



JHU/APL Rethinking Seminar Series
*Rethinking Future Environments
and Strategic Challenges*

www.jhuapl.edu/rethinking



9 May 2018

Dr. Kenneth Pollack
American Enterprise Institute
Rethinking and Assessing Middle East Options

Notes:

1. Below are informal notes of the speaker's remarks as taken by a JHU/APL staff member.
2. Links to the video, audio, and presentation files from other Seminars can also be found on the *Video Archives*, *Past Series*, and *Speakers* pages of the website. Videos from recent years may be found on the [JHU/APL YouTube Playlist](#).

Introduction

Our troubles with Tehran are so problematic because the US starts with the presumption that the Iranians hate us, however, 79 million of them probably actually like us. The problems are with the regime and its hard-liners who run Iran's foreign policy. They see the US as their mortal enemy and fear that the US would destroy them unless they fight back. The problem is that they have acted on this belief all across the Middle East and have done things that are designed to hurt the US directly or through our allies. If they just ranted about America, there wouldn't be a problem.

Understanding the Source of the Regime's Thinking

- In some cases, some individuals may actually believe the US is evil
 - The US has had a long history with Iran and we have done some dumb things to them, although probably not as many or as bad as they think
 - Some seem to believe that the US is behind every bad thing that has happened to them
- It is also useful to the regime to call the US Iran's enemy
 - This helps them maintain their power
 - The current regime has largely discarded the tenets of Ayatollah Khomeini leaving only the hatred of the US to justify and legitimize their control
- Nothing we have done has managed to change their view as can be seen with the situation during various administrations
 - Pollack was the "Iran Guy" in the Clinton Administration when there was an effort to at least move toward a better relationship
 - While the population and some of the leadership clearly wanted it, the hard-liners did not
 - Obama tried even harder and did get agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was to be the gateway for rapprochement
 - Obama started pushing for it during the election campaign
 - SecState Kerry wanted it even more and once they had the JCPOA he tried to get someone in Tehran to work on widening the rapprochement
 - Again, there were no takers

- The Obama Administration hoped that the JCPOA would be transformational while the Tehran leadership saw it as purely transactional
 - Obama was the best American president Tehran would ever get but they stiffed him
- Bottom line: After 30 years of work on Iran, Pollack believes that no matter how the US tries, the Tehran regime is just not interested in an improved relationship
 - The US keeps trying but then Tehran slams the door
 - Iran seems comfortable having the US as its enemy and continues to try various ways to hurt us

Iran and the Overall Instability in the Middle East

- Problem: The Arab state system developed after WWII is failing
 - It was never that good having been built on political autocracy, an oil-driven economy, and very traditional socio-cultural societies
 - Things were reasonably stable there until the 1990s
 - Then the Arab Spring in 2011 showed the huge spread of unrest and dissolution among the population
- The Middle East is changing and its traditional state systems no longer work
 - No one likes it, but they don't know what they want instead
- There are some interesting experiments going on with varying degrees of success
 - Tunisia is experimenting with a form of democracy
 - Saudi Arabia is experimenting with some dramatic social and economic changes and Morocco is trying something similar
 - There is no way to know what will actually work
- Some states have already failed since the Arab Spring such as Syria, Lebanon, and Libya
 - Revolutions occurred in Tunisia and Egypt
 - Massive unrest appeared in places like Bahrain and Oman
 - Prospects for even more unrest and government failures are high
- Bottom line: This situation could lead to great improvements or it could lead to greater chaos/conflict/autocracy
 - The US wants the Middle East to have a new, better, stable situation
 - Iran wants that chaos, autocracy, and conflict to continue
 - They see these situations as opportunities and actively work to undermine other governments, especially those aligned with the US
 - They try to move in whenever they see state collapse occurring to take advantage of any vacuums of power, possibly by backing proxies

