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<u>Our Philosophy</u>

Everything is political. Everything we do is implicated in, intertwined with, and swimming through spheres of politics. Whether it is the material politics of capitalism, where certain groups of people attain more wealth at the cost of others, or the black radical politics around the U.S., we are all participants in one way or another.

While it is true that everything is political, it is also equally a lie to say politics is everything for people. It is common to find high school students hating politics, either because of a deep resentment of a politician's subject-position or because of a perceived disconnect between politics and the student. It is an undeniable trend that high school students are gradually divesting from politics. Politics is seen as an external structure that denies the student any agency in changing politics.

However, though the downward trend is strong, we can do more to give students opportunities to garner agency. Whether the politics is engaged with the stability of American democracy or the progression of a feminist group, creating spaces for students to express their agency, their energy, their opinions can go a long way towards revealing their relation to the world.

We created Neo Politico to establish that space where any student, regardless of their prior experience, can voice their opinions on certain issues. Every opinion matters because everyone matters. We only hope that more students across the entire world can join us in increasing political engagement and producing a critical consciousness of the world.

Speed vs. Quality as a Reaction to Danger

Author: Winfred Darko from the Bronx High School of Science, NY

September 11, 2001 was a day of tragedy for multitudes of people. Containing one of the worst attacks on the U.S. mainland in recent history, this day – in which so many Americans (specifically, U.S. citizens uninvolved with the military) died "in their own country" as a direct result of terrorism – would not be easily forgotten. These attacks sparked several massive responses, including the passing of the "Patriot Act" bill into law a month after the attacks and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security a year later.

Americans were (justifiably) frightened of a repeat of these attacks, which is why opposition to these policies did not have immediate support. In fact, only one person in the Senate opposed the passing of the bill. This senator, named Russel Feingold, stated,

> "The proposed bill contained vast new powers for law enforcement, some seemingly drafted in haste and others that came from the FBI's wish list that Congress has rejected in the past. You may remember that the Attorney General announced his intention to introduce a bill shortly after the September 11 attacks. He provided the text of the billt he following Wednesday, and urged Congress to enact it by the end of the week. That was plainly impossible, but the pressure to move on this bill quickly, without deliberation and debate, has been relentless ever since."[1]

Here, Feingold reveals one of the biggest flaws of the decision-making process of the post-9/11 era: Making a quick decision was considered more important than making a good decision. This pushed policy-makers towards enacting policies that would eventually fail and/or backfire.

A great example of this is the Iraq war.

Only two years after the September 11 attacks, fear of another terrorist attack remained rampant. So when Bush claimed that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, most people did not question whether or not Hussein truly had these weapons, and instead wanted to make sure that they were eliminated. In 2003, enough people were

willing to support Bush's decision to invade Iraq, even without the approval of the United

Nations Security Council, and began the invasion.

In the words of Donald Trump, the war was a "mess." Hussein was captured

within months of the invasion, and was executed in 2006. Yet, U.S. troops remained in the

region until at least 2011, eight years after the invasion. Efficient plans of what to do after the

removal of Hussein were not designed before the invasion, and so there were none enacted.

When his death caused a vacuum of power, there was nothing to prevent the formation of

insurgent groups throughout the country. It is because of this never-ending intervention that,

as of September 2015, over two hundred forty thousand people have died violently since the

invasion. [2]

Hopefully, we can learn from these events and not make rash decisions that can

end up hurting people. In the words of Senator Feingold,

> "There have been periods in our nation's history when civil liberties have taken a back seat to what appeared at the time to be the legitimate exigencies of war. Our national consciousness still bears the stain and the scars of those events: The Alien and Sedition Acts, the suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War, the internment of Japanese-Americans, German-Americans, and Italian-Americans during World War II, the blacklisting of supposed communist sympathizers during the McCarthy era, and the surveillance and harassment of antiwar protesters, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., during the Vietnam War. We must not allow these pieces of our past to become prologue."[3]

The Job

Author: Samuel Eluto from the Brooklyn Technical High School, NY

The job is a salesman
He is doing well at the job, there's no competition
The product is democracy©

The job is an oil contractor
Everyone is in the business whether they like it or not
The boss's job is genocide and it's taking graveyard shifts

The interview is set up by government desk jockeys
They run the races
The job is to clean up the horse shit at the end

The job comes with a lot of responsibilities
The job isn't pretty
But neither is the response
But neither is the employee
The job is to make sure contradictions stay unconditional

