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Article 1.

MYT

Can Iraq Be Saved?

The Editorial Board

November 1, 2013 -- With Iraq wracked by the worst violence in three years, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki was in Washington this week looking for military aid and other help. This was quite a turnabout, since he had essentially forced American troops to leave in 2011. Since then, the pressures in Iraq have grown, and Mr. Maliki bears much responsibility for the current turmoil.

His plea for assistance is urgent because Al Qaeda in Iraq, a Sunni group and Al Qaeda affiliate that was significantly degraded in 2008, is again a major threat, stoking war against Iraq's majority Shiites. Since January, more than 7,000 people have been killed in bombings and shootings in outdoor markets, cafes, bus stations, mosques and pilgrimages in Shiite areas.

Al Qaeda in Iraq waged a virulent insurgency that brought the country near civil war in 2006 and 2007, then suffered big defeats from Iraqi Sunni tribal groups and American forces. Since the Americans withdrew, the group has gained strength against Iraqi forces that are incapable of fully protecting civilians and has taken in fighters spilling in from neighboring Syria. These are serious problems. Mr. Maliki, however, has been playing a central role in the disorder. There is no doubt that militant threats would be less pronounced now if he had united the country around shared goals rather than stoked sectarian conflict.

Instead, he has wielded his power to favor his Shiite majority brethren at the expense of the minority Sunnis. The Sunnis, banished from power after Saddam Hussein's ouster, have grown more bitter as they have been excluded from political and economic life. Mr. Maliki is also at odds with the Kurds, the country's other major ethnic group in what was supposed to be a power-sharing government.

American officials have often argued that, however imperfect, post-Saddam Iraq has benefited because Iraqis shifted their battles from the street to the political arena. But the escalating bloodshed has steadily poisoned the political space, undermined incipient democratic institutions and made a stable future that much more elusive.

Iraq might be in a safer place today had Mr. Maliki reached a deal with the administration to keep a small number of American troops in the country after 2011 to continue military training and intelligence gathering. He would also have more credibility if he had not aligned Iraq so closely with Iran, a Shiite state, and had not permitted Iran to fly through Iraqi airspace to deliver arms to Syria.

The United States has a strategic interest in Iraq's stability, and in recent months it has resumed counterterrorism cooperation, including intelligence sharing. That should continue, as should American efforts to foster better relations between Iraq and the region.

President Obama and Mr. Maliki, who met at the White House on Friday, agreed on the need for equipment so Iraqi forces can pursue militants. But there was no indication that Mr. Maliki, who plans to run for a third term, had received new commitments for American-made weapons like Apache helicopters and expedited delivery of F-16 fighters.

Given his authoritarian duplicity, there is no reason to trust him with even more arms unless he adopts a more inclusive approach to governing and ensures that next April's election will be fair and democratic.

Article 2.

Commentary Magazine

Iraq's Violence: What Can Be Done?

Max Boot

11.01.2013 -- Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of Iraq is in the United States this week for high-level meetings, including a sit down today with President Obama. It seems like an awfully long time ago that Obama proclaimed the Iraq War a "success" and claimed "we're leaving behind a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq, with a representative government that was elected by its people."

That speech–Obama's own "Mission Accomplished" moment–occurred on December 14, 2011 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Nearly two years later Iraq is unraveling. Violence has returned to 2008 levels, with an average of 68 car bombings a month. No exact figures exist, but it's estimated that 7,000 people have been killed in terrorist attacks this year, and Gen. Lloyd Austin, head of Central Command, is warning "it could easily get worse," with a "continued downward spiral that takes you to a civil war."

Even the White House concedes that al-Qaeda in Iraq has staged a dismaying comeback, spreading its tentacles into Syria and emerging as "a 'transnational threat network' that could possibly reach from the Mideast to the United States."

There is, in fact, a very real danger that the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq, as al-Qaeda in Iraq has now restyled itself, can consolidate a fundamentalist emirate stretching from western Iraq to northern Syria which will become what Afghanistan was prior to 2001: a magnet and breeding ground for jihadist terrorists.

To be sure, not all is awful in Iraq today. One of the few bright spots is surging oil production, which has increased 50 percent since 2005. Iraqi Kurdistan, almost a separate country by now, is also flourishing. But the overall situation is grim, and Maliki has no one but himself to blame. If he had pursued more inclusive policies, he could have kept the Sunnis who had turned against al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2007-2008 in large numbers from reverting to the way of the gun. Instead Maliki has allowed his paranoia to run rampant by targeting senior Sunni figures for arrest and prosecution.

Feeling cornered, the Sunnis have fought back the only way they know how—with car bombs targeted against Shiites. This is the deadly strategy perfected by al-Qaeda in Iraq from 2003 to 2007, and it is risking a repeat of what happened in those dark days when Shiite death squads retaliated by torturing and killing innocent Sunnis.

