

The Layalina Review

On Public Diplomacy and Arab Media



Layalina Productions Inc., 1250 24th Street NW, Suite 300 Washington, DC 20037

Vol. VIII No. 2 January 13-January 26 2012

A Vision of Peace with the Taliban

The Obama administration expressed renewed confidence in engaging with the Taliban as a step forward to end a ten-year war in Afghanistan, reports The Washington Post. Taking precautionary measures against the Taliban galvanizing its standing in the country following the talks, the administration is laying out confidence-building measures, while members of the diplomatic, military and intelligence communities have expressed doubts regarding the “value of talks with the Taliban.”

Speaking on conditions of anonymity, US officials who read the latest Afghan National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) “warned that the Taliban would grow stronger, using the talks to gain credibility and run out the clock until US troops depart Afghanistan, while continuing to fight for more territory.”

The Afghan government has thus far demonstrated a poor track record in imposing itself, with the warlords continuing to impose their law unabated. The Washington Post notes that the NIE recommended “eliminating top Taliban leaders in the next two years” to offset the situation.

In the meantime, Afghanistan’s President Hamid Karzai has also shown uneasiness about the talks, expressing his concerns that the US and the Taliban could marginalize him. One sign was the surprising public endorsement by the Taliban of

the plan to open a negotiating office in the Persian Gulf state of Qatar, according to the Arabic language news site Elaph.

Partisans of the talks in the administration cite the recent participation in preliminary talks of more senior and influential Taliban representatives as a positive sign. One topic was expected to be a US offer to release two or three Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo to custody in Qatar, although two officials said that effort is moving more slowly than plans for the office. A waiting period would follow that transfer before any other Taliban transfers would be considered.

Elaph explains that according to US Special Envoy for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Marc Grossman, the US has not yet taken a decision regarding the release of members of the Taliban from Guantanamo. In addition, Washington also asserted that any talks with the Taliban to end the war would be with the consent of the Afghan government, which would ultimately take the lead.

US officials added that the office in Doha would provide an environment away from Pakistan, which Washington sees as playing a malevolent role in Afghanistan, encouraging links between militant Islamists and the Taliban.

As Mr. Grossman declared that he found strong support for peace during his visit to Afghanistan after holding a meeting with the Haqqani network, he added that he looked forward to the Taliban “renouncing international

terrorism,” according to the Arabic news site Al-Jazeera.

President Karzai allegedly joined in the process and he personally held peace talks with the insurgent faction Hizb-i-Islami, appearing to assert his own role in a US-led bid for negotiations. Hizb-i-Islami is a radical Islamist militia that controls territory in Afghanistan’s northeast and launches attacks against American forces from Pakistan. Its leader, powerful warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, is a former US ally now listed as a terrorist by Washington.

Elaph remarks that Mr. Grossman stated that despite the differences between Pakistan and America, the US cannot “get a comprehensive peace process without the participation of Pakistan.”

While the Taliban declared that it would step up “political

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efforts” to secure peace in Afghanistan in response to US moves to open talks, it also stated that its involvement in any talks did not constitute an acceptance of the legitimacy of President Karzai’s government, reports Al-Jazeera.

“This understanding does not mean a surrender from Jihad and neither is it connected to an acceptance of the constitution of the stooge Kabul administration,” the statement added.

“The Afghan government and the international community must see the insurgents renounce violence, break with al-Qaeda and support the laws and constitution of Afghanistan.”

- US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

“We are still in preliminary stages of testing whether this can be successful and we remain committed to the red lines that we have consistently laid out; namely, that both the Afghan government and the international community must see the insurgents renounce violence, break with Al-Qaeda and support the laws and constitution of Afghanistan,” Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state said.

The new site Al-Jazeera remarks that the Obama administration’s focus has been stability in Afghanistan after most foreign combat troops completely pull out by 2014, and any possible deal with the Taliban would aim to achieve that.

