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## The Senate Armed Services Committee Preps for War

By Renee Parsons  
October 13, 2016

As the chaos in Syria continues to escalate, the Senate Armed Services Committee's recent three hour hearing entitled "US National Security Challenges and Ongoing Military Operations" provided a glimpse into how eager bipartisan Committee members are for the US military to engage 'Russian aggression.'

The only two witnesses scheduled to testify were the provocative tag-team of Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford thus blurring the lines of a Constitutional-democracy's civilian authority with the military's subordination to that civilian authority. With the high ranking Dunford seated at Secretary Carter's elbow, there were repeated occasions when the two spoke with one voice; leaving considerable question as to whether the government's civilian control and decision-making authority had been usurped by a strident advocacy for war with the military implementing its own autonomy.

It was of special note that the hearing occurred on September 22nd, a mere five days after the September 17th 'mistake' air attack by the US on Syrian troops at Deir Ezzor and two days after an attack on the UN humanitarian convoy headed to Aleppo. Like an 800 pound gorilla in the room, there was not one question, not even a mere mention of the Deir Ezzor attack by any committee member while the convoy attack generated considerable agitation – all assuming

Russian guilt. Not one Senator of either political party, ever referred to the ‘mistake’ air attack. Clearly, omission of the Deir Ezzor attack had been agreed to by all members of the Committee prior to the hearing.

Given that a major function of this Committee is oversight of its assigned jurisdiction which is the nation’s military apparatus (including the Department of Defense, defense policy, weapons research and development and the security aspects of the country’s nuclear program), the complete lack of curiosity on the part of every member of the Committee regarding the ‘mistake’ air attack is an answer in itself and the Committee’s eagerness to make accusations against another sovereign country without a shred of evidence should be astounding – but it is not.

This hearing of the Armed Services Committee is but one example of how the country’s highest elected officials have relinquished their authority and, in the process, lost their credibility, until we are now looking at a powerful Senate committee like Armed Services with minimal intellectual curiosity, few critical thinking skills and negligible analytical ability. While the Committee deliberately avoided demanding an explanation for the ‘mistake’ at Deir Ezzor, if indeed it was a ‘mistake,’ it did not hesitate to assert inflammatory allegations regarding the UN convoy attack 48 hours after the event and before a credible assessment could be made.

In his opening statement, Secretary Carter went into full gear praising the US military as the “finest fighting force the world has ever known. There’s no other military that’s stronger, or more capable, or more innovative, or more experienced, or with better friends and allies. That’s a fact.”

While no Senator dared challenge Carter’s claim, it remains a mystery how an insurgent gang of flip-flop and turban wearing ‘terrorists’ have had sufficient funding and organizational capability to stymie and stalemate the US military for more than a decade. As if on pre-arranged cue, the Committee’s well behaved Greek Chorus could be heard wringing their hands in deference with promises of budgetary support for the Pentagon which apparently has a tough time existing on \$700 billion a year.

Some years ago during the Vietnam War, Another Mother for Peace was an integral part of the antiwar movement. Today, with seven out of twenty-six Committee members being female (three Republicans and four Democrats), not one woman expressed anything remotely like a reproach or an independent analysis of why war is productive for either the health or wealth of the nation. Since much of the support for pro-war Hillary Clinton that comes from women is based on her potential of becoming the country’s first female President, apparently it is now politically correct for women to favor endless imperialist wars and militarism as much as men.

In response to Committee Chair John McCain’s (R-Az) opening comments, General Dunford replied with all the authority in the world that “we do not have any intention of having an intelligence sharing arrangement with the Russians.” When McCain pointed out that was Secretary of State John Kerry’s “proposal,” Dunford repeated with conviction “ the US military role will not include intelligence sharing with the Russians.”

Since Dunford's testimony was on September 22nd, at the time of a UN Security Council meeting taking place with the Ceasefire Agreement in Syria being a hot button topic and since Secretary Carter did not contradict Dunford's certitude, we can only assume that as the debate raged at the UN, the decision had already been made for the US to not participate in the ceasefire agreement, a key component of which was establishment of a Joint Intelligence Center (JIC). No Senator spoke in favor of the ceasefire or the proposed coordinated effort to target 'terrorists.'

Sen Jack Reed (D-RI), ranking Democrat of the Committee, recited a glowing tribute of US successes in Iraq against ISIL, vague reference to the Syrian ceasefire not "holding" and his support for President Obama's decision to keep 8,400 troops in Afghanistan into 2017 after more than a decade of failed war. Reed went on to attack Russia for 'harassing US air and naval forces in the area' as 'their aviators have harassed US ships and aircraft deployed to the region.'

Apparently the Senator believes the rest of us are geographically-challenged and do not understand that it is the US that is trespassing and intruding into Russia's neighborhood and that Russia is not threatening to sail up the Potomac River. Senator Reed, who ought to know better, went on to claim that Russia "continues its pattern of confrontation and antagonistic behavior."

