

Obama Foreign Policy - A Brief Postscript

July 26, 2014

JULY 21, 2014 — Since the writing of my effort to analyze the Obama foreign policy (“Droning On, Fracking the Planet,” *New Politics* Summer 2014), a confluence of events – in various ways, all blowback from ravages of U.S. policies past and present – combined to transform much of world politics in nasty and dangerous directions, with huge tolls in destruction and human misery. To review very briefly:

- In Iraq the vultures have come to roost, or more precisely to feed on the carcass of the society first crippled by Saddam Hussein’s grotesque rule and then destroyed by Bush’s invasion. Having acquiesced in prime minister al-Maliki’s sectarian and repressive practices until the place blew apart, the United States looked on helplessly as the too-brutal-for-al-Qaeda “Islamic State in Iraq and al-Shams” (under whatever name it’s currently trading) took over a third of the country while the U.S.-trained Iraqi military disintegrated. It’s true that the Obama team inherited the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld tar pit, but they’re sure-enough stuck in it now. Left to its own infernal devices, the “Islamic State” itself should begin to crumble as the atrocious rule of ISIS impels its ex-Baathist partners to fight against it, but it’s always possible that this U.S. administration or the next one – by launching a bombing campaign, for example – might hold it together.
- In eastern Ukraine, Putin’s boys left to play without adult supervision have certainly produced a challenge to my repeated predictions that the crisis won’t rupture the ties of economic interdependence between Europe and Russia. The broken bodies in the debris field of the blown-up Malaysian airliner testify to the human costs of cynical geopolitical rivalries. At this writing, it’s unclear whether Putin will distance his regime from the separatist militias or, alternatively, exploit the crisis to “freeze” in place the attempt to fracture the country. What’s needed right now (exactly along the lines of the excellent articles on Ukraine in the current *New Politics*) are simultaneous, unconditional demands (i) on Russia, to leave Ukraine alone, and (ii) on the U.S. and NATO, to explicitly disavow the goal of bringing Ukraine into NATO membership and to retract the onerous neoliberal economic demands of the IMF and EU – thereby dramatically reversing the United States’ Clinton- and Bush-era triumphalism.
- On the southern U.S. border, the horrific harvest of child refugees has sprung up from decades of imperialism in Central America – Reagan’s counterrevolutionary wars and sponsored genocides of the 1980s, the insane “war on drugs” that ripped apart U.S. inner cities, the celebrated Clinton-era North American Free Trade Agreement, and more recently the Honduran coup quietly endorsed by the Obama administration that restored the rule of oligarchic “death-squad democracy” in that country. Broken societies have now produced gangs from which families face the choice for their kids to flee, or die. Unforgivably, the Obama administration – caught between a militant racist right wing backlash and its own cowardice – is creating machinery to deport most of these kids as quickly as possible, rather than respecting the rights of fair hearings and asylum they have under international *and* existing U.S. law.
- Beyond words is the Israeli assault in Gaza – of which whatever we may try to say today, the situation will be even worse tomorrow. It is pointless here to try to summarize the horrors of this massacre, the crackdown in the West Bank that preceded it, and the explosive growth of explicitly genocidal attitudes within the Israeli public – all of which will be undoubtedly explored in the *New Politics* blog and ensuing issues of the magazine. I will only state here that I certainly got it right about the political and moral collapse of this president and his administration on Palestine, to say nothing of the Congressional chimpanzees. (As I write this,

it seems that the Senate has voted 100-0 to unconditionally support Israel's slaughter as a defense against "unprovoked" rocket attacks and to demand the dismantling of the Palestinian unity government. This complicity in mass murder follows a similar House of Representatives resolution.) The question now is whether, as the rubble and the piles of bodies mount, Israel's destruction of Palestine might change from a second-rate issue of little strategic importance to a serious liability for U.S. imperialism. *At the present moment*, with the Egyptian regime firmly allied with Israel and with many Arab regimes consumed with multiple crises, that doesn't seem an immediate prospect - but we know from the Arab Spring that circumstances can dramatically change, and perhaps the rapid growth of global BDS may affect the climate in Europe.

In short, the damage wrought by the "necessities" of imperialism, and by the strategic choices of this administration and previous ones, has come into ominously sharper focus.