

By Robert S. Dudley

Half-Assed

“The [US] strategy [in Syria] has completely fallen apart. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah are gonna fight for their guy, and we’re not gonna do a damned thing to help the people who want to change Syria for the better by getting rid of the dictator in Damascus. ... You have turned Syria over to Russia and Iran. ... All what I can say is: it is a sad day for America, and the region will pay hell for this. ... This [is] a half-assed strategy, at its best.”—*Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.), to Pentagon chief Ashton B. Carter and Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Senate Armed Services Committee, Oct. 28.*

Iron-Assed

“He just became very hard-line and very different from the Dick Cheney I knew and worked with—just iron-ass. [He seemed to be] knuckling under to the real hard-charging guys who want to fight about everything, use force to get our way in the Middle East. ... I’ve concluded that [Cheney’s spouse] Lynne Cheney is a lot of the eminence grise here—iron-ass, tough as nails, driving.”—*President George H. W. Bush, from his new book, quoted in the New York Times, Nov. 5. Dick Cheney was Defense Secretary under Bush 41.*

Kick-Assed and Iron-Assed

“I think he [Former Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld] served the President badly. I don’t like what he did, and I think it hurt the President having his iron-ass view of everything. I’ve never been that close to him anyway. There’s a lack of humility, a lack of seeing what the other guy thinks. He’s more kick-ass and take names.”—*George H. W. Bush, same source.*

Bomber Backer

“We’re 150 percent behind the bomber. It’s strategically important to the country. It’s incredibly important that we move into this next phase. We’re excited they’re moving forward with it. ... Our subcommittee and I believe the full committee is going to be ... making sure this becomes a reality.”—*Rep. Randy Forbes (R-Va.),*

House Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee, statement on USAF’s Long-Range Strike Bomber, Oct. 27.

Breedlove Doctrine

“I really don’t think anyone truly understands what [Russian President Vladimir] Putin is about. ... We watch the capabilities and the capacities that he builds, ... and from those capabilities and capacities, we can deduce what he might want to do. ... That’s how I try to determine where Mr. Putin might be headed. ... The thing that worries me is a snap exercise or an exercise that turns into an invasion. Remember that, for almost two decades, we have been trying to make partners out of Russia. And what we realize now is that we do not have a partner in Russia. And so now we have to refocus our intelligence and redevelop those indications and warnings that make sure we don’t get surprised.”—*USAF Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, interview on NPR, Nov. 2.*

China’s Warning

“If the United States continues with these kinds of dangerous, provocative acts, there could well be a seriously pressing situation between frontline forces from both sides on the sea and in the air, or even a minor incident that sparks war. I hope the US side cherishes the good situation between the Chinese and US navies that has not come easily and avoids these kinds of incidents from happening again.”—*Adm. Wu Shengli, China’s naval commander, statement on sailing of US Navy cruiser USS Lassen in China-claimed area of South China Sea, The Guardian, Oct. 29.*

Forcing Failure?

“[Problems in the VA] have not been as widespread as it has been made out to be. ... Bring in people and just tackle (it), ... have an ongoing review of the care that is being given, do more to make sure that every VA hospital is delivering care to the highest standard of the community. ... They [Republicans in Congress] try to create a downward spiral—‘Don’t fund it to

the extent that it needs to be funded, because we want it to fail.”—*Hillary Clinton, Democratic presidential aspirant, MSNBC broadcast, Oct. 26.*

Blast From McCain

“Hillary Clinton’s remarks downplaying the significance of the scandal in which veterans died awaiting care at the VA hospitals in Phoenix and across our nation while corrupt bureaucrats collected bonuses are disgraceful and show a total lack of appreciation for the crisis facing veterans’ health care today. ... [She] owes an apology to the families of the veterans who lost their loved ones due to mismanagement and corruption in the federal government.”—*Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), statement issued on Oct. 26.*

General Trump Checks In

“When they say that this [the F-35 fighter] cannot perform as well as the planes we already have, what are [we] doing? And spending so much more money? I do hear that it’s not very good. I’m hearing that our existing planes are better. And one of the pilots came out of the plane, one of the test pilots, and said, ‘This isn’t as good as what we already have.’ ... So when I hear that, immediately I say we have to do something, because you know, [we’re] spending billions.”—*Donald Trump, Republican presidential aspirant, Hugh Hewitt radio program, Oct. 22.*

From the Black Lagoon

“US nuclear strategy and planning needs to change. ... US policymakers will have to ask searing questions that they have avoided for a quarter-century. How do we respond to nuclear blackmail? What risks are we willing to incur by ignoring direct nuclear threats designed to forestall US military activities abroad? Are we really willing to trade Seoul for Pyongyang, or Los Angeles for Tokyo? ... The questions themselves seem like the return of creatures from a black lagoon of the global past, but not preparing for them may assure a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions.”—*Michael Auslin, American Enterprise Institute, writing in The National Interest, Oct. 28.*