

It gives me no pleasure to write this. Barack Obama has lost it, I am afraid.

He and John Kerry very nearly got sucked into bombing Assad's forces in Syria a few months ago. Luckily a combination of rebellious Liberal and Labour MPs at Westminster and some deft Russian diplomacy stopped the "Gadarene swine" warmongers in Washington, Whitehall and the Quai D'Orsay from rushing over the cliff of making war on those Syrians who don't want to live in an extremist Islamic state.

Now Obama, who remains the proprietor of the un-closed Guantanamo concentration camp, is about to attempt another spectacular "omni-shambles". He is now proposing to spend \$500 million arming and training "moderate" elements in the anti-Assad coalition who will be using their weapons only on military and regime targets, we are told. Or perhaps they will use them on ISIS too.

This new strategy is nonsense. It is built on a monstrous lie – namely that a secular inclusive republican state can be won by the arms of the Syrian Sunni forces.

If the Assad regime falls, Syria will probably become a genocidal bloodbath. Obama's "moderates" will probably be pushed aside by Sunni extremists. Their American arms and equipment, like the Iraqi army's American arms and equipment, once captured will end up being used in a genocidal slaughter conducted by ISIS and the Al Nusra Front.

The Russians and Iranians will pump further arms and equipment into the Syrian conflict to prevent this outcome.

Instead of stopping the Syrian slaughter, Obama will be taking on the role of "butcher by proxy". If he arms the rebels he will have a lot of blood on his hands.

There is another way. It involves the US eating a little humble pie. It involves withdrawing the US precondition for negotiations that Assad should step down. If he stepped down, his side would collapse and ISIS and Al Nusra would seize power immediately. Assad's supporters are not minded to commit collective suicide. They know that if they lose, there is no possibility of Syria remaining a secular state. He will not step down.

The alternative also involves turning off the billions of dollars that the undemocratic Saudi and Qatari Sunni autocracies are pumping into the Sunni forces in the Syrian conflict. Obama could achieve that outcome if he wanted to.

The alternative involves an international and regional consensus brokered by the UN, pursuing peace by a process of truce, gradual repatriation of refugees, reform and opening up of the Syrian institutions of government and rebuilding of the Syrian economy. That is where the US, the Saudis and the Qataris could usefully spend their dollars.

You might think that after its experiences in Islamic states as far apart as Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, Yemen, Gaza and Syria, someone in Washington might have learnt that the so-called Arab Spring was nothing like the Czech Spring or the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact.

The great majority of the Arab world is simply not a world which collectively wants to replace its rulers with what the West would see as democracy – secular societies based on multi-party parliamentary institutions guaranteeing freedom of thought and expression and religion. Only a small and weak minority share those aims. If the West is happy to cohabit with Sunni autocracies in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Morocco, Bahrein, and elsewhere, it should ask itself whether it is not the master of double standards.

The US, in particular, should appreciate that its approach to Guantanamo, to West Bank settlements, to drone attacks, and to Shia interests guarantees that it has absolutely no traction with ordinary Arabs. It may have allies in the palaces but it has few or none in the mosques, the souks, or in the dusty streets of the Middle East's small towns and villages.

Arming “moderate” elements in the Syrian conflict will immediately taint them with the status of America's stool-pigeons – a fatal disease in the Arab and Islamic world. We should also remember how quickly the Afghani Taliban in another part of the Islamic world mutated from US allies to America's enemies in a very short time.

Intensifying the conflict in Syria in the hope of marginalising extremism is plain daft and morally indefensible. It is also doomed to fail.