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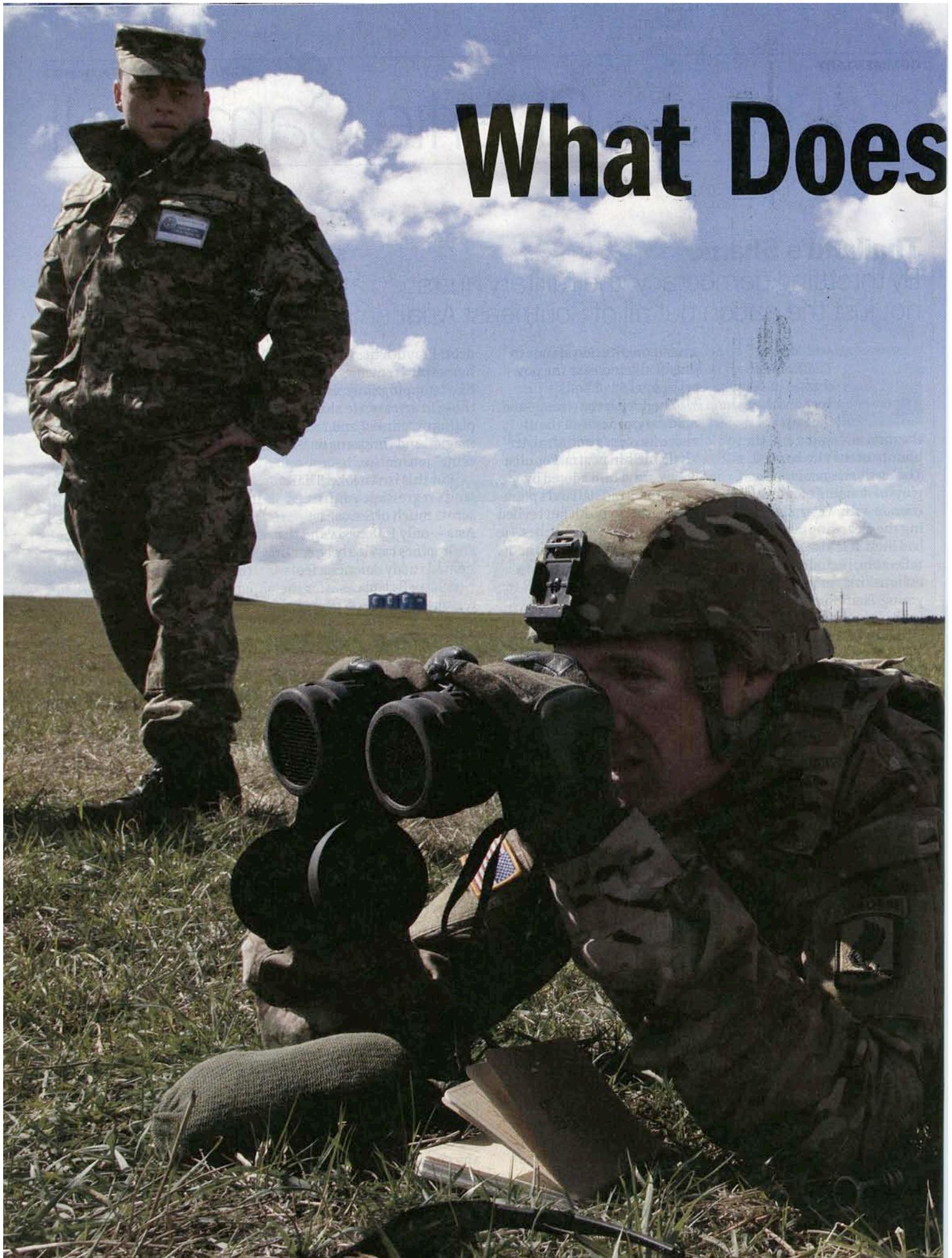
Jihadists claim victory in battle for one of the last regimecontrolled towns in Idlib

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ISIS Alternates Stick and Carrot to Control

Palmyrahttp://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/29/world/middleeast/isis-alternates-stick-and-carrot-to-control-palmyra.html?_r=0

What Does



WORLD

America Stand For?

With the 2016 campaign looming, it's time for the U.S. to fix its dysfunctional foreign policy By Ian Bremmer



Indispensable?
U.S. instructors conduct target practice with members of the Ukrainian national guard

AP/WIDE WORLD

HERE'S A QUESTION: WHAT ROLE does President Barack Obama believe the U.S. should play in the world? His words and his actions tell different stories. Obama's speeches often detail a vision as grand as anything Ronald Reagan ever offered about America's timeless greatness and its leadership in the world. At other times, Obama focuses on pragmatism and the need to set hard priorities. At still other times, he stresses the burdensome costs of an ambitious foreign policy with an urgency we haven't heard from Washington since the 1930s.

Words aside, Obama's deeds suggest that he's not acting in the world so much as reacting to crises as they appear. The eruption of the Arab Spring in 2011, for example, caught the White House flat-footed. Eventual support for pro-democracy demonstrators in Egypt only opened a rift with Saudi Arabia, America's closest Arab ally, that Obama is still scrambling to manage. In Syria, Obama threatened "enormous consequences" if President Bashar Assad employed chemical weapons on his country's battlefields, only to back down and accept a Russian-brokered compromise when Assad went ahead and used those weapons on his own people. A crisis in Ukraine drew the President into a confrontation with Russia that stoked real conflict with little potential reward, beyond the satisfaction of defending a principle—and not even defending it very well.

