

Mr. GRAHAM. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TERRORIST THREATS

Mr. GRAHAM. Madam President, Senator MCCAIN and I have decided to come down before the Fourth of July break to talk about two issues that are very important to our national security.

The first issue I would like to discuss is the threat we face as a nation from terrorist safe havens in Syria and now Iraq.

The President has indicated in recent days that it is unacceptable to allow terrorist organizations such as ISIS to have safe havens from which to launch attacks against our country.

Mr. President, we agree. What are you doing about it? I understand Iraq is complicated. I understand you would need a new government in Iraq that Sunnis could buy into to probably turn Iraq around. That is a problem, but that is a separate problem from safe havens that can be used to launch attacks against the United States. Please do not turn over to the Iraqi politicians the timeline as to whether we will act to protect ourselves.

This is the FBI Director: "My concern is that people can go to Syria, develop new relationships, learn new techniques and become far more dangerous, and then flow back."

Americans are now in Syria. Some 7,500 foreign fighters from 50 countries have gone to Syria. They are now in Iraq. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria was kicked out by Al Qaeda. These are the most extreme people on the planet. They have now gone into Iraq and taken large territories and up to \$500 million in resources. They had a \$30 million-a-year budget. They have more money than they ever dreamed of. Their desire to hit the homeland is growing. Last week the leader of this group said: We will be coming to America next.

Mr. President, do not use the political problems in Baghdad as an excuse not to act when it comes to denying safe havens to terrorists who have espoused attacking our country. Where is your plan to dislodge these people in Syria and Iraq? Where is your plan to deal with the safe haven issue? Where is your plan to hit a terrorist organization that is desirous of hitting us?

Mr. President, you cannot have it both ways. You cannot alert us as a nation that we are threatened by a safe haven in Iraq and Syria and do nothing about it. I understand the political complexities that exist in Iraq, but I also understand the need to deal with the safe haven issue. What do you envision as a solution to the safe haven problem in Syria and Iraq? When are we going to act? Is there no military component available to the United States to hit a terrorist organization

that is operating out in the open in Syria and Iraq, that represents a direct threat to our homeland?

Mr. President, now is the time for you to come up with a plan to deal with the safe havens. That issue is separate and apart from dealing with the political complications and the meltdown in Iraq. You have said and the Director of National Security Mr. Clapper has said that Syria is an apocalyptic state; it is in a very bad way; that the jihadists in Syria represent a direct threat to our homeland.

The same jihadists in Syria have moved now into Iraq. Three years ago when Senator MCCAIN was urging airstrikes and that a safe zone be established, there were fewer than 1,000 foreign fighters in Syria. Today we think there are up to 26,000 ISIS types in Syria. Now they are moving to Iraq at lightning speed, taking town after town, amassing resources in terms of military hardware and money that will make them not just a terrorist organization but a terrorist army.

Mr. President, there is a terrorist army on the march in Iraq and Syria. They have indicated they want to hit our Nation. They want to strike us in the region, throughout the world, and here at home. You seem to have no plan. We want to help you. We understand this is complicated, but you, as Commander in Chief above all others, have a duty to come up with a solution to this problem. You have defined the problem well, but you have done nothing to solve the problem. We stand ready to help you solve that problem.

Now, as we try to figure out where to go in Iraq and what is the right strategy, the one thing that is important to me is not to rewrite history. I do not want to dwell on the past, but I am not going to sit on the sidelines and let this administration—which, as Senator Obama, Senator Clinton, and Senator Kerry, was all over the Bush administration for the mistakes they made. That is the way the political process works.

When the Iraq war was going poorly on President Bush's watch, Senator MCCAIN called for the Republican-appointed Secretary of Defense to resign. I would argue that Senator MCCAIN above all others has been consistent when it comes to Iraq. It does not matter who is making the mistake; if he believes one is being made, he will speak up.

The line that there were just a few dead-enders in Iraq was not true. The reason we knew it was not true is that Senator MCCAIN and I went to Iraq numerous times. The first time we went, we were in an SUV with a three-car convoy. We went down to Baghdad, had dinner, and went shopping. Every time thereafter, the security was tighter, our ability to leave the base was restricted, and the people on the ground who were fighting the war were telling us: This thing is not going well. Every time we would hear from the Bush administration that the media was mis-

representing the truth and that this was just a few dead-enders, we knew better. We spoke up.

Abu Ghraib was a direct result of being overwhelmed by circumstances on the ground. We thought that once the Iraqi Army disbanded and Saddam Hussein was displaced, we would be able to handle Iraq with a few thousand troops. The Bush administration was wrong in that calculation. Senator MCCAIN spoke up, and the surge did work.

To President Bush's undying credit: You corrected the mistakes that happened on your watch. You kept an open mind. You changed strategy because the strategy you originally pursued had failed.

President Obama, your strategy has failed. The idea of abandoning Iraq, disengaging politically and militarily, has come home to haunt us as a nation.

Senator MCCAIN and I said back in 2011: If we do not leave a residual force behind as an insurance policy for our own national security interests, we will regret it.

Madam President, 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers, well placed, would have given the capacity to the Iraqi Army to allow them to be more effective, and what we see on the ground today would have never happened. I am convinced that ISIS would never be in Iraq the way they are today if there had been an American military component—10,000 to 15,000—providing capacity and expertise to an Iraqi army that is literally falling apart.

