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Tulsi Gabbard Is Right, and Nancy Pelosi Wrong. It Was US Democrats Who Helped Cultivate the Barbarism of ISIS

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*There is something profoundly deceitful in the way the Democratic Party and the corporate media are framing **Donald Trump**'s decision to pull troops out of Syria.*

One does not need to defend Trump's actions or ignore the dangers posed to the Kurds, at least in the short-term, by the departure of US forces from northern Syria to understand that the coverage is being crafted in such a way as to entirely overlook the bigger picture.

The problem is neatly illustrated in this line from a report by the Guardian newspaper of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's meeting this week with Trump, who is described as having had a "meltdown". Explaining why she and other senior Democrats stormed out, the paper writes that "it became clear the president had no plan to deal with a potential revival of Isis in the Middle East".

Hang on a minute! Let's pull back a little, and not pretend – as the media and Democratic party leadership wish us to – that the last 20 years did not actually happen. Many of us lived through those events. Our memories are not so short.

Islamic State, or Isis, didn't emerge out of nowhere. It was entirely a creation of two decades of US interference in the Middle East. And I'm not even referring to the mountains of evidence that US officials backed their Saudi allies in directly funding and arming Isis – just as their predecessors in Washington, in their enthusiasm to oust the Soviets from the region, assisted the jihadists who went on to become al-Qaeda.

No, I'm talking about the fact that in destroying three key Arab states – Iraq, Libya and Syria – that refused to submit to the joint regional hegemony of Saudi Arabia and Israel, Washington's local client states, the US created a giant void of governance at the heart of the Middle East. They knew that that void would be filled soon enough by religious extremists like Islamic State – and they didn't care.

Overthrow, not regime change

You don't have to be a **Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi** or **Bashar Assad** apologist to accept this point. You don't even have to be concerned that these so-called "humanitarian" wars violated each state's integrity and sovereignty, and are therefore defined in international law as "the supreme war crime".

The bigger picture – the one no one appears to want us thinking about – is that the US

intentionally sought to destroy these states with no obvious plan for the day after. As I explained in my book Israel and the Clash of Civilisations, these haven't so much been regime-change wars as nation-state dismantling operations – what I have termed overthrow wars.

The logic was a horrifying hybrid of two schools of thought that meshed neatly in the psychopathic foreign policy goals embodied in the ideology of neoconservatism – the so-called "Washington consensus" since 9/11.

The first was Israel's long-standing approach to the Palestinians. By constantly devastating any emerging Palestinian institution or social structures, Israel produced a divide-and-rule model on steroids, creating a leaderless, ravaged, enfeebled society that sucked out all the local population's energy. That strategy proved very appealing to the neoconservatives, who saw it as one they could export to non-compliant states in the region.

The second was the Chicago school's Shock Doctrine, as explained in Naomi Klein's book of that name. The chaotic campaign of destruction, the psychological trauma and the sense of dislocation created by these overthrow wars were supposed to engender a far more malleable population that would be ripe for a US-controlled "colour revolution".

The recalcitrant states would be made an example of, broken apart, asset-stripped of their resources and eventually remade as new dependent markets for US goods. That was what George W Bush, Dick Cheney and Halliburton really meant when they talked about building a New Middle East and exporting democracy.

Even judged by the vile aims of its proponents, the Shock Doctrine has been a half-century story of dismal economic failure everywhere it has been attempted – from Pinochet's Chile to Yeltsin's Russia. But let us not credit the architects of this policy with any kind of acumen for learning from past errors. As Bush's senior adviser **Karl Rove** explained to a journalist whom he rebuked for being part of the "reality-based community": "We're an empire now and, when we act, we create our own reality."

The birth of Islamic State

The barely veiled aim of the attacks on Iraq, Libya and Syria was to destroy the institutions and structures that held these societies together, however imperfectly. Though no one likes to mention it nowadays, these states – deeply authoritarian though they were – were also secular, and had well-developed welfare states that ensured high rates of literacy and some of the region's finest public health services.

One can argue about the initial causes of the uprising against Assad that erupted in Syria in 2011. Did it start as a popular struggle for liberation from the Assad government's authoritarianism? Or was it a sectarian insurgency by those who wished to replace Shia minority rule with Sunni majority rule? Or was it driven by something else: as a largely economic protest by an under-class suffering from food shortages as climate change led to repeated crop failures? Or are all these factors relevant to some degree?

Given how closed a society Syria was and is, and how difficult it therefore is to weigh the evidence in ways that are likely to prove convincing to those not already persuaded, let us set that issue aside too. Anyway, it is irrelevant to the bigger picture I want to address.

The indisputable fact is that Washington and its Gulf allies wished to exploit this initial unrest as an opportunity to create a void in Syria – just as they had earlier done in Iraq, where there were no uprisings, nor even the WMDs the US promised would be found and that served as the pretext for Bush's campaign of Shock and Awe.

The limited uprisings in Syria quickly turned into a much larger and far more vicious war because the Gulf states, with US backing, flooded the country with proxy fighters and arms in an effort to overthrow Assad and thereby weaken Iranian and Shia influence in the region. The events in Syria and earlier in Iraq gradually transformed the Sunni religious extremists of al-Qaeda into the even more barbaric, more nihilistic extremists of Islamic State.