Everyone starts off their job with the alarm blaring
The alarm is reminiscent of drone strikes
Looks like he is going to be up for a long time
The job is to always be awake
The jobs all have different titles, but the same memories and baggage:
To be an unknown savior to a country that doesn't need a false prophet

The Greater of Two Evils

Author: Narelle Gilchrist

With troops stationed in all corners of the world, American military presence remains both a matter of great contention and of great importance on a global scale. Yet, recently, we have seen a trend away from direct, boots-on-the-ground intervention towards indirect action that includes merely training foreign troops and providing air support, and nowhere is this as apparent, or as dangerous, as in the Middle East. In fighting the Islamic State, we have encouraged other nations to take the lead, and one nation in particular has stepped up to the task: Iran. But as the Western nations find themselves in the position of allying themselves with Iran, they have ignored the nation's dangerous role as a catalyst for sectarian violence throughout the Middle East, a role that is becoming critical. Can and should we choose between this "lesser" of two evils? When looking at the bigger picture, we can see that the answer must be a resounding no. Allowing Iran to gain a foothold in the volatile region would only bring further instability and sectarian violence, perpetuating the conflict for generations to come.

Recently, a revealing and disturbing New York Times headline read "U.S. Strategy in Iraq Increasingly Relies on Iran." The quickest and easiest way to defeat ISIL means allowing Iran to do our dirty work for us, falling back on their support from the ground, even without official collaboration, so that we ourselves do not have to provide the necessary troops.[1] Using the logic of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," we are, in effect, allies with Iran, even though we officially ignore each other. Yet, in context, this indirect alliance is dangerous, for the issue of the Islamic State has broader implications for the

stability and future of the region as a whole. It is part of a generational conflict, and thus, we must consider not just the immediate outcomes, but also how our strategies today will affect the forces of extremism for decades to come.

Much of the turmoil in the Middle East is shaped by the Shia-Sunni conflict, a cycle that is perpetuated and pushed forward by the government of Iran. By sponsoring Shiite extremists in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq, Iran effectively spreads fear and tension throughout the Middle East, and this quest for power is perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the Ayatollah's regime. Nowhere is this trend as apparent as it is in Iraq and Syria, where the Shia-Sunni conflict has become a deep cycle. In a way, the current crisis is the direct result of the sectarian conflict left in the wake of the 2003 invasion and the Syrian Civil War. Under Saddam Hussein, Iraqi Sunnis had oppressed and persecuted Shias, creating anger and fear that allowed the rise of Shiite extremists in the power vacuum that was left after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. After nearly a decade of conflict, many Iraqi Sunnis responded by joining the Islamic State. In Syria, too, Sunnis have feared not just Bashar Al-Assad, but also Lebanon's Hezbollah, Iraq's Shiite militias, and Iran's Revolutionary Guard.[2] As the Syrian Civil War destabilized the region, each of these groups sought to take advantage of the situation, seizing power and influence, and fear of these extremists pushed more Sunnis towards the Islamic State. Thus, the Islamic State is a product of a cycle decades in the making, one that may not end after its defeat.

This history perfectly illustrates why involving and validating Iran in the fight against the Islamic State would only invite further conflict. If we allow Iran to take charge in the fight against ISIL, we will be allowing them to gain unchecked influence in Iraq – influence that will only spread. The Iraqi conflict is not solely about ISIL, and it will not end

when ISIL is defeated. If we do not ensure that Iraq becomes a stable, pluralistic democracy after the defeat of ISIL, the power vacuum that will be left will undoubtedly lead to yet another sectarian conflict. With Iran in a position of influence and power, its connections to Hezbollah, Assad, and other Shiite extremists will leave these groups with an opportunity to seize control, leading to a Shia monopoly on the region.[3] Without a stable, pluralistic government to counter it, Iran will only gain more power, both in Iraq and in the region as a whole. Inevitably, this influence will create more frustration among Sunnis, leading to another group of extremists, and the cycle will continue, leaving us with a situation that could be even worse than the one we have now.

Even now, as Iranian militias have helped to liberate and guard parts of Iraq, security checkpoints have become home to Shia flags and posters of the Iranian supreme leader, symbolizing the power Iran has already begun to seize.[4] Yet, these very flags can have a detrimental effect on the fight against the Islamic State itself, for they are hated and feared by Iraqi Sunnis and will essentially push them closer into ISIL's arms. Many Iraqis actually fear Iran more than they fear the Islamic State, for its militias have frequently victimized Iraqi Sunnis and are seen as a threat to everything they hold dear.[5] Faced with Iranian Shia forces, countless Sunnis may, in fact, turn to the only protector they have left – ISIL. In order to avoid this, it is essential that the coalition to fight the Islamic State is professional and nonsectarian – a coalition that, by definition, cannot include Iran.

