, for the US, Israel's security is paramount,

he praised the Arab peace plan put forward by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, which offers full Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab land and the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Recognising explicitly that the problems of the region are inter-linked, and implicitly that resolving most of them needs at least Iran's quiescence, Mr Obama expanded a remark from his inaugural speech, that "if countries like Iran are willing to unclench their fist, they will find an extended hand from us".

Quite properly, the president acknowledged he would be judged "not by my words but by my actions". While that may partly have been to fend off criticism of his failure to speak out against the heavy cost in civilian lives of Israel's recent assault on Gaza and Hamas, it was also to underline he had already despatched George Mitchell as special envoy to the region - "fully empowered by me".

In Northern Ireland, Mr Mitchell helped bring Sinn Féin/IRA to the table, to direct contact with the British and Irish governments, and to eventual peace. Eventual success in the Middle East will clearly require him to do the same with Hamas. It helps that in Mr Obama he has a president who is a statesman and a salesman rolled into one.

No room for Israel under America's umbrella

Max Boot

Now that the war in Gaza is over, Israeli and American leaders must turn their attention from Hamas to the larger threat from its backers in Tehran. A report in Haaretz, Israel's leading newspaper, suggests that the Obama team may consider extending the US nuclear umbrella to Israel in the event that Iran goes nuclear. This idea was floated in April by columnist Charles Krauthammer and picked up by Hillary Clinton, who declared when she was still a presidential candidate that if Iran attacked Israel, "We would be able to totally obliterate them."

Such tough talk may make us feel good, but it should not be mistaken for a solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis. It is not clear what purpose a US nuclear threat would serve, since Israel has its own nuclear arsenal, estimated to contain 100-200 warheads. That is enough to "totally obliterate" Iran.

This Israeli deterrent is more credible than any US threat. It is unrealistic to assume that, in the event of an Iranian attack on Israel, a US president would kill innocent Iranians. The chance of US action lessens if you consider how an Iranian warhead would be delivered. A strike employing Iran's Shahab-3 missiles is the least likely delivery method as it can be traced back to its return address even before it lands. Harder to trace, and more likely to be used, would be a portable nuclear device set off by terrorists. The US would be forced to contemplate retaliation based on murky intelligence. We know where that led us in Iraq. Would President Barack Obama risk nuclear war based on intelligence that could be equally faulty?

Even if we assume that the US could create a credible nuclear deterrent against Iran, that hardly means we could breathe easily. During the cold

war the two superpowers came perilously close to nuclear conflict on at least two occasions: not only during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis but also during Nato's 1983 "Able Archer" exercise, which some in the Kremlin misread as preparations for an actual first strike. Such miscalculations are even more likely when dealing with Iran's isolated, fanatical and paranoid leaders.

Even if nuclear weapons are never used, their very possession can be destabilising. Shielded by its nuclear arsenal, the Soviet Union was able to dominate eastern Europe, invade Afghanistan and back proxies who waged costly wars in Korea and Vietnam. The Kremlin was able to act so aggressively at least in part because the US had no effective military options against a nuclear-armed superpower.

Pakistan has operated with similar recklessness since testing its first nuclear weapons in 1998. In 1999 its army increased its infiltrations of Kashmir, sparking a low-level conflict with India that could have spun out of control. Pakistan has also proliferated its technology, with the A.Q. Khan ring providing nuclear know-how to such states as Iran and North Korea.

As Stanford's Scott Sagan notes, Pakistan offers a more apt analogy for the Iranian nuclear programme than the Soviet Union. Iran, like Pakistan, is a militantly Islamic state that has close links to terrorist groups. With nuclear weapons in its possession, it is likely the mullahs would be emboldened to step up their already substantial support for terrorism. They might also be tempted to share nuclear secrets with allied states such as Syria or even with sub-state groups such as Hizbollah.

Iran's neighbours are already terrified by its presumed designs to dominate the region. Tehran's possession of nuclear weapons would increase their fears and could lead such states as Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates to acquire their own atomic arsenals. Some suggest that the US could prevent that by extending its nuclear umbrella not only to Israel but to these other countries. That strategy worked with South Korea, West Germany and Japan, but in all three the US guarantee was backed by large numbers of US troops. Since there are few US troops stationed in most Middle Eastern countries, their leaders would have cause to doubt the sincerity of any US pledge to risk nuclear war on their behalf.

Rather than planning for what happens after Iran acquires nuclear weapons, we need to concentrate on what we can do to prevent it. Talking about how we deter a nuclear Iran suggests we have already accepted it into the club. That is the last message we want to send - it could be self-fulfilling.

It is not clear what purpose a US nuclear threat would serve; Israel has enough warheads to 'totally obliterate' Iran

The writer is the Jeane J. Kirkpatrick senior fellow in National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and author, most recently, of War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History, 1500 to Today

Global View / By Bret Stephens

Guantanamo Is No Blot On U.S. Honor

President Obama's decision to close the detention facilities at Guantanamo Bay within a year is being hailed as a necessary step in restoring the good name and moral hygiene of America. Fundamentally, it tests the proposition that self-esteem can be a form of self-defense.

Nobody ever actually liked Guantanamo. It was a strange growth on the body of American law, made necessary by extraordinary circumstances that existing institutions were ill-prepared to handle. Even Donald Rumsfeld had reservations: In his excellent memoir, "War and Decision," former Defense Undersecretary Douglas Feith writes that his boss recoiled at turning his department into "the world's jailer."

But the best case against Guantanamo was always inherently odd. It came down to the view that its benefits as a holding pen for the world's most dangerous men could not outweigh the inevitable PR disaster of removing such men to an exotic locale, a step removed from ordinary conventions of law, prone to lurid speculation about Papillon-like goings on, corroborated by the testimony of inmates trained to cry "torture" whenever incarcerated.

In other words, the smart case against Gitmo is that the stupid case against it was bound to prevail, with first-order consequences for America's image and self-image, and second-order ones for our ability to inspire, lead and be followed.

Is this true? Paradoxically, the case for Guantanamo is only becoming obvious as the clock ticks toward closure. Consider, for instance, the recent career of Said Ali al-Shihri.

