

President Trump Is 'Stealing the March'

The ousting of Steve Bannon from the National Security Council (NSC) staff is part of a reorganization initiated by President Donald Trump's National Security Advisor, Army Lt. General H.R. McMaster. This move solidifies leadership within the NSC at a critical time in our nation's history and it clears the deck for action.

My first reaction to the attack on Syria's Shayrat airfield was that President Trump made the foolish mistake of leading by heart rather than mind. Not the case. The attack constituted a carefully, albeit quickly, devised strategic move. The first clue was that the president's entourage traveling to Mar-a-Lago to meet with China President Xi Jinping included Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Secretary of Defense James Mattis and National Security Advisor Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster. The foreign policy A-Team. What does that tell us? In military terms, Trump was "stealing the march," a military term for gaining the strategic advantage before the opponent can react.

General McMaster's 1997 book *Dereliction of Duty* examined President Lyndon Johnson's national security team from 1964 through 1968 when major decisions led to disaster in Vietnam. President Johnson manipulated his national security team to assure compliance and near-obsequious acquiescence among joint chiefs of staff. For Johnson, the conflict in Vietnam distracted from his top priority: instituting his Great Society. President Johnson got the military leadership he wanted, weak, unobtrusive and accommodating: the B-team. President Trump turned to his A-team for the first, major foreign policy statement of his presidency. McMaster, who may have masterminded the attack on the Syrian base, studied Johnson's mistakes as the departure point for meeting the

challenges President Trump faces. As the president admitted during his April 5 press conference, he “inherited a mess.” The messes he inherited in Syria and North Korea rank at the top of Trump’s national security problems. While LBJ put his domestic political agenda ahead of national security, Trump does not.

After completing his doctorate, McMaster served as operations officer for the Army’s Opposition Force (OPFOR) based at Ft. Irwin, California in the heart of Death Valley. During the late 1990s, McMaster employed Russian armored tactics and equipment modified to emulate Russian weapons. The OPFOR also excelled at deception. Each tank brigade underwent two weeks of simulated warfare. Almost invariably the visiting brigade was handed its proverbial head on the initial engagement due to the OPFOR stealing the march, doing the unexpected to achieve a decisive advantage. The target was always the mind of the opponent because the brain is where the decisive—the strategic—fight is won or lost.

The brilliance of the attack on Shayrat airfield was its strategic impact. The operational target was the Syrian base from which aircraft took off to drop nerve gas on civilians—killing almost 100—many of them women and children. The strategic targets, however, included political leaders in Damascus, Teheran, Moscow, Pyongyang and Chinese President Xi Jinping dining beside President Trump at Mar-a-Lago when 59 cruise missiles started obliterating Shayrat.

The attack means leading from behind is over and America is on the path to recovering world leader status. Assad survives for now but needs to think about retiring. Putin will fume and fuss, but should know milquetoast at the White House, hand-wringing in Foggy Bottom, and a Pentagon focused on political correctness rather than combat effectiveness are gone.

Regarding North Korea’s latest missile launch, President Xi probably spent last night reevaluating what his dinner host

said 48 hours earlier regarding North Korea, “all options are on the table.” It’s important because, as one of China’s leading businessmen, Xi knows that after U.S. bunker-buster bombs hit North Korean nuclear sites and precision-guided munitions rain down on missile launch sites, communist artillery probably will pummel Seoul a few miles to the south. Within the hour, American and South Korean airstrikes will obliterate most North Korean artillery, but much of Seoul will be shattered. It’s likely Republic of Korea (ROK) and a limited number of US ground forces will be battling the North Korean People’s Army. U.S. and ROK forces will prevail but Seoul and its economy may be devastated. North Korea will be as well with millions of starving refugees streaming north to become China’s problem.

World leaders hear this: Adult leadership is back in charge at the White House and intent on reclaiming America’s exceptional role in world leadership. {eo}

Dr. Earl Tilford is a military historian and fellow for the Middle East & terrorism with The Center for Vision & Values at Grove City College.

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