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[Article 1.](#)

NYT

Who Will Win in Iraq?

Steven Simon

June 16, 2014 -- Washington— To go by much of the commentary about [Iraq](#) in recent days, the country is already past the breaking point under the lightning campaign by Sunni insurgents. Reinforced by hardened fighters from Syria and sympathetic communities in northern and western Iraq, the insurgents control much

of Mosul, the most important city in northern Iraq, and Tikrit, the home of Saddam Hussein's clan, and they have laid siege to Samarra, the site of one of Shiism's most storied shrines. It would be no surprise if the next few weeks brought them to the gates of Baghdad.

But an assault on Baghdad, or even its capture, would be an illusory victory. It can only end in defeat — and the strengthening of the insurgents' sworn Shiite enemies in Baghdad and, especially, Tehran.

First, consider the brute demographic reality. Unlike in Syria, Sunnis are a relatively small part of the Iraqi population, about 25 percent — though they are a majority in some areas of the west and north. And in Baghdad their numbers are minuscule.

The reason for this lies in an earlier Sunni revolt triggered by the second Gulf war. Baghdad was the target then, too, and its Sunni population was about 35 percent. As the Sunnis asserted themselves militarily, Shiites struck back; by 2008, when their fury was largely spent, Sunnis were reduced to as little as 12 percent of the city's population.

If the insurgents of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, enter Baghdad's residual Sunni neighborhoods, they will likely be welcomed, but they won't have much to work with, nor will they have the strategic depth they will need in the street fighting that ensues.

Moreover, rather like what happened in Syria, the Sunni offensive is likely to spur a transformation of the Iraqi Army from the sorry mess it is now into a more resilient and operationally effective force.

In Syria, the army reeled in the face of the rebellion in 2011; desertions were rife and large sections of territory were lost to the insurgency. But as incompetent commanders were killed or relieved and a new leadership emerged, the army was able to bring its vastly greater firepower to bear on an increasingly fractionated adversary. Its combat capability was multiplied by the successful integration of civilian militias and the intelligence and tactical advice supplied by [Iran](#). This trajectory is likely to be replicated in Iraq.

The character of the Sunni offensive will mobilize more than just the army. Mass execution has been meshed with the use of religious symbolism by the insurgents, who framed their objective as extirpating "the filth" — Shiite teaching and believers — from Najaf and Karbala, the two holiest Shiite cities. In a minority war on a majority population, this is a suicidal tactic. The Shiites will hit back even harder than last time.

In addition to being hobbled by their paltry numbers, the rebels have chosen to make war on an adversary with powerful friends who have a serious stake in the future of Iraq.

Iran has already pledged assistance to the government of Prime Minister [Nuri Kamal al-Maliki](#) and reportedly deployed elite units of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps to Iraq. The United States has sent an aircraft carrier and amphibious assault ship to the Persian Gulf and stepped up intelligence help for the Iraqi government. Although Washington is unlikely to use force directly against the rebels — in part because insurgents don't present the kind of targets that American air power is optimized to destroy, and in part because of reluctance to re-engage militarily in Iraq — the kind of advisory help, material assistance and diplomatic support that is on offer will stiffen Iraq's spine. Perceptions, real or imagined, of American and Iranian collusion will help, too.

At the same time, gulf states that tacitly support the rebels as payback against Iran for its perceived takeover of Iraq will do nothing to support the rebels' military campaign, for fear of creating an uncontrollable situation, even if their nationals privately fund the rebel army.

And once the fighting is over, the Sunnis will be even more isolated than before. President Obama's call for a multiethnic governing coalition aside, it is inconceivable that Mr. Maliki will now reverse his policy of excluding Sunnis from governance.

In short, despite the rapid success of the Sunni campaign, it is a kamikaze attack that will make the Shiite hold on the Iraqi state stronger, not weaker.

That said, it's unlikely that Mr. Maliki will have the stomach to retake the Sunni-majority areas of western Iraq anytime soon. The rump Iraq, like the Assad regime in Syria, will be ever more in thrall to Iran, and committed to domestic policies that make the reconstitution of the country via a political process ever more unlikely.

That's hardly an optimal outcome for Washington: Among other things, Washington's support for the Maliki government will put further strain on its ties to the gulf states; it will also complicate any effort to deal aggressively with Iran, with which it will find itself in an odd-couple alliance.