Problem is, while it's easy to see the toxic trend, it's hard to reverse it. The administration, never particularly interested in Iraq in the first place, lost most of its leverage when it pulled U.S. troops out at the end of 2011. Maliki is now hoping to buy high-end American hardware including F-16 fighters and attack helicopters, and that gives us a bit of leverage–but only a bit. Iraq is rich enough to buy from Russia or China or, for that matter, France if the U.S. decides not to sell it weaponry. There are, however, certain capabilities that the U.S. has that

no other nation can match, and it is those that should be used to try to affect Iraqi behavior. As the Edward Snowden revelations have made plain, the U.S. has unrivaled intelligence capabilities, especially in the sphere of electronic snooping, which could be shared with the Iraqis. So, too, we have drones and Special Operations Forces that once helped to unravel al-Qaeda in Iraq's networks. If sent back into Iraq, they could probably do it again.

Obama should offer Maliki the use of these forces and capabilities, but only on certain conditions: namely that Maliki start accommodating and stop persecuting the Sunnis. Specifically, he should re-start the Sons of Iraq program, which between 2007 and 2008 enrolled some 100,000 Sunni men to fight al-Qaeda in Iraq. This pro-government militia was critical to the success of "the surge" in Iraq, and it could help to catalyze a new, smaller surge—one that would not involve any conventional American ground troops but that would send more Special Operations and intelligence personnel to work with their Iraqi counterparts.

Re-establishing relationships which once existed between the U.S. and Iraqi military could pay further dividends by giving the U.S. side greater "situational awareness" of events in Iraq. This would allow American personnel to help their Iraqi partners in the security forces to resist Maliki's attempts to misuse them for political purposes.

It would also give the U.S. greater insight into Iranian machinations in Iraq: Iran has been gaining power ever since the departure of U.S. troops. Not having the U.S. support to fall back on, Maliki has turned to the Iranians for advice and support in fighting back against al-Qaeda in Iraq. Unfortunately, the Iranians are Shiite hardliners whose

involvement only further radicalizes the Sunnis and makes the situation more toxic.

Greater U.S. involvement in Iraq is necessary to counter the Iranians, but it is unlikely to happen because it conflicts with Obama's desire to pull out of the Middle East at all costs. The cocksure president is also unlikely to take any action which suggests that his 2011 troop pullout was a mistake—which it was. That, unfortunately, increases the likelihood that Iraq will continue to drown in a sea of blood.

Article 3.

Foreign Policy

One word will define Egypt's constitution

Nathan J. Brown

November 1, 2013 -- Those interested in following every word of the work of the Committee of 50 drafting comprehensive revisions to Egypt's constitution now have a variety of sources to follow: one "official" twitter feed; an "unofficial" one; and the latest addition, an "official" Facebook page. But the most important word governing Egypt's future constitutional order will not be mentioned in any of those places. Indeed, it will not even be placed in the final text scheduled to be submitted to voters next month. That fateful word will be spoken only by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and it will be a simple "yes" or "no" concerning his candidacy for the presidency of the Egyptian republic.

That is not to belittle the nature of the other issues being discussed. The matters on which agreement is elusive --

religion and state; the position of the military; the system by which Egypt's next parliament will be elected; the duties or even the existence of an upper house of parliament; judicial structures and guarantees -- are significant. Of course, in the best of worlds the most progressive and airtight clauses will work their effect only very slowly: with Egypt's legal framework and state structures thoroughly authoritarian in their basic framework and modes of operation, nothing will change overnight. As the committee members have elevated debates about freeing the media from state shackles, Islamist broadcasters remain closed. As they deliberate over political freedoms, the country's largest political party remains largely shuttered retaining only the shell of a legal existence. As they craft language to allow protests and demonstrations, supporters of the ousted government are harassed and hounded. None of this means that the wording of the constitution is irrelevant, but even if the delegates agree on general principles (which they have yet to do) and manage to codify that agreement in a skillful manner, there will be much legal and institutional meat to put on the skeletal constitutional framework.

But even if that process begins, the most fundamental questions regarding state structure depend on the decision of a figure who is not even in the room. If Sisi decides to run for president, whatever document is produced by the committee will operate in a manner that revives (and even strengthens) the presidency that has dominated the Egyptian state since the office was created after the abolition of the monarch over half a century ago. If he does not run, the main institutions of the Egyptian state will operate in a more decentralized manner. Neither path is likely to be particularly democratic.

Without Sisi in the presidency, the post will likely go to a

civilian figure -- either one of Egypt's meager group of politicians or a senior public figure. When Mohamed Morsi occupied the presidency with a substantial social movement and political party behind him, he was unable to make the levers of power work very effectively, and his elected successor is likely to find a similar problem. Various state institutions have used the post-2011 period to carve out considerable autonomy for themselves, and some are striving to ensure that such autonomy gets enshrined in the constitution (most notably the military, the judiciary, al-Azhar, but also, to a lesser extent, the labor federation and even the state-owned press). Even those that do not get constitutional guarantees (particularly the array of security and intelligence services) have shown little inclination to subject themselves to any kind of political oversight.

