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Article I.

The New-Yorker

Putin Goes to War

David Remnick

March 1, 2014 -- Vladimir Putin, the Russian President and autocrat, had a plan for the winter of 2014: to reassert his country's power a generation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He thought that he would achieve this by building an Olympic wonderland on the Black Sea for fifty-one billion dollars and putting on a dazzling television show. It turns out that he will finish the season in a more ruthless fashion, by invading a peninsula on the Black Sea and putting on quite a different show—a demonstration war that could splinter a sovereign country and turn very bloody, very quickly.

Sergei Parkhomenko, a journalist and pro-democracy activist who was recently detained by the police in Moscow, described the scenario taking shape as “Afghanistan 2.” He recalled, for Slon.ru, an independent Russian news site, how the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, in 1979, under the pretext of helping a “fraternal” ally in Kabul; to Parkhomenko, Putin’s decision to couch his military action as the “protection” of

Russians living in Crimea is an equally transparent pretext. The same goes for the decorous way in which Putin, on Saturday, “requested” the Russian legislature’s authorization for the use of Russian troops in Ukraine until “the socio-political situation is normalized.” The legislature, which has all the independence of an organ grinder’s monkey, voted its unanimous assent.

Other critics of Putin’s military maneuvers in Ukraine used different, but no less ominous, historical analogies. Some compared the arrival of Russian troops in Simferopol to the way that the Kremlin, in 2008, took advantage of Georgia’s reckless bid to retake South Ossetia and then muscled its tiny neighbor, eventually waging a war that ended with Russia taking control of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

In a recent Letter from Sochi, I tried to describe Putin’s motivations: his resentment of Western triumphalism and American power, after 1991; his paranoia that Washington is somehow behind every event in the world that he finds threatening, including the recent events in Kiev; his confidence that the U.S. and Europe are nonetheless weak, unlikely to respond to his swagger because they need his help in Syria and Iran; his increasingly vivid nationalist-conservative ideology, which relies, not least, on the elevation of the Russian Orthodox Church, which had been so brutally suppressed during most of the Soviet period, as a quasi-state religion supplying the government with its moral force.

Obama and Putin spoke on the phone today for an hour and a half. The White House and Kremlin accounts of the call add up to what was clearly the equivalent of an angry standoff: lectures, counter-lectures, intimations of threats, intimations of counter-

threats. But the leverage, for now, is all with Moscow.

The legislators in the Russian parliament today parroted those features of modern Putinism. In order to justify the invasion of the Crimean peninsula, they repeatedly cited the threat of Ukrainian “fascists” in Kiev helping Russia’s enemies. They repeatedly echoed the need to protect ethnic Russians in Ukraine—a theme consonant with the Kremlin’s rhetoric about Russians everywhere, including the Baltic States. But there was, of course, not one word about the sovereignty of Ukraine, which has been independent since the fall of the Soviet Union, in December, 1991.

If this is the logic of the Russian invasion, the military incursion is unlikely to stop in Crimea: nearly all of eastern Ukraine is Russian-speaking. Russia defines its interests far beyond its Black Sea fleet and the Crimean peninsula.

Marina Korolyova, the deputy editor of the liberal radio station Echo of Moscow, told Slon.ru, “I am the daughter of a military officer who went in with the troops that invaded Czechoslovakia, in 1968. Today’s decision of the President and the Federation Council—I feel the pain personally. It is shameful. Shameful.”

It is worth noting that, in Moscow, the modern dissident movement was born in 1968, when four brave protesters went to Red Square and unfurled a banner denouncing the invasion of Prague. Those demonstrators are the heroes of, among other young Russians, the members of the punk band Pussy Riot. This is something that Putin also grasps very well. At the same time that he is planning his vengeful military operation against the

new Ukrainian leadership, he has been cracking down harder on his opponents in Moscow. Alexey Navalny, who is best known for his well-publicized investigations into state corruption and for his role in anti-Kremlin demonstrations two years ago, has now been placed under house arrest. Navalny, who won twenty-seven per cent of the vote in a recent Moscow mayoral ballot, is barred from using the Internet, his principal means of communication and dissidence. The period of Olympic mercy has come to an end.

It's also worth noting that, in 1968, Moscow was reacting to the "threat" of the Prague Spring and to ideological liberalization in Eastern Europe; in 1979, the Kremlin leadership was reacting to the upheavals in Kabul. The rationale now is far flimsier, even in Moscow's own terms. The people of the Crimean peninsula were hardly under threat by "fascist gangs" from Kiev. In the east, cities like Donetsk and Kharkov had also been quiet, though that may already be changing. That's the advantage of Putin's state-controlled television and his pocket legislature; you can create any reality and pass any edict.

I spoke with Georgy Kasianov, the head of the Academy of Science's department of contemporary Ukrainian history and politics, in Kiev. "It's a war," he said. "The Russian troops are quite openly out on the streets [in Crimea], capturing public buildings and military outposts. And it's likely all a part of a larger plan for other places: Odessa, Nikolayev, Kherson. And they'll use the same technique. Some Russian-speaking citizens will appear, put up a Russian flag, and make appeals that they want help and referendums, and so on." This is already happening in Donetsk and Kharkov.

“They are doing this like it is a commonplace,” Kasianov went on. “I can’t speak for four million people, but clearly everyone in Kiev is against this. But the Ukrainian leadership is absolutely helpless. The Army is not ready for this. And, after the violence in Kiev, the special forces are disoriented.”

Just a few days ago, this horrendous scenario of invasion and war, no matter how limited, seemed the farthest thing from nearly everyone’s mind in either Ukraine or Russia, much less the West. As it happens so often in these situations—from Tahrir Square to Taksim Square to Maidan Square—people were taken up with the thrill of uprising. After Viktor Yanukovych fled Kiev, the coverage moved to what one might call the “golden toilet” stage of things, that moment when the freedom-hungry crowds discover the fallen leader’s arrangements and bountiful holdings—the golden bathroom fixtures; the paintings and the tapestries; the secret mistress; the lurid bedrooms and freezers stocked with sweetmeats; the surveillance videos and secret transcripts; the global real-estate holdings; the foreign bank accounts; the fleets of cars, yachts, and airplanes; the bad taste, the unknown cruelties.

The English-language Kyiv Post published a classic in the genre when it reported how journalists arriving at the “inner sanctum” of the mansion where Yanukovych had lived in splendor discovered that he had been cohabiting not with his wife of four decades but, rather, with—and try not to faint—a younger woman. It “appears” that Yanukovych had been living there with a spa owner named Lyubov (which means “love”) Polezhay. “The woman evidently loves dogs and owns a white Pomeranian spitz that was seen in the surveillance camera’s footage of Yanukovych leaving” the mansion.

But that was trivia. Masha Lipman, my colleague in Moscow, sketched out in stark and prescient terms some of the challenges facing Ukraine, ranging from the divisions within the country to the prospect of what Putin might do rather than “lose” Ukraine.

Putin’s reaction exceeded our worst expectations. These next days and weeks in Ukraine are bound to be frightening, and worse. There is not only the threat of widening Russian military force. The new Ukrainian leadership is worse than weak. It is unstable. It faces the burden of legitimacy. Yanukovich was spectacularly corrupt, and he opened fire on his own people. He was also elected to his office and brought low by an uprising, not the ballot; he made that point on Friday, in a press conference in Rostov on Don, in Russia, saying that he had never really been deposed. Ukraine has already experienced revolutionary disappointment. The Orange Revolution, in 2004, failed to establish stable democratic institutions and economic justice. This is one reason that Yulia Tymoshenko, the former Prime Minister, newly released from prison, is not likely the future of Ukraine. How can Ukraine possibly move quickly to national elections, as it must to resolve the issue of legitimacy, while another country has troops on its territory?

Vladimir Ryzhkov, a liberal Russian politician who no longer holds office, said that the events were not only dangerous for Ukraine but ominous for Russia and the man behind them. “It’s quite likely that this will be fatal for the regime and catastrophic for Russia,” he told Slon.ru. “It just looks as if they have taken leave of their senses.”

