

A Concert of the Greater Middle East.

In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars Europe was a political shambles. Decades of what Clausewitz thought to be “total war” had ruined the economies and “status quo ante” social systems of the many European states. To overcome the instability of the continent and the likelihood that this would lead to further disastrous warfare, the Great Powers of the time met at Vienna after 1815 to create a system of balanced agreements which would bring into equilibrium the interests of all the possible adversaries on the European scene. This system preserved European peace for many years until it came to pieces in August 1914. The system has been known to history as the “Concert of Europe.” What is now needed is a “Concert of the Greater Middle East.”

In the “Islamic Culture Continent” extending from Morocco to Indonesia and from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean, the states, factions and sects of the region tremble on the edge of the chasm of massive military conflict.

-Iraq is torn by Sunni insurgencies both secular and jihadi and is “governed by” a controlling Shiite majority which is itself the prize being struggled over by competing Shiite militia armies.

- Iran pursues a dangerous nuclear program which threatens all its neighbors (including Israel) with the possibility of war and hegemonic domination while meddling deeply in the political destruction of Iraq.

- The Kurdish “nation” now possesses a homeland in northern Iraq which is threatened in the long run by Turkish animosity and suspicion.

- Syria exists in a precarious state balanced between American hostility and the policy pressures of its Iranian senior ally. The long term stability of its government is threatened by sanctions and political covert action.

- Lebanon is transitioning toward a political expression of Lebanese Shia majority numbers. This could lead to civil war. Lebanese Christian allies of the United States and Israel do not want to give up the unwarranted power in the country that their small numbers no longer justify.

These and many other factors threaten war in the region both inside and among these countries, war which could easily spread to their sponsors in the world community.

This situation is so dire and fraught with the possibility of major war that a regional conference of ALL the actors is justified, indeed is imperative.

This conference should be designed to bring into equilibrium the interests of the state and non-state “players” whose real or imagined grievances and needs threaten the peace of mankind. Just as the Great Powers of 1815 sponsored the Congress of Vienna to forge an understanding of what had to be done to achieve a lasting peace among those who hesitated on the brink of war, the present Great Powers; the United States, Russia, China, France, and Britain must call for a definitive international round of negotiations to settle ALL outstanding disputes among the peoples of the Greater Middle East. Would such a series of conferences meet under the auspices of the United Nations? The present structure of international law makes that unavoidable, but the attitudes and direct and continuous participation of the Great Powers will be a pre-requisite for success.

What might the set of agreements and policies making up the “Concert of the Greater Middle East” look like? From an American perspective they may look like this:

- A “Grand Bargain” with Iran in which Iranian and Shia aspiration to be treated for the first time in history as equal in importance in the Islamic World with the Sunnis and in which the position of Iran as a major power in the Greater Middle East is accepted by the

United States. In return the United States should demand of Iran that it place its nuclear and missile programs under full international controls and that it both restrain the Shia government of Iraq from de-stabilizing excesses and desist from the Iranian support to international jihadi terrorism for which it is well known.

- A “Bargain Among Allies” made between The United States and Turkey with regard to a Kurdish Homeland in what is now northern Iraq. The terms – Kurdistan will make all its oil export and refining deals with the Turks. – Kurdistan will abandon irredentist claims in the Turkish Republic and will take an active role in the suppression of armed PKK activity in Turkey. – Kurdistan will support the rights and position of the Turcoman minority in areas accessible to it and in particular, in Kirkuk. – The United States will maintain an air base and substantial ground garrison in Kurdistan to enforce all of the above. (This will be necessary in any case to provide a military “reserve” needed to support the safety of the United States diplomatic presence in Iraq)
- Lebanon and Syria to be brought to a mutual and legal recognition of their distinct national identities in which Syria undertakes to refrain from political activities of ANY KIND in Lebanon and in

which Syria accepts that violation of this undertaking opens it LEGALLY to armed international intervention in its internal affairs. In return Syria would be absolved from the unending American hostility to the existence of the present regime on Damascus.

- Israel must be a full participant in all conferences and meetings involved in this process. In return, Israel will undertake to make Palestine (the state) a vital and thriving economy.
- In the Sunni Arab areas of Iraq, the United States should learn to differentiate among those who fight; - against Shia domination in Iraq, - those nationalists and Baathists who fight for their condemned leader, - Sunni Bedouin tribesmen under the tribal Sheiks, - “Alawi” style nationalist Shia, - and local or international jihadi types. What the US and the international community must learn to do is “divide and conquer.” The variety of people in the Middle East is no different than anywhere else. The need to “neuter” Islamic jihadis is overwhelming. Muslims and Arabs hate the idea that outsiders can see the “daylight” between them and make use of it, but the fact is that there are enough mutually hostile factions in the “Sunni Triangle” that those

who are useful in the struggle for stability in the region and the world can be made allies in the fight against jihadism. The needs of mankind outweigh the psychology of anti-colonialism and a choice should be made among present adversaries and those who are chosen as potential allies should be supported against the true enemy. It is likely that the Bedouin tribes would become allies against the fanatics.

- US Forces in Iraq (outside Kurdistan) should be scaled back in their activities to a mission which concentrates on training the forces of governments friendly to the USA and securing our citizens and embassy.

Is there a practical alternative to a “Congress of Geneva” (or wherever the grand meeting is first held)? Yes. The alternative is war and chaos.

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