

War and famine. Peace and milk. —Somali proverb

The “Back to Iraq?” Issue

[S]ome have compared today’s Sunni-Shia conflict, which is consuming swaths of Mesopotamia and Western Asia, to that war, which caused death on a massive scale, plagues, economic destruction, and social turmoil.

Chris Patten (page 5)

ISIS, Iraq, and the War in Syria: Military Outlook

Jeffrey White, June 19, 2014

Events on the battlefield will reveal the true effects of the crisis, but the ISIS campaign in Iraq could ultimately help the Syrian opposition and hurt the Assad regime.

The stunning advance of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in northern and western Iraq over the past week has significant military implications for the war in Syria. The jihadist group’s forces and operations in Syria have already been affected positively and negatively by its commitments in Iraq. Going forward, Syrian rebel factions may take advantage of the ISIS campaign in Iraq to move against the group’s positions in Syria, especially in Raqqa province. They may also be able to capitalize on the withdrawal of Iraqi Shiite militants who had previously been fighting on behalf of the Assad regime. For the regime, the situation will require more effort by its native forces and perhaps by its Hezbollah ally, which may need to pick up the slack caused by the departure of Iraqi elements. Bashar al-Assad’s forces may have increased military operations against ISIS since the latest crisis emerged, putting further pressure on the regime’s limited and stretched military assets.

If, as seems likely, the fighting in Iraq continues at serious levels for some time, these effects will become more pronounced in Syria. But developments on the battlefield in both countries will provide the clearest indicators of who is benefitting from the situation and who is not.

SCOPE AND MEANING OF THE ISIS ADVANCE

Earlier this month, ISIS forces began a rapid advance in northern Iraq, routing government forces and taking the important city

of Mosul by a coup de main. Facing almost no resistance and supported by disaffected Iraqi Sunnis, ISIS continued its drive south, overrunning Iraqi military facilities, taking additional towns, threatening Samarra and Baquba, and arriving within thirty-seven miles of Baghdad itself. Stiffening government resistance slowed the advance, as did the mobilization of Shiite militia forces and volunteers, Iraqis returning from Syria, and, reportedly, Iranian forces. Meanwhile, Kurdish forces have secured the northern city of Kirkuk and prevented ISIS penetration into the Kurdistan Regional Government.

With a force estimated to number a few thousand, ISIS was able to bring Iraq to the brink of collapse, defeat major army formations, capture large amounts of military equipment, loot hundreds of millions of dollars from Iraqi banks, and begin establishing itself as the governing authority across a large tract of Sunni territory. The group did not do this alone, cooperating with Sunni tribal forces and former Baathists of the Saddam Hussein regime. While the ISIS advance has slowed, it has not come to a halt — rather, it has created a new reality in Iraq, and its implications for various actors in Syria are becoming apparent.

EFFECTS ON ISIS IN SYRIA

The ISIS campaign in Iraq will likely prove to be a mixed blessing for the organization in Syria. To be sure, the positive effects for its forces may be manifold. In the near term, ISIS as a whole will be politically and psychologically strengthened. It will be seen as successful in battle, capable of major organizational and logistical accomplishments, and clever and supple in its operations.

(continued on page 3)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Director.....	2
Organizing Middle East Peace <i>Chris Patten</i>	5
2014 is Looking a Lot Like 1914 <i>Jeffrey Sachs</i>	6
Responsibility to Protect? <i>Peter Galbraith</i>	7
What Should the US Do in Iraq: Stop What is Counterproductive <i>Andrew Bacevich</i>	8
Can the US Afford Another \$3 Trillion War? <i>Linda Bilmes</i>	9
EPS Iraq Statement	11
EPS at the AEA Meetings 2014	12

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From the Director

I joined the staff of EPS, then known as ECAAR, in August 2002, just as people were beginning to talk about the possibility of going to war with Iraq. It was patently obvious to me that the reasons that were being given for a unilateral "preemptive strike" were bogus. There was no evidence of a link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. And if there had been real weapons of mass destruction there would have been more for Colin Powell to show at the UN than a single document, now known to be forged, showing Iraqi purchase of yellow cake uranium. It was clear to me that the arguments for the war were trumped up because the Administration wanted to go to war and needed the nation to get behind it.

In February of 2003 EPS published a statement advising against US military action in Iraq. I've reprinted it in this issue (on page 11) because I am still impressed by how prescient the authors were. The statement predicts that pulling resources away from domestic issues to invest them in an unnecessary war could lead to a financial crisis, a housing crisis, joblessness, rising oil prices, and increased insecurity and terrorism.

When the US invaded Iraq in March 2003 the price of oil was \$25 a barrel. Today it's around \$100. I wonder if it's a coincidence that ISIS began their campaign to establish a caliphate in Iraq just as Iraq's oil production finally returned to near pre-war volume, at four times the price.

Today, we are still facing the same questions: How do we create more security for the American and Iraqi people? How do we encourage peace and stability in the broader Middle East? What is necessary to secure human rights and economic opportunity in the region and globally?

As soon as I heard about ISIS's military activities in Kurdistan, I thought, as I'm sure many did, "Oh no! Will this mean a return of US boots on the ground in Iraq?"

Conditions are developing daily, and no doubt will have changed by the time this reaches your hands. Nonetheless, we

wanted to bring together analysis and discussion of the issues facing the people of Iraq and the world. These pieces were written in late June through August, and so reflect the shifting situation on the ground. I decided to arrange them in chronological order so that you can follow the progression of thought.