NYT

Making Russia Pay? It's Not So Simple

Peter Baker

March 1, 2014 -- President Obama has warned Russia that “there will be costs” for a military intervention in Ukraine. But the United States has few palatable options for imposing such costs, and recent history has shown that when it considers its interests at stake, Russia has been willing to pay the price. Even before President Vladimir V. Putin on Saturday publicly declared his intent to send Russian troops into the Ukrainian territory of Crimea, Mr. Obama and his team were already discussing how to respond. They talked about canceling the president’s trip to a summit meeting in Russia in June, shelving a possible trade agreement, kicking Moscow out of the Group of 8 or moving American warships to the region. That is the same menu of actions that was offered to President George W. Bush in 2008, when Russia went to war with Georgia, another balky former Soviet republic. Yet the costs imposed at that time proved only marginally effective and short-lived. Russia stopped its advance but nearly six years later has never fully lived up to the terms of the cease-fire it signed. And whatever penalty it paid at the time evidently has not deterred it from again muscling a neighbor. “The question is: Are those costs big enough to cause Russia not to take advantage of the situation in

the Crimea? That's the \$64,000 question," said Brig. Gen. Kevin Ryan, a retired Army officer who served as defense attaché in the American Embassy in Moscow and now, as a Harvard scholar, leads a group of former Russian and American officials in back-channel talks. Mr. Obama announced the first direct response after a 90-minute telephone call with Mr. Putin on Saturday as he suspended preparations for the G-8 summit meeting in Russia in June. The White House said that "Russia's continued violation of international law will lead to greater political and economic isolation."

Michael McFaul, who just stepped down as Mr. Obama's ambassador to Moscow, said the president should go further to ensure that Russia's business-minded establishment understands that it would find itself cut off. "There needs to be a serious discussion as soon as possible about economic sanctions so they realize there will be costs," he said. "They should know there will be consequences and those should be spelled out before they take further actions."

Mr. Putin has already demonstrated that the cost to Moscow's international reputation would not stop him. Having just hosted the Winter Olympics in Sochi, he must have realized he was all but throwing away seven years and \$50 billion of effort to polish Russia's image. He evidently calculated that any diplomatic damage did not outweigh what he sees as a threat to Russia's historic interest in Ukraine, which was ruled by Moscow until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Mr. Putin may stop short of outright annexation of Crimea, the largely Russian-speaking peninsula where Moscow still has a major military base, but instead justify a long-term troop presence by saying the troops are there to defend the local population from the new pro-

Western government in Kiev. Following a tested Russian playbook, he could create a de facto enclave loyal to Moscow much like the republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia that broke away from Georgia. On the other hand, the White House worries that the crisis could escalate and that all of Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine may try to split off. Finding powerful levers to influence Mr. Putin's decision-making will be a challenge for Mr. Obama and the European allies. Mr. Obama has seen repeatedly that warnings often do not discourage autocratic rulers from taking violent action, as when Syria crossed the president's "red line" by using chemical weapons in its civil war. Russia is an even tougher country to pressure, too formidable even in the post-Soviet age to rattle with stern lectures or shows of military force, and too rich in resources to squeeze economically in the short term. With a veto on the United Nations Security Council, it need not worry about the world body. And as the primary source of natural gas to much of Europe, it holds a trump card over many American allies.

The longer-term options might be more painful, but they require trade-offs as well. The administration could impose the same sort of banking sanctions that have choked Iran's economy. And yet Europe, with its more substantial economic ties, could be reluctant to go along, and Mr. Obama may be leery of pulling the trigger on such a potent financial weapon, especially when he needs Russian cooperation on Syria and Iran. "What can we do?" asked Fiona Hill, a Brookings Institution scholar who was the government's top intelligence officer on Russia during the Georgia war when Mr. Putin deflected Western agitation. "We'll talk about sanctions. We'll talk about red lines. We'll basically drive ourselves into a frenzy. And he'll stand back and just

watch it. He just knows that none of the rest of us want a war.” James F. Jeffrey was Mr. Bush’s deputy national security adviser in August 2008, the first to inform him that Russian troops were moving into Georgia in response to what the Kremlin called Georgian aggression against South Ossetia. As it happened, the clash also took place at Olympic time; Mr. Bush and Mr. Putin were both in Beijing for the Summer Games.

Mr. Bush confronted Mr. Putin to no avail, then ordered American ships to the region and provided a military transport to return home Georgian troops on duty in Iraq. He sent humanitarian aid on a military aircraft, assuming that Russia would be loath to attack the capital of Tbilisi with American military personnel present. Mr. Bush also suspended a pending civilian nuclear agreement, and NATO suspended military contacts. “We did a lot but in the end there was not that much that you could do,” Mr. Jeffrey recalled.

Inside the Bush administration, there was discussion of more robust action, like bombing the Roki Tunnel to block Russian troops or providing Georgia with Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice bristled at what she called the “chest beating,” and the national security adviser, Stephen J. Hadley, urged the president to poll his team to see if anyone recommended sending American troops. None did, and Mr. Bush was not willing to risk escalation. While Russia stopped short of moving into Tbilisi, it secured the effective independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, while leaving troops in areas it was supposed to evacuate under a cease-fire. Within a year or so, Russia’s isolation was over. Mr. Obama took office and tried to improve relations. NATO resumed military contacts in 2009, and the United States revived the

civilian nuclear agreement in 2010. Mr. Jeffrey, now at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said Mr. Obama should now respond assertively by suggesting that NATO deploy forces to the Polish-Ukrainian border to draw a line. “There’s nothing we can do to save Ukraine at this point,” he said. “All we can do is save the alliance.”

Others like Mr. Ryan warn that military movements could backfire by misleading Ukrainians into thinking the West might come to their rescue and so inadvertently encourage them to be more provocative with Russia. Ms. Hill said the Russian leader might simply wait. “Time,” she said, “is on his side.”

Article 3.

The Washington Post

Ukraine crisis tests Obama’s foreign policy focus on diplomacy over military force

Scott Wilson

For much of his time in office, President Obama has been accused by a mix of conservative hawks and liberal interventionists of overseeing a dangerous retreat from the world at a time when American influence is needed most.

The once-hopeful Arab Spring has staggered into civil war and

military coup. China is stepping up territorial claims in the waters off East Asia. Longtime allies in Europe and in the Persian Gulf are worried by the inconsistency of a president who came to office promising the end of the United States' post-Sept. 11 wars.

Now Ukraine has emerged as a test of Obama's argument that, far from weakening American power, he has enhanced it through smarter diplomacy, stronger alliances and a realism untainted by the ideology that guided his predecessor.

It will be a hard argument for him to make, analysts say.

A president who has made clear to the American public that the "tide of war is receding" has also made clear to foreign leaders, including opportunists in Russia, that he has no appetite for a new one. What is left is a vacuum once filled, at least in part, by the possibility of American force.

"If you are effectively taking the stick option off the table, then what are you left with?" said Andrew C. Kuchins, who heads the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "I don't think that Obama and his people really understand how others in the world are viewing his policies."

Rarely has a threat from a U.S. president been dismissed as quickly — and comprehensively — as Obama's warning Friday night to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The former community organizer and the former Cold Warrior share the barest of common interests, and their relationship has been defined far more by the vastly different ways they see everything from gay rights to history's legacy.

Obama called Putin on Saturday and expressed “deep concern over Russia’s clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, which is a breach of international law,” the White House said.

From a White House podium late Friday, Obama told the Russian government that “there will be costs” for any military foray into Ukraine, including the semiautonomous region of Crimea, a strategically important peninsula on the Black Sea.

Within hours, Putin asked the Russian parliament for approval to send forces into Ukraine. The vote endorsing his request was unanimous, Obama’s warning drowned out by lawmakers’ rousing rendition of Russia’s national anthem at the end of the session. Russian troops now control the Crimean Peninsula.