A dark US vanity project

After Rove and Cheney had their fill playing around with reality, nature got on with honouring the maxim that it always abhors a vacuum. Islamic State filled the vacuum Washington's policy had engineered.

The clue, after all, was in the name. With the US and Gulf states using oil money to wage a proxy war against Assad, Isis saw its chance to establish a state inspired by a variety of Saudi Arabia's Wahhabist dogma. Isis needed territory for their planned state, and the Saudis and US obliged by destroying Syria.

This barbarian army, one that murdered other religious groups as infidels and killed fellow Sunnis who refused to bow before their absolute rule, became the west's chief allies in Syria. Directly and covertly, we gave them money and weapons to begin building their state on parts of Syria.

Again, let us ignore the fact that the US, in helping to destroy a sovereign nation, committed the supreme war crime, one that in a rightly ordered world would ensure every senior Washington official faces their own Nuremberg Trial. Let us ignore too for the moment that the US, consciously through its actions, brought to life a monster that sowed death and destruction everywhere it went.

The fact is that at the moment Assad called in Russia to help him survive, the battle the US and the Gulf states were waging through Islamic State and other proxies was lost. It was only a matter of time before Assad would reassert his rule.

From that point onwards, every single person who was killed and every single Syrian made homeless – and there were hundreds of thousands of them – suffered their terrible fate for no possible gain in US policy goals. A vastly destructive overthrow war became instead something darker still: a neoconservative vanity project that ravaged countless Syrian lives.

A giant red herring

Trump now appears to be ending part of that policy. He may be doing so for the wrong reasons. But very belatedly – and possibly only temporarily – he is seeking to close a small chapter in a horrifying story of western-sponsored barbarism in the Middle East, one intimately tied to Islamic State.

What of the supposed concerns of Pelosi and the Democratic Party under whose watch the barbarism in Syria took place. They should have no credibility on the matter to begin with.

But their claims that Trump has “no plan to deal with a potential revival of Isis in the Middle East” is a giant red herring they are viciously slapping us in the face with in the hope the spray of seawater blinds us.

First, Washington sowed the seeds of Islamic State by engineering a vacuum in Syria that Isis – or something very like it – was inevitably going to fill. Then, it allowed those seeds to flourish by assisting its Gulf allies in showering fighters in Syria with money and arms that came with only one string attached – a commitment to Sunni jihadist ideology inspired by Saudi Wahhabism.

Isis was made in Washington as much as it was in Riyadh. For that reason, the only certain strategy for preventing the revival of Islamic State is preventing the US and the Gulf states from interfering in Syria again.

With the Syrian army in charge of Syrian territory, there will be no vacuum for Isis to fill. The jihadists’ state-building project is now unrealisable, at least in Syria. Islamic State will continue to wither, as it would have done years before if the US and its Gulf allies had not fuelled it in a proxy war they knew could not be won.

Doomed Great Game

The same lesson can be drawn by looking at the experience of the Syrian Kurds. The Rojava fiefdom they managed to carve out in northern Syria during the war survived till now only because of continuing US military support. With a US departure, and the Kurds too weak to maintain their improvised statelet, a vacuum was again created that this time has risked sucking in the Turkish army, which fears a base for Kurdish nationalism on its doorstep.

The Syrian Kurds’ predicament is simple: face a takeover by Turkey or seek Assad’s protection to foil Turkish ambitions. The best hope for the Kurds looks to be the Syrian army’s return, filling the vacuum and regaining a chance of long-term stability.

That could have been the case for all of Syria many tens of thousands of deaths ago. Whatever the corporate media suggest, those deaths were lost not in a failed heroic battle for freedom, which, even if it was an early aspiration for some fighters, quickly became a goal that was impossible for them to realise. No, those deaths were entirely pointless. They were sacrificed by a western military-industrial complex in a US-Saudi Great Game that dragged on for many years after everyone knew it was doomed.

Nancy Pelosi’s purported worries about Isis reviving because of Trump’s Syria withdrawal are simply crocodile fears. If she is really so worried about Islamic State, then why did she and other senior Democrats stand silently by as the US under Barack Obama spent years spawning, cultivating and financing Isis to destroy Syria, a state that was best placed to serve as a bulwark against the head-chopping extremists?

> Tulsi Gabbard calls The New York Times and CNN — the hosts of the debate — "completely despicable" for alleging she is a Russian asset and Assad apologist. pic.twitter.com/0pzpA4nvRo
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> — Axios (@axios) October 16, 2019

Pelosi and the Democratic leadership's bad faith – and that of the corporate media – are revealed in their ongoing efforts to silence and smear **Tulsi Gabbard**, the party's only candidate for the presidential nomination who has pointed out the harsh political realities in Syria, and tried to expose their years of lies.

Pelosi and most of the Democratic leadership don't care about Syria, or its population's welfare. They don't care about Assad, or Isis. They care only about the maintenance and expansion of American power – and the personal wealth and influence it continues to bestow on them.

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***Jonathan Cook** won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.*

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