

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Middle East Muddle

Preface

The contents of the map of the Middle East in this piece are (a) unintelligible to the ordinary human being, and (b) if they are intelligible, they are thoroughly depressing.

With a twinge of empathy for the reader, I have lightened the load a bit by adding some happy-go-lucky songs and limericks. They are appended to the back of an essay that will depress Tinker Bell.

Middle East Muddle

April 3, 2016

Regarding the current situation in the Middle East, here are thoughts from two politicians of the moment: Ted Cruz says carpet bombing the enemy's area would be an effective strategy.¹ Senator Lindsey Graham is lobbying for more American boots on the ground.²

The questions are: Where to place the bombs with the carpet bombing, and where to put the boots on the ground? Which enemy does America bomb; ISIS? Assad? Al-Queda rebels? Stated another way: Whom do we fight without risking a war on a much greater scale, that with Russia?

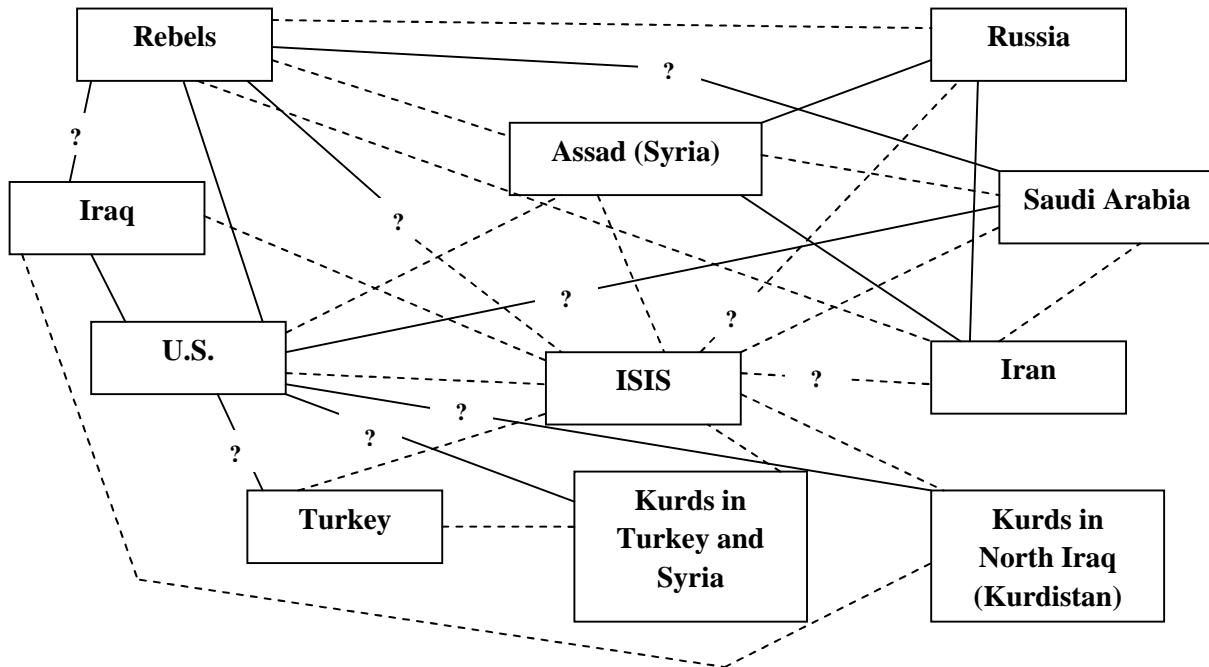
This chart represents only the tip of the iceberg of the relationships of the contending factions in the Middle East.

If we were to examine the "Rebels" entity, we would find scores of different rebel factions, some at odds with one another; some loyal to America, some not; some only interested in fighting the Assad regime; some interested in simply gaining power for themselves.

If we were to "open-up" the two Kurds' boxes and look inside, the situation would be even more complex, as well as with the others.

¹ Discussed during the presidential debates.

² From several recent news releases.



Legend:

Solid line: Supports

Dashed line: Opposes

Explanation of Question Marks:

1. Rebels and ISIS: Solid line because of mutual Sunni affiliation, but a question mark because ISIS wants all Muslims to be part of *its* caliphate, a goal that does not set too well with the rebels. In addition, rebels are dedicated to fighting the Assad regime, not ISIS. However, because the rebels are being supported by America, I've made this line both solid and dashed. Some would call this idea splitting hairs. I call it splitting lines.

2. Saudi Arabia and Rebels: Solid line because both Sunni-based parties want Assad, Iranian, and Shia influence removed from Syria, but a question mark because the rebels are not fond of Middle East despots.

3. U. S. and Saudi Arabia: Solid line because of traditional alliance, but question mark because Obama did not support Egypt's now-disposed Mubarak, and did not follow up on his "draw a line threat" against Syria. Not to mention, the Saudis are, charitably speaking, highly irritated by the nuclear treaty with arch-enemy Iran.

4. U. S. and Turkey: Solid line because of traditional alliance, but question mark because Turkey routinely bombs the Kurds, whom America supports... if in name only.

5. Iran and ISIS: Iran is more interested in keeping Assad in power than defeating ISIS. However, even Iran is not easy with ISIS declaring itself to be a world-wide caliphate; especially since Iran is Shia-based, and ISIS is Sunni-based.

6. Rebels and Iraq: Seemingly allies, except Iraq's Shia-dominated leaders (and the parts of military that are Shia) are said to have launched offensives against the rebels.

7. U.S. and Kurds in Turkey and Syria: Kurds are one of the more effective forces fighting ISIS. Yet, the U.S. must toe-the-line, as U.S. ally, Turkey, is bombing some of the Turkish Kurds, which they consider as terrorists.

8. U.S. and Kurdistan: Kurdistan is a bane to Iraq, as the region wishes independence from Iraq. It is a front-line fighter against ISIS, but is receiving only token support from the U.S., and risks being destroyed by ISIS. Yet another tragedy unfolding.

9. Russia and ISIS: Russia is more interested in keeping the Assad regime afloat than defeating ISIS. It is bombing the rebels into submission to thwart their opposition to Assad. This strategy is woefully short-sighted. It is only a matter of time before ISIS establishes its “provinces” in the Muslim areas of Russia. What can Russia be thinking? ISIS is surely more of a long-time threat to Russia than the rebels.

Consulting a map of Syria and Iraq shows the dispersion of rebels, Assad forces, Kurds, Iranian, and Iraqi combatants, and helpless citizens; a polyglot of interspersions of these factions. Yes, concentrated strongholds exist, but many are separate islands of combat. To gain a sense of this situation, see this figure.³



Do the U.S. troops place their boots into the strongholds themselves, or in between these islands of animosity? As with our practice in WWII, do we simply level much of everything then launch a Marshall Plan to fix what we destroyed? That means carpet bombing, one of the favored strategies of think tank hawks like Ted Cruz.

As stated by a Kurdish officer, “In some spots, the gap between IS and the Kurdish regional government is measured in kilometres; in others, metres. ... There’s no buffer, which means you can’t make a defensive line.”⁴

The truth of the matter is three-fold: First, the Middle East muddle is essentially one of a religious civil war between Sunnis and Shias and their assorted sects. Second, from the first supposition, there is no amount of diplomacy that is going to assuage centuries-old, deeply ingrained vendettas between the Sunnis and Shias, the Turks and the Kurds, the Kurds and other Kurds, and Allah only knows who else.

From the second supposition, the third supposition follows: These parties will be at each others’ throats until one or the other has none left to cut. They need to form an alliance to combat ISIS, but because of their centuries-old feuds, that is religiously and politically improbable.

Even within the Kurdish realm, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is not recognized as a legitimate entity by the President of the Kurdish regional government, Masoud Barzani. Nor by

³ Recent news releases.

⁴ Ibid.

Turkey---which has a bombing campaign against PKK enclaves. (We glanced briefly into one of the boxes in the chart to make my point about the complexity of the issue.)

