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[Article 1.](#)

NYT

ISIS and SISI

[Thomas L. Friedman](#)

June 24, 2014 -- The past month has presented the world with what the Israeli analyst Orit Perlov describes as the two dominant Arab governing models: ISIS and SISI.

ISIS, of course, is the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the bloodthirsty Sunni militia that has gouged out a new state from Sunni areas in Syria and Iraq. SISI, of course, is Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the new strongman/president of Egypt, whose regime debuted this week by shamefully sentencing three Al Jazeera journalists to prison terms on patently trumped-up charges — a great nation acting so small.

ISIS and Sisi, argues Perlov, a researcher on Middle East social networks at Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies, are just flip sides of the same coin: one elevates “god” as the arbiter of all political life and the other “the national state.”

Both have failed and will continue to fail — and require coercion to stay in power — because they cannot deliver for young Arabs and Muslims what they need most: the education, freedom and jobs to realize their full potential and the ability to participate as equal citizens in their political life. We are going to have to wait for a new generation that “puts society in the center,” argues Perlov, a new Arab/Muslim generation that asks not “how can we serve god or how can we serve the state but how can they serve us.” Perlov argues that these governing models — hyper-Islamism (ISIS) driven by a war against “takfiris,” or apostates, which is how Sunni Muslim extremists refer to Shiite Muslims; and hyper-nationalism (SISI) driven by a war against Islamist “terrorists,” which is what the Egyptian state calls the Muslim Brotherhood — need to be exhausted to make room for a third option built on pluralism in society, religion and thought.

The Arab world needs to finally puncture the twin myths of the military state (SISI) or the Islamic state (ISIS) that will bring prosperity, stability and dignity. Only when the general populations “finally admit that they are both failed and unworkable models,” argues Perlov, might there be “a chance to see this region move to the 21st century.”

The situation is not totally bleak. You have two emergent models, both frail and neither perfect, where Muslim Middle East nations have built decent, democratizing governance, based on society and with some political, cultural and religious pluralism: Tunisia and Kurdistan. Again both are works in progress, but what is important is that they did emerge from the societies themselves. You also have the relatively soft monarchies — like Jordan and Morocco — that are at least experimenting at the margins with

more participatory governance, allow for some opposition and do not rule with the brutality of the secular autocrats.

“Both the secular authoritarian model — most recently represented by Sisi — and the radical religious model — represented now by ISIS — have failed,” adds Marwan Muasher, the former foreign minister of Jordan and author of “The Second Arab Awakening and the Battle for Pluralism.”

“They did because they have not addressed peoples’ real needs: improving the quality of their life, both in economic and development terms, and also in feeling they are part of the decision-making process. Both models have been exclusionist, presenting themselves as the holders of absolute truth and of the solution to all society’s problems.”

But the Arab public “is not stupid,” Muasher added. “While we will continue to see exclusionist discourses in much of the Arab world for the foreseeable future, results will end up trumping ideology. And results can only come from policies of inclusion, that would give all forces a stake in the system, thereby producing stability, checks and balances, and ultimately prosperity. ISIS and Sisi cannot win. Unfortunately, it might take exhausting all other options before a critical mass is developed that internalizes this basic fact. That is the challenge of the new generation in the Arab world, where 70 percent of the population is under 30 years of age. The old generation, secular or religious, seems to have learned nothing from the failure of the postindependence era to achieve sustainable development, and the danger of exclusionist policies.”

Indeed, the Iraq founded in 1921 is gone with the wind. The new Egypt imagined in Tahrir Square is stillborn. Too many leaders and followers in both societies seem intent on giving their failed ideas of the past another spin around the block before, hopefully, they opt for the only idea that works: pluralism in politics, education and religion. This could take a while, or not. I don’t know.

We tend to make every story about us. But this is not all about us. To be sure, we’ve done plenty of ignorant things in Iraq and Egypt. But we also helped open their doors to a different future, which their leaders have slammed shut for now. Going forward, where we see people truly committed to pluralism, we should help support them. And where we see islands of decency threatened, we should help protect them. But this is primarily about them, about their need to learn to live together without an

iron fist from the top, and it will happen only when and if they want it to happen.