The situation is, of course, complex. What will be the effect of the ISIS incursions on the political situation in Iraq? President Maliki has agreed to step down and a new president has been chosen who is seen as having a better possibility of uniting various factions in Iraq. Air strikes are under way and the US and Europe are sending arms to the Kurdish militia. Ultimately, there must be an Iraqi-led political solution.

As Peter Galbraith discusses in his piece on page 7, I do think that we have an obligation to step in and avert genocide. I also think, like Jeff Sachs (see page 6), that any response to the crisis, including the humanitarian crisis, demands an international, diplomatic, response.

I am very concerned about the slippery slope of US military involvement. It is only in the last two and a half years since the US officially pulled out of Iraq that our domestic economy has really begun to recover from the job and housing crises. As Linda Bilmes notes (on page 9), air strikes are relatively affordable, but getting drawn back into a full scale ground war could be devastating.

There might be a way to devise an economic cooperation agreement that would share oil revenues with all Iraqis, and incentivize the development of other income streams in the Sunni and Shia sectors. There might be a way to include all interests, even fundamentalist, in a democratic government. But I am very skeptical that more military action is the way to accomplish these solutions.

ISIS, Iraq, and the War in Syria: Military Outlook

(continued from page 1)

The group's image as an irresistible force will be enhanced, and those living in ISIS-controlled areas will see little prospect of relief from its rule.

ISIS will also benefit from the very large amounts of cash looted from Iraqi banks, reportedly as much as \$495 million. This sum will enhance the group's ability to build its forces, arm them, and provide governance, goods, and services within its area of control.

Perhaps most important, ISIS military capabilities could be significantly boosted by the capture of large numbers of Iraqi army vehicles, weapons, and ammunition, as well as by the addition of new recruits. At minimum, these gains will allow the group to arm and equip more fighters, enhance its mobility, and increase its firepower. This assumes that ISIS is capable of recovering, integrating, and maintaining the captured equipment. New videos have shown the movement of such equipment into Syria, and ISIS units in Iraq are already employing captured Humvees and trucks; they could potentially employ captured tanks and artillery as well. The effects of these developments may soon be felt in Syria.

Yet the Iraq campaign will likely have negative effects for ISIS forces in Syria as well. First is the potential diversion of forces. It is not clear what percentage of ISIS forces are fighting in Iraq, but it is believed to be half or more of the group's roughly 10,000 members. ISIS may be compelled to commit even more forces to Iraq, weakening its military position in Syria. Second, the large amount of Iraqi territory over which the group has gained at least nominal control might also require additional forces from Syria, both to resist government countermeasures and help control the areas. Third, the Assad regime has reportedly increased its military operations against ISIS, apparently in response to the group's movement of captured military equipment into Syria, and perhaps in coordination with the Iraqi government. On June 15-16, regime air forces struck ISIS-associated targets in Raqqa and Hasaka provinces. If such strikes become a

regular occurrence, they will put additional pressure on ISIS and perhaps weaken its ability to fight in Syria.

EFFECTS ON SYRIAN REBELS AND THE ASSAD REGIME

ISIS now faces a potential three-front war: against various Syrian rebel factions, against Iraqi government forces, and perhaps against the Assad regime, which had largely refrained from directly confronting the group until recently. This situation will likely prevent ISIS from concentrating its resources against its Syrian opponents and should give these enemies opportunities to move against it. The group's ability to defend its territory in Raqqa and Aleppo provinces appears to have weakened recently, and rebels have been able to take some advantage of this. At the same time, the ISIS offensive in Deir al-Zour province has at least slowed, relieving some of the pressure on its Islamist opponents in the area.

ISIS units in Iraq are already employing captured Humvees and trucks; they could potentially employ captured tanks and artillery as well.

The return of Iraqi fighters from Syria to Iraq should also benefit the rebels. Iraqi Shiite militants have been heavily involved in the fighting around Damascus and Aleppo, and their departure has weakened the effective coalition of forces the regime has used to score victories. These effects would be compounded if Hezbollah or Iranian forces serving in Syria were sent to Iraq. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has indicated that his organization will assist in Iraq if asked, though the group

seems more likely to increase its commitment in Syria instead.

Whatever the case, the departure of some allied forces will increase the burden on the regime's regular and irregular native forces, which are already stretched thin and suffering substantial casualties. Hezbollah is already said to be making up some of the deficit, but its existing forces in Syria continue to take casualties, and its commitment to Assad remains a political problem at home in Lebanon. Moreover, if the reported airstrikes against ISIS in eastern Syria become a persistent mission, the regime's limited air assets will be diverted from attacking the opposition in more strategically important parts of the country, giving some relief to rebel forces and civilians.

OUTLOOK

The escalated fighting in Iraq will likely continue for some time. Now that the initial ISIS advance has slowed, neither the group nor the Iraqi government has the capacity to quickly or radically change the situation on the battlefield. The fighting is likely to be protracted and indecisive, with similar effects on the situation in Syria.

Over time, an ongoing battle of attrition in Iraq may work to the advantage of rebel forces in Syria. While ISIS is well organized and formidable in some respects, maintaining a two- or three-front war will require it to allocate resources against multiple threats, replace combat losses, integrate captured equipment, consolidate its hold on newly gained areas, and stave off Iraqi counteroffensives and opportunistic advances by its enemies in Syria. For an organization of its size, this adds up to a serious challenge.