I am convinced today that if we had continued to push the Iraqi political system to reconcile, we would not be where we are today. Dave Petraeus and Ryan Crocker—one general and one diplomat—spent hours every day of the week practically pushing the Sunnis, the Shias, and the Kurds to solve their problems with the political process. It was working.

In 2010 we made a fateful mistake. We allowed Syria to go bad. Syria became the supply center for Al Qaeda in Iraq, which was on its back. In 2010 the surge had worked. Al Qaeda in Iraq, which was the predecessor to ISIS, was completely devastated. They are back in the game for three reasons: Syria became a failed state. We had a chance to stop that and did not. They were being resupplied from Syria with equipment and fighters. We decided to disengage from Iraq politically. We had a hands-off approach to the political problems in Baghdad. We withdrew our troops all from 2010 to 2011. Those three things became a perfect storm to lead us to where we are today.

We do want to look forward because looking backward does not solve the problem. But here is what we will not accept. We will not accept a rewriting of history. When this administration says the reason we have no troops in Iraq today is because of the Iraqis, that is an absolutely false statement.

In May of 2011 Senator MCCAIN and I, at the request of Secretary Clinton,

went to Iraq to talk about a follow-on agreement, a strategic partnership agreement that had in its making a military component that would give legal protections to our troops who were left behind.

I remember this as if it were yesterday. We were in a meeting with Prime Minister Malaki. We were talking about leaving troops behind and whether the Iraqis would give us the legal protections we needed because I told Prime Minister Malaki: No American politician is going to allow soldiers to be left behind in a foreign country without legal protection.

If a person was charged with a crime in Iraq, given the inventory in their legal system, I did not feel comfortable allowing that soldier to go into the Iraqi legal system. We would deal with disciplinary problems.

He turned to me and said: How many soldiers are you talking about?

I turned to Ambassador Jeffrey, the U.S. Ambassador, General Austin, the commander, and said: What is the answer?

They replied to me: We are still working on that.

The Prime Minister of Iraq laughed. This was in May of 2011. We could not tell the Prime Minister of Iraq how many troops we were talking about.

We went to the Kurdish portion of Iraq and talked to President Barzani. He would have accepted any amount of troops we wanted to leave behind. He was openly embracing the follow-on force.

We met with Mr. Allawi, one of the leaders of the Iraqiya Sunni bloc, who was very open minded to a follow-on force.

The day after we left Iraq, Prime Minister Malaki issued a statement saying that if the other parties would agree, he would agree to a follow-on force.

On November 15, 2011, we had a hearing with General Dempsey and Secretary Panetta in the Armed Services Committee. We asked the following question: Was it the Iraqis who rejected a follow-on force, originally envisioned to be 18,000 or 19,000?

The bottom-line number from the Pentagon was 10,000.

I asked the question. Was it the Iraqis who said: No, we do not want 18,000. That is too many.

The numbers kept going down to finally 3,000.

Senator MCCAIN asked the question.

The answer was: The reduction in numbers that we will be willing to offer to the Iraqis did not come from a rejection by Iraq but by a reduction of the numbers by the White House.

In other words, the cascading effect of the numbers from 18,000 to 3,000 was not because Iraq said no; it was because the White House kept changing the numbers to the point that the force envisioned would be ineffective and fail.

Those are the facts.

Senator MCCAIN will address the statements by the President before,

during, and after, but I am here to tell you, without any doubt in my mind, the reason we don't have troops in Iraq after 2011 is because the Obama administration wanted to get to zero. They wanted to honor our campaign promise to get us out of Iraq.

They did so, and now they are trying to blame the Iraqis. They are trying to rewrite history. I can understand why they don't want to own what happened in Iraq. I can't understand why we would let them get away with it, and I am not going to let them get away with it.

Going forward, we have a mess on our hands, and I want to help the President where I can.

But, Mr. President, you were very good at questioning the policies of the Bush administration, and you held nothing back. I am here to tell you I know what you are saying about Iraq is not true.

On October 21, during a conference call with staff, Denis McDonough and Tony Blinken—former National Security Adviser to BIDEN and now National Security Council—briefing staff members about the problems with legal immunity was asked a question by Senator MCCAIN's staff person: If you could get a legal agreement that we felt was solid, would you leave any troops behind, and they said no.

So we are going to write them a letter. There are several of our staff who were on that phone call and we are going to ask Mr. McDonough and Mr. Blinken: Did you say that, and they can say whatever they want to, but I have people I know and I trust who were on that phone call and they know what was said.

With that, I will turn it over to Senator MCCAIN.

Mr. MCCAIN. I would ask my colleague one question before we go on; that is, in addition to this overwhelming information in which the Senator and I were deeply involved that proves conclusively that the President of the United States did not want to leave a single troop member behind in Iraq and succeeded in doing so, did the Senator from South Carolina ever hear the President of the United States, either before the decision was made, during or after—did the Senator ever hear any record of him saying he wanted to leave a residual force behind?

Mr. GRAHAM. Quite the opposite. If we go back and look at the tape around this debate, the President basically said: We left Iraq and we are not going to be bogged down by Iraq.

There was no regret that I am so sorry we couldn't convince the Iraqis to leave a residual force behind because that would have been the best outcome for Iraq and the United States, and I regret that we could not get there and they will regret their decision.

