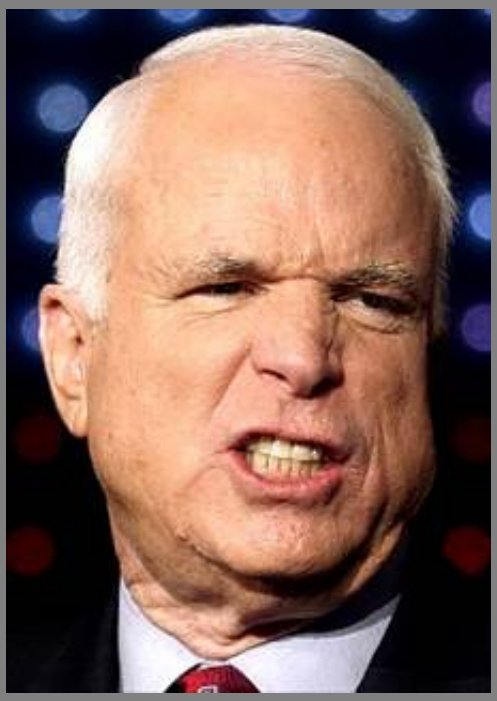
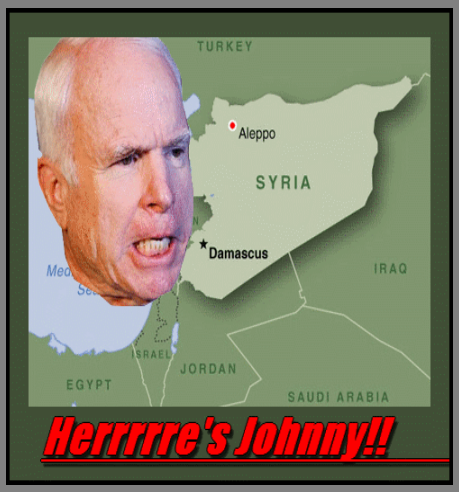
Despite John McCain's Push For Military Intervention In Syria, What's The Rush?

Author : michaelbloomer



Michael Matthew Bloomer. August 25, 2013.



We're going to prevail and we will win and
it'll be one of the best things that's happened to America
and the world in a long time

'cause it'll reverberate throughout the Middle East.

-- Senator John McCain, on the Iraq war,
"Meet the Press" interview, March 3, 2003

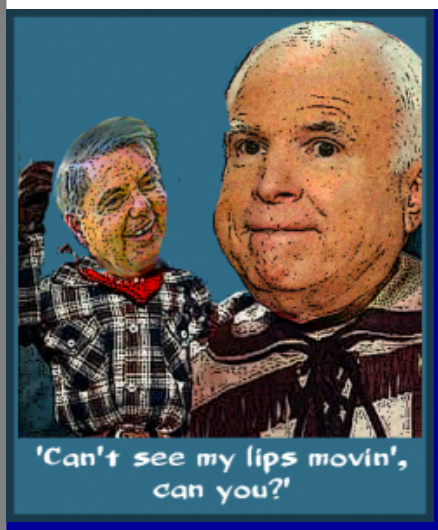
Well, the senator was both right and wrong, very wrong. We defeated the Iraqi army, yes, but, no, we far from "won" a war that became a decade long struggle with nothing to show but a fractured Iraq, and a Middle East on fire. McCain was right, though, our misadventure did "reverberate throughout the Middle East." And not in the positive way McCain envisioned.

Today, with more of the same miscalculated optimism, Senator McCain (joined by his impotent sidekick Georgia Senator Lindsey Graham) criticized the Obama administration for sitting "on the sidelines for too long" during the Syrian civil war which reveals, he and Graham assert, "a further sign of U.S. indecision and weakness," even though the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons has not been substantiated but U.N. chemical weapons inspectors who have just today begun their investigation. Do we want to, again, go forward with intelligence assessments alone? We did that in Iraq, and where were the WMD? *Let's wait this time for the U.N. to do its work.* Did we learn nothing?

