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Regime Change Madness: Hillary, Obama and Murderous Mayhem in the Muslim World

By Paul Street
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It is by now standard for U.S. liberals and Democrats to blame former Republican United States president George W. Bush and the top 9/11-exploiting neocon champions of aggressive, regime-changing American imperialism (Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz et al.) for the rise of the barbaric Islamic State (IS) and the remarkable spread of extremist Islamist jihad in recent years. There is obvious justice in the charge. The monumental devastation caused by Bush's arch-criminal and deceptively sold invasion of Iraq contributed significantly to those developments.

Still, recalling that it was a Democratic U.S. president (Jimmy Carter) who first provided the resources that made Osama bin Laden a force to be reckoned with and that leading Democrat Hillary Clinton voted (as a U.S. Senator) for Bush's invasion, responsible observers of U.S. policy need to give the current Democratic president, Barack Obama, and the next one, his former Secretary of State, Hillary, equal credit for growing deadly Sunni extremism. Mr. Obama and Mrs. Clinton have pursued aggressive policies of regime change that have opened the door for jihadist expansion. They have done so over and against the opposition and warnings not just of peace activists but also of top U.S. military analysts and officials.

Syria

A recent *London Review of Books* report from the brilliant, Pulitzer-winning investigative reporter Seymour Hersh shows that Obama's aggressive pursuit of regime change in Syria sparked criticism and pushback from the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). By Hersh's account, Obama's determination to unseat Syrian president Bashar al Assad and his related false claim that "moderate" rebels were in place to do the job disturbed key military thinkers and officeholders who understood that moderates were weakly represented among Syria's rebel movement and that the president's obsession with removing Assad served jihadist forces leading the Syrian resistance:

"Barack Obama's repeated insistence that Bashar al-Assad must leave office – and that there are 'moderate' rebel groups in Syria capable of defeating him – has in recent years provoked quiet dissent, and even overt opposition, among some of the most senior officers on the Pentagon's Joint Staff...The military's resistance dates back to the summer of 2013, when a highly classified assessment, put together by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then led by General Martin Dempsey, forecast that the fall of the Assad regime would lead to chaos and, potentially, to Syria's takeover by jihadi extremists, much as was then happening in Libya. A former senior adviser to the Joint Chiefs told me that the document was an 'all-source' appraisal, drawing on information from signals, satellite and human intelligence, and took a dim view of the Obama administration's insistence on continuing to finance and arm the so-called moderate rebel groups."

The administration refused to heed the DIA and JCS's prescient warnings, rooted in solid intelligence. Massive CIA arms shipments to the jihadist rebels fighting Assad continued, helping fuel the rise of the IS. The arms travelled from Libya to Syria through the leading IS sponsor and U.S. ally Turkey in the wake of the killing of former Libyan head of state Muammar Gaddafi by Islamist extremists who screamed "God is Great" while sodomizing Gaddafi with bayonets. "The operation," Hersh notes:

"was largely run out of a covert CIA annex in Benghazi, with State Department acquiescence. On 11 September 2012 the US ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens, was killed during an anti-American demonstration that led to the burning down of the US consulate in Benghazi; reporters for the *Washington Post* found copies of the ambassador's schedule in the building's ruins. It showed that on 10 September Stevens had met with the chief of the CIA's annex operation. The next day, shortly before he died, he met a representative from Al-Marfa Shipping and Maritime Services, a Tripoli-based company which, [a JCS official told Hersh], was known by the Joint Staff to be handling the weapons shipments."

Ambassador Stevens was in Benghazi to oversee the CIA's technically illegal arms smuggling operation there. The U.S. consulate in Benghazi, attacked by jihadist extremists who roamed the city's streets, was part of the U.S. effort to bring down Assad. The White House concocted a story claiming that the Benghazi attack had emerged from a "spontaneous demonstration" sparked by an Internet video that had mocked the founding Muslim prophet Mohammed. Obama instructed Secretary Clinton to play along with the fairy tale and she complied. Late in the evening of September 11, 2012, she released a statement connecting the attack to "inflammatory material posted on the Internet" and "deplor[ing] any intentional effort to denigrate the religious beliefs of others." The message said that America's "commitment to religious tolerance goes

back to the very beginning of our nation.” (Thus was an incident that emerged from criminal and blood-soaked U.S. imperialism wrapped in the flag of America’s supposed noble commitment to tolerance and diversity in its liberal struggle with religious fanatics.)

Libya

Libya became a chaotic jihadist stronghold and an incubator of extremist Islamist violence across North Africa thanks to Gadaffi’s U.S.-led removal from power in Tripoli. The regime destruction was implemented through mass bombings undertaken by the U.S., France, England and other NATO nations with the explicit intent of unseating Gadaffi in the spring and summer of 2011. Here again the Obama administration’s aggressive imperial policy was carried out over and against misgivings and warnings from the JCS and DIA, who were less than impressed by the administration’s claims that failure to intervene would lead to humanitarian disaster, even genocide. As Gareth Porter notes at *Middle East Eye*:

“In 2011, the JCS had been strongly opposed to the effort to depose the Muammar Gaddafi regime in Libya...When the Obama administration began its effort to overthrow Gaddafi, it did not call publicly for regime change and instead asserted that it was merely seeking to avert mass killings that administration officials had suggested might approach genocidal levels. But the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), which had been given the lead role in assessing the situation in Libya, found no evidence to support such fears and concluded that it was based on nothing more than ‘speculative arguments’...The JCS warned that overthrowing the Gaddafi regime would serve no US security interest, but would instead open the way for forces aligned with al-Qaeda to take over the country.”

The nightmare the DIA warned against came to pass, with disastrous consequences both within and beyond Libya. None should the coldly indifferent psychosis of Hillary Clinton’s comment on the U.S. operation in Libya: “We came, we saw, he died.”

