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Bill Spindle and Gerald F. Seib

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NYT

Obama Finds He Can't Put Iraq War Behind Him

Peter Baker <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/peter_baker/index.html>

June 13, 2014 -- In a high-profile speech <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/29/us/politics/obama-foreign-policy-west-point-speech.html> to Army cadets last month, President Obama tried to move beyond America's tumultuous adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan with a new doctrine all but forswearing the use of military power except in the most dire of circumstances.

Barely two weeks later, Mr. Obama has already found himself in those circumstances and seems on the verge of ordering the American military to intervene once more in Iraq. While ruling out ground troops to save the beleaguered Baghdad government from insurgents, Mr. Obama is considering a range of options, including airstrikes by drones and piloted aircraft.

The possible return to Iraq, even in limited form, underscores just how much that forlorn land has shaped Mr. Obama's presidency. It defined his first campaign for the White House, when his opposition to the war powered his candidacy. It defined his foreign policy as he resolved to pull out of Iraq and keep out of places like Syria. And it defined the legacy he hoped to leave as he imagined history books remembering him for ending America's overseas wars.

Yet as much as he wanted Iraq in the rearview mirror, the swift march toward Baghdad by Islamic extremists calling themselves the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, has forced him to reconsider his approach. As much as he wanted to leave the fate of Iraq to the Iraqis themselves, he concluded that the United States still has a stake in avoiding the collapse of a state it occupied for more than eight years at the cost of nearly 4,500 American lives.

"We have an interest in making sure that a group like ISIS, which is a vicious organization and has been able to take advantage of the chaos in Syria, that they don't get a broader foothold," Mr. Obama said on Friday, using an alternative name for the group, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. "There are dangers of fierce sectarian fighting, for example, the terrorist organizations try to overrun sacred Shia sites, which could trigger Shia-Sunni conflicts that could be very hard to stamp out."

Stepping back, he cited the United States' own tortured history in Iraq and the desire not to let American efforts there go to waste. "We have enormous interests there," he added, "and obviously our troops and the American people and the American taxpayers made huge investments and sacrifices in order to give the Iraqis the opportunity to chart a better course, a better destiny."

Still, he insisted that Iraq's leaders have to make the sorts of compromises that will bring stability to their country, and stressed that he would not let their problems consume the United States all over again. "We're not going to allow ourselves to be dragged back into a situation in which, while we're there, we're keeping a lid on things," but Iraq's own political leaders are failing to address the underlying fissures dividing the society.

Mr. Obama has long been criticized by Republicans for pulling troops out of Iraq at the end of 2011 without leaving behind a small residual force. That was a timetable originally agreed to by President George W. Bush, and Iraqi leaders at the time would not agree to immunity provisions insisted on by the Pentagon, but critics argued that Mr. Obama should have tried harder to extend the American presence.

Moreover, they said the president has not done enough to pressure Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki to reconcile with the Sunni minority, and they said Mr. Obama's failure to do more to help moderate rebels in next-door Syria has emboldened more radical Islamist forces who have spilled over into Iraq.

Not only has the latest eruption in Iraq revived those criticisms, but it has also exposed the president's plan for withdrawing from Afghanistan to further questions. Mr. Obama announced last month that he would end the combat mission there by the end of this year, leaving behind 9,800 troops, all of whom would leave by 2016.

Republicans on Friday urged Mr. Obama to act decisively in Iraq, questioning why he wants to take several days to decide. "We shouldn't have boots on the ground, but we need to be hitting these columns of terrorists marching on

Baghdad with drones now," said Representative Ed Royce of California, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Representative Howard (Buck) McKeon of California, the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said the president needed a broader strategy for containing the threat in the region. "There are no quick-fix solutions to this crisis, and I will not support a one-shot strike that looks good for the cameras but has no enduring effect," he said. He added that the president should consider firing his national security team.

From the other side of the spectrum, Democrats expressed nervousness about becoming entangled in Iraq just two and a half years after leaving. Even former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who voted for the 2003 invasion as a senator but is now positioning herself for another run for president, said she opposed the use of American force to help save the Iraqi government without assurances from Mr. Maliki.

"Not at this time no," she said to the BBC in an interview recorded on Thursday. Mrs. Clinton, who if she ran and won would inherit the Iraq situation, said the White House should continue to reject Mr. Maliki's request for airstrikes until he has demonstrated inclusiveness. "That is not a role for the United States," she said of military force.

Liberal activists were more vehement. "For the last 12 years, Iraq has been Bush and Cheney's war," said Becky Bond, the political director for an activist group called Credo. "But if the president decides to double down on George W. Bush's disastrous decision to invade Iraq by launching a new round of bombing strikes, Iraq will become Barack Obama's war."

That would be the last thing Mr. Obama would want. For him, Iraq has been the template of everything foreign policy should not be. He opposed the invasion as a state senator in Illinois, and many of his decisions as president have been measured against the lessons he took from Iraq. To him, the war proved that military intervention more often than not made things worse, not better.

