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# *in*FOCUS

QUARTERLY

PROGRESS AND PERIL IN THE MIDDLE EAST



**Robert J. Lieber** on the Consequences of American Withdrawal | **Seth Cropsey** on the Threats and Opportunities in the Middle East | **Curt Weldon** on Losing Libya | **Michael Rubin** on Turkey's Democratic Decline | **Kenneth Timmerman** on Iran's Ethnic Minorities | **Sarah Feuer** on Tunisia's Potential | **Benjamin Weinthal** on Weaponizing Refugees | **Nervana Mahmoud** on Terror in the Sinai | **Ernie Audino** on an Emergent Kurdistan | **Shoshana Bryen** reviews *Ike's Gamble*

Featuring an Interview with **Robert Ford**, Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria



# LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

The fifth anniversary of the "Arab Spring" passed largely unnoticed. It was a lovely moment with "Google people" in Tahrir Square and people clamoring for "democracy" and "freedom." That the Arab Spring didn't last is an unsurprising tragedy. The feelings were real, but people with no experience in governance, power-sharing, loyal opposition, contested elections, a free press and multiple centers of power - all necessary to the building of a free and democratic society - couldn't hang on in the face of traditional power and tribal impulses. The result, fed by mistakes and wishful thinking on the part of the American administration, has been power vacuums often filled by the most radical, most destructive, most retrograde actors, who win because they observe no societal red lines.

In this issue of *inFOCUS* we examine the crumbling of both the Arab Spring and some of the traditional power blocs. Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford brings his deep understanding of that country to our interview.

Robert Lieber explains what the "Obama Doctrine" wrought, and Seth Cropsey finds both threats and

opportunities in regional retrenchment. Leadership voids, political schisms and infighting in Libya, Iran, and among the Kurds are tackled by Curt Weldon, Ken Timmerman and Brig. Gen. Ernie Audino, USA (ret.). Sarah Feuer brings us the bright spot that is Tunisia, and Benjamin Weinthal the danger to Europe and the West in the weaponization of refugees. The undoing of the Ataturk revolution is addressed by Michael Rubin. Nervana Mahmoud's detailed dissection of terrorism in Sinai is invaluable.

Shoshana Bryen reviews Michael Doran's *Ike's Gamble* as both history and metaphor, rounding out the issue.

If you appreciate what you've read, I encourage you to make a contribution to the Jewish Policy Center. As always, you can use our secure site: <http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/donate>

Sincerely,



Matthew Brooks,  
Executive Director



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# Diplomacy's Aversion to Power: Consequences of Retreat

by **ROBERT J. LIEBER**

America's retrenchment in foreign policy has been driven not only by ideological considerations but also by public disillusionment with the results of long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and by complex policy dilemmas, the perceived intractability of regional problems, and economic and budgetary constraints. And "realists" from both the academic and policy worlds have applauded it.

In practice, of course, the retreat process has been uneven and more subtle in some areas and functions than in others. Nonetheless, President Obama's foreign policy has more often than not been one of disengagement, conciliation of adversaries, and aversion to the use of American power that itself has

an ever more dangerous world with the rise of hostile powers, fanatical terrorist movements, and worsening regional conflicts in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Meanwhile, our allies have become uneasy and have sought to hedge their own security commitments, while senior U.S. military and intelligence leaders warn of increasing threats to America itself.

## ■ *The Obama Doctrine*

Some have questioned whether an Obama Doctrine really exists. President Obama himself described his concept as, "Don't do stupid [s . . . t]." However, there is ample evidence from his rhetoric and actions of an identifiable approach to foreign policy—whether

Second, policies toward adversaries are disproportionately conciliatory, even in response to flagrant provocation. The diplomatic opening to Cuba was unilateral, taking place without substantive concessions on the part of the Castro regime, and the number of political arrests dramatically increased after it occurred. In the case of Iran, Tehran repeatedly ratcheted up its terms for agreement, for example, on weapons imports that contravened previous UN Security Council sanctions and on self-provision of soil samples, with little pushback from the United States. And in the aftermath of the July 2015 nuclear agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA), there was not even a face-saving expression of disapproval when the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led crowds chanting "Death to America." Moreover, the State Department itself continued to designate Iran as a state supporter of terrorism.

Next, while being conciliatory toward adversaries, the president's "doctrine" repeatedly exhibited a distancing from countries that had long been traditional allies of the United States. In his first term especially, Obama distanced himself from Europe. In the Middle East, as the administration sought accommodation with Iran, differences grew with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and diplomatic relations with Israel became more tense than at any time in at least a generation. Distancing was evident in personal relationships too, where Obama, unlike his predecessors, failed to establish close associations with foreign leaders.

More broadly, the Obama approach has been one of retrenchment and

President Obama's foreign policy has more often than not been one of disengagement, conciliation of adversaries, and aversion to the use of American power...

been affected by marked reductions in the size of the U.S. military. This approach has been adopted with the aim of reducing conflict, motivating local actors to counterbalance regional threats, encouraging the international community to "step up" in assuming the burdens of regional stability, protecting America's own national interests, and promoting global order.

But the results of this policy indicate that it has failed to achieve its own objectives. As a consequence, we now face

or not the word "doctrine" is used to describe it. As he leaves office, the signposts of the Obama approach can be distinguished clearly.

These include, first, an innate suspicion about the use of American power and a reluctance to deploy and use it. When presented with options about the dispatch of advisors, numbers of troops to be deployed, or frequency and intensity of air strikes, Obama's instinct has almost always been to opt for the minimal choice and to lead, if at all, from behind.

disengagement, especially when compared with his recent predecessors. In post-Qaddafi Libya, there was reluctance to do what was necessary to support stabilization. There was an ineffectual policy “reset” with Russia that allowed Putin to increase his power despite a failed economy. Diplomatic support was denied to the “green” protest in Iran; military assistance was refused for moderate

diplomacy and engagement. These included diplomatic recognition of Cuba, an opening to Iran based on an agreement to curtail its nuclear program, and identifying global climate change as a national security priority. Nonetheless, the urgency of crises in Syria and Iraq tended to overshadow these priorities, and in each case, policies of retrenchment or inaction proved damaging.

...Obama highlighted three foreign policy objectives, each reflecting his preference to shift away from America's traditional geopolitical priorities in order to emphasize diplomacy and engagement.

rebels early in the Syrian uprising. The administration insisted on removing all U.S. forces from Iraq in December 2011, rejected defensive weapons for Ukraine, and carried out deep cuts in U.S. troop strength and the defense budget.

Obama has sometimes been willing to use military force, as in the use of Special Forces and drone strikes against ISIS, the temporary troop surge in Afghanistan, and the killing of Bin Laden. Nonetheless, the impulse toward retrenchment has been evident, especially in widely reported disagreements with experienced foreign and defense policy members of his national security team, especially Defense Secretaries Robert Gates, Leon Panetta, Chuck Hagel, and Ashton Carter, CIA Director David Petraeus, and on occasion Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. These differences have arisen over policies toward Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine. In his memoir, Gates described how, in the midst of a contentious White House meeting, he concluded that Obama “doesn’t trust his [military] commander . . . doesn’t believe in his own strategy.”

Following his reelection in 2012, Obama highlighted three foreign policy objectives, each reflecting his preference to shift from America’s traditional geopolitical priorities in order to emphasize

## ■ Syria

In 2011, the Asad regime used poison gas against its own population. Reacting to reports on August 20, 2012, President Obama declared, “We have been very clear to the Asad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a *red line* for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation . . . [T]here would be enormous consequences.”

The statement was widely seen as an explicit warning.

A year later, in August 2013, after Asad’s forces used chemical weapons causing hundreds of civilian deaths, Obama announced that he would seek authorization from Congress before using military force to intervene in Syria. He also sought support at the United Nations and from Britain. However, when asked directly about his red line

statement, Obama responded evasively, citing the 1992 Chemical Weapons Convention, and adding, “I didn’t set a red line; the world set a red line.” After implying that force might be used, administration spokesmen then downplayed the scale of any such a measure. Obama’s hesitant initial call to action was followed by the British Parliament’s rejection of intervention, whereupon Washington backed away from using force and thus from any real enforcement of the president’s warning.

With the use of force then in abeyance, the Russians proposed an agreement for Syria to destroy its chemical weapons and production facilities and to join the Chemical Weapons Convention. As a powerful backer of the Syrian regime, Moscow had considerable leverage with Asad. The Obama administration found the measure a welcome way out of its policy dilemma, and the deal was agreed to in September 2013. The Asad regime subsequently did hand over much of its chemical weapons arsenal and dismantled many production facilities. Nonetheless, within months of the June 2014 deadline, international inspectors reported that Asad’s forces had again resorted to using poison gas in the form of barrel bombs filled with chlorine. Syria did so, however, at a time of other crises for U.S. policymakers, involving Russia in Ukraine, ISIS in Syria and Iraq, China in the East and South China Seas, and delicate nuclear negotiations with Syria’s backers, Iran and Russia. As a result, the Obama administration largely sidestepped the subject of Syrian chemical weapons on the technicality that chlorine had not been specified in the original agreement.

...Obama policy rhetoric greatly understated and undervalued the wide range of options between nonintervention and the use of force while downplaying the costs of inaction.





German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Barack Obama at the 2014 G7 Summit in Krüin, Germany. (Photo: White House/Pete Souza)

Set against the scale of death and devastation in the Syrian war, the chemical weapons issue seems only a footnote, but the broader symbolic significance of the red line fiasco reverberated widely beyond the region, calling into question America's reliability and seriousness of

safe areas, and a "no fly zone" to protect refugees and forces. Obama opposed these measures or later favored minimal options. Whether initial efforts might have succeeded is a matter of conjecture, but the consequences of more than five years of bloody war in Syria are beyond

threatens to destabilize the European Union. In sum, these events contradict Obama's complacent assumption that, "[T]he Middle East is no longer terribly important to America's interests."

### ■ *Iraq*

By 2009, the "surge" had produced a degree of order and a tenuous peace among Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. President Obama aimed to remove U.S. troops by the end of 2011, but two decisions motivated by that objective had fateful consequences. One involved the result of the 2010 Iraqi elections. A relatively secular and multiethnic coalition under Ayad Allawi had won a narrow plurality in the vote, but the Iranian-backed Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, refused to accept the election results. Over the objections of U.S. military officials, including the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, General Ray Odierno, the Obama administration led by Vice President Biden and then-ambassador Christopher Hill supported Maliki and his Shiite party in the mistaken belief it would help speed the end of the war and U.S. withdrawal.

## ....aversion to the use of power undercuts the effectiveness of diplomacy.

purpose. It fueled a perception of indecision and uncertainty, not only in the Middle East, but much more widely, leaving the administration with lessened credibility among allies and adversaries.

Moreover, it was not only the question of chemical weapons. As early as 2012, Secretary of Defense Panetta, Secretary of State Clinton, and CIA Director Petraeus had urged support for moderate rebels seeking to oust Asad. In doing so, they argued for weapons,

dispute: vast areas and large populations at times under the control of the fanatical ISIS movement, the proliferation of ISIS fighters and aligned movements throughout the Middle East and parts of Africa, more than 400,000 Syrians dead, millions displaced in Syria or into neighboring countries, Russia and Iran as the predominant external powers in the Levant, and a flood of more than a million refugees into Europe that is triggering extreme populist movements and



*Iraqi Armed Forces and Iranian-backed PMUs in Fallujah, 2016. (Photo: Mahmoud Hosseini)*

The other fateful event concerned the final drawdown of U.S. forces. As the December 2011 target date neared, American military and diplomatic officials in Iraq recommended leaving as many as 30,000 troops to underwrite stability and to assist the Iraqi military with training, air support, and intelligence. In June 2011, after debates among his advisers and disagreements between the White House and the military, Obama decided on a figure of 10,000 (later reduced to 5,000). As a precondition for being implemented, this decision required renewal of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) providing legal immunity for U.S. troops, but discussions to achieve it failed. The reasons are disputed, but the negotiations might well have succeeded if military and economic aid had been better used as leverage, if Obama had not insisted that the Iraqi Parliament approve the SOFA, or if the talks had been conducted with greater skill and determination.

In December 2011, the remaining U.S. troops were withdrawn from Iraq. With their departure, Maliki immediately turned to repressing his Sunni rivals and to purging the Iraqi Army officer corps of all but his most loyal cronies. The consequences proved disastrous. Alienated Sunnis turned toward the

previously dormant insurgency. With the resurgence of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the successor to al-Qaeda in Iraq) and then its offensive in Iraq in 2014, much of the Iraqi army collapsed, losing a third of the country and Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, even while outnumbering ISIS forces by as much as thirty-to-one. In the aftermath, former Defense Secretary Gates has observed that if the United States had kept troops in place, ISIS would not have been able to expand into Iraq.

In August 2014, with the deterioration of conditions in Iraq, Obama found it necessary to order air strikes and to redeploy U.S. military advisers and Special Forces there, becoming the fourth successive American president to intervene in Iraq. Ironically, the 5,000 U.S. troops now operating there are deployed under an immunity agreement signed by Maliki's successor, Haider al-Abadi, and without the kind of parliamentary approved SOFA that Obama had required in 2011.

### ■ **Power and Diplomacy: Restoring America's Role**

President Obama repeatedly framed foreign policy as a stark choice between his preferred course of action

and military conflict. Not only in confronting real-time problems in Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine, but in dealing with Iran, Russia, China, Cuba, and others, Obama policy rhetoric greatly understated and undervalued the wide range of options between nonintervention and the use of force while downplaying the costs of inaction.

In practice, aversion to the use of power undercuts the effectiveness of diplomacy. It has been said that power without diplomacy is blind, but it is equally true that diplomacy not backed by power is impotent. Skillful integration of power and diplomacy, wielded with prudence and informed judgment strengthens deterrence, provides reassurance to allies, and can actually lessen the need for military action. Moreover, in enhancing the credibility of U.S. commitments and signaling to potential adversaries, it reduces the risks of war by inadvertence where an adversary might otherwise dangerously underestimate American resolve.

American retrenchment has not yielded peace, stability, and global order, but instead seen growing instability, intensifying civil wars, expanding territorial control by hostile groups, worsening threats from terrorism, gross human rights abuses, and surging floods of refugees. Not all of these would have been or are solvable by American actions, but inaction or ill-considered U.S. policies have, on balance, exacerbated these problems. Washington must now heed these policy failures to understand why it is necessary to adopt a more robust world role, not only to serve America's own national interests but also for reasons of regional and global order.

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ROBERT J. LIEBER *Ph.D. is professor of government and international affairs at Georgetown University. His latest book is *Retreat and Its Consequences: American Foreign Policy and the Problem of World Order*. An earlier version of this article appeared in the *World Affairs Journal*. Reprinted with permission.*



# Threats & Opportunities in the Levant and the Middle East

by **SETH CROPSEY**

**A**fter decades of leading the democratic world in the Cold War and more than a decade of multiple wars since 9/11, many Americans would like relief from world affairs. They would prefer to have nothing to do with foreign wars, with lands that breed jihadists or stagnate in corruption, or have populations that reject modernity or hate the United States. The preference is easy to understand, but it's not realistic. The issue is not whether isolationism is desirable; it is whether it's possible. To put the question more precisely: Can Americans preserve their security, prosperity and civil liberties without maintaining an active role in the world – and specifically in the Middle East and its environs? The answer is no.

## ■ *Is Isolation Possible?*

An American president can try to “pivot” or turn away from the region's problems. But history teaches that ignoring problems magnifies them. The questions then are, what should be America's strategic vision of the region and what are the organizing principles to increase security, stability and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean? Isolation is not an option. The region's wealth will necessarily influence interests around the world; and so will its pathologies. The West cannot be indifferent to the conquest of a country such as Saudi Arabia with large oil reserves and therefore large revenues.

Similarly, even though America and other Western countries tried to stay out of Syria's civil war, the conflict's harmful effects reached them in the form of terrorist murders and millions of refugees.

Neither the Middle East (nor any other large region) can be quarantined. Nuclear or biological weapons developed there could strike anywhere and cyber-attacks launched from there can infect computers anywhere. Isolation is impossible in the world of Internet, easy travel and miniaturized means of mass destruction.

Technology aside, there's the question of who will protect freedom of navigation on the seas? Since the sun set on the British Empire, the United States has kept the world's seas open to commerce. No other country or alliance is ready and able to substitute. Without open sea lines of communication, much of the world's trade would be in danger. If, in hopes of disengaging from the Middle East or cutting its defense budget, the United States were to relinquish this essential role, the harm to the global economy, including America's economy, would be catastrophic.

Founded on liberal democratic ideas similar to those that America embodies, Israel has shared those interests wholeheartedly. No other country in the region has greater capability or willingness to contribute to their advancement through “hard” means, such as military, intelligence and cyber, and “soft” means, such as technology, culture and alliance building.

## ■ *Regional Security Challenges*

**Iran:** Iran is competing with its neighbors for regional hegemony as part of a Shiite-Sunni conflict for dominance within the broader Muslim world.

The Iran nuclear deal aims to constrain that country's nuclear weapons infrastructure, and Iran has agreed to delay its development. The deal does

not, however, require dismantling most elements of its nuclear program. Iran remains a threshold nuclear state. The deal promises to put massive financial resources at the disposal of the Iranian regime, which can be expected to use them to recapitalize its conventional military and Revolutionary Guard forces and to increase operations around the Arabian Peninsula (with or without Russian cooperation). Iran could also increase support for Hezbollah, Hamas and other proxies.

Over the past few decades, non-democratic regimes, including most notably North Korea, repeatedly violated arms control and peace agreements. Optimists continue to hope that North Korea will relinquish its nuclear weapons for a suitable set of incentives. Realists cannot take for granted that the United States will act promptly to apply sanctions against Iran if the Iranian regime either violates agreements or tests their bounds, as it has done with its recent missile tests.

Despite a long history of mutual distrust, Iran and Russia are now cooperating on Syria in ways that threaten interests of the Sunni Arab states, of Israel and of the United States. The implications for security in the Red Sea and Mediterranean are hard to overstate.

It is possible for the Iranian-Russian axis to use anti-access and area denial tactics in the Red Sea (Bab el-Mandeb Straits), Arabian Gulf, and Mediterranean to restrict U.S. and allied forces' ability to operate. Or Moscow might use its assets in the Mediterranean to distract NATO in the event of Russian aggression elsewhere – for example, in Ukraine or the Baltics. Or it might

exploit long-standing hostility between NATO members Greece and Turkey.