Journalism Today: Back to the Future

Journalism throughout the world remains a dangerous field, as evidenced by the murder of Pakistani journalist Mukarram Khan Aatif on January 17, reports Hurriyet Daily News.

The 43-year-old correspondent, who worked for VOA’s Deewa Radio since 2006, was shot by gunmen at a mosque in Shabqadar, located 20 miles north of Peshawar. Aatif was rushed to a hospital in Peshawar, where he died as a result of bullet wounds. According to district police chief Nisar Khan Marwat, a prayer leader was also injured by the gunfire.

The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack and remarked, “We warned him many times not to work for them, but he didn’t accept our demand,” spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan told AFP. “Many other journalists are now a target,” he added.

VOA Director David Ensor explained that his team “mourn the loss of our colleague.” Soberly, US Broadcasting Board of Governors chairman Walter Issacson pointed out that his assassination was a “tragic reminder” of the dangers facing other correspondents. According to Reporters Without Borders, eight journalists were killed in Pakistan in 2011, rendering it the deadliest country for journalists.

Meanwhile, traditional media continues to battle for an

audience throughout the Arab world. According to Asharq-Alawsat, satellite operator Arabsat alleged that Iran was somehow jamming Al-Jazeera broadcasts near Tehran and Maragheh in northwest Iran.

Despite “sustained interference,” Arabsat announced a new frequency for viewers in Iran. “These occurrences will only strengthen our commitment to continue providing our award-winning coverage across the region 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” commented the broadcaster.

However, with the one-year anniversary of former Tunisian President Ben Ali’s ouster on January 14, press freedom groups and journalist support organizations continue to anticipate the future of a free media throughout the Middle East and North Africa. At PBS’s MediaShift, University of Montana journalism professor Anne Medley discusses her latest project, Speak Out Tunisia.

In collaboration with the Tunisian PaCTE, Speak Out Tunisia aims to “build a network of educated, ethical journalists across Tunisia who can continue to report accurately and fairly on their country, government and communities to the rest of the world.”

“Tunisians today believe in the role of citizen journalism in preserving freedom of speech; however, we need it to be an efficient and credible institution and not a double-edged sword,” said PaCTE vice president Fatma Mokadmi.

Medley notes that there is a lot of raw power already present in the recently freed Tunisian press. “Tunisians were well-versed in using social media long before the revolution. The power of the people to capture and disseminate videos and photos via the Internet already exists,” she points out. “The goal of Speak Out Tunisia

will be to harness that power and turn it into well-produced, ethical and balanced reporting that Tunisians can trust.”

“The Arab media scene is in a state of flux as a result of the Arab Awakening”

- Visiting professor at Northwestern University Joe Khalil

Medley previously taught multimedia journalism in the Democratic Republic of Congo, emphasizing ethics, the organic development of stories and the necessity of spontaneity in video journalism. She hopes that adapting the program to suit the technologically-connected Tunisian people will give them the same lessons to build the press. While handheld cell phone cameras, Internet access, and other tools may be available, Medley stresses, “training in ethics, accuracy and production skills,” are necessary to prevent citizen journalists from falling victim to oppressive governments or influential businesses.

The Northwestern University in Qatar published its own paper regarding the future of Arab media studies, reports Habib Toumi for Gulf News. The university released its findings and recommendations following a symposium in which media scholars and industry professionals from France, Jordan, the United Kingdom, the US and Qatar explored the possibilities and methods for teaching and researching regional media.

Toumi briefly summarizes the

document, which he states “highlights the disconnect between academic institutions and professional media organizations, the prevalence of premature analyses that often dominate the discourse on Arab media, and the narrow scope and lack of historical perspective that typically characterize research and education on Arabic language media.”

According to the paper, archiving reports from all forms of media will create a database that will be valuable for academics in the future. The document also recommends exploring ways to encourage creative and critical thinking, to re-visit the very notion of Arab media and to also discuss alternative forms of media.

