

LESSONS FROM TODAY'S SENATE HEARING ON SYRIA

Lesson #1: We're going to war so we don't lose some friends

John Kerry twice said that if we don't bomb Assad we'll lose friends and/or allies. "If we fail to act we'll have fewer allies."

That admitted something that has been acknowledged – usually not in print – in DC. We're doing this not to retain our general credibility, but to retain "credibility" with Saudi Arabia and Israel. Credibility with Saudi Arabia is important, I presume, because they continue to sell oil in dollars and buy lots of military toys – including \$640 million of cluster bombs that undermine everything the Administration says about humanity.

Credibility is important with Israel because if they don't believe we'll attack Iran if they need us to, they'll just attack on their own. Here's confirmation of something that had already been confirmed but somehow is getting trotted out again today: the US had to stop Israel from unilaterally attacking Iran last year. (Update: As Max Blumenthal notes, AIPAC's statement in favor of war mentions Iran more than Syria.)

Lesson #2: The friends we do have don't want anyone to know they are our friends

At one point, when Kerry was asked who in the region support us, he deferred to closed session.

He won't tell us who supports this!

This is likely about protecting Jordan, where we're staging covert operations, which would make an easy target for Assad. Kerry implied Jordan supported this action, though was pretty coy about it.

Still, back when we attacked Saddam in 1991, he still had WMD. His neighbors knew that. But they were willing to openly support our attack on him. Not this war.

Lesson #3: Bombing another country unilaterally is not war in the “classic sense”

Because the Administration plans not to have boots on the ground and will instead bomb from outside Syria, and even though Kerry seems to readily admit that we may need boots on the ground, he says this is not war “in the classic sense.”

Lesson #4: The Administration promises no boots on the ground except insofar as it anticipates boots on the ground

Kerry was asked specifically about how he felt about explicitly prohibiting boots on the ground. He answered by saying the Administration didn't want boots on the ground but might need them if Syria imploded and we needed to put people on the ground to secure the CW. He also said, with respect to securing CW, he didn't want to take any tools away from General Dempsey.

Lesson #5: Whatever comes out of this resolution is separate from effort to oust Assad

Kerry and Obama have both said these attacks will be limited and don't aim to oust Assad. But it became clear over the course of the hearing (as witnesses tried to balance those, like McCain and Ron Johnson, who wanted more war, and those, like Tom Udall, who wanted limits) that in addition to this strike there's the pre-existing policy of increasing our support to the rebels, effectively to oust Assad. So while this strike is not about regime change, it exists on top of a strategy that is about regime change.

Lesson # 6: A map showing alleged attacks is physical evidence

No. I don't understand this one.

Lesson #7: The Administration claims it has

evidence “beyond a reasonable doubt” against Assad

Both Menendez and Kerry both claimed we have evidence beyond a reasonable doubt against Assad. Kerry even noted that’s the standard we use to send people away to prison.

Neither one, of course, explained why we weren’t referring (or trying to – it would take a Security Council referral) Assad’s crimes to the International Criminal Court.

But as they did with Anwar al-Awlaki, they believe that declaring something “beyond a reasonable doubt” (though honestly, they never voiced their case against Awlaki that strongly) is sufficient and they don’t need to wait for UN inspectors or real juries.