

Hurricanes and Wars



by Lev Tsitrin

There is something Marxist about comparing inanimate nature to human affairs; and yet the comparison of wars to hurricanes is just too illustrative to ignore. Both are destructive, and both have a similar nature. Hurricanes are caused by an imbalance in atmospheric pressure – the high-pressure air pushes itself into low-pressure areas causing powerful winds. The tools of war operate in the exact same way. The pressure of gunpowder that is suddenly burned into pressurized gas speeds a bullet out the barrel of a gun; the pressure from a blast wave of a bomb wrecks buildings and kills people.

Yet not just the weapons of war, but the war itself is powered by pressure imbalance – political pressure, that is. A built-up pressure of militant nationalism, combined with the perception of a vacuum in a neighbor's ability or willingness to fight, causes strong temptation for aggression. Germany of the 1930s is a classic example, Hitler pumping nationalist resentment and passions till they spilled over the Germany's borders. Re-militarization of Rhineland in 1936 showed to Germans that Europe had no will to fight (the horrors of WW1

being too fresh on everyone's minds), so the high pressure on the German side of the border, and the vacuum of fighting spirit on the French/British side caused what was to follow: Austria's *Anschluss*, the capture of Czechoslovakia, and the invasion into Poland that officially triggered the WW2.

This imbalance of political pressure is caused not only by the rise of political pressure in one country, but, also, by the drop in the previously-normal pressure in another one. Consider Mr. Obama, who was the grand master of creating a political vacuum. Russia wants the Crimea? Who's in the way? After all, "Ukraine is a core interest for Moscow in a way that it is not for the United States," Mr. Obama [coolly observed](#), bowing to the cold war's notion of "spheres of interest," and expressing a perfect understanding of where Russia's are. Putin's putting of pressure was met with correspondent removal of America's counter-pressure. Obama practiced the same doctrine in the Middle East, too, starting with his grand gesture of apologizing to Moslems, in his Cairo speech, for the 9/11 attack. At the height of mass protests in Tehran in 2009, when Iranians demanded to know whether Obama was "with us or with the ayatollahs," Obama figured that it was easier to be with the ayatollahs – apparently on a principle that "who is in power in Iran is a core interest for the ayatollahs in a way that it is not for the United States." He proceeded by letting the Russians and Iranians entrench themselves in Syria. The same Obama Doctrine was deployed in Iran's attempt to build an atom bomb: why fight the ayatollahs when one can accommodate them? Hence, the Iran "deal" that gave Iran's nuclear project international legitimacy in exchange of a 15-year hiatus in producing the actual weapon, so Mr. Obama and his successor – which, at a time, was supposed to be Hillary – could complete their terms in office, unbothered.

But now, chickens came home to roost – Obama's accommodating vacuum produced Russia's war with Ukraine, and dislocation in

the Middle East around the newly-empowered Iran. Suddenly, there is war in Europe, and a clear prospect of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. All of a sudden, countries like Saudi Arabia that seemed insignificant – their strengths being in near-obsolete fossil fuel that is about to be supplanted by renewables at any minute – became critical to the survival of the Western economies that are squelching at the prices at the pump and at the prospect of unheated homes in the winter – not to mention the real possibility of the idled manufacturing plants.

Hence, the urgent need to build up America's presence in the Middle East, and Biden's hasty visit to patch-up ties with "pariah" Saudis, accompanied by assurances of America's determination not to leave a vacuum in the Middle East for Russia, China, or Iran to fill.

This is a welcome development – not only because the area is indeed vitally important, but for the sheer recognition of what power vacuum does – it creates conflicts and wars. That the nature abhors vacuum has been known for a long time; but it only now seems to have dawned on certain politicians that the politics abhors vacuum, too. Vacuum will always fill up – but not necessarily in a way that is good.

Yes, maintaining the healthy pressure in world's political atmosphere is very expensive – which was Obama's reason to let go of the effort. Yet the price of a resulting vacuum, as we now see in Ukraine, far exceeds the costs of the upkeep of proper pressure in international atmosphere that prevents wars. Though at the time, Obama and his parsimonious "doctrine" seemed wise to his supporters, it is, as we now plainly see, merely penny-wise.

The world is simply too small for having "unimportant" areas. Recent reports of China's penetration into Indio-Pacific, and the hand-wringing from Australia and the US on the loss of tiny, but strategically important island states like Solomon

Islands to Chinese influence, reinforce the simple message: politics, like nature, abhor vacuum. "If you want peace, prepare for war," the saying goes. This is how international peace is maintained – by keeping the pressure even, and not creating vacuum: vacuum, as Mr. Biden learned from Mr. Obama's monumental folly, is deadly. It is just too bad that he had to learn this elementary fact through the nose.