Impossible to Predict Where Situation Is Going

- Iran is an active player pushing the wrong way toward greater instability / chaos / autocracy
 - That's what works for them
 - Iran wants to be the center of the Middle East and to dominate the region
- The US has not really been playing an active role in the region for the last decade, leaving Iran as the most important player there now
 - Iran is the most influential power in Iraq now despite all past US efforts there
 - Assad's Syrian regime was almost defeated when Iran stepped in
 - Iran then brought in Russia, Hezbollah, and Shia militias, which saved Assad and left Iran playing a central role – more than they could have hoped for directly
- The current situation is frightening to Israel as they see Iran building a military network throughout Syria, however it is currently primarily defensive

- However, this network is primarily to ensure Iran's control over Syria as well making sure that Assad remains Syria's leader but with Iranian tutelage
- The Israelis believe that once Iran feels comfortably in control, the defensive posture will turn offensive toward wherever they believe they could spread their influence next
 - Iran is already beginning to dominate Lebanon, where Hezbollah went from a group that could block others actions to being a key player in Lebanese politics
 - Iran now has a foothold in Yemen
 - Saudi Arabia probably exaggerated the extent of Iranian involvement there at first when the Saudis intervened
 - However, the Saudi intervention probably caused some of the increase in Iran's power there because the Houthis were forced to rely on Iran significantly more
 - Iran is now trying to build up the Houthis to be a Hezbollah-like force
 - Israel is telling the Saudis not to let Iran do the same thing to them in Yemen that they did to Israel with Hezbollah
 - Hezbollah has 160,000 rockets and missiles that could be launched at Israel
 - This appears to be what Iran is doing there
- Bottom line: The Middle East is up for grabs
 - Iran has been playing hardball and doing it well so that they now dominate the northern tier of the Arab world
 - Iran is currently consolidating its gains, but once that happens they will go looking for the next set of targets
 - They could move against Jordan or Kuwait and potentially Israel and Saudi Arabia to spread their influence and hurt America's primary allies

Allies are Terrified

- Allies often exaggerate the level of threat from Iran, but it is a real threat to them
- When Iran gets aggressive, allies try to push back against Iran, but only Israel has an adequately significant military force to face Iran and even that force is somewhat limited
 - Result: Their actions tend to make the situation that much worse
 - Example: Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen in 2015
 - The Saudis were frustrated by Obama's lack of interest in the region and kept telling the US that it had created a power vacuum that the Iranians were filling
 - The Saudis wrong-headily chose to get involved in Yemen's civil war
 - Problem: The Saudis are not capable of ending the war there on good terms
 - Pollack predicted that the Saudis would overstrain their politics and finances to the extent that the US would have to bail them out, which is happening
- Bottom line: The US can't expect to leave Middle East problems to our allies there because if we aren't playing an active role there, we are likely to be dragged into a horrific regional war

The Iranian Nuclear Deal (JCPOA)

- Five years ago, everyone was yelling about the prospect of Iran getting nuclear weapons but no one feared Iran would use such weapons against them
 - Even 80% of Israelis did not fear Iran would use nuclear weapons against them
 - People were comfortable that the Iranians understood deterrence
 - The real fear: If the Iranians had nukes, they would feel less constrained in their other hostile activities in the region, exacerbating all the area's problems
- Iran respects US and Israeli military power and understands that either could get more aggressive, but also believes that having nuclear weapons would provide sufficient deterrence

