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Ask Bush, Why the Iraqi Military Won't Fight

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It's quite a surprise that John McCain did not rise on his hind legs when he got wind of what U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter had said on the Memorial Day week-end. It was just the thing to make the War Party irate—even more so than the Iraqi prime minister was. (Who is he these days? Ah: Haider al-AbadiIt.)

Defense Secretary Carter's quip was a no-brainer, really. Observations such as his were routine when Bush 43 began swinging the wrecking ball in Iraq. The War Party line, however, is to continue duping its ditto-heads into believing that the sorry state of Iraq began with Bush's successor, President Barack Obama.

Said Carter: "The rout of Iraqi forces at the city of Ramadi showed they lacked the will to fight against the Islamic State. ... They chose to withdraw. ... What apparently happened is the Iraqi forces just showed no will to fight. ... They were not outnumbered. In fact, they

vastly outnumbered the opposing force. We can give them training, we can give them equipment – we obviously can't give them the will to fight.”

ISIS captured Ramadi, the capital of the Anbar province, in early May.

The ineptness of the reconstituted Iraqi Army is nothing new. In 2006, then-Sen. Hillary Clinton demanded to know when the “Iraqi government and the Iraqi Army would step up to the task.” “I have heard over and over again, that the government must do this, the Iraqi Army must do that,” griped Clinton to Gen. John P. Abizaid, then top American military commander in the Middle East. “Can you offer us more than the hope that the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Army will step up to the task?”

Indeed, the War Party is in the habit of thrashing about in an ahistorical void—or creating its own reality, as warbot Karl Rove, George Bush’s muse, is notorious for saying. The neoconservative creed as disgorged by Rove deserves repeating:

“We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”

The lowly “you” Rove reserved for “the reality-based community” (guilty).

Curiously, a military that has done nothing but flee before the opposition ever since the Americans commandeered Iraq, had fought and won a protracted war against Iran, under Saddam Hussein. The thing we currently call the Iraqi military has been unable and unwilling to fight the wars America commands it to fight.

Why?

For one, Bush’s envoy to Iraq, Paul Bremer, made the decision to dissolve the Iraqi Army and civil service, early in 2003, with the blessing of Bush at whose pleasure Bremer served. Bush’s minions viewed the dissolution of the Iraqi Army as part of the “De-Ba’thification” process.

Not the least of the difficulties, as DEBKA *file* has observed, is that many in the Arab world see the battle with the Islamic State “not as an Arab but as a U.S.-European war. This line resonates widely in the other Arab countries aligned with the coalition.” It goes a long way in explaining the lackluster participation of the Emiratis, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in the

coalition against ISIS. In fact, the involvement by Amman turned out to be more symbolic than substantive, too.

Having grown up in Israel, I confess to harboring a bias about the mettle of the Arab fighting force, raised as I was on images of army boots piled up high in the Sinai desert, where in 1967, Egyptians (who had actually fought bravely) shed those shoes and fled before the IDF (Israel Defense Forces). Al-Qaida and ISIS reversed these biases; they're fierce, disciplined fighters. Ditto the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, now leading the Shiite militias in the battle against ISIS.

Yes, let the locals take out their trash. Let regional players take care of ISIS. Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, seemed to second the sentiment. He thinks Iran's involvement "could turn out to be 'a positive thing.'"

But not if Chucky Krauthammer can help it. The influential neoconservative commentator was decidedly unhappy about Jordan's initial and fleeting enthusiasm for the battle. The consensus in the U.S., as reflected by Chucky, is that only Muslims approved by the world superpower (the U.S.) and the region's superpower (Israel) are fit to fight ISIS.

Another dynamic is at play in the region besides the Sunni-Shia divide. It is that between the forces of centralization and the forces of decentralization. As a rule, the U.S. sides with the former; the Arab people with whom we meddle generally side with the latter. Given the tribal, familial focus of their societies; Arabs are unlikely to abandon their particularism in favor of American statism.

Take the Houthi rebels of Yemen. Like the Kurds of Iraq, they are demanding greater regional autonomy. Alas, the U.S. is looking to empower another puppet central power like former Yemeni president Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, the better to lord it over its Yemeni client state. And never mind that the Houthis are fighting against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, whom we revile as well.

In the words of Sir Walter Scott, "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive."