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The MAGA President's Anti-Nation-Building Nation-Building

It's almost a foregone conclusion. The President's approval rating in the polls drops (in the case of the current President to under 40 percent, with disapproval touching 60 percent), and the knee-jerk reaction is to offshore the focus of America's attention.

When we watch all of the outrageous things this President's Administration has done, we hear: "Well this is what he promised he'd do!" Well . . . he also promised 'no nation-building.' But by now the President has seemingly gotten a taste for violence, beginning at home with his ICE raids on schools, churches, hospitals, construction sites, and courthouses, where the agents sit like masked ghouls waiting outside these buildings to pounce on their victims as soon as they appear. So he's pivoting away from his faltering efforts at world peace, which he hoped would bring him the Nobel Peace Prize—and for which he has actively and shamelessly campaigned—and turning toward his earlier saber-rattling (remember Greenland, Canada, and Panama?) into military adventurism.

Bombing Iran's nuclear facilities was his first extra continental adventure. It was pronounced a success, having 'completely destroyed' the targeted underground facilities. In fact, the Administration's own experts downplayed the damage to something more like significantly slowing the time frame for Iran to acquire nuclear-grade material. Nonetheless, no Americans were killed, only a handful of Iranians, so it was declared a clinically executed surgical strike. OK, what next?

Well, the public reaction to the ICE raids (along with the illegal use of federalized National Guardsmen) was broadly negative. What to do? How about Nigeria? Boko Haram? They're an easy target! But a rationale beyond the horrific sexual abuse and sex trafficking of little girls had to be sought. So, the Administration promoted the claim that their attacks specifically targeted Christians, a claim that Nigerian authorities summarily dismissed. However, having rattled those sabers, they seem to have put that bit of military intervention into their back pocket—at least, for now. It probably wouldn't have boosted the President's standing much in the polls, and in any case it's very unlikely this Administration to assist the authorities of a predominantly black nation.

Then came drug trafficking: An excuse to send drones out to sink suspicious looking power boats in the Caribbean and off the Pacific Coast of Central America and claim that they're bringing drugs into the country that are responsible for tens of thousands of American deaths. Never mind that that cannot be true, since the 'killer drug' is fentanyl and that is actually being produced in clandestine labs in Mexico using basic ingredients

acquired from China. Oh well, not to worry, the President just had his PR people claim otherwise.

But what if those military actions were illegal, since drug interdiction requires the seizure of the drugs and the arrest of the criminals, who are then allowed their day in court? Again, not to worry. The Administration just calls it a ‘war on narcoterrorism’ — that’s their ‘good justification,’— even though those conditions don’t satisfy the criteria spelled out in the War Powers Act, and it’s not been approved by Congress, and is thus illegal? Once again, all of that is just ignored. Congress won’t do anything about it. And even if these actions were taken as an act of war, the strikes in international waters violate the rules of conduct in war according to international law. Survivors of an attack, when no longer a threat, are to be rescued. But of course the Administration doesn’t recognize the World Court, so that doesn’t matter either. So they just proceeded with the summary execution of more than one hundred individuals thus far with US drone attacks. However, the President’s approval rating has not improved. In fact, it’s fallen further. Evidently, it was time to up the ante! Although these attacks were likely the initial volley of what was to come. The attack of Venezuela.

Venezuela is pariah state. It should be easy to invade it and get rid of the dictator Maduro. He’s already been under indictment for exporting cocaine to the US. To amp up the rhetoric, the Administration pushed its phony claims that Venezuela had stolen American oil and that the President wants it back! (I haven’t heard him say that he wants the oil back from Saudi Arabia or Kuwait or Abu Dhabi!) The truth is much more complicated. Venezuela agreed to pay compensation to the oil companies for nationalizing the oil reserves (albeit at a much lower value than they were worth), but mismanagement and international sanctions made it impossible to fulfill those financial obligations. Therefore, it was more a case of bankruptcy than theft. And the oil companies involved never chose to pursue it. So, the military strike early in January successfully capturing Maduro and his wife and secreting them away to New York to stand trial on drug charges. (All after the President had just pardoned a former Honduran drug trafficker, convicted of the largest such criminal activity in US history. One wonders what payoff the President got for that?!)

So, where does this military adventurism place America? The President says ‘we’—presumably, Marco Rubio—will ‘run’ Venezuela, straighten it out, make it a great country again! Sure sounds like ‘Nation-Building’ doesn’t it? And if history is any guide, the President’s approval ratings should initially rise—as always happens when the US enters into a new military conflict, even of its own making. And, of course, this is a Congressional election year when the President’s party is underwater in the polls. But history has also shown in Vietnam and again in Afghanistan,

that the initial patriotic response to such military adventurism has limits. The Presidential election is nearly three years away. The Administration better show results quickly.

Milton H Marquis