



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
CONGRESSIONAL PROGRAM

Assessing U.S. Interests and
Strategy in an Unraveling Middle East

August 10-16, 2016
London, United Kingdom





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Assessing U.S. Interests and Strategy in an Unraveling Middle East

Rapporteur's Summary

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The Aspen Institute's annual Congressional Program conference on Middle East policy, entitled *Assessing U.S. Interests and Strategy in an Unraveling Middle East*, convened in London, United Kingdom, from August 10-16, 2016. Participating were 19 members of Congress along with 12 scholars. The conferees met weeks after a failed military coup in Turkey and one year after a nuclear agreement with Iran that remains controversial. Today's Middle East is grappling with failed states, civil wars, and terror groups such as ISIS that have enabled autocratic regimes to become even more repressive, in the name of stability. The aim of the conference was to facilitate a frank, informative and nonpartisan discussion to examine these trends as well as viable U.S. strategies to counter them.

Understanding Radical Islam

An expert on Islamic radicalism assessed the various strands of Salafist Islam, a deeply traditional movement that interprets the Koran literally. While dogmatic, Salafism did not begin as a violent movement, but many of its adherents have been radicalized over the years as a result of political events

including the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the ongoing Syrian civil war. This combination of orthodox religious views, mass conflict, political repression and power vacuums, has fueled the rise of groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. Failing states such as Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen have been an important training ground for radicals.

While ISIS has been more effective than al-Qaeda in spreading terror, al-Qaeda is trying to distinguish themselves as "moderate" in comparison to ISIS and may actually have longer staying power in Syria given their socialization of the Syrian public. Whatever emerges after the Syrian conflict is likely to be a deeply conservative Sunni state. Whereas al-Qaeda attempted to carry out large-scale attacks carefully planned and executed by numerous individuals over months and years (such as 9/11), ISIS has pioneered "micro-terrorism" such as recent attacks in San Bernardino, Orlando, Paris and Nice. Such incidents of Islamist radicalism are a generational battle that will not be resolved in the coming years; "this is the new norm."

Many contended that the most effective way to defeat ISIS's ideology is the military defeat of ISIS,

just as the Soviet Union needed to collapse to deflate its ideology and its international adherents. Everyone wants to join the winning team; it must be made clear that ISIS is the losing team. Many still believe that ISIS has momentum. In order to change that, ISIS strongholds in Raqqa [Syria] and Mosul [Iraq] will need to be recaptured.

One expert believed there was a missed opportunity for the U.S. to help shape events in Syria after the beginning of the country's 2011 uprising by the failure to provide lethal aid to the then-more moderate Syrian opposition. "Now we're forced to try and contain the violence in Syria rather than shape its outcome." A former senior U.S. military official concurred with this assessment, arguing that U.S. reluctance to arm more moderate Syrian rebels early on ceded momentum to more radical groups.

The expert also challenged the argument that conflict in Syria is not a direct threat to U.S. interests. "The seeds of the next big attack against the U.S. are being sewn in eastern Syria; it's not an isolated conflict like the Congo civil war." Social media has played an enormous role in helping ISIS connect with recruits in the West, though Twitter and Facebook have become much better about clamping down on ISIS accounts.

A former senior Western official remarked that Shia jihadism should also be understood and taken seriously. Iran's theocratic system of government—known as Velayat-e Faqih or "Rule of the Juris"—is similar to a caliphate. The West needs the support of major Sunni states (such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries) to defeat Sunni radicalism and cannot count on them if it appears we're not doing anything to counter Shia militias, Hezbollah and Iran.

The expert on Islamism argued that Syrian leader Bashar Assad is not a U.S. ally in the fight against ISIS but part of the problem. "Assad cannot be rehabilitated; He's not the least bad option." If Assad wins the Syria conflict it means the "Iraqification" of Syria. Assad will owe a huge debt to Iran, which will wield enormous influence over Syria.

Several experts cautioned that the sudden defeat and collapse of the Islamic State is not a desirous outcome, as it could actually cause an uptick in terrorism (from fleeing radicals) and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis (the greatest refugee crisis since WWII). A no-fly zone in Syria should be the first policy priority to establish goodwill toward the U.S.

and stop the flow of refugees, one participant said. The Russian presence in Syria makes such a no-fly zone more complicated.

Syria

A former senior U.S. military official enumerated five important lessons for the United States in the Middle East, post-September 11:

- Ungoverned spaces in the Islamic world will be exploited by Islamic extremists;
- Extremist-control territories explode, not implode; Syria is a geopolitical Chernobyl;
- American leadership is absolutely imperative. All U.S. allies combined have less military resources than the U.S. That said, allies, including Islamic allies, are critically important;
- A comprehensive approach is necessary, not just counterterrorism but also politics, reconstruction, rule of law—police, judicial, prisons—and communications are essential;
- This is an ultra-endurance marathon, not a sprint.

The former official emphasized that while there is no "military solution" in Syria, neither is there a political solution without a military context. As long as Bashar Assad feels like he's winning he won't be compelled to seriously negotiate as he's achieving his objectives without compromising. One example of what the U.S. could do militarily, short of entering the conflict with "boots on the ground," would be to "crater" the runways of the Syrian Air Force, inhibiting their ability to barrel bomb their population. "As long as Assad is around the primary motivation of many Sunnis will be jihad against him."

At the same time, there must be a deliberate strategy toward both ISIS and Assad, as the sudden, abrupt collapse of either will cause more problems. Assad is armed and funded by Iran and Russia. ISIS grew out of a revived al-Qaeda in Iraq. It's imperative that the U.S. begin planning for the day after. Providing safe haven for Syrian civilians is a good first step. Interventions needn't involve large amounts of U.S. troops or heavy costs; it can be done with a modest number of troops coupled with air-power (including unmanned vehicles such as predator drones), resembling less costly operations in Libya and Afghanistan.

A multilateral strategy to defeat ISIS must also entail a strategy against Assad; Sunni states don't only want to fight Assad but also ISIS. There's a strong perception among Sunni states that the U.S. has tilted toward Iran. "Iran is not a contributor to stability in the region," the former official argued; "it's a contributor to instability." He argued that Congress and next U.S. administration should issue a joint public statement that Iran will never be allowed to enrich weapons-grade uranium. "It would provide great reassurance to our allies," the former official argued, "and counter perceptions of a U.S. tilt towards Iran."

It's important to recognize that while on the surface Syria—like Iraq—appears a Sunni-Shia civil war fought on Syrian territory, all ethnic and sectarian conflicts are over power and resources. Another important lesson from the U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan is to use existing organizations within a country whenever possible, rather than dissolving them and trying to create new ones from scratch. The disbandment of the Baathist army violated a fundamental rule to avoid policies that create more radicals than it eliminates.

The former U.S. official emphasized that U.S. intelligence capability remains the best in the world, citing examples such as the killing of Osama bin Laden and the drone killing of Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen. But it's impossible to predict when popular uprisings in the Middle East (or elsewhere) will take place, though it's important for the U.S. to retain human and technical intelligence in countries.

Turkey

It was argued that the July 2016 failed coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has made Erdoğan stronger, with a few caveats. His approval rating has gone up 20 percent (to 60 percent popularity) and he has no strong opponents. At the same time, he is now far more paranoid and insulated, dependent on a small team of trusted advisors. Erdoğan believes strongly that the coup was perpetrated by followers of Fethullah Gülen, a 75-year-old Islamic preacher who lives in Pennsylvania but commands a large following inside Turkey. One scholar compared "Gülenists" to American missionaries in the third world who gained respect and loyalty by creating schools and providing education for underserved communities.

The scholar argued that Turkey has undergone a slow-motion Islamist political revolution over the last two decades and that the Turkey of old—led by a secular military elite—"no longer exists." The Justice and Development party (AKP) of President Erdoğan began as a "necessary" political force, providing representation to the country's long disenfranchised traditional classes. Over time, however, Erdoğan has become an "elected authoritarian" and Turkey has become an "illiberal democracy." This in turn has worsened Turkey's economic situation, precipitating capital flight among wealthy Turks to Europe and the U.S.

A former U.S. official commented that Erdoğan had either coopted or intimidated the country's press and judiciary, calling into serious question whether it can still be called a democracy and a U.S. ally. One scholar responded that Erdoğan comes from an Islamic tradition and is not committed to Western values, but at the same time, it's highly unlikely that under his leadership Turkey will leave NATO. It was also argued that Washington had been insufficiently appreciative of the trauma Turkey suffered from the attempted coup and the commitment of the Turkish parliament to meet while under bombardment.

Turkey is fraught with major internal and external security challenges. Since 1925—the birth of the Turkish republic—the country has had a perennial problem of Kurdish enfranchisement in numerous iterations. This challenge has been exacerbated over the last decade given the increasing autonomy and nationalist ambitions of Kurds in Iraq and now Syria.

Consequently, argued the scholar, the Turkish government has been far more severe dealing with Kurdish agitators than with ISIS. For years the Erdoğan government acquiesced while radical Salafist groups fighting the Assad regime—including ISIS—used Turkey as a jihadi waystation. ISIS also began recruiting from the local Turkish population. Numerous terrorist attacks in the country—including a deadly June 2016 attack on the Istanbul airport—forced the Erdoğan government to belatedly recognize the threat these groups pose to Turkey's stability.

Given Turkey's internal tumult coupled with a fraught regional environment, the Erdoğan government has made an effort to improve relations with erstwhile frenemies such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. While Turkish-Iranian relations appear

cordial—given Turkey’s demand for energy and Iran’s supply of it—the two countries have major foreign policy differences, most prominently in Syria where they support opposing sides in the country’s civil war. One scholar compared Turkey and Iran to a “slow dancing couple breathing heavily down each other’s necks which each holding a dagger dipped in poison behind their back.”

Saudi Arabia

A scholar on the Arab world (and former Western Ambassador in the Middle East) argued that now is “a potentially revolutionary moment” inside Saudi Arabia. Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS)—the 31-year-old favorite son of his 80-year-old father King Salman—is popular among Saudi youth and has amassed enormous power in a short period of time. It appears possible he could leapfrog 57-year-old Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef (MBN) to succeed his father.

Internally MBS has launched an ambitious “Vision 2030” intended to bring dramatic economic and cultural reform to Saudi Arabia. The scholar argued that Vision 2030 is “breathtaking” in scope and “exactly the type of reform we [in the West] want. If he manages to achieve only 30 percent,” it will still be significant. The downward shift in oil prices makes it both more difficult and more necessary for Saudi Arabia to undergo major economic reform. The key challenge will be creating enough jobs (approximately 250,000 per year) to accommodate the country’s burgeoning labor force.

Externally MBS, who is also Minister of Defense, has waged a costly war in Yemen—against “Shia extremism” and Iran-supported Houthis—without clear parameters for success. Saudi Arabia had wanted the nuclear deal with Iran to also constrain Tehran’s regional activities as there is a mismatch in capacities between Iran on one hand and Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries on the other. Iran is 80 million people while the GCC collectively represents 25 million people. Consequently, Saudi Arabia is going to continue to need the U.S.—or another outside power—as a guarantor of regional security. Riyadh’s belief that Washington has “tilted toward Tehran” has led them to be more assertive in countering security threats. “For years we’ve criticized Saudi Arabia for wanting to

fight down to the last American,” said the scholar. “We need to be more supportive of them now.”

In addition to its complicity in civilian deaths in Yemen, Saudi Arabia’s international image has suffered as a result of radical Sunni jihadists—first al-Qaeda and now ISIS—who are perceived to be funded by Riyadh and offshoots of Saudi Arabia’s highly conservative Wahabi school of Islam. The scholar argued Saudi Arabia’s financial and religious links to ISIS have been “vastly overstated.” There is no evidence to prove official Saudi funding of ISIS and Saudi Salafism—while deeply intolerant—has long been “quietist” or politically passive. The major Salafi and jihadi scholars are based outside of Saudi Arabia. “These days,” he said, “people radicalize not by going to Saudi Arabia but going online.”

Saudi Arabia had in the past supported Islamist groups as a bulwark against Arab nationalist movements, communism (particularly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) and Iran’s revolutionary aspirations post-1979. For the last decade and a half, however, Saudi Arabia has come to see such groups as a threat to their internal security but has struggled to put the genie back in the bottle. Today it appears that the largest private donors to jihadi groups reside in Kuwait and Qatar, not Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia also has a problem in that it wants to be perceived as the vanguard of the Sunni Muslim world, but has not been able to protect Sunni civilians in Syria.

Iraq

A scholar who spent a decade in Iraq argued that “nothing that happened in Iraq after 2003 was inevitable.” Policy decisions made early on by the United States—including the dismissal of Iraqi civilian forces and the disbandment of the Baathist army—led to Iraq’s collapse and civil war. From 2007-2009 the U.S. had the right leadership, strategy, and resources to help reconstitute the Iraq state. But the 2010 decision by the Obama administration to support the reelection of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki enabled Maliki’s sectarian authoritarianism and fueled disenfranchisement and resentment, particularly (but not only) among Sunni Iraqis.

Today, the scholar argued, “Iraq is ruled by corrupt, kleptocratic elites. When they were exiled in London they lived on benefits. Now they come back as millionaires.” This corruption has provoked enormous

outrage among Iraqis—as evidenced by the recent storming of the Iraqi parliament—and further degraded state institutions. The scholar emphasized that it is a mistake to understand Iraq as primarily a sectarian or ethnic conflict. “What’s taking place in Iraq is not ancient hatreds but modern competition for power and resources in a weak, and failing state. It’s much more about greed than about God.”

In the words of the scholar, America’s lack of willingness to project power has created a vacuum that has been filled by bad actors such as Putin’s Russia, Iran, and violent militias. U.S. power projection needn’t only be boots on the ground. While the U.S. cannot decide the outcome in Iraq, it should conceive itself as a balancer of nations. U.S. power and influence in Iraq should not only be focused on fighting ISIS, for ISIS is a symptom of a much larger problem: poor governance.

When America is seen as uninterested or unreliable in Iraq it opens up opportunities for Iran, which is intent on making sure Iraq is never a strong country and cannot threaten Iran again (as it did during the era of Saddam Hussein). Iranian-backed Shia militias commit horrible human rights abuses. Residents of ISIS-occupied Mosul, for example, hate ISIS but are terrified of what comes next if Shia militias reconquer the city.

Several members of Congress questioned America’s interests and strategy in Iraq. “How do we articulate to our constituents,” asked one member, “why we should be over there and do all these things when it appears they hate us and their leadership is kleptocratic?” One member of Congress commented that “we in the U.S. are windshield people, while many in the Middle East are rearview mirror people.” America is focused on policies that can make the future better, while Iraqis (and others in the Middle East) are often trying to relitigate past grievances. Several scholars emphasized that the U.S. can wage influence in Iraq but not control. As such it’s important to manage expectations and move from crisis resolution to crisis mitigation.

Egypt

One scholar described Egyptian President General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as a “ruthless, pragmatic autocrat focused on restoring order.” Sisi’s main security priorities are to control Egypt’s enormous

border with Libya and dislodge ISIS, which is trying to develop supply lines between its bases in Libya and the Sinai in Egypt. Given their shared threat of radical Islamism, Sisi sees Egypt’s interests closely aligned with that of Israel.

While there is tremendous economic frustration in Egypt, Sisi, the scholar argued, doesn’t want to enact any major economic reforms until he consolidates his regime. Despite popular dissatisfaction Sisi lacks competition from both democratic forces and the Muslim Brotherhood, which has failed to recover from the July 2013 military-led coup against former President Mohammed Morsi. “The Muslim brotherhood just sulks and lives as victims,” the scholar said. “They have no plan for recovering their popularity. And there are no democratic forces able to take over in Egypt if Sisi leaves.”

“Sisi is pro-U.S. provided that Washington doesn’t ask him about democracy and human rights,” one scholar observed. Many Egyptians are skeptical about “American values” in Egypt, believing them to be “sex and unrestricted freedom...few people believe that America has stood for liberal human rights in Egypt,” given Washington’s longtime support for the authoritarian government of former leader Hosni Mubarak. One way of trying to shape Egypt’s trajectory is to restructure U.S. aid to Egypt to focus more on civilian [i.e. non-military] and educational aid. For example, the Egyptian military elite that come regularly to Washington for military education and values should be expected to teach those values when they go back to Egypt.

Iran

One scholar argued that there are two Irans: official Iran, led by repressive clergymen and revolutionary guardsmen, and unofficial Iran, made up of the country’s young, change-seeking population. Western officials have focused almost exclusively on improving ties with official Iran, but have refrained from supporting unofficial Iran’s aspirations to live under a more tolerant government. It was argued that the mandatory hijab (headscarf) worn by Iranian women is “a wall that must be torn down.” Western officials—particularly European officials—were urged to support the right of Iranian women not to wear hijab, and female European politicians visiting Iran were implored to refrain from wearing the hijab.