None of that happened. It was all about the last combat soldier is out. We are done with Iraq. We have given them all the help we can give them. We

are going to move on, and we are not going to be bogged down.

Now the place is going to hell. It is a direct threat to the United States, and they are trying to rewrite history—and I think it was October.

Mr. MCCAIN. The President of the United States, in the last couple of days—please correct me—it was the first time he said it was Iraqis who did not want to leave a force behind.

Mr. GRAHAM. The Iraqis did not want to leave a force behind.

Mr. MCCAIN. Yes; he was saying they did not.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the following quotes, including October 2012.

I quote the President of the United States:

What I would not have done is left 10,000 troops in Iraq [as Candidate Romney proposed], that would tie us down. That certainly would not help us in the Middle East.

Jay Carney said on October 1, 2012:

When President Obama took office, the Iraq War had been going on for years and he had campaigned with a promise to end that war, and he has done that.

One of my favorites is December 2011:

In the coming days the last American soldiers will cross the border out of Iraq. . . . with honor and with their heads held high. After nearly nine years, our war in Iraq ends this month.

Anyway, the list goes on. In fact, the President campaigned for reelection in 2012 on the premise that he had gotten us out of Iraq.

The Senator from South Carolina and I predicted this would happen if we didn't leave a residual force behind. I say to my colleagues again, if we repeat this same total pullout of Afghanistan, we are going to see this same movie in Afghanistan.

So I plead with the President of the United States, please revisit your decision that every American troop be pulled out.

The Afghans do not have the capability, whether air assets, intel or other capabilities, to defend themselves against an enemy that has a sanctuary in Pakistan.

I plead with the President of the United States, do not make the same mistake in Afghanistan.

I point out again, at the end of the surge we had won the conflict in Iraq. The conflict was won, and instead obviously we blew it.

I would like to talk for a few minutes with my colleague from South Carolina because we need to understand what is happening in Iraq. In the last 3 to 4 weeks, this whole part of Iraq has been taken over by the forces of ISIS.

The second largest city in all of Iraq, Mosul, has been taken over, which triggered 500,000 refugees—500,000 refugees left Mosul.

Tal Afar—a major city, Kirkuk, where the Kurdish forces came in and took over Kirkuk and made it now part of the Kurdish part of Iraq.

What is most concerning, I say to my colleagues—and I know the Senator

from South Carolina and I have been focusing on this—is the Jordanian-Iraq border. The border crossings from Iraq into Jordan have been taken over by ISIS.

As we know, Jordan is a small country. It is overburdened now with hundreds of thousands of refugees. It has significant problems on the Syrian side of its border. This can be a terribly destabilizing factor to our—probably outside of Israel—strongest and best ally in the entire Middle East.

Ramadi, Fallujah, every Iraq veteran will remember Ramadi and Fallujah. Every Iraq veteran will remember the second battle of Fallujah where we lost 96 brave soldiers and marines and over 600 wounded. Now the black flags of Al Qaeda fly over Ramadi and Fallujah. The border to Syria no longer exists, my friends.

If we look at Syria, all the way to Aleppo, all the way around, a part of the Middle East that is larger than the State of Indiana is now overtaken by the richest and most powerful terrorist organization in history; that is, ISIS.

We cannot address Iraq, if we do, without addressing Syria, as well as the movement of men and equipment back and forth. By the way, the Sunni don't like these people. They are the most radical form of Islam. They don't like them, but they prefer them to the government—the Shiite-run government by Maliki—which has been systematically discriminating against them.

So what do we need to do? As the Senator from South Carolina said, what we want is Maliki to be in a transition government that transitions him out of power, but we cannot wait until that happens.

By the way, they have also taken a place just north of Baghdad where the largest oil refinery is, Baiji, that provides energy to the 7 million people in Baghdad, and they have also come to a place called Haditha, where a dam is that holds a water supply. If they get hold of both of those places, they basically have a stranglehold on Baghdad itself.

This is serious.

So what has the President of the United States and the administration decided to do? Send 90, 200 or 250 people over to Iraq and with the stated purpose of “assessing the situation.”

Those of my friends and colleagues who have been to Iraq know it is a flat desert area, including very hot now. These people, these ISIS forces, are moving in convoys of 100, 200, 300 vehicles.

They can be taken out by air power. Right now the President of the United States has refused to do that, but they can be taken out by air power.

Air power does not determine conflicts, but air power has a profound psychological effect on your adversary. We have drones, and we have the air capability to take out a lot of these forces.

Remember, they are probably at a maximum of about 10,000, and as the

Senator from South Carolina said, they started out with about 1,000, but don't forget they are moving back and forth between Syria and Iraq in this now huge area. They are moving on Baghdad.

I don't know exactly what is going on. I don't believe they can take Baghdad with a frontal assault. I do believe it is possible that they could cause assassinations, bombings, breakdowns in electricity, and breakdown in law and order. In other words, this place where we sacrificed roughly 4,450 American lives is now in the hands of the largest terrorist organization in history.

I say to the President of the United States: We can't wait. If the next 2 weeks that the administration says they are going to use to assess this situation is wasted in assessment, I don't know what is going to happen in Iraq. I don't know what is going to happen to Jordan. I don't know what is going to happen as far as the continued increasing influence of the Iranians.

Published reports today indicate there are Iranian forces, Iranian assistance all through Iran.

An article from the *New York Times*, “Iran Secretly Sending Drones and Supplies into Iraq, U.S. Officials Say,” states:

Gen. Qassim Suleimani, the head of Iran's paramilitary Quds Force, has visited Iraq at least twice to help Iraqi military advisers plot strategy. And Iran has deployed about a dozen other Quds Force officers to advise Iraqi commanders, and help mobilize more than 2,000 Shiite militiamen from southern Iraq, American officials said.

Iranian transport planes have also been making two daily flights of military equipment and supplies to Baghdad—70 tons per flight—for Iraqi security forces.

While the United States is assessing, Iranians are exercising more and more influence.

I have also been told—and I cannot verify it—that the Russians are now offering to provide assistance to Maliki.

There has to be a transition government. There has to be a transition of Maliki out of government, but to wait until that happens, it may be too late.

I would ask my colleague from South Carolina, are you concerned about the Iranian influence and what do you believe is the situation that could evolve on the Jordanian border?

Mr. GRAHAM. If you listen to the people who are launching these attacks, they say they are going to Jordan. What are they trying to accomplish? Bizarre as it may sound to the average American, they have a very specific plan and it sort of goes like this: They want to purify their religion. They are Sunnis. They have a version of Islam, Sunni Islam that is beyond horrific, that is a woman's worst nightmare.

If you want to find a world of women, go to Syria, Iraq, and eventually Afghanistan, I am afraid. You would not believe what these people are capable of doing, what they will do to a person who smokes. They will chop your finger off. I mean, they will kill children in front of their parents.

These people represent the worst in humanity. My fear is, the President's fear, that the stronger they get over there the more exposed we are over here.

So, Mr. President, if you believe it is not in our national security interests to allow these folks to have a safe haven in Syria and now in Iraq, what are you doing about it? You have political problems in Iraq, I have got that, but why does that prevent us from attacking these people in Syria where their leadership resides and where their supply depots are? There has to come a time when this country is going to commit to defending itself.

My goal is to keep the war over there so it doesn't come back here.

Senator MCCAIN, 3 years ago now almost, urged us to act in a way that would have allowed the moderate forces of the opposition to be empowered and to avoid where we are today. We chose not to act, at our own peril.

So I make this crystal clear, this area Senator MCCAIN has described in Iraq represents a terrorist safe haven in the hands of people who want to attack us here at home.

I am not making that up. The Director of National Intelligence, the FBI Director, and Jeh Johnson, the head of Homeland Security, have all said Syria represents a threat to the homeland.

Well, if a Syrian enclave and safe haven represents a threat to the homeland, an Iraqi enclave bigger and richer surely represents a threat to the homeland, and the President admitted as much. So I don't want to hear any more discussions about we have to wait until Iraq gets its house in order until we protect American national security interests.

As to Jordan, now is the time in a bipartisan fashion for the Congress to speak with one voice and tell the world and everyone in the region that we will defend Jordan. The King of Jordan is the last moderate voice in the Middle East surrounding Israel. The King of Jordan has been the most faithful ally to America. The King of Jordan has been effectively engaged with Israel. The King of Jordan represents the best hope in the Middle East.

If we allow a terrorist army—not an organization, now, an army of committed jihadists—to invade that country and put the King at risk, that will be one of the great tragedies in modern history. I think it is now time to let the terrorist army know: You are not going into Jordan, and say it in such a fashion as to not give Iraq away. But if we don't reinforce Jordan quickly, it would be a mistake.

I have high confidence in the Jordanian military, but let me say this: It is in our interests for the King to survive; it is in our interests for Jordan to flourish; it is in our interests for ISIS to be stopped in their tracks in Iraq; it is in our interests for them to be wiped off the face of the Earth to the extent possible; it is in our interests to go on the offensive before it is too late.

One thing I can say I have learned from 9/11 is thinking and believing if we ignore them they will ignore us is a very bad mistake. On September 10, 2001, the day before 9/11, we didn't have one soldier in Afghanistan, we didn't even have an ambassador, and we sent no money in terms of assistance to the Taliban. We were completely disengaged from Afghanistan. How well did that work?

Anytime you disengage from people that bloodthirsty and you believe it will not come back to haunt you, you are making a mistake. Anytime a group will kill women in a soccer stadium for sport and we think we are safe if we ignore them, we are making the mistake for the ages.

These people, the ISIS, represent a depraved form of humanity in the category of the Nazis. And what are we doing about it?

I am tired of ceding city after city, country after country to radical Islam. Now is the time to fight back—fight back as if it meant fighting for your home and your family, because it does—fight back over there so we don't have to fight them here. And they are coming here. If you don't believe me, ask them.

The best way to keep them from coming here is to align ourselves with people over there who do not want their agenda for their family and are willing to fight along our side. Right now, who feels comfortable fighting with America? Right now, our enemies are emboldened, our friends are afraid.

Now is the time to turn this around, Mr. President. You are waiting and waiting and thinking and thinking, and they are on the march. I know this is complicated, but the one thing that is not complicated is that the terrorist organization you said could not have safe haven has the largest safe haven in the history of the world. They are richer than they have ever been, they are more powerful than they have ever been, and you are doing nothing about it. You need to do something about it before it is too late, and we stand ready to help you.

