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TRADING ONE ISLAMIC STATE FOR ANOTHER

Max Boot

Commentary, June 3, 2016

The Iraqi offensive to retake the city of Fallujah stalled this past week after meeting terrific resistance from Islamic State fighters and amid concerns about all the civilians, including 20,000 children, still trapped inside that city. But the push to take Fallujah will resume before long, and in all likelihood it will succeed, albeit at considerable human cost. The question is: Who will benefit? The Obama administration and the American military will tout this as a big victory for the United States, the government of Iraq, and the anti-ISIS cause. In fact, it will be more of a victory for Iran than for anyone else, because of the prominent role played by Iranian militias in this offensive.

This is a fact that American officials would prefer to deny or obfuscate. Look, for example, at what the State Department spokesman, retired Admiral John Kirby, said on June 1: “To the degree Iraq’s neighbors are going to play a role with helping Iraq fight Daesh, we want them - all of them - to do it in a way that doesn’t further inflame sectarian tensions or increase those tensions. But that - the inclusive approach that he’s taking, if it can be effective on the battlefield, well, then that’s a good thing and obviously we want to encourage that.” Only in the minds of American officials can the approach of Shiite militias be described as “inclusive.” ...

ABC News had a telling investigation of what the militias were up to last year: These “dirty brigades” were “often photographed carrying U.S.-made Colt M4 rifles manufactured in Connecticut or driving Humvees made in Indiana while torturing victims or proudly displaying severed heads. The U.S. equipment ended up in their hands presumably courtesy of the Iraqi military.”

Today, the *Wall Street Journal*’s Nour Malas has an eye-opening article about the de facto commander of the Shiite militias, who goes by the nom de guerre Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes. (His real name is said to be Jamal Jaafar Ibrahimi.) Although

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born in Iraq, he is a longtime Iranian operative closely associated with the Quds Force and its commander, General Qasem Suleimani, who is probably the most powerful man in Iraq today. Mohandes may well be the second or third most powerful. Not only does he control the Popular Mobilization Forces, as the militias are known, but he also exerts tremendous influence over the more mainstream government security forces. “He signs off on things, gets cash, gets the cars,” the *Journal* quotes Moeen al-Khadhimi, a senior member of the Badr Organization, the largest faction in the PMF, as saying.

Before achieving his current position of prominence, Mohandes masterminded an Iranian-backed attack against the U.S. and French embassies in Kuwait in 1983 — a crime for which he has been sentenced to death in absentia by a Kuwaiti court. More recently, he was a prime mover behind the Iranian-backed Special Groups that imported a particularly potent type of explosives known as EFPs (explosively formed penetrators) that could punch through the armor of American vehicles. These EFPs took a heavy toll in American lives and limbs before the U.S. pullout in 2011.

Mohandes, the *Journal* noted, “has since appeared in photos at meetings with the prime minister and defense officials, his beige guerrilla wear contrasting with the others’ dark suits. He has been overseeing militia operations against Islamic State he says aim to eventually retake Mosul, the Sunni-majority militant stronghold. For the past week and a half, he has appeared in the Fallujah command center leading PMF operations around the city.” This, then, is the person that the United States is aiding by carrying out air strikes in Fallujah. The U.S. can comfort itself that Mohandes isn’t actively targeting American personnel — at the moment. But there is little doubt he will gladly do so in the future if it will serve Iranian interests.

At the moment, however, Iran and its militias are able to take advantage of the American intervention in Iraq to pursue their own interests. As Mohandes often likes to say: “The Americans may have the skies, but we own the land.” He could go even further and admit that the American control of the skies is furthering the militias’ control of the land. That is a high, indeed unacceptable, price to pay for

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rolling back the Islamic State. The U.S. is, in effect, substituting one Islamic State — the one headquartered in Tehran — for another. That’s not a trade-off we should make or have to make.

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THE NEXT US VICTORY IN IRAQ

MAY JUST MEAN ANOTHER CRISIS

Judith Miller & Charles Duelfer

[New York Post](#), May 15, 2016

President Obama could end his presidency with a crisis in Iraq of his own making. In April, the president said the conditions for liberating Mosul from the Islamic State should be in place by year’s end. But Sunni Iraqi tribal leaders and Kurds are quietly warning that “doing Mosul” is likely to result not in military victory but a humanitarian and political disaster.

First, Iraq’s second-largest city is home to 1 million to 2 million people. ISIS, which hasn’t hesitated to slaughter fellow Arabs and flatten cities, has had ample time to prepare to take hostages and booby-trap buildings. Consider the Iraqi government’s recent “victory” in Ramadi, with a population far smaller than Mosul. ISIS virtually flattened it before being ousted in January. ISIS is even more deeply embedded in Mosul, which it has occupied since June 2014. Its fanatics haven’t hesitated to use chemical weapons in Syria and against Kurdish peshmerga forces.

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An offensive would spread panic among the city's beleaguered residents, who would be trapped inside Mosul along with their occupiers. Baghdad's plans to liberate the city include strangling ISIS by laying siege to Mosul in preparation for a full assault. If Ramadi is any example, liberation could turn Mosul into an uninhabitable ghost town.

Second, Mosul's Sunnis still distrust Baghdad. Many fear Iraq's semi-independent Shiite militias, some backed by Iran and encouraged by former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, pose a greater long-term threat to them than ISIS. Horrific images of Shiite militia-inflicted atrocities vie on Sunni smartphone screens with ISIS's beheadings and corporal punishments. Every family has a relative whom the militias have brutalized and killed.

Third, even if the US-backed Iraqi forces succeed in expelling ISIS from Mosul, then what? Who will occupy and administer the city? After the US occupation of Baghdad in April 2003, American officials gave Sunnis little stake in the planning for and future of a post-Saddam Hussein era. Why should Mosul's Sunnis believe that the chaotic central government in Baghdad has their interests at heart? Many Sunnis continue to view the 2007 "surge" as a "bait and switch" by Washington, at their expense.

Fourth, Iran seems determined to continue fomenting conflict within Iraq as long as possible. Qasem Soleimani, the head of the Iranian Quds Force who fought against Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war in 1980-1988, has greater control over some militias than the nominal political leadership in Baghdad. Few Sunnis in Mosul believe that Baghdad can protect them. Fifth, chaos in Mosul could trigger even greater chaos in Baghdad. Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi seems to be trying to limit corruption and run a more inclusive regime. But trying to reclaim Mosul before Sunnis derive benefit from his efforts is risky, and American officials have signaled deep concern about the Abadi government's stability.

No strong Sunni voices in Mosul have expressed support for the invasion/liberation of their city by Iraqi forces. They know all too well America won't be there to protect them. Many continue to see the growing influence of Iran and its surrogate militias as a longer-term threat to their survival than ISIS, particularly given the nuclear deal with Iran, yet another signal of America's realignment in the Middle East.

Obama faces a tough choice, perhaps more consequential than his decision to launch the raid that killed Osama bin Laden. Should he try to encourage Iraqi forces to retake Mosul before leaving office to claim another victory over the radical jihadis he has vowed to "degrade and destroy," or encourage Baghdad to wait until a more cohesive government is in place? While reclaiming Mosul would enable Obama to claim yet another "legacy" achievement, liberation of the city under current conditions is likely to result in more bloodshed, higher casualties, greater destruction and the creation of thousands more refugees in Iraq — a tragic, but utterly predictable coda to the Obama presidency.

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THE DIFFICULT AND IMPORTANT TASK

OF COMMEMORATING THE DESTRUCTION OF IRAQI JEWRY

Ben Cohen

[JNS](#), June 3, 2016

Every Iraqi Jew has a tale to tell about the Farhud, the two-day pogrom that befell the Jews of Baghdad 75 years ago in June 1941. In the case of my own family, it was a matter of heeding the advice of a Muslim business colleague of my grandfather, who told him that dark days were looming for the Jews, and that he

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would be wise to get his family out of the country as quickly as possible—which my grandfather did.

But my grandfather was part of a fortunate minority. When the Farhud—which means, in Arabic, “violent dispossession”—erupted, there were around 90,000 Jews still living in the Iraqi capital, the main component of a vibrant community descended from the sages who, 27 centuries earlier, had made the land once known as Babylon the intellectual and spiritual center of Judaism.

By the time the violent mob stood down, at the end of the festival of Shavuot, nearly 200 Jews lay dead, with hundreds more wounded, raped, and beaten. Hundreds of homes and businesses were burned to the ground. As the smoke cleared over a scene more familiar in countries like Russia, Poland, and Germany, the Jewish community came to the realization that it had no future in Iraq. Within a decade, almost the entire community had been chased out, joining a total of 850,000 Jews from elsewhere in the Arab world summarily dispossessed from their homes and livelihoods.

That the Farhud is even remembered today is in large part down to a handful of scholars and activists who have committed themselves to publicizing this terrible episode. During the week of the Farhud’s 75th anniversary, some of them—like the American writer Edwin Black and Lyn Julius, the British historian of Middle Eastern Jewry—have been organizing memorial ceremonies in the U.S., the U.K., and especially Israel, which absorbed the great majority of Iraqi-Jewish refugees. I myself was honored to address the memorial ceremony at New York City’s Safra Synagogue, where 27 candles—one for each century of the Jewish presence in Iraq—were lit and then promptly snuffed out, to symbolize the sudden extinction of Iraqi Jewry.

Commemorating the Farhud, and establishing its rightful place as an example of the persecution of the Jews during the Nazi era, has been a difficult task. For

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several decades after the Second World War, the importance of the Farhud was subsumed by the widely held notion that the Holocaust was something that consumed only European Jews. The truth was that the Nazis had both a direct presence and significant influence across the Arab world. So when, in 1941, the British had suffered a series of blows in southern Europe and North Africa, the time was right for a coup against the pro-British government in Baghdad. The strategic goal of the Nazis was to seize Iraq's oil fields, thereby providing them with the fuel needed for the invasion of the Soviet Union.

In April, the month my grandfather and his family left Iraq, a local Nazi lackey, Rashid Ali al Ghailani, seized power, believing that an alliance with Hitler would create the conditions for Iraq's national independence. Rashid Ali's principal supporter was the pro-Nazi Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who arrived in Baghdad in 1939 having escaped British arrest. Until then, the mufti's main role had involved inciting genocidal violence against the Jewish community in British Mandatory Palestine, which was especially pronounced during the Arab revolt of 1936-39. Once in Iraq, the mufti solidified his Nazi loyalties, meeting with Hitler in Berlin in November 1941 and later organizing Bosnian and Albanian Muslims into the "Handzar" division of the SS.

The Farhud itself should not be seen as a spontaneous outburst. For days before the violence, a steady stream of anti-Jewish propaganda was broadcast on the radio. Members of what Lyn Julius describes as a "proto-Nazi youth movement," the Futuwwa, began daubing Jewish homes and businesses with red paint in the shape of a palm, in order to make the passage of the rioters easier.

Their actions were, in common with all pogromists in all locations, unspeakable. In his memoir of the Farhud, "In the Alleys of Baghdad," Salim Fattal recalled the "murderers and rapists...who abused their victims to their heart's content, with no let or hindrance. They slit throats, slashed off limbs, smashed skulls. They made no distinction between women, children, and old people. In that gory scene, blind hatred of Jews and the joy of murder for its own sake reinforced each other." Babies and young children were thrown into the Tigris river, some of them

butchered with swords only moments before.

Ironically, the Farhud occurred a few days after Rashid Ali himself fled Iraq, following a failed attack on a Royal Air Force base. As the violence escalated, British troops, who were just eight miles from the city, could have intervened. But as the historian Tony Rocca explained to the BBC, “Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, Britain’s ambassador in Baghdad, for reasons of his own, held our forces at bay in direct insubordination to express orders from Winston Churchill that they should take the city and secure its safety. Instead, Sir Kinahan went back to his residence, had a candlelight dinner, and played a game of bridge.”

Thus began the process of making Iraq, like much of Europe, judenrein. It was a process that soon enveloped the rest of the Arab world. Six months after the war’s end, anti-Semitic riots broke out in Libya and Egypt. Those Jews who remained in Iraq, around 140,000 of them, endured a raft of discriminatory legislation reminiscent of the Nuremburg Laws. These led, during the early 1950s, to their complete expropriation.

As terrible as it is to say this, part of the reason that the Farhud remains a relatively obscure event is because the expelled Iraqi Jews became victims of their own subsequent success, creating new lives in Israel, the U.S., Canada, and Europe. Unlike the Palestinian Arabs, they were not permanently stamped with the mark of the refugee, meaning that their pleas for justice have always been regarded as a historical question, rather than a pressing geopolitical concern.

