



## Republicans Shouldn't Stoke International Revolution

By Justin Logan

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Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham would like to help National Review readers keep score on who bears what share of responsibility for the rise of the Islamic State. It turns out it's mostly Barack Obama's fault.

McCain and Graham lay blame on the lawn of the White House for four reasons: Obama failed to keep tens of thousands of U.S. troops in Iraq indefinitely; he failed to do enough to arm and train "moderate" Syrian rebels against Bashar Assad; he failed to bomb Assad after the now-infamous chemical weapons attack/"red line" walkback; and he didn't bomb the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq in late 2013.

The Batmobile whizzes past self-awareness when the Caped Crusader and Boy Wonder shout that conservatives "who believe that ISIS's rise is somehow a result of too much action by President Obama and our nation are either misinformed about world events or wedded to naïve ideologies." It is clear to everyone not in the grips of a different naïve ideology that the chaos and maelstrom of sectarian violence McCain and Graham helped set loose in Iraq contributed to the rise both of a sectarian Shia government and Sunni resistance movements, be they insurgencies or quasi-state groups like ISIS.

Let's Bomb Everyone All the Time

Their whole argument has an "assume a can opener" quality about it. Neither the American public, nor the Iraqi public, nor the Iraqi government wanted American troops to stay in Iraq. McCain and Graham attribute ousted Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's resistance to a fear that the number of troops proposed would not be enough, but this is far from clear. Selling an inflamed Iraqi public on the idea that American troops would be in their country but exempt from their laws was always going to be a tough sell.

Moreover, McCain and Graham attribute a magical power to the presence of U.S. troops: How, exactly, were they to have "played a key role in checking Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's worst sectarian tendencies and in supporting Iraqi security forces"? The same Iraqi security forces that

abandoned their weapons and deserted the battlefield while facing ISIS? The same sectarian tendencies that sank Maliki, as well as his predecessor Ibrahim al-Jaafari? It's almost as if something is causing those sectarian tendencies and organizational difficulties other than the lack of American troops in the country.

Beyond his failure to keep the Iraq enterprise going, McCain and Graham are piqued that the president has not struck Assad's forces in Syria or ISIS yet. One might remark that the U.S. Constitution reserves Congress an extra-special place when it comes to taking the country to war, but should probably hesitate for fear it will be seized upon by the McCains and Grahams of the body.

But while McCain and Graham have a good story about who they'd like to lose in the region—Assad, his enemies (ISIS/al Nusra/"Khorasan"), Iran—but no good story about who they'd like to win. Presumably they want the same liberal pluralists to take over who have eluded us in Iraq since the invasion.

### Trolling... With Weapons

At some point it will become a problem for Republicans that their leading foreign policy voices are warmongers with terrible track records, but that time is not yet. Graham was recently lampooned, first at the National Interest magazine and later by The Daily Show for what can only be described as hysteria. Graham is either totally detached from reality or engaged in some sort of arch dada troll of the American people.

It was not true, contra Graham, that "chemical weapons in Syria today means nuclear weapons in the U.S. tomorrow" (September 2013). Nor is it true that if the president doesn't do what Graham wants in Syria the consequence is "we all get killed back here at home" (September 2014). When they are not engaging in bizarre death fantasies, McCain and Graham are weasel-wording and using every extreme headline to justify spouting tendentious nonsense – such as a Washington Free Beacon piece that used official acknowledgement of things people were tweeting to blare that "U.S. Confirms ISIL Planning Infiltration of U.S. Southern Border" (later walked back, of course). McCain and Graham should realize their antics are ridiculous and do violence to the very idea of America as "home of the brave."

There is one party in the United States that calls itself conservative. Its leading foreign policy lights, men like McCain and Graham, have an unerring track record of threat inflation, terrible decisions, and lying to explain them away. The substance of their views can be described in one word: revolutionary. In a country situated like the 2014 United States, conservatives should act and think like conservatives, not international revolutionaries.

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