Moreover, historical precedent exists that create questions as to whether a Syrian sarin gas attack was a "black flag" operation conducted by the Free Syrian Army, or other rebel groups, like the jihadists, al-Nusra, or by nations seeking a *casus belli* or to provide other nations a *casus belli*. Al Qaeda's al-Nusra are certainly front and center among suspects for a black flag operation, but so may be Iran, or factions in Iran, who seek to draw the west into a general Middle East war where it might be bogged don for many years. The U.N. needs time to complete its chemical weapons investigations, and to help shed light on the true perpetrators of the chemical attack. As it is, the discussion now is eerily similar to the inspections controversies prior to our invasion of Iraq.

Nevertheless, despite this manifestly slippery slope of uncertainty, McCain and Graham and others (now apparently much of the Obama administration and NATO) have apparently already completed their investigations, *sans* UN report. Here's today's McCain/Graham statement:

"Recent reports and information from Syria lend additional credibility to what has been clear since last week: Assad and his forces have once again used chemical weapons against civilians in Syria and are, in fact,



escalating their use. Their recent massacre of hundreds of men, women, and children around Damascus clearly constitutes the commission of a war crime, and it is the responsibility of civilized nations everywhere to ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

Now is the time for decisive actions. The United States must rally our friends and allies to take limited military actions in Syria that can change the balance of power on the ground and create conditions for a negotiated end to the conflict and an end to Assad's rule. Using stand-off weapons, without boots on the ground, and at minimal risk to our men and women in uniform, we can significantly degrade Assad's air power and ballistic missile capabilities and help to establish and defend safe areas on the ground. In addition, we must begin a large-scale effort to train and equip moderate, vetted elements of the Syrian opposition with the game-changing weapons they need to shift the military balance against Assad's forces.

The United States has sat on the sidelines for too long as the conflict in Syria has taken the lives of more than 100,000 Syrians and turned millions more into refugees, including 1 million children. The conflict is now becoming a regional one that directly threatens some of America's closest friends and allies in the Middle East. And with each passing day, we run the growing risk that Syria's vast caches of chemical weapons could be transferred to, or acquired by, forces that could pose a threat to the United States and our friends and allies.

It is not in our national security interest for this conflict to grind on, as some suggest. To the contrary, as we have clearly seen, the longer the conflict in Syria goes on, the worse and worse it gets and the more it spreads throughout the region. Instead, we must work to end this conflict as soon as possible by taking decisive steps that can shift the balance of power on the battlefield against Assad and his forces. Anything short of such actions now would only allow the conflict in Syria to continue, with all

of its worsening consequences, and would be a further sign of U.S. indecision and weakness. This will only add to the deterioration of the region."

We've heard much of this talk and rationalizing before. McCain, the Senate's most senior one-trick war horse, has repeatedly - incessantly - deployed bluster and power mythology rather than attend to the lessons of a now long record of "on the ground" reality in American adventures and misadventures in Vietnam, in Beirut, in Somalia, in Iraq, in Afghanistan. In Libya, for another example, McCain originally urged America to go it alone, but it was NATO that carried the battle. President Obama wisely stayed his hand and chose to use Libya both as a marker for a renewed U.S. suspicion of "going it alone," and as a renewed policy (like the Persian Gulf War in 1991) to rely upon a coalition whose interests were most threatened.

McCain/Graham's call for using "stand-off weaponry" *sounds* good: it's powerful technology and a ground troop-sparing tactic. For example, with drone warfare now familiar, improved (and often disreputable), one might agree, if one were unconcerned about civilian casualties. Well, *Libya is not Syria*.

Syria's political and military significance *dwarfs* Libya's. It has nothing to do with size. A partial list of extreme caution signs warning 'stay away' includes:

*** a more deadly armed force that has many decades of Soviet/Russian military assistance under its belt (as well as Chinese and Iranian). This includes more than ten thousand tanks and armored vehicles, thousands of artillery pieces, and a modern and effective anti-aircraft system. [Global Power.com] While the quality of a significant portion of Syrian military hardware is questioned - much is outdated Soviet equipment - its quantity dwarfs Libya's, for example. And:**

