



Canadian Institute for Jewish Research
Prof. Frederick Krantz, Director

ISRANET DAILY BRIEFING

cijr@isranet.org www.isranet.org 514-486-5544

Tuesday Jan. 14, 2014 Volume XI, No. 3,222 Yom Shlishi, 13 Shevat 5774

P.O. Box 175 • Station H Montreal • Quebec • H3G 2K7 514-486-5544 cijr@isranet.org www.isranet.org

UNENDING SYRIAN CIVIL WAR, OBAMA'S SHI'ITE "TILT", & COLLAPSE OF COLONIAL BORDERS MAY LEAD TO SEEDBED OF GENOCIDE, W. TERRORISM

N.B.: The Latest Issue of Israzine is now on our website and can be viewed by following the link: [White House Ties of NIAC, U.S. Pro-Iranian Regime "Lobby", Increasingly Questioned; Machla Abramovitz, Dec. 27, 2013](#)

Contents:

Obama and the Sunni-Shiite War: Fouad Ajami, *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 12, 2014 — The ground burns in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Borders are being contested, and militant Islamists have all but overwhelmed secular authorities.

Haunted by Syria?: Elliott Abrams, *Weekly Standard*, Jan. 13, 2013 — When the history of the Obama administration is written, there will be a long and damaging chapter on its immense humanitarian and strategic failure in Syria.

Syria's Dictatorship Anniversary: Sympathy for the Two Devils: Barry Rubin, *PJ Media*, Dec. 24, 2013 — Incidentally, Syria's Ba'ath dictatorship is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

Syria's Civil War Tests Whether Borders Drawn Less Than a Century Ago Will Last: Liz Sly, *Washington Post*, Dec. 26, 2013 — That half of his farm lies in Syria and half in Lebanon is a source of mystery and inconvenience for Mohammed al-Jamal, whose family owned the property long before Europeans turned up and drew the lines that created the borders of the modern Middle East.

On Topic Links

The Changing of the Tide in the Syrian Civil War: Itamar Rabinovich, *Israpundit*, Dec. 17, 2013

Yes, Support the Syrian Rebels: Daniel Pipes, *National Review*, Dec. 19, 2013

Beirut's Perfect Storm: Patricio Asfura-Heim & Christopher Steinitz, *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 3, 2014

On My Mind: Syria's Chemical Weapons: Kenneth Bandler, *Jerusalem Post*, Dec. 23., 2013

Saudis' Grant to Lebanon Is Seen as Message to U.S.: Anne Barnard, *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 2014

OBAMA AND THE SUNNI-SHIITE WAR

Fouad Ajami

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 12, 2014

The ground burns in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Borders are being contested, and militant Islamists have all but overwhelmed secular authorities. Yet America's chief diplomat, Secretary of State John Kerry, was in the neighborhood this week, for the 10th time, on an expedition to Israel and the Palestinian territories. There was no sudden urgency to the impasse between Israel and the Palestinians, nor had an opening presented itself for serious negotiations. Israel's attention was focused, as it had to be, on the large menace of Iran and its nuclear drive, and the Palestinians remained mired in their own squabbles.

It was the practice of so many years that Arabs deployed what pressure they could exert on the United States on behalf of the Palestinians. No longer. It is the struggle for Syria, and the Iranian bid for primacy in the Fertile Crescent, that engage the Arabs. This "shuttle diplomacy" of our secretary of state, if anything, is evidence of the retreat of American power. President Obama and his foreign policy lieutenants are given to

the assertion that they don't want the U.S. caught in the middle of other peoples' wars. But by deeds of commission and omission, the U.S. is caught up in a deadly sectarian struggle between Shiite Iran and its "sister republics" in the Arab world on one side, and the Sunni order of Arab power on the other. Mastery of the arcane details of the Shiite-Sunni schism may not be an American specialty, but over the last two years this president and his advisers have placed the U.S. on the side of Iran and its Arab satraps in Lebanon and, now, Iraq.

