

NOT SO GREAT EXPECTATIONS: PAYING THE PRICE OF HUBRIS IN IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN

Developments over the past few days on several different fronts are coming together in a way that outlines just how arrogantly the US conducted the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and how the consequences of that hubris are now diminishing the previously dominant role for the US in the region going into the future. At the same time, these developments drive home the message of the terrible waste of lives and money the war efforts have been.

In today's New York Times, we learn that the staff at the gargantuan US embassy in Baghdad is about to be cut in half. It appears that one of the driving forces behind these cuts is that the Iraqis are not making it easy for embassy personnel to move freely into and out of the country:

At every turn, the Americans say, the Iraqi government has interfered with the activities of the diplomatic mission, one they grant that the Iraqis never asked for or agreed upon. Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's office – and sometimes even the prime minister himself – now must approve visas for all Americans, resulting in lengthy delays. American diplomats have had trouble setting up meetings with Iraqi officials.

Perhaps Mr. al-Maliki should study the activities of the US Customs Service if he really wants to learn how to make it even clearer to selected foreigners that he doesn't want them in his country.

But al-Maliki is not the only elected Iraqi

official who sees an opportunity to repay the US for the hubris it has shown the region, as the Times quoted Nahida al-Dayni, whom they described as “a lawmaker and member of Iraqiya, a largely Sunni bloc in Parliament” with regard to the embassy compound:

The U.S. had something on their mind when they made it so big. Perhaps they want to run the Middle East from Iraq, and their embassy will be a base for them here.

That US actions in the Middle East would have prompted such an attitude among local officials should have been foreseen, but the Times article informs us that the State Department seems to have been hit by a bit of shock and awe:

The swift realization among some top officials that the diplomatic buildup may have been ill advised represents a remarkable pivot for the State Department, in that officials spent more than a year planning the expansion and that many of the thousands of additional personnel have only recently arrived.

The “realization among some top officials that the diplomatic buildup may have been ill advised” seems to be one of the largest understatements of our time. And that the Times would describe that realization as “swift” boggles the mind, in that all US actions in Iraq going back to the groundwork for the 2003 invasion were ill advised.

Given the decimation of Iraq, with hundreds of thousands of dead civilians, a hotbed of depleted-uranium induced birth defects in Fallujah and nearly a decade spent under an occupying US military presence, it’s just very difficult to work up sympathy for the poor souls in the embassy who are so hassled by the Iraqis that their salad bar sometimes runs low or that they are forced to ration chicken wings at six

per person on wing night.

But the realization by our geniuses at the State Department that perhaps we are not all that welcome in Baghdad comes at the same time that the myth of US "progress" in Afghanistan is being openly challenged and as the realization is sinking in that our decade of war there will not prevent the Taliban re-taking the country once we leave.

Even the planning for the role of special forces and the CIA in Afghanistan after withdrawal of combat troops reflects diminished expectations:

As a result, more territory may be ceded to the Taliban. "We can lose the countryside, but I don't think we're going to lose Kabul and Bagram," said the former senior CIA officer, who added that the agency could end up adding paramilitary personnel in Afghanistan as the size of the U.S. military deployment shrinks.

So even if the Taliban take most of the country, it appears that the US aim now is to maintain a puppet government in Kabul as long as possible and to protect, at all costs, the Bagram prison that is the not-so-secret Guantanamo on steroids.

In what should add even more pain to those who claimed all these military actions by the US were vital to protect us from the terrible scourge of radical Islam and even the threat of such gaining a foothold inside the US, we also learn today that radical Islam is virtually a non-existent threat here:

A feared wave of homegrown terrorism by radicalized Muslim Americans has not materialized, with plots and arrests dropping sharply over the two years since an unusual peak in 2009, according to a new study by a North Carolina research group.

The study, to be released on Wednesday, found that 20 Muslim Americans were charged in violent plots or attacks in 2011, down from 26 in 2010 and a spike of 47 in 2009.

Charles Kurzman, the author of the report for the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, called terrorism by Muslim Americans “a minuscule threat to public safety.” Of about 14,000 murders in the United States last year, not a single one resulted from Islamic extremism, said Mr. Kurzman, a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina.

But, somehow, Peter King and Joe Lieberman will still find a way for us to keep wasting billions of dollars month to month to fight this “minuscule threat to public safety”. Maybe they can increase funding for the agents provocateurs who help to move these “suspects” into action against the US, even though, as Kurzman noted, among those who do try to take action “very few of these people are competent”.

It would appear that very few of the people on the US government side of this battle are competent, as well.