- **"Syria has more than 4,000 units of air defense artillery, mainly Soviet-made. These may be outmoded, but the quantity is huge and the population density is 110 people per square kilometer, so Syria can't easily be occupied like the almost-empty Libya and its four people per square kilometer. . . If we examine the possibilities of military intervention, we should not forget the missile park of Syria. According to different sources, the army loyal to the regime has about 80-170 tactical ballistic missiles, Soviet and North Korean Scuds and Tochkas. The range of these missiles is about 75-500 km, meaning that Iraq, Turkey and Israel can be attacked with them." [See more]**
-

- **Concerns like these, of course, were voiced well before the invasion of Kuwait**

to oust Iraq's armed forces in 1991. Certainly,, in the Syrian case as well, a concerted attack by a smoothly operating coalition would overcome even Syria's formidable forces. Yet, recall that "stand off weapons" did not dislodge Iraq from Kuwait, it was boots on the ground that did so. Consider: what response is likely should western forces lose even one or two aircraft and their crews fall into Syrian government hands? *Do we want to risk boots on the ground in Syria should a bombing and missile campaign fail to assist the rebels?*

- *** direct Iranian assistance. Iran (and China) have recently provided Syria with modern anti-ship missiles to upgrade its mostly outdated Russian systems, "In 2006, the Syrian army bought the Iranian-made Noors anti-ship cruise missiles, which are identical copies of the Chinese C-802. In 2007 Russia agreed to sell a supersonic cruise missile system named Yakhont to Syria at a price of 300 million US dollars." [See more] Iran continues to provide its full support for the Assad regime;**
- *** a historically voluble border with Israel that has occasionally erupted in violence during the Syrian Revolution. The big question: *Will Israel agree to remain on the sidelines during a U.S. and/or NATO incursion into Syria, especially should Syria launch missiles at Israel?***
- *** Geographically, in addition to Israel, Syria shares borders with Jordan (chock full of Syrian refugees), Turkey (threatened with its own unrest and a member of NATO), Iraq, and Lebanon (sharing with Syria Israel's northern border, and alive with Assad's active fifth column, Hezbollah, already all-in in Assad's support).**
- *** Turkey, a longtime Assad regime critic, counsels caution, suggesting sanctions. Since the alleged Assad regime chemical weapons usage, Turkey has expressed concerns about its own safety from Syrian chemical weapons attacks. Der Spiegel reported: "Such a course of action is seen to be 'unlikely but definitely possible', according to an official at the Turkish Defense Ministry in Ankara. In recent days, the government has strengthened precautions against a nerve gas attack in the country's southern regions along the border with Syria. 'Our armed forces are aware,' he says. Turkish media have reported that troops have been conducting exercises in preparation for the worst." [See more]**
- *** Russia looms less pliable than during the Libyan intervention due to a recent general chill in U.S.-Russian relations and its own long-term interests in Syria. With tens of thousands of Russian citizens in Syria, and innumerable**

commercial, military, and cultural interests formed over its more than 40 years of association, to Russia, Syria is not Libya, nor is it Iraq or Afghanistan. Russia provides Syria with most of its military aid, and therefore has billions of rubles to lose should Syria come under the military influence of NATO or the United States; Russia lost billions in military contracts in Libya.

-
- *** Russia's Vladimir Putin seems at times to be itching for a fight with the west. For example, Russian officials continued to call the alleged chemical attack a provocation carried out by the opposition, a "black flag" operation. The Russian ambassador to Lebanon, Alexander Zasypkin, quoted by the official Syrian news agency, SANA, warned, *"I'd like to remind that the issue of chemical weapons should not be exploited for serving other goals as was the case in Iraq."* [See more]**
-
- **AP reported yesterday that Russia's "**
    - ***Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said all countries should wait for the results of the investigation. . . Our American and European partners must understand what catastrophic consequences this kind of politics would have for the region, for the Arab and Islamic world as a whole,*" Lukashevich said,**
-
- **advising the U.S. and its allies against taking a "gamble" and using unilateral force in Syria. Russia does not want to lose much of its influence in the Middle East by standing silently aside as the west considers military involvement there. *Might a western incursion into Syria, no matter how "surgical," cause Russia to avoid the appearance of weakness by itself, for example, stepping up military aid to Assad, their closest ally in the Middle East?***

[caption id="attachment_7585" align="alignright" width="185"]

'President Obama, got a match?' [/caption]

Add it up,
Syria resembles a military-grade ammunition depot already surrounded by high winds and raging fire, firebreaks absent, and with few, if any, local firefighters available. No forecast of rain.

