

# Why Many Muslims Hate the West

**Exclusive:** Many Americans and Westerners are baffled by the violent rage expressed by many Muslims, but the reasons for their anger are real, deriving from a “deep history” of anti-Islamic wars and colonial exploitation of the Middle East, as ex-U.S. diplomat William R. Polk describes.

By William R. Polk

The issue of terrorist attacks on America has been so politically sensitive that most commentators have simply wrapped themselves in the flag and closed their eyes and ears. Yet, even in fairy tales, ostriches were never saved by burying their heads in the sand. It is not a good defensive posture and it wouldn't be wise for real-life Americans to behave like make-believe ostriches.

If we want to be safe rather than sorry in the dangerous world we now inhabit, we need to be clear-headed, logical and informed. Those characteristics do not arise from anger or impulsiveness. They *can* arise only from sober assessment of causes and intelligent evaluation of possible actions. Achieving these qualities has become ever more necessary because we face an uncertain and increasingly complex future.

So in this first of two essays I will put together and consider what motivates terrorists, what they remember and what we have done; in Part 2 I'll look at what we *can* do and what we *cannot* do to achieve what I have called “affordable world security.”

I begin with a simple fact of human nature: human beings, like even puny and ill-armed animals, strike out when they perceive an attack or threat to their psychological, cultural or physical existence. Protecting what Freud called the “ego,” the intrinsic sense of being, is the ultimate form of self-defense. Whether the attack is real or not, intended or accidental, it is *perception* that triggers and shapes the response. The key word is “perceive.”

Legal or moral *justification*, while usually vigorously proclaimed, does not play a key initial role in determination of action. Justification is usually claimed by both sides. It is usually equivocal and can be “proven” only by a selective gathering of events. That selection, naturally, is governed by the mindset of each side.

Moreover, it is time sensitive: yesterday's attack may justify today's response, but what about events that occurred the day before yesterday? The clock starts at different points for each party and the flow of events cannot be “cherry-picked,” except for propaganda purposes.

If we wish to understand not to condone but to understand we need at least temporarily to put aside the issues of guilt and justification. Rather, we need to attempt to see whole patterns including the views of our opponents. This is not a simple procedure and is not undertaken with slogans in a sound bite. So, how to do it?

My answer is analogous to the procedure of physicians in their attempt to understand an illness taking a case history. That case history, by definition, cannot be just the events of the present or the immediate past. It requires digging into what I have called "deep history." Only if the past is "squeezed" to bring out angers, hopes, fears and perceptions from their origins and through their mutations can a sensible approach be made to designing successful policies to deal with the present and the future.

Otherwise, we are likely to make snap judgments that may exacerbate rather than solve the problem. That, I will argue, is what we are now doing with insurgency, guerrilla warfare and terrorism.

### **Hardest Step: Understanding**

The first step in moving toward understanding may be the hardest. To understand, we need to credit the fact that our opponents believe in the rightness of their cause, just as we believe in ours. It is puerile to ascribe to them trivial or inappropriate motivations.

The second step is to inform ourselves. As the great Chinese strategist Sun Tzu wrote nearly 3,000 years ago, "Know yourself. Know your enemy. A thousand battles, a thousand victories."

Despite his admonition, even such statesmen as Napoleon (in the Spanish guerrilla war against the French) and Churchill (in the Greek guerrilla war against the Germans first and then the British) denigrated their opponents.

As Churchill said of the *Andartes*, they were just "miserable Greek *banditti*." Churchill got away with his blindness because America bailed out Britain's Greek policy with the Truman Doctrine.

Napoleon was not so lucky. He lamented from his exile that the Spanish "little war," *la guerrilla*, "destroyed me. All the circumstances of my disasters are bound up in that fatal knot." Too late, Napoleon began to understand that the Spanish guerrillas were motivated by ideas similar to those that gave his own forces and his own people their unity and power.

Ideas mattered then. Impelled by them, farmers became guerrillas. Similar ideas today are turning tribesmen, farmers, fishermen, religious students, teachers,

shopkeepers and even lawyers into guerrillas, terrorists and suicide bombers. So what are the ideas?

The ideas that matter today usually grouped under the headings of nationalism and religion have long pedigrees. They began to take shape at the dawn of animal life on Earth. How this happened is now a fairly well-known story, but it was not a widely known story at the beginning of my own academic career and still may not be entirely familiar; so at the risk of duplication, allow me to touch on the main points.

To live in what Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century philosophers Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau called "the state of nature," early humans had to secure access to sources of food and water. So little groves of fruit and nut trees and patches of edible roots and legumes around a spring or pond became miniscule "states." Among our remote ancestors, such "states" were no larger than a day's walk across.

Living in them were miniature "nations," usually composed of less than a hundred individuals whose survival depended on their defending, feeding and caring for one another. The tie that bound them together was kinship. But, because kinship erodes as generations pass, clans tended to sunder and move apart. Over about two million years, this process of continuous alienation populated the planet. Alienation is deeply "programmed" in all of us.

Then, about 10,000 years ago, people found ways to intensify their sources of food and to improve their means of collecting it. Doing so enabled them to gather together in unprecedented numbers. Hunters and gatherers became herders and farmers. Having more, they were less able to scatter.

Little bands settled into villages that grew into towns and then into cities. As they settled together and grew more numerous, kinship no longer was immediately evident and no longer provided a satisfactory means of defining their relationship to one another.

We don't know exactly how it happened, but roughly 5,000 years ago, in various parts of the world, peoples independently discovered other sources of affinity. They became aware that even those they no longer recognized as cousins spoke in the same way, dressed in a similar fashion, ate the same foods and did not eat other foods and accepted as suitable shared customs and beliefs.

While they may still have thought of one another as somehow kindred, they began to enlarge that concept into the combination of custom and locality. Thus, they began to think of neighbors as surrogate kinsmen. As they grew closer together, they came to regard themselves as "the people" and to regard aliens as enemies

or as virtually “non-people.” In fact, many of the words we use as names of primitive societies actually mean “the people” while some of the names of other societies mean “the enemy.” Fear of the foreigner is deeply ingrained in us.

As I have argued, perhaps the single most compelling force in the evolution of our social, political, commercial and military institutions has been the tension inherent in having to live contiguous to those who do not share “our” customs: that is, the dilemma of being simultaneously both neighbors and strangers. [See my book *Neighbors and Strangers: The Fundamentals of Foreign Affairs* (2000) for the results of this tension in the origins of all aspects of world affairs.]

“Imprinted,” generation after generation, century after century of warfare, with fear of foreigners, and despite sporadic and feeble attempts to achieve a sense of a common humanity, we still have trouble comprehending those whom we regard as “not us.”

This worldview is obvious in all our foreign relations and in many aspects of our domestic affairs. It is crucial in trying to reach an understanding of what I have called violent politics. [See my book *Violent Politics* (2008)]. So how are we doing in that quest?

### **Affinities and Animosities**

Most of the books and articles I have read and practically all of the discussions I have heard, on insurgency, guerrilla warfare, terrorism and counterinsurgency, skip lightly over *motivation* to portray *events*. Many seem almost to revel in the ugliness of the conflict. This obviously sells books but hardly enlightens us.

While individual reporters are often very good at describing events, they rarely offer much help in guiding us to an understanding of causes. The media does not have much time for analysis. But their reports at least make clear that the situation we face has not improved and in many aspects is getting more dangerous.

What we read in the press is not much improved by the advice offered to governments by “think tanks.” Not surprisingly, the available reportage and advice has led to a dead end. We, the French, the British, the Russians reached that dead end in Afghanistan. The Chinese in Tibet and Central Asia are also approaching it.

That is where the governments of all the major powers now find themselves. Despite huge expenditures of blood and money, the rich “North” has not been successful in subduing conflict in the poor “South.” Nor, do intelligence and security services believe we can prevent attacks from the “South” on our own

homeland.

The sequence appears unending: insurgents hit; dominant powers respond; they respond; we respond; they re-respond And warfare becomes not only everlasting but ever more brutal and ugly.

As the great Nineteenth Century French student of war, Antoine-Henri Jomini, wrote on what he called "wars of opinion," such wars "enlist the worst passions [of whole populations and] become vindictive, cruel and terrible" Attacks and reprisal without restraint become virtually inevitable. [See: *The Art of War (Précis de l'art de la guerre)*, which was first published in English in 1862 and was used as a textbook at West Point.]

In these circumstances, trying to suppress guerrilla warfare and terrorism by using lethal force has proved to have an effect similar to trying to douse a fire with gasoline. So what are the circumstances? What are Jomini's "wars of opinion?"

A careful reading of history shows that what Jomini called wars of opinion are actions that whole societies come to believe aim at destroying not only their governments and institutions what is now called "regime change" but also their way of life and beliefs.

Feeling embattled, both sides believe themselves to be the victims; neither side is willing to understand, much less to excuse, the other. "Common ground" is demarcated by fear and hatred. "War" is transmuted from an issue one partly governed by law between governments into a deeper, unbridled, even primordial conflict among peoples.

And, as incident follows horrifying incident, this "opinion" comes to be shared ever more widely by both insurgents and counterinsurgents. Each side, virtually each person, comes to think of his opponent as intrinsically evil and himself as justified in taking any action, adopting any tactic, no matter how brutal or indiscriminate that is judged to be effective.

That cycle of hate, as I will illustrate is where we are today in the clash between "us," the established nation-states of the "North," and the Muslim insurgents of the "South." (Ironically, when Samuel Huntington wrote "The Clash of Civilizations," it was a gross simplification, but, inspired by it, governments have helped to turn the interpretation into reality.)

This conflict is not solely a matter of contemporary "opinion." Rather there are deep and still vivid indeed constantly renewed memories that shape actions and beliefs today.

As with the physician's case history, knowing and understanding them is crucial to our interpretation of our current dilemma and our possible choices of what to do about it. To elucidate them, I will touch on key elements in our past relationship that form the backdrop to the present. I begin where both insurgents and counterinsurgents begin, with religion.

### **Religious Certainty**

Islam is the third and most recently announced of the great monotheistic religions, along with Judaism and Christianity. Each religion claims a direct and essentially unique relationship to the Divinity, but to a secular historian, the relationships among the three are obvious.

Judaism and Islam are particularly close and share many beliefs and customs. As the Quran defines Islam, it is "the religion of Abraham" from whose "true faith" Muslims believe the Jews strayed; to the contrary, Jews have always regarded Islam as an imperfect attempt to copy Judaism.

Islam and Christianity are less similar. Islam views Jesus as a prophet with a special relationship to God but holds that treating Jesus as "the son of God" or as a god himself is to commit the mortal sin of polytheism (Arabic: *shirk*). As viewed by the Christian Church Muslim denial is sacrilege. Even worse in Christian eyes was Judaism's total rejection of Jesus.

So, despite or even because of their similarities, the three religions regarded one another as perversions. Each saw the very existence of the others as a sin against the true God-ordained faith which it alone held.

The attitude of each was partly shaped by geography and history. Christian Byzantium (East Rome) was the established world power defending against Islam. As the Islamic Caliphate expanded, conquering much of the Byzantine empire and all of the Sasanian Persian empire, it acquired resident Christian, Zoroastrian and Jewish communities. (And, ultimately, it acquired whole societies of Hindus whose polytheism it gradually came to ignore.)

Except in the heat of warfare, Islam incorporated these peoples into its system but left them free to practice their religions, engage in their distinctive diet and dress, enforce their own laws and customs and to govern themselves under their own authorities. This pattern of autonomous "nationhood," (Arabic/Turkish: *millet*) grew out of the pagan Arab tribal custom of granting hospitality to a "protected stranger," (Arabic: *jar*).

Both Christians and Jews generally lived securely in communities within Muslim states whereas both Jews and Muslims were always at risk and often persecuted, occasionally driven away or even slaughtered in Christian states.

Over centuries many Christians and Jews converted to Islam. That Islam forcibly converted them is a myth; actually, the Islamic states were keen that the conquered peoples remain non-Muslim because that status required them to pay an extra tax.

