

Bush's Last Bullet: Why the US Attacked Syria

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The sovereignty of an independent, stable country that has carried out many constructive moves in recent months and weeks, which could have surely contributed to the stabilization of the Middle East, has been violated, its borders breached and its civilians killed.

But when the country targeted is Syria, an Arab country, and the perpetrator is the US military, then, somehow things are not as appalling as they may seem.

The US raid on a small farming community near the Iraq-Syria border on October 26 is being treated differently than the Russian attack on Georgia in August 2008. The latter was vehemently condemned by every last leading US official, who specifically decried Russia's violation of international law, laws governing the sovereignty of nations, and the destabilization of a whole region. Few in the US government, and fewer in the ever-willing mainstream media, dared offer any alternative reading to what truly triggered the conflict. For example, Georgia's initial violent attacks on South Ossetia, killing many Russian citizens and peacekeepers, seemed a negligible fact.

The Syria case, where a dozen US commandos killed eight Syrian civilians, including a father and his four sons, is somehow an entirely different story. Georgia is an ally of the US; Syria is not. Georgia was armed and trained largely by US-Israeli weapons and military experts; Syria is a key recipient of Russian weapons. Georgia was used as another US foothold in an extremely strategic and rich region; Syria is a safe haven for the political leaderships of various Palestinian groups that continue to fight the Israeli occupation. Georgia is serving the essential role of tightening the geopolitical belt around Russia; Syria's strong relations with Iran, is rather complicating US efforts to tightly control Iraq.

Considering the Bush doctrine - not just that of preemptive war and rationalising torture, but others that rank US interests above international law, and regards US actions with different standards to those of any other nation - one hardly needs to infuse UN resolutions that forbid the sort of action as bombing a quiet village inside some other country's borders. It is simply 'irrelevant', a term that is dear to President Bush, for that is how he wished to delineate his government's view of the UN for refusing to give him the green light to invade Iraq.

True, the attack on Syria may seem like a classic belligerent military policy, carried out by a president who defines national security as perpetual violence. But there is certainly more to the story that is largely missing from most analyses offered by government officials and in US media.

The Times of London quoted an anonymous US official in an October 29 report as saying: "You have to clean up the global threat that is in your backyard (that being Iraq) - and if you

don't do that, we are left with no choice but to take these matters into our own hands."

The official repeated the claim that the target was an Iraqi national affiliated with Al Qaeda, Abu Ghadiyah. His real name is Badran Turki Hishan al-Mazidh, who "was appointed as an Al Qaeda commander by the organisation's late founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi." Of course, once alien Arabic names are offered, then most analysts take such claims at face value. Who is daring enough to question the integrity of that claim altogether, especially as Abu Ghadiyah has allegedly been killed. Thus, Randall Mikkelsen's Reuters analysis: "The US helicopter attack into Syria this week underscores the Bush administration's determination to cross borders when it can strike an enemy target, and to weather any international backlash."

But here is the source of oddity. Syria had recently initiated indirect peace talks with Israel, via Turkey. It officiated its diplomatic relations with Lebanon, raising hopes that both countries might settle their protracted feud that has affected the stability of Lebanon, and more recently of Syria itself. These friendly moves had already inspired even more surprising gestures in Lebanon itself, as the leaders of the country's main rivals, Hezbollah and the Future Movement, have met amidst smiles and friendly handshakes. More, Syria and Iraq are also closer than ever, to the point that the Iraqi government offered some of the strongest condemnations of the US attack on Syria, using Iraqi territories.

Equally important, is that Syria has been improving its relations with Europe, including its once greatest detractor, France. Not only is the relationship between Syria, its neighbors and the EU significantly improving, but also the type of language used to describe such relationships: endless accolades of Syria's important regional role in bringing peace and stability to the Middle East and so forth. The European response to the US military raid also highlights the already existing rift between the US and the EU. "France calls for restraint and underlines its attachment to the strict respect of the territorial integrity of states," read a statement by Sarkozy's office. Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos of Spain demanded an end to "such dangerous events."

The claims that US national security comes first, and that Al Qaeda terrorists are infiltrating the border into Iraq, hardly suffice. In recent weeks, US military officials admitted that "Syria has been more cooperative than in the past in dealing with the problem of foreign fighters entering Iraq, and the number has declined over the past year." The percentage decline of the reported infiltration is so significant that one has to question the military wisdom in carrying out such a raid now, while refraining from doing so in the past.

The Syrian regime is aware of its limited military options, and had opted to choose a calmer approach to mend fences with others, while, at the same time, hoping to strengthen its relationship with Russia, inviting the latter to plant Russian missile defense system in its territories. Naturally, neither Israel - who wants to ensure that the balance of power remains in its favour - nor the US - who wants to keep Syria isolated regionally and internationally, and keep Russia at bay, are pleased with the successful Syrian strategy, thus the bombing of October 26. Indeed, it was a warning to Syria, but considering Bush's dwindling weeks in office, it might as well be a late warning that would yield nothing but further animosity towards the US, not just in Syria but throughout the world.

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