

August 26, 2013

Opening up today's coverage of the Middle East, [Caroline Glick](#) says there is no doubt American foreign policy has been reset.

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Clinton's gimmick was meant to show that under President Barack Obama, American foreign policy would be fundamentally transformed. Since Obama and Clinton blamed much of the world's troubles on the misdeeds of their country, under their stewardship of US foreign policy, the US would reset everything.

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Five years later we realize that Clinton's embarrassing gesture was not a gimmick, but a dead serious pledge. Throughout the world, the Obama administration has radically altered America's policies.

And disaster has followed. Never since America's establishment has the US appeared so untrustworthy, destructive, irrelevant and impotent. ...

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Using the same elitist sensibilities that cause him to blame American "arrogance" for the world's troubles, and embrace radical Islam as a positive force, Obama has applied conflict resolution techniques developed by professors in ivory towers to real world conflicts that cannot be resolved peacefully.

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Obama forced Israel to apologize for defending itself against Turkish aggression, believing that Erdogan would then reinstate full diplomatic relations with the Jewish state. Instead, Erdogan continued his assault on Israel, most recently accusing it of organizing the military coup in Egypt and the anti- Erdogan street protests in Turkey.

As for Egypt, as with Syria, Obama's foreign policy vision for the US has left Washington with no options for improving the situation on the ground or for securing its own strategic interests. To advance his goal of empowering the Muslim Brotherhood, Obama pushed the Egyptian military to overthrow the regime of US ally Hosni Mubarak and so paved the way for elections that brought the Muslim Brotherhood to power.

Today he opposes the military coup that ousted the Muslim Brotherhood government. ...

Walter Russell Mead was in the WSJ with additional critique of U. S. Mideast policy. ... *With the advantages of hindsight, it appears that the White House made five big miscalculations about the Middle East. It misread the political maturity and capability of the Islamist groups it supported; it misread the political situation in Egypt; it misread the impact of its strategy on relations with America's two most important regional allies (Israel and Saudi Arabia); it failed to grasp the new dynamics of terrorist movements in the region; and it underestimated the costs of inaction in Syria.*

America's Middle East policy in the past few years depended on the belief that relatively moderate Islamist political movements in the region had the political maturity and administrative capability to run governments wisely and well. That proved to be half-true in the case of Turkey's AK Party: Until fairly recently Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whatever mistakes he might make, seemed to be governing Turkey in a reasonably effective and reasonably democratic way. But over time, the bloom is off that rose. Mr. Erdogan's government has arrested journalists, supported dubious prosecutions against political enemies, threatened hostile media outlets and cracked down crudely on protesters. Prominent members of the party leadership look increasingly unhinged, blaming Jews, telekinesis and other mysterious forces for the growing troubles it faces.

Things have reached such a pass that the man President Obama once listed as one of his five best friends among world leaders and praised as "an outstanding partner and an outstanding friend on a wide range of issues" is now being condemned by the U.S. government for "offensive" anti-Semitic charges that Israel was behind the overthrow of Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi.

Compared with Mr. Morsi, however, Mr. Erdogan is a Bismarck of effective governance and smart policy. Mr. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood were quite simply not ready for prime time; they failed to understand the limits of their mandate, fumbled incompetently with a crumbling economy and governed so ineptly and erratically that tens of millions of Egyptians cheered on the bloody coup that threw them out.

Tinfoil-hat conspiracy theorists and incompetent bumbler make a poor foundation for American grand strategy. We would have done business with the leaders of Turkey and Egypt under almost any circumstances, but to align ourselves with these movements hasn't turned out to be wise.

The White House, along with much of the rest of the American foreign policy world, made another key error in the Middle East: It fundamentally misread the nature of the political upheaval in Egypt. Just as Thomas Jefferson mistook the French Revolution for a liberal democratic movement like the American Revolution, so Washington thought that what was happening in Egypt was a "transition to democracy." That was never in the cards. ...

So, what to do now in Egypt? American policy there, reasons Charles Krauthammer, should support the military over Morsi and the brotherhood.

... After all, we've been here. Through a half-century of cold war, we repeatedly faced precisely the same dilemma: choosing the lesser evil between totalitarian (in that case, communist) and authoritarian (usually military) rule.

We generally supported the various militaries in suppressing the communists. That was routinely pilloried as a hypocritical and immoral betrayal of our alleged allegiance to liberty. But in the end, it proved the prudent, if troubled, path to liberty.

The authoritarian regimes we supported — in South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Chile, Brazil, even Spain and Portugal (ruled by fascists until the mid-1970s!) — in time yielded democratic outcomes. Gen. Augusto Pinochet, after 16 years of iron rule, yielded to U.S. pressure and allowed a free election — which he lost, ushering in Chile's current era of democratic flourishing. How many times have communists or Islamists allowed that to happen?

