



# Searching For A Strategy

***As Obama Hits The Road To Reassure Anxious Allies, Concern Over His Lack Of A Foreign Policy Strategy Is Dominating At Home***

**Amid Increasing Global Unrest, Obama Is Travelling Abroad Today To Calm Nerves And Reaffirm The U.S. Commitment To Defend Our NATO Allies.** “President Barack Obama will travel to Estonia in September to discuss ‘collective defense’ with the Baltic states, as the White House looks to reaffirm its commitment to defend NATO allies amid unrest in nearby Ukraine.” (Jeffrey Sparshott, “White House: Obama To Visit Estonia In September,” [The Wall Street Journal](#), 8/15/14)

- ***The Hill* Headline: “Obama To Visit Estonia To Reassure Baltic Allies”** (Justin Sink, “Obama To Visit Estonia To Reassure Baltic Allies,” [The Hill](#), 8/15/14)

**LAST WEEK, OBAMA SHOCKED MANY WHEN HE CONCEDED THAT HE HAD NO STRATEGY TO DEAL WITH THE MILITANT ISLAMIC GROUP TERRORIZING IRAQ AND SYRIA**

**Obama Admitted He “Does Not Yet Have A Strategy To Combat The Militant Islamic Group ISIS That Has Seized Large Chunks Of Iraq And Syria.”** “President Obama admitted today that his administration does not yet have a strategy to combat the militant Islamic group ISIS that has seized large chunks of Iraq and Syria.” (John Parkinson and Erin Dooley, “President Obama Says ‘We Don’t Have A Strategy Yet’ To Bomb ISIS In Syria,” [ABC News](#), 8/28/14)

- **Obama On ISIS: “We Don’t Have A Strategy Yet.”** OBAMA: “But I don’t want to put the cart before the horse. We don’t have a strategy yet. I think what I’ve seen in some of the news reports suggests that folks are getting a little further ahead of where we’re at than we currently are. And I think that’s not just my assessment, but the assessment of our military as well. We need to make sure that we’ve got clear plans, that we’re developing them.” (Barack Obama, [Statement By The President](#), Washington, D.C., 8/28/14)

**Obama Has “Dealt Himself A Significant Political Blow By Suggesting That His Policy On The Issue Is Adrift.”** “President Barack Obama tried to get himself a bit more political space Thursday to make a decision about whether to expand the U.S military campaign against Islamic militants in Iraq and Syria, but in so doing he may have dealt himself a significant political blow by suggesting that his policy on the issue is adrift. ‘We don’t have a strategy yet,’ Obama said as he took questions from reporters in the White House briefing room.” (Josh Gerstein, “Obama’s ‘Strategy’ Misfire,” [Politico](#), 8/28/14)

- ***Politico* Headline: “Obama’s ‘Strategy’ Misfire”** (Josh Gerstein, “Obama’s ‘Strategy’ Misfire,” [Politico](#), 8/28/14)

**“As With All Gaffes, The Worst Ones Are The Ones That Confirm People’s Pre-Existing Suspicions,” As Obama’s Strategy Comments Do.** “As with all gaffes, the worst ones are the ones that confirm

people's pre-existing suspicions or fit into an easy narrative. That's why '47 percent' stung Mitt Romney so much, and its why 'don't have a strategy' hurts Obama today." (Aaron Blake, "Why Obama's 'We Don't Have A Strategy' Gaffe Stings," [The Washington Post](#), 8/29/14)

- **"President Barack Obama Isn't Just Grappling With What Feels Like An Endless Foreign Policy Nightmare Around The World. Now He's Got One Hell Of A Messaging Problem At Home."** (David Nather and Philip Ewing, "Barack Obama's Mixed Messages," [Politico](#), 8/11/14)

## **BUT HIS STRATEGY ADMISSION SHOULDN'T COME AS A SHOCK—OBAMA HAS LONG STRUGGLED TO KEEP UP WITH AN INCREASINGLY CHAOTIC WORLD**

**As A Series Of Global Crises Have Emerged Over The Years, The Administration "Has Remained Largely Hands Off," Which Plays To The Narrative Of It Not Having "A Real Strategy."** "And as a series of overseas foreign policy crises have popped up in recent years, the White House has remained largely hands-off -- a decision that rightly or wrongly feeds the narrative of it not having a real strategy. And it certainly didn't help that the White House set a so-called 'red line' of the Syrian government using chemical weapons on its people, but didn't actually do anything when it crossed the red line." (Aaron Blake, "Why Obama's 'We Don't Have A Strategy' Gaffe Stings," [The Washington Post](#), 8/29/14)