American policy makers might anticipate that the insurgency will burn itself out before it presents a real threat to American interests. But they can't relax too much, because to the extent that this sectarian brawl produces something resembling a winner, it won't be in Washington, Mosul or Baghdad — but in Tehran.

Steven Simon, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, was the senior director for the Middle East and North Africa at the National Security Council from 2011 to 2012.

[Article 2.](#)

The National Interest

Can Iraq Be Saved?

[Zalmay Khalilzad](#)

June 17, 2014 -- The sudden fall of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, and large swaths of the country's Sunni regions to groups of insurgents and extremists spearheaded by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a grim manifestation of the failure of the country's leaders to implement a system of governance as agreed in the constitution. Iraq's mistakes—and those of the international community, including the United States—were not unavoidable, though, and the lessons learned can help resolve similar governance dilemmas in Syria and Afghanistan.

The Iraqi constitution plotted a path for creating a system that protects the country from relapse to dictatorship and emphasized concepts that are appropriate for a country with a history of authoritarian rule and in which ethnic and sectarian divides run deep. The constitution included robust checks and balances, a clearly defined federal system, and provisions for a fair sharing of power and resources among the country's various communities, provinces and regions.

Although the political process had a shaky start as the Sunni community [largely boycotted](#) the first post-Saddam election, intense diplomatic efforts by the United States eventually convinced Iraq's Sunni leaders to conditionally support the moving forward with the referendum on the constitution, which received more than two-thirds support. The Sunnis also participated in the post-referendum national elections in late 2005. As a result, the framework garnered the buy-in of the country's key groups—Shia, Sunni, and Kurd. As Iraqi communities were coming together, the [Al Qaeda attack on Samarra shrine](#), a revered site for the Shia, in February 2006 resulted in a massive increase in violence verging on a sectarian civil war.

Despite the increase in violence, and with U.S. commitment and help, the Iraqis came together and replaced Prime Minister Jaffari with Nouri al-Maliki and formed a national unity government. Supported by increased U.S. troops during the surge, the tide was turned. The improvement in security following the surge and the successful election in 2010 offered Iraq the security space to consolidate democracy and advance toward stability. The chance, alas, was squandered.

Iraq could have capitalized on that progress at the time and avoided this fate if it had implemented the roadmap that was prescribed in the constitution.

Instead, a number of mistakes were made. Contrary to the constitution, the party that won the largest number of seats in the 2010 election—the secular and cross-sectarian Iraqiya led by Ayad Allawi—[was not allowed to form the government](#). Instead, in a deal backed by the United States and Iran, Prime Minister Maliki remained the country's prime minister. Instead of implementing a power-sharing agreement,

which was the basis for Maliki remaining in office, he began to eliminate political rivals (especially among the Sunni Arabs), politicize the military and security services, and monopolize (rather than share) power. He also undermined the implementation of the federal system that was clearly stipulated in the country's constitution. The consequences were twofold.

First, large segments of the Sunni community lost trust in the government, and more dangerously, lost hope that they would be treated with dignity and fairness as partners in governing the country.

Second, relations between the central government and the Kurdistan region also deteriorated to the extent that Kurdish leaders became convinced that Iraq's federal structure had failed because the Maliki government repeatedly ignored or violated the political compact enshrined in the constitution, which was the basis of Kurdish assent to remain in a new Iraqi federal state.

The United States could have played a vital role in helping Iraq stay on the right path. Instead of a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops and consequent political disengagement from Iraq's affairs, the United States should have sought to maintain a residual security presence in the country, coupled with robust diplomatic engagement, to provide the core security support necessary for the democratic political process to resolve the country's problems peacefully.

Sustained presence and stabilizing influence over decades is in great part what allowed Germany, Japan and Korea to undertake the long-term sustained effort to build the political and economic institutions required for long-term stability and prosperity.

Continued robust U.S. military and political engagement in Iraq in the past few years could have prevented today's crisis if the United States had done the following:

- Functioned as a credible buffer between different communities, bridging communications and diffusing tensions by ensuring that each side understood their rights and responsibilities (for example, facilitating joint military mechanisms along disputed territories);
- Overseen the proper implementation of power-sharing agreements and checked the excesses of the ruling party/coalition, which would have restrained Maliki's behavior;
- Provided the sophisticated but essential capabilities that Iraq's established military did not possess (e.g., intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; complex operational planning; high-quality training, etc.);
- Prevented Iran from using Iraqi land and airspace to drag Iraq into the Syrian civil war on the side of Bashar Assad's regime, with all its consequences for internal Iraqi cohesion;

- Assured key regional actors that Iraq's new government would not become a hostile power to any of them. If the core interests of their allies in Iraq could have been safe-guarded in an agreed power-sharing framework, interested regional parties would have had the incentive to help that framework succeed.