In short, such a constitutional order resembles the situation I described in the aftermath of the July 3 coup: "if so much state activity is to be insulated, politics (and the organizations, movements, and parties that populate political and civil society) is squeezed very much to the side. The width of the state leaves little room for the people." The fall of Mubarak ended the grip of the presidency over all state institutions, and no civilian president is likely to be able to reestablish it.

But matters could be quite different if Sisi occupies the presidency. No longer would the military establishment be so isolated with one of their own rank at the helm. The security services actively worked to undermine elected President Morsi; they would be far more likely to toe the line if there were a strong president from the military. Sisi's popularity and likely landslide victory would probably cow the parliament and most civilian political parties; such actors would show life

only on matters on which Sisi had not clearly spoken. Egypt would once again be ruled from the presidency. To be sure, the situation would be different from the Nasserist period (in which a ruthless security apparatus and a single political party ensured the president's total domination) or even the Mubarak presidency (in which a stultified National Democratic Party still could produce loyal majorities to succumb to the presidential will and other institutions were dominated as much through sycophancy and co-optation as intimidation). A Sisi presidency would likely still find some obstacles -- the institutional autonomy for many actors would remain even if their political will to stand up to the president would weaken; the president would likely keep a watchful eye to ensure that the military did not use its privileged position to coalesce behind a rival; and a fractured parliament could be a difficult body to manage. And the new modes of contentious politics that Egyptians have adopted over the past few years -- demonstrations, petition campaigns, ruthless public criticism -- could still make the society difficult to steer politically, especially as the Sisi mania dies down and Egyptians come to realize that they cannot have their Sisi cake and eat it too. The current situation -- in which a weak civilian leadership bears formal responsibility, especially for economic issues and social services while the military retains a dominant hand without any accountability -- would seem to be ideal from a general's perspective. It is for that reason that I have long considered Sisi's candidacy unlikely. Moving from his current position to the presidency would not be a demotion, but it would be taking on a set of headaches and perhaps, over the long run, turn some of his enthusiastic boosters into skeptics, especially if public services continue to deteriorate along with

general economic conditions.
But the choice between these two alternative futures -- one with a divided and feckless state apparatus and the other with a more unified and decisive one -- may create political pressures on him to seek the job. It is true that neither of these scenarios is democratic in anything more than a plebiscitary sense, but that is an unmistakable result of the political choices the Egyptian people made this past summer.

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Article 4.

TIME

The Saudis Are Mad? Tough!

Fareed Zakaria

Nov. 11, 2013 -- America's middle east policies are failing, we are told, and the best evidence is that Saudi Arabia is furious. Dick Cheney, John McCain and Lindsey Graham have all sounded the alarm about Riyadh's recent rejection of a seat on the U.N. Security Council. But whatever one thinks of the Obama Administration's handling of the region, surely the last measure of American foreign policy should be how it is received by the House of Saud.
If there were a prize for Most Irresponsible Foreign Policy it

would surely be awarded to Saudi Arabia. It is the nation most responsible for the rise of Islamic radicalism and militancy around the world. Over the past four decades, the kingdom's immense oil wealth has been used to underwrite the export of an extreme, intolerant and violent version of Islam preached by its Wahhabi clerics.

Go anywhere in the world--from Germany to Indonesia--and you'll find Islamic centers flush with Saudi money, spouting intolerance and hate. In 2007, Stuart Levey, then a top Treasury official, told ABC News, "If I could snap my fingers and cut off the funding from one country, it would be Saudi Arabia." When confronted with the evidence, Saudi officials often claim these funds flow from private individuals and foundations and the government has no control over them. But many of the foundations were set up by the government or key members of the royal family, and none could operate in defiance of national policy; the country is an absolute monarchy. In a December 2009 cable, leaked by WikiLeaks in 2010, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton confirmed that Saudi Arabia remained a "critical financial base" for terrorism and that Riyadh "has taken only limited action" to stop the flow of funds to the Taliban and other such groups.

Saudi Arabia was one of only three countries in the world to recognize and support the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan until the 9/11 attacks. It is also a major player in Pakistan, now home to most of the world's deadliest terrorists. The country's former Law Minister Iqbal Haider told Deutsche Welle, the German news agency, in August 2012, "Whether they are the Taliban or Lashkar-e-Taiba, their ideology is Saudi Wahhabi without an iota of doubt." He added that there was no doubt Saudi Arabia was supporting Wahhabi groups

throughout his country.

Ever since al-Qaeda attacked Riyadh directly in 2003, the Saudis have stamped down on terrorism at home. But they have not ended support for Wahhabi clerics, centers, madrasahs and militants abroad. During the Iraq War, much of the support for Sunni militants came from Saudi sources. That pattern continues in Syria today.

