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## What Did 9/11 Change?

### Obama's "Yeminization" of the Mideast

by MUSA al-GHARBI

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Earlier this month, the White House unveiled its new foreign policy credo: "Don't do stupid shit." While many lamented the modesty of this approach, acting with restraint in order to limit iatrogenesis is certainly a worthy goal—and an approach with wide and enduring popular support—in fact, this is the vision most of Obama's voters endorsed they elected him (twice). And despite the past several years of a foreign policy which uncomfortably mirrors that of his predecessor, there have been faint glimmers of hope, such as when the Administration took the long-overdue measure of shuttering many of the State Department's semi-clandestine "democracy promotion" programs, or its gesturing towards reconciliation with Iran. But these moments of sanity have been far too few and far between. And it didn't take long for this new commitment to run off the rails, despite its humble aspirations. In fact, it was dead on arrival:

Just prior to delivering his new catchphrase, the President offered a much more detailed vision of his Administration's approach in a foreign policy address at West Point—therein he revealed that part of his new "common sense" approach to policy-making includes a tacit approval of the

Egyptian military coup and subsequent oppression, to include resuming the military aid which has and continues to be used largely against the Egyptian public—for the sake of preserving the regime’s peace treaty with Israel and “shared efforts against violent extremism.” Of course, Obama failed to mention how the Egyptian regime’s squashing of all internal dissent implies that the security apparatus will be deployed largely against “moderates,” thereby empowering and legitimizing the narrative of the “extremists”—indeed, giving rise to the same conditions which birthed these movements in the first place and allowed them to flourish.

Meanwhile, Libya is disintegrating even as a new military dictator works to abolish the civilian government established in the wake of NATO’s ill-conceived regime-change—with the support of the U.S.’s new partner-in-crime Fatah al-Sisi. In fact, the Egyptian coup served as a template, with Haftar expressing his intention to emulate al-Sisi’s model in Libya. He has since announced his plans to descend upon Tripoli—and the Administration’s response? Rather than assisting the government they, themselves, put in place—instead the White House further undermined it, violating its sovereignty and expressed will (and likely international law) by abducting Ahmed Abu Khatallah, despite the immense destabilizing effect that the previous raid to capture Abu Anas al-Libi had on Libya’s domestic politics.

And yet, even as the U.S. is complicit in the rise of these new dictatorships, they continue doubling-down on their failed policies in Syria—now unabashedly arming the rebels, in continued defiance of U.N. requests to stop perpetuating the conflict—and despite the consistent pattern of these assets falling into the hands of bad actors, and more disturbingly, despite President Obama’s own insistence that it is a “fantasy” to believe that providing these weapons would allow the insurgents to prevail over the regime. Instead, even when these resources are successfully funneled towards the ever-elusive “moderates,” what these rebels have primarily been doing is acting as a buffer between the regime and the “extremists,” thereby allowing the latter space to flourish—facilitating the rise of ISIS and their campaign back into Iraq, where they were further empowered by seizing, you guessed it, more U.S. arms intended to help fight “extremists.”

Then, adding insult to injury, Secretary Kerry, echoing Tony Blair, had the gall to insist that the United States was in no way responsible for the crises unfolding in Iraq and Libya! A sentiment which we can be sure Iraqis and Libyans do not share.

But this whole charade reached its peak of absurdity when the Obama Administration began asserting that the U.S.-Gulf sponsored “transition” in Yemen may serve as a template for how to

resolve the crises in Syria *and* Iraq. Ignoring that both countries and their respective crises are profoundly disanalogous to that of Yemen, what exactly are the “successes” the U.S. is hoping to repeat?

The long-standing Yemeni dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh was replaced by his veteran Vice President Abed Rabbah Mansour Hadi, “elected” in a sham 1-candidate race. Of course, Hadi himself served within the upper-echelons of the regime for decades and was complicit with all of its corruption and oppression—despite his pre-transition reputation as a possible reformer, thus far the primary difference between him and his predecessor is that Hadi is more compliant with the U.S. and Saudi agenda for his country (even as the former remains a profoundly destabilizing force).

Following after the façade of regime-change was a flimsy “reform” initiative, which, even three years into the “revolution” has amounted to little more than reshuffling various leadership positions. The long-postponed and much lauded “National Dialogue Conference” failed to reconcile or unite Yemen’s main political actors—instead, the parties vaguely agreed to dissolve the country into a 6-region federation. There has been little progress since then, with the elections which were supposed to follow after the NDC indefinitely postponed.

People continue to die almost daily at the hands of the Yemeni government, various militias, and U.S. drone strikes, with no one to hold anyone accountable in any meaningful sense. Meanwhile, the endemic socio-economic problems which fostered the uprising remain largely unaddressed and are getting worse in many respects.

And THIS is the vision which Obama wants to export—not only to Syria, but also to Iraq? A largely symbolic regime-change ushering in a more palatable client state? Even if, as in Yemen, at the cost of rendering the country in question a permanent warzone wherein the common people live in the total absence of security—be it physical, legal, economic, social, or psychological—constantly struggling against scarcity of critical resources and crumbling infrastructure with no foreseeable end to their plight? And with no consideration, in either case, about whether or not the people of Iraq or Syria actually *want* what the Administration is trying to force down their throats...

Almost equally disturbing is that this is not a new idea—it does not reflect a growth or evolution in the Administration’s thinking; it is not reflective of some new, albeit ill-applied, pragmatism—this is the very same vision the United States has been articulating since mid-2012, beginning before the ink on the Yemeni agreement was even dry. Despite the drastic change

(deterioration) of the Syrian crisis (largely as a result of U.S. policies), which now threatens the entire region, the Administration seems to have learned little in the intervening years and remains committed to the same “stupid shit.” It’s the same “stupid shit” the United States tried again and again for decades during the Cold War, turning Syria into one of the least-stable countries in a chronically unstable region—a period which was only brought to an end with the rise of the al-Asad government America is, once again, trying to overthrow.

Accordingly, insofar as they are truly concerned with the dignity and interests of their respective peoples, the Syrian and Iraqi opposition should never mistake the Obama Administration as an ally committed to their cause—the White House’s intentions are clear, and the opposition should refuse to provide ideological cover for American meddling; it will not end well for them, it never does.

In fact, if the U.S. were to succeed in replicating Yemen-styled coups in Syria and Iraq, when paired with the reconstituted regimes in Egypt and (soon) Libya—it would be tantamount to systematically deconstructing the entire “Arab Spring,” complete with past-due monarchs and fascist dictators sponsored by the U.S. for the sake of its perceived security and geopolitical interests, at the expense of most of the Arab populace, thereby giving rise to the radicalization by which these very partnerships are legitimized—even as America continues to trumpet its hypocritical rhetoric about freedom, justice, and human rights.

So much for 9/11 changing everything...