Instead, Iraq's neighbors viewed the situation as a zero-sum struggle for power, though failing to recognize the fact that no one Iraqi group could completely control or defeat its rivals. Regional powers competed to fill the vacuum produced by the United States' departure. Iran wanted Shia to dominate. Gulf states wanted Sunnis to retake power. As neighbors begin to fear the worst-case outcome for their interests, they begin to act by fueling the conflict and internal divisions in an effort to assist groups with which they sympathize. The danger of creating a vacuum by precipitous withdrawal is an important lesson for Washington as it draws down the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.

The tragedy of Iraq shows that fragmented societies composed of multiple communities that have distinct ethnic and sectarian identities cannot be legitimately controlled by one group. The concentration or monopoly of power by one individual or community at the expense of others exacerbates tensions, anxiety and distrust. These conditions, when exploited by a determined extremist group like ISIS, can eventually push the country to a state of civil war. In the case of Kurdistan region, the Kurds will likely demand a restructuring of relations with Baghdad, [perhaps even seeking independence](#). Going forward, the situation is likely to follow one of two paths.

First, Iraq's leaders could seek to restore stability through renewed power-sharing arrangements among the three large communities—Sunni, Shia and Kurd. Based on conversation with Iraq's leaders, there is a consensus that Maliki must be replaced with a new prime minister to restore unity. This could unfold in two ways. Iraqis could establish a supreme national council consisting of the major leaders of the three communities, which could include Maliki, but which would have a new prime minister. Alternatively, the three communities could agree on a new Shiite leader to replace Maliki as Prime Minister.

Getting Maliki to cooperate will be difficult. He is stubborn and has done quite well in this year's election. He will try to play the Iran card and argue that if you imposes conditions on its assistance, [he will move closer to Tehran](#) and accept its "unconditional" aid. Yet, difficult is not impossible. Even with his large voting bloc, he does not have the votes in parliament to form a new government. The Shiite religious leadership led by Ayatollah Sistani is not favorable to him.

To achieve this outcome, U.S. diplomatic leadership, combined with a willingness to assist Iraq on the security front, will be vital. U.S. diplomacy should engage not only Iraqi leaders, but also directly or indirectly coordinate with others actors, especially

Iran. This type of coordination was critical in 2006, when Prime Minister Jaffari agreed to vacate the post of Prime Minister.

If a new power-sharing arrangement is reached in Baghdad, local Sunni Arab leaders, including tribes, are likely to cooperate with the government against ISIS. This is what happened in 2006, 2007 and 2008. The Kurds, too, might defer exercising the option of going their own way.

The second path for Iraq—in the absence of compromise—will be fragmentation. Kurdistan, which now controls all the disputed territories that were in dispute with Baghdad and has also acquired the oil and gas resources that can make it financially independent, will likely decide to go its own way, forging strong ties with Turkey and the West. Iraq's southern provinces and the Baghdad government will come under increased Iranian influence. In these areas, militias including some Shiite extremist groups with ties to Hezbollah and the Iranian Quds Force will gain control. The Sunni provinces will remain unstable, with both internal disputes and continued conflict with and within Baghdad and with various groups establishing ties with different regional states and transnational groups, including terrorists potentially threatening U.S. interests. As this unfolds, the United States might have to target terrorist sanctuaries in Iraq in a way similar to its actions in Pakistan, Yemen and Libya.

The situation in Iraq, as well as the one in Syria, demonstrates that [the United States cannot wish away the problems of the Middle East](#). The security problems of this critically important region, if left unattended, will grow worse, until they demand a response from the United States. Yet, with wise diplomacy and statecraft, the United States can broker political arrangements that stabilize not only Iraq, but also the region. We cannot, however, do so from the sidelines.

Zalmay Khalilzad was the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq and the UN.

[Article 3.](#)

The Washington Post

The result of Obama's do-nothing policy? Iraq.

Richard Cohen

June 16, 2014 -- Whose fault is the current debacle in Iraq? It could be Nouri al-Maliki's since he is the country's strongman and has alienated the minority Sunnis. It could be George W. Bush's because he started the whole thing off with possibly the stupidest war in history, the Children's Crusade exempted on account of youth.