In Syria, it is unclear to what extent the rebels can take advantage of the situation. Opportunities could arise to make gains against ISIS and the regime, but the rebels' ability to exploit them is uncertain. Their weaknesses in command likely mean that any such response would be ad hoc and depend on existing or newly formed coalitions of rebel units. This would reduce the

(continued on page 4)

ISIS, Iraq, and the War in Syria: Military Outlook

(continued from page 3)

prospect for major success against their enemies.

For the Assad regime, the Iraq situation is yet another major challenge. Damascus will need to find a way to compensate for the loss of allied Iraqi militants and perhaps intensify the fight against ISIS in areas where regime forces are weak. Furthermore, any success it has against ISIS would actually help the Syrian opposition.

Again, events on the battlefield will clarify the true effects of the crisis. If ISIS becomes involved in a protracted war of attrition in Iraq, its position in Syria could weaken visibly. Rebel successes or failures against the Assad regime will indicate whether or not they have been able to take advantage of the situation. Likewise, further regime victories against the rebels and an increase in Hezbollah forces would indicate that Assad is overcoming the negative effects of the crisis. There will be plenty of conflicting claims about all of this, but the facts on the ground should become clear.

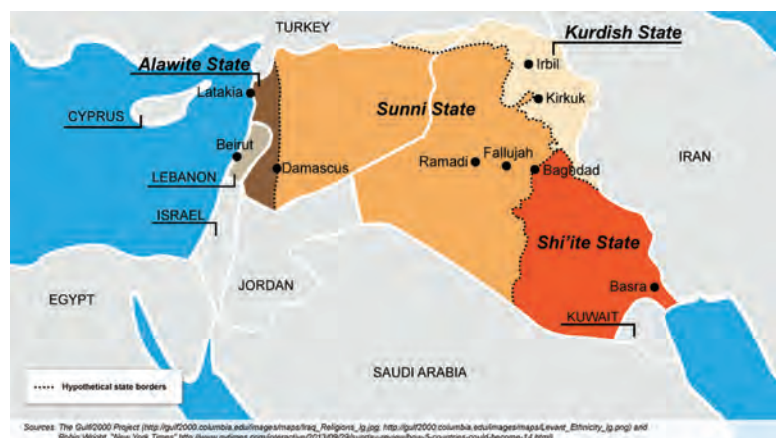
Finally, while the ISIS advance in Iraq has increased the complexity of the Syrian war, it also presents another opportunity for the United States and its allies to make gains against Assad. Military assistance to moderate Syrian rebel groups would help them take advantage of the situation, allowing them to act more effectively against ISIS, the enemy of all, and the regime, the enemy of most. Given that ISIS-seized American military equipment could soon affect the group's capabilities in Syria, the rebels may need concrete U.S. assistance now more than ever.

This article is © 2014 The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Reprinted with permission. Jeffrey White is a defense fellow with The Washington Institute and a former senior defense intelligence officer.



Above is a map of the Middle East as it stood near the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1900, with the boundaries imposed after the end of World War I by the French and British under the Sykes-Picot Agreement shown in white.

Below is a hypothetical map of the same area, divided along sectarian lines. What is striking about this hypothetical map is that it pretty accurately reflects that state on the ground at the moment, with the Islamic State controlling much of the area labeled "Sunni State"; an autonomous Kurdistan; the area around Baghdad controlled by the (mostly Shia) Iraqi government; and a small area in the west of Syria controlled by the Assad government. —ed.



Maps reprinted courtesy of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Organizing Middle East Peace

Chris Patten, June 30, 2014

In Bertolt Brecht's great anti-war play, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, one of the characters says, "You know what the trouble with peace is? No organization."

The play is set during Europe's Thirty Years' War, which devastated Europe in the first half of the seventeenth century, ending only with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The war began as a religious struggle between Protestants and Catholics, but rapidly morphed into a long-running fight between rival countries and dynasties, principally between the Habsburgs and the Holy Roman Empire on one side and Cardinal Richelieu's France on the other.

Not surprisingly, some have compared today's Sunni-Shia conflict, which is consuming swathes of Mesopotamia and Western Asia, to that war, which caused death on a massive scale, plagues, economic destruction, and social turmoil marked, for example, by a wave of witch hunting.

There had in fact been a peace settlement a half-century before the fighting broke out—an effort to organize peace. Emperor Charles V engineered the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, which was based on an agreement that sovereign states could choose for themselves which version of Christianity to adopt. When that treaty fell apart, the killing started.

What was the "organized peace" that preceded the current bloody turmoil in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere? The answer depends on how far back one goes.

As the Ottoman Empire crumbled, the Western powers launched a self-aggrandizing project to redraw the region's map, installing regimes, creating dependencies, establishing spheres of influence, and securing access to increasingly important supplies of oil. Then came a persistent tendency to judge the behavior of states across the Maghreb and the Levant by whether or not they would make diplomatic (or other) trouble over Israel's attitude toward Palestine and the latter's claim to viable statehood. There have also been explicit interventions, from the covert removal of Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, to the more

recent military intervention in Iraq, which led to a quarter-million Iraqi deaths.

