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Wacky US Foreign Policy

By Ivan Elan
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The United States has by far the greatest military dominance in world history – both absolutely and relative to other great powers at its time in history – to back up its foreign policy. Such a potent, offensively oriented force is hardly needed for the defense of what the nation’s founders realized was perhaps the most intrinsically secure great power in world history, because of its remoteness from the centers of world conflict. Instead, what is really needed is simply more common sense in dealing with other countries. The U.S. government, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, has operated a foreign policy that is akin to the stereotype of a muscle-bound bodybuilder with very little upstairs.

For example, the United States, with the world’s other great powers, laudably reached an agreement with Iran to delay its getting a nuclear weapon for ten to fifteen years and maybe beyond. (Iran was two to three months from being able to make a possible run to a bomb.) Surprisingly, experts say that this deal has one of the most rigorous inspection regimes to enforce compliance of any similar agreement in history. Yet the United States is begging its Middle East regional allies – who should be jumping up and down for joy that the unfriendly Iran will probably not be getting a nuclear weapons anytime soon – to accept the agreement and also more US taxpayer largesse to build up their militaries. Like the Camp David peace agreement in the late 1970s, why should the United States need to bribe countries to accept something that improves their security? Even if Iran uses some of the money from economic sanctions relief to increase funding to groups like Hamas and Hezbollah (it has many internal needs for the money), these groups launch minor attacks and are nowhere near as dangerous for the Middle East region as an Iran with nuclear weapons.

In fact, Shi'ite Hezbollah in Syria is helping to fight the even worse Sunni ISIS and al Qaeda groups – read: it and allies Russia, Iran, and the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, in this case, are aligned with US interests. In the wake of the nuclear agreement, the Iranian president has even made noises about also reaching a deal with the United States on Syria. However, instead of recognizing that US interests align with these less-than-perfect players, the United States has implacably called for the removal of al-Assad's Syrian regime.

Historically, Assad-controlled Syria has been hostile to the United States and does have a lousy human rights record. But those attributes also applied to Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, which the United States ousted using force. How did that work out? Turmoil reigns in both places and surrounding areas, and they have become havens for radical terror groups. Again, even after these catastrophic blunders, the US government still thinks that removing Assad will bring about "good government" or at least better government and a miraculous solution to Syria's civil war.

The Russians don't agree and appear to be creating an air base in Syria to conduct airstrikes to shore up what's left of the Assad regime. Instead of secretly applauding this measure as helping to battle a common enemy – ISIS and al Qaeda – in that country, the United States is threatening Russia over helping its longtime ally. US criticism of Russia's growing involvement in the Syrian civil war is hypocritical because the US government is already conducting air strikes against ISIS and also training anti-ISIS fighters in Syria (and also Iraq). US involvement has made the Syrian civil war more intense, but even Obama's recent pledge to accept 10,000 Syrian refugees into the United States is minuscule, especially when compared to the outflow of four million Syrians and Germany's acceptance of 800,000 people in dire need.

In addition, the United States has accused Russia of sneakiness in assisting Assad in Syria and separatist forces in Ukraine. Of course, this accusation is also hypocritical because in Libya, the United States got the Russians to accept a U.N. Security Council Resolution for a NATO-imposed no-fly zone over the country, allegedly to prevent Gaddafi from killing civilians in the civil war there (he wasn't doing so), only to use the resolution to oust Gaddafi and introduce chaos to that country.

As for Ukraine, the United States and Western allies imposed economic sanctions on Russia for annexing Crimea – a Russian-speaking enclave in Ukraine that used to be part of Russia – and surreptitiously assisting rebels in the Russian-speaking eastern part of Ukraine. Yet not too long ago, Russia complained about the United States and NATO detaching Kosovo, a province of its ally Serbia, using military force against the Serbs. The Russians also point out that their activities in Ukraine followed the overthrow of a democratically elected, Russia-friendly Ukrainian government by street mobs. Their claim of US orchestration may be overblown, but the CIA has been involved in some of these destabilization activities in the past.

Ukraine has always been vital to Russia economically and has a centuries old relationship with it, including also being part of the Soviet Union. Like the United States, with its Monroe Doctrine in the Western Hemisphere, the Russians like to maintain a secure buffer zone in Eastern Europe because, over the centuries, they have been invaded repeatedly through that area, including the scorched earth Nazi invasion during World War II that left Russia in ruins and with a staggering

25 million dead. One doesn't have to be of Russian ancestry (I'm not) or apologize for Vladimir Putin being a human rights-violating thug (he is), to see that Russia has some valid security concerns. In fact, Russia may be destabilizing eastern Ukraine mainly to keep the now unfriendly country out of the ever-expanding hostile NATO alliance, the entry to which George W. Bush promised would happen. NATO has already expanded to other countries bordering Russia, taking away the security buffer zone.

Yet not only with Russia, but also with Iran and Assad's Syria – similar unfriendly countries with despots running the show – the United States haughtily declares them to be in the wrong when the US government certainly has not been clear of intrigue in the post-World War II period either. More important, in certain specific cases, a realistic assessment of US interests might uncover that they may align more with those of such countries and less with those of our traditional allies – for example, Saudi Arabia and Turkey – which are also rather autocratic and are often bad allies.