Saudi Arabia's objections to the Obama Administration's policies toward Syria and Iran are not framed by humanitarian concerns for the people of those countries. They are rooted in a pervasive anti-Shi'ite ideology. Riyadh has long treated all other versions and sects of Islam as heresy and condoned the oppression of those groups. A 2009 report from Human Rights Watch details the ways in which the Saudi government, clerics, religious police and schools systematically discriminate against the local Shi'ite population, including arrests, beatings and, on occasion, the use of live ammunition. (And not just the Shi'ites. In March 2012, Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti issued a fatwa declaring that it was "necessary to destroy all the churches in the Arabian Peninsula.")

The regime fears that any kind of empowerment of the Shi'ites anywhere could embolden the 15% of Saudi Arabia's population that is Shi'ite--and happens to live in the part of the country where most of its oil reserves can be found. That's why the Saudis sent troops into neighboring Bahrain during the Arab Spring of 2011, to crush the Shi'ite majority's uprising.

Saudi royals have been rattled by the events in their region and beyond. They sense that the discontent that launched the Arab Spring is not absent in their own populace. They fear the rehabilitation of Iran. They also know that the U.S. might very soon find itself entirely independent of Middle Eastern oil.

Given these trends, it is possible that Saudi Arabia worries that a seat on the U.N. Security Council might constrain it from having freedom of action. Or that the position could shine a light on some of its more unorthodox activities. Or that it could force Riyadh to vote on issues it would rather ignore. It is also possible that the Saudis acted in a sudden fit of pique. After all, they had spent years lobbying for the seat. Whatever the reason, let's concede that, yes, Saudi Arabia is angry with the U.S. But are we sure that's a sign Washington is doing something wrong?

Article 5.

Al-Monitor

The Saudi Leadership Crisis

Madawi Al-Rasheed

November 1 -- On his visit to Riyadh, John Kerry, the US secretary of state, will encounter a strategic partner that has become too bewildered by the changing Arab world. A chorus of important princely Saudi voices have already been heard before the visit, pointing to disappointment amounting to anger over the failure of the United States to act in Syria and promising serious shifts in the Saudi-US partnership. The two Al-Faisal brothers, Saud and Turki, in addition to Bandar bin Sultan, have left no doubt that Saudi Arabia is distressed by recent US policies vis-à-vis Syria and Iran. Over the last decade, Saudi Arabia struggled to reassure its own people and the international community that it still matters, not only for its oil, but also for its claims to lead the Arab world. Away from both rhetoric and wishful thinking, Saudi realities are today

very different from what they used to be in the 1970s, when for a brief moment King Faisal had the potential to play a leading role. Yet Saudi Arabia today is far from that fleeting historical moment. Saudi Arabia consolidated its partnership with the West in the shadow of the Cold War. But as that war gave way to more complex political outcomes, the West's reliance on Saudi Arabia was withering, regardless of how important Saudi resources are. Saudi Arabia was previously thought of as part of any solutions that deal with the region's many problems, but now it may have actually become part of the problems facing the Arab region after its stumbling uprisings. The Saudis struggle today to reassert their position for many reasons. First, Saudi Arabia today lacks charismatic and energetic leadership capable of energizing not only its domestic politics, but also foreign relations. Internally, the Saudi monarchy is at a standstill, refusing to acknowledge that it is out of touch with the serious changes that swept the Arab world over the last three years. The leadership is still relying on old strategies to keep the winds of change away from the Arabian desert. It resorts to a combination of carrots and sticks, with the latter often becoming easily deployed in an attempt to stifle debate and intimidate courageous activists. This leadership still thinks that change can only come from above, with society remaining at the receiving end of royal largesse and initiative. It cannot comprehend that it rules over a different generation engaged with current affairs and aspiring toward real participation in decision-making. When most of the senior leadership is above the age of 80, there is a serious generation gap difficult to bridge with paternalism and the promise of subsidies. The leadership has only succeeded in keeping a lid on the implosion as a result of the ongoing

instabilities in neighboring countries. Saudis are meant to learn a lesson that equates political change with chaos, death and turmoil. As long as this instability continues, the leadership can rest assured that nobody will rock the boat. Then Saudis must watch those imaginary enemies, first Iran, then the Muslim Brotherhood, with their secret cells that allegedly plot to destabilize the country. If that's not enough, there are always those conspiracy theories that circulate about an omnipotent superpower clandestinely planning the partition of Saudi Arabia. Consequently, Saudis are regularly injected with a fair dose of fear and apprehension about their future, to the extent that they do not even think about change. Ruling by fear of an unknown future and multiple alleged enemies in a turbulent region guarantees that society remains acquiescent.
Externally, Saudi Arabia has failed to recognize its limited capacities when dealing with regional issues from the occupation of Iraq to the recent Syrian crisis. As it has inflated its role in the region and sold propaganda about this role to its own constituency, any setback is immediately considered as threatening its stature. Saudis have been sold a good amount of propaganda about their government's commitment not only to Arab causes, but also those of the Muslim world. Statistics about its overseas spending on these causes make big news, but not recently.
While in the past Saudis took for granted that their government should help Arabs and Muslims, more recently they have begun to resent this charity. The more they experience duress in meeting basic needs, the more they question the logic of dedicating a considerable amount of wealth to helping others. Why should new housing complexes be built in neighboring countries as gifts from the Saudi government while more than

