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Article 1.

NYT

5 Principles for Iraq

Thomas L. Friedman

June 14, 2014 -- The disintegration of Iraq and Syria is upending an order that has defined the Middle East for a century. It is a huge event, and we as a country need to think very carefully about how to respond. Having just returned from Iraq two weeks ago, my own thinking is guided by five principles, and the first is that, in Iraq today, my enemy's enemy is my enemy. Other than the Kurds, we have no friends in this fight. Neither Sunni nor Shiite leaders spearheading the war in Iraq today share our values.

The Sunni jihadists, Baathists and tribal militiamen who have led the takeover of Mosul from the Iraqi government are not supporters of a democratic, pluralistic Iraq, the only Iraq we have any interest in abetting. And Iraq's Shiite prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, has proved himself not to be a friend of a democratic, pluralistic Iraq either. From Day 1, he has used his

office to install Shiites in key security posts, drive out Sunni politicians and generals and direct money to Shiite communities. In a word, Maliki has been a total jerk. Besides being prime minister, he made himself acting minister of defense, minister of the interior and national security adviser, and his cronies also control the Central Bank and the Finance Ministry.

Maliki had a choice — to rule in a sectarian way or in an inclusive way — and he chose sectarianism. We owe him nothing.

The second principle for me derives from the most important question we need to answer from the Arab Spring. Why is it that the two states doing the best are those that America has had the least to do with: Tunisia and the semiautonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq?

Answer: Believe it or not, it's not all about what we do and the choices we make. Arabs and Kurds have agency, too. And the reason that both Tunisia and Kurdistan have built islands of decency, still frail to be sure, is because the major contending political forces in each place eventually opted for the principle of "no victor, no vanquished."

The two major rival parties in Kurdistan not only buried the hatchet between them but paved the way for democratic elections that recently brought a fast-rising opposition party, that ran on an anti-corruption platform, into government for the first time. And Tunisia, after much internal struggle and bloodshed, found a way to balance the aspirations of secularists and Islamists and agree on the most progressive Constitution in the history of the Arab world.

Hence my rule: The Middle East only puts a smile on your face when it starts with them — when they take ownership of reconciliation. Please spare me another dose of: It is all about whom we train and arm. Sunnis and Shiites don't need guns from us. They need the truth. It is the early 21st century, and too many of them are still fighting over who is the rightful heir to the Prophet Muhammad from the 7th century. It has to stop — for them, and for their kids, to have any future.

Principle No. 3: Maybe Iran, and its wily Revolutionary Guards Quds Force commander, Gen. Qassem Suleimani, aren't so smart after all. It was Iran that armed its Iraqi Shiite allies with the specially shaped bombs that killed and wounded many American soldiers. Iran wanted us out. It was Iran that pressured Maliki into not signing an agreement with the U.S. to give our troops legal cover to stay in Iraq. Iran wanted to be the regional hegemon. Well, Suleimani: "This Bud's for you." Now your forces are overextended in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, and ours are back home. Have a nice day.

We still want to forge a nuclear deal that prevents Iran from developing a bomb, so we have to be careful about how much we aid Iran's Sunni foes. But with Iran still under sanctions and its forces and Hezbollah's now fighting in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, well, let's just say: advantage America.

Fourth: Leadership matters. While in Iraq, I visited Kirkuk, a city that has long been hotly contested between Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen. When I was there five years ago, it was a hellish war zone. This time I found new paved roads, parks and a flourishing economy and a Kurdish governor, Najimaldin Omar Karim, who was just re-elected in April in a fair election and

won more seats thanks to votes from the minority Arabs and Turkmen.

“We focused on [improving] roads, terrible traffic, hospitals, dirty schools,” and increasing electricity from four hours a day to nearly 24 hours, said Dr. Karim, a neurosurgeon who had worked in America for 33 years before returning to Iraq in 2009. “People were tired of politics and maximalism. We [earned] the confidence and good feelings of Arabs and Turkmen toward a Kurdish governor. They feel like we don’t discriminate. This election was the first time Turkmen and Arabs voted for a Kurd.”

In the recent chaos, the Kurds have now taken full military control of Kirkuk, but I can tell you this: Had Maliki governed Iraq like Karim governed Kirkuk, we would not have this mess today. With the right leadership, people there can live together.

Finally, while none of the main actors in Iraq, other than Kurds, are fighting for our values, is anyone there even fighting for our interests: a minimally stable Iraq that doesn’t threaten us? And whom we can realistically help? The answers still aren’t clear to me, and, until they are, I’d be very wary about intervening.

[Article 2.](#)

WSJ

The Men Who Sealed Iraq's Disaster with a Handshake

Fouad Ajami

June 13, 2014 -- Two men bear direct responsibility for the mayhem engulfing Iraq: Barack Obama and Nouri al-Maliki. The U.S. president and Iraqi prime minister stood shoulder to shoulder in a White House ceremony in December 2011 proclaiming victory. Mr. Obama was fulfilling a campaign pledge to end the Iraq war. There was a utopian tone to his pronouncement, suggesting that the conflicts that had been endemic to that region would be brought to an end. As for Mr. Maliki, there was the heady satisfaction, in his estimation, that Iraq would be sovereign and intact under his dominion.

In truth, Iraq's new Shiite prime minister was trading American tutelage for Iranian hegemony. Thus the claim that Iraq was a fully sovereign country was an idle boast. Around the Maliki regime swirled mightier, more sinister players. In addition to Iran's penetration of Iraqi strategic and political life, there was Baghdad's unholy alliance with the brutal Assad regime in Syria, whose members belong to an Alawite Shiite sect and were taking on a largely Sunni rebellion. If Bashar Assad were to fall, Mr. Maliki feared, the Sunnis of Iraq would rise up next.

