

US Foreign Policy Should Change

All reasonable people are troubled by the continuing tragic migration crisis in Europe and the apparent suffering of so many thousands of people. The drip has become a flood. The United States and European countries have a moral obligation to help, after proper vetting, individuals validly seeking asylum or rescue. At the same time, while being compassionate, it would be irresponsible to aid inordinate numbers of individuals in this mass influx.

Not all the truth is out about the large numbers in this disastrous crisis, nor is there any consensus on how to cope with it. Yet enough is known to realize that the flood is not only a humanitarian disaster, but also a startling reminder of the failure of U.S. and European foreign policy in the Middle East. Well-intentioned words and actions should not serve to veil the facts that require an American response.

The European Union is haltingly prepared, if in a disorganized and controversial way, to welcome to a degree those fleeing war and political persecution, but more reluctant to absorb those immigrating for economic reasons. It may be that the latter group constitutes the majority of those seeking asylum.

There are various explanations for the hundreds of thousands flocking to Europe, but the ultimate responsibility for the crisis is the Western refusal to commit itself to two issues: a solution to the strife and Islamist control of a considerable part of Iraq, and ending the slaughter in the civil war in Syria. That war has so far led to about 250,000 deaths and millions being displaced inside and outside Syria.

The whole world is threatened by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS) and the self-styled caliphate that organization has established.

The main problem in the area is the contending Arab and Muslim political and religious groups, yet the refusal of the West, particularly the U.S., to play a role is crucial. In 2003 a major mistake was made, during the Bush administration, by Paul Bremer when he disbanded the Iraqi army and the Baath party in Iraq, leading to unemployment, resentment, and the empowerment of a corrupt and inefficient Shiite minority. Not surprisingly, some of the former Baath leaders have aided the administration of IS.

But even more important has been the overly cautious foreign policy of Obama. Somewhat surprisingly, it was Hillary Clinton, after she was secretary of state, who remarked that Obama's phrase "Don't do stupid stuff" is not an organizing principle for foreign policy. It is true that no policy can solve all problems. However, it is now apparent that the initial Obama mistake was the failure to build up or to aid a credible fighting force of those originally opposing the Assad regime in Syria.

Many in the U.S. applauded Obama's refusal to commit ground troops of any kind to the region. Yet the total withdrawal of the Obama administration from Iraq and refusal to render sufficient help to Syria, as well as the refusal of European countries to intervene directly after the Arab Spring, meant losing the opportunity for moderate elements to emerge in the Arab world.

As a result, the countries of the EU had neither the will to participate nor the willingness to secure their borders sufficiently to prevent smuggling of people, some of whom were terrorists, from North Africa and the Middle East. Those countries, except Germany, are today hesitating – partly for economic reasons, but even more for political and security reasons – to absorb the mass of migrants.

Those migrants will exacerbate conditions in and among European countries. First, the migration has caused friction

among the European countries because of the difficulty in agreeing on a quota system for claims for asylum. It will put pressure on economic resources as far as welfare and benefits are concerned. It will almost inevitably increase the strength of the anti-immigrant, far-right parties, with unfortunate consequences in both national and global politics.

Moreover, the danger of the migration influx has already become apparent. Media reports have shown migrants in Bulgaria, and some on a train in France, shouting "Allahu Akbar" and obscene language in struggles with police.

Migrants in a camp near Milan have resorted to violence, destroying traffic signals and attacking shops in riots over "poor living conditions." The Greek island of Lesbos, six miles from the Turkish shore, has been invaded by thousands and become a war zone, with frequent violence and riots.

Mytilene, the main town of Lesbos, has become a public urinal.

The U.S. role cannot be misunderstood. Candidate Barack Obama on July 14, 2008 called for the phased redeployment of combat troops that he had long advocated, which he thought was needed for long-term success in Iraq and the security interests of the United States. He pledged that, if elected president, on his first day in office, he would give the military a new mission: to end the war. On January 21, 2009, his first full day in office, he did as he promised by asking the U.S. military leadership to plan for a responsible military drawdown from Iraq.

What should the U.S. do now? The official U.S. refugee resettlement program now accepts up to 70,000 a year; so far this year, 1,300 Syrians have been accepted. The Obama administration is now "actively considering" ways to be more responsive to the global migrant crisis. The U.S. has provided \$4 billion in humanitarian assistance since the Syrian war began. It is faced with the dilemmas of whether to

accept more people and/or to give more money.

More helpful for resolution of the crisis would be change, a more forceful change, in U.S. foreign policy. Hillary Clinton now says that while she was secretary of state, she disagreed with Obama's decisions and had argued for the U.S. to provide more training for Syrian rebels opposing the Assad regime.

Yet this was only part of the U.S. retreat from the Middle East and of the decision not to use a strong military response. The survival, and indeed extension, of IS shows that U.S. air strikes, though of some value, have not succeeded.

U.S. policy must take account of present realities: the threat of Islamic terrorism and militancy, essentially in the case of Iran but more immediately with the Islamic State. IS, originally an offshoot of al-Qaeda in Iraq, had been weakened after 2006 but became stronger with the emergence of Baghdadi as leader in 2010 and his merger of the various jihadist groups in 2013. This happened during the Obama administration, which failed to appreciate this development and did little to help destroy the caliphate that IS established. With control over some 80,000 square miles and a population of 10 million, and a fighting force of more than 30,000, IS has created a brutal state based on Islamic law and made notorious by its cruelty, public beheadings, full veils for women, and special taxes imposed on non-Muslims.

IS must be considered a criminal entity that the U.S. should help end. The U.S. should not enter into direct negotiations with it to give it legitimacy or a propaganda victory. The U.S. should provide aid to those groups, Kurds and now Assyrian Christians, now fighting in Syria. These Christians are individuals speaking Aramaic, the language of Jesus, confronting IS in the Nineveh Plain in Syria since they were driven out of Mosul and other cities. Their small group, the Nineveh Plain Protection Unit, formed in 2014, should be aided by the U.S.

The candidates of both parties for the presidency should not only declare their compassion for those genuinely suffering from Middle East politics, but also resolve to change U.S. policy to make it more realistic in defending freedom in the Middle East.

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