- **The Disconnect Between Obama's Condemnations And Decisive Actions Threaten To Leave Him "Looking Ineffective Or Even Impotent."** "And the disconnect between dramatic condemnations and decisive action against ISIL threatens to leave the president looking ineffective or even impotent, just as his call for Syrian President Bashar Assad to resign remains unheeded three years later." (Josh Gerstein, "Obama's Blurry Foreign Policy Vision," [Politico](#), 8/26/14)

**National Journal's Ron Fournier: On Foreign Policy, Obama Has Been The "Underestimator In Chief."** RON FOURNIER: "Its only mission is to take us out. We are going to get hit. They are coming after us and we are going to get hit if we don't figure out how to stop them. So, short term, yes, the President is doing fine. Long term, look, this is a president who underestimated ISIS, he called them JV. He underestimated what was going to happen after Libya, he said that in *The New York Times* article. He underestimated Putin. He underestimated several other areas. He's been the commander in chief or the underestimator in chief. So I don't want him to underestimate. We can't afford the President to underestimate this threat." (Fox's [Fox News Sunday](#), 8/10/14)

- **Politico Headline: "Obama's Blurry Foreign Policy Vision"** (Josh Gerstein, "Obama's Blurry Foreign Policy Vision," [Politico](#), 8/26/14)

## **Obama Has Continued To Underestimate The Threat Of ISIS And Has Had An "Ad-Hoc" Approach, Which "Should Haunt Him"**

**FLASHBACK: Obama On Islamist Groups, January 2014: "The Analogy We Use Around Here Sometimes, And I Think Is Accurate, Is If A Jayvee Team Puts On Lakers Uniforms That Doesn't Make Them Kobe Bryant."** "In the 2012 campaign, Obama spoke not only of killing Osama bin Laden; he also said that Al Qaeda had been 'decimated.' I pointed out that the flag of Al Qaeda is now flying in Falluja, in Iraq, and among various rebel factions in Syria; Al Qaeda has asserted a presence in parts of Africa, too. 'The analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant,' Obama said, resorting to an uncharacteristically flip analogy." (David Remnick, "Going The Distance," [The New Yorker](#), 1/27/14)

- **The Wall Street Journal Headline: "U.S. Underestimated Urgency Of Islamic State Threat In Iraq"** (Siobhan Gorman And Julian E. Barnes, "U.S. Underestimated Urgency Of Islamic State Threat In Iraq," [The Wall Street Journal](#), 8/10/14)

***The Washington Post's David Ignatius: Obama's ISIS-Jayvee Analogy "Should Haunt Him."*** WOLF BLITZER: "The President back in January, President Obama gave an interview to *'The New Yorker'* magazine and was speaking about Al Qaeda's, you know, organization, if you will. ISIS, these terrorists in Syria and Iraq and he seemed to down play how dangerous they were when he said, 'the analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant.' Junior varsity. That was the quote that the President said then, seems to be haunting him now." DAVID IGNATIUS: "It should haunt him." (CNN's "The Situation Room With Wolf Blitzer," 8/7/14)

***The Council On Foreign Relations' Richard Haass: "I Found So Odd The Disconnect" Between ISIS' Agenda And Obama's Plans For The Region.*** HAASS: "So we ought to take these guys a lot more seriously about what it is they, they're potentially—which is why, by the way, what the President said last night. I gotta tell ya, I found so odd, the disconnect, between the nature of their agenda, and the narrowness, the way he articulated what we're going to do." (MSNBC's "Morning Joe," 8/8/14)

- ***Bloomberg's Al Hunt: "I Fear" Obama's Strategy On ISIS Is "Ad-Hoc."*** JOHN HEILEMAN: "Barack Obama's foreign policy is criticized by a lot of people for being ad-hoc. And, the question, Al, you mentioned before that people are worried about a slippery slope, do you think the President is making this particular policy with respect to ISIS in an ad-hoc way, or do you think they have a notion of, a short, medium, and long game here that the president isn't telling everybody about but that is all pretty well calculated in the white house, or are they making it up as they go along?" HUNT: "John, I fear it's closer to the former." (MSNBC's "Morning Joe," 8/8/14)

### ***While Obama Failed To Enforce His Own "Red Line" In Syria, The Civil War Continues To Wreak Havoc***

***After Obama Declared That, In Gassing 1,400 Civilians To Death, Assad Had "Violated Civilized Norms And Crossed His, Obama's, Red Line," He Shelved His Request For A Military Response.*** "Obama declared that Assad, in gassing 1,400 civilians to death, had violated civilized norms and crossed his, Obama's, red line. He asked for congressional approval for a military response; then he shelved that request in favor of a deal, brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin, for Assad to hand over his chemical arsenal." (Fred Hiatt, Op-Ed, "Obama's Foreign Policy Reveals The Effects Of Disengagement," [The Washington Post](#), 7/27/14)