As Persian Zoroastrians converted, they continued to stress their non-Arab identity by a distinctive interpretation of Islam, Shiism. The development of Shiism within Islam, like Protestantism within Christianity, is complex but in part both were determined by ethnicity. The bitter relationships between Sunnism and Shiism today are reminiscent of the religious wars in early modern Europe. (And, as poorer Hindus converted to Islam, they escaped the tyranny of the caste system, exchanging the virtual slavery of being an "untouchable" (*achuta* or *dalit*) for the "brotherhood" (*ikhwaniya*) that is one of the most attractive aspects of Islam.) Historically, Islam has been the most tolerant of the three religions.

Judaism began, as we know from the Old Testament, as a far more militant and ruthless conqueror of the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. It offered no means for non-Jews to achieve safety comparable to the status of protected community in Islam: its God, Yahweh, authorized the massacre of all who stood in the way of the Jewish nation.

It was the Roman Empire that pacified the Jewish nation. Breaking out of Israel, Jews became among the most civilized and cosmopolitan of the Romans. They drew back from militarism and, although they continued to convert distant peoples in Africa, Asia and Europe, they became politically passive. For that they have paid a terrible price. It was this tradition of passivity against which Zionists revolted and returned Judaism to militarism.

Christianity has been generally intolerant and violent in its relationship with both Jews and Muslims. Christians forced European Jews into ghettos, made them wear distinctive dress and subjected them to all sorts of indignities and dangers. The Crusades began with attacks on Jews resident in Europe.

Except in what became Spain, which was partly Muslim for about 700 years, and areas of southern Italy and France, Muslims were effectively banned from Europe. Whereas Jews and Christians established trading posts through the Islamic world, Muslims hardly ever dared visit Europe and until the rise of the Ottoman empire in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth centuries none became residents. [One of the great contributions to medieval history is the multivolume portrayal of the Jewish communities in the Mediterranean and particularly in Egypt by S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (1989)]

Wars between Christians and Muslims began during the lifetime of the Prophet

Muhammad. This was partly because Islam was founded on the frontier of the great Christian empire of Byzantium. The first Christian-Muslim clash was in 636 AD. Wars have occurred intermittently ever since.

In campaign after campaign, European Christians fought Spanish, North African, Middle Eastern, Balkan and Central Asian Muslims. The campaigns of what we think of as *the Crusades* lasted 176 years from 1096 to 1272. Among the victims were both European Jewish communities (the First Crusade started with an attack on them) and resident Christians in Palestine (who were burned to death in their Jerusalem church by the Crusaders when they finally reached Jerusalem).

Struggle became endemic in more modern times. And the nature of the conflict was partly transfigured from religion to imperialism. The record is both clear and asymmetrical: it was the Christian "North" that attacked the Muslim "South." Here briefly are some of the key events:

### **The Wars on Islam**

Portugal and Spain continued their moves against the "Moors" into Africa and then on to India while Russian tsars beginning with Ivan the Terrible moved south to crush kingdom after Muslim kingdom in Central Asia.

By the end of the Eighteenth Century, the French and the British had gained overwhelming military, commercial and organizational advantage. For them, as for the Russians, Muslim India was the ultimate prize. But the road to India was blocked by Muslim states that had to be subdued.

Relatively speaking these states lagged far behind Europe. Partly blinded by their vision of their past, the Muslim rulers and their medieval armies almost literally did not know what hit them. On the east, Peter the Great and Catherine defeated the horsemen of Asia one after another. The Russians were matched by the French on the west.

In one of the most colorful battles of all time, the gloriously dressed and splendidly mounted Mamluk horsemen of Egypt charged Napoleon's artillery. They were not only slaughtered but humiliated. That was to be the fate of the Muslims in the centuries to follow.

In India, Britain first conquered Bengal and then set about destroying the great Mughal Empire. Already intent on blocking Russian expansion, the British then pushed toward Central Asia and the Middle East. They fought Afghan Muslims along the "Northwest Frontier" for generations; took over and ruled Egypt; defeated the Muslim revivalist movement, the *Mahdiah*, in the Sudan; established hegemony in the Persian Gulf; dominated Iran; and ultimately acquired control over what became Iraq, Jordan and Palestine.



Some of these conquests were particularly violent: in Afghanistan, the British killed hundreds of thousands of Afghans (but lost a whole army in one of its three wars), and in Iraq, the British wiped out Arab tribesmen with poison gas. Only on the "Northwest Frontier" was warfare still at least partly a Great Game.

For the Italians, war was no game; in Libya it became genocide. They tried to wipe out not only the Islamic revival movement, the *Sanusiyah*, but also the entire tribal population. Everywhere, the colonial campaigns were ugly.

"Subduing the natives," as the Dutch did in their wars in Indonesia were brutal affairs. They reached the nadir in Congo where the Belgians killed between 10 and 15 million Africans about twice the number of Jews killed by the Nazis in the Holocaust engaged in systematic rape, cut off the hands or feet of unproductive natives and stripped Congo of its raw materials.

[While these horrible crimes were not attributable to Americans, natives both there and throughout the colonial world tended to group Americans with Europeans as "whites" so we have been damned by association. On the Congo see Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (1997). A summary was published by Andrew Osborn, "Belgium confronts its colonial demons," *The Guardian*, July 18, 2002. Osborn points out that the scale of massacre was almost double that of the Holocaust yet Belgium has made neither apology nor restitution.]

Meanwhile, the French conquered North, West and Central Africa, killing hundreds of thousands of Muslims and destroying their social and religious organizations. The French invaded and brutally suppressed the people of Algeria, stealing their lands.

Having invaded Syria, they twice bombarded Damascus when the Syrians tried to prove that Europeans were wrong that they were "not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world"

The Covenant of the League of Nations proclaimed a more polite version of "the White Man's burden," the "sacred trust of civilization." France espoused the words but violated them in deeds.

The European thrusts into the "Muslim world" were combinations of religious, nationalist, colonial and imperialist ventures. They were often brutal, frequently nearly continuous and uniformly destructive of civic and religious institutions.

Except for the Philippines, these were not American wars, but the American role in the slave trade that bought millions of Africans to America is now being reevaluated. No one knows much about the enslaved peoples of Africa, but certainly a large portion of them were Muslims.

In short, Muslim experience mainly with Europeans but also to a lesser extent with Americans has been a key element in their attitude toward the white, Christian “North.”

Even if we, the Northerners, choose to ignore the history of our relationship, the descendants of the victims will not. Muslims, like Jews, increasingly probe into and publicize their holocaust. The memory of the “deep past” already plays a significant role in the growth of Muslim sentiment toward the Christian North. It will play an important role in international affairs far into the future. [Further, as Graham Fuller pointed out, “there are a dozen good reasons why there is bad blood between the West and the Middle East today, without any reference to Islam or to religion.”]

Memory of the “deep past” is a cause in the growth of Muslim hostility today in such movements as the Taliban, Al Qaeda, various movements of *Salafiyah* and more recently, the Islamic State. [*Salafiyah* is a complex doctrine and has been generally misunderstood: It is roughly comparable to the Puritan movement in Protestant Christianity. That is, it sought to gain strength and purity, and so to advance, by returning to the “pure” religion at its origin. I have discussed it in detail in my 2013 essay.]

But, one may object, that is all so far in the past that it surely can be put aside. To consider that opinion, look briefly at the more recent past. What has been the recent relationship of the Christian “North” and the Muslim “South.”

### **The Modern Era of Warfare**

Dividing history into periods is useful for analysis, but it is a simplification. For the vast majority of the “Southern” people there was no new era; they continued to live as their parents and grandparents had lived. More rapidly and more nimbly, their rulers often tried to copy the drill, the uniforms and the weapons of the European invaders. This military modernization was particularly marked in Egypt under Mehmet Ali Pasha and in the Ottoman Empire under Sultans Selim III and Mahmud II. They thought that if they looked modern, they would be strong.

Deeply disturbed by change but growing aware of their weakness, some religious leaders tried to gain strength by going back to draw on their heritage. None of these activities slowed Western penetration.

The Industrial Revolution had given the West irresistible power. Handicraft industries collapsed before cheap imported goods. Governments became enmeshed in debt they hardly understood. Food crops were replaced by cotton for export. Intermediaries proliferated. Traditional patterns of land ownership were

overturned by changes that converted Indian, Iraqi, Palestinian and Egyptian farmers into serfs.

Even styles in dress changed so the turban gave way to the Fez. Local authorities from Morocco to Indonesia were replaced or became puppets of the new, European-imposed order.

Among the small elite, nationalism was espoused as it had been in Italy, Greece, Poland, Germany and France as the guide to liberty and dignity. It was thought to be the "secret" of Western power. For many younger Arabs, Caucasians and Indian Muslims, the "Young Turks" became role models.

Then, encouraged by the proclamations of the First and Second World Wars, nationalist movements gained momentum. Those were heady days of manifestos, marches and the first real political parties. A new day seemed to have dawned. And, step by step, nationalism itself was refined toward its apex, secular Baathism.

But, along the way many of those who protested, marched and organized would become willing agents of the European rulers or their native agents. After what were often sharp lessons of the danger of speaking truth to power, most leaders quickly traded youthful exuberance for adult calculation. This transition was made easy and financially attractive by the Western-installed or Western-tolerated monarchs of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Libya and Morocco.

For both reformers and opportunists the issue of preservation of the cultural values of what had come to seem an archaic society became irrelevant. Soon it was overshadowed by the great new challenge of Communism, the dangers of resurgent Israel and the heady opportunities of the Cold War.

It was the Cold War that brought the United States into the Middle East. Taking over from Britain first in Greece and then generally throughout Africa and Asia, America assumed Britain's role but played it with far more vigor and money and far less subtlety and skill.

Using the "façade rulers" whom the British had cultivated or creating new proxy rulers through subversion, bribery and threat became the strategy of the Dwight Eisenhower-John Foster Dulles-Allen Dulles period. Coups were organized and carried out in Iran, Iraq and Syria and help was given to prevent them in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Morocco. Seeing these events, many of the next generation redirected their anger from Britain and France to America.

The best known action of America was the 1953 overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadegh, an action proposed by the British to enable them to regain control of Iranian oil. Followed by the cooption of the Shah, the coup

may be taken as the starting point for the Muslim reaction against America.

But already four years before in 1949, the CIA had engineered a coup d'État in Syria. In testimony in the U.S. Senate, it was shown to have tried to murder various Middle Eastern leaders including Prime Minister Qasim of Iraq and President Nasser of Egypt. A few years later in 1980, it helped to make a military coup in Turkey.

In the following years, America has intervened overtly or threatened invasion almost everywhere in the Middle East and parts of Africa. Additionally, it has imposed "crippling sanctions" that have impoverished and infuriated large numbers of people.

Arab, Pakistani, Kashmiri, Somali, Berber and other Muslim people, often led by secular rulers, have themselves engaged in a remarkable series of ugly violations of civil liberties, blunders and wars during this period. One after another, rulers have adopted the security state model: militarism without compensating civic institutions.

Generally speaking except for the oil-rich states, they have kept their people quiet by giving them little bread but many circuses. As a group the leaders and their cronies are known for their greed, corruption and brutality. Their records of torture and imprisonment are among the worst in the world. To the "man in the street," there is little to distinguish the local tyrant from the foreign ruler.

In two crucial aspects, the Muslim states still suffer from the aftermath of imperialism: first, most of the governments have not grown from their own social "soil" but from foreign transplants. Consequently, civic institutions have rarely taken root.

Parliaments, law courts and the media remain, as they were under imperialism, tools in the hands of rulers. Military and security forces, the key legacy of foreign rule and the result more recently of subsidy and training, are the most often the only efficient, mobile and powerful organizations. They form autonomous states within nominal states.

A second heritage of the imperial period is disunity. Domestically, the older tradition of brotherhood (*ikhwaniyah*) and mutual responsibility has been largely replaced by individualism and selfishness. Those who can take, take; few any longer honor the Islamic obligation of tithe (Arabic: *zakat*). Enrichment by any means is avidly sought: "the Devil take the hindmost."

As among individuals so among societies, there is little or no sense of unity. While rulers join interstate organizations and loudly proclaim their unity, they often bitterly and covertly work against what they publicly identify as common

causes. Rulers connive in the overthrow of their peers and quietly make deals behind their backs.