Now, even as Assad clings to power in Damascus, Iraq's Sunnis have risen up and joined forces with the murderous, al Qaeda-affiliated Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), which controls much of northern Syria and the Iraqi cities of Fallujah, Mosul and Tikrit. ISIS marauders are now marching on the Shiite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, and Baghdad itself has become a target.

In a dire sectarian development on Friday, Iraq's leading Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, called on his followers to take up arms against ISIS and other Sunni insurgents in defense of the Baghdad government. This is no ordinary cleric playing with fire. For a decade, Ayatollah Sistani stayed on the side of order and social peace. Indeed, at the height of Iraq's sectarian troubles in 2006-07, President George W. Bush gave the ayatollah credit for keeping the lid on that volcano. Now even that barrier to sectarian violence has been lifted.

This sad state of affairs was in no way preordained. In December 2011, Mr. Obama stood with Mr. Maliki and boasted that "in the coming years, it's estimated that Iraq's economy will grow even faster than China's or India's." But the negligence of these two men—most notably in their failure to successfully negotiate a Status of Forces Agreement that would have maintained an adequate U.S. military presence in Iraq—has resulted in the current descent into sectarian civil war.

There was, not so long ago, a way for Mr. Maliki to avoid all this: the creation of a genuine political coalition, making good on his promise that the Kurds in the north and the Sunnis throughout the country would be full partners in the Baghdad government. Instead, the Shiite prime minister set out to subjugate the Sunnis and to marginalize the Kurds. There was, from the start, no chance that this would succeed. For their part, the Sunni Arabs of Iraq were possessed of a sense of political mastery of their own. After all, this was a community that had ruled Baghdad for a millennium. Why should a community that had known such great power accept sudden marginality?

As for the Kurds, they had conquered a history of defeat and

persecution and built a political enterprise of their own—a viable military institution, a thriving economy and a sense of genuine national pride. The Kurds were willing to accept the federalism promised them in the New Iraq. But that promise rested, above all else, on the willingness on the part of Baghdad to honor a revenue-sharing system that had decreed a fair allocation of the country's oil income. This, Baghdad would not do. The Kurds were made to feel like beggars at the Maliki table.

Sadly, the Obama administration accepted this false federalism and its façade. Instead of aiding the cause of a reasonable Kurdistan, the administration sided with Baghdad at every turn. In the oil game involving Baghdad, Irbil, the Turks and the international oil companies, the Obama White House and State Department could always be found standing with the Maliki government.

With ISIS now reigning triumphant in Fallujah, in the oil-refinery town of Baiji, and, catastrophically, in Mosul, the Obama administration cannot plead innocence. Mosul is particularly explosive. It sits astride the world between Syria and Iraq and is economically and culturally intertwined with the Syrian territories. This has always been Mosul's reality. There was no chance that a war would rage on either side of Mosul without it spreading next door. The Obama administration's vanishing "red lines" and utter abdication in Syria were bound to compound Iraq's troubles.

Grant Mr. Maliki the harvest of his sectarian bigotry. He has ridden that sectarianism to nearly a decade in power. Mr. Obama's follies are of a different kind. They're sins born of

ignorance. He was eager to give up the gains the U.S. military and the Bush administration had secured in Iraq. Nor did he possess the generosity of spirit to give his predecessors the credit they deserved for what they had done in that treacherous landscape.

As he headed for the exits in December 2011, Mr. Obama described Mr. Maliki as "the elected leader of a sovereign, self-reliant and democratic Iraq." One suspects that Mr. Obama knew better. The Iraqi prime minister had already shown marked authoritarian tendencies, and there were many anxieties about him among the Sunnis and Kurds. Those communities knew their man, while Mr. Obama chose to look the other way.

Today, with his unwillingness to use U.S. military force to save Syrian children or even to pull Iraq back from the brink of civil war, the erstwhile leader of the Free World is choosing, yet again, to look the other way.

Mr. Ajami, a senior fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution, is the author, most recently, of "The Syrian Rebellion" (Hoover Press, 2012).

[Article 3.](#)

The Daily Beast

Iran Is the Biggest Loser in Iraq

[Aki Peritz](#)

15 June 14 -- After all of its efforts to undermine the U.S. mission, Tehran now has a violent, semi-failed state right on its border. And it will have to deal with the financial fallout on its own.

Sen. John McCain has called for the heads of President Obama's entire national-security staff for the debacle in Iraq. Papers and websites are filled with opinion pieces running some variation of the title "Who lost Iraq?"

Other folks can debate and assign blame for "who lost Iraq." But I'll let you in on a little secret about who the biggest loser is, now that Iraq seems to be going up in flames (besides the long-suffering Iraqi people): the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Yes, because Iran's security strategy for the past decade has been to (A) keep America off balance inside Iraq, while (B) making sure Baghdad doesn't ever pose a threat like it did during the Iran-Iraq War. While the U.S. maintained its presence in Iraq and tried to keep the locals from cutting each others' throats, the Iranians quietly not-so-quietly developed their massive networks within the country, raised proxies, and generally subverted our efforts.

Iran's covert/overt effort to bleed the U.S. in Iraq was a massive, complex endeavor. During the American occupation, Iran bankrolled multiple lethal Shia proxy groups like Jaysh al-Mahdi, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, and Khataib Hezbollah that in turn killed American troops and rocketed the U.S. Embassy, sometimes multiple times a day. Tehran flooded the country with precision-engineered bombs, called Explosively Formed

Penetrators (EFPs), able to penetrate American tanks, causing thousands of American and Iraqi casualties in the process. Furthermore, Tehran has bribed Iraqi generals and politicians to undermine American efforts, had its elite Quds Force operate within Iraq for years; and even may have a hand in a particularly gruesome murder of five U.S. servicemen in 2007.

