

The United States, Britain and the Rise of Militant Islam

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I cannot agree more with Norman's Introduction to Paul Rogers's analysis of the likely consequences of a war against Iran(<http://www.normangirvan.info/rogers-military-action-against-iran/>). The United States and Britain are directly responsible for the emergence of a militant Islamist régime in Iran. It was their joint action in overthrowing the Mohammad Mossadegh government in 1953 (the very first democratic government in the Middle East) because it had had the temerity to nationalize its own petroleum industry in 1951, including the Iranian holdings of British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). The AIOC-Iranian agreement of 1933 was very disadvantageous to Iran, as had been the previous agreement, signed in 1901. The Mossadegh government was perfectly justified in not only wanting to obtain a fair price for the country's principal economic resource but also to assume national control over an industry of such strategic importance to Iran. After nationalization, the name of the company was changed from AIOC to the National Iranian Oil Company. (Mansoor Moaddel, "State-Centered vs. Class-Centered Perspectives in International Politics: The Case of U.S. and British Participation in the 1953 Coup against Premiere Mosaddeq in Iran", **Studies in Comparative International Development** , Summer 1989).



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The AIOC transferred its headquarters to Britain and organized a boycott of Iranian oil (Does that sound familiar?). AIOC also contested the nationalization before the International Court at the Hague, which ruled against it. In 1953, President Eisenhower authorized the CIA to mount a coup against Mossadegh's government, in collaboration with Britain. It was not the last time that both countries were to join forces to overthrow the government of a Middle East country. The pro-Western government that replaced Mossadegh (following exactly the same scenario that the US subsequently attempted with the pro-Western Ayad Allawi after Saddam's overthrow - there must be a CIA blueprint for such operations) rescinded the nationalization and signed an agreement

with the AIOC which permitted it to resume its activities in Iran under conditions that were still very favourable to the company. In 1954, AIOC changed its name to BP.



With the support of the U.S., the young Shah resumed royal control over the Iranian government and ruled the country increasingly oppressively, with the help of Savak, the country's dreaded national intelligence agency which was equipped with the necessary material for doing so by the US. The country's powerful Ayatollahs were the only force with the influence and the courage to oppose the Shah. Their great influence with the Iranian people and their courageous opposition brought down the imperial government in 1979, and an Islamist government under Ayatollah Khomeini was installed in its place. To add injury to injury, the US actively supported Saddam's unprovoked attack on Iran in 1980 which led to a bloody conflict that lasted eight years. That support included facilities for manufacturing a (chemical) weapon of mass destruction - mustard gas - which Saddam used on Iranian troops and civilians. An estimated 600,000 Iranians died (compared to an estimated 400,000 Iraqis) in the war.



That historical background has a determining influence on both American and Iranian attitudes and actions (both current and future) in the drama now playing out in the Middle East theatre. Unfortunately, we should not expect that either rational thought or cool heads would guide the American decision whether to launch an attack or not on Iran. The American president, whether he is called Barak Obama, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, or any other name, might be the most powerful man in the world but his power in his own country is more limited than most observers/commentators (even relatively informed ones) imagine.

When Truman was leaving office, it is reported that he declared that his successor would realize how much power he really has when he issues an order and nothing happens. In a formal public address, President Eisenhower warned about the great danger that the powerful American military/industrial complex poses to the country. When Kennedy assumed office, no one told him about the CIA plans (officially approved by the out-going administration) to invade Cuba. He found out about them only later, just in time to abort them.

Those same forces still exercise an inordinate influence on American actions - either in pre-empting the government by presenting it with a fait accompli in an external theatre

or in influencing policy, directly or indirectly. War is still seen as "good business" by the military-industrial complex; the CIA still, presumably, conducts operations that are illegal or not authorized by the White House; the President still has limited control over certain elements of his administration who might have been appointed by previous governments or who do not agree with his policies; irrational foreign policy actions are still motivated by dangerous ideologies. A Gallup poll, conducted in 2000, revealed that 44% of Americans are "born-again" or "evangelical." It is not outside the bounds of possibility that a single individual from that very large group of religious ideologues, who is in a position to do so, might hear a call from God to bring about Armageddon in the manner that Stanley Kubrick described so chillingly in his brilliant film, "Dr. Strangelove". Thus, although an American attack on Iranian nuclear installations is regarded by all experts as dangerous and indecisive, that does not mean that it will not happen.

As Norman says in his introduction to the Paul Rogers/Oxford Group Report, a protracted war, which is the likely result of an American attack on Iran, would have disastrous consequences for small developing countries like ours in Caricom. I agree wholeheartedly with you that we should not wait passively for the proverbial s... to hit the fan; that *"a region with serious political leadership would be acting on two fronts"*, including taking appropriate diplomatic action. On several occasions, in discussions in this forum and in postings on your website, I have advocated that Caricom become more active in international diplomacy, particularly in areas of potential concern to our region. I have demonstrated, with examples, that small countries can influence international policy by the quality of their diplomacy. Urging, in my critique of the Port of Spain Declaration on Sustainable Development, that Caricom undertake appropriate international initiatives in that area, I made the following comment:

"Historically, Caricom countries have tended to play a fairly passive role in international fora, keeping as low a profile as possible, intervening little in debates and then only in a very perfunctory way, and never taking initiatives on matters of no direct national concern. To the consternation of other countries from the South, certain Caricom countries have, in the past, sometimes extended that passivity to abstaining on resolutions of importance to the South. However, that history of international passivity is not necessarily a presage for the future..... Caricom countries have an opportunity to discard the futures "available" to them, that is to say, those futures which could be forecast on the basis of past performance. They can actively create different futures - futures that can be made to happen through their own endeavours."