The Russian economy depends on high world prices for energy so Middle Eastern instability serves a paramount Russian interest. This is not the case with the United States. Nevertheless, Russia is not necessarily in a zero-sum game with the United States on every issue. Even during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union found common ground, for example, in opposing the spread of nuclear weapons.

## Would-be proliferators ... conclude that the key to survival for rogue regimes is having ... WMD

**Syria:** Syria is now a failed state; much of it is ungoverned space. The resulting power vacuum has drawn in ISIS, other Sunni extremist groups, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah. The Kurds may aim to break off pieces of Syria for an eventual Kurdish state.

Asad appears to have won the upper hand against his Sunni extremist opponents, which is a victory for Russia and Iran, both of which aided him militarily and diplomatically. Asad's demise, however, if it favored rebels loyal to ISIS or al-Qaeda, would hardly serve Western interests.

As Russia pours air and naval assets into Syria, otherwise increases its Eastern Mediterranean presence and retains its hold on Crimea's naval ports, the Putin regime will become a key factor in the region's maritime and general security. Russia has been delivering advanced supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles for over five years. Such missiles could find their way into Hezbollah hands, which would further endanger Israeli maritime interests.

Russia continues to bolster its regional naval presence in the Syrian port of Tartus and its air capabilities at Syria's Khmeimim base, near Latakia.

### ■ *Proliferation*

Prudent military planners will assume – and mitigate the risks – that any weapons system in the region could get into the hands of terrorist organizations. Risks of WMD proliferation in the Middle East are increasing. In reaction to Iran's nuclear program and for other reasons, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others in the region may use civil nuclear programs and dual-use technology to produce fissile materials for nuclear weapons or try to acquire nuclear or other mass-destruction

weapons by other means.

Dissuasion was long recognized as important to non-proliferation policy, but recent history tends to encourage proliferation, highlighting the advantages rather than disadvantages of pursuing WMD. Would-be proliferators undoubtedly contrast the overthrow of the Taliban, Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi regimes with the survival of the North Korean and Iranian regimes. They may conclude that the key to survival for rogue regimes is having – or reaching the threshold of – WMD.

Coordinated U.S. and Israeli policies should include increased intelligence cooperation, maritime and air interdiction activity, generating options for military strikes, and efforts to establish international cooperation. As noted, the United States and Russia share an interest in preventing WMD proliferation and worked together even in the Cold War for that purpose.

### ■ *Cyber security*

Cyber risk applies to every element of society, civilian and military and favors offense over defense. Cyber operations – to collect confidential information or to disrupt, deceive or destroy – are

not the province of only a small number of highly skilled experts in a handful of technologically advanced countries. They are universal. They are part of ISIS's war in Iraq and the civil wars in Syria and Yemen, as well as the activities of the Chinese, Russian and Iranian military and intelligence services.

Israel has become a world leader in the technology of cyber defense. But the cyber domain is, by and large, strategically and legally uncharted territory. There is no general agreement on what constitutes aggression or what would be a proper response to various types of intrusions.

### ■ *Refugees and Migrants*

Large numbers of Middle Eastern and African refugees and migrants are trying to enter Europe, many through Turkey and Greece. Some are traveling overland. Many are taking boats across the Eastern Mediterranean. Throughout the continent, many people view the refugees sympathetically. Numerous others, however, view them as a time bomb of social instability and political violence. Finding them homes in the wealthy Gulf States would improve the chances of their assimilation, overcome the language barriers of resettling in non-Arabic speaking lands, and fulfill a moral obligation of their co-religionists.

### ■ *Turkey-Israel Relations*

Turkey's once-proud boast of "no problems with neighbors" is now a bygone. It is fighting a revived domestic Kurdish insurgency and has suffered attacks from ISIS, in Syria and at home. Its armed forces have also lately clashed with Syrian government forces and with the Russian military. Turkey has been quarreling with European Union officials about what it sees as purposeful delays in processing Turkey's application for membership. Disputes with the United States and Russia over their Syria policies have increased Turkey's sense of isolation, and it is still too early to know how the summer's coup attempt will affect Turkey's foreign and defense policies.



To mitigate these problems, Turkish officials have been working to break out of this isolation and improve their ties abroad, including with Israel.

## ■ Other Challenges

Weak governance in Yemen, the Sinai, and Sudan allows the growth of radical Muslim terrorist organizations that threaten the movement of world trade and transportation – for example, the downing of a Russian commercial jet over the Sinai in the fall of 2015. In Libya, the dangers of a failed state on the Mediterranean littoral arise, as in Syria.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah has been weakened by losses in the Syrian civil war, but may be strengthened by the new funds Iran will obtain through the nuclear deal. Hezbollah's rocket threat to Israel is growing. According to press reports, Hezbollah's arsenal now exceeds 150,000 rockets.

Within Egypt, Salafist terrorists affiliated with ISIS continue to operate in the Sinai, despite Egyptian military operations to eliminate them.

Maritime matters are among Israel's principal concerns. Controlling the sea lines of communication is vital to Israel's security and economy. Coastal security has been a priority since Israel's birth. New maritime security challenges have arisen as Israel's offshore gas facilities have grown and the Red Sea becomes contested space among regional and global powers.

## ■ Regional Security Opportunities

Commonly viewing the region as split by a Sunni-Shiite conflict, officials in mostly Sunni countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt see Israel as a useful partner against the combination of Iran, the Asad regime and Russia. Areas of common concern include terrorism threats, radical Islamist ideology, missile defense and Iran's nuclear capabilities. Diplomatic progress with the Palestinians could make it easier for Israel to cooperate with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other states in the region. Lack of such progress in

recent years, however, has not altogether precluded such cooperation.

Egypt and Israel share interests in containing threats from Hamas and in protecting their respective energy facilities and in combating Islamist extremist groups engaged in terrorism in the Sinai Peninsula. A combined military front is required against the Salafi-jihadi groups

Disengagement from the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean does not actually isolate the United States; it simply forfeits America's ability to shape events.

in the Sinai. A different combined strategy is required for dealing with Hamas, which is functioning as the government in Gaza.

Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remains ideologically hostile to Israel, but has practical reasons to improve bilateral ties. Turkish officials may want to buy Israeli natural gas to reduce Turkey's dependence on Russian gas. Turkey also appears interested in increasing its diplomatic influence in the region and specifically in playing a role in Israeli-Palestinian affairs. Israeli officials are considering a long-term cooperative arrangement with Turkey on gas, possibly including a pipeline.

Turkey has maintained a complex mix of policies toward terrorist groups. It has for decades fought an on-again, off-again battle against the Kurdish Worker's Party, known as the PKK, a terrorist, separatist organization. Turkey under Erdogan, however, has also warmly supported the terrorist leadership of Hamas in Gaza. If Turkey is now willing to cooperate with Israel and Egypt in opposition to global jihadist groups such as ISIS and al Qaeda, it would be worthwhile to explore the possibilities for a regional coalition.

In assessing the Syrian civil war, it is important to identify the principal strategic danger. Is it a victory by ISIS (and other Sunni extremists) or a victory by Asad and his Iranian patrons? But in the

meantime, the civil war eliminates any conventional threat to Israel from that quarter. The civil war has also weakened Hezbollah, whose losses in Syria may have exceeded all of its losses against Israel since the early 1980's. Hezbollah may now be more cautious about initiating provocations across the Lebanon border.

ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other Islamist groups reject the very idea of the nation-state. Hamas shares ideological principles with such groups. This can alter Palestinian education and politics, but how – and how it affects rivalries among Palestinian nationalists and Islamists remains to be seen.

## ■ Conclusion

Disengagement from the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean does not actually isolate the United States; it simply forfeits America's ability to shape events. This is not an argument for any particular kind of engagement – it does not, for example, point to U.S. intervention now in Syria. But it is an argument against believing that non-intervention will spare America from paying a price for what happens in the region. Cooperation between the United States and Israel is one way to enhance the opportunities for increasing security and constructive engagement.

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# Libya: How Misguided Can We Be?

by the Honorable CURT WELDON

Libya is a strategically important country, and in 2002 Moammar Qadaffi was angling to secure his role as leader of the African Union by portraying himself as the pivotal leader between Africa, the Middle East, and the West. I met his son Saif when I chaired the International Energy Advisory Council in 2003. Saif was the representative from Libya and it was he who invited me to lead a bi-partisan congressional delegation to Libya to discuss his father's public commitment to renounce terrorism, give up his weapons of mass destruction and cooperate with the United States and President George W. Bush.

In 2004, as my six-member bipartisan congressional delegation walked into the most elaborate tent imaginable, I contemplated the words we would utter upon meeting Col. Qadaffi for the first time. As the first U.S. bipartisan delegation and first Americans to meet Qadaffi in over 20 years, we were invited to "tour" Qadaffi's home that the U.S. had bombed in 1986 on orders of Ronald Reagan.

Qadaffi walked into the tent in a purple satin outfit carrying prayer beads in one hand. We extended courtesies and sat down. His first words were of thanks coupled with our need to explain why it took us 20 years to sit in his tent with him. "If you thought that I was a terrorist, why not come and tell me that to my face – and then bomb me if my answers were not satisfactory," Qadaffi said. "But you bombed me first and killed my baby in the process."

"None of us were in the Congress twenty years ago, Colonel. And we had

to overcome objections in our own government just to be here today to thank you for your public statements renouncing terrorism and pledging to give up your program of WMD," I said. "You need to know that Americans are a forgiving people, but we will never forget the Lockerbie bombing and the murder of two Americans in the La Belle nightclub for which your country has admitted involvement."

I told Qadaffi we were not meeting with him to debate U.S. foreign policy – in our system, foreign policy is the prerogative of the president or secretary of state. But we made the stop to tell him personally that members of Congress (Democrats and Republicans) supported our president in his praise for Qadaffi's words and that we were prepared to support President Bush in normalizing relations if and when it was verified that Qadaffi had actually delivered on his promise.

We reiterated our interest in avoiding more bloodshed, but also in stop-

ping terrorism and controlling and eliminating WMD originating in Libya and worldwide. We talked for almost two hours. Qadaffi's most striking comment was his biggest concern. He said, "In the end I realized that we have no need for WMD and that terrorism needs to be controlled throughout the world – so I announced to the world that Libya would take the lead on both matters. Libya will also cease its actions and hostility against Israel. But what worries me most is that your nation will ultimately embarrass me and my people. My friends in the region quietly tell me that I am making a mistake and that I will regret my decision because your leaders cannot be trusted."

We assured Qadaffi that our colleagues in Washington and around the world hailed his leadership on these issues. In fact, in a brief private discussion, I challenged Qadaffi to contact Kim Jung Il in Pyongyang and ask him to follow the lead of Qadaffi. He said that he would and months later we found out that Qadaffi did make that call.

Qadaffi's one request was that I return with a second delegation and, on the occasion of the Great Jamahiriya (Libya's version of the State of the Union Address), that I speak to the entire country. After a brief discussion with my col-

Americans are a forgiving people, but we will never forget the Lockerbie bombing and the murder of two Americans in the La Belle nightclub...

leagues, I told Qadaffi that we would return and I would speak, but only if our President verified that Qadaffi's commitments were being fulfilled. I also told Qadaffi that my plan was to invite a member of the Senate to join us. "I will ask my friend Joe Biden," I said, "to join our delegation."





*Muammar Qaddafi attending the 12th African Union Summit in Ethiopia, Feb. 2, 2009.*

In spite of the admonition of the Bush administration (as Joe explained to my delegation in the Tripoli Airport) Biden joined us on that historic second trip. I spoke to the Jamahiriya on the first day, broadcast live nationwide, and Joe spoke on the second day, challenging the Libyan people to accept the announcement of Qaddafi regarding his commitment to rejoin the family of nations. Our speeches were carefully consistent with the message of our government and Secretary of State Colin Powell acknowledged such in my de-brief upon return to the United States.

Our goal was simple and straightforward, as it had always been – “Support the President” – and engage with the people and institutions of Libya. We laid out an aggressive agenda of interaction with Libya and its people – assisting in converting the al-Rabta biochemical plant into a pharmaceutical factory producing anti-AIDS medications for all of

Africa, encouraging American companies to work with Libya on infrastructure and humanitarian projects. A major international conference in Tripoli in 2005 was organized through the Oceans Security Initiative I had created. It was attended by 200 delegates from all of the Mediterranean countries, the United States and Russia. A blueprint was developed for environmental, economic, trade and maritime security against pirates and terrorism.

In the ensuing months Libya and Qaddafi responded by eliminating WMD (actually shipping equipment to the United States for disposal), renouncing terrorism and cooperating with the United States and international entities and earmarking massive infrastructure projects for companies around the world.

Each of my next four trips to Libya were more impressive – a trip to the Al Rabta Plant where Italian production machines had been installed to produce

the AIDS medications, a trip to the Port of Misrata to witness growth of an international Free Trade Zone in a port being constructed using the Dubai model, visits to medical centers to witness collaboration with international medical centers in Europe and the United States, and trips to al-Fahta University where I addressed students.

### ■ **Sidetracked**

My colleagues and I had pushed for bold actions to build relationships in Libya with institutions and organizations worldwide to assist in developing a new generation of young Libyan leaders – not part of the Qaddafi family. In some cases that did occur – but more often than not, profits for foreign nationals exceeded commitments to internal reform and leadership development.

At a dinner with my associate Dr. Ahmed Gadi, dean of civil engineering at a-Fateh University and his wife at the

al-Mahary Hotel (which had been built by the Turks), I said, “You must be very happy for your students.”

“What do you mean?” Ahmed retorted.

“Well, I am certain that your engineering students are being used as interns by the U.S. firm in the massive contract to rebuild your nation” I said.

“Well no, Congressman, I have had no contact with that U.S. firm for my department or for my students,” Ahmed replied.

I immediately reached out to the firm and they were quick to ask me how to reach Dr. Gadi. They should have needed no prodding.

Instead of focusing on the stability of Libya, its institutions and its youth, the focus was on profit generation while reinforcing the family’s control.

Dr. Shukri Ghanem, whom I had met when he served as prime minister, as well as head of the Libyan National Oil Company, on more than one occasion complained to me that American and European leaders were cutting deals through Qadaffi’s children and relatives for allocations of oil and special deals. At Shukri’s request, I went to Vienna to meet with him after he left Libya during the war. He told he feared for his life because of all the private deals that had been done through former officials that might cause concerns abroad once they were made public.

I met with Shukri at his daughter’s home in Vienna and cautioned him regarding his personal safety. Asked if he sought asylum in the United States or Europe, he replied, “No Congressman, I want to return to my Libya to help lead our people.” Within weeks Shukri was found floating in the Danube River, dead from an “accidental” fall. Unconfirmed reports surfaced that his hands were tied.

Well-connected individuals and groups were focused on securing tranches of investment dollars from the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) instead of on implementing programs to employ Libya’s youth. Instead of the stability of Libya, its institutions and its youth, the focus was on profit generation while reinforcing the family’s control.

### ■ **The End of the Beginning**

Remarkably, in January 2011 the British conducted an arms show in Libya pitching British military systems. Yet, in February 2011, they joined France, the United States and NATO in invading and de-stabilizing Qadaffi and the country.

During the war, I arranged a call at the request of a senior member of Congress on the Foreign Affairs Committee with Saif Qadaffi and heard Saif explain to my former colleague, “I was in the room with my father and [former French President Nicolas] Sarkozy when Sarkozy told my father if he gave control of Libya’s oil to France the war would end.”

Granted, Qadaffi was an imperfect leader – but he had upheld his commitments to the United States regarding terrorism and WMD.

The attack on Libya has now been considered to be one of the worst mistakes ever made by the West. Disagreeing with the decision to go to war, I was concerned with the loss of life and chaos

in Libya, but also concerned that U.S. troops might be put at risk.

And so in February 2011 after the war broke out, I prepared an Op-Ed for *The New York Times* telling Qadaffi to “step aside.” I was contacted by a Bush confidant friend of Saidi Qadaffi, who had seen a draft. “Saidi showed it to his father,” my friend said. “Qadaffi is ready to leave and asks if you will come to Tripoli to meet him because he trusts you.”

Remembering Qadaffi’s admonition to me in our first meeting, I thought I should make the trip and sit face-to-face in the tent and tell him to leave, even though I had opposed the invasion. I requested and received calls from Saidi and Qadaffi’s Chief of Staff Bashir Saleh, with whom I had become friends. Both called and begged to me to come to meet the leader – I requested an invitation letter from Bashir addressed to me and he sent my exact draft language back to me with his signature affixed.

I asked the U.S. friend of Saidi to pay for my airfare and he offered Frequent Flyer miles – I desired no remuneration. I also asked him to join me along with the son of one of Hillary Clinton’s friend and one of Joe Biden’s former staffers. To be protected from the games that are frequently played, I also brought along a TV anchor and cameraman to document everything.

After the dates were set, I briefed U.S. government agencies and told *The New York Times* that my op-ed was not to be published until I was already in Libya – which it agreed to do.

We flew to Tunis and then to Remada where we were met by a Libyan caravan that had crossed into Tunisia. For four hours, we drove down the coast, through the small cities and villages,

Make no mistake - Qadaffi was ready to leave – and if the West had allowed him to leave, tens of thousands of lives would have been saved.



past the refinery complexes and amidst the fighting – until we reached Tripoli and our hotel. There was no evidence of a humanitarian disaster “about to occur,” as U.S. officials had claimed.

Within hours Saidi and Bashir arrived separately at our hotel, which had been bombed and only opened for us. We met Saidi and Bashir and they

Make no mistake – Qadaffi was ready to leave – and if the West had allowed him to leave, tens of thousands of lives would have been saved, elections would have been held, Libya would have remained stable and terrorist groups including ISIS would not have flourished and used Libya as their base of operation.

physical, economic, health, education and the security to practice religious beliefs without outside interference and malicious manipulation. As a result, all of North Africa would become more stable and more prosperous.

Internal leadership is absolutely critical, but assessments and strategic planning will have to come from the international community. Working with Libyan leaders, American and other officials, using experienced gained, for example, from post-communist Russia, can assess outside assistance in key target areas and develop recommendations.