Keeping its American adversary pinned down in the quicksand of Iraq's ethno-sectarian conflict suited Tehran's interests quite nicely, as long as the war didn't spill across its 900-plus-mile border. But the Stars and Stripes don't fly over military bases in Iraq and American taxpayers aren't spending billions of dollars every month anymore—and so now Iran must deal with the continuing fallout alone.

When Iraq pulled back from a total civil war in 2008-2011, Tehran should have told its longtime friend, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki that, even though he really wanted to crack down on those suspicious Sunni tribes in Anbar province once the Americans left, he should instead try to integrate them into Iraq's government and security forces. With all that oil money gushing into Baghdad's coffers and a few years of relative stability behind it, Maliki could have even developed Anbar's infrastructure, too, in order to keep those tribes fat, happy—and co-opted. This was Saddam's general strategy, and how he kept power for so long.

Tehran should have done this not because they particularly liked Sunni Iraqis, but rather because it's in Iran's critical national-security interest to keep their neighbor stable—and prosperous. After all, Iraq has quickly become one of Iran's top trading partners, doing \$12 billion in two-way trade in 2013. Tehran

and Baghdad was also slated to open a 167-mile pipeline that would supply Iraq with three to four million cubic meters of natural gas per day, earning Iran some \$3.7 billion annually.

On the other hand, upsetting and alienating a large percentage of the population such as the Sunnis is a recipe for disaster. As citizens of a multiethnic country that is only about 60 percent ethnic Persian, every Iranian instinctively understands this.

But either Iran didn't provide this advice, or Maliki didn't take it. Instead, he decided to take the rod against Sunni groups, like the Anbar Awakening councils that routed al Qaeda in Iraq in 2007. And issue an arrest warrant for the Iraqi vice president, Sunni Tariq al-Hashimi, on terrorism charges in 2011. And ignore the endemic corruption in the country.

And so long-simmering tensions reemerged. This gave breathing room to al Qaeda in Iraq/Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), which lost its founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, in 2006 to an American air strike, and then his successors Abu Umar al-Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al-Masri in 2010. Within the larger political backdrop, ISIS survived and grew into the menace that it is today.

Now, Iran is doing the best it can to salvage what it can. The Quds Force is on the ground battling ISIS, and presumably Tehran is rushing all manner of aid to a beleaguered Iraqi government. Longtime Quds Force chief Brigadier General Qassem Soleimani is reportedly in Baghdad, which indicates the severity of the crisis. Back at home, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has said Iran will "fight and combat" terrorism after his

country's Supreme National Security Council on June 12th convened an emergency session to discuss Iraq's predicament.

Still, Iran is now obliged to fight a two-front war against Sunni groups—one in Syria and now another in Iraq. Given that punishing international sanctions are crushing its economy over its nuclear-weapons program, it's not like Tehran has infinite funds to spare for foreign adventures.

Of course, Iran is willing to take on a lot of hardship to secure what it considers its national-security interests (say, its nuclear-weapons program), but opening up a new effort against Sunnis—with boots on the ground in Iraq—must be causing a lot of heartburn in Tehran.

If events continue to go south in a big way, the IRGC might be forced to choose between competing, compelling security priorities. It's also still too early to tell, but every aid shipment to Baghdad might mean one fewer for Damascus.

What about the day after tomorrow? Even if ISIS is rolled back significantly in the next few weeks, the systemic problems that put Iraq into this current mess will still remain. The Iraqi army still won't have effective leadership. The parliament will still be unable to govern—despite the severity of the crisis, it couldn't even pass a declaration of a state of emergency after Mosul fell. The Sunnis will remain aggrieved. Corruption will still take its toll. And ISIS will now find new Iranian targets to hit.

One silver lining to ISIS's menace to Iraqi society is that it might actually bring Iran and the U.S. closer together, at least on this battlefield. Who knows, Americans commanders might soon find themselves working with the exact same people who were

killing and maiming American troops only a few years ago.

For instance, if elite Iranian troops battle ISIS on the ground, and the U.S. decided to provide air power to smite ISIS from the skies, it would make for a much more effective counteroffensive if the two forces coordinated their efforts. Few would have predicted a scenario where Iranian troops provided actionable intelligence to American commanders to destroy murderous jihadist militants, and vice versa. But war sometimes makes for strange bedfellows.

Nevertheless, Iran can only go so far to pacify Iraq with its own forces. The IRGC and its Shia proxies are reviled in Sunni-majority areas, and an effort to hold territory by these groups would eventually cause a major backlash among the population. So Iran would have to eventually withdraw, leaving a power vacuum, again, in those areas.

More broadly, many of the socio-economic and sectarian drivers that brought Iraq to this horrific juncture would remain in place after the shooting stopped. A semi-failed state containing thousands of virulently anti-Shia veteran fighters on its western border will remain a long-term national-security nightmare for Tehran.

But America shouldn't gloat over Iran's misfortunes too deeply. After all, just because Iran is the biggest loser in this current Iraqi crisis doesn't mean America is winning this particular battle either.

Aki Peritz is a former CIA analyst and coauthor of Find, Fix,

Finish: Inside the Counterterrorism Campaigns that Killed bin Laden and Devastated Al Qaeda.

Article 4.