Not to be outdone, Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn) who received five military deferments between 1965-1970 and later fraudulently claimed service in Vietnam, did no better with what appeared to be a set-up question: "General, is there any doubt in your mind that Russian planes were responsible for attacking the UN convoy trying to deliver aid to Aleppo?" Dunford pointed the finger at Russia but offered no evidence. During the hearing, Carter affirmed a new standard for US aggression with "Russia is responsible for the strike whether they conducted it or not because they have taken responsibility for the conduct of the Syrians by associating themselves with the Syrian regime."

Regarding Syria, Blumenthal surpassed every other gung-ho member of the Committee stating that the "US bears a responsibility to use its military forces to stop the bloodshed and needless and senseless killing of civilians." Apparently a believer in 'humanitarian war', Blumenthal now favors going to war to stop the killing and bloodshed – not unlike the US intervention in Libya.

Unexpectedly offering a welcome break from the script of mindless militaristic hogwash was Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) who opened with "The situation in Syria is a colossal disaster. I do not believe it had to happen. I believe a wise statesman could have foreseen some of the difficulties we are facing today and we should have been more careful and cautious in our declarations on how we expected Syria to develop over the years. It has not developed as President Obama projected and disaster has been the result."

Who would have guessed that a 70 year old Senator from Selma, Alabama would express what not one other Senator on the panel had the inner grit to articulate. Sessions, unable to leave the subject, continued that Syria is "such a disaster; hundreds of thousands dead, six million refugees. I do not see an end in sight. General Dunford just said that Assad is not leaving any time soon. Five years ago the President said Assad has to go and is going. He did not go and this is all a result of that." Sessions then asked Carter "What kind of end do you see for this disastrous conflict? What's our goal?"

Carter's predictable response "we are making progress in our counter ISIL campaign" and "US policy in Syria is to end the civil war" and a "political transition from Assad to a government that includes a 'moderate' opposition that can run the country." So Carter's message was clear: the Obama Administration will settle for nothing less than removing Assad – no matter the costs of violence and human lives sacrificed.

But Sessions was not having any of it as he interrupted Carter's glib chatter. "I believe we could have done a better job. We need an active American policy, a leadership in the world but we cannot establish all these governments and run them and assure how they will come out in the end. We cannot occupy these countries for decades to assure that. That is just not realistic." And "A wise statesman would have seen the danger in Syria, a wise statesman would have seen the danger in Libya, and a wise statesman should have seen what could have happened in Egypt. We've got to be more realistic in our foreign policy and know what we can do to positively affect the world and what we cannot do. We cannot assure democratic governments though this region and we are now facing a colossal humanitarian disaster."

Following Sessions, as his words evaporated into thin air with no recognition from any of his Committee peers that his solemn insights deserved some acknowledgment, the more inconsequential banter continued until Sen Mike Lee (R-Iowa) quizzed Carter about the who's who complexities in Yemen. Citing the "tensions" of US ally Saudi Arabia fighting the Houthi rebels which are being opposed by AQAP who are alleged foes of the US who are also opponents of the Houthis while the Saudis continue to fund AQAP – leaves the age-old question "which side are you on" to be determined.

Sen. Jeane Shaheen's (D-NH) frivolous inquiry "what other options do we have that might change the trajectory of what's happening in Syria?" led to a no-fly zone discussion with Carter responding "there can be no question of grounding US aircraft that are conducting strikes against ISIL. We do that with exceptional precision and care and concern about civilian casualties that no other country can match." No, seriously. That's exactly what he said with a straight face and no reference to the "mistake" at Deir Ezzor unless, of course, DE was the precision target.

In further discussion about a No Fly zone, Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss) suggested that No Fly be renamed to a 'more palatable term', perhaps a BBB (barrel bomb ban) would surely fool the Russians. Carter added that "Secretary Kerry is trying to promote a No Fly zone for Russia and Syria who are attacking the Syrian people" and attempting "a stand-down of the Syrian and Russian Air Force." There was, of course, no mention that the Russian and Syrian Air Forces have been attacking ISIL for months and to ground the Russians and Syrians would be counter-productive to defeating the jihadists.

Dunford recounted that 'for us to control all of the air space in Syria would require us to go to war against Syria and Russia' but clarified his position with the reassurance that imposing a No Fly zone for the Russian and Syrian air forces would not require a full scale war.

While the hearing provided a public platform exposing the country's decayed political apparatus labeled as bipartisanship with little difference between Democrats and Republicans (with noted exceptions), it was obvious that Committee members prefer to remain in the dark about who bore

ultimate responsibility for the Syrian ‘civil’ war. For all the staff and resources at their disposal, every member of the Committee has chosen to ignore that Syria had been on the Pentagon’s regime change hit-list since 2001 and that the CIA moved into Syria seeking ‘rebels’ (later dubbed the Free Syrian Army) after Assad rejected the Qatar pipeline in 2010.