<http://www.normangirvan.info/port-of-spain-declaration-a-critical-analysis-mervyn-claxton/>

The possible negative consequences for small developing countries like Caricom of an American invasion of Iran are fairly obvious because of the inevitable impact on oil prices, which would affect air travel and tourism, among other things. The possible negative consequences for small developing countries like Caricom, of precipitate action in the Afghanistan theatre are much less obvious. But there is such a thing as "unintended consequences". As a student of history, I am all too aware of how a single action can set off a train of events over which the protagonists lose all control and which can eventually have worldwide effects.



www.hauntedtypebox.com/blog/tag/wwi/

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the Bosnian city of Sarajevo in June 1914, set off a train of events which led, directly and inexorably, to the outbreak of the First World War. The incident happened in the Balkan region, which was then the most dangerously volatile region in the world. Arguably, the Afghanistan/Pakistan region is currently the most dangerously volatile in the world. The great political fragility of both Afghanistan and Pakistan, their vulnerability to state collapse or takeover by radical Islamist forces, and the acute hostility between India and Pakistan (two nuclear powers) could lead to a train of events that might affect the entire globalized world, particularly small developing countries like ours in Caricom which depend on tourism, export outlets for our largely primary produce, and foreign investment.

If "unintended" developments in the Afghanistan/Pakistan theatre of operations precipitate Pakistan's state collapse or capture by militant Islamists, that country's nuclear weapons might well fall into their hands despite all the safeguards that were in place by the government and the army. If that nightmare scenario becomes a reality, it

is not unlikely that the Islamists would trump their recent suicidal attack on Bombay with a suicidal nuclear attack on India, which would certainly retaliate in kind. Ever watchful for the slightest opportunity to make mischief, North Korea might take advantage of America's preoccupation with dousing that nuclear holocaust to launch a nuclear attack on South Korea. Fearing that it would be next on the list of North Korea's targets, Japan might launch a pre-emptive attack on North Korea. The whole of Asia would become a nuclear-hot war zone. The disastrous consequences for the financial markets, international trade, tourism and, particularly, for small developing countries like ours do not need to be spelt out.

That is why I do not subscribe to such laudable sentiments and simple demands that the US should drop tools and pull out of Afghanistan forthwith. American actions, dating back to the 1980s, have contributed greatly to the present situation in that country but that responsibility entails another responsibility - to ensure that its departure does not result in the s... hitting the fan. I have yet to see a proposed solution to that very complex situation which would ensure that that does not happen.

My views on the Afghanistan situation do not imply any support for American hegemonic actions there or anywhere else in the world. Indeed, I consider that American actions since the beginning of the Cold War have made that country the principal threat to world peace. In my article, [Culture and North-South Narratives of Superiority/Inferiority – Part 2](http://www.normangirvan.info/13-north-south-narratives-of-superiority/inferiority-2-by-mervyn-claxton/) <http://www.normangirvan.info/13-north-south-narratives-of-superiority/inferiority-2-by-mervyn-claxton/> I cited, approvingly, the following excerpts from Harold Pinter's address when he accepted the Nobel Laureate for Literature in 2005:

"Perhaps the most striking example of the great gap which exists between Western/Northern myths and reality is the myth the United States has propagated from the time of the Cold War right up to the present time – the myth of bringing freedom and democracy to non-European peoples, who happen, overwhelmingly, to be in the South. Harold Pinter, the Nobel Laureate for Literature in 2005, was so incensed by the cynical hypocrisy of the most powerful country in the world destroying nascent democracies whose policies do not coincide with American interests, and toppling regimes the world over, causing death and mayhem in those societies, and justifying its actions on the grounds that it is bringing freedom and democracy to the countries concerned that he made it the subject of his [Nobel Prize acceptance speech](#). The following excerpts from Pinter's powerful, eloquent diatribe speak for themselves:



Harold Pinter

http://open.salon.com/blog/karhi_keyan/2008/12/26/nobel_winner_harold_pinter_dies

Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America's favoured method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as 'low intensity conflict'. Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop. It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued - or beaten to death - the same thing - and your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the camera and say that democracy has prevailed. This was a commonplace in US foreign policy in the years to which I refer."

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"I spoke earlier about 'a tapestry of lies' which surrounds us. President Reagan commonly described Nicaragua as a 'totalitarian dungeon'. This was taken generally by the media, and certainly by the British government, as accurate and fair comment. But there was in fact no record of death squads under the Sandinista government. There was no record of torture. There was no record of systematic or official military brutality. No priests were ever murdered in Nicaragua. There were in fact three priests in the government, two Jesuits and a Maryknoll missionary. The totalitarian dungeons were actually next door, in El Salvador and Guatemala. The United States had brought down the democratically elected government of Guatemala in 1954 and it is estimated that over 200,000 people had been victims of successive military dictatorships."

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"The United States finally brought down the Sandinista government. It took some years and considerable resistance but relentless economic persecution and 30,000 dead finally undermined the spirit of the Nicaraguan people. They were exhausted and poverty stricken once again. The casinos moved back into the country. Free health and free education were over. Big business returned with a vengeance. 'Democracy' had prevailed. But this 'policy' was by no means restricted to Central America. It was conducted throughout the world. It was never-ending. And it is as if it never happened."

"I should remind you that at the time President Reagan made the following statement: 'The Contras are the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers.' "

"The United States supported and in many cases engendered every right wing military dictatorship in the world after the end of the Second World War. I refer to Indonesia, Greece, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Haiti, Turkey, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, and, of course, Chile. The horror the United States inflicted upon Chile in 1973 can never be purged and can never be forgiven. We have brought torture, cluster bombs, depleted uranium, innumerable acts of random murder, misery, degradation and death to the Iraqi people and call it 'bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East'."

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