

What Canada can do to help stabilize the Middle East and resurrect a strong Western alliance

The new government has already declared that it will, as promised in the late election campaign, withdraw Canada's token participation in the U.S.-led bombing campaign against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, although it is continuing to train some local forces supported by the West. It should emphasize that its motives are not any absence of antipathy to the barbarous lunatics of ISIL or the depraved Russo-Iranian puppet regime of Bashar Al-Assad, which gasses its own people and routinely commits atrocities. The motive for this partial withdrawal must be and presumably is that there are serious credibility problems with the aptitude of the Obama administration to lead such an initiative effectively.

No sane person could question the efficacy and courage of the U.S. armed forces. Despite the fact that its last deployment to Iraq has led to the unspeakable fiasco of the dissolution of that country into general violence and the domination of the Shiite majority by Iran, the world's premier terrorism-supporting country, the American armed forces were completely victorious and served patiently in a thankless and misconceived mission for many years, though all American servicemen and women are volunteers.

There is not much more that can be said about the incorrigible incompetence in foreign affairs of the Obama government, worthy successor to the approximately equally inept blunderbuss era of George W. Bush that preceded it. In August 2014, President Obama responded to the collapse of the Iraqi government before only about 20,000 ISIL militants, the

unforeseen sequel to his abrupt withdrawal from Iraq after claiming to have successfully ended the war and insurgency there, by announcing a bombing and training campaign. He modestly described his ignominious, half-hearted return to Iraq as "American leadership at its best." When President Roosevelt declared in 1940 that "We must be the Great Arsenal of Democracy," and President Truman promoted the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe (1947), and President Kennedy managed the Cuba Missile Crisis (1962), and President Nixon called for the support of "the Silent Majority" for a staged withdrawal from Vietnam (1969), and President Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative (1983), it really was American leadership at its best, but all of those men left it to commentators and historians to come to that conclusion for themselves.

The Obama plan has been to operate on a minimalist conflict basis, doing nothing remotely adequate to assist the secular resistance to both Assad and ISIL, or to counter Russian and Iranian support of Assad, which has more effectively focused on attacking the local allies of the West and its remaining supporters in the Arab world, especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Last week the U.S. deputy secretary of State, Antony Blinken, said the Syrian conflict would ensnare Russia, "and that in turn creates a compelling incentive for Russia to work for, not against, a political transition. The quagmire will spread and deepen, drawing Russia further in." He was invoking Vietnam War terminology, from when the United States had 550,000 draftees in-country and was taking 200 to 400 dead every week. In fact, Russia has sent 2,000 advisors and a few squadrons of bombers and interceptors, provided a modest amount of munitions, and taken very few casualties (in a nation which is relatively oblivious to casualty levels anyway, and under Vladimir Putin is substantially unaffected by fluctuations of opinion).

There is no justification for any such confidence, as Russia

isn't risking much and its participation in Syria is not onerous to it. Obama has countered with the insertion of fifty (50) more special forces soldiers to assist the Kurds, giving new and microscopic meaning to tokenism. He is boxed in by his pretense that the Iraqi War is over and by his inexplicable fear of offending Russia, which is a paper tiger the U.S Air Force and naval Air Force could sweep from the skies of Syria or even Russia itself if there was a reason to, in one weekend. These concerns prevent him from enforcing a no-fly zone in Syria or rendering direct military assistance to the Kurds who are officially in Iraq, but who in fact seceded from that state as it crumbled.

Obama has even blanched at the easy prospect of eliminating Assad's puny air force, just as he has failed to give effective assistance to Ukraine or tightened sanctions on Russia, despite a cascade of provocations. He is inadvertently replicating Lyndon Johnson's on-again, off-again, air war in Vietnam, always hoping that the other side would reciprocate de-escalation. Wars don't work that way and brutal dictators don't respond as desired – they have to be pummeled until they are afraid to continue their challenge. Obama, a pacifist who has already apologized for the authoritarian way Roosevelt and Churchill led the Western Allies to victory in the Second World War; for Truman's use of the atomic bomb on Japan (after warning that country); and for Eisenhower's role in ousting the mad and incompetent Iranian leader Mossadegh, cannot bring himself to do anything seriously forceful, even against IIL, far from the most formidable, but surely the most odious adversary the U.S. has ever faced, not excluding Nazi Germany.

In all of the circumstances, it is not unreasonable that the new Canadian prime minister is reluctant to collaborate fully in such a half-hearted and belated response to the enemies of the West in the Middle East. We can only prayerfully hope that this, as well as Justin Trudeau's frequent lamentations of the incongruity of the former government's tough talk and anemic

defence budgets, are his motives, and not some ingrained or tactical pacifism. War is abhorrent, but given the wickedness of opponents and the almost complete absence of combat danger, if the Americans really had shown any leadership, this would be an operation that Canada should participate in thoroughly, as Brian Mulroney did in the first Iraq War and Jean Chrétien did in the assault on the Taliban government of Afghanistan that had sheltered bin Laden and the 9/11 terrorist assailants.

We have descended precipitately from the Reagan-Thatcher-Kohl-Mitterand-Mulroney era to where the world is waiting for the return to the White House and the Elysee (Paris) of serious presidents, the resuscitation of the Western Alliance, and the plausible redefinition of Western security interests in a way that deters the endless probing and provocations that were incited by the under-reaction of the Clinton administration to the early terrorist outrages, the overstretched bellicosity of George W. Bush, and the complacent and guilt-sodden defeatism of Obama. If Trudeau is abstaining from a jolly-hockey sticks hack job of an expedition while rebuilding Canada's armed forces and preparing to help resurrect NATO, he is serving the West admirably.

Half-measures, waffling, and prevaricating, which has been the general world response, will just aggravate the problem

No one should imagine that the aid and relief option is an easy road. There are 20 million refugees in the world who have fled their countries, including five million Palestinians, and 40 million more have fled their homes but remain, however reluctantly, in their native countries, the largest totals since 1945. And those were mainly Europeans and comparatively easy to assimilate to their destinations as they fled before the anticipated mercies of the German and Soviet armies. The only way to deal with such an immense human tragedy is to mount a gigantic effort in creating and stocking refugee

camps, while imposing comparative peace on the erupting countries of origin, as the West more or less did in the former Yugoslavia, and then to repatriate and resettle most of the migrants where they originated and accept a reasonable number of the more promising refugees – equitably dispersed among all their hoped for countries of destination.

Half-measures, waffling, and prevaricating, which has been the general world response, will just aggravate the problem and encourage self-seeking mischief-makers like Putin and the ayatollahs. Canada can help to get some of this underway, as we await the revival of civilized and purposeful instincts among the Western Great Powers, but a real policy should emerge fairly soon; this is no time for mere and unctuous spectatorship. Our military abstention raises the requirement for a major humanitarian effort.

First published in the