

SouthViews

No. 116, 8 May 2015

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The West and Its Self-Assumed Right to Intervene

The author argues that the West, led by the United States, has taken on itself the right to intervene in the affairs of others and, in the case of the Arab world, has created situations that justify subsequent military interventions which have had a high cost in both human and financial terms.

By Roberto Savio

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The 'West' is a concept that flourished during the Cold War. Then it was West against East in the form of the Soviet empire. The East was evil against which all democratic countries – read West – were called on to fight.

I recall meeting Elliot Abrams, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State during the Ronald Reagan administration, in 1982. He told me that at the point in history, the real West was the United States, with Europe a wavering ally, not really ready to go up to the point of entering into war with the Soviet Union.

When I tried to explain to him that the East-West denomination dated back to Roman times, long before the United States even existed, he brushed this aside, saying that the contemporary concept was that of those standing against the Soviet Empire, and the United States was the only power willing to do so.

The Reagan presidency changed the course of history, because he was against multilateralism, the United Nations and anything that could oblige the United States to accept what was not primarily in the interests of Washington. The fact that United States had a manifest destiny and was therefore a spokesperson for humankind and the idea that God was American were the bases of his rhetoric.

In one famous declaration, he went so far as asserting that United States was the only democratic country in the world.

After the end of the Cold War, President George W. Bush took up the Reagan rhetoric again. He declared that he was president because of God, which justified his intervention in Iraq,

albeit based on false data about weapons of mass destruction (Abrams was also by his side). Now it turns out that he has an indirect responsibility for the creation of the Islamic State (IS).

All this starts in Iraq. The first governor at the end of the U.S. invasion was retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner who did not last very long because his ideas about how to reconstruct Iraq were considered too lenient. He was replaced by U.S. diplomat Paul Bremer.

Bremer took two fateful decisions: to eliminate the Iraqi army, and to purge all those who were members of the Baath party from the administration, because they were connected to Saddam Hussein. This left thousands of disgruntled officers and a very inefficient administration.

Now we have learned that the mind behind the creation of IS was a former Iraqi colonel from the secret services of the Iraqi Air Force, Samir Abed Al-Kliifawi. The details of how he planned the takeover over of a part of Iraq (and Syria), have been published by Der Spiegel, which came to have access to documents found after his death. They reveal an organisation which is externally fanatic but internally cold and calculating.

After the invasion of Iraq, he was imprisoned by the Americans, and there he connected with several other imprisoned Iraq officers, all of them Sunnis, and started planning the creation of the Islamic State, which now has a number of former Iraqi army officers in its ranks. Without Bremer's fateful decision, Al-Kliifawi would probably have continued in the Iraqi army.

What we also have to remember here is that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was rendered useless by the Cold War, and many saw its demise. However, it was given the war against Serbia as a new reason for existence, and the concept of the West, embodied in a military alliance, was kept alive.

According to a report by scholars with the 'Costs of War' project at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies, the terrible cost of the Iraqi invasion had been 2.2 trillion dollars by 2013, not to speak of 190,000 deaths. If we add Afghanistan, we reach the staggering amount of 4 trillion dollars – compared with the annual 6.4 trillion dollar total budget of all 28 members of the European Union – for "resolution" of the conflict.

One would have thought that after that experience, Europe would have desisted from invading Arab countries and aggravating its difficult internal financial balance sheet. Yet, Europe engaged in the destabilisation of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, leading to the explosion of Jihadists from there, 220,000 deaths and five million refugees.

In the case of Libya, under the prodding of France's Nicolas Sarkozy and the United Kingdom's David Cameron, both for electoral reasons, Europe entered with the aim of eliminating Mu'ammarr Gheddafi, then leaving the country to its destiny. Now thousands of migrants are using Libya in the attempt to reach the shores of Europe and Cameron has decided to ignore any joint European action.

For some reason, Europe always follows United States, without further thinking. The case of Ukraine is the last of those bouts of somnambulism. It has invited Ukraine to join the European Union and NATO, prodding a paranoiac Putin (with the nearly unanimous support of his people), to act to finally stop the ongoing encirclement of the former Soviet republic.

The problem is that Europeans are largely ignorant of the Arab world. A few days ago, Italian police dismantled a Jihadist ring in Bergamo, a town in northern Italy, arresting among others an imam, or preacher, No Italian media took the pain to ascertain which version of

Islam he was preaching. All spoke of an Islamic threat, with attacks being planned on the Vatican.

If they had looked with more care, they would have found out that he preached the Wahhabi version of Islam, which is the official version of Islam in Saudi Arabia, and which consider all other Muslims as apostates and infidels. This is very similar to IS, which has adopted its Wahhabi version of Islam, but is a far cry from equating Wahhabism with terrorism – all terrorists may be Wahhabis but not all Wahhabis are terrorists.

Saudi Arabia has already spent 87 billion dollars in promoting Wahhabism, has paid for the creation of 1,500 mosques, all staffed with Wahhabi imams, and continues to spend around three billion dollars a year to finance Jihadist groups in Syria, along with the other Gulf countries. This has made Assad an obliged target for the West, and he has succeeded in his claim: better me than chaos, a chaos that he has been also fomenting.

Now the debate is what to do in Libya and NATO is considering several military options. The stroke of luck this time is that U.S. President Barack Obama does not want to intervene. However, with the 28 countries of the European Union increasingly reclaiming their national sovereignty and seldom agreeing on anything, a military intervention is still in the air.

Meanwhile, thousands of refugees try crossing the Mediterranean every day (with the known number of deaths standing at over 20,000 people) to reach Europe, thus strengthening support for Europe's xenophobic parties which are exploiting popular fear and rejection.

It is a pity that, according to United Nations projections, Europe needs at least an additional 20 million people to continue to be competitive ... but this is politically impossible.

Edited by Phil Harris

Source: Inter Press Service News Agency (IPS):

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/05/opinion-the-west-and-its-self-assumed-right-to-intervene/>.

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