



## Unraveling and Capitulation

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### Abstract

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- \* Encouraged and thrilled by the ostensible progress in the negotiations with Tehran, the Obama White House is increasing active intervention in all Middle Eastern affairs. However, the dominant driving forces behind the policies of the Obama White House have very little to do with the actual situation in the greater Middle East, or, for that matter, the self-interests and aspirations of all local actors and powers.
- \* The immediate objective of Obama's Washington is to prevent the getting together of Russia, China and Germany-led Europe virtually at all cost – all the more so at costs to the regional actors and powers. The greater Middle East becomes the new focus and instrument of the desperate efforts of the Obama White House to prevent the emergence of a cohesive sphere of Eurasian polities. The objective of the Obama White House is to create a strategic-economic posture that will deprive Russia, China and the Europeans of the opportunity to jointly cooperate.
- \* The anticipated dominant roles of Iran and Turkey as regional powers empowered by the US is the driving force behind the evolving policy of the Obama White House towards America's erstwhile allies – Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. To further their objectives, the Obama White House is exercising horrendous pressures on these now estranged US allies.
- \* In all the regional capitals, the changes of policy are the expression of desperation. Instead of attempting to discuss policies and regional realities with the Obama White House-leaders and governments considered staunch allies of the United States have resigned to the imperative to lie low until the Obama storm passes and then face and address the destruction left in its wake.
- \* While the great powers can step back in lieu of the mounting pressures from the Obama White House, the local powers and actors have no such luxury. They are in the region to stay. Although US incessant pressure will continue till early 2017 – there is no telling whether the local powers and aspirant actors will be able to withstand Washington's interventionism. Meanwhile, the incessant pressure of the Obama White House keeps raising the volatility of the entire region. Hence, there are growing indications of a regional eruption beforehand. A small spark from Iran or any of its proxies will suffice to set aflame the entire greater Middle East.



## About ISPSW

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## About the Author of this Issue

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Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State.

He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (*New York Times* No. 1 Bestseller & *Washington Post* No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (*New York Times* Bestseller & *Foreign Affairs Magazine* Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports.

Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



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## Analysis

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Encouraged and thrilled by the ostensible progress in the negotiations with Tehran, the Obama White House is increasing active intervention in all Middle Eastern affairs. However, the dominant driving forces behind the policies of the Obama White House have very little to do with the actual situation in the greater Middle East, or, for that matter, the self-interests and aspirations of all local actors and powers.

The immediate objective of Obama's Washington is to prevent the getting together of Russia, China and Germany-led Europe virtually at all cost – all the more so at costs to the regional actors and powers. The US considers the emergence of a geo-strategic and geo-economic Eurasian bloc comprised of the key great powers of the Eastern Hemisphere – Russia, China and Germany-led Europe – a principal threat to US global hegemony. For Washington, the reversal of this threat warrants everything. The Obama White House therefore pushes to instigate crises and gaps between Europe and Russia. At the same time, Obama strives to artificially increase the European strategic-economic dependence on the US so that it will be impossible for Europe to defy US diktats vis-a-vis Russia or any other issue.

The US-engineered flaring-up of the civil war in Ukraine, coming in the wake of the US-instigated and -sponsored Color Revolution, has been the primary front in the undermining of the emerging Eurasian bloc. But as the Europeans and Russians become increasingly reluctant to follow the American diktats regarding Ukraine and instead strive to bring the fratricidal war to a negotiated end – the greater Middle East becomes the new focus and instrument of the desperate efforts of the Obama White House to prevent the emergence of a cohesive sphere of Eurasian polities. The public-political demonization of Russia, and particularly Putin, on account of Russia's Middle Eastern policies is another facet of Washington's regional policy.

Obama is adamant on empowering Iran and Turkey as the primary regional powers entrusted with implementing US policy and safeguarding US interests. Obama's objective regarding Iran is complex. Obama is determined to attain a dramatic Grand Rapprochement with the Mullahs of Tehran as the key to establishing his legacy. Obama yearns for a foreign policy achievement that, like Nixon's February 1972 trip to Beijing, will overshadow the failure of his domestic-economic policies and the consequent public enmity and ire. Indeed US major businesses, starting with oil and aviation companies, are already visiting Iran to discuss renewal of relations even when sanctions are still in effect. Obama has long considered Erdogan's Turkey the example of, and precedent for, the establishment of a modern power based on Islamist tenets. Obama wants to empower Turkey as a proof of the veracity of his vision about the central role of Islamism in modern polity. Turkey's growing rifts with both Israel and conservative Arab governments make the empowerment of Turkey all the more appealing to the Obama White House.