This also is largely a heritage of imperialism. Each European state pulled its colonial elite into its own educational system. I observed this when, in 1953, the Rockefeller Foundation convened a meeting of the outstanding Arab intellectuals.

So "embedded" were they in the cultures of their former masters that some were comfortable only in French, others in English, one in Italian while none was able to express himself satisfactorily in standard Arabic. What was evident in language spilled over into law, politics, economics and bureaucratic organization.

The lack of unity has, of course, been heightened by subversion, espionage and foreign manipulation. Individuals have learned not to trust one another. And this sense of wariness has been heightened by the almost continuous wars with Israel and by the common belief that rulers and whole governments covertly collude with Israel. (In wars and other forms of conflict the more recent include 1948-1949, 1956, 1967, 1969-1970, 1973, 1982, 1982 1996, 2008, 2012 and 2014.)

Israeli intelligence operatives have been able to profit from this lack of cohesion. For instance, in 1970, I was asked by the chief of the office of the Israeli Prime Minister to negotiate a cease-fire on the Suez Canal with President Nasser of Egypt. To reassure me, the Israeli official casually mentioned that the Israelis knew Nasser's opinion of me. There and elsewhere, Israeli intelligence had an often astonishing access to intimate information.

### **Failing the People**

The bottom line is that a significant portion of Muslims and particularly of Arab Muslims believes that their governments have failed their peoples; they have not created institutions that are regarded as constructive, representative and honest; they have not created a sense of dignity which was their repeatedly proclaimed quest; they are generally believed to be corrupt, brutal and tyrannical.

Many believe that the governments we see today are only slightly veiled continuations of imperialism, installed either or both to protect such Western interests as oil, to underwrite American policy toward Israel or to bring about the complete subjugation of Islam. Many also would say that the few local rulers who tried to carry out an independent policy were deposed by force.

Nasser, Saddam and Gaddafi dictators as they certainly were were engaged in

efforts to create a modern, progressive and self-sufficient society and to uplift their peoples. However unsavory they were politically, they did bring education, better health and security. We didn't like them. We tried to kill Nasser and did kill Saddam and Gaddafi.

Nationalism and what was called "Arab Socialism" failed. All that was left was religion. To the forces now operating in the name of Islam, I will turn in the next essay.

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## Mideast Alliances Shift Again

Like shifting desert sands, the volatile Middle East is going through a new, though subtle, realignment of adversaries and allies, with Turkey's political tensions shaking up one area while Saudi Arabia makes moves of its own, as recounted by ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Some recent policy decisions by Middle Eastern governments have the potential to shake up regional alignments, or what are widely perceived to be alignments. In the near term this will have little to do with the Iran nuclear agreement, despite the attention the agreement is getting at the moment. That accord will not lead to realignments as great as its opponents fear, and its larger impact on regional diplomacy will be gradual and only slightly apparent in the near term.

The agreement by the Turkish government to cooperate more actively than previously with the United States in combating the so-called Islamic State or ISIS in northern Syria represents a more immediate shaking up.

The recent suicide bombing by an ISIS member that killed 32 victims in a Turkish town is one of the immediate precipitants of the Turkish decision, but the thinking behind the decision is more complicated than that. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan seems at least as interested in ensuring that Kurdish rebels do

not establish themselves in the patch of land that is the focus of the U.S.-Turkish agreement as that ISIS not establish itself there.

These priorities are demonstrated by Turkish military operations since the agreement was announced, which have included strikes against Kurdish targets as well as ISIS ones. To the extent that the newest twist in Turkish policy involves a partial lessening of what has been another Turkish priority, which is the toppling of Bashar al-Assad, the twist represents a reversal of sorts. But Erdogan's determination in recent times to shove out Assad is itself a reversal of what had been years of cordial relations between Turkey and the Assad regime.

Domestic politics have much to do with the Turkish gyrations. The failure of Erdogan's AK party (AKP) to win a parliamentary majority in recent elections, due mainly to the success of a liberal Kurdish-dominated party, is directly related to the latest twist in Turkish policy toward the Kurds. AKP is looking for support in forming a governing coalition from a nationalist party opposed to political openings to the Kurds. Thus Erdogan has effectively closed his own earlier opening, another reversal of a reversal.

Domestic political change is also involved in recent policy revisions by another major regional state, Saudi Arabia, that are likely to have even greater consequences for regional alignments. The assumption of the Saudi throne by King Salman and the accretion of power by his young son have been associated especially with a more aggressive stance in the neighborhood, especially prosecution of the war in Yemen.

But another significant change since the transition from Abdullah to Salman has been a rapprochement with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Brotherhood's Palestinian offshoot, Hamas, after years of strong Saudi opposition to the Brotherhood. The Saudis recently received a visit from Hamas political chief Khaled Meshaal, although they sought to downplay the significance of it.

The improvement of relations with Hamas was made possible partly by the estrangement between Hamas and the Assad regime in Syria. The conventional wisdom about the Saudi overture to Hamas is that this is part of an effort to displace Iranian influence and to bolster Sunni unity with regard to conflicts such as the one in Yemen.

The conventional wisdom may be largely correct with regard to Saudi objectives, but the further consequences may not be what the Saudis intend. A softened posture toward the Brotherhood and a partnership with Hamas puts the Saudis on a possible collision course with both the Egypt of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Israel, for whom bashing of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas have been dominant features of their respective policies.

Confrontations are likely to arise that will expose the fragility and artificiality of what is commonly described as an “alliance” between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and the supposed convergence of interests between Saudi Arabia and Israel with respect to Iran. Saudi Arabia and al-Sisi’s Egypt have almost nothing in common beyond being Sunni and Arab, and Saudi Arabia and Israel have nothing in common besides being states defined largely in terms of a specific (but different in each case) religion.

The next major armed conflict in the Gaza Strip, and barring a major change in Israeli policy, this is a matter of *when* rather than *if*, would be the sort of confrontation that would lay these realities bare.

Looking beyond the immediate ripple effects of current diplomatic doings and thinking about farther-reaching ripples, it is not at all crazy to suggest, as Leon Hadar has, that Israel’s best long-term interests lie in the direction of developing (or rather, recalling the days of the shah, redeveloping) a partnership with Iran.

For the time being the invective and enmity that flow in both directions of that relationship make such a development seem out of reach, but the geopolitical considerations that argue for it are still there. The same can be said of Israel’s relations with Turkey, the other major non-Arab power in the region.

The chief implication for U.S. policy is to be aware of how fragile and ephemeral putative alliances and alignments in this region can be, to realize that domestic political changes far short of revolution or regime change can have major effects on those alignments, and to be nimble and to avoid getting wedded to what is fragile and ephemeral.

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest’s Web site. Reprinted with author’s permission.)**

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## Obama’s Egypt Policy Breeds Terrorism

**Exclusive:** President Obama has gotten in line behind the Israeli-Saudi preference in Egypt for the brutal dictatorship of Gen. al-Sisi over the elected (but now deposed) Muslim Brotherhood government of President Morsi, a posture so shocking that even some U.S. neocons object, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall



Like a stopped clock, even rabid neoconservatives can be right once in a while. A good case in point is a recent open letter to Secretary of State John Kerry, signed by such neocon luminaries as Robert Kagan, Elliott Abrams, Reuel Gerecht and Ellen Bork, calling on the Obama administration to “press the Government of Egypt to end its campaign of indiscriminate repression in order to advance a more effective strategy for countering violent extremism.”

The Obama administration, which helped blow up Libya and Syria in the name of human rights, has resumed arms shipments to the military regime of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, which seized power from a democratically elected government in 2013. Washington’s double standard not only undercuts U.S. credibility internationally, it also jeopardizes important security interests in the region.

As the letter from the “Bipartisan Working Group on Egypt” rightly warns, “State violence, several thousand killed during street demonstrations, tens of thousands of political prisoners, hundreds of documented cases of torture or forced disappearance, sexual assault of detainees or family members, reported collective punishment of Sinai communities possibly with weapons provided through U.S. military aid, is creating more incentives for Egyptians to join militant groups.”

The letter adds, “By carrying out a campaign of repression and human rights abuses that is unprecedented in the country’s modern history, and by closing off all avenues of peaceful expression of dissent through politics, civil society, or media, Al-Sisi is stoking the very fires he says he wants to extinguish.”

Just three days before the group sent its letter to Kerry, Human Rights Watch reported that Egyptian security forces, operating with “nearly absolute impunity,” have killed hundreds of dissidents in recent months, detained more than 40,000 suspects, and “forcibly disappeared” dozens of people. University students in particular have been targeted for mystery disappearances and killings.

The government has also jailed some 18 journalists for publishing reports that conflict with government-approved messages. Its massacre of roughly 1,000 protesters in Cairo in August 2013 ranks as one of the worst single-day atrocities in the region.

Government repression is growing more, not less, severe with time. President al-Sisi recently issued an executive decree giving himself the power to fire officials at independent state institutions. The government is also fast-tracking legislation to further crack down on press freedoms, including, for example, heavy fines for contradicting official statements on terrorist attacks. Human rights organizations have termed it “a blatant violation of the

constitution.” The executive director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information said the proposed law “turns journalists into mere conveyors of the state’s official data.”

Yet the tepid response of Kerry’s State Department is to endorse Egypt’s “fight against terrorism,” while expressing the “hope” that the final version of Egypt’s new counterterrorism law will respect “individual rights.” The New York Times rightly called the statement “laughable.”

It is, however, fully in keeping with the Obama administration’s “see-no-evil” policy toward Egypt of late. During a visit to Cairo last year, Kerry praised al-Sisi for expressing “‘a very strong sense of his commitment to human rights.” Then, in December, the United States delivered 10 Apache helicopters to support Egypt’s counterterrorism efforts. Finally, this March, the Obama administration lifted its partial freeze on military aid to Egypt, enacted in October 2013 to encourage movement toward free and fair elections in the country.

When Egypt started buying arms from France and negotiating with Russia, the administration suddenly decided that resuming its full \$1.3 billion in annual military aid was “in U.S. national security interests.” That finding came despite the administration’s admission this June that “the overall trajectory for rights and democracy has been negative,” including “arbitrary and unlawful killings” and repressive new laws and executive initiatives that “undermine prospects for democratic governance.”

One factor in the administration’s calculus is its concern over rising numbers of Islamist terrorist attacks within Egypt. They include numerous guerrilla operations by the Egyptian affiliate of the Islamic State (Wilayat Sinai) and, more worrisome, the devastating car bombing of the Italian consulate in downtown Cairo this month. A campaign of urban terrorism could devastate the country’s economy and turn Egypt into a much greater crisis than Syria.

But as numerous human rights activists warn, Egyptian repression has become the most effective recruiting tool for anti-government extremists. The Muslim Brotherhood’s longstanding doctrine of peaceful political change has lost credibility with young activists, who refuse to submit passively to arrest and torture at the hands of state security forces.

Reflecting pressure from within its ranks, the powerful Islamic movement declared in late January, “We are at the beginning of a new phase where we summon our strength and evoke the meaning of jihad. . . [We] prepare ourselves, our wives, our sons and daughters, and whoever follows our path for relentless jihad where we ask for martyrdom.”

As one student of Egypt's Islamists notes, "the matter has yet to be settled. Given the Brotherhood's long history of non-violence, many members don't find it easy to accept it now even in response to the Sisi regime's clampdown. But the fear of losing ground is occupying the minds of Brotherhood leaders. The way many Brotherhood leaders are framing this is that if there is a war between society and the state, and if the society has taken a stance, the Muslim Brotherhood should not hinder society's fight for freedom."

Last year, Robert Kagan became one of the first neoconservatives to break with conservatives in Congress, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Netanyahu regime to warn about prospects for "a new Egyptian jihadist movement brought into existence by the military's crackdown."

"To Israel, which has never supported democracy anywhere in the Middle East except Israel, the presence of a brutal military dictatorship bent on the extermination of Islamism is not only tolerable but desirable," Kagan wrote. But "In Egypt, U.S. interests and Israel's perceptions of its own interests sharply diverge. If one believes that any hope for moderation in the Arab world requires finding moderate voices not only among secularists but also among Islamists, America's current strategy in Egypt is producing the opposite result."

Kagan's pithy observations remain as true today as they were then. The advice that he and others in the Working Group on Egypt sent to Kerry last week, urging him to stop whitewashing Egypt's regime and instead to pressure it to meet international human rights commitments and promote national reconciliation, is not simply humane but the wisest possible strategic counsel.

**Jonathan Marshall is an independent researcher living in San Anselmo, California. Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were "Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions"; "Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran"; "Saudi Cash Wins France's Favor"; "The Saudis' Hurt Feelings"; "Saudi Arabia's Nuclear Bluster"; "The US Hand in the Syrian Mess"; and "Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil War." ]**

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## Egypt's Descent into Despotism

Egypt's brief experiment with democracy was crushed by internal and external forces alarmed by a populist Islamic government. With the backing of Israel, Saudi Arabia and others, a brutal military despotism took over and consolidated power, but it shouldn't be called a government, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Military officers often take over countries, but only a fool would call the result a government. Governments do not have to be democratic, but they do have to be rule-based. The rules can come in the form of generic laws or customs, but in all cases they have to be promulgated, that is, be publicly set forth.

In addition, obedience to the rules has to rest on something more than fear. If whatever system is running the show is subject to the whim of an individual or group of individuals, or operates through rules known only to the police, or relies mostly on terror, it is not a true government. It is despotism of some sort. Most instances of military rule fit the description of despotism. Speaking of such regimes as governments is just so much nonsense.

By the way, dictionary definitions of government are usually inadequate, restricting themselves to vague statements like "a particular system used to control a country." If the mafia took over Italy, would you understand their form of control as government? There has been progress over the years as to what really constitutes a government, and the rule of the condottieri no longer fits.

Historically the United States and the politicians who create its foreign policy do not bother with such distinctions. Often they seem to prefer despotisms. Be it for ideological or economic reasons, the U.S. has indulged in regime change for almost 200 years, and a good number of times the beneficiaries of such change are the local military bosses.

This history has had a cumulative effect on U.S. credibility: today, when Washington proclaims its mission is to bring democratic government to an otherwise benighted world, almost no one outside of the USA believes it. This is a fact never mentioned by the mainstream American media.

### **The Case of Egypt**

An example of a current military despotism that has been, and is now again, the recipient of U.S. military largesse is the one in Egypt. The military has run things in Egypt since 1952, when a group of officers overthrew King Farouk and emasculated the Egyptian parliament. That situation lasted until 2011, when a popular revolt forced the resignation of Hosni Mubarak, an air force officer who had, for over 30 years, masqueraded as Egypt's "fourth president."

Mubarak's fall was followed by a brief hiatus of democracy. During this time the Egyptian people actually engaged in a relatively free and fair election in which they selected a legitimate president in the person of Mohamed Morsi. The fact that Morsi was a religious Muslim did not make his election any less legitimate, though it did present those who did not vote for him with a choice:

Would they accept an elected government led by a devout Muslim, with the implied possibility of altering its orientation through future elections, or would they reject the electoral results and revert back to military despotism, with the explicit awareness that changing that form of rule would require another popular revolution? We now know that a good number of those who did not vote for Morsi chose to return to military control.

That sizable minority certainly has gotten what they wished for. Egypt is now back under the control of a military dictatorship, this time led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, a "field marshal" who became the "sixth president" of Egypt by pulling off a coup in 2013, followed by a rigged national election.

What have "President" el-Sisi and his lieutenants been busy doing since putting aside their uniforms for tailored suits? Here is a list of items based on recent news reports as well as anonymously released recordings, which (shades of Richard Nixon) the Egyptian strongmen were at once arrogant and stupid enough to make.

–They have been busy manipulating the Egyptian news media so as to construct a cult of personality in which el-Sisi is promoted as a heroic figure "carrying the responsibility of the country in an existential crisis." The media have been instructed to describe el-Sisi as a "brave, special, free and patriotic Egyptian." To criticize him is to "slander this beautiful thing we have found in our lives." One can't help wonder who dreamt up this terminology.

–They have been busy funneling money into special accounts controlled by the military. It is of particular interest that one of these accounts is named the "Tamarrod" account. Tamarrod was the name of a supposedly independent secular and "democratic" youth movement that was very active in calling for the removal of Mohamed Morsi. This raises the question of whether significant elements of Egypt's so-called democratic movement opposing Morsi were no more than fronts funded and manipulated by the military.

–They have been busy manipulating the courts and legal system. This should come as no surprise, because at least since Mubarak's time the Egyptian courts have been stacked with supporters of military rule. The elected Morsi government ran headlong into a so-called legal barrier when almost everything it attempted was overruled by a court system loyal to the deposed Mubarak dictatorship. Subsequently one of the charges being brought against Morsi by the restored military despotism is "insulting the judiciary."

–They have been busy destroying any person or group who would oppose them, including the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been declared "a terrorist organization." For the Egyptian military to call the Muslim Brothers terrorists

is like Israel calling the Palestinians terrorists. At the very least it is an example of projecting onto your foes tactics that you yourself practice.

The el-Sisi cabal has also imprisoned and tried Mr. Morsi on a long list of manufactured charges, some of which may result in his execution. Last but not least, members of the truly independent secular democratic movement have been harassed and imprisoned.

—And, of course, el-Sisi, this “beautiful thing” that has come into the lives of all Egyptians, has allied with Israel to oppose Palestinian resistance to occupation. As a result he and his cabal are now actively complicit in the ruination of every Palestinian trapped in Gaza.

There are many names you can give the present nature of rule in Egypt. You can call it a dictatorship, a despotism, a tyranny, a garrison state, unlimited rule, or even a reign of terror carried on by thugs in suits. All of these would be relatively accurate.

What you can't call it is a government. To do so would slander the centuries-long struggle against all forms of despotism that have taken place both in the West and in the East. And, even more to the point, it would slander all those Egyptians who have, at great personal risk, stayed loyal to the goal of democracy for their country.

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## Saudi Cash Wins France's Favor

Saudi Arabia wields enormous influence in the West not only because of its oil power but also its ability to lavish billions of dollars or euros on sophisticated weapons systems, a bonanza of cash that has turned the head of French President Hollande, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Why did French President François Hollande fly into Riyadh this week to show support for Saudi Arabia's bloody attacks on South Yemen and to reassure King Salman that Paris will demand tough terms in any nuclear deal with Iran? It's the same reason Willy Sutton robbed banks: that's where the money is.

Last year Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates spent more than \$100 billion on weapons. That's real money, even to a country as big as France.

President Hollande visited Saudi Arabia just one day after attending the signing ceremony for a \$7 billion contract by France's Dassault Aviation to sell 24 Rafale fighter jets and air-to-air missiles to Qatar. That deal in turn followed a \$6 billion agreement in February with Egypt's military regime, a close ally of Saudi Arabia, for the sale of a frigate warship, missiles and another 24 Rafale fighters.

Announcing the contract with Egypt, Hollande hailed it as the long-awaited first export contract for the French-designed aircraft. Among major French political parties, most of which gushed over the deal, only the Green party condemned "the delivery of weapons of war to a military dictatorship whose violations against human rights are now legion."

Amnesty International also raised questions about the deal in light of the Egyptian regime's appalling human rights record, which includes the slaughter of 1,400 people and arrest of 22,000 following the overthrow of the elected government of President Mohamed Morsi in 2013.

Saudi Arabia is well aware that its arms purchases buy influence in Western capitals. Speaking to a reporter at the Gulf summit this week, Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said of France, "We have common views with regard to the challenges in the region today with Syria, Yemen, Iraq, terrorism — and of course Iran's nuclear program, and there are very large commercial and military ties between our two countries."

France's foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, in turn gushed about Saudi Arabia's warm reception to French commercial overtures in military, oil, transportation, and nuclear energy markets. "We sense the new [Saudi] team's desire to move quickly," Fabius said at the start of the Gulf summit. "We're working on 20 projects, which may represent several billion euros."

Ignoring pleas from Human Rights Watch, Fabius said nothing, at least in public, about Saudi Arabia's use of cluster bombs in civilian areas of Yemen. Saudi Arabia and the United States are among the few nations that refused to sign a 2008 treaty against the use of cluster munitions.

Not surprisingly, news of French arms deals did not amuse leaders of Iran, Saudi Arabia's current bête noire. President Hassan Rouhani said in a speech, "Some American or European nation should not be proud of selling more weapons to this or that country. They create insecurity in the region and unjustly make regional countries scared of each other, preparing the ground for a weapons market. . . ."

Is this the way to create employment in Western countries? For someone to be employed in an arms factory while people are killed in Baghdad, Damascus or Sanaa?"

France, like the United States, Russia, Israel and other weapons producers, has a long history of pushing arms sales to "this or that country." The maker of the Rafale fighter jet, Dassault was notorious as the supplier to Argentina's military junta of the Exocet missile that sank the HMS Sheffield destroyer during the Falklands war in 1982. It also sold Exocet-equipped Mirage F-1 fighters to Saddam Hussein's military in the 1980s, equipping his regime to attack Iranian oil tankers.

In recent years France has been the world's fifth largest arms exporter, just behind China and Germany. (The United States and Russia rank number one and two.) In 2014, its foreign arms sales exceeded \$9 billion, augmented by \$3 billion in sales to Lebanon, funded by Saudi Arabia.

France's arms sales so far this year are already nearly double the 2014 total. They support 30,000 new jobs, according to France's Defense Ministry. Such employment is "vitally important" in a country that is "hit by unemployment and threatened with de-industrialization," said Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. Sales to the Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, France's largest arms buyers, have become all the more important since France held up the delivery of a Mistral-class warship to Russia during the Ukraine crisis.

The vast sums of money at stake in such arms deals inevitably breed corruption. The founder of Dassault Aviation, Marcel Dassault, was accused by his chief accountant in 1976 of bribing finance ministry officials to help him evade at least \$300 million in taxes.

His billionaire son and successor, Serge Dassault, is an outspokenly conservative senator and also owner of the country's main conservative newspaper, Le Figaro. He was convicted in 1998 along with a former secretary general of NATO and other Belgian political leaders for paying a bribe to win defense contracts. He was also indicted in April 2014 for making electoral payoffs.

Hollande's predecessor as president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, has also been dogged by allegations of corruption related to the arms trade. When the European Union ended sanctions against Libya in 2004, France lost no time selling military jets, bombs, rockets and missiles to the Gaddafi regime. One of Muammar Gaddafi's sons, supported by other sources, said that his father gave former French President Nicolas Sarkozy more than 50 million Euros to finance his first presidential campaign in 2006-7.



In return, Sarkozy hosted Gaddafi in December 2007 during an ostentatious state visit to Paris, complete with 400 servants, 30 female virgin bodyguards, and a heated tent across from the Elysée Palace. Sarkozy's government also permitted the sale of additional arms and surveillance equipment to the Libyan intelligence services.

In 2011, Sarkozy mysteriously turned on Gaddafi and led the NATO campaign to overthrow him. Some sources even credit a French secret service agent with assassinating Gaddafi on Sarkozy's orders during the fighting that ensued. As reported by Asia Times Online, Sarkozy's about-face began when Gaddafi's chief of protocol defected to Paris and reported that the dictator planned to move his financial reserves from French to Chinese banks.

In addition, Paris learned that Gaddafi planned to cut back on purchases of French fighter planes and to award major oil deals to Italian interests at France's expense. Conveniently, Sarkozy's turn against Gaddafi made the Libyan leader's bitter antagonists in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council extremely pleased, setting the stage for the surge in recent French arms deals.

In all of such dealings, France merely reflects, rather than creates, international norms. The United States, not France, leads the world in selling machines of death to the Middle East, with \$8.4 billion in arms sales to the region in 2014 alone.

As the New York Times noted recently, the F-15 and F-16 jets used by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to bomb Yemen are built by Boeing and Lockheed Martin.