But the U.S.'s foreign policy incoherence didn't begin with Barack Obama. The intellectual drift and the growing gap between words and deeds dates back to the Cold War's end. George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton's joint misadventure in Somalia, George W. Bush's ill-considered wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the near constant mishandling of relations with Russia and the halfhearted efforts to both engage and contain a rising China have taken a heavy toll on America's treasury, credibility and self-confidence.

That toll will keep rising. The best-funded, most heavily armed terrorist group in history still occupies large sections of Iraq and Syria—capturing the Iraqi city of Ramadi on May 17—and now inspires followers from West Africa to Southeast Asia. Russia's defiant leader will likely up the ante in Ukraine. The Prime Minister of Israel—one of America's

closest allies—will continue to fight the White House over Iran. China is challenging U.S. naval supremacy in the South China Sea and its economic dominance everywhere else.

At the same time, the U.S. itself has changed. The next President will have fewer options than Clinton, George W. Bush or even Obama, because the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have left the American public deeply reluctant to support any military action that might require a long-term U.S. troop presence. Without the credible threat of military commitment, the rest of our foreign policy tools become much less effective.

The world has changed too. Powerful allies like Britain, Germany, Japan and South Korea still care about what America wants, but they can't create jobs and grow their economies without broader and deeper commercial relations with China. Emerging countries are not strong enough to overthrow U.S. dominance, but they have more than enough strength and self-confidence to refuse to follow Washington's lead. The U.S. remains the world's sole superpower, the only country able to project military power in every region of the world. Its cutting-edge industries and universities are second to none. But China is now the only country in the world with a carefully considered global strategy.

Listen to the next wave of presidential candidates, though, and you might think nothing has changed. "We have to use all of America's strengths to build a world with more partners and fewer adversaries," says Hillary Clinton. "If we withdraw from the defense of liberty anywhere," warns Jeb Bush, "the battle eventually comes to us." Marco Rubio tops them both: "The free nations of the world still look to America to champion our shared ideals. Vulnerable nations still depend on us to deter aggression from their larger neighbors. And oppressed people still turn their eyes toward our shores wondering if we hear their cries, wondering if we notice their afflictions."

These and the other candidates rattle off long lists of foreign policy priorities, but they avoid any mention of the costs and the risks. They speak as if successful foreign policy depends mainly on faith in the country's greatness and the will to use American power, with barely a nod to what the American public wants. They tell us America must

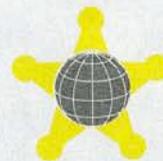
lead—but they don't tell us why or how.

Except in 1940 and 1968, presidential campaigns have rarely been fought over foreign policy. But in this election, Americans need to know how each of the would-be Presidents would act in the world, because the next 25 years are likely to be extraordinarily volatile. It's time to make a choice on foreign policy, and my new book, *Superpower*, offers three distinctly different directions for America's future.

Indispensable America

DESPITE THE REVERSALS OF THE PAST DECADE, some still argue that the U.S. remains the world's indispensable leader, able to do things no other nation can. This view persuaded Bill Clinton that NATO could be expanded to Russia's doorstep without consequence and that economic engagement with China would turn that country into an American-style democracy. It persuaded George W. Bush, a man who had campaigned against "nation building," to

THREE CHOICES A POLL OF MORE THAN 100,000 AMERICANS



INDISPENSABLE AMERICA

No other nation can provide the leadership that the world desperately needs.



MONEYBALL AMERICA

We can't do everything, but we must defend U.S. political and economic interests where they're most threatened.



INDEPENDENT AMERICA

We must rid ourselves of international burdens and focus on improving the country from within.

Respondents as a whole are almost evenly split, which offers the next President a chance to take a new tack on foreign policy.

28% Indispensable **36%** Moneyball **36%** Independent

launch two of the most ambitious nation-building projects in U.S. history.

The failures in Iraq and Afghanistan have cast a shadow over the notion of American indispensability, yet the idea's proponents still make some strong points. They warn that there's no way to isolate ourselves from today's threats, which hurtle through cyberspace and cross borders in a single suitcase. They insist that the U.S. will be safer only if others live in peace, and that it will be prosperous only if other countries produce middle classes that can afford to buy the products we make. Americans can be secure only in a world where democracy, rule of law, access to information, freedom of speech and human rights are universally recognized, they say, because these values create lasting strength, security and wealth in the societies that establish and protect them. And only America, they assert, has the power and the will to bring that world about—and the responsibility to do it.

Moneyball America

THEN THERE ARE THOSE WHO SUPPORT what I call Moneyball America, an idea inspired by author Michael Lewis' account of how baseball's Oakland A's used a rigorous, hyper-rational approach to build a winning team on the cheap. Moneyballers would redefine U.S. foreign policy to maximize return on the taxpayers' investment. The trick is to set intelligent priorities based on America's strengths and limitations. As President George H.W. Bush understood, removing Saddam Hussein from Kuwait required care and commitment, but it was doable and it fit the national interest. Removing Saddam from Baghdad would have come with a profoundly different set of costs and risks. That was a gamble that the elder Bush—prudently—chose not to take.