The one person who is not at fault, we are told over and over again, is the current president of the United States. Like Millard Fillmore, he has kept us out of war. President Obama is hardly the ogre of right-wing invective, and Obamacare will turn out to have been a truly major reform of our creaky health-care system. But the subject of this column is foreign policy, the area where a president's power is substantially unchecked. He can, as Obama showed by [swapping Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl for five Taliban commanders](#), just ignore the law. The GOP emitted a pro forma wail and then returned to contemplating the meaning of [Eric Cantor's defeat](#). No one much cared.

Other than avoiding war, it's hard to know what Obama wants. I know what he says, but actions always speak louder than words. For instance, he wanted Bashar al-Assad to cease using chemical weapons. [His language was strong](#), nearly warlike: "Assad's government gassed to death over a thousand people, including hundreds of children. The images from this massacre are sickening: Men, women, children lying in rows, killed by poison gas. Others foaming at the mouth, gasping for breath. A father clutching his dead children, imploring them to get up and walk."

What happened next? Virtually nothing.

All those poisoned kids were soon forgotten and so, too, were all those people killed in the war, perhaps as many as 200,000. Those of us who advocated more forceful action were denigrated as war lovers who wanted to send in the infantry. (Better boots on the ground than head in the clouds — but I prefer neither.) Airstrikes and such might not have worked, but doing nothing never does.

This is a serious, depressing discussion. Countless lives have been lost. A civil war that might have been stopped in its tracks was allowed to fester. The Syrian dictatorship survived, and the war has spilled into Iraq. It has the potential to engage the whole Middle East — Jordan, for sure, and then that tiny nation west of the Jordan River: Israel. The madmen of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria don't only kill Muslims; they would gladly also drop a bomb on Tel Aviv.

The United States may [now find itself on the side of Iran](#) — a majority Shiite nation much like Iraq. What could be more preposterous? What could be more ironic? Worse, we could find ourselves engaged in a religious war — Sunni vs. Shiite. What will our Sunni friends — the Saudis, for instance — think of that? Or maybe we should just wash our hands of the whole thing and turn over a hunk of the Middle East with its oil to a terrorist organization — one that boasts of committing massacres. Oh, what dreams it must have in the desert night.

William Goldman, the screenwriter, is one of my favorite philosophers. "Nobody knows anything," he once wrote. I thought of him when the politically indestructible Cantor got trounced. What happened? Theories galore, but the salient fact is that nobody saw it coming.

It was the same with the stock market crash of 2008. Everyone had charts and graphs and smiling eminences on CNBC, but — somehow, I mean somehow — almost everyone got it wrong. And what about [ISIS](#)? How come the administration did not know what was coming? If it did, it sure kept the information close to the vest.

To balance the Goldman Rule — call it a hedge — I invoke one of my own creation: the Rule of the Worse. You thought Cantor was bad? Look who's coming after. You thought you can't get more evil than al-Qaeda? Look at who's pillaging Iraq, a terrorist group that even al-Qaeda can't stomach.

The wise president applies both rules. We know so little, but the one thing we do know is that things can get worse. They did in the Middle East, where Obama settled for a victory jog around the political infield after getting Assad to give up most of his chemical weapons. He now must deal with a region that is so much worse than anyone imagined. Where does the fault lie? Where it always has — where the buck stops.

Whose fault is the current debacle in Iraq? It could be Nouri al-Maliki's since he is the country's strongman and has alienated the minority Sunnis. It could be George W. Bush's because he started the whole thing off with possibly the stupidest war in history, the Children's Crusade exempted on account of youth. The one person who is not at fault, we are told over and over again, is the current president of the United States. Like Millard Fillmore, he has kept us out of war.

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Roger Cohen is a journalist and author. He is a columnist for The New York Times and International Herald Tribune. He has worked as a foreign correspondent in fifteen different countries

[Article 4.](#)

The National Interest

ISIS Challenge in Iraq: Why America Should Work with Iran

[Payam Mohseni](#)

June 16, 2014 -- The US should seize the opportunity presented by the Iraq crisis to reach out and engage Iran. The threat posed by ISIS and radical jihadism as well as the potential for further regional instability represent important areas of mutual strategic concern for both countries. By engaging the Iranians, the US will gain the critical ability to shape the course of events without getting bogged down in the conflict. It will also help the US build a working relationship with Iran that could ease the current nuclear negotiations forward and lay the groundwork for future cooperation when a successful deal is reached.

