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Could there be a political solution to the civil war in Syria?

President Trump highlighted in his State of the Union Address that almost all ISIS territory in Iraq and Syria has been liberated.

By DARLENE CASELLA April 17, 2018 22:00
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A girl looks on following alleged chemical weapons attack, in what is said to be Douma, Syria in this still image from video obtained by Reuters on April 8, 2018. (photo credit: WHITE HELMETS/REUTERS TV VIA REUTERS)

The Syrian Arab Republic is in Western Asia, bordering Lebanon, the Mediterranean Sea, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Israel. It is home to a diverse mix of ethnic groups; Syrians, Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, Caucasians, Mandeans and Turks. Religious affiliations include Sunni, Christian, Alawite, Druse, Ismaili, Shi'ite, Salafi, Yazidi and Jewish.

What is current-day Syria has been under the control of Babylonians, Cyrus the Great, Persians, Greeks, Alexander the Great, Armenians, Romans and Byzantines. The Apostle Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. Muhammad's followers invaded in 626 CE. French, English, Italian and German overlords ruled until the Crusades, followed by the Ottoman Empire. After WWI Syria became a French Mandate, and it gained independent statehood after WWII.

In the mid 1950s Syria signed a pact with the Soviet Union. Various wars with Israel, which had begun in the 1940s, continued.

In the 1967 war, Syria lost two-thirds of the Golan Heights to Israel. Syria backed Yasser Arafat and the terrorist PLO, and continues to back Hamas and Hezbollah. Hafez Assad was a strongman president of Syria. His eye-doctor son, Bashar Assad, became president in 2000.

Inspired by the "Arab Spring" revolutions, the Syrian Civil War began in 2011. Peaceful protests were cracked down on by the Syrian Army. By 2013 more than 100,000 civilians, including children, had been killed. Syrian refugees fled to Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey. By 2017 more than 400,000 civilians had been killed.

The United States was indecisive in the early stages of the war. In 2013 it became apparent that the regime of President Bashar Assad was deploying chemical weapons against Syria's civilian population. US president Barack Obama's "red line" was crossed. He did nothing as fighters were killed and hundreds of thousands of innocent victims suffered horrific violence and death. The terrorist group Islamic State (ISIS), which president Obama dubbed "junior league," prospered and grew. Soon proxy wars against that caliphate included troops from Iran, Russia, Turkey the US and more.

ISIS fighters in 2018 are fleeing Syria and Iraq. "Jihadists are going underground, dispersing to other safe havens, and returning to their home countries" said Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen. Raqqa, the self-proclaimed capital of ISIS, fell since President Donald Trump took office. Gen.

Paul Selva, vice chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, announced: "The remaining Islamic State leadership and its shadowy network of fighters is now on the lam."

President Trump highlighted in his State of the Union Address that almost all ISIS territory in Iraq and Syria has been liberated.

After ISIS is decimated, what is the military American interest in Syria? Foreign ministers of US, Britain, France, Jordan and Saudi Arabia recently met in Paris and drew up an unofficial set of principles (Paris Paper) regarding a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It included limiting the powers of the Syrian president, expansion of the prime minister's role, setting principles for serious change in the regime, credible elections in which everyone can vote, a new constitution, and other important changes. It calls for the withdrawal of foreign militaries. With this framework, the United Nations is assembling a conference for a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

Russia, Turkey and Iran support President Assad. Russia advanced a political solution for the Syrian crisis by holding a conference at the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi. The January 2018 Conference of National Dialogue did not go smoothly. It is reported that the Syrian regime was disrespectful, while the Supreme Negotiating Authority representing the Syrian opposition boycotted the conference. Kurdish groups stayed away.

The Syrian ambassador to the UN stressed that “the conference participants gave no mandate, authorizations, or authority in the matter of establishment of the committee for discussion of the constitution.

We disregard the results and anything else connected to it.” Sochi’s results teetered on the brink disaster.

President Assad’s regime is accused of arresting human rights activists, censoring websites, detaining bloggers, arbitrary detentions, torture, killings and disappearances.

Diplomatic relations have been severed by the US, Britain, Belgium, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Libya, Spain, Tunisia, and Arab states in the Persian Gulf.

A political solution, such as presented in the Paris Paper, seems an outcome everyone could applaud. A solution that would end the civil war, the suffering of innocent civilians, and enable the country to rebuild, so that refugees could return to their homeland.

All five nations of the Paris conference expressed willingness to help in the rebuilding of Syria after there is a transfer of power in accordance with UN Resolution 2254.

Perhaps detractors of the proposition that the US military leave Syria should look closer at the greatest interests of the US, the Paris Paper’s principles, and what the UN would propose in the coming Syria conference.

One of the conditions of the Paris Paper is that foreign militaries withdraw.

Holding his cards close to his vest, it seems President Trump is giving voice to what is in American interests and perhaps the first step toward implementing the principles of the Paris Paper, a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

The author, currently retired, has been an English teacher, a stockbroker, and owner/president of a small corporation. She lives in Bermuda Dunes, California, and can be reached at darlenecasella@msn.com.