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The Pivot to Nowhere

The Teetering Empire

by PATRICK FOY

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With 2014 now upon us, a cosmological question may have occurred to you. Where is America going to “pivot to” next? Being a foreign policy and history buff, I’ve thought about it. Gideon Rachman, chief foreign affairs columnist of the *Financial Times*, has some ideas on the subject which he presented in a recent column. According to Rachman, America is pivoting back to the Middle East. He wishes it weren’t so. He is concerned that “America is obsessed by a region with a population one-third the size of China’s.” We should all be concerned, but for a different reason.

The Obama White House announced some months ago that America was pivoting to Asia. Fine. Naturally, I paid no attention. (How can anyone take Obama seriously at this stage?) The White House now appears to be reversing course. And why is that? An unnamed US official has given Gideon the spot answer: “The White House is about crisis management. And, in foreign policy, 90 per cent of the crises are in the Middle East.” Which only begs the question, why?

Mr. Rachman informs us, "...a Syrian conflict that has now claimed more than 100,000 lives; violent turmoil in Egypt; and the tensions caused by Iran's nuclear programme....as the year developed, Mr. Kerry became deeply involved in all of these issues, while keeping up the pressure on the Israelis and the Palestinians."

Crisis management? Keeping up the pressure? Ugh! May I suggest that the world would be a saner and much safer place if Washington were to pivot all the way back to North America, in fact, back inside the Washington D.C. beltway. Most of these Middle East calamities were dreamed up by officials and politicians in Washington—Neocons and Liberal interventionists—then exported to the outlying provinces of the American *faux* empire. That empire is now teetering because of it.

Item. In the first place, the nuclear "crisis" with Iran is entirely bogus. There is no crisis to manage. There is only a make-believe cover story. The start of "serious nuclear negotiations with Iran" is not about nuclear weapons at all, but about using the hypothetical Persian Bomb to further crucify Iran with economic and financial sanctions, if Tehran does not give up what it does not have, and jump through hoops.

As you might imagine, all sorts of "tensions" can be generated by gratuitous trouble-making. Washington's attitude toward Iran has been scandalous. The possibility that obsessed policy-makers in the White House, on Capitol Hill and in Tel-Aviv may actually believe their own propaganda is unfortunate. In days of yore, the Soviet *nomenklatura* had a similar problem.

It does not occur to Rachman to ask *why* Washington is fixated with Iran and its non-existent nuclear weapons program. He accepts the officially-proffered, exceedingly far-fetched scenario as true, like 98% of the Western establishment commentariat. The reluctance to wander off the reservation is palpable.

Item. In the second place, the so-called "civil war" in Syria was an avoidable tragedy, irrespective of the flaws of the Assad regime. This bloodbath is the result of a coordinated, covert policy of destabilization. The aim was to wreck and implode Syria as a nation-state, following the pattern of Iraq. Without outside instigation, no "civil war" would have happened. Washington took the nominal lead. Luckily, Vladimir Putin and Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov stepped in at the 11th hour, and took the matches away from Obama and Kerry.

Why was Syria being targeted? Years ago Israel annexed part of Syria, the Golan Heights, and has no intention of ever returning it. A Syria in ruins, run by Sunni extremists and a veritable

madhouse, would make negotiations on this outstanding issue impossible. That is the goal. In addition, Syrian president Assad is an ally of Hezbollah, which successfully defended Lebanon in its most recent armed confrontation with Israel. Now Saudi Arabia has gotten into the act due to murderous sectarian rivalry between Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

In sum, the White House has taken its cue from self-interested schemers and fanatics. In retrospect, would it not have been wiser for Washington to focus upon honest-broker diplomacy in an attempt to tranquilize the region? But wisdom and honesty are in perilous short supply in the capital of the lone surviving superpower. We now face varying degrees of mayhem in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. It's a nightmare. *Cui bono?*

Item. Egypt has already been destroyed for all intents and purposes. In the aftermath of Anwar Sadat's 1979 peace treaty with Israel, Egypt became utterly dependent upon American foreign aid to survive. Most of the aid went to the Egyptian military and to Sadat's opportunistic successor, Hosni Mubarak. It was tantamount to a bribe, to maintain them in power, to stop them from abandoning the peace treaty, and to prevent them from helping their fellow Arabs, the Palestinians, caged up in Gaza. If Sadat had not been assassinated, I very much doubt he would have allowed Egypt to become a flunky and for himself to be taken advantage of.

Mubarak was no Sadat. Egypt was under martial law all this time. Clearly, it was an untenable and unhealthy situation. That seemed OK with Washington. Then Egypt exploded, finally. Now, thanks to a coup, the military is back in charge. The country is in chaos and its economy in shambles. A genuine civil war is in the offing. This is the indirect result of American foreign policy "crisis management" over decades. Some might call it meddling. If you ever wanted to visit the Pyramids, you can forget it.

There appears to be a pattern of nation-wrecking at work. Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. One explanation might be that American politicians are eager to push forward the perceived interests of Israel, because it advances their own career trajectories upward. Not to be outdone, Washington's foreign policy elite make grandiose commitments based on the misguided idea that America is the indispensable nation. The consequences are often catastrophic.

Item. Gideon Rachman writes as if various Middle East problems are unrelated and compartmentalized. To the contrary, they are linked. Everything Washington does must be cleared at the end of the day, one way or the other, with the Israel Lobby. The overriding concern being, is this good for our ally Israel? If it's not exactly what Tel Aviv might want, then Israel must be compensated in some way. This leads to further complications and posturing.

Take Egypt. Presidents Sadat and Mubarak, both military officers, were the direct heirs of Colonel Gamal Nasser, who came to power in Egypt as a pan-Arab nationalist in 1952, largely in response to the success of the Zionists in Palestine, next door. Without the imposition of Zionism in Palestine, there may well have been no military coup against King Farouk, and Egypt may have evolved in a normal, secular way, free of martial law and Islamic fanaticism.

Egypt, not Saudi Arabia, was and remains the leader of the Arab world. The Arabs had nothing against Jews as such. The Arabs had lived in harmony with Jews throughout the Middle East for centuries. But the Arabs could hardly be expected to welcome the expulsion of Arab Palestinians from Palestine, to be replaced by many thousands of Jewish outlanders, mainly from Russia and Poland. These interlopers arrived as prepackaged zealots, with the attitude that they owned the country and that the native inhabitants were of no importance. It amounted to naked neocolonialism in a post-colonial world.

Hence, the 1948 war over Palestine, the Arab-Israeli conflicts thereafter, and now the never-ending “peace process”, which has turned out to be a 24-carat charade. The crux of the problem remains the right of return of those dispossessed Palestinians from 1948 and 1967. They and their descendants number several million and remain in refugee camps scattered throughout Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza. Restitution is in accordance with the Geneva Conventions and UN resolutions. Washington and Tel Aviv stonewall the issue.

All kinds of blowback have resulted from the refusal by Washington and Europe to act honorably and bring justice to the Palestinians. The list is too long to cover here. It is the main reason why Washington has singled out Iran for special treatment. Iran does not recognize the *status quo* in Palestine. Tehran stands up for the Palestinians and promotes their story. It is an embarrassing alternative narrative which Washington and Tel Aviv would prefer no one hear.

Conclusion. America’s difficulties in the greater Middle East have been self-inflicted. The price for hubris and folly has been high. I was surprised to learn from Gideon Rachman’s article that the Pentagon still maintains 40,000 troops in Iraq. I thought that misadventure was over. Obama said so. The “right” war in his view was Afghanistan, as opposed to Bush’s “wrong” war in Iraq. Obama has prosecuted his war. Afghanistan is deteriorating rapidly and, after ten years of combat, looks to be a bust.

Recall that the U.S. Army and Air Force and the CIA are in Afghanistan solely because of 9/11. That’s where the bad guys were. But this fact only begs the larger question, to wit, why was America hit on 9/11? What was the motivation? That is critical to understand. Was the 9/11

atrocities largely the result of Washington's one-sided policy backing Israel to the hilt no matter what? If the answer is yes or maybe, the implications are profound.