“This is the start of a debate on Arab media’s teaching curriculum and research agenda and is an area where the roles of educational institutions and media industries become so important,” said Joe Khalil, a visiting professor at Northwestern University, who convened the symposium.

“The idea for this symposium echoed a general belief that it is time to look back and look forward at our mission as educators and researchers interested in the region. The Arab media scene is in a state of flux as a result of the Arab Awakening, and it is a great time to examine the impact of satellite television and also look at issues related to media professions, research agendas, and collaborative works,” he concluded.

I s l a m i s t s : A C o n s t a n t R e a l i t y

Egyptian Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa attempted to assuage fears that an Islamist government in Egypt would deal the final blow to its burgeoning democracy, reports

Al-Arabiya.

In a conversation with the Arab news publication, Gomaa pointed out that Islamic law had been established as far back as the 1923 Egyptian constitution. “It is the ceiling no one can exceed even in the parliament,” he added. The Grand Mufti stressed that religious minorities will be protected under Islamic law, which he contended grants religious minorities the freedom to practice their own faith.

The Islamic leader spoke about the divide between Islamist political parties and extremist groups, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan. “Throughout history, we have never seen a religious extremist group that survived and no matter how strong it might become for a certain time, it is bound to fall at the end,” he stated. “Taliban and al-Qaeda offer the best examples,” he opined.

Ultimately, Gomaa maintained, any future ruler of Egypt would be accountable to the entire population and concerned more with the country’s stability than establishing a fundamentalist Islamic state. If the leader abuses his power, the Grand Mufti argued, “stability will be jeopardized and the same will apply to the economy, for stability and the economy are closely linked.”

At Al-Mustaqbal, Thomas Friedman suggested that Egypt’s Islamist parties would encounter a formidable obstacle in governing the country. While they push for a moderate approach, modernization, religious virtue, upholding the principles of democracy and respecting the rights of all Egyptians, Friedman argues that they will have to learn to do so without oil.

The Islamist parties in Egypt, he stressed, will have to “open up to the world, and it seems that they realize that.” Friedman

points out that Egypt is, in fact, an oil-importing country, which has a significant tourist market. Any political party will truly have to take its constituents' and its neighbors' concerns to heart as Egypt's economy is not reliant on natural resources.

"We are the guardians of Sharia," maintained Salafist An-Nour party leader Nader Bakar. However, he pointed out that "our doors are open to all intellectuals," stressing an inclusion of those who hold different principles. He suggested a similar approach to Brazil in economic principles, eschewing a dictatorship in Egypt. Friedman concludes that the Islamists will have to focus on dealing with economic issues -- without oil -- which may possibly result in ideology and religious principles taking a back seat to stability.

At The Huffington Post, USC Center on Public Diplomacy director Philip Seib addresses the American response to the rise of Islamist parties throughout the Middle East and North Africa. He lauded Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman John Kerry, who met with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood following their electoral victory.

"You're certainly going to have to figure out how to deal with democratic governments that don't espouse every policy or value you have," Kerry pointed out. "The United States needs to deal with the new reality."

The underlying message to Seib continues, "Accept the results of democratic elections and build new relationships." He stresses that US public diplomacy's approach to Islam has evolved since 9/11, taking on a nuanced approach that considered the many facets of Islam throughout the world.

"The next step," Mr. Seib suggests, "given the rise of

Islamist political power, will be to better incorporate a respectful understanding of Islam in the design of public diplomacy programs." Specifically, he urges the creation of cultural, educational and business-related public diplomacy programs involving people who are familiar with Islamic tradition and culture, to avoid any missteps that may be viewed as a "purposeful assertion to anti-Islamic policy."

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Ultimately, Islamist political parties are a reality in the region and consequently "US public diplomacy needs to catch up with this new reality."

