

“LET’S BOMB SYRIA” VERSION 2 IS WORKING; WHY DID VERSION 1 FAIL?

Polls taken almost exactly one year apart show a remarkable reversal in US opinion regarding the prospect of air strikes on Syria. Last year, in a poll conducted September 6-8, (pdf) there were a number of questions regarding action in Syria. By a margin of 59% to 39%, Americans overwhelmingly said they thought Congress should not pass the then pending resolution authorizing “military action for 60 to 90 days” that also banned use of US troops in a combat role. Further, 55% of those polled stated that even if Congress passed the resolution, they opposed US air strikes in Syria while only 43% favored them. In the hypothetical of no Congressional authorization, opposition to the air strikes rose to 71% with only 27% favoring them. Just one year later, those numbers have reversed. In a poll conducted September 4-7, 65% of Americans now say they support expanding US air strikes against the Sunni insurgents into Syria, while only 28% oppose them. Checking the crosstabs, support for the strikes jumps to 74% for Republicans but still is 60% for Democrats.

So why is this year’s Drum-Up-War week working, when last year’s failed?

Despite the heinous nature of last year’s sarin attack, it seems to me that most Americans did a good job of recognizing that what is underway in Syria is a civil war in which the US has no vital interest other than humanitarian concern for widespread death and displacement of citizens. Having failed to paint Bashar al-Assad as an evil-doer on the level of Saddam Hussein (or perhaps after Americans rejected such an obvious campaign to do so) Obama and his fellow war hawks now consider ISIS “the focus of evil in the modern world”.

The beheading of US journalists in Syria got huge play in the press. And yet, if we drill down a bit, the rate of journalists being killed in Syria is going down from its peak in 2012.

Somehow, Obama's war gang has managed to convince ordinary Americans that ISIS represents a real threat to the US. That same poll that favors attacks on ISIS in Syria found that a staggering 91% of Americans find ISIS to be a serious threat to the US (59% said "very serious" and 31% said "somewhat serious"). Sadly, there is no reality behind this fear on the part of Americans. Even Time, in doing its best to support the hysteria, winds up undercutting the concept in a story today. In a piece creatively titled "Understanding the ISIS Threat to Americans at Home", we learn:

On the one hand, Attorney General Eric Holder has said western fighters joining ISIS and returning home radicalized are the national security danger he worries about most. "We are seeing, I would say, an alarming rise in the number of American and European Union nationals who have been going to Syria to help extremist groups," Holder told TIME last month. "This represents a grave threat to our security," he said.

But in a thorough presentation on Sept. 3 at the Brookings Institution, outgoing director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Matthew Olsen, presented a less scary picture. ISIS has no cells in the U.S., Olsen said, "full stop." Further, Olsen said, "we have no credible information" that the group "is planning to attack the U.S." ISIS, Olsen said "is not al Qaeda pre-9/11."

At most, the article concludes, quoting Obama in his "exclusive" with Chuck Todd, he needed "to launch air strikes to ensure that towns like Erbil were not overrun, critical infrastructure, like the Mosul Dam was protected, and that we

were able to engage in key humanitarian assistance programs that have saved thousands of lives.”

The links Holder is hyping about ISIS and AQAP simply do not exist:

Holder says the danger comes from the combination of westerners joining ISIS and the expert bomb-makers working for the al Qaeda affiliate in Yemen, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). It is not clear what if any evidence exists of such collaboration yet. On the one hand, AQAP has issued statements in support of ISIS, and both groups are active in Syria and Iraq; on the other, al Qaeda and ISIS split in the last year after a debate over tactics and territory.

Several senior administration officials tell TIME they have seen no evidence of direct contact between individual members of AQAP and ISIS.

In the end, the article concludes, Obama’s war team has deduced that we must attack ISIS because at some point in the future, they will turn their sights on us. Never mind that in this case, attacking ISIS in Syria winds up helping Assad, whom we wanted to attack last year:

Jane Harman, the president of the Woodrow Wilson Center, said that while the Assad government was a major topic of discussion, she and other participants told Mr. Obama that he could order military action in Syria without fear of helping Mr. Assad, since ISIS was occupying ungoverned territory that his forces were unlikely to reconquer.

I guess that Harman and Obama know that Assad won’t be able to reconquer those once ISIS is gone because of the bang-up job we will do

training and equipping our famous “moderate” rebels, but hey, what could go wrong on any of this?

In the end, though, the apparent support for this version of strikes on Syria seems to me to have come about because of the shift in focus on the “enemy” from a president oppressing the citizens of his country to an international terror group that we must fear and that represents true evil. As far as the average American is concerned, meddling in another country’s civil war is out of bounds, but when it comes to protecting the homeland against evil-doers, anything goes.

And it doesn’t even need Congressional approval.