TOP THREE FLASHPOINTS

"Key US allies in the region are certain that Tehran is acting in bad faith. Washington seems desperate to reach any deal with Tehran." "

Arab News November 17, 2013

As of 2013-11-18

By John Antal



FIAShPoints is a bi-monthly update on the most critical national security issues facing the United States. Author and military expert John Antal will provide you with insights and a quick synopsis of the top three flash points in the world at the time of each report. FlashPoints will list the greatest danger to the USA, and then list risks of medium and serious danger. Keep abreast of the latest impending international crisis by reviewing FlashPoints



1. Iranian Detente

- a. Three days of talks in Geneva, Switzerland between Iran and the P5+1 (US, Britain, China, France, Germany, and Russia) ended on November 9, 2013. Initially a deal looked close, but French foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, nixed the deal. Fabius told France Inter radio that Paris would not accept a "fools' game" and that the deal was a "sucker's deal."
- b. The goal of the P5+1 is to ascertain that there is no military dimension to the nuclear program in Iran. The resolutions the United Nations Security Council reaffirmed -- 1696 (2006), 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007) and 1803 (2008) -- demanded under Chapter VII of the UN Charter that Iran suspend uranium enrichment and heavy-water-related projects, and also established sanctions for non-compliance. (see: http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/sc9459.doc.htm)
- c. Western diplomats said one of the sticking points during the talks was Iran's argument that it retains the "right" to enrich uranium.
- d. Iranian spokesmen reported that France single-handedly stopped progress on a deal.
- e. "We have said to the negotiating sides that we will not answer to any threat, sanction, humiliation or discrimination. The Islamic Republic has not and will not bow its head to threats from any authority," Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif said during a speech at the National Assembly after the talks concluded.

1. Iranian Detente (continued)

- f. In the meantime the US is pushing hard for a deal, in spite of French opposition.
- g. A senior White House official said that a solution could be found for one of the major stumbling blocks to an agreement that would freeze the nuclear program. (New York Times November 15)
- h. "For the first time in nearly a decade, we are getting close to a first step ... that would stop the Iranian nuclear program from advancing and roll it back in key areas," the official told reporters on condition of anonymity. (Yahoo News)
- i. The French continue to oppose any deal that permits Iran to reach breakout capability. French President Francois Hollande assured Israel on Sunday that France would continue to oppose an easing of economic sanctions against Iran until it was convinced Tehran had ended a pursuit of nuclear weapons. In a visit to Israel to reassure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on November 17, 2013, Hollande said: "France will not give way on nuclear proliferation."



Iranian Foreign Minister
Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted
Secretary John Kerry on November
11, 2013 and blamed Kerry for the
failure of the latest P5+1 Talks: "Mr.
Secretary, was it Iran that gutted
over half of US draft Thursday
night? and publicly commented
against it Friday morning?"
(photo credit: Screenshot BBC)



Secretary of State John Kerry

1. Iranian Detente (continued)

j. A November 17, 2013 post in the Arab news summed up the Saudi view succinctly: "If anything, President Barack Obama has failed to demonstrate leadership. Neither foes nor friends in the Mideast appreciate his policies. Even Israel, America's closest ally, is concerned that Obama's policies will be detrimental to everyone in the long run. While America's allies are sometimes wrong, they think that a deal with Iran that fails to put an end to the nuclear program may be a bad one for the region in the years to come. Perhaps, for this reason, France "sabotaged" the talks in Geneva. Key US allies in the region are certain that Tehran is acting in bad faith. Washington seems desperate to reach any deal with Tehran."

http://www.arabnews.com/news/479086

k. Nuclear negotiations are expected to resume in Geneva, Switzerland on November 20, 2013, but on a lower level – with senior diplomats rather than foreign ministers attending.