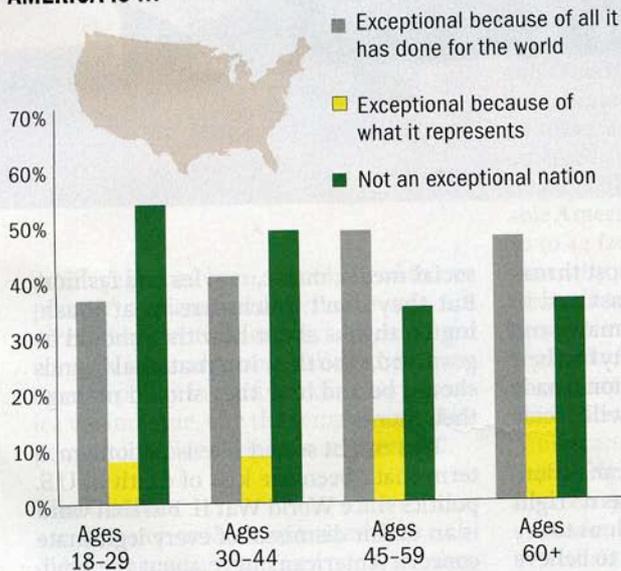
Moneyballers believe that the President should safeguard American interests, not export American values, and that the only nation we should rebuild is our own. The

President should never send Americans into harm's way simply to spread democracy or defend a principle. But Moneyballers also believe that Washington must lead coalitions of the willing, able and like-minded to block the proliferation of the world's most dangerous weapons and to deny terrorists the tools they need for a catastrophic attack on the U.S. homeland. Since the fate of the U.S. economy now depends on the world economy, they believe that American foreign policy must promote and protect global growth, both by minimizing the risk of war and by giving as many powerful countries as possible a stake in stability through commerce and investment.

The Obama Administration's pivot to Asia is a Moneyball idea—provided doing more in Asia means acknowledging the need to do less in other regions. Europe can take the lead on managing frictions with Russia, given that country's deeper economic ties with Germany, Britain, France

70% OF AMERICANS FOUND A GENERATIONAL DIVIDE ON FOREIGN POLICY

AMERICA IS ...



CHINA IS ...



All age groups believe China is America's greatest challenge and its greatest opportunity

Ages 18-29:
America's international reputation

Ages 30-44 and 45-59:
America's economy

Ages 60+:
The respect of our leaders for America's founding principles

WHICH IS MOST AT RISK?



THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS ...



Respondents overwhelmingly in all age groups said:

Washington believes it can manage an unmanageable region



Generation gap



39% of voters 60 and over believe that Indispensable is the best choice for American foreign policy

While ... **41%** of voters 44 and below prefer the Independent path

SOURCES: SURVEYMONKEY; EURASIA GROUP. POLL OF 1,044 RESPONDENTS CONDUCTED OVER 69 DAYS IN MARCH 2015 WITH A MARGIN OF ERROR OF +/-3 PERCENTAGE POINTS

and Italy. With respect to the Middle East, Moneyballers believe that the U.S. should help bolster the security of Israel but need not back every Israeli action against the Palestinians. And no U.S. President should be reluctant to negotiate with our enemies if there is something valuable to be gained—in every region of the world. Everywhere possible, we must shed costly burdens in favor of opportunities, and we must insist that our elected leaders enhance America's value, not our values. For Moneyballers, that's the way to win.

Independent America

THOSE WHO CHAMPION THE INDISPENSABLE and Moneyball options have good arguments, and both choices are better than the incoherence that has characterized the past 25 years of U.S. foreign policy. But I don't believe these are the best options, because I don't think support for either path can be maintained over time. Instead, my opinions are more closely aligned with what I call Independent America—a nation that declares its independence from the responsibility to fix the world.

The American people simply will not support costly interference in countries they don't care about, and whatever our presidential candidates tell voters on the stump, there is no credible evidence that this sentiment will prove short-lived. Americans have learned that no nation, not even the sole superpower, can consistently get what it wants in a world where so many other governments have enough power to resist U.S. pressure. We need to stop issuing promises we know we can't keep and threats we know we won't carry out.

What was the true lesson of the war in Vietnam? Or the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq? No matter how powerful you are, it's hard to defeat an enemy that cares much more about the outcome than you do. Don't escalate the fight with Russia over Ukraine, a nation that will always matter much more to Moscow than to Washington. Instead of boosting Vladimir Putin's popularity by feeding anti-American fury in his country, let Europe lead. This is not a new Cold War. The American people don't care. Why continue this fight?