The New Yorker

The Iraq-Syria Connection

Dexter Filkins

June 23, 2014 -- The day after Islamic militants swept into Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, and several other enclaves along the Tigris River, the conquering army, called the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, posted a photograph on Twitter. It showed one of its fighters—a Chechen volunteer, the group said—opening the door of an American-made Humvee that it had seized from the Iraqi Army. The Humvee and the militant, the group said, had just arrived at an ISIS base in Syria, where, presumably, they were ready to be dispatched in the war there.

The border between Iraq and Syria may have effectively disappeared, but the dynamics driving the civil wars in those nations are not identical. In Syria, an oppressed majority is rising up; in Iraq, an oppressed minority. (The opposition fighters in both wars are mostly members of the Sunni sect.) Both countries just held elections: in Syria, the dictator, Bashar al-Assad, won in a display of empty theatre; in Iraq, where Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is expected to form a government

for a third term, the elections were for the most part free. In Iraq, the dynamics driving the strife are largely Iraqi, and in Syria they are largely Syrian.

Even so, the events unfolding in Iraq point toward a much wider war, reaching from the Iranian frontier to the Mediterranean coast. The long open border between Iraq and Syria, and the big stretches of ungoverned space, has allowed extremists on each side to grow and to support one another. ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, two of the strongest groups fighting in Syria, were created by militant leaders from Iraq, many of whom had fought with Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia against the United States. The vast swath of territory between the Euphrates and the Tigris—from Aleppo, in Syria, to Mosul, in Iraq—threatens to become a sanctuary for the most virulent Islamist pathologies, not unlike what flourished in Afghanistan in the years before 9/11. Among those fighting with ISIS and Al Nusra are hundreds of Westerners, from Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States. At some point, the survivors will want to go home; they will be well trained and battle-hardened.

The extremist groups dominating the fighting are beginning to take their war beyond the two countries that they now freely traverse. In January, ISIS carried out a car-bomb attack in Beirut near the offices of Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant group that has been fighting on behalf of Assad. The Nusra front has also carried out attacks in Lebanon. Meanwhile, the number of Syrian refugees who have fled to that nation exceeds twenty per cent of its population, which is not something that a state as weak and as fractious as Lebanon can be expected to sustain. In Jordan, the presence of half a million Syrian refugees is putting an enormous strain on the fragile monarchy.

The revolutionary government of Iran looms ominously over it all. Iran has been decisive in supporting Assad, and its influence over Maliki, never small, has increased enormously since the departure of the last American forces in Iraq, in December of 2011. During the war, Iranian agents trained, armed, and directed a network of Shiite militias, which killed hundreds of American and British soldiers. Those same militias are evidently being readied to confront the Sunni onslaught in Iraq; thousands of their members have already been fighting for Assad in Syria. Iran's intervention in Syria has also alarmed Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which have poured in guns and money to help the rebels. It is not difficult to imagine a multinational war, fought along a five-hundred-mile front, and along sectarian lines, waged ultimately for regional supremacy.

What can the United States do? It has already done quite a bit, of course. The invasion of Iraq, in 2003, by destroying the Iraqi state, empowered the Shiite majority—Maliki in particular. As long as American troops remained in Iraq, they could restrain Maliki and his Shiite brethren from their worst sectarian impulses. By the time the last troops departed, the civil war, which began in 2006, had been brought under control. But, in the two and a half years since the troops' departure, Maliki has been free to pursue a stridently sectarian project, which has cut the Sunnis off from political power. He has alienated—even, in some cases, arrested—the most reasonable Sunni leaders and embarked on mass arrests of young Sunni men. In the process, Maliki has to a great extent driven the Sunnis back into the arms of the extremists. Indeed, in the sectarian calculus that now dominates Iraqi politics, Sunni unrest has worked largely in his favor, as it has allowed him to portray himself as the Shiites'

protector. The Iraqi state, built mainly by the Americans, is too feeble to resist the Sunnis' efforts to break away.

For a time, in the waning months of the occupation, the White House and Maliki considered keeping some American troops in Iraq, in non-combat roles, ostensibly to train soldiers but also to help manage the nation's politics. No deal was ever struck, and it's difficult to imagine any appetite in Washington today for a substantial American reentry into Iraq. But, with the militants nearing Baghdad, and the Iraqi Army faltering, President Obama will almost certainly feel compelled to act. Already, the U.S. has been rushing sophisticated weaponry to the Iraqi Army. The question now before the President is whether to take more significant steps, such as air strikes.

In Iraq, as in Syria, the choices are almost all bad, and the potential for American influence is limited. Syria appears to be headed toward an effective partition between predominantly Sunni and predominantly Alawite enclaves, and an impoverished, Somalia-like future where guns rule. In Iraq, the Kurds, the third big group, are taking advantage of the chaos by tightening their hold on Kirkuk and other disputed areas, in an effort to cement a future separate from that of the rest of Iraq. At the least, Iraq faces a future as a violent country, with a weak central government and many areas dominated by extremists. But things could get much worse than that.

Within a day after sweeping into Mosul, ISIS militants freed thousands of prisoners, looted bank vaults, and declared the imposition of Sharia law. From now on, the group said, unaccompanied women were to stay indoors, and thieves would be punished by amputation. The "divine conquest" of Mosul by

a group of Islamic extremists is a bitter consequence of the American invasion. For now, there seems to be very little we can do about it.

Dexter Filkins has received numerous prizes, including two George Polk Awards and three Overseas Press Club Awards. His 2008 book, "The Forever War," won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Best Nonfiction Book, and was named a best book of the year by the New York Times, the Washington Post, Time, and the Boston Globe.

Article 5.

