

*The Field of Fight:
How We Can Win the Global War Against Radical Islam
and Its Allies*

Lt. General Michael T Flynn and Michael Ledeen
New York: St Martin's Press, 2016

The appointment of General Michael Flynn as Donald Trump's national security adviser highlights a great contradiction that runs through what we know of the new administration's foreign policy. On the one hand, Flynn has on many occasions identified Iran as being behind the global jihad that is supposedly being waged against the United States. He has also condemned Putin's Russia for supporting and encouraging this jihad. On the other hand, Trump himself has repeatedly made clear his admiration for Putin and expressed his willingness to accommodate Russian ambitions in the Middle East, the Ukraine and elsewhere; indeed, to such an extent that he has been described as the real 'Manchurian candidate'.¹ Putin's ally in the Middle East is Iran. And, just to complicate the situation, Flynn has also been accused of being too close to the Russians. Something will have to give. Either Trump is going to have to disappoint Israel and the US neo-cons by abandoning this hostility to Iran or the *rapprochement* with Russia is likely to be short-lived. Certainly serious divisions and conflicts within the Trump administration are guaranteed.

Who is Michael Flynn?

In *The Field of Fight*, Flynn describes himself as someone who has 'been fighting for more than thirty-three years, much of the time at the top levels of US military intelligence'. He describes his experiences during the US invasion of Grenada, predictably exaggerating its importance as 'a turning point in the Cold War'. At the same time, he reveals a somewhat uncertain grasp of Central and South American politics when he writes of how, at this time, the US was 'fighting the Sandinistas and engaging the Somozans and all manner of other insurgents'. The Somozans were the murderous thugs

¹ See for example <<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/11/is-donald-trump-a-manchurian-candidate>>.

and gangsters whom the US was supporting in Nicaragua!

His rise to prominence began when he went to work with the notorious Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in 2003. Flynn was one of the architects of a transformation in intelligence gathering and utilization, for which he generously gives credit to General Stanley McChrystal. 'Pattern Analysis' was the way forward and McChrystal was 'the principal driver of this revolutionary intelligence system'. To fight the insurgency in Iraq, they had to put together 'a million-piece puzzle' with 'no box top to look at to help us'. Intelligence and the effective use of it were crucial to fighting this war. Moreover, 'interrogations were enormously important'. He does not condemn the use of torture as such in his discussion, but his account makes it pretty clear that he has little time for its practical efficacy. (He apparently disagrees with Trump, who has often appeared to positively relish torture.) Flynn's discussion of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is actually very interesting and makes a serious contribution to our understanding of them.

His work in Iraq and Afghanistan led to his appointment as director of the Defence Intelligence Agency. In retrospect, it seems that Flynn was promoted out of his depth. His strengths as a soldier were tactical rather than strategic. When it came to the strategic situation the US found itself in, he increasingly embraced a variety of neo-con conspiracy theories that were bolstered by what his staff derisively called 'Flynn facts'; that is 'facts' that were not actually true. Conflict with other agencies and with members of his own staff eventually led to his being replaced.

With the publication in 2016 of his *The Field of Fight* (co-authored with Michael Ledeen, to whom we shall return), he made clear his strategic vision and presumably attracted the attention of Donald Trump. More than a hundred of the book's one hundred and eighty pages of text was devoted to this. What is this vision?

As far as Flynn is concerned, the US is involved in 'a world war' against 'an alliance between Radical Islamists and regimes in Havana, Pyongyang, Moscow and Beijing'. On

another occasion, he broadens the enemy alliance to include 'Iran, Syria, Bolivia, Venezuela and Nicaragua'. One thing he is absolutely clear about, however, is that 'Iran is the lynchpin of the alliance, its centrepiece'. He is, he admits, 'plenty scared. We could lose. In fact, right now we're losing'.