- Similar thinking occurred in Pakistan, which once it had nuclear weapons believed that India wouldn't dare attack them no matter what sort of crazy provocation they instigated
 - Result: Pakistan grabbed Indian territory, blew up an Indian hotel, etc.
- The fear: If Iran got nukes, they might be 10 times more aggressive in the region believing that their nuclear weapons would keep them safe
- Nuclear weapons really weren't the problem in Iran
 - In N. Korea the nuclear weapons are the problem since it is generally believed that the North Koreans might actually use them
- The idea behind the JCPOA would take this one piece out of the instability equation there
 - It won't solve the problems in the Middle East but would make it a little easier to address them
- The US tends to over-emphasize the nuclear issue with Iran while ignoring a lot of its other aggressive behavior
- Trump's strategy to push back on Iran was simply to pull out of the JCPOA
 - The Obama/Kerry strategy really wanted the deal both to remove the nuclear issue and to provide a gateway to a rapprochement with Iran
 - However, they didn't get the gateway
 - If the JCPOA is considered a gateway to rapprochement, then you can make concessions about enrichment 15 years from now because you expect a better relationship in 3-5 years
 - All the concessions were considered temporary until we had a better rapprochement with Iran
 - Then we wouldn't need the treaty since it would have become vestigial
- The deal does have problems
 - Trump is correct that it was not the best possible deal and had several problems including:
 - The sunset clause that allow Iran to increase enrichment 10-15 years out
 - The complicated inspection procedures
 - The lack of addressing ballistic missiles
 - These concessions made sense as part of a transformational process but we never got that process or the rapprochement, leaving a very imperfect deal for the longer term
 - President Trump was wrong to pull out of JCPOA – while not perfect, it was having a major impact
 - Iran's nuclear weapons program had been shelved for 8-13 years, which was actually a good deal for Iran
 - Other countries in the past started to develop nuclear weapons investing a lot of money and taking huge strategic risks but then stopped for one reason or another
 - This could happen with Iran, too, if the right incentives were given
- Problem: If the deal had worked as planned, we would have gotten a good rapprochement and then the JCPOA could just disappear, but now we don't know what will happen

What's Next?

- Europe, Russia, and China may try to keep Iran within the deal, but that may depend on how the US implements the sanctions
- Biggest problem with what Trump did: How do you *get to* what comes next?
- Trump should have used the threat of pulling out of the deal for leverage – now he has none
 - The situation is made worse because the US becomes the bad guy in this scenario
 - The others agreed to it as a starting point even though it wasn't perfect
 - Pulling out is also bad as a matter of international law / strategy / politics / diplomacy
- If we want a better deal, we will need to have all the other countries to agree
 - At some level we may need the Iranians to agree

- Also, we especially need China and Russia, otherwise they could break any deal that is reached with the Europeans
 - Problem: How can we do that given what Trump just did with the JCPOA
- There was a way to get a better deal but that requires leverage, which we don't have now
 - Trump may have pulled out of the deal only because he said it was the worst deal ever
 - Some in the Administration have suggested the pullout is actually about regime change
 - Trump wants to put maximum pressure on Iran to bring about its economic and political collapse, which would bring in a better regime
 - Hard to imagine a regime that would be worse
 - Iran is already in bad shape and more pressure could push it over the edge
 - Other countries would have followed the US lead because it has the largest economy and others are reluctant to cross us
 - While this is not an insane strategy, all the different steps required to make it work seem unlikely
- We would need to:
 - Get others to go along with our concept, but they are currently very unhappy with us
 - Find a way to interest Europe but that would be hard now, and Russia, China and India would be even less interested
 - Be the one that controls the oil sanctions
 - Trump has said that unless a country significantly reduces its Iranian oil purchases, it will be cut off from the US banking system
- Basic question: What is a significant reduction?
 - The President gets to decide
 - The Obama Administration came up with a reduction goal of 20%
 - We don't know what Trump will call a significant reduction that a country must meet to avoid being cut off from US banking
 - It could be only 4 barrels or maybe Trump will want to call for 1% more than Obama did
- The problem with secondary sanctions is we would wind up fighting with France, Britain, and China – all trade partners and we must be willing to fight them
 - To win, they must be willing to go along with sanctions
 - Problem: We already have a lot of trade issues with them so they may not be interested in going along with the US on these issues
- We may not get a regime change
 - Iran's regime is insanely corrupt and horrible at managing the economy
 - There also needs to be an uprising against the government and a need for an army that will not shoot protestors
 - Iran's people try to rise up and revolt often but never succeed in an overthrow
 - The military is under the control of the conservatives and so they are willing to go out in the street and shoot protestors
 - Revolutions only succeed if the military loses its capability or willingness to fight its own population
 - Bottom line: The Iranian regime may continue to chug along
 - In the 1960s no one would have expected that N. Korea would last 20 years but they are still there despite mass starvation, isolation, ruined economies

