



Syria: Intervention for the sake of it

by Denis Joe

I was sitting in a café in Liverpool market last week and was surprised to hear talk, amongst the customers, about the imminent attack on Syria. Some people voiced the opinion that “They should keep out of it”, “Let them sort it out themselves” and “This will lead to World War 3”. What seemed strange about the way the customers were talking about a potential intervention in Syria was the matter-of-fact way in which it was discussed. There seemed to be a strong sense of detachment, particularly in the use of ‘they’ instead of ‘we’, as if military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya have normalised a practice that at one time would have been seen as exceptional. It reminded me of Obama’s first presidential campaign, when he promised to take US troops out of Iraq and send them to Afghanistan. Very few, if any, anti-war protesters or politicians challenged this stance.

The roots of the Civil war in Syria can be found in the protests in January 2011 against the ‘disappearance’ of opposition activists and government corruption. Initially it was the Syrian Kurds who protested against human rights abuses but by March the protests had escalated into

a civil uprising. Dissatisfaction with the ruling Ba'ath party was already in [evidence](#) before the uprising..

A heavy handed response from the military only escalated the problem. In April, 2011, the city of Daraa came under siege as protesters demanded the release of political prisoners and an end to the state of emergency. On April 8th, heavy clashes erupted in the city between protesters, the military and unknown groups of gunmen in which 23 protesters and 19 soldiers were killed. The military also stated that 75 soldiers were wounded by, what they called, terrorist gunmen. Later the city became the scene of fighting between the military and a group of defectors who called themselves The Free Syrian Army.

Since then atrocities have been reported on both sides of the civil war. During that time foreign mercenaries were very much in evidence. In July of this year Global Research News estimated that 1,500 foreign mercenaries and militants had entered Syria via the [Turkish border](#) .

Throughout the civil war the West have given their blessing to the rebel forces even though there is no universal agreement between the diverse groups that make up the opposition to the Assad regime and there have been reports of opposition groups turning against each other, particularly between the Islamist State and the [Free Syrian Army](#) . Whilst this in-fighting has weakened the opposition to Assad it has also had the effect of allowing the Syrian military to gain the upper hand against the rebel forces.

In July the rebels, having faced a heavy defeat at the hands of the Syrian military in Damascus, captured the village of Khan al-Assal. Khan al-Assal had been a major front in the fight for the city of Aleppo, Syria's largest city. In March, chemical weapons were allegedly used in the village, killing more than 31 people. The Syrian government and the rebels blame each other for the attack, and both have demanded an international investigation. Then in August hundreds of people were said to have been gassed outside Damascus.

At this point heavy condemnation was poured on the head of the Assad regime, even though there had been no proof that the regime had carried out the attack. In fact there was strong suspicion that it was the rebel forces that carried out the attack, according to victim's testimony to the U.N. [Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria](#). There were also reports from Turkey that sarin gas had been found in the homes of suspected [Syrian Islamists](#).

Nonetheless the West continued to hold the Assad regime responsible and there were calls for US President Obama to act on his declaration last year that any use of chemical stockpiles by Syria's regime would cross a "red line". Obama had, until now, managed to avoid US intervention in Syria. The Syrian regime strongly denied using gas against on the people of the Damascus suburbs. The videos and pictures of victims, shocked the world, but proved nothing.

The British government called for an emergency UN session, and whilst the coalition government were prepared to support the US in any action against the Syrian regime, they experienced a defeat in a Commons' vote on it. The defeat was an obvious shock to the government and although there has been much crowing about 'common sense' winning out, it is worth noting that the government lost by only 17 votes - hardly a massive defeat. What is also worth noting (and this does not apply just to Britain) is that what guided the thinking was not any concern about the Syrian people, but concern that this might prove as damaging as the illusionary WMD that Saddam Hussein's regime were supposed to have had. Since then it has

transpired that Britain sold nerve gas chemicals to the Syrian regime [10 months after the civil war began](#). The fallout of the British governments defeat meant that the US has had to place their faith in the French where the President can declare war without recourse to the Assemblée nationale. Hollande is supportive of US intervention and would be content to have French involvement. However a recent poll published in Le Parisien, showed that 64 per cent of the country are "hostile" to taking part in military intervention in Syria and 58 per cent did not trust [Hollande to conduct any operation.](#)

The response from the US hardly shows a confident approach. President Obama has assured the people that there would be "no boots on the ground" and has decided to put the issue to congress. Syria's Al-Thawra newspaper sees US prevarication as the start of an "historic defeat" and they have a point. As president, Obama is commander in chief and has no need to take the issue to congress (which doesn't reconvene until September 9th). Syrian rebels fear that the president could suffer the same defeat that the [British coalition government have suffered](#), and this could well be likely. Obama and his staff seem to have little reason for intervening in Syria, in fact the president has said that any action in Syria would have ["no objective whatsoever."](#) In one sense it seems as if the shadow of Iraq hangs over all decisions concerning intervention in Syria. But I feel there is much more to it than that. Over the weekend Obama has talked about the potential threat to "our allies" in the Middle East. If a report in [The Tablet](#) is to be believed, Israelis don't appear to be too concerned about events in Syria.

The issue of Syria raises some very important questions about international politics. The role of the US as the World Policeman, which it has held since the ending of the Second World War, seems to be highly questionable. The US may have the greatest military capabilities of any nation in the world, but its current indecisiveness suggests an increasing lack of will to use its might.