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Obama's Syrian Pivot *In Search of the Moderate Rebel*

by RENEE PARSONS

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As President Obama travels to eastern Europe this week to meet with former Soviet countries doling out a billion dollars in gratitude for their encirclement of Russia, the president's assertion at last week's commencement of cadets at West Point that "Those who suggest that America is in decline, or has seen its global leadership slip away — are either misreading history or engaged in partisan politics" is reason for alarm that the president's "inside the bubble" world view continues to deny the facts.

The President's pronouncement that "the United States will use military force, *unilaterally if necessary*, when our core interests demand it" and his contention that "America should *never ask permission...*" scares the bejesus out of me – and then the president followed up with this puzzling contradiction:

"when issues of global concern do not pose a direct threat to the United States, when such issues are at stake — when crises arise that stir our conscience or push the world in a more dangerous direction but do not directly threaten us — then the threshold for military action must be higher. In such circumstances, we should not go it alone."

If the foregoing was meant to provide assurance that there is a rational presence hovering over the nuclear button, the remainder of the president's speech as "partnerships I've described do not eliminate the need to *take direct action* when necessary to protect ourselves" while relying on "actionable intelligence" did little to assuage that trepidation.

Despite the US having not 'won' a war since 1945 has not deterred Obama from pursuing multiple reckless military paths around the world that may ultimately take the US into a pre-emptive nuclear altercation – with the alarming prediction that even a minimal 1% confrontation of nuclear weapons could result in "catastrophic disruptions of global climate and massive destruction of Earth's protective ozone layer."

It was, however, the president's stated goal that a "critical focus .. will be the ongoing crisis in Syria" as "we will *step up* our efforts to support Syria's neighbors – Jordan and Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq (another encirclement with Israel omitted) – and work with Congress to ramp up support for those in the Syrian opposition" while "*pushing back against the growing number of extremists* who find safe haven in the chaos" that failed to answer the critical question of exactly how is a non-nuclear Syria with comparatively no air force, no navy, no army and no oil a threat to the national security of the US?

The President's usual braggadocio of "Our intelligence community has done outstanding work" is actually not correct beginning with the 9-11 attacks which is responsible for more than a decade of one catastrophic middle east conflict after another. As Edward Snowden reminded us during his recent interview with Brian Williams, the US intelligence community had the necessary information to detect an imminent domestic attack but had failed to act. Snowden said. "*We actually had records of the phone calls from the United States and out. The CIA knew who these guys were.*"

Predating the president's West Point address is the report that US training camps had been up and running for some weeks with rebel trainees arriving in Qatar through Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkey and that secret routes for transporting new weapons into Syria had already been laid out. Even as the Syrian Army made considerable progress in holding key areas of the country in recent months against a well-funded opposition with numerous tentacles, the President's recent announcement sure to escalate the violence with anti-aircraft missiles and accelerated CIA training represents an intensification of US efforts already underway with weapons provided to 'moderate' Syria rebels in June, 2013.

As international opinion leans toward view that the tide has turned in support of Assad, the president's timing for providing increased sophisticated weaponry for the 'moderate' rebels, even after another round of arms were provided via secret Congressional approval in January, indicates that the president's earlier concern of US weapons falling into the hands of extreme jihadists has been little more than a public relations charade.

A distant relative of the Shiites, the Alewites of which Syrian President Bashar al Assad is a member, do not share Islamic religious dogma, are considered an 'inferior agnostic sect' by al Qaeda as Assad's secular government stands in the way of a jihadist Islamic State. The participation of Hezbollah, Iran's Revolutionary Guard (both Shiite related) and Iraq's

experienced Shiite fighters have been critical to the success of the Syrian Army. It is no secret that the US, Israel and Saudis underestimated Assad's ability to maintain power. Unable to solidify public support from Syria's Sunni majority and gain a foothold of its own, al Qaeda (ISIS) joined with the indigenous based Jabhat al Nusra (all Sunnis) in attempts to oust Assad.

In his address at West Point, the president assured the world that "al Qaeda's leadership on the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been *decimated*." While the President obliquely referred to al Qaeda on the rise in Syria and its fragmentation into splinter group with "today's principal threat comes from decentralized al Qaeda affiliates and extremists," he failed to connect the dots that an al Qaeda presence along the Iraq-Syria border allows it, at will, to take refuge in Iraq and create more death, destruction and turmoil in the Anbar province of that desperately forlorn country.

US illogical opposition to Syria's secular government, considered an 'idolatrous criminal regime' by extreme Islamic jihadists in favor of tyrannical rebels, is puzzling when one considers that the jihadi opposition to Assad are the same "growing number of extremists" the president refers to and can reasonably be expected to interact with the president's 'moderate' rebels which visited the White House recently and are scheduled to receive shiny new US weapons.

When the president refers to 'extremists' in Syria, he must understand that the extremist jihadists are fighting on the same side as the president's CIA 'vetted moderate' coalition and that any guarantees that 'moderates' will deny weapons to their Sunni brothers is sheer madness?

Dare one suggest that the 'moderate' coalition may be little more than a clever fabrication in order to hoodwink the American public for the purpose of providing American funds and weapons to Assad's opponents?

And does the president expect the 'moderates' to fight al Qaeda forces at the same time they are engaging Assad supporters? Exactly what does the president believe the relationship between his 'moderate' rebels and al Qaeda rebels to be?

Despite the president's muddled speech outlining his foreign policy objectives, there continues to be too many contradictions and complications regarding the US dealings with 'moderate' rebels that demand a better explanation and more scrutiny.

The Navy Times reports that al Qaeda has decentralized its functions with experts arguing that a restructured al-Qaida is perhaps stronger than it has been in recent years. In contrast to the president's 'decimated' assertion, "We have never been on a path to strategically defeat al-Qaida. All we've been able to do is suppress some of its tactical abilities. But strategically, we have never had an effective way of taking it on. That's why it continues to mutate, adapt and evolve to get stronger," said David Sedney, former deputy assistant secretary of defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. Decentralization does not mean weakness, he said.

According to a 2011 Center for Strategic and International Studies report, one of al Qaeda's stated goals has been, not surprisingly, to draw the US military into a Sunni – Shiite civil war by targeting Shiites.

It is old yet still relevant news that the US (via the CIA) armed and trained the Mujahadin in Afghanistan including a 1979 visit with former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and a visit to the Reagan White House in 1985 (see photos) only to find those same rebels turn on their benefactors on 9/11 and when the US attacked Iraq and Afghanistan.

The National Security and Foreign Policy Commission met recently in Teheran with representatives of more than 30 countries in support of the Syrian elections, stopping the violence and hoping to solve the crisis politically and democratically. The Speaker of Iranian Shura Council Ali Larijan voiced the eerily familiar prediction that the “western and regional countries committed a strategic mistake through triggering sedition in the region and bringing terrorists from all over the world because *they will be badly affected by their terrorism once they turn back to their countries.*” And who says history does not repeat itself?

And lastly, what will it take for the president to realize that the real threat is from the extremist jihadis and not Assad?