President’s quandary

There are rarely good — or obvious — options in such a crisis. But the position Obama is in, confronting a brazenly defiant Russia and with few ways to meaningfully enforce his threat, has been years in the making. It is the product of his record in office and of the way he understands the period in which he is governing, at home and abroad.

At the core of his quandary is the question that has arisen in White House debates over the Afghan withdrawal, the intervention in Libya and the conflict in Syria — how to end more than a dozen years of American war and maintain a credible military threat to protect U.S. interests.

The signal Obama has sent — popular among his domestic political base, unsettling at times to U.S. allies — has been one

of deep reluctance to use the heavily burdened American military, even when doing so would meet the criteria he has laid out. He did so most notably in the aftermath of the U.S.-led intervention in Libya nearly three years ago.

But Obama's rejection of U.S. military involvement in Syria's civil war, in which 140,000 people have died since he first called on President Bashar al-Assad to step down, is the leading example of his second term. So, too, is the Pentagon budget proposal outlined this past week that would cut the size of the army to pre-2001 levels.

Inside the West Wing, there are two certainties that color any debate over intervention: that the country is exhausted by war and that the end of the longest of its post-Sept. 11 conflicts is less than a year away. Together they present a high bar for the use of military force.

Ukraine has challenged administration officials — and Obama's assessment of the world — again.

At a North American summit meeting in Mexico last month, Obama said, "Our approach as the United States is not to see these as some Cold War chessboard in which we're in competition with Russia."

But Putin's quick move to a war footing suggests a different view — one in which, particularly in Russia's back yard, the Cold War rivalry Putin was raised on is thriving.

The Russian president has made restoring his country's international prestige the overarching goal of his foreign policy, and he has embraced military force as the means to do so.

As Russia's prime minister in the late summer of 2008, he was considered the chief proponent of Russia's military advance into Georgia, another former Soviet republic with a segment of the population nostalgic for Russian rule.

Obama, by contrast, made clear that a new emphasis on American values, after what were perceived as the excesses of the George W. Bush administration, would be his approach to rehabilitating U.S. stature overseas.

Those two outlooks have clashed repeatedly — in big and small ways — over the years.

Obama took office with a different Russian as president, Dmitry Medvedev, Putin's choice to succeed him in 2008.

Medvedev, like Obama, was a lawyer by training, and also like Obama he did not believe the Cold War rivalry between the two countries should define today's relationship.

The Obama administration began the “reset” with Russia — a policy that, in essence, sought to emphasize areas such as nuclear nonproliferation, counterterrorism, trade and Iran's nuclear program as shared interests worth cooperation.

But despite some successes, including a new arms-control treaty, the reset never quite reduced the rivalry. When Putin returned to office in 2012, so, too, did an outlook fundamentally at odds with Obama's.

‘Reset’ roadblocks

Just months after his election, Putin declined to attend the Group of Eight meeting at Camp David, serving an early public

warning to Obama that partnership was not a top priority.

At a G-8 meeting the following year in Northern Ireland, Obama and Putin met and made no headway toward resolving differences over Assad's leadership of Syria. The two exchanged an awkward back-and-forth over Putin's passion for martial arts before the Russian leader summed up the meeting: "Our opinions do not coincide," he said.

A few months later, Putin granted asylum to Edward Snowden, the former National Security Agency contractor whose disclosure of the country's vast eavesdropping program severely complicated U.S. diplomacy. Obama had asked for Snowden's return.

In response, Obama canceled a scheduled meeting in Moscow with Putin after the Group of 20 meeting in St. Petersburg last summer. The two met instead on the summit's sidelines, again failing to resolve differences over Syria.

It was Obama's threat of a military strike, after the Syrian government's second chemical attack crossed what Obama had called a "red line," that prompted Putin to pressure Assad into concessions. The result was an agreement to destroy Syria's chemical weapons arsenal, a process that is proceeding haltingly.

Since then, though, the relationship has again foundered on issues that expose the vastly different ways the two leaders see the world and their own political interests.

After Russia's legislature passed anti-gay legislation, Obama included openly gay former athletes in the U.S. delegation to the

Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

New barbarities in Syria's civil war — and the near-collapse of a nascent peace process — have drawn sharper criticism from U.S. officials of Putin, who is continuing to arm Assad's forces.

How Obama intends to prevent a Putin military push into Ukraine is complicated by the fact that, whatever action he takes, he does not want to jeopardize Russian cooperation on rolling back Iran's nuclear program or completing the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal.

Economic sanctions are a possibility. But that decision is largely in the hands of the European Union, given that its economic ties to Russia, particularly as a source of energy, are far greater than those of the United States.

The most immediate threat that has surfaced: Obama could skip the G-8 meeting scheduled for June in Sochi, a day's drive from Crimea.

"If you want to take a symbolic step and deploy U.S. Navy ships closer to Crimea, that would, I think, make a difference in Russia's calculations," Kuchins said. "The problem with that is, are we really credible? Would we really risk a military conflict with Russia over Crimea-Ukraine? That's the fundamental question in Washington and in Brussels we need to be asking ourselves."

Scott Wilson is the chief White House correspondent for the Washington Post. Previously, he was the paper's deputy Assistant Managing Editor/Foreign News after serving as a

correspondent in Latin America and in the Middle East. He was awarded an Overseas Press Club citation and an Interamerican Press Association award for his work abroad.

Article 4.

NYT

From the Pyramid to the Square

Thomas L. Friedman _

March 1, 2014 -- THE Egyptian strongman Field Marshal Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi was recently in Moscow visiting with Russian strongman Vladimir Putin. Putin reportedly offered Sisi \$2 billion in arms — just what a country like Egypt, where half the women can't read, needs. The whole meeting struck me as so 1960s, so Nasser meets Khrushchev — two strongmen bucking each other up in the age of strong people and superempowered individuals. Rather than discuss arms sales, Sisi and Putin should have watched a movie together.

Specifically, Sisi should have brought a copy of “The Square” — the first Egyptian film ever nominated for an Oscar. It's up this year. Sisi has a copy. Or, to be more precise, his film censor's office does. For the last few months, the Egyptian authorities have been weighing whether to let the film — an inspiring and gripping documentary that follows six activists from the earliest days of the Tahrir Square revolution in 2011

until the Muslim Brotherhood was ousted by Sisi in 2013 — to be shown in Egypt.

Meanwhile, pirated and downloaded copies of the film, which is also on Netflix, have spread virally across Egypt and been viewed by many Egyptians in homes and coffeeshops and discussed on social media. What's more, it was recently dubbed into Ukrainian and downloaded (some 300,000 times) by protesters there and shown in the Maidan, which also means the Square, in Kiev. A dubbed version is now spreading in Russia, too, said the film's director Jehane Noujaim, who also directed "Control Room."

"This is the globalization of defiance," Noujaim said to me. "With cheap, affordable cameras and Internet connections, anyone now can change the conversation" anywhere. It's true.

The film resonates with those who gathered in squares from Cairo to Caracas to Kiev, added the film's producer, Karim Amer, because it captures an increasingly universal phenomenon: average people uniting and deciding "that the Pharaoh, the strongman, won't protect us" and the religious sheikh "won't cleanse us." We can be and must be "authors of our own story." It has long been said, added Amer, that "history is written by the victors. Not anymore." Now versions can come from anywhere and anyone. Power is shifting "from the pyramid to the square" — from strongmen to strong people — "and that is a big shift."

And that's why Putin and Sisi need to see the film. (Disclosure: the filmmakers are friends of mine, and I have been discussing their project with them for two years.) It captures some of the

most important shifts happening today, starting with fact that in today's hyperconnected world wealth is getting concentrated at the top, but, at the same time, power is getting distributed at the bottom and transparency is being injected everywhere. No palace will remain hidden by high walls, not even the giant one reportedly being built for Putin on the Black Sea.