Secretary of State John Kerry speaks during a news conference with Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on November 4, 2013. The Saudis are not happy with US moves toward Iran. (US State Department photo)

1. Iranian Detente (continued) -- Analysis by John Antal

Analysis: Balancing détente with Iran takes a clear strategy and focus. US friends and allies must understand our goals and see how our relationship with them will be strengthened by détente with Iran and not weakened. Israel, Saudi Arabia and France are worried that Washington has neither a strategy nor the ability to focus. The Israelis are very nervous that President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry are throwing them under the bus. Israel knows that it is a major target of any Iranian nuclear arsenal (delivered by missile, aircraft or terrorist) and that the daily chants of "death to Israel" in Tehran must be taken seriously. The Saudis are upset because détente between the US and Iran means a stronger Iran as economic sanctions are lifted, and this bodes ill for Saudi Arabia with regards to the ever increasing Sunni-Shia conflict. There are reports that the Saudis plan a 'major shift' away from the US. If the Iranians reach a nuclear weapons breakout capability, the Saudis hint that they will buy nukes from Pakistan. The French are looking to the future where the US has less influence in the Middle East and are looking to move relations closer to Saudi Arabia and Israel. At home, President Obama appears desperate for a "good news" deal with Iran to bolster his domestic popularity and reverse the perception that he is a weak leader due to the debacle of the Syrian Red line in September 2013 and the Obamacare fumble in October 2013.

The heart of the matter is that American leadership is in question. Since the end of WWII, the US has worked hard to limit the number of nations with nuclear weapons. The greatest danger to the US is that a bad deal with Iran could set off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, or worse, prompt an Israeli military response. In either case -- the proliferation of more nuclear powers or an Israeli attack on Iran - the US loses. Nuclear war has been avoided since WWII, but sometimes just narrowly. Nuclear proliferation in the Middle East makes and already dangerous world much more dangerous. Nukes in the hands of terrorists is the nightmare of all those involved in security operations. If a bad deal is reached with Iran, and Iran becomes a producer of nuclear weapons technology, the 2d and 3d order effects could be very hazardous for the US.

2. The Collapse of Libya

- a. Libya is in collapse. If Libya was a model for military intervention in the 21st Century, as some pundits proclaimed, then it was a model of failure.
- b. In 1969, 27-year-old army officer Muammar Gaddafi led a coup d'état against the ruling King Idris. Gaddafi held onto power until 2011 when Libyan rebels, supported by NATO with airpower and logistical support, toppled Gaddafi's government. Gaddafi was captured and killed on October 20, 2011.
- c. Regime change did not bring freedom, prosperity, or safety to Libya. It is easier to remove a dictator than it is to replace him with an effective government. Consumed by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, NATO and the US did not have the will to engage in nation building in Libya.
- d. Since then, Libya has descended into chaos and may break apart.
- e. In the east, Sheikh Ahmed Zubair Senussi, head of the Cyrenaica Transitional Council, declared Cyrenaican self-government. Cyrenaica federalists declared self-government on June 1, 2013 and control the cities of Benghazi, El Merdj, Grennah or Shahat, Marsoe, Sousah, and Tocra. Cyrenaica is where most of Libya's oil is found. In late October, the Cyrenaica federalists opened an independent parliament in Benghazi.
- f. The tribes in the southern Fezzan region of Libya have also declared independence from Tripoli.
- g. Adding to the chaos, on October 5, 2013 a US Army Delta Force team entered Libya and captured Nazih Abdul-Hamed Nabih al-Ruqai'i, known by the alias Abu Anas al-Libi. Abu Anas al-Libi is charged in the US for the bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 that left 200 people dead and hundreds more wounded.