70% of Saudis do not own a house? Such legitimate questions have been suppressed in the past but now ordinary citizens often ask them. Saudis are more inclined to question their government's logic in pursuing charitable projects abroad as they become more aware of their own unmet needs. They have also learned the hard way that patronizing the Arabs has not always pacified them or turned them into straightforward clients. Second, the Saudi government has failed to be flexible in its dealing with challenges both at home and abroad. A conservative monarchy with multiple aging heads is not a good starting point for flexibility. Since King Abdullah came to power in 2005, the image of the reformist monarch as a humanitarian father has collided with the reality of slow reform, corruption and increasing repression. Abdullah is truly sidelined as an arbiter of Saudi internal politics, which remains the prerogative of the Ministry of Interior, headed by Prince Muhammad bin Nayef, and its many bureaucratic branches. The king's son, Mutaib, may continue to play the game and keep the myth of reform going, but contradictions in the system are already obvious. So Abdullah empowers women and appoints them to the consultative council while the Ministry of Interior curbs their campaign to drive and arrests male supporters of the campaign. Abdullah initiated the national dialogue forum amidst the euphoria of reform, which has evaporated with time. Abdullah also saw no harm in mixing between the sexes in newly founded universities, but the Ministry of Interior, through religious police in search of immorality, continues to harass both men and women. Such contradictions are symptomatic of a Saudi leadership divided on reform and, in fact, short of formulating a comprehensive reformist agenda. The introduction of minimalist social

reforms collides with the stagnation of the political system; hence contradictions are bound to be symptomatic of the old style of government. The same inflexibility is a characteristic of the way the Saudi government conducts its foreign policy. In today's world there seems to be no room for eternal enemies or friends. Even allies seem to fall out over covert intrigues and spying. Saudi Arabia has been accustomed to see the world in black and white, but it should develop its skills to deal with gray areas. If John Kerry has a chance to succeed in his visit to Riyadh, he must point to the Saudi leadership that the old inflexibility at both the domestic and regional levels threatens to perpetuate the Arab region's descent into more chaos, not to mention Saudi Arabia itself. Because Saudi Arabia has no choice but to listen to the power that guarantees its security, I do not think Kerry's task should be impossible. With the prospect of the United States reaching out to other regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia should not miss the opportunity to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Madawi Al-Rasheed is a visiting professor at the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She has written extensively about the Arabian Peninsula, Arab migration, globalization, religious trans-nationalism and gender.

Article 6.

Agence Global

Consequences of U.S. Decline

Immanuel Wallerstein

1 Nov 2013 -- I have long argued that U.S. decline as a hegemonic power began circa 1970 and that a slow decline became a precipitate one during the presidency of George W. Bush. I first started writing about this in 1980 or so. At that time the reaction to this argument, from all political camps, was to reject it as absurd. In the 1990s, quite to the contrary, it was widely believed, again on all sides of the political spectrum, that the United States had reached the height of unipolar dominance.

However, after the burst bubble of 2008, opinion of politicians, pundits, and the general public began to change. Today, a large percentage of people (albeit not everyone) accepts the reality of at least some relative decline of U.S. power, prestige, and influence. In the United States this is accepted quite reluctantly. Politicians and pundits rival each other in recommending how this decline can still be reversed. I believe it is irreversible.

The real question is what the consequences of this decline are. The first is the manifest reduction of U.S. ability to control the world situation, and in particular the loss of trust by the erstwhile closest allies of the United States in its behavior. In the last month, because of the evidence released by Edward Snowden, it has become public knowledge that the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) has been directly spying on the top political leadership of Germany, France, Mexico, and Brazil among others (as well, of course, on countless citizens of these countries).

I am sure the United States engaged in similar activities in 1950. But in 1950, none of these countries would have dared to make a public scandal of their anger, and demand that the United States stop doing this. If they do it today, it is because

today the United States needs them more than they need the United States. These present leaders know that the United States has no choice but to promise, as President Obama just did, to cease these practices (even if the United States doesn't mean it). And the leaders of these four countries all know that their internal position will be strengthened, not weakened, by publically tweaking the nose of the United States.

