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QUOTES FOR THE DAY:

“War does not determine who is right, only who is left.”, Bertrand Russell.

“Only the dead have seen the end of war”, Plato.

“What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or in the holy name of liberty or democracy.”, Ernest Hemingway.

WORLD WAR THREE ON SIMMER VERSUS HOT:

In issue 45 I said we would come back to some of the world’s regional conflicts – more serious than, and a nice break from, the totem topplers and statue smashers here at home.

I make no pretense at being highly knowledgeable regarding any of the areas

currently in conflict. My goal, with a few side bar comments, is to present a listing of who is who in this incredible number of proxy wars (jersey numbers not included).

AFGHANISTAN:

A brief review from issue 45; The Congress has gotten its shorts all in a knot because of allegations that the Russians have been paying the Taliban bounties to kill our soldiers- not conclusively proven and, if so, to minimum effect. Further, it had been rumored that the Russians had been supplying the Taliban with things like night vision goggles and armor piercing ammunition – not nice, because we had actually partnered up with Russia earlier on in the fight against Al Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan.

As General John Nicholson, former U.S. commander in the country recently testified, “The Taliban wanted surface to air missiles, the Russians didn’t give them to them. So, I always concluded their support to the Taliban was calibrated in some sense.”

U.S. analysts say that Russia's covert efforts are aimed at harassing and embarrassing the U.S. as troops leave the country, "rather than profoundly changing the course of the conflict."

Now, fast reverse to the 1980s, a current CIA officer has said, "We turned up the heat as the Russians were leaving Afghanistan." Oh, boy-history rewritten. No! That wasn't when we turned up the heat. The Russians were wailing on the Mujahedeen with their helicopters and fighter planes. Then we started supplying the Mujahedeen with shoulder mounted, stinger heat seeking missiles, and the war shifted as they shot hundreds of Russian aircraft from the skies, killing thousands of Russians. That's when and why the Russians left Afghanistan, with their tails between their legs.

The Russians have long memories, the U.S., by proxy, killed thousands of their troops - really surprising they haven't sold surface to air missiles to the Taliban as pay back.

So, here we are today, the Taliban agreeing not to fire on U.S. troops while peace negotiations

are underway, but the Afghans get no such reprieve. We are committed to leaving the country if we can get the Taliban and the weak Afghan government to agree on a deal. I wouldn't want to put my pen to that agreement. Whether it be six months or six years I see the Taliban eventually taking over.

LIBYA:

Here you really do need a score- card. We start with the recognized government in Tripoli backed by the U.N. So, we should really be backing that side, right? Maybe yes, maybe no.

On the other side, the commander opposing the Libyan government, Gen. Khalifa Hifter, has the backing of Egypt, Russia and the U.A.E.- all nice proxy war buddies. But wait a minute- turns out that Hifter was a long time CIA asset- seems to still have quite a few in the U.S. who like him. President Trump has even been known to say a kind word.

Hifter and company were about ready to pounce on Tripoli and finish off the legitimate government when out of the distance, what to

their wondering eyes should appear, not Santa's reindeer, but Turkey's Recep Erdogan with a warship, drones and thousands of Turkish funded Syrian fighters. Wait a minute shouldn't they be fighting the war in Syria? Anyway, all of a sudden Hifter's troops are getting their lunch handed to them and they had to retreat to lick their wounds in eastern Libya. A newly chastened Gen. Hifter has decided it might now be a good idea to stop fighting and negotiate an end to Libya's civil war.

SYRIA:

Of all the conflict countries, the civilian tragedies here are just unbelievable. The Syrian Arab Republic led by President Bashar Al-Assad came under attack way back in 2011, primarily in Damascus and Aleppo, with protests of discontent. Assad has been supported by Iran, Russia, Iraq and Hezbollah and a cast of lesser entities. Opposition has come from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the U.S., France, Great Britain, Germany and many others with different levels of either direct military involvement, economic support

and/or weapons. As I said earlier, the purpose of this exercise is to show the complexity of the proxy universe in all these countries, not dissect the incredible complexities of this war. While Assad's forces are accused of gassing civilians, Saudi Arabia, dropping U.S. provided munitions, is accused of bombing hospitals and killing thousands of other civilians. It is estimated that in the past nine years 225,000 civilians have been killed and hundreds of thousands of others displaced, homeless and/or in refugee camps.

A major add on to the Syrian civil war, has been the battle against ISIS in Syria and Iraq which has raged for much of the same time, with a ten nation group led by the U.S.,and greatly helped by Kurdish forces, resulting in the recapturing of 98% of the territory formerly claimed by ISIS by 2017. On top of all that, the Turks treat the Kurds as their enemies, even though they were fighting for the same thing in Syria.

The various players are so complex in their interrelationships that the old phrase, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Is frequently

better stated, “The enemy of my enemy is my enemy.”

YEMEN:

Just one more failed “Arab Spring” transition. Beginning in 2011, with a new head of government, Mansour Hadi, a rival faction, The Houti movement (A Shia muslim minority group) began fighting for control of the country, and in 2015 took over the capital, Sanaa, while Mr. Hadi fled and took up residence in Saudi Arabia. So, here we are, once again, with a mega proxy war in progress and, not surprisingly with many of the usual combatants. Iran supports the Houtis and Saudi Arabia, Hadi’s government. What a cast of characters – Saudi Arabia is backed up by 8 other Sunni Arab states with air support and munitions from the U.S., UK and France.

You would think with all that support for the Sunni side this would have been over long ago. A failed Stockholm peace initiative has left the country in a state of devastation with 12,000 civilians killed, a raging corona virus problem, 80% of the country’s 24 million people need

humanitarian assistance, 10 million are one step away from famine and 2.4 million children suffer from acute malnutrition. And, all the while, Saudi air strikes, using our munitions, continue to hit hospitals and civilian locations, just as they have done in Syria.

IRAN:

I wouldn't normally include Iran with the above countries. Their ever present enemies being the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, but they are not involved in a home land war. As noted, they are heavily involved in many of the region's proxy wars. But, guess what? There's a new trouble maker in town.

China's Xi Jinping wants to make nice with Iran with a beautiful economic and security partnership. China would invest billions in Iran at a time when the U.S. has been strangling the Iranian economy with massive sanctions. In return Iran would be selling oil to China at deep discounts for the next 25 years.

On the military side China would get its first foothold in the region, “a strategic preoccupation fear of the U.S. for decades.”

“If put in effect as detailed, the partnership would create new and potentially dangerous flashpoints in the deteriorating relationship between China and the U.S.” We would certainly have to be much more circumspect about our physical threats to Iran’s growing nuclear capability. It is likely our forceful actions may be limited to continuing cyber strikes and reliance on Israel’s Mossad to periodically physically neutralize major parts of Iran’s production facilities. Don’t foresee any U.S. Tanks rolling down the main streets in Tehran any time soon.

I don’t feel it necessary to go into the Iraq situation – not a major battleground today per se, but certainly has all the proxy players jockeying for position.

SO WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?:

In the very region where Armageddon was to take place we have what I view as a simmering

world war in progress being fought/supported by numerous countries. These are seemingly endless conflicts between militant adherents to the same Muslim religion- Sunnis and Shiites, aided and abetted by many other players seeking power, control and influence in the region.

Can this region be kept on “simmer”? Who knows? But, if it comes to a full boil, I think Albert Einstein has a good take on that prospect:

“I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.”

Your faithful scribe,

PB