An analyst of Iran assessed that the Iran nuclear deal (known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) had so far proven “a non-proliferation success, a geopolitical disappointment, and a domestic letdown for most Iranians.” The deal succeeded in curtailing Iran’s nuclear activities and subjecting it to more transparency, but Iran’s regional activities—including its support for Syria’s Bashar Assad and radical militias, and its belligerence toward Israel—had shown no signs of moderating. Domestically, Iran’s deep state heightened its repression to seemingly signal to its population that external compromise does not reflect internal weakness.

The Iran analyst assessed that the JCPOA, meant to be a 10-year agreement, could “unravel” in the coming years due to political differences between the U.S. and Iran. A fundamental point of contention between the two sides is whether additional, non-nuclear related sanctions would constitute a violation of the JCPOA. While Iranian officials frequently warn that any additional U.S. sanctions would violate the nuclear deal and cause Iran to reconstitute its nuclear activities, from Washington’s perspective, non-nuclear related sanctions—against Iranian regional or domestic activities or support for terrorism—are not a violation.

The analyst warned that in the event of additional U.S. sanctions that trigger Iran to resume its frozen nuclear activities, reassembling a cohesive international coalition will prove difficult for two reasons: 1) In contrast to former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who helped unite the world against Iran, Tehran’s current government—led by president Hassan Rouhani and foreign minister Javad Zarif—are seen as moderates who should be engaged, not shunned; 2) Given the chaotic state of the Middle East, most countries around the world—save for the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia/GCC—now see Iran as a force for stability in the Middle East, not a source of instability.

Another scholar assessed that the nuclear deal with Iran—the JCPOA—is “still better than any alternative.” It was argued that it’s important that Iran feel the benefits of sanctions relief; more U.S. sanctions could fray the deal.

The observers of Iran argued that one concrete way for Washington to promote the cause of freedom in Iran is to dramatically improve the quality of the

Voice of America’s Persian News Network. Despite having an annual budget greater than that of BBC Persian, the VOA is poorly managed and staffed by government bureaucrats instead of journalists. As a result, VOA has limited credibility in Iran, in contrast to the widely regarded BBC Persian.

Economic and Social Trends in the Middle East; Opportunities and Challenges for Western Policymakers

A former U.S. national security official explained that whereas in government the Middle East is viewed almost exclusively through the prism of risks, in the private sector it is also viewed through the prism of opportunities. From an investment perspective the Middle East has several appealing characteristics, including a sizable middle class and a rapidly urbanizing population. Like anywhere else in the world, rule of law and local human capital are critical ingredients for investment; as such many countries in the region are currently non-investable. Notable exceptions include Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Turkey and Egypt are consumer economies the size of Mexico. Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia appear to be serious about economic reform for the first time.

The investor enumerated three reasons why the United States should care about the economies of the Middle East:

- 1) Healthy economies are essential for the stability of the region and the security of the U.S. It’s important for Washington to enhance economic engagement with the Middle East and elevate the role of the economic conversation with regional governments. Both U.S. and regional entrepreneurs can serve as important role models in our ongoing efforts to counter violent extremism.
- 2) The Middle East is a critical strategic crossroads for the United States linking Europe, Africa, Asia, and Russia.
- 3) While the U.S. has not had success promoting democracy in the Middle East, the promotion of free enterprise goes hand in hand with the promotion of liberal democracy and provides an opportunity to champion civil society and the role of women.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is the least economically integrated region in world. Intra-region trade is very low compared to Asia and Latin America. The U.S. is uniquely placed to foster interregional economic cooperation among MENA countries and teach small business skills that have been critical to the success of the U.S. private sector. The economic void is otherwise filled by China, which has a much more transactional relationship with regional economies and little interest in spreading values such as transparency and indigenization of the local labor force.

Another participant concurred that U.S. political and economic leadership is critical to the security and prosperity of the Middle East. The world's Muslim population is set to exceed the global Christian population by 2070. This demographic bulge highlights the need to reform the educational systems of Middle Eastern countries, to teach critical thinking rather than rote learning. It was argued that as long as the Middle East was devoid of economic opportunities and excitement for young people, radical groups would continue to find appeal. ISIS was compared to the Hell's Angels, with their appeal less because of religious austerity and more because of a sense of adventure and risk.

Another participant argued that what's unique about our current times—particularly in the Middle East—is the internal chaos countries are undergoing coupled with unprecedented global interdependence. The success or failure of Middle Eastern countries has a direct bearing on the security of the West. For example, Turkey's stability and internal politics are

critical to the West's security interests in the Middle East. The EU has done a poor job trying to accommodate Turkey.

Several members of Congress remarked that their constituents, American taxpayers, are "fed up" with spending hundreds of billions of dollars in the Middle East "with nothing to show for it." In addition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, one member cited a news report about several hundred million dollars spent on training just a few Syrian rebels. "We need to do fewer things better," one remarked. The question, "what is our strategy and what does victory look like?" should always be asked. Others argued that there must be a "broad-based domestic consensus in the U.S. before we can develop a clear strategy, end game and definition of success." One former diplomat argued that while President Obama's reticence to be more actively involved in the Middle East reflect the concerns of most American citizens, when America walks away, "bad things tend to happen more."

Burning the Earth: ISIS and the Threat to Britain

Nearly 14 years on from the start of the so-called war on terror, the global jihad movement is deepening and expanding.

Shiraz Maher

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It was never supposed to be like this. For a period, in late 2011, it seemed as if the so-called war on terror was won. The United States had killed two of al-Qaeda's most important figureheads: Osama Bin Laden and the American-Yemeni preacher Anwar al-Awlaki. Peaceful uprisings across North Africa suggested that a new, more democratic era was emerging in the region. Respectable commentators, who do not ordinarily lean towards hyperbole, regarded the decade-long struggle against that most ambiguous of abstract nouns—"terrorism"—as being over. "Al-Qaeda played no role in the Arab spring," wrote Peter Bergen, a contributing editor of the *New Republic*, "and hasn't been able to exploit in any meaningful way the most significant development in the Middle East since the collapse of the Ottoman empire."

The Syrian jihad has changed all that. The threat now emerging from Islamic State in the new Middle East is unprecedented for two reasons. The first relates to the sheer scale of mobilization in Syria and Iraq. What IS has achieved is remarkable. Not only has it carved out a proxy state but it has mobilized the largest volunteer army of Sunni foreign fighters in recent history. Consequently, the threat facing Britain and the West is not just that much broader than previous iterations, but it has also been extended by at least a generation.

The second reason is the creation of newly ungoverned spaces in which individuals can learn bomb-making skills and also acquire combat

experience. This is significant when analyzing the number of failed plots in and against Britain over the past 14 years. Just two weeks after the London bombings of July 7, 2005, another series of bombs was placed on transport networks but failed to explode. Nearly two years later, on June 29, 2007, bombs were placed outside a nightclub in the Leicester Square area of central London; the next day, an explosive-laden Jeep was driven into Glasgow Airport. The following year, an attempt was made to bomb a family restaurant in Exeter.

In each of those instances terrorists had evaded the security services and placed explosive devices in public areas. Only good fortune born of incompetence saved lives. Back then terrorists were mostly unable to visit hot spots such as Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan's tribal areas in order to learn their trade undetected. Instead, they relied largely on the internet to make crude and improvised devices. But in June 2012, with political unrest on Europe's doorstep, Jonathan Evans, the then director general of Britain's Security Service, baldly noted, "parts of the Arab world have once more become a permissive environment for al-Qaeda".

Evans was speaking before IS morphed into the beast it has become today, the datedness of his remarks demonstrating just how fast events in the region have spiraled out of control. To appreciate just how grave the situation has become, consider Nasser Muthana, the young British fighter with IS who in July 2014 tweeted a picture of a bomb-making factory with the caption:

“So the UK is afraid I come back [sic] with the skills I’ve gained.”

It was precisely this threat that Andrew Parker, who succeeded Evans as the head of the Security Service, spoke about last month in his Lord Mayor’s Defense and Security Lecture.

“The threat we are facing today is on a scale and at a tempo that I have not seen before in my career,” Parker said. In the past year the Security Service has thwarted six attacks in the UK and several more overseas. The attack on a Tunisian beach in June killed 30 British holidaymakers, demonstrating just how diversified the threat to both our citizens and our interests is becoming. This will only intensify in the coming years.

It now looks increasingly likely that IS has also carried out its first act of international terrorism by bombing a Metrojet flight en route from Sharm el-Sheikh in the Egyptian Sinai to St Petersburg in Russia. IS’s Sinai branch claimed responsibility for the atrocity, although its claims have not yet been categorically proven. If true, however, there are profound implications, not least that IS will have demonstrated its ability to bypass airport security procedures, whether for passengers or for staff.

Western airlines have long been an obsession of jihadists. Last Christmas, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula issued a call for attacks on British Airways and easyJet in response to what it described as the British government’s “arrogance”. American and French airliners were also identified as potential targets.

A senior official told me that in the lead-up to the 2012 Olympics, British intelligence officers assured the Prime Minister that the Games would be free from terrorism. Were Britain to host the 2016 Games the intelligence assessment would be very different. This is telling—the Syrian civil war was already in full swing by the time of the London Games, but it did not, at that stage, pose a significant threat to our national security.

In the early phases of the war, the terrorist threat to the West appeared to be in decline as jihadists made their way to Syria to fight the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. There was little interest in carrying out attacks at home. A naive romanticism surrounded these early fighters. The Guardian’s George Monbiot compared them to volunteers in the Spanish Civil War.

British fighters I was interviewing at the time seemed to appreciate this. One man from London with whom I developed a long-standing relationship even asked me to thank Monbiot on his behalf. “It really helped the mujahedin,” he said. This man epitomized the optimism of the early wave of fighters, who could not understand why they were considered a security threat. “Why is the gov [sic] calling us security threat and terrorists akhi [brother]?” he asked. He was sincerely bemused.

Nasser Muthana, the fighter who later boasted about his bomb-making skills, was also keen to reassure the government that Islamic State posed no threat. “Mi6 believe 300 Brits have returned to the UK . . . and how many terror attacks have they done? 0!!” he wrote. “We aren’t interested in you. We want Khilafa [the caliphate].”

The change in IS’s posturing towards the West came after the declaration of the caliphate in late June 2014. From that point the group adopted a more belligerent and expansionist policy, with the first edition of its English-language magazine promising to conquer Rome and defeat “crusaders” around the world.

Its fighters became more brazen. They cheered the beheading of western hostages and boasted of planning attacks in the West. There is a rationale for this: the caliphate cannot have static borders and must be territorially expansionist. Its duty is to confront the West and subjugate it to Islam.

Jihadist fighters believe they need a state ruled by a religiously sanctioned amir (leader) before waging wars of conquest. Without such an authority in place, offensive jihad cannot take place, because the group’s primary aim is to acquire and then amalgamate new territory under Islamic rule.

By contrast, defensive jihad requires no official sanction. Instead, jihad in this instance arises naturally, in response to external events such as invasion or occupation. Indeed, the Syrian jihad grew out of precisely these circumstances—an inevitable response to months of brutal repression after Bashar al-Assad tried forcibly to suppress peaceful protesters.

The distinction between offensive and defensive forms of jihad was popularized in the early modern era by Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, a Palestinian warrior-scholar who led the Arab contingent of mujahedin

against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Azzam argued that offensive wars are of less importance than defensive ones. The latter, he insisted, are *fard al-ayn* (an individual obligation), under which every Muslim is personally obliged to remove the source of belligerence. Wars of conquest are only *fard al-kifayah* (collective responsibility): an obligation that is communally satisfied provided someone undertakes it.

“It is a duty of the amir to assemble and send out an army unit into the land of war once or twice every year,” Azzam wrote. “Moreover, it is the responsibility of the Muslim population to assist him, and if he does not send an army he is in sin.”

For the members of IS, this, as much as anything else, explains their change in approach from June 2014 onwards.

One of the main problems for Islamic State at present is how to project power while trying to fight offensively. Like any military force, the group wants to achieve a competitive edge over its adversaries but realizes it cannot achieve this technologically. Consequently IS has developed another approach—an asymmetry of fear—through which it has cultivated a reputation for brutality and barbarism that it hopes will act as a deterrent.

To achieve this, the group releases films of its acts of extreme violence, presented to the world as if each were a new offering from Stanley Kubrick or Quentin Tarantino. The strategy has proved remarkably effective. Shortly after the Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh was captured in December last year (the following month, he was filmed being burned to death in a cage) the United Arab Emirates withdrew from coalition air raids against IS targets. The corollary was clear: the UAE would not expose its pilots to the risk of capture.

The Kurds have so far proved highly resilient against the advance of IS. As a result, the level of violence perpetrated against captured Peshmerga fighters has slowly increased as IS tries to intimidate its soldiers into acquiescence. One recent release is among its most barbarous yet. It begins with the (by now sadly) familiar scene of captured men, all wearing matching overalls, being forced to kneel in a line. A knife-wielding executioner delivers his message of

foreboding before the captives are pushed to the floor and beheaded.

The depressing familiarity of these videos has eroded their potency. Not so for the Kurds. To restate IS’s nihilistic relentlessness, this video was intended to shock more than any other that had come before. The captured Kurds had their throats only partially cut by the executioners, who then used this opening physically to rip their heads off. The agonized captives are seen writhing in agony as their heads are yanked in tearing, jerking motions.

The violence spawned by Islamic State is not whimsical: there is always an underlying message or a rationale behind it. Tactics such as the horrific treatment of captured fighters has produced results in the past, as in 2014 when IS marched on Mosul. The Iraqi army melted away, abandoning posts and fleeing for refuge. Quite simply, no one was prepared to risk capture.

This approach derives from a well-established strategy first pursued by al-Qaeda in Iraq—from which IS grew. In the years immediately after the September 11, 2001 attacks, senior al-Qaeda theorists debated how the movement could endure the “war on terror” and emerge victorious. Two divergent views emerged.

The first came from Abu Musab al-Suri, a Syrian who argued that the global jihad movement would find it difficult to secure the kind of political sanctuary it had enjoyed under the Taliban. This would make it harder to maintain a centralized command-and-control structure, or to run training camps. Instead, he argued for a more diffuse approach, through which al-Qaeda would inspire individuals in the West to conduct random acts of terrorism: “lone-wolf” or “self-starter” terrorism.

Arguing against al-Suri was Abu Bakr Naji (widely believed to be the pen name of the Egyptian jihadist Mohammad Hasan al-Hakim). Naji wanted al-Qaeda to adopt a scorched-earth policy: more brutal attacks, more nihilism, more death. He believed the jihad movement’s adversaries could be scared off by its fighters making the cost of participation unacceptably high. Jihad, he argued, “is nothing but violence, crudeness, terrorism, frightening [others] and massacring”. He recognized that such an approach would invariably result in significant loss of Muslim life, too—the very constituency in whose name he

claimed to act—but dismissed any concerns about this with blithe indifference. Yes, people would lose their parents and their children but “such is war and the masses must become accustomed to it”, he surmised.

Successful military leaders from Islamic antiquity “knew the effect of rough violence in times of need”. This shaped Naji’s views about how al-Qaeda should proceed. Islam’s historic warriors had not been harsh without reason—“How tender were their hearts!” he wrote—but they were nonetheless compelled to act with severity because they “understood the matter of violence” and “the nature of disbelief and its people”. It was this reading of Islamic history and jurisprudence that led him to conclude that “we must burn the earth under the feet of the tyrants so that it will not be suitable for them to live in”.

The strategy of deterrence was set. “It behooves us to make them think one thousand times before attacking us,” Naji said.

Abu Musab al-Suri succeeded in convincing al-Qaeda’s central leadership—then based in Afghanistan and Pakistan—to adopt his approach. This was also embraced by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (based in Yemen), which then, principally through its English-language magazine Inspire, began to urge attacks in the West by “lone wolves”. Stephen Timms, the Labour MP for East Ham, was a notable victim of this strategy. In May 2010, he was stabbed in the stomach by Roshonara Choudhry after she downloaded Inspire and decided to “punish” Timms because he had voted in support of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

In Iraq, however, the situation was different. There, fighters relished the prospect of a direct confrontation with the U.S. and its partners. They adopted Naji’s approach and wanted to turn the entire country into a barbaric and brutalized canvas. Under the stewardship of its first leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, al-Qaeda in Iraq pursued a bruising course of action: attacking coalition forces in Iraq, provoking a sectarian war with the Iraqi Shias, and targeting western societies through terrorism.