What We Need to Do

- Trump's bet on dumping the JCPOA may or may not work – or we just may alienate our allies
 - We need allies to push back and prevent Iran from creating a nuclear weapons base

- The US does need to push back on Iran in order to prevent the Iranians from expanding in the region and taking advantage of the chaos there to create more chaos
 - However, we should not be pushing back the way that President Trump is trying to do it
- The AEI website has a [series of Pollack's essays](#) on where the US should be pushing back:
 - *Start with Syria*
 - The Iranian-led alliance is winning now but it is also a source of vulnerability
 - They tied themselves to an incompetent, corrupt, hated regime – much as the US did in Vietnam and Russia did in Afghanistan
 - We need to do what Russia did to us in Vietnam and we did to them in Afghanistan – get the people to ask why they are sending their soldiers overseas
 - Supporting Assad has been costly for Iran
 - They are spending \$20-\$50B – a huge burden on their small economy
 - Hundreds or thousands of their soldiers were killed
 - In recent protests, the largest complaints were about the money and manpower being spent in Syria
 - Beating Iran could be done by supporting headaches created by the opposition – easy to do; the allies want this, too
 - *Then on to Iraq*
 - Iraqis all hate Iran – even those paid by Iran
 - If we help them to face up to the Iranians, they will do it
 - Instead we are again pulling out our troops, not providing economic relief, and not supporting them diplomatically leaving the Iranians the only game in town
 - The Shia militia backed by Iran are the worst possible but the only option for Iran since they will likely turn Iraq into Lebanon
 - Nothing is likely to change after the upcoming election
 - Iran is the only one at the table so they don't need to have a very strong hand; they only need to ante-up and they constantly do that
 - *Yemen*
 - It would have been better if Saudi Arabia had stayed out of Yemen's civil war
 - We need to get both the Saudis and the Iranians out of there
 - Because things are so bad now, we have to increase our support to help Saudi Arabia *and* the Iranians get out
 - What is needed is a big military victory and then political concessions – very similar to what the rebels actually asked for
 - A resulting power-sharing agreement might help get the Iranians out
 - *Persian Gulf*
 - We should be more aggressive with the Iranians there
 - The US Navy should not have to run away from the stunts the Iranians have been pulling there
 - We must show allies our resolve about Iranian activities as well as maintaining freedom of navigation in international waters
- We can't be everywhere given limited resources and willingness to act, there are some things/places we should not try to change:
 - *Lebanon* because it is too fragile
 - Iranian-backed Hezbollah is now so big and embedded that trying to kill it would also kill Lebanon
 - We need to wait until Iran is weaker
 - *JCPOA pull-out* because we need international help on these issues especially from Europe and East Asia
 - It was what the leaders wanted to do from the beginning

- All the leaders told Trump they would stand with him on any actions against Iran in Syria if he just didn't destroy the deal; Trump wasn't interested
 - *Regime change in Iraq* (which will be needed at some point) because they continue to call us their enemy and turn down any efforts to develop better relations
 - This would improve regional stability
 - We must consider this a long term aspirational policy goal
 - The Iranians are likely to fight back against all of the suggestions made above, but the ability to do so varies from place to place
 - They have a limited capability to push back in Syria but greater capabilities in Iraq
 - If the US goes after the regime, it will fight back with everything they've got because this would be their doomsday scenario
 - The American people don't want their soldiers marching into Tehran to occupy the country and try to do better what we did in Iraq
 - However, that may be the road we take if we are serious about regime change
 - If Iran believed that the US would force a regime change, that would provide some level of deterrence as we have seen in the past
 - When Iran has over-reacted in the past, it has usually been when they thought we were coming for the regime, which we weren't
 - Example: Blowing up the Khobar Towers housing complex in Saudi Arabia killing 19 Americans
 - Bottom line: We want to hold regime change in reserve and consider it a policy we are not actively pursuing

