

June 15, 2014

Matthew Continetti says Iraq is on obama now.

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McCain is dreaming. Does anyone think President Obama is about to replace Susan Rice with Fred Kagan, and switch out General Austin for General Petraeus? To assign responsibility for American incompetence to President Obama’s National Security Council is to miss the target. The NSC is a symptom of the dysfunction, not its cause. Behind our endless series of foreign-policy screw-ups—Benghazi, Snowden, Syria, Crimea, Bergdahl, Iraq—is not Obama’s team. It’s Obama.

The Obama foreign policy is best represented not by the famous national security “Team of Rivals” of Obama’s first term, but by the team of yes men and incompetents of his second. Gates, Panetta, Clinton, and Petraeus are celebrities who had the wit and stature to disagree with Obama. Kerry, Rice, Hagel—this collection of loyalists and losers (quite literally in Kerry’s case) is incapable of disagreement with the president because he handpicked them for their subservience.

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It ought to be obvious by now, five-and-a-half years into his presidency, that Obama does not take disagreement lightly. Consider the look of contempt and resentment on his face when McCain spoke at the 2010 health care summit, the disdain and condescension that characterized his debates with Mitt Romney, the annoyance and even anger he expresses when he feels compelled to grant Fox News Channel an interview. Obama “really doesn’t like people.” It’s evident whenever he encounters dissent. ...

Peter Wehner says he's even worse than we thought.

President Obama spoke on Iraq earlier today, pledging to do nothing and essentially saying nothing, even as that nation is breaking apart, with Islamic militants overrunning Iraq and vowing to capture Baghdad.

In light of the unfolding disaster in Iraq, which is linked to the unfolding disaster in Syria, which is part of a broader failure in the Middle East, which is only one part of an across-the-board failure in foreign policy, which is separate from the failures at home—including healthcare.gov and ObamaCare more broadly, chronically high unemployment, the stimulus and “shovel ready jobs,” a historically weak economic recovery, the lowest workforce participation rate since the 1970s, increasing income inequality, and record poverty—the following needs to be said. Even those of us who were highly critical of Mr. Obama early on, who twice voted against him and worked in campaigns to defeat him, could not envision how epically incompetent he would be.

The harm this man has done is immeasurable. And he still has more than two years left to go.

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More from [Mario Loyola](#) on the criminal negligence in our government.

... what did Obama do? He did what he normally does, which is to counteract what little capacity for action the U.S. national-security establishment retains when left on autopilot. He has visited Iraq only once during his presidency, early in 2009; but even then he only visited troops, and declined to meet with any senior Iraqi officials. He has met with Prime Minister Maliki only twice, once in [December 2011](#) and once in [November 2013](#), by which time the current debacle was well in train. By [all accounts](#), Obama barely lifted a finger to preserve a long-term U.S. presence in Iraq, even when — as Dexter Filkins recently reported in a [phenomenal feature](#) for The New Yorker — all major Iraqi factions were asking, in private if not in public, for the U.S. to stay.

The tentative end-of-2011 withdrawal date became fixed, and all U.S. forces were gone by the beginning of 2012. What so many Iraqis feared would happen next did not take long to come. The Shiite factions that had rallied to the U.S. side ran for Iranian cover. Sunni tribal leaders who had thrown in their lot with the U.S. were left to fend for themselves in the face of impending and ever more certain assassination. The Iraqi government became more corrupt and authoritarian as Maliki cemented power within his own narrow coalition. The Kurds rested in their mountain redoubt behind their powerful peshmerga militia, as the Sunni heartland once again became fertile ground for ISIS and other Sunni extremists. The country began to descend once again into the Wahhabi-Iranian proxy war that Bush had ended on America's terms in the final years of his presidency.

Meanwhile, on Syria, Americans quickly agreed, on a broad bipartisan basis, to make the worst of a bad situation. As soon as the rebellion began, there were those, including here at NR, who took the attitude that there were no moderate Sunni rebels in the Syrian resistance, and that we should just let our enemies in Syria (namely everyone) pulverize each other in the hopes they would all lose. In fact, the resistance included plenty of people willing to align themselves with the U.S., namely the very same tribes that had aligned themselves with the U.S. in Iraq.

The civil war in Syria would inevitably threaten the stability of Iraq, and potentially turn into a cataclysmic regional conflict. Hence, opponents of intervention in Syria should have realized that the only alternative to intervening in Syria was to send U.S. forces back into Iraq, in order to seal off the Iraq–Syria border and buttress the Iraqi security forces.

