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Examples of U.S. Foreign Policy Dysfunction

By Rick Sterling
October 28, 2015



If the U.S. is to ever change its foreign policy based on dominance and aggression to a foreign policy based on diplomacy and respect for international law, there needs to be foundation of realistic assessments. Foreign policy decisions need to be based on reality not fantasy and propaganda.

Unfortunately, dysfunction, deception and propaganda extend across the spectrum from Congressional Republicans to Hillary Clinton to the White House to Bernie Sanders. The following are recent examples:

Benghazi Hearings in Congress ignore important issues to focus on superficial.

Congress recently held hearings on what happened in Benghazi Libya leading up to the death of Ambassador Stevens. The hearings focused on what former Secy of State Clinton knew, when she knew it and whether she should have ordered more security. Before that, millions were spent exploring the email home server issue. Meanwhile the root cause of Stevens' death and consequences of the US/Nato overthrow of the Gaddafi government have been ignored. The hearings were silent on the deaths of tens of thousands of Libyans, the eruption and expansion of terrorism within Libya and beyond and the massive numbers of refugees fleeing across the Mediterranean. Instead of evaluating the consequences of "regime change" in Libya, Congressional members focused on cheap political advantage. Mainstream media said nothing about the shallowness of the hearings; they were happy to report on political maneuvering and whether or not Clinton would lose her temper or be able to get "above the fray".

Points which would have been informative to explore include:

- * Were the claims of imminent 'massacre' in Benghazi exaggerated and largely false? These claims paved the way to the UN Security Council resolution and NATO imposed No Fly Zone. Was it a fake emergency?
- * Who authorized the the transition from "protecting civilians" to a campaign of attack and Libyan government overthrow? UN Security Council members China and Russia both say there were deceived and that the US and NATO violated the UN Security Council resolution.

Politicians and much of the media have portrayed Gaddafi as "crazy" for many years. For readers interested in a reality check, see the short video of Gaddafi's speech to the Arab League in 2008 as he points out the contradictions of acknowledging Israel on the 1967 boundary, as he warns the Arab League leaders of plots and coups, and as he says "we might be next" (for assassination). For a concise contrast of Libya before and after the NATO backed invasion see this article aptly titled "From Africa's wealthiest democracy under Gaddafi to Terrorist Haven after US Intervention".

Clinton advocates No Fly Zone for Syria despite U.S. military opposition and Turkey turning against it.

U.S. military leadership has generally opposed the "no fly zone" idea. They have made clear that a "no fly zone" begins with military attacks on anti-aircraft positions and is an act of war. They have underscored that imposing such a zone in Syria would be vastly more difficult than in Libya where there were no sophisticated anti-aircraft installations. Even then it took seven months of intense bombing to overthrow the Tripoli government. The risks in Syria would be huge with a significant chance of international war. The idea is reckless and irresponsible for the following reasons:

* The areas are controlled by armed opposition groups, predominately Jabhat al Nusra (Al Qaeda). Very few civilians remain in the areas proposed for NFZ in Syria. Most have fled to areas under Syrian government control, especially around Latakia and Tartous. Other have gone to Turkey. The proposal is basically to make US and NATO the air force for Al Qaeda. Amazing.

* If it was imposed, the No Fly Zone would more likely become an “intense conflict zone” rather than a “safe zone” as promoted by interventionists. It would bring USA and NATO directly into the conflict which is what the proponents want.

* There already exists a “safe zone”. It’s called the Turkish border.

Of crucial importance, the second Turkish Parliamentary elections are this coming Sunday November 1. Polls indicate the ruling “Justice and Development Party” (AKP) will probably lose majority control of the parliament. It’s possible they will lose power altogether. Either way, this will put a stop to the schemes for an all powerful Turkish President (Erdogan) and continuation of the war on Syria. All three non-AKP parties in Turkey oppose the current policies supporting war and terrorism in Syria.

Clinton’s NFZ proposal is opportunistic and out of step with reality in Syria and Turkey.

White House continues anti-Assad lies as they are further exposed in Turkey.

The White House must know very well that Assad government forces did NOT carry out chemical weapons attack on the outskirts of Damascus in August 2013. They must be acutely aware of this because they could not get the U.S. Intelligence to agree with statement that Assad was behind the atrocity back in Fall 2013. Instead of the usual “U.S. Intelligence assesses with high confidence” they had to substitute the “US Government assesses”. Although rarely remarked or noted in mainstream media, this was a significant deviation.

Despite this, and the investigations of the most acclaimed US investigative journalists (Seymour Hersh, Robert Parry, Gareth Porter, Russel Baker) which all point to the Assad government NOT being responsible, just a couple weeks ago the White House spokesman asserted the Assad government “used chemical weapons against his own people”.

Meanwhile last week in Turkey two deputies of the social democratic party CHP held a press conference to expose the evidence of Turkish involvement in shipping sarin to Syria and the refusal of the Erdogan government to pursue the investigation or charge the culprits.

This evidence including wire taps supports the conclusions of Hersh and others, that the chemical weapons used in Damascus on August 21, 2013 were supplied by Turkey to armed “rebels”. This further exposes the fact free propaganda that “Assad used chemical weapons on his own people”. Politicians and mainstream media outlets such as PBS Frontline just keep repeating it.

Bernie Sanders joins the absurd propaganda campaign against Venezuela and former leader Hugo Chavez.

As recently reported at Venezuelanalysis, Bernie Sanders referred to former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as a “dead communist dictator”. It’s nonsense, just like the White House claim that Venezuela is a “threat to US national interests”. It’s sad that Sanders is following that path. Chavez was a socialist not communist; he was member and leader of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. Between 1998 and 2013 Chavez and the PUSV competed in elections seventeen times. They won every time except once. Elections in Venezuela are vastly more free and fair than elections in the US. They have high turnout, they have very active and hard campaigning, there is a paper trail to verify the accuracy of the electronic voting, over 50% of the electronic votes are matched to the paper votes to confirm the accuracy of the vote counting.

National Lawyers Guild and Task Force on the Americas (and others) have sent many delegations to Venezuela. They have observed conditions including the voting process. National Lawyers Guild’s statement on the 2013 election concluded the Venezuelan elections were “well organized, fair and transparent”. They added *“The U.S. would do well to incorporate some of the security checks and practices that are routine in Venezuela to improve both the level of participation and the credibility of our elections,”* said NLG attorney Robin Alexander.

So why in the world is Bernie Sanders promoting false propaganda that Chavez was a “communist dictator”?

Task Force on the Americas, based in the SF Bay Area, has written a letter to the Sanders campaign asking him to review and correct his inaccurate statement.

CONCLUSION

There is profound need for dramatic changes in U.S. foreign policy. Given that over 55% of the discretionary budget of the U.S. goes to the military, it’s likely that positive changes in domestic policy will depend on changes in foreign policy. The starting point has to be realistic assessments of conditions in other countries, sincere examinations of the consequences of past actions and a genuine commitment to abiding by international law. As we can see from the above examples, there is a long way to go.