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U.S. Foreign Policy Is a Shambles

Aggravating Conflicts

by SHELDON RICHMAN

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With al-Qaeda affiliates wreaking havoc in Iraq, Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham seem to lament that no U.S. troops are on the scene to get in on the action.

“The Administration must recognize the failure of its policies in the Middle East and change course,” McCain and Graham said.

Change course? Do they want to send troops back to Iraq, so they can do more dying and killing? McCain and Graham, who never saw an opportunity for U.S. military intervention they didn't like, continue to operate under the absurd illusion that American politicians and bureaucrats can micromanage something as complex as a foreign society. Their hubris knows no bounds, but, then, they never pay the price for their foolishness. Who pays? The Americans they cheer off to war, but even more so, the people in foreign lands who are on the receiving end of American intervention.

How do those scoundrels in Washington sleep?

If you haven't noticed, American foreign policy is a shambles. Iraq and Afghanistan are engulfed in violence, and their corrupt, authoritarian governments are objects of suspicion and hatred. The suggestion that U.S. forces could make things better only shows how out of touch people in Washington can be.

Anyone who was thinking clearly in 2001–2003 knew it would come to this. Afghanistan has a history of driving out invaders. Only someone blinded by the allure of empire could fool himself into thinking the U.S. government could arrange affairs such that they wouldn't unravel the moment U.S. personnel prepared to leave the country.

The 2003 Iraq invasion raised even more questions about the ability of policymakers to engage in clear thinking. Under Saddam Hussein, the minority Sunni Muslims ruled the Shi'ite majority, many of whom were sympathetic to Shi'ite Iran, America's supposed *bête noir*. Take out Saddam, and Iran's friends would rule. Indeed, the man who became Iraq's prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, was handpicked by Iranian authorities. (Ironically, the Shi'ite leader that the Bush administration chose to fight, Muqtada al-Sadr, was the most nationalist of Iraqi Shi'ites and least sympathetic to Iran.)

With Shi'ites in control, Iraqi Sunnis resisted. And then came the al-Qaeda fighters, who saw a chance to kill both Shi'ites and Americans. Hence the continued violence in Iraq, even though U.S. forces left at the end of 2011 — despite the Obama administration's best effort to keep some there.

Iraq and Afghanistan are not the only places where U.S. foreign policy is in disarray. Take Egypt. The Obama administration — including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton — stuck with hated military dictator and ally Hosni Mubarak until the bitter end and even then tried to have his second-in-command and torturer in chief, Omar Suleiman, take over when Mubarak was finished. That didn't work, of course, and a fledgling democracy (whatever its imperfections) began to sprout wings.

The Obama administration praised Egyptian democratic aspirations, but when the military deposed President Muhammad Morsi last year, the administration sided with the coup makers — although it could not use the word *coup*, for that would require stopping the annual \$1.5 billion payment to the Egyptian military. The U.S. government has no desire to end that appropriation, because it keeps Egypt in the American camp and blunts its support for the Palestinians, who are under occupation by U.S. partner Israel. With Egypt's military government cracking down on the civil liberties of the members of Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood, U.S. policy looks more monstrous every day.

Speaking of Israel, Secretary of State John Kerry seems to be going all out for a peace agreement between the government of Benjamin Netanyahu and the Palestinians, but Kerry's effort has a fatal flaw at its core. Netanyahu & Co. don't want the Palestinians to have a viable, autonomous state free of Israeli domination. We know this because the prime minister keeps announcing plans for more illegal Jewish-only residences on Palestinian land acquired through war. Kerry won't condemn this flagrant undermining of "peace" talks because he, like so many American politicians, is beholden to Israel's powerful American lobby.

Then there's Libya and Syria — but you get the idea. U.S. foreign intervention aggravates conflicts and puts America on the side of oppressors. No wonder it's falling to pieces.