But instead of co-opting the Syrian resistance, or — the next best thing — sealing the border between Syria and Iraq, we did nothing. By the start of 2013 we had abandoned both the Sunni resistance in Syria and the Sunni heartland in Iraq to Islamist networks, particularly ISIS. The Syrian civil war's slide across the border into Iraq rapidly became a reality. Violence increased throughout the year until Maliki came begging for American help in November 2013. But Obama hadn't done anything to stop the region from sliding back into chaos and there was no point in starting now. Maliki left empty-handed, with little choice but to throw himself at the mercy of the Iranians — and hope for survival in a revival of the Wahhabi-Iranian proxy war. ...

Great [Power Line](#) post on the the situation in Iraq when W left office.

... The bottom line was that Iraq was under control, but still in a state of low-intensity war. Iraqi forces, with the help of small groups of American advisers and — in extreme circumstances — American air power, were more than capable of handling large-scale threats from jihadists but

weren't yet capable of stopping all violence (and, indeed, may never have been). The situation was stable, and — here's the key — sustainable.

Yes, to sustain it would have required the continued presence of American troops, and those troops may have sustained occasional additional casualties, but that's the price we pay to secure hard-won victories. ...

Jonah Goldberg says our policy in Iraq has been to make sure the country's future conformed to the administration's talking points.

... Barack Obama, on the other hand, believed the Iraq war was a mistake from day one and that conviction informed every foreign-policy decision he has made since. He has said, insinuated, implied, hinted, and shouted as much almost every day of his presidency. So invested in the Iraq war being a mistake — and so invested in received opinion celebrating his foresight — he has not merely acted on the reasonable view it was a mistake, he appears to have done everything he can to make sure it is remembered as a mistake for all time. The Left wanted the Iraq war to be Vietnam, and Barack Obama has given them what they wanted. All that's missing now are the images of Americans clinging to helicopters. ...

... The president deliberately let negotiations over the status of American forces in Iraq deteriorate until there was nothing to do but lament that we couldn't work things out. Indeed (as I wrote in my column yesterday), his entire Iraq policy — his entire foreign policy — has been driven by a need to make it conform to his political talking points, rather than the other way around. There's nothing wrong with presidents keeping their promises, but presidents have an obligation to do so with the stipulation that the national interest might diverge from what Jen Psaki can vomit up on Crossfire.

...

And, as regards the missing Lois Lerner emails, **John Steele Gordon** says instead of being like Jimmy Carter, the president has become more like Richard Nixon. How about the worst of both?

Many people think that Barack Obama's presidency, with his inept, if not disastrous foreign policy, and his ineffectual or counterproductive domestic programs can be aptly compared with Jimmy Carter's. When Carter ran for reelection in 1980, it should be remembered, he carried fewer states than had Herbert Hoover in 1932.

Now, it seems, it's worse. Today, House Ways and Means Chairman Dave Camp issued a press release announcing that the IRS claims to have lost all the emails that Lois Lerner sent to or received from government agencies, including the White House, between January 2009 and April 2011. They have only her internal emails (H/T Instapundit). How very convenient. ...

... So it would seem that not only does the Obama administration exhibit the worst attributes of the Carter administration, it also exhibits the worst attributes of the Nixon administration. No one believed Nixon's explanation for the infamous missing 18 1/2 minutes of oval office tapes. I doubt many will believe that this is an accident too.

Free Beacon

Blame Obama First

The president's national security team isn't the problem. Obama is.

by Matthew Continetti



A series of bombs hit the Shiite stronghold of Sadr City in Baghdad, Iraq

On June 12, as al Qaeda forces marched toward Baghdad, John McCain spoke on the Senate floor. Noting that the al Qaeda affiliate ISIS has conquered a third of Iraqi territory, has overrun the city of Mosul, has captured abandoned American equipment, and has stolen more than \$400 million in cash reserves, McCain said that the enemies of the United States are on the verge of a strategic victory. Only a major course correction, McCain went on, might prevent the emergence of an al Qaeda state that stretches from eastern Syria to the outskirts of Baghdad. “It’s time that the president get a new national security team,” he said.

Criticism of that team—of Obama’s National Security Adviser, his Secretaries of Defense and State, and his top foreign policy speechwriter—has been mounting. “This is what happens when hacks take over foreign policy,” [Kim Strassel wrote last week in a devastating *Wall Street Journal* column](#). The criticism is bipartisan. Col. Jack Jacobs, a NBC military analyst, said the other day that the Obama team “most decidedly” is weak, “[and isolated, and a lot of decisions it makes are either ill considered or do not consider everything that needs to be considered](#).” David Ignatius is blunt: “The administration,” [he said on *Morning Joe*](#), “is going to have to step up.”

The cliché “personnel is policy” strikes me as true. But its truth is a function of whether the personnel we are talking about actually have the capacity to make decisions. “The first thing I think we need to do,” McCain said on the Senate floor, “is call together the people that succeeded in Iraq, those that have been retired, and get together that group and place them in positions of responsibility so that they can develop a policy to reverse this tide of radical Islamic extremism, which directly threatens the security of the United States of America.”