Insofar as the media discuss U.S. decline, most attention is placed on China as a potential successor hegemon. This too misses the point. China is undoubtedly a country growing in geopolitical strength. But accession to the role of the hegemonic power is a long, arduous process. It would normally take at least another half-century for any country to reach the position where it could exercise hegemonic power. And this is a long time, during which much may happen. Initially, there is no immediate successor to the role. Rather, what happens when the much lessened power of the erstwhile hegemonic power seems clear to other countries is that relative order in the world-system is replaced by a chaotic struggle among multiple poles of power, none of which can control the situation. The United States does remain a giant, but a giant with clay feet. It continues for the moment to have the strongest military force, but it finds itself unable to make much good use of it. The United States has tried to minimize its risks by concentrating on drone warfare. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has just denounced this view as totally unrealistic militarily. He reminds us that one wins wars only by ground warfare, and the U.S. president is presently under enormous pressure by both politicians and popular sentiment not to use ground forces.

The problem for everyone in a situation of geopolitical chaos

is the high level of anxiety it breeds and the opportunities it offers for destructive folly to prevail. The United States, for example, may no longer be able to win wars, but it can unleash enormous damage to itself and others by imprudent actions. Whatever the United States tries to do in the Middle East today, it loses. At present none of the strong actors in the Middle East (and I do mean none) take their cues from the United States any longer. This includes Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan (not to mention Russia and China). The policy dilemmas this poses for the United States has been recorded in great detail in The New York Times. The conclusion of the internal debate in the Obama administration has been a super-ambiguous compromise, in which President Obama seems vacillating rather than forceful.

Finally, there are two real consequences of which we can be fairly sure in the decade to come. The first is the end of the U.S. dollar as the currency of last resort. When this happens, the United States will have lost a major protection for its national budget and for the cost of its economic operations. The second is the decline, probably a serious decline, in the relative standard of living of U.S. citizens and residents. The political consequences of this latter development are hard to predict in detail but will not be insubstantial.

Immanuel Wallerstein, Senior Research Scholar at Yale University, is the author of The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World (New Press).

Article 7.

The Weekly Standard

A Dangerous Game

Elliott Abrams

November 11, 2013 -- There's a Washington think-tank variation on the board game Risk, and here's how it goes: I give you a short statement about Obama policy in the Middle East, and you have to say who it's from.
For example:

"The Persians are taking over Iraq and Syria and building a nuclear weapon. Are you Americans crazy? You think you will outsmart them in Geneva? They send Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hezbollah troops to fight in Syria and you do nothing? You draw a red line over chemical weapons and let Putin erase it?"

So who said it: Saudi foreign minister Saud al-Faisal? King Abdullah of Jordan? The Israelis? The Emiratis? The Moroccans? The Kuwaitis? Lebanese Christians? The list of candidates is long.
It's hard to win this game, because in private, all these players are saying pretty much the same thing. At this point they are less angry than astonished by -American policy, though the Saudis have been coming out of the closet in recent weeks with real resentment about the way Obama is changing the rules. In the game Risk, there are no teams, and alliances are temporary and often disregarded. Our Middle Eastern friends see Obama as playing by those rules rather than the ones that have governed American policy for decades, where alliances are real and lasting, and behavior is predictable. In real life they did not expect to see an America -desperate for a deal with Iran. None of these American friends likes the new rules

much because it is they who face the risks: For them, what are mere guessing games in Washington can mean life or death. While Secretary of State John Kerry has been making fine speeches and signing op-eds about what is acceptable and unacceptable in world politics, deaths in Syria rise each day (perhaps to 125,000 or even 200,000 now), there are 6 million persons displaced all over Syria and crowding into Jordan and Lebanon, and reports are coming out of cholera and polio.

The actions of the State Department have rarely seemed as disconnected from reality as they are today. The New York Times's October 26 story about Obama's new "modest" Middle East policy was based on interviews with Susan Rice. According to the story, and to Rice, we now have these goals in the region: a successful negotiation with Iran, a successful negotiation of Israeli-Palestinian peace, and a successful negotiation of the Syrian conflict. Gone, it seems, are bad old habits like the assertion of American power or the preference for defeating one's enemies. The Iranians send troops to Syria, so we send John Kerry to talk with the Russians in a suite overlooking Lake Geneva. The only thing multiplying faster than Iranian centrifuges are talking points. But centrifuges produce enriched uranium, while talking points produce only position papers and Memoranda of Conversations.

Israel's former minister of defense and head of the Israel Defense Forces Ehud Barak once said that Israel survives in the Middle East not because Israelis can quote the Bible, but because they have the best army around—and that's a view their neighbors all share. Until recently, the top gun in the neighborhood was the Americans. Only they had the ability to send hundreds of thousands of troops to stop aggression like Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. They had the Sixth

Fleet in the Mediterranean, the Fifth Fleet in the Gulf, a red line against chemical weapons use, and dozens of flat statements promising to prevent Iran from getting to a nuclear weapon. But Susan Rice's list of American priorities—presumably also Barack Obama's—might be Belgium's: all talk, all conferences, all Brussels and Geneva and the Security Council.

