

WHY DO AMERICANS REJECT THE OBAMA "RED LINE"? By Linwood Bragan

The President, who campaigned as a reluctant warrior, has had little success when it comes to military matters. The peace in Iraq has turned into civil war. In 2012 we lost more troops to suicide than to battle. Even his administration's greatest success, getting Osama bin Laden, has failed to turn the growing tide against the war. The American culture is in no mood to fight: poll after poll reveals this. And then there is Syria and its civil war conflict which has been ongoing since 2011.

The New York Times reported that while holding an impromptu press conference on August 20, 2012, President Obama warned Syria that, "...it would face American military intervention if there were signs that its arsenal of unconventional weapons was being moved or prepared for use". In responding to questions, the President referred to this as a "Red Line". A year later, chemical weapons were in fact used against Syria's citizenry - allegedly at the orders of president, Bashar al-Assad.

Following through on his "Red Line" comment, the President clearly stated that a strike - what he later called "a shot across the bow" - would be made against Syria for its use of chemical weapons. However, since the deployment of poison gas, the line has been: ignored, marched up to, had its parentage denied, been internationalized and reset all in an effort to garner international support. Most recently, it has been re-declared in efforts to seek cover from congressional approval.

Though normally anxious to authorize military spending the House and Senate appear at odds from their leadership in authorizing war. Political insiders and elites liked the saber rattling for a strike. However, they found that the rank and file (particularly the "radicals" of both the Left and Right) took a pass.

Having marched America away from what might best be described now as a faded "Pink line", has allowed Russia, our Middle Eastern rival and ally of Syria, to exploit this void of American indecision and exert even greater influence. In

fact, Russian President Vladimir Putin now finds himself being left to play a major role as conciliator in the region. It appears the American Congress is only too happy to allow Putin this position which may allow them to dodge the issues and any difficult votes.

On the anniversary of two American tragedies, both on 9-11 America's culture is still deeply affected by our experiences. September 11, 2001 shocked America and the world by the scale of the carnage upon innocents. Last year's

9-11 Benghazi consulate assault was small in comparison with only four casualties; however, it again involved the senseless and brutal deaths of Americans who were attacked while at work and killed by radical Islamists.

Unlike the support that followed the 2001 attack, skepticism of government increased in the aftermath of the Benghazi attack in 2012. From the lack of action by the administration since the attack, it appears such skepticism was justified. Americans were promised that justice would be brought to those who led the attacks.

However, while news organizations such as The New York Times, CNN, and the Associated Press have managed to garner interviews with the perpetrator, the Administration has failed to use the resources available to it to even "fire a shot across the bow" as was promised against Syria. FBI investigators, Special Forces and CIA drones have not as yet been deployed to locate, question, capture or eliminate this terrorist or any of his faction.

It is little wonder that, after a dozen years of wars, the American public no longer has any taste for the fight. Though public support of our military is near all-time high numbers and no one questions its might, exhilarating feelings to support a march to war in Syria cannot be found. The public perception from Left, Right, Center, Far Left and Far Right all appear united in one thing: their skepticism of administration claims of "irrefutable evidence" that requires the United States intervention in the Syrian civil war.

Two things on which the majority of Americans, whether Left or Right in their political per-



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suaions, are now united is a reluctance to march forth in military might and - with a stagnant economy at home - a loss of confidence in the whole political leadership in Washington. Peggy Noonan writing in the Wall Street Journal discussed this ongoing change in the American public:

"A point on how quickly public opinion has jelled. There is something going on here, a new distance between Washington and America that the Syria debate has forced into focus. The Syria debate isn't, really, a struggle between libertarians and neo-conservatives, or left and right, or Democrats and Republicans. That's not its shape. It looks more like a fight between the country and Washington, between the broad American public and Washington's central governing assumptions."

The good news is American confidence appears to still be strong, but it is the confidence in our families, our neighbors, our congregations, our local community. However, that confidence may not carry forward in the future as increasing numbers of Americans believe our children may not have as great an opportunity as we have enjoyed.