[Article 2](#)

The Washington Post

A terrorist with gang-leader charisma

David Ignatius

June 24, 2014 -- A glimpse of the passionate loyalty inspired by [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#), the leader of the insurgent group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, comes in a recent video made by a 20-year-old Muslim recruit from Cardiff, Wales.

“We understand no borders,” [says the young man](#), identified as [Nasser Muthana](#), a recruit who apparently joined ISIS about eight months ago.

“We have participated in battles in [Syria], and in a few days we will go to Iraq and will fight them and will even go to Lebanon and Jordan, wherever our sheik [Baghdadi] wants to send us.”

“Send us, we are your sharp arrows. Throw us at your enemies, wherever they may be,” [pledges the young man](#) to Baghdadi on the video. The British recruit is dressed in a simple uniform and a light head scarf, his thin beard a sign that he is barely out of high school. Before he decided to join the jihad, Muthana, whose family emigrated from Yemen to Britain, had been accepted by four medical schools in Britain, [according to an analysis by the Daily Mail](#).

Baghdadi’s ability to inspire such intense support worries U.S. officials. His fighters seemingly will go anywhere and do anything for the cause. They combine a fanatical passion with an unusual degree of organization, technical skill and tactical planning.

“Baghdadi is a ruthless, resilient and ambitious terrorist leader who unfortunately has shown a knack for tactical operations and, it seems, military strategy,” says a U.S. counterterrorism official. He describes Baghdadi as “headstrong” and “opportunistic” in his ability to break with core al-Qaeda leadership and fashion alliances with Iraqi and Syrian tribal leaders.

Baghdadi may be more skillful in the field than either of his mentors, Osama bin Laden or Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. He is creating his own “emirate,” guarded by tanks and heavy weapons, something bin Laden only dreamed of. And he has recruited Sunni tribal leaders with more finesse than Zarqawi, whose hyper-violent tactics ultimately turned the Iraqi population away from him.

“Baghdadi is the unquestioned leader of [ISIS] and relies on a set of trusted lieutenants, but he has empowered local commanders to make decisions and seems to have employed a somewhat decentralized command structure,” says the U.S. counterterrorism official. It’s a mob-like approach, with Baghdadi using “brutal methods to terrorize civilian populations” and financing operations with “coercive methods that would be familiar to an organized crime group,” the official explains.

Baghdadi’s gang-leader charisma may reflect the [time he spent as a prisoner at Camp Bucca](#), a U.S.-run detention facility that U.S. military officers feared was becoming a school for jihadists. The likelihood these camps were radicalizing inmates was “a very real concern,” Maj. Gen. Douglas Stone, then deputy commander for detainee operations, told Newsweek in 2007.

It’s telling that, as Baghdadi has built his organization over the past several years, one of his most effective tactics has been to liberate Iraqi prisons that were holding al-Qaeda detainees. ISIS mounted a sophisticated [attack on Abu Ghraib and Taji prisons](#) nearly a year ago, which freed [up to 1,000 inmates](#), many of them hardened al-Qaeda fighters. An Iraqi government communique noted then how sophisticated the attack was, combining car bombs, suicide bombers and coordinated mortar fire. When ISIS swept through Mosul this month, the group freed another [2,000 to 3,000 veteran fighters from a prison outside the town](#).

Though the U.S. official describes Baghdadi as a “homegrown terrorist” who has never traveled outside Iraq and Syria, his group has cleverly mobilized international social media to boost its cause. The online journal [War on the Rocks](#) this week analyzed a [“Twitter storm” on #AllEyesOnISIS](#). In a 24-hour period that began Friday, there were 31,500 tweets, with the top 50 tweeters accounting for nearly 20 percent of the volume, or an average of 126 messages per person.

“This shows that a small number of enthusiastic and deeply invested activists shouldered the burden,” the journal noted.

[Baghdadi’s semi-official biography](#), disseminated on jihadist Web sites, stresses his piety and family values. His father is a tribal elder who “loves the religion.” His grandfather was known for persistent prayer and “being good to his kin, and keenness to the needs of the modest families.” Though Baghdadi rarely speaks in public, he has “an eloquent speech and strong language and has an obvious acumen and smartness.”

