

Syria: War threat, the US-Russia deal and some left delusions

Friday 27 September 2013, by [KARADJIS Michael](#) (Date first published: 25 August 2013).

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For two and a half years, the Bashar Assad regime has waged a barbaric war against the Syrian populace, using long-range missiles, fighter aircraft, helicopter gunships, tanks, artillery, cluster bombs and almost certainly chemical weapons, not to forget everyday machine gunning and torture, in a bid to crush the heroic uprising of Syria's "wretched of the earth", the peasants and urban poor, against his gangster-capitalist regime.

Some 110,000 have been killed, hundreds of thousands injured and 7 million people, a third of the population, turned into refugees, including over 2 million who are overwhelming neighbouring countries, a refugee population resembling the Palestinian refugee population uprooted by the creation of the Zionist regime in Palestine. Half the country has been turned into moonscapes; indeed, if the US did attack, it may find it difficult to find any targets left. The medical system has been smashed to bits with the regime systematically targeting hospitals, ambulances and health infrastructure; thousands are probably on the road to death right now due to lack of medical equipment, water or electricity [1].

The war waged by the regime has no other aim than to keep in power a narrow ruling clique that has ruled for 50 years. Despite some "left" fantasies, it has no progressive content whatsoever; the fact that some "leftists" could possibly even imagine this kind of war could have a "progressive aim", despite such means, says a lot more about these leftists than about the war itself.

Terrified of popular revolution, throughout these 2.5 years, the US and especially Israel have happily watched the slaughter, and despite hypocritical whining about the regime, the US has made sure to not send a single gun or bullet to the armed opposition up until now. [2]

As Noam Chomsky explains:

"There are growing claims that the West intends to supply the opposition with arms. I believe this is quite misleading. The fact of the matter is, that were the United States and Israel interested in bringing down the Syrian regime there is a whole package of measures they could take before they came to the arms-supply option. All these other options remain available, including, for example, America encouraging Israel to mobilise its forces along the northern border, a move that would not produce any objections from the international community and which would compel the regime to withdraw its forces from a number of frontline positions and relieve the pressure on the opposition. But this has not happened, nor will it, so long as America and Israel remain unwilling to bring down

Assad regime. They may not like the regime, but it is nevertheless a regime that is well practised in accommodating their demands and any unknown alternative might prove worse in this respect. Much better, then, to watch the Syrians fight and destroy each other [3]."

Nevertheless, as Assad's regime is clearly a liability – its ultra-brutal repression is only creating more, and more radical, opposition, yet is unable to crush it and thus restore stability – the US has for some time now aimed for a "Yemeni solution", whereby Assad himself and a few top henchmen are stripped of power but the core of the regime and the military-security state remains.

Throughout this time, the Syrian opposition – armed and unarmed – has been divided on the question of supporting an imaginary Western intervention to get rid of the regime. However, evidence from the ground, from the less "political" if you like, tends to show that many average Syrians would gladly see a US attack if the US destroyed the "conventional" weapons of mass destruction that Assad has used against them for the last 2.5 years. Average people ducking ballistic missiles smashing into their apartment blocks and hospitals do not tend to spend a lot of time with geopolitics or political philosophy, as people in the West have the luxury of, but with how they can prevent their families getting massacred.

Illusion

Naturally, the idea that the US, even if it did intervene, would surgically remove Assad's advanced weapons just to help the revolution is a complete illusion, but that's another matter.

In fact, the idea that the US has ever wanted to intervene at all, including in this current crisis, is, in my opinion, also largely a grand delusion of western left thinking.

Throughout these years, a significant part of the left has played a disgraceful role, only comparable to the same role many played over the Serbian genocide in Bosnia in the 1990s. In both cases, it has been something of a "Waterloo" for the left. In both cases, however, many principled leftists have opposed this so-called "anti-imperialist" party line, according to which we no longer have to be socialists, we no longer have to care about human solidarity, we no longer have to support the struggle of working people against murderous capitalist cliques elsewhere in the world, it only suffices to be "anti-imperialist" in the narrowest sense, even if it means supporting precisely these murderous capitalist cliques against their people.

Regarding the principled leftists who have opposed this line, this contribution has no argument with them. Thus just a disclaimer: if during this contribution I often refer in shorthand to "the left", it is only meant to refer to "the part of the left who have become apologists for Assad, and/or those who see a plague on all your houses" – a formulation a little long to continually repeat.