Unencumbered and unchecked, Islamic State has now taken Naji’s vision to its extreme extent. One of the unintended consequences of his philosophy is its ability to create powerful bonds of camaraderie and solidarity among its practitioners. Much has been

written of the way IS creates a sense of brotherhood among émigrés who join the group: yet this aspect is often overlooked. The diminution of anyone external to the group as “other”, coupled with the perpetration of extreme acts, has a profoundly unifying effect for those on the inside.

As such, there is little room for empathy or compassion for their former fellow British citizens. Consider this message published on social media by Raphael Hostey, a young Mancunian who travelled to Syria in October 2013. “Today’s Jumah Khutbah [Friday sermon] was about Britain,” he wrote, “and how Dawlatul-Islam [Islamic State] will come to them and kill them, enslaving their women and children.”

Ali Kalantar, a then 18-year-old from Coventry who had been studying for his A-levels before he joined IS, expressed similar sentiments. Having told his parents he needed money to buy a laptop for school, he booked a circuitous route to the front line to evade the security services, flying from Birmingham to Frankfurt and then on to Istanbul before travelling to Syria by land. “I can’t wait for the day we fight [Americans] on the ground,” he wrote. “Kill their mens, slave their womens [sic], orphan their kids.”

It isn’t only male fighters who revel in the sadism of IS justice. Khadijah Dare, a convert from Lewisham, in south-east London, who migrated to Syria with her husband, cheered the beheading of the American journalist James Foley in August 2014. “UK must b shaking up ha ha,” she wrote on Twitter. “I wna b da 1st UK woman 2 kill a UK or US terrorist!” Dare had previously posted pictures of her infant son carrying an AK-47 assault rifle.

Although it might seem counterintuitive, western female migrants are often among the most vociferous purveyors of violent content online. Whereas their husbands are able to fight on the front lines, these women at times feel frustrated by their inability to make a direct contribution towards the war effort. Trying to radicalize others through the internet and inspire attacks at home provides one way of assuaging this need. To that end, one western female who goes under the name of “Bint Mujahid” warned: “Live in fear. Sleeper cells and lone wolves are undetectable [sic]. And they will strike again, when you least suspect it.”

Gauging the extent and potency of this kind of threat is a difficult task. The best academic literature on the security risk posed by irregular volunteer fighters returning from conflict suggests that between 11 and 25 percent of them become terrorists. There is limited solace in this. Yes, history suggests that most of those fighting in Syria and Iraq will not become terrorists at home, but there are two important caveats to consider. The first is that most will die in combat. The second is that, given the sheer scale of mobilization in Syria and Iraq, even if you use conservative estimates, an exceptional number will still go on to present a substantial security risk.

If 750 Britons have made their way to the conflict, between 83 and 187 can be expected to pose some form of security challenge when they return. This represents the threat from returnees only. Terrorist attacks such as the 2014 Sydney café siege and Ottawa shooting were carried out by individuals who had otherwise wanted to join Islamic State but had been unable to do so.

The U.S. and UK are both increasingly looking towards drone technology to mitigate the threat from IS. It is unclear just how many western fighters have been killed in drone strikes, but the Conservative government is believed to have agreed on a “kill list” of British citizens.

Abu Rahin Aziz, a former credit controller from Luton, was killed in early July this year after being targeted by the U.S. military. Although it is not known whether the request for the strike came from British officials, Aziz, in the hours before his death, had been using social media to make threats against U.S. interests. Specifically, he had warned that IS would attack the United States on July 4.

A few days before that, Aziz had been looking forward to the tenth anniversary of the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London. He hoped there would be more violent incidents, and boasted that IS would attack the UK, citing Covent Garden, Territorial Army offices and MPs as potential targets. And he named Theresa May, the Home Secretary, as an “enemy of Islam”.

Yet it is not just U.S. drones that are targeting British citizens fighting for IS. In August, David Cameron took the unprecedented decision of authorizing an RAF drone strike against Reyaad Khan.

The 21-year-old was once a straight-A student from Cardiff who aspired to become a politician, and even Britain’s first prime minister of south Asian ethnic origin.

Like many of the young men who join IS, Khan reveled in its sadism. He boasted about executing prisoners, claimed to have participated in beheadings and warned he would become a suicide bomber. When he later tried to direct a plot to kill the Queen, David Cameron gave the order for the first targeted strike against a British citizen. Another Briton, Ruhul Amin from Aberdeen, was killed alongside him.

At the same time as RAF drones were killing Khan, the U.S. struck against Junaid Hussain, a Birmingham-born computer hacker previously jailed for breaking into Tony Blair’s email account. He claimed to lead Islamic State’s “cyber caliphate”, an online army of hacktivists who, among other things, had hacked the U.S. Central Command Twitter account.

All of these men tried to inspire attacks at home using both the internet and instant messaging services on smartphones, such as WhatsApp, Kik messenger, Wickr and Surespot. These play an important role in connecting IS fighters with those who cannot physically migrate to the caliphate.

Just last month, a 15-year-old boy from Blackburn was given a life sentence after pleading guilty to terrorism offences, so becoming Britain’s youngest terrorist. He had been in frequent contact with an Australian fighter, Abu Khaled al-Cambodi, who introduced him to an IS supporter in Melbourne, Australia, called Sevdet Besim. The Blackburn boy (who cannot be named for legal reasons) then began urging the 18-year-old Besim to behead a police officer during the Anzac Day celebrations, at the military parade to commemorate the first major battle fought by Australian and New Zealand forces in the First World War.

Evidence of the plot emerged following intercepted communications between the men—an issue that came into sharp relief on November 4 when Theresa May presented a draft of the Investigatory Powers Bill to parliament. Under surveillance plans being proposed by the government, details of the

internet activity of everyone in the country would be stored for a year.

Concerns persist about the proposed legislation despite the Home Secretary's attempt to create a framework of regulatory oversight while also limiting the amount of data that is captured. Much of this boils down to a debate about precisely what kind of society we want, given the need to balance civil liberties against security. The bill has been significantly watered down since May first began to formulate it, with the provision of what the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, David Anderson QC, calls "a powerful, outward-facing super-regulator". Judges will now have the power to block operations authorized by the Home Secretary.

Yet, for all the talk of oversight and regulation, there is much in the bill to cause alarm. One of the provisions would require companies to help the intelligence agencies hack personal devices. To that end, there has been much discussion of banning instant messaging services such as WhatsApp and iMessage, or at least the technology within them that allows for encryption.

All of this rather misses the point. Easily accessible platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram were wildly popular among jihadists operating in 2013 but have since largely lost prominence. This is the result, in part, of the social media companies actively pulling terrorist content from their own platforms; however, it is far from being the chief cause. More importantly the jihadists have lost confidence in those platforms and are migrating to new services such as Telegram.

Herein lies the challenge for Theresa May: not only has the technology already moved on but, as events in the Levant demonstrate, the threat now facing the West is diversifying, deepening and becoming ever more sophisticated. It is also a threat that has proved to be resilient and committed: having endured nearly 14 years of a so-called war on terror, global jihadism is stronger than ever.

Islamic State has captured this spirit of resolute defiance perfectly. Whenever its name is called, supporters chant: "Baqiya wa tatamaddad" – "lasting and expanding".

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Why ISIS Seeks a Battle with Western Nations – and Why it can't be Ignored

*Islamic State believes it must eventually confront and then defeat the West.
To get there, it seeks to polarize Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike.*

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It was precisely the type of attack that had long been feared: a coordinated and brutal act of urban warfare that brought Paris to a standstill for more than three hours on an otherwise typical Friday night. Six of the nine attackers had spent time fighting for Islamic State in Syria. Indeed, it was the third act of international terrorism perpetrated by IS in a fortnight, a campaign that started with the bombing of a Russian Metrojet flight over Sinai in Egypt, followed by a double suicide bombing in Beirut that killed 41 people—the deadliest attack in the Lebanese capital since the civil war there ended in 1990.

There are several significant operational observations to be made about what transpired in Paris. The attackers wore suicide belts in which the active ingredient was TATP, a highly unstable explosive based on acetone and hydrogen peroxide. TATP was also used in July 2005 when the London transport network was attacked. Known as the “mother of Satan” because of its volatility, it is usually manufactured at home and it is prone to accidental detonation—or, indeed, sometimes fails to detonate at all.

When two weeks after the July 2005 attacks four bombers attempted to replicate the carnage, their bombs failed to explode precisely because they had not been manufactured properly. The same was true for Richard Reid, the “Shoe Bomber”, and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the “Underwear Bomber”, who smuggled TATP explosives on to American aircraft in 2001 and 2009, respectively.

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the Paris attacks is that every device proved to be viable—a

reality born of the permissive environment in Syria and Iraq. A new generation of terrorists is now able to learn and rehearse the skills required to build devices that detonate successfully. The skills come with experience, and the newly ungoverned spaces of the Levant provide an ideal training ground.

Yet, for all the viability of the TATP devices used in Paris, the greatest loss of life came from assault rifles. This demonstrates how relatively unsophisticated tactics can still achieve mass casualties for terrorists determined to kill as many people as possible. The threat is particularly acute in mainland Europe, where automatic weapons move easily across the Continent, typically originating from criminal gangs in eastern Europe. Smuggling them into Britain is harder because the Channel limits the number of potential entry points.

The added protection resulting from Britain being an island is often overlooked. Just as guns are able to move more freely across the Continent, so, too, can people. This was brought into sharp relief when Imran Khawaja, a British man from west London who joined Islamic State in January 2014, attempted to re-enter the UK.

Khawaja had been particularly cunning. He hoped to slip back into Britain by evading the authorities after faking his own death in Syria, a plan his compatriots facilitated by eulogizing and glorifying him. He then made his way across Europe by land, passing through several European countries before being arrested on arrival at Dover. None of this is to suggest that Britain does not face a very serious threat from Islamic State

terrorism (it does), but the risks here are diminished compared to the threat facing countries in mainland Europe.

Trying to understand the strategic rationale behind Islamic State's attacks outside Syria and Iraq is daunting. A degree of conjecture is required, although information gleaned from its communiqués, statements, and behavior can go some way towards informing a judgment.

It may seem obvious to observe that IS sees itself primarily as a state, yet this is worth restating, because other jihadist groups have made claims to statehood while continuing to act as terrorists or insurgents, tacitly recognizing the nonsense of their own position. Not so Islamic State. It truly believes it has achieved the Sunni ideal of a caliphate and it acts accordingly.

This was the thinking that led the group to break from al-Qaeda, rebuffing Ayman al-Zawahiri's position as the group's emir. From Islamic State's perspective, countries are not subservient to individuals. The significance of this self-belief became apparent last summer when the U.S. began dropping aid parcels to stranded Yazidis who were otherwise starving and dying from exposure in the Sinjar Mountains of Iraq. The U.S. also committed itself to protecting Erbil in northern Iraq by bombing IS fighters who were moving on the city, not least because U.S. diplomats were based there and President Obama could not afford a repeat of the 2012 Benghazi debacle in Libya.

Islamic State responded by beheading its first Western hostage, the American journalist James Foley. Although the video of this was billed as a "Message to America", it was directed specifically at Obama rather than the American people. In a speech evidently written for him, Foley told viewers that the U.S. government was to blame for his execution because of its "complacency and criminality".

When Mohammed Emwazi—"Jihadi John"—appeared in ISIS videos as executioner-in-chief, he went some way towards explaining those accusations. "You are no longer fighting an insurgency. We are an Islamic army and a state," he said. "Any attempt, by you, Obama, to deny the Muslims their rights of living safely under the Islamic caliphate will result in the bloodshed of your people." To that extent, Islamic

State has pursued a campaign of retribution over the past 12 months against those it regards as belligerent enemies: the United States, Britain, France, Russia and its regional arch-rival Hezbollah, the Lebanese-based and Iranian-backed Shia militia.

There is an unspoken corollary to this approach, too: that Islamic State wants to make the cost of acting against it so unbearably high that its opponents are intimidated into acquiescence. For all its nihilistic sadism, IS is a rational actor. The group controls a large landmass, enjoys autonomy and makes claims to a revived caliphate. That is a project it wants to continue expanding and consolidating by being left alone to overrun the Middle East, a process that involves massacring minorities, including the Shias, Christians, Yazidis and Kurds.

If the West intervenes in this it must be prepared to face the prospect of mass-casualty terrorism at home.

Some will invariably argue that this is precisely what we should do. Leave them to it: Islamic State may be distasteful, but the cost of acting against it is too high. Besides, we cannot police the world, and what concern is it of ours if Arab societies implode in this way?

This view overlooks a broader (and inevitable) strategic imperative that can never be divorced from Islamic State. The group's millenarianism and commitment to eschatological beliefs are such that it wants to be left alone—for now.

IS ultimately believes it must confront and then defeat the West in a comprehensive battle between haqq and batil: truth and falsehood. That became clear enough when Abdul-Rahman Kassig (originally Peter Kassig) became the fifth Western hostage to be executed by IS in November last year. The video of his killing was different from those that preceded it and started with the execution of 21 soldiers from the Syrian Arab Army who were fighting on behalf of President Bashar al-Assad.

A short speech by Mohammed Emwazi—again, directed at Obama—noted that the execution was taking place in Dabiq, a town in north-western Syria. The significance of this is not to be underestimated. Dabiq is noted as being the venue of a final showdown between the armies of Islam and those of "Rome", a reference to the superpower of the day.

“To Obama, the dog of Rome, today we’re slaughtering the soldiers of Bashar and tomorrow we’ll be slaughtering your soldiers,” Emwazi said. “We will break this final and last crusade . . . and here we are burying the first of your crusader army [Kassig] in Dabiq.”

Kassig was branded a “crusader” because he had served in the U.S. armed forces.

That final encounter is not necessarily reliant on Western intervention. Emwazi explained that Islamic State would also use Dabiq as a springboard to “slaughter your people on your streets”. Thus, for Islamic State, a confrontation with the West is inevitable. It would rather be left to consolidate its position for now, but there is no eventuality in which we could expect to escape its sabre-rattling indefinitely.

The religious significance attached to sites such as Dabiq plays a huge role in motivating the fighters of IS. While the world looks on with horrified bewilderment at its rampages, the power of its eschatological reasoning provides some insight.

Writing shortly after Russia entered the conflict, a relatively well-known Dutch fighter called Yilmaz (also known as Chechclear) invoked the importance of end-times prophecies. “Read the many hadith [sayings of the Prophet Muhammad] regarding Bilad al Sham [Greater Syria/the Levant] and the battles that are going to be fought on these grounds,” he said. “Is it not slowly unfolding before our eyes?”

Herein lies the power of Islamic State’s reasoning—its fighters, and the movement as a whole, draw huge succor from the religious importance of the sites around which they are fighting. It serves to convince them of the righteousness of their cause and the nobility of their endeavors.

Faced with a campaign of Western aerial bombardment (albeit one that is limited and unambitious), Islamic State has decided to bait its enemies into fighting it on the ground. To that end, towards the end of the Kassig execution video, Emwazi advises Obama that Islamic State is “eagerly waiting for the rest of your armies [sic] to arrive”.

One final point should be noted about the possible strategic aims of November 13 Paris attacks. Islamic

State has been dispirited by the mass migration of Syrian refugees into Europe. Instead, it has appealed to them to migrate eastwards, towards the caliphate, rather than into disbelieving Western nations.

In an attempt to dissuade refugees from heading to Europe, IS released a series of videos featuring Western foreign fighters—including some from France—who told viewers how much they despised their home countries. Their message was one of persecution, of Muslims under siege, and of a hostile, unwelcoming Western world.

By way of contrast, they attempted to display the benefits of living in the so-called caliphate, with stilted images of the good life that would make even North Korean officials blush: schoolchildren in class, doctors in hospitals, market stalls filled with fresh produce.

Smuggling fighters into France who had posed as refugees is likely to have been a deliberate and calculating move, designed to exploit fears among some about the potential security risk posed by accepting Syrian refugees. Islamic State likens refugees seeking a future in Europe to the fracturing of Islam into various encampments following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD. Most of these sects arose from divisions over who should succeed the Prophet in leadership of the Muslim community, but some went into open apostasy.

Viewing events in this way, Islamic State argues that any Muslim not backing its project is guilty of heresy. For refugees to be running from it in such large numbers is particularly humiliating: the group even ran an advert that juxtaposed an image of a camouflaged military jacket alongside that of a life vest. A caption read, “How would you rather meet Allah?”

An article published this year in Islamic State’s English-language magazine Dabiq made this very point. It noted that: “Now, with the presence of the Islamic State, the opportunity to perform hijrah [migration] from darul-kufr [the land of disbelief] to darul-Islam [the land of Islam] and wage jihad against the Crusaders . . . is available to every Muslim as well as the chance to live under the shade of the Shariah alone.”

