

Violence in Syria Stems from Foreign Aggression

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Interview with Finian Cunningham

By: Kourosh Ziabari



Through his writings, Finian Cunningham has exposed the imposture and hypocrisy of the Western governments in funding and assisting terrorists in Syria.

An anti-war author and journalist, he is opposed to the U.S.-engineered sanctions against Iran and believes that these sanctions constitute crimes against humanity. "These sanctions are illegal. They are without any legal or political foundation. These sanctions reveal clearly the barbarous nature of the Western governments," he writes.

What follows is the text of Iran Review's interview with Finian Cunningham in which the ongoing unrest and violence in Syria, West's plots for starting a new war in the Middle East, the suspension of Syria's membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Arab League and the anti-Iranian sanctions have been discussed.

Q: the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has just suspended the membership of Syria while only a handful of countries, including Iran and Algeria, contested the decision. What's your take on that? I read your article in which you stated the Saudi Arabian government brought shame to the Islamic world by bowing down to the demands of the United States and its allies in taking Syria off the OIC. Would you please elaborate on that?

A: It is clear that Saudi Arabia and the Sunni monarchies of the Persian Gulf, Qatar in particular, politicized the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation. This recent extraordinary meeting of the OIC in Saudi Arabia was convened by the House of Saud not to genuinely discuss the conflict in Syria - as it was supposed to do - but rather the meeting was called with the real purpose of isolating and denigrating the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. In that way, the OIC decision to sanction Syria was reminiscent of the earlier move in November 2011 by the Saudi-dominated Arab League to suspend Syria. These are political maneuvers orchestrated by the Saudis, Qataris and other Persian Gulf dictatorships to undermine and discredit the Syrian government.

The premise of the decisions by OIC and the AI is that the conflict in Syria is attributable to repression by the Syrian authorities against its people, involving human rights violations and a refusal to enact democratic reforms. This is a completely false premise and distortion of the violence in Syria. This is also the portrayal of Syria that is presented over and over again by Western governments, primarily the U.S. and the former Middle East colonial powers Britain and France. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have over the past year emerged more than

ever as proxies of the Western governments. The OIC conference was therefore fulfilling the propaganda function of blackening, besmirching and isolating the Syrian government, trying to reinforce the image that it is a pariah state that deserves to be shackled politically, economically, diplomatically and morally. The hidden agenda here was the Western powers' desire for regime change. The Assad government has for years been a geopolitical thorn in the side of the Western powers and their Zionist and Arab dictator allies.

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The cruel irony in all this is that the violence and suffering in Syria over the past 17 months has largely stemmed from covert aggression and sabotage in that country which is being fuelled by the U.S., Britain, France, Turkey, Israel and the Persian Gulf dictatorships. It is an open secret that the mercenaries assailing Syria and committing heinous crimes against humanity are actually armed and assisted by Western powers, Turkey, Israel and the Arab monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates as well as Jordan. Given these facts, it is reprehensible that the OIC conference should be called by Saudi Arabia in the first place, and secondly that the conference is coerced by the Saudi dictators to sanction Syria. It is doubly reprehensible that Saudi Arabia, which claims to be the custodian of the two holy sites of Islam, Mecca and Medina, is using a mantle of religious authority to perpetrate a treacherous political agenda, and to use the sanctity of Islam to blatantly cover up the crimes, violence and human suffering in Syria that it is so heavily responsible for.

Q: The opponents of the Syrian government, consisted mainly of the United States and its allies in the region, claim that the country's armed forces have so far killed hundreds of peaceful protesters who demand that President Assad step down. On the other hand, the proponents say that the U.S., Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have armed the terrorists and insurgents in the country and have caused the escalation of the violence and bloodshed. Would you please present us an overview of what's going on in Syria? Who is really telling the truth?