But Western countries have been reluctant to face up to the region's underlying realities, set out in a 2002 report by the United Nations Development Program. The Arab scholars and policymakers who drafted the report drew attention to the connections between authoritarian government, economic weakness, high unemployment, and excessively confessional politics. The more dictatorial politics in the region became, the more young men, denied both jobs and freedom of expression, turned to extremist and violent Islamism, the perversion of a great faith.

So here we are today, with the obvious but inadequate answer to the question, "Well, what would you do about it?" being the Irish farmer's reply to a traveler's request for directions: "I wouldn't start from here."

Alas, that is no answer at all, though it may be a useful riposte to those – like former US Vice President Dick Cheney – who advocate a replay of the recent past. Denying reality, American and British neoconservatives apparently believe that recent events justify their view that their war of choice in Iraq would have been a great success had there only been more of it.

But the neocons are not entirely misguided. The United States, former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice rightly argued, for too long had pursued "stability at the expense of democracy"; as a result, it had "achieved neither."

That is a powerful argument for not abandoning a long-term commitment to the sort of pluralist values embraced by, among others, the authors of the 2002 report. The West has been inconsistent in its application of these principles, has occasionally tried to impose them by force (with disastrous consequences), and has failed to use effectively the money and mechanisms devised to support them. Consider, for example, the miserable results of the European Union's trade and cooperation agreements around the Mediterranean.

The West must use all of its diplomatic resources to broker an understanding

between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the main sponsors of, respectively, Shia and Sunni armed struggle. It is not remotely in either country's interest to see their own region go up in flames. These two countries need to start repairing their relations, a prospect (recently set back) which seemed a real possibility back in May.

With American and Turkish help, Iraq should be steered in the direction of a federal state, which recognizes the aspirations of Kurds, Sunni, and Shia. In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad remains in office but hardly in power. His army is probably winning, but the fighting continues. At the moment, the best outlook appears to be that described by the Roman historian Tacitus, "They make a desert, they call it peace."

The time is long since past when outsiders could have considered an effective military intervention. But with UN Security Council support, the world's humanitarian efforts should be more extensive and focused, so that greater relief can be brought to the almost 11 million Syrian refugees who need it.

Finally, we should not ignore the continuing toxicity of the unresolved Israel-Palestine conflict, which continues to feed political extremism and raises serious questions about the West's commitment to human rights.

Countries outside of the region face an additional task: the need to discourage young men from going to fight in Islam's civil war. That is a problem for my own country, where it seems that we have not done a good job instilling in some communities an understanding and acceptance of the values that often brought these young men's parents to the United Kingdom in the first place.

The agenda for real and lasting peace is long and complex. Plans need to be organized, and they will take years to implement. Unless we start now, the fires will spread—fanned by politics and religion—and it will not only be Nineveh that is consumed by them.

© Project Syndicate. Chris Patten, the last British Governor of Hong Kong and a former EU commissioner for external affairs, is Chancellor of the University of Oxford.

2014 is Looking a Lot Like 1914

Jeffrey D. Sachs, July 23, 2014

Karl Marx famously wrote that history repeats itself, “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” Yet when we look around nowadays, we can’t help but wonder whether tragedy will be followed by yet more tragedy.

Here we are, at the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, and we find ourselves surrounded by cascading violence, duplicity, and cynicism of the very sort that brought the world to disaster in 1914. And the world regions involved then are involved again.

The First World War began with a mindset, one based on the belief that military means could resolve pressing social and political issues in Central Europe. A century earlier, the German military theorist Carl von Clausewitz had written that war is “a continuation of political intercourse carried on with other means.” Enough politicians in 1914 agreed.

Yet the First World War proved Clausewitz tragically wrong for modern times. In the industrial age, war is tragedy, disaster, and devastation; it solves no political problems. War is a continuation not of politics, but of political failure.

The First World War ended four imperial regimes: the Prussian (Hohenzollern) dynasty, the Russian (Romanov) dynasty, the Turkish (Ottoman) dynasty, and the Austro-Hungarian (Habsburg) dynasty. The war not only caused millions of deaths; it also left a legacy of revolution, state bankruptcy, protectionism, and financial collapse that set the stage for Adolf Hitler’s rise, the Second World War, and the Cold War.

We are still reeling today. Territory that was once within the multi-ethnic, multi-state, multi-religious Ottoman Empire is again engulfed in conflict and war, stretching from Libya to Palestine-Israel, Syria, and Iraq.

The Balkan region remains sullen and politically divided, with Bosnia and Herzegovina unable to institute an effective central government, and Serbia deeply jolted by the 1999 NATO bombing and the contentious independence of Kosovo in 2008, over its bitter opposition.

The former Russian Empire is in growing turmoil as well, a kind of delayed reaction to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, with Russia attacking Ukraine and violence continuing to erupt in Georgia, Moldova, and elsewhere. In East Asia, tensions between China and Japan—echoes of the last century—are a growing danger.

As was the case a century ago, vain and ignorant leaders are pushing into battle without clear purpose or realistic prospects for resolution of the underlying political, economic, social, or ecological factors that are creating the tensions in the first place. The approach of too many governments is to shoot first, think later.

Take the US. Its basic strategy has been to send troops, drones, or bombers to any place that threatens America’s access to oil, harbors Islamic fundamentalists, or otherwise creates problems—say, piracy off the coast of Somalia—for US interests.

In the industrial age, war is tragedy, disaster, and devastation; it solves no political problems. War is a continuation not of politics, but of political failure.

