

“No Ground Troops to Syria:” Obama’s Smartest Move in Eight Years?

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Global Research, November 18, 2015
[CounterPunch](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)
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Three questions about Paris:

1) Was the over-the-top, no-holds-barred, 24-7 media blitz really an attempt to keep the public informed about a critically important event or was the coverage geared to pressure President Obama into sending ground troops to Syria?

2) Is Obama’s excuse for not putting boots on the ground in Syria to fight ISIS credible (Obama says he believes the current strategy is “ultimately going to work”.) or is the administration afraid of a confrontation with Russia?

3) Does the media’s coverage of the attacks in Paris (Similar attacks which took place in Beirut, Baghdad and Turkey were treated as mere footnotes) reflect pervasive racist attitudes in the West or is it another example of our dreary agenda-driven media?

While there’s no question that the victims of this horrific crime deserve all of our sympathy and support, there’s also no question that the media has exploited the attacks to serve their own purposes. From the moment the attacks were first announced on Friday until today, the media has conducted a full-blown, round-the-clock propaganda campaign that reenacted every bomb blast, every screeching siren, and every lurid detail in order to generate as much fear in the public mind as possible. The objective in fueling this mass hysteria became apparent to me after watching all five political talk shows on Sunday where the consensus view of all the interviewees was: “ISIS is evil. Obama needs to do something. Obama needs to send troops to Syria.”

For example: Jeb Bush says to George Stephanopoulos, “We need to show leadership...We need no-fly zones...We need ground troops.”

Not to be outdone, *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol said, ‘We need 50,000 troops to take Raqqa.’ Shortly after, Fareed Zakaria of GPS chimed in with this (completely phony) heartfelt appeal for US intervention. He said:

“Imagine if the world responded... by joining forces and doing exactly what’s necessary to eradicate a Caliphate that only leaves carnage in its wake? maybe, just maybe, this Democratic President can mobilize the world to respond accordingly. Maybe it will be enough to simply neuter the culprits, not eviscerate the whole population of the region, causing intractable blowback.”

Can you believe it? He candidly admits that US intervention could “eviscerate the whole

population of the region (and cause) intractable blowback”, but he wants to “go for it” anyway.

Unbelievable. Of course, none of the news programs allowed anyone opposed to US warmongering anywhere near a microphone. Can't have that. The unwavering uniformity of opinion just shows that the media wants more war which is why they're waving the bloody shirt of Paris to pressure Obama. They don't care about the victims, what matters to them is their agenda.

But the strategy isn't working, not this time at least. In fact, Obama is actually digging in his heels. On Monday, in a truly extraordinary press conference following the G-20 Summit, Obama announced that he wasn't going to send ground troops to Syria after all. He said he thought “it would be a mistake.”

You could have heard a pin drop after he made his statement. And then, of course, the press corps went into full attack-mode.

“Not send troops? How can you not send troops after all the terrorist hype we've been spewing for two days straight? We demand you send troops.”

The media's indignation was apparent by the questions they leveled at Obama after his brief presentation. And what was amazing about the questions, was that, all five questions were exactly the same question! I'm not making this up. The entire pathetic Q&A can be read [here](#).

Take a look: First question, Jerome Cartillier of AFP:

Q. — “Mr. President. One hundred and twenty-nine people were killed in Paris on Friday night. ISIL claimed responsibility for the massacre, sending the message that they could now target civilians all over the world. The equation has clearly changed. Isn't it time for your strategy to change?”

Subtext to question: We want you to send ground troops.

Second question, Margaret Brennan, CBS News:

Q. — “Mr. President. A more than year-long bombing campaign in Iraq and in Syria has failed to contain the ambition and the ability of ISIS to launch attacks in the West. Have you underestimated their abilities? And will you widen the rules of engagement for U.S. forces to take more aggressive action?”

Subtext to question: We want you to send ground troops.

Third question, Jim Avila, ABC News:

Q.- “Mr. President. In the days and weeks before the Paris attacks, did you receive warning in your daily intelligence briefing that an attack was imminent? If not, does that not call into question the current assessment that there is no immediate, specific, credible threat to the United States today?”

Subtext to question: You have no idea what ISIS is doing, so why not send in ground troops.

Forth question, Jim Acosta, CNN:

Q. — “Mr. President. ... a lot of Americans have this frustration that they see that the United States has the greatest military in the world, it has the backing of nearly every other country in the world when it comes to taking on ISIS. I guess the question is — and if you’ll forgive the language — is why can’t we take out these bastards?”

Subtext to question: We want you to send ground troops.

