

The Empire's New Clothes: The Naked Imperialism of "Humanitarian Intervention"

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Some critics from the left and the right characterized my recent article "[Syria and the Sham of Humanitarian Intervention](#)" as an unnecessarily harsh indictment of a policy that provides a necessary tool for the international community to protect human rights and save innocent lives.

But the recent decision by the Obama Administration to "up the ante" in Syria with more direct military involvement only confirmed my original thesis that humanitarian intervention has nothing to do with humanitarian concern, and is instead is a propaganda tool that affords "the U.S. State the perfect ideological cover and internal rationalization to continue as the global "[gendarme](#)" of the capitalist order."

Look at the stage-managed drama leading up to the announcement on U.S. policy toward Syria that took place last week in Washington. In a surreal replay of the process leading to the illegal war on Iraq, it became clear that while everyone had been waiting to learn the results of meetings among high level officials of the Obama administration, who, we were told would be debating the next phase of U.S. policy on Syria, we learned instead that the decision to increase its open involvement with the civil war it fomented in Syria had been made weeks earlier. So the meetings last week were just political theater providing the Administration the stage to announce its' "findings" on the use of Chemical weapons by the government in Syria. As an official said the chemical weapons findings offered "[fresh justification to act](#)."

Revising the "weapons of mass destruction" deception, the government "[confirmed](#)" that Syrian forces used chemical weapons that caused the deaths of over a hundred people out of the over 90,000 estimated to have died in the conflict. With no evidence or independent confirmation, the Administration announced that it is now compelled to involved itself more directly in the conflict to save the Syrian people from their murderous government.

However, in a telling and hopefully positive sign of the times, significant segments of the U.S. public are not falling for this ploy, at least not for now. And perhaps because of the recent revelations of governmental attacks on the press, some U.S. media outlets are not serving as aggressively as mouthpieces for the government in the obsequious manner they did in the run-up to and subsequent attack on Iraq.

This might also explain why some mainstream media outlets in the U.S. are finally allowing some minimal information and analysis of the conflict in Syria to be presented to the U.S. public from a more critical perspective. This includes information that has been regularly covered throughout the world but barely receives a mention in the U.S. press, like, for

example, the fact that the Syrian government still receives majority support, including from significant numbers of Sunni Muslims, who are terrified of the religious fanatics who have poured into their country to “[liberate](#)” them. Instead of the continuing framing of the ballooning numbers of people killed in the conflict as the result of genocidal government actions, some outlets have actually presented evidence indicating that Syrian soldiers and pro-government militias make up [43.2% of the deaths](#).

Another small but significant example of the slight change in the slant of information is a recent opinion piece that was allowed to run in the [New York Times](#) that was highly critical of Administration policy in Syria. In that piece, it was argued that President Obama, lacking a grand strategy for Syria and the Middle East, has become a victim of rhetorical entrapment “from calling on foreign leaders to leave (with no plan to forcibly remove them) to publicly drawing red lines on the use of chemical weapons, and then being obliged to fulfill the threat.”

However, as important as it is to have a more critical perspective in a major publication, it would be wrong to believe that the Administration lacks a specific strategy for Syria with concrete objectives. The implication that the Administration does not have an agenda in Syria and that misguided but benevolent rhetoric has trapped it into making the decisions it is making is a familiar claim of innocence that liberals often evoke.

More than rhetorical entrapment, the Obama Administration has consciously and consistently maneuvered from the very beginning of the Syrian crisis to reconfigure the reality on the ground to the advantage of its strategic objective. That objective is to alter the balance of forces in the region against Iran by either subordinating or destroying the Syrian state.

When the opportunity presented itself, it was this strategic objective, informed by the U.S. National Security strategy position for the Middle East region, that was embraced and executed with devastating effect by the Obama Administration in the form of the manufactured civil war in Syria. What the New York Times opinion piece confused and conflated is “absence of a strategy” with tactical decisions based on shifting conditions, like the decision to openly supply the “rebels.”

The U.S. saw a strategic opportunity to execute its plan for regime change in Syria using the fictions of the so-called Arab Spring, the “successful” Western war on Libya, and the ideological fig leaf of humanitarian intervention.

Unfortunately, anti-war, anti-imperialist and people-centered human rights activists have not developed effective strategies to counter the push for war. So today we confront a situation in which the Obama Administration has not only blown the dust off of what should be a completely discredited playbook from Iraq on how to manipulate the public into supporting war, it has also added the new play of humanitarian intervention to confuse opposition. Instead of the imminent threat argument, used to make the absurd charge that Saddam Hussein might turn over WMDs to Al-Qaeda, with Syria the need for intervention is strictly “altruistic.”

That is why the immediate priority for anti-war, anti-imperialist, human rights activists in the U.S., for countering the government’s effort to normalize war is to strip away the moral pretext of humanitarian intervention and expose its ugly, imperialist reality. No other group has the power and the responsibility other than us to do this. We must boldly point out that

while strutting around the globe clothed in the fiction of humanitarian concern, imperialism is actually naked, and the sight is offensive.

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