Hence, US troops, the CIA, drone missiles, or US-backed armies are engaged in fighting across a region stretching from the Sahel in West Africa through Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond.

All of this military activity costs hundreds of thousands of lives and trillions of dollars. But rather than solving a single underlying problem, the chaos is growing, threatening an ever-widening war.

Russia is not handling itself any better. For a while, Russia backed international law, rightly complaining that the US and NATO were violating international law in

Kosovo, Iraq, Syria, and Libya.

But then President Vladimir Putin took aim at Ukraine, fearing the country was about to drop into Europe’s pocket. Suddenly, he was silent about obeying international law. His government then illegally annexed Crimea and is fighting an increasingly brutal guerrilla war in eastern Ukraine through proxies and, it now appears, direct engagement of Russian forces.

In this context, the fate of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 is terrifying not only for its brutality, but also in its intimation of a world gone mad.

Those who aimed and fired the missile have not been conclusively identified, though Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine are the most likely culprits. What is certain, however, is that the violence unleashed by Putin’s war on Ukraine has claimed hundreds of innocent lives and brought the world a step closer to disaster.

There are no heroes among the great powers today. Cynicism is rife on all sides. The US effectively violates international law by resorting to force without UN sanction. It sends drones and secret forces into sovereign countries without their approval. It spies relentlessly on friend and foe alike.

Russia does the same, inflicting death on Ukraine, Georgia, and other neighbors. The only constants in all of this are the easy resort to violence and the lies that inevitably accompany it.

There are four major differences between now and the world of 1914.

For starters, we have since lived through two disastrous world wars, the Great Depression, and the Cold War. We have had the opportunity to learn a thing or two about the stupidity and uselessness of organized collective violence.

Second, the next global war, in this nuclear age, would almost surely end the world.

The third major difference is that today, with our wondrous technologies, we have every opportunity to solve the underlying problems of poverty, hunger, displacement, and environmental degradation that create

(continued on page 8)

Responsibility to Protect?

Peter W. Galbraith, August 8, 2014

President Obama's announcement that the United States' will protect forty thousand Yazidis trapped on Sinjar Mountain in Northern Iraq is a decisive and timely response to an unfolding humanitarian disaster. Air-drops of water and food, already under way, will save lives.

The Yazidis, however, will not really be safe until they can get off the desert mountain and back to their homes in Sinjar. This will require American airstrikes in combination with the ongoing campaign by the Kurdistan military, known as the peshmerga, to retake the city. President Obama has said he will authorize airstrikes if necessary—and they probably will be—to save the Yazidis.

The Yazidis are Kurdish-speaking adherents to an ancient religion that considers that God is the creator of all, including good and evil. Because they consider Satan to be one of God's creations, many Muslims denigrate the Yazidis as devil worshippers, and they have often faced greater persecution than other religious minorities. Needless to say, ISIS reviles them.

In their public decrees, ISIS gave the Yazidis a choice between converting to Islam or death. In Sinjar, the killings came so rapidly that it seems unlikely that anyone had the option to convert. As the terrorists set about massacring the men, they announced that the women would serve as temporary "wives" for ISIS fighters. In effect, ISIS has announced a program of rape that should outrage Americans, much as the mass rapes in Bosnia did two decades ago.

President Obama has rightly accused ISIS of genocide. Article 2 of the Genocide Convention defines "genocide" as killing members of a group "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such." There is no doubt that ISIS' killings are intended to destroy the Yazidis as a religious group. Article 4 makes clear that the Convention applies not only to duly constituted governments, but also to individuals and organizations, such as ISIS.

In her 2002 book, *A Problem from Hell*, Samantha Power describes the Clinton Administration's contortions to avoid characterizing as genocide the killings of the

Muslims in Bosnia and the Tutsi in Rwanda. The reason for not using the g-word, as Power explains, was simple: if the killings were genocide, the US would be morally and legally obliged to act to prevent it.

By using the term genocide, President Obama is obligating the United States to act to save Iraq's Yazidis and threatened Christians. This is not a small undertaking. The Yazidis and many of Iraq's Christians live in the borderlands between the Kurdistan region and the territory that had been controlled by Baghdad. After the Iraqi Army abandoned these areas in June, the Peshmerga took over security.

[T]he United States has an unfortunate record of identifying genocides only after they have taken place.

When I visited the borderlands at the end of June, Kurdish leaders explained that they were now defending a 650-mile front against a highly mobile ISIS that was armed with modern American-supplied weapons, all abandoned or turned over by the collapsed Iraqi army. The United States, they complained, refused to sell Kurdistan weapons, and the Kurds feared being out-gunned. This week, their fears were realized. The peshmerga's small arms proved ineffective against the hundreds of American armored Humvees used by ISIS.

ISIS has used its advantage in mobility and arms to drive the peshmerga out of Sinjar, the Mosul dam area, and several Christian towns. When ISIS attacks, civilians panic, particularly in Christian and Yazidi villages. This complicates the task of the Kurdish defenders, who not only must confront a ruthless foe, but must also look after terrorized civilians.

Although the peshmerga withdrew from certain areas, their units are still intact and they have their arms. Unlike the largely defunct Iraqi Army, the peshmerga can take advantage of US airstrikes. And, this week, the Obama administration reversed

a decade-long embargo on arming the peshmerga and began sending in arms. More will be needed, along with training.

