

Mr Trump does a U turn on military intervention

Trump supporters do not mind if their President breaks the normal conventions of diplomacy or asserts US interests too brashly in his tweets. They might mind a bit more as he backs down from one of the main refrains of his campaign, that he would keep the USA out of many of the military interventions favoured by Mrs Clinton and the Democrat establishment. Mr Trump gave us the impression US troops would be coming home from Afghanistan.

The dismissal of Mr Bannon as Chief Strategist has placed Mr Trump more precariously dependent on the advice of the Generals in the White House who do not share Trump supporters scepticism about US military adventures abroad. Aware of the danger of his foreign policy looking like continuity Obama Mr Trump claimed his policy is new and different. The main differences he tells us are they will not go in for state building, and will win against the terrorists by using greater force.

Ruling out state building arguably makes it more difficult to get a long term success. Only if these troubled countries can establish moderate well supported governments that can turn people to building a more prosperous economy is their hope of stopping recruitment and deployment of more terrorists. If the US now does not wish to help do this, it may make things more troubled.

Saying more force can be used to defeat the terrorists is also not easy. These terrorists belong to a bewildering array of differing and fluctuating groups and cells. There is no single ISIL army to be defeated in the field. They embed in the civilian population, making it inevitable that the more force you use the more civilians you are likely to kill. Given the distrust of Sunni for Shia and vice versa, if the west targets one group of terrorists it can appear to be taking sides in a religious civil war which leads to resentment of the western forces. Some of those the US fights welcome martyrdom which adds to the risks. Years of bombing Middle Eastern targets, several invasions later, there is still a substantial terrorist problem in parts of the Middle East. Why should we believe that more bombs will crack it?

PS I now hear that the US Secretary of State shares these criticisms of his Presidents statement. According to the S of S the US will not have an easy win by using more force and will need to undertake negotiations and diplomacy to resolve the conflict!