

The rape of Syria

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Even if crude and disgusting, the closest metaphor for what has been done to Syria – note ‘what has been done’ and not ‘what has happened’ as if effect had no cause - is pack rape. But what has been done to Syria *is* crude and disgusting, absolutely savage, and these people, in their grey suits (or pant suits) and pastel ties and their lying talk of ‘transition to democracy’ and support for ‘rebels’ and ‘moderates’ have the same cruel instincts as the pack rapist except that they rape entire countries. Think for a moment of how Hillary Clinton responded when told of the murder of Muammar al Qadhafi: ‘We came, we saw and he died.’ Then she laughed, having said in Tripoli not long before that she was ‘looking forward’ to the capture or killing of the Libyan leader.

Who but a psychopath could ‘look forward’ to a killing or laugh at a murder, particularly one so gruesome? At least the inner Clinton was out in the open but it is not just her. It is the entire cabal of people who have waged outright war on Iraq, Libya and Syria and fired missiles into Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen or any other country they choose. The US has just blown up a mosque in Syria, killing dozens of people as they prayed, its gulf ‘ally’, Saudi Arabia, has just strafed a boatload of refugees, killing dozens more, and this is just in one day. These are terrible crimes, committed in the knowledge that there will be no retribution for them under international law.

The attack on Syria was part of the long-term US neoconservative project to destroy all seven regional countries (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Iran) that stood in the way of the US and Israel. As the destruction of the government would entail the collapse of the country ‘regime change’ was never just about that. It was always the countries that would be destroyed, with a ‘new’ or ‘greater’ Middle East being built out of the ruins. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union the US was talking of itself as a ‘hyper’ power confident of fighting and winning multiple theatre wars and prepared to attack any country which it regarded as a potential threat irrespective of sovereign rights guaranteed under international law.

Although Iraq had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks they were the pretext used for the invasion of 1993. Iraq had already been crippled by the war of 1990-91 and the decade of genocidal sanctions that followed and was now destroyed as a unitary state. At the same time Bush came under pressure from Israel and Saudi Arabia to attack Iran in the name of ‘taking out’ its nuclear reactors. Had such a plan ever gone ahead the destruction of life and environmental damage has to be imagined as radioactive fallout drifted over the Persian Gulf but the US balked. There had to be other ways of getting at Iran that would not be so dangerous to the US itself.

It was not just Iran, of course, but the ‘Shia crescent,’ linking Iran, Syria and Hizbullah, that Israel, the Saudis and the US wanted to destroy. Decades of intervention through threats, sanctions and war on Lebanon had failed to achieve this objective. On the contrary, Israel was humiliated once, when it was driven out of Lebanon in 2000, and humiliated again

when it invaded again in 2006 and its troops failed to advance more than a few kilometres from the armistice line.

The US was using a variety of weapons to assert its control over the Middle East, direct military attacks of its own or through Israel, sanctions, against Iran and Syria, with the EU abjectly following on, intimidation and threats of military attack but the formula did not seem to be working. Iran was not intimidated, Hizbullah was riding high as an organization that had done more damage to Israel than any Arab state, and the 'axis of resistance' (Iran, Syria and Hizbullah) remained firmly in place.

Around 2005 it seems to have been Saudi Arabia that suggested fighting fire with fire, by radicalising Sunni Muslims yet again, this time not against the Soviet Union but against Iran and its Shia allies. This was attempted by the leading US client in Lebanon, Saad Hariri, before being integrated into a broader plan to destabilise Syria from within. This had not yet been activated when the 'Arab spring' created the opportunity for the US and its friends to intervene.

Their first option was an air war on the lines of the seven-month onslaught that destroyed Libya. The bellowing fury of the US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, has to be remembered when this first option was blocked at the UN Security Council by Russia and China. So the US, Britain and France and their regional 'allies' had to settle for a second best option, a war of attrition waged through their radicalised armed Sunni Muslim proxies. These governments divided the tasks involved in the overthrow of the Syrian government: the US coordinated, with Britain and France clinging to its coat-tails (as usual); Saudi Arabia and Qatar stumped up the money for the arms and salaries of the armed groups; Jordan and Turkey provided the territorial space for mobilisation as well as a home for the so-called Free Syrian Army and the equally fictitious Syrian National Council. The first was never an army and the second never represented the Syrian people. These exile formations had no existence outside foreign support and their propaganda usefulness wherever they could be put on show as the voice of the 'opposition.'