Mr. MCCAIN. I wish to emphasize with my colleague from South Carolina, continuously we hear from the President of the United States that those of us who are in strong disagreement with his strategy—well, there is none. The fact is there is no strategy.

We keep being accused of wanting to send “thousands of troops” on the ground in Syria or in Iraq. That is patently false. I know of no one who shares our concern who wants to send ground combat troops into Iraq. So I wish the President of the United States would stop saying that.

Second of all, what we do want is we want some people who can be forward air controllers, some of our special forces people, to direct these air strikes against what is movement of these hundreds of vehicles in convoy across open desert. It can be done.

The next thing I wish to emphasize is how dangerous it is becoming, particu-

larly at the most holy Shiite shrines of Samarra and Karbala. Those two are the holiest shrines of the Shia. If ISIS comes into those holy sites and destroys them, we are going to see this thing explode even more.

There are many other things I would like to say, but I don't want to continue too much longer on this, but to point out again, this is not just an Iraq problem. This is the border which runs along between Syria and Iraq. We cannot address just the Iraqi side.

Lately, interestingly, Bashar Assad has been using his air power to attack ISIS. If the United States does not become involved, then people such as Bashar al-Assad, people such as the Iranians will fill that vacuum. It is time for us to act.

What do I mean by that?

First of all, why don't we send Ryan Crocker and David Petraeus back to Baghdad. They are the smartest people I have ever known, and everybody agrees with that: Send them back to Baghdad and sit down with Maliki. Also, send some military planning teams that can assess the situation and address the needs of the Iraqi military, those that can still function effectively. Go ahead and orchestrate the air strikes, and understand that the problem in Syria is going to have to be addressed as well. So there are concrete steps that every military leader I know advocates as a way of turning this around.

There is no good option. Because of the situation we are in, there is no good option. But the worst option is what the administration is doing today, which is nothing, except sending a few advisers over to give some assessment of the situation.

No one wants to get back into any conflict. No American wants to do that. I am the last one who wants to do that. But we have to understand what our Director of National Intelligence has told us, what our Secretary of Homeland Security has told us, what our common sense and eyes will tell us: If you have a terrorist organization that has hundreds of millions of dollars, that has control of an area the size of the State of Indiana where they are consolidating power and they have promised they will attack us—the United States can't afford another 9/11. We can't afford to see these jihadists pouring out of Syria and Iraq into Europe and into the United States of America, because these extremists have flowed in from all of these countries.

The President of the United States can make the American people aware of this threat, and that we have to take action, without sending ground combat troops into the conflict. And I am confident—because the memory of 9/11 has not faded in the memory of the people of this country. We remember that tragedy graphically. All of us remember where we were that day. But this is a clear and present danger, and it is long time overdue for the United

States to react as the strongest and most powerful Nation in the world.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the article from the Atlantic by Peter Beinart entitled “Obama's Disastrous Iraq Policy: An Autopsy.”

I further ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an op-ed by DENNIS ROSS, one of the most respected individuals on the entire Middle East, entitled “Op-ed: To contain ISIS, think Iraq—but also think Syria.”

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Atlantic, June 25, 2014]

OBAMA'S DISASTROUS IRAQ POLICY: AN
AUTOPSY

(By Peter Beinart)

Yes, the Iraq War was a disaster of historic proportions. Yes, seeing its architects return to prime time to smugly slam President Obama while taking no responsibility for their own, far greater, failures is infuriating.

But sooner or later, honest liberals will have to admit that Obama's Iraq policy has been a disaster. Since the president took office, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has grown ever more tyrannical and ever more sectarian, driving his country's Sunnis toward revolt. Since Obama took office, Iraq watchers—including those within his own administration—have warned that unless the United States pushed hard for inclusive government, the country would slide back into civil war. Yet the White House has been so eager to put Iraq in America's rearview mirror that, publicly at least, it has given Maliki an almost-free pass. Until now, when it may be too late.

Obama inherited an Iraq where better security had created an opportunity for better government. The Bush administration's troop “surge” did not solve the country's underlying divisions. But by retaking Sunni areas from insurgents, it gave Iraq's politicians the chance to forge a government inclusive enough to keep the country together.

The problem was that Maliki wasn't interested in such a government. Rather than integrate the Sunni Awakening fighters who had helped subdue al-Qaeda into Iraq's army, Maliki arrested them. In the run-up to his 2010 reelection bid, Maliki's Electoral Commission disqualified more than 500, mostly Sunni, candidates on charges that they had ties to Saddam Hussein's Baath Party.

For the Obama administration, however, tangling with Maliki meant investing time and energy in Iraq, a country it desperately wanted to pivot away from. A few months before the 2010 elections, according to Dexter Filkins in *The New Yorker*, “American diplomats in Iraq sent a rare dissenting cable to Washington, complaining that the U.S., with its combination of support and indifference, was encouraging Maliki's authoritarian tendencies.”