While US public diplomacy may need to tweak its approach to such affairs, Rime Naguib at Al-Masry Al-Youm suggests that the western media has already moved in that direction. "Usual warnings over the 'hijacking' of the youth's revolution by Muslim fundamentalists are giving way to an increased emphasis on the 'moderation' of the Brotherhood," she points out, citing American newspapers emphasizing the

Muslim Brotherhood's "disguised modernism."

The Economist, Naguib cites, argued that the Brotherhood was in fact more tolerant and democratic. In the December 2011 article, the publication noted that representatives "repeatedly insisted that they will uphold the rights of women and religious minorities and respect the verdict of the polls, even if it goes against them."

She notes that although news outlets have not shied away from using the "Islamist" label for political parties, they are making a distinction between moderate and extremist Islamist parties, suggesting that those who remained standing after the Arab Spring uprisings were moderates. "Grit your teeth and cautiously welcome it -- in the hope that the Arabs turn away from the more malignant variety," The Economist wrote.

She concludes that shifting attitudes may possibly be a result of the realities of the situation. Egypt's Islamist parties will have to contend with addressing the economy, unemployment, instability and other practical issues. As Eric Tager and Ira Weiner wrote in Foreign Affairs Magazine, "Washington will have no choice but to work with whoever comes to power in Cairo."

However, many still remain concerned about the future of the region, especially in relation to Israel. At The Jerusalem Post, Oren Kessler reports that a study conducted by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) concluded that the Muslim Brotherhood's Ikhwanonline still contains anti-Semitic, anti-Israeli content.

Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) members themselves have been issuing contradictory statements. Although FJP deputy leader Essam Al-Arian told The New York Times that the party

would honor the Egypt-Israel agreement, Muslim Brotherhood deputy chairman Dr. Rashad Bayoumi refuted his statement: “This is not an option, whatever the circumstances, we do not recognize Israel at all. It’s an occupying criminal enemy.”

Ikhwanonline references a Zionist and Jewish character in its articles criticizing the Israelis for their actions in Gaza and the West Bank.

According to Naguib at Al-Masry Al-Youm, the MEMRI also uncovered several themes repeated throughout the website: Holocaust denial, denunciation of negotiations with non-Muslims and calls for martyrdom and jihad. In October 2011, Dr. Muhammad Abd Al-Rahman Al-Masri posted that the conflict between Muslim countries and Israel transcends the themes of occupation: “The conflict between the Zionist state and the Muslim ummah is not like the fight between a landowner and a plundering occupier. This fight is, in essence, a struggle of faith, a cultural struggle [over] fate and existence...The Koran indicates this fight [will continue] until the Day of Judgment.”

As conflicting statements continue to emerge from the leaders and members of Islamist political parties and Muslim groups, the political future of the region remains uncertain.

A Democracy Step by Step

Tunisians celebrated the first anniversary of democratic reforms with a gathering of regional leaders and regular citizens alike in the capital, according to USA Today.

The news site noted that “Tunisia greeted the anniversary with prudent optimism... Now a human rights activist

is president, and a moderate Islamist jailed for years by the old regime is prime minister at the head of a diverse coalition, after the freest elections in Tunisia’s history.”

Of all the Arab countries to witness uprisings, Tunisia has done more than any other to further their democratic drive. USA Today also picked up on statements from the Tunisian media that the new leadership pardoned 9,000 convicts and converted more than 100 death penalty sentences to life in prison. Such acts of goodwill exhibit Tunisia’s efforts to further their transition from the dark days of Ben Ali’s regime.

The accomplishments of the Arab Spring have proven to be a breakthrough for democracy. The protests were “the biggest challenge to authoritarian governments since the downfall of Soviet Communism,” Freedom House proclaimed in a recent report that was elaborated on by NPR. The repressive reactions of other autocratic states to the uprisings have, however, contributed to a downward trend towards authoritarianism worldwide.

Despite this trend, the Arab Spring still gives reason to be optimistic. The report cites that the protests “arose in a region of the world where many observers dismissed the idea of democratic change as futile.”