Islamic State recognizes that it cannot kill all of the refugees, but by exploiting European fears about their arrival and presence, they can at least make their lives more difficult and force them into rethinking their

choice. All of this falls into a strategy where IS wants to eradicate what it calls the “grayzone” of coexistence. Its aim is to divide the world along binary lines—Muslim and non-Muslim; Islam and non-Islam; black and white—with absolutely no room for any shades of grey.

“The Muslims in the West will quickly find themselves between one of two choices, they either apostatise and adopt the kufri [infidel] religion propagated by Bush, Obama, Blair, Cameron, Sarkozy and Hollande in the name of Islam so as to live amongst the kuffar [disbelievers] without hardship, or they [migrate] to the Islamic State,” says an editorial in Dabiq magazine. “The option to stand on the sidelines as a mere observer is being lost.”

Atrocities such as the Paris attacks are designed to put a strain on the “grayzone”, thereby polarizing Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike. Indeed, this is precisely what Islamic State said it hoped to achieve after the Malian-French radical Amedy Coulibaly declared, in a video released two days after

his death, that he had participated in the Charlie Hebdo attacks on IS’s behalf. “The time had come for another event—magnified by the presence of the Caliphate on the global stage—to further bring division to the world and destroy the grayzone everywhere,” Dabiq said.

Beyond the tendency of all totalitarian movements to move towards absolutism in their quest for dominance, Islamic State also believes that by polarizing and dividing the world it will hasten the return of the messiah. Once again, eschatology reveals itself as an important motivating principle.

This is both a blessing and a curse for Islamic State. Certainly, it is what underwrites its remarkable self-assurance and certainty and at the same time fuels its barbarism. Yet it may also prove to be its unravelling. IS has now attacked Russian and French civilians within a fortnight, killing hundreds. The wider world is finally realizing that Islamic State is a threat it cannot afford to ignore.

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Five ‘Big Ideas’ to Guide us in the Long War Against Islamic Extremism

General David Petraeus

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The formulation of sound national policy requires finding the right overarching concepts. Getting the “big ideas” right is particularly important when major developments appear to have invalidated the concepts upon which previous policy and strategy were based—which now appears to be the case in the wake of the Arab Spring.

To illustrate this point, I have often noted that the surge that mattered most in Iraq was not the surge of forces. It was the surge of ideas, which guided the strategy that ultimately reduced violence in the country so substantially.

The biggest of the big ideas that guided the Iraq surge included recognition that:

- The decisive terrain was the human terrain—and that securing the people had to be our foremost task. Without progress on that, nothing else would be possible.
- We could secure the people only by living with them, locating our forces in their neighborhoods, rather than consolidating on big bases, as we had been doing the year before the surge.
- We could not kill or capture our way out of the sizable insurgency that plagued Iraq; rather, though killing and capturing were necessary, we needed to reconcile with as many of the insurgent rank and file as was possible.
- We could not clear areas of insurgents and then leave them after handing control off to Iraqi security forces; rather, we had to clear and hold,

transitioning to Iraqis only when we achieved a situation that they could sustain.

Now, nine tough years later, five big ideas seem to be crystallizing as the lessons we should be taking from developments over the past decade.

First, it is increasingly apparent that ungoverned spaces in a region stretching from West Africa through the Middle East and into Central Asia will be exploited by Islamic extremists who want to establish sanctuaries in which they can enforce their extremist version of Islam and from which they can conduct terrorist attacks.

Second, it is also apparent that the attacks and other activities of such extremists will not be confined to the areas or regions in which they are located. Rather, as in the case of Syria, the actions of the extremist groups are likely to spew instability, extremism, violence and refugees far beyond their immediate surroundings, posing increasingly difficult challenges for our partners in the region, our European allies and even our homeland.

Third, it is also increasingly clear that, in responding to these challenges, U.S. leadership is imperative. If the United States does not lead, it is unlikely that another country will. Moreover, at this point, no group of other countries can collectively approach U.S. capabilities. This does not mean that the United States needs to undertake enormous efforts to counter extremist groups in each case. To the contrary, the United States should do only what is absolutely

necessary, and we should do so with as many partners as possible. Churchill was right when he observed, “There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them.” And, if one of those partners wants to walk point—such as France in Mali—we should support it, while recognizing that we still may have to contribute substantially.

Partners from the Islamic world are of particular importance. Indeed, they have huge incentives to be involved, as the ongoing struggles are generally not clashes between civilizations. Rather, what we are seeing is more accurately a clash within a civilization, that of the Islamic world. And no leaders have more to lose should extremism gather momentum than those of predominantly Islamic states.

Fourth, it is becoming clear that the path the United States and coalition partners pursue has to be comprehensive and not just a narrow counter-terrorism approach. It is increasingly apparent that more than precision strikes and special operations raids are needed. This does not mean that the United States has to provide the conventional ground forces, conduct the political reconciliation component or undertake the nation-building tasks necessary in such cases. In Iraq at present, for example, it is clear that the Iraqis not only should provide those components, but also that they have to do so for the results achieved—with considerable help from the U.S.-led coalition—to be sustainable.

Fifth, and finally, it is clear that the U.S.-led effort will have to be sustained for what may be extended periods of time—and that reductions in our level of effort should be guided by conditions on the ground rather than fixed timetables. While aspirational timelines for reductions in our efforts may have some merit, it is clear from our experiences under both post-9/11 administrations that premature transitions and drawdowns can result in loss of the progress for which we sacrificed greatly—and may result in having to return to a country to avoid a setback to U.S. interests.

To be sure, there is nothing easy about what I describe. Success in all such efforts will require sustained commitment, not just of our military forces, but also of the capabilities of other departments and agencies.

A comprehensive approach is neither easy nor cheap. But that is also true of the actions we have to take as inadequately governed spaces become ungoverned and in turn are exploited by transnational extremists.

The Long War is going to be an ultramarathon, and it is time we recognized that. But we and our partners have the ability to respond in a thoughtful, prudent manner, informed by the big ideas that I have described. Nothing less will prove adequate.

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Anti-Muslim Bigotry Aids Islamist Terrorists

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Almost 15 years after the 9/11 attacks, and five years since the killing of the chief architect of those attacks, the United States and the world face a resurgent threat from terrorism. This stark reality should inform the national debate as we prepare to elect our next commander in chief.

As states across the Middle East have collapsed into civil war, Islamist extremist groups such as the Islamic State have exploited the upheaval to seize vast swaths of territory, which they have used to rally recruits, impose totalitarian rule over the people trapped in these areas and plot attacks against the rest of the world.

Few responsibilities that our next president inherits will be more urgent, important or complex than thwarting these terrorist plans, reversing the conditions that have enabled their rise and combating the broader Islamist extremist ideology that animates them.

It would be a mistake to minimize the continuing risk posed by these groups. Although al-Qaeda's senior leadership ranks have been dramatically reduced, and while encouraging progress is being made against the Islamic State in Iraq and, to a lesser degree, Syria, these remain resilient and adaptive organizations. While Islamist extremist networks do not pose an "existential" threat to the United States in the way that Soviet nuclear weapons once did, their bloodlust and their ambition to inflict genocidal violence make them uniquely malevolent actors on the world stage.

Nor can they be "contained." On the contrary, from Afghanistan before 9/11 to Syria and Libya today, history shows that, once these groups are allowed to establish a haven, they will inevitably use it to project instability and violence.

Moreover, the fact is that free and open societies such as ours depend on a sense of basic security to function. If terrorism succeeds in puncturing that, it can threaten the very fabric of our democracy—which is, indeed, a central element of the terrorist strategy.

For that reason, I have grown increasingly concerned about inflammatory political discourse that has become far too common both at home and abroad against Muslims and Islam, including proposals from various quarters for blanket discrimination against people on the basis of their religion.

Some justify these measures as necessary to keep us safe — dismissing any criticism as "political correctness." Others play down such divisive rhetoric as the excesses of political campaigns here and in Europe, which will fade away after the elections are over.

I fear that neither is true; in fact, the ramifications of such rhetoric could be very harmful—and lasting.

As policy, these concepts are totally counterproductive: Rather than making our country safer, they will compound the already grave terrorist danger to our citizens. As ideas, they are toxic and,

indeed, non-biodegradable—a kind of poison that, once released into our body politic, is not easily expunged.

Setting aside moral considerations, those who flirt with hate speech against Muslims should realize they are playing directly into the hands of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. The terrorists' explicit hope has been to try to provoke a clash of civilizations—telling Muslims that the United States is at war with them and their religion. When Western politicians propose blanket discrimination against Islam, they bolster the terrorists' propaganda.

At the same time, such statements directly undermine our ability to defeat Islamist extremists by alienating and undermining the allies whose help we most need to win this fight: namely, Muslims.

During the surge in Iraq, we were able to roll back the tide of al-Qaeda and associated insurgents because we succeeded in mobilizing Iraqis—especially Sunni Arabs—to join us in fighting against the largely Sunni extremist networks in their midst. Later, we took on the Iranian-backed Shiite militia, with the important support of the Shiite-majority Iraqi security forces.

Likewise, the rapid ouster of the Taliban regime after 9/11 was made possible by our partnership with Muslim fighters of the Afghan Northern Alliance. And in Southeast Asia, it was by working with the government of Indonesia—the most populous Muslim-majority country in the world—that Jemaah Islamiah, once one of al-Qaeda's most capable affiliates, was routed.

The good news is that today, hundreds of thousands of Muslims are fighting to defeat the terrorists who wish to kill us all. This includes brave Afghan soldiers fighting the Islamic State and the Taliban, as well as Persian Gulf forces in Yemen battling both Iranian-backed Houthis and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. And it includes Arab and Kurdish forces who are battling the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In fact, we should do more to support these partners of ours.

Inescapably, clearing territory of entrenched terrorist networks and then holding it takes boots on the ground. The question is—whether in Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria or Mali—do the bulk of those boots need to be our own or those of local Muslim partners

I fear that those who demonize and denigrate Islam make it more likely that it will be our own men and women who ultimately have to shoulder more of this fight—at greater cost in dollars and lives.

We should also acknowledge that patriotic Muslim Americans in our intelligence agencies and armed forces—many of them immigrants or children of immigrants—have been vital assets in this fight with radical Islam.

It has also been through building ties of trust and cooperation between law enforcement and Muslim communities in the United States that we form our most effective defense against homegrown radicalization and lone-wolf attacks.

Again, none of this is to deny or diminish the reality that we are at war with Islamist extremism—a fanatical ideology based on a twisted interpretation of Islam. Nor is it to minimize the need for smart, intelligence-driven measures to prevent terrorists from infiltrating our borders and exploiting our immigration policies.

But it is precisely because the danger of Islamist extremism is so great that politicians here and abroad who toy with anti-Muslim bigotry must consider the effects of their rhetoric. Demonizing a religious faith and its adherents not only runs contrary to our most cherished and fundamental values as a country; it is also corrosive to our vital national security interests and, ultimately, to the United States' success in this war.

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Saudi Arabia and Yemen: U.S. Policy Challenges in an Unstable Peninsula

Sir John Jenkins

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It is tempting to look at the current conflict in Yemen as a side show, subordinate to the main regional security challenges in Syria, Iraq and Libya; to write Yemen off as a distant land of which we know little and care less, a place from some orientalist *Outlander*, full of fierce men with turbans, kilts, daggers and Kalashnikovs, chewing qat and engaged since time immemorial in incomprehensible tribal conflicts. It can also be tempting to see the current Saudi and Emirati entanglement there as driven by the alleged recklessness of the new Saudi Deputy Crown Prince and reflecting a new and unwelcome impulsiveness in the Sunni states of the Gulf, the containment of which now constitutes the real challenge facing U.S. and other western policy makers. This would be an error. Yemen cannot be seen in isolation from the wider security and political challenges facing the U.S. and Europe in the Middle East and North Africa. The purpose of this paper is to argue that Yemen is one of a set of wider conflicts in the region that reflect a secular shift in the balance of power and a set of deeper unresolved conflicts that threaten western interests and demand a more sophisticated balancing of action, a doubling down on traditional partners, a more robust approach to Iran and not reduced but smarter U.S. and European engagement in a new configuration of quasi-alliances and inter-state partnerships.

The current problems in Yemen did not start in 2011, when protests against President Ali Abdullah Saleh erupted. Until 1990 Yemen historically had

never been politically united. For over a thousand years the northern and western part of what is now the Republic of Yemen had been ruled—intermittently and not without challenge—by rulers religiously sanctioned by direct descent from the family of Ali, the Prophet Muhammad’s cousin, son-in-law and the fourth and last of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. The rulers—titled Imams—and probably the majority of the population were Zaidis, a school of Shia Islam that eschewed the more elaborate rites and jurisprudence found in Twelver Shiism, the principal school in Iran and elsewhere. In the majority Sunni South, there had been a series of independent traditional tribal rulers until the arrival of the British in the mid-19th century and the creation of a Crown Colony at Aden. In the Hadhramaut valley and its coastal settlements to the East other Sunni tribal trading communities, often speaking a distinctive language and linked with communities in what is now Dhofar in Oman, persisted. With the re-establishment of the Saudi State under Abdul Aziz Al Saud in the early years of the 20th century, the Zaidi Imamate and the neighboring Sunni Idrisi Emirate in what is now the Governorate of Jizan came under huge pressure, culminating in the absorption by the new Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) of the latter and the annexation of significant parts of the former. As in the lower Gulf, the British presence in the area deterred further Saudi expansion. But tribal and sectarian ties now straddled the border. And Yemen continued to assert irredentist claims to the lost territories. This gave KSA an abiding interest in the security of the whole area. This was reinforced in

1948 by a short-lived coup attempt (allegedly with the involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood) in which the ruler, Imam Yahya, was assassinated, and the more successful republican coup of 1962 that was supported by Nasser's Egypt. In the latter case, KSA gave extensive support to the royalist side, in spite of sectarian differences. This did not stop the eventual establishment of a republican regime in North Yemen or, following the withdrawal of the British in 1967, a communist regime in the South. But it prevented Nasser's Egypt establishing a foothold on the Arabian Peninsula. And it enabled an increasingly wealthy KSA to establish a powerful network of patronage that served to manage threats to its borders, to support northern tribes in their continued opposition to the south and—after the eventual fall of the southern regime and its incorporation into the North—as patrons also of southern Sunni tribes and Islamists, through the instrument of the Islah movement, which is partly Muslim Brotherhood, partly Salafi and partly tribal. In addition, the migration of large numbers of Hadhrami Yemenis (most famously Muhammad bin Laden) to KSA from the 1930s onwards, in search of work and business opportunities, gave the country both an economic interest in the Hadhramaut and ambitions to do more—including potentially to secure an access route to the Indian Ocean which would circumvent the Strait of Hormuz, threatened by Iran. This status quo was disrupted in the 1990s by the rapidly changing nature of politics in Yemen under the protracted Presidency of Ali Abdullah Saleh, a Zaidi Shia himself but from one of the smaller tribal groups of the north. Under severe economic pressure and following the discovery of oil in the border area, the hasty unification of the two Yemens in 1990 was followed by civil war in 1994, when Southerners resentful of Northern rule unsuccessfully sought to dissolve what they regarded as a shotgun wedding. Saleh had described the delicate task of running Yemen through balancing competing interests as “dancing on the heads of snakes”. This dance became ever more complex: Saleh chose to use Yemen's limited oil income from the mid-1980s to rule by patronage rather than to create a modern state, but his ability to buy support faltered as oil income dwindled. Saleh's blunder in supporting Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait led to humiliation by the Saudis. His attempts to ingratiate himself

included allowing Salafi proselytization in the Shia north. At the same time Saudi handling of the tribes became less assured, notably after the death in 2011 of Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz who had historically taken on the time-consuming task on behalf of the family. And tensions between the north and the south never disappeared.

As elsewhere, the demonstrations of 2011 reflected diverse discontents: anger at the impact of the deteriorating economic situation on ordinary people; at the increasingly obvious corruption of Saleh, his family and his close associate, Ali Muhsin al Ahmar, the Islahi Commander of the Yemeni Army's First Armoured Division; Southern separatist sentiment; resentment by the educated elite of Saleh's heavy-handed repression; and Islamist resentment of U.S. drone strikes. In addition, the government had since 2004 mismanaged six conflicts with a group of Northern Zaidis now generally known as the Houthis (from the family who played the principal role in their leadership: the group itself is more mixed). The roots of the conflict were varied. Sectarianism may have played a part, as may intra-Zaidi resentments. Some Yemenis claim the Houthis represent continuity with the tradition of Zaidi imams by resisting the expansion of fiercely anti-Shia Salafi Wahhabi madrasas in the north. There was—and is—also a certain anti-Americanism at work. Iran developed educational and religious links with them, which eventually morphed into opportunistic (if not decisive) support for their military operations.