2. The Collapse of Libya (continued)

- h. On October 10, 2013, a group calling themselves the Libyan Revolutionary Operations Room kidnapped Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan. This Islamist military group said they were holding Mr. Zidan as a reprisal for the American Delta Force capture of Abu Anas al-Libi, on October 5th. Zidan was quickly released when another militia group intervened.
- i. Zidan's central government is not functioning and the parliament is impotent. As shown by the kidnapping of the Prime Minister, there are no effective security forces. The judicial system does not function. Militias and tribal groups are fighting to gain power. "There's fighting everywhere, checkpoints everywhere, I've moved my wife and children to somewhere safe," reported one Benghazi businessman.
- j. On October 18, Libya's military police commander Ahmed al-Barghathi, was assassinated in Tripoli.
- k. On November 16, 2013, Libya's deputy intelligence chief, Mustafa Noah, was kidnapped outside Tripoli's international airport.
- l. **On November 16, 2013, the Libyan government announced a state of emergency in Tripoli** for 48 hours to "spare bloodshed" in light of ongoing clashes between rival militias that have left at least 43 dead and hundreds injured. (Al Jazeera November 16, 2013)

2. The Collapse of Libya (continued) -- Analysis by John Antal

Analysis: Libya's problems are immense. The population is awash in weapons and tribal wars are surging as rival factions battle in the streets of Tripoli. Oil field workers are killed and robbed and oil production has virtually stopped. Libya has the 10th-largest proven oil reserves of any country in the world and had the 17th-highest petroleum production. Oil is the major source of Libyan wealth and disruption of the oil business reduces Libya's income.

Many Libyans believe that the US and NATO are acting in Libya, and the greater Arab Middle East, in a vast conspiracy to destabilize their governments. As crazy as this seems to most of us, this kind of thinking is fueling anti-American hatred among people who see themselves as victims and is fuel for the fire for a new generation of terrorists who see the US as the evil enemy.

The US cannot fix every nation's problems, but when it intervenes it inherits a moral obligation to provide solutions. The inability to follow-through is worse than a miscalculation. Libya is a prime example how American foreign policy is not working to end the war on terror. The attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi on September 11, 2012 by al-Qaeda affiliated terrorists demonstrates the failure of American policy in Libya. The U.S. capture of the terrorist Abu Anas al-Libi from Tripoli reinforced how Libya's chaos is making it easier for al-Qaeda operatives to find safe haven there. Former Secretary of State Collin Powell once warned that "if you break it, you own it" -- that when you take down the regime you become the government. This is appropriate in the case of Libya. Before 911, al-Qaeda could claim only one real base – Afghanistan. Today, al-Qaeda has a home in Libya, as well as Algeria, Chechnya, Iraq, Kenya, Morocco, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Pakistan Somalia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.

3. The Fragmentation of Syria

- a. The Syrian Civil War started on March 15, 2011 and is tearing Syria apart.
- b. "War has shattered Syria. Heavily armed government forces will stop at nothing to destroy opposition to retain power. The government uses airstrikes, artillery barrages, and tanks against its own people. Assad's army is literally scorching the earth under the feet of women and children. If Assad's Air Force has a single rule of engagement, the rule seems to be never to waste a bomb. This abject cruelty has led to a brutal war that eclipses Iraq and Afghanistan combined." Michael Yon, November 11, 2013.
- c. The Syrian rebels are a diverse group consisting of about 100,000 fighters, depending on whose numbers you believe. Most of the 100,000 are Sunni and aligned with Sunni Saudi Arabia in the greater Sunni-Shia conflict waging across the Middle East. According to a study by Janes (Janes Information Group (IHS Inc.), about 30,000 of the rebels are considered hard core Islamists. About 10,000 are al-Qaeda. http://www.newsmax.com/Newsfront/islamists-extremists-dominate-rebels/2013/09/16/id/525880
- d. All wars are brutal, but this one is an example of heightened brutality. As Assad's forces bomb villages with artillery and air strikes, some anti-Assad rebels behead their captives. On November 13, a member of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) asked for "understanding forgiveness" after they mistakenly cut off the head of one of their fellow rebels and held it aloft for public display. (http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/ news/2013/11/15/21477555-syria-rebels-linked-to-al-qaeda-apologize-for-beheading-fellow-fighter)
- e. The humanitarian disaster in Syria continues. Over 120,000 killed and 2 million refugees. (http://www.lse.co.uk/AllNews.asp?code=loegkpgo&headline=France urges action on Syria says 120000 dead)