When Iraqis went to the polls in March 2010, they gave a narrow plurality to the Iraqiya List, an alliance of parties that enjoyed significant Sunni support but was led by Ayad Allawi, a secular Shiite. Under pressure from Maliki, however, an Iraqi judge allowed the prime minister's Dawa Party—which had finished a close second—to form a government instead. According to Emma Sky, chief political adviser to General Raymond Odierno, who commanded U.S. forces in Iraq, American officials knew this violated Iraq's constitution. But they never publicly challenged Maliki's power grab, which was backed by Iran, perhaps because they believed his claim that Iraq's Shiites

would never accept a Sunni-aligned government. "The message" that America's acquiescence "sent to Iraq's people and politicians alike," wrote the Brookings Institution's Kenneth Pollack, "was that the United States under the new Obama administration was no longer going to enforce the rules of the democratic road . . . [This] undermined the reform of Iraqi politics and resurrected the specter of the failed state and the civil war." According to Filkins, one American diplomat in Iraq resigned in disgust.

By that fall, to its credit, the U.S. had helped craft an agreement in which Maliki remained prime minister but Iraqiya controlled key ministries. Yet as Ned Parker, the Reuters bureau chief in Baghdad, later detailed, "Washington quickly disengaged from actually ensuring that the provisions of the deal were implemented." In his book, *The Dispensable Nation*, Vali Nasr, who worked at the State Department at the time, notes that the "fragile power-sharing arrangement . . . required close American management. But the Obama administration had no time or energy for that. Instead it anxiously eyed the exits, with its one thought to get out. It stopped protecting the political process just when talk of American withdrawal turned the heat back up under the long-simmering power struggle that pitted the Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds against one another."

Under an agreement signed by George W. Bush, the U.S. was to withdraw forces from Iraq by the end of 2011. American military officials, fearful that Iraq might unravel without U.S. supervision, wanted to keep 20,000 to 25,000 troops in the country after that. Obama now claims that maintaining any residual force was impossible because Iraq's parliament would not give U.S. soldiers immunity from prosecution. Given how unpopular America's military presence was among ordinary Iraqis, that may well be true. But we can't fully know because Obama—eager to tout a full withdrawal from Iraq in his reelection campaign—didn't push hard to keep troops in the country. As a former senior White House official told Peter Baker of *The New York Times*, "We really didn't want to be there and [Maliki] really didn't want us there . . . [Y]ou had a president who was going to be running for re-election, and getting out of Iraq was going to be a big statement."

In recent days, Republicans have slammed Obama for withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq. But the real problem with America's military withdrawal was that it exacerbated a diplomatic withdrawal that had been underway since Obama took office.

The decline of U.S. leverage in Iraq simply reinforced the attitude Obama had held since 2009: Let Maliki do whatever he wants so long as he keeps Iraq off the front page.

On December 12, 2011, just days before the final U.S. troops departed Iraq, Maliki visited the White House. According to Nasr, he told Obama that Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, an Iraqiya leader and the highest-ranking Sunni in his government, supported terrorism. Maliki, argues Nasr, was testing Obama, probing to see how the U.S. would react if he began cleansing his government of Sunnis. Obama replied that it was a domestic Iraqi affair. After the meeting, Nasr claims, Maliki told aides, "See! The Americans don't care."

In public remarks after the meeting, Obama praised Maliki for leading "Iraq's most inclusive government yet." Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister, Saleh al-Mutlaq, another Sunni, told CNN he was "shocked" by the president's comments. "There will be a day," he predicted, "whereby the Americans will realize that they were deceived by al-Maliki . . . and they will regret that."

A week later, the Iraqi government issued a warrant for Hashimi's arrest. Thirteen of his bodyguards were arrested and tortured. Hashimi fled the country and, while in exile, was sentenced to death.

"Over the next 18 months," writes Pollack, "many Sunni leaders were arrested or driven from politics, including some of the most non-sectarian, non-violent, practical and technocratic." Enraged by Maliki's behavior, and emboldened by the prospect of a Sunni takeover in neighboring Syria, Iraqi Sunnis began reconnecting with their old jihadist allies. Yet, in public at least, the Obama administration still acted as if all was well.

In March 2013, Maliki sent troops to arrest Rafi Issawi, Iraq's former finance minister and a well-regarded Sunni moderate who had criticized the prime minister's growing authoritarianism. In a *Los Angeles Times* op-ed later that month, Iraq expert Henri Barkey called the move "another nail in the coffin for a unified Iraq." Iraq, he warned, "is on its way to dissolution, and the United States is doing nothing to stop it" because "Washington seems petrified about crossing Maliki."

That fall, Maliki prepared to visit the White House again. Three days before he arrived, Emma Sky, the former adviser to General Odierno, co-authored a *New York Times* op-ed entitled "Maliki's Democratic Farce," in which she argued that, "Too often, Mr. Maliki has misinterpreted American backing for his government as a carte blanche for uncompromising behavior." The day before Maliki arrived, six senators—including Democrats Carl Levin and Robert Menendez—sent the White House a letter warning that, "by too often pursuing a sectarian and authoritarian agenda, Prime Minister Maliki and his allies are disenfranchising Sunni Iraqis . . . This failure of governance is driving many Sunni Iraqis into the arms of Al-Qaeda."

Still, in his public remarks, Obama didn't even hint that Maliki was doing anything wrong. After meeting his Iraqi counterpart on November 1, Obama told the press that, "we appreciate Prime Minister Maliki's commitment to . . . ensuring a strong, prosperous, inclusive, and democratic Iraq," and declared "that we were encouraged by the work that Prime Minister Maliki has done in the past to ensure that all people inside of Iraq—Sunni, Shia, and Kurd—feel that they have a voice in their government." A former senior administration official told me that, privately, the administration pushed Maliki hard to be more inclusive. If so, it did not work. In late December, less than two months after Maliki's White House visit, Iraqi troops arrested yet another prominent Sunni critic, Ahmed al-Alwani, chairman of the Iraqi parliament's economics committee, killing five of Alwani's guards in the process.