Regarding Egypt, rather than emoting, we should be thinking: what's best for Egypt, for us and for the possibility of some eventual democratic future.

Under the Brotherhood, such a possibility is zero. Under the generals, slim.

Slim trumps zero.

As for Syria, Craig Pirrong of Streetwise Professor says, given our tardiness, there are no longer any plausible options.

... A robust air campaign against Assad would seriously jeopardize his ability to survive. But then what?

That's the real problem. Perhaps if the US had intervened in US and toppled Assad in 2011, a somewhat stable outcome could have been achieved. Stable by Mideastern standards, anyways. Maybe like Iraq, circa 2008-2009. You wouldn't want to live there, but it could be worse.

That's no longer an option: it now will be worse than Iraq post-Surge, and likely worse than Iraq pre-Surge. In the last two years, the Islamist fanatics, many of them foreigners, have come to dominate the opposition. Assad's fall would result in a bloody civil war between the factions of the opposition, and the communities that support Assad (notably the Alawites). The place would become a horror show, a magnet for jihadists, and a sanctuary for terrorists.

The US Army and Marines have no stomach for getting involved in such a fight, the American people have no stomach for it, and it is hard to justify on the basis of our national interest.

Some Europeans, notably the French and British, are currently all hot to intervene, but given their pathetic military capabilities, that's a case of "let's you and him fight." Moreover, you know that as soon as things get tough, or at the first claim that the US military has committed an atrocity, the Europeans would be self-righteously criticizing us.

So I have little doubt that US airpower could make relatively short work of Assad's military forces and government, and tip the balance to the opposition (who were on the verge of victory early this year without air support) but the aftermath would be a bloody mess, and we would be led by a CIC (Commander in Chief) who would have no stomach for the fight. So I can understand Dempsey's reluctance completely.

I am seriously conflicted about how to proceed. ..

Jerusalem Post

Resetting US foreign policy

by Caroline Glick

Aside from the carnage in Benghazi, the most enduring image from Hillary Clinton's tenure as US secretary of state was the fake remote control she brought with her to Moscow in 2009 with the word "Reset" in misspelled Russian embossed on it.

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And disaster has followed. Never since America's establishment has the US appeared so untrustworthy, destructive, irrelevant and impotent.

Consider Syria. Wednesday was the one-year anniversary of Obama's pledge that the US would seek the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime if Assad used chemical weapons against his opponents.

On Wednesday, Assad's forces used chemical weapons against civilians around Damascus. According to opposition forces, well over a thousand people were murdered.

Out of habit, the eyes of the world turned to Washington. But Obama has no policy to offer. Obama's America can do nothing.

America's powerlessness in Syria is largely Obama's fault. At the outset of the Syrian civil war two-and-a-half years ago, Obama outsourced the development of Syria's opposition forces to Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Erdogan. He had other options. A consortium of Syrian Kurds, moderate Sunnis, Christians and others came to Washington and begged for US assistance. But they were ignored.

Obama's decision to outsource the US's Syria policy owed to his twin goals of demonstrating that the US would no longer try to dictate international outcomes, and of allying the US with Islamic fundamentalists.

Both of these goals are transformative.

In the first instance, Obama believes that anti-Americanism stems from America's actions. By accepting the mantle of global leadership, Obama believes the US insulted other nations. To mitigate their anger, the US should abdicate leadership.

As for courting Islamic fundamentalists, from his earliest days in office Obama insisted that since radical Islam is the most popular movement in the Islamic world, radical Islam is good. Radical Muslims are America's friends.

Obama embraced Erdogan, an Islamic fascist who has won elections, as his closest ally and most trusted adviser in the Muslim world.

And so, with the full support of the US government, Erdogan stacked Syria's opposition forces with radical Muslims like himself. Within months the Muslim Brotherhood comprised the majority in Syria's US-sponsored opposition.

The Muslim Brotherhood has no problem collaborating with al-Qaida, because the latter was formed by Muslim Brothers.

It shares the Brotherhood's basic ideology.

Since al-Qaida has the most experienced fighters, its rise to leadership and domination of the Syrian opposition was a natural progression.

In other words, Obama's decision to have Turkey form the Syrian opposition led inevitably to the current situation in which the Iranian- and Russian-backed Syrian regime is fighting an opposition dominated by al-Qaida.

At this point, short of an Iraq-style US invasion of Syria and toppling of the regime, almost any move the US takes to overthrow the government will strengthen al-Qaida. So after a reported 1,300 people were killed by chemical weapons launched by the regime on Wednesday, the US has no constructive options for improving the situation.