I strongly recommend a U.S. Congress/Libyan Parliament Working Group, modeled after similar relationships between Congress and the Japanese Diet, European Parliament, Russian Duma, Ukraine Rada, German Bundestag and others. A formal relationship can be developed between the Libyan Parliament and Congress. Parliamentary exchanges, staff exchanges, working

## Now, more than ever, we need to unify forces with the emerging Libyan leadership and defeat ISIS.

told me that Qadaffi was ready to “step aside.” The meeting with Qadaffi was set for the next day – that is until Saif Qadaffi (listening to his intel advisor Abdullah Senussi) convinced his father to cancel the meeting. Saif was convinced that if I met with his father and convinced Qadaffi to act on his desire to leave, Saif would never follow in his father’s footsteps as Libya’s leader.

I was outraged, angry and threatened to hold a press conference at the Rixos Hotel where the media was housed. Bashir and Saidi (and my American colleagues) convinced me to meet instead with Libyan Prime Minister Bagdadi Mahmoudi. With TV camera audio on (no photos were allowed) we met with the prime minister. I explained that I was not there in an official capacity and was not there to debate the war – I was there to tell Qadaffi to leave.

Mahmoudi explained that Qadaffi was prepared to step aside but wanted to do so with dignity. I requested a sealed letter from Qadaffi be prepared, signed and delivered to me, which I would deliver to our State Department.

The next day our TV crew filmed the delivery of the sealed letter, which I carried with me until I delivered it to our Embassy staff in Tunisia. Qadaffi’s letter was delivered to the Secretary of State – but to this day – has never been released to the public.

As an eight-time traveler to Libya who has not taken one dime from Libya, I saw no evidence of an impending humanitarian crisis before the war and, Qadaffi had done everything requested of him by the United States and NATO allies. Further, a realistic assessment of

## ...our commitment must be for the success of the Libyan people, Libyan youth and the long-term stability of the Libyan nation.

what might occur in Libya post-Qadaffi with radical Islamist terrorists was woefully lacking, and the West had not taken necessary steps to help build and nourish a civil society and future leaders separate from the family.

### ■ **Empowerment Strategy**

Libya, battered by outside forces, including ISIS – a sad result of Western intervention in 2012 – is not ready for international assistance on a large scale, but it should not be written off. As ISIS is forced from its territorial base there, a well-conceived and well-led program could help bring the Libyan people the security they are sorely missing;

sessions and IT based bilateral capital-to-capital communications could produce suggestions for enhanced bilateral relations, specific programs, workshops and conferences and task forces to focus on specific initiatives.

The United States has an opportunity to aid the Libyan people in their quest for independence, self-governance and dignity for every person. Will we be able to learn from our mistakes?

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# Turkey's Reichstag Fire

by MICHAEL RUBIN

When tanks blocked bridges in the heart of Istanbul and F-16s bombed Turkey's parliament in Ankara last summer, Western diplomats were caught by surprise. So too were U.S. forces stationed at the Incirlik Air Base in southern Turkey. The U.S. intelligence community had no inkling that anything was amiss until the troops started moving. Once forces loyal to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had put the attempted takeover down, he took to the airwaves and called the coup attempt "a gift from God" because it provided an excuse to crack down on competitors and opponents. Using enemies lists prepared well in advance, his purges have touched more than 100,000 and sparked widespread conspiracy theories among Turks that the July 15 coup was Turkey's equivalent of the Reichstag fire, a manufactured crisis meant to allow a dictator to consolidate power. The transformation now underway in Turkey appears consistent with an agenda Erdogan has long worked to implement, secretly at first but with increasing boldness now.

Why have Americans so consistently misread Turkey and Erdogan, its leader since 2003? Long after Erdogan's implementation of a program to transform Turkey into an authoritarian, Islamic state, senior American officials were describing Turkey as a model for the Muslim world and Erdogan as a democratic reformer.

## ■ *Credulity and Obliviousness*

There are two main reasons for such persistent error: credulity and obliviousness to history. Too many Americans amplify a narrow slice of elite, westward-looking Turkey into a representation of the whole. When

Americans visit Turkey's Mediterranean and Aegean coasts or tourist-friendly and trendy Istanbul neighborhoods, they see a Turkey foreign to most Turks and resented if not disdained by Erdogan and his allies. Erdogan was born in Kasimpasa, a poor Istanbul neighborhood, but spent his formative years in Rize, a small, impoverished Black Sea town in eastern Turkey.

Furthermore, the problem is not only what Americans see, but what they hear: Too many diplomats, politicians, and journalists have a bad habit of believing what interlocutors tell them, especially if they speak the language of Western liberalism. Even after Erdogan began subtly shifting Turkey's orientation from West to East, American officials remained largely in denial. Gullibility and naiveté are bad enough, but combine it with a failure to appreciate history and the result is toxic both for policy and analysis.

Long after Erdogan's implementation of a program to transform Turkey into an authoritarian, Islamic state, senior American officials were describing Turkey as a model for the Muslim world...

Americans have a very different conception of history than almost any other people on earth. Americans consider anything more than a decade ago to be the distant past, and think nothing of moving a thousand miles away. In Turkey—and much of the rest of the world—it's the opposite: People are hard-pressed to move 10 miles from their family but consider the last thousand years as yesterday. Put another way, most Americans focus on the future

unencumbered by slights suffered by their grandparents, great-grandparents, or co-religionists whom they have never met, but men like Erdogan nurse ancient grudges as if they suffered the slights personally. Erdogan sees himself on a mission not only to right what he considers to be historical wrongs in Turkey, but also to promote Sunni Islam worldwide.

## ■ *Erdogan and Ataturk's Turkey*

Erdogan hates Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey and its ruler from 1923 to 1938, for all the reasons so many westward-looking Turks embrace him: Ataturk sought to break from the Ottoman past, relegate the caliphate to history, and place Turkey firmly in Europe. More than nine decades later, it remains just as polarized as the day when Ataturk declared a republic and separated mosque and state. The 62-year-old Erdogan never knew Ataturk—Turkey's founding father died

16 years before Erdogan was born—but Erdogan, a product of Turkey's long-marginalized Imam Hatip religious school system, harbors a grievance against the secularist icon as strong as if Ataturk had wronged him personally. "One ought not to stand [in respect, stiff] like a straw on Ataturk's commemoration events," he declared in 1994, shortly after becoming Istanbul's mayor. Eleven years later, Erdogan changed the traditional backdrop for the prime minister's



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. (Photo: R4BIA.com)

monthly television address from the Turkish flag and a portrait of Atatürk to photos of Atatürk's mausoleum and a mosque. The message was clear. Atatürk was dead, but Islam lived on.

Erdogan and his followers do have legitimate reasons for grievance. Atatürk was a progressive, but he was no man of peace. He presided over an authoritarian state and put down by force anyone who opposed his outlook, leaving behind a trail of tears far from forgotten by those with whom he crossed paths. His rule was marked by numerous uprisings—both religious and ethnic—by those opposed to his desire to reorient Turkey toward the West. Few Americans hold grudges for events that occurred during the Hoover administration, but for Turks or Kurds whose ancestors suffered for their religiosity or ethnicity, wounds still fester. In 2015, the AKP and the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), both opposed to Atatürk's vision, won 60 percent of the vote. When Erdogan whips up mobs against secularist, pro-Western Turks in Istanbul and elsewhere, he is as much

seeking historical vengeance as contemporary gain. The same holds true for his apologies: He has apologized for state-sponsored atrocities such as the 1937 Dersim massacre perpetrated against Turkey's Kurds, but he systematically ignores or excuses Islamist atrocities, such as the 1993 Sivas massacre, perpetrated by Sunni Islamists against Shiite Alevis.

### ■ After Atatürk

Atatürk died on November 10, 1938, and was immediately succeeded by his longtime prime minister and aide, Ismet Inonu who, like his mentor, ruled over Turkey with an iron fist. In 1950, however, he lost big in Turkey's first somewhat free election. The Democrat Party's Adnan Menderes immediately began to consolidate power, undermine military influence, and began slowly to reverse some of Atatürk's reforms. He allowed muezzins, for example, to call Muslims to prayer in Arabic rather than Turkish and generally gave religious conservatives more space.

At 3 a.m., on May 27, 1960, Colonel Alparslan Turkes led a bloodless coup

and arrested Menderes, top ministers, and senior Democrat Party officials. Over subsequent days, the junta forced more than 3,000 officers to retire and fired more than 1,000 university professors and 500 judges, most without evidence of any malfeasance. After a yearlong trial on charges of treason, violating the constitution, and misusing public funds, the military government hanged Menderes and two top ministers. Erdogan later recalled watching his father cry as the six-year-old when Menderes was hanged.

The military staged coups again in 1971, 1980, and 1997. In the former two, the military acted against the backdrop of political paralysis, social tension, and political violence. In the most recent case, it moved to force the resignation of Necmettin Erbakan, a staunch Islamist and Erdogan mentor who sought openly to privilege Islamism at home and abroad.

Each coup influenced Erdogan. He was studying in an Imam Hatip school—an Islamic religious school—in 1971, as the military-backed government rounded up members of radical left-wing



groups, both Kurdish and Turkish, while death squads allegedly affiliated with the military began to target a wider array of opposition. The government declared martial law in 11 provinces the following month and cast a wider net in its roundup of students, activists, and political opposition. Torture was commonplace, and Turkey's jails filled with political prisoners.

In 1980, he was a young activist in the National Salvation Party (Millî Selamet Partisi) when General Kenan Evren overthrew the government. While that action surprised no one—the military had been debating and planning its move for months—the aftermath took repression to a new level. The military may have executed only 50, but it detained at least a quarter million people and some say it may have jailed twice that number. It blacklisted another million Turks from government employment. There was no due process; the military's suspicion trumped evidence. It was a formative period for the politically ambitious Erdogan.

The 1997 coup touched Erdogan more directly. After the military forced Erbakan's resignation, it closed religious schools, shuttered businesses owned by prominent Islamists, and disbanded the Welfare Party. Many of those with close ties to the ousted premier found themselves targeted by prosecutors for offenses real or imagined. At the time, Erdogan was mayor of Istanbul, but a religious-incitement charge landed him in prison and led to what at the time was billed a lifelong ban on politics.

### ■ **Erdogan's Rise**

The AKP's 2002 triumph, and Erdogan's rise to the premiership months later, might have healed decades of political wounds if Erdogan had generosity of spirit. He convinced many Americans that he had turned the page. Erdogan talked about his brief imprisonment as a time for maturation, and close aides told Western journalists, diplomats, and members of Congress that Erdogan

had learned from the mistakes of the past and appreciated the importance of working across party lines and respecting constitutional parameters. In reality, Erdogan wanted revenge.

His enemy lists were long and detailed. They included not only those who criticized him during his reign but also those who crossed his friends and allies in the years prior to his holding office. He stacked Turkey's Savings Deposit Insurance Fund, an important banking regulatory board, with party and personal loyalists and used it to target businessmen and companies with a long record of support for party rivals. A year into his first term, Erdogan used the

scary, however, is that it is not just reactive but proactive. When the Turkish leader arrived at the Brookings Institution, a 100-year-old Washington think tank, on March 31 to address an invited group of journalists, academics, and analysts, Erdogan's personal security, before the event even began, accosted and tried to remove audience members Erdogan believed might question his platitudes and assertions.

As Erdogan grew more confident, he cast a larger net. He often used fabulist coup plots as a reason to crack down. In 2007, for example, his government launched an investigation into the so-called Ergenekon conspiracy, in which

...Erdogan began subtly shifting Turkey's orientation from West to East, American officials remained largely in denial.

board to seize 219 companies belonging to a rival in the 2002 elections. He likewise wielded Turkey's tax agency as a weapon against Turks who donated to or were perceived to support rival parties. In February 2009, chafing at the refusal of its media companies to toe his party line, Erdogan-controlled tax authorities fined the conglomerate Dogan Group, owner of several newspapers, \$500 million. When the company continued its criticism, the government slapped another \$2.5 billion fine on it just seven months later.

He has reserved special ire for journalists. From his first days in office, Erdogan has harassed journalists and their editors with lawsuits for transgressions as mild as lampooning him in political cartoons or paraphrasing rather than replicating verbatim speech excerpts in tweets. According to Reporters Sans Frontières, Erdogan's Turkey has arrested more journalists per capita than any other country, including China and Russia. What makes Erdogan's repression so

prosecutors alleged that several hundred secularists planned to incite political violence as a pretext to a military coup. Over the next 13 months, police detained hundreds of suspects, holding most incommunicado and refusing them access to lawyers. By February 2011, indictments surpassed 8,000 pages; Turkey's courts ultimately overturned convictions for lack of evidence.

In 2010, the liberal, anti-military *Taraf* newspaper published claims of another conspiracy, the so-called Sledgehammer (Balyoz) affair. Once again, Turkish police rounded up hundreds of suspects. Harvard Professor Dani Rodrik, the son-in-law of Cetin Dogan, a prominent general named in the plot, noted that the smoking-gun computer files upon which the government's case rested were written in a Microsoft Word version that had not existed when the plan was allegedly hatched. Ultimately, this case too collapsed.

Erdogan also sought to turn past purges on their heads. Railing against

the 1980 coup became a staple of his castigation of the military. In 2010, the AKP amended the constitution to allow the perpetrators of the coup to stand trial. When, two years later, he placed Evren in the dock, Erdogan celebrated: "With the support of the people, we have... allowed the judiciary to fulfill its duty and start the coup trial process." Five hundred witnesses from across the political spectrum registered to recall their suffering and exact revenge on their tormentors. In some cases, however, justice delayed was just as spurious as that which occurred after Evren's coup.

### ■ **Turkey Today**

This brings us to the present. The scale of Erdogan's purge may soon surpass that of 1980. The smoke had not even cleared before Erdogan announced the arrest of not only 8,000 soldiers, including one-third of Turkey's flag officers, but also another 7,000 civilians. Within hours, the government had suspended or detained almost 3,000 judges, revoked the licenses of 21,000 teachers, and laid off an additional 15,000 from the education ministry. It dismissed 8,000 policemen, sacked more than 1,500 university deans, and fired several

thousand more spread across Turkey's 21 ministries. Turkish police even arrested 60 children on charges of treason. Every day, the Turkish press reports

new arrests and firings. Erdogan has no intention to limit the purge to state employees, however. Ali Babacan, a long-time Erdogan aide and former foreign and finance minister, said on July 31 that the government would also "cleanse" the private sector. "There is no room for us to take any risk here. This cleaning process must be without mercy," he told CNN Turk.

With Erdogan's opponents on the run and an iron grip on all mechanisms of state, what comes next? In 1994, while still mayor of Istanbul, he declared, "Thank God Almighty, I am a servant of the Sharia" and, the following year, called himself "the imam of Istanbul." That was the unvarnished Erdogan. He

may have promoted an illusion of reform and refinement after the 1997 coup and his subsequent imprisonment, but he has now shed that pretense and embraced an

**Erdogan's Turkey has arrested more journalists per capita than any other country, including China and Russia.**

agenda he has nurtured his whole life. He aims not only for power and money but also seeks to achieve a larger goal: the complete reversal of Ataturk's reforms. In 2012, Erdogan declared his goal was "to raise a religious generation." That same year, doctors diagnosed him with colon cancer and gave him only two years to live. Erdogan might have beaten that prognosis, but he is conscious that his time is not infinite. He wishes to see Turkey celebrate its centenary in 2023 not as the secular state envisioned by Ataturk but as an Islamic Republic.

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# Non-Persian Iran

by KENNETH R. TIMMERMAN

When most people think of Iran, they think “Death to America,” terrorists and turbans, evil-looking beards and missiles rising from bright, arid canyons. If they think further, some might recall the past glories of Persian empires, or the fabled Peacock Throne the former Shah aspired to occupy. But even among so-called Iran “experts,” few consider this simple and far-reaching fact: in today’s Iran, Persians are at best a feeble majority, possibly as small as 51 percent of the total population.

Real figures for Iran’s minority populations are hard to come by. The Shah conducted a regular census, but its primary aim, according to the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, was to “count the *de jure*

The central authority is dominated by Persians, who constitute 51 percent of Iran’s population.”

So who are these non-Persian minorities? They are Azeris, Kurds, Lurs, Qashqai’is, Ahwazis, Arabs, Balouchis, Turkmenis, Afsharis, Gilaki and Mazandarani. They live predominantly on Iran’s periphery, where they control Iran’s access to the outside world. In the cases of the Azeris, Kurds, Ahwazis and Balouchis, families and clans sprawl across international borders and thrive on a cross-border economy, much of it based on smuggling.

The significance of this geography should be obvious, especially given the growing politicization of Iran’s minorities. Put simply, Iran’s minorities pose a

well as some of their neighbors, notably Azerbaijanis. And while former leaders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) such as Mohsen Rezai and Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf have tried unsuccessfully to appropriate Iranian nationalism for political gains, Iranians never forget the response Ayatollah Khomeini gave to a reporter in January 1979 when asked what he felt about returning to Tehran from exile. “Hichi,” Khomeini said. “Nothing.”

Some of Iran’s minorities are well integrated. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and former Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi, for example, are both Azeris, a Turkic people that populates huge swathes of territory all the way from Azerbaijan in the northwest to Mashad, on the border with Afghanistan. Azeris have been among the most fanatical Shiite supporters of the current regime.

Tribes such as the Bakhtiari, Lurs, and Qashqais, in western and southern Iran, have produced prime ministers and generals. Linguist Don Stillo, writing in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, considers the Lur dialect to have derived directly from Old and Middle Persian, and the Lur people to be descendents of the aboriginal Iranian tribes, driven into the mountains by Arab invaders.

But other large minorities, especially the Kurds and the Balouchis – have been repressed by Tehran-centric governments for generations. In this, the Islamic Republic has not distinguished itself from its predecessor.

What’s new is the extent to which Iran’s ethnic and religious minorities have succeeded in organizing themselves

...the regime until very recently forbade schools to teach minority languages – with the exception of Arabic, required for Islamic studies.

sedentary population and the *de facto* mobile and tribal population.” Similarly, under the current regime, which seized power in 1979, the census has counted the urban versus the rural population, and gathered basic age and employment statistics. But never was the explosive issue of ethnic origin or identity asked.

A ground-breaking report published in 2008 by the Congressional Research Service found that Iran’s then 70.5 million people are “ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse.

geopolitical threat to the very existence of the Islamic regime, a threat the regime recognizes and attempts to mitigate through a mixture of co-optation and force.

