

AFTER SPECTACULAR FAILURES IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN, US TO THROW MORE MONEY AT TRAINING FOR SYRIAN REBELS

Arms Windfall for Insurgents as Iraq City Falls

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

Weapons provided by the United States to help Iraqi forces battle militants are now in the hands of the militants.

Former Ambassador to Syria Urges Increasing Arms Supply to Moderate Rebels

By MICHAEL R. GORDON

Robert S. Ford, who resigned in February, said more weapons to the moderate Syrian rebels would increase the opposition's leverage in peace talks and combat the rise of extremist groups.



This image is from June, but it could apply to just about any day US policy and “accomplishments” from Afghanistan to Iraq and beyond are discussed.

A central part of Barack Obama’s prime-time disclosure that he is authorizing air strikes in Syria was his call for half a billion dollars to train and equip “moderate” rebels in Syria. Proving that bipartisanism in Washington is not dead, John Boehner was quick to show his support for this nifty plan:

Congressional leaders rallied behind President Obama’s call to combat the Islamic State, vowing Thursday to back his request for funding to arm Syrian rebels as early as next week.

Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said he expects the House to pass Obama’s \$500 million funding request to train and equip Syrian rebels who are fighting the militant group, also known as ISIL or ISIS.

/snip/

“We only have one commander in chief,” Boehner said. “At this point in time, it is important to give the president what he is asking for.”

Remarkably, though, even this USA Today article notes that there might be a slight problem or two with this brilliant plan to stop ISIS, otherwise known as “the personification of evil in the modern world”:

Sen. Mark Begich of Alaska, another endangered Democrat, said he was opposed to arming Syrian rebels. “We must have greater assurance that we aren’t arming extremists who will eventually use the weapons against us,” he said.

House Republicans are divided into two camps, according to Rep. John Fleming of Louisiana. He told the Associated Press after a closed-door caucus meeting that one side hopes to hold Obama “accountable for doing the right thing.” The other group – that includes himself, Fleming said – believes Obama’s plans amount to an “insane strategy to go out there and depend on people that are proven undependable” to take down the Islamic State.

Wow. I think I just became a big fan of a Republican congressman from Louisiana.

So where could Begich have gotten the idea that if we arm extremists they might eventually use those arms on us? I mean, besides folks like Osama bin Laden and the death squads we have armed in Iraq and Afghanistan? And how could Fleming think the groups we plan to train and arm might be undependable? That is, besides the Iraqi troops we trained who then abandoned their posts and US-supplied weapons as soon as ISIS entered the picture or the Afghan troops that routinely give territory back to the Taliban as

soon as US forces withdraw?

And about that half billion dollar budget. Note that back in June, SIGAR's latest figures (pdf) showed that the US has already disbursed over \$48 billion to the Afghan Security Forces Fund which provides funding for the training and support of Afghanistan's troops. Despite those billions, of course, no one doubts that these forces will be completely unable to function once US troops and US funding are gone, just as we saw when Iraqi forces faded away in the face of ISIS.

So yes, we are still stuck in that version of the movie Groundhog Day where we just end up training and equipping groups to take on our latest enemy, only to have the effort fail. But who should lead this august effort? Our most accomplished failure on this front, hands down, is David Petraeus. How could we possibly not use the author of this brilliant prose, penned in September, 2004, claiming that his second attempt at training troops in Iraq was a smashing success:

Helping organize, train and equip nearly a quarter-million of Iraq's security forces is a daunting task. Doing so in the middle of a tough insurgency increases the challenge enormously, making the mission akin to repairing an aircraft while in flight – and while being shot at. Now, however, 18 months after entering Iraq, I see tangible progress. Iraqi security elements are being rebuilt from the ground up.

But, alas, I guess Petraeus is still too damaged to be used in this new training effort. No, the damage is not his multiple failures at training, but is because he had the audacity to get caught boinking his biographer.

The US is instead calling on a trusty backup to Petraeus, John Allen, who will oversee the entire effort to battle ISIS:

Retired Marine Gen. John Allen will coordinate the broad international effort to battle the Islamic State militants, as the campaign against the extremist group ramps up and nations begin to determine what role each will play, U.S. officials said Thursday.

Allen, who has been serving as a security adviser to Secretary of State John Kerry, is expected to work with the nearly 40 nations around the world who have agreed to join the fight and help them coordinate what each will contribute, several officials told The Associated Press.

Hmm, somehow, the AP article describes Allen's experience but leaves out his most important demonstration of how prepared he is to lead this failed effort. Allen's infinite wisdom and depth of knowledge about all things Islamic led him to the profound suggestion that Ramadan fasting was leading Afghan troops to attack their American trainers. Yes, Allen is very well poised to continue the US tradition of spectacular failure in training and arming groups that will either turn their weapons on us or surrender those weapons to someone who will. We even know this time as we enter the exercise that loyalties for groups in Syria are "all over the map".

As a postscript, all of these repeated failures by our political and military leaders are only possible with the help of a failed press. An article in today's New York Times illustrates how compliant "news" outlets help to obscure any responsibility on the part of the US for the radicalism and violence pervading the Middle East. The article is about the US effort to get Arab allies in the fight against ISIS, but it is the literal framing of the article I want to focus on. Here are the opening two paragraphs and closing two paragraphs of the article:

Many Arab governments grumbled quietly in 2011 as the United States left Iraq,

fearful it might fall deeper into chaos or Iranian influence. Now, the United States is back and getting a less than enthusiastic welcome, with leading allies like Egypt, Jordan and Turkey all finding ways on Thursday to avoid specific commitments to President Obama's expanded military campaign against Sunni extremists.

As the prospect of the first [American strikes inside Syria](#) crackled through the region, the mixed reactions underscored the challenges of a new military intervention in the Middle East, where 13 years of chaos, from Sept. 11 through the Arab Spring revolts, have deepened political and sectarian divisions and increased mistrust of the United States on all sides.

/snip/

Um Taha, a 35-year-old Sunni in Baghdad who withheld her full name, captured the mixture of cynicism and tenuous hope that may pass for the prevailing mood in the Arab world now.

She said she hoped the coalition succeeded, "despite the fact that America was one of the reasons why this radical organization originally existed."

That is just stunning. Note that the current "chaos" in the Middle East is described as starting with September 11, almost completely ignoring the blind rage the US demonstrated in its response to September 11 (there is the "mistrust of the United States" mentioned, but it is not explained). That leaves the final observation that "America was one of the reasons why this radical organization originally existed" more easily categorized as "they hate us for our freedoms" than "they hate us because

we are carrying out a new Crusade". Having the media compliantly paint the US as only a victim and never an aggressor assures that the American public and its Congress will meekly submit to moving our political and military "solutions" on to the next level of failure, even when our attempts to recruit allies are hampered by that history of aggression.