

THE ROVING EYE

Fear and loathing at Hotel Babylon

By Pepe Escobar – Asia Times Online 27 June 2014

So now a huge Hardcore Sunnistan stretches all the way from the suburbs of Aleppo to Tikrit and from Mosul to the Jordanian/Iraqi border - the same one that dissolved in 2003 when Shock and Awe turned into Mission (Un)Accomplished.

In an eerie echo of Dick Cheney's army's footprints reverberating in the sands of Anbar province, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and their coalition of the willing (jihadis, Islamists, Ba'athists and tribal sheikhs) now pose as the "liberators" of Iraqi Sunnis from the clutches of an "evil" Shi'ite majority government in Baghdad.

In addition, ISIS also controls the PR wars. [Here](#), a jihadi details how any sort of possible Washington "kinetic" involvement will be interpreted as an unholy alliance between the Empire and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki against the underdogs.

From a Sunni perspective, it's down with Iraq's Counter-terrorism law; down with de-Ba'athification (with the ascent of neo-Ba'athist Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshbandia - JRTN, led by former Saddam honcho Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri); down with the Interior Ministry in Baghdad going after Sunni politicians; down with protests being crushed.

At the same time, it's the return of the US-sponsored Sahwa (Sons of Iraq) - who fiercely fought al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2007, the mother of ISIS - and the return of assorted Shi'ite militias (Muqtada al-Sadr not only repelled the new wave of US "military advisers" - that's how it started in Vietnam - but also warned that his own badass Men in Black will "shake the ground" fighting ISIS.) The mid-2000s are the new normal; it's gonna be militia hell all over again.

Mesopotamia, we got a problem. Neo-Ba'athists want nothing but a secular Iraq run by Sunnis, Saddam-style (rather former neocon darling Ahmad Chalabi.) ISIS wants a Caliphate extending all across the Levant under Sharia law. Something's got to give.

What will give will be the Iraqi nation itself - the balkanized, protracted (intended) consequence of the 2003 invasion and occupation, finally transmogrified into Jihad Central.

It's payback time

The Obama administration's "strategy" (remember "Don't Do Stupid Shit", the Ukraine strategy?) is to impose regime change on al-Maliki; after all, he had the bad taste of refusing to let US troops keep occupying Iraq past the 2012 deadline, and on top of it his government is close to Tehran.

Thus the answer to the now legendary question of how the US intel satellite maze failed to capture that long column of ISIS Men in Black in their gleaming white Toyota Land Cruisers crossing the Syrian-Iraq desert wasteland. Call it the Mother of All Intel Failures (remember Saddam's talk of Mother of All Battles?)

Here we have trademark Empire of Chaos "revenge" against Baghdad, Tehran and - why not - Moscow (after all Russian president Vladimir Putin offered full support to al-Maliki to fight the jihadis.) Iraq duly merges with Ukraine. And as for payback redux, it's - almost - all spelled out [here](#).

As for the Beltway-peddled myth - once again - of "good terrorists" and "bad terrorists", this week Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria pledged its allegiance to ISIS. This means that ISIS now virtually controls

both sides of the border, at Albu Kamal in Syria and Al-Qaim in Iraq. As a bonus, ISIS and allied Sunni tribal sheikhs also surrounded the US-controlled Camp Anaconda in Iraq and are ready for a long-term mortar game. Will Beltway "analysts" ever learn?

That little fiction known as Jordan - run by King Playstation, aka Abdullah - will be ripe for the taking as soon as hardcore Salafis from Zarqa (Zarqawi's hometown) totally align with ISIS. Add that piece of real estate to the embryo Levantine Caliphate and we'll be talking major business - oil refineries possibly included.

"Don't Do Stupid Shit", applied to Syria and Iraq, means that the Obama administration has gone (almost) no holds barred in its "Assad must go" policy, by the way a Ba'ath government; what's implied is that Washington is an ally of ISIS in Syria, while a (determined?) foe of ISIS in Iraq. Assad's "sin" is that he's an ally of both Tehran (like al-Maliki) and, most of all (from an American perspective), Hezbollah. And now comes the Obama administration's latest "Stupid Shit" - in the form of weaponizing "appropriately vetted" rebels in Syria.

Lording over this suspension of disbelief scenario, the whole Beltway, White House included, sells the illusion it is thoughtfully deliberating whether the real dangerous Men in Black here are in fact from ISIS - and what to do about them.

As some sort of Washington-Tehran cooperation against ISIS becomes self-evident, that poses a major problem for the perennial Bomb Iran crowd in the Beltway, as well as for hardliners in Tehran; after all ISIS has erected a massive geostrategic barrier between Iran and Syria, threatening Tehran's connection with Hezbollah.

Likudniks will go no holds barred to prevent any cooperation. But that will be a detail anyway. Baghdad may get all the help it needs from Iranian special forces and militias such as Muqtada's. ISIS does not have the manpower or the expertise to lay siege to Baghdad; people in Sadr City alone would rip them to shreds. Not to mention attack Najaf and Karbala, the Shi'ite holy cities, which are already protected by heavily armed popular brigades.

Will NATO meet Jihadistan?

Kirkuk is now under virtual Kurd control. Its "devolution" to Baghdad will be immensely problematic - and that's a major euphemism. Kirkuk produces around 670,000 barrels of oil a day. Up to 300,000 are exported via the pipeline to Ceyhan, in Turkey. Yet only 120,000 barrels a day have been online these past few weeks.

Iraq's total production is 3.3 million barrels a day - the bulk concentrated in the south, around Basra. There's no realistic evidence ISIS would ever be able to capture Basra.

So the problem remains some refineries in the north such as Baiji. Elite Iraqi counter-terrorism forces can deal with it. If ISIS by any chance would be able to hang on to some oil and gas - a major if - that's certified joy for, most of all, market speculators. And soon there might be thousands of US special forces "securing" Iraqi oil fields and the Green Zone in Baghdad.

Assad's Syrian Army can - and it's already - contributing to fight ISIS. In the end, ISIS can realistically be repelled by the Syrian Army, elite Iranian special forces, Shi'ite brigades and yes - an [imminent cameo](#) by those second-hand fighter jets from Russia and Belarus.

ISIS won't take over Baghdad. But like a freak mutant, in a Hardcore Sunnistan goes Hollywood fashion, it might go even more bonkers and try to take over Amman, Doha and even Riyadh.

The Empire of Chaos will keep betting on - what else - chaos. And it's going swimmingly its way - from the real possibility of a final push towards a Great Kurdistan (in Syria, Iraq, Turkey and even Iran) to sectarian militia hell all across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Yemen. Not to mention all possible ramifications in Northern Africa, Central Asia and the North Caucasus.

What will Hillary Clinton, the Hillarator, do? In this case, one's gotta wait for early 2017. She could always pull another "We came, we saw, he died" and triumphantly stage a second coming in the Levant as a droned Athena singing *Light My Fire*.

In the end, NATO won't meet Jihadistan. No "responsibility to protect" (R2P) Arabs from killing Arabs. NATO will be - gleefully - "watching" in the sidelines. Because from Northern Africa and across the Middle East to the Caucasus and all the way to Western China, the name of the (burning) game is to keep Dr Zbig Brzezinski's "Eurasian Balkans" ever simmering in a funeral pyre.

Pepe Escobar is the author of [Globalistan: How the Globalized World is Dissolving into Liquid War](#) (Nimble Books, 2007), [Red Zone Blues: a snapshot of Baghdad during the surge](#) (Nimble Books, 2007), and [Obama does Globalistan](#) (Nimble Books, 2009).

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http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/MID-02-270614.html