First, US engagement will make certain Iraq does not become wholly dependent on Iranian aid and that the US will play an important role in shaping the operational environment. Iran's Revolutionary Guards are already in Iraq advising and assisting the government on the military operations. Iran has openly declared its ability and

intent to help Iraq, and it has the recent experience of success in Syria to effectively do so. The current conflict means that Iran's influence and penetration of Iraq will only increase and become more entrenched than ever before. By assisting the Iraqis and working with the Iranians, the US can create mutual dependencies between the groups and enable the US to influence the operation of the fighting and the political balance between the different parties.

Second, the US will be more effective in trying to reach a political solution to the conflict by engaging Iran. The current crisis cannot be solved simply through military means; it requires a political solution more importantly. The increasing monopolization of power by the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki had alienated the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds and excluded them from governance. To forge a broader and more inclusive coalition to lead Iraq, the assistance of Iran will be critical as it is an influential power behind the scenes. By engaging the Iranians, the US can shape the political process necessary for the reformulation of power in Baghdad.

Third, the cooperation between the US and Iran will do much to build confidence between the two countries that would serve to help the current nuclear negotiations.

It would also establish the parameters for a future working relationship between the US and Iran should the negotiations succeed. A history of mutual hostility and the lack of trust between the countries pose important challenges in the current negotiations. On the Iranian side, for example, whenever I travel to Tehran, hardliners have repeatedly voiced their suspicions of US willingness to engage them to me and frequently raise the issue of mistrust when discussing the negotiations.

Cooperating on such a mission can do much to dispel these ideas and open the environment for more fruitful decision-making on the nuclear issue.

While detractors may claim that by doing so the US will give Iraq to Iran on a silver platter, the US will actually be strengthening its own position in the country. By not doing so, Iran will be the sole benefactor of the crisis as it begins to assist Iraq just like Syria. Of course, the US should be highly cautious of providing direct military assistance to the current Iraqi government so as not to appear to have sided with the Shia in the sectarian conflict. However, by engaging Iran privately and working with all regional partners in reaching a political and military solution to the crisis, the US will be effective in promoting political stability and greater social inclusion in Iraq.

[Payam Mohseni](#) is the Iran Project Director and Fellow for Iran Studies at the Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. He is also a Visiting Assistant Professor at Harvard's Department of Government where he teaches on Iranian and Middle East politics.

[Article 5.](#)

NYT

Take Mosul Back

Roger Cohen

June 16, 2014 -- London — Less than 60 miles from Mosul, where the Sunni Islamic fanatics who have overrun the city are slaughtering their enemies as if the Middle Ages never ended, a rather different scene in Iraq was recently described in a report from the Russian investment firm Renaissance Capital:

“We saw Ferraris and Bentleys being driven by students at the American University of Iraq in Suleimaniyah, and at the only five-star hotel in Erbil, the car park was filled with new BMW’s and Range Rovers. The few international restaurants in Erbil cost approximately \$90 per person for a meal with a beer. The city’s shopping centers carry international brands, all of which we noticed are priced at least 40 percent higher than the international standard; and shop managers claimed inventory flies off the shelves.”

In nascent Kurdistan, run by the Kurdistan Regional Government, whose relations with the central government in Baghdad are a stop-go affair, things are different. Even the worst mess has its winners. The Kurds, almost a century after missing out on statehood at the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, are the beneficiaries of Iraq’s mayhem. Even their relations with their Turkish nemesis have been commerce-smoothed into something approaching warmth.

Nobody should bet against an independent Kurdish state within the next decade. Syria and Iraq are in a state of implosion; Middle Eastern borders are up for grabs. Qaeda affiliates have already done their grabbing. They control wide swathes of Syria and Iraq 13 years (and trillions of dollars) after the United States went to war in Afghanistan to dismantle the jihadi state within a state of Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda.

This is not a terrific denouement to America’s post-9/11 wars. The blame game is in full swing. Aficionados of the counterfactual are having a field day. Iraq in its agony is the perfect locus for handicappers of the hypothetical. It’s an old game. If Napoleon had had B-52s at Waterloo, things might have worked out differently. The left blames the disaster on President Bush and the American invasion of 2003 that shattered the Iraqi state and removed its murderous dictator, Saddam Hussein. If this had not happened, there would be no fanatics from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria at the doorsteps of Baghdad. Wrong, says the right. President Obama is to blame for abandoning Iraq in 2011 without leaving a residual counter-terrorism

force. His feckless failure to back the Syrian opposition early in the uprising was a principal cause of Syria's collapse into a lawless haven for Islamic fanatics. If Obama had been more resolute in Iraq and Syria, ISIS would not be on the rampage. A plague on both their houses! It's unseemly to fight Washington's talk-show wars over the myriad dead of the Levant.