This is not because the regime is Persian or Iranian nationalist: it is not. On the contrary, the ruling Shiite Islamic clerics have banned traditional pre-Islamic names for children, and when they first seized power, sought to eliminate Now Ruz celebrations, a pre-Islamic rite of spring shared by most Iranians as





*Green movement supporters protesting in the streets of Tehran, Iran on June 15, 2009 (Photo: Hamed Saber)*

politically, and in voicing their grievances to international bodies, including the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran, who for several years has included sections on ethnic and religious minorities in his twice-yearly reports.

I can recall having dinner with Abdul Rahman Qassemloo in the mid-1980s in Paris, and quizzing him on the war the Islamic regime waged on his followers in the very early days of the revolution after he demanded autonomy for Iranian Kurdistan.

“We tried to call a council of minorities, to see if other ethnic groups would back our struggle,” he said. “Only two of us came, and both of us were Kurds.”

The other Kurd who attended that 1979 meeting was Rahman Haj Ahmadi, a Qassemloo ally who later helped create the Free Life Party of Iranian Kurdistan, PJAK. “Today if we called such a meeting, groups from all over

Iran would come,” he told me.

Qassemloo and his Kurdish Democratic Party initially fought alone against the new Islamic regime. But within a year he was joined by dissidents of all political stripes and ethnic backgrounds, who sought refuge in Kurdistan from the regime or safe passage into exile.

Among the most prominent of these internal exiles was Darioush Forouhar, the leader of the nationalist Iran Nation’s Party (INP). After joining the first revolutionary government of Mehdi Bazargan as minister of labor, Forouhar fled Tehran to Kurdistan when Khomeini imposed absolute clerical rule. It was this hitherto unknown politico-religious doctrine, known as the *velayat-e-faqih*, which transformed the anti-Shah rebellion into a theocracy. Rejection of the *velayat-e-faqih* subsequently provided the glue for the anti-regime forces, including Iran’s ethnic minorities.

On February 19, 2005, leaders of major ethnic organizations convened in London to form a Congress of Iranian Nationalities for a Federal Iran. Seven organizations, representing Balouchis, Azeris, Kurds, Ahwazis, and Turkmens signed on. Today, twelve organizations belong to the Congress.

In its charter, the group staked out the grievances held in common by the non-Persian Iranian peoples. They denounced the “totalitarian, anti-democratic” nature of the regime, and demanded “the separation of religion and state.” They also demanded equal treatment under the law of all Iranian citizens, without regard to gender, ethnic, or religious identity.

As many as 70 percent of Iranian children grow up in households speaking a mother tongue other than Persian and do not successfully learn Persian after their first year in school, Education Minister Hamid Reza Haji Babai noted in a November 2009 seminar. Despite

this, the regime until very recently forbade schools to teach minority languages – with the exception of Arabic, required for Islamic studies.

Poverty is widespread in minority provinces, as the government steers development funds and industrialization projects to more politically reliable areas.

### Poverty is widespread in minority provinces, as the government steers development funds and industrialization projects to more politically reliable areas.

For example, 76 percent of the Balouch population in Sistan-va-Balouchistan province “live in extreme poverty,” according to Balouchi activist, Nasser Bolodai, a spokesman for the Congress of Nationalities. In Arab Khuzestan (bordering Iraq), Bolodai believes “the unemployment rate in the province’s Persian majority city of Dezful is 7 percent whereas in the Arab majority cities of Abadan and Mohammerah [Khorramshahr] the rates are 41 percent and 60 percent respectively.”

Low level insurgencies have been simmering in the Balouchi and Kurdish areas of Iran for decades, marked by regular skirmishes between IRGC troops and individuals or groups the regime labels “bandits,” “drug traffickers,” “smugglers” or “terrorists.”

In recent years, the non-violent political struggle in these outlying provinces has intensified as well. International human rights organizations as well as the United Nations Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran regularly report the execution of political activists. The U.S.-based Boroumand Foundation found that Iran topped the world for executions per capita in 2015 with 1084 instances of capital punishment, many of them imposed on human rights activists. On Feb. 24, 2016, Shahindokht Moalverdi, the regime’s vice president for Women and Family Affairs, acknowledged that regime agents had executed the entire

male population of a village in Sistan-va-Balouchistan province, on allegations of drug trafficking.

In its response to the latest UN human rights report in October 2016, the regime rejected accusations it was arbitrarily arresting or abusing human rights activists. “Unfortunately, refer-

ring to them as human rights defenders is done carelessly and negligently, to the extent that in some cases terrorists are also being called defenders of human rights,” the unsigned reply stated.

The discrimination extends to religious minorities, in particular to former Muslims who have embraced Christianity, Baha’is, Zoroastrians, Sunni and Sufi Muslims. (The overwhelming majority of Iran’s Jewish population, dating from the Babylonian captivity, fled Iran for Israel, Europe and the United States in the years immediately following the revolution, as have many Assyrian and Armenian Christians).

The Islamic Republic’s constitution imposes a religious test on candidates for government jobs known as “Gozinesh,” which requires them to declare their

Some applicants to universities are also subjected to Gozinesh,” Bolodai writes.

Baha’is and members of many other non-recognized religions are forbidden to enter colleges and from having their own private colleges or even home schooling their children. According to Ahmed Shaheed, the outgoing UN Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran, persecution of Baha’is because of their faith goes beyond arbitrary arrests, detention, and prosecutions, to their very existence as citizens. Regime policies “restrict the types of businesses and jobs Baha’i citizens can have, support the closing of Baha’i-owned businesses, place pressure on business owners to dismiss Baha’i employees and call for seizure of their businesses and property,” Shaheed wrote in an October 2016 report.

In its 2005 charter, the Congress of Nationalities announced as its goal a “federal system of government on the basis of national ethnicity and geography in a united and integral Iran.”

The fundamentalist Shiite Muslim regime in Tehran has long feared ethnic strife. And while it consistently accuses groups such as PJAK, the KDPI, or the Congress of Nationalities of “separatism” – that is, seeking to break Iran into small, ethnic mini-states – its real fear is that the political demands of these groups could ignite nationwide protests that would spell the end of the clerical dictatorship.

Mustapha Hijri, the secretary gen-

### Not only do the minorities control Iran’s borders with the outside world: they almost universally despise the Shiite Persian center.

allegiance to the *velayat-e faqih*, a concept totally alien not just to Baha’is, Christians and Jews, but also to Sunni and Sufi Muslims. “The use of this practice effectively excludes the majority of Balouch, Turkmen and Kurds from employment within the government and, in some cases, within the private sector.

eral of the KDPI, came to Washington, DC in May 2011 to promote the agenda of the Congress of Nationalities, and met with me for several hours at my house. “We want ethnic federalism,” he said. “This is not separatism. We want federalism based on ethnicity and geography, not just the regions or provinces.”

Why was that distinction so important? “The current provincial lines in Iran were drawn by Tehran to prevent minorities from having a majority,” he argued. For example, Kurds are split among four provinces in northwestern Iran. He wanted to redraw the map to create “ethnically pure provinces.”

Hijri’s vision sounds like separatism to many Iranian nationalists. But it was also rejected by former KDPI member Rahman Haj Ahmadi, the secretary general of the rival Kurdish group, PJAK, who feared it could set off inter-ethnic wars between Kurds and Azeris

In an interview in Stockholm on Aug. 4, 2011, which is available on the [iran.org](http://iran.org) website, Ahmadi rejected the idea of creating ethnic enclaves. “We want no internal borders inside a democratic Iran. We call our option, ‘democratic confederation.’ We believe Iran should be a bit like Europe, where different cultures live together in harmony within the European Union, while maintaining their cultural identities. We believe in a single, united, confederal Iran,” he told me.

He contrasted his idea to ethnic or geographic federalism, which implies exactly the type of split into ethnic mini-states that Iranian nationalists and the Islamic regime accuse the minorities of seeking.

“A confederation has no borders. We do not aim to destroy Iran, but to keep it as it is and transform it into a democratic system that respects the identity and the rights of every citizen. I am a Kurd, born of a Kurdish mother. But I live in Iran. Iran is a country of many ethnicities. We want all of them to feel they have equal rights as Iranians.”

Since these conciliatory remarks, much has happened to polarize Iran’s minorities and enflame those calling for outright separation from the Tehran-centric Islamic state.

Probably the most significant event was the January 2015 liberation of Kobane, a Kurdish city that straddles the Syrian border with Turkey, by Kurdish

militias including PJAK and the PKK, which Turkey and the Obama administration consider to be terrorist groups.

The United States openly supported the pro-PKK militias during the prolonged battle, providing intelligence, weapons, and even air strikes against ISIS positions. The willingness of the Obama administration to disregard the hysterical demands from Ankara that the United States leave the Kurds to die emboldened Kurdish groups throughout the region.

## The Green Movement of 2009 failed because its predominantly Persian, Tehran-based leaders failed to reach out to minorities who are natural sympathizers of any pro-freedom movement.

Following the victory in Kobane, the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, Mustapha Barzani, announced plans in February 2016 to hold a referendum on the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. Under intense pressure from Ankara and Baghdad, Barzani agreed in October 2016 to suspend the referendum until after the liberation of Mosul.

The KDPI, which had abandoned the armed struggle in 1996 and reportedly cooperated with the Iranian regime against its political rival, PJAK, announced in March 2016 it was sending peshmerga fighters into Iran. Clashes between KDPI fighters and the IRGC began on April 19, 2016, when a KDPI peshmerga unit attacked government security forces in Sanandaj, the capital of Iranian Kurdistan. Since then, PJAK, too, has resumed armed attacks against the IRGC, which it had suspended in 2011. Also joining the fight were military units of the Kurdistan Freedom Party commanded by Hussein Yazdanpanah, a well-respected guerilla leader.

One theory currently being discussed by Kurdish observers in the region is that the KRG encouraged the

Iranian Kurds to step up armed actions against the IRGC, to prevent the Iranians from invading northern Iraq in the event the KRG declares its independence.

Today’s Iran is a rich stew of ethnic minorities. Not only do the minorities control Iran’s borders with the outside world, they almost universally despise the Shiite Persian center. The Green Movement of 2009 failed because its predominantly Persian, Tehran-based leaders failed to reach out to minorities who

are natural sympathizers of any pro-freedom movement. While many Azeris and Kurds were arrested during the anti-regime demonstrations, the Green Movement leaders failed to articulate a vision for a secular, democratic Iran that respected the cultural, linguistic and political rights of minorities.

The key to Iran’s future could well lie with these groups. If they remain isolated, weak, and cut off from each other and from the outside world, the clerical regime can survive. But if they join forces with each other and with Iranian nationalists around a vision of a secular, democratic Iran, they could burst the iron hoops of the Revolutionary Guards and the intelligence services with a quickness and force that would surprise not just the regime, but the world.

The question becomes whether these groups, and their Persian counterparts, can articulate an Iranian identity that is more powerful than the ethnic or religious identities that currently divide them.

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# Syria: Military Problems and Political Solutions

## An *in*FOCUS Interview with Ambassador ROBERT FORD

Amb. Robert Ford served as U.S. ambassador to Syria from 2011 to 2014, and as ambassador to Algeria from 2006 to 2008. As the top American envoy in Damascus, he led State Department efforts in proposing and implementing U.S. Syrian policy and working with European and Middle East allies in dealing with the Syrian civil war. Amb. Ford was recalled from Syria because of what State described as “credible threats” against his life. He subsequently resigned, and is currently a Senior Fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington. *in*FOCUS editor Shoshana Bryen spoke with him recently.

***in*FOCUS: IS THERE AN AMERICAN NATIONAL INTEREST IN WHO CONTROLS SYRIA? IF SO, IS IT IN THE AMERICAN INTEREST TO SEE SYRIA IN THE FUTURE AS A UNITARY STATE, OR A STATE DIVIDED INTO CONFEDERATED PARTS?**

**Robert Ford:** I think our overriding interest in Syria is that the land area of Syria be a source of stability as opposed to instability, and that it not be a place where extremists can be easily recruited.

If we thought it was possible to partition Syria in such a way that it would facilitate stability and facilitate local governments being able to constrain

their recruitment drives, so I don't think partition is the way to go.

Second, the unitary state has the advantage of being better able to rebuild the country and undermine extremist recruitment over the long term, as extremists often feed off of economic hopelessness. Dividing Syrian territory into Sunni, Alawi, Kurdish, other areas, is almost a recipe for slow rebuilding, if any rebuilding at all.

***IF: IF THE BEST-CASE SCENARIO WOULD BE A UNITARY STATE WITH ENOUGH OF A GOVERNMENT TO CONTROL EXTREMISTS, HOW DO WE GET THERE?***

The Obama administration, for example, is trying to fight al-Qaeda and Islamic State extremists by helping Syrian Kurds, but in that process they're infuriating Syrian Arabs

the extremist problem within those local governments' jurisdictions, partition might work fine. But partition would almost certainly involve more fighting. It would almost certainly aid extremists in

**RF:** Getting there will take years, and so the first thing your readers need to understand is there is no quick fix. There are things that you could do in the short term to help. I think the Obama

administration is trying for a quick fix, and I think it's going to fail badly. A fix that will not be sustainable over the long term. The Obama administration, for example, is trying to fight al-Qaeda and Islamic State extremists by helping Syrian Kurds, but in that process they're infuriating Syrian Arabs and stirring ethnic conflict just like we had in Iraq, but now it's going to be in Syria as well. That's not a long-term solution. The administration is actually creating a long-term problem.

What do you do, since the fundamental problem here is a political problem of a Sunni Arab community that is the large majority in Syria, but which is basically without power? You have to get to some kind of a power sharing arrangement. Some analysts in Syria say Bashar al-Asad will never agree to power sharing. I'm not so sure. Maybe they [Asad and the Alawis] will, maybe they won't, but if they won't agree to power sharing, then can some alternative solution be found where a new government can be set up that does involve power sharing? The way things are going now, we're not moving in that direction, either in terms of the Syrian government or in terms of the Syrian opposition. Both sides are still trying to achieve military victory.

**iF: WOULD A U.S.-RUSSIAN AGREEMENT ON THIS HELP TO MOVE THEM FORWARD?**

**RF:** Absolutely, but the Russians aren't interested in power sharing either.

**iF: THE RUSSIANS ARE LOOKING FOR A UNITARY STATE UNDER ASAD?**

**RF:** Yes. That's what the Iranians want too, and I don't think the Russians and the Iranians are going to change their minds until they're suffering a little bit on the battlefield, since it's a war. They're trying to impose their vision through military means. In a situation like this, you have to have military pressure.

**iF: AMERICAN MILITARY PRESSURE, OR LOCAL SYRIAN MILITARY PRESSURE?**

**RF:** I wouldn't advocate U.S. direct military force. Some of my colleagues at the State Department did, in a dissenting message to the secretary of state last summer. My preference is to help local fighters on the ground.

**iF: DOES THE U.S. KNOW WHICH ONES ARE ON OUR SIDE AND WHICH ONES ARE NOT?**

**RF:** Oh, absolutely we do. Of course we do. We've always known who they are. We know who they are now. They're getting some help now, they just don't get really much.

Let me give you an example, and it's one of the groups that we were giving help to. That was two years ago now, and he said they got 300 bullets a month from the CIA. This was a Syrian from a group called the Hazzam movement, which has since been destroyed .... He said they got 300 bullets per month per man from the CIA. I said – I'm an economist, I'm not a war fighter – "Well, that sounds like a lot. How many do you use in a day?" He said, "If you're in combat, you might use 100 to 200 a day." I said,



*Ambassador Robert Ford. (Photo: Middle East Institute)*

"Well, then you've only got a couple days' supply." He said, "Exactly." I said, "What do you do the rest of the month?" He said, "That's our problem."

If that's true, and I have no reason to doubt it, and even if he was exaggerating and they got 1,000 bullets per man, it's still not enough, and it just tells me that the American effort is really half-hearted. It's not serious. It's show. It's checking the box.

**iF: ABSENT A DECISION TO MAKE THESE PEOPLE WELL-ARMED, COMPETENT FIGHTERS, ALL YOU REALLY HAVE IS ENOUGH WEAPONRY FOR THEM TO CONTINUE TO FIGHT AND LOSE.**

**RF:** Right, and then you understand that this isn't a quick fix, that even if they got a lot stronger and began to really inflict

casualties on these Iranian fighters in Syria and Iraqi Shia allies, it's not going to change the balance immediately. Of course, the Syrian opposition itself has to do more, so any American aid to the opposition, or boosted aid, has to be complemented by dramatic changes in terms of the way the Syrian opposition itself works.

In particular, it needs to do two things. It needs to reach out politically to the components of the Asad government's support base, to say, "We're not all extremist crazies that are going to murder you in your beds. We are people who want to cut a deal to share power, to respect everybody's human rights, guaranteed local security, *et cetera*."

The other thing they need to do is hold accountable, within their own ranks, those people that are committing war crimes, and some of the opposition





Two destroyed tanks in front of a mosque in Azaz, Syria, August 2012. (Photo: Christiaan Triebert)

fighters have committed war crimes. There was a horrific beheading of a young soldier captured by the opposition after Aleppo, and they know exactly who that fighter is, but how come he hasn't been held accountable? That was a war crime.

If we're going to do more to help them, they have to do more themselves politically, because if you're just going to increase weaponry, all you're going to do is escalate the fighting. The escalation has to be matched by political outreach, so that the elements of Asad's support base, and they are tiring, have a sense that, "Well, we have an alternative to constantly fighting."

**iF: WHICH MAKES SENSE TO ME AS AN AMERICAN, BUT I WONDER HOW MUCH OF THAT CAN BE DONE IN SYRIA WITHOUT MAJOR U.S. POLITICAL INPUT?**

**RF:** It cannot. I don't sense that that's what the Trump administration wants

to do. The Trump administration can speak for itself, but I have seen no evidence that suggests that that's the way they're thinking. The issue of the disenfranchised and angry Sunni Arab community in Syria is not fundamentally a military problem; it's a political problem. The whole uprising started as a political issue, not a military issue, and at its root it is a political issue.

**iF: CAN THIS BE DEMILITARIZED AND UP-POLITICIZED? I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S A WORD, BUT THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE SUGGESTING, THAT THE UNITED STATES, TO THE EXTENT THAT WE WANT TO BE HELPFUL, HAS POLITICAL WORK TO DO.**

**RF:** I'm not talking about demilitarizing. I mean, I'd like to get there, but I don't think you can avoid military aspects now. This is a war with a Syrian government that uses chemical weapons, uses barrel bombs against schools and hospitals. This is not a government that

responds to purely political gestures. It responds to pressure, military pressure. It doesn't respond to political pressure.

**iF: IT'S BACKED BY THE RUSSIANS, WHO ARE PROVIDING MILITARY BACKUP, SO IT'S HARD TO SEE HOW ANYBODY DEFEATS THEM MILITARILY IN ANY EVENT.**

**RF:** You can't defeat them militarily. You can undermine them politically but you can't defeat them militarily. You just can't. The possibility of an opposition military victory died in the summer of 2015 when the Russians intervened. I don't think a military victory by the opposition was ever likely. It would have been hard for the opposition even before that because the Iranians were escalating so much, but when the Russians came in, that was the end of any prospect of pure military victory by the opposition. I don't think the Syrian opposition has figured that out yet. They still seem to be sort of in the mood to try to prevail militarily.



**IF: IF WE GIVE THEM MILITARY AID, BUT THEY CAN'T WIN A MILITARY VICTORY, AND YOU NEED A POLITICAL SIDE BUT WE'RE NOT SUPPLYING IT, THEN IT SEEMS THAT WE'RE JUST CAUSING THE WAR TO CONTINUE.**

If we're going to do more to help them, they have to do more themselves politically, because if you're just going to increase weaponry, all you're going to do is escalate the fighting.

**RF:** The war won't stop; the opposition won't surrender. My question is how to get from the military battle to a political negotiation.

Any increase in military aid has to be a quid pro quo, and with changes in the opposition's political approach. Here are some things tactically which I'd like to see the opposition do, and I have suggested this to them and they just kind of look at me. They say, "Well, even you love Shia," and this kind of thing.

They hold prisoners of the regime. I think they should unilaterally release them, just give them up, send them back, and say, "These are Syrians like us and they're caught in a horrible war, and we feel bad for them and we feel bad for their families, and so unilaterally as a goodwill gesture, we're releasing them. We wish the Syrian government would treat our prisoners as well. They don't, but we're not the Syrian government. We're better than the Syrian government. We believe in Syrians as people."

I'd like to see them release the Iraqi Shia militia members they've captured. I'd love to see them take them back to Ayatollah Sistani in Iraq and release them into his care and say, "You are a figure who doesn't believe in sectarian conflict. We know you from what you've done in Iraq. We wish you would tell Iraqi Shia that we're not trying to kill Shia, and that this is not their war. Just as you, the Iraqi Shia, faced a brutal dictator in Saddam Hussein, we face one in

Bashar al-Asad. We don't understand why Iraqi Shia, who suffered so much under dictatorship, are not supporting us in our fight against a dictator."

The Syrian opposition would have to reach out to Iraqi Shia, but the Syrian op-

position is now sectarian. They won't do it. In the leadership of the political opposition, there is not one Alawi of note, not a single one. There's not even really a Christian of note, except for maybe George Sabra. There aren't any of the prominent Sunni businesspeople that support Asad, or people from that class of people. They need to change their political leadership. They need to change their face. They need to change their language. Stop referring to Alawis as apostates. It's demeaning, and it doesn't give confidence to anybody that they're going to be different if they're in power.

There's a lot of stuff they could do like that. All of those things I've just mentioned are entirely in their power. They could decide today to do it, and what a

The issue of the disenfranchised and angry Sunni Arab community in Syria is not fundamentally a military problem; it's a political problem.

difference it would make. It would just really change people's attitudes. You don't change them overnight, but it would make people think, "Wow, maybe these guys aren't such horrible monsters," Because right now, the way the regime responds to the situation is to say, "Well, they're all Islamic extremists," and the regime's support base agrees with that. In fact, not all of the opposition are Islamist. I think the

extremist element within the opposition ranks is actually the minority, but because the opposition is just determined to win militarily, they've worked with these extremist people and let the extremist people set the agenda. That's a mistake.

**IF: PROBABLY, BUT IT ALSO HELPS THEM IN THE UNITED STATES POLITICALLY TO GET MORE ASSISTANCE.**

**RF:** One of the things that you find with people in civil wars like this – and I worked in Algeria during their civil war there in the 1990s and then in Iraq in the 2000s and then here in Syria – is people become so convinced of the unique righteousness of their cause that they lose the ability to understand how the other side is perceiving things. They lose the ability to see how outsiders see things, because they are so totally convinced of the justice of their own cause. That's very much what's happened in Syria, on both sides.

There are plenty of regime apologists who will say, "Asad's not great, we agree, but we're fighting for civilization against barbarian Islamic hordes." They just cannot see that there are large segments of the Syrian opposition that have nothing to do with that, that are in fact fighting them on the ground, even more than Asad's forces are.

**IF: I WOULD LIKE TO MOVE OUTWARD FROM THE SYRIANS, TO THE RUSSIANS AND THE IRANIANS. SINCE THE RUSSIANS HAVE CLEARLY STAKED THEIR INTEREST IN THE ASAD REGIME AND THE MILITARY BASES THAT THEY GET, DO YOU THINK THAT IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION CAN EXERCISE INFLUENCE WITH THE RUSSIANS?**

**RF:** I think John Kerry has tried every diplomatic trick available. He's moved toward the Russian position to entice them. He's offered military-to-military cooperation in Syria to entice them, which is what Vladimir Putin said he wanted when he went to the United Nations in September 2014 and spoke at the General Assembly, Kerry's gone to that

**RF:** Absolutely. I think that's what they're working for. You probably saw too, Shoshana, the article that Martin Chulov from *The Guardian* wrote a couple months ago, and that appears to me to be exactly what they're doing.

I think the Americans are so focused on the Islamic State. I think the country that's going to be more concerned about

going to do, bomb the Iranians? I highly doubt that, and they certainly don't control the border. The real question is would they accept Israelis flying literally over their heads to bomb an Iranian or Hezbollah convoy? You know, there are Russian combat aircraft operating every day now. It's just a huge deconfliction challenge to the Israelis now. It has increased exponentially.

**iF:** CAN WE SLIDE OVER TO THE KURDS, WHO AS ONE WAG SAID, ARE "ALWAYS IN THE WHEY"?

**RF:** I've talked to the Syrian Kurds, both people representing the PYD and people representing parties from the Kurdish National Congress, including the Yekiti Party and others, and I think we can say that all Syrian Kurds look at the model of Iraqi Kurdistan and say, "Wow, that's great, we'd like to get something like that," maybe with the idea of one day gaining independence, either as a Syrian Kurdish region or mini-state, or confederation with other Kurdish regions, although I think they understand that that's distant. The idea of

The possibility for an opposition military victory died in the summer of 2015 when the Russians intervened.

extent. I just don't think you can talk the Russians into cooperating. I think the Russians have to understand that they can't impose militarily, and that in fact there will be a cost to them. Right now, they're not convinced that whatever cost there might be is all that serious.

**iF:** I ASSUME THE SAME OF THE IRANIANS, ALTHOUGH THE IRANIANS HAVE A LOT MORE BATTLE CASUALTIES THAN THE RUSSIANS. DOES THAT AFFECT THE IRANIAN PERSPECTIVE?

**RF:** I think the Iranians are willing to fight the Syrian opposition to the last Iraqi and the last Hezbollahi.

The Iranians have taken some casualties, or at least they report that they have, but I think they're a long way from feeling sufficient pain. If the war lasted another 20 years... maybe, but I think that's why it's all the more important for the Syrian political opposition to work politically and not just depend on the military angle, because they're never going to win militarily. A combination of political and military pressure, I think will be much more effective.

**iF:** THEN THE IRANIANS HAVE A CLEAR PATH TO THE SHIITE CRESCENT.

an Iranian land bridge from Iran through northern Iraq and into the PYD areas of northern and northeastern Syria, and then across to Aleppo and down into Lebanon, the country that obviously has to be really concerned about that is Israel. It'll be much harder for the Israelis if they have to deal not just with Damascus' air force and deal with supply convoys that may occur, but now they have the added complication of

I think the Iranians are willing to fight the Syrian opposition to the last Iraqi and the last Hezbollahi.

the Russian Air Force base at Hmeimim.

To me, the Israelis are a big loser in this entire arrangement. I don't know, maybe the Israelis have worked out an agreement with Putin the Israelis can continue to intercept arms shipments going through to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Russians will stand down their aircraft and land defenses. I don't know. I have not seen any news report to that effect, but I wouldn't necessarily expect to see a news report.

I don't think the Russians are going to be in a position to say to the Iranians, "Don't ship advanced rocketry by land over to Lebanon." What are the Russians

an autonomous region along the lines of Iraq, that seems within reach to the Syrian Kurds, and they like that idea.

Of course, the Turks hate it, we can talk about why, and the Bashar al-Asad government hates it. We can talk about why. There's at least one report I've seen that the Russians tried to get Asad to buy off on it and Asad didn't. The idea, of course, in Baathist ideology is that it's a centralized state. "Decentralization" is not a word in the Baathist political vocabulary.

**iF:** I WAS THINKING ABOUT TURKEY, BECAUSE NORTHERN IRAQ DOESN'T

**SEEM TO UPSET THEM THAT MUCH, BUT ARE THEY GOING TO ACCEPT A KURDISH AREA IN SYRIA?**

**RF:** The short answer is no. The longer answer is that Iraqi Kurds are different from Syrian Kurds in the eyes of Turks and just in terms of their own demography and ethnography. Iraqi Kurds don't have the same ties to Turkish Kurds that Syrian Kurds have to Turkish Kurds. The border between Turkey and Syria is a very arbitrary line drawn on a map, basically, largely following the Berlin-to-Baghdad railroad built by Kaiser Wilhelm's Germans before World War I. Everything on the north side of the railroad tracks is Turkey, and everything on the south side of the railroad tracks is Syria, by a deal between Turkey and France after WWI in 1937.

The rail line basically split Kurdish families, Kurdish clans, and Kurdish tribes, without any sense of following some kind of family or tribal line, just cut it right in the middle. That's why, when there was all the fighting in 2014, in Kobane, along the border on the Syrian side, and the Turkish government didn't help the Kobane Kurds, there were huge demonstrations in cities like Diyarbakir

Barzani was the lesser of two evils, and actually the Turks and Barzani get along pretty well. The PKK, and the PYD, its affiliate, the Turks view as a mortal threat.

**iF: THAT'S AN OUTSTANDING EXPLANATION. LOOKING AT ISIS IN IRAQ FOR A MINUTE, THE ASSUMPTION IS THAT MOSUL WILL BE LIBERATED AT THE END AND RAQQAH WILL BE LIBERATED. DO WE HAVE SOME OBLIGATION TO HELP THESE PEOPLE, AFTERWARDS, SETTLE THE POLITICAL ISSUES?**

**RF:** I don't think we can settle issues for them. I think the Americans had the most leverage in terms of getting Iraqis and Syrians to fix those governance issues in places like Raqqah and Mosul, before the military operation began. Our leverage diminishes as the operations wind closer to an end. They're still some distance away, but the prospect is that one group or another will try to take control of Mosul and/or Raqqah. Other groups will not accept that, and it will just shift the fighting between the Islamic State and the armed forces to fighting within those forces.

The Americans needed to be thinking about a process by which the forces the

they did in places like Mosul and Anbar in 2008 and 2009. They'll just sort of leave whoever they've been arming to run these places, and what you'll get is resistance to that, and extremist groups, al-Qaeda, Islamic State, or whoever, will exploit that, and then eventually rise back up again and overturn the American client.

**iF: AT WHICH POINT WE'VE DONE REALLY NOTHING FOR THE PEOPLE OF THOSE PLACES?**

**RF:** Correct. That's why I've said I don't think the administration's approach to this makes a lot of sense.

**iF: WE HAVE A NEW ADMINISTRATION COMING. WE WILL HAVE A NEW ALIGNMENT AND WITHOUT ASKING A POLITICAL QUESTION, WHAT RECOMMENDATION WOULD YOU MAKE TO THE INCOMING PEOPLE TO TRY TO GET A BETTER HANDLE ON THIS THAN PERHAPS WE'VE HAD IN THE PAST?**

**RF:** Understand that the problem of extremism in places like Iraq and Syria is not a military problem. It is essentially a political problem, and they're going to be successful in dealing with these extremist problems in Syria and Iraq only to the extent that they operate in ways that undermine the recruitment of extremist groups over the medium and long term. They need to be thinking not just about bombing, but about how to encourage settlement of the Syrian civil war and governance structures in Iraq, both locally and nationally, that will help undermine the appeal of extremists in Syria and Iraq.

**iF: THAT IS A GREAT ANSWER. I HOPE THEY LISTEN TO YOU.**

**RF:** I doubt it.

**iF: THANK YOU ON BEHALF OF THE JEWISH POLICY CENTER, inFOCUS, AND ITS READERS.**

...the problem of extremism in places like Iraq and Syria is not a military problem...

and Mardin. Those are their cousins and their second cousins over there in Kobane fighting the Islamic State.

That's not the same response that the Iraqi Kurds had. The Iraqi Kurds did actually send Peshmerga to help with this position, but the Iraqi Kurds don't have the same language, don't have the same tribal ties, don't have the same immediacy of relations that the Syrian Kurds have. Because Masoud Barzani was a rival to the PKK, the Turks in a sense decided that

Americans are helping themselves develop a leadership that would be acceptable then to the populations in Raqqah and Mosul. Since the Americans view this as a military issue more than a political issue, what a surprise, the American military is treating it as a military issue.

That leaves us a lot of work to do, but I'm not sure the Americans are even thinking much about it. Everything I'm hearing is that the Americans have not given much thought to this, very much as



# Tunisia's Bumpy Road to Democracy

by SARAH FEUER

January 14 marks the sixth anniversary of the ouster of longtime Tunisian autocrat Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, part of an uprising that sparked a wave of so-called "Arab Spring" revolts across the region. Of the countries experiencing upheaval since 2011, Tunisia remains the only one continuing down a path, however bumpy, to democracy. The struggling state on the Mediterranean faces considerable economic, political, and security obstacles to full democratic consolidation. But six years later, the Tunisian experiment in democracy has made important strides and remains worthy of American investment.

## ■ *Reasons to celebrate*

Tunisia's transition from authoritarianism has been remarkably peaceful, especially when compared to cases like Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. The low level of civil strife partly reflects a streak of pragmatism that has eluded transitions elsewhere. Consider the hotly contested spring 2011 decision to permit members of the former ruling party to participate in politics. Banning former regime figures likely would have signaled to the revolutionaries who first took to the streets in December 2010 that a deeper regime change was in the offing, but it also might have excluded the nearly one million citizens (out of a population of 11 million) registered as members of the former ruling party from participating in the new political system. Similar punitive efforts to exclude elements of the pre-Spring regimes – however understandable – yielded disastrous results in Libya and Egypt, so Tunisia probably spared itself significant social unrest by bucking the trend.

Pragmatism has also characterized the political behavior of the dominant

post-revolutionary players. Witness the decision of the Islamist Ennahda ("Renaissance") Party and two secular parties to form a governing coalition after the country's first free and fair parliamentary elections in October 2011. Or consider Ennahda's ultimate acquiescence to those who opposed its proposals to insert Islamic law into the constitution and criminalize blasphemy. Ideology similarly took a back seat when President Beji Caïd Essebsi's fiercely anti-Islamist party Nidaa Tounes ("Call of Tunisia") entered a coalition with Ennahda following the 2014 parliamentary elections.

Such decisions have helped keep the transition afloat, though not without a cost. On the secularists' side, the choice to govern alongside Ennahda exacerbated tensions within Nidaa Tounes that partly reflected disagreement over whether to work with the Islamists at all. Nidaa's infighting led to a series of party resignations throughout 2015 and to a formal breakup of the party a year later. The implosion of Nidaa reduced its seat tally in the parliament and made Ennahda, with 69 seats, the largest party in the legisla-

economic front, but it will have come about at the expense of considerable political instability.

For its part, Ennahda's concessions during the constitutional drafting process alienated some of the party's base, as did the decision to enter a coalition with anti-Islamists, some of whom were politically active under the former regime. For two years, Ennahda repeatedly postponed a formal party congress as internal debates continued over the nature of its Islamist identity and the relationship between its political and religious activities. Then, in 2016 the party announced that it would be disavowing the term "political Islam" in favor of "Muslim democracy" and separating its political and religious activities. It remains to be seen whether such pronouncements reflect a deeper ideological shift for the Islamist movement or merely a re-branding, but either way, the fact that Ennahda was moved to issue such dramatic statements suggests the party was looking for ways to maintain and expand a base of support that had been damaged by decisions taken since the uprising.

The low level of civil strife partly reflects a streak of pragmatism that has eluded transitions elsewhere.

ture once again. The ongoing dysfunction within Nidaa has also been partly to blame for the slow pace of reforms in the legislature and the ensuing decision to replace the government of Prime Minister Habib Essid with a national unity government in 2016. The latter may yet prove better able to take some bold steps on the

In short, the main political actors have paid a price for recognizing that a delicate transition requires a minimal degree of consensus. In the moments when consensus proved elusive, Tunisia's vibrant civil society organizations remained a key source of pressure to ensure that the political class made good

on its democratic promises. In October 2015, the Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to four leading Tunisian civil society organizations – the League of Human Rights, the General Labor Union, the Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, and the Order of Lawyers (akin to a bar association) – in recognition of their successful mediation of ongoing political disputes that

electrocuted while standing atop a power pole in protest against persistent joblessness and unfair hiring practices. Smuggling across the Libyan and Algerian borders has increased, in part because the state remains reluctant to clamp down for fear of depriving citizens of such income – even though these smuggling routes are used to transport not only goods like oil and food, but also weapons and terror-

time in any country, and it is especially arduous in transitioning states. Tunisia's transition is unfolding in a very rough neighborhood, so the slow pace of reform creates additional pressures.