But people now can't just see in, they can see far — how everybody else is living. And as Tahrir and Kiev demonstrate, young people will no longer tolerate leaders who deprive them of the tools and space to realize their full potential. The Square has a Facebook page where Egyptians are invited to answer questions, including: "Who would you most like to watch this movie with?" One answer, from Magda Elmaghrabi, probably spoke for many: "I would watch it with my dad who passed away 9 years ago. He emigrated to the States not for lack of wealth, but for his fears of what would happen in the future for Egypt and whether there would be opportunities for my 2 older brothers. I would love to have discussed what occurred and see his emotional reaction as the Egyptians stood up for what they believed in."

Another reason Putin, Sisi and all their protesters need to see "The Square" is that it doesn't have a happy ending — for anyone, not yet. Why?

The Egyptian protesters got sidelined by the army, because while they all wanted to oust the Pharaoh, they couldn't agree on a broader reform agenda and translate that into a governing majority. But Putin and Sisi will also lose if they don't change, because there is no stable progress without inclusive politics and economics. I understand the need and longing by those not in

the squares for “stability” and “order.” Putin and Sisi both rose to power on that longing for stability after so much revolutionary ferment. But both men have to be asked: Stability to do what? To go where? To jail not just real terrorists, but, in Sisi’s and Putin’s cases, legitimate journalists and opposition and youth leaders? Many Asian autocrats imposed order, but they also built schools, infrastructure and a rule of law that nurtured middle classes that eventually delivered democracy.

So the protesters are long on idealism but short on a shared political action plan. Sisi and Putin are long on stability but short on a politics of inclusion tied to a blueprint for modernity (and not just rising oil prices). Unless they each overcome their deficiencies, their countries will fail to fulfill their potential — and all their “squares” will be stages for conflict, not launching pads for renewal.

[Article 5.](#)

Agence Global

Saudi Arabia: Besieged and Fearful

Immanuel Wallerstein

1 Mar 2014 -- The Saudi regime has long been considered a pillar of political stability in the Middle East, a country that commanded respect and prudence from all its neighbors. This is no longer true, and the first ones to recognize this are those who

are important internal players in the regime. Today, they feel besieged on all sides and quite fearful of the consequences of turmoil in the Middle East for the survival of the regime. This turn-around derives from the history of Saudi Arabia. The kingdom itself is not very old. It was created in 1932 through the unification of two smaller kingdoms on the Arabian peninsula, Hejaz and Nejd. It was a poor, isolated part of the world that had liberated itself from Ottoman rule during the First World War, and came then under the paracolonial aegis of Great Britain. The kingdom was organized in religious terms by a version of Sunni Islam called Wahabism (or Salafism). Wahabism is a very strict puritanical doctrine that was notably intolerant not only of religions other than Islam but of other versions of Islam itself.

The discovery of oil would transform the geopolitical role of Saudi Arabia. It was an American firm, later called Aramco—not a British firm—that succeeded in getting the rights for prospection in 1938. Aramco sought assistance from the U.S. government to exploit the fields. One consequence of Aramco's interest combined with President Franklin Roosevelt's vision of the geopolitical future of the United States was a now famous, then little noticed, meeting of Roosevelt and the ruler of Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud, on Feb. 14, 1945 aboard a U.S. destroyer in the Red Sea. Despite Roosevelt's grave illness (he was to die two months later) and Ibn Saud's lack of any previous experience with Western culture and technology, the two leaders managed to forge a genuine mutual respect. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's attempt to undo this in a meeting he immediately arranged soon after that turned out to be quite counter-productive, as he was seen as "arrogant" by Ibn Saud.

While much of the five-hour private discussion between

Roosevelt and Ibn Saud was devoted to the question of Zionism and Palestine—about which they had quite different views—the longer-run real consequence was a de facto arrangement in which Saudi Arabia coordinated and controlled world oil production policies to the benefit of the United States, in return for which the United States offered long-term guarantees of military security for Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia became a de facto paracolonial dependency of the United States, which however permitted the very extensive royal family to grow wealthy and "modernize"—not only in their ability to use technology but even in a cultural sense, bending in their own lives many of the restrictions of Wahabite Islam. It was an arrangement both sides appreciated and nourished. It worked well until the latter half of the first decade of 2000. Two major events upset the arrangement. One was the geopolitical decline of the United States. The second was the so-called Arab spring and what the Saudis regarded as its negative consequences throughout the Arab world.

From Saudi Arabia's point of view, the relationship with the United States soured for a number of reasons. First, the Saudis felt that the announced "Asia/Pacific" reorientation of the United States, replacing the long-dominant "Europe/Atlantic" orientation, implied a withdrawal from active involvement in the politics of the Middle East. The Saudis saw further evidence of this reorientation in the willingness of the United States to enter into negotiations with both the Syrian and the Iranian governments. Similarly, they were dismayed by the announced troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the clear reluctance to engage in another "war" in the Middle East. They felt they could no longer count on U.S. military protection, should it be needed.

They therefore decided to play their cards independently of the United States and indeed against U.S. preferences. Meanwhile, their relations with other Islamic groups became more and more difficult. They were extremely wary of any groups linked to al-Qaeda. And for good reason, since al-Qaeda had long made it clear that it sought the overthrow of the existing Saudi regime. One thing that worried them especially was the Saudi citizens who went to Syria to engage in jihad. They feared, remembering past history, that these individuals would return to Saudi Arabia, ready to subvert it from within. Indeed, on February 3, by royal decree of the monarch himself (a rare occurrence), the Saudis ordered all their citizens to return. They sought to control how they returned, and intended to disperse them along the frontlines, to minimize their ability to create internal organizations. It seems doubtful that these jihadis will obey. They consider this edict an abandonment by the Saudi regime. In addition to the potential adherents of al-Qaeda, the Saudi regime has long had a difficult relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. While the latter's version of Islam is also Salafist, and in many ways similar to Wahabism, there have been two crucial differences. The Muslim Brotherhood's principal base has been in Egypt whereas the Wahabite base has been in Saudi Arabia. So this has always been in part a contest as to the locale of the dominant geopolitical force in the Middle East. There is a second difference. Because of its history, the Muslim Brotherhood has always regarded monarchs with a jaundiced eye whereas Wahabism has been tied closely to the Saudi monarchy. The Saudi regime does not welcome therefore the spread of a movement that wouldn't care if the Saudi monarchy were overturned. Whereas once they had good relations with the Baathist regime in Syria, this is now impossible because of

the intensified Sunni-Shi'ite polarization in the Middle East.

The Saudi lack of appreciation for secularists, sympathizers of al-Qaeda, supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Shi'ite Baathist regime does not leave any obvious group to support in Syria today. But supporting no one does not project an image of leadership. So the Saudi regime sends some arms to a few groups and pretends to do much more. Is the great enemy really Iran? Yes and no. But to limit the damage, the Saudi regime is secretly engaged in talks with the Iranians, talks whose outcome is very uncertain, since the Saudis believe that the Iranians want to encourage the Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia to erupt. While the total number of Shi'ites inside Saudi Arabia is uncertain (probably circa 20 percent), they are concentrated in the southeastern corner, precisely the area of largest oil production.

About the only regime with whom the Saudis are on good terms today is the Israelis. They share the sense of being besieged and fearful. And they both engage in the same short-run political tactics.

The fact is that the Saudi regime has internal feet of clay. The inner elite is now shifting from the so-called second generation, the sons of Ibn Saud (the few surviving sons being quite aged), to the grandsons. They are a large and untested group who might help to bring the house down in their competition to get their hands on the spoils, which are still considerable.

The Saudis have good reason to feel besieged and fearful.

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University, is the author of The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World (New Press).

Article 6.

Commentary Magazine

Will Israel Be the Next Energy Superpower?

Arthur Herman

They will feast on the abundance of the seas, and on the treasures of the sands.