According to an unclassified June 2007 document from Guantanamo's Office for the Administrative Review of the Detention of Enemy Combatants, Mr. Shihri "was identified as an al Qaeda facilitator in Mashad, Iran, for youth traveling to Afghanistan"; "wanted two individuals to assassinate a writer based on a fatwa by Sheikh Hamud bin Uqla" (a favorite of Osama bin Laden); and "trained in urban warfare at the Libyan Camp north of Kabul, Afghanistan."

Charming résumé. But what's remarkable here is that the dark lords of Gitmo justice nonetheless found sufficient exculpatory evidence to release Mr. Shihri from detention. "The detainee stated that he was just a Muslim not a terrorist"; that he "denied any involvement or knowledge of assistance provided to jihadists traveling to Pakistan or Afghanistan"; and that, upon his release, "he would attempt to work at his family's furniture store, if it is

still in business" in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Maybe the store had gone out of business. Last week, Mr. Shihri, who had undergone a "rehabilitation course" courtesy of the Saudi government, resurfaced as al Qaeda's deputy chief in Yemen, alongside an accomplice named Mohamed Atiq Awayd al-Harbi, a colleague of Mr. Shihri's from Guantanamo who was released the same day.

Mr. Shihri's role with al Qaeda hasn't been merely ceremonial. According to reports, he was involved in a September attempt to bomb the U.S. Embassy in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a. No Americans were killed, but 16 others died in the attack. It's a pity we don't know their names.

Monday, Reuters reported that the embassy had again "received a threat of a possible attack." Some such attack is probably bound to succeed in killing Americans one day, perhaps in a big way, and possibly with the fingerprints of

one of the 60-odd Gitmo graduates the U.S. believes have "returned to the fight." What lessons shall we draw in that event?

No doubt some will conclude that the Gitmo ordeal is what turned a random collection of Peshawar holiday-makers and itinerant Saudi carpet salesmen, who made their way to the Afghan frontier on the eve of 9/11, into raging jihadists. Similar arguments were heard a generation ago in favor of deinstitutionalization, on the theory that psychiatric institutions manufacture insanity.

There will also be those who argue that the death of innocents is the price free societies pay for freedom. They will argue, too, that the price is actually a bargain, since the moral stature gained by shutting down places like Guantanamo earns us the kind of moral and political credit we need to broaden America's appeal in the Muslim world.

In his inaugural address, Mr. Obama noted that "our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint." All this is obviously true.

Then again, our security also depends on doing what we can to keep the likes of Mr. Shihri—far from the most dangerous of Gitmo's prisoners—away from his would-be victims. To do so is neither a violation of conscience nor a blot on our national honor; it should not be a violation of the law. And a president sworn to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution should know this.

Write to bstephens@wsj.com

The President
still hasn't said
where to hold
the worst
of the worst.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2009

Obama and Iraq

In a week of symbolic breaks with the ancien regime, President Obama called in U.S. war commanders last week to signal his desire to get out of Iraq. Then, meeting over, he issued a vague statement about planning "a responsible military drawdown" that omitted mention of his campaign promise to pull out within 16 months.

For Iraq's sake, long may such obfuscation reign. The country faces big tests in the coming year, starting with provincial elections on Saturday. Robust American engagement guided Iraq out of its bloodiest days in 2006. The military commanders who implemented the successful surge now counsel against hasty withdrawal, lest those gains be lost. This is a potential win-win for Mr. Obama. If Iraq emerges from 2009 as a stronger democracy, the White House could then reduce troop levels with little risk of relapse.

The President, who prospered in the Democratic primaries thanks to his antiwar stance, will reap the strategic benefit. Let historians appreciate the irony.

The 146,000 U.S. troops still in Iraq today are needed less to end violence than as glue for a still fragile polity. The GIs are the honest brokers in an Iraq recovering from vicious sectarian fighting, and they are crucial to building a steadily improving Iraqi Army. To withdraw in 16 months, the U.S. would have to start immediately to rotate out a brigade roughly each month, taking its eye off those crucial missions.

Why take that risk now, of all times? After Saturday's local elections, the majority Shiites will willingly share power with Sunnis, who boycotted the last poll in 2005. Sunnis have chosen to come back into the fold through the ballot box, along the way helping to give birth to vibrant retail politics. Some 14,000 candidates from 400 parties battle for

440 seats on 14 (of 18) provincial councils. There will also be a referendum on the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement this summer, and parliamentary elections by the end of the year.

American GIs can make sure these elections come off smoothly and are accepted broadly as legitimate. The current campaign has seen an uptick in suicide attacks and bombings, showing that die-hard Sunni insurgents and Iran-backed militias still want to sabotage democracy in Mesopotamia. Iran lost its fight to stop the U.S. forces deal last year and is sure to try again. A Shiite democracy on its border is an existential rebuke to the mullahs. Military commanders are bracing for Iran to stir up trouble in the months ahead, particularly in the south. By helping Iraq resist this powerplay, Mr. Obama will only strengthen his hand for his promised diplomacy with Tehran.

General Ray Odierno, the commander

in Iraq, says the U.S. will be able to pull out two, possibly three, of 14 brigades in 2009, assuming all goes well. Last year's forces agreement obliges cuts. By summer, American combat forces are supposed to be out of the cities, and out of the country by the end of 2011, well in time for the next U.S. Presidential election.

The new Administration may still be tempted to pull out in bigger numbers sooner—both to appease its antiwar left and spend less on defense. Another argument is that the U.S. can't beef up in Afghanistan without quick reductions in Iraq. As a matter of arithmetic, that's broadly correct. But before a larger force can do much good in Afghanistan the U.S. needs a plan for deploying it.

Here's the lose-lose scenario: Allow Iraq to deteriorate by withdrawing too soon and push into Afghanistan without a better strategy. Mr. Obama has inherited a victory in Iraq that he can't afford to squander.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2009

Islamist Contortions

By Sadanand Dhume

For those who wonder what problems corruption-ridden and disaster-plagued Indonesia must tackle most urgently, the Indonesian Council of Ulema has the answer: yoga.

On Monday, the Council, a quasi-official grouping of 700 Islamic clerics, decreed that Muslims should shun the ancient Indian practice. The clerics worry that Hindu-influenced chants and invocations might weaken Muslim believers' faith. The decree, though not legally binding, carries the force of moral authority, and, as is not uncommon in the Muslim world, the unspoken threat of enforcement by vigilantes.

The Council's decision was not entirely unprecedented. Malaysia's National Fatwa Council issued a similar ban last November. Nonetheless, it comes as a reminder of the challenges the world's most populous Muslim-majority country faces as it struggles to nurture a fledgling democracy in the face of the increasingly undemocratic demands of fundamentalist Islam.

To be sure, Indonesia is no Saudi Arabia. The majority of the country's Muslims—88% of its 235 million people—practice a gentle folk Islam infused with elements of the archipelago's long Animist-Hindu-Buddhist past. The country's constitution is nonsectarian. Overt legal discrimination against non-Muslims, the cornerstone of government policy in neighboring Malaysia, is rare. Most people live in harmony.

But in recent years, Indonesian funda-

mentalists—including hardline clerics, politicians from the Prosperous Justice Party and vigilante groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front—have grown increasingly assertive. These groups don't always agree with each other on tactics, but have broadly similar worldviews. They have spearheaded the persecution of the minority Ahmadiyya Muslim community, the passage of a so-called anti-pornography bill that encourages vigilantism and discriminates against non-Muslim cultures, and a regulation that forces Christian schools to offer religious instruction on Islam.

Put bluntly, Islamic fundamentalism puts a crimp on Indonesia's otherwise impressive democratic flowering. It's at odds with individual rights, freedom of conscience and freedom of expression. In a mature democracy, you wouldn't find a government body called the Coordinating Board for Monitoring Mystical Beliefs in Society outside the pages of a novel. In Indonesia, it helps the government determine which groups are labeled "heretical" or "deviant."

After two successful national elections since the end of Suharto's 32-year-reign in 1998—and with another due this year—Indonesians are justifiably proud of having mastered the processes of democracy. But the gains may be chimerical unless they can defend their ability to publicly scruti-

nize, criticize—and, if necessary, mock—bad ideas that come from Islam as readily as those drawn from a political manifesto.

Since the 1970s, Indonesian Islam has been stripped of its legendary tolerance toward other faiths by a combination of rapid urbanization, compulsory religious education in government schools, and the efforts of Middle Eastern and home-grown purifiers of the faith. In recent years, this Arabization of Indonesian Islam has gathered pace as globalization has brought the religious and political discourse (often indistinguishable from each other) of Riyadh

Why are Indonesian clerics bent out of shape over yoga?

and Tehran to Jakarta. Reminded daily that they are recipients of God's final revelation, a large minority of Muslims—perhaps between 10% and 15%—embrace the fundamentalist notion that the cause of their backwardness lies not in a failure to embrace modernity but in a failure to fully embrace their faith. Many more, while not full-blown fundamentalists themselves, are broadly sympathetic to these ideas.

Indonesia's fundamentalists have shown themselves to be better motivated and better organized than their opponents. Weak or sympathetic politicians (including President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono), courts and police allow them to use violence or the threat of violence to control the public square—by driving Playboy magazine out

of Jakarta, or by attacking secular nationalists at a high-profile rally for religious freedom. Meanwhile cultural norms put any public criticism of Islam out of bounds. Hardliners can be chided for distorting the faith, but an unspoken code of self-censorship ensures that no one ever questions the faith itself. The kind of robust debate between believers and unbelievers that marks most democracies is notable for its absence in Indonesia.

To put this in perspective, consider that Indians are free to debate the caste-centered and sexist aspects of Hindu scripture. The Spaniard who believes in contraception and gay rights can flatly declare that he doesn't care what the Bible says or what the Pope thinks. But an Indonesian who publicly expresses similar sentiments about the Quran or the prophet Muhammad immediately invites threats of violence.

This constrained national discourse cedes fundamentalists the moral high ground, a crucial advantage in this battle of ideas. Unless Indonesians can find a way to broaden the debate, to allow purely secular and even antireligious arguments to set up stall in the public square, they should not be surprised to find themselves in a land where clerics set the agenda, both in yoga class and outside it.

Mr. Dhume is a Washington-based writer and the author of "My Friend the Fanatic: Travels With a Radical Islamist" (Skyhorse Publishing, May 2009).

Mobilizing the UN II ■ Bernard Kouchner

The savaging of humanitarian law

Modern war disgusts us in the tragic consequences it has for civilians.

How could we not be horrified at the sight of bodies, atrociously maimed or burned; the bodies of women, men and children lying in the smoking ruins of their homes, in hospitals unable to cope that have become simply places to die, absent sufficient drugs and equipment?

Unfortunately, such atrocities are to be seen in many places around the world, usually with relative indifference — the paradoxical outcome of the way in which the media have made violence an everyday event.

Somalia, Congo, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Darfur, Gaza: this depressing litany of conflicts with their multitude of innocent civilian victims swept away by the storms of war must not however leave us indifferent.

The international community — and in particular France and the European Union, for which human rights are a core value, the very foundation of their sense of identity — cannot stand silently by in the face of such a situation.

In a period of armed conflict there is in fact a body of rules and principles that all parties to the conflict must obey: international humanitarian law.

That body of law, which has been largely built up since World War II, derives mainly from the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols.

While the International Committee of the Red Cross is the statutory guardian of those standards, all states parties to the conventions must not only obey them but also ensure that they are obeyed by the parties in an armed conflict.

What that means is that the international community has a special responsibility in ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law.

Indeed, one of the essential principles of interna-

tional humanitarian law is that a distinction must be made at all times and in all circumstances between combatants and non-combatants, along with its corollary: a distinction between military targets and civilian targets, the latter to be protected. There are few conflicts in which that principle is fully respected.

In northeastern Sri Lanka, 230,000 civilians have been caught up in the fighting. The Tamil Tigers are accused by all NGOs of refusing to allow civilians to flee the war zone.