By this January, jihadist rebels from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, or ISIL) had taken control of much of largely Sunni Anbar province. Vice President Biden—the administration's point man on Iraq—was now talking to Maliki frequently. But according to White House summaries of Biden's calls, he still spent more time praising the Iraqi leader than pressuring him. On January 8, the vice president "encouraged the Prime Minister to continue the Iraqi government's outreach to local, tribal, and national leaders." On January 18, "The two leaders agreed on the importance of the Iraqi government's continued outreach to local and tribal leaders in Anbar province." On January 26, "The Vice President commended the Government of Iraq's commitment to integrate tribal forces fighting AQ/ISIL into Iraqi security forces." (The emphases are mine.) For his part, Obama has not spoken to Maliki since their meeting last November.

Finally, last Thursday, in what was widely interpreted as an invitation for Iraqis to push Maliki aside, Obama declared, "that whether he is prime minister or any other leader aspires to lead the country, that it has to be an agenda in which Sunni, Shia and Kurd all feel that they have the opportunity to advance their interest through the political process." Obama also noted that, "The government in Baghdad has not sufficiently reached out to some of the [Sunni] tribes and been able to bring them into a process that, you know, gives them a sense of being part of—a unity government or a single nation-state."

That's certainly true. The problem is that it took Obama five years to publicly say so—or do anything about it—despite pleas from numerous Iraq experts, some close to his own administration. This inaction was abetted by American journalists. Many of us proved strikingly indifferent to a country about which we once claimed to care deeply.

In recent days, many liberals have rushed to Obama's defense simply because they are so galled to hear people like Dick Cheney and Bill Kristol lecturing anyone on Iraq. That's a mistake. While far less egregious than George W. Bush's errors, Obama's have been egregious enough. By ignoring Iraq, and refusing to defend democratic principles there, he has helped spawn the disaster we see today. It's time people who aren't Republican operatives began saying so.

[From the *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 2014]

TO CONTAIN ISIS, THINK IRAQ—BUT ALSO
THINK SYRIA

(By Dennis Ross)

The conflict in Iraq will not be settled any time soon. Although the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, and its Sunni allies may not be about to march on Baghdad, they are continuing to expand their control over much of northern and western Iraq. The military and diplomatic steps that President Obama has ordered reflect the U.S. need to prevent ISIS from embedding itself in more of Iraq. Whether they will work, however, is another matter.

Iraq is a mess today. The president is right to expect the Iraqi government to take the lead in its own defense. He is right to insist that Iraq's government must become more inclusive and less sectarian. And he is right to be wary of getting sucked into a sectarian conflict in which we take sides.

The same calculus has guided the United States in Syria. There, our fears of the costs of action—even limited military support for the opposition—led us to ignore the costs of inaction. We hoped that sanctions, a political process and humanitarian assistance would make it possible to affect the reality in Syria. It did not. Those who argued that the price would go up in human and strategic terms—and that we needed to affect the balance of power within the opposition and between it and the regime of President Bashar Assad—were right.

Today, the costs in terms of spillover in the region and the consequences of radical Islamists, particularly ISIS, coming to dominate the opposition are clear. Syria is a disaster, there is no border between Syria and Iraq, and the re-emergence of a terrible sectarian conflict in Iraq is inextricably linked to Syria. There will be no effective or enduring answer to the ISIS threat in Iraq without also taking steps in Syria to deny it a sanctuary and a recruiting base.

If nothing else, this should tell us that our response to the current crisis in Iraq must be guided by a broader strategy toward the region, one that has clear objectives in Iraq and Syria and takes into account that resisting ISIS cannot make it appear that we are

suddenly partners with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. The fact that the Iranians also have reason to fear ISIS means we have converging but not identical interests.

The Iranians have used radical Shiite militias—Hezbollah, Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al Haq—in Syria and Iraq. The latter two—armed, trained and funded by the Iranians—were responsible for killing hundreds of American soldiers in Iraq. We should be talking to Iraq's neighbors, including Iran, about what we and they can do to help stabilize Iraq and defeat ISIS.

But Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan will not be responsive if they think fighting ISIS means the U.S. is prepared to leave the Sunnis vulnerable to Iran and its Shiite-backed militias. If Iran wants stability in Iraq and not an ongoing sectarian war on its border, it will need to accept that although the Shiites will hold many of the levers of power, they must also be prepared to share them.

In Iraq, if the U.S. is to help blunt ISIS, the central government must give Sunnis and Kurds a sense of inclusion and a stake in working with Baghdad and the military. Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's conspiratorial, authoritarian approach has made that impossible. We should make any coordinated military action with the Iraqi government contingent on Maliki actually taking such steps, including appointing a government of national unity, empowering a Sunni defense minister and permitting the Kurds to export their oil. Absent that, we may still choose to target ISIS forces if there is a need, but without regard to what the Iraqi government may seek.