A distressing aspect of Obama's embrace of Erdogan is that Erdogan has not tried to hide the fact that he seeks dictatorial powers and rejects the most basic norms of liberal democracy and civil rights.

Under the façade of democracy, Erdogan has transformed Turkey into one of the most repressive countries in the world. Leading businessmen, generals, journalists, parliamentarians and regular citizens have been systematically rounded up and accused of treason for their "crime" of opposing Turkey's transformation into an Islamic state. Young protesters demanding civil rights and an end to governmental corruption are beaten and arrested by police, and demonized by Erdogan. Following the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt last month, Erdogan has openly admitted that he and his party are part and parcel of the Muslim Brotherhood.

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As for Egypt, as with Syria, Obama's foreign policy vision for the US has left Washington with no options for improving the situation on the ground or for securing its own strategic interests. To advance his goal of empowering the Muslim Brotherhood, Obama pushed the Egyptian military to overthrow the regime of US ally Hosni Mubarak and so paved the way for elections that brought the Muslim Brotherhood to power.

Today he opposes the military coup that ousted the Muslim Brotherhood government.

The US claims that it opposes the coup because the military has trampled democracy and human rights. But it is all but silent in the face of the Muslim Brotherhood's own trampling of the human rights of Egypt's Christian minority.

Obama ignores the fact that Mohamed Morsi governed as a tyrant far worse than Mubarak.

Ignoring the fact that neither side can share power with the other, the US insists the Brotherhood and the military negotiate an agreement to do just that. And so both sides hate and distrust the US.

Wresting an Israeli apology to Turkey was Obama's only accomplishment during his trip to Israel in March. Secretary of State John Kerry's one accomplishment since entering office was to restart negotiations between Israel and the PLO. Just as the consequence of Israel's apology to Turkey was an escalation of Turkey's anti- Israel and anti-Semitic rhetoric, so the consequence of Kerry's "accomplishment" will be the escalation of Palestinian terrorism and political warfare against Israel.

As Jonathan Tobin noted Wednesday in Commentary, to secure Palestinian agreement to reinstate negotiations, not only did Kerry force Israel to agree to release more than a thousand Palestinian terrorists from prison. He put the US on record supporting the Palestinians' territorial demands. In so doing, Kerry locked the US into a position of blaming Israel once the talks fail. When the Palestinians escalate their political and terrorist campaign against Israel, they will use Kerry's pledges as a means of justifying their actions.

The current round of talks will fail of course because like the Turks, the Syrians and the Egyptians, the Palestinians are not interested in resolving their conflict.

They are interested in winning it. They do not want a state. They want to supplant Israel.

Clinton's Reset button was played up as a gimmick. But it was a solemn oath. And it was fulfilled. And as a result, the world is a much more violent and dangerous place. The US and its

allies are more threatened. The US's enemies from Moscow to Tehran to Venezuela are emboldened.

The time has come to develop the basis for a future US policy that would represent a reset of Obama's catastrophic actions and attitudes. Given the damage US power and prestige has already suffered, and given that Obama is unlikely to change course in his remaining three years in power, it is clear that reverting to George W. Bush's foreign policy of sometimes fighting a war on nebulous "terrorists" and sometimes appeasing them will not be sufficient to repair the damage.

The US must not exchange strategic insanity with strategic inconsistency.

Instead, a careful, limited policy based on no-risk and low-risk moves that send clear messages and secure clear interests is in order.

The most obvious no-risk move would be to embrace Israel as America's most vital and only trustworthy ally in the region. By fully supporting Israel not only would the US strengthen its own position by strengthening the position of the only state in the Middle East that shares its enemies, its interests and its values.

Washington would send a strong signal to states throughout the region and the world that the US can again be trusted.

This support would also secure clear US strategic interests by providing Israel with the political backing it requires to eliminate Iran's nuclear program. Moreover, it would bring coherence to the US's counter-terror strategy by ending US support for Palestinian statehood. Instead, the US would support the institution of the rule of law and liberal norms of government in Palestinian society by supporting the application of Israel's liberal legal code over Judea and Samaria.

Another no-risk move is to support former Soviet satellite states that are now members of NATO. Here, too, the US would be taking an action that is clear and involves no risk. Russia would have few options for opposing such a move. And the US could go a long way toward rebuilding its tattered reputation.

Low risk moves include supporting minorities that do not have a history of violent anti-Americanism and are, in general, opposed to Islamic fascism.

Such groups include the Kurds. In Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, the Kurds represent a national group that has proven its ability to self-govern and to oppose tyranny. With certain, easily identified exceptions, the stronger the Kurds are, the weaker anti-American forces become.

Then there are the Christians. The plight of the Christians in the Islamic world is one of the most depressing chapters in the recent history of the region. In country after country, previously large and relatively peaceful, if discriminated against, Christian minorities are being slaughtered and forced to flee.