"Last year," it added, "Qatar signed an \$11 billion deal with the Pentagon to purchase Apache attack helicopters and Patriot and Javelin air-defense systems. Now the tiny nation is hoping to make a large purchase of Boeing F-15 fighters to replace its aging fleet of French Mirage jets. Qatari officials are expected to present the Obama administration with a wish list of advanced weapons before they come to Washington" in May for a summit of Gulf state leaders at Camp David.

American arms makers stand to make untold billions of dollars thanks to the clash between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The biggest prize of all will be sales of the new and hugely expensive F-35 fighter jet.

"This could be the precipitating event: the emerging Sunni-Shia civil war coupled with the sale of advanced Russian air defense systems to Iran," said one defense analyst. "If anything is going to result in F-35 clearance to the Gulf states, this is the combination of events."

U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia alone during the Obama years so far total \$46 billion, according to Bill Hartung, director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy: “The volume of major deals concluded by the Obama administration in its first five years exceeds the amount approved by the Bush administration in its full eight years in office by nearly \$30 billion. That also means that the Obama administration has approved more arms sales than any U.S. administration since World War II.”

Over and above any foreign policy considerations, Hartung added, American presidents simply look to favor politically influential defense contractors and boost the U.S. economy.

“Sometimes it is made quite explicit,” he said. “When they sell to the Saudis, for example, the Pentagon points out it will create x number of jobs in the United States. So they’re not shy about talking about the jobs aspect.”

These considerations go a long way toward explaining the Obama administration’s irresolute and self-defeating policies toward the Middle East over the past several years. Obama knows that supporting Syrian rebels will only lead to a victory by Islamist forces and further regional bloodshed, but dares not challenge Saudi Arabia in public.

Obama knows about but will not publicly condemn financial support from wealthy Saudis and other Gulf state princes for ISIS and other terrorist groups. He privately regrets the civilian carnage in Yemen but publicly allies himself with Saudi Arabia’s illegal campaign of aggression. To his credit, he has risked Saudi Arabia’s wrath by negotiating a nuclear deal with Iran.

In the Middle East, arms sales have replaced oil as the grand prize. But until the United States and its European allies wean themselves from dependence on both, we will all remain hostage to the perverse policies of a few kingdoms that care nothing for democracy, human rights, or American strategic interests.

Jonathan Marshall is an independent researcher living in San Anselmo, California. Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were “Unjust Aftermath: Post-Noriega Panama”; “The Earlier 9/11 Acts of Terror”; “America’s Earlier Embrace of Torture”; “Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions”; and “Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran.”

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## Seeking Justice for Egyptian Massacres

Egypt’s 2013 military coup killed hundreds of unarmed protesters as it overthrew

the elected Muslim Brotherhood of Mohamed Morsi. The coup had the support of Saudi Arabia and Israel which assured that the U.S. did little. But an appeal for justice is underway in the Netherlands, writes Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

On July 3, 2013, the Egyptian military staged a coup'etat and deposed the democratically elected government of President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. Thousands of Egyptians staged demonstrations throughout Egypt to show support for Morsi.

One month later, the Egyptian army and police carried out several massacres in Cairo, killing hundreds of unarmed protesters. Authorities mounted a military response to largely peaceful protests by supporters of the Brotherhood against the illegitimate Egyptian government. Although aimed primarily at the Brotherhood, the crackdown included other political opposition groups and individuals.

Four Dutch citizens of Egyptian origin, who were present during three of the most brutal massacres in summer 2013, filed a petition in the Netherlands that charged Egyptian Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim with crimes against humanity. In September 2014, the Dutch law firm of Seebregts & Saey submitted a formal request to the Dutch prosecutor to prosecute Ibrahim.

Dutch criminal courts have jurisdiction under the International Crimes Act when a Dutch national has been the victim of a crime. Due to head of state immunity, the lawsuit did not name Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who ordered the Rab'a massacre when he was Defense Minister.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) undertook a one-year investigation into the conduct of security forces responding to the demonstrations. In its report titled "All According to Plan: The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt," HRW concluded, "police and army forces systematically and intentionally used excessive lethal force in their policing, resulting in killings of protesters on a scale unprecedented in Egypt."

HRW also determined "the killings not only constituted serious violations of international human rights law, but likely amounted to crimes against humanity, given both their widespread and systematic nature and the evidence suggesting the killings were part of a policy to attack unarmed persons on political grounds."

Although HRW was able to confirm that some protesters used firearms in a few

instances, they did not justify “the grossly disproportionate and premeditated lethal attacks on overwhelmingly peaceful protesters.”

### **The Rab’a Massacre**

There were over 20,000 protesters in Rab’a Square. In what HRW called “the gravest incident of mass protester killings,” Egyptian police, snipers and military personnel opened fire on unarmed demonstrators on Aug. 14, 2013, “killing at least 817 and likely more than 1,000.” Security forces used live ammunition “with hundreds killed by bullets to their heads, necks, and chests.” Snipers fired from helicopters over Rab’a Square.

“Much of the shooting by police appears to have been indiscriminate,” HRW found, “openly firing in the general direction of crowds of demonstrators instead of targeting armed protester gunmen who may have posed a serious threat.”

The Rab’a mosque, which served as a refuge, particularly for women and children, “held so many corpses that it felt like it ‘had turned into a cemetery,’” one protester told HRW.

An 18-year-old boy came into the hospital and said his stomach hurt. A doctor noted, “I looked down and his intestines were all out. He had taken several bullets and [later] died.”

The doctor also reported that another person “took a bullet in the face, causing his face to open and tongue to fall out . . . He spent 40 minutes looking at me and gesturing for help, but I couldn’t do anything. Surgery was not possible.”

The deaths “amounted to collective punishment of the overwhelming majority of peaceful protesters,” HRW concluded.

One of the petitioners, who was present at the demonstration, was not wounded but people on his left and right were being shot. He was also present when the authorities set fire to the hospital on Rab’a Square, killing about 300 patients who were not able to leave.

### **Other Attacks**

On July 7, 2013, about 2,000 Brotherhood supporters began a peaceful sit-in. Shortly before dawn on July 8, police and army units opened fire, targeting those in the protest and others emerging from prayers at the mosque. Authorities killed 61 protesters with live ammunition and injured 435. Most suffered gunshots to the head, neck and chest. One of the petitioners was hit by a bullet, but survived.

At least 95 protesters were killed on July 27, 2013. A field hospital doctor

reported, "From 2 a.m. until 8:30 a.m. it was a steady stream; the bodies kept coming. Most had gunshot wounds in the head, neck or chest. The hospital was overflowing; we were completely over capacity."

Another field house doctor told HRW: "All of the dead were either dead on arrival or died immediately after they arrived, because of where they were hit; if you're hit in the head or chest, you won't last very long. The entire hospital floor was covered with injured people. It was beyond imagination."

The two petitioners who were present at this demonstration were not wounded but were in danger of being hit. Others a short distance away were hit by bullets.

Dutch law provides for sentences up to life in prison for convictions of crimes against humanity. The crime is defined as intentional killing or other inhumane acts of a comparable nature which intentionally cause severe suffering or severe physical or psychological damage, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population pursuant to State policy.

HRW found that "security forces systematically and deliberately killed largely unarmed protesters on political grounds . . . in a widespread manner, resulting in the deaths of over 1,150 protesters, in July and August of 2013."

HRW further concluded, "[t]he manner in which security forces used force to disperse protests appears to reflect policies set by the Egyptian government." In fact, "the government anticipated and planned for the deaths of several thousand protesters."

The Rab'a massacre was "executed pursuant to a plan formulated by the Interior Ministry and approved by the Cabinet and National Defense Council after three weeks of preparation," HRW determined, citing statements of Ibrahim that he anticipated the dispersal would kill large numbers of demonstrators.

Ibrahim made public statements revealing he knew beforehand that many people would die during the police and military actions to end the demonstrations. The day after the Rab'a massacre, Ibrahim said "the dispersal plan succeeded 100 percent," indicating that it adhered to a plan that had been put in place.

In a televised interview on Aug. 31, 2013, Ibrahim confirmed that the Interior Ministry expected losses of "10 percent of the people," adding, "you will find thousands lost from their side."

HRW learned that "[s]ecurity forces detained over 800 protesters on Aug. 14, 2013, some of whom they beat, tortured and in some cases summarily executed."

## **Politicized Justice**

On April 11, 2015, 51 Brotherhood supporters were convicted in a mass trial, based on the testimony of a single police officer. HRW said the evidence presented at the trial demonstrated that the men were disseminating news about and organizing peaceful protests in opposition to the military coup and removal of Morsi.

Fourteen of the defendants were sentenced to death and the other 37 were given life sentences. According to Joe Stork, deputy Middle East and North Africa director of HRW, "The fact that people who covered and publicized the mass killings in 2013 could go to prison for life or be executed while the killers walk free captures the abject politicization of justice in Egypt."

Morsi was convicted of charges including incitement to violence and torture from 2012 demonstrations that resulted in the deaths of 10 people outside the presidential palace. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

The case against Ibrahim is under consideration by the Dutch prosecutor's office. Should the prosecutor refuse to prosecute Ibrahim, the petitioners can request that the superior court in The Hague order the prosecutor to prosecute.

There has been no legal accountability for the massacres conducted by the Egyptian military government against the largely peaceful protesters. If high government officials in Egypt are permitted to commit crimes against humanity with impunity, it will encourage similar actions in the future both in Egypt and elsewhere.

Since there is little prospect for justice in Egypt itself, the Dutch lawsuit may be the only vehicle for accountability for these most serious crimes.

**Marjorie Cohn is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law and former president of the National Lawyers Guild. Her most recent book is "Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues."**

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## Did Money Seal Israeli-Saudi Alliance?

**Special Report:** The odd-couple relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel may have been sealed with more than a mutual desire to kiss-off Iran. According to an intelligence source, there was a dowry involved, too, with the Saudis reportedly giving Israel some \$16 billion, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

For more than half a century, Saudi Arabia has tried to use its vast oil wealth to build a lobby in the United States that could rival the imposing Israel Lobby. At top dollar, the Saudis hired law firms and PR specialists and exploited personal connections to powerful families like the Bushes but the Saudis never could build the kind of grassroots political organization that has given Israel and its American backers such extraordinary clout.

Indeed, Americans who did take Saudi money including academic institutions and non-governmental organizations were often pilloried as tools of the Arabs, with the Israel Lobby and its propagandists raising the political cost of accepting Saudi largesse so high that many people and institutions shied away.

But Saudi Arabia may have found another way to buy influence inside the United States by giving money to Israel and currying favor with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Over the past several years, as both Saudi Arabia and Israel have identified Iran and the so-called "Shiite crescent" as their principal enemies, this once-unthinkable alliance has become possible and the Saudis, as they are wont to do, may have thrown lots of money into the deal.

According to a source briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts, the Saudis have given Israel at least \$16 billion over the past 2 ½ years, funneling the money through a third-country Arab state and into an Israeli "development" account in Europe to help finance infrastructure inside Israel. The source first called the account "a Netanyahu slush fund," but later refined that characterization, saying the money was used for public projects such as building settlements in the West Bank.

In other words, according to this information, the Saudis concluded that if you can't beat the Israel Lobby, try buying it. And, if that is the case, the Saudis have found their behind-the-scenes collaboration with Israel extremely valuable. Netanyahu has played a key role in lining up the U.S. Congress to fight an international agreement to resolve a long-running dispute over Iran's nuclear program.

Urged on by Netanyahu, the Republican majority and many Democrats have committed themselves to destroying the framework agreement hammered out on April 2 by Iran and six world powers, including the United States. The deal would impose strict inspections and other limits to guarantee that Iran's nuclear program remains peaceful.

By crashing the deal, Israel and Saudi Arabia would open the door to more punitive sanctions on Iran and possibly clear the way for Israeli airstrikes, with Saudi Arabia granting over-flight permission to Israeli warplanes. The Saudi-Israeli tandem also might hope to pull in the U.S. military to inflict

even more devastation on Iranian targets.

Neither the Israeli nor Saudi governments responded to requests for comment on Saudi payments into an Israeli account.