The facts are plain enough. The United States invaded Iraq in 2003 because of its weapons of mass destruction program. However Iraq did not have any weapons of mass destruction. The invasion brought the Shiite majority to power, so advancing the interests of Shiite Iran, America's enemy. It ousted the Sunnis, upsetting the Sunni-Shiite balance in the Middle East, and infuriating America's nominal ally, Saudi Arabia. As a result, a Sunni-Shiite regional conflict has been escalating over the past decade.

There was no Al Qaeda in Saddam's Iraq. The United States birthed it through the invasion. It then beat Al Qaeda down, before allowing its affiliates to regroup by leaving and doing nothing about Syria's disintegration. American and Iranian interests in Iraq are now aligned in preserving the sectarian Shiite government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, encouraging his (unlikely) outreach to the winning Kurds and the whiplashed Sunnis, and beating back the barbarians of ISIS. However, the political forces arrayed against cooperation with Iran in the Congress are powerful — and U.S. and Iranian interests part ways in Syria and over Israel. A logical approach in the Middle East is seldom a feasible approach.

Got it?

If not, do not worry. The blame game misses the point. Iraq and Syria, well before America's hapless intervention and hapless paralysis, were rotten to the core, as ripe for dismemberment as the Ottoman Empire a century ago, sickened by the personality cults of brutal rulers, cracking at the internal lines of fracture colonial overseers chose to disregard. They were in a state of postponed decomposition. Sunnis in Iraq and Alawites in Syria, minorities both, believed (and believe) they had some irreversible right to rule. They do not.

President Obama should use targeted military force to drive back the fanatics of ISIS. If the jihadis cement their hold, the blowback will be felt in Europe and the United States. Such action will not resolve Iraq's problems, or the region's. But the alternative is far worse. It would be a betrayal of the thousands of American lives lost since 2001 and of the millions in the Middle East who view the Middle Ages as over.

Roger Cohen joined The New York Times in 1990. He was a foreign correspondent for more than a decade before becoming acting foreign editor on Sept. 11, 2001, and foreign editor six months later.

[Article 6.](#)

The Washington Post

Obama's foreign policy of retreat

George F. Will

June 16, 2014 -- "From the Halls of Montezuma To the shores of Tripoli . . . "

— [The Marines' Hymn](#)

Two hundred and nine years after Marines visited those shores, dispatched by President Jefferson to punish Barbary pirates for attacking U.S. vessels in the Mediterranean, Marines are again in that sea, poised to return. If they are sent ashore, their mission will be to rescue U.S. citizens from the consequences of U.S. policy. Then they might have to do the same thing in Baghdad.

The House Select Committee on Benghazi should not consider the attack on the U.S. compound in Benghazi, Libya, its sole or even primary topic. Rather, it should begin at the beginning, with the U.S. military intervention in Libya's civil war 18 months before Benghazi.

Today, Libya is an anarchy of hundreds of rival militias. The U.S. intervention, for which President Obama's phrasemakers coined the term "[leading from behind](#)," was justified by "R2P" — the "[responsibility to protect](#)" Libyans, especially in Benghazi, from the supposed threat of genocide inflicted by [Moammar Gaddafi](#). This humanitarian imperialism quickly became an exercise in regime change. But the prolonged attempt to assassinate Gaddafi from the air made no provision for a replacement regime.

The Benghazi committee should hear from [Alan J. Kuperman](#) of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas. In his policy brief "[Lessons from Libya: How Not to Intervene](#)," he says:

Gaddafi did not initiate violence against peaceful protesters. Rather, protesters initiated the violence that engulfed four cities. Media reports "exaggerated the death toll by a factor of 10, citing 'more than 2,000 deaths' in Benghazi during the initial days of the uprising, whereas [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW) later documented only 233 deaths across all of Libya in that period." Furthermore, when the United States and a few other NATO nations intervened in March 2011, "Gaddafi already had regained control of most of Libya, while the rebels were retreating rapidly toward Egypt. Thus, the conflict was about to end, barely six weeks after it started, at a toll of about 1,000 dead. . . . [The intervention] enabled the rebels to resume their attack, which prolonged the war for another seven months and caused at least 7,000 more deaths." The intervention encouraged peaceful protesters in Syria to use violence in

the hope of attracting an intervention. This increased the rate of killing there tenfold. And since Gaddafi fell, “sophisticated weapons from Gaddafi’s arsenal — including up to 15,000 man-portable, surface-to-air missiles unaccounted for as of 2012 — leaked to radical Islamists throughout the region.”

