

SOPHISTICATED STUPIDITY

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[This Monday's Archive was written not quite 20 years ago, on June 2, 2004. Perhaps you won't find it surprising that the State Department under Biden is behaving towards Iran just like it was two decades ago, but it is astounding nonetheless. Here's the explanation, from back then to today.]

TTP, June 2, 2004

As an Army General, Colin Powell knows how to wage war. Unfortunately, the kind of war he knows how to wage best is bureaucratic, not military. Worse than unfortunately, the war he is waging is against his own president.

It is tempting to hurl accusations of treason or something close to it in the face of the State Department's chronic obsession of coddling America's enemies. But with rare exceptions, the Pinstripes are far from traitors and look upon themselves as loyal Americans. Conservatives need to resist the urge to question their patriotism, and examine instead their method of diplomatic reasoning – which can be characterized as Sophisticated Stupidity.

The Foggy Bottom Pinstripes are just as tribal as most everyone else, and wage wars against their rivals in competing tribal bureaucracies. They look upon the Pentagon as a rival not an ally. War is always seen by them as a failure – the failure of their diplomacy, not as Tallyrand described war as just another form of diplomacy.

Thus we have the continuous disaster of our foreign policy, because American Pinstripes aren't smart enough to use the “talk, talk, war, war” strategy our enemies use to defeat us as did the North Vietnamese.

A classic example of Sophisticated Stupidity during the Reagan Doctrine Era was the State Department's vendetta against the Anti-Communist liberation movement, RENAMO, in Mozambique.

RENAMO was the Anti-Communist liberation movement the Reagan Administration refused to support. All the others, the Contras in Nicaragua, UNITA in Angola, the Afghan Mujahaddins, the TPLF & EPLF in Ethiopia, the KPNLF in Cambodia, received either weapons or money or training, and were not demonized in the media.

The Pinstripes of course saw this as not an opportunity to weaken the Soviet Empire, but took it personally as diplomatic failures. Chester Crocker, Reagan's Under Secretary of State for Africa, decided he needed a diplomatic success in contrast to these "failures." He chose Mozambique to demonstrate how through superior diplomatic skill, the Communist government of a Soviet Colony could be wooed away from the Soviets and transformed into an American ally.

Thus RENAMO became the pariah of the world's Anti-Communist guerrillas, demonized as rapacious monsters rather than freedom fighters, for the sake of State Department egos.

Luckily, such egos were overridden elsewhere by Ronald Reagan, and victory in the Cold War was achieved. Whether victory in the War on Moslem Terrorism can be achieved depends on overriding Pinstripe Egos once again.

I'm going to give you an example – the critical example – of this, but first a warning. You're going to say that this is so stupid it can't be true – yet, sadly, this is actually the clear goal of the Near East Bureau of our State Department. Believe it or not, it is their desperate obsessively argued-for goal to have a strategic alliance with the Ayatollahs of Iran.

Here's their reasoning. An American-Ayatollah Alliance applies the same technique of using "fault lines" between enemies as FDR did in aligning with Stalin against Hitler and Nixon did in aligning with Mao against the Soviets. The Islamic fault line is the Sunni-Shia schism. Al Qaeda is Sunni – so the way to best weaken Sunni terrorism would be to ally ourselves with the world's major Shia nation, Iran.

This meant that as Nixon went to China, Bush should go to Iran. Infuriatingly, President Bush refused to recognize the sophisticated brilliance of this proposed strategy. Instead of implementing it, he has become its impediment. The President must not be allowed to stand in the way of the diplomatic genius capable of defeating Al Qaeda.

And that is why Colin Powell and the State Department are conducting a sub rosa war to undermine the Bush Presidency. They have realized that the only way to achieve their dream is through a Kerry Presidency – with Powell retained as Secretary of State.

You really don't know whether to belly-laugh at buffoons who think they are so dazzlingly smart in coming up with a foreign policy initiative so impossibly naïve – or weep over the danger such people are to America's security.

Such people are so dangerous because bottomless naivety posing as oh-so-smart realism creates a religious fanaticism that self-blinds its believers.

That Iran's Ayatollahs are sponsoring terrorism in Iraq and are cooperating with Al Qaeda in so doing; that they

are acquiring nuclear weapons; that the Iranian people despise them; that the Shias of Iraq are Arab and have little desire to be manipulated by Persians, Shia or not – all of this and so much more is dismissed as somehow irrelevant.

“The best way to achieve peace in Iraq is to achieve regime change in Iran”: Those words of Michael Ledeen’s wisdom (see his columns in Ledeen’s Lair) form the basic reality the Pinstripes won’t recognize, the basic reality they are determined to resist. Such self-induced blindness is the dangerous result of Sophisticated Stupidity.

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