When he agreed to send more troops to Afghanistan, he insisted on a timetable for pulling them out. When he decided to intervene in Libya, he used only air power and made sure that NATO allies took the lead. When the Syrian civil war broke out, he resisted calls to step in even with air power or, for a long time, arms for the rebels. The longer he has been in office, the more skeptical he seems to have grown about the utility of force as a means of changing the world for the better.

Even as he acknowledged on Friday the possibility of using force again in Iraq, he put the onus on Mr. Maliki and other Iraqi leaders to set aside sectarian differences and stabilize their country. "The United States will do our part," he said, "but understand that ultimately it's up to the Iraqis, as a sovereign nation, to solve their problems."

Still, those who have spent time around Mr. Obama heard deep frustration in his voice as he spoke about the prospect of re-engaging in Iraq. "I can only imagine what's going through the president's head," said Julianne Smith, a former national security aide to Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.

"He was just getting to the point where he felt he could free himself from this agenda and not define his foreign policy solely on the last guy's," she said. "He's been keen not to use Bush as a reference point and get away from that and be more forward-looking and have a strategy. And he was just turning a corner when this hit."

Article 2.

The Economist

Jun 13th 2014 -- Avoiding aggressive questions is a hallmark of the White House press corps. So it should be no surprise that reporters watching President Barack Obama make an emergency statement on Iraq on June 13th failed to pelt him with the queries that lurk at the centre of the debate over America's role in the Middle East. Namely: Mr President, did you help to bring these horrors about when you rushed to pull American combat troops out of Iraq as quickly as possible? And, Mr President, does any part of you regret ignoring pleas to arm and train non-extreme opposition forces across the border in Syria over the past two years?

Instead reporters allowed Mr Obama to explain why American involvement in Iraq would be limited, would take "several days" to be sent, would not involve any return of ground troops and was conditional on Iraq's central government coming up with a "sincere" political plan to resolve sectarian divisions. "We can't do it for them," Mr Obama said severely.

"Nobody has an interest in seeing terrorists gain a foothold inside of Iraq and nobody is going to benefit from seeing Iraq descend into chaos. The United States will do our part," he added. "But understand that ultimately it's up to the Iraqis, as a sovereign nation, to solve their problems."

Yet is that enough? Does such cool rationality from the global policeman make the world more dangerous? The question of Mr Obama's caution and hyper-realism (some would say cynicism) underpins everything. Foes and friends listen to Mr Obama. Then they then watch violent men harness ethnic, sectarian and nationalist hatreds to challenge the international order, seemingly with impunity. Finally, enemies and allies alike wonder: does the world feel this volatile because Mr Obama has signalled America is so reluctant to intervene?

But nobody asked Mr Obama whether what is happening in Iraq or Syria is his fault, in any way. As the president stood in the summer sunshine, his Marine One helicopter visible behind him, waiting to carry him to a speech about education and poverty-reduction on a Sioux reservation in North Dakota, reporters instead asked him to analyse the situation.

Which he did. The president is an intelligent, rational and rigorous observer of global horror. And he is often eloquent in his assessment of why it is folly to think such problems can be easily or reliably solved by military means alone. Asked about the sight of Iraqi army units abandoning their posts in the face of smaller enemy forces, Mr Obama made a good point. If Iraqi troops were not "willing to stand and fight" against the militant attackers, that points to a "problem in terms of morale" and commitment that reflects political divisions in the country. He expressed fears of worsening violence should Sunni insurgents overrun Shi'ite sacred sites in the country.

His observations were sound. And here is the frustrating thing about reporting on this president's worldview. In and of itself, his cool, cerebral analysis is often more rational and less hypocritical than the criticism raining down on him from his political opponents.

Republicans in Washington, knowing full well that voters have precisely no appetite for a return to Iraq, content themselves with accusing the president of allowing the world to fall apart and emboldening wicked men and dangerous foes through a lack of attention and "weakness". By this they seem to mean that Mr Obama should stop saying that American force may not be capable of fixing the world. They do not mean that they actually want Mr Obama to do anything with American force.

Thus the most senior elected Republican in Washington, the Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner, criticised the president on June 12th for watching terrorists seize growing swathes of Iraq, adding: "And what is the president doing? Taking a nap!"

Mr Boehner chided Mr Obama for failing to reach an agreement that would have allowed large numbers of American troops to stay in Iraq after 2011. He urged the president to “get engaged” in Iraq before it was too late.

What American forces would be doing in Iraq, were Republicans in control, is anybody’s guess. Mr Boehner murmured on June 12th about providing kit and technical assistance to the Iraqi government. He declined to say whether America should launch air strikes. Even the hawk’s hawk, Senator John McCain of Arizona says that he does not want ground troops sent back to Iraq, though he would like Mr Obama’s national security team fixed.

Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, a putative White House contender in 2016, spoke for the Republican party’s non-interventionist wing, declaring the situation a “really confusing mess” and musing aloud: “You could even go back ten years and say, you know what, it might have been a little more stable when we had that awful guy [Saddam] Hussein, who hated the Iranians.”