Iran planned and prepared for this fight. Its role in Lebanon dates to the early 1980s, when the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini found fertile soil among the Shiites of that country. Iran formed the Hezbollah militia in the country's south and in the Bekaa Valley to the east. Hezbollah fighters, newly urbanized young men in search of financial patronage and a sense of mission, came to think of themselves as soldiers in Khomeini's wilayat al-faqih, a Shiite notion involving ordained supremacy. The Sunnis had their Arab nationalism and ties to the Arabs of Egypt and the Gulf; the Christians had their sense of Lebanese identity and their ease with the West. With Iran at the head, this was the Shiites' opportunity to conquer their self-contempt and sense of isolation.

But of late it is the breakdown of the Syrian state, and the fight over that pivotal country, that has given the Iranians this chance at a big role in Arab endeavors. Iran and Syria made common cause in the 1980s when Old Man Assad still ruled. He broke with the taboos of Arab brotherhood and sided with the Iranian revolutionary regime in its war with Saddam Hussein. This wasn't an alliance of equals, but Hafez Assad held his own in that delicate relationship. His son, current President Bashar Assad, could not maintain that balance, and the massive rebellion that broke out against his regime in 2011 by the Sunni majority forced him into greater dependence on Iranian subsidies and military support. The Sunni Arab charge that Syria is now occupied by Iran is a slight exaggeration, but only ever so slight.

Iraq presented Iran with an entirely different setting. This was a wealthy oil country, populous, with a jealous sense of its own place in the region. After the American invasion in 2003, political primacy belonged to Iraq's Shiites, but Iraqi Shiism was not eager to slip into subordination to Iran's will and preferences. But here, too, the Syrian war, and the lack of American interest and willpower were of immense help to the Iranians. The U.S. had quit Iraq by the end of 2011, leaving no residual forces. In the nature of such matters, the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki had to proclaim that withdrawal as a signal day in Iraqi political history. But in truth the fragile Baghdad government was not ready to go it alone. The men in power in Baghdad were suspicious of the intentions and the schemes of the Sunni states of the Arab world, as well as those of Turkey. They would have welcomed an American force large enough to shelter them.

The sectarianism unleashed by the Syrian civil war rendered the Iraqi government more susceptible to Iran's influence, and helped poison the well between the Baghdad government and its Sunni population. For Mr. Maliki and his Daawa party, the Syrian rebellion was a Sunni rebellion, plain and simple. A man given to a healthy dosage of paranoia, Mr. Maliki was unnerved by the rebellions of the Arab Awakening. Syria's upheaval, he was convinced, had a warning for him as well. If the Sunni Arab states, Turkey and the jihadists were determined to bring down the Alawite regime in Damascus, it stood to reason that the Shiite government in Baghdad would be in their cross hairs as well.

Having quit Iraq, the Obama administration developed a vested interest in the narrative that all was well in that country. What influence the U.S. still had was tethered to the rule of Mr. Maliki, even as he drifted away from the Sunnis and the Kurds. Borrowing from the book of the Arab authoritarians of old, Mr. Maliki depicted his bid for dominion as part of a campaign against terror. When he turned up in Washington last October, he came to ask for weapons and diplomatic support, but above all to convey to his rivals that he had Washington's blessing for his campaign for a third term as prime minister.

The Obama administration played along when it would have been the better part of wisdom to deny him the visit in the midst of a political campaign. Mr. Maliki is a lucky man. His political bid for yet another term has the endorsement of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and that of Mr. Obama and Mr. Assad.

When the U.S. lay down the foundations of its presence in the Arab world, it befriended and worked with the powers that be—the Sunni regimes. The Shiites were then outsiders, and the inroads Iran was to make into the Arab states were unthinkable.

This is a radically different moment. America's allies in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the smaller states of the Gulf, and among the Sunnis in Lebanon and Syria can be forgiven the conclusion that the U.S. has acquiesced in this Iranian project. Washington is keen to conciliate Iran. Secretary Kerry has proposed a role for the Iranians in negotiations over Syria—even as Iranian forces and proxies are busy battering what is left of that country. Beirut once mattered to the U.S., but we have left it to the reign of Hezbollah, and what help comes to Lebanese moderates is now offered by Saudi Arabia and France.