And this is where John McCain and Lindsey Graham and many others want to lob "stand-off" missiles.

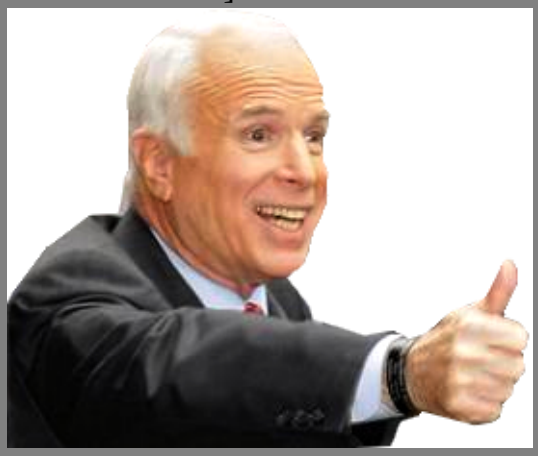
****

Below, let's review Senator McCain's (and by proxy, Senator Graham's) record of correctness on many important issues of our time.

++++++++++++++++++++

I published the post below on February 1, 2013 during
Chuck Hagel's SecDef nomination hearing.
John McCain sped to military power to explicitly misrepresent Chuck Hagel's record
and, undoubtedly without knowing it, to *im*plicitly misrepresent his own.

[caption id="" align="alignleft" width="246"]



'This is *my* thumb, people. It's *my* thumb! Show me *yours*!!!!![/caption]

"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"

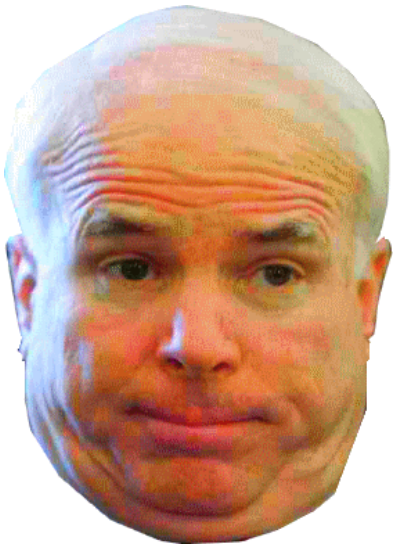
John McCain to Chuck Hagel about
Hagel's disagreement with the Iraq surge
Originally published here, February 1, 2013

At the Senate "advise and consent" confirmation hearing yesterday John McCain had so little self-knowledge that he asked Chuck Hagel *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"* about Hagel's lack of support for the Iraq military surges. As President George H.W. Bush said about Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, "This shall not stand," so here's my small list drawn from of a huge number

of examples of John McCain's wrongness legacy:

- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - "[Saddam Hussein] is hell-bent on acquiring these weapons of mass destruction in the view of any expert.
    - And, by the way, our intelligence has consistently not been accurate. Not in 1981, when the Iraqis bombed the reactor; not in 1991, when we were astonished at the degree of development that he had achieved in developing weapons of mass destruction, the stage of successes he had reached in that area. And so I don't know where he is in the stage of development, but there's very little doubt in my mind that he would use it." Face the Nation, September 2002
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - "We're going to prevail and we will win and it'll be one of the best things that's happened to America and the world in a long time 'cause it'll reverberate throughout the Middle East." --on the Iraq war, "Meet the Press" interview, March 3, 2003
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - "[T]here's no doubt in my mind that we will prevail and there's no doubt in my mind, once these people are gone, that we will be welcomed as liberators." March 24, 2003, edition of *Hardball* -- several days after the U.S.-led coalition had invaded Iraq
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - “Nobody in Afghanistan threatens the United States of America.” Hannity & Colmes, April 10, 2003
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - *"Well, then why was there a banner that said mission accomplished on the aircraft carrier?"* John McCain, responding to assertion by Fox News' Neil Cavuto that "many argue the conflict isn't over," June, 11, 2003
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - Excerpts from *Past the Point of Justifying*, his Op-Ed, *The Washington Post*, John McCain, June 15, 2003:
    - Like many Americans, I am surprised that we have yet to locate the weapons of mass destruction that all of us, Republican and Democrat, expected to find immediately in Iraq. But do critics really believe that Saddam Hussein disposed of his weapons and dismantled weapons programs while fooling every major intelligence service on earth, generations of U.N. inspectors, three U.S. presidents and five secretaries of defense into believing he possessed them, in one of the most costly and irrational gambles in history? ...