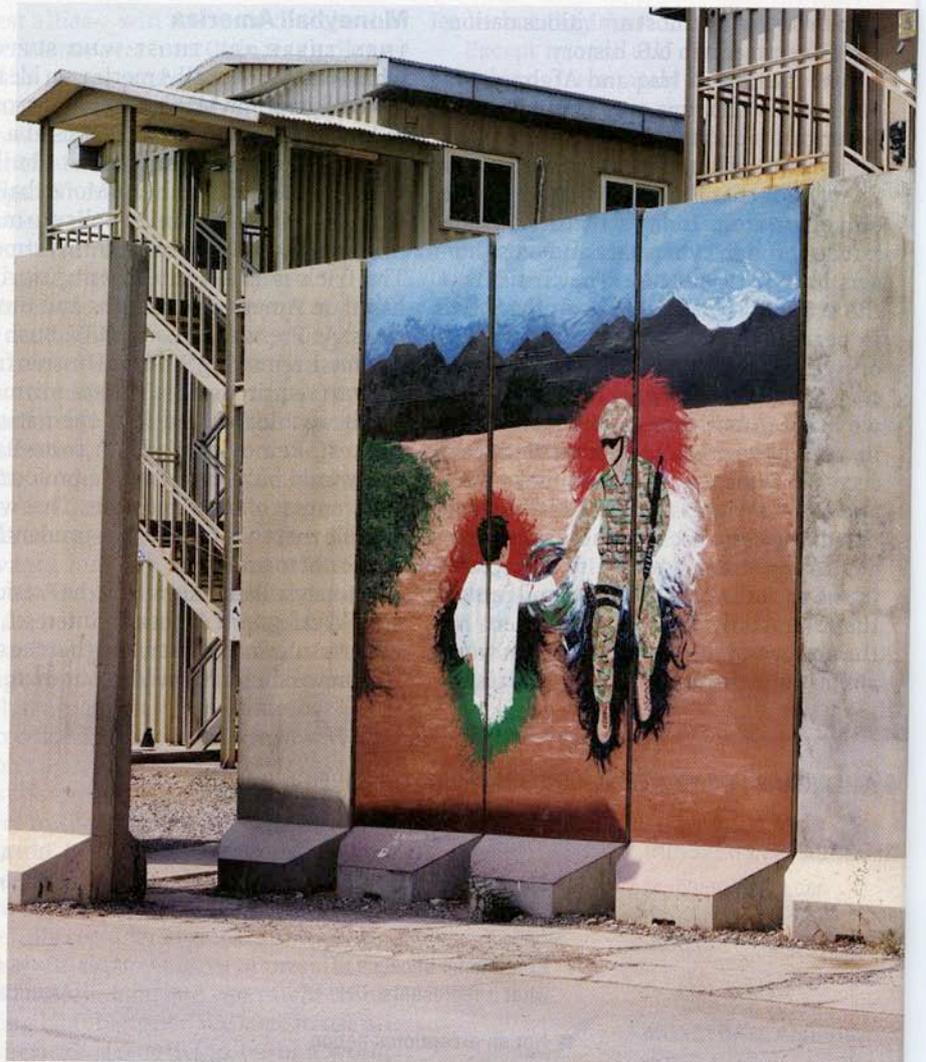
Independents know the U.S. shouldn't try to push Israelis and Palestinians toward a peace deal that neither side really wants. It shouldn't defend Middle East dictators while claiming to defend freedom

and human rights. Let those most threatened by ISIS, in the Middle East and in Europe, take the lead. Let Germany and Japan finally accept responsibility for their own security. Accept that decisions made in Beijing, not in Washington, will decide whether China sinks or swims.

It's not simply that America can no longer police the world. It's that it has no right to force those who disagree with us to see things our way. Americans like to believe that democracy is so undeniably attractive and our commitment to it so obvious that others should simply trust us to create it for them within their borders. That's just not the case. Some countries still want American leadership, but many around the world want less U.S. interference, not more. They love American technology,

social media, music, movies and fashion. But they don't much care what Washington thinks about how they should be governed, who their international friends should be and how they should manage their money.

This might sound like isolationism, a term that's been the kiss of death in U.S. politics since World War II. But that word is an unfair dismissal of every legitimate concern Americans have about the obvious foreign policy excesses and costly miscalculations of their government. Those who want Washington to declare independence from the need to play Superman believe that the U.S. has profound potential that's been wasted in mistakes overseas. Imagine for a moment that every dollar spent in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past





Left behind *Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan, which housed 40,000 allied military and civilian personnel at the peak of the Afghan war*

the cause of making human rights a reality for millions of oppressed people,” don’t forget to ask them how much their plans would cost. Ask the same of Jeb Bush, who says that “nothing and no one can replace strong American leadership,” and Marco Rubio, who insists that only America is “capable of rallying and bringing together the free people on this planet to stand up to the threat of totalitarianism.”

Americans can’t ignore threats from abroad, particularly from terrorists. We must share information and costs with others threatened by ISIS, even as we avoid entering wars we can’t sustain. But our leaders continue to tell us that U.S. troops are “defending our freedom” in places overseas where American freedom is not at risk. It’s an unfortunate truth, but the fall of Ramadi to ISIS—and whichever city is unlucky enough to be next—has very little bearing on U.S. security.

I believe it’s time for a new declaration of independence from the responsibility to solve everyone else’s problems, and I’m not the only one who thinks so. Working with SurveyMonkey, my firm Eurasia Group polled more than 1,000 Americans about their foreign policy preferences. While respondents as a whole roughly split their support among the three choices I’ve outlined above, those over 60 were nearly twice as likely (40%) to choose Indispensable America as those ages 18 to 29 (20%) or 30 to 44 (20%). Those younger age groups generally preferred the Independent path. The poll underscores the fact that the next generation of American voters doesn’t share the values of their parents and grandparents. They don’t accept that the world needs American leadership, or that Americans have been specially ordained to provide it. Politicians ignore this emerging reality at their peril.

It won’t be easy for future Presidents to withstand the inevitable pressure from hawks at home and friends abroad to entangle the U.S. in fresh foreign conflicts. But America’s true promise—for its people and for the world—depends now on Washington’s willingness to lead by example at home. To champion the Indispensable approach is to pretend the world hasn’t changed. To select Moneyball is to cope

with that change by sacrificing our values. But to embrace Independent America is to find a new purpose for those values. Democracy is a process, and the best way to persuade the citizens of other countries to demand democracy is to make it work more effectively at home. Don’t just tell the world that democracy is best. Show it, and build an America that others believe is too important to fail.

These are not isolationist values. The U.S. should continue to export and import goods and ideas, and welcome the citizens of other countries who would come to America legally, as millions have done since our founding. The U.S. should also accept more of the world’s refugees, whose numbers are now at the highest level since the end of World War II. The civil war in Syria has forced up to 4 million people to flee their country, yet the U.S. has so far accepted fewer than 1,000 of them. “Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” That’s a principle, inscribed in the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, that Americans can be proud of—and one on which we’ve too often fallen short.