A cautionary note: Iran and the Fertile Crescent are not—and by a long shot—a fair reflection of the demography of Islam. The weight of Islam is in the Sunni states. If we opt for an alliance with Iran and its satraps, we should do so in the full knowledge that our choice places us at odds with the vast majority of the Islamic world. Already, our failure to come to the support of the Syrian rebellion has eroded so much of our standing among Muslim Sunnis, in the Arab world and beyond. Five years ago in Cairo, a citadel of Sunni Islam, Mr. Obama called for a new policy of engagement with the Islamic world. That seems more like light years away.

[Contents](#)

HAUNTED BY SYRIA?

Elliott Abrams

[Weekly Standard](#), Jan. 13, 2014

When the history of the Obama administration is written, there will be a long and damaging chapter on its immense humanitarian and strategic failure in Syria. With three years of Obama yet to come, we have not even seen the full humanitarian disaster play out—nor have we yet confronted the dangers that are arising there from the vast jihadist presence.

There are hard choices to be made when strategic and humanitarian interests diverge or even conflict. In Syria, they combined: The United States had an obvious interest in seeing the Assad regime replaced, and two and a half years ago Obama said Assad must go. After all, this was an enemy regime, tied to Iran and Hezbollah and brutal in its repression of all dissent, and it had a good deal of American blood on its hands because it had facilitated the travel of jihadists to Iraq to kill Americans in the previous decade. Assad's departure would be a grave setback to Iran and Hezbollah and a great boon to the people of Syria, who would have a chance to establish a decent government. The population is 74 percent Sunni, so Assad as an Alawite was always going to have to rule by the gun; a Sunni-led government might be able to rely on the ballot box or at least on a less repressive system.

As part of the "Arab Spring," a revolt had started—and Assad had tried to crush it by killing uninvolved civilians and peaceful protesters. Unlike Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, who gave up power, Assad had not flinched: His reaction was to crush the opposition with any force necessary. He used chemical weapons, air attacks on civilian neighborhoods, artillery assaults on medical facilities and dense civilian housing. His method of dealing with opposition was mass murder, and this was evident early. So the toll mounted, and today there are probably 200,000 dead—some estimates are double that—and one fourth of the population is homeless, now refugees or displaced persons.

Assad's murders gave rise to an armed opposition, and there was some pressure to help it get organized. Assad, not the people of Syria, had chosen blood, and his killings were aided by Iran and Hezbollah—with arms supplied by Russia. America's Gulf Arab allies (primarily Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE) and Turkey wanted Assad out and saw the battle for Syria as a critical security issue for the entire region. So did the French. So did key Obama administration officials: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and then her successor John Kerry and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates urged support for the rebels. The danger was not just that they would lose, but that they would become radicalized unless there were a serious effort to train and arm non-jihadist forces.

Without American leadership, the Arabs and Turks would be unable to put together a coherent program and might back groups we viewed as extreme and dangerous, and tied to al Qaeda. With American leadership, especially early on, we could have organized a coherent international effort to back non-jihadist Sunni rebels, make them stronger than their rivals, and enable them to fight against the regime and against al Qaeda-linked jihadists. Indeed the vacuum that sucked in jihadists from all over the world would never have been created. Nor is this 20-20 hindsight; there were plenty of people inside and outside the administration urging the more active policy for the United States.

But no argument could persuade the president. Advice and warnings from his subordinates fell on deaf ears, as the jihadist groups grew in power. Even the multiple uses of chemical weapons by Assad led to nothing, or worse than nothing. In fact they led to an Obama threat—his famous “red line”—and then his eleventh-hour reversal on a decision to strike some of Assad's assets by way of punishment and deterrence. Instead, Obama fumbled and grasped the helping hand of Vladimir Putin, who concocted a chemical weapons deal between Obama and Assad. Under it, Assad declares where his stocks are, and the “international community” works with him to remove them. Of course we have no idea if he is declaring 10 or 40 or 70 percent of those stocks, and no one in the region believes it is 100 percent. Meanwhile Assad, rather than the people of Syria whom he is murdering in large numbers, is now our partner.

