

Libya, Syria and NATO's R2P; The Morality Play of Britain's "Progressive Media"

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Targeting Syria – The 'Bad News' For The Guardian

Afghanistan and Iraq may still be in flames. A bloodbath may continue to flow from Nato's 'humanitarian intervention' in Libya. No matter, mainstream journalists are appalled that a double Russian and Chinese veto at the UN has thwarted Western efforts to do more good in Syria. The two powers rejected the latest draft of a UN Security Council resolution condemning the Syrian government and preparing the way for international sanctions.

In the Guardian, Middle East editor Ian Black [wrote](#) last week:

'Bashar al-Assad can certainly feel satisfied that powerful allies have stood by him and prevented international action that might – just – have given him pause for thought as he pursues his vicious crackdown on Syria's protest movement.'

This is the standard media version of events, repeated endlessly, for example, by the BBC and ITV. We are to understand that the Syrian government is responsible for a vicious repression of peaceful protestors along the lines of Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain and Yemen.

But is it an accurate depiction of the conflict?

In May, Michel Chossudovsky, Professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa, [commented](#) on the first outbreaks of violence in Syria:

'What is clear from these initial reports is that many of the demonstrators were not demonstrators but terrorists involved in premeditated acts of killing and arson. The title of [an] Israeli news report summarizes what happened: *'Syria: Seven Police Killed, Buildings Torched in Protests.'*

The initial conflict, Chossudovsky noted, 'had all the appearances of a staged event involving, in all likelihood, covert support to Islamic terrorists by Mossad and/or Western intelligence. Government sources point to the role of radical Salafist groups (supported by Israel). Other reports have pointed to the role of Saudi Arabia in financing the protest movement.'

Jeremy Salt, associate professor in Middle Eastern History and Politics at Bilkent University, Ankara, [wrote](#) this month:

'The armed groups are well armed and well organised. Large shipments of weapons have been smuggled into Syria from Lebanon and Turkey. They include pump action shotguns, machine guns, Kalashnikovs, RPG launchers, Israeli-made hand grenades and numerous other explosives. It is not clear who is providing these weapons but someone is, and someone is paying for them.'

So why do Western media keep referring to a 'vicious crackdown on Syria's protest movement'?

Chossudovsky explained:

'The existence of an armed insurrection is not mentioned by the Western media. If it were to be acknowledged and analysed, our understanding of unfolding events would be entirely different. What is mentioned profusely is that the armed forces and the police are involved in the indiscriminate killing of protesters.'

He added some background:

'Since the Soviet-Afghan war, Western intelligence agencies as well as Israel's Mossad have consistently used various Islamic terrorist organizations as "intelligence assets". Both Washington and its indefectible British ally have provided covert support to "Islamic terrorists" in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo and Libya, etc. as a means to triggering ethnic strife, sectarian violence and political instability... The ultimate objective of the Syria protest movement, through media lies and fabrications, is to create divisions within Syrian society as well as justify an eventual "humanitarian intervention".'

As Chossudovsky observed, Syria is on the US list of 'rogue states.' In 2004, in an [interview](#) with Democracy Now!, former Nato chief General Wesley Clark recalled a conversation with a Pentagon general in 2001, a few weeks after the September 11 attacks:

'He reached over on his desk. He picked up a piece of paper. And he said, "I just got this down from upstairs" — meaning the Secretary of Defense's office — "today." And he said, "This is a memo that describes how we're going to take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and, finishing off, Iran."'

The Guardian's Morality Play

Ian Black continued in the Guardian:

'The veto by Russia and China of a binding UN security council resolution threatening unspecified measures against Syria caps months of feverish diplomatic action at the UN. Britain, France and Portugal knew they were facing an uphill struggle, so they diluted and qualified the text of what they were proposing in order to avoid failure. But they failed anyway.'

'Since military action was explicitly excluded in the final "blue" draft of the resolution, the optimists thought, or hoped, that Russia might comply.'

But the dilutions and qualifications did not rule out more aggressive action later. The final resolution allowed for the Security Council to consider unspecified measures against Syria after a 30-day period. Former Guardian journalist Jonathan Cook responded to our request for comment:

'Black mentions the exclusion of "military action" but this is not in itself a guarantee that the US won't find other ways to bring about regime change. There was plenty of evidence during Israel's attack on Lebanon in 2006 that the US and Israel were trying to widen the attack to Syria. Israel is very concerned about Syria's stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons that nearly match its own. It isn't too far-fetched to see the US using this resolution as a prelude to a variation of the Iraq strategy: demanding Syria destroy its WMD; upping world fury; isolating Damascus; and then allowing/enabling an Israeli attack.' (Email to Media Lens, October 6, 2011)

Black added:

'But on Tuesday night, officials said, there was a last-minute hardening of Moscow's position. Beijing, as ever, dutifully followed suit. Lebanon, India, South Africa and Brazil - currently on the council - abstained.'

Cook again:

'The US tries to shape the world in ways that are beneficial to its strategic and commercial interests, and does so through arm-twisting and threats to those countries that object but are not strong enough to stand up to its power...

'This is so obvious it should not even need to be stated. And yet Black's analysis totally ignores this reality, turning the Security Council vote into some kind of morality play. He is positively misty-eyed about Western interests, as though they were informed solely by a resolute determination to stand up for human rights and the oppressed. His approach is typified by this weaselly line:

"Beijing, as ever, dutifully followed suit."