America's ideologues, such as Graham, offer simplistic solutions that require more realistic debates than his strategy that, "It makes everything more likely." "Everything" means everything, Senator.

Some proponents of boots on the ground claim that America should send in a few hundred thousand troops to flush the infidels out of their caves and huts. As mentioned, Ted Cruz wants carpet bombing of ISIS. In Mosul, ISIS has embedded itself among the populace. Which carpet in Mosul, Mr. Cruz?

Obama did not declare a no-fly zone in the area before Russia started flying over the rebels, with catastrophic consequences. Now, declaring a no-fly zone would bring America into direct conflict with Russia. The Russians got there first, Barack.

Until the United States can form an effective alliance with Russia to present a front of two super powers; until these two powers can form a (one-time?) alliance with Iraq, Iran, the Kurds, Turkey, et al to address the specific issue of ISIS---this issue alone---all parties are spitting into the wind. Even with such an alliance, it is more likely the wind's direction will not change.

Meanwhile, The deployment of U.S. special forces should be undertaken to save the citizens of Aleppo and Kurdistan, who may very well be ethnically cleansed by the Assad regime and Russia (in Aleppo) and ISIS (in Kurdistan).

About my chart. See any solid lines (symbolizing support) attached to the ISIS box? There are none. If the various factions would reflect on this fact and work together, ISIS would not stand a chance. Color this last statement "Mission Impossible."

Middle East Muddle: Songs and Limericks

Hello once again from Your on the Street Reporter, who is, as usual, off the streets. Like many news (desk) reporters of today, I continue to feed on others' fact-findings and comfortably report from my podium about the latest trivia on presidential debates, a topic the media dwells on. After all, it requires little effort.

- Whoa! Here's Bob again. "Hello Mr. Dylan, what brings your virtual presence here?"
- Bob, "Hey dude. NSA dropped me a note that you were in your office writing some songs about the Middle East. I know that's not your handle. Thought I would lend a hand."
- Reporter, "What?! How does NSA know what I do in my private office?"
- Bob, "Easy. They work with Google to monitor the key strokes you make on your computer."
- Reporter, "But they're not here! They can't see me or my typing."
- Bob, "Look man, Google knows everyone's *alphabet*. And Uncle Sam has sensors in everyone's neighborhood. Very sensitive sensors."
- Reporter, "Whew. Makes me want to go back to pencil and paper. Anyway, here is what I've been working on."
- Bob, "Far out! Let's put them to music."
- Reporter, "Okay, the first one is played and sung to the tune and rhythm of "They're Rioting in Africa," by the Kingston Trio."
- Bob, "Borrowing suits me just fine. Here goes."



They're starving in Aleppo,
There's deaths in Iraq.
There's beheadings by IS hands,
and Assad's on a deadly track.

The Middle East is festering in one unhappy stew.
The Sunnis hate the Shias,
The Shias hate the Jews.

The Turks hate the Kurdish,
The Kurds do the same.
And the Russians don't like anybody very much!

But we can be thankful that some happy day,
Israel will set the spark off,
and they will all be blown away!

There's discord in Kurdistan;
conflict in Iran.
But we can be sure of it:
They're all killing with an equal hand.



- Bob, "Not bad. Reminds me of Detroit. Any others? "
- "Yeah. From of our past virtual sessions, you know I like limericks. Maybe you can put a couple limericks to music that I wrote about St. Louis, eh, the Middle East."
- Bob, "Hm. Okay here we go again."



There once was a nation, Iraq,
put together by imperial quacks.
 Made up of Shia and Sunni,
 vowed to render each puny,
'till they made their cities mere shacks.



There once was a nation called Syria,
put together after world war euphoria.
 Western powers chose its borders,
 leading to so much disorder,
that the result was deadly hysteria.



- Bob, "Right up my alley, dude. A lot of angst."
- Reporter, Thanks Bob! I'll split the royalties that I'll get from Spotify."
- Bob, "You mean the site that pays artists for their songs in miniscule of a cent per play? Then brush up on your fractions, dude. And long division, too."