



The US and Us: The Mitvim-DC Monthly

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The US and Us: The Mitvim-DC Monthly is a monthly report on US-Middle East issues. Each report includes an analysis, a roundup of commentaries, and a profile of a major US policymaker. The series is of particular importance at a time in which personnel changes and policy re-evaluations regarding Israel and the Middle East are taking place. This report is prepared by Brian Reeves, a Visiting Fellow at Mitvim, breeves@mitvim.org.il. Previous issues can be [read here](#).

A. Analysis

US Should Foster More Regional Diplomatic Role

For the sake of reaching a long-term ceasefire in Gaza, and for future efforts towards a two-state solution, the US must encourage more regional diplomatic participation.

The conflict in Gaza captivated the American audience, ushering a month of “strategic analyses” in papers and think tanks on US, Israeli and Palestinian options for a way forward. Of secondary interest were options after the extension of the Iran nuclear talks until November. In the background, ISIS continues to cement its power in northwestern Iraq, while analysts scramble to make sense of the ramifications and to devise ways to return stability to the region.

For the US, though, attempts for a ceasefire in Gaza this past month were a disaster. Despite working endlessly to incorporate the efforts of regional and European actors, Secretary Kerry’s efforts were repeatedly dashed, only to be replaced by a tenuous 72-hour [ceasefire](#).

Although it has fallen short, the US has chosen the right course. A strategy of encouraging greater participation from these self-appointed Middle Eastern mediators and others represents the surest way the US can expect to broker a ceasefire. Moreover, this option can satisfy the large swath of Americans weary of the toll that a protracted involvement in the Middle East has taken but who worry about the prospect of a declining US influence around the world.

Dr. Galia Press-Barnathan at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem once argued in an [academic article](#) that by allowing greater intra-regional European security cooperation after the Cold War, the US was able to mitigate its costs of maintaining stability there while still preserving its hegemonic position. This theory of “security regionalization,” as she calls it, may be extrapolated to a US option in the Middle East of “diplomacy regionalization,” whereby the US

would encourage regional third party states to engage more actively in negotiations with the conflicting parties— Hamas, Fatah, and, at least indirectly, Israel.

Unfortunately, rather than exhibiting regional cooperation the ceasefire talks—and inter-Arab relations in general—have been characterized by competition. This competition has manifested itself in a clash between a Saudi- and Israeli-backed Egyptian ceasefire initiative, on the one side, and Turkish and Qatari efforts to vouch for Hamas, on the other.

Making matters worse for itself, in the search to find a more palpable offer for Hamas after it rejected the former's terms, the US appears to have swung a full 180°, adopting almost entirely those of the latter. Kerry's lopsided proposals have stirred feelings of betrayal and mistrust from all sides.

To this end, both Israeli and moderate Palestinian leaders alike have rebuked his last major [proposal](#) on July 26, released to the parties after a [meeting in Paris](#) between Western leaders and Turkey and Qatar. It was soundly rejected by Israel's [cabinet](#), as well as the Palestinian Authority, which ridiculed the US for having discarded the Egyptian initiative in favor of a "[friends of Hamas](#)" outlook. Two weeks on, despite various Obama [officials](#) having come to Kerry's aid, not to mention Israeli Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer, Kerry's most recent remark that Netanyahu is a "[stubborn head](#)" has left few to wonder whether the diplomatic spat is still ongoing.

For the US to rebound from this series of diplomatic blunders, it must make a more concerted effort to juggle the demands of all parties. It should devise an international mechanism combining regional cooperation within the divergent camps and the various conflict party-mediator relationships that allow, for example, the US to circumvent having to speak with Hamas directly. Though a daunting task, only a year ago Kerry pulled off another admirable feat by convincing the Arab League to amend the Arab Peace Initiative to allow for negotiation on minor [land swaps](#). Such endeavors for compromise are helpful, and align with the spirit of diplomacy regionalization.

The US must also see to it that Abbas and the Palestinian Authority be placed at the center of all Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, including over Gaza. The surest way for the US to bolster the PA's voice over that of Hamas is to countenance the Fatah-Hamas "technocratic government," which retains Abbas' leading role. Plus its contact with both Israel and Hamas can be exploited as a primary mediating source.

In short, greater regional diplomatic involvement under this international mechanism could prevent another fissure within the Palestinian ranks, would act as a confidence-building measure between Israel and the Arab parties, and would provide international (US or EU) monitoring for the implementation of (and against breaches to) agreements. A Middle Eastern diplomacy regionalization is the US' most secure, comprehensive, and cost-effective path out of the current mess, and onto the road to a two-state solution.

B. Article Roundup

US Policy Options for a Post-Ceasefire Gaza

Aaron David Miller, at The Wilson Center, dissects Kerry's ceasefire diplomatic failures and [proposes the US strategic role be small](#): transactional, and not transformational.

Dennis Ross, at The Washington Institute, argues that the Obama administration adopt a new mindset on Gaza by [factoring in the changing dynamics of the region](#).

Ibrahim Sharqieh, at Brookings, demands that the US ponder "[Palestine's right to defend itself](#)," and offers three ways the US can cultivate greater stability in Gaza and the West Bank.

The Washington Post Editorial Board endorsed the idea of the [US disarming Hamas](#).

US Policy Options for the Middle East

Brookings released a lengthy report on the "[New Middle East Cold War](#)," including US policy options addressing the regional competition and reevaluating the Shia-Sunni sectarian divide.

Ray Takeyh, at the Council on Foreign Relations, advocated before the US House of Representatives that the best way to contain Iran lies in [bringing stability](#) to Iraq and Syria.

Robert Kutner evaluates in the American Prospect the [US limitations on power](#), specifically addressing Obama's foreign policy efforts in the Middle East.

The Carnegie Endowment offers a Q&A of the local and regional [implications of the Gaza conflict](#), as well as ideas for US diplomacy in the Middle East.

US and Iran Talks

Benjamin Armbuster, at the Center for American Progress, spells out [three key components](#) for a successfully negotiated agreement with the Iranians.

Zachary Keck writes in the National Interest that in order to deter Iran from going nuclear, the US should convince them [non-nuclearization is in their interest](#).

US and ISIS

Dr. Stephen Biddle, at the Council on Foreign Relations, appeared before the House Armed Service Committee with US policy options for a [response to the situation in Iraq and Syria](#).

Anthony Cordesman, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, asserts that the US should bypass Prime Minister al-Maliki [launch an all-out assault](#) on ISIS.

James Jeffrey, at The Washington Institute, pressed the Senate for swift [US action against ISIS](#).

C. Policy Profile

Stuart Jones – The new US Ambassador to Iraq

At a delicate time for Iraq given the recently emerged ISIS threat, Stuart Jones has been installed as the new US ambassador to the country. Having served in neighboring [Jordan](#) as ambassador since 2011, Jones replaces Ambassador Beecroft, who was simultaneously tapped as the new representative to Egypt.

Jones' appointment was passed [unanimously](#) through the Senate, and it is no wonder why. The career Middle East diplomat had [served](#) from 2010-2011 as Deputy Chief of Mission in Baghdad, as Governorate Coordinator for Anbar Province in 2004, and Director for Iraq on the National Security Council in 2004-2005 on top of key posts in Egypt, Turkey and others around the world.

Regarding the current turmoil, Jones has already offered his remarks, expressing his confidence in Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to summon the "political will to try to unify the groups" against ISIS. If the Obama administration indeed authorizes US support on this endeavor, it will be up to Jones to coordinate with the Iraq political echelon to return stability to the country once ISIS is repulsed.