Yet even for the principled left that support the Syrian uprising and have nothing but contempt for the regime, I believe there is still often confusion regarding both the actions and the motivations of imperialism in this war.

In early May, the US announced it had evidence that Assad had used chemical weapons. Several days of tough-sounding chatter followed, when ideas of how the US might intervene were discussed. The idea that the US might just start to think about having a discussion on whether or not it might be a good idea to think about sending some light weapons to some highly "vetted" groups of rebels, faced with this massive onslaught of heavy weaponry, was discussed.

The left went into a tailspin to denounce what they believed was the obviously immanent war. They denounced not just the fantasy suggestions of direct intervention; even the vague suggestion that

the US may think about sending a few guns was denounced by some as a terrible escalation. Some on the left asserted that both sides in Syria were bad, believing this kind of bland meaningless and classless talk to be very profound, just happening to not notice that this was also the opinion of all imperialist leaders, indeed the main reason they refused to send a gun to the rebels. Some on the left indignantly asserted that if the US sent some arms to “moderate” rebels, they might get into the hands of Al Qaida, again not noticing that the main argument continually put forward by US and other western leaders for not arming any “moderate” rebels was that these arms might reach Al Qaida.

These very moral leftists also often reminded the US ruling class that if any arms got to Al Qaida, that the latter might later turn them against the US. They warned against “blowback”, that wonderful masterpiece of outright imperialist liberalism, which managed to masquerade itself as leftist or even far-leftist talk. Curious. In some cases, they would then quote an imperialist leader saying the same as they were, refuse to notice that he/she was saying the same as what they had been saying for two years, and rejoice that now “even” some ruling-class figures are “beginning to understand” how bad the Islamic terrorists are. Even more curious.

They must have been (silently) horrified to find that within the very same week that began with this US semi sabre-rattling, US leaders announced they were meeting with Russian leaders to get the Geneva peace process started, as there was no possible solution to the Syrian conflict other than a negotiated, political solution. The left probably silently thought, “we could have told you that,” but instead preferred to insist that this was just a time-saver, and a cover, for Obama, that the US ruling class, despite all the evidence, “really” still wanted to attack Syria, for some reason best known to those making the claim.

Naturally, nothing at all came of all the talk of maybe thinking about perhaps considering sending a few arms to some vetted rebels if they were really good.

Chemical weapons

Then in early July came apparent confirmation that Assad had used chemical weapons. So then it all began again, the entire cycle, the entire circus. The only difference this time was that instead of a hundred “maybe think about it”, Obama declared that the US would begin to send some arms to vetted groups of rebels. That really made some on the left mad. Even worse (for them) was that Britain and France engineered the collapse of the EU’s arms embargo against the Syrian rebels.

Once again lots of furious left rhetoric which, like last time, was in fundamental agreement with most imperialist assertions even while imagining them to be different; once again, within the same week of Obama’s announcement was his meeting with Russia’s President Vladimir Putin at the G8 to launch the Geneva process and again all the declarations about diplomatic solution etc, including the joint G8 declaration, which also stressed that this political, diplomatic solution must preserve “the core” of the Baathist military-security state, and that both regime and rebels ought to turn their guns against Al Qaida, while no mention was made of Assad.

And then “the left” thought it was really bad that the main political and military leaderships of the Syrian opposition rejected this call for surrender.

And once again, despite this time Obama saying he would send arms, not a gun was ever sent to the rebels. And the day after the EU arms embargo was lifted, Britain announced it had only been kidding (i.e., that they would make sure not to send any arms), and France announced that it would only send arms to vetted rebels if these good folk promised to use them to attack Al Qaida. Indeed, every statement from US leaders tended to suggest how unlikely any sending of arms, or any kind of

intervention, would be, despite Obama's initial statement. Once again, the left, again feeling cheated of their war, declared all this to be a ruse, while the US was allegedly forever still planning for war.

The "anti-war" (pro-peace? anti-imperialist? left-wing?) rhetoric of the US ruling class reached a crescendo in the very week before Assad's massive chemical attack on August 21.

On August 13, CIA deputy director Michael Morell said that the potential overthrow of Bashar Assad's regime in Syria is the largest threat to United States national security and may help Al Qaeda acquire chemical weapons. According to Morell, the Syrian government's weapons "are going to be up for grabs and up for sale" if Assad is ousted. Unless the US has a plan of attack ready for that moment, munitions and warheads currently controlled by Assad could end up in the hands of just about anyone.

