

# **HERMIT HERALD**

## **ISSUE 102**

**FEB. 22, 2021**

### **QUOTE FOR THE DAY**

**“Honestly, if you’re given a choice between Armageddon or tea, you don’t say, ‘what kind of tea?’” Neil Gaiman, author**

### **A CALL TO FOCUS ON WHAT’S IMPORTANT**

**Iran, Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon – all focal points for the much anticipated Armageddon.**

**Iran seems to be getting the most attention right now, with the new Biden administration deciding to reverse the Trump administration’s distrust of the nuclear arms agreement with Iran, and the resulting pull out by the United States.**

**This is one of those topics where both Democrats and Republicans are pursuing what**

**they feel is the best course of action, but “feel” is the operative word. In Fact, neither side “knows” the best course, and I suspect it’s going to be quite some time before history renders a final verdict.**

**The Trump administration thought the nuclear agreement was weak and gave Iran too many opportunities to cheat, as well as freedom to develop new missile technology, which could be used against any of its neighbors (read-Israel). The idea of crippling sanctions was to either bring the Iranian government back to the negotiating table and/or to create such unhappiness on the part of the citizenry that they would eventually overthrow the Theocratic government. The latter being unlikely, given the unwavering support for the government by the all powerful, Revolutionary Guard.**

**With regard to the change of direction by the Biden administration in seeking to re enter the nuclear agreement, the hurdles are significant. For starters, the Iranians have already said something along the lines of, “Fine we’ll sit down and talk – no promise that anything will**

**happen, but, before we even sit down, the U.S. will have to lift the sanctions.” A total non-starter from the U.S. perspective.**

**Russia and China both think it would be wonderful for the U.S. to re enter the agreement. They are two of Iran’s major trading partners.**

**Thus far, the Saudis, Israel and other Arab countries that are hostile to Iran are keeping criticism of the Biden proposal at a low volume, but it is well known that re entry into the nuclear agreement by the United States would, from their perspective, have to include new conditions, which, for starters, would include a ban on missile development and agreement to cease support by Iran for their proxy wars in Yemen, Syria and Lebanon, not to mention their constant meddling in Iraq.**

**So, here we have the U.S. believing we are pursuing a new and better direction, but, for starters, both sides are talking to a wall.**

**HOW DID WE GET HERE?**

**OK, maybe old history to many of you, but I wanted to refresh my own memory. After the death of Mohammad in 632, one contingent of his followers decreed that his successor should come from Mohammad's family and they settled on his cousin and son-in-law, Ali.**

**The other contingent believed the successor should come from an elite highly respected member, and they chose Mohammad's close friend, Abu Bakr. From Abu Bakr's side the Sunnis emerged, and from Ali's side, the Shia.**

**Both sides tolerated each other for centuries, but a common religion, notwithstanding, the desire for wealth and power has eclipsed the ties that bound them, leaving both camps in a constant state of conflict.**

**Globally, the Shia movement is quite small, but they are prominent in some of the most critical parts of the Mideast. The Shia represent a large majority in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan, as well as a plurality in Lebanon.**

**The Sunnis, on the other hand, are vastly greater in numbers and geographic spread,**

**being the majority in forty countries; the most powerful entity in the Mideast being, Saudi Arabia.**

**In March of 2015, the head of Yemen, Abdrabbuh Hadi, requested the Saudi's assistance in putting down a rebellion by the Houthis, and the Saudis enlisted nine other nations to assist. What a ready made population distribution for civil war, as Yemen is 53% Sunni and 45% Shia. The Houthis were Iran's proxy in Yemen, and the Iranians have provided massive weaponry to them throughout the conflict. Our Ally, Saudi Arabia, has been pounding the Houthis, and a lot of civilians as well, with armaments sold to the Saudis by the U.S.**

**To the consternation of our allies in the Mideast, the Biden administration has removed the "terrorist" designation from the Houthis, apparently in the hope that more humanitarian aid might be able to get through to the civilian population. Our allies see this as appeasement to the Iranians and a slap in the face.**

**In Syria, Bashar Al-Assad, has ruled since 2000. During the Arab Spring protests in 2011 he ordered a crack down, and has had as his main supporters, Iran and Russia. The U.S., Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Kurds have supported the rebels – so far 500,000 killed or missing and 55% of a prewar population of 22 million has been displaced.**

**Other stuff going on in Syria as well. Let's not forget ISIS, which, at its height controlled 1/3 of Syria and 40% of Iraq. By December 2017 ISIS had lost 95% of its territory.**

**For several years now, militias funded by Iran have been creating havoc in Iraq, shelling our troops just in recent days. Not to forget Hezbollah in Lebanon, also supported by the Iranians, and always spoiling for a fight.**

**So, now that we see that Iran is up to its ears in numerous Mideast conflicts we have a better understanding as to why our allies in the Mideast are adamant that, if the U.S. is to give any consideration to re entering the Iranian nuclear deal, there will have to be an Iranian agreement to cease their military**

**adventurism, and to cease with the development of missile technology. The question becomes, are we going to override the legitimate concerns of our allies and make nice with Iran? Or, are the Iranians apt to accede to the demands of our allies? In the latter case, not a snow -man's chance in hell. And, in the former case, nothing but bad things coming from ignoring our allies – just moves the clock further in the direction of Armageddon.**

### **HOPING WE'RE NOT MAKING A BIG MISTAKE**

**Given the warning signs above, it is hoped that the new Defense Secretary, Lloyd Austin, is an independent thinker and, with the advice of his senior military officers, will give president Biden strong counsel to heed the concerns of our allies in the Mideast and not throw them under the figurative truck. It appears that the new Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, while vowing to be tough on Iran, is actually more in the appeasement mode.**

**By further empowering the Tehran regime, according to Henry Kissinger, we would be**

**putting Iran, “on a glide path to a nuclear weapon.”**

## **IS PRESIDENT BIDEN UP TO THIS CHALLENGE?**

**Former Defense Secretary, Robert Gates (Bush and Obama administrations, and former head of the CIA) expressed his doubts in his 2014 memoir. Speaking of Mr. Biden he wrote, “ I think he has been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades.” Coming from Mr. Gates, that’s a very bad report card.**

**Another commentator articulates a few of these missteps, pointing out that Mr. Biden voted against the Gulf War and in favor of the Iraq War, votes for which he later expressed regret. He opposed the troop surges that did bring a degree of stability to both Iraq and Afghanistan.**

**Mr. Biden has said to everyone’s confusion, “The Taliban, per se, is not our enemy.” (we’ll talk more about Afghanistan in an upcoming issue).**



**Mr. Biden has argued for dividing Iraq into “statelets”, a widely ridiculed concept, and, he was opposed to the raid that killed Osama bin Laden.**

**It can only be hoped that now that he is president, Mr. Biden will have the benefit of counsel from people who have actually been in the thick of the Mideast crucible.**

### **A VERY SAD DAY**

**And, of course, a very sad year, as we observe the 500,000<sup>th</sup> death in the United States from Covid- 19. It’s not just the tragedy of one half million of our citizens dying, but the families torn apart and the friends lost. Those circles of affected families and friends must be anywhere between 20 and 100 per person – just staggering to think of – all compounded by the nearly thirty million who have suffered the virus, many of whom will have a long time to full recovery. Prayers for them all – a year no one will forget.**

**Your faithful scribe, PB**