In the cases of both Libya and Syria, Mrs. Clinton – recently dubbed “Queen of Chaos” by the veteran journalist and commentator Diana Johnstone – contributed significantly to the horrific outcomes in her role as Obama’s Secretary of State. Hillary led the political and public relations campaign to depose Gadaffi under the misleading guise of preventing atrocity and even genocide. Mrs. Clinton even worked to nix a U.S. military proposal to prevent the complete destruction of Libyan government by negotiating for Gadaffi’s resignation and the retention of the Libyan armed forces’ capacity to keep jihadists at bay. Once again, with Syria, Hillary, the Iraq invasion enthusiast, led the public relations and propaganda charge in calling for regime change against another Muslim head of state. The Washington- and largely Hillary-led campaign against the Assad regime in Syria created the basic context for a second revival of jihadism in Iraq and the rise and expansion of IS across vast swaths of both Syria and Iraq.

The likely outcomes were foreseen in both cases by top U.S. military analysts and officials whose calls for caution were ignored and over-ridden by the “humanitarian” admonitions and directives the current and next Democratic U.S. president. Rand Paul calls Hillary Clinton a “neocon” in the foreign policy realm with no small justice.

“She Talks About Me Being Dangerous”

Meanwhile, Obama’s multinational drone assassination program (justly described by Noam Chomsky as “the most extreme terrorist campaign of modern times” and endorsed by Bernie Sanders) has done more to spread the geographical scope of extremist Islamic jihadism than George W. Bush’s Iraq invasion. As the Clinton money and empire machine gears up for a return to the White House, however, Hillary’s murderous imperialism takes on greater relevance for the future. Liberals and Democrats (two overlapping but non-identical categories) are justly aghast at Donald Trump’s chilling and idiotic call for a ban on Muslim immigration “until we can figure out” why so many Muslims are angry at the U.S. Still, considering the millions of Muslims killed, maimed, and displaced by the U.S. imperial regime-changing madness that Mrs. Clinton has played such a key and leading role in advancing, “The Donald” pales before the “Queen of Chaos” as an actual and proven threat to Muslim people. Many of the migrants Trump proposes to block from U.S. shores are fleeing turmoil that Hillary has played no small role in inflicting. Another difference is that Trump has little chance of becoming the next U.S. president while the smart money is on Hillary’s return to the White House.

Which reminds me, here are two interesting quotes from Trump on the campaign trail last month

“Look at what she [Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State] did with Libya, what she did with Syria...a total mess.... She *talks about me being dangerous* [for proposing an immigration ban on Muslims]. *She’s killed hundreds of thousands of people* ...The Middle East is a total disaster under her” (no small part of the answer to The Donald’s question on the sources of Islamist rage at the U.S.)

“We’ve spent \$4 trillion trying to topple various people that frankly, if they were there and if we could’ve spent that \$4 trillion in the United States to fix our roads, our bridges, and all of the other problems; our airports and all of the other problems we’ve had, we would’ve been a lot better off. I can tell you that right now.”

Trump has a well-deserved reputation among U.S. media operatives for outrageous bluster, insult, and inaccuracy. In the case of these two statements, as with Trump’s “surprisingly honest” (ABC News) observation that the American political system is “broken” by the corrupting influence of big campaign donations, however, Trump’s verbiage contains considerably more fact than fiction.

The curiosity extends beyond the contrast with the “liberal” Hillary. As the Canadian activist and thinker Gabriel Alan recently commented to me: “Trump, the avowed racist, is the only elite national politician right now who actually is willing to take issue with the mass slaughter of Arabs for regime change! Talk about political irony...”

Bernie Better?

Please do not think that this commentary is intended to bolster the Bernie Sanders’ campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. It is not because I concur with the following reflections of fellow *CounterPuncher* Shamus Cooke:

“Some Sanders supporters might respond; ‘at least his foreign policy is better than Hillary’s.’ But Sanders himself has been unable to provide a real argument to support this claim during the ongoing debates. When Sanders attempted to frame Hillary as ‘pro-regime change’ in relation to the catastrophe she created in Libya, Hillary pointed out that Sanders voted ‘yes’ to support that regime change. As the war machine rolled into Libya Sanders wasn’t a speed bump; he was a lubricant. Clinton and Sanders both have Libyan blood on their hands.”

“Sanders has Afghan blood on his hands too, having voted for the invasion of the now-endless Afghan war that triggered the beginning of the flurry of Middle East wars. And while Sanders brags about voting ‘no’ for the 2003 Iraq war, his vote soon morphed into a ‘yes,’ by his several votes for the ongoing funding of the war/occupation.”

“Sanders also voted ‘yes’ for the U.S.-led NATO destruction of Yugoslavia, and supports the brutal Israeli military regime that uses U.S. weapons to slaughter Palestinians.”

“When it was announced that Obama was choosing sides and funneling guns to the Syrian rebels — thus exacerbating and artificially extending the conflict — Bernie was completely silent; a silence that helped destroy Syria and lead to the biggest refugee crisis since World War II.”

“Sanders is consistently on the wrong side of history; he’s also been a direct accomplice to a series of massive war crimes”

All sad but true. Dare we add that Sanders has voiced his determination to continue Obama’s drone war and that (as Cooke suggests), Sanders’ underlying commitment to the U.S. imperial project and military Keynesian (google up Bernie and the F-35 fighter jet) renders mute his call for progressive, social-democratic, and Scandinavia-inspired change inside the United States? The costs, public-private investment pattern, and largely media-manufactured culture of America’s giant military empire and permanent war of/on terror cancel out social-democratic welfare-state Keynesianism in the “homeland.” But I’ve said and written that before, more than once.