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## The Suicide of a Great Nation

Ebola and ISIS Are Symptoms of Decline

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Yale Professor Paul Kennedy's seminal 1987 **work** the *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* explores how powerful nations tend to self-destruct economically based on their tendency to take on responsibilities and missions that are peripheral to their core interests and which stretch their resources to a point where they go into political decline and eventually either retrench or collapse. He notes that deficit spending on the military is the single most important element in the decline of great powers. Basing his analysis on the Spanish, British, French, Austro-Hungarian and Russian/Soviet Empires, he called the tendency "imperial overstretch."

Kennedy's observations have sometimes been cited by contemporary historians to illuminate the decline of the United States over the past twenty years. To be sure, there are elements of imperial overstretch in the inside the beltway consensus that America must be the leader of "the world's democracies." It relies on the assumption that overwhelming military superiority of necessity translates into the ability to shape developments thousands of miles away. This has proven a fallacy as one sits back and watches Iraq and Syria deconstruct due to misguided American policies while a malignant and monstrous new presence called ISIS strives to fill the vacuum created by US missteps. For Afghanistan the only lesson learned, questionable at that, is apparently that to avoid a replay of Iraq a permanent US garrison or expeditionary force must remain as guarantor of a modicum of stability, which presumably will only be maintained until the 2016 elections in the United States so the Democrats can avoid being blamed for having "lost" Afghanistan on top of being blamed for having "lost" Iraq.

Given the eye on elections, it should surprise no one that domestic politics drive much of how the United States interfaces with the rest of the world, but the problem is actually much larger than that. Recent kiss and tell memoirs by Robert Gates, Hillary Clinton and Leon Panetta are in agreement on the fallibility of the decision making process in the White House. They reveal that President Barack Obama was often at odds with his advisers, not necessarily over specific policies, but more often due to the White House's implementation thereof and its unwillingness to provide the kind of consistent leadership that distinguishes actual strategy from what becomes all too often after-the-fact disconnected reactions to developments.

To be sure, Obama suffers from not having had the kind of preparation needed to head any large organization, much less the United States government. His two-year tenure in the Senate was undistinguished and those who lampoon him as little more than an ex-community organizer are not far from the truth. Like the Lord High Executioner in the Mikado he was elevated "by a set of curious chances," to include Republican adversaries who were considered completely toxic by large parts of the electorate.

Like his predecessor, Obama has compensated for his deficiencies by surrounding himself with cronies. Obama's are ideologically compatible but often have even less experience than he does. But they are loyal to him personally and maintain an essentially politicized agenda that only occasionally is supportive of genuine national interests.

So Obama's course in on the job training leaves a lot to be desired. But there is still more than that, unfortunately, because what we are seeing now is doing grave damage to our country even as constitutional liberties are stripped away and the stagnant economy offers little hope for the struggling middle and working classes.

I would cite two recent developments that are symptomatic of the inability or possibly even the unwillingness of the federal government to advance the wellbeing of the American people. First is the escalating war in Iraq and Syria being fought against the terrorist group ISIS. The military action is in response to the brutality of the group, to include the beheading of two Americans and two Britons, but the actual genesis of ISIS has "Made in the USA" all over it. ISIS is filling a power vacuum created by Washington. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the removal of Saddam Hussein destroyed a secular regime that did not threaten the United States in any way which was a bulwark against the ambitions of neighboring Iran and which was terrorist-group free.

Exit Saddam and repeat something of a similar strategy to remove equally secular and equally anti-terrorist Bashar al-Assad in neighboring Syria and one winds up with a huge no man's land hole in the heart of the Arab world. And the US support of insurgency in Syria has been meant to accomplish what? Stopping Assad from abusing his own people apparently, and bringing in free elections just like have taken place so successfully in Egypt, Libya, and Eastern Europe. Indeed, one might reasonably predict that the current conflict will be a replay of the fiasco in Libya where a tyrannical but basically pragmatic ruler was replaced by chaos.

The American horse in the race is difficult to discern, but the air war against ISIS has **already cost** nearly a billion dollars and is sure to go up dramatically even as the results go down because no one seriously expects bombing to accomplish anything. And the costs are characteristically unfunded, relying on borrowed money just like in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Given the clearly visible downside, if one searches real hard for reasons to support American military engagement in the Middle East at the present time it would be difficult if not impossible to come up with a good answer. ISIS does not actually threaten the United States and is not likely to do so in the foreseeable future. If the group is to be destroyed it must be done by the local people who are most affected by it, not by bombers sent from Washington and if the locals don't want to do it, it's their problem, isn't it? Involvement in unnecessary wars, including World War I, is what brought the empires to their knees in the early Twentieth Century. Will Afghanistan and the Middle East be the graveyards of American pretensions? It sure looks that way.

Second is the Ebola virus, which both the President of the United States and the Secretary of State **have described** as a major international problem and a serious threat to our own national security. So what have they done about it? They and their minions have fumbled and bumbled just like their predecessors did with Hurricane Katrina in 2005, only this time it's worse because they knew this particular health crisis was coming. They are sending a few soldiers, **including national guardsmen** who are not medical specialists and will likely be at risk, to Liberia as they build operating tents and other infrastructure to confront the crisis, assistance that was by the way **originally sought** months ago when it might have actually made a difference.

Meanwhile the domestic public policy aspect of what the government is doing to keep Americans from contracting the disease is mired in political correctness. It consists of taking foreigners' temperatures at airports and asking them to fill out a questionnaire on whether they have had contact recently with Ebola patients. Everyone who actually wants to enter the US and who has just suffered through a twelve hour plane ride answers "no."

Given the open door policy and as not every Ebola victim is feverish while any symptoms take a while to develop it will not take long for West Africans who have the resources to do so to move *en masse* to the US for the expensive medical treatment that is not available back at home. And it will be free for them as they have no insurance and cannot be turned away when they show up at the hospital door while thousands of Americans will contract the disease from them. And when the visitors die there will be the inevitable lawsuits, alleging that they **received inferior treatment** because they were both foreign and black.

There are **reportedly** only four hospitals with isolation wards totaling 23 beds that are currently equipped to deal with Ebola in the US. The Center for Disease Control (CDC), following the

lead of the White House, is studying the problem after having first established a fool proof medical protocol which apparently failed to work in Dallas. There are **reports** that “rapid response” teams are now being assembled to assist local hospitals in spite of previous government assurances that there was no reason to panic. And there is even a Democratic political hack who has been named “**Ebola Czar**,” a sure sign that the government doesn’t have a clue about what it is doing.

One Worlders, globalists, generic bleeding heart types and some Libertarians have no problem with potentially infected Africans entering the United States because they believe for various reasons that borders are somewhat irrelevant anyway. And, of course, the slightest whiff of a hint that anyone might be discriminating against Africans drives them crazy. Appropriately named White House press spokesman Josh Earnest **expressed it this way** “Putting in place a travel ban could have a pretty perverse effect on people who are seeking to travel to this country.”

Plus the lovers of mankind in the abstract are inevitably assuming that even if a lot of sick Africans are brought to the US they themselves and their upper middle class families will not become victims. They are basically the same people who want illegal immigrants to remain in this country just as long as they do not choose to move in next door.

**One commenter** on *The American Conservative* website, ironically using the name Public Defender, put it this way “My question is why would you think that quarantining whole countries would do any good? Wouldn’t Ebola patients infect a lot fewer people in a spread-out, advanced country with a comparatively strong public health system than in a jam-packed, third-world country with a third-world health system?” This takes the Obama White House’s “responsibility to protect” to a whole new level. Let diseased foreigners come over here so we can provide them with expensive medical care while they are simultaneously infecting and killing us. The *Washington Post*’s Kathleen Parker is somewhat tongue in cheek as she **recounts the argument** being made that we should not stop the African visitors because we are, after all, a “nation of immigrants.”

Realistically the federal government can do certain things to minimize the potential impact of Ebola on the US that would not disrupt international air travel and not amount to a blockade on the countries where the disease is prevalent. First and foremost, all non-American citizen travelers intending to come to the States whose connecting flights originated in the three African countries in question should be denied that privilege until the disease has been brought under control. Sorry if it is inconvenient, but no one has a “right” to travel to the United States except American citizens.

Opponents of such action maintain that a travel ban will not keep all infected persons out and CDC Director Tom Frieden even **argues absurdly** that it is better to let the African travelers move freely as those who are diseased can be “tracked.” He doesn’t explain exactly how that works once someone enters the US and disappears into the local African community, probably because it is completely impractical. Both he and other open borders types miss the point: fewer infected African visitors means fewer infected Americans as a consequence of their presence.

How to accomplish it? If the travelers in question are actual citizens of the three countries they should be denied visas to travel to the US. If they already have visas they should be canceled. If they are residents of the three countries but traveling on European or other passports that do not

require visas they should be willing to submit to a three week quarantine at their own expense before entering the US.

This can be easily accomplished as the US State Department controls visa issue and the Department of Homeland Security can access flight manifests to determine who has been traveling from where before attempting to fly to the United States. It is essential that this be done. Continuing to let in 150 Africans every day from the three affected countries is **not sound public policy**. It is committing suicide by act of omission.

Why is the United States taking steps to destroy itself? Well, the lack of any political leadership that really is interested in benefiting Americans is a serious problem, but Obama is only the heir of a lot of bad ideas that have been circulating for a long time. Coming from the right (including the politically hermaphroditic Hillary Clinton), there is the assumption that the United States must exercise global leadership and make itself safer by starting and fighting war after war in places that most Americans would be unable to identify on a map. From the left there is the fiction that Washington has some kind of responsibility to play a benevolent role, using violence if absolutely necessary, to bring peace, justice and the American way. This thinking has brought us a world in chaos exemplified by surging ISIS and Ebola. And *inter alia* the decline and eventual fall of America will follow. There is no sign that anything will change soon.