### **Congressional Acclaim**

The reported Saudi-to-Israel money transfers put Netanyahu's March 3 speech to a cheering joint session of the U.S. Congress in a different light, too. The Prime Minister's bitter denunciations of Iran before hundreds of transfixed American lawmakers could be viewed as him demonstrating his value to the Saudi royals who could never dream of getting that kind of reaction themselves.

Indeed, as Congress now moves to sabotage the Iranian nuclear agreement, the Saudis could be finding that whatever money they invested in Israel is money well spent. The Saudis seem especially alarmed that the nuclear agreement would prompt the world community to lift sanctions on Iran, thus allowing its economy and its influence to grow.

To prevent that, the Saudis desperately want to draw the United States in on the Sunni side of the historic Sunni-Shiite conflict, with Netanyahu serving as a crucial middleman by defying President Barack Obama on the Iran deal and bringing the full force of the Israel Lobby to bear on Congress and on the opinion circles of Official Washington.

If Netanyahu and the Saudis succeed in collapsing the Iran nuclear framework agreement, they will have made great strides toward enlisting the United States as the primary military force on the Sunni side of the Sunni-Shiite sectarian divide, a dispute that dates back to the succession struggle after Prophet Muhammad's death in 632.

This ancient feud has become a Saudi obsession over the past several decades, at least since Iran's Shiite revolution overthrew the Shah of Iran in 1979 and brought to power the Islamic government of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Upset with the ouster of a fellow monarch, the Shah, and fearing the spread of Khomeini's ascetic form of Shiite Islamic governance, the Saudi royals summoned Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, a fellow Sunni, to Riyadh on Aug. 5, 1980, to encourage him to invade Iran.

According to top secret "Talking Points" that Secretary of State Alexander Haig prepared for a briefing of President Ronald Reagan after Haig's April 1981 trip to the Middle East, Haig wrote that Saudi Prince Fahd said he told the Iraqis that an invasion of Iran would have U.S. support.



"It was interesting to confirm that President [Jimmy] Carter gave the Iraqis a green light to launch the war against Iran through Fahd," Haig wrote, in the document that I discovered in U.S. congressional files in 1994. Though Carter has denied encouraging the Iraqi invasion, which came as Iran was holding 52 U.S. diplomats hostage, Haig's "Talking Points" suggest that the Saudis at least led Hussein to believe that the war had U.S. blessings.

Haig also noted that even after the overthrow of the Shah and the establishment of the Islamic state under Khomeini, Israel sought to maintain its clandestine relations with Iran by serving as an arms supplier. Haig reported that "Both [Egypt's Anwar] Sadat and [Saudi Prince] Fahd [explained that] Iran is receiving military spares for U.S. equipment from Israel."

Those Israeli weapons sales continued through the eight bloody years of the Iran-Iraq War with some estimates of the value reaching into the scores of billions of dollar. The Israelis even helped bring the Reagan administration into the deals in the mid-1980s with the so-called Iran-Contra arms shipments that involved secret off-the-books bank accounts in Europe and led to the worst scandal of Reagan's presidency.

### **Rise of the Neocons**

In the 1990s with the Iran-Iraq war over and Iran's treasury depleted Israeli attitudes cooled toward its erstwhile trading partner. Meanwhile, American neocons juiced by the demonstration of U.S. military supremacy against Iraq during the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union leaving the U.S. as "the sole superpower" began advising Netanyahu on employing "regime change" to alter the Mideast dynamic.

During Netanyahu's 1996 campaign, prominent neocons including Richard Perle and Douglas Feith outlined the plan in a policy paper entitled "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm." The document argued that "Israel can shape its strategic environment by weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right, as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Mysterious Why of the Iraq War.](#)"]

The overriding point of this neocon strategy was that by imposing "regime change" in Muslim nations that were deemed hostile to Israel, new friendly governments could be put in place, thus leaving Israel's close-in enemies Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon without outside sponsors. Starved of money, these troublesome enemies would be forced to accept Israel's terms. "The Realm" would be secured.

The neocons first target was Sunni-ruled Iraq, as their Project for the New American Century made clear in 1998, but Syria and Iran were next on the hit list. Syria is governed by the Assads who are Alawites, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, and Iran is governed by Shiites. The neocon plan was to use U.S. military force or other means of subversion to take out all three regimes.

However, when the neocons got their chance to invade Iraq in 2003, they inadvertently tipped the Mideast balance in favor of the Shiites, since Iraq's Shiite majority gained control under the U.S. military occupation. Plus, the disastrous U.S. war precluded the neocons from completing their agenda of enforced "regime change" in Syria and Iran.

With the new Iraqi government suddenly friendly with Iran's Shiite leaders, Saudi Arabia became increasingly alarmed. Israel was also coming to view the so-called "Shiite crescent" from Tehran through Baghdad and Damascus to Beirut as a strategic threat.

Saudi Arabia, working with Turkey, took aim at the center of that crescent in 2011 by supporting a Sunni-led opposition to the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a set of protests that quickly spiraled into bloody terrorist attacks and harsh military repression.

By 2013, it was clear that the principal fighters against Assad's government were not the fictional "moderates" touted by the U.S. mainstream media but Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front and a hyper-brutal Al-Qaeda spinoff that arose in resistance to the U.S. occupation of Iraq and evolved into the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" or simply the "Islamic State."

### **Israeli Preference**

To the surprise of some observers, Israel began voicing a preference for Al-Qaeda's militants over the relatively secular Assad government, which was viewed as the protectors of Alawites, Shiites, Christians and other Syrian minorities terrified of the Saudi-backed Sunni extremists.

In September 2013, in one of the most explicit expressions of Israel's views, Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren, then a close adviser to Netanyahu, told the Jerusalem Post that Israel favored the Sunni extremists over Assad.

"The greatest danger to Israel is by the strategic arc that extends from Tehran, to Damascus to Beirut. And we saw the Assad regime as the keystone in that arc," Oren told the Jerusalem Post in [an interview](#). "We always wanted Bashar Assad to go, we always preferred the bad guys who weren't backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by Iran." He said this was the case even if the "bad guys" were

affiliated with Al-Qaeda.

Oren expanded on his position in June 2014 at an Aspen Institute conference. Then, speaking as a former ambassador, Oren said Israel would even prefer a victory by the Islamic State, which was massacring captured Iraqi soldiers and beheading Westerners, than the continuation of the Iranian-backed Assad in Syria.

“From Israel’s perspective, if there’s got to be an evil that’s got to prevail, let the Sunni evil prevail,” Oren said.

On Oct. 1, 2013, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu hinted at the new Israeli-Saudi relationship in his United Nations General Assembly speech, which was largely devoted to excoriating Iran over its nuclear program and threatening a unilateral Israeli military strike.

Amid the bellicosity, Netanyahu dropped in a largely missed clue about the evolving power relationships in the Middle East, saying: “The dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran and the emergence of other threats in our region have led many of our Arab neighbors to recognize, finally recognize, that Israel is not their enemy. And this affords us the opportunity to overcome the historic animosities and build new relationships, new friendships, new hopes.”

The next day, Israel’s Channel 2 TV news reported that senior Israeli security officials had met with a high-level Gulf state counterpart in Jerusalem, believed to be Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the former Saudi ambassador to the United States who was then head of Saudi intelligence.

The reality of this unlikely alliance has even reached the mainstream U.S. media. For instance, Time magazine correspondent Joe Klein described the new coziness in an article in the Jan. 19, 2015 issue: “On May 26, 2014, an unprecedented public conversation took place in Brussels. Two former high-ranking spymasters of Israel and Saudi Arabia Amos Yadlin and Prince Turki al-Faisal sat together for more than an hour, talking regional politics in a conversation moderated by the Washington Post’s David Ignatius.

“They disagreed on some things, like the exact nature of an Israel-Palestine peace settlement, and agreed on others: the severity of the Iranian nuclear threat, the need to support the new military government in Egypt, the demand for concerted international action in Syria. The most striking statement came from Prince Turki. He said the Arabs had ‘crossed the Rubicon’ and ‘don’t want to fight Israel anymore.’”

While the Saudis may still pay lip service to the plight of the Palestinians, that issue is no longer much of a priority. Indeed, the Saudi royals may view

the Palestinians, many of whom are secular having seen first-hand the evils of Islamic extremism, as something of a regional threat to the Saudi monarchical governance which is based on an ultra-fundamentalist form of Islam known as Wahhabism. That some of the reported \$16 billion Saudi payment to Israel was going to finance Israeli settlements on the Palestinian West Bank would further reflect this Saudi indifference.

In 2013, again collaborating with Israel, Saudi Arabia helped deal a devastating blow to the 1.8 million Palestinians locked in the Gaza Strip. They had received some relief when Egypt elected the Muslim Brotherhood government of President Mohamed Morsi, who relaxed the embargo on passage between Egyptian territory and Gaza.

But the Saudis saw the populist Muslim Brotherhood as a threat to monarchical rule and Israel was angry over Morsi's apparent sympathy for Hamas, the party ruling Gaza. So, Saudi Arabia and Israel supported a military coup which removed Morsi from power. The two countries then showed off their complementary powers: the Saudis helped the government of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi with money and oil, while Israel had its lobby work the corridors of power in Washington to prevent retaliation for the ouster of an elected government.

### **Back to Syria**

Israel's growing collaboration with Saudi Arabia and the two governments' mutual hatred of the "Shiite crescent" have extended into a tacit alliance with Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front in Syria, with which the Israelis have what amounts to a non-aggression pact, even caring for Nusra fighters in Israeli hospitals and mounting lethal air attacks against Lebanese and Iranian advisers to the Syrian military.

Israel's preference for the Saudi-backed jihadists over Iranian allies in Syria was a little-noticed subtext of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's address to Congress on March 3, urging the U.S. government to shift its focus from fighting Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State to fighting Iran. He trivialized the danger from the Islamic State with its "butcher knives, captured weapons and YouTube" compared to Iran, which he accused of "gobbling up the nations" of the Middle East.

To the applause of Congress, he claimed "Iran now dominates four Arab capitals, Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut and Sanaa. And if Iran's aggression is left unchecked, more will surely follow." His choice of capitals was peculiar, however, because Iran took none of those capitals by force and, indeed, was simply supporting the embattled government of Syria and was allied with Shiite elements of the

government of Lebanon.

As for Iraq, Iran's allies were installed not by Iran but by President George W. Bush via the U.S. invasion. And, in Yemen, a long-festering sectarian conflict has led to the capture of Sanaa by Houthi rebels who are Zaydi Shiites, an offshoot of Shia Islam that is actually closer to some Sunni sects.

The Houthis deny that they are agents of Iran, and Western intelligence services believe that Iranian support has consisted mostly of some funding. Former CIA official Graham E. Fuller has called the notion "that the Houthis represent the cutting edge of Iranian imperialism in Arabia as trumpeted by the Saudis" a "myth." He added:

"The Zaydi Shia, including the Houthis, over history have never had a lot to do with Iran. But as internal struggles within Yemen have gone on, some of the Houthis have more recently been happy to take Iranian coin and perhaps some weapons, just as so many others, both Sunni and Shia, are on the Saudi payroll. The Houthis furthermore hate al-Qaeda and hate the Islamic State."

Indeed, the Saudi airstrikes, which have reportedly killed hundreds of Yemeni civilians, have aided the Yemen-based "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" by limiting Houthi attacks on the terrorists and enabling AQAP to overrun a prison and free scores of its militants.

But President Obama, recognizing the joint power of the Saudis and Israelis to destroy the Iran nuclear deal, authorized support for the Saudi airstrikes from U.S. intelligence while rushing military resupplies to the Saudis. In effect, Obama is trading U.S. support for Saudi aggression in a neighboring country for what he hopes might be some political space for the Iran-nuclear agreement.

### **New Terrorist Gains**

Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies, along with Turkey, are also ramping up support in Syria for Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front and the Islamic State. Flush with jihadist reinforcements, the two terrorist organizations have seized new territory in recent weeks, including the Islamic State creating a humanitarian crisis by attacking a Palestinian refugee camp south of Damascus.