Democrats, such as Senator Dianne Feinstein of California, content themselves with denouncing Republicans for failing to acknowledge that they once cheered George W Bush into war with Iraq. Republican “cheerleaders for the disastrous war in Iraq are now joining the blame-America-first crowd rather than working with our Commander-in-Chief to confront this crisis,” she says.

In short, the woeful level of Washington debate allows Mr Obama to explain why the world is complicated, and why this is mostly for others to fix. It permits his opponents to talk vaguely about “weakness” and the need for leadership, without spelling out what that might mean—let alone what they might support by way of air strikes, arms transfers and so on.

Should America change course? Are there dangers to Mr Obama’s hyper-realist foreign policies? What if others seem incapable of fixing problems that threaten American interests? Those would be better topics for debate, but would involve challenging the overwhelming (and understandable) desire of Americans to avoid fresh entanglements. Thus, within the Washington bubble, they are not voiced.

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Article 3.

Newsweek

Does This Mean Osama Bin Laden Has Won?

Kurt Eichenwald <<http://www.newsweek.com/authors/kurt-eichenwald-0>>

13 June 2014 -- In the end, Osama bin Laden may achieve the goal that inspired the 9/11 attack after all. And, strangely, one of the best ways to thwart that dream is for the United States to anger some of its friends and cooperate with its enemies—in particular, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The successful march toward Baghdad by the Sunni fundamentalist group in Iraq—Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)—has been as inevitable as it is threatening to any prospects of peace in the Middle East. Now, the centuries-old tribal warfare between the two most prominent sects of Islam—Sunni and the Shiite—has been inflamed once again, with the fundamentalist group exposing the weakness and incompetence of what its followers see as just another impure government established by the West.

What so many Americans, including their leaders in government, have long failed to understand is that this was what bin Laden and Al-Qaeda wanted all along. The intent of the bloody attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was to lure the U.S. and its allies into attacking the Middle East. Bin Laden was quite open about that.

Such a war, he believed, would unify Muslims and then lead to an enormous victory that would drive the West to withdraw from all of the Middle East. From there, bin Laden wanted to set off a Sunni revolution that would topple secular, Western-supported governments in the Arab world and confront Shiites, whom he deeply opposed. In fact, ISIL has proclaimed that the current confrontation isn't a war between Iraq's government and Islamists, but Sunnis vs. Shiites.

For those who didn't understand prior to the American invasion of Iraq about this boiling cauldron of tribal hate that played so important a role in Middle Eastern security, the evidence grew stronger throughout the war. Al-Qaeda and its affiliated organizations have killed untold thousands of Shiites in the past 11 years—in particular, in Iraq. In fact, in 2007, groups in Kuwait that pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda issued a fatwa—a legal pronouncement by a religious scholar—against the Shiite government in Iran.

From the beginning, this has been the irreparable flaw in the American strategy to topple the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein. Saddam was a brutal and murderous dictator, but as a secular Sunni who ruled with an iron, bloody fist, he was able to crush the fundamentalist threat. But once the Sunni government was driven from power and the Iraqi military disbanded by the Americans, its members joined forces with the more threatening Islamists among its tribal brethren.

The American plan was for Iraq to be ruled by a cooperative government between the majority sect, the Shiites, and the minority Sunnis. But this idea of cooperative leadership between the Hatfields and the McCoys was always destined to collapse—hundreds of years of war were not going to be set aside just because the West demanded it.

The Sunnis who attempted to join the new political order were soon marginalized. Their almost token representation intensified bubbling Sunni anger about perceived discrimination and inequality. Making it all the worse has been the leadership of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who has made every effort to destroy any credible leadership among the Sunnis attempting to join the government.

According to a report by the International Crisis Group, a nongovernmental group that works on conflict resolution, Maliki has cast out prominent Sunni leaders on the basis of their connections to Saddam's Bath Party and has disproportionately deployed government security forces in the Sunni neighborhoods of Baghdad and Sunni governorates.

The primary political movement of the Sunnis—Al-Iraqiya—fell apart as Maliki strove to consolidate his and the Shiites' power. A major sign of Sunni impotence in Iraq came in late 2012 with the arrest of the bodyguards of a prominent member of Al-Iraqiya. Sunnis launched an extraordinary, peaceful protest movement, only to see a response of further repression.

The result? Intensifying support among Sunnis for the only remaining option—insurgency. The signs of a growing possibility of civil war became more evident in the summer of last year as the number of car bombings swelled across the country.

Of course, the Iraqi security forces were supposed to have been able to protect the country by now. Instead, they have melted away in the face of the oncoming march of ISIL. In part, that is also Maliki's fault. He ended the on-the-ground training of his forces by U.S. military advisers too soon—and over American objections. And this poorly trained, undisciplined group were fully aware that the far stronger, far better Syrian military struggled and experienced significant losses in the early confrontations against ISIL and other jihadists in their country.

But the issues that are driving the explosion of violence in Iraq also contains the seeds of a solution—or the prospect of an even more intense conflagration. The fundamentalist Shiite regime of Iran would, from the opening days of an Iraq governed by ISIL, be confronted by a country on its border led by Sunnis bent on the destruction of the Tehran government. An all-out religious war—this time between nations—might well be considered inevitable by the Shiites in Iran.

