

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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

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**1. *Gil Yaron* Fragile Fatah-Hamas reconciliation dampens hopes for
nationhood**

Without a unified populace, Abbas can hardly claim to represent all Palestinians. What the Palestinians will be left with then would be the less appealing spectre of turning back to Hamas' ideology of armed struggle.

2. *Editorial* Turkish Israeli Reset

Reports of rapprochement talks between Turkey and Israel are most welcome.

**3. *Steven King* International activists should take the road to
Damascus, not Gaza**

Assad is a major sponsor of terrorism. He has allowed his country to be used as a transit point for terrorists en route to Iraq and Syria is second only to Iran in its patronage of Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas, both of which have their bases in Damascus.

4. *Rhoda Kadalie* The Western Left's outrage outage

An obsession with Israel has led to blindness to the character of Syrian and Libyan regimes.

**5. *Bits and Pieces* Clips from various media in the Middle East and
elsewhere**

Analysis: Fragile Fatah-Hamas reconciliation dampens hopes for nationhood

Gil Yaron, The Toronto Star, 22 June 2011

<http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/1013278--analysis-fragile-fatah-hamas-reconciliation-dampens-hopes-for-nationhood>

Abdallah Frangi is still quite happy. In the summer of 2007, the senior Fatah executive was forced to abandon his home after the armed wing of the Islamic party Hamas took charge of the Gaza Strip in a bloody coup.

Returning to his house would have put him at risk of becoming another victim of the power struggle between Hamas and its arch-rival, Fatah. But five weeks ago, Frangi was finally able to go home, thanks to a reconciliation sponsored by Egypt's new post-revolutionary government.

The two most powerful Palestinian factions agreed to bury the hatchet, form a government of unaffiliated technocrats, and prepare for statehood and elections.

"People in Gaza are very optimistic. It is so good to be back," Frangi said Sunday in a phone interview.

Only two days later, however, the cracks in the deal became more obvious. Unable to find common ground, the two parties — whose rhetoric had briefly turned conciliatory — reverted to hateful patterns. Neither side has internalized the compromises needed to form a united government.

"In many ways, the reconciliation agreement is very shallow," said Palestinian commentator Sam Bahour in Ramallah.

Hamas, for example, has insisted it would never give up its arms, that the new government had no authority to enter into peace negotiations, and that it must be an equal or even senior partner in the government. It also refuses to abide by the international community's demands that it reject armed struggle and recognize Israel's right to exist.

Fatah chairman Mahmoud Abbas immediately staked similar claims: Only he would chart the course of the new government, which would be bound by his directives. Abbas fears disastrous consequences for his regime, now deeply dependent on foreign aid, should Hamas take over and donor nations decide to cut the flow of money.

While the ideological struggle between the parties goes back more than 20 years, its focus now is on Prime Minister Salim Fayyad, the former banker who has won praise for his moderate policies, successful nation-building projects, and dedication to keeping the Palestinian struggle unarmed.

He's supported by 45 per cent of Palestinians, according to recent polls. And even the Israeli army admits grudgingly that the Palestinian Authority is doing a good job in

fighting terror — which is exactly why the Islamists reject Abbas' bid to keep Fayyad in power.

Hamas official Salah Bardawil said this week that his movement “will not agree to grant Salam Fayyad the confidence to run the national unity government.”

These differences appear unbridgeable. A summit that was supposed to take place this week between Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Mashal, to announce the composition of the common government, has been postponed indefinitely.

Some spokespeople maintain Mashal and Abbas will appear together in the near future to announce the formation of a new cabinet.

“I am still optimistic,” says Frangi, Abbas' senior advisor on foreign policy. But behind the scenes, apprehension about whether Hamas and Fatah will ever agree is rising. Already, Hamas is raising accusations that Fatah's security forces are continuing to arrest activists in the West Bank, after both sides had announced they would release political prisoners.

According to the analyst Bahour, “foreign meddling” exacerbates the tensions. “The U.S. is exerting huge amounts of pressure on Abbas not to sit with Hamas. Washington puts him in an impossible position,” Bahour says.

Without the prospect of meaningful negotiations with Israel or of uniting Palestinians under one government, Abbas' options are very limited. He had planned to turn to the UN General Assembly in September in a bid to become a member state within the 1967 borders — bypassing a veto by the U.S. and bypassing negotiations with Israel.

But without a unified populace, Abbas can hardly claim to represent all Palestinians, a factor that will weaken his uncertain strategy to reach statehood. What the Palestinians will be left with then would be an unbearable stalemate, or the even less appealing spectre of turning back to Hamas' ideology of armed struggle.