At the end of 2013, that is the picture. The chemical weapons deal gave Assad license to continue killing by any means other than chemical weapons, and he is using it. A vicious bombardment of Aleppo began December 15 and continued day after day. Helicopters drop “barrel bombs” filled with explosives, nails, and other shrapnel designed to kill indiscriminately. “The medics say they are removing people in parts; they aren't sure how many there are,” came the report from the Aleppo Media Center. “There was a big massacre today. We were treating shrapnel wounds, deep abdominal and brain injuries. I just lost count of the amputations,” a doctor told *CNN* two days before Christmas. Three days before New Year's, a helicopter dropped a barrel bomb on a vegetable market, killing two dozen more people. The American strike that President Obama decided against at the last minute could have destroyed some of Assad's helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, damaged their bases, degraded their ability to conduct such attacks, and given Assad a firm and credible warning to stop using airpower against civilian targets.

The Obama administration has a variety of excuses for its inaction. What can we do, after all? Would a jihadist victory be better than Assad? Small but growing elements of the foreign policy establishment are now echoing the line that we can't after all allow al Qaeda to take over, so perhaps Assad is a necessary evil. But there were obvious things to do, and the administration should not now be allowed to escape condemnation for its feckless refusal to make choices. If today's choices are worse than yesterday's, or those available in 2012 and most of 2013, that is because Obama decided to do nothing. When I testified to the House Armed Services Committee in July 2013, I urged a onetime strike at Assad's air assets and noted that Secretary Kerry was in favor of the same move: Cripple Assad's small air force and you tilt the battlefield militarily, politically, and psychologically. Remember Kerry's speech of August 30?

[To Read the Full Article Click the Following [Link](#) –ed.]

[Contents](#)

**SYRIA'S DICTATORSHIP ANNIVERSARY:
SYMPATHY FOR THE TWO DEVILS**

Barry Rubin

[PJ Media](#), Dec. 24, 2013

Incidentally, Syria's Ba'th dictatorship is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. The best Syrian analyst I can think of, a very honest guy, is Ammar Abdulhamid. I recently read an article he wrote and was struck by how sad the situation in Syria is. He wrote: Re-legitimizing the Assad regime today, after all it had done, will green light genocidal ventures elsewhere in the world. If world leaders are standing helpless in the face of one genocide today, what will they, I wonder, when they are faced with a dozen? The world witnessed similar conditions during the Cold War for sure, but this is supposed to be the post-Cold War Era, the Era of Never Again and R2P, an era where social media is creating deep links between average citizens and realities on the ground everywhere in the world. Allowing for a return of Cold-War-like realities and developments, or, to be more specific, allowing for the start of Cold War II, is a major step backward. It's a major setback, a major failure, and it will come with a hefty price tag for all.

In other words, he is predicting terrible continued bloodshed in Syria, and the even more depressing probability of more genocide, since the international community is powerless to help. The likelihood is that Syria will become an Iranian colony. Yet there is a big hole in Abdulhamid's analysis; that of the fate of moderate Syrians, because for a moderate Syrian, the flip of the coin leads to an unavoidable outcome; heads they lose, tails they lose. If the regime side wins, there will be a massacre of Sunni Muslims. If the Syrian rebels win, there will be a massacre of Alawites and Christians. Either way, there will be mass murder. This is horrible. Let me make it plain. There will be mass murder, even genocide in Syria. There is no escape; one group will most certainly be at the mercy of another. Syrian rebels have made it clear they will enforce Shari'a.

I was in Syria once, and the regime soldiers ushered me out politely. In fact, I was riding in a taxi there at the moment Richard Nixon resigned. I remember a moderate Syrian Politician asking me, "Will I see democracy in Syria during my lifetime?" I stood with my mouth agape, unable to reply. Seeing my jaw drop, he shrugged sadly and said, "Oh well, maybe in my children's lifetime." Many of the Syrian rebels have in fact defected to al-Qa'ida. So much for the "moderates" that the American taxpayers support and arm. On the other side of the picture, you have not just Russia, but also Iran and Hizballah protecting the Asad regime. Roughly 40% of the Syrian territory is held by the regime; approximately 40% by the rebels; and about 20% by the Kurds. An estimated 70% of the population is controlled by the regime. So dangerous and serious is the situation that I must in good conscience make a statement: The United States and the West are working on a solution that will probably end up being a genocidal situation in Syria. Ammar is correct, but either side winning the war will lead to more bloodshed. Tens of thousands of children have been killed, only the prelude to tens of thousands more. An estimated 200,000 people have been killed thus far.

