

Republican Perspective

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by John Littig

The Ghost of Lyndon Baines Johnson

After the November 13 Paris terrorist attacks, the French promptly bombed an Islamic State (ISIS) command center in Raqqa. They got the targeting guidance from our Pentagon. This prompted some to ask: if we knew where the command center was, why had we not already destroyed it?

The answer is that our targeting rules require zero civilian casualties. Thus we don't bomb military targets within cities---which of course is exactly where ISIS locates its key military installations. This prohibition is despite the Pentagon's description of our air strikes as "the most precise in the history of warfare."

Retired four-star General Jack Keane calls our policy "constricting" and "an absurdity." Keane added "...the French are in there not using the restrictions we have imposed on our pilots." Let alone the Russians, who "...don't care at all about civilians" according to Keane.

This is not to say that we should bomb indiscriminately where civilians are present. Certainly a policy that strives to minimize civilian casualties makes good sense---especially when many of those civilians may not be ISIS enthusiasts. But zero civilian casualties is an unreasonable restriction, or as Keane says: "an absurdity."

Former CIA Deputy Director Mike Morell shed additional light on the administration's war-fighting priorities. Appearing on PBS' "Charlie Rose" Morell said "We didn't go after oil wells...because we didn't want to do environmental damage and we didn't want to destroy that infrastructure." Morell said the White House wanted to preserve the oil wells because they would be needed by Syria when ISIS eventually is defeated.

(How does preserving the Syrian oil industry comport with this administration's love affair with clean energy and loathing for fossil fuels? But I digress---so back to the targeting issue.)

The same reasoning applied to oil trucks. But after Paris, the U.S. began bombing oil trucks in order to cut off the terrorists' main source of revenue. Hundreds have been destroyed. "So now we're hitting oil trucks, Morell said, "And maybe you get to the point where...we also have to hit oil wells."

So there you have it. A war in which environmental concerns and preserving the enemy's infrastructure take precedence. In August 2014, President Obama said

“this is going to be a long-term project.” With the strategic priorities backwards, he’s right. No wonder we have not been able to “degrade and eventually destroy” ISIS.

We are engaged in a war where we do not place highest priority on victory but on avoiding enemy civilian casualties, preserving the enemy’s productive infrastructure, and being exemplary stewards of the environment. And, by-the-way, the President does not even use those key words: *enemy* and *victory*.

In World War II, a significant part of our winning strategy was to destroy the enemy’s infrastructure, not to preserve it. And civilian casualties were not a consideration. Ask the people of Dresden or Tokyo. Also we did not file environmental impact reports in the process of selecting targets.

And warfare decisions were largely left to the military. Of course the overarching strategic decisions were made by the civilian leadership. For example, the decision to defeat the Nazis first, Japan after. And the atomic bombings, with their far-reaching implications for the course of history. But for the most part, war-fighting decisions were made by war-fighting commanders, not the by Commander in Chief.

In September of 2014, The Wall Street Journal said “The U.S. military campaign against Islamist militants in Syria is being designed to allow President Obama to exert a high degree of personal control, going so far as to require that the military obtain presidential signoff for strikes...”

Target selection by the president is antithetical to a successful outcome. Just ask Lyndon Baines Johnson.