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Another Holy War?

...Assad warned that a U.S. strike on Syria would set the Middle East ablaze.
I have to ask: Has he not SEEN the Middle East lately? --Gov. Mike Huckabee, Fox News

Melbourne, Australia has been named the world's most livable city for the third year in a row, according to a survey of 140 cities released this month by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). Next in line is Victoria (Australia), followed by Canada's Vancouver, Toronto and Calgary. On the dark side of the ledger, the EIU rates Damascus, the capitol city of Syria, the world's worst, most untenable city on the planet. Can't imagine why.

Damascus is often noted as the world's oldest, continuously inhabited city. It is first mentioned in the "Book of Beginnings," Genesis Chapter 14. Unfortunately, because this city of antiquity has been a long-time hostile next door neighbor to the tiny nation of Israel, it has a date with destiny. A day is coming when it will *cease to be a city* (Isaiah 17:1). How soon could that happen?

During the first few weeks of Syria's "spontaneous" uprisings in the spring of 2011, things were different. It was exhilarating to be part of what outsiders dubbed, *The Arab Spring*, a widespread unrest across much of the Arab world. Who would have considered that tens-of-thousands of Syrians, mostly civilians, would be killed? It didn't happen that way elsewhere. At least, not so far.

At the outset, many analysts believed that the Syrian government would prevail, largely because most top officials were of the same *Alawite* sect as President Bashar al-Assad. However, following the use of lethal force against unarmed protesters, many soldiers and some low-level officers began to desert the Syrian Army, forming the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

Sensing a populist movement capable of toppling the Assad government, President Obama issued a fatwa for the beleaguered "Royal" to step aside, warning of possible U.S. intervention if the civil war continued to escalate. Unfortunately, Obama's intelligence community hadn't done its homework. With plenty of cash and military hardware already on the way from Moscow and Tehran, President Assad was not terribly persuaded by Mr. Obama's re-election speeches.

But upon hearing from other world leaders that he was failing to "walk his talk," President Obama gave his foreign policy critics one more "Oh yeah?" Calling it a "red line," he warned that the U.S. really, really would step up if rumors were true that Assad was using chemical weapons against his own people. Well—guess what?

This weekend, administration officials are packaging two reports for immediate release. The first is a classified assessment to be presented to members of Congress. A second, less specific version for public consumption, is meant to substantiate White House claims that chemical weapons were in play in last week's Ghouta attack. But, will a war-weary public buy into another "limited skirmish?"

According to a just-released *Reuters/Ipsos* poll, only nine percent of respondents support the idea of U.S. military intervention in Syria. The poll, taken August 19-23, the same week that reports of

chemical warfare were released, indicate the lowest support for intervention since the poll began tracking opinion on the issue.¹ Nevertheless, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel is sending strong signals that U.S. warships could begin launching Cruise missiles against Syrian military installations sometime soon.

While liberal v. conservative differences were once said to “end at the water’s edge,” those days are gone. A bevy of well-known conservatives have a much different opinion as to the efficacy of more military involvement in the Middle East and are loudly and vehemently saying so. Several had this to say:

“There are no good guys in the conflict in which Obama is about to take sides. There are only bad guys and worse guys. And which side do you suppose Obama has chosen? That’s right. The worse guys—the really, really bad guys, those actually allied with al-Qaida.”

--Joseph Farah, *Worldnetdaily.com*

“Giving guns to the opposition will prolong the war; and unfortunately, the opposition is no better than the present government—in some ways it may even be worse...Mr. President, I would strongly urge you to keep America out of the Syrian conflict. In my opinion, the best thing that we can do is to help bring both sides to the negotiating table.”

--Franklin Graham, *Pres. Samaritan’s Purse*

“Mr. President, do you really think it’s wise to send our missiles and aircraft to provide fire support for al-Qaeda? That is exactly what you’ll be doing, if you hit Assad. Assad’s an odious butcher, filth on two legs. But in the world of serious strategy, you rarely get a choice between black and white. You choose between black and charcoal gray. Employing our military assets to support either side in Syria would be a mistake.”

--Army Lt Col. Ralph Peters, Ret

“The sole beneficiary of this apparent use of poison gas against civilians in rebel-held territory appears to be the rebels, who have long sought to have us come in and fight their war.”

--Pat Buchanan, political commentator

“To paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld, you go to war with the president you have...And I don’t think this president understands enough about the implications of what he’s about to do, or even that he can define what his objective is...”

--John Bolton, Former U.S. Ambassador to UN

“So what, we’re about to become al-Qaeda’s air force now?” --Former Congressman Dennis Kucinich

“The war in Syria has no clear national security connection to the United States and victory by either side will not necessarily bring into power people friendly to the United States...”

--Senator Rand Paul (KY)

No question that Syria is particularly loathsome. It has become home to many of the world’s leading terrorist organizations. But in the category of “loathsome,” we wonder how Washington, D.C. and many equally large U.S. cities rate in Heaven’s economy these days.

Although we are intrigued by suggestions that America could be a tool in the hand of the Lord, fulfilling Isaiah 17:1 which says: “Behold, Damascus will cease from *being* a city, and it will be a ruinous heap”—hermeneutical considerations inform us otherwise. Jeremiah and other prophets also speak to the ultimate destruction of Damascus. But they do so in context with eight or nine other city-states surrounding Israel, that have likewise defied the living God—right from the beginning.

Good news: Jesus Himself is coming to set things straight—possibly sooner than we might all expect!

Rick Forcier

¹ New poll: Syria intervention even less popular than Congress, *The Washington Post*, 8/26/2013