Letting Iran take the lead in fighting ISIL will have disastrous effects both on the current fight and the regional balance of power in years to come. Therefore, we must rely on other regional powers, such as Turkey, Israel, and the Gulf-Arab states, to support our strategy. Iran will continue to fight ISIL unilaterally, but we must no longer rely on their

support, whether directly or indirectly. Instead, we must alter our strategy to exclude Iran entirely, so that it will gradually be shut out of decision making and bear little to no effect on the ultimate effort to defeat the Islamic State.[6] That way, we can determine the future of Iraq, ensuring that it finally becomes a stable, pluralistic democracy, freed from warfare and extremism.

When fighting the Islamic State, we must look at the bigger picture, and victory while collaborating with Iran would come at too high of a price. ISIL, while it is perhaps the greatest threat we face today, is the result of forces far deeper than one organization and one movement. By validating Iran, we will only be strengthening these forces for future generations of conflict. Thus, Iran is, in fact, the greater of the two evils we face. ISIL may be the fight of the moment, but Iran is the catalyst of instability generations in the making. It is the spark that can ignite the region, both now and in the future. We must leave Iran out of the coalition and out of the fight.

"The Fire Storm"

Author: Samiur Khan from the Bronx High School of Science, NY

"Great job Anad," exclaimed Mr. Karim, "you got an A on your essay." Anad's eyes widened. A mix of excitement and shock drove Anad to snatch the paper he wrote from his teacher and run out of the class, screaming off the top of his lung. He had finally done it. After countless revisions, endless criticisms, and sleepless nights of research, the seeds of his labors had sown a harvest in a winter. Anad ran out onto the streets. His joy spread like wildfire as street vendors, passer byers, and drivers slowed down to watch a child celebrate hard work. After a few minutes of celebration, Anad found his footing and headed home. All he could think of was how he would celebrate with his parents. Maybe they could all visit their relatives. Maybe his parents would buy him a gift or give him some money so he could purchase something for himself.

He rushed up the ste –

Anad woke up gasping for breath. A huge piece of what was once his home rested on his chest. The ringing in his ear wouldn't stop. Day became night as dust, debris, and smoke filled the once relaxing blue skies. Anad tried asking for help, but he couldn't muster the energy to call. Through every ounce of his energy left, Anad hefted the debris off of him and finally could taste the "air." Anad dragged himself towards the street. It was there he realized, that his home and his life... were gone.

Anad found his essay crumpled along the side of the street. The red A smudged across the page like blood. He squinted at the page and read: It is the fight against guerrilla militaries where the U.S. military embraces a sporadic fight too. The distinction between civilian and military blurs in guerrilla warfare, and so does the U.S. military's tactics. During the Vietnam War, the US military would often destroy monasteries. When asked why, military officials would say, strangely, that they had to destroy it in order to protect it."

Anad let the wind carry the essay into the distance. He dragged himself around without direction.

A little girl's war

By Mónica Martinez from the Clear Lake High School, TX

Little girl twenty-one look at all that you have done.
You carve your hands to hold a son instead of a big gun
Who ever knew you wouldn't love a man
On missions that you chart
On which you never can take part
Little girl twenty-three staying inside your house a jail so free
Fixing Aiden's math homework,
Wanting him to write letters for you
Wanting to read them far away
Because only you know that you are so gay
Little girl thirty-four
You stay with camo in your heart.
Baking scones is quite the art
Although you want to fight for a country you love
A love that your government doesn't approve of
With the son
Without the gun

The Role of Military Industrial Complex in US Military Policy

Author: Joshua Zakharov from the Bronx High School of Science, NY

On January 17th, 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower left his office with an ominous warning. "In the councils of government," he admonished, "we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

Over half a century later, has President Eisenhower's foresight remained valid? Has this mysterious military-industrial complex caused the rise of misplaced power? Has it come into unwarranted influence? Is it present in the councils of government?

First, we ought to establish what exactly was meant by Eisenhower. The military-industrial complex, a term he coined, referred to the system of close relationships between heavy industry (predominantly arms manufacturers), Congress and other legislative bodies, and the United States armed forces. In the United States specifically, the military industrial complex began to form more clearly in the mid-20th century as companies such as IBM, Lockheed, General Electric, Boeing, and more began contracted work for the military to produce even more advanced weaponry and technology. Corporations previously involved in civilian industry and technology were thus drawn to the much more profitable sector of weapons production for the military as demand within the armed forces grew for greater technological advances to combat growing Soviet hard power in the age of the Cold War. This growing supply and demand of and for weapons technology left the United States in a constant readiness for war, whether it needed to be in that state or not.

Even before Eisenhower voiced this concern, the military-industrial complex had begun to form in the United States and abroad. For the first couple of years of World War One, Allied powers pushed for United States military aid. However, given President Woodrow Wilson's consistent pleas for neutrality, all that Western European powers had to settle for was US military prowess through its arms manufacturers, engaging in much more frequent trade with them. Some senators, like Bennett Clark, even went so far as to accuse Wilson's eventual entry into the war as being a result of the influence of arms corporations involved in Europe that sought greater profits abroad.

This system remains pervasive and deeply engrained today, kept in place by government representatives. Corporations like Lockheed, GE, and Boring are members of an exhaustive list of arms manufacturers that maintain a foothold in our legislative process. The primary vehicle for this influence is the lobbying process, by which agents of these corporations persuade members of the federal government to pass legislation that favors them. For example, Michael Chertoff, formerly the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, heavily advocated for the use of full-body scanners in airports, provided by an organization contracting him as a lobbyist, and succeeded. Other technologies familiar to us – U2 bombers, C130 planes – are also products of lucrative contracts with the government, provided by corporations like Lockheed Martin. Even in 2014, the Pentagon passed a bill to preserve $22 billion more dollars to defense contractors, bringing the defense budget to $497 billion.[7]

The events of September 11th, 2001, have lit another fuse for the military industrial complex - the war on terror. William Hartung of Brown University, for example, finds that there have been hundreds of billions of dollars in new contracts for arms

manufacturers written since the "War on Terror" was declared. Particularly because this war has the advantage for government and for military contractors of being vague in nature, it is extremely widespread in its scope of operations across North Africa and the Middle East and is nearly perpetual, with new battles being waged daily in conflicts from ISIS to Yemeni unrest.

What this all means is that there is a system in place – an "iron triangle," as some refer to it – in which government officials, those who draft legislation, and lobbyists of military contractors exist in a mutually beneficial cycle wherein the government acquires and implements advanced military technology and fuels its international war effort in exchange for billions of dollars for these corporations. As it is a drain on the economy worth hundreds of billions of dollars and takes legislation out of the hands of the people and puts the influence over it into the hands of corporate arms manufacturers, it is doubtlessly a negative influence on power structures in our country. The state of vague and constant war that efforts like the war on terror have left us in only serve to reinforce this, wherein the United States' ability to simply pick an international conflict to become a part of (like the ISIS fight, driven by our air force, whose equipment doubtlessly comes from members of the iron triangle) guarantees it an ability and justification for issuing more and more multibillion dollar contracts. Thus, it can be seen that Eisenhower has demonstrated impressive foresight – they are indeed in the councils of our government and certainly wield unwarranted influence.

[1] Cooper, Helen. "U.S. Strategy in Iraq Increasingly Relies on Iran." The New York Times. March 5th, 2015. June 26th, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/06/world/middleeast/us-strategy-in-iraq-increasingly-relies-on-iran.html?_r=0

[2] Khedery, Ali. "How ISIS Came to Be." The Guardian. August 22nd, 2014. June 26th, 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/22/syria-iraq-incubators-isis-jihad

