

Syria and the Seeds of World War

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The Russian-Chinese veto of a UN resolution paving the way for intervention in Syria has provoked a furious reaction from the United States and its imperialist allies.

Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the United Nations and a leading representative of the “human rights” warriors demanding universal acquiescence to the schemes of US imperialism, branded the veto envoys as “shameful and disgusting” and threatened that “over time it is a decision they will come to regret.”

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the vote a “travesty” that had “neutered” the UN.

France, not to be outdone in the pursuit of imperialist aims in a country over which it exercised a quarter-century colonial mandate, responded with similar belligerence. Foreign Minister Alan Juppe declared the double veto a “moral stain” on the United Nations, and Defense Minister Gerard Longuet described Russia and China as countries that “deserve a kick in the ass.”

No such expressions of concern about the “neutering” of the UN or “moral stains” were heard when the US delegation repeatedly vetoed resolutions denouncing aggression by its principal ally in the region, Israel, as it waged wars against defenseless populations in Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank, killing thousands of civilians.

Morality and human rights have nothing to do with it. The outrage heard from Washington and the capitals in Western Europe is over the failure of Moscow and Beijing to line up behind US imperialism’s strategy for re-organizing the world in its own interest and that of the financial elite.

The supposed “principles” underlying the US initiative—that the major imperialist powers have the right to intervene and depose the governments of former colonial countries they deem guilty of violating human rights—stand in complete contradiction to international law. As in everything else, the American financial aristocracy makes up the rules as it goes along.

The reasoning of the Russian and the Chinese governments is fairly straight-forward. They see the US posturing once again as the champion of democracy and human rights as it carries out a relentless campaign of aggression aimed at transforming Iran and Syria—both key trading and strategic partners with Moscow and Beijing—into neo-colonial puppet states of American imperialism.

At stake for Russia is the loss of its one remaining ally in the Arab world, together with billions of dollars in arms contracts, access for its navy to its sole port on the Mediterranean

and tens of billions of dollars more in investments.

China has similar, though lesser interests in Syria. Both countries recognize, however, that Syria has been targeted for regime change as part of a larger campaign aimed at toppling the government of Iran—China’s key energy supplier—and bringing the entire oil-rich and strategically vital region stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Basin firmly under US hegemony.

The modus operandi in pursuing these imperialist aims is now all too familiar. A targeted regime is denounced with hypocritical invocations of human rights violations after the US and its allies promote civil war in the country and then utilize the inevitable repression as the pretext for intervention.

This was the formula employed successfully in Libya, after Russia and China abstained, failing to exercise their veto, on a resolution authorizing a “no-fly zone,” supposedly to protect the civilian population. This resolution was then exploited as a pseudo-legal fig leaf for a US-NATO war of colonial aggression involving non-stop bombardment of Libya. Special forces and intelligence assets led the so-called rebels in the toppling and ultimate assassination of Muammar Gaddafi.

The “human rights” sentiments expressed by Obama, Clinton, Rice and others have all the sincerity of Adolph Hitler’s expressions of outrage over Czechoslovakia’s supposed crimes against the Sudeten Germans.

Yet they serve a vital political function.

The human rights crusade has been the medium through which an entire social layer of ex-left and liberal members of the more affluent sections of the middle class—a key constituency of the Democratic Party—has abandoned the antiwar posture it embraced under the Bush administration and largely integrated into the imperialist war drive under Obama.

Typical of this layer is the MSNBC news program host Rachel Maddow, who appeared on NBC’s “Today” program Tuesday morning to declare that the “entire world” has lined up against Iran and that “everybody expects Israel to take the lead” in attacking the country’s nuclear program.

The “entire world” for Maddow and her ilk consists of the capitalist governments of the US and Western Europe and presumably excludes Russia, China and India—comprising nearly half of the planet’s population—not to mention the hundreds of millions of working people throughout the world who oppose yet another and far bloodier war in the Middle East.

More and more, both the language and practice of international policy employed by the US and its allies echoes the methods that characterized the periods preceding 1914 and 1939. Under conditions of a protracted world capitalist crisis, humanity once again confronts the threat of world war. The only social force that can answer this threat is the international working class, mobilized on a socialist program to put an end to the source of war, the capitalist system.

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