President Obama, acting under the guise of protecting US diplomats and military in the city, has committed the US air power to the defense of the Kurdistan capital, Erbil. This is not only a morale booster to the strongly pro-American Kurds; it will allow Kurdish commanders to shift forces away from the capital to the defense of the vulnerable borderlands.

President Obama's response to the Yazidi genocide has been swift and unambiguous. In four decades of working in war zones, I can't think of any other case where the United States responded so quickly to a humanitarian disaster. Except for the 1999 intervention to save Kosovo, the United States has an unfortunate record of identifying genocides only *after* they have taken place, and not when they could be prevented.

While moving to save Iraq's religious minorities, President Obama has articulated a new American approach to genocide. As the president said, "When we have the unique capabilities to help avert a massacre, then I believe the United States of America cannot turn a blind eye. We can act, carefully and responsibly, to prevent a potential act of genocide."

In Iraq, the United States is acting with the authorization of the federal government in Baghdad. ISIS has no friends in the United Nations and, while not legally necessary, President Obama might usefully seek Security Council endorsement of his words and actions. It could set a useful precedent for prompt global action to deal with future genocides.

The president has taken a great deal of criticism in recent months for a perceived excess of caution and lack of resolve in US foreign policy. But what he articulated this week should change that perception. Perhaps, some day, it may even be spoken of with admiration as the Obama Doctrine.

Peter W. Galbraith is a former US Ambassador to Croatia who, as a staffer with the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, helped uncover Saddam Hussein's genocide against the Kurds in the late 1980s.

What the US Should Do in Iraq: Stop what is counterproductive

Andrew J. Bacevich, August 11, 2014

From a moral perspective, President Obama's response to the plight of Iraqi minorities targeted for extinction by vicious Islamists is justifiable and even commendable. Yet the resumption of American military action in Iraq—bombs for the wicked, bundles for the innocent—cannot disguise the overall disarray of US policy in the region.

The moral sensibilities that have apparently moved the Obama administration to renew the Iraq war are, to put it mildly, selective. Elsewhere in the immediate region, Washington has hesitated to confront wickedness and has stood by while innocents have been subjected to the cruelest treatment. Whatever the factors that have shaped the US response to Syria's civil war, the military coup that terminated Egypt's experiment with democracy, and Israel's assault on Gaza, moral concerns have figured, at best, as an afterthought.

If recent US actions in the Middle East contain a common theme, it's this: a vague hope that suppressing rampant Islamic radicalism will restore order to a region that previous US military efforts have done so much to destabilize. Yet translating that hope into reality poses daunting challenges, nowhere more so than in Iraq.

Peter Baker of *The New York Times* has referred to Iraq as the "graveyard of American ambition." The characterization is an apt one. Each of the last five presidents has seen Iraq as an instrument to serve US interests or has expected Baghdad to comply with specific American requirements. Each in turn has failed, bequeathing the consequences of that failure to his successor.

During the 1980s, to curb the ambitions of revolutionary Iran, Ronald Reagan sought to use Iraq as a proxy. The chief result, along with the vast and pointless bloodletting of the Iran-Iraq War, was to fuel the megalomania of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

The administration of George H. W. Bush marked Iraq's transformation from unseemly partner to full-fledged adversary. Bush punished Iraq for invading Kuwait, confident that from victory would come a "new world order." Rather than order, the United States

found itself saddled with responsibility for garrisoning the Persian Gulf.

To keep Hussein "in his box," Bush inaugurated and Bill Clinton affirmed a policy of militarized containment. Yet the permanent stationing of US forces in the Islamic world and the punitive sanctions imposed on Iraq stoked anti-American jihadism and thereby helped lay the basis for 9/11.

The events of September 2001 inspired President George W. Bush to make Iraq the centerpiece of his campaign to transform the Greater Middle East. Promising to liberate and democratize Iraq, Bush instead broke it.

Although Barack Obama's vow to extricate the United States from his predecessor's misbegotten war vaulted him into the White House, events have stymied his hopes of making a clean break. A weak Iraq state and ineffective military forces—created at considerable expense during the several years of American occupation—have proved unable to cope with resurgent violence.

To imagine at this late date that the United States possesses the capacity to reverse this sad situation is surely a delusion. Even if an infusion of American air power succeeds in saving the lives of those at immediate risk, Iraq will remain a basket case. Riding to the temporary rescue of Kurds, Yazidis, or persecuted Iraqi Christians may salve American consciences, but it won't redeem a bipartisan record of failure that now extends over several decades. That failure is definitive and indelible.

Historians will have a field day in apportioning responsibility for that failure, a project likely to provoke arguments continuing far into the future. What those responsible for formulating policy are called on to do is to move on, cognizant of the past but accepting it as fixed and irrevocable.

If restoring a semblance of stability to the Middle East is in the interests of the United States, as it surely is, the present moment requires two things.

Step one is to stop doing what's counterproductive. That means ending the excessive militarization of US policy that Washington's inordinate preoccupation with

Iraq has promoted. Nothing would be more foolish than for President Obama to allow himself to be drawn into another large-scale conflict, as he himself appears to appreciate.

Step two means setting sensible priorities, differentiating between what is truly essential and what is merely important. Washington's protracted obsession with Iraq over many years has badly skewed US policy priorities. There are places that Americans should consider worth fighting and dying for. There are places on which the very fate of the planet may hinge. But Iraq is not one of those places. It's time to break free of the tar baby and move on.