The US has done next to nothing to defend them.

Strong, forthright statements of support for Christian communities and condemnations of persecution, including rape, forced conversions, massacre, extortion and destruction of church

and private Christian-owned property from Egypt to Indonesia to Pakistan to the Palestinian Authority would make a difference in the lives of millions of people.

It would also go some way toward rehabilitating the US's reputation as a champion of human rights, after Obama's embrace of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Under Obama, America has made itself worse than irrelevant. In country after country, it has become dangerous to be a US ally. The world as a whole is a much more dangerous place as a consequence.

Nothing short of a fundamental transformation of US foreign policy will suffice to begin to repair the damage.

WSJ

[The Failed Grand Strategy in the Middle East](#)

by Walter Russell Mead



An opponent of Egypt's President Morsi holds up a picture of Barack Obama and the American flag during a rally outside the presidential palace in Cairo on July 7.

In the beginning, the Hebrew Bible tells us, the universe was all "tohu wabohu," chaos and tumult. This month the Middle East seems to be reverting to that primeval state: Iraq continues to unravel, the Syrian War grinds on with violence spreading to Lebanon and allegations of chemical attacks this week, and Egypt stands on the brink of civil war with the generals crushing the Muslim Brotherhood and street mobs torching churches. Turkey's prime minister, once widely hailed as President Obama's best friend in the region, blames Egypt's violence on the Jews; pretty much everyone else blames it on the U.S.

The Obama administration had a grand strategy in the Middle East. It was well intentioned, carefully crafted and consistently pursued.

Unfortunately, it failed.

The plan was simple but elegant: The U.S. would work with moderate Islamist groups like Turkey's AK Party and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood to make the Middle East more democratic. This would kill three birds with one stone. First, by aligning itself with these parties, the Obama administration would narrow the gap between the 'moderate middle' of the Muslim world and the U.S. Second, by showing Muslims that peaceful, moderate parties could achieve beneficial results, it would isolate the terrorists and radicals, further marginalizing them in the Islamic world. Finally, these groups with American support could bring democracy to more Middle Eastern countries, leading to improved economic and social conditions, gradually eradicating the ills and grievances that drove some people to fanatical and terroristic groups.

President Obama (whom I voted for in 2008) and his team hoped that the success of the new grand strategy would demonstrate once and for all that liberal Democrats were capable stewards of American foreign policy. The bad memories of the Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter presidencies would at last be laid to rest; with the public still unhappy with George W. Bush's foreign policy troubles, Democrats would enjoy a long-term advantage as the party most trusted by voters to steer the country through stormy times.

It is much too early to anticipate history's verdict on the Obama administration's foreign policy; the president has 41 months left in his term, and that is more than enough for the picture in the Middle East to change drastically once again. Nevertheless, to get a better outcome, the president will have to change his approach.

With the advantages of hindsight, it appears that the White House made five big miscalculations about the Middle East. It misread the political maturity and capability of the Islamist groups it supported; it misread the political situation in Egypt; it misread the impact of its strategy on relations with America's two most important regional allies (Israel and Saudi Arabia); it failed to grasp the new dynamics of terrorist movements in the region; and it underestimated the costs of inaction in Syria.

America's Middle East policy in the past few years depended on the belief that relatively moderate Islamist political movements in the region had the political maturity and administrative capability to run governments wisely and well. That proved to be half-true in the case of Turkey's AK Party: Until fairly recently Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whatever mistakes he might make, seemed to be governing Turkey in a reasonably effective and reasonably democratic way. But over time, the bloom is off that rose. Mr. Erdogan's government has arrested journalists, supported dubious prosecutions against political enemies, threatened hostile media outlets and cracked down cruelly on protesters. Prominent members of the party leadership look increasingly unhinged, blaming Jews, telekinesis and other mysterious forces for the growing troubles it faces.

Things have reached such a pass that the man President Obama once listed as one of his five best friends among world leaders and praised as "an outstanding partner and an outstanding friend on a wide range of issues" is now being condemned by the U.S. government for "offensive" anti-Semitic charges that Israel was behind the overthrow of Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi.

Compared with Mr. Morsi, however, Mr. Erdogan is a Bismarck of effective governance and smart policy. Mr. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood were quite simply not ready for prime time; they failed to understand the limits of their mandate, fumbled incompetently with a crumbling economy and governed so ineptly and erratically that tens of millions of Egyptians cheered on the bloody coup that threw them out.

Tinfoil-hat conspiracy theorists and incompetent bumbler make a poor foundation for American grand strategy. We would have done business with the leaders of Turkey and Egypt under almost any circumstances, but to align ourselves with these movements hasn't turned out to be wise.