What's missing? Any American friend in the Middle East can give you the list: Punishing Assad for using chemical weapons after the American president drew a red line. Giving the Syrian nationalist rebels what they need to drive Assad from power and thereby weaken both Iran and Syria. Letting the ayatollahs know they will give up their nuclear weapons program or see it destroyed. Giving democrats, liberals, and religious minorities the moral and political support they need to survive against the twin pressures of Islamism and military dictatorship. What's missing, in other words, is the use of power. The new "modest" policy eschews American power as if it were a malign inheritance from the past, like sexism: That's the way we were in the bad old days, but we've worked our way through to a new and more mature approach now. This explains the astonishment of our Middle Eastern friends and allies who find themselves facing Lavrov and Putin, Khamenei and Soleimani, Assad and Nasrallah. Our allies have not attained the same level of enlightenment about world politics as the Obama team, among whom terms like "victory" and "enemy" are thought outmoded. What our friends know is that our enemies aren't playing Risk, they're playing for keeps. Everyone from Morocco to Iran gets that, but no one in the White House seems to.

It is only four years since Barack Obama went to Cairo to say

"as-salamu alaykum" and "seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world." This was the task for which he claimed to be especially, indeed uniquely, qualified: In that speech he said, "As a boy, I spent several years in Indonesia and heard the call of the azaan at the break of dawn and the fall of dusk." And, he noted, "I have known Islam on three continents before coming to the region where it was first revealed."

Oh well. Four years is a long time in politics. In Arabia, where Islam began, Obama is now reviled by leaders who believe he is either dangerously naïve or indifferent to the risks they face. In Egypt his policies have managed the neat trick of alienating everyone from the Muslim Brotherhood to the army to the liberals and democrats. In Israel there is dread about an administration that appears to view drone strikes as the apex of America's assertion of power—and all else as morally ambiguous.

Addressing the American Israel Public Affairs Committee last spring, Ehud Barak said this: "It is no secret, and I'll repeat it again, that we live in a tough neighborhood, where there is no mercy for the weak. And no second chance for those who cannot defend themselves." That's another line that could easily have come from the Saudis, Emiratis, Jordanians, and so on: That's how they all see the Hobbesian world in which they live. For a while, for some decades, the "war of all against all" was limited by a Pax Americana that imposed some rules. Now those rules can be broken in the face of official American indifference—disguised, to be sure, in briefings, speeches, and spin as a new strategic approach. "We have to be humble," Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes told the columnist David Ignatius last week. Ignatius, a reliable Obama

apologist, called it “strategic humility,” but even he acknowledged that it is “quite dangerous.”
To those whose futures are put in peril by it, the Americans appear to be imposing huge new risks on nations that have been their friends for decades. The New York Times called that a more “modest” Middle East policy, but the only thing “modest” here is the vision and ability of those in charge in the White House.

Article 8.

Foreign Policy

How Not to Think About the Israel Lobby

Stephen M. Walt

November 1, 2013 -- As some of you may have noticed, I haven't been writing about the Israel lobby that much lately. Life's too short to spend all one's time on the activities of one particular interest group -- even if it has an awful lot of influence -- and there are many topics at least as important as the special relationship between the United States and one small country in the Middle East. Plus, I'm satisfied with my earlier writings on this topic, in part because subsequent events kept confirming their accuracy and because most of the criticisms we received were remarkably weak and tended to confirm our main points.
But occasionally I do see someone writing about the Israel lobby in a way that merits a response. Case in point: the recent WaPo blog post on this topic by Max Fisher, which inspired a sympathetic exegesis by Michael Koplow here. Fisher is often

an astute analyst and Koplow has written some smart things on other topics, so it was somewhat surprising to see such careless reasoning from both of them.

The gist of their argument is two-fold. First, they maintain that there is a widespread belief that AIPAC and other organizations in the Israel lobby are all-powerful, and that the lobby "controls" U.S. Middle East policy. Koplow implies that John Mearsheimer and I hold this view, though Fisher does not. Second, recent events -- most notably the Obama administration's failure to heed AIPAC et al.'s push for military intervention in Syria -- demonstrate that this view is bogus. Together, the two pieces suggest that all this talk about an "Israel lobby" is sort of silly, and that these groups have rather limited influence on U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Like some other attempts to kick up dust on this question, both pieces involve the ritual slaughter of a straw man. No serious person writing on this topic believes the Israel lobby is "all-powerful" or that it controls every aspect of U.S. Middle East policy. It is telling that Fisher does not mention or quote any individual or group making such a claim. Mearsheimer and I certainly didn't; in our book we repeatedly state that the lobby does not get its way all the time. We also emphasized that its activities were akin to those of other powerful interest groups, and generally consistent with normal practice in American politics.

Viewed in this light, the lobby's failure to get the United States into a war in Syria is hardly telling evidence of its limited influence. Getting the United States to launch an unprovoked war is a big task -- especially when you consider how America's recent wars in that part of the world have gone -- and no lobbying or interest group can accomplish that by itself.