Andrew J. Bacevich is a professor of history and international relations at Boston University's Pardee School of Global Studies.

2014 is Looking a Lot Like 1914

(continued from page 6)

so many dangerous tinderboxes.

Finally, we have international law, if we choose to use it.

The belligerents in Europe and Asia 100 years ago could not turn to the UN Security Council and UN General Assembly, venues where diplomacy, rather than war, can be the true continuation of politics. We are blessed with the possibility to construct peace through a global institution that was founded to help ensure that global war would never recur.

As citizens of the world, our job now is to demand peace through diplomacy, and through global, regional, and national initiatives to address the scourges of poverty, disease, and environmental degradation. On this 100th anniversary of one of the greatest disasters of human history, let us follow tragedy not by farce or more tragedy, but by the triumph of cooperation and decency.

Jeffrey D. Sachs is a professor at Columbia University in New York and a special adviser to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Can the US Afford Another \$3 Trillion War?

Linda Bilmes, August 27, 2014

After piling up trillions of dollars of war debt during the last decade, America seemed to be on the brink of a new era—ready to shut off the Iraq-Afghanistan funding faucet, bring its troops home, and enjoy a peace dividend.

But the respite looks like it will be brief. The new security threats around the world are leading to renewed calls for military engagement; maybe not boots on the ground but air strikes, drones, and weapons and training for shadowy opposition groups.

With Iraq descending into chaos and ISIS beheading Americans, the public is not only alarmed at the prospect of getting dragged back into the fray, but also wondering if the economy can withstand any more.

Of course, in purely financial terms, the US can easily pay for whatever it takes. Patrolling the no-fly zones over Iraq during the 1990s after the first Gulf War cost around \$12 billion a year.

Training the opposition and protecting civilians in Syria, combined with a weighty air campaign to take on both ISIS and the Assad regime, would cost some \$20-22 billion per year, according to an estimate by Ken Pollack from the Washington-based Brookings Institution.

These are small numbers compared to the nearly \$200 billion the US has been shelling out each year for the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. And the US is still a rich country; interest rates are low and borrowing is cheap.

Despite all of this, the cost of re-engaging in conflict will be heavy. The country is still digging itself out from the financial hole created by the extraordinarily expensive Iraq and Afghan wars.

In addition to the trillions appropriated for war spending, the regular Pentagon budget grew by \$1.3 billion in constant dollars since 2001 to the highest levels in real terms since World War II. This “culture of endless money,” as former Defense Secretary Robert Gates called it, was notoriously wasteful, with accounting systems so flawed it was impossible to track where all the money was being spent.



Oil fields on fire, Kirkuk, Iraq, September 13, 2007. Photo by Ian Terry

Withdrawal from Iraq and the expected departure from Afghanistan were supposedly a prelude to belt-tightening at the Pentagon. Congress enacted measures designed to cut military spending by some \$540 billion over the next decade.

Thanks in part to the budget “sequester” of 2011, the Pentagon announced deep cuts in almost all areas, including shrinking the size of the army from 520,000 to 440,000 troops, paring back military pay raises and benefits, buying fewer weapons, and attempting to clean up its finances.

[T]he public is not only alarmed at the prospect of getting dragged back into the fray, but also wondering if the economy can withstand any more.

However, the sharp deterioration in the global security situation means that reform efforts are now being quietly shelved. Even before the latest setbacks in Iraq there was little appetite in the military to carry on with the unaccustomed austerity. Military circles have been warning darkly about the “hollow force”—the idea that cutbacks would mean lower readiness and sub-par forces.

Respected Pentagon figures such as former Under Secretary for Policy Michèle Flournoy are warning that future budget cuts will harm the US military’s ability to carry out its missions.

Any talk of improving the national balance sheet through deeper military cutbacks has all but disappeared. For the nation as a whole, this means the loss of a potential peace dividend windfall of the kind the US enjoyed after the end of the Cold War, which helped boost domestic prosperity during the Clinton years. Instead, military spending looks sure to rebound, prolonging the shortage of money needed to fix roads, rebuild bridges, and repair schools. Desperately needed Pentagon reforms are likely to be put on hold, as Congress and top defense officials continue to focus on foreign military engagements.

A dozen years of war have left American national finances in need of serious repair. The US already borrowed some \$2 trillion to pay for the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, a major contributor to the growth in the national debt from \$6.4 trillion in 2003 to \$17.7 trillion today.

The war also contributed to a sharp rise in oil prices, which increased from \$25 a barrel in 2003 to a peak of \$140 in 2008, significantly constraining US flexibility to respond to the financial crisis—which is by no means over. And the country hasn’t yet paid for one of the biggest costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts: medical care

(continued on page 10)

Can the US afford another \$3 trillion war?

(continued from page 9)

and disability compensation for the 2.5 million veterans who served there. Already more than 900,000 returning service members have been awarded disability benefits for the rest of their lives, which will cost an additional trillion dollars in the coming decades, according to the Veterans Benefit Administration.

Despite two failed wars, it seems the country hasn't learned the lessons about the huge cost of military adventures and

the limits to what military intervention alone can do to solve complex foreign policy challenges. In 2003, the US ignored the question of how it would pay for the Iraq War. The Bush administration was so confident of a short campaign that it fired its top economist, Lawrence Lindsey, for suggesting the conflict might be expensive.