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In his mind, the president has already considered all of the opposing arguments, and has found them wanting. He gives every impression of believing that he knows the thinking of his opponents—and the interests of his opponents—better than his opponents do. [As Obama told his political director Patrick "It's Constitutional Bitches" Gaspard](#): "I think that I'm a better speechwriter than my speechwriters. I know more about policies on any particular issue than my policy directors. And I'll tell you right now that I'm gonna think I'm a better political director than my political director." No doubt he also thinks he is a better secretary of State, a better secretary of Defense, and a better National Security Adviser, too.

We are experiencing the foreign policy President Obama wants us to experience. On Thursday afternoon, when a reporter asked him if America would use force to help restore order to Iraq, the president said, "I gave a very long speech about this" at West Point. That "[very long speech](#)" was almost universally panned. Ranging from Boko Haram to the Law of the Sea Treaty, its argument was one Obama has made since the beginning of his presidency: that America should not act unilaterally unless our "vital" interests, as defined by Obama, are threatened. On all other "issues of global concern," we "should not go it alone," but rather "broaden our tools to include diplomacy and development, sanctions and isolation, appeals to international law, and, if just, necessary, and effective, multilateral military action."

Broadened tools, soft power, carrots and sticks in the form of sanctions, and international law are the means by which liberal internationalists such as Obama limit the range of forceful U.S. action on the world stage. They are the ingredients in the foreign-policy recipe that has brought chaos to the Middle East—including more than 150,000 Syrians dead and an empowered Iran—and has given us the Russian annexation of Crimea, guerrilla war in eastern Ukraine, a bullying China, a degraded U.S. military, and [a disapproving American public](#).

But Obama does not disapprove. He sees his foreign policy as a success. "Standing with our allies on behalf of international order, working with international institutions, has given a chance for the

Ukrainian people to choose their future—without us firing a shot,” Obama said at West Point. [Yesterday Ukraine said that Russian tanks had crossed its border. “It is possible we are victims of our own leadership,”](#) a senior administration official said of Iraq in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*. That official is right: global security *is* the victim of our own leadership. Our elected leadership.

“We are winding down our war in Afghanistan,” Obama said in his “long speech about this.” Can he really look at the images coming from Iraq and not recognize that they are a preview of what is to come when America leaves Afghanistan? Obama has not only proposed the wrong solutions to the problem of [a degrading international order](#). He fails to see the problem altogether. He is more concerned with the limits of American power than with its responsibilities.

He seems not to understand that only force can stop force. [Receiving an award from USC’s Shoah Foundation in May](#), the president mentioned the crises in Syria and Nigeria, and said wearily that, “having to think through what levers, what power do we have at any given moment, I think, ‘drop by drop by drop,’ that we can erode and wear down these forces that are so destructive; that we can tell a different story.” Drop by drop, erode and wear down—this is foreign policy by erosion. Tell a different story? Stories don’t bring back girls. The Delta Force does.

A look at world news has got to be depressing not only for supporters of the war on terror, not only for advocates of a foreign policy that upholds American primacy, but also for men and women of any party who have served the U.S. government with competence, professionalism, and obligation. Unfortunately, no change of personnel will restore these basic attributes to the conduct of American diplomacy. Only a change of president can do that.

Contentions

[Obama Even Worse Than We Thought](#)

by Peter Wehner

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In light of the unfolding disaster in Iraq, which is linked to the unfolding disaster in Syria, which is part of a broader failure in the Middle East, which is only one part of an across-the-board failure in foreign policy, which is separate from the failures at home—including healthcare.gov and ObamaCare more broadly, chronically high unemployment, the stimulus and “shovel ready jobs,” a historically weak economic recovery, the lowest workforce participation rate since the 1970s, increasing income inequality, and record poverty—the following needs to be said. Even those of us who were highly critical of Mr. Obama early on, who twice voted against him and worked in campaigns to defeat him, could not envision how epically incompetent he would be.

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National Review

Obama's Criminal Negligence in Iraq

The president didn't end the Iraq war. He restarted it.

by Mario Loyola

President Barack Obama came to office promising to “bring a responsible end to the war in Iraq.” That should have been easy enough to do, considering the war was already over. Alas, he seems to have had in mind something quite different than “ending a war.” Perhaps because of his general bias against exertions of American power, Obama seems to have convinced himself that our continuing military presence in post-war Iraq was the same as continuing the war.

This novel conception of when wars end suggests Obama may yet pull our forces out of Europe and the Far East in order to “end” World War II. It also helps to explain how he came to equate “responsibly ending the war in Iraq” with throwing away everything we had gained from it. Obama made it plain from the start that he saw no reason to keep investing in a mistake. He let our military presence in Iraq lapse, and left the Iraqi government to fend for itself when it was still far too fragile. There is a reason we stayed in Germany and Japan and South Korea for decades after the fighting stopped: We didn't want our sacrifices to be for nothing, and we didn't want to have to fight again.

Now the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIS — the very al-Qaeda forces we defeated in Iraq in 2007 — have come back and taken over huge swaths of the country, including most of the Sunni heartland to the west and north of Baghdad. Meanwhile, over in next-door Syria, Obama stood by while the rebels fighting Bashar Assad came under the dominance of extreme Islamist forces, and then sold them all out with the chemical-weapons deal in September 2013. Consequently, we have thrown the Iraqi government into a de facto alliance with the murderous Baathist regime in Syria — a feat that not even common enemies and a common ideology could achieve during Saddam's rule — and now both governments find themselves increasingly dependent on Iran.

With Iran's power and prestige thus enhanced, and rapidly filling the vacuum left behind by the U.S., the mullahs now see the possibility at long last of extending the Islamic Revolution across the Fertile Crescent. With our impending agreement to let Iran keep its nuclear-weapons programs, we can now settle comfortably into the role of a de facto subordinate ally of Iran, whose forces we may soon be helping with air strikes in Iraq. If you're wondering where that leaves our actual allies among the Gulf kingdoms and Israel, they are wondering the same thing.

Foreign-policy mistakes are inevitable, and should generally be expected, if not always forgiven. But in its approach to Iraq and the Middle East as a whole, the Obama administration has been criminally negligent. It could be years and maybe decades before we see a situation as good as the one Obama found when he got to office — and things are almost certainly going to get far worse before they get better.

By the time he got to the White House in early 2009, Obama should have realized that the war in Iraq was already over, and that we had won. Exactly two years earlier, the Iraqi security forces were reaching critical mass, simultaneous with the start of America's own surge, and the Sunni tribes of Anbar province were all coming over to the U.S. side. By the summer of 2007, when I was embedded in Iraq, U.S. and Iraqi forces had utterly defeated al-Qaeda's Iraqi offshoot, ISIS, in a series of massive joint operations. The following year, the Shiite prime minister Nouri al-Maliki

personally orchestrated the offensive that crushed the Iranian-backed militias collected in and around Basra in southern Iraq.

U.S. casualties in Iraq were close to levels commensurate with peacetime training activities back home, and a tenuous but real peace reigned over the whole country. Obama inherited from the Bush administration the framework agreement for a long-term alliance with Iraq, as well as a status-of-forces agreement that set December 2011 as a tentative withdrawal date for all U.S. forces. Iraqi politics were dominated by a Shiite-led coalition that overtly favored an ongoing alliance with the United States. In the press, Shiite militias accused each other of being under Iranian control.

At that point, the U.S. was exerting an enormously beneficial and calming influence on Iraqi politics. Sunnis who felt abused by the majority Shiite government could appeal to the Americans for help, while Shiites could remonstrate to the Americans about Sunni intransigence. Both could get results — peacefully — through America's good offices. In a country where no faction trusted any of the others, all factions could trust the Americans to be impartial, for the simple reason that we were impartial. More important, to invoke the title of Bing West's great book, we were the strongest tribe.

This central position allowed the various factions of Iraqi politics to embrace an alliance with the United States, instead of being forced to seek the protection of coreligionists in Saudi Arabia or Iran whose real agenda was the continuation of a Wahhabi-Iranian proxy war *inside* Iraq. This is something that Iraqis constantly commented on in their own press, but which Americans by and large never understood: In toppling the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, the U.S. had opened the door to a proxy war between the Wahhabi extremists of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Arab states and the Shiite extremists of Khomeini's revolution in Iran. That war proved far bloodier than America's counterinsurgency campaign. In fact, the purpose of the counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq was to defeat both sides in the proxy war, so that our newfound allies in the government of Iraq could cement their power and forge a lasting government.

Hence, America's continuing military presence allowed U.S. military officers and diplomats to exert enormous influence both within Iraq and in the broader Middle East. It allowed us to keep the peace among Iraqi factions while *simultaneously* diminishing Iranian and Wahhabi Arab influence. We had gained, at a frightful cost in lives and treasure, a priceless strategic asset, namely the possibility of Iraq as a strong military ally, hosting U.S. forces as long as we needed to keep them there, engaged against the extremists in Syria and Iran, as well as al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, and their sympathizers among the Arab states. And the prospect of a successful democracy (however rudimentary and corrupt) functioning at the heart of the Middle East gave enormous hope to the pro-democracy movements of the region. In order to consolidate those gains it was absolutely vital for the U.S. to make a long-term commitment and back it up with a long-term military presence.