3. The Fragmentation of Syria (continued)

- f. In August it was reported that Assad's forces used chemical weapons against the rebels. The US railed against this, claimed that Assad had crossed the Red Line, and then backed down. The "Red Line" chemical weapons issue that nearly involved the US and France in a new Middle East war, subsided when Russia sponsored a face-saving option that allowed for international collection and destruction of Assad's chemical arsenal. The global chemical weapons watchdog, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), says it has now adopted a detailed plan for the destruction of Syria's stockpile by mid-2014.
- g. Adding to the misery, the World Health Organization declared on November 14, 2013 that a polio emergency declared in Middle East following outbreak in Syria with 13 cases detected. Polio is an acute, viral, infectious disease spread from person to person, via the fecal-oral (intestinal source), usually from ingesting contaminated food or water. Until this year, polio had been almost completely eradicated world wide, due to years of polio vaccination efforts. Studies show that one out of every 200 people infected with the poliovirus is left permanently paralyzed. Of those paralyzed by polio, 5 to 10% die due to respiratory failure.
- h. A larger Middle East war, involving Syria, Lebanon (Hezbollah) and Syria is a major concern. Due to threats and the Israeli desire to preempt attacks on their homeland, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) has launched four airstrikes against targets in Syria since the start of the Syrian civil war. In each case, the Israeli planes never violated Syrian airspace, but launched missiles from Israel to hit targets in Syria. The latest Israeli strike occurred October 30, 2013 against Syrian air defense weapon systems near the Syrian coastal city of Latakia.

3. The Fragmentation of Syria (continued) -- Analysis by John Antal

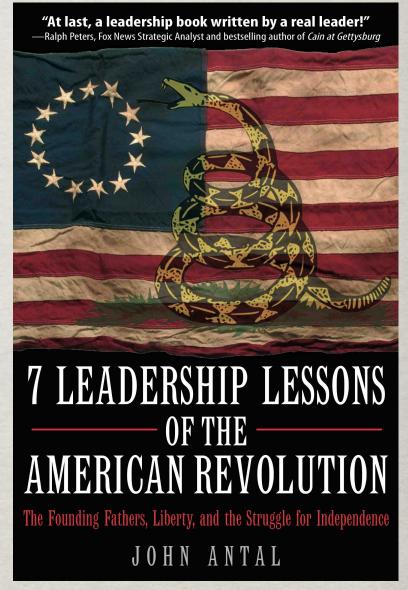
Analysis: The Syrian civil war is now largely a major battleground for the Sunni-Shia conflict. Israel watches nervously from the sidelines, getting involved when their security interests are threatened. Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey are absorbing many of the refugees. There was a lot of chatter about the US supplying weapons to Syrian rebels in September 2013, but very little news on this now. After September's debacle over the Red Line, which guaranteed the survival of the Assad regime, the US has shown that it has no stomach for a fight in Syria – and make no mistake, it would take hard fighting to end the Syrian civil war. No other nation wants to get embroiled in the Syrian mess. As Michael Yon, an internationally renowned war correspondent announced, Syria is shattered. Unless one side eliminates all opponents – a very unlikely possibility since no side has a decisive advantage – this war will go on for years before it burns itself out. Syria, like Libya, will be another failed state in the Middle East and a likely breeding ground for future problems.

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"John Antal's timely book, 7 *Leadership Lessons of the American Revolution* is succinctly written and easily understood. On the surface, it demonstrates how those who risked all to create this republic used specific leadership principles to overcome tremendous challenges in that endeavor. These same techniques are just as valid in this century as in theirs. Along the way, Antal paints these revolutionaries as living, breathing human beings with high-risk tasks to accomplish. But Antal's study actually goes much farther – because behind his straightforward storytelling lies something much more important: an examination of what principles that leadership came from, and what principles it should serve. You'll come away with the feeling that the founders of this country weren't "historical figures" but living, breathing human beings with huge problems to solve, for which they used methods available to any one of us who cares to learn."

Bradley Thompson, television writer and producer and the co-writer for the hit TV series' Battlestar Galactica and the second season of Falling Skies.

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