This time around, America is starting off in a much weaker financial position, with no strategy to pay for our existing war debts. If

it is to embark on another round of military engagements, the president needs to be up front with the American people about what it will cost—and how they are going to pay for it.

Linda J. Bilmes is the Daniel Patrick Moynihan Senior Lecturer at Harvard University, and co-author, with Joseph Stiglitz, of "The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict."

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EPS Statement on Iraq, originally published February 2003

As American economists, we oppose unilateral initiatives for war against Iraq, which we see as unnecessary and detrimental to the security and the economy of the United States and the entire world community.

If war would serve to counter a clear threat to the country, the economic consequences would be secondary. But we question whether war would serve security and not increase the risk of future instability and terrorism. We see the immediate human tragedy and devastation of war as clear; and we see as well serious potential economic harm to our nation and to the world.

Given the precarious state of our own economy, America requires the attention and focus of leadership and resources to address economic problems at home. Instead, leadership and resources are being diverted to an unnecessary and costly war. As UN Chief Inspector Hans Blix points out, the objective of containment is being achieved now, by 250 inspectors at a cost of \$80 million per year, in contrast to a force of some 150,000 soldiers and at least \$100 billion for war.

No administration can credibly promise to solve all problems simultaneously, and as a result of our administration's comparative neglect, the American economy suffers the following serious problems:

First, private business investment in the United States has not yet started to recover

in most areas. Lack of new investment means lack of jobs. The prospect of war threatens America's financial, energy, and other markets. And the larger commitment of the administration to the military will impede, not advance, the recovery of the technology sector by drawing resources away from civilian applications.

Second, there is a recent and troubling slowdown in consumer spending, which has been supporting the slow recovery. American households are highly indebted. Only low interest rates, continuing demand in the housing sector, moderate oil prices, and cheap imports have kept the consumer going. We fear that war may significantly drive up interest rates and oil prices. If indeed this is so, or if the ongoing decline in the dollar goes too far, the effect could be to unleash a major consumer retrenchment in the United States, overwhelming the added government military spending.

Third, state and local government budgets continue to suffer. These budget shortfalls are translating into service cuts and tax increases. Either way, household budgets will take a serious hit. The war fever in Washington is blocking efforts for revenue sharing with the states, which is a major way the federal government could prevent a state and local calamity, and it is blocking adequate support efforts for homeland security. Nor can we hope, in such

a climate, to address our continuing and larger problems of health care, education, unemployment, and poverty, all of which remain urgent concerns here at home.

During the 1990s America enjoyed strong economic growth, strong financial markets, and unprecedented job expansion. We believe a contributor to that growth was the "peace dividend" following the end of the cold war. Unfortunately, in place of a "peace dividend," today we are being offered a "war surcharge," which will be further aggravated by the effect of a war on the price of oil, especially if it results in destabilizing Saudi Arabia.

The current policy of sponsoring a new war in the Middle East plays Russian roulette with our economy. Instead, our leaders should focus on restoring our economy and stimulating job growth. The American people cannot afford to tolerate a mismanaged economy or a naïve underestimation of America's economic perils.

We ask economists, business leaders, and all Americans to join us in opposition to the decision to go to war, and instead to support a return to a policy that pays adequate attention to the needs of our economy. We do not believe that this war is necessary to the national security of the United States. A sound economy is necessary to the security of the United States and to peaceful world economic development.

Upcoming Events

- **October 10–11, 2014: The Peace Science Society Conference will be held in Philadelphia, PA, hosted by the University of Pennsylvania. <http://pss.la.psu.edu/>.**
- **January 3–5, 2015: The American Economics Association Annual Meetings will be held in Boston, MA. See page 12 for listing of EPS events at the meetings. http://www.aeaweb.org/Annual_Meeting/.**
- **January 8–11, 2015: Western Economics Association International 11th Pacific Rim Conference will be held at Victoria University of Wellington and Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://www.weai.org/index.html>.**
- **April 10–11, 2015: Peace Metrics, Peace Economics, and the Role of Business at American University in Washington, DC, hosted by The Institute for Economics and Peace and American University's Kogod School of Business. <http://economicsandpeace.org/education/tertiary/conference>**

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EPS at the AEA/ASSA Annual Meetings

Boston, Massachusetts January 3-5, 2015

Inequality: Challenge of the Century? (Panel Discussion)

Saturday, Jan 3, 2015 2:30 pm, Boston Marriott Copley,
 Grand Ballroom, Salon E

Panel Moderator: James Galbraith (University of
 Texas-Austin)

- Olivier Giovannoni (Bard College)
- Branko Milanovic (City University of New York)
- Stephen Rose (Georgetown University)
- Joseph Stiglitz (Columbia University)

US-Russia: Avoiding a New Cold War, Session in honor of Michael Intriligator (Panel Discussion)

Sunday, Jan 4, 2015 10:15am, Boston Marriott Copley,
 Grand Ballroom, Salons J & K

Panel Moderator: Richard Kaufman (Bethesda Research
 Institute)

- Ruslan Grinberg (Russian Academy of Sciences)
- Aleksandr Nekipelov (Russian Academy of Sciences)
- Sergey Shakin (Moscow School of Economics)
- William Hartung (Center for International Policy)
- Michael Lind (New America Foundation)
- Robert Skidelsky (Warwick University)
- Jeffrey Sachs (Columbia University)

Please come visit us in the exhibit hall at Booth #129.