The ISIS leader, in sum, is a clever, disciplined, violent and charismatic man — with an eye for manipulating Muslim public opinion.

[Article 3.](#)

YaleGlobal

As Conflict Grows in Middle East, US-Saudi Gulf Widens

Fahad Nazer

24 June 2014 -- Those who expected the summit between US President Obama and Saudi King Abdullah to produce a “reset” button after unusually strained relations between the two nations were bound to be disappointed. While the Obama administration reassured its Saudi hosts that the differences between the two sides were “tactical,” a careful reading of the assertive, and risky, policies that Saudi Arabia has adopted in places as varied as Syria, Egypt Iraq and Iran – in sharp difference with Obama administration’s extremely cautious, if not ambiguous policies in the region – reveals that the difference is perhaps deeper, more philosophical, and unlikely to be bridged in a two-hour meeting or perhaps even over the next two years. Developments in Egypt, Syria, Iran and Iraq since the March meeting have only underlined the growing gulf between the two strategic allies.

The unusually blunt, public criticism that some Saudi officials and analysts have leveled against the Obama administration in Saudi and US media suggests that the profound difference stems from varying perceptions of the threat that the region’s crises pose to the national security of each

nation. More importantly, the two nations have differing conceptions of their own capacity and obligation to resolve these crises.

While the US poses serious questions about its ability to control events in the Middle East and major reservations about whether it is obligated to try to stabilize a region spiraling out of control, [Saudi Arabia has reacted](#) [1] to this US soul-searching by declaring its readiness to pursue a more “assertive” foreign policy to advance its own interests “with or without the support” of western allies.

[The Saudis have suggested](#) [2] that as the sole remaining superpower, the US was best positioned to restore the status quo in the Middle East. And while Obama reiterated at a recent address at West Point that the US remains the sole “indispensable” nation in the world and that it must continue to lead because “no one else will,” he also acknowledged that some of what he considered to be the worst US foreign policy blunders were the result of rushing into “military adventures” with minimal circumspection. It is safe to assume that the president includes the 2003 US invasion of Iraq in that category.

As the controversial Iraq war casts its long shadow over the Obama administration’s non-committal policies in the region, the [Saudi leadership’s expectations](#) [3] from the US until recently may have been predicated on another Iraq war – when the administration of George H.W. Bush demonstrating its commitment to Saudi Arabia’s security in 1990 deployed 500,000 US troops to the kingdom to expel Saddam Hussein’s forces from neighboring Kuwait. In the eyes of Saudis, that war not only proved unrivaled primacy of the United States on the international stage, it also demonstrated loyalty to its friends.

While the Arab Spring clearly challenged many assumptions about the Middle East, unleashing discontent and sweeping away dictators, one trend is sure: Saudi Arabia detests instability and prefers resoluteness, especially in times of crisis. The Saudis may have come to terms with two new realities: First, the Middle East has been reconfigured in a fundamental way, and the second, the US appears unwilling – and perhaps incapable – of undoing this change.

While the Obama administration is doing all it can to avoid becoming embroiled in the myriad of crises across the region, Saudi Arabia has not

stood on the sidelines. The contrast is stark and can be seen in Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Iran.

As the US continues to struggle with the decision whether to provide military support to the moderate faction of the Syrian rebels fighting to topple the Assad regime, the Saudis suggest that they see Syria as a defining moment – an opportunity to stop what they see as Iranian “meddling” in the region by removing its closest Arab ally. The Saudis also realize that as the leader of the Sunni Muslim world, many inside and outside Saudi Arabia think the kingdom has a moral – if not a religious – obligation to come to the aid of its Sunni brethren in Syria who are bearing the brunt of the Assad regime’s brutality.

In Egypt, where the US expressed its concern about the military-backed government’s widening crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and has cut economic and military aid to pressure the then transitional government to change course, the Saudis were the first to praise the toppling of the Brotherhood’s Mohamed Morsi. Riyadh pledged billions of dollars of economic aid to shore up the new government of now President Abdul Fatah Sissi and declared the Brotherhood a terrorist organization. As Obama continues to test the water in Egypt, the Saudis made up their mind some time ago, they’re all in supporting the predictability provided by Sissi’s government.