This gave the Saudis—and the West—a headache that persists today. Yemen is their essential hinterland, with personal, tribal and economic links replicated by no other country and a complicated religious balance—analogue to that in the Eastern Province (EP)—that they need to manage in the interests of national stability. In addition, after the destruction of the attempted uprising by Al Qaeda (AQ) in KSA between 2003 and 2007 the remnants had fled to Yemen, where the organization was able to exploit a lack of government control and security to develop deep roots, and regrouped there. They plotted against the West—but also against KSA, as the attempted assassination of Prince Muhammad bin Naif in 2009 and another thwarted plot in 2012 in Jeddah showed. The Saudis had relied on Ali Abdullah Saleh to maintain order. He

had done so for three decades. But he was losing his grip. He allowed the U.S. to strike AQAP (Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula as it had become) targets from the air. But on the ground his own counter-terrorism efforts, through the Political Security Office (PSO) and even the newly created Special Forces backed by the U.S. and UK were often pure pantomime: there were probably at least three different forms of AQ in Yemen, with only a hard core being consistently one thing or the other and many operatives protected by Saleh and Ali Muhsin being occasionally rounded up but then usually released. In addition, though he finally agreed under pressure from the Gulf Cooperation Council, the U.S. and Europe to step down in 2011 in favor of his deputy, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, he then sought to undermine him (and the Saudi favorite Ali Muhsin) at every step, formed a clandestine alliance with the Houthi rebels of the North that enabled them eventually to join forces and sweep down through Sana'a to Aden and compel the evacuation of Hadi's legitimist government—which had fled Sana'a for the south shortly before—to Jeddah. That left the Saudis and the West in need of an alternative. But neither the GCC Initiative of 2011 onwards, the related National Dialogue Process nor successive UN-led mediation efforts have produced one. Hadi is widely seen as weak and ineffective. The Houthis remain in control of the North and there seems no realistic chance of their being dislodged in any way that might look like a clear victory for the Saudis and their allies. Not all AQAP claims are true, but some AQAP elements and perhaps ISIL are building up their strength and capability in parts of the South and the Hadhramaut. And the continued conflict is having an impact on KSA's relations with the U.S., Europe and some of its neighbors. This is true of Oman, which after the experience of the civil war in Dhofar has a profound interest in Yemeni stability and whose efforts to mediate have been met with Saudi skepticism. It may be true to an extent of Egypt, which remains suspicious of the Muslim Brotherhood links of Islah and, as in Syria, sympathizes with military rule. And it may even be true in private of the UAE, who share Egypt's deep suspicions of Islah and would probably prefer renewed efficient military authoritarianism in Yemen to the Sunni Islamists whom KSA has traditionally favored.

In addition, Iran continues to intervene in spite of its denials. Yemen is peripheral to them but useful in occupying Saudi energies. And this brings into focus an important policy consideration. Leaving to one side the unquestionably agonizing issue of the humanitarian impact of the conflict, in a strategic sense what is happening in Yemen is not simply about Yemen: it is about KSA, Iran, AQ, the Islamic State (ISIL) and the wider region. That is why it matters so much. And this is not a situation that the Saudis simply created with their recklessness, as some assert. Under the late King Abdullah the Saudis recognized the need to replace Ali Abdullah Saleh and agreed to work through the GCC with key western powers to achieve a satisfactory transition. The transition failed for various reasons: Saleh himself never really bought into it and retained a disruptive capacity in spite of private Saudi and public international guarantees to him about his safety and the future of his family; Hadi proved petulant and obstructive; the Houthis were dissatisfied with what they were offered in terms of territorial control in the North; Southern separatists in turn thought they were being sold short and significant elements of Yemeni society (the relatively liberal merchant classes of Aden, Ta'iz or Sana'a, for example) were not properly included. In addition the Houthis overreached between the summer of 2014 and late 2015 by seeking to colonize the government and constantly seize new territory.

The subsequent Saudi and Emirati-led intervention has been popular in KSA in particular. It appeals to a strong sense among young Saudis, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the Kingdom's population that their country should be more assertive in promoting its national interests in the region and in particular pushing back against what they and many other Sunni Arabs regard as Iranian and Shia expansionism. This is a complex phenomenon. Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 an appeal to sectarianism has been from time to time a highly effective instrument of political mobilization. More particularly since the toppling of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq in 2003 it has been used by a variety of groups—both Sunni and Shia—across the region to bolster their positions. We have seen this in Iraq and Syria with the mobilization of a wide range of Shia militias. It is an essential part of the appeal of Sunni

jihadist groups like AQ, ISIL, Jabhat al Nusra, Ahrar al Sham and so forth. And it represents a double-edged sword for Sunni states such as KSA, for whom maintaining popular support is important but who also need to manage a sociologically complex sectarian landscape and for whom the most critical domestic threat is likely to be Sunni radicalism. In addition, Iran has used the power of Shia symbolism to inspire transnational support networks: but it also functions as a Persian nation state with distinctively national objectives.

And this raises the critical question of how the U.S. and Europe construe their interests in this complex environment. For the last 15 years the U.S. and UK at least have seen counter-terrorism as the hinge. That is why they have built enduring relationships with the Saudi Ministry of the Interior and its counterparts in Jordan and Egypt. It is the reason they sought to build an effective counter-terrorism force under former President Saleh, which could work with them and with KSA to prevent the serious threats presented by AQAP in Yemen from materializing; there were successes in spite of Saleh's ambivalence. Now, after the Iran nuclear deal, there is a feeling in KSA and the wider Gulf that the U.S. is having second thoughts and would prefer to build a new relationship with Iran than work to strengthen the old one with KSA under its new, untested and sometimes impulsive leadership. The latter is under undoubted strain in spite of the considerable assistance given by the U.S. (and the UK and France) to Riyadh in pursuit of its now protracted conflict with the Houthis in Yemen. And it is doubtless true that KSA is at times an uncomfortable partner. There is clearly a complex relationship between the welcome Riyadh gave to Muslim Brothers fleeing Nasser's repression in the 1950s and 1960s, the global promotion of the Saudi form of Salafism (loyalist and politically quietist but still deeply intolerant), the emergence under Muslim Brotherhood influence – particularly that of the ideologue, Sayyid Qutb—of politically mobilized forms of Salafism from the 1970s onwards and the subsequent metastasis of some elements of this movement into violent Sunni jihadist groups. And the Saudi government can be clumsy in managing its external relationships.

But KSA has always operated as a state within a state system. It has never claimed khalifal status or sought to promote violent jihad, except in Afghanistan in the 1980s with the encouragement of the U.S. and other Western powers. And it has consistently defined its national interests in ways consonant with the U.S. and its European partners. Now, with the collapse of the state powers of the Arab north, KSA has emerged as the key Sunni state, alongside the UAE, which has harnessed its militantly modern ambitions to Riyadh's muscle. If we think that the political future of Sunnis in Iraq and Syria are key components of any new and stable political dispensation in the region, that an Iran that seeks to control large parts of the Arab-speaking world will foster sustained and endemic sectarian conflict, that the only Arab states over the last 50 years that have successfully met repeated crises and emerged stronger are the Sunni states of the Gulf, that these states wish now to shape their own future—as we see dramatically with the new Economic Reform Plan in KSA—along lines the international community and the international financial institutions have long recommended and that these states would prefer a future in which their efforts to evolve domestically and to achieve peace in their region are balanced by a sustained and shaping U.S. presence that engages with but does not privilege an Iran that continues to foment unrest and has its own long history of support for terrorist organizations—then there is really no alternative to doubling down on KSA and the GCC as a whole. This does not mean a free pass on uncomfortable issues. But a Saudi Arabia, a UAE or indeed a Bahrain that feels that the U.S. is unlikely to play its traditional (at least since 1970) role as guarantor of its security is also unlikely to respond to cajoling on issues such as human rights or humanitarian reconstruction. It is easy to overestimate the bandwidth in these relatively young states and to underestimate the impact of demographics and family rivalries. But they are prepared to be helped in shaping their own futures if that help is genuinely on offer.

The alternative is to let them profit—painfully—from their own mistakes. The risk is that the lessons they learn are not the lessons the U.S. would prefer them to learn. That is likely instead to lead to a period of prolonged regional instability, dominated by proxy and sometimes direct conflict with Iran. We are already

seeing a concerted attempt to push back against Iran in Lebanon and the Gulf, with the declaration by the GCC of Hizbollah as a terrorist organization, the active encouragement to Gulf nationals to withdraw funding from the Lebanese banking system, the expulsion from the Gulf of Lebanese nationals, action against the Shia opposition movement, Al Wifaq, in Bahrain and increased support to certain opposition groups in Syria such as JaN (Jabhat al-Nusra). These actions on their own are unlikely to derail Iran. So there will be popular pressure within the Arab Gulf to escalate. That brings heightened risks. And sustained sectarian conflict in the region will have blowback within Sunni states, including Jordan and Egypt. If the aim is to resolve these conflicts, integrate Iran into a newly stabilized state system and the global economy and reduce the threat from radical jihadi violence, then we need the Arab Gulf states, notably KSA, more than we need Iran. And efforts to push KSA into sharing the region with Iran will almost certainly have the opposite effect if the former thinks Washington no longer has its back.

Given all of this, what sort of Yemen do we collectively want? KSA would probably like an Islamic-legitimate Sunni state of unconditional allegiance after its own model that protects its southwestern flank and shuts out Iran from the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea: if that is not achievable in the country as a whole, then a loyalist government at least from Sana'a south, with the Zaidi north contained and the Hadhramaut under growing Saudi influence. The UAE would like the war to finish and reconstruction begin to embed the sort of developmental legitimacy that underpins their own state, perhaps under an authoritarian but non-Islamist government. Northern Yemenis would like peace and security more than democracy; southerners would prefer to have nothing to do with the north (but are not sure they want to have anything to do with each other). And trying to impose Western ideas or ideologies is, for the moment,

irrelevant. The keys are stability, security, and economic development. The UN has shown it cannot convene the different parties or the regional powers to achieve this. Only the U.S. conceivably has the power to do so, if it chooses to use it. Failure is always possible. But a continuation of the various conflicts in Yemen could also eventually look like failure to a significant part of the Saudi population, which would in turn have an impact on stability and reform within the Kingdom. It would provide a permissive environment for AQAP and other jihadi groups, which would seek to undermine the security of the Arabian Peninsula as a whole and to launch attacks—as they have sought to do in the past—against the Far Enemy. It would distract attention from the expansionist ambitions of Iran elsewhere in the region and help solidify the rule of Shia militias across a swathe of territory from Lebanon to Iraq. The ultimate question is how much this matters to the U.S. and to Europe. If the answer is, not much, then the best course of action is to let regional powers sort out the mess, however long it takes, and accept the consequences. If the answer is that it matters a lot and regional powers will be incapable of sorting things out any time soon, then there is no alternative to seeking actively to shape the future through regional partners who have shown a willingness to be shaped. And it this last consideration that is genuinely new. In the past, the GCC tended to expect others to do all the heavy lifting. Now some of them, including KSA and the UAE, are beginning to show that they will accept their share of responsibility. But they need an outside partner which can bring global power to bear and a range of capabilities—to plan, coordinate, advise and implement—that they do not have. That does not mean excluding Iran. But it does mean treating Iran as another state within an essentially unbalanced regional state system, with engagement calibrated on the basis of its actions not its words or the hopes of others.

Calling all Women Leaders: Join My Stealthy Freedom Campaign

Masih Alinejad

Journalist & Activist

By now, as everyone knows, Theresa May is the United Kingdom Prime Minister, and it is only the second time in history that a woman has occupied such an office. Of course, British history has had its share of tough female leaders, from Boudica, who led the uprising against the Roman occupiers, to Queen Elizabeth I, who fought off the Spanish Armada, and of course Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady.

In the United States, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is the Democratic nominee to be the next President. And if some polls are to be trusted, she will be the next leader of the world's most powerful nation. And to make matters even more interesting, there is a very strong push for the next Secretary General of the United Nations to be a woman as well.

With Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor for the past 11 years and the de facto leader of European Union, come November, we could have the three most powerful and prosperous nations in the West all led by women.

That's a prospect that horrifies the Islamic leaders in Iran. A year after the historic nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, human rights issues, especially women's rights, have taken a turn for the worse. It's as if every other issue has been swept under the carpet. Compulsory hijab rules are enforced even as more women post selfies of themselves without the veil on social media sites.

In the Islamic Republic, women cannot control what they wear, let alone dream of high office. Under the Islamic Republic, an Iranian woman cannot leave

the country without her husband's consent. If Iran were to produce a Merkel or May or Clinton, she'd have to ask her husband's permission to travel to world events such the UN General Assembly. Last year, Niloufar Ardalan, the captain of Iran's women's soccer team, was prevented from traveling with the rest of the team to compete in a tournament in Malaysia. Her husband refused to give her permission to renew her passport so that she could take their son to school on his first day.

Defenders of the Islamic Republic's clerical rulers say Iranian women can drive cars, get an education, attend the university and have a job. These defenders say Iran has a better record compared to the other Islamic theocracy, Saudi Arabia.

True, but historically, Iranian women always enjoyed more rights than our neighbors. Now, women in Afghanistan and Turkey are ahead of us. Before the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, had vowed that he would not introduce compulsory hijab. However, after the overthrow of the secular Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the issue of hijab was hotly debated in newspapers and in public events. Under the Shah, women had been free to choose whether to put on veil, or the all-enveloping chador, a loose piece of cloth that covered the body from head to toe, or wear Western-style clothing. At that time, Iran was on a path to modernization which looked to the West, and Iranian women dressed like their European or American counterparts.

After the Revolution, a number of moderate clerics including Ayatollah Taleghani, said "we can convince Muslim women to wear the hijab, but we should not compel them."

As President Hassan Rouhani recounts in his memoirs, he was not one of the moderates. In fact he says he was responsible for introducing compulsory hijab after the Revolution. As the cleric in charge of cleansing the Army, he imposed compulsory dress codes on female employees working in the general headquarters of the army. Soon that decision was applied to all government offices.

Here is what he writes: "As a first step, we gathered all the full-time female employees of the army staff and notified them that from now on they were to show up at work by wearing the veil. Despite the fact that there were merely two or three female employees who were not wearing the veil, most women started nagging and muttering at our announcement of making the veil mandatory for their workplace. Yet, I kept a firm stance and I said, as of tomorrow, the military police will be stationed at the entrance and will prevent non-veiled women from entering the premises".

Last September, some 36 years later, Rouhani addressed the UN General Assembly, basking in the glowing publicity of the historic nuclear deal. Iran was going to be a more cooperative member of the international community, he told the world. But Rouhani has never kept his promise to ensure 35 million women are treated as full citizens.

Iranian women are among the most educated women in the region. So many women win acceptance to universities that the authorities changed the admission rules to favor male students.

Sadly, advancements in education have not been matched by equivalent advancements in the social status of women. At every level of educational attainment, women's economic participation rates are half that of men. Iran ranks 135 out of 142 countries for political empowerment of women, according to the World Economic Forum's 2014 Gender Gap Index. And these disparities, while having some social and cultural roots, are reinforced by design.

Iranian law requires women to seek their husbands' permission to travel, work and attend university. And when a husband is abusive, women face huge legal hurdles in getting a divorce. Perversely,

in the eyes of the law, adult women are not capable of making these important life decisions, yet girls can legally marry starting at 13 years old and are treated as "adults" when it comes to criminal responsibility starting at age nine.

Some leaders in Iran want to double down on this systematic gender discrimination. They propose laws that would require businesses to hire men over women, and married people over unmarried people. Some government offices have already restricted the hiring of women. What's more, in some state universities, women have been barred from pursuing engineering and math.

The veil or the hijab is the most obvious and visible symbol of this discrimination against women. Compulsory hijab is against international human rights standards and as such is a systematic violation of half of a population of Iran. Free choice is an important factor to guarantee a respectful life for all human beings including women. Iranian women should have the right to choose.

And that is why in May 2014, I started my My Stealthy Freedom campaign against compulsory hijab. In the My Stealthy Freedom Facebook page, which has more than 1 million followers, we raise the issue that hijab should be a choice and not a compulsion. In Islamic countries like Lebanon, Syria, Malaysia, Tunis and many more, no such compulsion exists.

As part of our campaign, we have urged women politicians who visit Iran not to wear a veil or cover their hair. Female Western politicians should not close their eyes to the violation of women's rights in Iran and help the Iranian government to oppress women abusing the term "law." This campaign has asked them to use their platform and position to challenge the Iranian government on this discriminatory law.

Some politicians say that they wear the veil or a headscarf when they visit the Islamic Republic just to show respect to the country's culture and history. Contrary to these views, the hijab is not mandatory under Islam and is not part of Iranian culture. It is a tool to control women. In the Islamic Republic, even non-Muslims and foreigners have to don the veil.