The White House, along with much of the rest of the American foreign policy world, made another key error in the Middle East: It fundamentally misread the nature of the political upheaval in Egypt. Just as Thomas Jefferson mistook the French Revolution for a liberal democratic movement like the American Revolution, so Washington thought that what was happening in Egypt was a "transition to democracy." That was never in the cards.

What happened in Egypt was that the military came to believe that an aging President Hosni Mubarak was attempting to engineer the succession of his son, turning Egypt from a military republic to a dynastic state. The generals fought back; when unrest surged, the military stood back and let Mr. Mubarak fall. The military, incomparably more powerful than either the twittering liberals or the bumbling Brotherhood, has now acted to restore the form of government Egypt has had since the 1950s. Now most of the liberals seem to understand that only the military can protect them from the Islamists, and the Islamists are learning that the military is still in charge. During these events, the Americans and Europeans kept themselves endlessly busy and entertained trying to promote a nonexistent democratic transition.

The next problem is that the Obama administration misread the impact that its chosen strategies would have on relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia—and underestimated just how miserable those two countries can make America's life in the Middle East if they are sufficiently annoyed.

The break with Israel came early. In those unforgettable early days when President Obama was being hailed by the press as a new Lincoln and Roosevelt, the White House believed that it could force Israel to declare a total settlement freeze to restart negotiations with the Palestinians. The resulting flop was President Obama's first big public failure in foreign policy. It would not be the last. (For the past couple of years, the administration has been working to repair relations with the Israelis; as one result, the peace talks that could have started in 2009 with better U.S. management are now under way.)

The breach with Saudis came later and this one also seems to have caught the White House by surprise. By aligning itself with Turkey and Mr. Morsi's Egypt, the White House was undercutting Saudi policy in the region and siding with Qatar's attempt to seize the diplomatic initiative from its larger neighbor.

Many Americans don't understand just how much the Saudis dislike the Brotherhood and the Islamists in Turkey. Not all Islamists are in accord; the Saudis have long considered the Muslim Brotherhood a dangerous rival in the world of Sunni Islam. Prime Minister Erdogan's obvious hunger to revive Turkey's glorious Ottoman days when the center of Sunni Islam was in Istanbul is a direct threat to Saudi primacy. That Qatar and its Al Jazeera press poodle enthusiastically

backed the Turks and the Egyptians with money, diplomacy and publicity only angered the Saudis more. With America backing this axis—while also failing to heed Saudi warnings about Iran and Syria—Riyadh wanted to undercut rather than support American diplomacy. An alliance with the Egyptian military against Mr. Morsi's weakening government provided an irresistible opportunity to knock Qatar, the Brotherhood, the Turks and the Americans back on their heels.

The fourth problem is that the administration seems to have underestimated the vitality and adaptability of the loose group of terrorist movements and cells. The death of Osama bin Laden was a significant victory, but the effective suppression of the central al Qaeda organization in Afghanistan and Pakistan was anything but a knockout blow. Today a resurgent terrorist movement can point to significant achievements in the Libya-Mali theater, in northern Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere. The closure of 20 American diplomatic facilities this month was a major moral victory for the terrorists, demonstrating that they retain the capacity to affect American behavior in a major way. Recruiting is easier, morale is higher, and funding is easier to get for our enemies than President Obama once hoped.

Finally, the administration, rightfully concerned about the costs of intervention in Syria, failed to grasp early enough just how much it would cost to stay out of this ugly situation. As the war has dragged on, the humanitarian toll has grown to obscene proportions (far worse than anything that would have happened in Libya without intervention), communal and sectarian hatreds have become poisonous almost ensuring more bloodletting and ethnic and religious cleansing, and instability has spread from Syria into Iraq, Lebanon and even Turkey. All of these problems grow worse the longer the war goes on—but it is becoming harder and costlier almost day by day to intervene.

But beyond these problems, the failure to intervene early in Syria (when "leading from behind" might well have worked) has handed important victories to both the terrorists and the Russia-Iran axis, and has seriously eroded the Obama administration's standing with important allies. Russia and Iran backed Bashar al-Assad; the president called for his overthrow—and failed to achieve it. To hardened realists in Middle Eastern capitals, this is conclusive proof that the American president is irredeemably weak. His failure to seize the opportunity for what the Russians and Iranians fear would have been an easy win in Syria cannot be explained by them in any other way.

This is dangerous. Just as Nikita Khrushchev concluded that President Kennedy was weak and incompetent after the Bay of Pigs failure and the botched Vienna summit, and then proceeded to test the American president from Cuba to Berlin, so President Vladimir Putin and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei now believe they are dealing with a dithering and indecisive American leader, and are calibrating their policies accordingly. Khrushchev was wrong about Kennedy, and President Obama's enemies are also underestimating him, but those underestimates can create dangerous crises before they are corrected.