The Unstated Key – the Need to Address the Failure of the Arab State System

- Iran is not 10-feet tall
 - They never started a civil war or an insurgency, nor have they successfully overthrown a foreign government
 - They have tried these actions but they have only been able to exacerbate situations, jumping in when they see an opportunity
- Solution: Don't create opportunities for the Iranians to come in and exploit
 - We must help / push / cajole / coerce the Arabs into making their own reforms including political, social, economic, etc.
 - Pollack is a big fan of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and what he is trying to do there and is what we need him to do there
 - We can't afford to have Saudi Arabia turn into another Yemen or Libya
 - If the Saudis manage to become something better and more stable, then others in the region can, too
 - This must be considered part of a wider Iran strategy
 - This should be part of what we ask of our allies in the region
 - They are all terrified of Iran
 - Other Arab states say their ability to reform is diminished by the Iranian threat
 - They have to put money toward defending against it and do political things because of it
 - They are exaggerating but they are not wrong on this point
 - Some use Iran as an excuse for not reforming at all
- Bottom line: We need to remove the Iran threat by helping Salman and eliminating the Iran threat as an excuse for not reforming
 - This is critical for the stability of the whole Middle East

- Iran finds the fissures in societies and pulls them apart; we need to seal up those fissures
- We can work with our European allies, who now see the need, and lead in pushing back Iran plus dealing with the civil wars, but countries in the region must do their part by reforming
 - If they stop reforming, then we stop pushing back on Iran
 - We can't be successful in pushing back on Iran, unless those in the region are willing to do their part

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Re: How Can the Iranians Work with the Shia When They Hate Them?

- Actually, the Iranians are really more ecumenical than we give them credit for
 - Iran is basically an anti-status quo entity
- Iran is willing to support lots of crazy groups from Christian terrorists, socialists, even Salafists who want to kill all Shia
 - Iran puts its money on every number on the roulette wheel in the Iraq civil war because it wanted to be on the winning side no matter who won
- Recently, they have had more trouble working with Sunni groups because of the Sunni/Shia split, which was being exacerbated by Saudi efforts to make it all about the Sunni/Shia split
 - Iran has not wanted that and has been able to make use of Shia communities to one degree or another in Iraq, less so in Syria, and more so in Lebanon and Yemen
 - There are Shia populations throughout the Gulf that they could use against the governments of Kuwait or Saudi Arabia
 - Shia in Yemen are about 5-10% of the population but up to 15% in Saudi Arabia and we don't want the Iranians to do there what they did in Yemen
- Iran is the ultimate anti-status quo state and can't assume that there is a natural firebreak when they get into Sunni areas
 - Iran is willing to support any group wanting to overthrow its current government and even more so if they want to do it by force
 - This plays to their advantage
 - We know they are supporting Hamas and even have ties with al Qaeda
 - The US can't just take the Sunni side in a wider Sunni/Shia war because we would lose a number of countries that would like to be on our side starting with Iraq
 - Iraq is majority Shia but it does not want to be a vassal of Iran

Re: Russia

- All the reasons that the Russians are in the Middle East are bad ones because they:
 - Want to harm us
 - Hope to make arms sales there
 - Are trying to expand their power
- Russia is doing all this partially by partnering with Iran and maintaining a strong alliance with them as they have for decades
 - After the fall of the USSR, the KGB successors reached out to Iran for help building a robust intelligence system to work against Islamic fundamentalists in Central Asia
 - Both were very frightened by the Sunni fundamentalists in the Caucuses and Central Asia
 - They recognized their commonality of interests that have been vastly expanded during the Syrian civil war
- The US created a vacuum in the Middle East and Russia moved in, but they are still very weak, especially in that region because:
 - They have very little capability to project power
 - They have very little resources and they are not willing to invest money or troops there
- Putin has to keep reassuring the Russian people that Syria is not another Afghanistan

- So, we should make it so for them
- If he saw such as situation developing coming, he'd have to get out of Syria because Russia could not go through that strain again
- If we could push the situation that way, we could then use the Russians to show Iran that they know where things are going in Syria and that they should cut a deal while they have leverage
 - There is a need to get to a power-sharing agreement now when they have maximum leverage to support the Alawites
- Bottom line: Putin has a weak hand but he plays it well especially since the US keeps not showing up at the table

