

Humanitarian Murder

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This past Sunday night on “60 Minutes” John Miller of CBS News [said](#), “I’ve spoken with intelligence analysts who have said an uncomfortable thing that has a ring of truth, which is: the longer this war in Syria goes on, in some sense the better off we are.”

Now, why would that be uncomfortable, do you suppose? Could it be because encouraging huge numbers of violent deaths of human beings seems sociopathic?

The discomfort that Miller at least claims to feel is the gauge of our moral progress, I suppose, since June 23, 1941, when Harry Truman said, “If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible.”

On Monday, *Time* magazine’s Aryn Baker published an [article](#) under the headline “Syria’s Rebels Turn on One Another, and That’s Not a Bad Thing.” Baker’s point wasn’t that more would die this way, but that this would allow the U.S. to escalate the war (which of course would mean more dying).

Remember that President Obama’s [reason](#) for wanting to attack Syria is to “confront actions that are violating our common humanity.” How is it that support for mass killing rarely seems to violate our common humanity if it’s that other 96 percent of humanity getting killed, and especially if it’s this 4 percent doing it? Why is the excuse to kill more people always that people are being killed, while we never starve people to prevent them from starving or rape people to protect them from rape?

The uncomfortable “60 Minutes” interviewer addressed his remarks to a former CIA officer who replied by disagreeing. He claimed to want the war to end. But how would he end it? By arming and aiding one side, just enough and not too much — which would supposedly result in peace negotiations, albeit with a risk of major escalation. While nobody ever works to extend peace in order to generate war, people are constantly investing in war in the name of peace.

As this man may be very well aware, arming one side in this war will encourage that side’s viciousness and encourage the other side to arm itself further as well. But suppose it were actually true that you could deescalate a war by escalating a war. Why are the large number of people who would be killed in the process unworthy of consideration?

We’ve seen lawyers tell Congressional committees that killing people with drones is either murder or perfectly fine, depending on whether Obama’s secret memos say the killings are part of a war. But why is killing people acceptable in a war? We’ve just watched public pressure deny Obama missile strikes on Syria. Those strikes were optional. Had they

happened that would have been a choice, not an inevitability. What of the immorality involved?

The best news is that we're beginning to feel uncomfortable.

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