A: I think that initially the Syrian people were inspired by the genuine fervor of the Arab Spring in early 2011 when other people across the region turned out *en masse* on the streets to challenge the dictatorial rule in their countries that have prevailed for decades. These authoritarian rulers have only been sustained by massive support from Western powers - militarily, politically and economically. The despotic rulers of the Arab world were put in place by the West to exploit the immense resources of the region and these rulers held power with excruciating repression. The Syrian regime was not in the Western camp, but its people were inspired by the events across the region to similarly demand democratic reforms. The Syrian government of Assad, whose family has ruled over that country for four decades, is not guilty of the same depth of despotism and repression as was seen Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Bahrain. Nevertheless the people of Syria, I think, were inspired to demand more freedoms from their government as their neighboring nations were. Reports indicate that the Syrian state responded with a violent heavy hand. Recently the President Bashar Assad has said in media interviews that he regretted that response.

However, that said, it is accurately documented that in Syria's Daraa city on the southern border the initial protests were hijacked by armed mercenaries who had infiltrated that country. Many of the early casualties of the violence were Syrian security forces. This indicates that protests were infiltrated by armed groups. The actions were not those of peaceful, civilian demonstrators, but rather were the actions of armed insurgents. In that way, the events in Syria were markedly different from those of other Arab countries, such as

Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan and Bahrain where the protests were largely civilian and peaceful. Subsequent details in Syria and to this day validate the analysis that the so-called uprising is a foreign-backed infiltration of armed groups to destabilize and topple the Assad government. It is well documented that the U.S. and Britain have had plans for regime change in Syria going back to as far as 1957. The Western powers, along with their regional allies Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Israel, manipulated the protests in Syria to enact an armed insurrection using mercenaries from the region in order to violently challenge the Syrian regime. This covert operation is ongoing to this day, and indeed has been greatly amplified to now pose a real, mortal threat to the Syrian authorities. In this way, the events in Syria mirror what happened in Libya. Under the guise of supporting a popular protest movement, the West and its allies have infiltrated an armed insurrection with the objective of overthrowing a government that the West is opposed to. It is a cynical, deceptive game plan of regime change. The West and its regional allies want rid of the Assad government for several geopolitical reasons. One of those reasons is to undermine and isolate the government in Iran. It is quite clear that this is the real, urgent agenda of the West. It has got absolutely got nothing to do with support democratic reforms in Syria or the protection of human rights. The Western powers are the violators of human rights in Syria. Their alliance with the criminal Zionist regime and the despotic dictatorships in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf is proof of their cynical, disingenuous call for democratic reforms in Syria. If the West was really serious about democratic reforms and human rights in the Arab world, they would be primarily focused on Saudi Arabia and relieving the suffering of the Palestinian people. Clearly, they are not.

It has to be noted that the so-called rebels in Syria have emerged to be identified as Jihadist-type mercenaries from various countries: Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia and Pakistan. These groups have long been used as proxies by the West. They are cultivated and funded by Saudi Arabia with its extremist deformed version of Islam, Wahhabism. It is proof of the foreign-backed nature of the violence in Syria that these groups are committing horrendous acts of violence against Syrian civilians of all religious dominations. It is proof too that the vast majority of ordinary Syrians do not support the mercenary groups. In fact, the ordinary people of Syria are living under a reign of terror by these groups.

✘Q: Should we accept the premise that the United States and its European and Middle East allies are bolstering unrest and violence in Syria through arming the Free Syrian Army, can we come to the conclusion that the final objective of toppling the Syrian government is to dominate the Middle East in such a way that might lead to a regime change in Iran, an end which the U.S. and other imperial powers have been seeking for so long?

A: Yes, the violence in Syria as in Libya is being fomented and fuelled by the Western powers in their objective of enacting regime change across the region. Iran is the prime target. Recall that the NATO commander Wesley Clark revealed back in 2007 that the Pentagon had a plan from as far back as 2001 to roll out a campaign of regime change in at least seven countries. They were Iraq, then Syria, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and “finishing off with Iran.” Now the order has not transpired exactly. But the thrust is that the U.S. has a long-term game plan for regime change across the oil-rich Middle East and Iran is the top prize. What is going in Syria today is the implementation of that plan as seen in Iraq and Libya.

Q: The Turkish government had assumed a fair and balanced position on the Middle East affairs in the recent years. It supported Iran's nuclear program in a difficult time when almost all the Western nations had been opposing Iran's nuclear activities and were pushing for UNSC resolutions and sanctions against Iran. Turkey also played a leading role in countering Israel during the 2008-2009 Gaza massacre and two years later when the IDF soldiers raided on the Freedom Flotilla. So, why has Turkey's stance on the Middle East issues changed so drastically that it's now allying with the United States, hell bound on overthrowing Bashar Assad in Syria?

A: Ankara, the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is playing a particularly treacherous role. I recall a visit by Erdogan to Damascus in 2010 where he lavished Bashar Al Assad with "brotherly" greetings. Erdogan has now revealed himself as a disgraceful back stabber. The reasons for this Turkish treachery are not clear. It could be do with ingratiating Turkey with Western governments in order to facilitate long-held Turkish aspirations to join the European Union. It could also be to do with vain, personal reasons of power aggrandizement in the region by joining with what Erdogan perceives as the winning side of NATO. But I think Turkey is playing a very dangerous game in doing this. And I think Ankara knows that. Their hesitation towards pursuing the covert war against Syria betrays deep distrust by the Turkish government about the West. They are afraid of being drawn into a quagmire and left in the sinking dirt by their supposed Western allies. After all a treacherous cheat is always a bit paranoid towards others, mindful that his past treachery could rebound. Also, another danger for Turkey is the instability that it is unleashing inadvertently among its Kurdish population in the Southeast of the country. Turkey is playing with fire by trying to stoke religious and ethnic conflict in Syria.

It should be noted too that there is a substantial dissent among the ordinary Turkish population towards what their government is engaging in Syria. Many Turks find Erdogan's policies and actions reprehensible. Again, this is a danger for the Turk rulers that they are sowing their own downfall within their country by playing this treacherous role in the Western chess game for regime change.

Q: After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel bombed Syria two times; one being the Ain es Saheb airstrike on October 5, 2003 and the other being the Operation Orchard in which the Syrian nuclear site near the Deir ez-Zor region was destroyed. The international community responded to the attacks passively and turned a blind eye to these violations of international law by Israel. Should Israel have been held accountable? What do you think?

A: Of course, Israel should be held to account for these incidents and many, many others. The state of Israel is a lawless, terrorist regime that stands out as a pariah. The crimes against humanity, the war crimes, the ongoing violation of international law and UN obligations, such as the occupation of Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the continuation of annexing Palestinian land are all outrageous crimes and affronts to human dignity. The Zionist regime gets away with these atrocities and violations because it has carte blanche from the U.S. and the European powers. Israel is a garrison state whose function is to project Western military power over the Middle East. It is really nonsense to expect the Western powers to hold Israel to account. Israel is functioning exactly as the West wants it to in order for these powers to exert hegemony over the Middle East. Israel is a pillar in the Western architecture of exploitation and domination over the Middle East. In an ideal world, the Israeli leaders and their Western political masters should be prosecuted in an international

court for war crimes and crimes against humanity going back to at least 1948 when the illegal state of Israel was first set up by the Western powers.

Q: What do you think about the prospect of conflict and unrest in Syria? Will the government of President Assad succeed in withstanding the internal and external pressures? Hillary Clinton has explicitly stated that the United States seeks a regime change in Syria and nothing else. Will this regime change finally take place?

A: It is a very grim situation. The Syrian authorities, armed forces and the ordinary people are showing tremendous tenacity and courage in confronting these foreign-backed masqueraders. Yet, the Western governments have a long-held plan to get rid of the Syrian government and to install a puppet regime that will be pliable to Western regional objectives of political, economic, military hegemony. The Western powers have stepped up their campaign of sabotage and are itching to find a pretext for more overt intervention. Just recently the U.S. President Barack Obama repeated cynical concerns about the Syrian authorities using chemical weapons of mass destruction, or for these weapons falling into the hands of armed groups like Al Qaeda. The cynicism here is beneath contempt. Here we have a Western leader who has, along with his Western allies, helped to infiltrate Syria with these so-called Al Qaeda mercenaries, and now he is appearing to be voicing concern that such groups may acquire chemical weapons. In this way, Obama is trying to create a false flag of concern that will justify an overt Western military intervention. His secretary of state Hillary Clinton disclosed during a visit to Turkey last week that there were plans to set up no-fly zones by NATO in Syria. This would be a re-run of the scenario that the NATO powers instigated in Libya last year. The so-called no-fly zones suddenly morphed into an all-out seven-month aerial bombardment by NATO on Libya which led to the overthrow of Gaddafi, just as the Western powers wanted.

It is hard to see how the Western powers can pursue their plans in Syria. Russia and China are not going to be deceived again as they were over Libya. Also the violence and instability across the region from increasing Western intervention can rebound very badly on the West. They must know that, or else they are incredibly stupid.

Having said that, there is a very real danger that the West in its nefarious imperialist gaming could end up sparking a world war. I don't think Russia, China and Iran are going to sit back and let the West tear apart an ally and all the strategic interests that these powers have in Syria.

It could turn out that the West backs off. However, that would still be a geopolitical gain for the West. Syria has been wrecked and badly weakened in this despicable Western episode of covert sabotage. The people have been traumatized and the economic base of the Syrian government must be decimated. That in itself has been a Western victory of sorts. Of course, that is appalling and heinous. It really is outrageous that the Western powers and their regional allies have gotten away with what they have in Syria. But just from a cold callous point of view, the wreckage of Syrian society can give the Western powers a certain smug satisfaction - even if these powers pack in their nefarious destructive covert war tomorrow and tell their mercenary proxies to go home. Syria, an official enemy of the West, has been devastated.



Q: What's your assessment of the international pressures on Iran over its nuclear program? Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and thus entitled to the right of enriching uranium for peaceful purposes. However, the Western powers want to deny Iran this right. Should Iran retreat from its position in order to be relieved from the pressures?

A: Iran has every right to pursue its nuclear development plans. I believe these plans are for entirely peaceful, civilian purposes and in that way, Iran is perfectly entitled to continue with its plans. I certainly hope that Iran continues because to not do so is submitting to the criminal imperialist powers. A bully must be faced down. That is the only solution. If for talks' sake Iran was to abandon its nuclear program, the Western imperialist powers will concoct some other agenda or purpose with which to try to subjugate Iran. The issue is not about nuclear power. The West knows that Iran is not trying to weaponize its nuclear capabilities. The nuclear "concerns" that the West continues to cite is a cynical pretext and cover for the West to try to cripple Iran, so as to engineer regime change. The Western imperialists cannot stand the fact that their puppet, the Shah, was kicked out of the country in 1979, and for the last three decades has embarked on a development plan that is independent from Western capitalist control. That is what is at issue. It must be extremely difficult for the people of Iran to be subjected to this foreign aggression, but I would say that they have to stand up to the Western bully, in the way that they have done so far and so admirably. Anyway, the world is changing dramatically and the power of these Western bullies is not what it once was. Their own societies and economies are falling apart. Also, as the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Tehran is demonstrating, there is a groundswell of international support for Iran. Countries in Asia and Latin America are no longer meekly submitting to the dictates of Western elite rule.

Q: The sanctions which have been imposed upon Iran are extremely affecting the daily life of ordinary Iranian citizens, making it unbearably difficult for them to access to foodstuff, medicine and other goods which are usually imported from other countries. Aren't these sanctions some kind of violation of human rights by those who purportedly advocate these rights?

A: These sanctions are illegal. They are without any legal or political foundation. I defer to the opinion of many international legal experts such as Francis Boyle, who say that these Western engineered sanctions actually constitute a war crime. These sanctions reveal clearly the barbarous nature of the Western governments. They have no respect for international law or human morality. It is entirely appropriate for other countries to ignore these sanctions and treat them with contempt. Iran should file a prosecution against the U.S., Britain, France and others for war crimes of aggression and crimes against humanity. The symbolism of such a procedure would have significant practical repercussions and hopefully relief for the people of Iran.

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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 political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

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