Re: Israel

- There is a very high risk of war in the Middle East:
 - Between Iran and the Saudis despite the fact that neither of them wants it
 - Between Iran and the Israelis because Iran is trying to do everything it can to nail down its stronghold in Syria, which is currently a defensive effort
- However, Iran's defensive presence in Syria threatens Israel
 - The 160,000 missiles and rockets Iran sent to Hezbollah are considered defensive to deter an attack on Hezbollah by Israel
 - Problem: Once they have the weapons, the situation looks very different to Israel
- Israelis believe that Iran is only in the process of establishing its control over Syria, but that could change very quickly
 - They have said that they will not allow Iran to turn Syria into another Lebanon
 - Syria could actually be worse because Lebanon doesn't have the major Iranian military infrastructure such as what Iran is building in Syria now
- Israel is likely to fight back very hard but how willing are the Iranians to take it?
 - At what point would Iran retaliate and how will they retaliate?
 - Israel's deterrence approach is that if someone hits you, then you hit back 10 times harder to convince the adversary not to hit you again
- So far, Israel has been hitting Iran and the Iranians have just been taking it, but:
 - At some point Iran will feel the need to hit back
 - Then Israel will feel forced to hit back at Iran 10 times harder
 - It would be hard for Iran not to retaliate
- Bottom line: This type of inadvertent escalation is very dangerous
 - Therefore, the US should do more in Syria now
 - The only thing that would prevent an Iran / Israel war is if the US becomes willing to take the fight to Assad – not with US troops but by backing the Syrian opposition forces
 - This is what Israel wants
 - We must make it clear that Iran won't be able to turn Syria into another Lebanon

Re: The United States in the Middle East

- The US has not done a great job in the Middle East, but who would have done better?
- We can't just walk away from the region since what happens there doesn't stay there
- We have done some good work there but also many mistakes – some of them horrible, some very helpful to the region
 - But who could have done better?
- Pollack wrote a book in 2008 mostly about the need for reform in the Arab world, warning that without it there would be civil wars, revolutions, insurgencies, greater terrorism – and it happened
- Problem: Americans are getting tired of trying to help in the Middle East but every time we try to walk away, we get pulled back in because there is no one else to turn the task over to
- China is the obvious successor since it has the same interests in the Middle East as does the US

- China wants the region stable to ensure that the oil keeps flowing and does so cheaply
 - They have a greater incentive because they buy so much more oil than we do
- However, China shows no inclination to get involved
 - The US showed none until 1968 when the UK announced they were done there
 - Then it took the US 20 years before recognizing that we would have to deal with the region's issues

Re: The US as the Only Possible Change Maker

- The US shouldn't be restructuring Middle East societies for them; we should be helping, cajoling, coercing them to do the restructuring for themselves
 - We should be doing what we did in Europe after WWII, in East Asia after the Korean War, and in Latin American since the 1980s – what we do all the time
- These are big projects but we have done this type of work before
- It would not be like the one-off Marshal Plan but it would also require the effort by the people of the region to act for themselves
 - We need to make them think about what would be a better political/economic/social system that would be stable for their people
 - The US role has been to do things like dealing with the external threats
- Now our allies get the picture in the Middle East agreeing on the need for stability and they are willing to help there
 - The ideas (from the World Bank, IMF, etc.) already exist
 - Problem: There is no willingness on the part of the US to lead as we did elsewhere previously
- There has been a long-term unwillingness to think about what needs to be done to reform the Middle East
 - Most US policymakers have just wanted Middle East problems to be patched up with bandages until they were out of office
 - Result: Any solution that is proposed will now cost even more than it would have before
- Pollack is sure that the policy he proposed won't be acted upon, but once again in 10 years people will say "We could have done it before but now it is too late"
- Churchill said that the Americans will eventually do the right thing after all the alternatives have been exhausted
- Pollack is waiting for all the alternatives in the Middle East to be exhausted

