



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

The Middle East Treaty Organization (METO)

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Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. This past week, the media somehow managed to move away from the subject of an NBA basketball player changing teams. The resolution of this event has motivated the public to allow the press to move-on to less important matters, such as civil wars in the Middle East. With a few exceptions, mostly apologia from the White House, the thrust of this coverage is the question: Where is America? That is to say: Why is America not making its presence known in these wars?

A number of the news postings and interviews are more pointed: Why has America not confronted the assaulting parties? Others lament that America's allies are losing faith in America's commitments in the international arena. As examples, America is not pivoting fast enough from the Middle East toward Far-East Asia to counter-balance China's recent saber rattling *within* its part of the world, but nowhere else. America is not renouncing China for contesting Japan's claims to small, obscure islands in the Pacific. After all, Japan is an ally, so it makes no difference as to the merit of the debate. America is treaty-bound to support an ally, however questionable the ally's behavior may be.

To make matters more complex, America's right-wing conservatives lament that the United States of America is sinking into the black hole of foreign affairs irrelevance. Today, the Sunday morning talk show pundits informed us that their contacts in the Middle East informed them the Middle East potentates are fearful America has retreated into isolationism.

To cite other examples, Uncle Sam is not contesting China's placing a floating platform too near the Vietnamese coast. After all, Vietnam is not an ally *per se*, but in relation to the emerging enemy China, Vietnam is more of an ally than China. We Americans must ignore small-scale Communism for the better good of combating large-scale Communism.

To cap-off these shortcomings, America is not doing enough in several countries in Africa that are engaged in either religious or cultural wars, or both---all of which have Islamic terrorists on the stage. And for this week, the right wing cadre of America's chicken hawks are characterizing America as chicken by its behavior in the Middle East.

It has become such an article of faith that the absence of a response means America is retreating from its responsibilities. I ask you to pause a moment to reflect on this situation. When a crisis erupts almost anywhere on earth, it is automatically assumed the United States---with its vast inventory of money-printing presses and resulting debt---will mount a response.

But responsibilities to whom? Think about that idea in this context: Whose vital interests are at stake with the Syria-Iraq ISIS situation? In this rough order: Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, et al. ...Forget this order, because the list includes every country in the Middle East.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) has stated it intends to create a caliphate. A caliphate is a sovereign, Muslim based state. It is ruled by one person, called a caliph. This man oversees all Muslims, including the Muslims in New Jersey. This claim is seen by many Muslims and non-Muslims as the ranting of a madman, yet he now controls parts of Syria and most of northern Iraq with indications that he aims to expand.

According to this self-appointed future caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, this new religious jurisdiction will first expand to encompass the Middle East. As caliphs have been known to behave in the past, he will eventually conquer what he can. But for now, emulating creeping

capitalism, the immediate area of creeping caliphateism encompasses the Islamic people in the Middle East, including Sunnis, Shias, Alawites, etc.

Consequently, for now the threat from al-Baghdadi is directed toward the rulers of the Middle East countries. In civil wars, the goal is to kill enough pawns to be able to reach the players in the back row. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is a Sunni, yet even the Sunni Saudi leaders have officially declared ISIS a terrorist organization. The leaders of Shia Iran and Shia Iraq are in his crosshairs. They know that few of their subjects are happy with their leadership, yet these leaders are determined to hold on to their privileged positions. A firebrand revolutionary possibly inciting the despots' subjects to protest their lot in life keeps these autocrats awake at night. They know ISIS is not playing checkers.

Nonetheless, these countries stand idle, awaiting for the United States to charge to the rescue. Saudi Arabia and Iran have formidable militaries, so do Jordan and Egypt. The practical approach is for these Middle East countries to form an alliance and go after ISIS before ISIS makes further progress. Is such an alliance possible? The Middle East experts would probably say no. To even contemplate Saudi Arabia and Iran as war allies seems surreal. How about Israel and Iran becoming military bedmates? I should be writing this essay as parody.

How about the Muslims in Israel, the ones under the thumbs of Israel? They are not exempt from the ISIS world-wide caliphate. But their membership in the caliphate would include Jerusalem, a place where many of them live, and a favored place for Jews and Christians to also live. How about the Jews in Israel? If they do not convert to Islam, the ISIS will brand them as dead. Of course, Israel is not in danger of being threatened by the ISIS caliphate delusion, but the nation is indeed in al-Baghdadi's strategic cross-hairs.