'As though Britain, France, Portugal and co don't also "dutifully follow suit" when the US demands it.'

Abandoning any pretense of neutrality, Black continued:

'This is bad news for protesters in Syria, where at least 2,700 have been killed since March, and bad news for those who yearn for a UN that can prove effective, if not in tackling all the world's ills at once, then at least in responding to one of its most glaring and urgent injustices.

'The chorus of condemnation from western capitals sounded genuine.'

The resilience of Black's faith in Western moral concern is impressive. This year, the West has supported dictators in Tunisia and Egypt to the bitter end, before dumping the tyrants, hailing a triumph for democracy, and then working for a restoration of the status

quo. It continues to support tyrants killing their own people in Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. It has criminally exploited a UN resolution to achieve regime change in Libya. It has also promised to veto the Palestinian bid for statehood and membership of the UN. In fact, the West has again shown itself to be a fierce opponent of the cause it claims to be defending in Syria.

Black wrote:

'Susan Rice, Barack Obama's ambassador to the UN, expressed outrage. "This will be seen in the region as a decision to side with a brutal regime rather than with the people of Syria," complained William Hague, "and will be a bitter blow to all those Syrians who have implored the international community to take a stand."... Privately, but fairly openly, the Russians were accused of being hypocritical and cynical.'

By contrast, former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, [commented](#):

'I know the American Envoy to the UN, Susan Rice, and have in the past worked with her and had great respect for her; she was genuinely committed to the fight against apartheid. But her histrionic walkout in reaction to a Russian statement which was both plainly true, and an eminently foreseeable result of America's own rash actions [in Libya], was just pathetic.'

On the World Socialist Web Site, Peter Symonds [noted](#) the breathtaking hypocrisy of Rice's walk-out: the US having, after all, vetoed numerous UN resolutions condemning Israeli crimes.

Black added in a feeble gesture towards balance:

'Arms sales and a strategic relationship with Syria certainly played a role in Russia's calculations, just as US links to Bahrain have tempered its criticism of repression in the Gulf state.'

As we have seen, Bahrain is only one example of how the West is systematically subordinating democracy to self-interest.

Although Russia and China have concerns about the way Nato interpreted UNSCR 1973 in Libya, Black noted: 'Still, Muammar Gaddafi's menacing advance on Benghazi and excoriation of his enemies as "rats" was not a western ploy.'

US analyst David Peterson responded to our request for comment:

'There are still no grounds to believe that as of March 2011, the possibility of a bloodbath carried out by the Gaddafi regime in Benghazi was anything but western propaganda to facilitate the adoption of 1973 and then immediately use 1973 to launch an aggressive war against the regime. If, inside Syria, the protests are becoming militarized — how do you suppose this has come about? The weapons and organizational capabilities just fell from the sky above. Right? Exactly like Libya from February 15 on.' (Email to Media Lens, October 6, 2011)

Black made vague mention that Russian and Chinese objections to the proposed resolution

on Syria had been 'far more about their anger over Libya'. By contrast, Craig Murray heroically [translated](#) a portion of the Russian speech at the UN – a feat apparently beyond the capacity of any mainstream media Moloch – allowing readers of his blog to evaluate the reasoning. The Russian ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, said:

'The situation in Syria cannot be considered without reference to events in Libya. The international community should be alarmed at statements to the effect that the implementation of Security Council resolutions on Libya, as read by NATO, provide a model for future NATO action for the implementation of the "responsibility to protect". One can easily imagine that tomorrow this "exemplary model" of "joint defence" can start to be introduced into Syria.'

Churkin continued on Libya:

'In the view of Russia, in that case members of the UN Security Council twisted the provisions of Security Council resolutions to give them the opposite of their true meaning.

'The requirement for an immediate ceasefire instead resulted in large-scale civil war, with humanitarian, social, economic, and military consequences which have extended far beyond Libya's frontiers.

'The no-fly zone resulted in the bombing of oil installations, television stations and other civilian targets.

'The arms embargo resulted in a naval blockade of the West coast of Libya, including for humanitarian supplies.

'The "Benghazi crisis" has resulted today in the devastation of other cities. Sirte, Bani Walid, and Sephi.

'This then is the "Exemplary model". The world must abolish such practices once and for all.'

As Murray observed:

'The fact is that what the Russians say is precisely true. NATO action in Libya went way beyond what the Security Council had actually authorised, which was a no fly zone to protect civilians, a ceasefire, and negotiations between the parties.'

Peter Symonds [added](#) a rarely-reported fact:

'In an obvious reference to Libya, South African ambassador Baso Sangqu issued a statement declaring that the Security Council had been abused and that implementation of its resolutions had gone far beyond mandates. South Africa was concerned, he said, about the imposition of punitive measures on Syria, believing that they had been designed "as a prelude to other actions." Explaining South Africa's abstention, Sangqu insisted that the Council should not be part of any hidden agenda for regime change.'

Finally, Black summarised:

'The failure of diplomacy seems likely to mean further escalation on the ground, where the protests are becoming militarised and there is talk of a fully-fledged civil war.'

A likely reversal of the truth, as indicated by the ferocious civil war Nato has stoked, and perhaps caused, in Libya. It was Nato's political support for violent resistance in Libya, its air campaign in support of anti-Gaddafi forces, its [flat rejection](#) of all ceasefire and peace proposals, and its demand that Gaddafi 'step down', that created the conditions for civil war and, as planned, regime change. The same powers are surely intending to pursue the same strategy and result in Syria.

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