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## ISIS: Made in Washington, Riyadh – and Tel Aviv

By Justin Raimondo

August 24, 2014

The Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) is being touted as the newest "threat" to the American homeland: hysterics have pointed to Chicago as the locus of their interest, and we are told by everyone from the President on down that if we don't attack them – i.e. go back into Iraq (and even venture into Syria) to root them out – they'll soon show up on American shores.

How is this supposed to work? Well, you see, that monster who beheaded James Foley had a British accent, and there are reports of more than a few Brits (and Americans) traveling to Syria to fight on behalf of ISIS. So these jihadi "internationalists" could always just fly back to either Britain or the US, where another 9/11 would shortly be in the works.

Let's put aside the FBI statement that, while Americans abroad may be in some unspecified degree of danger, ISIS represents "no credible threat" to the continental United States. If we take the ISIS-threatens-us-at-home war propaganda seriously we have to believe Western law enforcement agencies, with all the tools at their command – including near total surveillance of online and telephonic communications worldwide – have no idea what dubious characters have traveled to Syria via, say, New York or London, and would in any case be powerless to prevent their return.

In short, we have to invade yet another country (or two) because our own post-9/11 security arrangements are virtually nonexistent – in spite of having spent untold billions on building them up.

Can that really be true?

If we step back from the hysteria generated by the beheading of US journalist James Foley, what's clear is that this new bogeyman is the creation of the United States and its allies in the region.

ISIS didn't just arise out of the earth like some Islamist variation on the fabled Myrmidons: they needed money, weapons, logistics, propaganda facilities, and international connections to reach the relatively high level of organization and lethality they seem to have achieved in such a short period of time. Where did they get these assets?

None of this is any secret: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the rest of the oil-rich Gulf states have been backing them all the way. Prince Bandar al-Sultan, until recently the head of the Kingdom's intelligence agency – and still the chief of its National Security Council – has been among their biggest backers. Qatar and the Gulf states have also been generous in their support for the Syrian jihadists who were too radical for the US to openly back. Although pressure from Washington – only recently exerted – has reportedly forced them to cut off the aid, ISIS is now an accomplished fact – and how can anyone say that support has entirely evaporated instead of merely going underground?

Washington's responsibility for the success of ISIS is less direct, but no less damning.

The US was in a de facto alliance with the groups that merged to form ISIS ever since President Barack Obama declared Syria's Bashar al-Assad "must go" – and Washington started funding Syrian rebel groups whose composition and leadership kept changing. By funding the Free Syrian Army (FSA), our "vetted" Syrian Islamists, this administration has actively worked to defeat the only forces capable of rooting out ISIS from its Syrian nest – Assad's Ba'athist government. Millions of dollars in overt aid – and who knows how much covertly? – were pumped into the FSA. How much of that seeped into the coffers of ISIS when constantly forming and re-forming chameleon-like rebel groups defected from the FSA? These defectors didn't just go away: they joined up with more radical – and militarily effective – Islamist militias, some of which undoubtedly found their way to ISIS.

How many ISIS cadres who started out in the FSA were trained and equipped by American "advisors" in neighboring Jordan? We'll never know the exact answer to that question, but the number is very likely *not* zero – and this *Mother Jones* piece shows that, at least under the Clinton-Petraeus duo, the "vetting" process was a joke. Furthermore, Senator Rand Paul (R-Kentucky) may well have been on to something when he confronted Hillary with the contention that some of the arms looted from Gaddafi's arsenals may well have reached the Syrian rebels. There was, after all, the question of where that mysterious "charity ship," the *Al Entisar*, carrying "humanitarian aid" to the Syrian rebels headquartered in Turkey, sailed from.

Secondly, the open backing by the US of particular Syrian rebel groups no doubt discredited them in the eyes of most Islamist types, driving them away from the FSA and into the arms of ISIS. When it became clear Washington wasn't going to provide air support for rebel actions on

the ground, these guys left the FSA in droves – and swelled the ranks of groups that eventually coalesced into ISIS.

Thirdly, the one silent partner in all this has been the state of Israel. While there is no evidence of direct Israeli backing, the public statements of some top Israeli officials lead one to believe Tel Aviv has little interest in stopping the ISIS threat – except, of course, to urge Washington to step deeper into the Syrian quagmire.

In a recent public event held at the Aspen Institute, former Israeli ambassador to the US Michael Oren bluntly stated that in any struggle between the Sunni jihadists and their Iranian Shi'ite enemies, the former are the "lesser evil." They're all "bad guys," says Oren, but "we always wanted Bashar Assad to go, we always preferred the bad guys who weren't backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by Iran." Last year, Sima Shine, Israel's Minister of Strategic Affairs, declared:

*"The alternative, whereby [Assad falls and] Jihadists flock to Syria, is not good. We have no good options in Syria. But Assad remaining along with the Iranians is worse. His ouster would exert immense pressure on Iran."*

None of this should come as much of a surprise to anyone who has been following Israel's machinations in the region. It has long been known that the Israelis have been standing very close to the sidelines of the Syrian civil war, gloating and hoping for "no outcome," as this *New York Times* piece put it.

Israel's goal in the region has been to gin up as much conflict and chaos as possible, keeping its Islamic enemies divided, making it impossible for any credible challenge to arise among its Arab neighbors – and aiming the main blow at Tehran. As Ambassador Oren so brazenly asserted – while paying lip service to the awfulness of ISIS and al-Qaeda – their quarrel isn't really with the Arabs, anyway – it's with the Persians, whom they fear and loathe, and whose destruction has been their number one objective since the days of Ariel Sharon.

Why anyone is shocked that our Middle Eastern allies have been building up Sunni radicals in the region is beyond me – because this has also been de facto US policy since the Bush administration, which began recruiting American assets in the Sunni region as the linchpin of the Iraqi "surge." This was part and parcel of the so-called "Sunni turn," or "redirection," in Seymour Hersh's phrase, which, as I warned in 2006, would become Washington's chosen strategy for dealing with what they called the "Shia crescent" – the crescent-shaped territory spanning Iran, Iraq, Syria, and parts of Lebanon under Hezbollah's control, which the neocons began pointing to as the Big New Threat shortly after Saddam Hussein's defeat.

The pro-Sunni orientation of US policymakers wasn't reversed with the change of administrations: instead, it went into overdrive, especially after the much-vaunted Arab Spring. Both Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State, and David Petraeus, who had yet to disgrace himself and was still CIA director, lobbied intensively for more support to the Syrian rebels. The Sunni Turn took a fateful turn when the Three Harpies of the Apocalypse – Hillary, Susan Rice, and now UN ambassador Samantha Power – hectored Obama into pursuing regime change in

Libya. In this case the US and its NATO allies acted as the Islamist militia's air force while supplying them with arms on the ground and diplomatic support internationally.

Yet even as Libya was imploding from the effects of its "liberation," the neocons and their "liberal" interventionist allies in the Democratic party – and in the highest reaches of the Obama administration – were building support for yet another fateful "Sunni turn," this time in Syria. Caving to this pressure, the Obama administration decided to act on accusations of poison gas supposedly used by Assad against the rebels to directly intervene with a bombing campaign modeled along Libyan lines. Only a huge public outcry stopped them.

ISIS could never have been consolidated in the form it has now taken without the strategic disaster of Washington's "Sunni turn." While the US may have reason to regret this harebrained strategy, it's far too late for that – and it looks to me like our "allies" in the region, including Israel, aren't about to turn on a dime at Obama's command.

Last year around this time Vladimir Putin very publicly warned against the scenario we are seeing unfold in the Middle East:

*"If Assad goes today, a political vacuum emerges – who will fill it? Maybe those terrorist organizations. Nobody wants this – but how can it be avoided? After all, they are armed and aggressive."*

Now that Putin's prediction has come to pass, we're too busy confronting him in Ukraine – and dreaming of the day we can do to him what we did to Assad – to acknowledge it. But you can hear the gears of our policymaking machine screaming in protest as Washington does an abrupt about-face and starts cooperating with Assad – previously denounced as the latest edition of Adolph Hitler – by sharing intelligence enabling the Syrian army to target ISIS positions.