So what did Obama do? He did what he normally does, which is to counteract what little capacity for action the U.S. national-security establishment retains when left on autopilot. He has visited Iraq only once during his presidency, early in 2009; but even then he only visited troops, and declined to meet with any senior Iraqi officials. He has met with Prime Minister Maliki only twice, once in December 2011 and once in November 2013, by which time the current debacle was well in train. By all accounts, Obama barely lifted a finger to preserve a long-term U.S. presence in Iraq, even when — as Dexter Filkins recently reported in a phenomenal feature for *The New Yorker* — all major Iraqi factions were asking, in private if not in public, for the U.S. to stay.

The tentative end-of-2011 withdrawal date became fixed, and all U.S. forces were gone by the beginning of 2012. What so many Iraqis feared would happen next did not take long to come. The Shiite factions that had rallied to the U.S. side ran for Iranian cover. Sunni tribal leaders who had thrown in their lot with the U.S. were left to fend for themselves in the face of impending and ever more certain assassination. The Iraqi government became more corrupt and authoritarian as Maliki cemented power within his own narrow coalition. The Kurds rested in their mountain redoubt behind their powerful peshmerga militia, as the Sunni heartland once again became fertile ground for ISIS and other Sunni extremists. The country began to descend once again into the Wahhabi-Iranian proxy war that Bush had ended on America's terms in the final years of his presidency.

Meanwhile, on Syria, Americans quickly agreed, on a broad bipartisan basis, to make the worst of a bad situation. As soon as the rebellion began, there were those, including here at NR, who took the attitude that there were no moderate Sunni rebels in the Syrian resistance, and that we should just let our enemies in Syria (namely everyone) pulverize each other in the hopes they would all lose. In fact, the resistance included plenty of people willing to align themselves with the U.S., namely the very same tribes that had aligned themselves with the U.S. in Iraq.

The civil war in Syria would inevitably threaten the stability of Iraq, and potentially turn into a cataclysmic regional conflict. Hence, opponents of intervention in Syria should have realized that the only alternative to intervening in Syria was to send U.S. forces back into Iraq, in order to seal off the Iraq–Syria border and buttress the Iraqi security forces.

But instead of coopting the Syrian resistance, or — the next best thing — sealing the border between Syria and Iraq, we did nothing. By the start of 2013 we had abandoned both the Sunni resistance in Syria and the Sunni heartland in Iraq to Islamist networks, particularly ISIS. The Syrian civil war's slide across the border into Iraq rapidly became a reality. Violence increased throughout the year until Maliki came begging for American help in November 2013. But Obama hadn't done anything to stop the region from sliding back into chaos and there was no point in starting now. Maliki left empty-handed, with little choice but to throw himself at the mercy of the Iranians — and hope for survival in a revival of the Wahhabi-Iranian proxy war.

When Obama got to power, a tenuous peace held in the Middle East, and the U.S. stood at the height of its influence and prestige in the region. Of course, the Middle East is a devilishly tricky place; upheaval is always around the corner; and the U.S. can't single-handedly control any region. But it should be obvious to anyone who takes an honest look at the events of the last five years that the Obama administration's whole approach to foreign policy was bound to make the Middle East a much more dangerous place.

Obama's skepticism of American power apparently blinded him to how vital that power was to the maintenance of peace and stability. Perhaps this discomfort with American power meant the gains of the Iraq war were a burden to him. If so, he couldn't do anything to reverse the 4,500 lives we lost and \$1 trillion we spent to liberate Iraq. But maybe he could make people stop saying the sacrifice had been worth it.

If that was his purpose, then there is at least one area in which his foreign policy is succeeding. As for the rest, behold the Middle East in flames.

Power Line

Iraq before Obama

by Paul Mirengoff

What was Iraq like at the end of the Bush administration. [David French](#) of NRO was there, in the roughest parts. Here's what he says:

I remember what Iraq was like in late 2008, when I left. My unit. . .had largely cleared out one of the last areas of al-Qaeda dominion in Iraq. At high cost we had taken thousands of square kilometers back from enemy control, broken the back of enemy resistance, and given the local population the chance to live something approaching a normal life. Want a measure of our success?

When we arrived in November 2007, in Diyala Province (labeled the Islamic Caliphate of Iraq by the al-Qaeda forces in control) every time any convoy rolled out of the gate, it had a greater than 25 percent chance of enemy contact — IEDs, ambushes, or sniper fire. When we left in late September 2008, that chance was down to approximately 1 percent.

Good men died making that progress. Friends and brothers, all of them.

But that's not to say that al-Qaeda was completely defeated. Even as we prepared to hand over the battle space to an incoming unit, al Qaeda struck one last blow — killing a very dear friend of mine when our troopers cornered a senior leader.

The bottom line was that Iraq was under control, but still in a state of low-intensity war. Iraqi forces, with the help of small groups of American advisers and — in extreme circumstances — American air power, were more than capable of handling large-scale threats from jihadists but weren't yet capable of stopping all violence (and, indeed, may never have been). The situation was stable, and — here's the key — sustainable.

Yes, to sustain it would have required the continued presence of American troops, and those troops may have sustained occasional additional casualties, but that's the price we pay to secure hard-won victories.

It's the price we paid in South Korea, French reminds us:

Our South Korean ally was so stubborn, so difficult to deal with, that it initially refused the armistice agreement that ended the most brutal phase of the Korean war, requiring America to essentially force compliance. What followed — as an allied Army continued to stare across the DMZ at hundreds of thousands of hostile troops — was a long-term low-intensity conflict that cost at least 98 additional American combat deaths and 814 American non-combat deaths.

Violence flared again along the DMZ in the 1960s, including one incident when a North Korean MiG shot down an American electronics warfare aircraft, killing 31 airmen. I've served in South Korea, and just a short walk around Seoul demonstrates the value — the humanitarian necessity — of the American sacrifice in that country.

Should we have pulled out of Korea and left what was to become one of Asia's most vibrant democracies and one of the world's top economies (with a vibrant Christian community) to be swallowed into the abyss of North Korean totalitarianism? If President Obama had followed

President Eisenhower, that's exactly what he would have done — and proclaimed success even as South Korean cities burned.

Fortunately, our presidents, both Republican and Democrat, preserved our hard-won success in South Korea. It wasn't the easy thing to do, but it was the right thing.

President Obama opted for the easy thing. In doing so, he has given away what brave Americans gave their life to win.

Indeed, Obama has disserved our Iraq War veterans both coming and going. Barring a reversal in Iraq, he has rendered their sacrifices a virtual nullity and he has failed to provide so many of them with the health care they were promised.

What a guy.

National Review

Obama's PR Foreign Policy

Talking points should conform to our national interest, not the other way round.

by Jonah Goldberg

The big news of the day doesn't lend itself to excessive jocularity. Nor should it lend itself to partisan gloating. This is awful, awful, stuff.

I supported the Iraq war. But for at least the last half decade or so, I've said it looks like it was a mistake. I've said "looks like" not to weasel out of anything, but to simply acknowledge that things change. If after a wobbly start Iraq got its act together and turned into a stabilizing, democratizing force in the region, then it wouldn't be a mistake. If it continued to slide into Iran's orbit, possibly breaking apart en route, then the war would have been for naught. Sometimes you can't get to a good place without going through a bad place first. That's true in our own lives and it's true of nations.

I truly believe that the Arab Spring and Iran's Green Revolution were aftershocks of the Iraq war and that we could have advanced the cause of liberty if we'd taken advantage of those opportunities. I'm not saying it would have been easy or that more chaos wouldn't have come with such efforts; I am saying that it was worth trying.

Barack Obama, on the other hand, believed the Iraq war was a mistake from day one and that conviction informed every foreign-policy decision he has made since. He has said, insinuated, implied, hinted, and shouted as much almost every day of his presidency. So invested in the Iraq war being a mistake — and so invested in received opinion celebrating his foresight — he has not merely acted on the reasonable view it was a mistake, he appears to have done everything he can to make sure it is remembered as a mistake for all time. The Left wanted the Iraq war to be Vietnam, and Barack Obama has given them what they wanted. All that's missing now are the images of Americans clinging to helicopters.

Let's Get the Spin Right and Everything Else Will Follow

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column yesterday), his entire Iraq policy — his entire foreign policy — has been driven by a need to make it conform to his political talking points, rather than the other way around. There's nothing wrong with presidents keeping their promises, but presidents have an obligation to do so with the stipulation that the national interest might diverge from what Jen Psaki can vomit up on *Crossfire*.

Consider the White House's claim of "decimating" "core al-Qaeda."

This is a metric designed to conform to talking points, it's not an actual foreign-policy objective. Whenever someone points out that al-Qaeda has "metastasized" and controls more territory than ever, the White House falls back on the claim that we've taken the fight to those who actually attacked us on 9/11. That's great, or at least it sounds great. But how is that a *strategic* objective? What does that do to further America's interests?

If the U.S. had wiped out most of the Japanese generals who plotted the Pearl Harbor attacks, but Japan was still at war with us, would anyone say "Well, we can wrap things up now"?

As for the word "decimated," I often wondered if they're hiding behind the popular meaning of decimated — i.e. "crushed" or "destroyed" — while keeping its traditional and literal meaning — kill 1 out of 10 — in their back pocket in case they need it to defend against the fact-checkers. Something like:

Carney: We've decimated core al-Qaeda.