In other words, Iraq has the biggest stake of any nation in the outcome of the struggle in Iraq. Maliki—as a fellow Shiite—has a strong alliance with Tehran. So do the two most prominent Kurdish militias in the Kurdistan Regional Government in Northern Iraq. And the Iranian militia is nothing like the slapdash Iraqi security forces—the Iranian Revolutionary Guards are so well trained and armed they could easily crush ISIL.

And Iran is already on the march. American officials say that two battalions of the Revolutionary Guards' most elite special operations group—the Quds Force—have already crossed the border and are fighting alongside Iraqi soldiers. Militarily, ISIL could not survive such an onslaught.

But here is where the Americans could play a role. If politicians once again fail to understand the dynamics taking place and fall back on the traditional opposition of Iran, they will be simultaneously opposing the Shiites and the Sunnis. While the cable news talking heads might not get that, the Iraqis certainly will.

Here is the danger: The Iranians will certainly rout ISIL, but such a victory by a Shiite force—particularly if it results in the killing of innocent Sunnis—would likely drive more Sunnis to support ISIL and the other fundamentalists. This is, after all, a direct conflict between the Sunnis and Shiites, which has been joined by a powerful Shiite nation. Iraqi Sunnis already believe that the Maliki government is too close to Iran. That issue will only intensify.

The answer? The U.S. must engage in complex diplomacy, recognizing that it shares a strategic interest with Iran's Shiites while also confronting Iraq's Shiites over their marginalization of the Sunnis in government. If Sunnis have no influence in governance—and if Iran is allowed to have a long-term presence in Iraq—the perception that this is purely a conflict between the two tribes will undoubtedly take hold.

Maliki must go and in his place a leader more committed to the nation, rather than to his faction, must take over. The Shiites in Iraq must be persuaded that power-sharing is about their own survival, and the Americans are the only ones in a position to help make that happen. Crisis can be averted. But it will not be easy.

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Article 4.

WSJ

Islamist Militants Aim to Redraw Map of the Middle East

Bill Spindle and Gerald F. Seib

June 12, 2014 -- IS militants are shown after allegedly seizing control of an Iraqi army checkpoint in northern Iraq, in an image posted on a jihadist website. Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

At an annual security conference in Israel this week, the head of the military showed pictures of two long-dead diplomats.

Mark Sykes, an Englishman, and François Georges-Picot, a Frenchman, secured their place in history by cutting a deal that drew the borders of the modern Middle East.

The point of recalling the men: It suddenly appears those century-old borders, and the Middle Eastern states they defined, are being stretched and possibly erased.

"This entire system is disintegrating like a house of cards that starts to collapse," Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz said.

The Obama administration signaled it is preparing to re-engage militarily in Iraq, a remarkable U-turn for a president who campaigned in 2008 on ending the war there and has cited the removal of U.S. troops as one of his top successes. Photo: AP

A militant Islamist group that has carved out control of a swath of Syria has moved into Iraq, conquering cities and threatening the Iraqi government the U.S. helped create and support with billions of dollars in aid and thousands of American lives.

The group—known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham—isn't a threat only to Iraq and Syria. It seeks to impose its vision of a single radical Islamist state stretching from the Mediterranean coast of Syria through modern Iraq, the region of the Islamic Caliphates established in the seventh and eighth centuries.

The threat of Sunni extremists eclipsing the power of its Shiite-dominated Arab ally presents Iran with the biggest security and strategic challenge it has faced since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Photo: Youtube/Brown Moses

Governments and borders are under siege elsewhere, as well. For more than a year, Shiite militias from Lebanon have moved into Syria and operated as a virtual arm of the Syrian government. Meanwhile, so many Syrian refugees have gone in the opposite direction—fleeing into Lebanon—that Lebanon now houses more school-age Syrian children than Lebanese children.

And in Iraq, the Kurdish population has carved out a homeland in the north of the country that with the help of Turkey and against the wishes of the Iraqi government exports its own oil, runs its own customs and immigration operations and fields its own military, known as the Peshmarga.

The picture is difficult for the U.S., which is deeply invested in keeping the region stable, and the rapidly deteriorating situation in Iraq is setting off alarm bells inside the Obama <http://topics.wsj.com/person/O/Obama/4328> administration. The U.S. is weighing more direct military assistance to the government of Iraqi President Nouri al-Maliki, the White House said Thursday, and officials hinted that aid might include airstrikes on militants who have edged to within a half-hour's drive of Baghdad.

"There will be some short-term immediate things that need to be done militarily," President Barack Obama said. "Our national security team is looking at all the options." Mr. Obama also urged Iraq's Shiite-dominated government to seek

political paths for moderate Shiites and Sunnis to work together against jihadists. "This should be also a wake-up call for the Iraqi government," he said.

Why are the borders of today's Middle Eastern states suddenly so porous and ineffectual?