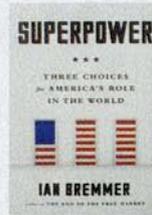
Trade, including megadeals like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, is crucial for the continuing strength of alliances that can no longer depend on our military might. But Washington must set an exceptionally high bar for political and especially military intervention in other countries. For the past 25 years, America’s leaders have acted as if the U.S. were becoming stronger in the world. That simply isn’t the case—the rest of the planet is catching up—and U.S. foreign policy should reflect that fact.

But this is my choice, not the only choice. Moneyball and Indispensable each have much to recommend them if our leaders build the needed public support. With another election on the horizon, Americans have a decision to make, one that will define their country’s role in the world. The worst choice of all is to continue to refuse to choose. ■

dozen years had been spent instead to empower Americans and their economy. Redirect the attention, energy and resources we now squander on a failed superhero foreign policy toward building the America we imagine, one that empowers all its people to realize their human potential.

The Choice

AS THE NEXT WAVE OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES takes the stage, listen to what they say about America’s role in the world. Beware those who talk of responsibilities but never of price tags. Reject those who claim that America can afford to do it all. When Ted Cruz says the President must stand “unapologetically, emphatically for freedom,” and when Hillary Clinton insists that the U.S. has a “deep commitment to



Foreign-affairs columnist Bremmer is president of Eurasia Group, a political-risk consultancy. His book Superpower: Three Choices for America’s Role in the World is published by Portfolio/Penguin

ISIS Victory Brings Calls for Change in U.S. War Plan

BY KARL VICK

The fall of Ramadi to the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) on May 17 was a body blow to the U.S.-led war against the extremist group. The capital of Iraq's Anbar province, Ramadi is the biggest prize captured by ISIS since it overran Mosul in a shock offensive last June.

Ramadi's fall, nine months into a U.S. bombing campaign that the Pentagon had framed as a slow, rolling success, illustrates not only the limits of airpower—ISIS attacked during a dust storm that grounded U.S. planes—but also the continuing weakness of the Iraqi government led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

"It is a very worrying development," says Jessica Lewis McFate,



Iraqi soldiers and Shi'ite militiamen fire at an ISIS position in Iraq's Anbar province

research director at the Institute for the Study of War.

Ramadi is where ISIS first gained traction in Iraq. In late 2013, Nouri al-Maliki, al-Abadi's openly sectarian predecessor, crushed a peaceful gathering of Sunni residents in the city protesting the government's favoritism toward the majority Shi'ite population. The repression let ISIS cast itself as protector of the Sunnis and assemble tribal allies through much of the Sunni western reaches of Iraq that it now holds.

The U.S.-backed al-Abadi was brought into office last September in part to coax Sunnis back into the Iraqi government. But with the collapse of the Iraqi army in Ramadi, Shi'ite militias, some backed by Iran, rushed to take over the fight for a Sunni city where they have not been welcome. The result could be sectarian bloodshed even if ISIS is eventually ousted from Ramadi.

The defeat has increased calls for President Obama to send U.S. commandos into the fight against ISIS, both to guide air strikes and to advise Iraqi commanders on the ground. The 3,000 U.S. military personnel in Iraq now keep well behind the lines, training Iraqi forces who still appear outmatched. A White House spokesman said Obama may "tweak the strategy" on the ground, but McFate calls for "shredding strategic assumptions." Either way, it's quickly becoming clear that ISIS is a tougher enemy than most predicted.

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Tajik OMON commander (special police unit) under influence of Salafists

28 MAGGIO 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA



Abdulloh Muhaqqiq, a Tajik expert on religion and security issues, considers that Tajik OMON (special police unit) commander Colonel Gulmurod Halimov, who is fighting alongside Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria, was probably under influence of Salafists.

“It is clear that the key factor for Tajik youth traveling to Iraq and Syria to fight alongside ISIL militants is propagation of Salafi ideas in the country,” said Muhaqqiq. “Over the past fifteen years, Salafists have brainwashed dozens of people working in the country’s law enforcement authorities and government bodies. As a matter of fact, they have undermined the authority of the government. Unfortunately, we do not know how many officials became Salafists. We do not know how many lawyers, journalists, mullahs and imam-khatibs are propagating Salafi ideas among the population.”

The expert further added that true Muslim would never join ISIL militants. “We see what they do. They kill innocent people, children, women and elderly people. They rape and pillage. This is not Islam,” the expert said.

According to him, Salafists operate on orders from their sponsors, first of all Israel and the United States. “Mrs. Hillary Clinton recently admitted that the United States created ISIL,” Muhaqqiq said, noting that the majority of Salafi supporters in Tajikistan are graduates from religious schools in countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, etc.

We will recall that The Tajik authorities banned Salafism as an illegal group on January 8, 2009, saying the Salafi movement represents a potential threat to national security and the Supreme Court added Salafists to its list of religious groups prohibited from operating in the country.

The movement claims to follow a strict and pure form of Islam, but Tajik clerics say the Salafists' radical stance is similar to that of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Salafists do not recognize other branches of Islam, such as Shi'a and Sufism. The movement is frequently referred to as Wahhabism, although Salafists reject this as derogatory.

The overwhelming majority of Tajiks are followers of Hanafia, a more liberal branch of Sunni Islam.

On December 8, 2014, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan formally labeled the banned Salafi group as an extremist organization. The ruling reportedly followed a request submitted to the court by the Prosecutor-General's Office. The ruling means that the group's website and printed materials are also banned.

Boko Haram's sexual abuse of captives

28 MAGGIO 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA



The United Nations' Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Bangura, has decried the reported rape and forced marriages of female captives of the Boko Haram.

In a statement signed by her office's Advocacy and Women's Rights Specialist, Letitia Anderson, Bangura lamented that one year after the abduction of the more than 276 Chibok girls', many remained in captivity.