At the New York ceremony for the Farhud anniversary, many of the speakers invoked the post-Holocaust slogan “Never Again!” As noble as that idea is, when it comes to the Arab world, it is also a simple statement of fact. There will be no more Farhuds in that region, because, outside of the sovereign State of Israel, there are hardly any Jews remaining in the area upon whom to re-inflict the bestialities witnessed in June 1941.

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TODAY IS D-DAY — YOU KNEW THAT, RIGHT?

Jerry Amernic

[National Post](#), June 6, 2016

Monday, June 6 is the 72nd anniversary of D-Day. What's that again? Well, if you don't know, it was the invasion by Allied forces of Nazi-occupied Europe on the beaches of Normandy. In France. Canada played a major role that day. Along with forces from the United States and Britain, 14,000 Canadians stormed Juno Beach and when the day was done those Canadians penetrated farther inland than any other Allied forces. But the price was high: 359 Canadians died and 715 were wounded. Another 18,700 Canadians were later killed or wounded in the Normandy campaign.

D-Day, in other words, was a turning point of the Second World War. But of course you know that, don't you? Well, if you are a student in a Canadian high school, or a college or university, maybe not. Many years ago, I did a feature profile on Richard Rohmer, a military man who, back on June 6, 1944, was a young reconnaissance pilot. He witnessed the entire Normandy invasion from the air. I remember him telling me about it. I remember his eyes tearing up when he told me about another pilot who was shot down right in front of him.

Another time when I was a newspaper reporter, I did a story on this remarkable

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reunion that took place at a Toronto hotel. A group of Belgian citizens were holding what would be their last get-together with the Canadian soldiers who had liberated them from Nazi Germany. The love in that room was profound. More than 1,500 Canadian soldiers are buried in Belgium.

So what is it worth? To Canadians, apparently not much. History is now a low priority in our schools. In Ontario, you can take a history course for one semester in the first year of high school and never touch a history book again. I know from years of teaching college courses how aware most students are when it comes to history.

When my agent was shopping around my novel, *The Last Witness*, which is about the last living survivor of the Holocaust in a near-future world that doesn't know history, one publisher turned it down because they didn't buy the premise that people would know so little in one generation. So I made a video. We interviewed university students in Toronto and asked them questions about the Second World War. Most had no idea who the Allies were. They couldn't identify Franklin D. Roosevelt or Winston Churchill. They didn't know how many were killed in the Holocaust. They told me D-Day happened on Feb. 14. That it took place in London. That it was some battle we lost. Or — the more common response — they had no idea what it was all about.

The video was shot three days before Remembrance Day. What would a Canadian veteran who stormed Juno Beach on June 6, 1944 — he would be about 90 now — think when he hears that university students in this country know next to nothing about D-Day and this country's monumental efforts on that day and in that war?

The problem is not unique to Canada. In the United States, the United Kingdom and other countries, the level of knowledge among the young is also feeble. I can cite all kinds of surveys and polls that would make your hair stand on end. But why not find out for yourself? On Monday venture onto a university or college campus and ask students about D-Day. You might be in for a surprise.

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[The Militia Commander Beating Back ISIS in Iraq Makes the U.S. Nervous: Nour Malas, *Wall Street Journal*, June 2, 2016](#) —Behind the rise of a paramilitary force in Iraq credited with saving the country from Islamic State is an Iran-trained jihadist the U.S. wants far from the battlefield.

[Our Iranian Allies: Lee Smith, *Weekly Standard*, June, 2016](#)—Last week pictures of Qassem Suleimani started to circulate on social media, which is always a pretty sure sign that an Iranian military campaign is about to kick off somewhere in the Middle East.

[Iraq's Uncertain Future: Amatzia Baram, *Middle East Forum*, May 23, 2016](#)—The bloodless storming of Baghdad's parliament by followers of the prominent Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr on April 30th challenged Prime Minister Haider Abadi's authority and exposed the fragility of his regime.

[Painful Lessons from the 75th Anniversary of the Farhud: Edwin Black, *Jewish Press*, June 1, 2016](#)—June 1-2 is the 75th anniversary of the Farhud, the 1941 pogrom by pro-Nazi Arabs attempting to exterminate the Jews of Baghdad. Hundreds were murdered and raped, and many Jewish homes and business looted and burned during a two-day orgy of hate and violence orchestrated by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini.