

How the West Fueled the Ever-Growing Carnage in Syria

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The actions of the United States and its allies in Syria have only led to escalating violence and chaos. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has committed serial aggression, isolating, demonizing, dividing and destroying Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and now Syria. In each case, it has cited higher motives and good intentions, even as it concealed its own covert role in igniting, fueling and militarizing internal conflicts.

On Tuesday March 27th 2013, Kofi Annan gave [a speech at the Graduate Institute in Geneva](#). In his usual careful and diplomatic tone, Annan spoke firmly against Western calls for more direct military intervention in Syria.

“Further militarization of the conflict, I’m not sure that is the way to help the Syrian people,” Annan said, “They are waiting for the killing to stop. You find some people far away from Syria are the ones very keen for putting in weapons. My own view is that as late as it is we have to find a way of pouring water on the fire rather than the other way around.”

Like many who seek peace in Syria, Annan looks back on the [“Action Group for Syria”](#) agreement that he brokered in Geneva on June 30th 2012 as a foundation for peace that was promptly squandered by the United States and its allies. In Geneva, all five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council signed on to a plan that would lead to free elections in Syria, with a transitional government of national unity including members of the existing government and the opposition. The critical factor which made agreement possible was that the U.S. and its allies dropped their demand for the removal of President Assad as a precondition for the transition to begin.

As Annan wrote in a [Financial Times op-ed](#) as he resigned his post as UN envoy a month later, “We left the meeting believing a Security Council resolution endorsing the group’s decision was assured... Instead, there has been finger-pointing and name-calling in the Security Council.”

A few days after the Geneva agreement, [Russia circulated a draft resolution](#) in the Security Council as Annan expected. But, instead of honoring the commitments they made in Geneva, the U.S., U.K. and France rejected it. [They drafted a rival resolution](#) containing all the elements they had dropped in Geneva and which had previously prevented consensus: automatic triggers for sanctions; no commitment to pressure rebel militias to comply; and the invocation of Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter as a pretext for future military action.

With the Security Council once again deadlocked, Saudi Arabia sponsored [a version of the West’s resolution in the UN General Assembly](#), calling for Assad to step down and for sanctions if he did not. The resolution seemed likely to fail, with Brazil, India, South Africa and much of the developing world lined up against it, but a watered down version was

passed.

The CIA has since stepped up its support to the rebels, providing satellite intelligence on Syrian military deployments and managing [arms shipments from the Persian Gulf and Croatia](#) via Turkey and Jordan. Predictably, the bloodshed has only increased on both sides. March was probably the deadliest month since the war began. In his speech in Geneva, Kofi Annan called the current UN estimate of 70,000 Syrians killed “a gross under-estimation.” In the early days of the conflict, UN casualty figures reflected [unsubstantiated and probably exaggerated reports](#) from the Syrian opposition and their allies in the Western media. Since then, the UN has held down its estimates as the killing has escalated and the real slaughter has almost certainly now surpassed the rebel propaganda, with the rebels themselves committing their fair share of it.

Norwegian General Robert Mood echoed Kofi Annan’s analysis in [a recent interview with the BBC World Service’s Hardtalk program](#). Mood led the 300-member military observer mission that went into Syria in April 2012 to monitor the ceasefire that was the first step in Annan’s six-point peace plan.

[Mood prematurely suspended that mission](#) in June 2012 because the ceasefire had failed to take hold and his unarmed observer teams were being fired on and threatened by hostile crowds. He said that the operation could only resume if all parties to the conflict were committed to the safety and freedom of movement of the observers. “The government has expressed that very clearly in the last couple of days,” Mood said. “I have not seen the same clear statement from the opposition yet.”

Reflecting on his mission 9 months later, General Mood told Hardtalk’s Steven Sackur, “There was an opening, but that opening was not used, because... the kind of international leadership that we would need was not there. That leadership could have been Russia, China, the U.S. coming together and at least agreeing on a joint message so that the government in Damascus and the key people in the Free Syrian Army and the opposition groups were given the same message. That message could have been one option to both of them that we will push forward with a plan for bringing Syria out of this terrible violence and onto a political track - a strong message to both the government and the opposition that we will accept nothing else. If such a message had come both from all of them in the P5 and the Security Council together and united, I do believe still today that it would have had a strong impact.”

Sackur asked Mood about the differences between the West and Russia and China over President Assad’s role during a political transition. Mood explained, “This is how small and how big the differences between the parties were. In my mind at that time, it would have been possible to lead Syria through a transition supported by a united Security Council with Assad as part of the transition. I believe there was an opening for that and I believe there was a willingness to do that. The insistence on the removal of President Assad as a start of the process led them into a corner where the strategic picture gave them no way out whatsoever...”

The more one studies the actions of the United States and its allies throughout this crisis, the more they seem to have been designed only to lead to ever-escalating violence. This raises the inescapable question whether, in fact, the slaughter and chaos taking place in Syria are in fact the intended result of U.S. policy rather than the tragic but unintended result of its failure, as Western propaganda would have us believe.

In stark contrast to cautious statements by U.S. officials, their actual policy appears to have consistently fostered the militarization and escalation of the crisis and to have undermined every peace initiative. In fact, their public statements may be only a smokescreen for a darker, more cynical policy:

- As the Arab League tried to broker a ceasefire in December 2011, [ex-CIA officer Philip](#)

[Giraldi reported](#) that unmarked NATO planes were flying fighters and weapons from Libya to a “Free Syrian Army” base in Turkey; British and French special forces were training Syrian fighters; and the CIA was providing communications equipment and intelligence. Giraldi wrote, “Syrian government claims that it is being assaulted by rebels who are armed, trained and financed by foreign governments are more true than false.”

- As Kofi Annan launched his peace plan in April 2012, the U.S. joined France and other allies at a [series of so-called “Friends of Syria” summits](#), where they promised unconditional political support, weapons and money to their Syrian proxies, making sure that they would not comply with the ceasefire that was the first step in the Annan peace plan.

- After finally dropping the precondition of Assad’s departure and agreeing publicly to Annan’s “Action Group for Syria” proposal at the end of June 2012, the Western powers returned to the UN Security Council and reasserted all their preconditions, killing the plan before it could get off the ground.

- The supply of weapons and fighters to the rebels has increased steadily since then. Saudi judges have sent [Arab Spring protesters to fight and die in Syria](#) instead of to prison. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Libya and other Arab monarchies send weapons, money and fighters. The Saudis fund shipments of European weapons from Croatia to Jordan to skirt the EU arms embargo. And the [CIA provides military training](#) to Syrian and foreign fighters in Jordan.

- Now, as if the U.S. has not been covertly fueling the conflict all along, the U.S. government is debating more open military support to the rebels.

To paraphrase an old riddle: “Are we governed by clever people who are putting us on, or by imbeciles who really mean it?” In this case, did the United States mean to open the gates of Hell in Syria, or did it just blunder into this mess?

Unfortunately U.S. policymakers have a dismal record of combining the worst elements of both. As the U.S. Congress debated war in Iraq in 2002, there were clever people in Washington who knew that [chemical and biological weapons do not remain potent for more than ten years](#) and that there was no evidence that Iraq had revived the banned weapons programs it dismantled in 1991. Senator Bob Graham, the Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, voted against the war authorization and begged his colleagues to read the classified National Intelligence Estimate, instead of the fake summary of it that they were given [“to strengthen the case for going to war”](#), as one of its authors, the CIA’s Paul Pillar, has since admitted. There were other “clever” people in Washington who knew as much as Senator Graham but voted for war anyway: “clever people putting us on.”

But the “clever people putting us on” were really as deluded as the “imbeciles who really meant it”. They saw the WMD fairy tale for what it was, but they failed to see the inevitable consequences of their own actions - not just for the people of Iraq, who they were quite prepared to sacrifice, but for the U.S. interests they hoped to advance.

As General Mood told Hardtalk, “It is fairly easy to use the military tool, because, when you launch the military tool in classical interventions, something will happen and there will be results. The problem is that the results are almost all the time different than the political results you were aiming for when you decided to launch it. So the other position, arguing that it is not the role of the international community, neither coalitions of the willing nor the UN Security Council for that matter, to change governments inside a country, is also a position that should be respected...”

As Mood said, “there will be results.” The use of military force, overt or covert, will kill and injure a lot of people, because that is what modern weapons are designed to do. And sufficient violence covertly unleashed within a society will break down law and order and turn groups of people against each other. U.S. military leaders understand this perfectly well based on decades of experience.

But, despite catastrophic failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, the “NATO rebellion” in Libya

provided the U.S. and its allies with a new model for “regime change.” NATO, Qatar and Saudi Arabia unleashed [a war that killed at least 25,000 people](#) and plunged the [most highly developed country in Africa](#) into an orgy of ethnic cleansing and unending chaos. They succeeded in butchering Colonel Gaddafi and installing a comprador regime to govern Libya’s oil industry, but [NATO-trained militias are still fighting each other](#) for control of many parts of the country and have exported violence and militia rule to neighboring countries, including Mali, as well as to Syria.

Syria is a more densely populated, more complex country than Libya, with powerful military forces and a relatively popular government with decades of experience in managing the diverse elements that make up Syrian society. In December 2011, as NATO flew in fighters and weapons from Libya, 55% of the population told pollsters [they still supported the government](#). That has surely eroded as the Syrian military has shelled and bombed its people, but that does not mean that people now support the foreign-backed rebels. What most Syrians want is exactly what Kofi Annan, General Mood and the current UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi have been trying to bring them: a peaceful political transition. But U.S., British, French, Saudi, Qatari and Turkish officials could not resist the temptation to adapt the Libyan “regime change” model to Syria, knowing full well all along that this would unleash an even bloodier and more destructive conflict. There seems to be no limit to the horror that our leaders will inflict on the people of Syria to get rid of President Assad.

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has committed serial aggression, isolating, demonizing, dividing and destroying Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and now Syria. In each case, it has cited higher motives and good intentions, even as it concealed its own covert role in igniting, fueling and militarizing internal conflicts. [As Harold Pinter said](#), “It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide, while masquerading as a force for universal good. It’s a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis.”

If post-war conditions permit, countries destroyed by U.S. aggression and covert war are recruited to join their more submissive neighbors as entry-level members of the U.S.-led capitalist world. Some American politicians appear to genuinely believe that this justifies the violence and slaughter that makes it possible, even though, as General Mood said, “the results are almost all the time different than the political results you were aiming for.”

The folly and savagery of destroying country after country like this stems from a fundamental misperception of the post-Cold War world that is rooted in fantasies like [Francis Fukuyama’s “The End of History”](#) theory. U.S. leaders imagined that, with the demise of the U.S.S.R., they stood at the threshold of a world made in America’s image. Politics and history had passed away, to be supplanted by management, marketing and finance. They would run the world as a giant business enterprise, of which they would be the executives and majority shareholders.

But this new global dictatorship, like all dictatorships, faced the problem of what to do with dissidents who still resisted integration into America’s informal global empire. By 1991, this seemed to have been reduced to a tantalizingly finite number of countries that the new American “superpower” could surely marginalize and, if necessary, destroy: Albania; Angola; Burma; Cambodia; Cuba; Iran; Iraq; Laos; Libya; North Korea; Palestine; Somalia; Syria; Vietnam; Yugoslavia; and, last but not least, China.

Twenty years later, many of those resistant regimes have been dealt with. But the United States is no closer to its cherished vision of a unipolar world. Their places on America’s global “kill list” have been taken by newly independent governments even more solidly committed to resisting American imperialism, including popular democratic regimes in Latin America, which the U.S. has “plagued with misery in the name of liberty” for almost two centuries, as Simon Bolivar predicted: Argentina; Bolivia; Ecuador; El Salvador; Nepal; Nicaragua; Pakistan; Russia; Sudan; Venezuela. Popular resistance movements to global

capitalism keep emerging in countries around the world, from Maoists in India to Islamist groups in the Muslim world; and much of the economically resurgent global South now has closer ties to China than to the U.S.

After killing millions and squandering trillions in its futile quest for dominance, the U.S. confronts a world it has even less power to control. But the mindset of America's leaders seems set in stone. Its rapacious machinery of covert war has only expanded under President Obama. As in the 1950s, 1970s & 1980s, the CIA has exploited America's military failures to carve out a larger role for itself, and Obama has been seduced as easily as Eisenhower, Carter and Reagan into becoming its commander, its patron and its puppet. The U.S. political system is not designed to produce new leaders who say, "No, thank you, I don't need a secret private army." True to form, Obama asked only, "What else can I do with it?"

The secrecy that makes the CIA and its JSOC foot-soldiers such attractive "tools" to President Obama is the very thing that makes them so dangerous to the rest of us, as we really should know by now. A hidden benefit of secret U.S. military operations has always been that the deferential U.S. media will report only the cover stories, turning the press into powerful co-conspirators in these operations. Secrecy and propaganda are mutually reinforcing.

For a consummate media manipulator like Obama, who was named ["Marketer of the Year" for 2008](#) by the American advertising industry, hiding a policy of covert war and assassination behind a dovish public image was an irresistibly "witty" global masquerade. His smiling face still beams out from Shepard Fairey's iconic campaign posters as his assassins ply their trade on [a dozen manhunts each night](#).

In their 2006 book [The Foreign Policy Disconnect](#), Benjamin Page and Marshall Bouton demonstrated that most of the crises in post-1945 U.S. foreign policy could have been avoided if U.S. leaders had paid more attention to the views of the public. But how can the public have any influence on secret policy-making? U.S. leaders have responded to public alarm at their aggressive and illegal use of military force, not by restoring law and order to U.S. policy, but by moving it farther into the shadows to protect it from public scrutiny and interference.

But the more this policy succeeds in its goal of secrecy and deception, the more it fails in the real world. Whether Presidents Bush or Obama are ever held to account for the death and destruction they have unleashed on other countries, our children and grandchildren will pay for our complicity in their crimes, as they struggle to invest what is left of our country's resources in a belated effort to repair the damage of war, shattered international relations, looted natural resources, gutted public services and climate chaos.

China is already overtaking the United States as the [world's largest economy](#), and may [overtake the U.S. in military spending](#) by about 2030. When will our leaders stop trying to bully a world in which they are no longer the biggest kid on the block? And where and when will they begin the vital transition to the peaceful, cooperative world order that is essential to our children's future?

Syria would be a good place to start, and now would be a good time to do it.

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