Re: Prospects for Syria

- Hard to tell if any of the oppositions forces will be worse or better than Assad on human rights and US interest
 - We can be sure that if the US isn't there, the result will be as bad if not worse
- The US should have learned the lesson in Afghanistan that if you are in the action, you do have some control over what happens with the opposition
 - You can support moderates, which keeps down extremists
 - However, when the US walks away, typically the extremists win
 - Extremists have built-in advantages
- There are all kinds of groups in Syria, even Salafist groups that fine dealing with the US
 - There is nothing in the Salafist religion that says Kill Americans – that's only in a particular brand of it
- President Obama announced in 2014 a serious effort to arm the Syrian opposition by arming and training 5,400 Syrian oppositionist
 - Immediately, 7,000 tried to sign up for it
 - Unfortunately, the anti-Salafist vetting process reduced the recruitment to only 50

- Most Syrians aren't crazy, anti-American Salafists, but most do hate the Assad regime and just want help to fight the regime and then they will figure out what comes next afterwards
 - Opportunity: The US could use this as a way to shape what happens next
 - Problem: The US generally doesn't stick around, letting those involved sort it out themselves, thereby creating a mess

Re: Middle East Solutions

- The real solutions for the Middle East are ultimately about education
- Arab Human Development Reports commissioned by the UN say that the region's educational system is broken and not preparing their students for a 21st century world
 - Fixing the education system is the long-term solution to the Middle East
- Problem: There are 6 civil wars plus other insurgencies and hostilities going on plus lots of people wanting to take advantage of the chaos
 - Education is a long-term effort but in the short-term there is a need to fight for an environment that permits the opportunity for education
- Recommended reading: Robert Worth's *A Rage for Order: The Middle East in Turmoil, from Tahrir Square to ISIS* had stories about life in various Arab countries after the Arab Spring
 - It tells how average people caught in civil wars are forced into circumstances they never should have faced because of the chaos they are subjected to
 - Worth discusses two women (a Sunni and an Alawite) who start off as best friends, but over time find themselves on opposite sides of the civil war, and finally wound up hating each other
 - They said they would cling to each other but couldn't
 - Then each said the other had always been a false friend, backstabbing and undermining even when they were "friends"
- Stopping a civil war is doable if first you create the military stalemate where everyone believes:
 - That neither side can win militarily
 - That if their side gives up their weapons they won't get slaughtered
- Problem: That requires men (and increasingly women) with guns

Re: Transformations Past and Future

- The US won't be doing the transformation, but we have to create the environments that permit the countries there to do their own transforming plus encouraging and enabling them to do so
- Our impact from the Marshall Plan is over-emphasized
 - Recent studies have shown that the money only provided a short-term lubricant for what those in the society wanted to do
- A lot of what the US has done in Europe and East Asia was taking care of the external threat
 - Primarily, it was keeping the Russians out so they could move ahead
- We should have done more about some dictators, but eventually we do get around to doing it
 - We were very comfortable with the S. Korean dictatorship until we saw it no longer working
 - Now that we have had so many examples, we should know better
- Problem: We keep putting money on short-term efforts rather than thinking about the long-term
 - Dictatorships don't work long-term – not for their people, nor for us

Re: Does the Middle East Want to Change?

- We hear this a lot but the same sort of thing was said of Europe after WWII
 - In WWII there was talk of Germans being bred to dictatorship
 - Similarly, people talked about the Confucian states being unable to become democratic because Confucianism made them think of themselves as subservient

- The Middle East is no different
 - They might not want what we have as democracy but they absolutely do want representation as well as government accountability and transparency
- Democracies can look different in different countries
 - Each needs a democratic government that works for its own culture and history
 - We can't do it for them
 - We shouldn't assume that there is no way for their cultures to become democracies or free market economies
- We can't say that every government in the Middle East needs to be a democracy
 - Countries need to be stable and happy enough not to revolt and sign up with al Qaeda or other Iranian backed groups because they hate their governments
 - Middle East countries will all need some form of pluralism because that is what they seem to want as well as some kind of open market system
 - They could turn out like Singapore, which is very stable
- The US job is not to tell them what to do but to create the circumstances these countries require to allow them to decide and create what fits their own culture, history, and aspirations
 - This would be the same thing that we have done in Europe, East Asia, and Latin America