Iranian politicians, however, insist that their views be respected even when they travel outside the country. Last year, during the Iranian president's visit to Italy, officials there covered up nude statues at a museum so

as not to offend Rouhani. At dinner, the Italians acted tactfully by serving fish, rather than non-halal meat, and not serving alcohol.

Maybe it is time Western female politicians stood up for their own cultural values and insist that since the veil is not part of their norms, they are not going to wear it.

Iranian women have suffered legal discrimination both before and after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. But what makes the situation even worse after 1979 is the introduction of laws that penalizes them for lack of “proper Islamic coverage.” For almost 37 years Iranian women have been fighting against compulsory hijab.

My Stealthy Freedom is now the most powerful women’s rights movement in Iran. In early July, the Iranian government organized a week-long publicity campaign to promote compulsory hijab and persuade

women against joining our movement. Our success is because we show the real discrimination Iranian women, not just through compulsory hijab, but in other areas of their lives, from employment to family law.

The rest of the world wants to build stronger ties with Iran. That is good, but the world leaders must insist that the Islamic Republic treat its women fairly. They must redouble their efforts to hold Iran’s leaders accountable for advancing women’s issues in the wake of the nuclear deal, not excuse them.

I dream of a day when Prime Minister May or Chancellor Merkel or even President Hillary Clinton would visit Iran and not wear a headscarf or any head covering. And on that day, I may get a chance to visit my own country after years in exile. That day, the women will no longer be stealthy.

I Governed in Iraq, and Saw the Lack of Postwar Planning First-hand

In June 2003 I arrived in Kirkuk to be told I was in charge of the province – and that the country was stable. I hope Chilcot can draw the right lessons from this war.

Emma Sky

Senior Fellow
Jackson Institute, Yale University

Although I opposed the Iraq war, I went on to serve in Iraq longer than any other British military or civilian official. When I testified before the Iraq inquiry on 14 January 2011, I explained how in 2003 I had responded to the government's request for volunteers to administer Iraq for three months before we handed the country back to the Iraqis.

I felt I had useful skills to contribute, after a decade in Palestine working on capacity building and conflict mediation. And I did not want the only westerner Iraqis would meet to be a man with a gun.

Before I went out to Iraq I was not briefed, and had no idea what my job was going to be. I received a phone call from someone in the British government telling me to make my way to RAF Brize Norton, jump on a military plane and fly to Basra, where I would be met by someone carrying a sign with my name on it and taken to the nearest hotel.

It sounded plausible. It was June 2003. The invasion was three months previous. The war was apparently over. I assumed the British government knew what it was doing—it had just not told me. So I followed the instructions. But I arrived in Basra airport to find no one expecting me, no sign with my name.

The next day, I boarded a military plane to Baghdad, and found my way to the Republican Palace, which had been turned in to the headquarters of the CPA—the Coalition Provisional Authority. There I was given my first briefing.

I was told the situation in Iraq was stable; that there were enough staff in Baghdad; and that I should try the north. So after a week I found a flight to Mosul. They had someone there, so I travelled further. When I arrived in Kirkuk I was informed that I was the senior civilian there, in charge of the province, and reporting directly to the head of the CPA in Baghdad. I had never run a town in the UK—let alone a province in someone else's country. I survived an assassination attempt in my first week on the job.

I went on to work as the political adviser to the top American generals from 2007-2010, through the surge and the drawdown of U.S. troops.

The Iraq war led to the deaths of 179 British soldiers, 4,500 Americans and perhaps 200,000 Iraqis. It changed the regional balance of power in Iran's favor, triggering proxy wars between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the Gulf countries; and it created the chaotic conditions that enabled al-Qaida in Iraq, and then Islamic State, to gain traction. Millions of people have been displaced, many of them seeking refuge in Europe.

Britain should never have invaded Iraq in 2003—the decision was based on the erroneous premise that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction; and, as my personal experience proved, the planning for the occupation was woefully inadequate. But the outcome of the intervention was not preordained or inevitable. There were different potential futures for Iraq.

Tomorrow Sir John Chilcot will finally make public his findings on the Iraq war. Released seven years after the inquiry was commissioned, and after considerable wrangling, it is unlikely to do much to restore public confidence in the integrity and judgment of elected officials—a key factor in the decision of the British electorate to leave the EU.

However, I hope the inquiry helps us better understand what happened in Iraq, so we learn not only the limitations of external actors in foreign lands, but also, importantly, where and how we can make a positive difference.

I hope it highlights to our political leaders and senior officials the importance of basing policy on realistic goals and assumptions; of developing a national strategy to bring about a political outcome; of using military force where necessary as a means not an end; of mediating between competing groups to broker an inclusive peace settlement; and of planning to avert state collapse.

I hope the report also acknowledges how, from 2007-2009, the coalition helped restore stability by bringing all groups into the political process and by building up the capacity of the state. This was the only period when the coalition had the right strategy, the right leadership and the right resources. Things fell apart again after the 2010 parliamentary election results were contested—and the U.S. rapidly disengaged, withdrawing all its forces.

The ghosts of the Iraq war have hung over Britain long enough, distorting the lens through which we

view our leaders, our government, our allies and the Middle East. We need to put the Iraq war in perspective. It's not about doing nothing. It's about doing the right things.

Previous interventions saved thousands of lives in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991, in Kosovo in 1999 and in Sierra Leone in 2000. We have done little in the face of mass murder in Syria and the displacement of half the Syrian people. Some may take satisfaction that we have kept our hands clean and not become mired in that country's problems. But the failure of the international community to respond is a blot on our collective conscience. Furthermore, for years to come we will be plagued by the fallout from Syria of refugees, terrorism, militias and regional instability. In an interconnected world, the suffering of others affects us sooner or later.

We live in uncertain times and in a world in transition. But it is not possible in this day and age to isolate ourselves from these trends and transformations. In the months ahead, our new political leaders will have the opportunity to define Britain's place in the world; to ensure government machinery that is effective and honest; and to help shape a vision for the new world order of the 21st century to replace the one we helped establish after the second world war, which is unravelling. Let us hope that these leaders will learn the right lessons from the Iraq war—and not forever be blinded by it.

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How the ‘Green Zone’ Helped Destroy Iraq

It was only a matter of time before ordinary Iraqis stormed the walled-in palaces of their corrupt politicians.

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While the United States has been fixated on the Islamic State and the liberation of Mosul, the attention of ordinary Iraqis has been on the political unraveling of their own country. This culminated on Saturday when hundreds of protesters breached the U.S.-installed “Green Zone” at the heart of Baghdad for the first time and stormed the Iraqi parliament while Iraqi security forces stood back and watched. The demonstrators, supporters of radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, toppled blast walls, sat in the vacated seats of the parliamentarians who had fled and shouted out demands for the government to be replaced. A state of emergency was declared.

This incident should be a jarring alarm bell to Washington, which can no longer ignore the disintegration of the post-Saddam system it put in place 13 years ago. The sad reality is that Iraq has become ungovernable, more a state of militias than a state of institutions. As long as that state of affairs continues, even a weakened Islamic State, which has been losing territory and support, will find a home in Iraq, drawing on Sunni fears of corruption and incompetence by the Shia-dominated government.

The greatest threat to Iraq thus comes not from the Islamic State but from broken politics, catastrophic corruption, and mismanagement. Indeed there is a symbiotic relationship between terrorists and corrupt politicians: They feed off each other and justify each other’s existence. The post-2003 system of parceling out ministries to political parties has created a kleptocratic political class that lives in comfort in the Green Zone, detached from the long-suffering

population, which still lacks basic services. There is no translation into Arabic of the term kleptocracy. But judging by the protesters chanting “you are all thieves,” they know exactly what it means.

Originally established in 2003 to protect the American occupiers, the walled-in Green Zone was supposed to have been temporary. But Iraqi elites took it over after the Americans left, spending public money on their mansions, generators, cars, security details, homes overseas and payouts to cronies. In this way the Green Zone has come to symbolize all that is wrong with the legitimacy and capability of Iraq’s government. Safe behind the concrete blast walls and razor wire—at least until Saturday—Iraq’s political elites live in splendid isolation, totally unaccountable to the Iraqi people and using the country’s oil wealth to fund their own luxurious lifestyles. Inside their air-conditioned buildings in the Green Zone, politicians have bickered over how to divide up the country’s budget among them.

In stark contrast, ordinary Iraqis have long been afflicted by car bombs, lack of running water and intermittent electricity—without their government seeming to either care or be capable of improving their situation.

For years, Iraqis have been gathering in the thousands to protest the corruption of the political class and the lack of public services. Iraq is rated 161 out of 168 in Transparency International’s corruption index. The severe drop in oil prices has led to a cut in public-sector salaries in a country where 95 percent of the budget comes from oil revenues and about 7 million

people are on the government payroll. The stress on society has brought angry young men out to the streets, demanding an end to the 13-year mismanagement and plundering of billions of dollars by the new political class.

In recent weeks, Sadr, who has been a destabilizing presence since the earliest days of the U.S. occupation, has been calling for people to protest and has threatened a vote of no confidence in parliament if his demands for reform were not met. He has also spoken out against sectarianism and demanded that “those who took Iraq to the abyss should step aside.”

In response to public demands, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, a fellow Shia, has been trying to replace the current government with one of technocrats focused on delivering public services rather than using ministries as fiefdoms of patronage. But despite his acknowledgment of the corrosive and corrupting impact of the quota system, there are so many vested interests that it is proving difficult to replace it. The political parties have so far succeeded in preventing these reforms from being implemented as they stand to lose their access to contracts and easy money.

In the past couple of weeks, rather than approving the list of technocrats that Abadi proposed, members of parliament have hurled water bottles and insults at each other, with the video footage widely circulated on WhatsApp.

On Saturday, Sadr accused politicians of blocking reforms and warned that corrupt officials and the quota system should be replaced or the entire government would be brought down. Although he did not call directly for action, his supporters penetrated the Green Zone after parliamentarians failed to reach a quorum to vote on a new cabinet of technocrats.

While this intense power struggle is taking place within the Shia community, it’s going to be even more difficult than it has been in the past to quell Sunni fears. The former prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, in particular is seeking the downfall of Abadi, presenting himself as the only Shia leader who can handle the security situation and manage the Sadrist protests.

In the middle of this an estimated 5,000 U.S. forces are back in Iraq—without a security agreement endorsed by the parliament. There is a risk that if parliament continues to fail to agree to a new cabinet,

the anger of the Iraqi protesters could be directed at the United States, blaming it for the post-2003 political system it established—and that U.S. troops could find themselves diverted from their mission to counter the Islamic State. Ironically, the Obama administration had insisted on parliamentary approval back in 2011 as the legal basis for keeping U.S. troops in Iraq. When that failed to materialize, all U.S. troops were withdrawn from Iraq in accordance with the 2008 Security Agreement.

They are back. Under the right circumstances, Iraqi forces, with U.S. support, can smash the Islamic State. But Washington should not kid itself: If the root causes that created the conditions for the rise of the Islamic State are not addressed, then some son-of-ISIS might emerge in the future—and the cycle will continue. The main lesson of the Iraq surge of 2007-09—when I was serving as political adviser to U.S. General Ray Odierno—was that if the politics do not come together, tactical successes are not sustainable, and things fall apart.

That is what is happening now. People living in Mosul hate the occupation of the city by the Islamic State, but they also express fears of Shia militia and Kurdish peshmerga. And there does not appear to be a plan for what to do once the Islamic State is defeated. There is no agreement on who will govern the liberated territories, nor how. And it is clear that there will be attacks of Sunnis on Sunnis, as revenge is taken on those accused of collaborating with or cooperating with the Islamic State.

And once the threat of the Islamic State has receded, there is likely to be increased Shia-on-Shia fighting, as well as Arab-on-Kurd fighting.

Reports Sunday indicated that protesters were starting to leave the Green Zone—for now. And Abadi is likely to survive politically—for now. But the sad reality is that his reforms are unlikely to be implemented and the corrupt elites will do everything they can to stay in power. Even partitioning Iraq into three parts—Sunni, Shia and Kurdish—a plan once favored by Vice President Joe Biden, would not resolve the underlying problems of weak governance and corrupt politicians. One way or another, the destructive politics of the Green Zone must end.

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The Carcass of a City ISIS Left Behind

*When ISIS finally was defeated in Ramadi, there was almost nothing left of the city.
The support of the people will be harder to rebuild than the houses and offices.*

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In the last days of December, I got a message on WhatsApp from Jaber al-Jaberi, a former member of the Iraqi parliament for Anbar province: “I’m in Ramadi,” he said. That was how I learned that the provincial capital, a key to the west of the country, had been liberated from the so-called Islamic State, or, as the Arabs say, Daesh.

It had been over one and a half years since Jaber had last seen his native city. It was a bittersweet moment. “I am happy because we liberated the city from these criminals,” he told me. But he was heartbroken to see Ramadi reduced to rubble.

Jaber had driven from Baghdad, accompanying Governor Suhaib al-Rawi, the chief of the police, and local security forces.

He found Ramadi deserted. Only the counter-terrorism forces—who had conducted most of the fighting to liberate the city—were visible in the streets. Before Daesh had taken over, around 600,000 people had lived there. Now only a few thousand remained, and some of those were trapped in enclaves still controlled by Daesh. And while the so-called Islamic State is losing territory it remains able to conduct deadly operations like those carried out Monday at a shopping mall in Baghdad and in Muqadiyah.

Airstrikes, and bombs planted in houses and alongside roads, had left Ramadi in ruins. Whole neighborhoods had been leveled. Power lines were down. Infrastructure was destroyed. And the bridges across the Euphrates—one of which dated back to the

British time in Iraq in the first half of the last century—were no more.

As Jaber walked through the carcass of what had once been Anbar University, he told me, he broke down in tears. On graduating from Baghdad medical college in the 1980s, Jaber had helped one of his professors, Tareq al-Hadithi, set up the college of medicine in Anbar University.

After 2003, Jaber had poured his energies into renovating the university and establishing student dormitories. He had shown the French ambassador around the university and they had discussed establishing a French language institute. Now all those dreams of investing in future generations had disintegrated. He could not even make out where the medical laboratories had once been.

“I have so many good memories from this city....” his voice trailed off. Jaber had built a new house there a few years ago. “Last time I was here, everything looked fine.” Now all his possessions were stolen, and his house mere debris.

When Daesh had moved into Ramadi, Jaber and two of his sisters had moved to Baghdad. Two of his brothers left to Amman. Another sister had gone to Iraqi Kurdistan, joining the majority of Ramadi’s residents. While those with money rented places, many lived in tents in camps, relying on family and friends to make ends meet. They had sold their gold and whatever they could take with them before they fled. Jaber estimated that over 80 percent of Iraq’s Sunnis were displaced from their homes.

Daesh had murdered Jaber's brother-in-law and a niece, who died when they were trying to kill her husband, a military officer.

Like many of Anbar's tribes, loyalties in his family were mixed. Jaber remained supportive of the government and with the political process, whereas one of his brothers was opposed to both the government and Daesh, and a small portion of his tribe were with Daesh.

I peppered Jaber with questions: How had everything gone so badly wrong in Ramadi? How had Daesh been able to take over? Who were these people?

Jaber described a subculture in Ramadi of uneducated men in their twenties and thirties. Some were thieves and petty criminals. Others had developed fundamentalist thinking. And when al-Qaeda in Iraq came into existence after the fall of the former regime, it was within that organization that they found a sense of power and identity.

However, when the Sahwa, the Anbar Awakening, turned against al-Qaeda, and aligned with U.S. forces during the Surge in 2007, many of these same young men were drawn away from the insurgency and swapped sides, turning themselves into local police. And that was why the violence in Anbar had dramatically declined from 2007 onwards and stability had returned to the province.

The agreement that my former boss, Gen. Raymond Odierno, the then-commander of U.S. forces in Iraq had negotiated with former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki was that 20 percent of the Sahwa would be integrated into the security forces and 80 percent into civilian jobs. But the deal was never implemented.

Rather, as U.S. forces withdrew, Maliki reneged on his promises to the Sahwa and arrested its leaders. He accused Sunni politicians of terrorism, driving them out of the political process. In response, Sunnis set up protest camps. But Maliki refused to meet their demands and sent in security forces to violently crush the demonstrations.

With the citizens of Ramadi so at odds with the central government once again, it had been easy for Daesh to rise up out of the ashes of al-Qaeda in Iraq and proclaim itself as the defender of the Sunnis. Daesh had taken over Anbar University and converted it into a prison.