The objective of the Obama White House is to create a strategic-economic posture that will deprive Russia, China and the Europeans of the opportunity to jointly cooperate – for example, on the western expanses of the New Silk Road and the Littoral Silk Road. As well, the Obama White House is pressuring Europe to replace Russian gas (including Central Asian gas piped via Russia) with Iranian gas and Qatari gas (that actually comes from a Qatari-Iranian joint field) that will reach Europe via Turkish pipelines.

The anticipated dominant roles of Iran and Turkey as regional powers empowered by the US is the driving force behind the evolving policy of the Obama White House towards America's erstwhile allies – Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. To further their objectives, the Obama White House is exercising horrendous pressures on the now estranged US allies.



In Israel, the Obama White House blatantly intervened in the recent parliamentary elections with the declared aim to topple Obama's nemesis Netanyahu. Numerous senior officials of Obama's own elections campaign team were dispatched to Israel, along with huge sums of money, in order to establish "grassroots NGOs" of the kind used by Obama to defeat Hillary Clinton in the 2008 primaries, and then win the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections despite mounting public mistrust (as manifested in the huge Republican wins in the Congressional elections of 2010, 2012 and 2014). Although Obama failed and Netanyahu and the Israeli national camp won the 17 March 2015 elections with a discernable majority – the extent of Obama's wrath and resolve have not been lost on Netanyahu.

Netanyahu decided that Jerusalem will focus on addressing only the most critical threats to Israel even if these require friction and confrontation with the Obama White House. These are the Iran nuclear threat and the threat emanating from Iran's proxies, particularly the HizbAllah and the HAMAS, to the Israeli population centers and national infrastructure. On everything else, Netanyahu decided, Israel will toe the line to mitigate confrontation and friction with the Obama White House even when the US policies are detrimental to Israel's own interests and/or are out of touch with reality.

Regarding Syria and Iraq, for example, Israel stands back from helping the minorities to survive and stabilize the Fertile Crescent of Minorities (of which Israel is a part). Israel also refrains from fighting the Jihadist forces even though they declare their intent to destroy the State of Israel once they come to power in Syria-Iraq. Instead, Israel permits the build-up and operations on Israel's borders of "moderate Jihadist" forces – including al-Qaida affiliated entities – trained and equipped by the US. Israel is also tolerating the mortal threat that these Jihadists constitute to Israel's allies Jordan and Egypt – all in order not to further aggravate the crisis with the Obama Administration.

Most contentious yet out of touch with reality is the Palestinian issue – a darling of the liberals in the US and the EU. In principle, there exists the absurdity of creating a new state in a region where modern Arab statehood is being rejected as one state after another is being destroyed by its own populace. Instead, the destiny of the Arab population should be addressed within the historic tribe and clan frameworks they aspire for as the sole alternative to the ascent of Islamism-Jihadism among their youth. Even if an agreement were to be reached – there is no legal signatory on the Palestinian side. The legal status of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu-Mazen) is dubious since his tenure as the president of the Palestinian Authority ran from 15 January 2005 until 9 January 2009. No elections took place in the Palestinian Authority because all polls and localized elections (to student bodies and professional councils) indicate that the HAMAS will win about two-thirds of the votes, the neo-Salafi Jihadists will win about 15%, and the militant wing of the Fatah (that defines the destruction of Israel as the sole way to end to the conflict) will win about 20%. Hence, even if Abu-Mazen were to sign – how would he be able to impose "peace" with Israel on a population adamant on rejecting Israel's right to exist? But Netanyahu has given up on confronting the Obama White House over the Palestinian issue and now reverts to non-binding rhetoric solely in order to avoid additional clashes with Obama.

In Riyadh, the incessant US pressure to accept the ascent of Shiite Iran and trust US guarantees is taking its toll. Riyadh is giving up challenging Obama's Washington even as Iran and its proxies in Iraq, Syria, Sudan and Yemen are effectively encircling Saudi Arabia. The straw that broke Riyadh's camel back was the US pressure on Pakistan not to support Saudi Arabia militarily against the Iran-sponsored Houthi onslaught in Yemen. Riyadh finally internalized that rhetoric notwithstanding, the Obama White House would rather see long-time ally Saudi Arabia destabilized by an Iranian proxy than challenge Iran over its aggressive ascent in Yemen. Alas,



rather than confront the US – Riyadh decided to accept the guarantees of the Obama White House in the hope that the US will indeed deliver on its promises to contain Iran and prevent Iran-sponsored Shiite subversion of, and insurrection against, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

This led King Salman to conduct a palace coup on 29 April 2015 in order to defuse the building pressures within the House of al-Saud to disengage from the US embrace and instead consolidate a new regional alliance against Iran and Turkey. King Salman appointed his full-nephew Muhammad bin Nayef the new Crown Prince, and his son Muhammad bin Salman the Deputy Crown Prince. This means the empowerment of the Sudairi branch of the al-Saud for decades to come. Historically, the Sudairis have been inclined to accept US guarantees and protection in return for assistance at home. Thus, the Saudi involvement in Yemen is winding down despite mounting cross-border threats. As well, Saudi Arabia agreed anew to support financially and militarily (including the supply of TOW ATGMs) the various “moderate Jihadist” entities in Syria at the behest of the US. Saudi Arabia also sponsors Iraqi “moderate Jihadists” at the behest of the US even though these Iraqis sponsor Jihadist terrorism inside Saudi Arabia. Riyadh would rather take these risks than pick-up another fight with Obama.

In Cairo, Sissi also resolved to lower the profile of his face-off with a vindictive Obama White House. Sissi therefore focuses on fighting terrorism at the heart of Egypt and in the Sinai Peninsula. However, Cairo is gradually giving up on protecting and furthering Egyptian vital interests in Libya, Yemen (the Bab al-Mandeb entry to the Red Sea) and even the Nile waters that are threatened by Ethiopian dam construction – all in order not to further aggravate the tense relations with the Obama White House.

In all the regional capitals, these and comparable changes of policy are the expression of desperation. Instead of attempting to discuss policies and regional realities with the Obama White House-leaders and governments considered staunch allies of the United States have resigned to the imperative to lie low until the Obama storm passes and then face and address the destruction left in its wake. However, the indigenous problems and crises plaguing the entire greater Middle East continue to unfold on their own and irrespective of the desires of leaders and governments to out-wait Obama. As pressure and volatility grow it might not be possible to contain and suppress explosive crises.

Ultimately, however, the greater Middle East has always been dominated first and foremost by history and traditions. And these Obama cannot change. Hence, the incessant pressure imposed by the Obama White House is creating huge internal pressure within the greater Middle East as all local powers and actors – from states to minorities and tribes – struggle to reconcile the US-led interventionism with their own quests to adjust to the evolving region. Having finally crossed the threshold of fear and begun to destroy the modern states in favor of resurrecting ethno-centric and tribal-localized self-identities and self-governance – the diverse grassroots of the greater Middle East will not surrender their gains to the Obama White House.

Moreover, both Russia and China are history-driven great powers. Hence, both Moscow and Beijing are cognizant of both the realities of the greater Middle East and the greater framework of the reawakened Mackinderian world order. Germany-led Europe is also beginning to grasp the convoluted realities of the region and the world. These great powers are increasingly inclined to step back – preserve their own vital interests in the greater Middle East, but avoid confrontation with the Obama White House. The only exception is the Russian and Chinese efforts to convince Iran to amend policies and expectations in lieu of the succession process in Tehran. Moscow and Beijing urge Tehran to revert back to traditional Persian world view and grand strategy – that is, return to being part of the minorities. Russia and China offer Iran a major role in the new Silk Road in



return. Alas, this effort is becoming increasingly difficult given the lure of the American promises to make Iran the regional hegemonic power in return for the Grand Rapprochement with Obama.

While the great powers can step back in lieu of the mounting pressures from the Obama White House, the local powers and actors have no such luxury. They are in the region to stay. Although US incessant pressure will continue till early 2017 – when a new American President and a new Congress take over – there is no telling whether the local powers and aspirant actors will be able to withstand Washington’s interventionism. Hence, there are growing indications of a regional eruption beforehand.

Iran is being pushed into untenable position because of the contradictory policies of the US and the other great powers. Iran desperately needs the military, economic and political support of the Eurasian great powers – Russia, China and Germany-led Europe – but their world view puts strict limits on the power and influence of Persia. However, Khamenei’s Tehran remains committed to the unrestricted hegemonic ascent of Islamist Mahdist Iran, and is convinced that the Grand Rapprochement with Obama will deliver this. Hence, there is growing time pressure on Tehran by both the desire to capitalize on the support the Obama White House can provide before early 2017, and the deterioration in Khamenei’s health that aggravates the succession crisis. Unless Khamenei and his successors quickly transform and adapt to the regional constraints of the Mackinderian world order – Tehran will face the growing pressure from both the powers of the greater Middle East and the great powers of Eurasia to accept the historic posture of Persia as accorded to modern Iran and abandon the Obama-tolerated quest for Khomeini’s Mahdist aspirations. Meanwhile, the incessant pressure and interventionism of the Obama White House keeps raising the volatility of the entire region. A small spark from Iran or any of its proxies will suffice to set aflame the entire greater Middle East.

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**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.