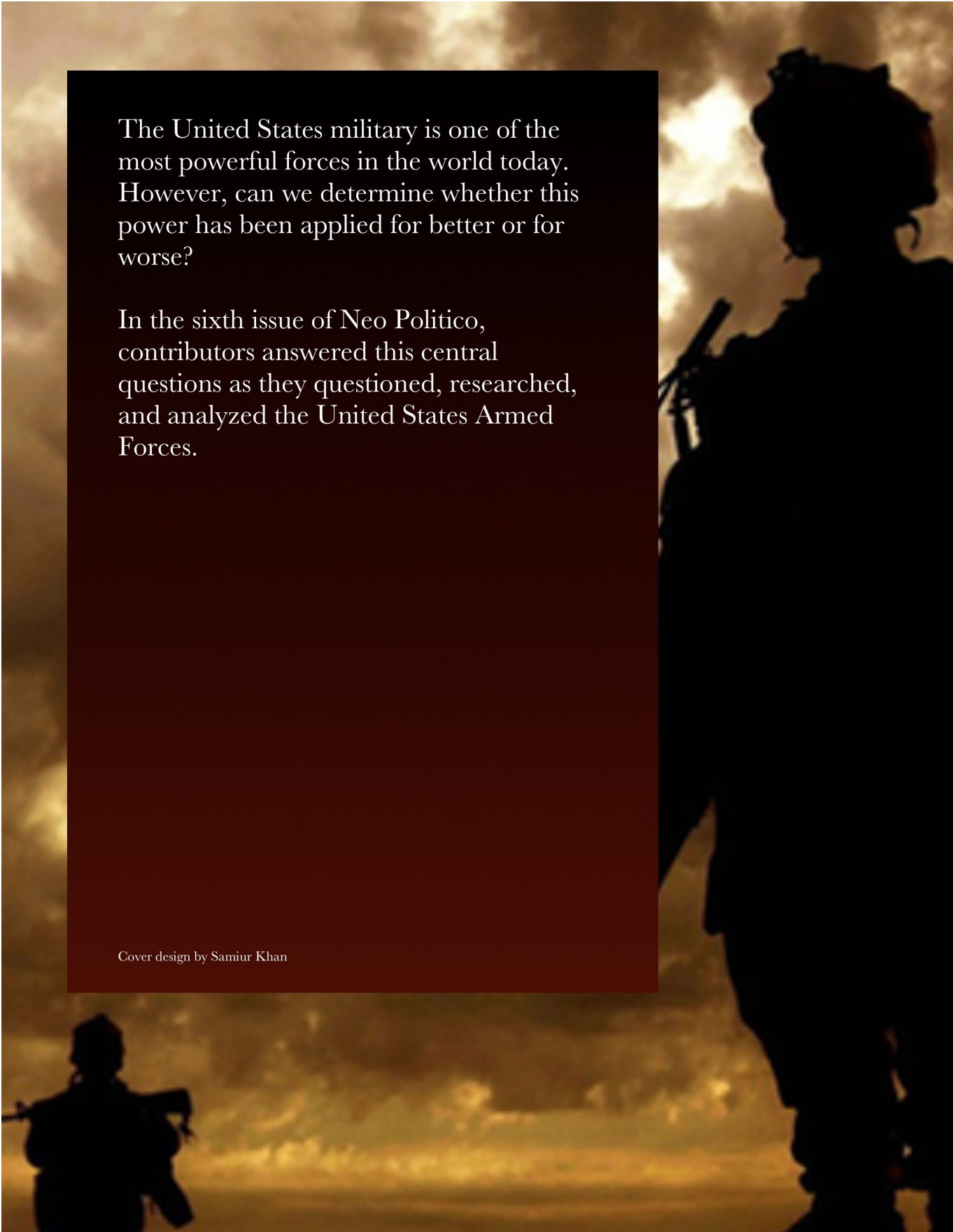[3] Gearan, Anne. "US Led Coalition Seeks to Exclude Iran from Fight Against Islamic State." Washington Post. September 13th, 2014. June 3rd, 2015. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-led-coalition-seeks-to-exclude-iran-from-fight-against-islamic-state/2014/09/13/71193e8a-3b4a-11e4-a023-1d61f7f31a05_story.html

[4] Barnard, Anne. "Iran Gains Influence in Iraq as Shiite Forces Fight Islamic State." The New York Times. March 5th, 2015. June 3rd, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/06/world/middleeast/iran-gains-influence-in-iraq-as-shiite-forces-fight-Islamic State.html?_r=0

[5] "The Caliphate Cracks." The Economist. March 21st, 2015. June 3rd, 2015. http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21646750-though-islamic-state-still-spreading-terror-its-weaknesses-are-becoming-apparent

[6] Lake Eli. "U.S. and Iran Hit ISIS, Ignore Each Other." The Daily Beast. August 26th, 2014. June 3rd, 2015. http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/08/26/u-s-and-iran-hit-isis-ignore-each-other.html

[7] Boehm, Eric. "Defense Contractors Spend Millions Lobbying Congress, Get Billions in New Budget - Watchdog.org." Watchdog. Franklin Center for Government & Public Integrity, 22 Jan. 2014. Web. 06 Oct. 2015. <http://watchdog.org/124909/defense-spending/>.

The United States military is one of the most powerful forces in the world today. However, can we determine whether this power has been applied for better or for worse?

In the sixth issue of Neo Politico, contributors answered this central questions as they questioned, researched, and analyzed the United States Armed Forces.

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