—Deuteronomy 33:19

1 March, 14 -- Tamar sits 56 miles off the coast of Israel, an offshore gas platform rising up from the Mediterranean like a white steel beacon whose roots reach down 1,000 feet to the seabed. Named for the natural-gas field beneath the sea floor, Tamar is the symbol of a bright future for Israel if Israel is ready for it: as the newest energy producer and exporter in the Middle East, and potentially the most important.

A classic quip since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 has been that Moses brought his people out of Egypt to the one spot in the Middle East that didn't have oil. "We proved that joke to

be wrong,” says Gideon Tadmor, chairman of the Delek Group, one of a consortium of companies that built the Tamar platform. Delek and its partners began extracting gas from Tamar in March 2013 and has been doing so with the natural gas from three other fields as well. Ten years ago, Israel was a country 80 percent powered by coal, with the remaining 20 percent from oil—all of which had to be imported. Now, natural gas supplies half those energy needs. The known fields could contain more than 900 billion cubic meters of natural gas. In global terms, that’s not much—roughly the amount the United States consumes in a year. But for a country of only 8 million people, it’s an energy bonanza. And, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, the Levant basin in which Israel’s fields sit may contain a total of 3.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas—about half the reserves in the United States with a fraction of the demand.

Nor is that all. Even before the first discoveries of natural gas in 1999, geologists had determined there were huge oil-shale fields stretching along Israel’s coastal plain. Those fields contained recoverable reserves, according to the latest estimate, of up to 250 billion barrels—almost equal to Saudi Arabia’s.

In short, Israel is poised not only for future energy independence, but for becoming a major regional energy player—maybe even, if it uses its resources wisely, the next energy superpower. The looming question, however, is not whether the world is ready for Israel to be the next Texas. It’s whether the Israelis are ready.

I got my introduction to the Tamar platform, and to Israel’s adventure in becoming an energy player, even before my wife, Beth, and I arrived in Israel, on the plane from Newark bound

for Tel Aviv. The passenger sitting next to us looked as if he was headed for a country-music festival. He wore a baseball cap with the logo of Noble Energy—one of the key players in the natural-gas revolution. We learned he had spent 30 years in the oil and gas business as a platform operator, including in West Africa and Thailand, before Noble had sent him out to Israel. Now he works on the Tamar platform. After 28 days there, he'll head home to Louisiana for four weeks to see his family and kids; they will be able to afford college thanks to the money he's earned working for Noble in Israel.

He also pointed out his fellow workers on the plane scattered among the Orthodox and Hasidic passengers—"roughnecks" (members of a drilling crew), "tool pushers," and mechanics. They all hailed from Texas, Oklahoma, and his native Louisiana, and one or two wore baseball caps with Hebrew lettering. These are the migrant laborers of Israel's newest industry, and proof of how much Israel depends on the United States for exploring, drilling, and developing its new-found energy resources. That may change as Israel's talent for innovation gets focused on energy technologies; Israelis themselves may accelerate the transition to faster, more efficient, and environmentally safer exploitation of both deep-water gas reserves and what are called the "unconventional oil sources," meaning oil shale and oil sands.

Indeed, it is in oil shale that the story of Israel's energy revolution really begins.

Israel has had a long and bitter history of looking for oil and finding none. Beginning in 1953, the National Oil Industry began launching a series of exploratory drilling holes. In just

over 33 years, it sank more than 410 wells—and found exactly five gas fields and three oil fields. The country's most productive oil field is near Helez, and it wasn't even discovered by Israel; Iraq Petroleum found it before 1948 and then sealed it up when Israel achieved its independence. Since the Israelis opened it again in 1955, Helez has produced 17.2 million barrels—an amount that would power Israel's current economy for only five weeks. In 1986, the Israeli government finally gave up and suspended its three-decade ritual of frustration.

Then, just two years later, the ground shifted, almost literally, under the government's feet. The very first comprehensive geological survey of Israel, including the coastal plain, revealed the existence of large deposits of oil shale, or kerogen.

Kerogen is a pre-petroleum organic compound of dead algae from long-extinct bodies of water. It is, in effect, a precursor to oil. Under great pressure and heat, kerogen can turn into the same kind of hydrocarbon compound as conventional petroleum. Rich kerogen deposits are found all over the world, from the Green River formation in Colorado to the Jordan River valley, including Israel.

Once the discovery was confirmed in 2006, the Israeli government began looking for partners in the United States. American companies had been wildcatting in Israel for decades. But while most knew how to drill, they were clueless about where. Instead, like Zion Oil's John Brown, they were managed by Christian fundamentalists who were literally relying on the Word of God as their guide. One wildcatter in the 1960s was led by a passage from Deuteronomy to conclude there was oil located somewhere on the ancient lands of the tribe of Asher, on

“the foot of Asher” between Haifa and Caesarea. No luck.

In 2007 the search for an American partner brought an Israel Petroleum Authority official to Houston and the offices of Shell Oil. It was a smart choice. Shell had been making breakthrough discoveries in how to produce oil from shale rock, thanks to its chief scientist, Harold Vinegar. He had modified a process, developed by the Swedes during World War II, of distilling kerogen into a usable fuel—an innovation that made the extraction of oil shale in Colorado’s Green River formation feasible and economical.

Vinegar had been working in Colorado when he learned about the rich kerogen deposits in Israel that extended into Jordan. Shell had already partnered with Jordan’s King Abdullah—and Vinegar, a Jew, was unhappy that the project didn’t include Israel, especially since the best shale rock was known to be on the Israeli side of the border. But he also knew that Shell, like all the other major oil companies, feared offending the Saudis by involving itself in Israeli oil speculation. Vinegar knew the Israeli official was on a fool’s errand.

One night the official came to dinner with Harold and his wife, Robin, and pressed Vinegar again and again. “Are you sure you can’t get Shell to come to Israel?” Vinegar had to keep repeating, no there was no way that was going to happen.

So the official suddenly changed gears. “Then you come!” he urged Vinegar. “Start a company. Put in an application for oil-shale exploration rights.”

Vinegar had been to Israel exactly once, back in 1972. His roots were in America. He had never formed a company in his life.

But as Vinegar tells the story, the Israeli wouldn't take no for an answer. Finally the Israeli took his leave, but not before he made one last pitch: "You just come," he told Vinegar. "The money will find you."

On October 31, 2008, Vinegar wrapped up his job at Shell and made the move. He was joined soon afterward by Yuval Bartov, who was teaching petroleum geology at the Colorado School of Mines. With backing from an American investor named Howard Jonas, whose path he had crossed working in Colorado, Vinegar was able to raise the money to create Israel Energy Initiatives in 2009, with Yuval Bartov as its first employer.

Today Israel Energy Initiatives sits in Har Hotzvim, the modernistic office park outside Jerusalem where many of Israel's most innovative high-tech companies have their headquarters (some have taken to calling it "Shalom Valley"). Vinegar is a broadly girthed, vigorous, and gregarious sixtysomething with a shock of white curly hair and a loud, infectious laugh. He reminded me instantly of Herman Kahn, whose iconoclastic theories of thermonuclear warfare sent shock waves through the American public consciousness—just as Harold Vinegar and his investors are sending shock waves through Israel's.

Sitting down to an afternoon with Vinegar and Bartov means having an engaging seminar not just on the technology of oil shale and its extraction, but on the opportunities as well as obstacles to their vision of an oil-rich Israel. The company drilled a test well in the Elah Valley southwest of Jerusalem. Based on the information they gleaned from that test, Bartov now thinks there are at least 40 to 60 billion barrels of

recoverable oil there—about one-quarter of the 250 billion barrels Bartov and the Israeli Geological Survey estimate are within Israel's reach.

But here is the problem. Current techniques for extracting oil, including the relatively new method called fracking, won't work with kerogen. And it is too time-consuming and expensive to mine the kerogen and then, after pulling it up, apply the heat and pressure necessary to turn it into oil.

The trick, as Vinegar and Bartov explain it, is heating and pressuring the kerogen while it's still in the ground. To do so, they would use a series of heater wells, each six inches in diameter, driven down into the kerogen. The wells would act like a pot still for whisky, literally cooking the shale at around 300 degrees Celsius until its various components are distilled and collected. Those include natural gas, water, and hydrogen sulfide (which is highly toxic but can be isolated to make by-products such as fertilizer).

But mostly, the process (called "retorting") would produce oil—roughly 25 barrels per ton (which equals roughly a cubic meter of oil shale). It would come out as a translucent golden-brown liquid instead of the typical black sludge that passes as crude oil—ready to go to one of Israel's two refineries for conversion into fuel.

The process is expensive, but it can still produce oil at \$40 a barrel, well below the current global price of \$80–\$100 dollars a barrel. If it sounds complicated or wasteful, consider: A single square kilometer of shale could supply enough oil to meet Israel's entire needs for a year. That's because horizontal

drilling—the other technology besides hydraulic fracking that’s opened up oil and gas reserves once considered inaccessible—enables the direction of drilling to turn sideways, allowing a much wider area of shale rock to be exposed. In effect, a single well can spread its drilling tentacles wide and deep underground, making development not only more efficient, but also economical in terms of land use.

For now, Vinegar and Bartov envision a pilot program involving a series of wells in the Elah Valley heating a 30-meter zone and producing the first 500 barrels in the first year, in order to establish the commercial viability of the oil-shale project. And with reserves holding the equivalent of 250 billion barrels, that would just be the start.

In the meantime, however, their discoveries have been overshadowed by natural gas.

As with oil shale, Israel’s natural-gas story involves Israeli and American entrepreneurs working together to change the country’s energy fortunes.

The Israeli in this case was Gideon Tadmor, a former lawyer who in 1991 set up his own gas-drilling company, on the bet that the same offshore fields that provided Egypt with its natural gas from the Nile Delta might extend into Israeli territorial waters. Like his Israel Petroleum Authority counterpart, he then set off on a pilgrimage to America to find a company bold enough to open the offshore fields, and brave enough to defy any possible Arab boycott.

That company was Noble Energy of Houston—an oil-drilling company founded in southern Oklahoma by Lloyd Noble in the

1930s that had expanded its operations to offshore natural gas. For its CEO, Charles Davidson, the Israeli offer was an opportunity to use their deep-water expertise to make some money while helping the state of Israel.

Noble engineers arrived in 1999 and, with deep seismic testing, confirmed the existence of hitherto unknown deposits of natural gas just a few miles off the Israeli coast. Noble helped to sink Israel's first offshore gas well in 2002, called Noa, followed by Mari-B in 2004. Then in 2009, Noble's geologists disclosed to Tadmor and the Israelis that they had found a much larger field named Tamar, with roughly 10 trillion cubic feet of gas. Those were reserves rich enough to invest in erecting a \$3 billion offshore platform to which gas from the entire Tamar field could be piped—the biggest infrastructure project in Israeli history. Divers operating as deep as 800 feet installed 457 miles of pipe and 1,200 miles of umbilical tubing to move the gas from fields 90 miles out to shallower water where the platform sits—the longest undersea “tie back” in the history of the offshore-energy world. The platform itself weighs 34,000 tons, and from sea floor to the tip of the platform measures 950 feet, 150 feet higher than Israel's tallest skyscraper, the Moshe Aviv Tower in Ramat Gan.

Fifty workers labor around the clock, monitoring the flow from six principal wells—some more than 20 miles away and three miles below the seabed—to the platform, where various contaminants (sand, water, sulphur, and extraneous gases) are extracted so the final product can be shipped via a 150-kilometer pipeline to a terminal at Ashdod, from which it is fed to power stations that supply Israel's electrical grid.

Tamar opened for business in March 2013. It currently pumps 1 billion cubic feet of gas a day, more than enough to serve Israel's natural-gas needs—even though, thanks to Tamar and Mari-B, almost 40 percent of Israel's electricity supply has now switched over to natural gas. The opening of Tamar was pronounced “historic” by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office. It was the crucial element in the Netanyahu government's 2010 plan to enable Israel to achieve energy independence in 10 years.

But nothing prepared anyone for the next discovery, dubbed Leviathan. Found in 2010, Leviathan is more than double the size of Tamar, with 16 to 18 trillion cubic feet of gas. The full extent of the field is still unknown, but energy consultant Paul Mecray told me it's easily one of the biggest offshore gas discoveries in a decade.

Together with Tamar, Leviathan is big enough to supply all of Israel's energy needs for decades, even if everything in the country is switched over to natural gas from electricity to cars—and with plenty left over for a booming export business. Noble's estimate is that Israel will be looking at \$145 billion in energy savings and in revenue from taxes.

As Noble awaits approval of a lease to develop the massive field, a wealth of options open up, both for Noble and her Israeli partners Delek Drilling and Avner Oil and Gas Exploration, and for Israel. Almost all involve exporting the bulk of Leviathan's gas. As Amit Mor, former assistant to Israeli Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure and now CEO of Eco Energy, says, “We now have gas for 50–60 years, in terms of domestic reserves, and that's even with the most [pessimistic] figures.”

One option involves building an export pipeline to Turkey, which would want the gas as a cheaper alternative to buying from Russia. Given Israel's up-and-down state of relations with Turkey, however—and a lack of encouragement from the current Turkish government—that option has few supporters.

More attractive is building a pipeline to Egypt, where facilities already exist to collect and process the gas—a special irony considering Egypt was once Israel's own longtime source of natural gas until the now-ousted President Mohammed Morsi cut off the supply in early 2013.

A third option would be to create a major liquid-natural-gas hub in conjunction with Cyprus, only 250 miles as the crow flies from Israel. The island nation has recently discovered its own huge offshore fields—more than 500 billion cubic feet's worth. The government of Cyprus would love to see that gas exported as a way to resuscitate its economy, but it needs 600 billion cubic feet to build an export facility that's economically feasible. If Israel supplied that extra 100 billion, and shipped its own gas to the same facility, Israel and Cyprus together could become important players in the European energy market. Russia is now the principal supplier, at more than three times the global market price for natural gas—and Vladimir Putin is not afraid to use the threat of cutting off supplies for political leverage.

A European Union market for Israeli liquid natural gas could have huge geopolitical ramifications in changing Europe's perception of the Jewish state. It's one reason the Israeli government is negotiating with Woodside Petroleum, an Australian company that specializes in building liquid-natural-

gas facilities, for a 30 percent stake in the development of Leviathan. Such a market might even make internal European pressures to boycott Israel go away. Yet Cyprus's close ties to Russia, and its dealings with Russia's state-run gas monopoly Gazprom, raise questions about whether relying on the Cypriot connection might be sowing the seeds of trouble later on.

Another idea I discussed with Noble officials would be to construct a floating liquid-natural-gas plant (or FLNG) that would collect, process, and liquefy natural gas for export directly from a Leviathan-based platform. FLNGs are huge and expensive—the one Royal Dutch Shell is building in South Korea for the western Australian gas fields is the size of six aircraft carriers—but it costs less than an onshore facility. A Leviathan-based FLNG could serve as the anchor for processing and liquefying Cypriot gas as well—except under Israel's control instead of Cyprus's.

These and other scenarios have one thing in common: the assumption that exporting a sizable portion of Israel's gas finds is the key to getting the most out of the discoveries, financially as well as politically, and that includes exporting to Israel's more immediate neighbors.

One of those is Jordan. Israel now has a fast-growing network of gas pipelines running from Noble and Delek's processing center at Ashdod up the coast, and across to the east. Extending the pipeline into Jordan would help not only to create an economic bond between the two countries but also to stabilize Jordan's economy and King Abdullah's government, especially since Jordan's own oil-shale project, so elaborately put together with Shell, might not produce anything until the 2020s.

The other is the Palestinian Authority. Its own offshore gas fields, Gaza Marine, lie untapped and unexplored because Hamas refuses to allow anyone to get near them—largely because Hamas’s patron, Iran, has ordered that they lie fallow. So while Hezbollah and Hamas are managing to keep Israeli gas out of Gaza and Lebanon, at least for now, Israel is opting instead to pump to the West Bank. Noble already signed a 20-year contract to supply the Palestine Power Company, starting in 2016 or 2017. A similar contract with Jordan is in the works.

There is time to weigh all options. No supplies from Leviathan can start flowing until Noble and its partners have built an onshore terminal in Israel for supplying the domestic market (two sites are now pending). That won’t happen before 2017. A FLNG couldn’t begin operating until sometime in 2018. A link-up with Cyprus would not come until after that.

All the same, combined with the promise of oil shale, Tamar and Leviathan together seem an unbelievable bonanza for the state of Israel, including its foreign relations. Back in his office at Har Hovitzim, Vinegar sees the two projects working together in harmony. “The natural gas in the Mediterranean will have a very favorable impact on the economy; but this will have a greater effect,” Vinegar told me. “[The kerogen production] means energy security for Israel, almost forever. It means an enormous continuing source of income. It means so many jobs—in both primary and related industries.” But with a wry smile, he adds, “I wish it were going faster.” The fact is, many Israelis are skeptical about Vinegar’s project and Israel’s offshore gas prospects.

And, incredibly, there are even some who’d like to put a halt to

the entire proceedings.

During our visit to Israel, friends took my wife and me to a large beach north of the city of Benyamina that sits within walking distance of their former kibbutz. They explained that this beach was one of the sites where Noble Energy had proposed building a reception terminal for Leviathan, until residents and communities banded together to say no, and in a series of furious public meetings blocked the plan.

For many in the Benyamina area, including our friends, the words Noble Energy are dirty. Listening to the roar of the surf and watching the sun set in an explosion of orange and pink over sand dunes that have been largely untouched since Phoenicians came to trade here three millennia ago, it was easy to see why.

The sudden oil and gas explosion has set off a predictable blowback from elements of the Israeli public, and the Israeli political class, especially on the left. It's not just the "not in our back yard" mentality and fears of burgeoning industrial sites where there used to be pristine beaches, or the specter of historic sites in the Holy Land destroyed in a reckless quest for oil (Elah Valley is where the Bible tells us David fought Goliath). It has also triggered a furious campaign from environmentalists, who've gone after the oil-shale project with the same rage and determination as opponents of fracking in this country.

Leading the environmentalist charge since 2011 has been Orr Karassin, who represents the Green Zionist Alliance on the board of directors of the Jewish National Fund. She spearheaded a high-profile report opposing oil-shale production and

Vinegar's pilot program. "There are too many questions," she told the Jerusalem Post, "regarding the environmental consequences," especially regarding safety concerns, including pollution of the water table, the possibility of underground fires, and even, she says, "very substantial indications of seismic activity, to the point of earthquakes."

Others share her apocalyptic vision of what might happen if Vinegar and his team get their way. "The Elah Valley will be turned into a great oil-shale production site," an article in Haaretz claimed. "Its vistas will likely be ruined, its soil and groundwater polluted by heavy metals, and its clean air will become a distant memory."

Vinegar rolls his eyes at the suggestion that his production method will trigger earthquakes. The retorting process he and his team would use is "environmentally sound," he says emphatically. Since the process is operated at pressures below hydrostatic pressure, any flow will be into the heated zone, not out into the aquifer, which is protected by thick layers of impermeable rock.

In addition, he points out, unlike conventional oil drilling, the retorting process will leave a tiny environmental footprint: less than a square kilometer over the life of 30 years of production, thanks to horizontal drilling.

Karassin and her supporters remain unconvinced. Any oil-shale pilot program, she says, "must be defined to the point where the impact of the technology is clear." But as Vinegar and Bartov point out, there's no way to understand the impact without a pilot program: "I'm sure we'll have a very small impact on air and no effect on water. But the pilot has to show it."

It's a classic catch-22, with opponents saying a project should be blocked because the technology is untested even though the only way the technology can be tested is by running the project. Yet Karassin is honest about the fact that, even if every environmental concern were answered, she would still be opposed: "Oil shale does not synchronize well with the current Israeli policy on alternative" energy sources such as wind, solar, and biofuels, she told the Post. (The Netanyahu government publicly pledged to convert 10 percent of Israel's electricity production to so-called clean renewables.) "Israel's wider interests must take precedence. And those require that the oil shale stays where it is."

Vinegar is incensed at this myopia masquerading as farsightedness. Oil, even more than natural gas from the sea, "means energy security for Israel, almost forever." It offers more options than just relying on gas exports as a national energy dividend, and in more concrete terms. Israel's vehicle as well as civilian- and military-aircraft needs amount to 50,000 barrels of oil a day. A successful program in the Shefla basin could deliver as much as four times that, or 200,000 barrels a day—more than enough to sustain Israel's fighting forces on the ground and in the air during a prolonged crisis.

Critics like Karassin refuse to listen, or don't care. Yet the green lobby has twice failed to halt the Elah Valley pilot project in Israel's Supreme Court. Vinegar's Israel Energy Initiatives is now embarked on the final review process, which will take another nine months (it may be another year and a half before final approval of contracts to get started).

But the Greek chorus of critics doesn't stop with the Vinegar

project. Their attacks extend to the coming offshore gas bonanza as well.

A “clean” fossil fuel like natural gas makes a difficult target for attacks based on environmental grounds. But there are worries that the Israeli energy boom will have the dire economic impact known as the Dutch Disease. The term was coined by the Economist to describe what happened when discovery of natural gas in Holland in 1959 triggered a decisive decline of other sectors of the economy, especially manufacturing, as revenues from natural-gas exports pumped up the price of the guilder and made other Dutch exports less competitive. When the gas boom was over in the early 70s, the Dutch economy was in worse shape than when it started. In many ways, it still hasn’t recovered.

The Bank of Israel has dealt with a possible outbreak of the Dutch Disease in a report issued in April 2013. The bank recommended creating a sovereign wealth fund, or national pension fund, to ensure that export income from the sale of gas doesn’t convert into shekels or enter the Israeli economy or even the national budget. This should quell any distorting effects. Still, many remain skeptical and worry about what will happen to Israel if and when the gas runs out.

Still others worry about security concerns, and the possibility that Israel’s emerging oil and gas facilities, including its offshore gas platforms, make perfect targets for terrorist attacks. As Eco Energy’s Amit Mor notes, Israel’s current floating storage re-gasification unit six miles off Hadera already makes it a “sitting duck” for groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. If jealous neighbors like Lebanon (which is already insisting that

parts of the Leviathan field extend into its own EEZ) or oil-rich countries in the region, such as Iran feel the heat from Israel's emergence as a major energy player, will they look for ways to shut it down—ones that include terrorist destruction? The specter of a Tamar platform hit by Hamas missiles and set ablaze, like BP's Deep Horizon, dampens the mood in any discussion of Israel's energy future.

Many inside and outside the Israeli Knesset also see in the rise of Israel's gas industry a more sinister trap. Ariella Berger, at the Israel Institute for Economic Planning, thinks there may be far less gas in recoverable reserves than Noble and its partners claim. Even if all contingent proven gas reserves are included, she pushes a final figure closer to 650–680 billion cubic meters, far lower than the 950 billion figure the Netanyahu government accepts. That lower number, she points out, would put Israel at No. 29 on the list of nations with provable reserves, behind the Ukraine—which is hardly an energy superpower. From Berger's perspective, an aggressive export-driven policy runs the risk of emptying the gas tank and leaving Israel high and dry just as it completes its shift from coal and oil to natural gas. She is urging instead that the vast bulk of the offshore finds should be kept at home for domestic use—and many in Israel agree with her.