      [caption id="" align="alignright" width="182"]



Well, if you want *facts* from *me you'll* have to explain *yourself*."[/caption]
    - Critics today seem to imply that after seven years of elaborately deceiving the United Nations, Hussein precipitated the withdrawal of U.N. inspectors from his country in 1998, then decided to change course and disarmed himself over the next four years, but refused to provide any realistic proof that this disarmament occurred.
    - I am not convinced.
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - The facts on the ground are we went to Afghanistan and we prevailed there." Wolf Blitzer Reports, April 1, 2004
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - "Could I add, it was in Afghanistan, as well, there were many people who predicted that Afghanistan would not be a success. So far, it's a remarkable success**."** CNN, March 2, 2005
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - "Afghanistan, we don't read about anymore, because it's succeeded**."** Charlie Rose Show, October 31, 2005
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - "There are neighborhoods in Baghdad where you and I could walk through those neighborhoods today."
    - McCain also said that the US is "beginning to succeed in Iraq" and an early pull out would result in an "unmitigated disaster of incredible proportions," and "we will see chaos and genocide in the region and we will be back and they will follow us home." Bill Bennett's Morning in America radio show, March 26, 2007
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - McCain complimented "deputy commander-in-chief" Cheney's "hard-headed clear thinking" and guidance on Iraq **a**t a July 16, 2004, campaign rally in Lansing, Michigan. McCain continued: "We are very fortunate that our president in these challenging days can rely on the counsel of a man who has demonstrated time and

again the resolve, experience, and patriotism that will be required for success and the hard-headed clear thinking necessary to prevail in this global fight between good and evil."

[caption id="attachment_4282" align="alignright" width="255"]

'I get no respect I tell ya. I found out there was only one way to look smart, hang out with Ted Cruz. I'm so dumb ... I worked in a pet shop, and people kept trying to teach me to fetch. No respect. I tell ya.'[/caption]

- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
  - "Make it a hundred...That would be fine with me." --to a questioner who asked if he supported President Bush's vision for keeping U.S. troops in Iraq for 50 years, Derry, New Hampshire, Jan. 3, 2008
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
  - "He's (for) health for the mother. You know, that's been stretched by the pro-abortion movement in America to mean almost anything. That's the extreme pro-abortion position, quote, 'health.'" about President Obama's support for protection of a mother's health in abortion decisions, presidential debate, Long Island, New York, Oct. 15, 2008
- *"Were you wrong, Senator?"*
  - "I think she's most qualified of any that has run recently for vice president, tell you the truth." --on Sarah Palin, interview with Don Imus, Oct. 22, 2008
- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
  - "[Sarah Palin] knows more about energy than probably anyone else in the United States of America. ... And, uh, she also happens to represent, be governor of a state

that's right next to Russia." --after being asked about Sarah Palin's foreign policy experience, interview with WCSH-6, Portland, OR, Sept. 12, 2008

- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*
    - "I also know, if I might remind you, that [Palin] is commander of the Alaska National Guard. In fact, you may know that on Sept. 11 a large contingent of the Alaska Guard deployed to Iraq and her son happened to be one of them. So I think she understands our national security challenges." touting Sarah Palin's foreign policy credentials, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Sept. 17, 2008

- *"Were you right or wrong, Senator?"*

    - "My friends, we've got them just where we want them." on Barack Obama and the state of the presidential campaign, Virginia Beach, Virginia, Oct. 13, 2008