

# Syria: The New 'R2P' - "RESPONSIBILITY TO PRETEXT": Human Rights, Democratic Reforms, Al Qaeda and now WMD

NATO's Growing List of Excuses for Intervention

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*NATO's alleged "concerns" over Syria and its anticipated military intervention in that country seem to multiply and interchange like an alchemist's brew. From human rights and democratic reforms, to the latest alleged concern of a takeover in Syria by Al Qaeda militants and the theft of chemical weapons of mass destruction.*

The seeming mercurial nature of US and Western apprehensions about Syria, driving a relentless focus on that country, is not because of any real complex of genuine concerns. It is more a reflection of the Western powers' inability to come up with a credible pretext for their unwarranted intervention in Syria's internal affairs.

The real goal for Western powers and their Middle Eastern allies is regime change in Damascus as a precursor to stepping up aggression toward Iran. This, in turn, is an integral part of Washington's permanent war agenda for hegemony in the world's oil-rich region, an agenda that began with Afghanistan and Iraq and which will not end with Syria and Iran - Russia and China being the ultimate rivals that need to be subjugated.

But getting back to Syria. While Washington, London and Paris have barely concealed their underlying aim of regime change in Damascus, they can't state this objective in unvarnished terms. That would incur all sorts of political problems, from illegality to moral unacceptability among their publics. Hence a brew of pretexts for intervention has been concocted to obfuscate what is otherwise naked imperialism.

Initially, Washington and its allies were "abhorred" by the Syrian government's alleged "crackdown on small, peaceful protests"... and "the brutality" of state forces. In the early weeks of the supposed Syrian uprising in March 2011 as part of the Arab Spring, there was much talk by the Western powers of the vaunted "responsibility to protect" doctrine. R2P had been invoked to justify NATO's no-fly zones in Libya in the same month, which quickly turned into an all-out aerial bombing campaign of the North African country. Perhaps fearing the more formidable Syrian air defences and the explosive repercussions for the Middle East region, the NATO powers shelved the R2P line with regard to Syria.

Then Western government and media apparent vexation shifted to President Bashar Al Assad's reluctance to "implement political reforms". That "concern" no longer quite convinced after the Syrian government introduced a new constitution at the beginning of this year that was popularly backed in a referendum, and culminated in parliamentary

elections this month.

Also, the “democratic deficit” complaint by Western powers promptly tanked when the Western-backed Arab dictatorships of Saudi Arabia and Qatar weighed in with ill-advised exhortations for Assad to “speed up political reforms”.

A variation on the R2P re-emerged when European foreign ministers targeted the financial assets of Asma Al Assad, the wife of President Assad, over alleged spendthrift shopping habits in the midst of her country’s violent turmoil. That outlandish high-profile “concern” has since petered out, as if it was never an issue. A case of Shop Till We Drop... our faux indignation?

Now the terrain of pretexts for Western interference in Syria has noticeably transformed from “soft power” issues of democratic and human rights to “hardcore fears” of international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. A reason for this paradigm shift is that the Western subterfuge in Syria has itself led to much sharper violence with the increased deployment by Western powers and their Arab proxies of more and better armed militants from neighbouring countries. The increasing covert militarist involvement has been necessitated because Syrian government forces were gaining the upperhand against the Western-backed mercenaries. In the grip of terrorism by so-called oppositionists, it is no longer plausible for Western governments and media to espouse concern for human rights of “small, peaceful protests”.

In a report earlier this week, the Washington Post says that the US and its allies are drawing up contingency plans to intervene in Syria on the back of fears that the country could come under control of Al Qaeda terrorists [1]. Of most concern is that Syria’s “arsenal of chemical weapons” may fall into the hands of these terrorists or some other militant group.

The paper quotes, as usual, unnamed Western security officials who are “increasingly concerned that Islamic extremists could attempt to seize control of whole towns and districts if the country slides into full-scale civil war”. One former US intelligence source says: “There’s a big worry that things could fall apart [in Syria] quickly... A big problem can turn up on your doorstep overnight.”

Indeed. A big problem can turn up on your Syrian doorstep overnight – especially when NATO powers and their Arab allies have been training, funding and directing terrorist mercenaries to destabilise that country over the past 14 months. The campaign of violence in Syria, involving kidnappings, shootings and no-warning car bombs, has gained greater killing power in recent weeks – in spite of and in contradiction to the Annan Peace Plan – as a result of heavy weaponry supplied to Western-backed armed groups from the \$100 million war chest set up by the Persian Gulf Arab states and coordinated by Washington [2].

As for the “threat of Al Qaeda”, the Western-backed mercenaries running amok in Syria are made up of Islamic extremists recruited from Libya, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Iraq, as well as from within Syria. Contrary to the Global War on Terror misconception, the US and its Western allies are more often than not working in violent collaboration with Islamists, whether Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Wahhabists or Al Qaeda jihadists, to project Western imperialist interests. These jihadists are operating in Syria with the full knowledge and support of Western powers to wage a campaign of terror and destabilisation against the secular Assad government. That is largely why these so-called oppositionists have failed to

garner any substantial support from Syria's co-existing Sunni, Druze, Christian or Alawite communities, even if some of these groups possess dissenting views towards the Assad government.

Middle East commentator Ralph Schoenman points out: "Such Al Qaeda operatives as there may be in Syria are figures serving the CIA and introduced by the US, Saudi Arabia and Qatar - much as they were so deployed in Libya to destabilise that country and to create conditions of conflict to justify NATO intervention."

The same noxious formula of NATO alchemy is being applied to Syria. Only in Syria there is now the added compound of international terrorism and chemical weapons of mass destruction. Under the guise of protecting the international community from chemical weapons falling into the hands of (Western-backed) terror groups, the US and its NATO allies are creating a new potent pretext for overt military intervention in Syria.

Note too that with such a pretext, there is plenty of scope for false flags and manufactured evidence.

The Washington Post tells us: "The contingency planning for securing Syrian chemical weapons relies on early warning from US spy agencies". So, the need for security derives from the activities of armed mercenaries that are supported and directed by Western powers. Furthermore, the "warning" of them gaining access to chemical weaponry will be given by US spy agencies - probably the most unreliable agencies in the world given their track record on non-existent weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and a wide range of other nefarious propaganda stunts.

The danger, in case you missed it, is amplified because "Syria possesses one of the world's largest arsenals of chemical munitions, including tons of nerve gases, such as VX and Sarin, as well as artillery shells and missile warheads for delivering them," claims the Washington Post, without any substantiation.

This is a new dimension to the demonisation of Syria by Western media. Seasoned Middle East commentator Ralph Schoenman says: "I have seen no prior literature or citation for the claim that 'Syria has one of the biggest stockpiles of chemical weapons in the world'. This claim has not been advanced before. Besides, that distinction of the having the world's biggest arsenal of chemical weapons belongs to the Pentagon."

The new claim of Syria's chemical weapons of mass destruction is also disputed by political analyst Christof Lehmann who says: "I have not seen any credible information that Syria should have any larger stockpiles of chemical weapons than any other country like Germany and the USA. This can be corroborated in the annual reports of the respected Stockholm International Peace Research Institute over the past decade."

Lehmann adds: "Of more concern for world security are the chemical, biological and nuclear weapons stockpiles in the US and US military bases around the world, as well as nuclear weapons in Israel. It is not unlikely that the same Western intelligence agencies who play an active role in the attempted armed subversion of Syria are creating anxieties about putative chemical weapons stockpiles to create a pretext for NATO's use of 'the right to protect' for justifying a military attack on Syria in the near future - with or without the UN Security Council mandate."

Ever since the collapse of the “evil Soviet empire” and the end of the Cold War, the US and its Western allies have been thrashing around for pretexts to justify their imperialist adventures around the world. Such adventures are a necessary part of control over natural resources, mainly oil and gas, in a world run by and for capitalist powers.

The “global war on terror”, “weapons of mass destruction” and “responsibility to protect” have emerged in various guises as the replacement pretexts for “defending the free world”. From Afghanistan to Iraq, former Yugoslavia to Libya, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, among others, we have seen these various pretexts applied to justify US or NATO intervention.

But, presently, Syria perhaps holds the distinction of having had all these US/NATO pseudo pretexts applied. In that way, R2P in Syria takes on a new meaning – “responsibility to pretext”.

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Notes:

[1] [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-allies-accelerating-plans-to-seize-chemical-arsenal-as-syrian-crisis-worsens/2012/05/19/gIQA19yKbU\\_story.html?wpisrc=nl\\_hdlns\\_wknds](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-allies-accelerating-plans-to-seize-chemical-arsenal-as-syrian-crisis-worsens/2012/05/19/gIQA19yKbU_story.html?wpisrc=nl_hdlns_wknds)

[2] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=30875>

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### **About the author:**

Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website Globalresearch.ca. He is a Master’s graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the

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