

Obama Spreads War Flames to Engulf Middle East

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As President Obama steps up the war that is inflaming ever wider sectors of the Middle East, USA continues its rapid slide toward Third World status. The two developments are not unrelated. Spending on war does not boost an economy as does domestic spending—and the Pentagon has been spending trillions on war.

At the start of the last decade, the U.S. was producing 32 percent of the world's gross domestic product. At decade's end, it was just 24 percent, conservative columnist Patrick Buchanan observed. "No nation in modern history, save for the late Soviet Union, has seen so precipitous a decline in relative power in a single decade," he writes.

Buchanan cites the George W. Bush Republicans for turning a budget surplus into a huge deficit with tax cuts and social spending. He also faults GWB's two wars, adding, "the huge U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq serves as (al-Qaeda's) recruiting poster."

This is the desperate situation President Obama is compounding by dispatching 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan, building up U.S. and NATO forces there to nearly 140,000. To this figure add 100,000 U.S. contractors, making the actual number of military-related personnel about a quarter million. All at the expense of the American taxpayers!

"The war—once mostly limited to Pakistan border—has spread to nearly every corner of the country" and "penetrated" the capital Kabul "with car bombings and spectacular attacks," the *AP* reported January 10th. Its headline: "Afghans Losing Hope After 8 Years of War."

The *AP* quotes 19-year-old carpet-seller Hamid Hashimi stating, "The more soldiers they send here, the worse it gets." And the more misguided air attacks that kill civilians, the angrier Afghan civilians get. The raids "have previously killed civilians and inflamed anti-American sentiment among Afghans," Joshua Partlow reported in the *Washington Post*.

"The use of Predator and Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles to fire missiles, while not as frequent as in Pakistan, is increasingly common in Afghanistan," Partlow wrote. And based on a study by the non-profit, New America Foundation of Washington, D.C., President Obama has increased those strikes dramatically.

According to the *AP* of Jan. 15, there have been more than 70 U.S. missile strikes in Pakistan over the last two years. "At least 700 people are reported to have been killed, many of them militants, including several foreign al Qaeda leaders, according to U.S. and Pakistani officials."

The wire service continues, "In public, Pakistani government officials criticize the strikes and say the United States, which is deeply unpopular in Pakistan, is acting unilaterally." The

CIA-directed program began in earnest two years ago, *AP* says. “The surge signals the Obama administration’s reliance on the tactic despite official protest from Islamabad.”

(Note that the U.S. is “deeply unpopular” in Pakistan. Imagine its unpopularity across the Moslem world, Asia, and even much of Europe. As one Middle East businessman cracked after being wrongly tossed into an American jail, “I’ve bought my last Cadillac.”)

By pouring in hundreds of thousands of troops to chase after a few hundred al Qaeda militants, the U.S. is spreading the war to wider and wider areas, and by using aerial assassination tactics, it is turning civilian populations into America haters.

These tactics raise the question of whether the U.S. will launch air strikes anywhere it believes al Qaeda forces are. Senator Carl Levin, Armed Services Committee chairman, January 13th asked whether the war will widen to include Yemen, known to have al Qaeda forces there. Will Yemen become the fourth country in which the U.S. is fighting? And, if you credit a report by Seymour Hersh that the U.S. already has “boots on the ground” in Iran, will there soon be all-out fighting in five Middle East countries?

According to liberal columnist Jim Hightower (Dec. 2nd), the government’s “rationales for escalation are hardly confidence boosters. The goal, we’re told, is to defeat the al-Qaida terrorist network that threatens our national security. Yes, but al-Qaida is not in Afghanistan! Nor is it one network. It has metastasized, with strongholds now in Pakistan, Indonesia, Morocco, Yemen and Somalia, plus even having enclaves in England and France.” Exactly, and why Buchanan used the phrase “recruiting poster.”

Hightower claims, “Obama has been taken over by the military industrial hawks and national security theorists who play war games with other people’s lives and money.” As this writer noted earlier, the Pentagon’s yearly budget now exceeds the annual expenditures of all 50 states for the health, education, welfare, and safety of 308-million Americans. What do you call that if not a warfare state?

Whoever is calling the shots, the cost to Americans and to the people of the Middle East is sobering. As Nobel economist Joseph Stiglitz and financial analyst Linda Bilmes wrote in “The Three Trillion Dollar War”(Norton): “Miserable though Saddam Hussein’s regime was, life is actually worse for the Iraqi people now. The country’s roads, schools, hospitals, homes and museums have been destroyed and its citizens have less access to electricity and water than before the war.” They add, “Apart from America’s oil and defense industries, it is hard to find any real winners.” Life is also worse for the American people, too, and not just from higher gasoline prices.

Millions of Americans have been sliding into poverty since 2001, losing their homes and jobs, and are unable to afford to educate their children. Stiglitz writes the true cost of the Iraq conflict is \$3 trillion and points out for one-third that sum USA could have built, for example, eight million new housing units (and created an immense number of new jobs in the process) or educated 43 million college students—giving a terrific boost to the economy.

But instead of seeking diplomatic solutions, President Obama is continuing the blind wars of aggression launched by his predecessor. Terrorist missile strikes kill just like IEDs. Those who wage war are terrorists, period. When will Americans catch on?

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