During the Israeli offensive in Gaza, there were several strikes in areas apparently devoid of any identifiable military target, and in particular that of Dec. 27, which hit the Gaza Training College, and the series of bombardments on Jan. 6 aimed at schools run by UNRWA (the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees).

Hamas also is responsible for violations of international humanitarian law, in part by firing rockets which were not aimed at military targets, but clearly intended to terrorize civilians in southern Israel.

Moreover, both Israel and Hamas have used weapons that have indiscriminate effects, since aerial bombing and mortar fire were not used in such a manner as to spare civilians. Yet the prohibition of the use of weapons with indiscriminate effects is another key principle of international humanitarian law.

The tragedy to which we have been witness in recent weeks is unfortunately not an isolated instance. Far too many armed conflicts ravage other parts of the world, from Sri Lanka to Darfur, from Somalia to Iraq, each with its funeral procession of massacred innocents. In each case the parties commit grave breaches of international humanitarian law, and in some cases mass atrocities punishable by international criminal justice.

Access is impeded to humanitarian aid and aid workers, plunging civilians into total destitution and

depriving them of the most basic medical treatment. Children, some less than 10 years old, are enlisted as soldiers as well as sex slaves.

In various conflicts, rape is increasingly being used in a systematic, planned and large-scale manner; in short, it is used as a genuine weapon of war, whether in the Kivus or in Sudan, with almost total impunity. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a woman is raped every 30 minutes; 30,000 were raped in the Kivus in the first half of 2007.

In the face of situations in which civilians are deliberately targeted, the maintenance and the restoration of peace are constant challenges.

France is engaged in numerous peacekeeping operations under UN mandates. The purpose of several of them — first and foremost the European Union operation in eastern Chad and north-eastern Central African Republic — is to provide protection to innocent civilians.

Such protection must involve first and foremost a guarantee of adherence to the principles of international humanitarian law in armed conflict and the inclusion of the issues surrounding the protection of civilians in mandates for peacekeeping operations.

I am convinced that compliance with international humanitarian law must be made the subject of depoliticized discussions at the United Nations, since such compliance is the duty of all, irrespective of the legitimacy of the military action undertaken by a specific state or armed group.

That is why I have asked France's permanent representative to the United Nations in New York to mobilize our partners on this matter. An initial meeting will be held in the coming days with a view to organizing a debate in the weeks to come.

What is at stake here is the credibility of the United Nations, and of the Security Council in particular, as the guardian of international peace and security.

Bernard Kouchner is the foreign minister of France.

The UN must examine compliance with international humanitarian law.

Roger Cohen

After the war on terror

In his first White House televised interview, with the Dubai-based Al Arabiya news network, President Obama buried the lead: The war on terror is over.

Yes, the with-us-or-against-us global struggle — the so-called Long War — in which a freedom-loving West confronts the undifferentiated forces of darkness comprising everything from Al Qaeda to elements of the Palestinian national struggle under the banner of "Islamofascism" has been terminated.

What's left is what matters: defeating terrorist organizations. That's not a war. It's a strategic challenge.

The new president's overturning of the Bush post-9/11 doctrine is a critical breakthrough. It resolves nothing but opens the way for a rapprochement with a Muslim world long cast into the "against-us" camp. Nothing good in Israel-Palestine, Afghanistan or Iran could happen across that Manichean chasm.

Obama said, "The language we use matters." He said he would be "very clear in distinguishing between organizations like Al Qaeda — that espouse violence, espouse terror and act on it — and people who may disagree with my administration and certain actions, or may have a particular viewpoint in terms of how their countries should develop. We can have legitimate disagreements but still be respectful."

Bush used to distinguish between terrorists and moderate, freedom-loving Muslims. Obama makes a much more important distinction here: between those bent on the violent destruction of America and those who merely dislike, differ from, or have been disappointed by America.

These days the overwhelming majority of the world's Muslims fall into the latter category. Obama is right to take his case to them through the Arabic-language Al Arabiya channel.

His tone represented a startling departure. He was

subtle, respectful, self-critical and balanced where the Bush administration had been blunt, offensive, bombastic and one-sided in its embrace of an Israel-can-do-no-wrong policy.

Speaking as his Middle East envoy, George Mitchell, began an eight-day visit to the region, Obama described the mission as one of listening "because all too often the United States starts by dictating."

Obama went further. Citing Muslim members of his own family and his experience of life in a Muslim country (Indonesia), he repositioned the national interest and his own role.

He defined his task as convincing Muslims that "Americans are not your enemy" and persuading Americans that respect for a Muslim world is essential. His objective, he said, was to promote not only U.S. interests but those of ordinary people — read Muslims — suffering from "poverty and a lack of opportunity."

That's a significant ideological leap for an American leader, from the post-Cold War doctrine of supremacy to a new inclusiveness dictated by globalization — from "the decider" to something close to "mediator-in-chief." I applaud this shift because it is based in realism: A changed world is susceptible to American persuasion, not to American diktat.

Still, words do not change the fact that the post-Gaza challenge facing Obama is immense. Here in Iran, where anti-American rhetoric is too significant a pillar of the 30-year-old Islamic Revolution to be lightly sacrificed, the response to the president's interview was cool. It came as the government, citing the Israeli assault on Gaza, approved a bill to investigate and prosecute alleged war crimes anywhere in the world.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said change under Obama was good but would only be credible if America apologized to Iran for its role in the 1953 coup, among other things, and withdrew troops from

around the world. The hard-line daily Kayhan said "Obama follows Bush's footsteps."

In fact, Obama said he would pursue dialogue with Iran and praised the greatness of Persian civilization even as he deplored Iranian threats against Israel, its nuclear program and "support of terrorist organizations in the past."

Any U.S.-Iranian dialogue will have to be rooted in a word Obama favors: respect. The United States has underestimated Iranian pride and the fierce attachment to its independence of a nation that has known its share of Western meddling.

Carrots and sticks will lead nowhere. Nor will an exclusive focus on the nuclear issue that fails to examine the whole range of American and Iranian interests, some shared, some contested.

What is certain, with Iran as with the rest of the Middle East, is that there will be setbacks. Terrorists will attack. Obama will be denounced. But as Mitchell knows

from his experience of bringing peace to Northern Ireland, the critical thing is perseverance.