## ■ U.S. Policy Implications

In his final State of the Union address on January 12, 2016 President Obama reaffirmed America's support for its allies, noting that "when it comes to every important international issue, people of the world do not look to Beijing or Moscow to lead – they call us." For Tunisia, U.S. support and leadership will be crucial if it is to build on the gains of the past six years and emerge from the next six on stronger democratic footing. Between 2012 and 2015 U.S. bilateral assistance to Tunisia steadily declined, but that trend was reversed after the Bardo and Sousse attacks of 2015 evidently convinced members of Congress that the birthplace of the Arab Spring remained precarious enough to warrant continued investment. Total U.S. assistance to the struggling state since 2011 has reached around \$750 million, in addition to three successive loan guarantees permitting Tunisia to access global capital markets.

In addition to bilateral aid, however, more attention will need to be paid to the regional sources of instability threatening Tunisia's democratic experiment. This will mean exercising U.S. leadership in containing and ultimately resolving the Libyan conflict. It will mean closely monitoring developments in Algeria, where a looming succession crisis, deteriorating economy, and persistent social unrest could throw Africa's largest country into chaos, with clear security implications for Tunisia. And it will mean greater support for and coordination with European allies as they struggle to manage a growing refugee crisis and rebuild their economies, on which Tunisia greatly relies for its own prosperity.

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In the moments when consensus proved elusive, Tunisia's vibrant civil society organizations remained a key source of pressure to ensure that the political class made good on its democratic promises.

had threatened to derail the transition two years prior. The role of these organizations also spoke to the country's undeniable gains in freedom since the uprising. These gains have not extended to all groups, as ongoing restrictions on gay rights organizations make clear. But by and large, Tunisia's flourishing civil society has been able to tackle social, economic, and political issues in unprecedented ways, contributing to a sense that there can be no turning back on matters like free speech, and no tolerance for any return to the law enforcement practices of the pre-2011 police state.

## ■ Causes for Concern

Still, the advances in political and civil liberties have occurred against a backdrop of continuing economic distress and persistent security threats. The bleakest aspect of the transition has been economic. For too many Tunisians, especially those living in the chronically neglected interior regions, the uprising brought little economic improvement and in some cases made conditions worse. Throughout the governorates where the protests originated, unemployment hovers around 25 percent and has reached 40 percent among young adults. In early 2016 riots broke out across the country after an unemployed man was

ists. Tunisia has benefited from successive IMF loans, but it will likely have difficulty honoring the most recent agreement, valued at \$2.9 billion.

The country also faces ongoing security threats, including spillover from the Libyan civil war, terrorist cells routinely uncovered at home, and the prospect of an estimated 6,000 radicalized Tunisians returning from Syria, Iraq, and Libya – the largest single contingent of foreign fighters in those conflicts. The years following the uprising saw a series of jihadist attacks on Tunisian soil, including a 2012 attack against the U.S. embassy, two political assassinations in 2013, and attacks targeting tourists at the Bardo National Museum and a beach in Sousse in 2015 that all but decimated the country's tourism industry. A November 2015 suicide bombing killed 12 members of the Presidential Guard in downtown Tunis – an operation for which the so-called Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility – and led President Essebsi to re-impose a three-month state of emergency. Then in March 2016, an estimated 50 militants with ties to IS in Libya attacked the town of Ben Guerdane near the Libyan border. The ensuing two-day battle left 46 militants, seven civilians, and 12 members of the Tunisian security forces dead. Security sector reform takes

# Weaponizing Refugees

by **BENJAMIN WEINTHAL**

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Willkommenskultur ("Welcome culture") refugee policy of last year has screeched to a grinding halt. Delivering an early December speech at her Christian Democratic Union's annual convention, at which she was reelected as the party's leader and candidate in the next national election with nearly 90 percent of the votes, she declared: "A situation like the one in the last summer of 2015 cannot, should not and must not be repeated."

Merkel, in a move to placate critics of radical Islam, called for a ban of full-veil coverings for women. Her motivation in trying to outlaw this form of Islamic dress came not out of security concerns, but rather as an effort to win back voters from the far-right, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany party. She did issue a caveat to the ban: "wherever legally possible."

Merkel's pro-Islam rhetoric ("Islam belongs to Germany") has largely disappeared from her speeches as the 2017 federal election approaches.

According to a German public opinion poll published in December by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a Social Democratic Party-aligned think tank, 40 percent of respondents said the country is being undermined by Islam, and 32 percent agreed with the statement that it is necessary to combat the government's "current policy." The lax—and at times nonexistent—system of vetting refugees and migrants is a perfect recipe for societal disintegration in the Federal Republic.

The German author and Social Democratic politician Thilo Sarrazin warned in his best-selling 2010 book *Germany*

*Does Away with Itself* that the country's system of unrestricted immigration would propel the Federal Republic toward oblivion. He was widely attacked by German intelligentsia—and by politicians across the political spectrum—for stoking societal discontent. His warning now seems to have been prophetic.

The chancellor's policy of unfettered immigration ignored the threat of "weaponized refugees" from Muslim-majority countries. Take the two most salient examples from 2016:

In July, an Afghani refugee used an ax to wound four passengers on a train in the Bavarian city of Würzburg. A police officer shot the ax-wielding jihadi who yelled "Allahu Akbar" as he slashed his victims. The Islamic State claimed the Afghani as one its soldiers.

estimated 100,000 asylum seekers will be sent back to their home countries.

Merkel's open-door immigration policy is again in the cross-hairs of potent criticism. The police in the southeastern city of Freiburg arrested an Afghani man, Hussein K., for the rape and murder of 19-year-old Maria Ladenburger, who volunteered at a refugee center. Hussein K. drowned Ladenburger, the daughter of a senior EU official. It is unclear if Hussein K. was animated by radical Islam. Germany's widely watched publicly-funded national news show Tagesschau did not report the murder of Ladenburger because it was a regional news item.

Mainstream German politicians – the governing coalition of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats –

Germany's slavish devotion to multiculturalism  
furnishes the philosophical underpinning for a  
bottomless pit of relativity...

A little over a week later, a 27-year-old Syrian refugee detonated a bomb, blowing himself up and injuring 15 people at a concert in the Bavarian city of Ansbach. He had pledged loyalty to the Islamic State in a video found on his mobile telephone.

In late November, Merkel announced that her government would begin to repatriate migrants who have no legal basis to be in Germany. "It cannot be that all young people from Afghanistan come here," said the chancellor. German news media reported that an

have showed little appetite to confront the jihadism embedded in the waves of refugees.

There are historical sensitivities at work in Germany. Writing on the website of *The American Interest*, the foreign policy expert Walter Russell Mead noted: "The refugee lobby makes things worse when it attacks the 'racism,' 'Islamophobia' and 'xenophobia' of 'selfish' publics unwilling to open the doors to refugees..."

Germany's slavish devotion to multiculturalism furnishes the philosophical





Syrian and Iraqi refugees arrive from Turkey to Skala Sykamias, Lesbos island, Greece. (Photo: Georgios Giannopoulos)

underpinning for a bottomless pit of relativity that allowed the immigration crisis to come about. A country that played such a large role in developing the modern philosophy of dialectical thinking (think of George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel)—making necessary connections is front-and-center in this school of thought—has a blind spot when it comes to the interplay between unvetted immigration and terrorism.

Merkel's 11-year tenure has been marked by a "Social Democratization" of her conservative party. She has long-since accomplished the equivalent of U.S. President Ronald Reagan's ability to win over Democratic voters. Merkel's "Reagan Democrats" are mainstream Social Democrats. With Merkel's Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party governing together in a "grand coalition," the largest opposition party in the Bundestag is the Left Party, a mix of disaffected western German trade unionists, and leftists and communists from the former East Germany.

A hyper-politically and socially correct environment does not lend

itself to a sophisticated post-9/11 immigration policy.

The German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV)—the rough equivalent of the FBI—monitors Islamism and is responsible for detecting plots.

The failed German anti-terror system was perhaps best typified by the revelation that a German intelligence agent, who converted to Islam, was recently arrested for seeking to inspire Islamists to carry out an attack against the BfV.

The lack of rigorous pre-employment checks at the BfV is emblematic of Germany's inadequate immigration control process. Authorities still rely on a 1994 law to evaluate candidates for the BfV. Internet searches to check for criminal activity and terrorist ideology are not a standard part of the agency's hiring process.

Security officials issued alarm bells about the dangers of unvetted migration from Muslim countries as early as October 2015. "The integration of hundreds of thousands of illegal migrants in Germany is no longer possible in light of

the numbers and already existing parallel societies," noted a security establishment white paper.

The document stated: "German security agencies... will not be in the position to deal with these imported security problems and the resulting reactions arising from Germany's population."

A senior level security official said, "The great influx of people from all parts of the world will lead to instability in our country," adding, "We are producing extremists through immigration. Mainstream civil society is radicalizing, because the majority don't want migration and they are being forced [to accept it] by the political elite."

He issued a grave warning: Many Germans "will turn away from the constitutional state."

Similarly, Josef Schuster, the head of Germany's Central Council of Jews, said, "Many Syrians and Arab migrants grow up in an environment in which hostility to Jews and Israel is common practice."

Schuster, whose organization represents the country's 100,000 Jews, continued, "When one lives in a country in

which one is told for 30 years that Israel is the No. 1 arch-enemy and Jews from the outset are all bad, then one does not simply arrive in Germany and that is suddenly forgotten.”

Lethal antisemitism is a crucial component of jihadism and reactionary politics in the Arab world. The European-based, Islamic-animated terrorism

What could influence a significant change in Europe’s counter-terrorism behavior? Sadly, sustained terrorism attacks along the lines of the November, 2015 Paris massacres in which jihadists murdered 130 people.

Mass terror attacks hammering away at civilians on a monthly basis in large European cities would produce pro-

## Mass terror attacks hammering away at civilians on a monthly basis in large European cities would produce profound security changes.

that has resulted in the murder of Jews in Denmark, France and Belgium has—one can argue—only just begun.

When Schuster raised his concerns with Merkel in early October, she merely said, “We must take care of that.” She provided no specifics. Merkel’s comment to Schuster mirrors the ad-hoc component to Germany’s security apparatus.

Germany’s central European location – and its feeble counter-terrorism measures – make it a natural conduit for terrorists concealed as migrants.

The same smuggling operation that brought a terrorist to France who executed the Paris terror attacks was involved in aiding a terror sleeper cell in Germany. In September, the German authorities arrested three Syrian members who disguised themselves as refugees and were waiting for instructions to be activated.

A month later, U.S. intelligence provided a tip to the German authorities that the Syrian Jaber al-Bakr intended to bomb an airport in Berlin. To their credit, three Syrian refugees were able to detain al-Bakr before he executed his bomb plot. There have been additional cases of the German authorities impeding planned terrorists acts by migrants.

But Europe is in a mode of political and operational inertia. Comprehensive anti-terrorism strategies are non-existent. France remains in state of extended emergency.

found security changes. In the absence of such wide-scale attacks, European countries will continue to limp on both legs in the war on terrorism.

The rhetoric of French leaders stands in stark contrast to other continental European politicians. The socialist French President Francois Hollande said in 2016: “The fact there is a problem [in France] with Islam is true. Nobody doubts that.” He added “there are too many arrivals, of immigration that shouldn’t be there.”

## Asad has nimbly exploited a war of displacement and refugee crisis to stop the 2011 democratic upheaval against his regime.

Hollande declared that he will not seek re-election in 2017. The socialist hawk Manuel Valls announced his candidacy along with competitors from the extreme-right Front National and the mainstream conservative party.

France’s presidential election might be the bellwether moment in 2017. A general election is also slated for the Netherlands in the same year. Members of the Netherlands parliament voted dramatically in favor of outlawing Islamic face veils donned by women in public situations. The November vote was passed by 132 members of parliament from a total of 150.

All of this helps to explain that there are shifts unfolding in Europe. In a year where unpredictability seems to be the only constant, it is difficult to gauge if tough leadership will emerge to crack-down on Islamic-animated terrorism among migrants.

The post-9/11 period in Europe has witnessed politicians (think of Nicolas Sarkozy’s presidency in France 2007-2012) who claimed to crack the whip like a German school teacher on immigration-linked terrorism but instead practiced the reformist deed.

France’s greatest president, Charles de Gaulle, neatly captured the phenomenon: “The graveyards are full of indispensable men.”

To combat lethal migrant terrorism, Europe and NATO will need to internalize that Bashar al-Asad’s war against his civilian population is the root cause. Europe will need to take the war to Syria. Kinan Masalmeh, a 13-year-old Syrian refugee, provided the solution for Europe in 2015 while in Hungary: “Please help the Syrians...The Syrians need help now. Just stop the war. We don’t want to stay in Europe. Just stop the war.”

Asad has nimbly exploited a war of displacement and refugee crisis to stop the 2011 democratic upheaval against his regime. The winners are Syria’s strategic partners—the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia. The losers are Syrians.

Europe’s misguided migrant and refugee policy has advanced Asad’s war aims. Sadly.

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# Egypt in the Crosshairs

by **NERVANA MAHMOUD**

Egypt is now facing a complex asymmetrical war on various fronts. On November 10, 2014, the Sinai-based al-Qaeda-affiliated Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM), the country's most active jihadist group, formally

sovereignty as a result of the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, and the neglect of the area by successive Egyptian governments thereafter, made it a permissive venue for radical groups in which to organize and operate. This, coupled with

leader, Sheikh Abdel-Latif Moussa, during fighting in the city of Rafah on the border with Egypt the following August. The incident raised the alarm about Gaza-Egypt border tunnels and the potential links between Gaza radicals and Sinai-based ones, especially after 2010's rocket attacks fired from Egypt's Sinai on Israel's port of Eilat and Jordan's adjacent Aqaba.

The year 2011 was a crucial one in the jihadi evolution of the Sinai. The anti-Mubarak uprisings that spring were followed by an almost complete collapse of security in the peninsula. In that vacuum, a new, more ruthless group called Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) was formed, and soon became the most prominent Sinai-based radical faction. ABM employed al-Qaeda's tactics, and routinely referred to and praised its leaders in its statements.

The linkages ran deeper, too. For example, Egyptian officials have alleged that a long-time Egyptian Islamic Jihad leader named Ahmed Salama Mabrouk, a subordinate of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, has played a leading role in ABM. As well, one of its main founders, Tawfiq Mohammed Freij, a veteran of Tawhid wal-Jihad and a close companion of both Khaled Mosaad and Nasseer Khamis El-Malakhi, was later described by the group itself as "one of the unique fingerprints in the history of the jihadi work in Sinai." It was Freij who introduced the idea of attacking pipelines that supplied gas to Israel. The first of the resulting attacks was launched in February 2011, and grew to become a major tactic utilized by ABM.

The anti-Mubarak uprisings [in 2011] were followed by an almost complete collapse of security in the peninsula.

declared its allegiance to the Islamic State (IS). Simultaneously, on Egypt's western flank, Libyan fighters in the city of Derna also pledged their allegiance to the Islamic State. IS has since claimed responsibility for attacks in Cairo, and may have loyal factions in the nearby Gaza Strip.

These developments are not entirely unexpected. For the Islamic State, operating in the Arab world's most populous nation provides both credibility and legitimacy. But IS's intrusion has been facilitated by two trends. First, Egypt has consistently neglected its periphery. The North Sinai, for example, had slipped from the control of the central government long before the rise of IS in the country. Second, while the fascination of rejectionist radicals with the concept of a medieval-style Islamic State is not new, Egypt's combination of vulnerable land and radical sympathies makes it a particularly enticing destination.

## ■ **A Lawless Region**

The Sinai has long served as a hotspot for Islamic militancy. The return of the peninsula to Egyptian

its proximity to the territory of the "Zionist enemy," made the Sinai an ideal location for jihadists.

The first jihadist group to exploit the peninsula was Tawhid wal-Jihad. Founded in 1997 by two friends from the Sinai city of Arish, Khaled Mosaad and Nasseer Khamis El-Malakhi, the group focused on attacking posh southern tourist resorts in Sinai. It is believed to be behind the 2004 attack in Taba and Nuweiba, the attack in Sharm al-Sheikh the following year, and subsequently the 2006 attack in Dahab. The group's reign of terror was short-lived, however; Khaled Mosaad was killed by Egyptian security forces in 2005, his comrade-in-arms Nasseer Khamis El-Malakhi in 2006.

Relative calm was restored in the Sinai thereafter, but radical militancy did not vanish. On the other side of the border, in Gaza, a group called Jund Ansar Allah emerged in November 2008 and briefly proclaimed "the birth of an Islamic emirate." The Palestinian Hamas Islamic Resistance movement, which serves as the ruler of Gaza, killed Jund's



## ■ *Morsi's Rule and Beyond*

During the tenure of Mohamed Morsi as Egypt's president (July 2012 to July 2013), the security situation in the Sinai did not improve. In August 2012, gunmen there killed 15 Egyptian border guards and hijacked armored vehicles to launch an attack across the Israeli border. Egypt blamed the attack on militants from Gaza, who allegedly entered Egypt through tunnels beneath the border. Subsequently, in September 2012, ABM claimed responsibility for a cross-border attack in which an Israeli soldier was killed. The same month, the multinational peacekeeping headquarters in Sinai was also attacked.

After President Morsi's ouster, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis intensified its attacks on the Egyptian state in a carefully crafted move to exploit the turbulent Egyptian political scene and to boost popularity among the country's Islamist youth. In August 2013, a rocket-propelled grenade killed 25 Egyptian soldiers near Rafah, and the following month, six soldiers were killed in a double suicide bomb attack in Rafah. The same month, Egypt's Interior Minister, Mohammed Ibrahim, survived an assassination attempt. A month later, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis released a video documenting the assassination attempt. The group was also allegedly behind the attack on security headquarters in the Sinai town of Al-Tor in October 2013, and a car bomb explosion near an Egyptian military in-

a step further and shot down an Egyptian military helicopter with a surface-to-air missile, killing five soldiers.

Over the intervening years, Egyptian authorities have attempted to crack down on Ansar Beit al-Maqdis—with at least some success. In March 2014, the group announced the death of its founder, Tawfiq Mohammed Freij, and another member, Mohamed al-Sayed Mansour al-Toukhi. In April 2014, an Egyptian court formally designated Ansar Beit al-Maqdis as a terrorist group. Later, in October, the Egyptian army announced the death of another senior ABM operative, Shehata Farahan, during a raid in Rafah.

## ■ *The Islamic State's Intrusion*

Following its pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State in November 2014, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis renamed itself Wilayat Sinai, or the Islamic State's province of Sinai, to fit in with its new affiliation. Egyptian and Israeli intelligence are still in the dark about the identities of the people running Wilayat Sinai. Israel's military admits that it doesn't know who the military commander of the group is, and there are no indications that Egypt has better information.

The motive behind the group's shift in loyalty was unclear. One possible cause was mobility. Prior to the announcement, ABM had been keen to prove that the killing of its senior operatives did not hamper its activities.

The edict was bad news for ABM, as it involved a curfew in North Sinai, the heavy presence of Egyptian army units, and a government decision to create a buffer zone along the Gaza border, during which it demolished thousands of homes along the border. All of these factors restricted the group's freedom of action—and might have helped it to decide to seek more strategically advantageous support from the better funded, equipped, and increasingly popular Islamic State.

What is clear, however, is that ABM's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State, as Mokhtar Awad and Samuel Tadros have written, has created the specter of competition with al-Qaeda. This is because part of the organization remained loyal to al-Qaeda, and the shift to identification with IS alienated a significant number of jihadis on the Egyptian mainland. The most significant defection from the group was the loss of ex-special forces officer Hisham Ashmawy, who later formed a new group loyal to al-Qaeda called al-Mourabitoun.

This, however, did not diminish the new Wilayat Sinai's lethality. On January 28, 2015, the group launched multiple simultaneous attacks involving car bombs and mortar rounds against several army and police positions, killing at least 26 people and causing Egyptian authorities to extend the curfew in North Sinai. The attacks did not stop, however. In March, a suicide bomber killed a civilian and wounded 30 policemen. In April, at least 14 people, mostly Egyptian policemen, were killed in separate operations when militants attacked a police station.

According to scholar Hassan Hassan, the Islamic State's franchise in Sinai has benefited significantly from the resources and expertise of jihadists fighting in Syria and Libya. Jihadist returnees injected new life into the weakening organization and helped to professionalize it. Today, Wilayat Sinai is arguably the most developed branch of IS outside of the Syrian and Iraqi conflict zone. In terms of both its communications media

...Islamic State's franchise in Sinai has benefited significantly from the resources and expertise of jihadists fighting in Syria and Libya.

telligence compound in the Suez Canal city of Ismailia the same month. Later, in November, a suicide bomber rammed his explosive-laden car into a convoy of buses carrying off-duty soldiers between Rafah and Arish. In 2014, the group took

Two weeks after Shehata Farahan was killed, the group conducted one of its deadliest attacks in North Sinai, killing at least 31 soldiers and forcing Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to declare a state of emergency in the North Sinai



*The Sinai Province of Islamic State, also known as Wilayat Sinai, released propaganda video showing the murder of hostages. (Screenshot)*

output and operations, the group's modus operandi is remarkably similar to the way IS operates at home. Its acquisition by the Islamic State has made it what it is today—a tightly organized group capable of inflicting damage in a largely lawless territory, using a logistical regional network that encompasses Libya, Sudan, Sinai, Gaza, and Syria.

Recent reports suggest increasing cooperation between Hamas and the Islamic State's so-called Sinai Province. This cooperation culminated in a prolonged secret visit to Gaza in December 2015 by IS Sinai's military chief Shadi al-Menai, who held talks with his counterparts in Hamas's military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (IDQB).

## ■ A Libyan Front?

In February 2015, the Islamic State, having established itself in Derna, eastern Libya, in late 2014, released a disturbing video showing the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christian workers who had been kidnapped from Sirte, Libya, a year earlier. In retaliation, Egypt's military carried out a series of air strikes against Islamic State militants in Libya.

Other reports alleged that Egyptian Special Forces launched a ground attack in Derna, capturing dozens of Islamist militants. However, Egypt's response to the IS threat near its western border was rather restrained, at least publicly.

Apart from Derna, the presence of IS on the Libya-Egypt border has not been proven. According to Mohamed Eljarh, a Libyan analyst and a nonresident fellow of the Atlantic Council, there is no evidence of the Islamic State's presence on the Libya-Egypt border. However, there have been incidents in which IS militants were arrested in the desert areas south and east of Tobruk as they were heading toward Derna. As such, it would be safe to say that the ISIS story in eastern Libya is clearly far from over.

Further complicating matters for Egypt, in September 2015 the Islamic State announced its presence in Egypt's Western Desert, and admitted its cadres clashed with the Egyptian army. A day after this alarming announcement, Egyptian Army aircraft hunting for militants in the desert accidentally bombed a convoy of Mexican tourists, killing 12 and wounding 10. The incident

highlighted the inability of Egypt's military establishment to protect its vulnerable 1,200-kilometer border with Libya.

Trade between the Western Egyptian Matrouh governorate and Libya has fallen by 80 percent due to unrest in the neighboring country and the frequent closure of the Salloum crossing, according to Matrouh tribal chief Beshir al-Obaidy. This, in turn, lays the foundation for further disorder, since economic depression has always helped militant groups both to survive and recruit.

Indeed, Libya has become Egypt's new Achilles' heel. The country's failure to form a unified government, and the ongoing rivalry between various Libyan factions, makes Egypt's task of securing its border much harder. While it is true that the Tobruk government in eastern Libya has allowed the Egyptian army to operate occasionally inside its territories, those operations are not sufficient to secure the common border. Egypt needs more sophisticated surveillance equipment and intelligence. The Mexican tourist incident not only highlighted the pitfalls of tackling the Western Desert, but also showed how tense and

agitated the Egyptian army units are operating in the relatively new Western border theater.

### ■ *Brotherhood under fire*

These conditions to Egypt's east and west have put increasing strain on the country's now-ousted Islamist movement. The tenure of Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated government saw a generally lax official approach to counterterrorism, raising questions about whether it had concluded some sort of deal with

This disorder has played into the hands of other Islamist groups. While Eric Trager of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy argues that there has been little evidence of younger Muslim Brotherhood members joining the Islamic State, at least so far, some Sinai tribal leaders fear that the death sentences issued against former President Mohamed Morsi and other Brotherhood members will push disaffected youth toward extremist groups now operating in the Sinai. Furthermore, al-Qaeda has tried to attract disenchanted Muslim

Army is based in Suez and is responsible for the southern part of the Suez Canal region. Responsibility for Sinai, after its return to Egyptian sovereignty following the peace deal with Israel, was allocated to both the Second and Third Field Armies, with North Sinai under the former and the South under the latter. This geographical distribution has never been ideal for dealing with militants, who are not confined to a single location and have to use Sinai's mountains and little villages as hideaway bases. Moreover, Sinai's position as a buffer zone between Egypt and Israel, with its attendant restrictions on Egypt's military presence in the Peninsula, has compounded the problem.

Egypt's military solution to the increased jihadist activity in North Sinai was largely limited to setting larger and more numerous checkpoints along the narrow northern coastal highway. However, instead of quelling militancy, this tactic exposed army ranks in those checkpoints to ambushes. In addition, militants regularly planted roadside bombs targeting army patrols and reinforcements from Cairo.

The military establishment then opted to launch massive military operations to restore order in North Sinai and confront Islamist militants. For example, in 2011, the army launched a large-scale hunt for militants under the name Operation Eagle. In 2012, a similar operation, Operation Sinai, was launched, during which the army started to destroy tunnels under the border with Gaza, with the aim of cutting weapons smuggling and the movement of jihadis across the border. Since then, the systematic destruction of tunnels and the hunting down and killing of senior ABM militant cadres has continued. However, all of the above measures have had little impact on the group's ability to launch deadly attacks.

Things are beginning to change, though. In early 2015, major attacks by militants killed at least 27 people, mostly soldiers. In response, President Abdel

Egypt's military solution to the increased jihadist activity in North Sinai was largely limited to setting larger and more numerous checkpoints along the narrow northern coastal highway.

local militants. Even if it did, however, there were limits to this collusion, both then and now—in large part because the Islamic State and the Brotherhood are fundamentally at odds with one another. As Michael Horowitz of the Levantine Group explains, the Islamic State has dismissed the Brotherhood as a “secular project,” likely because the group accepted the “Western concept” of democracy.

The Muslim Brotherhood has historically maintained that it is a moderate, non-violent Islamist group, although Morsi's ouster tested this proposition. Since its fall from political grace, the Brotherhood has been riven by widespread anger and deep political divisions. As a whole, the Brotherhood is now sharply divided and lacks a cohesive strategy to counter the government and stop young elements from joining more radical Islamist groups. According to Ahmed Rami, a spokesman for the Brotherhood-connected Freedom and Justice Party, since July 2013 the movement has been facing one of the deepest crises in its history—one that is both organizational and tactical.

Brotherhood members. Thus, in October 2015, Hisham Ashmawy, leader of the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Mourabitoun, released a video message calling on the youth of the Rabaa and Nahda Brotherhood camps, who had been forcibly evicted by Egyptian security forces, to join his group. He called on them to attack police and army ranks, but—unlike the tactics of the Islamic State—to do so within the boundaries of sharia (Islamic religious law).

### ■ *An evolving response*

Egypt's government – and specifically its military, which serves as the principal instrument of official counterterrorism policy – has struggled to keep pace with this changing geopolitical landscape.

This is in part because the structure of Egypt's armed forces has not changed significantly since 1968. The late Gamal Abdel Nasser formed the Second and Third Field Armies following Egypt's defeat by Israel in 1967. The Second Field Army is based in Ismailia and is responsible for the northern part of the Suez Canal region. The Third Field



Fattah al-Sisi made two important decisions. He established a unified military command east of the Suez Canal, tasked with fighting radical groups in the Sinai Peninsula. He also pledged \$1.3 billion to develop the impoverished area. Both decisions indicated a major shift in Egypt's military leadership away from its de facto mind-set of fighting conventional wars. It also showed Egypt's readjustment to the evolving reality of a growing insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula.

al-Azhar University in which Sisi called for a "revolution" in Islam to reform interpretations of the faith.

The outcome of these steps, however, is far from certain. Despite recent losses, the Islamic State is still keen to prove its viability. In October 2015, militants kidnapped three pro-government tribal fighters manning a checkpoint in Sinai. Eleven police conscripts were injured in a blast that targeted a tank in North Sinai's Arish. In Cairo, IS claimed

issue. al-Azhar even pressed charges against reformist Islamic researcher Islam Beheiry, accusing him of insulting religion. Later, a Cairo court sentenced Beheiry to five years in prison for insulting Islam.

### More to come

Neither terrorism nor the dream of a medieval-style Islamic state is new to Egypt. What is new today, however, are the changes in both local and regional conditions that have complicated and in many case frustrated Egypt's counter-terrorism efforts. The terrorist groups active against the Egyptian state today are fueled by a lethal triangle of factors: a disenfranchised periphery, divided (and divisive) national politics, and increasingly angry Islamist youth. This trio of causes virtually guarantees that Egypt's cycle of terror will continue for the foreseeable future.

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Terrorist groups active against the Egyptian state today are fueled by a lethal triangle of factors: a disenfranchised periphery, divided national politics, and increasingly angry Islamist youth.

This military reshuffle has been matched by other measures. Since taking office, President Sisi has approved a stringent anti-terrorism law that sets special courts and details sentences for various terrorism crimes, ranging from five years to the death penalty. He has also tried to address the ideological background of jihadism, most prominently in a January 2015 address to Islamic scholars at

it had planted a car bomb at an intersection near the pyramids. In response, Egypt has extended by three months a state of emergency imposed on parts of Northern Sinai.

Ideologically, meanwhile, the government has encountered significant resistance among al-Azhar scholars to the reform of Islamic thought, despite Sisi's repeated entreaties to tackle the

The screenshot shows the Jewish Policy Center website. At the top is the logo and the tagline "CONTEMPORARY CONSERVATIVE THOUGHT". Below is a navigation bar with links: HOME, ABOUT, PUBLICATIONS, NEWS BRIEFS, EVENTS AND MEDIA, SUBSCRIBE, and DONATE. A "TRENDING NOW" section highlights "Jewish Policy Center Unveils Redesigned Website". The main content area features a large article "Iraqi Forces Retake Fallujah Neighborhood" with a photo of soldiers. To the right are smaller articles: "Jordan's King Dissolves Parliament Ahead of Elections", "French Political Gymnastics & How to Help the Palestinians", "Take Advantage of the Reserves for Innovation", and "Washington to Arm Libyan Militias". At the bottom, there are three featured sections: "InSIGHT: Informed Analysis & Opinion" with "Reversing Israel on the Golan Heights", "InCONTEXT: Our Take on the News" with "Washington to Arm Libyan Militias", and "Our Latest Quarterly" with "Israel: Beyond the Headlines".

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# Kurdistan After Mosul – A Time for U.S. Selfishness

by **ERNIE AUDINO**

**N**o one successfully ends a war without first being clear as to what he wants out of it. An unclear objective is Pig Latin for “no exit strategy,” and even a clear objective is no better when it is of a low perceived value. The moment the cost of a fight exceeds the value of the desired end state is the same moment the soon-to-be loser starts looking for a way to go home. If a war is worth fighting, it is worth winning, so if the next U.S. President decides to pursue in Iraq what he has a reputation for doing elsewhere, winning, he will need to do what his predecessor has not - clearly define our objective for the Day After Mosul and make the case that our pursuing that objective is important.

A key piece of that objective will have to be a strong, if not independent, Kurdistan.

Here’s part of the reason - the other two options, a Baghdad capable of governing effectively or a Tehran allowed to fill the vacuum, are either infeasible or not acceptable, in that order.

Look at Baghdad. Since the signing of the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 and the subsequent British and French mandates, poor governance in Baghdad has been the rule, not the exception. The current regime of Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al Abadi is little different. Where it operates, it is only as a reflex to Iranian muscle. Otherwise, Baghdad is a capital chronically unable to execute the basic functions of national governance. It cannot secure its borders. It cannot provide for the internal security of its citizens. It cannot legislate consistently

for recurring failure to maintain a quorum in its parliament. It cannot maintain a judiciary independent of influence from the country’s supreme Shia cleric. Nor does it function in compliance with express constitutional requirements for the disbursement of federal revenues. It is a capital of a country that is collapsing of its own weight. No reasonable indicator remains to suggest Baghdad has the potential to effectively govern the expected post-Mosul chaos.

Look at Tehran. Beginning in 2006, if not earlier, Tehran committed to a foreign policy purposed to dominate Iraq and expand Iranian influence across the co-religionist Shia Crescent leading through Syria to the Mediterranean. In 2014 Tehran quickly exploited the *fatwa* of Iraqi Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani to build an army of Shia militias inside Iraq. Raised, supported and cadred by Iranian Special Forces, these are the so-called

Shia militias - they provide 15,000 of the 40,000 fighters involved in the seizure of the city. So far the Shia militias have kept to avenues of approach plotted along the western side of Mosul, but the name they’ve chosen for their offensive, Operation We Are Returning, should chill the city’s Sunni inhabitants and provoke their Turkish brothers to the north.

We’ve tried optimism. We’ve transitioned post-invasion U.S. hard power in Iraq to an overwhelming reliance on soft power. The U.S. and others simultaneously adhered to a policy that injected, and continues to inject, billions of dollars “by, through and with Baghdad” to enable the country to stand on its own two feet and be capable of living in peace with its citizens and its neighbors. That course of action, tragically, has proven unsuitable to the task at hand. The result - Iraq has become a weakling encircled by wolves, a vacuum that operates like

The moment the cost of a fight exceeds the value of the desired end state is the same moment the soon-to-be loser starts looking for a way to go home.

Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their strength has reached 110,000 men under arms. They now constrain the political freedom of maneuver of the Iraqi prime minister, and their combat power has become indispensable to the Iraqi Army. It cannot conduct major operations without them. As the Iraqi Army moves north on Mosul, so move the

a sucking chest wound drawing deeply into its vital organs the malevolent vectors capable of killing it and the interests of others tied to it.

So, what’s left? An emergent Kurdistan. It’s not a perfect Kurdistan, and it’s not yet a very strong Kurdistan, but the Kurds have accomplished in the north of Iraq much of what we had hoped for



Two Kurdish fighters with the YPG. (Photo: Flickr/Kurdishstruggle)

the rest of the country. When in 1991 the Coalition no-fly zone pushed Saddam Hussein off their backs, the Kurds seized the opportunity and lifted themselves from the ashes of genocide. They subsequently established the most peaceful, the most democratic, the most industrious, the most moderate and Western-friendly portion of Iraq. It's not without blemish, but it has set the example for the rest of a country and a region that is trying to kill it. We can choose to continue to ignore this reality, although our adversaries don't, or we can get with the program and directly help Kurdistan achieve its full potential.

But our doing so will make sense only if we are first of clear mind as to what we want out of Iraq and are convinced that a strong Kurdistan helps us achieve it. These specific U.S. interests are relevant and should be indisputable:

- The destruction of ISIS as an organization
- The defeat of jihadi ideology
- The reestablishment of a balance of power in the Persian Gulf
- More democratic allies in the Gulf, not fewer
- Assured access to energy

Does a strong Kurdistan advance these interests? Yes. Here's why:

ISIS will not be destroyed without the Kurds. The Kurdish track record has been one of consistent victory in battle against ISIS. Not perfect, but overwhelmingly effective. This is not the case with any other major group in the fight. The Kurds provide the most trusted and effective indigenous ground force in Iraq (and in Syria). They have operated as the obvious main effort against ISIS since the Iraqi Army abandoned Mosul in the face of ISIS in June 2014. When the Iraqi troops ran away, the Kurds stepped forward. With the notable exception of Sinjar at the extended, western frontier on the Syrian border with Iraq, the Kurds quickly seized and held an initial front line that ran 600 miles along ISIS-held territory. They then advanced to clear huge areas beyond that, to include reclaiming Sinjar and the seizure of blocking positions to the west, north and east of Mosul. They maintain these positions to this day and their doing so isolates Mosul, the necessary pre-condition to the current attempt by the renewed Iraqi Army to reclaim it. The Kurds can't and won't do it all, but they can and do keep Kurdish-controlled soil free of ISIS elements at any militarily significant level.

The defeat of jihadi ideology will be driven by moderate Sunni voices. This

long-term battle will be won by the triumph of persistent moderate Islam over extreme. Victory will be a function of a corresponding debate within Sunni Islam. The United States and its Western allies will not have an effective voice in this debate, but they will play a role. It will be to enable, promote, support and defend the moderate Sunni voice. The Kurds provide a well-known and consistent part of that voice, and theirs has already proven an effective counter to the spread of jihadi ideology.