In contrast to the hopes of Tunisians, Heykel Mahfoudh conjectures that the country is entering “a paradoxically necessary phase of turbulence.” Mahfoudh, an advisor for the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, reveals that disquiet in the economy and society may pose problems.

Also of concern are the apparent hypocrisies of the new leadership. Diana Mukkaled writes in Asharq Alawsat about

the current Islamist Prime Minister, Hamadi Jebali, who recently decided to unilaterally appoint senior figures in the media. “What is the logic behind the governmental appointment of media figures, if not to control what is being written and said in the media, which is something that Jebali himself ran afoul of during the Ben Ali era?” Mukkaled argues that the current leadership is not very different from that of the old regime.

“[The protests were] the biggest challenge to authoritarian governments since the downfall of Soviet Communism”

-Freedom House

The set backs of the Arab Spring are, unfortunately, widespread in the countries that followed Tunisia’s lead. Yemen in particular has found itself in a fragile state, consumed by widespread violence and at the whim of a fickle President Saleh who has repeatedly manipulated all attempts for a compromise with protesters. Asharq Alawsat’s Adel al Toraifi laments that “the real problem with President Saleh is that he is still not convinced that his time in power is almost at an end.”

At the heart of debate now is the immunity law that protects Saleh and his aides from prosecution. Protesters as well as foreign powers and organizations have decried the statute with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

alleging that “immunity could violate international law” in Monsters and Critics news.

Adding to turmoil in the region was the self-immolation of five Moroccan protesters in Rabat. Demonstrations in the country have centered on the dearth of jobs for university graduates who have loosely consolidated into a movement to demand more job opportunities. For The New York Times, Nadi Bakri describes the despair felt in Morocco as “the rise of the practice also illustrates how little the Arab revolts have changed the conditions that led to mass unrest in the first place.”

Cyber Squabbles Between Saudi and Israeli Hackers

Cyber attacks were exchanged between hackers from Saudi Arabia and Israel last week, threatening to bring down economic institutions and exacerbate deteriorating relations, reported The Jerusalem Post.

Hackers identified as Saudis reportedly brought down the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange and El Al websites. In addition, detailed credit card information of Israelis was leaked and made available online by an unknown Saudi asserting, “The motivation was political.”

Israel’s Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Minister Yuli Edelstein responded to the incidents by proclaiming, “The cyber war against Israel is very real...It’s not just about writing Jews drink blood and something like that. It’s an attack on [the Israeli air liner] El Al, on its companies and its people.”

In another article by The Jerusalem Post, Israeli hackers retaliated by bringing down the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency websites and the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange. An Internet group called Israel Defenders, were reportedly responsible for the cyber attack according to one Israeli hacker.

“The cyber war against Israel is very real.”

-Israel’s Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Minister Yuli Edelstein

The group claimed in a statement that their actions were triggered by “lame hackers from Saudi Arabia decided to launch an attack against Israeli sites.” They added “this is only the beginning...there may be disruption to the [Saudi] government’s stock exchange site.”

However, an Israeli hacker remarked, “Usually we do not like to hurt innocent sites, but there is now a cyber war, and every war has victims.”

A Saudi Internet user identified as oxOmar, who is responsible for a number of Internet attacks against Israeli sites, announced that his cyber attacks would continue until the Israeli government “apologized for what he described as a ‘genocide against Palestine’.”

Currently, the exchange of cyber attacks remains at a standstill as an Israeli hacker commented that his team, known as the IDF Team, “...will not attack without reason.”

In related news, Palestinian youth in the West Bank protested against a meeting between Israeli

and Palestinian negotiators, according to the UAE Daily, The Khaleej Times.

Earlier this month, negotiators met twice before following strong encouragements by the Middle East Quartet – a diplomatic entity comprised of the European Union, Russia, the United Nations, and the United States.