Tony Blair, now also a Middle East envoy and Mitchell's partner in Belfast, once put it to me this way: "The only reason we got the breakthrough in Northern Ireland was we did in the end focus on it with such intensity over such a period that every little thing that went wrong — and everything that could go wrong did at some point — was all the time being managed and rectified." He described the approach as: "Any time we can't solve it, we have to manage it, until we can start to solve it again."

Bush had the ideological framework wrong. Obama has transformed it by ending the war on terror. Now comes the hard Middle Eastern work of solve-manage-solve. It will need the president's unswerving focus.

Readers are invited to comment at my blog: www.ihb.com/passages

Obama has the right paradigm. Now comes the hard work of solve-manage-solve.

Thomas L. Friedman

The five-state solution

In February 2002, I traveled to Saudi Arabia and interviewed the then crown prince, now king, Abdullah, at his Riyadh horse farm. I asked him why the next Arab summit wouldn't just propose to Israel full peace and normalization of relations, by all 22 Arab states, for full withdrawal from all occupied lands and creation of a Palestinian state. Abdullah said that I had read his mind ("Have you broken into my desk?" he asked me) and that he was about to propose just that, which he later did, giving birth to the "Abdullah peace plan."

Unfortunately, neither the Bush team nor Israel ever built upon the Abdullah plan. And the Saudi leader always stopped short of presenting his ideas directly to the Israeli people. Since then, everything has deteriorated.

So, I've wondered lately what Abdullah would propose if asked to update his plan. I've even probed whether he'd like to do another interview, but he is apparently reticent. Not one to be deterred, I've decided to do the next best thing: read his mind again. Here is my guess at the memo Abdullah has in his drawer for President Obama. I'd call it: "Abdullah II: The Five-State Solution for Arab-Israeli peace."

Dear President Obama,

Congratulations on your inauguration and for quickly dispatching your new envoy, George Mitchell, a good man, to the Middle East. I wish Mitchell could resume where he left off eight years ago, but the death of Arafat, the decline of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war in Lebanon, the 2009 Hamas-Israel war in Gaza, the continued expansion of colonial Israeli settlements and the deepening involvement of Iran with Hamas and Hezbollah have all created a new reality.

Specifically, the Palestinian Authority is in no position today to assume control of the West Bank, Hamas is incapable of managing Gaza and the introduction of rockets provided by Iran to Hamas has created a situation whereby Israel won't turn over the West Bank to any Palestinians now because it fears Hamas would use it to launch rockets on Israel's international airport. But if we do nothing, Zionist settlers would devour the rest of the West Bank and holy Jerusalem.

What can be done?

I am proposing what I would call a

five-state solution:

1. Israel agrees in principle to withdraw from every inch of the West Bank and Arab districts of East Jerusalem, as it has from Gaza.

Any territories Israel might retain in the West Bank for its settlers would

What might King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia propose if asked to update his plan for peace in the Middle East?

have to be swapped — inch for inch — with land from Israel proper.

2. The Palestinians — Hamas and Fatah — agree to form a national unity government. This government then agrees to accept a limited number of Egyptian troops and police to help Palestinians secure Gaza and monitor its borders, as well as Jordanian troops and police to do the same in the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority would agree to five-year "security assistance programs" with Egypt in Gaza and with Jordan in the West Bank.

With Egypt and Jordan helping to maintain order, Palestinians could focus on building their own credible security and political institutions to support their full independence at the end of five years.

3. Israel would engage in a phased withdrawal over these five years from all of its settlements in the West Bank and Arab Jerusalem — except those agreed to be granted to Israel as part of land swaps — at the same pace that the Palestinians meet the security and governance metrics agreed to in advance by all the parties. The U.S. would be the sole arbiter of whether the metrics have been met by both sides.

4. Saudi Arabia would pay all the costs of the Egyptian and Jordanian trustees, plus a \$1 billion a year service fee to each country — as well as all the budgetary needs of the Palestinian Authority. The entire plan would be based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and blessed by the UN Security Council.

The virtues of this five-state solution — Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Israel and Saudi Arabia — are numerous: Egypt and Jordan, the Arab states that have peace treaties with Israel, would act as transition guarantors that any Israeli

withdrawal would not leave a security vacuum in the West Bank, Gaza or Arab Jerusalem that could threaten Israel. Israel would have time for a phased withdrawal of its settlements, and Palestinians would have the chance to do nation-building in an orderly manner. This would be an Arab solution that would put a stop to Iran's attempts to Persianize the Palestinian issue.

President Obama, too much has been broken to go straight back to the two-state solution. It would be like trying to build a house with bricks but no cement. There's no trust and no framework to build it.

Israelis and Palestinians need the kind of cement that only Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan can provide. It would give Israelis security and Palestinians a clear pathway to an independent state.

I hope you will give careful consideration to the five-state solution.

Peace be upon you,
Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz

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Mobilizing the UN I ■ Linda Mason

The blue helmets must get tough in Congo

The seemingly endless turmoil in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo took another turn last week. Thousands of Rwandan troops entered the country, apparently by invitation of the Congolese government, to rout Hutu military forces that had fled Rwanda after the genocide 14 years ago.

They arrested General Laurent Nkunda, the leader of the Congolese Tutsi rebel group who up until last week was an ally of Rwanda and reportedly received arms, supplies, and soldiers from the Rwandan military.

These moves took the world by surprise, including the UN peacekeeping forces stationed in the Congo.

Experts are weighing in on whether these moves will eventually stabilize eastern Congo. But it is clear that the military build-up and shifting alliances mean more brutal fighting in the short-term and more suffering for countless Congolese families that simply want a safe place to live.

Civilians in Congo continue to pay the price in this long war — despite protection from the United Nation's largest peacekeeping force. Over 5.5 million Congolese have died in this conflict. To put the death toll in perspective, 400,000 people have died in Darfur in its six-year conflict, and 800,000 people died in the 100-day Rwandan genocide.

In addition to the death toll in Congo, rape is pervasive — 23 percent of the population in eastern Congo have reported witnessing acts of sexual violence. Rape happens with impunity.

I just returned from Congo and found a heartbreakingly beautiful country that has been ripped apart by brutality and lawlessness. As I traveled throughout the countryside, I was shocked on two accounts:

First, eastern Congo is a beautiful, resource-rich land. It is lush and green, with forests of giant Eucalyptus trees, rivers and waterfalls, and areas rich in minerals.

But I was also shocked to see that this land is uncultivated, crops are idle and no commerce or trucks are on the roads. Instead, there are displacement camps and armed militias roaming the roads and villages.

One million civilians, out of a population of 6 mil-

lion in eastern Congo, have fled to these displacement camps.

International media portray the conflict in eastern Congo as a proxy war between Congo and Rwanda. Unfortunately, it is far more complex. The conflict is primarily a fight over resources — vast amounts of

minerals and rich arable land.

To gain advantage, militias of all stripe attack villages, raping and slaughtering a who are in their way. Many soldiers, men and boys, have no political loyalty but are either forcibly conscripted or join a militia in order to survive. If they want to eat, the fight. Congo is in desperate need of job: functioning markets and agriculture — in short, economic alternatives to war.

There are also many bases for the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), the UN peacekeeping force of 17,000 soldiers. These bases are enclosed, well-protected and set away from the villages.

I saw UN patrols, but I never saw a soldier outside his vehicle or mingling with civilians. Few soldiers speak the local language, and many do not know the local communities and have rarely used force to protect civilian communities, the key element of their mandate.

After numerous displaced Congolese were attacked last November, the UN Security Council voted to send in an additional 3,000 troops.

This recognition of the enormity of the problem and the UN's willingness to augment existing troops is laudable. But to be effective, MONUC needs additional support and resources from the international community, including the United States and must focus intensely on two objectives.

First, it must be willing to use deadly force to protect civilians. Without a credible military threat, attacks on villages will not stop.

Second, MONUC needs to gain the confidence of the civilians it is protecting. Swahili-speaking soldiers need to be visibly present on the roads and in the villages in conflict areas. They need to break up roadblocks, allow freedom of movement, provide local stability and security, and report abuses from any of the military groups.

The UN's peacekeeping role is a vital one — both armed protection and local confidence-building. The Congolese people need both now.

Linda Mason is chairwoman of Mercy Corps and founder of Bright Horizons Family Solutions.



Lionel Heeling/Agence France-Presse

The humbling of Davos Man



John Gapper

It's lonely at the top.

Having journeyed this week up a Swiss mountain valley to the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, I find myself in select company. Several members of the global business elite discovered at the last minute that they had pressing business elsewhere.

Where is John Thain, the former chief executive of Merrill Lynch? Back in New York trying to rescue his good name after being pushed out by Bank of America and having details of his \$1.2m (£907,000, £839,000) office refurbishment leaked. And where is Sam DiPiazza, chief executive of PwC? In India, where two PwC auditors have been held by police over their role in the alleged \$1bn fraud at Satyam Computers.

This is usually the time of year when Davos Man – the global banker and business leader whose fortunes have risen spectacularly during the past three decades – gets to strut his or her stuff. This January, Davos Man is being humbled instead.

It is tricky to be seen at a talking shop in Switzerland when your house is burning down. Even Bob Diamond, president of Barclays, which managed to persuade investors this week that it is not going bust, decided it would be wiser to stay in London.

But there is more going on than a bunch of chief executives temporarily bowing to public relations realities. The ascendancy of Davos Man is under threat for the first time since Klaus Schwab organised the inaugural meeting in 1971. The history of Davos parallels the rise in prestige and power of the private sector and free enterprise. After a blip in the crisis-ridden early 1970s, Mr Schwab's annual circus of chief executives, politicians and non-governmental organisations has been on a roll.

Companies and banks footed the bill for the frenetic round of debates and dinners, and politicians and others dutifully turned up. It was in their interests because this was where the money, and the power, was.

Davos Man was not always popular. He was condemned from the right by Samuel Huntington, the US political scientist, for his "dead soul", being a rootless cosmopolitan who disdained the patriotic pride of the ordinary Joe. From the left, anti-globalisation activists accused chief executives of exploiting the poor.

But his power was unquestioned. The election of Margaret Thatcher in the UK in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in the US in 1980 ushered in scepticism about government. Private enterprise filled the gap, with billionaires such as Bill Gates not only building businesses but also usurping the role of the public sector and governments in addressing inequality and social problems.

Now, all that is under threat. The credit crisis has ruined the reputations of Wall Street bankers and handed power to politicians and regulators. "The president of the US and the Treasury secretary have been given a degree of power that no president has had since Franklin Delano Roosevelt," says Nick Burns, a Harvard professor and former US undersecretary of state.

Suddenly, business leaders lack legitimacy. A US survey conducted by Edelman, the public relations company, last autumn found that the trust of the public in US business had fallen from 58 per cent the previous year to 38 per cent. Only 49 per cent of Americans (Americans, for heaven's sake!) think the free market should be allowed to function independently.

I find these data worrying because the failures of the credit crisis do not obviate the good things businesses can do. Mr Gates' philanthropy and other private-sector initiatives to improve the state of the world were more than mirages.

Davos Man now faces a struggle not only to operate freely in business but also to regain his former authority. It seems to me that business people have to do two things to regain trust.

The first is simple enough, although

painful: stop behaving like the 18th century French aristocracy. After an extended period of extreme prosperity, and an increasing proportion of financial rewards accruing to people at the very top, it is easy for these people to lose their heads (in this case, figuratively).

Perhaps Mr Thain is being singled out unfairly, since Bank of America wants to make him into a whipping boy, but his lavish office expenses and decision to accelerate the payment of Merrill bonuses speak to being, like many other financiers, weirdly detached from reality. Most people are happy, in normal times, for there to be big disparities of income and wealth, and for business people and entrepreneurs to do well. Many of us, after all, harbour hopes of getting rich ourselves one day. But there must be, as Richard Edelman, head of the eponymous firm, phrases it, some "shared sacrifice".