If American policy in Syria has been a boon to the Russians and Iranians, it has been a godsend to the terrorists. The prolongation of the war has allowed terrorist and radical groups to establish themselves as leaders in the Sunni fight against the Shiite enemy. A reputation badly tarnished by both their atrocities and their defeat in Iraq has been polished and enhanced by what is seen as their courage and idealism in Syria. The financial links between wealthy sources in the Gulf and jihadi fighter groups, largely sundered in the last 10 years, have been rebuilt and strengthened. Thousands of radicals are being trained and indoctrinated, to return later to their home countries with new skills, new ideas and new contacts. This development in Syria looks

much more dangerous than the development of the original mujahedeen in Afghanistan; Afghanistan is a remote and (most Middle Easterners believe) a barbarous place. Syria is in the heart of the region and the jihadi spillover threatens to be catastrophic.

One of the interesting elements of the current situation is that while American foreign policy has encountered one setback after another in the region, America's three most important historical partners—Egypt's military, Saudi Arabia and Israel—have all done pretty well and each has bested the U.S. when policies diverged.

Alliances play a large role in America's foreign policy success; tending the Middle Eastern alliances now in disarray may be the Obama administration's best hope now to regain its footing.

As the Obama administration struggles to regain its footing in this volatile region, it needs to absorb the lessons of the past 4½ years. First, allies matter. Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Egyptian military have been America's most important regional allies both because they share strategic interests and because they are effective actors in a way that groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and smaller states aren't. If these three forces are working with you, then things often go reasonably well. If one or more of them is trying to undercut you, pain comes. The Obama administration undertook the hard work necessary to rebuild its relationship with Israel; it needs to devote more attention to the concerns of the Egyptian generals and the House of Saud. Such relationships don't mean abandoning core American values; rather they recognize the limits on American power and seek to add allies where our own unaided efforts cannot succeed.

Second, the struggle against terror is going to be harder than we hoped. Our enemies have scattered and multiplied, and the violent jihadi current has renewed its appeal. In the Arab world, in parts of Africa, in Europe and in the U.S., a constellation of revitalized and inventive movements now seeks to wreak havoc. It is delusional to believe that we can eliminate this problem by eliminating poverty, underdevelopment, dictatorship or any other "root causes" of the problem; we cannot eliminate them in a policy-relevant time frame. An ugly fight lies ahead. Instead of minimizing the terror threat in hopes of calming the public, the president must prepare public opinion for a long-term struggle.

Third, the focus must now return to Iran. Concern with Iran's growing power is the thread that unites Israel and Saudi Arabia. Developing and moving on an Iran strategy that both Saudis and Israelis can support will help President Obama rebuild America's position in the shifting sands. That is likely to mean a much tougher policy on Syria. Drawing red lines in the sand and stepping back when they are crossed won't rebuild confidence.

President Obama now faces a moment similar to the one President Carter faced when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. The assumptions that shaped key elements of his foreign policy have not held up; times have changed radically and policy must shift. The president is a talented leader; the world will be watching what he does.

Mr. Mead is the James Clarke Chace Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College and editor-at-large of the American Interest.

Washington Post

The choice in Egypt

by Charles Krauthammer

Egypt today is [a zero-sum game](#). We'd have preferred there be a democratic alternative. Unfortunately, there is none. The choice is binary: the country will be ruled by the Muslim Brotherhood or by the military.

Perhaps it didn't have to be this way. Perhaps the military should have waited three years for the intensely unpopular Mohamed Morsi to be voted out of office. But Gen. [Abdel Fatah al-Sissi seems](#) to have calculated that he didn't have three years, that by then there would be no elections — as in Gaza, where the Palestinian wing of the Brotherhood, [Hamas, elected in 2006](#), established a [one-man-one-vote-one-time dictatorship](#).

What's the United States to do? Any response demands two considerations: (a) moral, i.e., which outcome offers the better future for Egypt, and (b) strategic, i.e., which outcome offers the better future for U.S. interests and those of the free world.

As for Egypt's future, the Brotherhood offered nothing but incompetent, intolerant, increasingly dictatorial rule. In one year, Morsi managed to squander [85 years of Brotherhood prestige](#) garnered in opposition — a place from which one can promise the moon — by persecuting journalists and activists, granting himself the unchallenged [power to rule by decree](#), enshrining a [sectarian Islamist constitution](#) and systematically trying to seize the instruments of state power. As if that wasn't enough, after its overthrow the Brotherhood showed itself to be the party that, [when angry, burns churches](#).