Syria is *"probably the most important issue in the world today because of where it is currently heading"*, Morell said, putting it ahead of Iran, core al-Qaeda, and North Korea in terms of US national security.

One would think that was clear enough: the overthrow of Assad is the problem (the worst in the world for the US), not the Assad regime; that the US saw a huge danger to imperialist interests in any new regime involving Sunni jihadists (though I believe that, while the US is honest about this, it is also using the bogey of Al Qaida to conceal its opposition to the victory of any and every stripe of the Syrian revolution, not only the reactionary jihadist minority).

Yet "the left" went out of their way to publish articles about Morell's declaration, claiming it proved that "even" figures in the US ruling class are beginning to understand what the muddle-headed left "already knew" about the danger of Al Qaida etc. They continued to insult everyone's intelligence by declaring that "the US was on the same side as Al Qaida" in Syria and other such bilge.

Then on August 19, just two days before the chemical attacks, chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, said that the Obama administration was opposed to "even limited" US military intervention in Syria as no side represented US interests:

"Syria today is not about choosing between two sides but rather about choosing one among many sides... It is my belief that the side we choose must be ready to promote their interests and ours when the balance shifts in their favor. Today, they are not."

Dempsey wrote that while the US could destroy the Syrian regime's air force, and change the military balance, "it cannot resolve the underlying and historic ethnic, religious and tribal issues that are fueling this conflict."

So, according to Dempsey, all sides are bad, none represent US interests, it is not a matter of a revolution versus a tyrannical regime, but "ethnic, religious and tribal" conflict etc. From the point of view of the kind of leftists I have been describing in this article, Dempsey must have become a full-blown left radical. They should have tried to recruit him to Information Clearing House, or Global Research, or Ramsey Clarke's mob, whatever they're currently called.

In fact, Dempsey was simply describing US imperialist interests, like Morrell, and like US leaders have continually described them for two years, for anyone that wanted to listen.

It isn't that the US ruling class is not listening to these leftists, it is that these leftists refuse to notice that they are saying the same thing.

Australia's Tory [Liberal Party] prime minister elect, Tony Abbott, normally a US stooge if ever there

was one, recently came out with doubts about US action in Syria because Syria is not a matter of “goodies v. baddies,” but of “baddies v. baddies”. The left should have been thrilled that Abbott had adopted their very left-wing view that both a capitalist state with massive quantities of conventional weapons of mass destruction that it uses on an enormous scale, and a terrorised population, a population fighting to end a dictatorship and being slaughtered like sheep, are all equally bad due to the relatively small number of crimes that sections of the rebels (mainly, though not exclusively, the Al Qaida reactionaries) also commit within this hellish conflict.

This is a left, presumably, that has never read Lenin on Ireland in 1916, nor ever read any accounts of the Algerian war of independence.

A “left-wing” view, did I say? On the contrary, Abbott was being entirely consistent and loyal to his class, unlike the left.

So then came the horrific chemical attacks on August 21, on East Ghoutta, part of the vast swathe of working-class outer Damascus fiercely loyal to the revolution, a region where Assad had not been able to crush the uprising despite massive use of his “conventional” missiles, aircraft, helicopter gunships, tanks and artillery. And an area that he continued to attack with all these means for five days after the chemical attacks, while holding up a UN team wanting to get in and investigate.

And much of the left wants to believe it may have been a bunch of Free Syrian Army (FSA) people, who were unknowingly transferring some containers of sarin poison gas from Saudi Arabian contacts in Jordan to Al Qaida, not knowing what it was, who then had an “accident” in a tunnel, tripped over and spilt the sarin. And apparently this not only killed everyone in the tunnel (except some who apparently survived to tell the tale), but also people scattered over 12 villages in the region (though separated by some areas that somehow weren’t affected). When that Japanese fruitcake released sarin in a subway in Japan years ago, 13 people were killed, all in the subway. This time, some on the left want to believe the sarin wickedly spread out of the tunnel and killed hundreds of people over an area far and wide.

Of course while the story sounds stupid enough already, for anyone who actually knows anything, the idea of Saudi Arabia providing chemical weapons to Al Qaida, their arch enemy whose reason for existence is the overthrow of those they consider the Saudi apostates, is completely stupid; the creators of conspiracist tales ought to do their homework better.

