
Back in the Iraq Quagmire

30/10/2015



Those date from the historic error of invading Iraq, a decision whose roots lay in the gross distortions of the the Global War On Terror. Each successive action has been marked by a similar set of intellectual failures, arrogant faith in American “can-do” spirit and diplomatic incompetence.

Recent developments in Syria, Iraq and Yemen exacerbate deteriorating conditions as the entire region descends deeper into disorder and sectarian war. Yet, Washington proceeds aimlessly along the same dangerous paths while the country’s political class suspends its critical faculties in playing along with these fateful games of make-believe. Therein lies the ultimate tragedy of this self inflicted national predicament.

A brief recitation of events over the past few weeks underscores the consequences of this literal mindlessness. Russia has intervened decisively, both militarily and politically, through initiatives at once confident and adroit which expose the amateurism of our leaders. Putin is running rings around Obama and his disorganized, disoriented team. And, once again, our \$83 billion per annum Intelligence apparatus is caught napping. Russia has changed the game, altered the underlying balance of forces, shaped the diplomatic agenda and wrong-footed us.

Washington’s confused response is to add a few adjectives to the dirty names it calls Putin, to dust off Cold War face masks, and now to recommit American fighting forces to Iraq (and maybe Syria) for no better reason than to show the Russkies that we’re not to be taken lightly – even if it’s obvious to all that we no longer are not the boss. Only yesterday did we see a ray of

sanity and practical wisdom in joining a Russian initiated conference on Syria that includes Iran – an Iran Obama decided to relegate back to invisibility even though it has more influence in Baghdad than he does and is on the ground in Syria.

The most radical of Washington's creative schemes is to declare al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, al-Nusra, honorary good-guys to be treated as respectable members of a favored rebel alliance called the "Army of Conquest" which we are arming with sophisticated weapons – directly and via Saudi Arabia and Qatar. To confirm that we take this magical renaming seriously, we vehemently condemn the Russians for bombing our new-found friends. Meanwhile, Turkey, the Saudis and the Gulfies double down in their overt backing for the Salafists and jihadis. Qatar goes so far as to threaten Assad with its own invasion of Southern Syria with unstated allies.

Turkey's Erdogan, for his part, has fooled Obama into agreeing to support a primary Turkish place in Northern Syria in exchange for previously denied access to Incilik air base and a pledge to take on ISIL. Erdogan has yet to inflict a casualty on ISIL but has launched an all-out campaign against the Kurdish PKK. That campaign has now been extended to the Kurdish YPG in Syria (an affiliate) who were lionized as the heroes of Kobane. They also are earmarked as the primary element in a fresh Washington sponsored coalition (The Euphrates Volcano – no, not a borrowing from Istanbul's red light district) that the Pentagon dreamers plan to have seize Raqqa along with a few thousand local Sunni Arabs that American Army trainers are touting as a crack unit. Those are the same U.S. officers whose earlier \$500 million program produced "4 or 5" ambulatory soldiers – plus a few who immediately defected to al-Nusra with their equipment. The general in charge has been rewarded with a star and a promotion.

In Iraq, the long advertised assault to retake Ramadi seems permanently stalled. Washington refuses to allow the Hashid Shia militias to participate – and we refuse to provide them air support farther north. Prime Minister al-Abbadi mutters about possibly asking the Russians for help since their planes seem actually capable of hitting meaningful targets. Obama replies: it is us or them! Then the bombshell: the President will renege on a series of solemn promises by sending American Special Forces back into combat in Iraq – and maybe Syria. Only a few "for the present time" according to Ash Carter. Then the secondary explosion: "the Republic of Iraq has not agreed to such a deployment" according to al-Abbadi.

Obama has violated another solemn pledge in announcing last week that the 10,000 American force in Afghanistan will remain indefinitely. In neither case, does the country get an apology or an explanation. We receive no notification of what strategies we are following, for what national purpose, with what objective in sight. Congress is silent – except for McCain and his clique who want more bombing everywhere. The media give these developments passing notice.

Democrats fret in a corner. Except for Hillary who remains driven by the belief that only a turbo-charged female warrior could make it into the Oval Office. She has bought into Erdogan's plan for a protected "no-fly zone" in northern Syria. The fact that this fanciful idea has been rendered moot by Russia's intervention since enforcement would mean World War III doesn't faze her.

Elsewhere, Obama perseveres as accomplice to Saudi Arabia's bloody assault on Yemen and the Houthis. We provide the technical support, Intelligence and target spotting – which led to destruction of a MSF hospital to match the one destroyed by an American helicopter strike in Kunduz called in by Special Forces commandos on the ground (only a few).

Failure of this monumental scale, involving scores of erroneous actions and decisions over many years, does not happen by happenstance or a run of bad luck. It happens because of

warped thinking, thoughtless strategy, unsound tactics, sloppy diplomacy, and an arrogance that leads to an utter incapacity to learn. Today, we have a feckless President absorbed by his post-White House plans, amateurs or place-holders throughout the foreign policy establishment, a self-serving military, and a singularly inept Intelligence service. And a disengaged public.