Reporter: Jay, we've checked and most of the original al-Qaeda members are still alive.

Carney: I refer you to Webster's dictionary. "Decimated" means to kill every tenth member of an army. We are well ahead of that standard. Frankly I think you should salute our rhetorical restraint.

We Change the Past

There's a staple of physics — and life — that the present can't change the past. What's done is done. Don't cry over spilt milk. The horse has left the barn. We already emailed the pictures of you with the hooker. Etc. Given the riot of unknowns that is physics today, I'm not sure that will always be true. And, in a very real sense, I'm not sure it's true about life either.

No, you cannot change the facts of the past. But you can change the significance of those facts. I'm not talking about Orwellian lying or Soviet airbrushing or the shoving of innocents down the memory hole. When new events take us by surprise the events that led up to it suddenly take on greater meaning.

From an old-school G-File:

In 2002, Adam Garfinkle, then of The National Interest, wrote a wonderful essay about Saudi Arabia. He quoted R. G. Collingwood's observation that "every new generation must rewrite history in its own way," and proceeded to argue that at least part of what Collingwood meant by this "is that what interests us about the past is at least partly a function of what bothers us or makes us curious in the present."

For example, for the French and British, when war broke out in 1939, the years 1918-19 became less significant and the years 1870-1871 loomed large. Or, when the Berlin Wall fell, 1917 — the year of the Russian Revolution — suddenly became much less interesting, but 1914 — the dawn of imperial implosion and nationalist explosion — became much more important. This is all a

lesson in the obvious for my beloved bride, who studied U.S.-Soviet relations in graduate school. By the time the ink was dry on her diploma, there was no Soviet Union.

The point of all this for Garfinkle was that, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, a whole new narrative of the 20th century was written. While on September 10, the years 1914, 1945, and 1989 seemed of paramount importance to historians, on September 12, the year 1924 suddenly leapt onto the stage — that was the year the House of Saud emerged as the dominant power on the Arabian continent. Before that, 1924 was the answer to a few trivia questions and little more (e.g., In what year was the People's Republic of Mongolia established? When was Frank Lautenberg born?).

Right now, the most important thing about 2011, according to conventional wisdom, is that Barack Obama authorized the killing of Osama bin Laden. It was certainly a good day, and a glorious one for the White House communications team which *immediately* turned it into a Caesarian argument for his domestic political authority. But what if ISIS succeeds in holding onto Mosul and Nineveh? Or even goes on to grab Baghdad? What if Iran is fully drawn into the conflict, rendering vast swaths of the Middle East a literal battleground — and not just a figurative one — for a bloody Sunni–Shia civil war? Suddenly, the most momentous thing about 2011 wouldn't be the killing of one aging terrorist hermited away with his "Girls Gone Wild" DVDs. It would be the White House's passive-aggressive acquiescence to the abandonment of Iraq. Again, as it stands, the Iraq war was a mistake. What we're seeing now are the fruits of a policy aimed at making sure it stays that way.

Contentions

[Like Jimmy Carter? How About Like Richard Nixon?](#)

by John Steele Gordon

Many people think that Barack Obama's presidency, with his inept, if not disastrous foreign policy, and his ineffectual or counterproductive domestic programs can be aptly compared with Jimmy Carter's. When Carter ran for reelection in 1980, it should be remembered, he carried fewer states than had Herbert Hoover in 1932.

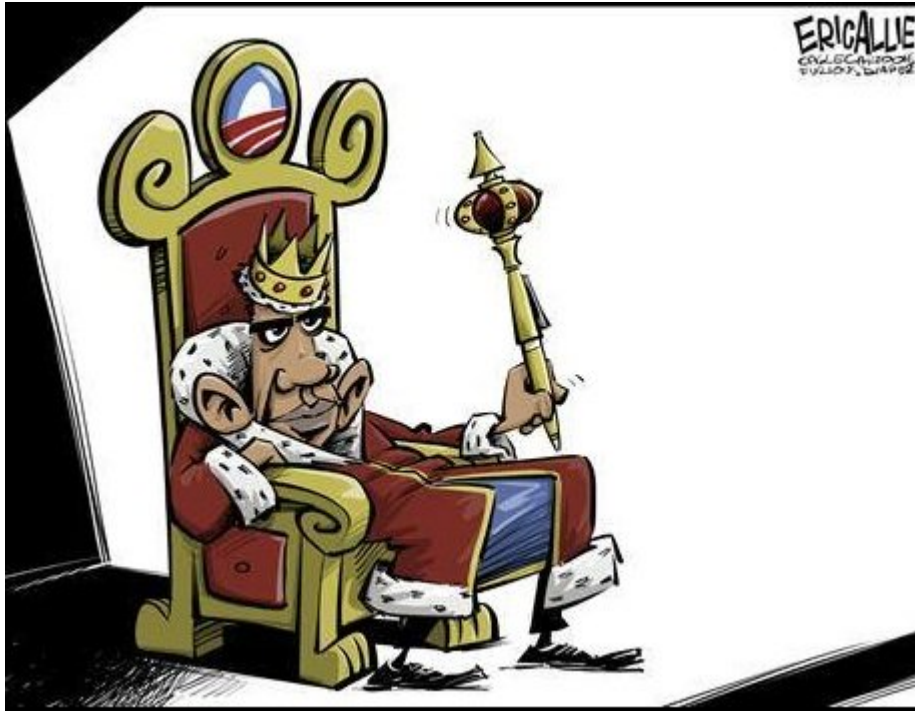
Now, it seems, it's worse. Today, House Ways and Means Chairman Dave Camp issued a [press release](#) announcing that the IRS claims to have lost all the emails that Lois Lerner sent to or received from government agencies, including the White House, between January 2009 and April 2011. They have only her internal emails (H/T Instapundit). How very convenient.

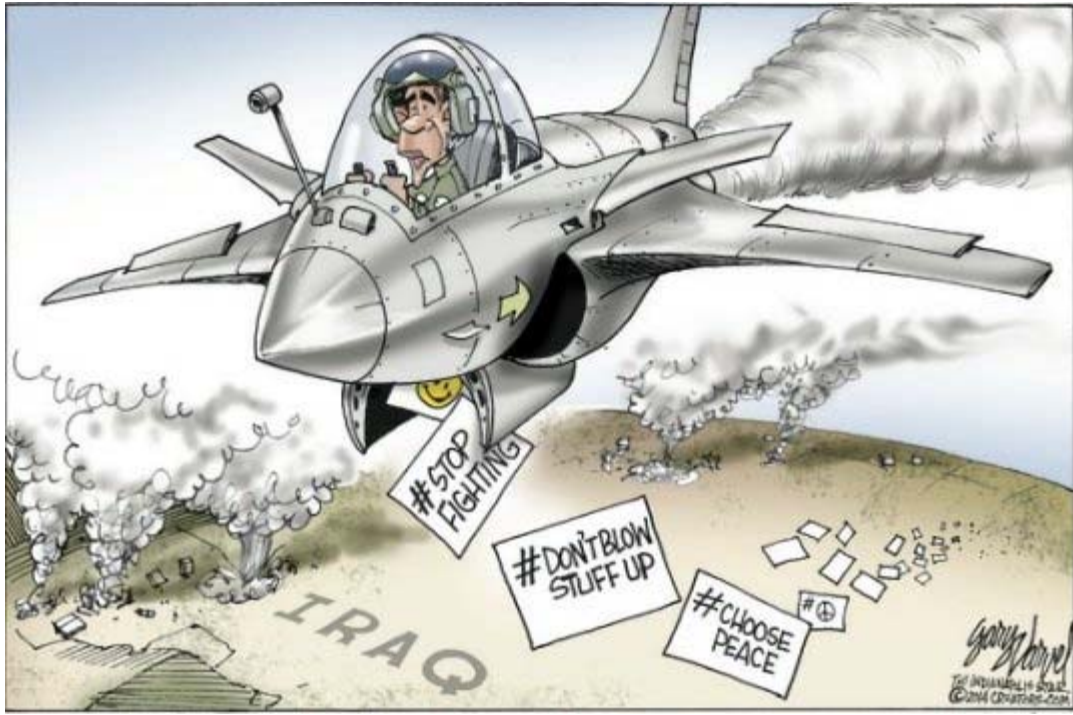
Camp, as you can well imagine, is not amused:

The fact that I am just learning about this, over a year into the investigation, is completely unacceptable and now calls into question the credibility of the IRS's response to Congressional inquiries. There needs to be an immediate investigation and forensic audit by Department of Justice as well as the Inspector General.

Just a short time ago, Commissioner Koskinen promised to produce all Lerner documents. It appears now that was an empty promise. Frankly, these are the critical years of the targeting of conservative groups that could explain who knew what when, and what, if any, coordination there was between agencies. Instead, because of this loss of documents, we are conveniently left to believe that Lois Lerner acted alone.

So it would seem that not only does the Obama administration exhibit the worst attributes of the Carter administration, it also exhibits the worst attributes of the Nixon administration. No one believed Nixon's explanation for the [infamous missing 18 1/2 minutes](#) of oval office tapes. I doubt many will believe that this is an accident too.







USS Ronald Reagan



USS Barack Obama

**JUST PAYING MY WAY
THROUGH OBEDIENCE SCHOOL**