The Huffington Post

Saudi Arabia's Sectarian Challenge

Giorgio Cafiero and Daniel Wagner

14 June 2014 -- Last month, two Saudi Shi'ites received death sentences for allegedly committing crimes that caused no deaths or injuries, marking the harshest punishments issued by Saudi Arabia's government against Shi'ite activists in the Eastern Province (EP) since sectarian unrest erupted in this strategically vital region of the Kingdom during 2011. In an effort to quell its citizens' aspirations for political and social reform, the government has since spent \$130 billion on public sector programs throughout the Kingdom. While the programs have failed to dampen anti-government sentiment in the Shi'ite

majority EP, they appear to have succeeded comparatively well in other parts of the country where the Sunni majority resides. However, given that most of the Kingdom's natural resource wealth is derived from the EP, further sectarian unrest could have significant geopolitical ramifications for the country, the region, and Saudi Arabia's oil purchasers.

Violence between the state security apparatus and Shi'ite dissidents has been confined to the EP, which is home to nearly all of the Kingdom's Shi'ites. Situated along the Persian Gulf coast, the Province is within close geographic proximity of Shi'ite-majority Bahrain, Iran and Iraq. The EP also borders Kuwait, Oman, the U.A.E., and Yemen, which all have sizeable Shi'ite minorities. Since 2011, Saudi Shi'ites have held demonstrations in major population centers across the EP in defiance of the government orders. Since then, 21 citizens have been killed and more than 300 detained as a result of Riyadh's crackdown on public displays of dissent in the EP. If history is any guide, continued oppression of Saudi Shi'ites has the potential to push some Shi'ite currents toward further militancy and extremism.

The History of Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Shi'ites constitute 10-15 percent of the Saudi population and their roots in the EP date back many centuries. Most Saudi Shi'ites practice Twelver Shi'ism, with smaller numbers adhering to Islamili and Zaydi Shi'ism. While many Salafists allege that the Shi'ite citizens in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) are "agents" of Iran, few Saudi Shi'ites are actually linked by blood to Iran's Shi'ites. Many are relatives of Bahraini Shi'ites, as greater Bahrain previously encompassed territory within modern-

day Saudi Arabia.

Throughout the 18th century, Wahhabi militants pursued their military conquest of eastern Arabia and waged violent jihad against the Shi'ite Arabs, considering them "apostates" or "false Muslims". King Abdulaziz Al Saud, the founder of the KSA, rose up against the Ottomans to gain control over eastern Arabia during the 1910s, committing massacres against Shi'ite communities. Since the Kingdom's establishment in 1932, Saudi Shi'ites have experienced discrimination in both the public and private spheres. No cabinet member, deputy minister, ambassador, or head of any university in the KSA is Shi'ite, and the construction of Shi'ite mosques is strictly prohibited.

Iran and Saudi Arabia's Shi'ites

Prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, many Saudi Shi'ites avoided politics altogether. Those Saudi Shi'ites who were politically active were primarily followers of secular and left-leaning ideologies, such as Ba'athism, Communism, and Nasserism. But the Iranian revolution provided Shi'ite Muslims across the Arab world with a new political model during the 1980s. Khomeini's ideology, which called for the overthrow of all monarchies in the Islamic world, gained support among Saudi Arabia's Shi'ites, who had long lasting grievances against the ruling Al-Saud family and Riyadh's most important strategic ally, the U.S.

The newly formed Organization of Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula (IRO) united tens of thousands of Saudi Shi'ites under the banner of Khomeini's ideology. The IRO's political agenda called for an end to the KSA's anti-Shi'ite

discriminatory laws, an end to crude oil exports to the U.S., and the establishment of a Saudi-Iranian alliance.

Throughout the Iran-Iraq War, Iran targeted the KSA, a primary backer of Iraq, by promoting Shi'ite unrest in the EP. Tehran sent radio broadcasts and cassette tapes into the EP encouraging Saudi Shi'ites to rise up against the Saudi monarchy. Saudi-Iranian relations were entirely severed for three years following the killing of hundreds of Iranian pilgrims during the Hajj of 1987. In response, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps established Hezbollah al-Hejaz (Saudi Hezbollah), which carried out numerous terrorist attacks within Saudi Arabia. Such acts included a strike against a gas plant in 1987 and the bombing of petrochemical installations in 1988. Saudi Hezbollah also assassinated Saudi diplomats in Pakistan, Thailand, and Turkey in 1989.

However, Iran reined in support for Saudi Hezbollah as Riyadh and Tehran's interests overlapped in 1990, following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. After the first Gulf War, more Saudi Shi'ites moderated their political positions, contending that a violent overthrow of the KSA was not realistic. Many substituted revolutionary zeal with political pragmatism, which entailed negotiating with the authorities in Riyadh.

By 1993, Riyadh granted a general amnesty to anti-government groups within the Shi'ite communities and pledged to improve their conditions on the belief that public criticism of the government would end. During the years that preceded the Arab Awakening, relative calm ensued within the EP. The most recent major terrorist attack carried out by Shi'ite elements in the EP occurred in 1996, when the Al-Khobar housing complex was

attacked, killing 19 U.S. servicemen and injuring 372 Americans, Saudis, and other nationalities.

Saudi Arabia's Arab Awakening

Since 2011, relations between Saudi security forces and various Shi'ite factions have deteriorated in the EP. Only days after the government announced a ban on all public protests that year Saudi Shi'ite protestors held a "Day of Rage". However, rather than calling for a violent revolution, the demonstrators' demands included equal rights for Shi'ites and the release of political prisoners in the KSA. In reaction, the Saudi police arrested more than 950 citizens, 217 of whom remain detained.