Perhaps including Iraq. The Benghazi committee is organizing as Iraq crumbles, its army disintegrating as the enemy approaches. In January, Fallujah fell to forces of the [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria](#), an al-Qaeda affiliate. ISIS’s conquest of Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city (its population of 1.5 million equals that of Philadelphia), then Tal Afar, is redundant evidence that the U.S. experience in Iraq was the worst episode of squandered valor in U.S. history.

Some will say that it would not have come to this if the Iraqi army had not been disbanded, or if there had been better occupation planning, or if there had been a bigger occupying force, or if an agreement had been reached to keep a significant number of U.S. troops in Iraq indefinitely, or if . . .

Enough. Here is a question for Republican presidential aspirants:

Given the absence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and given that we now know how little we know about [“nation-building”](#) and about the promotion of democracy in nations that need to be “built,” and given that Saddam Hussein’s horrific tyranny at least controlled Iraq’s sectarian furies, and given that Iraq under him was Iran’s adversary, and given that 10-year wars make Americans indiscriminately averse to military undertakings — given all this, if you could rewind history to March 2003, would you favor invading Iraq?

Obama is conducting the foreign policy retreat that he promised, that then-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton facilitated without apparent qualms and that many Americans said they wanted until it began to make them queasy. The Republican challenge is to articulate a policy that fills the vast space between this retreat and the ruinous grandiosity of the “freedom agenda” of Obama’s predecessor.

Americans prefer not to think about, and rarely allow elections to turn on, foreign policy. Events, however, are not cooperating. Trotsky probably did not really say this, but someone should: “You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you.”

George Frederick Will is an American newspaper columnist, journalist, and author. He is a Pulitzer Prize–winner best known for his conservative commentary on politics.

[Article 7.](#)

Foreign Policy

Why the New World Order Won't Be Orderly

[Randall L. Schweller](#)

June 16, 2014 -- Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, foreign policy experts have been predicting that the United States' days as global hegemon are coming to a close. But rather than asking themselves which country is most likely to replace the United States, they ought to be asking themselves whether the concept of global hegemony still applies in our era. It increasingly seems that the world will no longer have a single superpower, or group of superpowers, that brings order to international politics. Instead, it will have a variety of powers -- including nations, multinational corporations, ideological movements, global crime and terror groups, and human rights organizations -- jockeying with each other, mostly unsuccessfully, to achieve their goals. International politics is transforming from a system anchored in predictable, and relatively constant, principles to a system that is, if not inherently unknowable, far more erratic, unsettled, and devoid of behavioral regularities. In terms of geopolitics, we have moved from an age of order to an age of entropy. Entropy is a scientific concept that measures disorder: the higher the entropy, the higher the disorder. And disorder is precisely what will characterize the future of international politics. In this leaderless world, threats are much more likely to be cold than hot; danger will come less frequently in the form of shooting wars among great powers than diffuse disagreements over geopolitical, monetary, trade, and environmental issues. Problems and crises will arise more frequently and, when they do, will be resolved less cooperatively.

CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

How did we get here? The shift began in the twentieth century, with the advent of nuclear weapons and the spread of economic globalization, which together have made war among the great powers unthinkable. As many scholars have pointed out, the world has enjoyed the longest period of relative peace in recorded history. The absence of cataclysmic wars among great powers has obviously been a great boon. But it has also come at a real cost. For the past several centuries, wars between the extant power