All of these Saudi actions have drawn minimal criticism from mainstream U.S. media and political circles, in part, because the Saudis now have the protection of the Israel Lobby, which has kept American attention on the supposed threat from Iran, including allegedly controversial statements from Iranian leaders about their insistence that economic sanctions be lifted once the nuclear agreement is signed and/or implemented.

Neocan warmongers have even been granted space in major U.S. newspapers, including the Washington Post and the New York Times, to openly advocate for the bombing of Iran despite the risk that destroying Iran's nuclear reactors could inflict both human and environmental devastation. That might serve the Saudi-Israeli interests by forcing Iran to focus exclusively on a domestic crisis but it would amount to a major war crime. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[NYT Publishes Call to Bomb Iran.](#)"]

The strategic benefit for Israel and Saudi Arabia would be that with Iran unable to assist the Iraqis and the Syrians in their desperate struggles against Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, the Sunni jihadists might well be hoisting the black flag of their dystopian philosophy over Damascus, if not Baghdad. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Secret Saudi Ties to Terrorism.](#)"]

Beyond the slaughter of innocents that would follow and the likelihood of new terrorist attacks on the West such a victory would almost surely force whoever is the U.S. president to recommit hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops to remove Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State from power. It would be a war of vast expense in money and blood with little prospect of American success.

If Saudi Arabia's petrodollars helped secure Israel's assistance in creating such a potential hell on earth, the Saudi royals might consider it the best money they ever spent and the resulting orgy of military spending by the U.S. government might [benefit some well-connected neocons](#), too but the many victims of this madness would certainly feel otherwise as might the vast majority of the American people.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

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## Reasons for the Mideast's Despair

The West is quick to show disdain for the Muslim world and almost as quick to bomb it. But the only way to ultimately diffuse Islamic extremism is to understand the West's historic role in causing the problem and then pursuing practical ways to address legitimate concerns, as Alon Ben-Meir explains.

By Alon Ben-Meir

The intensified public discussion about the root causes of violent extremism among some Muslims has focused mainly on the socio-economic and political conditions that exist in Arab countries and among Arab communities in Europe and the U.S., which provide a breeding ground for extremism.

But to effectively counter violent extremism, we must also carefully consider how the development of events in the wake of World Wars I and II have impacted the psychological disposition of the Arab population throughout the Middle East.

Starting with the arbitrary division of the region by Western powers, the wars, revolutions and scores of violent conflicts that followed have added layer upon layer of deep resentment and hatred of the West, and the puppet Arab leaders who were installed to serve their Western masters.

The following provides a brief historic, panoramic view of what the vast majority of the Arab population has experienced, which has informed their perception of the world around them, left an indelible mark on their psyches, and framed the beliefs and behavior of many.

President Barack Obama stated at the Summit of Countering Violent Extremism that “the Muslim world has suffered historical grievances [and] does buy into the belief that so many of the ills in the Middle East flow from the history of colonialism or conspiracy.”

Whether the colonial powers were only partially or fully to blame is hardly relevant because the Arab masses continue to believe that colonialism was behind the ills and suffering they endured. From the perspective of the majority of the Arabs, the developments of major events that followed the two World Wars simply confirmed their perception.

Even before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, Britain and France reached a secret pact in 1916 (the Sykes-Picot Agreement) to divide Ottoman-held territories in the Middle East between the two powers irrespective of sect, ethnicity and religious affiliations. Dividing the “pie” between them was viewed as exploitive, arrogant and dismissive of the welfare of the indigenous populations, ushering in decades of strife and turmoil.

The creation of most of the Arab states following World War II hardly changed the plight of the Arabs living in these countries. The French and the British appointed governors, kings and emirs who ruled with iron fists, further intensifying hatred toward the Western powers and toward the authoritarian regimes under which they groaned.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was regarded as yet another Western conspiracy. The humiliation of the Arab armies by the nascent Israeli forces, the loss of substantial territory, and the creation of the Palestinian refugees have added a further layer of deep resentment. The Israeli occupation, which led to the rise of Hamas and Hezbollah, continues to feed the Palestinians a daily ration of indignity to this very day.

The 1953 overthrow of the freely-elected Mosaddegh government in Iran, engineered by the CIA and British intelligence because of the parliament's decision to nationalize the oil industry, was seen as the most flagrant intervention in the internal affairs of a Muslim state. The installation of the Shah, a Western puppet, and his ruthless treatment of his subjects were never forgotten by the Iranians and still remain a source of anger and antipathy toward the U.S.

When Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was hailed as a nationalist hero, rose to power in Egypt and dared to challenge the West's dominance and "ownership" of the Suez Canal, the French and British, in cahoots with Israel, answered with war.

The war with Egypt once again trampled Arab pride as the retaking of the Canal and the occupation of the Sinai by Israel was viewed by the Arabs as a blatant manifestation of the West's vulgarity of self-entitlement and Israel's hunger for more Arab land.

And then came the 1967 Six Day War. In 144 hours, Israel conquered Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian territories more than three times its own size. Though the defeat of the Arab armies on the battlefield was humiliating, it was the psychological defeat that shattered the Arabs' self-esteem.

Although the 1973 Yom Kippur War salvaged Egypt's national pride (Egyptian forces were allowed to remain on the East side of the Suez Canal, which provided Anwar Sadat a political victory), it did little to allay the Arabs' humiliation as Israel continued to occupy Arab land on three fronts.

The 1979 Iranian revolution marked the first major Muslim country to revolt against the United States, sending a clear message to Arabs and Muslims that the West will no longer impose its whims with impunity. Unsurprisingly, the Mullahs' victory did not change the core resentment and hatred toward the West.

Although the 2001 Afghanistan war was arguably necessary to destroy al-Qaeda following the 9/11 attack, the prolongation of the war, its destructiveness and the death toll were and continue to be seen as consequences of the West's never-satisfied appetite for dominating Muslim/Arab lands.

The Afghanistan war produced a new generation of militant Muslims who operated



both with and independent of al-Qaeda, ready to challenge Western powers and the autocratic Arab regimes that want to maintain the status quo.

Notwithstanding how much Saddam Hussein was reviled for his ruthlessness, the vast majority of Arab youth viewed the 2003 Iraq War as an unprecedented assault on the Arabs' heartland and people. Iraq was essentially dismantled, pitting Sunnis against the Shiite majority; tens of thousands were killed and violent Islamists converged into Iraq, which eventually led to the birth of ISIS while poisoning a new generation of young Arabs with intensely anti-Western sentiments.

The Arab Spring, which ushered in great hope and promise for the future, turned out to be a cruel winter. The U.S. and the EU have selectively interfered in the various Arab Spring countries without any clear strategy, believing that pushing democracy down the throat of the people would provide a panacea for their political ills.

All considered, the vast majority of the Arab people accept their lot in silent desperation. But the relatively small minority who are engaged in violent extremism rose to defy by whatever means both Western powers and the authoritarian Arab regimes. These jihadists differ in age, financial ability, education and family prominence; they do not fit a single profile nor do they follow a single path to extremism.

However, they all have one thing in common: hatred of the West and the own corrupt leaders. They no longer believe that their governments will heed their call for change; they believe Western influence is a curse and only jihad can change their destiny and the course of history.

Religious extremism and the deliberate distortion of Islamic teaching provided the outlet that could justify any violent action to remedy decades of servitude and subjugation. Dying while fighting the enemy is extolled as martyrdom, the ultimate sacrifice that opens the gates of heaven and offers true freedom and dignity, of which they were deprived on earth.

Though the use of force is at times necessary to destroy an irredeemable foe such as ISIS, it is critical to recognize that no amount of military force can eradicate ideology and religious conviction. A multitude of measures are necessary to counter violent extremism, including education, economic assistance, job opportunities, integration, addressing grievances, engagement in social activities, and much more.

But to successfully combat this long-term problem, Western powers must act on a number of fronts to set the stage for reconciliation. Reconciliation must begin

by recognizing and admitting to past mistakes. Regardless of the extent of the West's abuse and exploitation of Arab resources and people, acknowledging its long history of misguided policies is critical to establish a dialogue which is still largely missing in the strategy of countering violent extremism.

The West can offer a model of democratic government, but must not impose it arbitrarily. The Arab states will find their own way to reconcile religion with the form of democracy they choose, and the West must honor the outcome of fair and free elections.

The West owes many of the Arab states, especially those with overwhelmingly poor populations such as Egypt, the financial and technical support needed to embark on sustainable economic development projects that empower the people. Poor, hungry and despairing youth need food even before freedom, and job opportunities, healthcare and education before meaningless elections.

The U.S. must never cease its effort to diffuse the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and bring an end to the occupation, which provides a continuing source of extremism. In doing so, the U.S. addresses one of the Arabs' foremost grievances against it, while strengthening Israel's national security.

Finally, since the West and the Arab states have a common interest in degrading, if not eliminating, radical militants, their collaboration must be strategic in order to avoid the potential of creating a new crisis. Does the U.S. know what the fate of Syria and Iraq will be once ISIS is defeated, and how that will impact the Sunni-Shiite "war" spearheaded by Saudi Arabia and Iran?

None of the above is meant to suggest that the Arab states have been merely the victims of imperialism. They have and continue to contribute to the plight of their people. The Arab world is rampant with inequality, gross human rights violations, and tens of millions of poverty-stricken young men and women with little prospect of finding a meaningful purpose to their lives.

If the Arab leaders want to end the scourge of violent extremism, they must assume some responsibility and not simply blame the West for their grievances and decades of socio-economic and political dislocation and despair.

Unless they invest now in economic development, education, healthcare and opportunities for growth, and allow for social and political freedom (albeit gradually), the radicalization of the young will only be intensified and the unforgiving storm will continue to sweep one country after another.

To be sure, countering violent radicalism will be a long and costly campaign. It will take foresight, courage and wisdom to learn from past mistakes. Together with the West, the Arab states must chart a new course of trust and mutual

respect to tackle the herculean job that lies ahead.

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## Yemen as Vietnam or Afghanistan

With U.S. intelligence help, Saudi Arabia has launched air strikes into Yemen and wants Egypt and Pakistan to invade, threatening to turn a long-simmering civil war into a regional conflict, a scenario that reminded retired U.S. diplomat William R. Polk of his work for President Kennedy on an earlier Yemeni war.

By William R. Polk

As the events unfold with the Saudi and Egyptian engagement in Yemen, I was reminded of my discussion with Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser on "his" Yemen war, sometimes called the North Yemen Civil War that began in 1962, became a stalemate and finally ended in 1970. As Mark Twain may have said, "history doesn't repeat but sometimes it rhymes." The rhymes, at least, seem unmistakable.

In the course of our first lengthy talk on Yemen, Nasser (rather angrily) replied to one of my comments, "you don't think I will win the war, do you?"

"No, Mr. President," I replied, "I don't."

"Well, you would be surprised to know that I have acquired your [America's] secret analyses of guerrilla warfare."

"Oh, Mr. President," I shook my head, "I know the people who wrote those reports. They are rubbish. I would throw them away if I were you."

He just looked at me, even more angrily, thinking I suppose, that having pulled off an intelligence coup, I was trying to trick him by claiming that it was really not a coup but a mistake. Then he said, "I know how to use helicopters, too." (Their use was then being touted by our military as our great weapon against the Viet Minh fighters in Vietnam.)

"And you lost one yesterday, didn't you?" I jibed.

"How did you find out about that?"

"Well, Mr. President, we spend a lot of money on the CIA finding out about such things and one way or another they usually do. That is what the CIA is supposed to do. They don't always succeed but sometimes they do."

"Well," Nasser retorted, "you Americans think you know all about everything, and you don't even have any of your people in Sanaa and none up in the north where the fighting is going on. You don't know anything about Yemen." Then, without thinking of the implication, I suppose, he said, "You should go see."

"Mr. President," I quickly said. "I regard that as an invitation." Impolitely, I then stood up. He looked at me with narrow, angry eyes. He obviously had not meant what I had inferred.

"All right, go see," he said. "I will give instructions that you can go anywhere you want, talk to anyone you want, see everything.."

"But, of course, I cannot even get there without your help," I said.

"You can have my plane."