Jaber explained that the tribes in Anbar had lost trust in the government and refused to fight Daesh. They remembered only too clearly how the Sahwa had been betrayed. "We could not convince them that the experience would be different from before."

Finally, 9,000 tribesmen were persuaded to join the tribal al-Hashd, the popular mobilization force, and received training from U.S. troops in bases at Taqqadum and al-Asad. And it was these tribesmen who had supported the counter-terrorism forces in their efforts to liberate Ramadi from Daesh at the end of 2015.

Governor al-Rawi has been nominated as the head of the Crisis Committee, which includes representatives of ministries, and is tasked with cleaning up the city, removing explosives, and restoring basic services to make Ramadi habitable once more so that its displaced citizens will return.

But difficult times remain ahead. There are huge challenges to rebuilding Ramadi, particularly with scarce resources available from the government due to the steep drop in oil prices to under \$35 a barrel.

And looming large is the question of how to break the corrosive cycle of revenge and retribution that has led to so many deaths and displacement.

Jaber was recently appointed to the new Higher Committee for National Reconciliation established under the auspices of Iraq's prime minister, the president, and the speaker of parliament, and with the mandate to promote "historic national reconciliation."

Reconciliation has been talked about continually in Iraq over the last decade—but little has been done to address the structural challenges facing the country, to agree on a workable system of government and to reinvent an inclusive national identity to which Iraqi's diverse peoples can relate.

Many observers believe that Iraq is finished: the Kurds are moving increasingly towards independence; Shia militias dominate the Iraqi government; Iranian influence is pervasive; and Sunni leadership is weak and fragmented.

Jaber knows the challenges facing Iraq only too well. But he still clings to hope. Prime Minister Hayder Abadi is working hard to keep Iraq unified. Salim Jabouri, the Speaker of Parliament, is supportive of him, as is President Fuad Masoum. Although they are

weak, the current incumbents of these key positions appear to be working together for the good of the country—a stark contrast with the Maliki era.

“This is the last chance to hold Iraq together,”

Jaber said, “to make everyone think of themselves first as Iraqis before Sunni, Shia, or Kurd.”

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The Middle East and the Global Context

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In the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, pressure has mounted on governments to provide better public services and economic opportunity for a growing and well-educated middle class, while technology and social media have provided for an amplification of these demands. Yet despite a short-lived period of optimism, governments in the region have been unable to address the underlying economic and social grievances that led to the Arab uprisings in the first place. Serious geo-political fault lines have emerged, and in some countries, a return to authoritarian tendencies. The United States and the European Union can play a pivotal role by assisting governments to implement economic, social and political reforms that deliver growth, expand opportunities for young people and provide a more stable outlook for the region. This presents a good opportunity for the new U.S. administration, particularly given cooler U.S.-Saudi relations since the Iran nuclear deal in July 2015 and President Obama's perceived disengagement from the Middle East.

Nowhere is post-Arab uprising disillusionment more clear or palpable than in Tunisia—a country that on the surface emerged successfully from the 'Arab Spring' with a relatively free media, the underpinnings of a democracy and reconciliation between secular and religious forces. The small North African country also boasts an educated population and a previously thriving tourism sector.

Yet in a trend that 'defies conventional wisdom'¹, Tunisia was the largest source of foreign fighters joining the Islamic state in 2016, with 6,000 to 7,000 volunteers travelling to Syria, while an additional 15,000 are barred from travel and suspected of extremist links. The Tunisian case demonstrates the bleak consequences of not sufficiently addressing the economic question, creating jobs or achieving a more equal distribution of wealth, even in the context of democracy and political stability. An attack on visitors to Tunisia's national museum in March 2015, followed by a mass shooting at a beach in June, all but collapsed the tourism sector. Under-privileged youth are angry about limited job opportunities, and the glaring inequalities that exist between them and the country's cosmopolitan elite, are unchanged since the 2011 uprising. While some have followed the well-trodden route of economic migration to Europe, others are increasingly drawn to the radical ideologies offered by the so-called Islamic state and similar movements, which have become a convenient outlet for anger and resentment.²

In the decade leading up to the Arab uprisings, the Brookings Institute noted that the middle classes in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Yemen, Syria and the Palestinian territories had expanded from 36% to 42% of the total population.³ Surveys demonstrated growing discontent from this segment of society with regard to

¹ Wall Street Journal, *How Tunisia Became a Top Source of ISIS Recruits*, February 25, 2016

² Packer, George, *Exporting Jihad*, published in *The New Yorker*, March 28, 2016

³ Brookings Institute, *Middle Class Dynamics and the Arab Spring*, March 18, 2016

the quality of public services, unemployment and corruption. These dynamics remain fundamentally unchanged across the region—with a young population that is well-connected and increasingly vocal in its demands.

In Tunisia's case, to some extent, the U.S. has understood these trends, doubling its economic assistance package to \$55 million in 2016, tripling military funding to \$62 million and increasing support for security and judicial institutions to \$12 million. Yet much more needs to be done to achieve a more equitable development model and this includes building a stronger EU-Mediterranean partnership, promoting regional trade and access to markets, as well as investing in infrastructure and productive activities that create jobs.

The Tunisian case brings to the forefront the broader challenge of economic reform in the MENA region, including for the oil-rich countries, where economic diversification has become a critical determinant of future sustainability, if not survival, for the political elites. While it can be argued that Iran, and to some extent the UAE, have managed to diversify their economies, a large number of countries in the region continue to derive more than 90% of their GDPs from oil and gas activities, making them vulnerable to fluctuations in these commodities.

In Saudi Arabia, the budget deficit ballooned to 15% of GDP (\$97.9 billion) in 2015, one of the highest ever registered, as oil prices dropped from \$110 a barrel to \$35 in early 2016. The numbers are striking—roughly 70% of Saudi's 31.5 million population is under the age of 30, while two-thirds of Saudis are employed in the public sector.⁴ By 2030, the working age population is set to double, raising a serious question about whether the country can continue to provide subsidized housing, land and utilities, as well as generate sufficient jobs for this burgeoning population. Similar trends can also be seen in other Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

In May, Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced sweeping reforms dubbed 'Vision 2030' that seek to increase the role of the private sector from 40% to 60% of GDP, reduce unemployment from 11% to 7.6% and boost employment-relevant skills training. Key initiatives

include privatizing more than two dozen agencies and state-owned companies, including the national airline, telecoms and electricity companies, a partial floating of Aramco, and introducing taxes on vacant land, cigarettes and soft drinks. A new privately funded healthcare system and an increased number of private schools are also proposed. While these reforms are admirable and much-needed, their success is by no means guaranteed.

Saudi promises for reform have remained dead-letter in the past, and hints of austerity measures tend to quickly lead to public anger and demands for political reform, highlighting the uneasy status quo that exists between the Saudi state and its citizens. In April, an outcry against rises in electricity and water tariffs led King Salman to fire the water minister, while surveys find that some 86% of Saudis want subsidies to continue.⁵ Nonetheless, Bin Salman's reform drive has taken Saudis by surprise. The crown prince is popular with the youth, who have welcomed his audacity, work ethic and transparent communications style. He has overseen a major ministerial shake-up and vowed to prepare the country for a post-oil world. Yet his assertive foreign policy—in particular the rising tensions with Iran, the intervention in Yemen, and lack of tolerance for dissent at home—have caused nervousness abroad.

In fact, the geo-political context poses a distinct challenge to Saudi reform plans. The country is engaged in costly proxy-wars against Iranian-backed forces in Yemen and Syria, while its ongoing support to Sunni-allies in Egypt and Bahrain is putting significant strain on its finances. With defense and security spending already taking up 25% of the government budget and regional tensions flaring, it is legitimate to ask whether Saudi Arabia can attract the private sector investment it needs for its reform vision, or make these reforms more acceptable to its citizens. The United States' long-standing alliance with the kingdom places it in a privileged position to help de-escalate regional tensions, while pushing for the types of political and social reforms that can provide an outlet for Saudi citizens. This is by no means an easy feat. The cost of failure and the prospect of widespread economic and social discontent in Saudi Arabia could well destabilize the entire region.

⁴ The Economist, *The Saudi Blueprint*, Jan. 9, 2016

⁵ Bloomberg News, *Saudi King Fires Water Minister After Complaints Over Tariffs*, April 24, 2016

In Afghanistan, the political, economic and security situations continue to be precarious. President Obama's decisions in July to extend the coalition troop presence will have a significant impact on redressing the security situation, as will the important work NATO is doing to build up the Afghan air force and provide air support to Afghan forces battling the insurgency. In the medium term, increasing the pressure on Pakistan, which hosts large numbers of the Taliban leadership, will also be important.

The fact that no major town or city fell to the Taliban in 2016—following the incursion into Kunduz last October—is a fleeting success. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are under severe strain, and there have been major Taliban assaults in Kabul, on police cadets in June, on a military center in April, and the targeting of our own Moby employees in January. Worryingly, there has also been a rise in abductions around the country, with the Taliban increasingly using bio-metrics at check-points to single out members of the armed forces.

On the political front, the National Unity Government is slightly less dysfunctional than it was six months ago, but will face a major challenge from the opposition in October, when the deadline arrives

for holding parliamentary elections and a constitutional Loya Jirga (Council of Elders meeting). With one-fifth of districts in the country (63 districts) under high alert, and nine under Taliban control, it is difficult to see how inclusive national elections can be held. The government has failed to deliver required reforms, boost economic growth or improve the delivery of public services. This is most clearly reflected in the large number of people fleeing Afghanistan for Europe, where ~200,000 Afghans claimed asylum last year. Afghans continue to make up a quarter of the refugees arriving in Greece.

The government did inaugurate some key economic projects in 2015—the \$10 billion TAPI pipeline in December, the CASA-1000 project to transmit electricity from Central to South Asia, and the Indian-built Salma Dam and hydro-power plant project in Herat. However, the trickle down benefits from these projects for ordinary Afghans are likely still years away. Given the fragile security and economic situations, and the prospect of a political impasse, continued U.S. and NATO engagement is critical to ensure that a resurgent Taliban, Al Qaeda and ISIS, do not further undermine the progress of the last 15 years.

A Global Investor's View on the Middle East and North Africa

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The dominant framework for thinking about the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) tends to be risk. Given ongoing conflicts and long-lasting tensions in multiple parts of the region, this is understandable. There is, however, another way of looking at the region. With companies like Kellogg's and Schlumberger making hundreds of millions of dollars in investments, parts of the region are also a land of economic opportunity. Ultimately, MENA is a diverse region and certain parts of it are un-investable, but other areas—and especially the leading cities within them—represent a \$2 trillion consumer economy. Capitalizing on this opportunity requires managing risks, to be sure, but can provide a great return on investment, both economic and otherwise.

Considering that Casablanca is closer to New York City than to Dubai is a good reminder that MENA is a very wide region. It contains the world's richest countries (by per capita income) and some of the poorest. Within this diverse landscape, and in addition to Israel, the two sub-regions ripe for investment are the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and consumer-driven economies in North Africa. These sub-regions are at very different stages of economic development and have distinct economic characteristics, but both provide strong investment opportunities.

GCC economies are characteristically net oil exporters, include some of the wealthiest populations in the world, and increasingly connect Africa to Asia. The decline in oil prices has put

some downward pressure on their economies. The region, however, has large foreign currency reserves and sovereign wealth funds that should allow them to weather low oil prices over the short and medium term.

By contrast, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia are net oil importers for whom low oil prices are a stimulus to consumption. Their economies are, in fact, generally driven by consumer goods and manufacturing. Even though North Africa has lower GDP and disposable income per capita than the GCC, it is still among the richest parts of continental Africa and has strong trade ties to Europe. Despite the Arab Spring, disposable income has continued to rise and good companies catering to this demand have done well. Moreover, disposable income is estimated to grow 50 percent by 2020.

In both regions, growth is driven by long-term structural factors including growing populations, favorable demographics, and urbanization. With over 200 million people and 20 million middle class households expected to grow by 1.5 times over the next ten years, these markets offer scale. By 2025, it's expected that 80 percent of the households in the region will be solidly middle-class. At a median age of 26, the population is at the front-end of the traditional consumption curve whereas the OECD is approaching the peak before savings picks up and consumption trends down. Ensuring this young, working-age population is productive is critical and unemployment remains a

key issue even though it is trending down. This is a key reason many governments in the region have stepped up support for entrepreneurship but private sector investment in these countries has an equally important role to play.

As with many ‘emerging markets,’ the economic map is about cities and not countries. Cities are the locus of economic activity and especially consumer activity in the modern world. Not surprisingly, just six cities—Abu Dhabi, Casablanca, Cairo, Dubai, Riyadh, and Tunis—make up 40 percent of the region’s total GDP. In these cities, consumer expenditure is typically growing 2-2.5 times faster than GDP growth at the national level. For example, consumer expenditure in Cairo, which represents a third of Egypt’s total GDP, is growing 13 percent per year while GDP in Egypt is at 3.7 percent. At the same time, the risk factors in cities are often very different from the countries they are in. As a result, for businesses and investors, the right map of the region is one marked by cities and not countries.

Ultimately, investors are focused on microeconomics over macroeconomics. This is why it makes sense to deconstruct MENA into sub-regions and look beyond sub-regions to specific cities. It is equally important to focus on the right sectors and sub-sectors. Defensive sectors like healthcare and education are growing much faster than the GDP rate as are financial services, food and beverage. These four sectors already represent over \$300 billion in annual expenditure.

However, supporting the right businesses means paying attention to the micro-trends within these sectors. For example, outpatient healthcare services are growing at 15 percent in Egypt but hospital services are growing faster than outpatient care in the UAE. For companies, understanding and catering to local trends and tastes is critical.

As global brands actively invest in the region, this is one reason they are often buying local companies. From Sanofi’s investment in UAE’s Globalpharma to Kellogg’s purchase of Egyptian biscuit company BiscoMisr and South African insurance giant Sanlam’s acquisition of Saham Finance of North Africa, major international companies are investing across the region. It’s worth noting that public markets in the region are not generally under-exposed to these sectors. As a result, many of the leading companies in the GCC and North Africa are not just local brands, but are privately-owned. This creates an opportunity for private equity firms which are increasingly active in the region and are poised to bridge a financing gap in the region.

MENA is a large and diverse region with more than its share of challenges, but it is also a dynamic and growing market. Recognizing the role that businesses, entrepreneurs, and investors play in delivering on the long-term prospects of North Africa and the GCC is essential to a holistic approach to the region.

Has the West Moved on from Sykes-Picot?

Peter Westmacott

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Senior Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs

It is just over 100 years since the British diplomat Sir Mark Sykes and his French colleague, Francois Georges-Picot, ended four months of secret negotiations with an agreement, supported by the Russians, which divided up South West Asia into zones of influence and control if, as they expected, the old Ottoman Empire finally collapsed at the end of the Great War.

Not everything suggested by Sykes and Picot came to pass, and they cannot be held responsible for all the ills that beset the region today. But this is perhaps a moment to reflect on what lessons we have and have not learned about the region over the last century.

The first and perhaps most obvious point is that, unlike the Ottomans, the negotiators who concluded the treaties of Versailles (1919), Sevres (1920) and Lausanne (1923) ignored the established tribal and ethnic patterns around which local society was organized. In what is now Iraq, for example, we British, despite the warnings of deeply knowledgeable experts like Gertrude Bell and T.E. Lawrence, put an imported Hashemite King in charge of a new Sunni-dominated unitary state consisting of what was already a distinctly Shia southern part of Mesopotamia, a Sunni tribal center and a Kurdish community in the north which had been promised a state of its own back in 1917 and was determined to secure for itself as much autonomy as possible.

The new country fell under a British mandate, which gave the UK responsibility for its security and its success. Gertrude Bell noted that the locals she was

negotiating with in 1920 weren't sure what they wanted but were "quite clear what they didn't want - us". When she died in 1926, Lawrence noted that her creation of an Iraqi state was a fine monument but one which seemed to him of doubtful benefit to people who had for so long done without.

Hostility to imposed central government, religious and ethnic differences, and resistance to foreign military occupation were all apparent when maps were being drawn almost 100 years ago. And yet by the time the U.S. and UK governments invaded Iraq in 2003, there was almost no understanding of the Sunni/Shia sectarian tensions that overthrowing Saddam Hussein would unleash; or a realization that Shia Iran, which had been on the receiving end of an eight-year war begun by the Sunni Ba'thist Saddam Hussein, with the support of Western countries, and seen the Shia Arabs of Southern Iraq slaughtered in their thousands by Saddam shortly afterwards, might take the opportunity to settle some scores.

It is easy to underestimate the importance of history. As Ambassador to Turkey at the time, it was my job to persuade the Turks to allow British as well as U.S. ground forces to cross Turkish territory in order to open a second, northern front against Saddam's forces should military action become unavoidable.

