National Post View: Eight Years of Obama’s Foreign Policy Disasters Recapped in Only Two Horrific Weeks

December 30, 2016

National Post

<http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/national-post-view-eight-years-of-obamas-foreign-policy-disasters-recapped-in-only-two-horrific-weeks>

It is sad to see the foreign policy of the United States being carried out in such gasping, feeble whimpers. But it is no longer surprising. The last two weeks have been a microcosm of the failures of the last eight years. They will not soon be forgotten, or the damage quickly undone.

First and foremost, of course, was the appalling decision of the United States — of President Barack Obama, let’s be clear — to not use America’s UN Security Council veto to strike down a heavy handed resolution levelled at Israel; more specifically, settlements it has established (and may expand) in portions of the disputed West Bank.

The settlements are undeniably controversial, nowhere more than in Israel itself. One can support Israel while questioning Israeli government’s settlement policies. But this resolution did more than just question the settlements. It called into question Israel’s right to control, after a future final peace agreement, even those sections of disputed territory that are by demography and history indisputably Jewish, including some of Judaism’s holiest sites. The resolution also attempted to do what generations of U.S. leaders have resisted doing — force an essentially bi-lateral process between Israel and the Palestinians into international fora that offer no solutions. Obama’s decision to permit the resolution to stand is an enormous black mark on the already shredded tatters of his foreign policy legacy.

It was also, incredibly, just the beginning of the Obama White House’s decision to unleash a parting salvo at a steadfast American ally. Outgoing Secretary of State John Kerry also unloaded on Israel, slamming the settlements, defending Obama’s lacklustre record of support for Israel, and asserting that friends must be honest with each other. Of course. But friends also need to carefully consider how and where such messages are delivered. Apparently in an attempt to show America’s continued goodwill toward Israel, despite his rhetorical assault, Sec. Kerry also announced that the White House was prepared to back a push for peace.

Really, Mr. Secretary? Is this a joke? Nothing says “committed to peace” like stabbing a friend in the back, while simultaneously proposing to launch a massive international process to address a generations-long impasse … with all of three weeks left in your term. This hardly rises to the level of token.

But that is par for the course with the Obama administration. Russia threatening NATO’s eastern flank? Send a battalion and some tanks, while imposing a few sanctions. China gobbling up and militarizing territory in the Pacific without legal cause and despite pledges not to? Sail the odd warship past a newly built island fortress for a look-see. Syria devolving into a hellhole of civil war and sectarian slaughter? Send some equipment — nothing too lethal, of course, because that might be controversial — and try to train a few fighters (but don’t break a sweat).

And, obviously, when the Assad regime nerve gasses its own people in direct defiance of your own declared “red line,” well, just pretend you never said that and walk away, whistling a merry tune. The less said about the nuclear deal with Iran, which freed up billions in frozen Iranian assets and lifted sanctions in exchange for Tehran’s unverifiable promise to briefly not build nuclear weapons, the better.

We could go on but the point is made. From Israel, to Syria, to Russia, to Iraq and through to the Pacific, America’s allies and partners have been forced to re-evaluate how useful an ally the United States really is, while its enemies and opponents discover just how far America can be pushed. Even when America’s interests have been directly and clearly challenged, for example, by Russia’s recent cyber adventurism, the best the White House can muster is an appeal to “knock it off” and a belated, half-hearted round of sanctions and diplomatic expulsions that could be described, if one were in a generous mood, as mostly symbolic.

America remains a great country — the only country truly capable of leading the free world. But for the last eight years, its commander-in-chief has not had any interest in that job, preferring to “lead from behind” when he led at all, and more keen on pursuing futile resets with rival powers than working with allies in pursuit of common Western interests. The state of the world today is proof of the failure of those policies — and leaves Mr. Obama’s successor in a very deep hole he may not be equipped to easily escape.