



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 for Israel's regional foreign policies as the second Obama administration takes shape – a time in which personnel changes and policy re-evaluations regarding Israel and the Middle East are taking place.

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A. Analysis

December is typically a month for reflection, for completion, for finality; in US policy circles, it's a chance to assess the year before, the wins and losses, and prepare for the coming year. With many issues slowing down, it seems only morbidly fitting that the most intractable of conflicts, that of Israel and the Palestinians, persists in negotiations. As the quandary in Syria reaches a 'policy-fatigue,' and the calamity that is Egyptian politics finds new nadirs, John Kerry and the US return their attention to Israel and Palestine in what one reporter summed up perfectly as: ["John Kerry heads for Israeli-Palestinian talks and no one but him is excited."](#)

Indeed, putting all the eggs in the negotiations basket may seem ill-advised for Kerry, especially given the Obama Administration's less-than-stellar 2013 Middle East policy. In the *Washington Post*, Max Fisher has [scathing reviews](#) for the US's approach to Egypt, arguing that the US failed in every "conceivable metric. Not only was the US able to maintain their relationship with the Egyptian army, but any progress towards a sustainable and transparent democracy was compromised." On Syria, the US has likewise failed to improve its policy, negotiating a chemical-weapons deal that does not seem to outweigh the negatives of the overall approach. While this chemical weapons deal is seen as an achievement within some Israeli policy circles, it is viewed with growing skepticism from the US, as the overall effectiveness of such arms-reduction has been called into question.

Now, as Kerry returns to the region, US officials are leaking to reporters their aim of proposing a framework for agreement by the end of January. High hopes indeed for the US, especially given the track record, but the resiliency of Kerry and the "do or die" nature of the current round of talks are enough for even the most ardent of cynics to think the US can improve its Middle East policy in 2014. After all, it has only one direction to go.

B. Article Roundup

The US and the Middle East

December has been a month of introspection on US involvement in the Middle East; at CSIS, Shadi Hamid and Peter Mandaville put forth a policy recommendation for [how the US can re-engage the region](#).

At Carnegie, Michele Dunne argues it's time for the US to [abandon its involvement in the Forum for the Future](#), instead redirecting its efforts towards designing a more constructive platform for a direct dialogue with Arab civil society.

The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process

There is increased speculation on the prospects of an interim Israeli-Palestinian agreement, and Aaron David Miller leads the charge, here asking whether John Kerry is actually on [the cusp of a framework agreement](#) between the two sides.

Iran and the future of negotiations

CSIS has released a report analyzing US-Iranian competition at four levels: energy, regime change, sanctions, and arms control. The report shows [competition has been "increasing steadily since 2011."](#)

Syria and Egypt

With the Syrian war entering its third year, Nicholas Heras explores [the possibility of an Assad mini-state](#) in a portion of the land. As Heras claims, Assad is in control of roughly 40 percent of the land and 70 percent of the Syrian population, and the creation of such a state is feasible.

Steven Cook, at the Council on Foreign Relations, predicts that [Egypt will see more turbulence](#) and protests in 2014. A rather safe assumption, Cook also predicts that extremists will find the instability to their advantage.

C. Policy Profile

Robert Ford, US Ambassador to Syria

Robert Ford, the career diplomat regarded as "one of the top Arabists" in the State Department, has served as the US Ambassador to Syria since 2010. Almost all of his time in office has been with handling the Syrian revolution; in the beginning stages of the protests, Ford traveled the country in support of peaceful protests against the Assad regime. In 2011, Ford was pulled from Damascus out of security concerns, and in 2013 it was released that John Kerry wanted to name him the successor to Anne Peterson as Ambassador to Egypt, something the [Egyptian government rejected](#). For the time being, it looks as though [Ford will be in Washington working on Middle East policy](#) until one of the two countries clears up. The Ambassador is a graduate of Johns Hopkins, and speaks German, Arabic, Turkish, and French. He has previously served as Ambassador to Algeria and as Political Counselor in Baghdad from 2004-2006.