Fifth question, Ron Allen, NBC News:

Q. — “Mr. President. I think a lot of people around the world and in America are concerned because given the strategy that you’re pursuing ... ISIS’s capabilities seem to be expanding. Were you aware that they had the capability of pulling off the kind of attack that they did in Paris? Are you concerned? And do you think they have that same capability to strike in the United States?”

Subtext to question: You should be doing more. We want you to send ground troops.

Are these really the questions a journalist would ask if he if he wanted to inform the public on a critical foreign policy matter or are they merely a way of hectoring the president so he does what the powerbrokers who own the media want him to do?

By the way, Obama snapped about halfway through the Q&A mainly because he just got frustrated with the tedious repetition of the same question. By the time he got to Jim Acosta he blurted out angrily: “I just spent the last three questions answering that very question, so I don’t know what more you want me to add.”

But don’t kid yourself, Obama knows what’s going on. He knows the bigwig media owners who sit on the same board of directors with the big weapons manufacturers, the Wall Street bankers and other honchos in the Military Industrial Complex (MIC) want another war. That’s what it’s all about. That’s why they have trained all their cameras on Paris to make sure that every wailing woman, every candle-lit vigil, and every bloody victim is filmed up-close-and-personal to maximize the emotional impact and help generate momentum for another US-led massacre in the Middle East.

But Obama’s not going to go that route. He’s not going to expand the war. Not because he’s opposed to violence or squeamish about killing innocent people. Heck no, that has nothing to do with it. Here’s the reason he gave at the press conference:

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, keep in mind what we have been doing. We have a military strategy that is putting enormous pressure on ISIL through airstrikes; that has put assistance and training on the ground with Iraqi forces; we’re now working with Syrian forces as well to squeeze ISIL, cut off their supply lines. We’ve been coordinating internationally to reduce their financing capabilities, the oil that they’re trying to ship outside. We are taking strikes against high-value targets — including, most recently, against the individual who was on the video executing civilians who had already been captured, as well as the head of ISIL in Libya....(So) Even as we grieve with our French friends, we can’t lose sight that there has been progress being made.”

“Progress”? A four and a half year stalemate followed by a Russian-led military campaign

that has rolled back all the gains the “US-backed” jihadis made in their effort to topple Assad? Obama calls that progress?

Let’s be blunt: US policy in Syria has gone off a cliff. It’s a complete and utter disaster. Obama knows that. He’s just making lame excuses. Here’s more:

PRESIDENT OBAMA: “...there have been a few who suggested that we should put large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground. And keep in mind that we have the finest military in the world and we have the finest military minds in the world, and I’ve been meeting with them intensively for years now, discussing these various options, and it is not just my view but the view of my closest military and civilian advisors that that would be a mistake — not because our military could not march into Mosul or Raqqa or Ramadi and temporarily clear out ISIL, but because we would see a repetition of what we’ve seen before, which is, if you do not have local populations that are committed to inclusive governance and who are pushing back against ideological extremes, that they resurface — unless we’re prepared to have a permanent occupation of these countries.

And let’s assume that we were to send 50,000 troops into Syria. What happens when there’s a terrorist attack generated from Yemen? Do we then send more troops into there? Or Libya, perhaps? Or if there’s a terrorist network that’s operating anywhere else — in North Africa, or in Southeast Asia?”

Okay, so now we’re getting closer to the truth. Obama and his top advisors have looked at this mess from all sides and figured out that it’s a hopeless cause, so they’re not going to send US troops to die for nothing. Good. At least, that makes sense.

But even THAT isn’t the whole truth. The whole truth is that Obama and crew are worried about Russia. Sure, the politicians do a lot chest thumping and saber rattling in their op-eds or when they’re bloviating in front of a TV camera. But this is the real deal. Syria is not make-believe. It’s a war, and it’s a war Russia intends to win. And if the US gets in Russia’s way, by setting up a safe zone within Syria’s sovereign borders or doing something else stupid like that, there’s going to be trouble. Obama knows this because he’s a reasonable man; immoral, but reasonable. He’s not a hothead like John McCain or a foam-at-the-mouth basketcase like Hillary Clinton. Obama is cut in the mold of James Baker, a dyed-in-the-wool imperialist who understood the parameters of imperial power. There are limits to power and a wise man will acknowledge those limits and act accordingly. That’s what Obama is doing. He’s decided that the rewards are just not worth the risks, so he’s cutting his losses and backing down. That doesn’t mean Washington’s plan for Syria has been abandoned, it just means that Obama wants to run out his time in office without dragging the country into another pointless bloodbath.

If you ask me, it’s the smartest move he’s made in eight years.

Mike Whitney lives in Washington state. He is a contributor to [Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion](#) (AK Press). *Hopeless* is also available in a [Kindle edition](#). He can be reached at fergiwhitney@msn.com.

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