"I am appalled by reports that hundreds of the recently released female captives were repeatedly raped by Boko Haram militias and compelled to marry their captors. These latest revelations suggest that the Boko Haram is not only destroying existing family and community structures but is bent on controlling their future composition.

"In order to give rise to a new generation raised in their own image, they are waging war on women's physical, sexual and reproductive autonomy and rights," Bangura said.

"I reiterate my calls for all abducted women and girls to be immediately released from captivity and returned safely to their families.

"I call upon the government of Nigeria, with support from the international community and local organisations, to provide medical and psycho-social care for those who have been impregnated."

Bangura also called for the provision of treatment for women and girls infected with sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDs.

Meanwhile, Nigerian authorities said they have detained 643 people linked to the Boko Haram group since February, the Hausa service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reports.

Addressing the Nigerian parliament in Niamey, the country's Security Minister, Hassoumi Massaoudou, said that those arrested and detained have been charged with acts of terrorism and criminal conspiracy.

"If this measure had not been taken, we could have had an uprising in the very interior of Diffa," the minister said.

Diffa came under heavy attack in February when Boko Haram, which wants to establish an emirate in Northern Nigeria, carried out attacks in neighbouring countries.

Sheikh Hassan Turki, leading Shabaab figure, dies in Somalia

28 MAGGIO 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA



A leading figure in the Somali-based Al-Qaeda-affiliated Shabaab movement has died in Somalia, the Islamic militant group said Thursday.

In a death announcement and obituary carried by jihadist media, the Shabaab said Sheikh Hassan Abdulahi Turki, known as Hassan Turki, died on Wednesday evening in the Middle Juba region south of the capital Mogadishu. Turki was in his 70s and suffered from poor health.

“Sheikh Hassan Abdulahi Turki died last night in Hargeysa Yarey township. We pray to God to give him his mercy and accept his long-term good deeds,” Shabaab spokesman Ali Mohamud Rage said in an audio message.

Rage said Turki “was one of Somalia’s greatest scholars” who had met “Al-Qaeda leaders, led by Osama bin Laden, twice in Afghanistan and another time in Sudan” and had fought against US soldiers in Mogadishu in 1993, the year 18 US soldiers were killed in the so-called Black Hawk Down incident during an ill-fated intervention.

The Ethiopian-born former soldier was a veteran Islamist who played a series of leading roles in Somalia’s civil war.

Turki was a founding member of Al-Itihaad Al-Islami in the early 1990s alongside Hassan Dahir Aweys, often regarded as the godfather of Islamic militancy in Somalia. Together they also formed a successor group called Hizbul Islam.

Turki played a key role in the Islamic Courts Union, which briefly controlled Somalia in 2006, and helped

establish the Shabaab which emerged in the wake of the US-backed Ethiopian invasion that ended its rule.

In 2004 the US put Turki on its list of global Al-Qaeda leaders after accusing him of involvement in the US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania six years earlier. In 2008 he survived a US air strike targeting him and other militant leaders in southern Somalia.

In recent years Turki's influence and importance waned as old age and ill-health took their toll.

Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar leader accuses Islamic State of creating 'fitna' between jihadist groups

BY BILL ROGGIO | *May 28, 2015* | billroggio@longwarjournal.org | [@billroggio](https://twitter.com/billroggio)



Salahuddin al Shishani (left), a Chechen commander who leads the Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar, and Abdul Karim al Ukrani (center), a Ukrainian, sitting behind an Imarat Kavkaz flag while in Syria.

The leader of the Islamic Caucasus Emirate's branch in Syria, who has attempted to remain neutral in and mediate the feud between the Islamic State and the Al Nusrah Front, al Qaeda's official branch in Syria, accused the Islamic State of creating "fitna," or civil strife, amongst the jihadist and rebel groups in the country.

Salahuddin al Shishani, the emir of the Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar, or the Army of the Emigrants and Helpers or Muhajireen Army, also accused the Islamic State of attempting to assassinate him after he and others tried to mediate a truce between the Islamic State and the Al Nusrah Front. [Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar is listed by the US as Specially Designated Global Terrorist organization](#). The jihadist group has sworn loyalty to the Islamic Caucasus Emirate, an al Qaeda-linked group that operates in the Russian Caucasus.

Salahuddin made the accusations against the Islamic State in an interview with Al Jazeera Turk on May 26. The interview was translated by a jihadist and posted online.

In the interview, Salahuddin said that the Syrian people initially "welcomed us [the muhajireen or foreign fighters] warmly" but many turned on them after the Islamic State

turned on fellow jihadist groups.

“What happened afterwards is literally a fitna,” Salahuddin claimed. The Islamic State “declared war against all Mujahideen groups and created a new front.”

He also noted that many fighters from the Caucasus joined the Islamic State due to the group’s “strong propaganda which they use very well and which needs to be taken seriously.”

“[M]any of our (Caucasian) youth believed in the deceptive propaganda of ISIS and joined them,” he stated. “Unfortunately, there are still young people who join them firstly because of their name and then because of the attraction of their propaganda.”

Many of the Caucasian jihadists who joined the Islamic State serve under Tarkhan Tayumurazovich Batirashvili, a Georgian national who is better known as Omar al Shishani. Omar, [who is listed by the US as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist](#), is a top military commander for the Islamic State. He is credited with some of the jihadist group’s more brazen victories in both Iraq and Syria. Omar previously served as the emir for the Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar before defecting to the Islamic State.

