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The Two Pit Bulls – And The Bone



The Russians cornered the United States, trapped it by its own words, and forced it into an 'Agreement' of sorts, under the United Nations banner, for Syria to hand over all its chemical weapons. It has been a real short-term geo-political coup for Russia, Syria and their allies, and an embarrassing setback for the United States, where it itself set the diplomatic landmines and then stepped on every one of them, with Vladimir Putin gleefully shepherding it along. While the two global 'powers' (the 'Pit Bulls') sparred, Bashar al-Assad and his regime won a short term reprieve, but Syria (the 'Bone') ultimately lost in the super-power wrangling. The acute frustration of the American President and his senior most officials was plain for all to see in the past two weeks, as they desperately tried to push for a targeted military strike but kept getting thwarted by President Putin.

The more President Obama and his administration tried to justify and push for a strike, including a direct plea to the American people, with reasons that were almost amusing in their ever broadening scope - a 'targeted' or

'unbelievably small' one, a 'no boots on the ground', an extremely measured technical one, for Syria's children, for America's children, for the security of the world, for America's security, for national interest, for international interest, as a warning and deterrent to Assad, as a future deterrent for other dictators, etc., and so it went on and on – the more they tried to convince, the more unconvinced everyone became – including the overwhelming majority of the American public and the Congress, in whose hands the President had left the final decision.

The effort the American administration put in to try and convince the world, its allies and its people was extraordinary, and went from steely determination, to sad-to-see comical desperation. Having left an unpopular and tough decision to a 'committee' and having set the traps for themselves that Putin was only too glad to spring, Obama and his team had no choice but to be reluctantly corralled and tamed, at least for now. But this is by no means over, the power struggle between America and Russia over the direction of Syria's fate is going to be ongoing and shall escalate regardless of this chemical weapons 'Agreement'.



Overall, this 'Agreement' is a good thing, as the world surely does not need another expanding war. But, it was not good for the American administration who had publicly stated its 'red line' intention to punish and perhaps remove Assad for crossing that line. The fact that it got

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neutralized in its publicly stated position by Putin was good for Russia as it once again wrested control of the 'Bone' away from America and its allies. It certainly was good for Assad and his regime as it saved them from the shock and awe of American missile strikes and perhaps regime change, and was a setback for the opposition. But it may not be so good for the people of Syria, as this 'Agreement' deals only with the chemical weapons issue and not with bringing peace to the country immediately, which is the only thing good for the people.

An 'Agreement' dealing with just the chemical weapons issue will prolong the civil war with all its accompanying death and destruction, as the two warring sides keep battling indefinitely. It will also keep an iron fisted dictatorship in place and embolden it. The invigorated Assad regime will push harder to crush opposition which will impact additional millions of innocent civilians, as the civil war destroys property and lives. Over two million plus people are already displaced to the neighbouring countries, living the horrific and uncertain lives of war refugees.

As the two 'Pit Bulls' battled over the 'Bone', the arguments put forward by both protagonists so far, regarding Syria, were blatantly self-serving and steeped in hypocrisy, but it is an important game of dominance and 'one-up-man-ship' that they play, one that is known and tolerated by all. The U.S.A. and Russia, and their respective allies, are going to continue to maneuver, posture and struggle for advantage over the other, while brazenly talking about world peace, prosperity and good-will towards all. This game is played by all countries and political institutions with all seriousness and feigned righteous bluster, and deadly intent, but no one has been more dominant in the past decades (since the Second World War) than the United States and Russia. Britain and Europe's power has declined dramatically and China's power, while ascending, is not quite there yet.

The United States and the resurgent Russia, once again take up the long dormant tug-of-war for global political influence and dominance. Both are equally insistent that they are doing

the right thing for humanitarian and legal reasons, while being on the opposite end of the others' position and perceptive. It is the classic face-off, and an old game, played forever by dominant global powers for their own purposes. While each side argues moral cause, and a higher and noble purpose of saving the world, or the innocent people, from the evil that the other represents, usually, the 'pitch' that drives the policy and the rhetoric is for self interest and self-aggrandizement. This time the 'Bone' that they have squared off on is Syria.

Syria has been a boon for Russia who has long resented the loss of power and influence since the breakup of the former U.S.S.R. Syria has given Putin the perfect and unexpected platform to take centre stage and push the U.S.A. on to the defensive. For all of Putin's arguments about averting escalation of war and upholding international law, it was his Russia that supplied arms and support to Assad's regime while civilians died, and it's veto's that prevented the international community from taking an active role much sooner, to bring the civil war to a quicker end.



Even now, Putin does not seem overly concerned about the Syrian people that are the real casualties of this prolonged civil war. In his op-ed in the New York Times he talked about his objection to America's planned unilateral military action, the breaking of international law, the illegality of acting outside of the United Nations Security Council, and Obama calling the American people "exceptional". Not much was mentioned by him on putting an end to the war in Syria immediately, saving civilian lives, restoring peace and rebuilding the country.

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Additionally, he is aware that his open and consistent support of Assad's regime keeps a brutal and oppressive dictatorship in place, and supplying it with more arms is going to prolong the conflict and add considerably to the collateral damage, yet that is precisely what he proposes to do if the Americans and their allies interfere. Not much thought and effort seems to be devoted to the increasing human toll and misery that the ongoing war is inflicting on the people. He views the Syrian conflict from the vantage point of what's good for him and Russia, geo-politically and economically, which is understandable, but millions of destroyed lives are the price of the benefits that will accrue to him and Russia and their allies. The outmaneuvering of the Americans and their allies was the 'cream' on top.



As for the United States, it showed and succumbed to its weaknesses we mentioned in our last blog on this subject. It was the Secretary of State, John Kerry's off-the-cuff statement about Syria surrendering its chemical weapons to prevent a strike that created the huge opening that Putin and Assad exploited and drove through. It was an embarrassing and

costly setback for President Obama, particularly internally, where it might be argued, he has more committed and determined enemies, than internationally. It was also a hit to America's international image and its continuing preeminence in global leadership.

Due to the many noble sounding but ultimately extremely messy, costly, ill considered and poorly executed wars that America has been in over the past decades, since the Second World War, which were started with stated 'good intentions' but ended with bad and unresolved outcomes, and failed objectives, such as Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, and lately Iraq and Afghanistan, America has steadily lost its credibility globally and as recent events show perhaps even internally. The enormous goodwill earned in the Second World War has been squandered and in its place a net deficit is now accumulated. Nobody doubts America's personal democratic values, particularly the individual's rights and freedoms, to be the preferred value system by which all people should be governed. But its execution of these stated goals abroad leaves a lot to be desired, and while it values American lives with a religious fervor, if only all governments did that, its cold and callous acceptance of other citizen's lives, simply as unfortunate collateral damage, leaves the countries affected cold at best and seething with anger at worst. It was this long track record of ill considered and poorly executed foreign interventions that finally caught up to America and its Administration, in its latest bid to intervene in Syria, and prevented it from carrying out its will, at least for now.

This boxing in of the United States of America by Russia was an unexpected reprieve to Assad and his backers and a serious setback to his opponents. But ultimately it is the Syrian people that have lost in this power struggle. It is they who must continue to suffer as the top dogs continue to wrangle over the ultimate fate of the bone between them, and the rest of the world and the United Nations side with one or the other, and debate.