in the international system and the rising challenger or challengers have occurred every hundred years or so, crowning a new leading power, which is responsible for organizing international politics and shouldering the burdens of global leadership. In crowning new kings, these hegemonic wars also obliterated the old orders, wiping the institutional slate clean so that a new global architecture, better suited to the times, could be built from scratch. The wars were thus a good thing in some sense, because they replenished the international system with new energy in service of world order and lasting peace. In their absence, we no longer have a force of “creative destruction” capable of resetting the world. And just as seas become foul without the blowing of the winds, prolonged peace allows inertia and decay to set in. Power is already more diffuse than it ever has been. And it is growing more so by the year. The United States remains an important power, but it knows that it no longer towers over all contenders. Plagued by ballooning debt, Washington has narrowed its foreign policy to a few basic objectives. Yet the deterioration of Pax Americana is not due solely to the United States' declining power. It is also a problem of will -- one rooted in fading national resolve to use those power advantages that the United States still enjoys. Interactions between political actors are also characterized by greater entropy. The digital revolution has allowed information to spread farther than ever before, empowering average citizens, celebrities, corporations, terrorists, religious movements, and shadowy transnational criminal groups. The power these groups can exert, however, is unconventional. They have the power to disrupt, to stop things from happening, but they don't have the power to enact their own agendas. Twitter, Facebook, and text messaging have allowed citizens to organize massive demonstrations and topple dictatorial governments. But there is little reason to believe that citizens organized via social media are able to institute political changes.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Entropy is not only on the rise in the international system. Individuals, too, are experiencing greater personal entropy, as they discover that they are incapable of handling the speed at which digital information is transmitted. Information rains down faster and thicker by the day. Increasingly, modern people may feel, as the psychologist and philosopher William James did in 1899, that an “irremediable flatness is coming over the world.” Flatness

here refers to a general sense of banality and loss of meaning. Rather than a heightened sense of stimulation and awareness, information overload produces boredom and alienation. As the economist Herbert A. Simon has explained, a “wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.” This is because in “an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients.” In that sense, modern society suffers from collective attention deficit disorder. No matter how much we pump up our brains with drugs originally intended to treat Alzheimer’s and narcolepsy or attempt to “train” our brains using Cogmed or Lumosity, we are likely to remain terminally distracted by the flood of digital information from Google, Twitter, e-mail, RSS readers, Netflix, Firefox tabs, and Flickr photostreams. Organizations, too, face this problem. The U.S. National Security Agency alone intercepts and stores nearly two billion separate e-mails, phone calls, and other communications every day. “The complexity of this system defies description,” lamented John R. Vines, a retired U.S. Army general who reviewed the U.S. Defense Department’s intelligence efforts last year. “We consequently can’t effectively assess whether it is making us more safe.”

Having greater quantities of information at our fingertips has not produced greater wisdom. Instead, it has led to information entropy. As the volume of information processed or diffused increases, the information becomes noise. In the digital age, information is routinely distorted, buried in noise, or otherwise impossible to interpret. The result is that people respond to the many contradictory “facts” and “informed opinions” being hurled at them by essentially selecting and interpreting facts in ways that accord with their own personal, idiosyncratic, and often flat-wrong ideas about the world. Knowledge no longer rests on objective information but, rather, on seductive “true enough” facts. Knowledge that is pocked with holes but that seems true enough will continue to hold sway over those who simply want to believe something that feels right.

WELCOME TO PURGATORY

The new world of rising structural and informational entropy means that history can no longer repeat itself. We will not endure the hell brought on by a world war, for example, or by utter economic catastrophe. But this

lasting peace won't be the heaven on earth that one might wish for either. Instead, we are on the cusp of an eternal purgatory. It will be a world full of confusion and instability. The age of entropy will be a time of restless disorder, an aimless but forceful hostility to the status quo -- a hostility that inspires the pervasive use of the dismissive prefixes anti- and post- (as in anti-Western, post-American, postmodern) and the promise to reinvent much or all of the present global order and its associated institutions. But the hope that getting rid of "what is" will by itself spawn something new and workable to take its place is just that, mere hope. In his Delphic interview with Time, former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi put it this way: "The world is now much more difficult than it was during your revolution. It's even more difficult. The world. More complicated, complex, difficult. It's a spaghetti-like structure. It's mixed up." None of this is to suggest that we will inhabit a miserable world of endless gloom and doom, that we and future generations are fated to endure wretched lives of perpetual unhappiness. Although we can't reverse the process of information overload, we can figure out how best to adapt, and maybe even learn how to turn floods of information into useful and reliable knowledge. There are no strategies that can guarantee success. But the focus should be on creating decentralized and self-organizing networks that are capable of responding to rapidly changing environments.

The age of entropy will not be a utopia, but it need not bring us to despair. Disorder does not suppress all that is good in the world. Without great wars, we have enjoyed prosperous and peaceful times. Nor is disorder itself something to fear or loathe. "The struggle itself," as Albert Camus famously pointed out, "is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy." Like Sisyphus, we need to embrace the unknowable, to accept our unintelligible world and our futile struggle to come to terms with its incomprehensibility. For better or worse, we have no other choice.

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