[Contents](#)

**SYRIA'S CIVIL WAR TESTS WHETHER BORDERS
DRAWN LESS THAN A CENTURY AGO WILL LAST**

Liz Sly

[Washington Post](#), Dec. 26, 2014

That half of his farm lies in Syria and half in Lebanon is a source of mystery and inconvenience for Mohammed al-Jamal, whose family owned the property long before Europeans turned up and drew the lines that created the borders of the modern Middle East. Jamal has mostly ignored the invisible frontier that runs a few yards from his house — and so did the Syrian civil war when it erupted nearby. Relatives were kidnapped, neighbors volunteered to fight and shells came crashing in, killing some of his cows, injuring three workers and underlining just how meaningless the border is. “I blame Sykes-Picot for all of it,” said Jamal, referring to the secret 1916 accord between Britain and France to divide up the remnants of the collapsing Ottoman Empire. The result was the creation of nation-states where none had existed before, cutting across family and community ties and laying the foundations for much of the instability that plagues the region to this day.

Less than a century after they were drawn, the durability of those borders — and the nations they formed — is being tested as never before. The war in Syria is spilling into Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Israel, sucking in places that for centuries belonged to a single entity and people whose history, faith and livelihoods transcend the nations in which they were born. Sunnis from across the region are pouring into Syria to fight alongside the rebels, many in pursuit of extremist ideals aimed at restoring Sunni dominion. Shiites from the same countries are flocking to defend President Bashar al-Assad’s Shiite-affiliated regime, compounding the sectarian dimension of a war that no longer is just about Syria.

Civilians are fleeing in the opposite direction, 2.3 million of them to date, transforming communities lying outside Syria in ways that may be irreversible. “From Iran to Lebanon, there are no borders anymore,” said Walid Jumblatt, the leader of Lebanon’s minority Druze community. “Officially, they are still there, but will they be a few years from now? If there is more dislocation, the whole of the Middle East will crumble.” Nobody seriously expects existing borders to be formally redrawn as a result of the ongoing upheaval. But as world powers prepare to gather in Switzerland next month for talks aimed at ending the Syrian conflict, this is a moment every bit as profound as the one that followed World War I when the region’s nations were born, said Fawaz Gerges of the London School of Economics.

Already the chaos of Syria’s civil war has muddled the map, creating new frontiers that more closely coincide with the communities they contain. Four flags now fly over the territory known as Syria, representing the competing visions of sect, identity and allegiance that the war has exposed — and the pieces into which it might break. The outcome could be further fragmentation of the existing states, or perhaps a longer-term consolidation that blurs the borders dividing them, Gerges said. “Everything is in question now, and it is all very difficult to predict,” he said. “But what we are realizing is that the Middle East state system set up after World War I is coming apart...Sectarian borders are real.”

[To Read the Full Article Click the Following [Link](#) –ed.]

[Contents](#)

ON TOPIC

[The Changing of the Tide in the Syrian Civil War](#): [Itamar Rabinovich, *Israpundit*, Dec. 17, 2013](#) — The transition to a new phase in the Syrian civil war was marked by the regime’s victory in al-Qusayr in June 2013.

[Yes, Support the Syrian Rebels](#): [Daniel Pipes, *National Review*, Dec. 19, 2013](#) — In April 2013, I published an article with the slightly inaccurate title, "Support Assad." Better would have been "Support Whichever Side Is Losing in the Syrian Civil War."

[Beirut’s Perfect Storm](#): [Patricio Asfura-Heim & Christopher Steinitz, *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 3, 2014](#) — As the conflict in Syria spills across the border into Lebanon, sectarian violence there has risen to levels unseen in recent years.

[On My Mind: Syria’s Chemical Weapons](#): [Kenneth Bandler, *Jerusalem Post*, Dec. 23., 2013](#) — Will the Cape Ray, the US vessel designated to receive and destroy Syria’s chemical weapons, suffer a fate similar to the Mobro 4000?

[Saudi’s Grant to Lebanon Is Seen as Message to U.S.](#): [Anne Barnard, *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 2014](#) — If a wealthy patron were all the Lebanese Army needed to counter the Shiite militant group Hezbollah as the dominant force in the country, the recent \$3 billion grant from Saudi Arabia might make a decisive difference in the country’s complex political landscape.