The Obama administration learned a valuable lesson from the George W. Bush administration’s ill-conceived plan to topple Iraq’s former President Saddam Hussein. Nevertheless, the administration finds it difficult to distance itself completely from Iraq, as Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, installed with US backing, struggles mightily to rebuild his nation and the Iraqi state while battling extremism and militants who have since over-run the country’s second largest city.

For the Saudis, Saddam Hussein was a lesser of two evils. He was a bulwark against Iranian expansion in the region, and his removal paved the way to a regime that is perhaps now Iran’s closest ally and with whom the Saudis have arguably their most troublesome relations. Saudi Arabia had serious reservations about the 2003 invasion and has since chided the US repeatedly for handing Iraq to Iran on “a silver platter.” The brazen attempt by the Al Qaeda–affiliated Islamic State in Iraq and The Levant, ISIL, to seize control of Mosul confirms the Saudis’ worst fears about lingering

instability in Iraq. The Obama administration will find it difficult not to come to the aid of Maliki, especially given the presence of large numbers of Al Qaeda fighters fighting in the open. The Saudis want nothing to do with Maliki and blame him for fomenting sectarianism in Iraq.

Perhaps Saudi Arabia expected the United States to apply more pressure on Iran after the Iraq invasion. The Saudis have viewed secret talks between the US and Iran leading to current negotiations between the P5+1 countries and Iran over its nuclear energy program as a breach of trust. While the Obama administration seems to be willing to turn a new page in US-Iran relations, many Saudis express deep misgivings about Iran's intentions regarding its nuclear activities and its wider role in the region, especially its ties to Shia minorities in the Gulf monarchies. The Saudis and Iranians find themselves on opposite sides in virtually every crisis currently gripping the region.

The US and Saudi positions remain aligned on energy policy and counterterrorism, both crucial. However, some would argue that the US drive to lessen its dependence on foreign oil, by developing its previously economically prohibitive shale oil and gas reserves, is a major reason behind its reluctance to act more assertively in the Middle East. The Arab Spring has exposed regional instability and fissures in how the two sides view the US role in the region. As the Obama administration has sought to redefine and reduce its commitments in the Middle East, the Saudis felt like they "had no choice" but to expand their own influence. In this context, full "alignment" is difficult to achieve.

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[Article 4.](#)

Atlantic Monthly

No, President Obama Did Not Break the Middle East

[Jeffrey Goldberg](#)

Jun 23 2014 -- A brief note on a new Elliott Abrams essay in Politico Magazine that appears under the eye-catching headline, "[The Man Who Broke the Middle East](#)." The man in question is not Sykes or Picot or Nasser or Saddam or Khomeini or George W. Bush or Nouri al-Maliki, but Barack Obama. I often agree with Elliott, but I could not let this one go by without a response. Don't worry. This won't take long.

Here is Elliott's thesis:

The Middle East that Obama inherited in 2009 was largely at peace, for the surge in Iraq had beaten down the al Qaeda-linked groups. U.S. relations with traditional allies in the Gulf, Jordan, Israel and Egypt were very good. Iran was contained, its Revolutionary Guard forces at home. Today, terrorism has metastasized in Syria and Iraq, Jordan is at risk, the humanitarian toll is staggering, terrorist groups are growing fast and relations with U.S. allies are strained.

A few points. The first is to note that the Middle East Obama inherited in early 2009 was literally at war—Israel and the Gaza-based Hamas were going at each other hard until nearly the day of Obama's inauguration. Obama managed to extract himself from that one without breaking the Middle East.

In reference to a "contained" Iran, I would only note that Iran in 2009 was moving steadily toward nuclearization, and nothing that the Bush administration, in which Elliott served, had done seemed to be slowing Iran down. Flash forward to today—the Obama administration (with huge help from Congress) implemented a set of sanctions so punishing that it forced Iran into negotiations. (Obama, it should be said, did a very good job bringing allies on board with this program.) Iran's nuclear program is currently frozen. The Bush administration never managed to freeze Iran's nuclear apparatus in place. ■ not optimistic about the prospects for success in these negotiations (neither is Obama), but the president should get credit for leading a campaign that gave a negotiated solution to the nuclear question a fighting chance.