The street demonstrations of Syrians calling for political reform were the cover used by outside governments for their assault. There was a template here that had been used frequently in the overthrow of governments in Latin America and Iran and was to be used in Kiev against the Ukrainian government. Far from the Syrian protests only turning violent in response to the violence of the state, they were violent from the beginning in Dara'a, southern Syria, near the conveniently accessible Jordanian border, where the central mosque was stocked with arms and even a field hospital when the 'peaceful' protests began. In the first week, scores of police and unarmed civilians were killed by armed men, almost certainly agents-provocateurs, often firing into demonstrations from rooftops to whip the crowd into a fury.

Behind the lies of 'transition to democracy' and support only for non-existent 'moderates' the destruction of Syria proceeded apace. The UN charter was being debased and international law violated by the same governments sworn to uphold both. We were plunged right back into the 1930s, when the 'liberal democracies' sat by while the fascists attacked China, Spain and Ethiopia. The League of Nations was powerless to act because

that was the way it was designed by the 'great powers' (Britain and France). Individual western governments were doing well out of the arms trade (in the case of the Japanese attack on China Britain was selling arms to both sides) and did not care too much, anyway, about black and brown people being killed in far-off countries.

In 1935 Italy invaded Abyssinia (Ethiopia), poison-gassing the natives to overcome their superiority in numbers, for the same reason that Iraq, with the US turning a blind eye, used cluster bombs and poison and nerve gas against Iran in the 1980s. Britain and France responded to this act of aggression by recommending (in the Hoare-Laval pact) that part of Ethiopia be given to the aggressor. The governments of both countries sat by while Germany and Italy set up the attack on the republican government in Spain. Communism - even the mild socialism of the Spanish republicans - could not be allowed to take root in western Europe, which is why Hitler was treated with such respect (including in Australia) until he began pointing his guns in the wrong direction.

The end point of this cowardice and cupidity was the Second World War. Looking at the recent destruction of the Middle East, in the greater context of the military encirclement by the US of Russia and China, who could be confident that the present situation will not end the same way? Yet Jonathan Freedland, writing in the London *Guardian*, can draw parallels with the 1930s without even mentioning the closest parallel of all, between the uniform and the suit, between the armed aggression of the fascists in the 1930s and the armed aggression of the 'liberal democracies' in the Middle East since the 1990s. Much further back, of course, but approaching a peak of violence in the 1990s.

Effectively these governments have ripped up the rule book and created a world in which there are no rules, at least not for them. They proclaim that 'violence is not the way', a frequent statement of Tony Blair's, when violence has been their way all along. No more than there was in the 1930s, there is no mechanism in the world able to punish them for what they have done. The International Crime Court goes after black and brown men, not white ones, with the exception of Slobodan Milosevic and some of his confreres. The worst of the crimes allegedly committed by Umar al Bashir or Robert Mugabe hardly compare with the genocidal assaults on Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Murderers go to jail for life but the long arm of the law does not extend to the heads of state, the secretaries of state, the prime, defence and foreign ministers of the countries responsible for wars of aggression and crimes against humanity in the Middle East. The criminal who gets away with one crime is likely to commit another and to keep going until he is stopped and the same is true of these people except there are no laws and no institutions to stop them. They got away with Iraq so felt free to attack Libya, and having got away with that, they felt free to move on to Syria and then, why not allow a side attack on Yemen as well?

Propaganda has been a main weapon in the war on Syria. In the media mainstream it has been pouring out of the pages of such beacons of liberal opinion as the London *Guardian* and the *Washington Post*. We saw all this when the media bought the lies told before and during the attack on Iraq in 1993 and now it has disgraced itself again. There has been no exaggeration, no embellishment, no distortion it has not hesitated to repeat and no allegation of wickedness it has not tried to turn against the Syrian government. It has sucked up all the fakery of 'rebels' and 'activists' inside and outside Syria and come back for

more. 'Human rights' organizations have played the same dishonest game, while there has been no end of praise for the 'White Helmets', a fake relief organisation embedded with violent armed groups and spinning out propaganda images to the same receptive media. Insofar as the UN is concerned, all we have had through six years of massacre, assassination, suicide bombing and chemical weapons attacks in Syria is handwringing and condemnation of the government that is being attacked.

The UN's inquiries into the situation in Syria have produced a stream of prejudiced reports based on 'evidence' taken from unnamed witnesses in unnamed countries. The latest again accuses the Syrian authorities of using chemical weapons, when the real evidence shows that all chemical weapons attacks were carried out by the 'rebels.' The media and 'human rights organizations continue to reproduce the lie that the Syrian military was responsible for the worst of these attacks around Damascus in August, 20123. The UN report accuses the Syrian government of committing a war crime through the 'enforced displacement' of the people of east Aleppo. This is fantastic, absurd and grotesque. Aleppo was infiltrated by takfiris who subjected the people in the eastern part of the city to rule by terror. When they murdered and massacred the UN had nothing to say about 'war crimes.' Their victims included two orthodox ecclesiastics kidnapped by Chechens and never seen again. When civilians tried to escape from their prison enclave they shot them. They destroyed much of the heart of old Aleppo.

Finally east Aleppo is liberated by the Syrian army with the help of Russia and the UN finds its voice, condemning not the armed gangs that held the city in bondage but the army that liberated it. Before the takfiris left they massacred all the Syrian soldiers they had been holding captive. The bodies were only discovered after their departure. Those displaced from east Aleppo were these same takfiris, their families and their supporters who were given a safe passage out to Idlib and would have been the target of revenge attacks had they stayed. This was the UN committee's 'war crime.' The men allowed to leave clearly included many criminals but the Syrian government wanted to bring the situation to an end without any more death and destruction.

Before Syria the UN allowed the attacks on Iraq and Libya to go ahead. In its name the people of Iraq were subjected to sanctions that even its own humanitarian coordinators described as genocidal. It provided the fig-leaf for the attack on Libya. 'It', of course, is mainly the moral voice of the Secretary-General, the recently retired Ban Ki-Moon, from whom came nothing but pained expressions of regret when what was needed was outright condemnation of actions that were making a mockery of the UN and its laws. Not once did he call on outside governments to end their support for the armed groups, to withdraw their forces and in short abide by the law. Instead, emissaries were sent to Syria to strike some kind of balance between the government and a brutal armed 'opposition' sponsored by outside governments.

We are seeing this political role being continued by his successor, Antonio Guterres, who has just forced the resignation of Rima Khalaf, the head of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, for refusing to withdraw a report condemning Zionist apartheid in occupied Palestine. This is so blatant, so much part of every-day Zionist practices, that trying to hide the truth is a complete indictment of Mr Guterres and the

moral role he supposedly plays as UN head. In reality, of course, his role is not moral but political, angled not towards the interests of the people of the world but in meeting the demands of 'the west' and its racist implantation in the heart of the Middle East. So we should not wonder why the world, and especially the Middle East, is in such a mess when the grand arbiter of world stability refuses to allow or speak the truth.

Do we have to be reminded that Syria is a member of the UN, represented at the UN by the government in Damascus? Yet here it is being trampled over as if it has no borders, no sovereignty, no rights, no seat at the UN, trampled over by foreign armies, coming and going as they please, and upholding, objectively, not 'rebels' or 'moderates' but the most vicious armed groups on the face of the planet.

The lies of the media mainstream have been compounded by the shrill rhetoric of fake leftists unable to see the wood for the trees, incapable of acknowledging the core of what is going on, which is the most determined attempt ever made by the 'west' and its allies to destroy an Arab government. These leftist frauds have put themselves in the service of imperialism, Israel and the most reactionary governments in the world. The starting point in the debate over Syria was never the authoritarian nature of the 'regime' but how to bring change to Syria without destroying it. It is not as if the Syrian political system developed in a vacuum. Democracy for the Syrian people did not suit the interests of the so-called liberal democracies. Syria had a democratic government until it was overthrown with the connivance of the CIA in 1949. The US tried to overthrow the government again in 1956. Israel was boasting of its spies in Damascus half a century ago and embarked on a wave of assassination, military attack, occupation and sanctions that has continued till the present day. For virtually all its independent life Syria has lived under siege, and no democracy can develop in this kind of environment.

In the past few years Bashar al Assad introduced important constitutional changes moving the country in that direction of a more transparent government. Outside governments ostensibly committed to 'transition to democracy' were put to the test when the Syrian parliament changed the constitution in 2012, removing the Baath Party as a pillar of the state and opening the way to multiparty elections. These elections were subsequently held fairly and without ballot box interference, according to teams of outside monitors. Presidential elections followed, in which, despite the turmoil in the country, a greater percentage of people turned out to vote (mostly for Bashar) than they did in the US presidential elections when Obama was running again.

Far from supporting these measures the US and its western allies dismissed them out of hand for the simple reason that they were never interested in 'transition to democracy' in the first place. They wanted to destroy the government and they did not care what came next. Neither, apparently, did the deluded leftists endlessly berating the Syrian government in the name of a fake revolution and fake civil war. What they did not see or did not want to see was what lay in wait if the secular government in Damascus was destroyed, a genocidal pseudo-Islamic totalitarian takfiri regime that would begin by slaughtering the Alawis and Shia it had not already murdered. It would drive out the Christians not already driven out unless they submitted to laws that have no place in the modern world and it would kill or imprison all Sunni Muslims who refused to accept their

diktats. Raqqa and Mosul would be their template: people crucified, beheaded in public and gays thrown from balconies. This collective of sadistic sectarian murderers was not *an* alternative to the secular Syrian government. It was *the* alternative.

The Syrian government, the military and the people have withstood this withering assault for six years. For a country of modest resources this is extraordinary. One would think, looking at the death and destruction, that the governments involved in this genocidal assault would have had enough but they have not. Hopes that Donald Trump would pull back have been disappointed. More US troops have been sent to Syria. Along with their Kurdish proxies they are now planning the advance on the Islamic State's Syrian capital, Raqqa. Its 'liberation' by these forces would set the stage for a new occupation, as the US is not going to Raqqa just to hand it back to the Syrian government and people. It is apparent that the neocon world view, confrontation with Russia and China and the remaking of the Middle East, still dominates US policy.

Turkey has its own agenda. The Turkish prime minister and now president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, threw himself into the attack on Syria with his usual bellicosity. It was to blow up in Turkey's face in the form of suicide bombings and the three million refugees who have streamed into Turkey, with the complications we are now seeing in Turkey's relations with Europe. Having weakened the authority of the central government, especially in northern Syria, the Turkish government then complained of the threat to Turkey's national security coming from the Syrian Kurds, who took advantage of the vacuum created in the north to stake out their own territorial claims. Increasingly at odds with the US over its support for the Syrian Kurds the Turkish forces inside Syria has been blocked from going further in the direction of Membij (held by the Kurds) and denied any role in the 'liberation' of Raqqa. It will now be deciding future moves in the space it occupies between strategies of the US and Russia.

As for the twin toxins of Israel and Saudi Arabia, both remain committed to the destruction of the 'Shia crescent', represented chiefly by Iran, the Shia of southern Iraq and Lebanon but now extended to Yemen, where Saudi Arabia's genocidal war against the Shia Houthis, armed and sanctioned by the US and its western allies, has brought the people to the point of mass starvation. Saudi Arabia continues to sponsor the takfiri groups in Syria while Israel supports them through frequent air attacks on Syrian army positions. These acts of war meet with the familiar silence from western governments, whose 'defence' industries are heavily dependent on Saudi purchases and no more than anodyne statements from the direction of the UN Secretary-General's office.

The Syrian government has repeatedly called on all governments breaching international law to get their troops out. They take no notice and there is apparently no power on earth that can compel them to live within the law. They continue to drop their bombs and Syrian civilians continue to die in large numbers. Six years later there is no sign of compassion or remorse for what they are doing, no indication that they are finally able to see Syria through the lens of what is best for its people rather than what is best for their own interests of power and domination.

This is the repetition of a familiar pattern. 'Western' governments have been attacking the Arab world continuously for two centuries. Very few countries from the Atlantic coast to the Indian Ocean end of the Persian Gulf have missed out on the pleasures of being invaded, of having their armies and civilians massacred thanks to eternally superior western weaponry and then their countries occupied. Many have been attacked more than once, Syria often since 1918. The Zionists are still trying to wipe Palestine off the map, and still have the support of the 'western' governments without whose money and support they could not have got a foot through the door. Netanyahu, whose government is fully involved in the attack on Syria, oversees murder on the West Bank yet is greeted with smiles and compliments in 'western' capitals.

The attempt to destroy Syria is not an aberration but the continuation of 'western' best practice. What will it take for 'the west' to back away? At what point will it begin to live up to the moral, ethical and legal standards that it endlessly proclaims are the triumphs of 'western civilisation'? Outside the confines of 'the west', certainly in the Middle East and in many Muslim countries, this 'civilisation' appears as no more than the mask on the face of the murderer. Syria has suffered many times from the savagery behind the mask and suffers yet again.

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