- ***Council On Foreign Relations' Leslie Gelb On Failed Syria Policy: "We Drew Red Lines And Then Didn't Do Anything About Them."*** We drew red lines and then didn't do anything about them, walked away from them. And now we're in a position where it seems we're just going to let this war drag on with terrible consequences that Fred Hof described and you know full well the horrors of it." (Leslie Gelb, Committee On Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, [Testimony](#), 10/31/13)

***Obama's Former Ambassador To Syria, Robert Ford: "As The Situation In Syria Deteriorated, I Found It Ever Harder To Justify Our Policy."*** "In February, I resigned as the American ambassador to Syria, after 30 years' foreign service in Africa and the Middle East. As the situation in Syria deteriorated, I found it ever harder to justify our policy. It was time for me to leave." (Robert S. Ford, Op-Ed, "Arm Syria's Opposition," [The New York Times](#), 6/10/14)

- ***The Washington Post's Fred Hiatt: "It Is No Secret That The Obama Administration's Syria Policy, To The Extent That One Exists, Is Failing."*** (Fred Hiatt, Op-Ed, "Senators Say John Kerry Admitted U.S. Failure In Syria," [The Washington Post](#), 2/3/14)

***James Clapper, Director Of National Intelligence, Called The Syrian Crisis An "Apocalyptic Disaster."*** "Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper Jr., in testimony before Congress on

Tuesday, called the war, which has killed more than 110,000 and displaced millions, an ‘apocalyptic disaster.’” (Anne Gearan, “Diplomacy Is Failing In Syria, Obama Acknowledges,” [The Washington Post](#), 2/11/14)

- **“While Nobody Was Paying Attention, The Civil War In Syria Entered Its Bloodiest Phase Yet...”** “While nobody was paying attention, the civil war in Syria entered its bloodiest phase yet, with 700 people killed in just two days of fighting between Bashar Assad’s forces and the Sunni militant group Islamic State of Iraq (ISIS).” (Joshua Keating, “The Crises You Missed,” [Politico Magazine](#), 8/4/14)
- **Reuters Headline: “Syria Refugees Top 3 Million Mark, UN Says”** (John Heilprin, “Syria Refugees Top 3 Million Mark, UN Says,” [Reuters](#), 8/29/14)

### ***And Obama Continues To Dodge On The Escalating Crisis In Ukraine***

**According To NATO, “Well Over” 1,000 Russian Troops Are Operating In Ukraine, Fighting Alongside Pro-Russian Separatists.** “NATO believes well over 1,000 Russian troops are operating inside Ukraine, a NATO military officer said on Thursday. The officer, briefing reporters on condition of anonymity, referred to the Russian actions as ‘incursions’ rather than an invasion. ‘We assess well over 1,000 Russian troops are now operating inside Ukraine,’ he said at NATO’s military headquarters in southern Belgium. ‘They are supporting separatists (and) fighting with them.’” (“More Than 1,000 Russian Troops Operating In Ukraine: NATO,” [Reuters](#), 8/28/14)

- **Vox Headline: “Let’s Be Clear About This: Russia Is Invading Ukraine Right Now”** (Max Fisher, “Let’s Be Clear About This: Russia Is Invading Ukraine Right Now,” [Vox](#), 8/27/14)

**The Hill Headline: “Obama Dodges On Ukraine Invasion”** (Justin Sink, “Obama Dodges On Ukraine Invasion,” [The Hill](#), 8/28/14)

- **In His Press Conference Last Week, Obama “Sidestepped” Questions On A Russian Invasion Into Ukraine.** “President Obama on Thursday sidestepped the question of whether Russia has mounted an invasion of Ukraine, describing the movement of troops and equipment across the border as an ‘incursion’ and ‘continuation of what’s been taking place’ in the region.” (Justin Sink, “Obama Dodges On Ukraine Invasion,” [The Hill](#), 8/28/14)

**National Journal’s Ron Fournier: Obama “Dithers And Waffles, And Seems To Be A Mental Step Behind Adversaries” Like Putin.** “The public is of two minds about Obama. They agree with his America-first, don’t-rush-to-war philosophy; they just don’t like how he’s projecting it. He dithers and waffles, and seems to be a mental step behind adversaries like Russian President Vladimir Putin.” (Ron Fournier, “The Audacity To Be Authentic: Hillary Clinton’s Risky Hedge Against Obama,” [National Journal](#), 8/12/14)

## **DEMOCRATS, FORMER OBAMA OFFICIALS, AND MILITARY COMMANDERS ARE CRITICAL OF OBAMA’S APPROACH TO FOREIGN POLICY CRISES**

**Obama’s Foreign Policy “Took Another Hit” As A Bipartisan Group Of “Key Lawmakers” Criticized His Administration’s Approach To International Crises.** President Obama’s foreign-policy credentials took another hit Sunday as key lawmakers from both parties criticized his reaction to international turmoil and suggested the administration should be more assertive in addressing conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine.” (Josh Hicks, “Obama Foreign Policy Sparks Bipartisan Criticism,” [The Washington Post](#), 8/31/14)