It's also worth noting that when Obama came to power, he discovered that the Bush administration had done no detailed thinking about ways to confront Iran, either militarily or through negotiations. There was rhetoric,

but no actual planning. Obama applied himself to this problem in ways that Bush simply did not.

Elliott writes that, in 2009, U.S. relations with Arab allies were good. But these relations, in many cases, were built on lies and morally dubious accommodations. He states that "the most populous Arab country is Egypt, where Obama stuck too long with Hosni Mubarak as the Arab Spring arrived, and then with the Army, and then the Muslim Brotherhood President Mohammed Morsi, and now is embracing the Army again." Let's break this down for a minute. It was the policy of several administrations to maintain close relations with Egypt's military rulers. It was Bush administration policy to maintain close relations with Mubarak. Perhaps the 2011 uprising in Egypt could have been avoided had the Bush administration, in honoring its "Freedom Doctrine," engineered Mubarak's smooth departure several years before Cairo exploded. Obama inherited a dysfunctional relationship with Egypt from his predecessor. This is not to excuse the administration's faltering and sometimes contradictory approach to the Egypt problem today, but simply to set it in some context.

On the peace process, Elliott writes,

Obama began with the view that there was no issue in the Middle East more central than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Five years later he has lost the confidence of both Israeli and Palestinian leaders, and watched his second secretary of state squander endless efforts in a doomed quest for a comprehensive peace. Obama embittered relations with America's closest ally in the region and achieved nothing whatsoever in the "peace process." The end result in the summer of 2014 is to see the Palestinian Authority turn to a deal with Hamas for new elections that—if they are held, which admittedly is unlikely—would usher the terrorist group into a power-sharing deal. This is not progress.

■ sure Elliott remembers that in 2006, the Bush administration helped bring the terrorist group Hamas to power, by engineering elections that neither the Palestinian Authority nor Israel actually wanted. ■ sure he also remembers that President Bush (along with a series of presidents before him) failed utterly to bring about a peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians. It seems a bit unfair to single-out Obama for failing at something presidents of both parties, for 40 years, have also failed to accomplish.

On Syria and Iraq, Elliott is on somewhat firmer ground. I've argued that an earlier intervention in Syria, in the form of support for what was then a more-moderate rebel coalition, might—might—have changed the balance of power.

On a deeper level, the idea of blaming any American president for the terrible state of the Middle East seems somewhat dubious. I argue this question with myself and with my friends all the time, because I do recognize that the U.S. has a singular role to play in the world's most volatile and dysfunctional region, and I agree with Robert Kagan, who argues that superpowers don't have the luxury of taking vacations from responsibility. But on the other hand, conditions in Iraq, while aggravated by certain Obama policies, cannot be pinned on him alone. For that matter, the man who truly broke Iraq was not George W. Bush, but Saddam Hussein, who through murder, rape, pillage, torture, and genocide destroyed millions of Iraqi lives.

What I would like is to read Elliott on this question: To what extent is this really about us at all?

[Article 5.](#)

The Atlantic

Obama's Disastrous Iraq Policy: An Autopsy

[Peter Beinart](#)

Jun 23 2014 -- Yes, the Iraq War was a disaster of historic proportions. Yes, seeing its architects return to prime time to smugly slam President Obama while taking no responsibility for their own, far greater, failures is infuriating.

But sooner or later, honest liberals will have to admit that Obama's Iraq policy has been a disaster. Since the president took office, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has grown ever more tyrannical and ever more sectarian, driving his country's Sunnis toward revolt. Since Obama took office, Iraq watchers—including those within his own administration—have warned that unless the United States pushed hard for inclusive government, the country would slide back into civil war. Yet the White House has been so eager to put Iraq in America's rearview mirror that,

publicly at least, it has given Maliki an almost-free pass. [Until now](#), when it may be too late.

Obama inherited an Iraq where better security had created an opportunity for better government. The Bush administration's troop "surge" did not solve the country's underlying divisions. But by retaking Sunni areas from insurgents, it gave Iraq's politicians the chance to forge a government inclusive enough to keep the country together.