And in the meantime, since I began writing this, the whole stupid story has been exposed as a fraud [\[4\]](#).

Red line?

But I digress. So, since Obama had declared a year earlier that the use of chemical weapons by the regime would be a “red-line” for the US, and several smaller instances had been ignored, the perpetration of such a massive attack could not be ignored. Obama, British PM David Cameron and French President François Hollande drew up plans for a military strike on Syria, as imperialist “credibility” is at stake. Assad kill 100,000 people with “conventional” weapons, flatten whole cities, turn the country into a moonscape, create 7 million refugees? Fine. But cross an imperialist-declared red line and kill 400-1400 people? Not fine.

Imperialist “credibility” is the issue, not any fundamental problem with the regime or even its repression.

Besides, unlike all the “conventional” weapons of mass destruction, non-conventional ones (nuclear,

chemical, biological etc.) should only be in the hands of the imperialist powers themselves (including little ones like Israel), that's where a "red line" is necessary, to show who is ultimately boss. In other words, Obama and co. don't really give a fig about Syrian people getting killed by Syrian chemical weapons, but they do care that, in the case of some future confrontation between a non-imperialist state (such as Syria after a revolution ousts Assad) and imperialism, the small state is able to equalise the amount of terror that the imperialist state possesses.

That it is more of a concern about who might get these chemicals if Assad falls, rather than about Assad having them, was made abundantly clear in the Morrell quote above (and again, for "Al Qaida", read "any Syrian revolutionaries"). It is also abundantly clear from almost every statement coming from US, and especially Israeli, leaders over the last two years.

Israel's overall stance was explained by Yuval Steinitz, Israel's minister of intelligence and strategic affairs, who stressed the "only scenario" for Israeli military action in Syria would be to "prevent the delivering of arms, chemical weapons and other kinds of weapons into the hands of terrorists" [5]. As Netanyahu explained, he considered the Syrian rebel groups among "the worst Islamist radicals in the world" [6].

As defence ministry strategist Amos Gilad explained following Israel's May attack on rockets in Damascus bound for Hezbollah in Lebanon, while "Israel has long made clear it is prepared to resort to force to prevent advanced Syrian weapons reaching Hezbollah or jihadi rebels," it was not interested in attacking Syria's chemical weapons because "the good news is that this is under full control (of the Syrian government)" [7].

At least, they were firmly under Syrian regime control at the time. But as every US and Israeli leader and strategist explains, like Morrell, if Assad falls, then there is danger. And it is possible that Israel's relatively hawkish-sounding view during the latest crisis, compared to the previous two years, may also be due to concerns that it may not necessarily have been the regime itself that decided on the chemical attack, but perhaps a rogue military faction within the regime, indicating the possible loosening of the regime's control [8], though this is only speculation.

So, therefore, we can say that, yes, Obama and other imperialist leaders do have real reasons, of imperialist "credibility", and of preventing either a revolutionary or and Islamist Syria from inheriting these weapons, to want to go to war.

But that's why, from the start, Obama insisted the action would be "limited" in nature, would have as its aim the punishment of the regime so that it knows not to do it again, and would definitely not aim at changing the regime or even changing the relative strength of regime and opposition on the ground; it would in no way signify any intervention into the war. At least that's what Obama said in every statement, regardless of what the left think they heard him say.

However, these very conditions listed by Obama also indicate that the US ruling class has real reasons for not wanting to go to war in Syria at all.

Therefore, it was no surprise that Obama took the historic decision to take a pending war to US Congress before beginning hostilities, rather than later while already in the thick of a war (when Congress is more likely to give approval to "support our troops"). US presidents have enormous war-making powers, and don't need to go to Congress first; unless I've got it wrong, the last time a US president took it to Congress first was in ... 1941.

And it soon became obvious that there was no way the bulk of US imperialist representatives seated in Congress were going to vote for war; if Obama took it to Congress, he would face a huge defeat, from both Republicans and Democrats.

Russia

Obama didn't want the embarrassment of defeat in the imperialist Congress; however, neither did he really want his stupid "punishment" strikes for US credibility, because he was as aware as any of us are that not only would they achieve nothing, but they would risk even further escalating the situation, to no good effect for anyone.

Just then, Russia came to his rescue. How about we ensure that Assad hands over his chemical weapons? We (US and Russia) can collaborate on this via the UN. Then the Assad regime agreed. Then the US agreed. A few days of negotiating guidelines with a little tough talk, and finally a formal US-Russia deal. Just like the US-Russia meetings that ended the left's war party in early May, and again in early July, except that this time the stakes were much higher and the end result much more significant.

A gain to all involved; Russia, which has been arming Assad to the teeth for two years, can say its "diplomatic" approach averted a disastrous US attack (and the left can tail along and call arming a near-genocidal two-year war and slaughter a "diplomatic means"); the US can claim it was its "credible threat of force" which forced Russia's hand and gives the resolution teeth; and Assad can go on using his massive arsenal of "conventional" weapons of mass destruction to crush the populace, knowing now where the red line really is.

Having the war now stolen from them yet again, when this time they were so sure it was happening, so we could do some "anti-war" work and ignore the fact that most of Syria is already a moonscape after two years of war, the left now has to warn that for the US, this is all just time saving, just a ruse, that imperialism still "really" still wants a war, really wants to intervene in Syria, is still preparing for it etc. Sounds familiar.

And even more, the left want to believe that Obama's "back-down" from war was due to pressure from ... the anti-war movement!

Apparently, the largest anti-war movement in history, right across the globe, could not prevent the US invasion of Iraq, but when a few hundred pro-war, oops, I mean "anti-war", demonstrators show up to a rally carrying photos of the guy who has waged war on Syria for 30 months, well that really stopped Obama in his tracks.

Much as I don't want to criticise the principled leftists who condemn Assad but opposed the US war threat out of principle (I was one of them; I spoke at such a rally, making sure to declare my "resolute" support for the Syrian revolution while doing so), nevertheless I can't help thinking that many of us also sound deluded when we repeat these sound-good mantras.

Is it just possible that, forced into a "credibility-saving" war threat that was clearly at odds with what it was saying loud and clear just the day before (no even small intervention because no-one represents our interests), that the historic act of referring a war to Congress where defeat was certain, that the immediate grabbing the bull by its horns when the Russian offer was made, that these acts demonstrate the fact that, as in the preceding 30 months, the US did not want a war on Syria, did not want to intervene in any way?

The US, no matter how much of a war-mongering state it is, does not intervene everywhere in the world where there is conflict. To believe, against all the evidence, that the US "really" wants to intervene but just, one would have to explain why.

There are of course some possible reasons, as alluded to above. As explained, it has nothing

whatever to do with Assad being a “progressive” or even a “thorn in the side” of the US. This is all complete nonsense. But rather, to put an end to the incessant instability (no matter how much the US and Israel benefit from people they don’t like all killing each other for a while, it is hardly the end game); to ensure they have an influence on the outcome; to steer that outcome against either genuine democratic revolution or jihadi takeover; and above all to ensure that Assad’s weapons of mass destruction are not captured either by pro-Assad Hezbollah or anti-Assad Sunni jihadists as the regime collapses.

Against such imperatives however are more fundamental facts: Dempsey wasn’t kidding when he said no one in Syria represented US interests; he was simply voicing the obvious class interests of the US ruling class. And any form of intervention, from rapid, small-scale “punishment strikes” to full-scale regime change, immediately poses the question of what happens next and who takes power.

Of course, the first option does not necessarily pose it; a chastened Assad remains in power. But the danger of even a small scale attack leading to uncontrollable repercussions, of things spinning out of control, is something much more obvious to the US ruling class than it is to the leftists who made a point of warning the US government about it.

The second option (the so-called “Libyan solution”), of course, has never been on the cards, even remotely; however, if things did spin out of control, as a result of the first option, it could become inevitable. And of course then there is the problem that there is no-one to put into power that the US likes. Of course, there are some ex-Baathist officers being assembled by the US and the Saudis in Jordan that they could try to ferry to power; but, firstly, a small bunch of people cannot control a country just because the US puts them there; they would need a base among the real FSA on the ground. And as every single report has shown, the exile political and military leaderships simply have no authority on the ground – they do not control the armed revolutionary populace.

Such regime change, therefore, would be reactionary on many levels; being brought to power that way would be the surest way to fully hijack such a bunch of exile leaders, strip them of whatever revolutionary authority they may have claimed; yet while that may sound good to the US, their lack of control would mean it was useless without the full-scale power of the US military remaining behind to back it up.