Despite the divisions amongst jihadist and other rebel groups that the Islamic State created, Salahuddin and his Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar remained neutral and attempted to facilitate a truce between the Islamic State and the Al Nusrah Front. The two groups have been at odds since Abu Bakr al Baghdadi declared the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (Syria) in early 2014 and attempted to absorb Al Nusrah. Al Qaeda ultimately expelled the Islamic State from its network as Baghdadi refused to obey the order of Ayman al Zawahiri to confine its fighting to Iraq.

Salahuddin said that he was chosen to mediate the dispute and obtain a temporary ceasefire to support the fighting in Aleppo (the “Muhajideen” were hoping to obtain a cease fire “for at least 3 to 6 months, so that we first could expel the regime” from Handarat). But the negotiations never got off the ground as the Islamic State mediators continuously insulted Abu Muhammad al Julani, the emir of the Al Nusrah Front.

“I went to Raqqah,” the Islamic State controlled city in Western Syria, “and met with high-ranking commanders of [the Islamic State] and Omar al Shishani was among them,” he claimed. “Actually, the meeting ended before it really started because it didn’t come to a basis for any dialogue. Just when we started talking about the issue, they began to insult the Emir of Jabhat al Nusrah and so I interfered. They didn’t stop with that. It was a hopeless attempt and while I knew that this would be the result, I wasn’t able to reject the requests of the fighting groups.”

Salahuddin said that he left the meeting unharmed but shortly afterward the Islamic State attempted to assassinate him.

“One of our brothers became Shaheed [a martyr] in this attack,” Salahuddin told Al Jazeera Turk. “They intimidate us to give Bayah [oath of loyalty] to them.”

An assassination attempt was carried out on Salahuddin on Jan. 19, [according to freelance reporter Ibn Nabih](#). Salahuddin's driver was reported to have been killed in the bombing.

Despite the attempt at intimidation, Salahuddin said he would remain loyal to the Islamic Caucasus Emirate.

"Me and my group gave Bayah to the Emir of the Caucasus (Abu Usman) [or Doku Umarov, the previous emir of the Islamic Caucasus Emirate] and even though we said many times that we won't break our pledge, they [the Islamic State] didn't give up," he said.

Salahuddin also disclosed some other interesting details. He said that he fought alongside "Hamza Gelayev," or Ruslan Gelayev, the Chechen military commander who fought in the First and Second Chechen Wars and was killed by Russian forces in 2004. Ruslan's son, Rustam Gelayev, was killed in August 2013 in Aleppo while fighting alongside Chechen fighters, according to Kavkaz Center, a mouthpiece of the Islamic Caucasus Emirate.

"I came to Syria by the order of the Caucasus Emirate," Salahuddin claimed.

He also claimed that his group does not receive support from foreign governments and survives by capturing Syrian military equipment and supplies.

"We trust in our warfare and we use the war booty we capture to resist the injustice," he said. "Currently we are in the possession of tanks and countless Ghanima [spoils of war] which we captured from the Assad regime... Only in our operation to the mountain in Maara we received financial support from a Arab Shaykh."

Additionally, Salahuddin said that fighters from the Caucasus excel on the Syrian battlefields "due to their experience in war."

"Our Chechen fighters had a great influence in these four years of war. And this influence still does exist. We are proud to fight alongside our Syrian Ansar brothers and for the same goal," he stated.

The tactical prowess of the fighters from the Caucasus, who have battled Russian troops for three decades, has been evident on the Syrian battlefield for some time. Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar has been instrumental in helping jihadists achieve key victories against Syrian President Bashar al Assad's forces. The group has spearheaded operations against key Syrian bases, including the operation [to take Minnigh Airport in Aleppo](#) in June 2013.

Most recently, Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar played a key role in [the Syrian Army's defeat at Jisr al Shughur, Idlib city](#), and the [Al Mastoumah military camp](#) in Idlib province, as Salahuddin admitted in the interview. Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar fought alongside Jaysh al Fateh, the coalition of jihadist and rebel groups that is heavily influenced by the Al Nusrah Front and Ahrar al Sham. [See *LWJ* report, [Al Nusrah Front leader preaches jihadist unity in Idlib.](#)]

"And we fight in the surrounding areas of Aleppo in the battlefronts Mallah, Layramon, Abu

Duhur, Jabali Azzam and Kantuman,” he noted.

The Muhajireen Army uses the same tactics as al Qaeda. The group has [deployed suicide bombers and launched suicide assaults](#) as part of their offensives. Additionally, the group is known to run training camps inside Syria. [See *LWJ* report, [Muhajireen Army releases video of Syrian training camp.](#)]

Jihadists claim victory in battle for one of the last regime-controlled towns in Idlib

BY THOMAS JOSCELYN | May 28, 2015 | tjoscelyn@gmail.com | [@thomasjoscelyn](https://twitter.com/thomasjoscelyn)



Jihadists in the Jaysh al Fateh (“Army of Conquest”) coalition are claiming victory in the town of Ariha, one of the Assad regime’s last strongholds in the province of Idlib.

The Al Nusra Front, al Qaeda’s official branch in Syria, plays a leading role in the Jaysh al Fateh alliance. Al Nusra posted the map shown above on one of its official Twitter feeds earlier today. The map, showing the jihadist-controlled territory in green, was accompanied by a short note saying that Ariha had fallen. A map posted just hours earlier showed the Assad regime in control of much of the town.

Similarly, the official Twitter feed for Ajnad al Sham, another member group in Jaysh al Fateh, has announced that Ariha is now under the mujahideen’s control. Ahrar al Sham, an al Qaeda-linked group that helps lead the alliance, has also posted videos and other images from the fighting.

