

The Dirty Role of the West in Syria

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Over recent months the situation in the Mediterranean has served as a dramatic reminder of what the leaders of Europe have tried hard to forget. The Syrian crisis has reached Europe.

Although a lot of talk has been made over numbers and percentages of refugees that every country may or may not accept, let's not forget that behind those numbers and the showy emotionalism of the politicians hides the ugly side of world politics.

The plans to overthrow the "annoying" regimes in the Middle East began at the time when the war hawks of Washington and their European allies prepared the first Iraqi war.

In a 2007 speech, US General Wesley Clark recounted a conversation he had back in 1991 with the then Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz.



Cartoon : Khalaji

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During that talk, the Secretary told the General that the Pentagon had already drawn plans in order to achieve the change of regimes in Iraq, Syria and Iran. "...We've got about 5 or 10 years to clean up those old Soviet regimes - Syria, Iran, Iraq - before the next great superpower comes on to challenge us."

General Clark went on to reveal that six weeks after the attack on the twin towers in 2001, an official from the Department of Defense told him that the Pentagon had issued a classified document describing the strategy of the USA in order to overthrow the regimes of

seven countries in the next five years.

The beginning would be made with Iraq, followed by Syria and Lebanon, then Libya, Somalia, Sudan and, finally, Iran.

Those claims were confirmed by the former French Minister of Foreign affairs, Roland Dumas when he told a French television station that Great Britain used to train and support Syrian rebels at least two years prior to the revolt aiming to overthrow Assad from power.

The money that fuels the war

Between 2006 to 2010, the US spent 12 million dollars in order to support and instigate demonstrations and propaganda against the Syrian government. WikiLeaks released over 7000 secret diplomatic cables that document that funding.

The cables revealed that up to 6,3 million dollars was funneled to the Movement for Justice and Development, a Syrian dissident organization based in London. The Movement operated the Barada satellite channel that broadcasted anti-government propaganda in Syria and that played an important part in the 2010-11 anti-Assad protests.

The remaining 6 million were spent by the US in order to support rebels and activists and educate journalists in ways of manipulating the news about the Syrian crisis in a manner that would benefit the rebels.

In April 2011, the spokesman for the State Department, Mark Toner, admitted that the WikiLeaks documents were authentic and he claimed that the US supported several "civil movements in Syria" with "the goal of strengthening freedom of expression".

In 2012, the French Minister of Foreign affairs, Laurent Fabius, alongside the UK, pushed for a relaxation of the EU arms embargo to Syria to enable "defensive arms to reach opposition fighters".

France was the first European power to recognize the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, a coalition of several rebel groups formed in Doha that according to the French president François Hollande, was the "only representative of the Syrian people".

The coalition was also recognized by neighboring Turkey and the Arab League as "the legitimate representative of the Syrian people's aspirations."

In December 2012, at a meeting held in Marrakesh, the United States backed the National Coalition as the transitional government of Syria.

By that time more than 100 countries, including the European Union, had recognized the Syrian opposition, despite fears that it might be linked to Al Qaeda-related groups.

According to the French foreign minister Laurent Fabius, "important" financial contributions were announced at the meeting: Saudi Arabia offered \$100 million, the US pledged a further \$14m in medical aid and Germany offered \$29m.

Two years later, in 2014, French president Hollande, cynically told French media that France

was arming and training Syrian rebels, for an unspecified period of time, because “they are the only ones to take part in the democratic process”.

In an interview with French daily Le Monde he admitted that France cannot “go it alone” and that there was “a good understanding with Europe and the Americans.”



Indeed there was.

The Libyan connection

Back in September 2012, the US consulate in Benghazi and a CIA base located a mile from the consulate were attacked by local militias. The attacks resulted to the death of four people, including the American ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens.

President Obama and Hillary Clinton were heavily criticized over the lack of security at the consulate and the delayed response.

But the official narrative failed to address some key issues: why the CIA base was attacked and what was the exact role of the consulate in an area partially controlled by local militia?

Officially the consulate’s role was to establish a cultural center and a library in Benghazi. But media reports indicate that the consulate had a much more obscure role.

Soon after the war to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi in Libya began, in February 2011, the CIA set up a base for its spying operations in Benghazi. The CIA base was known as the Annex and according to the Wall Street Journal the sole aim of the consulate was to “provide diplomatic cover to the Annex”.

The Sunday Times of London reported that the United States had been secretly purchasing the stockpiled weapons of Gaddafi — including anti-aircraft SA-7 missiles, anti-tank rounds, rocket-propelled grenades and mortar shells.

Via a connection with Middle Eastern countries that were already supporting various

opposition groups in Syria some of these weapons were channeled to the rebels.

Pulitzer Prize winning investigative reporter Seymour Hersh has also revealed that President Obama and the Turkish PM, Erdogan had reached a secret deal in the beginning of 2012.

The deal was that the CIA and the British M16 would undertake to move Gaddafi heavy weapons out of Libya and use them to supply the Free Syrian Army; Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were to provide the funds for this operation that was covered under the auspices of an Australian entity.

It is very likely that most of those weapons ended up in the hands of the Al-Nusra front - an extremist group that is linked to Al Qaeda in Syria. When the US and its European and Middle Eastern allies were channeling heavy weaponry to the rebels in Syria, up to 9 per cent of the Free Syrian Army's total fighters belonged to the Al Nusra Front.

In 2012 Washington Post reported that the jihadist group is growing fast "in part because it has been the most aggressive and successful arm of the rebel force"

Indeed, by 2013, virtually all rebel areas controlled in Syria would be led by jihadists.

The Ghouta massacre

In August 2013, yellow smoke rose over the rebel -controlled suburb of Ghouta near Damascus. A few hours later and the lifeless bodies of 1000 people, including 300 children would be lying in the streets. It was one of the worst sarin attacks in the history of the Syrian civil war.

President Obama accused the Syrian regime for allegedly crossing the 'red line' he had set in 2012 on the use of chemical weapons and announced US military intervention in Syria.

However, two days before the planned strike, Obama said that he would seek congressional approval of the intervention.

So what has made the US President to change his mind?

Seymour Hersh presents an alternative narrative to the events: The US intelligence feared that Turkey was supplying sarin gas to rebels' months before the attack took place. This information was never made public.

Hersh writes that "the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency issued a highly classified five-page "talking points" briefing on June 19th which stated the Syrian rebel group al-Nusra maintained a sarin production cell".

According to the paper "Turkey and Saudi-based chemical facilitators, 'were attempting to obtain sarin precursors in bulk, tens of kilograms, likely for the anticipated large scale production effort in Syria".

According to Hersh's exposé, in 2012 the US intelligence services believed that the rebels would lose the war.

This prompted the Turkish national intelligence agency and Gendarmerie, the nation's paramilitary law enforcement arm, to work with al-Nusra Front in Syria in order to help them

built their chemical development.



Erdogan allegedly hoped that the use of chemical weapons on Syrian civilians would led to a military response from the United States against Asad.

Hersh' report has sparked controversy and the New Yorker and Washington Post declined to publish it.

It would take years until the political and military games surrounding the Syrian conflict come to light.

Meanwhile, 4 million Syrians are forced to escape the conflict and over 250.000 people have tried to reach Europe in August 2015. Western countries are willing to grant asylum, but are not willing to stop the actions that fuel the war.

It seems that the bodies of the drowned Syrian children shocked a lot of consciences, but changed no policies.

***Fragkiska Megaloudi** is an independent journalist covering humanitarian stories and news from my home country of Greece.*

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