Throughout the Arab Awakening, the EP's sectarian tensions have become increasingly connected with other sectarian conflicts in the region. Linked to the EP by a 16-mile causeway, Bahrain is dealing with its own Shi'ite-led uprising against a Sunni monarchy. Saudi forces entered Bahrain in March 2011 to assist Manama in efforts to crackdown on anti-government demonstrators within Bahrain's Shi'ite population. During the "Day of Rage" protestors in the EP expressed their solidarity with their Shi'ite counterparts in the streets of Bahrain. Saudi officials justified their interference in Bahraini affairs on the premise that Bahrain's uprising was linked to the Shi'ite demonstrators in the EP. Officials in the KSA are apparently concerned that Tehran may reactivate Saudi Hezbollah to pressure Saudi Arabia into backing away from its positions on Bahrain and Syria.

When Saudi Aramco's corporate computers were hacked in 2012, it resulted in three-quarters of the data being replaced with

an image of a burning U.S. flag. According to the U.S. government, Iranian agents were behind the hacking. Regardless of Tehran's actual involvement, with the majority of Saudi Aramco workers being Shi'ites, the event was a reminder -- as if one were needed -- that a small number of individuals have the potential to strike against the KSA's oil industry.

That same year, the Interior Ministry accused Shi'ite "criminals" of carrying out a "foreign agenda", playing into a Salafist narrative that Saudi Shi'ites were a "fifth column" or "agents" of Iran. Reported cases of Shi'ite militants firing guns at police would, if true, indicate that the violence has already escalated and militant extremism is gaining ground within certain Shi'ite currents in the EP.

Integration vs. Alienation

Iran's ties with the smaller GCC states have thawed since President Rouhani took office last year. Although Saudi Arabia remains the GCC state that most aggressively counters Iran, it appears that Riyadh is making efforts to keep diplomatic lines with Iran open, while continuing to wage proxy wars aimed at countering Tehran's influence in the Arab world, most notably in Syria. While Saudi Arabia's diplomatic overtures to Iran last month were driven by numerous factors, Riyadh likely considers one benefit of reduced tension with Iran to be greater potential for decreasing the EP's sectarian temperature. It is, however, difficult to forecast how Tehran may respond, or whether any progress in the bilateral relationship will have a positive impact in the long-term.

Sectarian unrest cannot be entirely attributed to Iran's quest for

greater influence in the GCC. Long before the Iranian revolution, Saudi Shi'ites were oppressed by the KSA's ruling Wahhabi order. The Saudi government should acknowledge that the root cause of anti-government opposition in the EP is a political system that treats Shi'ites as second class citizens. How the Saudi authorities seek to deal with the Shi'ite opposition -- whether through dialogue and compromise or further oppression -- will shape the future of the KSA's sectarian landscape. Greater authoritarianism and human rights violations threaten to unleash a more militant response from Saudi Shi'ites.

Since 2011, the anti-government activism in the EP has underscored certain parallels between the Saudi Shi'ites' call for political and social reform, and Arab Awakening movements in other Middle Eastern and North African states. Clearly, the KSA is vulnerable to enhanced dissent and rebellion within its borders. Yet, by responding to calls for political and social rights with an iron fist, the Saudi government is swimming against the tide.

Funding a Rentier State can placate citizens only as long as the government maintains legitimacy. The oppression of Saudi Arabia's Shi'ites is costing the ruling order its legitimacy among an increasingly large number of citizens in the EP. To preserve relative stability, Riyadh needs to find a way to integrate its Shi'ite minority more meaningfully into Saudi society. Alienating and repressing the Shi'ites has not worked. The problem can only grow more pronounced with time.

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Article 6.

National Review

Obama's National-Security Team of Yes Men

Matthew Continetti

June 14, 2014 -- n June 12, as al-Qaeda forces marched toward Baghdad, John McCain spoke on the Senate floor. Noting that the al-Qaeda affiliate ISIS has conquered a third of Iraqi territory, has overrun the city of Mosul, has captured abandoned American equipment, and has stolen more than \$400 million in cash reserves, McCain said that the enemies of the United States are on the verge of a strategic victory. Only a major course correction, McCain went on, might prevent the emergence of an al-Qaeda state that stretches from eastern Syria to the outskirts of Baghdad. "It's time that the president got a new national-security team," he said.

Criticism of that team — of Obama's national-security adviser, his secretaries of defense and state, and his top foreign-policy speechwriter — has been mounting. "This is what happens when hacks take over foreign policy," Kim Strassel wrote last week in a devastating Wall Street Journal column. The criticism is bipartisan. Colonel Jack Jacobs, a NBC military analyst, said the other day that the Obama team "most decidedly" is weak, "and isolated, and a lot of decisions it makes are either ill-considered or do not consider everything that needs to be considered." David Ignatius is blunt: "The administration," he said on Morning Joe, "is going to have to step up."

The cliché "personnel is policy" strikes me as true. But its truth is a function of whether the personnel we are talking about actually have the capacity to make decisions. "The first thing I think we need to do," McCain said on the Senate floor, "is call together the people that succeeded in Iraq, those that have been retired, and get together that group and place them in positions of responsibility so that they can develop a policy to reverse this tide of radical Islamic extremism, which directly threatens the security of the United States of America."

McCain is dreaming. Does anyone think President Obama is about to replace Susan Rice with Fred Kagan, and switch out General Austin for General Petraeus? To assign responsibility for American incompetence to President Obama's National Security Council is to miss the target. The NSC is a symptom of the dysfunction, not its cause. Behind our endless series of foreign-policy screw-ups — Benghazi, Snowden, Syria, Crimea, Bergdahl, Iraq — is not Obama's team. It's Obama.

The Obama foreign policy is best represented not by the famous

national-security “Team of Rivals” of Obama’s first term, but by the team of yes men and incompetents of his second. Gates, Panetta, Clinton, and Petraeus are celebrities who had the wit and stature to disagree with Obama. Kerry, Rice, Hagel — this collection of loyalists and losers (quite literally in Kerry’s case) is incapable of disagreement with the president because he handpicked them for their subservience.

In 2013, when Kerry tried to “lean forward” by advocating intervention in Syria, Obama cut him off at the knees. Rice is a friend of the president’s who owes him for saving her career after she withdrew from contention for secretary of state. Hagel? I wonder if he’s even found the keys to the executive washroom.

It ought to be obvious by now, five-and-a-half years into his presidency, that Obama does not take disagreement lightly. Consider the look of contempt and resentment on his face when McCain spoke at the 2010 health-care summit, the disdain and condescension that characterized his debates with Mitt Romney, the annoyance and even anger he expresses when he feels compelled to grant Fox News Channel an interview. Obama “really doesn’t like people.” It’s evident whenever he encounters dissent.

In his mind, the president has already considered all of the opposing arguments, and has found them wanting. He gives every impression of believing that he knows the thinking of his opponents — and the interests of his opponents — better than his opponents do. As Obama told his political director Patrick “It’s Constitutional Bitches” Gaspard: “I think that I’m a better speechwriter than my speechwriters. I know more about policies on any particular issue than my policy directors. And I’ll tell you

right now that I'm gonna think I'm a better political director than my political director." No doubt he also thinks he is a better secretary of state, a better secretary of defense, and a better national-security adviser, too.

We are experiencing the foreign policy President Obama wants us to experience. On Thursday afternoon, when a reporter asked him if America would use force to help restore order to Iraq, the president said, "I gave a very long speech about this" at West Point. That "very long speech" was almost universally panned. Ranging from Boko Haram to the Law of the Sea treaty, its argument was one Obama has made since the beginning of his presidency: that America should not act unilaterally unless our "vital" interests, as defined by Obama, are threatened. On all other "issues of global concern," we "should not go it alone," but rather "broaden our tools to include diplomacy and development, sanctions and isolation, appeals to international law, and, if just, necessary, and effective, multilateral military action."

Broadened tools, soft power, carrots and sticks in the form of sanctions, and international law are the means by which liberal internationalists such as Obama limit the range of forceful U.S. action on the world stage. They are the ingredients in the foreign-policy recipe that has brought chaos to the Middle East — including more than 150,000 Syrians dead and an empowered Iran — and has given us the Russian annexation of Crimea, guerrilla war in eastern Ukraine, a bullying China, a degraded U.S. military, and a disapproving American public.

But Obama does not disapprove. He sees his foreign policy as a success. "Standing with our allies on behalf of international

order, working with international institutions, has given a chance for the Ukrainian people to choose their future — without us firing a shot,” Obama said at West Point. Yesterday Ukraine said that Russian tanks had crossed its border. “It is possible we are victims of our own leadership,” a senior administration official said of Iraq in an interview with the Wall Street Journal. That official is right: Global security is the victim of our own leadership. Our elected leadership.

“We are winding down our war in Afghanistan,” Obama said in his “long speech about this.” Can he really look at the images coming from Iraq and not recognize that they are a preview of what is to come when America leaves Afghanistan? Obama has not only proposed the wrong solutions to the problem of a degrading international order. He fails to see the problem altogether. He is more concerned with the limits of American power than with its responsibilities.

He seems not to understand that only force can stop force. Receiving an award from USC’s Shoah Foundation in May, the president mentioned the crises in Syria and Nigeria, and said wearily that, “having to think through what levers, what power do we have at any given moment, I think, ‘drop by drop by drop,’ that we can erode and wear down these forces that are so destructive; that we can tell a different story.” Drop by drop, erode and wear down — this is foreign policy by erosion. Tell a different story? Stories don’t bring back girls. Delta Force does.

A look at world news has got to be depressing not only for supporters of the war on terror, not only for advocates of a foreign policy that upholds American primacy, but also for men and women of any party who have served the U.S. government

with competence, professionalism, and obligation. Unfortunately, no change of personnel will restore these basic attributes to the conduct of American diplomacy. Only a change of president can do that.

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Article 7.

American Thinker

Are Israel and the U.S. on a Collision Course?

C. Hart

June 15, 2014 -- While the U.S. Obama Administration was quick to condemn the recent Gaza missile attack against Israel, it was not willing to put the blame on PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Since the forming of the new Fatah-Hamas unity government, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said he will hold Abbas responsible for all attacks generated by the Palestinians against the Jewish State. Israel claims that when Abbas sought world support for the new government, he agreed to honor past agreements with Israel, which included disarming terrorist organizations both in the West Bank and Gaza. The

recent rocket attack was in violation of that commitment.

Israeli officials were caught by surprise when only hours after the Palestinian government was formed, the U.S. announced it could work with such a government. The Obama Administration still plans to send funds to the PA, but a fight is expected in Congress in the coming weeks. Hearings on Capitol Hill will deal with laws passed by Congress since 2006. These laws require that America cut aid to any Palestinian government that involves Hamas in the formation; in the sharing of power; and in the day to day governance. Hamas was involved in the selection process, deciding which technocrats would be elected as representatives of the Palestinian people. The input of Hamas in the aspect of governing will be more obvious when the Palestinians elect a president in the next six months.

Israel is trying to convince not only the U.S. but the international community that because Hamas calls for the destruction of the Jewish State world leaders should have nothing to do with this new government. But the U.S. and EU have already established a working relationship with the players involved, and it appears Israel is losing the diplomatic battle.

Former Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., Zalman Shoval, hosted several plenary discussions during the recent 14th Annual Herzliya Conference in Israel. He said that the miscarriage of the nine month peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians; America's misguided efforts in those negotiations; and, the U.S. decision to work with the Fatah-Hamas government "could create critical and dangerous divergences, with possibly long-term effects." Shoval added that, though there is a feeling by some Israelis that the U.S. can no longer be relied upon, "Israel

has not, and shouldn't even think of having an alternative to America."

Speaking at a roundtable discussion titled, "America's Bond with Israel: Fragile, Handle with Care", U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy, Matthew Spence, agreed. "I don't feel like the bond between the U.S. and Israel is fragile in any way. I think the bond is strong; the bond is deep; the bond is unbreakable."

From a military and security perspective Spence is correct. There has been unprecedented defense dialog and shared intelligence cooperation between the two allies. Spence specified the historical levels of military assistance and technology that America has provided to Israel. Additionally, joint military exercises between the two nations have been some of the largest drills conducted in the region.

The U.S. continues to declare America's commitment to Israel's security, looking for every opportunity to express this bond. Spence pointed out that Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel met with Israel's Minister of Defense Moshe Ya'alon about three weeks ago for the sixth time. "That is the most that Hagel has met with any of his counterparts of defense ministers around the world... I think the important part is that the U.S. firmly is committed to making sure that Israel can defeat any of its enemies or any combination of its enemies in the region. And, that is what we call the Qualitative Military Edge (QME)."

This U.S. pledge was met last year when America gave \$3.1 billion to Israel in military aid. Spence claimed it was the highest amount in U.S. history. "That is part of a ten year, over

\$30 billion commitment to the State of Israel; coming at a time when the U.S. is making difficult budget decisions at home; making painful cuts. But, throughout these cuts, the iron clad commitment to Israel, in very concrete ways, remains.”

Spence failed to point out that, reportedly, at least 75% of that assistance is designated for the purchase of advanced American weaponry. Dr. Michael Oren, former Ambassador from Israel to the U.S., was one of the speakers at the roundtable. He commented, “The fact that Israel and our defense relationship generates tens of thousands of jobs for American workers is not a bad thing.”

A case can be made for Israel and America standing together, shoulder to shoulder, in defense cooperation. But this particular bond does not seem to satisfy the concerns of many Israelis. Nor does the fact that an overwhelming majority of Americans (74%) continue to define themselves as pro-Israel.

There are problematic issues that persist which undermine the cooperative efforts of both governments. The U.S. refuses to acknowledge that the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) is part of the homeland biblically promised to the Jewish People. Israelis want to live in their tribal lands, and feel that no other nation should tell them what to do. Oren explained that building in the settlements not only has political ramifications, but also strategic ones for Israel’s security. There’s been a thickening of the borders which were extremely narrow before the 1967 war.

One of the pillars of the U.S.-Israel relationship has been no diplomatic surprises between allies. Israel breached this confidence when it created an incident during U.S. Vice

President Joseph Biden's visit to Jerusalem in March 2010. At a sensitive time in diplomatic relations, the Israeli government announced new building construction in Jerusalem beyond the Green Line. This infuriated the White House.

However, Israel has been surprised by a number of American policy decisions: Obama's infamous Cairo speech; America's secret back-channel negotiations with Iran on nuclear issues; and the quick American decision to work with the Fatah-Hamas unity government.

Then there was President Obama's choice not to recognize the existence or legitimacy of the Bush-Sharon letter of April 14, 2004, which Oren claimed had serious ramifications for American diplomacy. It was an unprecedented move not to accept the validity of an undertaking by a previous president.

In addition, there has been no American distinction made between Israel's building of settlements in outlining areas of the West Bank, and Israel's expansion in Jewish neighborhoods of Jerusalem. Many of these neighborhoods are over the 1948 armistice lines with Jordan, but Israelis living there now are not aware of this. Oren said American condemnation has created a lack of U.S. credibility within the Israeli public. This has also restricted Palestinian decision-making, as they follow America's lead.

These political actions, coupled with America's decision to indirectly work with Hamas through the new Palestinian government, has hurt the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Oren was adamant that it has created an impasse. "When Fatah makes a unified government with an organization that declared

its goal – not just the destruction of the sovereign state of Israel, but the murder of every Jew worldwide, that elicits a concern.... It's something we have to stand up to, and rectify, and try to restore that credibility.” In Oren’s view, it is essential for making progress in peace negotiations.

The solution is to start exploring ways in which the two sides can rebuild confidence. Confidence-building measures have been used to coax the Palestinians into peace negotiations. Oren has a different spin on it: “What about restoring confidence-building measures between the U.S. and Israel; and, start restoring some of the fundamental pillars in our relationship?”

That means no surprises, full disclosure, and a sense of trust regarding diplomatic and strategic issues. One of the greatest tests will be what kind of agreement the U.S. and five other world powers will make with Iran. Will it guarantee Israel’s security?

Shoval, who chaired the roundtable session, concluded, “The relationship at present is not fragile, but the relationship must be looked at with care, because there are factors working both in America, but even in Israel, which could affect that relationship in the future.” Shoval said both countries should avoid unnecessary pitfalls.

Continued cooperation between Israel and America; a unified bond between two strong allies; is vital to keeping mutual enemies at bay in the volatile Middle East.