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## From Iraq to Ukraine: A Pattern of Disaster

By Justin Raimondo

March 16, 2014

Eleven years ago this week the United States invaded Iraq – an event the late General William E. Odom rightly called the biggest strategic disaster in US military history. The decade since that catastrophe proves one thing about US policymakers: they've changed their tactics without learning a thing.

Iraq today is a seething cauldron of religious and ethnic hatreds: a full-scale civil war is in progress, with Sunnis in open rebellion against the majority Shi'ites. As I write this, the latest news is that a car bomb exploding in Baghdad killed 19 people – in addition to another bomb north of the capital killing 2 and wounding 6. And that's just in the past twenty-four hours: violence has escalated dramatically this year. The US is sending more arms to the government, including 100 Hellfire missiles – a government, by the way, that is staunchly pro-Iranian and which asked us politely but firmly to leave.

As George W. Bush would say: "Mission Accomplished!" But that's only if you're Ahmed Chalabi, the "hero in error" who somehow persuaded the Clinton and Bush administrations to put him on the CIA payroll and proceeded to hornswoggle Western governments – and the complicit media – with tall tales of Iraq's fabled-but-nonexistent nuclear weapons program.

Chalabi, it turned out, was working for Tehran – which naturally wanted its old enemy, Saddam Hussein, put out of commission so the Shi'ite majority could take power. A decade later and the leaders of Shi'ite parties who had found shelter in Tehran for decades rule the roost in Baghdad –

thanks to the very same people who are now exhorting us to attack Iran. Yes, the neoconservatives whose policies led directly to the extension of Iranian influence throughout Iraq now insist the Iranian mullahs are building "weapons of mass destruction" and must be stopped.

Our enormous failure in Iraq exhausted us, not only financially but also morally and psychologically. Not that the war hawks of Washington were the least bit deterred by their abysmal failure: it was the American people who began to wonder if perhaps it hadn't been worth the lives, the destruction of an entire country, and the rise of militant anti-Americanism on a world scale. In reaction, ordinary Americans became increasingly vocal about the need to stay out of the world's intractable conflicts and instead tend to business at home.

The political class didn't pay much attention at first, only modifying their approach. Instead of simply invading, in the Bushian fashion, the strategy was to utilize proxies as a temporary expedient, while laying the groundwork for more direct overtly military intervention. Libya was supposed to be the model: this was preceded by a big propaganda campaign, in which our credulous mainstream media picked up the administration's "imminent humanitarian disaster" talking point and ran with it. That the alleged site of this impending massacre of the rebels by Qaddafi's men was supposed to have taken place in Benghazi underscores how and why this new strategy began backfiring from the start.

Libya began falling apart the moment we announced its "liberation," and has gone rapidly downhill ever since. Yet the War Party achieved a nominal victory in that the scheme *worked*, after all. The Three Harpies of the Libyan Apocalypse – Hillary Clinton, Susan Rice, and Samantha Power – succeeded in dragging the President, not exactly kicking and screaming, into the Libyan mini-quagmire. If US troops weren't bogged down fighting an insurgency, the administration soon found itself fending off a congressional insurgency around the attack on our "consulate" and the first assassination of an American ambassador in many years.

The same Three Harpies agitated for the aborted bombing of Syria, another "humanitarian" intervention on behalf of oppressed "moderate" Islamists. (Which is saying something when it comes to Syria, where Al Qaeda is now considered "moderate" compared to the ultra-radical ISIS.) Hillary was particularly interested in expanding the aid program which had so far only given the rebels light arms and political support. When the President vetoed stronger measures, she resigned – and although her resignation was long planned, there was a certain synchronicity in the timing.

So what or who pushed the President into the Syrian air strikes that never happened? I covered that in the run-up to the President's announcement and his subsequent backing off in the face of popular outrage. Suffice to say here that once again the War Party had come up against what must inevitably be dubbed the "Iraq Syndrome," after its predecessor, the "Vietnam Syndrome."

This is the way our political class talks about the rumblings of rebellion that have occurred over the past half century or so, outbreaks of opposition to the idea of America as a world empire. Our elites view these periodic eruptions of "isolationism" as a psycho-ideological malady, which is where the Syndrome business comes into it.

Of course the real disease vector is in Washington, where the contagion of empire has unleashed an authoritarian plague eating away at the Constitution and the rule of law. A lawless regime of total surveillance has usurped the Fourth Amendment, and the bulwark of liberty, the Bill of Rights, is besieged in the name of "national security."

It's an old phrase with a new meaning: yesterday, which seems so long ago, "national security" meant the security of the nation, i.e. the territory of the United States. Today it means the "national interest," and our various and ever-changing "interests" extend into every continent, every country, every godforsaken -and-best-forgotten corner of the globe.

Yesterday we were a country: today we are an empire, a fact our political elites naturally glory in, but they face a major problem – the bigger the empire gets the more opposition its existence arouses, at home as well as abroad. Empires don't come cheap, and the costs are ever-rising. In an age of austerity the War Party has a harder sell.