Need evidence? Look no further than the geographic boundaries of the black flag of ISIS inside Iraq. Its footprint precisely matches the areas corresponding to the country's Sunni Arab demographic, but not to those of the Sunni Kurdish demographic. The several million Kurds in Iraq are overwhelmingly Sunni, but the appeal of jihadism amongst them has been infinitesimally small. This is nothing new. Kurds have long been overwhelmingly resistant in the face of outside Islamist groups who, since the early 1960s, have proselytized amongst Iraqi Kurds, primarily into the slender and remote Hawraman region along the Iranian border. There is a lesson here, should we want to look for it.

Reestablishing a balance of power in the Gulf means checking Iranian power, not accommodating it. Since the withdrawal of U.S. combat power from Iraq, Iran has emerged as the dominant power in the Gulf. Iranian influence now reaches across Iraq, Syria, portions of Saudi Arabia and elsewhere and provides a key motivator for much of the Sunni Arab support for ISIS. In Iraq, Tehran now enjoys functional control of Baghdad and the southern 60 percent of Iraq and is expanding its muscular reach north. Already, Iranian proxies, the Shia militias, have clashed with Kurdish peshmerga forces along the boundaries of Kurdish-controlled soil, and the tens of thousands of additional Shia fighters participating in the offensive to reclaim Mosul are seizing terrain between the city and the Syrian border. Unless checked, Tehran will



soon acquire a land-bridge into northern Syria and, with Iranian combat power now surrounding the Kurdish Region of Iraq on three sides, will gain positions from which to compel Kurdish behavior in the future.

No U.S. interest is served by ignoring these territorial ambitions of Iran. The next American president can immediately begin to disrupt them, of course, but he must be willing to do something his predecessors have not - establish a permanent, large-scale U.S. military base on Kurdish soil in the north of Iraq. The Kurds have been asking for such a base for years, and the Turks will welcome it as a way to keep Iran away from its southern border.

Rational U.S. foreign policy is proposed to promote more democratic allies, not less. The Kurdish north of Iraq

Baghdad where the Shia-dominated Iraqi Ministry of Defense bars anything it does not want transferred to Kurdish hands. Under the combined costs of fighting a war and simultaneously providing shelter for the nearly two million refugees seeking safety with the Kurds, the KRG is running out of money.

The next president can change this policy, of course, and he can begin immediately in two ways. First, by authorizing the direct, U.S. equipping of the peshmerga through the Kurdish capitol of Erbil, rather than through Baghdad, and second, by orchestrating an immediate increase in direct U.S. economic support to Erbil.

Maintaining access to energy means keeping it in the hands of allies, not in the clutches of adversaries. Among OPEC countries Iraq is second

imports 28 percent and France imports 17 percent. Other European dependencies are even higher. Poland imports 91 percent of its energy from Russia, the Czech Republic imports 73 percent, Finland imports 76 percent, Lithuania imports 92 percent, Slovakia imports 98 percent, Hungary imports 86 percent, Sweden imports 46 percent and Greece imports 40 percent.

But the Europeans are not the only ones dependent on Russian oil - the Russians are, too. Energy exports comprise a full 70 percent of Russia's annual exports and total \$500 billion and 52 percent of the entire Russian federal budget. Russian energy exports to the EU account for 84 percent of all Russian oil exports and 76 percent of Russian natural gas exports.

Should President-Elect Donald Trump determine to exploit this Russian vulnerability, he might consider, in part, immediately endorsing and promoting Kurdish oil exports, something President Obama has refused to do. Erbil and Ankara have already constructed a pipeline north to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean. Both capitals are incentivized to keep Kurdish oil flowing, and the Europeans are motivated to diversify their energy markets.

As members of the incoming presidential administration prepare to take their seats in Washington and begin fresh reviews of U.S. strategy for Iraq, they will begin at the end, the place where American interests are served. An interesting thing about such interests, however, is that sometimes the important ones are shared by others. Perhaps the great Kurdish nationalist, Mustafa Barzani, said it best while standing on a battlefield in northern Iraq in 1962 and requesting help from the United States. Quoting the 13th Century Persian poet, Saadi, he said, "Joint interests make for the best of allies."

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## The Kurds provide the most trusted and effective indigenous ground force in Iraq (and in Syria).

provides our only friendly democratic ally in the Gulf region, and with Israel it makes for one of only two in the Middle East. These are reasons enough to vigorously promote it, but those of weak knees caution against anything that might be perceived as support for Kurdish independence. They need not worry, because the real issue is not whether the next U.S. president supports Kurdish independence. It's what he's doing to prepare for it.

This is because Iraq is leaving Kurdistan, not the other way around. Iraq is now divided by major regional actors who have entered it in force to secure their interests, and two years ago Baghdad ceased all constitutionally required federal payments to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In the face of this, the Obama administration remains wedded to a tottering government in Baghdad incapable of functioning on behalf of its citizens. Even U.S. equipment intended for the peshmerga is sent first to

only to Saudi Arabia in terms of proven and potential oil reserves, but nearly two thirds of that oil lies beneath Iraqi soil currently dominated by Tehran. The remaining third lies beneath Kurdish soil, but Iranian combat power now occupies terrain on three sides of it. No Western interest is served by ignoring a condition that in the future can support Iranian throttling of Kurdish oil exports.

Here's why this is particularly important. Kurdish energy reserves are impressive, 50 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, 80 billion of unproven reserves and nearly 10 trillion cubic meters of natural gas. They have the potential to help undermine Russian energy levers on NATO partner, Turkey, and the European Union. Turkey annually imports 35 percent of its oil and 60 percent of its natural gas from Russia. Germany and Belgium each annually imports 30 percent of their energy from Russia, the Netherlands imports 34 percent, Italy

# Justice, Glory, Gold and Vengeance

review by SHOSHANA BRYEN

**R**ead Ike's Gamble twice – once as history and once as metaphor.

The temptation is to insert “Obama” for “Eisenhower” and read on, but if you do, you will miss Michael Doran's fascinating look at the general-turned-president and the politics of the time in which he served. Retrospectively, Americans tend to think of the mid-1950s as the halcyon days. The big war was over with the United States as the only superpower and the only Allied country without massive damage on the home front. The Baby Boom was in full swing and the GI Bill providing an education to millions who had served abroad. There were Levittowns and poodle skirts. Elvis Presley's “[You Ain't Nothin' but a] Hound Dog” was released in 1956. And Dwight D. Eisenhower, after ending the Korean War, was generally considered a genial, not-too-bright president who played golf as much as he did anything else (OK, shades of Obama here).

The post-World War II period was also the last gasp of British and French imperialism, and the rise of American influence in the Middle East. It was when Eisenhower's patience with Winston Churchill ran thin and finally lapsed. It was the first serious British-American realignment since the War of 1812. It was when, for the first time, America's misunderstandings about Arab and Muslim nationalism mattered. And, for the first time, Washington was in the international driver's seat, dealing with the transformation of the USSR from wartime ally to atomic bomb-armed adversary.

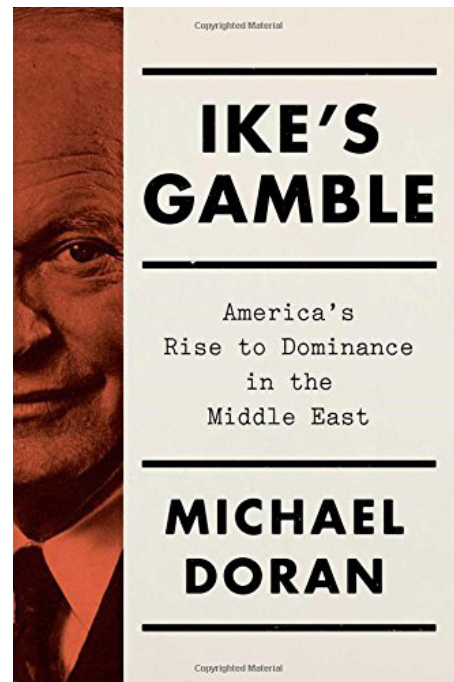
Doran, a former Middle East advisor to the White House and deputy assistant secretary of defense, captures the

diplomatic tone perfectly. He doesn't seem to care much for Churchill, however, or at least Churchill in his post-war incarnation as prime minister.

Beginning with Churchill's 1953 visit to Washington to bid farewell to Harry Truman, Doran paints him as stuck in “empire mode” and eager to get on to relations with Eisenhower, with whom he was intimately familiar. But Eisenhower was no longer Supreme Allied Commander, charged with bringing home the prize demanded by his civilian boss, President Franklin Roosevelt (the “unconditional surrender” of Nazi Germany). Now he would decide the prize – and he was already writing the British out of the Middle East.

Eisenhower showed Churchill a polite face and left to his subordinates the task of telling the prime minister. Anthony Eden, Churchill's foreign secretary, agreed with Ike's criticism of Churchill, but he, too, had a uniquely British way of viewing his country, the United States and the wider/colonized world – an “odd couple” with England as James Bond and the U.S. as Felix Leiter. Eisenhower was no more accommodating of Eden's view than Churchill's view.

He had his own – or rather, he had Secretary of State John Foster Dulles view, bolstered by a cast of characters from the British Foreign Office, the State Department and the CIA. One familiar name is Kermit Roosevelt, but the other two key players are almost unknown in American circles – retired Brig. Gen. Henry Byroade and British diplomat Evelyn Shuckburgh. Doran makes them politically understandable and three-dimensional. Dulles



*Ike's Gamble:  
America's Rise to  
Dominance in the  
Middle East*

Michael Doran

Free Press

told Shuckburgh that U.S. policy was designed to “deflate the Jews,” at which Shuckburgh didn’t bat an eyelash.

Eisenhower’s chief priority appears to have been to keep the Arabs on “our side” of the Cold War. This would entail:

- Pulling as many countries as possible into the Northern Tier – an alignment of Turkey and Iraq with room for Pakistan and Jordan – particularly Egypt’s General Gamal Abdel Nasser, and bribing him as necessary.

- Separating the United States from the colonialist French and British in the eyes of the Arab world – again particularly Nasser, which entailed pushing the British out of the Suez Canal Zone as quickly as possible as a down payment to the Egyptian leader; and

- Solving the Arab-Israeli crisis by leaning on Israel as the remaining currency with which Nasser would be bribed. “What we had in mind was (a) slightly smaller Israel,” as Byroade said.

What Eisenhower – or Dulles, et al. – missed was that Egypt’s strong man had his own priorities.

Nasser’s chief objective was to assert his position as leader of the Arab nationalist movement, not as an American ally. Thus he was far more interested in destroying the Northern Tier than in joining it because Iraq was Egypt’s chief rival in the region, not a brotherly Sunni Arab state.

Byroade and Shuckburgh both professed surprise at this. Shuckburgh wrote in his diary, “The Egyptians are in a state of fury about (Iraqi Prime Minister) Nuri’s determination to sign a pact with Turkey and will not be comforted. I had no idea they were quite so jealous of Iraq.” The Egyptian desk officer at the State Department, William Burdett, confessed, “None of us anticipated the strength of the Egyptians’ reaction. And considering how irrational they have been, it is difficult to see how we could have done so.”

“Byroade’s ignorance of inter-Arab politics and his deep conviction that forcing concessions from Israel was the key to winning over Nasser made it easy



*President Dwight D. Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.*

for him to convince himself that Nasser’s conflict with Iraq was ephemeral.”

Solving the Arab-Israel crisis was not only NOT on Nasser’s list of priorities, but peace with Israel would openly undermine his plan to be leader of the Sunni Arab world. It was, therefore, a non-starter regardless of what Israel or the United States did.

In fact, for all the discussion about Israel, its size, shape and role, the country only shows up in the book as a player on page 188. At which point British imperialism kicks in again as Israel, which had agreed to launch the first shots of the war against Nasser, said it would have to be a border skirmish, not an all out at-

like a traditional imperialist. He told Nasser what he thought Nasser wanted to hear, failed to listen to the inter-Arab subtext, excused Nasser’s provocations and lies, and believed Nasser only wanted help from Washington. Early in the game, Dulles “informed his staff that it was important to ‘pursue policies in the area during the next few months that will help build up Nasser and give us the opportunity to say to him that we are prepared to cooperate with him in strengthening his position, but that it must be accompanied by his cooperation in Alpha [the Baghdad Pact].”

And his State Department “informed the American ambassador in

The post-World War II period was also the last gasp of British and French imperialism, and the rise of American influence in the Middle East.

tack. British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd replied that “Britain could not justify an invasion of Egypt on the basis of a mere border skirmish. Lloyd demanded, instead, that the Israelis launch what he called ‘a real act of war.’”

Dulles, who considered himself anti-imperialist, behaved instead very much

Cairo that it intended ‘to convince Nasser that we... are desirous of extending our support and assistance – political, economic, and military – to Egypt and in general of assisting Egypt to achieve the international standing to which she is entitled to aspire.’” Dulles explained:



For many years now, the United States has been walking a tightrope between the effort to maintain our old and valued relations with our British and French allies on the one hand, and on the other, trying to assure ourselves of the friendship and understanding of the newly independent countries who have escaped from Colonialism. Recent events, are close to marking the death knell for Great Britain and France... If the United States supports the French and British on the colonial issue," [we would go down with them]."

Eisenhower added insult to injury when, during the 1956 Suez war, Nasser managed to cut off Britain's oil supply and Washington declined to provide North American oil, telling aides, "those who began this operation should be left to work out their own oil problems – to boil in their own oil, so to speak."

Following his showdown with the French and British, Eisenhower took on Israel, forcing it out of the Sinai with threats of sanctions and rejection of Israel's security demands, and announcing that to prevent "incalculable ills" for Israel, "In the interests of peace – the United Nations has no choice but to exert pressure upon Israel to comply with the withdrawal resolutions." Dad still knows best. Dulles wrote:

I expressed the view that we had gone just as far as was possible to try to make it easy and acceptable to the Israelis to withdraw and I felt that to go further would almost surely jeopardize the entire Western influence in the Middle East and make it almost certain that virtually all the Middle East countries would feel that United States policy toward the area was in the last analysis controlled by the Jewish influence in the United States and that accordingly the only hope of the Arab countries was in association with the Soviet Union.

Which is precisely where they went. Egypt, Iraq, Syria became Soviet allies and Eisenhower turned to the Saudis as the basis for U.S. power projection in the region. Eisenhower, Doran writes, had decided "supporting traditional allies was less beneficial to the West than a policy aligning the United States with 'the whole Arab world.' The concept is unusual. Steely-eyed realists like Eisenhower tend to bet on tangible entities... above all, they support friends and pun- ish enemies. The French, British, and

spent the previous decade serving as a barrier to al-Qaeda moving across North Africa. The departure of U.S. forces from Iraq empowered Sunni jihadist ISIS and Shiite jihadist Iran at the same time.

All of this rearranging of allies and adversaries was at least as high-handed and colonialist as anything Dulles and Ike ever managed, with similarly dismal results for the same reasons.

1. Finding "new friends" at the expense of old friends and calling it "accepting new realities" doesn't work;

## President Barack Obama had a plan to reduce American involvement in the Middle East/Persian Gulf and boost regional alternatives.

Israelis repeatedly urged Eisenhower to adopt this conventional conception, but he steadfastly refused. He was unshakably convinced that a bet on his traditional friends would undermine the Western position in the Cold War."

This is a good place to start the metaphorical reading – but don't spend too much time there.

President Barack Obama had a plan to reduce American involvement in the Middle East/Persian Gulf and boost regional alternatives. He invited Muslim Brotherhood representatives to his Cairo speech over the objection of longtime American ally, Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, and then into the White House. That gave way to the promotion of Iran as a regional partner, disregarding the objections of Saudi Arabia and the Sunni states (not to mention Israel). The president's view of Israel mirrored Ike and Dulles, Byroade and Shuckburgh – with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the center of regional disruption and Israel as the center of the problem. Bombing Libya removed long-time dictator Muammar Qaddafi, who had turned his nuclear/chemical capabilities over to the United States and United Kingdom, and

2. Ignoring the provocations and threats from the new friends doesn't make them more moderate; and

3. Calling the Arab-Israel conflict the priority of the Arabs in the face of all evidence to the contrary doesn't help.

Two points:

*Ike's Gamble* is a great and readable piece of history, but there's always a nit to pick; this one is on page 142. Doran writes, "Van Loon attended the Conference of Arab University Graduates in Jerusalem (the Old City was Jordanian at that time) as a guest of the Iraqi delegation." The Old City was never Jordanian. Pronounced corpus separatum in 1947 by the United Nations, the eastern side was conquered and annexed by Jordan and the Jews expelled in 1948. The annexation was recognized only by Pakistan and Great Britain.

Chapter 13, called "Regret," details Eisenhower's later thinking about Israel and about the region. The Obama administration would have done well to start there, and it is worth the price of the book.

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### ■ *A Final Thought ...*

## Foreign Policy Priorities

The temptation in making a list of foreign policy “priorities” is simply to cite a series of problems facing the United States and presume they can be resolved. If they could have been, they would have been. It would be more useful to consider priorities for American behavior – political, economic and military. There are four questions to be asked:

- What should the United States do to ensure that allies feel secure and adversaries don’t?
- How can the United States encourage countries that are neither allies nor adversaries to cooperate on issues of importance?
- How can the United States encourage countries to want to be “more like us” (politically and economically free with more transparent government) and “less like them” (totalitarian, communist, jihadist, and less transparent)?
- What if they choose to be “more like them”? What are the limits of American encouragement or coercive capabilities?

First, the administration must reassure our allies, many of whom really aren’t sure where they stand: Israel, of course, but also Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan,

Japan, and the smaller European and Asian states. The future of NATO must be coordinated with our allies.

Second would be to enunciate foreign policy goals; to decide what it wants to achieve in various parts of the world – militarily, but more important politically – and then decide with the help of military and diplomatic professionals how to pursue those goals. This is the difference between “doing something,” in military parlance, and getting something done.

The broad goal could be ensuring that America’s friends and allies around the world are not inhibited in their growth and development by the actions of unfriendly and/or hegemonic powers. This would require enhancing trade and other relations, increased emphasis on messaging and public diplomacy, and military rebuilding and modernization including nuclear modernization.

Creating strategy to meet the goal would provide a blueprint for America’s three largest and gravest security challenges: Russia, China and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

– Shoshana Bryen