

Bolton in the Cat Seat

Before you read accounts of Mr. Bolton and what he might do as director of the National Security Council, allow me to make some notes on our current situation including the advent of Messrs. Bolton, Pomperio and the neoconservatives who will follow, holding on to their coattails.

To get a clear understanding of Bolton and his objectives, ideas and abilities for several years been important but now, with the State Department in a shambles, the NSC will be unbalanced and, when Secretary Designate Mike Pompeo, a fellow ideologue, takes control, all restraints will be removed. The ideologues will be in charge.

But leave aside the question of ideology, neoconservatism, and just look at the cost/effective ratio of the of their actions: every major initiative promoted by the neoconservatives has weakened America. The cost in lives, standing the world, and treasure has been appalling. And what has resulted? Does anyone feel more secure as a result of what they have led us to do? Did what they told us would happen, for example in Iraq, actually happen? The invasion was to end in days, weeks or at least in months in “victory” with the grateful Iraqis gathering in their millions to sing the Star Spangled Banner and cheer our troops.

Unfortunately, we failed to informed the Iraqis of the role the neoconservatives, including the major player, and insistent advocate, John Bolton, had assigned them.

As a result (as of two years ago), 4,224 American soldiers lost their lives and 31,952 lost limbs or were otherwise severed injured. Tens of thousands more were sufficiently damaged that they are (and will continue to be) completely or partially wards of the Veterans Administration. Our grandchildren will be paying for their treatment.

Of course, the cost to Iraq and to the Iraqis is at least an order of magnitude greater on every separate item of cost. No one knows or can know the number of deaths. My reading from the various estimates is that about 40 to 50 Iraqis (men, women and children) died or were killed for each American casualty. But, like many statistics, this tells only part of the story. A whole generation of Iraqi children has been severely malnourished. As a result, many are “stunted” physically with corresponding severe brain damage. The once thriving (under the politically tyrannical but socially progressive) middle class has been wiped out or has fled the country. The civic structure, which after all is the minimal requirement for public safety and so ultimately for a functioning society, has been shattered. Economically, the country has ceased to function and the social effects are stunning.

From my personal attempt to ward off the invasion of 2003, I came ironically to the conclusion that Saddam Husain must have fooled us — he must have been a secret member of the neoconservative ideologues’ band.

He refused to take the steps that might, just might, have prevented the invasion. As Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz told me when I visited Baghdad in the spring of 2003, just before the American attack, “Your government is determined to attack Iraq and there is nothing we

can do to stop the invasion.” I argued strenuously against that conclusion, making two proposals that I told him might work, but I fear that he was right. Mr. Bush and his neoconservatives had the bit clamped firmly their teeth and like a horse heading for the barn they could not be stopped.

Mr. Bolton’s assurances that the police operation would last for weeks morphed into months and now into 15 years. And counting. Will there be any end? The word “victory” has passed out of style. The idea of making the sad tyranny into a democracy has become a bad joke. We are totally unable to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. Indeed, for all our vaunted skills we don’t even know exactly what that would mean.

Maybe the war will end when Iraq runs out of people. As T.E. Lawrence (“Lawrence of Arabia”) satirically wrote of an earlier invasion of Iraq, “We killed about ten thousand Arabs...We cannot hope to maintain such an average: it is a poor country, sparsely peopled.” Great hope for peace!

Had enough? Then don’t consider Afghanistan. It is worse, has lasted longer and for even less reason.

Yet, no sooner than a disaster (“their,” our leaders’ and their ideological advisers’ fault) has become apparent, it is forgotten. That is our, we the peoples’, fault). Quickly, as we drowse, play games or listen to the songs of sirens (in our electronic age sirens taking the form winsome “presenters” on TV), the ideologues recover their influence and move to repeat the tragedy they have just enacted.

Am I wrong? ,Just count the wars, the covert “operations,” the assassinations, the socially lethal sanctions, even the attacks on our own civil liberties and freedoms.

What has been happening is somewhat like a shell game. Before we have time to assess the damage — even the damage to us — in one area, our gaze is diverted and we allow it to be diverted — to another area or issue.

I am no psychiatrist and neither was he but I believe Einstein was correct when he said that the definition of insanity was doing the same thing over and over again in the belief that the next time it would produce different results. Are our leaders and particularly their neoconservative “minders” just playing a game with us? Or are they insane or are we? Or both of us? I am pretty sure about them, but it is hard to escape the fact that we go blithely about our daily chores and amusements, acquiescing or approving each predictable, and predicted, disaster after the previous one. In this “best of all possible worlds,” after all, everything is now very comfortable.

Why worry? If those wretched people out there in Faroffistan cause any trouble, we can let them have it. After all, in the final analysis, as Mr. Trump warned Little Rocket Man, he had a bigger button to fire nuclear weapons.

That is, he could burn down the whole Earth. Mr. Bolton appears to find that an appealing venture. I wonder if he or any of his neoconservative warriors have any even vague idea of what would result from their policy? If so, they have certainly not shown it. By Einstein’s

definition, we have aided and abetted the lunatics, theirs and ours, to take over the asylum. And, they have seized the opportunity, dressing themselves in the robes of power and assuming the personalities of Caesar, Mussolini, Napoleon, Stalin and Hitler. If only they could play-act it would be just a game. But with their hands on the hand that could push the "button," it is not a game. It could be deadly serious.

Will it be deadly serious? We cannot know. But what we do know is that men like Bolton are at least true believers, are experienced, clever and determined. By Einstein's definition, they have shown themselves also to be at least unstable and perhaps also touched by insanity. We also that our Founding Fathers were right in their estimate of Americans' dedication to protecting our country. They expected that we would not do much.

Our history shows that they were more realistic than merely cynical. We have not honored even their low expectations.

America is by any criteria obviously on the wrong path. Do we have the sense to check the ignposts? If they show us that we are not heading in the direction necessary to save our republic do we have the strength, the sense and the staying power to change direction? If we do not change, we will not avoid either the results of *their* crime nor *our* responsibility: we will pay the upkeep of the asylum *and* pay for the damage they have done, are doing and will do. That might entail the decline and fall of what the Founding Fathers thought of as our historical task, "experimenting" with the capacity of our people to keep us on the path to the preservation of our life, liberty and happiness.

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