Sometime before the Turkish parliament failed to vote in our favor by a sufficiently large majority on March 1, 2003, I was told privately by a senior Turkish Government minister that public opinion in the South East was resigned to saying yes to the Americans but

deeply hostile to the idea of the British also being allowed to transit Turkish territory. Why? --Because locals still held us responsible for the decision of the League of Nations in 1926 to put the oil fields, and many Kurdish tribal lands, in Iraq rather than in Turkey.

We also ignore at our peril local sensitivity to foreign military occupation. Living in Iran before the revolution of 1979, I remember worrying about the complaints we were hearing about the size, and behavior, of the large U.S. contingent running the base on the edge of Isfahan where the Shah's Bell military helicopters were headquartered.

I recall an argument I had twenty-five years later in Ankara with a visiting U.S. neo-con who was arguing that we had had to get rid of Saddam Hussein because he was responsible for the Al Qaeda terrorist outrages of 9/11. How so? Because, he explained, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in the first Gulf war had created the need for a U.S. military presence in the region which had then provided the leitmotif for Al Qaeda.

I never bought the argument that this tenuous link between Saddam and 9/11 justified the U.S. and UK leaving the job in Afghanistan unfinished and turning their attention to an altogether more optional war in Iraq. But my interlocutor had half a point: it is easy to forget today, as we wrestle with the challenges posed by the psychopathic inhumanity of ISIL, that their fore-runners in the world of Sunni jihadism were motivated not by blind hatred of every human being who challenged their authority or opinions, but by the humiliation they felt at their 'subjugation' of their lands to foreign military occupation.

Today, there is some criticism of the Obama administration for its reluctance to become more

involved militarily in the fight against ISIL and the tyranny of the Assad regime in Syria. I am of course biased but I think the President had a point when he told Jeff Goldberg of *The Atlantic* this Spring that diplomacy was a key element of American power because "when we deploy troops there's always a sense on the part of other countries that sovereignty is being violated". Or, as a grey-haired lady demonstrator put it on the banner she carried to the huge rally against the Iraq war in Hyde Park in London in March 2003: "if you want to stop terrorism, stop f.....ing around in other people's countries."

Real power, President Obama argued to Goldberg, means getting what you want without having to resort to violence. Well, yes. But effective diplomacy can also require a credible threat to use force to ensure you get the right results. This is a game where there is no scope for bluffing.

President Obama has set out with clarity the reasons why at the end of August 2013 he decided to push the pause button rather than go ahead with air strikes against the Syrian regime in response to its use of chemical weapons against Syrian civilians. But that decision has led to widespread criticism that American 'red lines' can now be crossed with impunity. Former Secretary George Shultz likes to tell of a lesson he learned from a staff sergeant when he was a young soldier: "Never point a rifle at anyone unless you are prepared to pull the trigger." Translation: don't bluff.

There is not a lesson this time from quite as far back as 1916. But it is another reminder that it is often better to learn from history and the experience of others than to plunge in unawares, and have to learn the hard way.

Assessing U.S. Interests and Strategy in an Unraveling Middle East

PARTICIPANTS

August 10-16, 2016
London, United Kingdom

Members of Congress

Representative Earl Blumenauer
and Margaret Kirkpatrick

Representative Bradley Byrne
and Rebecca Byrne

Representative Jason Chaffetz
and Julie Chaffetz

Representative Chris Collins
and Mary Collins

Representative Susan Davis
and Steve Davis

Representative Dan Donovan
and Serena Stonick

Representative Lois Frankel

Representative Gregg Harper
and Sidney Harper

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and Nathaniel Horn

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and Jeanie Lamborn

Representative Billy Long

Representative Nita Lowey
and Steve Lowey

Representative Don Norcross
and Andrea Doran

Representative David Price
and Lisa Price

Representative Peter Roskam
and Steve Roskam

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Representative Jan Schakowsky
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and Brooke Yoder

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Iranian journalist and activist

Sir John Jenkins
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Former commander of U.S. forces in Iraq
Former CIA Director
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Assessing U.S. Interests and Strategy in an Unraveling Middle East

AGENDA

August 10-16, 2016
London, United Kingdom

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 10

American participants depart the U.S.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 11

Participants arrive in London mid-day

6:30-8:30 pm *Working Dinner*

Scholars and members of Congress will explore topics covered in the conference. Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated daily.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12

9:00 am **INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK OF THE CONFERENCE**

Dan Glickman, *Executive Director, Aspen Institute Congressional Program*

9:15 am *Roundtable Discussion*

UNDERSTANDING AND COUNTERING ISLAMIC RADICALISM

Over the last three decades Islamist groups have further radicalized, from Hezbollah to al-Qaeda and now ISIS. The frequency of terrorist attacks continues to increase and now affects Africa, Europe and the U.S. as well as the Middle East. Yet 15 years after 9/11, the characteristics and motivations of violent Islamists remains poorly understood and fiercely debated. Are today's extremists the product of the radicalization of Islam, or the Islamization of radicalism? What is the political, social, and economic context which compels young men and women to join Islamist organizations, and what Western policies serve to mitigate and exacerbate the threat of terrorist attacks?

- What are the micro (alienation, adventurism) and macro (state-sponsorship) drivers of radicalism?
- Why do some countries (such as Tunisia) produce a disproportionate number of foreign fighters?
- What is the relationship between salafism and jihadism and their relevance as a purported motivator for terrorists?
- What are the successful traits of programs that counter violent extremism? Are there replicable lessons that can be applied at a larger scale?
- How can Muslim leaders and government officials cooperate more effectively to prevent radicalization?

- In the wake of major attacks in Paris, Brussels, San Bernardino, and Orlando, is there adequate intelligence among Western nations?

Shiraz Maher, Senior Research Fellow, International Center for the Study of Radicalization, Kings College, London

11:00 am *Break*

11:15 am Roundtable Discussion

U.S. STRATEGY IN CONFRONTING ISIS AND STABILIZING SYRIA

The war in Syria has caused over 400,000 deaths and displaced (internally or externally) over half of the country's 22 million people. What began as a civil protest against an authoritarian regime has morphed into a geopolitical proxy war fought on Syrian soil. Despite periodic negotiations between the United States, Russia, and regional powers, only fleeting ceasefires have been achieved. Rather than deposing Syrian leader Bashar Al-Assad, the Obama administration has focused on defeating ISIS, whose approximately 30,000 fighters have established brutal—though seemingly tenuous—domain over a sizable chunk of land and population spanning the Iraq-Syria border nearly the size of Great Britain. This is in contrast to Moscow, which supports Assad militarily arguing that the Syrian government needs its support as it holds the key to stability.

- What are U.S. interests in Syria and which policies can best forward them?
- How stable is the Syrian regime of Bashar Al-Assad and what is the state of the Syrian opposition?
- Is ISIS growing weaker or stronger and how effective is the U.S.-led aerial campaign against it? To what extent, if at all, are U.S. regional allies directly or indirectly aiding ISIS?
- What are the interests and activities of external actors such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Russia in Iraq and Syria? What are the implications of continued civil strife in Iraq and Syria for neighbors such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Israel?
- Is it possible to completely dismantle ISIS or can allied forces only hope to run it back underground?
- Does the depth of human misery suffered by millions inside Syria and by refugees who have fled the country demand different policy solutions?

Gen. David Petraeus, former commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, former CIA Director; Chairman, KKR Global Institute, New York

1:00-2:00 pm *Lunch Discussion*

A BRITISH VIEW OF MIDDLE EAST CHALLENGES

What are the UK's top foreign policy concerns both globally and in the Middle East? To what extent do UK and U.S. interests in the region coincide and conflict?

Richard Wood, Head of European Union Internal Policy, United Kingdom Foreign Office

2:30-4:00 pm *Individual Discussions*

Members of Congress and scholars meet individually to discuss U.S. foreign policy. Scholars available to meet individually with members of Congress for in-depth discussion of ideas raised in the morning and luncheon sessions include Shiraz Maher and Gen. David Petraeus.

6:30-8:30 pm *Working Dinner*

Scholars and members of Congress will explore topics covered in the conference. Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated daily.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13

9:00 am *Roundtable Discussion*

TURKEY: THE CHALLENGE OF PRESERVING ORDER, DEMOCRACY AND COOPERATION

Turkey was once thought of as a model of Islamic democracy for Arab countries to emulate, but President Erdogan has grown increasingly authoritarian, significantly curtailing press freedoms and jailing his critics. The recent coup attempt drew attention to these trends and pressures. A NATO ally, Turkey's allowance of U.S. military operations to operate from its territory pertinent to Syria is pivotal. The role of the Kurds in confronting ISIS in Syria concerns Turkey, which has had a long-standing dispute with the Kurdish movement in eastern Turkey. Turkey's relations with Russia were on edge when Turkey shot down a Russian military plane that allegedly violated Turkish airspace. There are nearly 3 million refugees within Turkey as part of an agreement with the European Union to reduce the flow into Europe.

- How vital is basing U.S. military operations in Turkey to the pursuit of U.S. military objectives in Syria?
- What does the coup attempt mean for the future of democracy in Turkey?
- What is Turkey's role in combatting ISIS?
- How long can Turkey be expected to house refugees?

*Soli Özel, Professor of International Relations and Political Science
Kadir Has University, Istanbul*

11:00 am *Break*

11:15am *Roundtable Discussion*

SAUDI ARABIA AND YEMEN: U.S. POLICY CHALLENGES IN AN UNSTABLE PENINSULA

Saudi Arabia's future is more precarious than ever. Domestically, 55-year-old Crown Prince Muhammed bin Nayef and 30-year-old Deputy Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman (son of 80-year-old King Salman) have competing visions for the country, and the balance of power appears to have shifted toward the latter, who advocates major economic and social reform. Abroad, Saudi Arabia's geopolitical rivalry with Iran has fueled sectarianism and conflict throughout the region, including a costly war in Yemen. This takes place against the backdrop of low oil prices, the spread of Sunni radicalism, and growing differences with the United States.

- What is Muhammed bin Salman's vision for Saudi Arabia and how likely is he to succeed his father?

- How is Saudi Arabia responding to the threat of ISIS both within its borders and abroad? Are there any attempts to curtail the influence of the Wahabi establishment (the country's ultra-conservative school of Islam) or the funding of Wahabi institutions abroad?
- After years of encouraging a more proactive Saudi foreign policy, should the West reign in Saudi Arabia's military campaign in Yemen?
- What are U.S. interests in Yemen, and can the United States help bring order in the country?
- In the wake of the nuclear deal with Iran, how can the West reassure its Gulf allies?
- With domestic energy production rising in the U.S., how will this impact long-term U.S. policies toward the peninsula?

*Sir John Jenkins, former UK Ambassador to Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia;
Executive Director, International Institute for Strategic Studies—Middle East, London*

1:00-2:00 pm *Working Luncheon*

Discussion continues between members of Congress and scholars on the challenges for the U.S. policy regarding Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

2:30-4:00 pm *Individual Discussions*

Members of Congress and scholars meet individually to discuss U.S. foreign policy. Scholars available to meet individually with members of Congress for in-depth discussion of ideas raised in the morning and luncheon sessions include Soli Özel, Ömer Taşpınar, Gönül Tol and Sir John Jenkins.

6:30-8:30 pm *Working Dinner*

Scholars and members of Congress will explore topics covered in the conference. Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated daily.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14

9:00 am *Roundtable Discussion*

POLITICS AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN IRAQ, IRAN, AND NORTH AFRICA

Iraq's viability as a nation state appears in grave doubt—despite the 2011 troop withdrawal, the U.S. military is once again engaged in combat in Iraq against ISIS. Iran, a country deeply divided between powerful hardline conservatives and pragmatists, is slowly being welcomed back into the international arena even if its regional behavior remains unchanged. Tunisia is hailed as the Arab Spring's lone success story, but morale within the country is low and its success is by no means certain. Egypt, historically a regional powerhouse, has been fraught by political unrest, the dictatorship of President Sisi, and a moribund economy dependent on Gulf largesse.

- Is America's "one Iraq" policy sustainable? Should the United States support Kurdish autonomy/independence?
- What is the working relationship, if any, between Iran and the U.S. in Iraq?
- Is the drop in oil prices a blessing or a curse for Iraq?
- Do other countries have any responsibility to contribute to stability?
- What is the long-term interest of the U.S. in Iraq, and what are the appropriate policies to support those interests?

- Can the U.S. successfully engage an Iranian regime whose top leadership continues to denounce Washington as its implacable enemy?
- How are each of these countries dealing with the threat of ISIS and Islamist radicalism?
- What are civil society activists in these countries doing to adapt to mounting repression, and how can the U.S. best support them?
- What accounts for Tunisia's moderate success and Egypt's turn towards autocracy?
- How can the U.S. better support Tunisia's transition? Must the U.S. make a Faustian bargain with the regimes in Turkey and Egypt to further its own interests?
- To what extent are Tunisia and Egypt being impacted by the state breakdown in Libya?

Masih Alinejad, Iranian journalist and activist, New York
Nervana Mahmoud, member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Manchester
Emma Sky, Senior Fellow, Jackson Institute, Yale University
former representative of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq,
*author of *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq**

11:00 am *Break*

11:15 am *Discussion continues*

1:00-2:00 pm *Working Luncheon*

Discussion continues between members of Congress and scholars on the challenges for U.S. policy regarding countering Islamic radicalism and confronting ISIS.

2:30-4:00 pm *Individual Discussions*

Members of Congress and scholars meet individually to discuss U.S. foreign policy. Scholars available to meet individually with members of Congress for in-depth discussion of ideas raised in the morning and luncheon sessions include Masih Alinejad, Nervana Mahmoud, and Emma Sky.

6:30-8:30 pm *Working Dinner*

Scholars and members of Congress will explore topics covered in the conference. Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated daily.

MONDAY, AUGUST 15

9:00 am *Morning Roundtable Discussion*

THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST AND THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

While many countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia are more prosperous, democratic, and stable than they were decades ago, much of the Middle East has stagnated or gone backward. What are the most important political, economic, and cultural factors that have distinguished the Middle East from the rest of the world? How are global technological and environmental trends impacting the Middle East? What is the outlook for Afghanistan and US-Afghan relations under President Ashraf Ghani?

- How do youth in the region differ from youth elsewhere in the world? Are their motivations and aspirations similar or different, and what is the relevance to U.S. policy?
- How do private sector investors view the Middle East and Afghanistan different than policymakers? How large is the Arab and Afghan Middle Class?
- How will a sustained drop in oil prices affect the long-term politics of the Middle East and of U.S. policy in the Middle East?
- Can the Afghan government withstand a resurgent Taliban threat?

Saad Mohseni, MOBY media group, Kabul/Dubai
Pradeep Ramamurthy, Managing Director and
Head of Global Markets for the Americas, the Abraaj Group, New York

11:00 am *Break*

11:15 am *Morning Roundtable Discussion*

THE END OF SYKES-PICOT*? CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NEXT U.S. ADMINISTRATION

The Middle East's political tumult has contributed to the greatest refugee crisis since WWII. At least four nations—Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya—appear irrevocably broken, and authoritarianism, sectarianism, and radicalism are on the rise. At the same time, America's burgeoning energy reserves and public fatigue with the Middle East have contributed to a strategic desire for more focus on Asia. Given the finite capacities of any administration, what should be America's priorities in the Middle East and how do they rank in the panoply of top international concerns? In what areas and on what issues are U.S. leadership and influence most needed?

*The secret Sykes-Picot Agreement effectively divided the Ottoman Empire outside the Arabian peninsula into areas of British and French control in 1918, negotiated by British and French diplomats Mark Sykes and Francois George-Picot.

- How do European and American views of the Middle East coincide and conflict? What are some misunderstandings between the United States and its European allies?
- Should the U.S. reduce weapon sales and military cooperation with its regional allies or will this merely push them into the hands of Russia and China?
- How can the U.S. support the aspirations of Arab youth while still maintaining ties with Arab rulers?
- If foreign policy is redistributive and not additive, will the U.S. successfully be able to focus more resources towards Asia or will the Middle East retain its privileged position in American foreign policy?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of multilateral as opposed to bilateral approaches to these challenges?
- Is a two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians still a possibility? If so, how? If not, what's plan B?

Peter Westmacott, former UK Ambassador to the U.S., France, and Turkey

1:00-2:30 pm *Working Lunch*

Discussion continues between members of Congress and scholars on the challenges for the U.S. policy in the Middle East.

2:00-6:00 pm Members of Congress travel to the Parliament Building to meet with Members of the British Parliament to discuss Brexit, NATO and the relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom.

6:30-8:30 pm *Working Dinner*
Scholars and members of Congress will explore topics covered in the conference. Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated daily.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 16:

Return travel to the USA