An image posted by Ahrar al Sham earlier today advertised the offensive, which successfully pushed the Assad regime’s forces out of the town in a matter of hours. The photo can be seen on the right.

While the ground assault was a swift success, Jaysh al Fateh’s forces began laying the groundwork for the battle days, or even weeks, ago. The jihadists cleared out pockets of regime fighters around the town earlier this month. And in the past few days they have



shelled regime forces inside the town from the high ground outside of it.

The jihadists' capture of Ariha is the latest in a series of stunning advances since late March. The Al Nusrah Front, Ahrar al Sham and several other groups announced that they had [established Jaysh al Fateh](#) shortly before they stormed the city of Idlib, which served as the province's capital. Assad's forces were [routed in a matter of days](#).

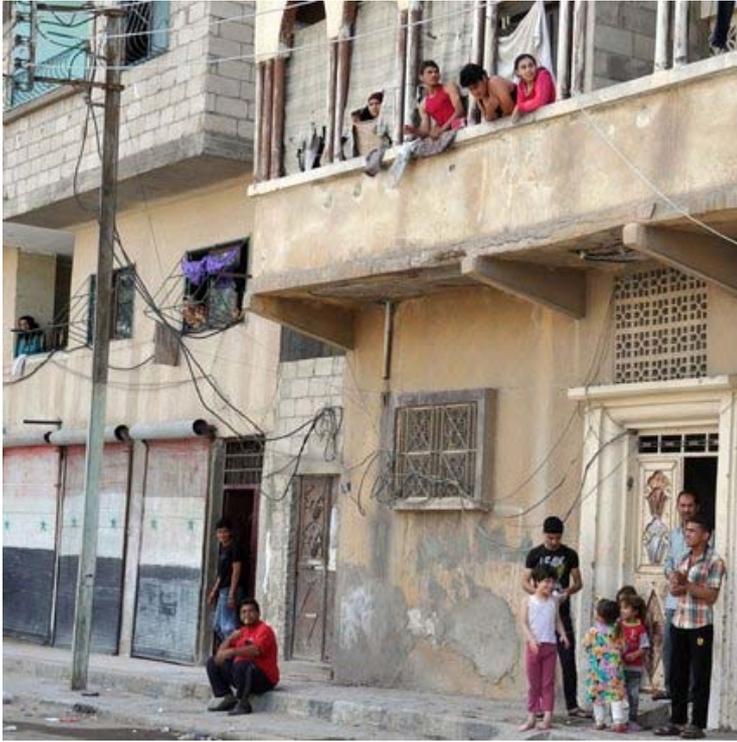
One month later, in late April, they [took the city of Jisr Al Shughur](#), which was considered another key city in the battle for control of the province. The coalition of groups that captured Jisr Al Shughur differed a bit from Jaysh al Fateh, calling itself the "Battle of Victory." However, the Al Nusrah Front and Ahrar al Sham were key to this grouping.

In mid-May, Jaysh al Fateh [overran the Al Mastoumah military camp](#) in Idlib. Regime fighters reportedly retreated from the camp to Ariha and its surrounding areas, making today's defeat all the more important.

Tags: [Ahrar al Sham](#), [Ajnad al-Sham](#), [Al Nusrah Front](#), [Al Qaeda](#), [Ariha](#), [Jaysh al Fateh](#), [Nusrah Front](#), [Syria](#)

ISIS Alternates Stick and Carrot to Control Palmyra

By ANNE BARNARD and HWAIDA SAAD MAY 28, 2015



Civilians looked out into their neighborhood in Palmyra, Syria, on May 18, the day after ISIS fired rockets into the city. Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Hours after they swept into the Syrian city of Palmyra last week, Islamic State militants carried out scores of summary executions, leaving the bodies of victims — including dozens of government soldiers — in the streets.

Then, residents say, they set about acting like municipal functionaries. They fixed the power plant, turned on the water pumps, held meetings with local leaders, opened the city’s lone bakery and started distributing free bread. They planted their flag atop Palmyra’s storied ancient ruins, and did not immediately loot and destroy them, as they have done at other archaeological sites.

Next came dozens of Syrian

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government airstrikes, some killing civilians. That gave the Islamic State a political assist: Within days, some residents had redirected the immediate focus of their anger and fear from the militants on the ground to the warplanes overhead.

In Palmyra, the Islamic State group appears to be digging into power in a series of steps it has honed over two years of accumulating territory in Iraq and Syria.

But Palmyra presents a new twist: It is the first Syrian city the group has taken from the government, not from insurgents. In Raqqa, farther north, and in Iraq, the group has moved quickly and harshly against anyone perceived as a rival.

The Islamic State alternates between terrorizing residents and courting them. It takes over institutions. And it seeks to co-opt opposition to the government, painting itself as the champion of the people — or at least, the Sunnis — against oppressive central authorities.

That method has helped the group entrench itself in the cities of Raqqa, Syria, and Mosul, Iraq, and is now unfolding in Palmyra.

The Palmyra takeover was detailed by half a dozen residents of the city, including supporters and opponents of the government, via phone or electronic messaging. All asked not to be fully identified, to avoid reprisals from the government or from the Islamic State, also known as [ISIS](#), ISIL or Daesh. Most cast themselves as caught between the threats of government airstrikes and ISIS beheadings or other killings.

On Wednesday, for example, several residents reported that the Islamic State had killed 20 army soldiers in an ancient amphitheater. Others recalled seeing the bodies of soldiers burned alive or beheaded by militants.

“They slaughtered many,” a cafe owner exclaimed about ISIS, then switched to the subject of air raids that he would later blame for the deaths of several friends: “God knows what they’re bombing, it’s so scary!”

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