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From: Anne-Marie Slaughter [redacted]
Sent: Friday, March 2, 2012 8:29 AM
To: H
Cc: Jacob J Sullivan (SullivanJJ@state.gov); Cheryl Mills; Abedin, Huma
Subject: an interesting proposal from Bruce Riedel re how Israel could help get Assad out of office

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How Israel Could Remove Assad Diplomatically and Bring Peace to Syria

How could Netanyahu topple Assad and weaken Hizbullah in one fell swoop—a far more strategic opportunity than a strike on Iran? Hand over the Golan Heights with one condition, says Bruce Riedel.

by [Bruce Riedel](#) | February 25, 2012 4:45 AM EST

If Israel is willing to think outside the box, it can deal Bashar al-Assad, Iran, and Hizbullah a body blow without firing a shot. Defense Minister Ehud Barak simply needs to convince Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu to put back on the table the offer Barak made to Assad's father in 2000—return of the Golan Heights to Syria in return for peace with Israel.

Twelve years ago this spring, Barak, after months of hesitation, finally put down a concrete offer to Hafez al-Assad. In Shepherdstown, W.Va., then Prime Minister Barak had rebuffed Syrian Foreign Minister Sharaa's repeated requests to state clearly what Syrian territory captured in 1967 Israel was prepared to give back to Syria on the Golan. Sharaa offered full peace with extensive security arrangements, including demilitarizing the Golan, limiting Syrian troop deployments near the Heights even in and around Damascus, and exchanging ambassadors in return for a full withdrawal to the ceasefire line that marked the border before the 1967 war. Finally, in Geneva in March 2000, Barak gave President Clinton authority to offer Assad all of the Golan except a thin strip 500 meters wide along the northeastern shore of Lake Tiberius. Syria would be compensated with territory elsewhere and thus get 100 percent of its lands back. Clinton promised billions in military aid to Israel to help sell the deal. But it was too late; Assad was on his deathbed, focused more on his son's succession, and said no. It was a tragic missed opportunity.

Barak's offer was very similar to one Bibi had made earlier in secret to Assad. It was a good deal in 2000, and it is a good deal today. If Israel puts the offer back on the table now, it should say clearly it is only open to a post-Assad government. The Assads lost their chance. Israel should make clear this is the basis for negotiations, not a take it or leave it proposition.

And it should include one more issue. In return for full peace and full withdrawal, a post-Assad government would need to cease all military and intelligence cooperation with Iran and Hizbullah. Cooperation with parties still at war with Israel would be inconsistent with a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement. Syria breaking with Iran and Hizbullah will break the supply line between Tehran and Beirut. Hizbullah leaders have always said this would be a disaster for them.

The Syrian opposition, of course, already hates the Shiite Iranian regime and its terrorist ally Hizbullah for backing the Assads for the past three decades. Since the start of the Syrian uprising a year ago, Iran and Hizbullah have done all they can to help Bashar, so this would not be a hard sell.

By putting its peace offer back on the table, Israel can play a constructive role in the Syrian crisis. It can say that not only can a post-Assad Syria move toward freedom after decades of dictatorship, it also can move toward peace. Syria has been at war since 1947—it is the cold war with Israel that two Assad presidents have used to justify their brutal regimes.

Of course, Bashar and his allies will denounce the Israeli move as evidence the opposition is really just a Zionist conspiracy. Many in the opposition or its extremist allies, like al Qaeda, will denounce it as well. But it will get support from those Syrians who want an end to decades of war and a restoration of their national sovereignty over the Golan. Syria can never restore its territorial integrity by war; only negotiations offer a chance to do that.

The entire international community will applaud Israel's initiative. The United States can help rally support behind it. Israel will be seen as a peacemaker and a friend of change.

Israel has nothing to lose. It has already made this offer before. If Assad survives, Israel keeps the Golan. If he is replaced by chaos, then there will be no negotiations and no peace. If a new Syrian government arises ready to make peace, then Israel has helped to isolate Hizbullah and broken the Syrian-Iranian axis.

Ephraim Halevy, the former head of Israel's secret intelligence service, Mossad, has rightly argued that toppling Assad and weakening Hizbullah is a far more important and strategic opportunity for Israel today than a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. Hizbullah has 50,000 rockets aimed at Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. Syria has hundreds of SCUD missiles tipped with chemical warheads that could end up in Hizbullah's hands.

Hizbullah needs to be deconstructed if there is ever to be peace in the Middle East. A unique window may be opening up to isolate it in Lebanon and then exert regional pressure from a post-Assad Syria to break it apart. Israel can help start the process.

Since the start of the Arab Awakening a year ago, Israel has correctly adopted a low profile. It also has looked off-balance and seems to yearn for the era of the dictators that provided predictability. That era is gone forever. Now is the time for Israel to take some dramatic step to show it is ready for a new Middle East. President Obama should explore all options with Bibi when they meet next month, not just military options but also peace plans.

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