As for Syria, though we must deny ISIS sanctuary there, the U.S. cannot partner with the Assad regime. The simple fact is that so long as Assad remains in power, he will be a magnet for every jihadi worldwide to join the holy war against him. No country in the region is immune from the fallout of the conflict in Syria, and we all face the danger of those who go to fight in Syria returning to their home countries to foment violence.

Though President Obama has spoken about ramping up our support for the opposition in Syria, we are late to that effort. It is time for the United States to assume the responsibility of quarterbacking the entire assistance effort to ensure that more meaningful aid—lethal, training, intelligence, money and humanitarian—not only gets to those who are fighting both ISIS and the Assad regime but is fully coordinated and complementary.

The broader point is that Washington's actions toward ISIS now must be taken with both Iraq and Syria in mind and be guided by a strategy geared toward weakening those forces that threaten the U.S. and its regional friends. The more we take this approach and highlight the costs to Iran of its current posture, the more the Iranians may see that their interests could be served by a political outcome of greater balance in Syria and Iraq. There will be risks to acting, but by now we have seen the costs of inaction, and they are only likely to grow over time.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I appreciate my dear friend Senator COONS' patience.

At this time I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

Mr. COONS. Madam President, something important, something unusual,

something worth noting happened this week, happened yesterday in this Chamber that I don't want to let pass without a few moments of comment.

Yesterday a broad bipartisan majority of this Senate came together to pass the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

First, I congratulate Senators MURRAY, ISAKSON, HARKIN, and ALEXANDER who led so capably on this bill. Senators MURRAY, a Democrat of Washington, and ISAKSON, a Republican of Georgia, spent years working through the details, policy, and language, and months making sure that they got this bill to a point where the Senate and the House in a bipartisan, bicameral way could adopt legislation.

What is this about? It is about something simple, important, and powerful: investing in America's workforce so we can compete with anyone around the world in the 21st century.

This is an area I have focused on a lot here in the Senate which I believe is critical to our Nation, our competitiveness, to strengthening our middle class, and to growing good jobs.

In manufacturing, it is a core challenge for us to ensure that our workers have the training employers are looking for, and that our manufacturing companies are globally competitive. Manufacturing is important to America, to our future, to our middle class, to our communities, and to our families because it pays well, it drives innovation, it contributes greatly to other sectors in our economy and in communities.

That is why a few months ago I launched the Manufacturing Jobs for America initiative that has brought together dozens of Senators. We initially pulled together Democrats from across my caucus to introduce 34 bills, some of the best and broadest ideas we could bring to the table about how to accelerate America's recovery of employment and steady growth in manufacturing. Roughly half of these bills are bipartisan.

Part of the goal of this Manufacturing Jobs for America initiative was to put good ideas out on the floor and get them in the mix as we debate things going forward. So I wish to take a moment today and celebrate that the ideas of many of our partners in this campaign, ideas drawn from many of the bills that are part of this initiative, ended up being important parts of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act that was passed this week.

Let me briefly touch on the five most important who contributed ideas that were embedded in this bill that passed.

First, the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act which was sponsored by Senators REED and BROWN. In our rapidly changing economy, ensuring we can train Americans of all ages for all jobs is critical. Senator REED's bill takes an important step in that direction by investing in adult education, expanding access to technology and digital literacy skills and improv-

ing the coordination of State and local programs.

A bill that was endorsed by the National Association of Manufacturers is the AMERICA Works Act, sponsored by Senators HAGAN and HELLER.

Another challenge we face is ensuring employers can quickly recognize whether a worker has the skills they need. So Senator HAGAN's bill helped solve this by ensuring we prioritize programs that invest in training that delivers portable national and industry-recognized credentials. This encourages job training programs to match the skills of workers with the needs of local employers, training individuals for the jobs currently available in their communities right now.

A third bill that contributed importantly to this bill that was enacted here yesterday, adopted by the Senate yesterday, was the Community College to Career Fund Act, sponsored by Senator FRANKEN and Senator BEGICH. Senator FRANKEN came to the floor yesterday and gave another passionate, important floor speech in support of these ideas. It is something that as I presided—and I have been with Senator FRANKEN in caucus and have heard him speak many times. It is about equipping workers with the skills they need by investing in partnerships between our community colleges and our employers. Senator FRANKEN, Senator BEGICH, myself and others have seen this work in our home communities. We have seen community colleges learn from manufacturers what today are the actual relevant modern manufacturing skills they need and then deliver customized training courses that make a difference in the skills, in the lives, in the college affordability and access of those who seek to join today's manufacturing workforce.

The fourth bill, the On-the-Job Training Act, cosponsored by Senators SHAHEEN and COCHRAN, contributes to the idea that we need to invest in on-the-job training. Because of Senator SHAHEEN's leadership on this bill, we will now make new and important investments so workers can learn what they need to do in the job that needs to be filled, rather than in an academic setting and then search the skills that may match the skills they learn. On-the-job training in this bill sponsored by SHAHEEN and COCHRAN is an important contribution to modernizing America's workplace skills.

The last, the SECTORS Act, cosponsored by Senators BROWN and COLLINS, is a provision that helps meet the fundamental challenge of connecting our schools with our businesses by requiring State and local workforce investment boards to establish sector-based partnerships.

With all of these bills there is an important and common theme. In the 21st century, rapid economic change is a given. In order to compete, in order to grow our economy and grow employment, in order to be productive and to have a successful and growing workforce, we need to be able to adapt as