The Great Set-Up - Is Washington Postering the UK against Iran?

Who needs enemies when one can befriend the United States of America? And indeed after being baited by Washington to seize one of Iran’s tankers on the premise that the said-tanker was in violation of Britain’s decision to bar Syria from importing crude oil, the UK, America’s very ‘special friend’, has been left to fend off for itself ... murky waters and all.

“The responsibility in the first instance falls to the United Kingdom to take care of their ships,” Mike Pompeo told media earlier this week, before adding: “We don’t war with Iran.”

Whatever bond the U.S. and the UK may share, or better yet may have once upon a time shared ... back when PM Tony Blair was only too keen to follow in America’s footsteps and declare war on an unsuspecting Iraq, it is rather evident that under President Trump’s new world order, friendship will not encompass any measure of sympathy, never mind empathy.

As far as the United States is concerned Britain has become a convenient pawn in a game of chess, which from Washington’s thwarted perspective seeks to a priori destroy those who might one day pose a threat to America’s
hegemony. Needless to say that the list of would-be enemies is rather long.

When a nation conceptualise its existence in perpetual belligerence so as to assert its own sense of self, such nation needs to absolutely create enemies, hence America’s propensity to approach politics as a grand display of military posturing.

As Simon Tisdall puts it in an article for the Guardian: “With the seizure of a supertanker off Gibraltar, distracted UK government was set up by John Bolton as collateral damage.”

And: “John Bolton, White House national security adviser and notorious Iraq-era hawk, is a man on a mission. Given broad latitude over policy by Donald Trump, he is widely held to be driving the US confrontation with Iran. And in his passionate bid to tame Tehran, Bolton cares little who gets hurt – even if collateral damage includes a close ally such as Britain.”

If few today are under any illusion that in fact Britain was led into a trap by one of its closest allies so that war hawks could use push their biased geopolitical schema, we ought to look beyond Washington’s old upset with Iran and understand what new motivations are simmering under the surface.

However intent America may be on bringing Iran to heel, the U.S. most immediate target to a developing crisis in the Strait of Hormuz may in fact lies thousands of miles east of the Islamic Republic. China I would argue is President Trump’s real target.

If we consider that the U.S. is currently locked in a trade war with China and that only weeks ago President Trump was only too happy to point out that any crisis related to the world oil route would hurt NOT his America but rather the Asian block, my argument is not as outlandish as many may think.

China as it were appears to agree with such an analysis. Reports have confirmed this week that Beijing increased its military footprint alongside its naval ‘silk road’, a clear sign that China is prepared to defend its interests against any and all attempts to disrupt its strategic energy supply route - notwithstanding the ever-increasing need to demonstrate strength in the face of President Trump’s pronounced overall belligerence.

We may do well to remember that the United States is always hunting for new threats to take out, and China has become a contender to America’s geo-economic supremacy, something Washington is unlikely to forgive ... just as it never forgave Iran for proclaiming its independence.

Washington here is operating on the deep-seated assumption that the UK will resort to violence to see through a resolution to this new crisis, thus playing directly into Trump’s pipedream of a Gulf Force to man the Strait of Hormuz. Such ambition, if it was entertained for a few fleeting seconds by Britain’s now resigned Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, has since met too much resistance, both abroad and at home to be viable - notwithstanding the irony of a UK-EU alliance in the middle of a messy withdrawal from the European Block.

Britain’s reluctance to go at it alone mind you reflects an interesting reality: Britain simply does not possess the means of its naval protection. Once the envy of all world powers, Britain’s navy has been reduced to a trickle, yet another consequence of those infamous austerity measures the nation were told it had to embrace to survive a bout of recession.

As the Express puts it:

“The Iran Crisis has revealed a stark decrease in the size of the British Royal Navy, leading experts to claim the maritime force is “too small” to deal with international conflict.”

For all its wants and its ambitions it is now starkly apparent that the UK is no longer a potent naval power, at least not when confronted to Iran’s military strength. But rather than read pending doom in such a realization we may want to acknowledge Iran’s commitment to regional peace as it continues to show restraint where others would have exacted revenge.

The UK was conned into a crisis it cannot militarize its way out, or as Tisdall eloquently writes:

“Despite its misgivings, Britain has been co-opted on to the front line of Washington’s confrontation with Iran. The process of polarisation, on both sides, is accelerating. The nuclear deal is closer to total
collapse. And by threatening Iran with “serious consequences”, without knowing what that may entail, Britain blindly dances to the beat of Bolton’s war drums.”

John Bolton’s gamble did little else than expose Washington’s hands towards not only China but its European allies, the UK included since it showed respectively belligerence and callousness. America’s willingness to weaponize its alliances, partnerships, and international agreements might one arrogance too many for any one nation to digest quietly - hence America’s deepening isolation on the international scene.

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