However, Palestinian protesters assembled before the Ramallah headquarters of Mahmud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority. The protesters “dismissed the talks as ‘futile’,” and asserted in a statement that “The Palestinian negotiators made a mistake in returning to the negotiating table on January 3 and 10, betting on the same process that failed for two decades.”

Nonetheless, the Middle East Quartet established a deadline as of January 26 for both sides to complete “comprehensive proposals on borders and security that could serve as a foundation for future talks.”

Syria Hits the Fan

A conclusive result of the Arab League fact-finding mission to Syria leaves a series of questions unanswered for the international community, according to Al-Arabiya.

The Arab League has been discussing for some time now how to tackle the Arab Republic’s uprisings and subsequent crackdowns. Nabil Al-Araby, current Secretary General of the Arab League, stated there will be no “magic wand” that will resolve the Syrian crisis. The Arab League head added that a foreign intervention is unlikely, as “Syria does not spur incentives for other countries that sell weapons to intervene. It does

not have oil.”

Support for the dissident Free Syrian Army has reportedly increased drastically, according to Voice of America. The organization is comprised mainly of soldiers who have defected from the national army and have begun staging attacks on government and military installations in addition to clashing with security forces.

In related news, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu announced that a Russian cargo ship momentarily held in Cyprus had reached its final destination in a Syrian port. The Turkish FM labeled the ship’s contents as “dangerous cargo” while Cypriot media maintained reports of up to 60 tons of ammunition and explosives. Thus far, Turkey has taken a harsh stance against Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad’s handling of the uprisings. Lebanon’s Daily Star also reported harsh words spoken by US President Barack Obama, who called the continued crackdown “unacceptable” while maintaining America’s call for al-Assad to cede power to popular opposition.

Furthermore, regional leaders have also begun to formulate their positions on Syria, with Qatari emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani calling for an Arab military intervention in Syria to “stop the killing.” However, Al-Assad has also found allies in Russia and China who have repeatedly vetoed United Nations Security Council resolutions against the Arab Republic.

Syrian sentiment in favor of UN Security Council involvement does exist however, as Colonel Riyadh al-Assad, leader of the Free Syrian Army, told the Arab League to “quickly transfer the case of Syria to the UN Security Council.” Across one of Syria’s southern borders, an unnamed senior military officer in Israel

expressed real concern over the fate of “huge stockpiles” of chemical and biological weapons amassed by the Syrian regime, should government control collapse entirely.

In the midst of international dialogue and internal violence, numerous sources discuss the supposedly wide support base the Syrian government still retains. Redress reveals that as many as half of Syrians have remained supportive of the contested regime throughout the bloodshed. According to YouGov Siraj survey commissioned by Al-Jazeera, 55 percent of Syrians favor President al-Assad. Redress claims that gross fallacies subsist in the survey’s methodology, citing that the survey had only 97 respondents from Syria, 55 percent of which yields a figure of 53 regime supporters among a population of over 20 million.

“We cannot accept the ferocious repression by Syrian leaders, a repression that is driving the country towards a chaos that benefits extremists of all sorts.”

- French President Nicolas Sarkozy

Redress attempted to explain the phenomena of what it described as misinformation against opposition to the Syrian government. The source quoted, “Pro-Western dictators like Ben

Ali and Mubarak are considered fair game, but when it comes to toppling contrarian dictators like Gaddafi and Assad there’s lingering sympathy for them.”

Although Syria’s future is uncertain, what remains certain is that the violence and killing will continue. New York based Human Rights Watch was quoted recently in Al-Arabiya as stating that 506 civilians have been killed alongside 490 Syrians detained since Arab League observers entered the country.

Furthermore, Al-Arabiya reports that Iran, whose government has reportedly played an active role in supporting the Syrian government, offered the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood several positions in power so long as al-Assad, who has maintained close ties with Tehran, is allowed to remain in power.