The problem was that Maliki wasn't interested in such a government. Rather than integrate the Sunni Awakening fighters who had helped subdue al-Qaeda into Iraq's army, Maliki [arrested them](#). In the run-up to his 2010 reelection bid, Maliki's Electoral Commission [disqualified](#) more than 500, mostly Sunni, candidates [on charges](#) that they had ties to Saddam Hussein's Baath Party.

For the Obama administration, however, tangling with Maliki meant investing time and energy in Iraq, a country it desperately wanted to pivot away from. A few months before the 2010 elections, according to Dexter Filkins in [The New Yorker](#), "American diplomats in Iraq sent a rare dissenting cable to Washington, complaining that the U.S., with its combination of support and indifference, was encouraging Maliki's authoritarian tendencies."

After the meeting, Maliki told aides, "See! The Americans don't care." When Iraqis went to the polls in March 2010, they gave a narrow plurality to the Iraqiya List, an alliance of parties that enjoyed significant Sunni support but was led by Ayad Allawi, a secular Shiite. Under pressure from Maliki, however, an Iraqi judge allowed the prime minister's Dawa Party—which had finished a close second—to form a government instead.

According to Emma Sky, chief political adviser to General Raymond Odierno, who commanded U.S. forces in Iraq, American officials knew this violated Iraq's constitution. But they never publicly challenged Maliki's power grab, which was backed by Iran, perhaps because they believed his claim that Iraq's Shiites would never accept a Sunni-aligned government. "The message" that America's acquiescence "sent to Iraq's people and politicians alike," [wrote](#) the Brookings Institution's Kenneth Pollack, "was that the United States under the new Obama administration was no longer going to enforce the rules of the democratic road.... [This] undermined the reform of Iraqi politics and resurrected the specter of the

failed state and the civil war.” According to Filkins, one American diplomat in Iraq resigned in disgust.

By that fall, to its credit, the U.S. had helped craft an agreement in which Maliki remained prime minister but Iraqiya controlled key ministries. Yet as Ned Parker, the Reuters bureau chief in Baghdad, [later detailed](#), “Washington quickly disengaged from actually ensuring that the provisions of the deal were implemented.” In his book, [The Dispensable Nation](#), Vali Nasr, who worked at the State Department at the time, notes that the “fragile power-sharing arrangement ... required close American management. But the Obama administration had no time or energy for that. Instead it anxiously eyed the exits, with its one thought to get out. It stopped protecting the political process just when talk of American withdrawal turned the heat back up under the long-simmering power struggle that pitted the Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds against one another.” Under an agreement signed by George W. Bush, the U.S. was to withdraw forces from Iraq by the end of 2011. American military officials, fearful that Iraq might unravel without U.S. supervision, wanted to keep 20,000 to 25,000 troops in the country after that. Obama now claims that maintaining any residual force was impossible because Iraq’s parliament would not give U.S. soldiers immunity from prosecution. Given how unpopular America’s military presence was among ordinary Iraqis, that may well be true. But we can’t fully know because Obama—eager to tout a full withdrawal from Iraq in his reelection campaign—didn’t push hard to keep troops in the country. As a former senior White House official [told](#) Peter Baker of The New York Times, “We really didn’t want to be there and [Maliki] really didn’t want us there.... [Y]ou had a president who was going to be running for re-election, and getting out of Iraq was going to be a big statement.”

In recent days, Republicans have slammed Obama for withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq. But the real problem with America’s military withdrawal was that it exacerbated a diplomatic withdrawal that had been underway since Obama took office.

The decline of U.S. leverage in Iraq simply reinforced the attitude Obama had held since 2009: Let Maliki do whatever he wants so long as he keeps Iraq off the front page.

On December 12, 2011, just days before the final U.S. troops departed Iraq, Maliki visited the White House. According to Nasr, he told Obama that Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, an Iraqiya leader and the highest-ranking Sunni in his government, supported terrorism. Maliki, argues Nasr, was testing Obama, probing to see how the U.S. would react if he began cleansing his government of Sunnis. Obama replied that it was a domestic Iraqi affair. After the meeting, Nasr claims, Maliki told aides, “See! The Americans don’t care.”