This targeting of Iran has got Michael Ledeen's fingerprints all over it. A neo-con ultra-Zionist, Ledeen infamously responded to Brent Scowcroft's 2002 warning that an invasion of Iraq risked turning 'the whole region into a cauldron' with the remark that 'If ever there were a region that richly deserved being cauldronized it is the Middle East'. The problem for Ledeen is the fact that Iranian influence has actually increased since the Middle East was so successfully 'cauldronized'. He has written books warning of the mortal threat that Iran poses to the United States: in 2007 his *The Iranian Time Bomb: The Mullah Zealots' Quest for Destruction* and in 2009 his *Accomplice to Evil: Iran and the War against the West*. This is the analysis that informs the strategic 'thinking' in *The Field of Fight*.

Iran, we are told, has been waging war against the United States 'for nearly forty years', 'has long supported al Qaeda' and the 1998 US Embassy bombings in East Africa were 'in large part Iranian operations'. The anti-American global alliance of which Iran is the lynchpin includes both 'ISIS and al Qaeda' and the consequences if the United States were to be defeated would be horrendous. Remember, Flynn has already expressed the opinion that this alliance are winning! Americans would find themselves living 'the way the unfortunate residents of the "caliphate" or the oppressed citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran live today, in a totalitarian state under the dictates of the most rigid version of Sharia'.

And he has no doubt that the Russians are supporting this assault on the West. Iran and Russia are the 'two most active and powerful members of the enemy alliance'. They are bound together by a shared hatred for democracy and love for dictatorship. Putin is a 'secular tyrant' while the ISIS caliphate resembles 'the Soviet bloc'.

All this has been kept from the American people. Obama, we are told, had 'an instinctive sympathy, even enthusiasm, for self-proclaimed anti-American "revolutionaries"'. This point is made a number of times. Obama's administration suppressed information about what was going on, in particular intelligence regarding the war Iran was waging against the United States. He is particularly scathing about the way 'Obama has tiptoed around open criticism of Vladimir Putin's many aggressive actions'. And this from a supporter of Donald Trump!

Clearly this is all so much neo-con fantasising; but it is not spun out of thin air. While the identification of Iran as the enemy in a new world war is a complete nonsense as far as the United States is concerned, it does very much represent the foreign policy interests of the Netanyahu government in Israel. Iranian support for Hizbollah is seen as a serious obstacle to the achievement of Israeli strategic objectives in Lebanon. The way in which Israel's supporters have chosen to try and bend US foreign policy to serve their interests is by demonising Iran and inventing a vastly, indeed hilariously overblown threat. Obama never fell for this. As Flynn puts it, one of Obama's worst mistakes was his 'open hostility to Israel', preferring 'a strategic alliance with Iran to...our traditional embrace of Israel'. This is all that his and Ledeen's vision really amounts to.

It remains to make just a couple more points regarding the threat posed by 'Radical Islam'. First of all, there is no serious discussion of Saudi Arabia and its part in encouraging, propagating and sponsoring 'Radical Islam'. Second, the threat posed by ISIS is absolutely minimised in order to emphasise the made-up threat posed by Iran. And third, drawing on his practical experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, while Flynn at some points emphasises the need to get moderate Muslims on board in the fight against the 'radicals', elsewhere he attacks Islam *per se*. What better way to alienate the moderate Muslims whose support he regards as crucial in winning his world war! All this certainly calls into question the book's intellectual integrity, leaving it open to the allegation of being

knowingly dishonest as well as wrong.

Which leaves us with Trump's election campaign. When its history is written it will be interesting to see whether or not Flynn brought his counterinsurgency expertise of disinformation and dirty tricks to it. Certainly he joined in chants of 'Lock Her Up' at Trump rallies, reposted and retweeted anti-Semitic and Islamophobic posts, and in the week before the actual election, gave credence to the story about Hillary Clinton and child sex slaves. Given Trump's poisonous relations with US intelligence agencies, Flynn, who has very little time for them, is likely to play a crucial role; although for how long is another matter.

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A new edition of his *British Counterinsurgency*
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