One way around this is utilizing "soft power" to achieve US foreign policy objectives, and recent events in Ukraine are the first results of the War Party's strategic shift. It is also, I might note, a geographic shift away from the Middle East, a pivot to Europe and Russia's "near abroad" that underscores – and possibly prefigures – the Clintonian approach.

The first Clinton administration, you'll recall, was focused on the anti-Slavic front, spending most of its foreign policy capital fighting a civilizational war against the Slavic Orthodox Russophiles of Serbia and Bosnia on behalf of the oppressed Muslim minority in the former Yugoslavia. This war will be resumed if and when the Clintons retake the White House; indeed, we are seeing the first stages of it unfold quite dramatically in the streets of Kiev.

Ukraine has been a longstanding battlefield in the on-again, off-again cold war with Vladimir Putin's Russia, and one where the US has not always fared as well as it has more recently. The Orange Revolution, you might not remember, went sour pretty quickly, with the hero of the revolutionary hour, Viktor Yushchenko, quickly discredited and now largely forgotten.

Not to worry. Thanks to the infusion of untold millions into various NGOs and Ukrainian opposition groups, there are new "heroes of the Revolution" who have taken the stage in the Maiden – and taken power in Western Ukraine. No need to send in US troops: the muscle is provided by the black-masked cadre of "Right Sector," football hooligans and neo-Nazi skinheads who wear the red-and-black insignia of the pro-Nazi Ukrainians who fought under SS command during World War II. Their ~~fuehrer~~ leader, Dmytro Yorash, is deputy chief of "national security," i.e. the new regime's political police.

With banker-technocrats like Arsenyi Yatsenyuk as inoffensive front man, the real coup leaders in Kiev – a coalition of old-time oligarchs like Julia Tymoshenko and the "reformed" neo-Nazis of the ultra-nationalist Svoboda party – are setting the stage for a proxy war against the Russians. We have already seen a series of low-level provocations, on the border and elsewhere, and now that the referendum over Crimea has taken place a military clash is all too possible. As in the case of the Syrian rebels, we'll be providing aid to Ukraine – a cool \$1 billion to start with – while our media shamelessly roots for the embattled "freedom-fighters."

Yet there is a growing awareness – see here, here, and here – in "mainstream" quarters of the "interim" Ukrainian government's creepiness. There really is no other word I can think of that describes a party which valorizes Stepan Bandera and the other founders of the Ukrainian SS unit that murdered 4,000 Jews in Lvov, and actively participated in the Holocaust. The Svoboda party, whose leader has denounced an alleged "Muscovite-Jewish" conspiracy against Ukraine, has no less than eight top posts in the coupist "government" in Kiev, that is if you count the even more radical Yorash as a fellow traveler.

In short, the blowback from this foolhardy display of US-funded "soft power" could potentially rival what happened at Benghazi – if not worse. Do we really want to use a bunch of neo-Nazi skinheads as a battering ram against the Russians? In Libya, we unleashed Islamist fanatics who murdered our Ambassador. Do we know what we are unleashing in Ukraine?

The encirclement of Russia has been an ongoing project of post-cold war US policymakers, with both Republican and Democratic administrations doing their bit. However, Bill Clinton really set the standard, not only with the Kosovo intervention but also in light of his obsession with the former Soviet republics of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and the various ex-Soviet republics surrounding the Caspian Sea. It was during the Clinton administration that the first shots of the new cold war were fired.

Indeed, President Clinton set up a special office of Caspian Basin Energy Diplomacy and appointed Richard Morningstar as his Special Advisor and overseer of the new sub-agency. If the US could yank the ex-Soviet states in the region out of Russia's "near abroad," Western companies could reap mega-profits while the Russians were locked out – and Putin's energy chokehold on Europe would be broken. The project was a classic case of crony capitalism and cynical geopolitics, with the US government canoodling with foreign dictators – some of them quite bizarre – in order to set up American and allied companies for the alleged coming "gold rush" in Caspian energy production.

Yet the eccentric dictators of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, for all their ruthlessness, come off as relatively benign compared to the gaggle of ultra-nationalists, open anti-Semites, corrupt oligarchs, and outright thugs (such as Yorash) who constitute the coup leadership in Kiev.

In Iraq we used "hard power" to install a regime that is not only tyrannical but also hostile to the US. Today in Ukraine we are deploying "soft power" to ensconce a government that will not only be a financial burden for as far as they eye can see, but which may also turn out not to be as "pro-American" as their effusive neocon cheerleaders would have us believe.

The Svoboda party claims to represent all Ukrainians in the region, and openly talks about a "Greater Ukraine" extending into parts of neighboring countries which may indeed have pockets of Ukrainians. The national-ethnic conflicts that have periodically transformed the map of south-central Europe go back a long way. Once this can of worms is opened there is no putting it back.

Quite aside from that, however, I thought I would never live to see the day when the US State Department whitewashed the neo-Nazi views and heritage of a gang of thugs who had seized power in a violent coup d'état.

In Iraq, Libya, and Syria, US policymakers empowered radical Islamists of one sort or another. That was bad enough. Today, however, in Ukraine they are empowering the heirs of Adolf Hitler.

How is this not a scandal?