In 2013, the export of natural gas became a fierce political issue. Matters came to head in June, when a select committee mandated by the government to study the issue and headed by Shaul Tzemach, director general of the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources, released its report. The committee recommended exporting up to 53 percent of Israel's offshore gas while making sure Israel has a reserve to last for 25 years. Even after the Netanyahu cabinet voted to cut that number to 40

percent, it was still too high for the leaders of both the Likud and Labor parties, who denounced the decision as “reckless.” Release of the report triggered demonstrations that blocked roads in central Tel Aviv, while demonstrators also besieged the home of Minister of Energy and Water Silvan Shalom.

For once parties on the left and right in Israel could agree: Exporting Israel’s precious natural-gas resources would be a catastrophic mistake, no matter how much foreign currency it would draw in or how many minds in capitals in Europe or elsewhere it might change regarding Israel.

For those on the right, the debate largely hinges on a question of exports versus energy security. For those on the left, it’s also about profits versus people—more specifically, profits for Noble Energy and its Israeli partners. They see the current export model as a payoff by the Netanyahu government to its capitalist supporters; or as Dror Strum, former head of Israel Antitrust Authority, puts it, “There are actually [only] two sides to the story, the gas monopolies and the Israeli public.”

Indeed, it’s not hard to find those on the left who wonder, like their ideological allies in the Green Zionist Alliance, whether it would have been better if Israel hadn’t discovered its new energy resources at all—and whether Israel’s national identity can even survive the onslaught.

“Nonsense.” That is the reaction of Uri Aldubi, chairman of Israel’s Association of Oil and Gas Exploration Industries, to this rising tide of anti-fossil fuel propaganda and defeatist pessimism about Israel’s energy-rich future. On fears of the Dutch Disease, he points out that the Tamar field hasn’t added

more than 1 percent of GDP to Israel's already booming and diversified economy. Even Leviathan, for all its potential riches, won't be able to overbalance an economy—which, unlike Holland's in the 1960s and 70s, is one of the most dynamic and innovative in the world. "The Start-Up Nation will adjust," Aldubi assures me, as will Israel's thriving entrepreneurial culture. And far from misdirecting economic resources, Israel's homegrown energy start-ups will only add more to the mix.

Aldubi has an even harsher reaction to worries that exporting too much gas will wreck Israel's own domestic market. "Quite frankly, this is B.S.," he says. "There is no way Israel can develop fields of this size without exporting." No one, not even an Israeli energy company, would invest the time and resources in opening the Leviathan field just to meet the tiny Israeli market. It's a point you hear from others who understand the energy business: Reserves in the ground count for nothing unless it's economically feasible to open them up. Israel's own neighbor Egypt is the classic example of a country that has very large natural-gas reserves and that suffers from an acute gas shortage. Israel could find itself in a similar squeeze once the Tamar field starts to play out, if there aren't enough export-earned shekels to pay for new wells to serve that domestic demand.

As for Israel's oil potential, he points out—like Harold Vinegar—that the aquifer in the Shefla basin is protected under the development scheme proposed by Israel Energy Initiatives. He, too, sees exploiting Israel's oil-shale potential as a way to diversify risk as well as economic opportunity, and not just for Israel but for its neighbors.

Indeed, what many in the Israeli Knesset seem not to understand is that what looms on the horizon is more than just energy independence—or lots of new government revenue. Turning Israel into an energy-market player could be the beginning of a revolution in the country's relations with its neighbors, who are already contracting to buy the gas. The list includes Jordan and Egypt—the latter, as Aldubi likes to point out, is the country that used to supply natural gas to both Israel and Jordan—as well as the Palestinian territories.

And this is where the possibilities become intriguing.

Shlomi Fogel may be described in the financial press as “one of Israel's wealthiest and most secretive billionaires,” but in the flesh he is affable, eloquent, and passionate about the most prolonged of all Israel's agonies, the conflict with the Palestinians and the status of the West Bank. Fogel is no milk-and-water Israeli liberal; he is close to Netanyahu and his master architect of the government's export-driven energy policy, Egon Kandel. But Fogel is also friends with key officials in the Palestinian Authority, as well as leading Palestinian businessmen, and he sees in Israel's energy discoveries an unprecedented opening to a new Israeli–Arab future.

The founder in 1993 of Ampa Industries, one of Israel's largest diversified companies, Fogel says he sees “four vectors signaling Israel's future rise as a world-class economic power.” The first is its impressive command of leading high-tech industries. The second, its up-to-date infrastructure, including high-speed Internet, far ahead of any other Middle Eastern country and even in some respects the United States. The third, its gift for entrepreneurial flair. The fourth is now oil and gas.

When asked whether the growth of Israel's oil and gas business can promote Palestinian-Israeli amity, Fogel is emphatic.

"Absolutely," he replies. People have had enough of politicians manipulating the issue for their own gain, he says. On both sides of the security fence, it's time for a bottom-up solution, taking root in one business deal at a time and creating a powerful middle-class constituency that has a stake in creating wealth instead of fomenting war. The export of natural gas to revivify the economy of the West Bank, with Palestinians finding well-paying jobs on building and servicing pipelines or in oil-shale production, could be a compelling way to jump-start the process.

"Jordan is moving toward development and purchasing of gas from us," he tells me. "I believe we will see better times with them." He sees the same possibility with the Palestinians, even in Gaza. "The rockets are not giving them a better future," he says. "Their young people will not accept misery and unemployment" for very long if they see a better more prosperous future unfolding in Jordan and the West Bank.

Of course, there are many reasons for believing ancient enmities won't die away anytime soon, especially when there are outside powers ready to exploit them. In mid-January, Russia's Gazprom announced it was talking to Palestinian officials about developing Gaza's offshore gas fields. Gazprom had tried to take a stake in the development of the Leviathan field, even though it might pose a challenge to Russia's natural-gas market in Europe. (The Israelis opted for the Australian company Woodside instead.) Making gestures toward Gaza might be Putin's way of getting revenge, as well as reasserting Russia's geopolitical stake in the eastern Mediterranean, as it did by taking a leading role in staving off an American attack on Syria last year.

Certainly none of it bodes well for the future—especially with Russia’s partner in the Middle East, Iran, likely to follow close behind.

All the same, Fogel’s enthusiasm is infectious, especially when he looks at the impact Israel itself could have on the global energy picture. Once Israel commits itself to expanding its own energy sector, the results, he is convinced, will reverberate back to America and beyond. As the energy industry becomes increasingly high-tech, once the Israeli penchant for improving and innovating those technologies kicks in, what seems impossible today could become common practice. (Four years ago, a Noble Energy official told me that the idea of developing the Leviathan field entirely offshore would have seemed impossible.)

The ultimate question is, Can the Israelis live with this new bounty? Have they become so accustomed to living in survival mode and being under constant threat that they simply cannot believe their good fortune—and cannot act on the opportunity?

In the end, what Israelis do may depend on how the outside world does, especially the Jewish community and supporters of Israel in this country. In order for its oil and gas bonanza to succeed, Israel needs two things, says Uri Aldubi: “operators and investors.” Almost all of them, for now, will have to come from outside—not only from the United States but from Europe as well. Universal Oil and Gas is a London-based company that recently partnered with the Association of Oil and Gas Exploration Industries to host a series of conferences to champion those links and also possibly to prepare the way for a future European market for Israeli gas. The talks are to take

place in Europe and in the Mecca of America's energy industry, Houston. The Israeli ambassador in Norway organized a similar conference in Stavanger last November, where Norwegian service and exploration companies with long experience in offshore gas development along their own continental shelf came not only to offer their knowledge and skill to Israel but also to learn how Israeli expertise in high-tech pursuits might transform their own businesses. The first outlines of Shlomi Fogel's prediction may be coming true.

But in the meantime, the world waits as Israel makes up its mind.

Arthur Herman is the author, most recently, of The Cave and the Light: Plato Versus Aristotle and the Struggle for the Soul of Western Civilization. Support for the research and writing of this article was provided by the Hertog/Simon Fund for Policy Analysis.