Iran at Odds with the West

Iranian officials responded to the assassination of one of their scientists by warning the West of possible retaliation, reported The Washington Post.

During the burial procession of the nuclear chemist, Ahmadi-Roshan who was killed in broad daylight, “Thousands of angry Iranians demonstrated against the United States and Israel.” In addition, Iran’s supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, “also threatened revenge in a letter of condolence to the scientist’s family...”

Although relations between Iran and the West continue down a dubious course and Iranians face accusations of illegal nuclear weapons development, the regime’s officials have “signaled a readiness to negotiate on at least one of the nuclear disputes behind the country’s worsening feud with the United States.”

In an effort to appease Western

concerns, Asharq Alawsat reported that Iranian officials permitted the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to lead a trip consisting of a “high-level UN nuclear agency delegation” to Tehran, possibly on January 28. However, it remains uncertain if the delegation would have the opportunity to visit sites covered in a November IAEA report, or if the delegation would solely engage in talks with Iranian representatives.

In the November report, the IAEA stated it “was able to build an overall impression that Tehran ‘carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device’.” However, Iranian officials claim the report is “baseless.”

A diplomat speaking on behalf of the Tehran-bound delegation remarked, “The aim of this mission is to try to get answers once and for all to all the questions raised by the IAEA’s report in November.”

In analyzing international relations with Iran, Ray Takeyh for The Washington Post, opined that the assassination of the Iranian scientist is “self-defeating in the sense that [it does]... little to slow Iran’s nuclear program,” and instead plays “into the regime’s hands as it seeks to fracture the international community.”

To maintain solidarity in the Western coalition, according to Takeyh, it must be stressed that “it is Iran’s behavior that remains outside the parameters of legality so long as Tehran continues to enrich uranium in defiance of U.N. resolutions and threatens to imperil peaceful maritime traffic. Any action that distracts attention from Iran’s illegal behavior only retards the efforts to disarm the Islamic Republic.”

Furthermore, in an op-ed by David Ignatius for The

Washington Post, the author suggested that as US-Iranian relations remain severely confrontational, it is critical that “both [nations] take quiet steps to avoid miscalculations and misunderstandings that can lead to an inadvertent military conflict.”

“The United States and Iran should explore the possibility of direct contact through the sort of back channel that nations use to communicate urgent messages - namely, their intelligence services.”

-David Ignatius for The Washington Post

He further pointed out weaknesses in Iranian-US relations and added, “Today Washington and Tehran lack any similar means of communication in a crisis... They communicate indirectly, through the Swiss embassy, which is inadequate.”

As such, Ignatius proposed that, “the United States and Iran should explore the possibility of direct contact through the sort of back channel that nations use to communicate urgent messages - namely, their intelligence services.” In effect, such a communication channel may amend an issue that “has frustrated past efforts to engage Iran - which is the lack of an authoritative intermediary.”

In conclusion, the author warned that a very limited amount of time remains for communication improvements. “Economic sanctions are creating a worsening crisis for Iran, one that is a potential threat to the regime’s survival. And more potent sanctions are on the way. Meanwhile, Israel the United States and other allied nations are conducting covert actions against the Iranian nuclear program,” Ignatius explained.

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The *Layalina Review* is brought to you thanks to a grant from The Dr. Scholl Foundation of Illinois. Compiled by Layalina Staff. The views expressed here are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Layalina Productions, Inc. Inaugurated in 2002 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit, private sector corporation, Layalina Productions, Inc. is dedicated to bridging the growing divide between the Arab world and the United States by fostering cultural, educational, and professional dialogues through effective commercial television programming. Layalina develops and produces informative and entertaining Arabic-language programming for licensing to satellite and cable television networks throughout the Arab Middle East and North Africa. Layalina is funded solely through tax-deductible donations from individuals and corporations, and through grants by foundations based in the US and the Arab world. Please support Layalina by making a tax-deductible donation. Visit www.layalina.tv or call 202-776-7761 for more information.