Various elements of the lobby did play an important role in getting the United States to invade Iraq, but as we emphasized in our book, they didn't do it by themselves then either. In particular, the war would not have occurred had Bush and Cheney not gotten on board, and it would almost certainly not have happened absent the 9/11 attacks. As with all interest groups, it matters what they are asking for and when they are asking for it.

Does this mean the lobby's power is on the wane? Maybe, but not by much. Israel continues to receive $3-4 billion in U.S. aid each year, even though it is now a wealthy country. It gets this aid even as it continues to take actions the United States opposes, most notably building settlements in the Occupied Territories. The United States continues to provide it with diplomatic cover in the United Nations and other international organizations, and U.S. officials consistently turn a blind eye to Israeli actions that are making the two-state solution that the U.S. favors impossible. Aspiring officials like Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and U.N. Ambassador Samantha Power still have to perform demeaning acts of self-criticism in order to win Senate confirmation. Do Fisher and Koplow think the lobby's influence has nothing whatsoever to do with any of this?

Or ask yourself this: why has President Obama spent more time meeting with Benjamin Netanyahu -- the leader of a small Middle Eastern country whose total population is less than New York City -- than with any other foreign official, and why did Netanyahu recently get a seven-hour meeting with Secretary of State John Kerry? Is it because Obama and Kerry find Bibi's company so engaging that they just can't bear to be apart? I don't think so. One measure of the lobby's impact is

simply the amount of time and attention that US officials have to devote to this one small country, while studiously ignoring its nuclear arsenal, illegal settlements, and other deficiencies. (No country is perfect, of course, but Israel is uniquely immune to criticism by prominent U.S. political figures.)
Finally, if you're not wearing blinders, it is impossible to miss the fact that AIPAC, WINEP, JINSA, the RJC, the ADL, and a host of other hardline groups in the lobby are now the principal opponents to a diplomatic deal with Iran. Just look at this article from The Forward, or this one from Ha'aretz, which make it clear that these are the principal groups holding Obama's feet to the fire on this issue. And of course it is many of these same groups or individuals who have been insisting for years that the U.S. keep all options "on the table" and use force against Iran if necessary. Absent pressure from these groups, it would be much, much easier for the United States to come to terms with Tehran.
Will they succeed in derailing a deal? I don't know. As I laid out in detail more than a year ago, the situation vis-à-vis Iran is different than the pre-war situation with Iraq in 2003, and "pro-Israel" organizations here in the United States are not as unified on this topic. A reasonable deal with Iran is clearly preferable to another Middle East war, and preferable to making unrealistic demands that make it harder to monitor Iran's nuclear research activities and might eventually convince Iran to pursue actual weapons. Because the United States and its allies have powerful incentives to pursue a diplomatic solution, resistance from hardline groups in the lobby may be insufficient to stop them.
Bu no interest group gets everything it wants. Interest groups and lobbies advance their cause partly by pushing for specific

policies (sometimes successfully, sometimes not). But they also succeed when they can limit the options that policymakers are willing to consider or can force policymakers to offer up other concessions to keep these groups happy. AIPAC famously lost the AWACs fight during the Reagan administration, but the battle was so difficult and costly that Reagan never really challenged it again. Similarly, former US Mideast negotiator (and FP colleague) Aaron David Miller has noted that "those of us advising the Secretary of State and the president were very sensitive to what the pro-Israel community was thinking, and when it came to considering ideas that Israel didn't like, we too often engaged in a kind of preemptive self-censorship." Bottom line: powerful interest groups often get their way not by achieving specific goals directly, but by shaping and constraining the options politicians are willing to contemplate.

So the question to ask is not whether AIPAC "wins" any particular issue (particularly when that issue involves a big demand). It is what US policy would be if these groups did not exist, or if they were advocating a different course of action. In other words, if Obama and Kerry didn't have to worry at all about the lobby, or if groups like J Street or Americans for Peace Now had as much clout as AIPAC, would the United States have handled relation with Iran in exactly the same way for the past twenty year or more? More tellingly still: would the United States have done a better job of brokering an Israel-Palestinian peace if its negotiators (a number of whom were drawn from the lobby's ranks) had not been acting as "Israel's lawyer" and if the U.S. could have made its aid to Israel conditional on an end to settlement building? If you think the lobby's clout had no impact on our mishandling of these two

important problems, I've got a bridge to sell you and then a couple of books for you to read.

One final point. Despite the flaws in their two posts, Fisher and Koplow may in fact be on to something. Two things have changed since Mearsheimer and I wrote our original article and subsequent book: 1) a lot more people are aware of the lobby and understand that its positions are often harmful to U.S. (and Israeli) interests, and 2) a few more people are willing to talk and write about this phenomenon openly, instead of being silenced by false charges of anti-Semitism or the fear of professional retribution. Democracy thrives on free, open, and rational debate, which is why a sensible but frank discussion of the lobby's influence is all to the good. Or as Andrew Sullivan might say: know hope.

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