

Response to Syria a Duplicitous Affair

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Reports from Syria are incredibly alarming and disconcerting, in particular this latest news cycle. It is common knowledge that Syria, along with numerous other nations around the world (including the US), has chemical weapons. Also common knowledge, Syria refused to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and is known to have four major chemical weapons plants. Given this information, why did the US not work comprehensively with allies to diplomatically address these issues with Syria? Instead, according to the Washington Post (April 17, 2011), the US secretly financed opposition groups in Syria and has continued to do so during the past decade!

Although we believe that we should adamantly denounce chemical attacks on Syrian citizens, we can't help but remind everyone, ourselves included, that the Syrian regime's involvement in this particular chemical attack still has to be proven and that media sources have failed to report on, let alone fill, the gaping holes in US intelligence that persist, including who ordered the use of chemical weapons and where those chemical weapons are now. Furthermore, we go along with those commentators who find it strange that chemical weapons were used at a time that coincided precisely with the UN inspectors' visit to the country. As Bashar Assad himself stated, this would be an insult to common sense.

We also recall how very slow the US was to respond to UN reports of genocide in the Congo, where 6 million people were killed. Why the difference in reactions? 1) the US condoned Rwanda and Uganda (as agents of US foreign policy) in their de facto annexation of eastern Congo and its mineral riches; 2) geopolitical dominance of oil and gas resources is at the forefront of the struggle in Syria; and 3) dare we say, the population being killed in the Congo was impoverished and black! When Congolese women and children screamed in agony, a staffer to UN Ambassador Susan Rice said, literally, that the US should "[look the other way](#)," knowing full well that a population was being annihilated.

Furthermore we can only greet statements forthcoming from US officials about "moral obscenities" with suspicion. The USA hardly has a "clean bin" in this regard, being widely accused of the perpetration and support of such moral obscenities, some more blatant, while others taking the form of legal illegalities, throughout its history - we ironically write this a few days from the 40th anniversary of the CIA-backed bloody Chilean coup against a democratically elected government! And needless to say, Chile represents but one of the many moral obscenities, as Argentinians, Brazilians, East Timorese, Central Americans, Grenadians, Iraqis, Vietnamese, Palestinians, Turks, Cypriots and many others can attest. Consequently, the USA and its spokespersons ought to be very careful when claiming the moral high ground in these situations. We have become a people wary of such bold rhetorical claims, in light of what is now historical record, including information attained from Wikileaks files.

Furthermore, one must question what will such a military strike achieve? Will it create the kind of democratic environment that many who participated in the "Arab spring"? (We would argue "spring" is an unfortunate term, more on the lines of the Bratislava spring, than anything else, in terms of outcome and inability to remove the deeply entrenched US-backed military structure in place.) Would it create the kind of chaos and anarchic situation that occurred in Iraq following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein? Would it be a means to allow an Al Qaeda-infiltrated or -affiliated rebel movement to flourish and fill the vacuum? Would this be the sort of US-driven policy that will backfire, as with Afghanistan and its backing of the Taliban against the Soviet Union and, of course, Saddam Hussein in his battles with Iran?

Recent visits to Turkey have been instructive, regarding what Assad and the rebels represent. For the leftists and secularists in this neighboring country, Assad represents the guarantee of secularism. The rebels, backed by the USA and Turkey's Muslim fundamentalist Prime Minister Recep Erdogan, represent a deliberate attempt at fundamentalist Islamization of the country and the establishment of Sharia law. Moreover, Erdogan's government was accused by thousands of Turkish protesters of being fully aware of the bombings Saturday, May 11, in Reyhanli next to the Syrian border, which left 51 people dead.

In Syria, religious minorities such as Christians, including Palestinian Christians, see Assad as a safeguard against the ascendancy of Islamic fundamentalism that could place their lives in jeopardy. Of course, we recognize that standing as a guarantee for secularism does not justify despotic rule and trampling on human rights and civil liberties. Despots throughout the world, and particularly the Arab world, ingratiate themselves to many foreign people and powers by presenting themselves as guarantors of secularism and as bulwarks against fundamentalism.

We are not saying that the Assad regime is to be condoned for the indiscriminate bombing of various villages and towns in its attempt to quell rebellion. Far from it! This deserves the utmost condemnation. We also believe that the presence of such a dictatorial regime is very much at odds with the quest for democracy that has been sweeping across several Arab states. And if there is enough evidence of use of chemical weapons by the regime, then this action must be condemned and sanctions imposed. Once again, however, the Assad regime's responsibility in this regard still has not been proven. Before any attempt at striking at Syria is made, citizens in the USA, the UK and all over the world require debates at the highest level, including US Congress, to understand the current situation in the beleaguered Middle East country and the widespread ramifications of such a strike, specifically given the geopolitical situation in this very volatile region and the world in general. We need to think only of a scenario involving the kind of government augured by Syrian rebels - this in a country that borders Israel. The latter is believed to possess undeclared weapons of mass destruction, including biological warfare weapons.

Militarization lies at the heart of the prevailing culture, in this day and age. The US and some of its allies seem ever so willing to apply military solutions to world problems, despite the perils that attend such "solutions." It suits a variety of interests, including the military-industrial complex, an ever-active arms industry, and opportunistic moves by leaders to "create their own Falklands. Here, we wish to highlight that in the Falklands case we had a duplicitous affair -

striking against a "right wing" dictatorship by the very same right-wing government in Britain, which openly supported similar regimes in Latin America, Chile in particular.

Moreover, we can't help but question if the current hysteria against Syria is meant to counter growing internal dissent in the US, generated by ruthless neoliberal policies that amount to a veritable war on one's own people, especially the most impoverished. And, in light of being duped previously by the Bush administration into believing in the existence of WMDs in Iraq, many people today are wary of any media-disseminated "evidence" of the use of chemical weapons and imputing this to the Assad regime. Of course, we are not saying that such evidence should be dismissed as pure fabrication. What we argue adamantly is that it must be viewed with seriousness and caution.

These are indeed difficult times in which we are living. Nevertheless, we must remain politically grounded and historically anchored in our understanding of and response to this crisis. Our call is for a greater moral struggle of conscience in this country and elsewhere, where we begin the struggle for democratic life in our own backyard - instead of supporting political officials who have no qualms against duplicitous responses to violence at home or abroad - responses anchored upon their perception of narrow US geopolitical and economic interests. Hence, it should be no wonder that we are justifiably guarded in our responses to humanitarian overtures so freely dispensed by Washington officials supporting a military strike on Syria.

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