Just months after the United States military moved out of Iraq, Islamic extremists have captured several vulnerable cities on its borders. Jerry Seib discusses with Foreign Policy Editor Bob Ourlan about the developing situation. Photo: Associated Press

The militants known as ISIS wreaking havoc in Iraq are an 'Islamist' group. The terms 'Islamist' and 'Islam' are often used interchangeably, but there are very distinct differences between them.

In short, the conflicts unleashed in Iraq and Syria have merged to become the epicenter of a struggle between the region's historic ethnic and religious empires: Persian-Shiite Iran, Arab-Sunni Saudi Arabia and Turkic-Sunni Muslim Turkey. Those three, each of whom has dominated the whole of the Middle East at one time or another in past millennia, are now involved in the battle for influence from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf.

Saudi Arabia, for example, refuses to recognize the Shiite government of Iraq, backs an array of almost exclusively Sunni Muslim rebel groups in Syria and bitterly opposes the Shiite Hezbollah.

Iran conversely, is the biggest backer of the Shiite-linked Syrian regime, has forged deep ties to the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government and assures that Hezbollah, which Iran's Revolutionary Guards nurtured from its birth in the early 1980s, remains impressively armed and trained.

The U.S. also has played a role. In the wake of 9/11, it toppled Saddam Hussein, who had no connection to the attacks, and launched an effort to remake Iraq as a first step to transform the region.

The Arab uprisings three years ago ousted more iron-fisted rulers, whose authoritarian regimes had kept ethnic and religious tensions in check. Syria's uprising reached no resolution, and instead morphed into a festering civil war. Both sides have turned to religious and ethnic propaganda and brutality to maintain their advantage.

The U.S. straddles some of the divisions. It supports the Shiite government it helped create in Iraq, for example, while denouncing the Shiite-linked Syrian regime. Its support of an Iraqi leader and encouragement of sectarian rule has helped fan tensions along religious and ethnic lines. The U.S. further undermined indigenous authority with its long, troubled occupation of Iraq as it sought to rebuild the country.

Broader changes in the global power structure also have helped unleash change. For decades, the Middle East was locked in place by the Cold War and petro politics. The U.S. supported countries opposed to the Soviet Union and rich in oil—Persian Gulf monarchies, Jordan and Egypt starting in the mid-1970s—while the Soviets supported their friends—Syria, Iraq, Libya at times and South Yemen. The U.S. backed a lot of anti-democratic and despotic regimes, but the result was relative stability.

Now, though, the Cold War framework has been shattered, and the growth of new energy sources elsewhere has reduced the premium placed on stability.

The trouble for the U.S. and regional powers is that the conflict may have outrun their control, fueled by the rise of the most pernicious groups in chaotic conditions.

ISIS is a threat to both Turkey and Saudi Arabia, but its easy conquests over the past week—including Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city—were made possible by governments hobbled by years of insurgency and opposition aided by those two countries and like-minded Arab Gulf residents.

Iran, for its part, has encouraged Shiite Muslim militia groups so extreme and violent, and often intent on targeting Sunni Muslims, that many Sunnis are willing to endure ISIS if it provides the protection their own government won't.

The mess puts Mr. Obama in a box. A few weeks ago he laid out in a policy speech his rationale for staying out of the mire of such sectarian conflicts, since they seem far removed from concrete U.S. interests. Yet, he now seems to acknowledge the U.S. must do something.

The danger for the president is the U.S. are being drawn back into the fray, but with very few options, never mind good ones.

Article 5.

The Council on Foreign Relations

Syria: Humanitarian Disaster—and Security Threat

Elliott Abrams <<http://www.cfr.org/experts/middle-east-israel-human-rights/elliott-abrams/b1567>>

June 13, 2014 -- The facts about the humanitarian situation in Syria are well-known: A minimum of 160,000 people have been killed. About 6.5 million Syrians have been forced to leave their homes and are displaced inside Syria, and 2.7 million are refugees in neighboring countries—altogether, nearly half of Syria's population of 22 million. The refugee burden on neighbors is immense: There are a million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, whose population is only a bit over 4 million, and 600,000 registered in Jordan, with a population of just over 6 million. These official refugee figures may be far lower than the real numbers (there are probably over a million refugees in Jordan), and do not begin to express the misery in which so many Syrians now live.

The refugee flows and the jihadi presence, which are both growing, constitute a threat to Syria, its neighbors, and the interests of the United States. Today, foreign fighters from around the globe are said to number anywhere from 8,000—the estimate given by Gen. Lloyd Austin, U.S. Central Commander—to 12,000, and several of the groups are linked to al-Qaeda. The Secretary of Homeland Security, Jeh Johnson, said in April 2014 that “Syria has become a matter of homeland security,” and the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, said in January 2014 that one of the al-Qaeda-aligned Syrian jihadi groups “does have aspirations for attacks on the homeland.” Among the foreign jihadis now fighting in Syria there are believed to be seventy Americans.

The U.S. Reaction

The U.S. government's reaction has been almost entirely humanitarian, through aid to neighboring countries and to various UN and private agencies. Soon the total will reach \$2 billion.