It is clear that the confidence once so bright with the election of a new President and Congress has been shaken. (The United States Armed Forces are the single arm of government that consistently ranks in high esteem with the American people across all segments of the demographic scales.) The federal government has never been bigger, more far reaching, and perhaps, less effective than it is at present. Our deficits are higher, taxes higher, expenditures higher with no end to it in sight. What has all this spending bought us: a stagnant economy, an intransigent political system, a self-serving political class, and a gridlocked national government?

Many questions loom on the horizon for the American people, but getting involved further into the wars, terrorism and fanaticisms of Syria specifically and the Muslim Brotherhood's radicalism in the Middle East in general isn't on the front burner for most of America. Poll after poll show Americans are war weary. They are tired of

being unappreciated for their battles.

They're tired of wasting their taxes on wars for seemingly ungrateful people on the other side of the planet who hate us for our efforts on their behalf. They are disgusted with sending their sons, brothers and fathers; and in these modern times, their daughters, wives and mothers to die or come back wounded. Even those physically unscathed oftentimes still return home changed by their tour of duty.

As a people we are tired. As a nation we are changed. As a culture we have been transformed by the collective experience of our warriors returned home from the battle front. We view the world differently because of a war too long fought and by terrorism in the homeland such as the bombs set off at the Boston Marathon. The focus of Americans has clearly shifted.

A recent Barna poll found that an overwhelming majority of Americans (75%) rank terrorism prevention as equal to or more important than the more politically emphasized issues such as: immigration, healthcare, unemployment, and immigration. In fact, that same percentage ranked terrorism prevention as more important or equal to family preservation.

Americans are telling our leaders that it is time to get our own house in order - there is plenty to do at home. No "shot across the bow is needed" until we have first given a cup of cold water to those who thirst (suffer the ravages of war) and food to those who hunger; to take care of and protect our American family.

"To us, family means putting your arms around each other and being there."

Former First Lady, Barbara Bush



Linwood Bragan is the Executive Director of CapStand. He has an extensive background in political activism having served on numerous political campaigns and, most recently serving on Capitol Hill as a Congressional Counsel and Legislative Assistant. Linwood has lectured in 20 states on political activism, finance, organization and elections. Email him at: linwood@capstand.org

Culture Tracks

Americans' Beliefs Regarding American Airstrike in Syria *

- 48% oppose an airstrike
 - 40% of Republicans oppose airstrike
 - 48% of Democrats oppose airstrike
 - 50% of Independents oppose airstrike
- 29% favor an airstrike
 - 35% of Republicans favor airstrike
 - 29% of Democrats favor airstrike
 - 29% of Independents favor airstrike
- 74% believe it will create a backlash against US and allies in the region
- 61% believe airstrike will lead to a long-term military commitment

Is There Clear Evidence of Chemical Weapons Use in Syria *

- 53% of Americans say yes, clear evidence
 - 56% of Republicans say yes
 - 62% of Democrats say yes
 - 47% of Independents say yes
- 23% of Americans say no, not clear
 - 23% of Republicans say no
 - 20% of Democrats say no
 - 27% of Independents say no

Americans' Hold High View of the Military **

- 78% say service members contribute to society's well being
 - 76% of men agree
 - 80% of women agree
 - 77% of those ages 18-49 agree
 - 81% of those ages 50 and older agree
 - 86% of Republicans/lean Rep. agree
 - 75% of Democrats/lean Dem. Agree

Americans Believe Preventing Terrorism Remains a Priority ***

- 77% believe it more important than healthcare
- 77% believe it more important than break-up of the family
- 76% believe it more important than education
- 75% believe it more important than unemployment
- 70% believe it more important than immigration

Americans' and Spiritual/Emotional Aftermath of Terrorism ***

- 43% believe attacks of 9-11 made people turn back to God
- 54% of born-again Christians agree
- 20% of atheists and agnostics also agree

Emotions Americans Experienced After Act of Terrorism ***

- After 9-11:
- Sadness 47%
 - Anger 40%
 - Fear 36%
 - Confusion 28%
 - Anxiety 18%

After Boston Marathon Bombing:

- Sadness 71%
- Anger 54%
- Fear 16%
- Confusion 13%
- Anxiety 8%

* Pew Research 9-1-2013

** Pew Research July 2013

*** Barna Poll August 2013