We have always been at war with Eurasia. Or is that Eastasia? I forget.

The lesson of all this?

What a tangled web we weave when first we practice to intervene. And deceive – this administration has not only been lying to the American people about the nature of the Syrian "liberators" we've been funding with their tax dollars, they also been deceiving themselves. The Sunni Turn has turned on them, and with a vengeance.

The ancient Greeks had a word for the particular sin committed by our political class: they called it *hubris* – a mindset generated by the belief that humankind can defy the gods and get away with it. Yet the divine pantheon of Olympus had a way of giving these malefactors their comeuppance: they sent the goddess Nemesis to avenge such sacrilege – and she was relentless in her pursuit. The word *nemesis* has come down to us to mean "the inescapable agent of someone's or something's downfall" – and that is as succinct an explanation of the origins of ISIS as we are likely to come across.

Okay, so the anti-interventionists told us so – but *now* what? What should the United States *do* about ISIS now that they've taken over half of Syria and a third of Iraq?

The answer is: let Assad, the Iranians, the Turks, and, yes, the Russians take care of it, since they are the states directly threatened by the growth of the so-called Islamic State. Why should we fight their war for them?

Contrary to the War Party's hebephrenic appeals to intervene, *inaction* on our part is key to the destruction of ISIS. The Grand Caliph of the Islamic State would like nothing more than to be able to portray ISIS as the valiant opponent of a US reentry into the region. It would be a tremendous propaganda victory for them to be able to frame their cause in this context because the result would be a successful international recruiting drive that would fill the ranks of the Islamic State's army even as hundreds are killed by US drones and missile strikes.

By letting nature take its course and permitting Iraq's predatory neighbors to gobble up the charred remains of the Iraqi state we destroyed, we can solve a problem we created in the first place, albeit not without incurring the inevitable cost of our initial error – which was invading Iraq in the first place.

ISIS has made a big deal out of declaring the end of the Sykes-Picot agreement, which divided the region between British and French interests at the end of World War I. Having declared their "Islamic State," ISIS claims to have destroyed the status quo by militarily – and, to much notice, symbolically – erasing the border between Syria and Iraq. The claim is laughable: a ragtag "army" of perhaps 17,000 fighters couldn't have achieved that without some significant outside help, not only from the Saudis and the Qataris but, decisively, from Washington.

We abolished Sykes-Picot by effectively putting an end to Iraqi statehood. The process was completed when Washington subsequently allied with Iraq's Sunni tribesmen in a vain hope to avoid the break up of Iraq and drive Al Qaeda out of the country. What happened, instead, was that the Sunni tribesmen's brothers across the by-then-virtually-nonexistent border were drawn into the Iraqi arena, where they took up the fight against Baghdad – and their American backers.

ISIS didn't blast Sykes-Picot to pieces: we did, and now we must live with the consequences. Nemesis has taken her pound of flesh.

The best course now is to learn the lesson every child has to absorb before he can attain adulthood in more than merely a physical sense: *actions have consequences*. Applied to the Middle East, this lesson can only have one meaning: stay out and keep out.

## **IMPORTANT NOTES IN THE MARGIN**

In light of the above, please note that Antiwar.com's seasonal fundraising drive is well underway – and we aren't there yet! As the US re-invades Iraq in the name of "solving" a "problem" we created by doing precisely what we're bent on repeating – do I really have to make a long, impassioned fundraising pitch, darkly warning of the consequences if Antiwar.com should fail to make its absolutely minimum goal?

Of course I don't. You know what to do.

### **NOTES IN THE MARGIN**

You can check out my Twitter feed by going [here](#). But please note that my tweets are sometimes deliberately provocative, often made in jest, and largely consist of me thinking out loud.