In public remarks after the meeting, Obama [praised](#) Maliki for leading “Iraq’s most inclusive government yet.” Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister, Saleh al-Mutlaq, another Sunni, [told](#) CNN he was “shocked” by the president’s comments. “There will be a day,” he predicted, “whereby the Americans will realize that they were deceived by al-Maliki ... and they will regret that.”

A week later, the Iraqi government [issued](#) a warrant for Hashimi’s arrest. Thirteen of his bodyguards were arrested and tortured. Hashimi fled the country and, while in exile, was sentenced to death.

“Over the next 18 months,” writes Pollack, “many Sunni leaders were arrested or driven from politics, including some of the most non-sectarian, non-violent, practical and technocratic.” Enraged by Maliki’s behavior, and emboldened by the prospect of a Sunni takeover in neighboring Syria, Iraqi Sunnis began reconnecting with their old jihadist allies. Yet, in public at least, the Obama administration still acted as if all was well.

In March 2013, Maliki sent troops to arrest Rafi Issawi, Iraq’s former finance minister and a well-regarded Sunni moderate who had criticized the prime minister’s growing authoritarianism. In a [Los Angeles Times op-ed](#) later that month, Iraq expert Henri Barkey called the move “another nail in the coffin for a unified Iraq.” Iraq, he warned, “is on its way to dissolution, and the United States is doing nothing to stop it” because “Washington seems petrified about crossing Maliki.”

That fall, Maliki prepared to visit the White House again. Three days before he arrived, Emma Sky, the former adviser to General Odierno, co-authored a [New York Times op-ed](#) entitled “Maliki’s Democratic Farce,” in which she argued that, “Too often, Mr. Maliki has misinterpreted American backing for his government as a carte blanche for uncompromising behavior.” The day before Maliki arrived, six senators—including

Democrats Carl Levin and Robert Menendez—sent the White House a letter warning that, “by too often pursuing a sectarian and authoritarian agenda, Prime Minister Maliki and his allies are disenfranchising Sunni Iraqis.... This failure of governance is driving many Sunni Iraqis into the arms of Al-Qaeda.”

Still, in his [public remarks](#), Obama didn’t even hint that Maliki was doing anything wrong. After meeting his Iraqi counterpart on November 1, Obama told the press that, “we appreciate Prime Minister Maliki’s commitment to ... ensuring a strong, prosperous, inclusive, and democratic Iraq,” and declared “that we were encouraged by the work that Prime Minister Maliki has done in the past to ensure that all people inside of Iraq—Sunni, Shia, and Kurd—feel that they have a voice in their government.” A former senior administration official told me that, privately, the administration pushed Maliki hard to be more inclusive. If so, it did not work. In late December, less than two months after Maliki’s White House visit, Iraqi troops arrested yet another prominent Sunni critic, Ahmed al-Alwani, chairman of the Iraqi parliament’s economics committee, killing five of Alwani’s guards in the process.

The real problem with America’s military withdrawal was that it exacerbated a diplomatic withdrawal.

By this January, jihadist rebels from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, or ISIL) had taken control of much of largely Sunni Anbar province. Vice President Biden—the administration’s point man on Iraq—was now talking to Maliki frequently. But according to White House summaries of Biden’s calls, he still spent more time praising the Iraqi leader than pressuring him. On [January 8](#), the vice president “encouraged the Prime Minister to continue the Iraqi government’s outreach to local, tribal, and national leaders.” On [January 18](#), “The two leaders agreed on the importance of the Iraqi government’s continued outreach to local and tribal leaders in Anbar province.” On [January 26](#), “The Vice President commended the Government of Iraq’s commitment to integrate tribal forces fighting AQI/ISIL into Iraqi security forces.” (The emphases are mine.) For his part, Obama has not spoken to Maliki since their meeting last November.

Finally, last Thursday, in what was widely interpreted as an invitation for Iraqis to push Maliki aside, Obama [declared](#), “that whether he is prime

minister or any other leader aspires to lead the country, that it has to be an agenda in which Sunni, Shia and Kurd all feel that they have the opportunity to advance their interest through the political process.” Obama also noted that, “The government in Baghdad has not sufficiently reached out to some of the [Sunni] tribes and been able to bring them into a process that, you know, gives them a sense of being part of—of a unity government or a single nation-state.”

That’s certainly true. The problem is that it took Obama five years to publicly say so—or do anything about it—despite pleas from numerous Iraq experts, some close to his own administration. This inaction was abetted by American journalists. Many of us proved strikingly indifferent to a country about which we once claimed to care deeply.

In recent days, many liberals have rushed to Obama’s defense simply because they are so galled to hear people like Dick Cheney and Bill Kristol lecturing anyone on Iraq. That’s a mistake. While far less egregious than George W. Bush’s errors, Obama’s have been egregious enough. By ignoring Iraq, and refusing to defend democratic principles there, he has helped spawn the disaster we see today.

It’s time people who aren’t Republican operatives began saying so.

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[Article 6.](#)

The Huffington Post

Time for America's Middle East Allies to Forge Their Own Destinies

Sarwar Kashmeri

24 June 2014 -- Baghdad is 900 miles from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; 500 miles from Amman, Jordan; 300 miles from Kuwait, and 1000 miles from Ankara, Turkey, countries that are allies of the United States, and armed to the teeth with American weapons. With over [700,000 soldiers](#), 6000 tanks,

2000 warplanes, and some 5000 conventional and rocket launched artillery pieces between them they vastly outnumber and outgun the forces of the so-called Independent State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) that is determined to set up a medieval brutal Caliphate in parts of Syria and Iraq.

If these heavily armed American allies that are minutes away from the killing fields of Iraq choose not to step in and rectify the rapidly unfolding chaos in their midst, why should the United States, some 7000 miles from Iraq spill its blood and treasure in another futile quest to remake the Middle East for them? A futile quest that has over the last decade chewed up the minds and bodies of 56,000 brave American soldiers, including some 4,700 killed.

Over a trillion dollars have been spent over the last 12 years in the disastrous 2003 American invasion of Iraq and its attempt to remake the Middle East. Estimates are that a similar amount will be required over the next two decades to care for the American soldiers who have thankfully survived the war in Iraq and returned to their anguished families.

Shouldn't the old adage about forcing Israelis and Palestinians to make peace -- we cannot want peace between them more than they can -- also apply to the Middle East? Of course it should. America cannot want a stable Middle East more than the people that live there, most of whom are awash with petrodollars and can easily afford to spend the billions that will be required to straighten out the mess in their backyard, if they cared enough to do it.

Then there are the consequences of America spending its political and material capital in distant lands under the ever more ephemeral mantle of global leadership. Consequences that directly and negatively impact Americans. For instance, The Financial Times, on April 28, 2014, reported that that the United States will have to spend \$3.6 trillion by 2020 to bring America's crumbling infrastructure to where it should be today. That is almost twice the amount spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined.

Or consider that the European Union and South Korea have just announced a deal to join forces and develop the next generation (5G) of mobile Internet Networks. The Financial Times said:

...the deal is a boost for the European telecoms industry in particular, which is struggling with declining revenues and lagging behind the US and Asia

in providing the current 4G standard.

Should not the FT have been reporting that the next generation of the Internet is being led by the United States so that its lead in the technologies that will create tomorrow's jobs will be unbroken? Or reporting that the political logjam in Washington has given way to an agreement to fix America's infrastructure to ensure the United States has some chance to compete with the world's rapidly rising commercial powers with their shiny new infrastructure and highly educated populations with which Americans now have to compete?

The [Obama doctrine enumerated at West Point](#) has it exactly right:

...when issues of global concern arise ...that stir our conscience or push the world in a more dangerous direction but do not directly threaten ...in such circumstances, we should not go it alone...in such circumstances, we have to work with others because collective action in these circumstances is more likely to succeed, more likely to be sustained, less likely to lead to costly mistakes.

The United States should use the 300 soldiers who are on their way to Iraq to stiffen its allies spines and to generate collective action to fight the forces of evil now set loose in the Middle East. America can help with this endeavor, but the heavy lifting must be the responsibility of America's Middle East Allies. If they care about their future security and stability, it is high time to demonstrate it by taking on the leadership in this fight. Their fight.

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