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Behind Trump's Syria Turnabout

By Justin Raimondo
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Trump came into office touting his “America First agenda,” disdaining NATO, and asking “Why is it a bad thing to get along with Russia?” He told us he abjured “regime change” and held up Libya as an example of bad policy. Now he’s turned on a dime, bombing Syria, and welcoming tiny (and troubled) Montenegro into NATO. His intelligence agencies are even accusing Russia of having advance knowledge of the alleged chemical attack in Syria (although the White House disputed that after it got out). And all this in the first one hundred days!

How did this happen? It’s easy to explain, once you understand that there is no such thing as foreign policy: all policy is domestic.

That’s the core principle at the heart of what I call “libertarian realism,” the overarching theory – if such a grandiose term can be applied to what is simply common sense – that explains what is happening on the world stage at any particular moment. And there is no better confirmation of this principle than the recent statement by Eric Trump, the President’s son, who said: “If there was anything that Syria [strike] did, it was to validate the fact that there is no Russia tie.”

Oh yes, and Ivanka was “heartbroken” – and so it was incumbent upon the President to change course, break a major campaign promise, and declare via his Secretary of State that “Assad must go.”

Got it.

Trump's Syrian turnabout is clearly a response to the coordinated attack launched on his presidency by the combined efforts of the Deep State, the media, the Democrats, and the McCain-Graham-neocon wing of the GOP – a campaign that still might destroy him, despite his capitulation to the War Party.

Vladimir Putin has likened the current Syria imbroglio to what happened in Iraq, with claims of “weapons of mass destruction” and a war fought on the basis of false intelligence, but there is one major difference: this time, the bombing came first, with the “evidence” an afterthought. You'll recall that in the run up to the invasion of Iraq there was an extended and quite elaborate propaganda campaign designed to make the case for war. Now, however, that process has been reversed: bombing first, “evidence” later.

Speaking of which, Bloomberg national security reporter Eli Lake tells us that the US is about to release a “dossier” explaining the rationale for the Syria strike: it is “short on specific intelligence” but long on “its refutation of Russian disinformation.” As in the case of the “Russian interference in the election” narrative, we'll doubtless be told that protecting “sources and methods” precludes us peons from seeing the actual “intelligence.” Ours is not to question why, ours is but to do and die, as the old saw goes: but is that – not to mention the moral imperative of safeguarding Ivanka's fragile emotional state – really enough to justify a 180-degree shift in US foreign policy?

The real significance of this “dossier” has little to do with justifying the Syria strike insofar as actual evidence of Assad's alleged crime is concerned, and more with signaling to the heretofore hostile “intelligence community” and political actors in the US that the days of President Trump trying to achieve détente with Russia are over. As Lake points out:

“But it is really the report's condemnation of the Russian response that is most striking. Trump has sought to reset the relationship with Moscow, as President Barack Obama hoped to do in 2009 and 2010. Now, one U.S. official tells me, Russian officials in phone calls with their Trump administration counterparts repeated in private the same propaganda lines their government was issuing in public. ‘That has led to a lot of frustration at the highest levels of the government,’ this official said.”

Translation: Forget getting along with Russia – just call off your bloodhounds.

We now have Putin warning that more “provocations” are in store, with some pretty specific details supplied. It wouldn't surprise me in the least, but we'll have to wait and see if that pans out. In the meantime, however, three factors are percolating in the mix: 1) Our spooks, not content with having turned the Trump administration around on Syria policy, won't let up on the alleged “Russian foreknowledge” angle. These guys mean business. 2) The previously stalled effort to overthrow Assad by funding and arming the Islamist savages championed by McCain, Graham, & Co. will recommence, with some success, and 3) The campaign to smear Trump as a Kremlin tool will continue, unabated, with both the House and Senate investigations barreling

full speed ahead, with plenty of help from the “former intelligence officials.” They aren’t about to let Trump off the hook quite so easily.

What all this shows is how far removed the making of US foreign policy is from actual facts on the ground, and the rational calculation of American interests. What it all comes back to is how it serves the political interests of those in power – and those who aspire after power. Facts have nothing to do with it except insofar as they can be manipulated – or created – so as to fit a preexisting agenda.

There are very few good arguments for striking out at the Syrian government. One of the pseudo-credible ones is that the use of sarin and other similar weapons, if allowed to go unpunished, would hurt our legitimate interests, since their use would then become pandemic. The riposte is that anyone who would even consider using such weapons is not likely to be deterred by US retaliation, no matter how swift.

In any case, this raises the question: did Bashar al-Assad drop sarin gas on a bunch of civilians at Idlib? Despite the rush to judgment, we don’t know the answer to that question, but several factors make it unlikely. He was winning the civil war, and this, if you’ll pardon the expression, seems like overkill. Furthermore, for years the Syrian rebels have been doing their damndest to frame Assad for just such a heinous crime in order to provoke US intervention on their behalf, to little avail – until now. Their record speaks for itself.

If indeed Assad is guilty, then it’s conceivable – although I would disagree – that one could make an argument for a one-off warning strike. Yet that is not what we’re seeing at all: already, Secretary of State Tillerson is echoing that old Obama-Clinton slogan, “Assad must go.” This isn’t a one-off: it’s a complete reversal of what candidate Trump said he’d do once in office.

As I said in my last column, the silver lining is that many of Trump’s prominent supporters – and former supporters – are waking up to the importance of non-interventionism as one of the pillars of “Trumpism.” Their former hero’s betrayal is putting them on a learning curve – and the best of them will come out the other side with a new awareness of what “America First” really means.

On the other hand, we are going to have to live with the consequences of this terrible turnabout – not all of which are readily apparent, and none of which redound to the benefit of the United States and its citizens.