The second thing is less painful but harder: to demonstrate competence. Davos Man's pitch, accepted by most people for many years, was that the private sector was better at doing things than governments. That did not seem a stretch: disasters such as hurricane Katrina exposed the US government's inability to fulfil its basic duties to citizens.

The credit crisis turned out to be Wall Street's own hurricane Katrina. It transpired that financiers had no idea of the risks they were taking and could not save their banks from sinking in a storm. The question then naturally arises: if Davos Man cannot do his own job, why should we let him do anything else?

At the moment, even in the rarefied air of Davos, there is no obvious answer to this question. Personally, I hope that business leaders can restore public confidence in their ethics and competence as quickly as possible because the alternative is unpleasant to contemplate. But few people are going to listen to, let alone follow, them until they do.

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Obama must shift U.S. policy toward Iran

New president needs to treat nation as key regional player

ANALYSIS

Jay Deshmukh
Tehran
AFP-Jiji

New U.S. President Barack Obama must view Iran as a strategic player rather than limiting his policy to Tehran's controversial nuclear drive if he hopes to achieve regional peace, analysts said Wednesday.

Both Washington and Tehran have an interest in the wider Middle East, and an easing of tensions between the two archfoes is key to ushering in peace in the region, they said.

Mohammad Saleh Sedghian, head of the Arab-Iranian Studies Center, said both administrations were watching each other closely to determine their next steps.

"The Iranians are watching the Americans' practical moves and the Americans, especially Obama, are expecting Iran to help them take the correct position on Tehran's nuclear plan and Iran's role concerning Hezbollah and Hamas," he

Fiery Ahmadinejad to seek second four-year term

Tehran REUTERS

Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will run for president again in June, an aide said Wednesday, in the first official confirmation he would seek a second four-year term.

Ahmadinejad's rivals in the June 12 polls could include moderate politician Mohammad Khatami, whose presidency from 1997 to 2005 was marked by improving ties with the West that have since deteriorated. Khatami has said he is considering whether to run.

Ahmadinejad has been criticized by opponents for economic policies they blame for soaring inflation. Proreform politicians in particular have accused the president of further isolating Iran with fiery speeches against the West.

Iran is embroiled in a row with the West, which says Tehran wants nuclear weapons. Iran denies this but has had three rounds of U.N. sanctions

slapped on it for not halting its atomic work.

However, analysts say Ahmadinejad's prospects may largely depend on retaining the support of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's top authority, who has often publicly praised the president and whose views influence millions of loyalists.

Ahmadinejad was the surprise victor in the 2005 presidential race after a second-round vote against influential cleric Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's president for much of the 1990s.

He won by appealing to many of the Islamic Republic's devout poor who had felt neglected by past governments. Ahmadinejad vowed a return to revolutionary values, a crackdown on corruption and a fairer distribution of Iran's oil wealth.

Presidents in Iran can run for two consecutive four-year terms before they must step down. They can run again at a later date.



V for victory: Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad plans to seek re-election in June. AFP-Jiji

said, referring to militant groups in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

Officials in Washington accuse Tehran of arming and funding the two Islamist movements as well as Shiite fighters in Iraq where U.S. forces are battling sectarian strife and a still-volatile insurgency.

Tehran denies the charges but acknowledges offering moral support to Hezbollah and financial aid to the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip.

But on Monday, Obama — in contrast to his predecessor, who refused talks with Iran until it halted sensitive nuclear

work — extended a diplomatic hand toward Tehran.

"As I said in my inauguration speech, if countries like Iran are willing to unclench their fist, they will find an extended hand from us," Obama said. "It is very important for us to make sure that we are using all the tools of U.S. power, including diplomacy, in our relationship with Iran."

On Wednesday, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said he would welcome Obama's plan if it contained "real change" but he also demanded an apology for past U.S. "crimes" against Iran.

Obama's policies toward Iran are expected to be guided by Tehran's own approach to its nuclear program, which many Western nations suspect is a cover for ambitions to build an atomic bomb.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice on Monday pledged "direct" diplomacy with Tehran if it halts uranium enrichment, the process that makes fuel for nuclear plants but can be extended to make the core of an atomic bomb.

The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United

States — plus Germany have offered Tehran economic and energy incentives in exchange for freezing enrichment.

But Tehran is pressing on with the sensitive work, insisting its nuclear program is peaceful and solely geared toward electricity generation.

Frederic Tellier, Iran analyst with the International Crisis Group, insisted that Obama has to treat Iran as a regional player.

"The Iranian leadership expects a comprehensive and equal-to-equal dialogue with the U.S.," Tellier said.

"This will require a strategic

vision that accepts Iran as a key player in the Middle East and a necessary interlocutor on critical issues which both Washington and Tehran have a deep national interest in discussing, including the stabilization of conflict zones in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Palestine and elsewhere."

He also said Washington's strategy should not be based on the outcome of Iran's presidential election in June.

"Such a strategy would lead the regime to denounce the U.S. for interfering in the elections," he said, adding that "not Mahmoud Ahmadinejad but Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (Iran's supreme leader) is in charge of strategic issues."

An early glimpse of Washington's views was seen Tuesday when U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Adm. Michael Mullen hinted that Iran had a specific role to play in the region.

"Iran, as a bordering state, plays a role as well and to the degree that we are able to dialogue with them and find some mutual interests, there is a potential there for moving ahead together," he said.

Hamid Reza Jalaipur, a sociology professor in Tehran, said if Iran fails to take advantage of a more flexible U.S. policy, it would be hurt in the future, "since Obama will seek support of Europe, the U.N. and the Arabs to pressure Iran."

Islamist fears cloud Somali peace summit

Djibouti meeting to elect president

Excluded hardliners capture Baidoa

By Barney Jopson in Nairobi

More than 400 Somali politicians will today meet in Djibouti, the Horn of Africa's smallest country, to implement the provisions of a nascent peace deal and select a new president.

The process, to be held under the auspices of the United Nations, has the support of foreign governments who are trying with fresh urgency to bring order to Somalia. The country's capacity to export instability has been underlined by piracy and the fears of western intelligence agencies about Somali terrorism abroad.

But events this week have highlighted the gap between conference room politics in Djibouti – one think-tank dismisses it as the “Djibouti bubble” – and the situation on the ground in one of the world's most violent and destitute countries.

The weakness of Somalia's western-backed transitional government was underlined on Monday when the politicians meeting in Djibouti voted to expand parliament from 275 seats to 550 to make room for moderate Islamists. At the same time hardline Islamists, who control most of south and central Somalia, captured the town of Baidoa, one of the government's last strongholds and the site of a former grain warehouse that has served sporadically as a parliament.

“The takeover of Baidoa illustrates the painful disconnect between politics and the reality on the ground,” says Rashid Abdi, a Nairobi-based analyst at the International Crisis Group.

“Djibouti is a dialogue between essentially very weak parties,” he says. “They don't control many

guns or much territory. So the question is, can anything they agree have any impact on the ground?”

Two years ago Ethiopian troops entered Somalia to oust an Islamist alliance that had sidelined the transitional government. Some of the defeated Islamists decamped to Djibouti, where they formed the moderate Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS).

But the radicals remained – led by the al-Shabaab militia, which the US says is tied to al-Qaeda – and launched an insurgency against the government and its Ethiopian backers, centred on

‘The question is, can anything they agree have any impact on the ground?’

Mogadishu, the capital. When Ethiopia began to withdraw its troops this month, the insurgents refocused on an under-manned force of African Union peacekeepers.

An important step will be taken today – if all goes according to plan – when the expanded parliament will elect a new president. The two leading candidates are Nur Hassan Hussein, the transitional government's prime minister, and Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, head of the ARS.

The Ethiopian government, an ally of the US, has supported the Djibouti process but expressed concern that it is being hurried.

One analyst in Addis Ababa says it is an important means of redistributing power to the satisfaction of Somalia's fractious clans. “The people running Mogadishu are the clan elders,” he says. “These are the people who, with reasonable leadership, should be capable of standing up to al-Shabaab.”

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The Geert Wilders case ■ Ian Buruma

Insults to free speech

If it were not for his hatred of Islam, Geert Wilders would have remained a provincial Dutch parliamentarian of little note. He is now world-famous, mainly for wanting the Koran to be banned in his country, "like Mein Kampf is banned," and for making a crude short film that depicted Islam as a terrorist faith — or, as he puts it, "that sick ideology of Allah and Muhammad."

Last year the Dutch government decided that such views, though coarse, were an acceptable contribution to political debate. Yet last week an Amsterdam court decided that Wilders should be prosecuted for "insulting" and "spreading hatred" against Muslims. Dutch criminal law can be invoked against anyone who "deliberately insults people on the grounds of their race, religion, beliefs or sexual orientation."

Whether Wilders has deliberately insulted Muslim people is for the judges to decide. But for a man who calls for a ban on the Koran to act as the champion of free speech is a bit rich.

When the British Parliament refused to screen Wilders's film at Westminster this week, he cited this as "yet more proof that Europe is losing its freedom." His defenders, by no means all right-wingers, also claim to be standing up for freedom. A Dutch law professor said he found it "strange" that a man should be prosecuted for "criticizing a book."

This seems a trifle obtuse. Comparing a book that billions hold sacred to Hitler's murderous tract is more than an exercise in literary criticism; it suggests that those who believe in the Koran are like Nazis, and an all-out war against them would be justified. This kind of thinking, presumably, is what the Dutch law court is seeking to check.

One of the misconceptions that muddle the debate in the West over Islam and free speech is the idea that people should be totally free to insult. Free speech is never that absolute. Even — or perhaps especially — in America, where citizens are protected by the First

Amendment, there are certain words and opinions that no civilized person would utter, and others that open the speaker to civil charges.

This does not mean that religious beliefs should be above criticism. And sometimes criticism will be taken as an insult where none is intended. Lkening the Koran to "Mein Kampf" would not seem to fall into that category.

If Wilders were to confine his remarks to those Muslims who do indeed harm freedom of speech by using violence against critics and apostates, he would have a valid point. This is indeed a serious problem, not just in the West, but especially in countries where Muslims are in the majority.

Wilders, however, refuses to make such fine distinctions. He believes that there is no such thing as a moderate Muslim. His aim is to stop "the Islamic invasion of Holland."

There are others who share this fear and speak of "Islamicization," as though not just Holland but all Europe were in danger of being engulfed by fascism once again. Since

Muslims still constitute a relatively small minority, and most are not extremists, this seems an exaggerated fear, even though the danger of Islamist violence must be taken seriously.

However, a closer look at the rhetoric of Wilders and his defenders shows that Muslims are not the only enemies in their sights. Equally dangerous are the people whom Wilders and others refer to obsessively as "the cultural elite." What they mean are liberals who are so concerned about Western racism that they find it hard to tolerate any criticism of non-Western people or non-Western faiths.

There are such people, to be sure, but even among my fellow Dutch citizens, political correctness of this kind is becoming increasingly rare.

In the past, it is true, legitimate debates about cultural and religious tensions arising from the poor integration of ethnic minorities were often stifled by an excess of liberal zeal. Doubts about the official drive toward pan-European unity and over liberal policies towards guest workers and refugees were too often dismissed as ultra-nationalism or worse.

In a bewildering world of global economics, multinational institutions and mass migration, many people are anxious about losing their sense of place; they feel abandoned by their own elites. Right-wing populists like Wilders are tapping into these fears.

Since raw nativism is out of fashion in the Netherlands, Wilders does not speak of race, but of freedom. His method is to expose the intolerance of Muslims by provoking them.

If they react to his insults, he can claim that they are a threat to our native liberties. And if anyone should point out that deliberately giving offense to Muslims is neither the best way to lower social tensions nor to protect our freedoms,

Wilders will denounce him as a typical cultural elitist collaborating with "Islamofascism."

The lawsuit against Wilders has been hailed in the Netherlands as a good thing for democracy. I am not so sure. It makes him look more important than he should be. In fact, the response of Dutch Muslims to his film last year was exemplary: most said nothing at all. And when a small Dutch Muslim TV station offered to broadcast the film, after all other stations had refused, the grand champion of free speech resolutely turned the offer down.

Ian Buruma is the author of "Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance."

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