The military, brutal and bloody, is not a very appealing alternative. But it does matter what the Egyptian people think. The anti-Morsi demonstrations were the largest in recorded Egyptian history. Revolted by Morsi's betrayal of a revolution intended as a new opening for individual dignity and democracy, the [protesters explicitly demanded Morsi's overthrow](#). And the vast majority [seem to welcome the military repression](#) aimed at abolishing the Islamist threat. It's their only hope, however problematic, for an eventual democratic transition.

And which alternative better helps secure U.S. strategic interests? The list of those interests is long: (1) a secure Suez Canal, (2) friendly relations with the United States, (3) continued alliance with the pro-American Gulf Arabs and Jordanians, (4) retention of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty, (5) cooperation with the U.S. on terrorism, which in part involves (6) isolating Brotherhood-run Gaza.

Every one of which is jeopardized by Brotherhood rule.

What, then, should be our policy? The administration is right to [deplore excessive violence](#) and urge reconciliation. But let's not fool ourselves into believing this is possible in any near future. Sissi crossed his Rubicon with the coup. It will either succeed or not. To advocate a middle way is to invite endless civil strife.

The best outcome would be a victorious military magnanimously offering, at some later date, to reintegrate the more moderate elements of what's left of the Brotherhood.

But for now, we should not be [cutting off aid, civilian or military](#), as many in Congress are demanding. It will have no effect, buy no influence and win no friends on either side of the Egyptian divide. We should instead be urging the quick establishment of a new cabinet of technocrats, rapidly increasing its authority as the soldiers gradually return to their barracks.

Generals are very bad at governance. Give the reins to people who actually know something. And charge them with reviving the economy and preparing the foundations for a democratic transition — most importantly, drafting a secular constitution that protects the rights of women and minorities.

The final step on that long democratic path should be elections. First municipal, then provincial, then national. As was shown in the post-World War II democratizations, the later the better.

After all, we've been here. Through a half-century of cold war, we repeatedly faced precisely the same dilemma: choosing the lesser evil between totalitarian (in that case, communist) and authoritarian (usually military) rule.

We generally supported the various militaries in suppressing the communists. That was routinely pilloried as a hypocritical and immoral betrayal of our alleged allegiance to liberty. But in the end, it proved the prudent, if troubled, path to liberty.

The authoritarian regimes we supported — in South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Chile, Brazil, even Spain and Portugal (ruled by fascists until the mid-1970s!) — in time yielded democratic outcomes. [Gen. Augusto Pinochet](#), after 16 years of iron rule, yielded to U.S. pressure and allowed a free election — which he lost, ushering in Chile's current era of democratic flourishing. How many times have communists or Islamists allowed that to happen?

Regarding Egypt, rather than emoting, we should be thinking: what's best for Egypt, for us and for the possibility of some eventual democratic future.

Under the Brotherhood, such a possibility is zero. Under the generals, slim.

Slim trumps zero.

Streetwise Professor

[Syria: All the Options are Terrible](#)

by Craig Pirrong

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, has been very negative about any US military involvement in Syria. The military takes this position when either (1) it truly believes that the use of military force will not achieve a satisfactory outcome at a satisfactory cost in lives and money, or (2) it has serious doubts about the political support for military

engagement. In the case of Syria, I strongly suspect that (2) drives Dempsey's opposition to US intervention, but that the messy aftermaths in Iraq and Libya have also convinced him (and the rest of the military) that (1) is true too. Obama is obviously allergic to military intervention, and the military is no doubt fearful of getting involved in a conflict with a commander in chief who is not committed to seeing things through. There is no deep political support in the country for intervention. Viet Nam and Iraq still haunt the US military. So Dempsey has resorted to the common tactic of a commander who does not want to be ordered into combat: he emphasizes the negative, and the capabilities of the would-be enemy.

But the recent alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government in an attack that reportedly killed hundreds-mainly children-has changed the dynamic dramatically. This attack, if it indeed occurred-and the initial US assessment is that it did-took place on the anniversary of Obama's drawing of a "red line" involving Syrian CW use. Obama gave himself an out a year ago, with the "whole bunch" proviso. Well, an attack that kills hundreds would be hard to write off as a minor employment of WMD. Obama is hoist on his own petard, and quite honestly, even if he had not staked his-and the country's-credibility on this issue, the pressure to intervene in the aftermath of a proven mass-casualty CW attack would be intense. The drawing of the red line only makes it harder for Obama to resist this pressure.

Consequently, the US is apparently assembling a target list, and if Assad's use of CW is confirmed, some action is highly likely, even in the face of Russian and Chinese opposition.