Rather off-handedly and not warmly, we shook hands. I said goodbye and rushed back to our embassy and wrote an "eyes only" message to President John Kennedy. I did not want it scattered around our government so I prevailed upon the CIA station chief to send it by his rather more restricted route. It was encrypted and sent in three batches. Before the second batch got sent, a reply came back: "go."

### **Off to Yemen**

So I went, and Nasser was as good as his word. I spent hours with his military commander, Abdul Hakim Amr who gleefully unfolded the huge map of showing the planned Egyptian sweep of the mountains to the east (while Anwar Sadat, then rather on the fringes of the Egyptian Establishment, angrily protested against Amr's indiscretion with a foreigner. He never forgave me for being there).

I went up to the supposed battle zone, near Saada, went out to all the villages where the war was, according to the CIA and British intelligence, being fought, met with the new Yemeni Leader Sallal and all the new Yemeni leaders, and then flew back to Cairo.

Disclosure (as they like to say in the media): I was bribed. As a going-away present, I was given 500 pounds of Yemeni coffee. Nothing so welcome to a traveler as 500 pounds of anything! But thanks to me, our Cairo embassy was "in coffee" for years!

I did not see President Nasser on my return but sent him a message through the

Governor of Cairo, Salah Dessouki, that I hoped to go down to the Saudi-Yemen frontier to meet with the guerrilla leaders, and somewhat jokingly I said to my friend Salah, "I want to be very sure that President Nasser knows exactly where I am going. And, Salah, please tell the President not to do anything silly."

Salah burst out laughing and said, "Bill, I certainly will not say that to the President!"

So I flew to Riyadh and, with the permission of then Crown Prince Faisal, with whom I had a rather close relationship, I took the American ambassador's airplane and flew down to Najran where I spent an evening with a group of the guerrilla leaders.

As we sat around a campfire, outside of Najran, we drank tea, ate a lamb roast and then, in a fairly typical desert encounter, we had a poetry duel. By pure luck, I happened to know the poem being recited and I capped the verse of one of the men. In their terms, that was like a passport for me. And we could then have a serious and frank discussion on the war, the strengths and weaknesses of the royalist forces and what might bring the war to a conclusion.

Our talk went on almost all night. Finally, just at first light, I had barely gotten to sleep when the first of four Egyptian but Russian-piloted TU 16 jet bombers arrived overhead from Luxor. They dropped 15 200 kg bombs on the oasis and on us. My pilot was just worried about his plane. The rest of us had other worries!

The biggest danger, in fact, was from the shrapnel falling from the anti-aircraft cannon. They were totally ineffective against the TU 16s as they could not reach them. (One of my aides, an Air Force colonel informed me that the TU-16s were at about 23,000 feet and the 90 mm cannon would reach about 18,000 feet.)

But a few people around us were killed. Another of my aides, a Marine Colonel, presented me with a wicked looking piece of one of the bombs. It had fallen or been blown not far from the place I was lying.

On our return flight to Riyadh, I wrote Nasser a "thank you" note, saying "Mr. President, I am most grateful for your kind hospitality in Egypt and Yemen, but I don't think you needed to entertain me in other countries."

Our ambassador, my good and old friend, John Badeau, was not amused. He said, "Bill, just say thank you and, please, don't hurry back!"

It was a few months later when I next saw President Nasser. We had a long and very frank talk then about Yemen. I compared it to Vietnam which I was already

sure would be a disaster. I pointed to the huge cost to us of Vietnam, how it disrupted all our domestic social goals and how it poisoned Americans trust in one another. I warned that in my opinion, Yemen might do the same to Egypt, disrupting what Nasser was trying to do to uplift his people and end their tragic poverty.

In our talk, Nasser said, "I certainly didn't agree with you, Bill, but I knew you would tell me the truth as you saw it." Somehow, the Israelis found out about this and later the chief of Prime Minister Golda Meir's cabinet, Mordachai Gazit told me, "We know that President Nasser trusts you."

As I was leaving, Nasser took me out to my car and even opened the car door for me. His guards were as astonished as I was, Apparently, he had never before done this. As we shook hands, he said, "Well, Bill, where are you off to this time?"

"This time, Mr. President, I am not going to tell you!"

He burst out laughing as did I. We did not meet again but our frankness and respect later enabled me to work out the 1970 ceasefire on Suez with him shortly before his death.

It is hard to believe that history now seems to be repeating with Egypt and Saudi Arabia again engaged in a counter-guerrilla war in Yemen! For Nasser, it was Egypt's Vietnam. Will the new Yemen war be Egypt's (and Saudi Arabia's) Afghanistan? I think it is very likely. All of the signs point in that direction.

And, as I have laid out in numerous essays on Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Mali and Algeria, and in my little book *Violent Politics*, guerrilla wars are almost never "won" but usually drain the supposedly dominant power of its wealth, moral position and political unity.

**William R. Polk is a veteran foreign policy consultant, author and professor who taught Middle Eastern studies at Harvard. President John F. Kennedy appointed Polk to the State Department's Policy Planning Council where he served during the Cuban Missile Crisis. His books include: *Violent Politics: Insurgency and Terrorism*; *Understanding Iraq*; *Understanding Iran*; *Personal History: Living in Interesting Times*; *Distant Thunder: Reflections on the Dangers of Our Times*; and *Humpty Dumpty: The Fate of Regime Change*.**

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# Netanyahu's False Narrative

As members of the U.S. Congress bobbed up and down with applause, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu spun a tale of brave little Israel fretting about its survival, but he left out the fact that Israel has a large arsenal of nuclear weapons and has often been the one to invade its neighbors, as Marjorie Cohn recalls.

By Marjorie Cohn

On March 3, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued an impassioned plea to Congress to protect Israel by opposing diplomacy with Iran. Referring to “the remarkable alliance between Israel and the United States” which includes “generous military assistance and missile defense,” Netanyahu failed to mention that Israel has an arsenal of 100 or 200 nuclear weapons.

The day before he delivered that controversial address, Netanyahu expressed similar sentiments to AIPAC, Israel's powerful U.S. lobby. He reiterated the claim that Israel acted in the 1967 Six-Day War “to defend itself.” The narrative that Israel attacked Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in self-defense, seizing the Palestinian territories in the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula in 1967, has remained largely unquestioned in the public discourse.

Israel relies on that narrative to continue occupying those Palestinian lands. And the powerful film “Censored Voices,” which premiered at Sundance in February, does not challenge that narrative.

But declassified high-level documents from Britain, France, Russia and the United States reveal that Egypt, Syria and Jordan were not going to attack Israel and Israel knew it. In fact, they did not attack Israel. Instead, Israel mounted the first attack in order to decimate the Egyptian army and take the West Bank.

For two weeks following the Six Day War, Amos Oz and Avraham Shapira visited Israeli kibbutzim and recorded interviews with several Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers who had just returned from that war. Largely censored by the Israeli government for many years, those reels have finally been made public. “Censored Voices” features the taped voices of young IDF soldiers, as the aging, former soldiers sit silently beside the tape recorder, listening to their own voices.

The testimonies documented in the tapes reveal evidence of targeting civilians and summarily executing prisoners, which constitute war crimes. A soldier asks

himself, "They're civilians should I kill them or not?" He replies, "I didn't even think about it. Just kill! Kill everyone you see."

Likewise, one voice notes, "Several times we captured guys, positioned them and just killed them." Another reveals, "In the war, we all became murderers." Still another says, "Not only did this war not solve the state's problems, but it complicated them in a way that'll be very hard to solve."

One soldier likens evacuating Arab villages to what the Nazis did to Jews in Europe. As a soldier watched an Arab man being taken from his home, the soldier states, "I had an abysmal feeling that I was evil."

In what proved to be a prescient question, one soldier asks, "Are we doomed to bomb villages every decade for defensive purposes?" Indeed, Israel justifies all of its assaults on Gaza as self-defense, even though Israel invariably attacks first, and kills overwhelming numbers of Palestinians mostly civilians. Each time, many fewer Israelis are killed by Palestinian rockets.

### **Israel's False Self-Defense Claim**

The film begins by showing a map of Israel surrounded by Egypt, Syria and Jordan, with arrows from each country aimed at Israel. The IDF soldiers felt those Arab countries posed an existential threat to Israel.

"There was a feeling it would be a Holocaust," one soldier observed. The Israeli media claimed at the time that Egypt had attacked Israel by land and by air on June 5, 1967. According to British journalist Patrick Seale, "Israel's preparation of opinion" was "brilliantly managed," a "remarkable exercise in psychological warfare."

In his book, *The Six-Day War and Israeli Self-Defense: Questioning the Legal Basis for Preventive War*, published by Cambridge University Press, Ohio State University law professor John Quigley documents conversations by high government officials in Israel, the United States, Egypt, the Soviet Union, France, and Britain leading up to the Six-Day War.

He draws on minutes of British cabinet meetings, a French government publication, U.S. documents in "Foreign Relations of the United States," and Russian national archives. Those conversations make clear that Israel knew Egypt, Syria and Jordan would not and did not attack Israel, and that Israel initiated the attacks.

Egypt was the only one of the three Arab countries that had a military of any consequence. Israeli General Yitzhak Rabin told the Israeli cabinet that the Egyptian forces maintained a defensive posture, and Israeli General Meir Amit,



head of Mossad (Israeli's intelligence agency), informed U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara that Egypt was not poised to attack Israel. Both the United States and the Soviet Union urged Israel not to attack. Nevertheless, Israel's cabinet voted on June 4 to authorize the IDF to invade Egypt.

"After the cabinet vote," Quigley writes, "informal discussion turned to ways to make it appear that Israel was not starting a war when in fact that was precisely what it was doing."

Moshe Dayan, who would soon become Israel's Minister of Defense, ordered military censorship, saying, "For the first twenty-four hours, we have to be the victims." Dayan admitted in his memoirs, "We had taken the first step in the war with Egypt." Nevertheless, Israel's UN Ambassador Gideon Rafael reported to the Security Council that Israel had acted in self-defense.

"The hostilities were attacks by the Israeli air force on multiple Egyptian airfields, aimed at demolishing Egyptian aircraft on the ground," according to Quigley. On June 5, the CIA told President Lyndon B. Johnson, "Israel fired the first shots today."

Article 51 of the UN Charter authorizes states to act in collective self-defense after another member state suffers an armed attack. Although Jordan and Syria responded to the Israeli attacks on Egypt, they and Egypt – inflicted little damage to Israel. By the afternoon of June 5, Israel "had virtually destroyed the air war capacity of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria," Quigley notes. "The IDF achieved the 'utter defeat' of the Egyptian army on June 7 and 8."

### **United States Empowers Israel**

U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk said that U.S. officials were "angry as hell, when the Israelis launched their surprise offensive." Yet, Quigley notes, "Israel's gamble paid off in that the United States would not challenge Israel's story about how the fighting started. Even though it quickly saw through the story, the White House kept its analysis to itself."

Although Security Council resolution 242, passed in 1967, refers to "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war" and calls for "withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict," Israel continues to occupy the Palestinian territories it acquired in the Six-Day War.

Israel has abandoned its claim that Egypt attacked first. Yet the international community considers that Israel acted in lawful anticipatory self-defense.

Quigley explains how the UN Charter only permits the use of armed force after an armed attack on a UN member state; it does not authorize anticipatory, preventive, or preemptive self-defense.

“The UN did not condemn Israel in 1967 for its attack on Egypt,” Antonio Cassese of the University of Florence explained. Quigley attributes this to Cold War politics, as the USSR supported Egypt. “For the United States in particular, Israel’s success was a Cold War defeat for the USSR. The United States was hardly prepared to condemn Israel after it performed this service.”

The United States continues to support Israel by sending it \$3 billion per year in military aid, even when Israel attacks Gaza with overwhelming firepower, as it did in the summer of 2014, killing 2,100 Palestinians (mostly civilians). Sixty-six Israeli soldiers and seven civilians were killed.

If Israel were to mount an attack on Iran, the United States would invariably support Israel against Iran and any Arab country that goes to Iran’s defense. Indeed, Netanyahu intoned to Congress, “may Israel and America always stand together.”

**Marjorie Cohn is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. Her most recent book is *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*.**

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