- **The Washington Post Headline: “Obama Foreign Policy Sparks Bipartisan Criticism”** (Josh Hicks, “Obama Foreign Policy Sparks Bipartisan Criticism,” [The Washington Post](#), 8/31/14)

**Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Dianne Feinstein (D-CA): Obama Has Been “Too Cautious” In Dealing With ISIS.** ANDREA MITCHELL: “The fact is, they have been on the march now for months, if not years. So why does the President still say we don’t have a strategy yet. Doesn’t that project



weakness from the White House?” DIANNE FEINSTEIN: “Well, I mean, I know what you want me to say. But I’m not going to say it in that sense. I think I’ve learned one thing about this president, and that is he’s very cautious. Maybe in this instance too cautious. I do know that the military, I know that the State Department, I know that others have been putting plans together. And so hopefully those plans will coalesce into a strategy that can encourage that coalition. From Arab nations, you know, Jordan is at jeopardy, Lebanon is at jeopardy, the UAA and other countries are in jeopardy. So, there is good reason for people to come together now and begin to approach this as the very real threat that it in fact is.” (NBC’s [“Meet The Press,”](#) 8/31/14)

- **Feinstein: Obama’s JV Comment Was “Wrong.”** MITCHELL: The President back in January told *The New Yorker Magazine*, David Remnick, that ISIS is the JV team. That was clearly wrong.” FEINSTEIN: Well, I think it’s wrong, too. I think it’s a mainly varsity.” (NBC’s [“Meet The Press,”](#) 8/31/14)

**NBC’s Richard Engel: Military Commanders And Former U.S. Officials Are “Apoplectic” Over Obama’s ISIS Strategy Admission.** ANDREA MITCHELL: “Richard, what about the President’s reluctance to take the fight against ISIS to Syria.” RICHARD ENGEL: “Well, I speak to military commanders, I speak to former officials, and they are apoplectic. They think that this is a clear and present danger. They think something needs to be done. One official said that this was a Freudian slip. It shows how the United States does not have a policy to deal with Syria, even when you have ISIS, which has effectively become a terrorist army, roughly 20,000 strong, about half of them foreign fighters and incredibly well armed after two major weapons hauls.” (NBC’s [“Meet The Press,”](#) 8/31/14)

**Michal McFaul, Obama’s Former Ambassador To Russia Said Finding A Solution To The Crisis In Ukraine “Should Not Be Difficult.”** “Obama’s former ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, suggested on ‘Meet the Press’ that finding a solution to the Russia-Ukraine tensions should not be difficult. ‘I think it’s easy,’ McFaul said. ‘This is not like other conflicts around the world. It would entail more decentralization in eastern Ukraine, the use of the Russian language, perhaps some international monitors there.’” (Josh Hicks, “Obama Foreign Policy Sparks Bipartisan Criticism,” [The Washington Post](#), 8/31/14)

- **McFaul On Easing The Russia-Ukraine Tensions: “I Think It’s Easy.”** “Obama’s former ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, suggested on ‘Meet the Press’ that finding a solution to the Russia-Ukraine tensions should not be difficult. ‘I think it’s easy,’ McFaul said. ‘This is not like other conflicts around the world. It would entail more decentralization in eastern Ukraine, the use of the Russian language, perhaps some international monitors there.’” (Josh Hicks, “Obama Foreign Policy Sparks Bipartisan Criticism,” [The Washington Post](#), 8/31/14)

## **UNSURPRISINGLY, AMERICANS ARE WARY OF OBAMA’S LEADERSHIP, PARTICULARLY ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES**

**Just 42 Percent Of Americans Approve Of The Way Obama Is Handling His Job As President, While 50 Percent Disapprove.** ([USA Today/Pew Research Poll](#), 1501 A, MoE 2.9%, 8/20-24/14)

**54 Percent Of Americans Believe Obama’s Approach To Foreign Policy And National Security Issues Is “Not Tough Enough,” While Only 36 Percent Responded It Was “About Right.”** ([USA Today/Pew Research Poll](#), 1501 A, MoE 2.9%, 8/20-24/14)

- **52 Percent Of Americans Disapprove Of Obama’s Handling Of The Situation Involving Ukraine And Russia, While Only 35 Percent Approve.** ([USA Today/Pew Research Poll](#), 1501 A, MoE 2.9%, 8/20-24/14)
- **56 Percent Of Americans Disapprove Of Obama’s Handling Of Iraq, While Only 35 Percent Approve.** ([USA Today/Pew Research Poll](#), 1501 A, MoE 2.9%, 8/20-24/14)