President Obama has been extremely reluctant to lift U.S. involvement from the humanitarian and diplomatic to the military. His 2012 decision against military aid to the Syrian rebels was made against the advice of his top national security officials at that time, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, CIA Director David Petraeus, Joint Chiefs Chairman Martin Dempsey, and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta. His last-minute decision in August 2013 not to strike Syria after its use of chemical weapons was popular in the Pentagon and with the public, but clearly went against advice from Secretary of State John Kerry.

In June 2013 the administration announced the provision of some aid to the rebels, but from all evidence little or no material help actually followed. Finally in late May 2014, the president himself announced in his speech at West Point a decision to give additional aid to the rebels: "I will work with Congress to ramp up support for those in the Syrian opposition who offer the best alternative to terrorists and brutal dictators."

The Price of Inaction

U.S. policy since the start of the rebellion in Syria in 2011 has failed. Regime brutality against the majority-Sunni population of Syria and intervention by foreign Shiite forces (Iranian and Hezbollah) have attracted a far larger and more dangerous group of jihadis than ever existed in Afghanistan, one whose threat to U.S. allies and interests keeps growing. That the Iranian and Hezbollah intervention has elicited no serious U.S. response has not only favored the regime's survival, but shaken faith in American reliability among all U.S. allies in the region and beyond.

That Iran has appeared far more determined to win in Syria, defined as keeping Assad in power, than the United States has appeared in achieving its stated goal (that Assad must go) similarly shakes confidence in U.S. power and willpower. The huge and growing refugee burdens threaten stability in Jordan, long a key U.S. ally, and in Lebanon. And the fact that Assad is an Alawite trying to rule a 74 percent Sunni country suggests that with him in power there will never be stability, only more war.

Less tangibly but of equal importance, U.S. willingness to enforce the norms of international conduct has been undermined, as has American moral leadership. The association of the United States with the cause of human rights and democracy, going back at least to Woodrow Wilson, has been weakened by its unwillingness to act in the Syrian case. America's soft power is linked to its reputation for idealism and the defense of human values. The refusal to use hard power in the Syrian case has contributed to a diminution of soft power as well.

Needed: A New Policy

The early goal of a quick departure for Assad and transition to democracy in Syria is now impossible to attain. More disorder and suffering are certain. But Syria need not be an endless source of refugees, a center of inhuman suffering at the hands of a vicious minority regime, and a worldwide gathering place for jihadi extremists.

First, the United States must establish a serious program to train and equip the rebels. Diplomacy has failed: the efforts made by the United States in Geneva to reach a political accord cannot now succeed, because diplomacy will always reflect the power relationships on the ground. Those must be changed by strengthening the anti-Assad, anti-jihadi force composed of nationalist Syrian rebels. Their weakness is largely linked to their possession of very limited amounts of guns and other equipment, and limited amounts of money with which to pay fighters, while jihadi groups appear to have far more of both.

The balance of forces will change when anti-jihadi groups can arm and train all the men they can attract, including attracting them from other forces to which they have gone because those forces were able to feed and clothe them and supply modern weapons. Without such a fighting force, there is no hope that the power of the regime or the jihadis can be countered.

Second, the United States should punish Assad for the continuing use of chemical warfare. This means an air strike robust enough to damage CW targets, including units that have used CW and any air assets ever used to deliver them. Any strike should at this point be broad enough to greatly restrict Assad's ability to use air power as an instrument of terror. More broadly, punitive air operations should be considered to force the regime to allow humanitarian aid to quickly reach those who need it. And even more broadly, air strikes can both change the military balance on the ground and affect the political and psychological dimensions of the conflict by demonstrating a new American policy and new determination.

As Anne-Marie Slaughter, director of policy planning in the State Department in Obama's first term, wrote in April 2014, "A U.S. strike against the Syrian government now would change the entire dynamic. It would either force the regime back to the negotiating table with a genuine intention of reaching a settlement, or at least make it clear that Assad will not have a free hand in reestablishing his rule."

Is such use of American air power feasible? Yes; outside of the Damascus area air defenses are quite limited and so would be the risk to the United States. This conclusion is supported by Israel's series of successful air attacks on Syria without losing one aircraft.

Third, the United States and other donors are still not delivering sufficient aid to Jordan and other neighbors of Syria to enable them to cope with the refugee crisis without severe political and economic strains—for example, on schools and hospitals. The United States and its Gulf allies, some of who are actively funding rebel groups in Syria, should undertake a serious joint review of Jordan's needs, and then act together to meet them. At West Point, the president pledged to do so.

Fourth, the United States should make it clear to allies in the region such as Israel and the Gulf Arab states that any nuclear deal with Iran will stop it from developing a nuclear weapon but will not stop Washington from confronting Iranian subversion and aggression—such as its sending hundreds of Revolutionary Guard and Quds Force combatants and advisers to Syria.

There are many suspicions in the region that a "grand bargain" between the United States and Iran is still in the cards, and that if a nuclear deal can be reached, U.S. resistance to other aspects of Iranian conduct would be softened just when sanctions relief would be giving Iran more economic resources. These fears should loudly be laid to rest. The Obama administration should clarify that it seeks a nuclear deal with Iran, but has no illusions about or intentions to negotiate a broad rapprochement with the Islamic Republic, and will help those nations that are resisting Iranian misconduct.