In my opinion, Dempsey has exaggerated the dangers and costs of a US air campaign against Assad. Yes, Syrian air defenses are more formidable than Libya's were, but they are still a Russian-designed system operated by Arabs. Pretty much every one of those has been shredded, either by the US or Israel, every time they have been attacked since 1973. (I always remember Moshe Dyan's answer to the question of how he explained his military success: "Fighting Arabs." This is particularly true when it comes to anything involving the operation of technically advanced systems.)

[This quite useful presentation provides an overview of how an air campaign would proceed.](#) It clearly suggests that such a campaign could be successful with very minor risks to US personnel, and at modest cost.

A robust air campaign against Assad would seriously jeopardize his ability to survive. But then what?

That's the real problem. Perhaps if the US had intervened in US and toppled Assad in 2011, a somewhat stable outcome could have been achieved. Stable by Mideastern standards, anyways. Maybe like Iraq, circa 2008-2009. You wouldn't want to live there, but it could be worse.

That's no longer an option: it now will be worse than Iraq post-Surge, and likely worse than Iraq pre-Surge. In the last two years, the Islamist fanatics, many of them foreigners, have come to dominate the opposition. Assad's fall would result in a bloody civil war between the factions of the opposition, and the communities that support Assad (notably the Alawites). The place would become a horror show, a magnet for jihadists, and a sanctuary for terrorists.

The US Army and Marines have no stomach for getting involved in such a fight, the American people have no stomach for it, and it is hard to justify on the basis of our national interest.

Some Europeans, notably the French and British, are currently all hot to intervene, but given their pathetic military capabilities, that's a case of "let's you and him fight." Moreover, you know that as soon as things get tough, or at the first claim that the US military has committed an atrocity, the Europeans would be self-righteously criticizing us.

So I have little doubt that US airpower could make relatively short work of Assad's military forces and government, and tip the balance to the opposition (who were on the verge of victory early this year without air support) but the aftermath would be a bloody mess, and we would be led by a CIC who would have no stomach for the fight. So I can understand Dempsey's reluctance completely.

I am seriously conflicted about how to proceed. On the one hand, I cannot abide Assad and his brutality, and the use of chemical weapons on civilians would put him well beyond the pale. But I foresee a bloody, messy, inconclusive aftermath of his overthrow. The US military would have a thankless task. It could be totally confident that the Europeans who support intervention now would desert at the first sign of trouble, and can provide no meaningful military heft. [The cynical ultra-realists say that the US should just let the two sides kill one another, thereby distracting them from terrorizing us](#): this is a variant of the Kissingerian "it's too bad they both can't lose" attitude to the Iran-Iraq war. But that is profoundly amoral, because it's not just jihadis and Syrian government thugs who would be dying: innocent civilians would bear the brunt.

Things would have been ugly in 2011, but things will be infinitely uglier now. 2012 and 2013 are years of the locust. 2014 and beyond will be hell, regardless of what Obama decides to do. We are where we are, and where we are is not a good place to be.

If I had to choose, I would decide that removing Assad would have some geopolitical benefits, and would not make the humanitarian situation any worse. Syria is Iran's major ally, and its bridgehead to Hezbollah. Assad's fall would be a strategic blow to Iran, and thus would be a strategic benefit to us. But this objective is not sufficiently beneficial to justify the commitment of any American ground forces. So I would limit American involvement to a robust air campaign targeting the Syrian air force, command and control targets, chemical weapons facilities, air defenses, and Hezbollah logistics and support, supplemented by a program to arm the opposition, trying to the extent possible to direct the weapons to the least bad guys. And I would plan like hell for the myriad contingencies that may follow.

What I definitely would *not* do is what Obama is apparently considering, namely, [a set of limited strikes intended to "send a message."](#) Back in the day, I would have said if you want to send a message, use Western Union. That's obsolete, but the concept is fully operative. The message that would be sent is that we lack seriousness and are just doing something because we have to do something so it doesn't look like we're doing nothing. Such actions betray a lack of will and seriousness and actually tend to encourage rather than deter thuggish rulers. We don't need Rolling Thunder in the desert. It would also unleash all of the negative diplomatic consequences that a more aggressive strike would.

In other words: moderation in war is imbecility (attributed variously to Lord Fisher and Macaulay). Or in other other words: If you want to take Vienna, take Vienna. Assad is facing an existential moment. We are not going to change *his* "calculus": he isn't going to back down in a

war for survival in the face of attacks that don't threaten his survival. We cannot affect his will to survive: we can affect his capability to survive. The best we can do is affect the "correlation of forces" to use the old Soviet term. By so doing, we can increase the odds that he will topple.

Even if this is done, the aftermath will be very ugly. But so are all the other alternatives. This just seems the least ugly of a hideously repulsive lot. Act or don't act, we'll be blamed for whatever ugliness transpires. Contributing to Assad's overthrow would at least have some strategic benefits. So, with reluctance, I guess that's the way I'd go.





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