Turkish Israeli reset

Khaleej Times Editorial, 22 June 2011

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2011/June/editorial_June40.xml§ion=editorial&col=

Reports of rapprochement talks between Turkey and Israel are most welcome. Ankara, which is rewriting its regional policy in the backdrop of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's third-term victory, will find itself on a firm foot as it bargains out a deal with Tel Aviv.

Their relations had hit all-time low after the bloody storming of the flotilla aid vessel in May 2010, and since then a stalemate has been there. Consecutive attempts to mend

the fences had ended in a deadlock, as Turkey has long been insisting on holding Israel accountable for the bloodbath on foreign vessels in the high seas. What new agenda or mandate the respective officials enjoy as they exchange notes is not difficult to guess. Their primary intention would be to patch-up and reinstate the understanding that both the naval powers have in the region, and subsequently further the military cooperation.

Given the political strings attached with the relationship, it is not going to be smooth sailing. Turkey, which has always been a frontline state in speaking for the rights of the Palestinians, will have to do some critical balancing in not only pressing the reset button in its relations with the Jewish state, but also in re-strategising the agenda as the issue of statehood for Palestinians comes up at the United Nations General Assembly this September. Irrespective of the deal that is stuck while restoring normalcy in their ties, Ankara will find itself politically locked down in its endeavour to hold Israel accountable for the killing of its nine citizens on board the Mavi Marmara. The diplomatic-lego tangle won't be easy to undo without the intervention of their respective political hierarchies. Similarly, to appease Turkey, which is now a force to be reckoned with, as it stands tall in the wake of Arab Spring openly campaigning for freedom, democracy and human rights, Israel will have to re-evaluate its off-the-cuff inquiry report that absolved itself of committing crimes in international waters. Such a measure will not only be a source of relief for Turkey, but will go a long way in re-casting Israel's image among its Arab neighbours.

Nothing short of taking to task soldiers who killed Turkish volunteers would come as a consolation on the diplomatic front. The choice is either to patch-up with humbleness or risk rupture. Turko-Israeli reconciliation shouldn't be limited to flotilla aid mess, and must encompass regional dialogue.

International activists should take the road to Damascus, not Gaza

Steven King, Irish Examiner, 22 June 2011

<http://www.irishe Examiner.com/opinion/columnists/stephen-king/international-activists-should-take-the-road-to-damascus-not-gaza-158509.html#ixzz1Q5UNo6m2>

As the Arab Spring becomes the Arab Summer and with the Middle East set to burst on to our TV screens this weekend with the Irish-owned ship MV Saoirse sailing to join the international flotilla to Gaza, it's an appropriate time to take stock.

In Egypt, the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak has emboldened the Muslim Brotherhood. The movement which gave rise to al-Qaida and Hamas is widely predicted to emerge as the largest political force after the elections planned for later this year.

Having demanded Mubarak's resignation, many of the big powers are belatedly admitting to themselves that Mubarak was not so bad after all. They might soon come to say the same about Yemen. The autocratic president has fled but nobody believes liberal democracy is just around the corner.

Likewise in Libya, even as NATO forces continue to strafe Colonel Gaddafi's installations, there is a grim realisation that the Benghazi-based rebels are not exactly

the French Resistance, even if intervention on the eve of Gaddafi's onslaught against Misrata probably saved countless lives.

After al-Qaida's involvement in the anti-Gaddafi revolt was exposed, the most compelling argument for backing the rebels became the questionable assertion that a failure to support the al-Qaida-infiltrated revolution will convince the non-al-Qaida rebels to join the terrorist organisation. But, of course, this is a losing argument. If supporting al-Qaida is a tolerable default position for the rebels, then how can it be contended that they will be preferable to Gaddafi?

That Gaddafi has still not been finished off is an indictment of NATO. The principle governments involved — the Americans, the British and the French — and their publics, know Gaddafi poses no actual threat to them and that their military intervention does not serve any vital interests. So they fight half-heartedly and, in the Europeans' case, run down their military capacity at an alarming rate in the process.

Some of the regimes which were looking shaky have stabilised. In Morocco and Jordan, their Western-backed monarchs have headed off the reformists at the pass. These oil-poor countries might finally be heading towards a situation where their parliaments — not their kings — have the largest say.

In Bahrain, the Shia opposition has been brutally put down, but at what long-term cost in terms of seeding resentment? In the rest of the Gulf, the populaces have either long since been bought off or, as in Saudi Arabia's case, are cowed into submission.

The West turned a blind eye to what happened in Bahrain. In essence, they seem to be saying that it was unnecessarily brutal but the cost of allowing a country to fall into the pro-Iranian camp was too high.

But amidst the many threats presented by the political bushfire now engulfing the Arab world, a unique opportunity is presented by Syria. Unlike, say, in Saudi Arabia for all its many faults, it's hard to imagine things could get worse there. The anti-regime protests in Syria are a welcome departure from the unattractive choices posed elsewhere.

The second President Assad is just as big a rogue as his late father. He is an illicit nuclear proliferator. Israel's bombing of his North Korean-built, Iranian-financed nuclear reactor in 2007 did not end Assad's nuclear adventures. He also has a large stockpile of chemical weapons including sarin gas and the warheads required to spray it around the region.

Aside from its mushrooming unconventional arsenals, Assad is a major sponsor of terrorism. He has allowed his country to be used as a transit point for terrorists en route to Iraq and Syria is second only to Iran in its patronage of Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas, both of which have their bases in Damascus.

If the Assad regime were deposed, it would represent a major setback to both the Iranian regime and Hezbollah. Conversely, Lebanon's March 14 democracy campaign and the Iranian Green Movement would be emboldened by the overthrow. Since March, 1,400 demonstrators have been killed by the Syrian security forces. Assad says his people love him and promises change but the reality is bullets in the backs of women mourning their sons.

The Assads have, successfully, put down dissent before. In Hama, upwards of 10,000 people were massacred on Daddy Assad's orders in 1982, many times more than infamously died in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps the same year.

Following in his father's footsteps, the current Assad deployed his air force against the Kurdish minority in 2004. Scores were killed and thousands were arrested and tortured. Nevertheless, somehow Assad – like the younger Gaddafi — has managed to create an image for himself as a good guy in bad guy's clothing. He behaves like another Gaddafi but Hillary Clinton calls him "a reformer".

The fear is, of course, that if Assad went, the Muslim Brotherhood would take over. But in the Syrian case, unlike Egypt's, is that necessarily a step backwards? It's tempting to think it would be a good thing if Assad were allowed to cling precariously to power. But history suggests dictators like Assad become externally aggressive in response as they try to earn legitimacy in their citizens' eyes. Right now, compelled to devote his energies to staying in power, Assad has little time to stir up fires elsewhere. But for how long?

The more immediate question is, why is the MV Saoirse and its assorted passengers heading for Gaza and not the Syrian coast? Surely, if anyone could use some solidarity right now, it is the Syrian opposition forces who are being murdered on a daily basis?

Yes, Israel is maintaining a sea blockade to prevent the smuggling of Iranian weaponry into Gaza. But can we really blame them? Ireland has special reason to understand the need to prevent the entry of weapons by sea for terrorist purposes, having had the experience of the IRA's attempts to import arms and explosives on ships from Libya in 1973 (the Claudia) and 1987 (the Eksund), and — with Martin Ferris' help — on the Marita Ann from the US in 1984.

As the deputy director of the Red Cross in Gaza stated in April this year: "There is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza." But there most certainly is a humanitarian crisis in Syria. The Gazan economy is clipping along and tonnes of consumer goods and food arrive daily. For sure, life is probably not very pleasant there by our standards but the oppression comes from the ruling Hamas regime, not Israel which pulled out every last settler and soldier years ago.

So how about it, Fintan Lane, Barry Andrews, Sinn Féin, and your far-left buddies? Why not divert a couple of hundred miles north to Latakia where President Assad is mowing down his own people because they dare to demand dignity and democracy? Surely, there is no contest in terms of suffering?

Is it because if you dare to dock in Syria, shouting slogans supporting the oppressed and generally winding up the Syrian Navy you know you won't be dealing with a regime that abides by international norms?

Is it because, even if you are non-violent — unlike those on the Mavi Marmara last year — you might still get your heads cracked? Is it because you're scared? Or do you just have a problem with a Jewish state in the Middle East?

The Western Left's outrage outrage

Rhoda Kadalie, PoliticsWeb, 22 June 2011

<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71619?oid=242218&n=Detail&pid=71616>

Soon after the royal wedding between Kate Middleton and Prince William, President Obama dropped a bombshell. Not wanting to steal their thunder, on 2nd May the Commander in Chief gave the order for the CIA and the US Navy SEALs to capture the world's most notorious terrorist, Osama Bin Laden.

The capture was riveting - the stuff of movies. Executed with military precision, America's security forces descended upon Bin Laden's compound with stealth black hawk helicopters and within 40 minutes took custody of his body. Soon after the assassination, Obama was quick to reassure the Muslim world that Bin Laden had been buried at sea according to Muslim rites.

Who cares about a man whose acolytes brutally killed Daniel Pearl in February 2002, while filming the barbaric deed? With no regard to Jewish custom, they slit his throat, beheaded him and cut him up into ten pieces. Why give a toss about a war criminal who master-minded the deaths of thousands of people indiscriminately? Bin Laden's fanatic Al Qaeda followers have killed thousands of Christians, Hindus and Muslims, held many Americans hostage, and tortured them with no regard to their religious beliefs.

The Arab uprisings from Tunisia to Yemen have shown Muslim dictators at their ruthless best, violating the religious rites of their own citizens, with an unspeakable brutality that defies belief. Muhammad Ghaddafi allegedly commanded the men in his army to use Viagra to rape Libyan women, continuing the age old tradition of using rape as a weapon of war to humiliate and subjugate women. Such barbarism is the surest sign that these countries are still trapped in the pre-enlightenment age, reluctant to modernise their archaic political, religious and cultural systems, for reasons that are obvious.

Ghaddafi's fellow Islamic Republic leader, Syrian president Bashar Al Assad, has driven masses of his own people across the border into Turkey; had his police and security forces torture and violate protesters in ways unimaginable; snipers shoot at people returning from mosques on Fridays, carrying corteges of dead bodies, with no regard for the sanctity of Muslim rituals. TV images show murdered protesters lined up in cold storages meant for food and raped and screaming women flee with their families across the border into Turkey and Lebanon. The result is 1 400 Syrians allegedly killed; 10 000 in detention; and a refugee camp holding 10,000 Syrians.

In the meantime, international outrage has been much milder than the outpourings of hate and condemnation against Israel when they obstructed the Flotilla Mavi Marmara from entering their shores. The United Nations, NATO, the European Union and even the USA are clearly too terrified to act against a country whose closest ally is its volatile neighbour, Iran. Syria's unwavering support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza means that any attack on it will have unpredictable consequences in a region that is as explosive as the terrorists they support.

The pro-democracy protests have caught the Left and international human rights agencies unawares because their obsession with Israel has blinded them to the human rights violations perpetrated by its neighbours against their own citizens. That a Saudi Arabian woman, Manal Al-Sharif, is arrested for daring to drive, is the surest sign that Israel is surrounded by a bunch of primordial fascists who consider 'driving women' as an act of rebellion.

These pre-enlightenment Islamic Republics get away with murder because they have oil, nuclear capabilities, links to terror networks, and hold the world to ransom as and when they wish. Compounded by deeply entrenched misogynist patriarchal cultures, their alliances spread over both sides of the ideological divide.

Just as the Ghaddafi family bankrolled the UK's London School of Economics (LSE) with 2.2 million pounds, so the Saudi Royal family has bankrolled the UK's School of Oriental and Asian Studies with enormous amounts of funding - approximately 755 000 pounds between 2006 and 2010. Sir Howard Davies, the Director of the LSE, in March 2011 admitted to taking money from these dictators and was compelled to resign.

These two schools are famous for their Leftist politics and have nurtured some of the world's foremost public intellectuals and academics, many of whom are unthinkingly anti-Israel and anti-Semitic and vehemently oppose the only democracy in the Middle East, while they are quiet the about the rest. We now know why. Silenced by filthy lucre, they have been found wanting and have much to answer for.

***Bits and Pieces* Clips from various media in the Middle East and elsewhere**

ICEJ, 23 June 2011: In an apparent sign that pressure from Western governments is having an effect on Palestinian strategy, PA President Mahmoud Abbas told a Lebanese TV station on Monday night that he is prepared to resume peace talks with Israel if the Americans and Europeans make him a good offer.

ICEJ, 22 June 2011: Representatives of 23 countries and the Palestinian Authority met in Croatia on Monday, including deputy Israeli Knesset Speaker MK Majallie Whbee (Kadima) and MK Dov Henin (Hadash). At the meeting the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) called for Hamas to recognize the Quartet's conditions for a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

ICEJ, 22 June 2011: The newly re-elected Canadian conservative Party led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper met to discuss support for Israel and the Durban III conference scheduled for 21 September. During the meeting Harper's government reaffirmed its stance that whoever attacks Israel also attacks all democracies in the world, a stand that have given Harper the title of the "most pro-Israeli head of government in the Western world." In regards to Durban III, Canada was the first country to openly declare its opposition and non-attendance in the upcoming anti-Semitic hate feast.