The tragedy behind the current chaos in the Middle East is that it did not have to happen. I have been studying the chronology of events leading to the second Iraqi war. Contrary to the statements of high-level members of the Bush administration, the decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein was made *before* the issue of Iraq's possessing weapons of mass destruction came to the fore.¹ The weapons pretext was the means to reach the end (an invasion). The invasion removed Sunni Hussein, which has led to much (not all) of the current bedlam. I say "not all" because Muslims somehow find a way to go after one another's throats.

Back at the ranch, FOX and Rush impugn Obama for his political cowardice. Shia Iran states it warned the West about letting the Syrian conflict get out of hand, meaning that the Sunnis are gaining dominate power. Saudi Arabia and the *Wall Street Journal* are outraged that the United States did not cross the "red line" and attack Syria when Syria was found to be using chemical weapons.

The red line is a phrase used daily by the arch conservatives and even some middle of the road people to expose Obama's craven nature. With the Russians stepping in at the last moment to prevent America from penetrating into Russia's quasi-turf (Syria), Russia brokered a deal with Syria and others to have the chemical weapons removed from Syria.

Recently, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW, the international body responsible for implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention) reports these weapons have been removed.² No boots on the ground for the moment. No body counts. The VA hospitals and the VA disability claims departments can take a breather.

I have attempted to discover what the United States could have done in Syria months ago. The pro-intervention supporters state America should have taken out Syria's air force, bombed

¹ I will make this study available in a few weeks. It is nearing completion.

² <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/07>.

Assad's palaces, and...get this: armed the rebels! Which rebels? Which one is the good-guy faction? One could answer, "Anyone who is against Iran." That grouping would include military/religious groups who are also against Israel. Choose your poison. America armed the rebels in Afghanistan to fight the Russians, and many of those guns were used to kill Americans.

How do smart leaders react when their countries face a threat? Often, they form alliances with their neighbors and confront the threat. As examples: NATO, CENTO, and SEATO. What are the countries in the Middle East doing about the ISIS threat? They continue (ad nauseum) to condemn their neighbors' mis-interpretation of Islam while they wait for America to put-on its policeman uniform and *lead* them into an international SWAT operation. Lead is defined as America taking on the brunt of the action and taking on most of the casualties without recompense or even gratitude.

Damned if you do, damned if you don't. Intervene and you are branded as a militaristic imperialist. No intervention and you are branded as shirking your responsibility. Again, responsibility to whom? To cultures and religious factions who detest America to begin with, who have no intent of "going democratic," much less separating church from state.

I've a modest, yet practical suggestion to the leaders of the Middle Eastern countries that will be affected by the success of ISIS. In spite of neo-con posturing, the ISIS so-called existential threat is not remotely close to a threat to the United States, but it is a threat to your countries. Put aside your vendettas for a while. Address the immediate threat. You can return to your mutual annihilation schemes of the last few centuries later.

Upon being released from a U.S. run prison camp, ISIS leader, al-Baghdadi (ironic name) said, "I'll see you in New York." He also said, "I'll see you in Baghdad." Without question, America must take this man seriously. (Manhunts are underway.) For this situation, the Shias and moderate Sunnis should keep his statement in mind. And instead of sitting around waiting for the world's policeman to walk the Middle East beat again, they should hit the streets and hit the ISIS themselves.

I can see it now: the Middle East Treaty Organization (METO). Like NATO helping pave the way for today's European Union (EU), METO could lead to the Middle East Union (MEU). After all, the EU is a mixture of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews. What's to prevent the MEU from being a mixture of Sunnis, Shias, Alawites, and Jews?

Upon proof-reading this report, it occurred to me that I did write a parody.

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In the meantime, what are America's slowly but surely ripening enemies up to? (Slowly but surely being so-painted by the media and neo-cons.) That would be Russia and especially China. Each week, Americans discover the two nations are engaged in creeping anti-Christian aggression against America's creeping Christian capitalism.

For China: building a navy and the like. What cheek! For Russia, finally realizing the promises of the western powers not to integrate the former eastern bloc countries into NATO and the EU was an outright lie. Annexing the Crimea was one reaction to this duplicity. Breaking up the Ukraine is another.

America and its allies can build walls of security. Look at NATO and the EU. They are increasingly circling Russia. But Russia and China cannot do the same. To this writer, a lover of

my country's foundations, I find America's post Cold War duplicity, clothed in the robes of righteousness, to be revolting.

For the situation in the Middle East, America's future enemies (again, Russia and China) are doing little. I would wager they are not having the debates we are having in America about donning the world-wide policeman uniform. They are not so righteous. As well, they understand the futility of changing centuries of behavior of the Middle East tribes.