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Article 6.

The Washington Post

Iran is committed to a peaceful nuclear program

Mohammad Javad Zarif

June 13 -- The nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1 powers <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-iran-push-to-meet-deadline-on-nuclear-deal/1926482.html> have reached a critical stage. I am reasonably confident that by next month's deadline, we can reach a comprehensive agreement that will assure the world that Iran's nuclear program will remain exclusively peaceful. All that is required is a sober appreciation of the realities faced and a serious calculation of alternatives. Illusions have in the past led to missed opportunities and should not be allowed to ruin the real prospect of the historic deal before us.

When current President Hassan Rouhani and I were leading the Iranian nuclear negotiating team almost 10 years ago, just before the election of former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, I presented a proposal to our Western counterparts that contained an array of measures designed by independent, non-Iranian scientists to provide assurances that our nuclear program would remain forever peaceful.

Prodded by the Bush administration, however, our counterparts demanded that we abstain from enrichment until at least 2015, effectively killing the chances of a deal. Their mistaking our constructive engagement for weakness, and opting for pressure and sanctions to gain concessions, led to a change in Iran's position, both by the ballot box in the 2005 presidential election and the subsequent expansion of Iran's peaceful nuclear activities.

As we approach 2015 the outcome of past maximalism and obsession with sanctions is clearly evident. In the past 10 years, Iran has gone from 200 to 20,000 centrifuges, our enrichment capacity has risen from 3.5 to 20 percent and the Arak heavy-water research reactor <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/19/iran-arak-nuclear-plant> is less than a year from being commissioned.

Nobody can rewind the clock. Sacrifices have been made. Capabilities are vastly different. Knowledge and expertise have been attained. None of this can be wished or negotiated away.

Today, President Rouhani and I are back at the negotiating table, and our commitment to constructive engagement has not changed. We are willing to provide assurances of the exclusively peaceful nature of our nuclear program. Our proposed measures are serious and would make a real difference. But we will not abandon or make a mockery of our technological advances or our scientists, nor would it be prudent or serve the interest of nuclear nonproliferation to expect us to do so.

And we have already delivered. Within 100 days of my being appointed as Iran's nuclear negotiator, the first nuclear agreement in a decade was concluded with the P5+1. The International Atomic Energy Agency has verified that we have kept up our end of the bargain. Furthermore, the cooperation we now extend to the IAEA has been recognized as the best in years. We are prepared to maintain this trajectory.

It would be tragically shortsighted if illusions were to again derail progress toward a historic achievement. There will be no better time to put an end to the unnecessary nuclear crisis than now, when all sides have much to gain and before the window of cooperation and pragmatic reason closes.

Excuses for once again torpedoing a deal, which can change the shape of our region, can certainly be found. Prominent among them is the myth of "breakout." For years small but powerful constituencies have irrationally advanced the idea that Iran can produce enough fissile material for a bomb in months.

While reaching a realistic deal is the best available option for the West to prevent such a remote possibility, it may be instructive to take that phobia at face value. Let's put it to a logical test. If Iran ever wanted to break out, all IAEA inspectors would have to be expelled from the country. Iran's program would then have to be reconfigured to make weapons-grade fissile material, which would have to be converted to metal, be molded into the shape required for a bomb and undergo countless other complex weaponization processes. None of these capabilities exist in Iran and would have to be developed from scratch. This would take several years — not a few months.

Even when Iran had the time for this, it did not opt for a bomb. Between 2005 and 2013, when its relations with the West and the IAEA were at rock bottom, Iran had time, little international constraints, relatively relaxed monitoring and enough centrifuges to press ahead toward a bomb. Furthermore, Iran had already paid the price of massive, unjust sanctions that far exceeded those imposed on countries that have developed a bomb.

Despite all this, we did not take a single step toward a nuclear weapon. The 16 security organs behind two consecutive U.S. National Intelligence Estimates, in 2007

http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/20071203_release.pdf and 2012

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/us-ages-see-no-move-by-iran-to-build-a-bomb.html?_r=0 , agreed.

It is ironic that some in the West ignore all of this in favor of projecting the dangerous double myth that Iran needs the bomb to protect itself and is only months away from getting one. It will be even more ironic if this hype torpedoed a deal that is the surest and safest way to preclude proliferation.

Today, we have a unique opportunity in our negotiations with the P5+1 to put in place long-term confidence-building measures, as well as extensive monitoring and verification arrangements, to provide the greatest assurance that Iran's nuclear program will forever remain exclusively peaceful. To overcome the obstacles to realizing this historic achievement, we must look ahead, but we also cannot ignore the lessons provided by the past. Comprehension of how the cycle of lost chances has been propelled by illusions is important. Taking action to exit this cycle is crucial.

As we enter the crossroads of turning the interim nuclear deal into a comprehensive solution, I urge my counterparts to reciprocate our willingness to address concerns about our capabilities with appreciation of our demand for our rights, dignity and respect. Most of all, I urge them to refrain from allowing illusions to derail the march toward ending an unnecessary crisis and opening new horizons.

Mohammad Javad Zarif is Iran's foreign minister.

Article 7.

Foreign Policy in Focus

Genesis: Harry Truman and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Adam Cohen

Genesis:

Truman, American Jews, and the Origins of the Arab/Israeli Conflict by John B. Judis http://www.amazon.com/John-B.-Judis/e/B00GDWW6OM/ref=3Ddp_byline_cont_book_1

June 13, 2014 -- Judis is an activist journalist cum historian who writes frequently at The New Republic. Instead of moralizing about the cast of characters involved in this complicated history, as others have already done, Judis looks at the enduring themes from the "Genesis" that influence today's Middle East.

Since the end of Ottoman rule at the conclusion of World War I, Judis details, Palestine's fate has remained linked to Western influence. The British mandate in Palestine acted as a formal colony for London in its final imperial decades. In the mandate's waning days, the mantle of Western leadership passed to its new leader, the United States, and its newest international institution, the United Nations. Both the United States and the UN failed to develop ideas to promote a sustainable solution to the Palestinian crisis before it broke into open warfare.

As the United States and the UN dithered, the situation on the ground evolved. The British mandate expired while President Harry Truman vacillated between the counsel of Zionist activists, political advisers, and State Department Cold Warriors over one unworkable plan after another—the critical, and sometimes exhausting, political and interpersonal dynamics that make up the lion's share of Genesis. The Jews and Arabs of Palestine, along with the armies of Palestine's Arab neighbors, then descended into a war that none could bring to a halt.

This story of Western ineptitude is incomplete without mentioning the second enduring theme from this period: the impact of lobbying in the West on Middle East policy. The most effective lobbyists were those who advocated for the Zionist cause, who believed, as Judis notes, that Palestine's Jews "were still engaged in a war for survival" in a war-torn world that turned them away.

Pro-Israel activists learned to harness the power of the Jewish vote in states such as Ohio and New York to influence the actions of President Truman, who was at once a moralist and an unrivaled political animal. Transforming a Jewish community increasingly convinced of the need for a Jewish state into single-issue voters, leading American Zionists like Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver effectively pushed U.S. policy towards what they believed to be in the best interests of the Jewish people.

But each plan the Truman administration considered, as Judis acknowledges, was fatally flawed. There might have been missed opportunities to implement a workable governance structure for Palestine during British rule. But during the Truman administration, the impact of Zionist activists, both within the formal lobbying organizations and within the White House itself, often pushed President Truman to reject plans for federation and partition as unworkable.

Finally, the book makes clear that the ongoing Palestinian Arab exile and refugee crisis remain the most pressing problems. Throughout Judis' account, ordinary Palestinians faced marginalization at nearly every turn throughout the 1948 war and beyond, turning the Palestinian Nakba into a reality. As Palestine's Jews finally achieved their goal of creating a political home of their own, its Arabs saw their own hopes for the same dashed. For the Palestinian Arabs, the great tragedy of exile began along with the decades-long hardships of life in refugee camps. Thus began the vicious cycle of outside meddling, violence, and indifference, as well as inner political turmoil, that plague the Palestinian people to this day.

In each of these themes lie potent parallels and truths for the present. Western failures, such as the recently defeated Kerry Peace Initiative <http://fpif.org/israel-palestine-kerrys-peace-talks-hit-separation-wall/>, make a greater statement about the compromised U.S. role in the region than anything else. The influence of American Jewish groups, many of which coalesce around the policies of the Israeli government, remains a strong, though neither absolute nor monolithic, force affecting U.S. congressional activity and Obama administration policy.

Though the UN and even the United States provide tangible support for the cause of Palestinian statehood, the Palestinian cause remains an aspiration. This is due in part to the enduring fact of internal political ruptures within the Palestinian camp that, despite current efforts at rapprochement, go to the religious and national core of Palestinian identity. It is also due, as Judis forcefully asserts, to the flawed U.S.-Israeli relationship that allows "Israelis to overlook what they did and are continuing to do to Palestine's Arabs." If peace is to come to the Middle East, surely all of these problems will need to be addressed.

But above all of this noise, the great tragedy of Palestinian exile remains unanswered. The Palestinians will be hard-pressed to accept a peace deal with Israel that does not satisfactorily remedy the plight of Palestine's refugees. Although it's likely not feasible for Palestinian exiles to return to communities that Israelis have lived in for generations now, it is easy to understand why this leaves so many Palestinians unsatisfied.

This nut, at the center of Genesis, is the hardest one for the Israelis and Palestinians to crack if they are to make peace. Judis writes:

[T]he main lesson of this narrative is that whatever wrongs were done to the Jews of Europe and later to those of the Arab Middle East and North Africa – and there were great wrongs inflicted – the Zionists who came to Palestine to establish a state trampled on the rights of the Arabs who already lived there. That wrong has never been adequately addressed, or redressed, and for there to be peace of any kind between the Israelis and Arabs, it must be.

Adam Cohen is a contributor to Foreign Policy in Focus.