Meanwhile, it would also be reactionary in relation to the section of the Damascus and Aleppo urban populations that still block with the regime, as well as the Alawite minority. While these urban sectors are very much the middle and upper classes (Syria is fundamentally a class war), not all these comfortable middle-class sectors should be seen as the enemy, but rather as people unconvinced due to many of the well-known political shortfalls, to put it mildly, of sections of the opposition leaderships, and more so with the rise of the jihadist fringe. As such, the task remains ultimately political, and forcible overthrow by a foreign power is not a good way to convince people politically.

But leftists needn’t worry: it remains the strategy that has been the furthest from imperialist thinking all along.

Those leftists and liberals prepared to give critical support to a US intervention tend to imagine a scenario intermediate between small punishment strikes and full-scale regime change. The US either will, they think, or else “should”, launch clinical strikes that will meticulously knock out Assad’s massive air power and other command and control facilities which give his regime such overwhelming superiority over the armed opposition, destroy the chemical weapons, and make sure to avoid bombing civilians or civilian infrastructure. Therefore, evening up the battlefield will allow

the opposition to fight on a level playing field without fear of Assad's aerial slaughter and give them a chance of either winning outright, or at least forcing Assad to the negotiating table with the opposition having stronger bargaining power.

What the pro-war left would need to figure with would be why they think the US would act so completely against its own class interests, especially when it has never been known to have done so before.

And what the anti-war left needs to figure with is that, given that reality, why do they imagine the US is hell-bent on making war and intervening, no matter how much it conflicts with available evidence?

The US is not a peaceful power. For some five years now, the US has been engaged in a terrible war all over the Middle East, launching murderous drone attacks on civilians over a wide arc from Pakistan, through Yemen, to Somalia, killing many thousands of people, including hundreds of children. There has been no declaration of war, not once has anyone suggested taking it to Congress. Why does the left imagine the attitude to Syria has been so different (with the exception that the US may be considering drone attacks against Al Qaida in Syria as well)?

All that said, what attitude should leftists take to the US-Russia deal to disarm Syria of chemical weapons?

On the one hand, if it prevents a catastrophic US attack, it is welcome. And if it helps disarm a regime that has massacred 100,000 people and destroyed its country of an extremely lethal weapon, the so much the better. And, while little sympathy should be felt for the Russian government that has poured heavy weapons into Assad's murder machine for 30 months, if the deal suggests that to Russia, its "place in the world" is ultimately more important than its relations with some tyrant, then in the circumstances that's not such a bad thing either (same goes for the new Iranian government's overtures).

On the other hand, for those opposed to the proposed US attack because we oppose imperialist intervention in general, how much less of an intervention is it now that significant numbers (hundreds? more?) UN troops will be all over Syria "ensuring compliance"? Instead of US cruise missiles, will it mean US and Russian troops, along with others, crawling over the country? Hard to know before details appear. Will it turn into the Iraqi situation of the 1990s?

Will a Syria disarmed of chemicals – something I see no problem with as such – then stand more naked before a chemical and nuclear armed Israel? Or, alternatively will Syrian compliance with destruction of its chemical weapons now put renewed global pressure on Israel to do the same?

Above all, for Syrian people, is this simply Assad gaining a mini-victory: his gamble with the red line has at least clarified how far he can go; clarifying that all the conventional weapons of mass destruction he has been using for 30 months are no problem to the world, so now that's clear, under cover of being "good" and complying, which will take a long time, he can get on with the job of waging his near-genocidal war against the Syrian people, just without chemicals.

None of this can be answered with any certainty. The left should be able to simply understand that, from where we stand, this outcome is better than a US strike, while still recognising that it has its own serious problems.

The revolutionary forces in Syria simply had no say, and have no say; they can hardly be blamed for not welcoming it with open arms. If in the best-case scenario, this leads to some kind of ceasefire, the revolutionary forces would need to use such a situation to rebuild the mass movement that has

been battered down by Assad's war; this is something necessary in any case, given the impossibility of outright military victory, the need to convince other sectors of the population, and the need for some recovery for the Syrian people from such a terrible catastrophe.

However, despite some "left" equalising of the oppressor and oppressed, it has never been up to the poorly armed resistance, which originally took up arms following eight months of Assad's slaughter of their peaceful protest, to guarantee a ceasefire; it is not their fault that there is not one. It is scandalous that some of the left blame them for receiving a trickle of arms from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, or even for receiving some US arms in the future, perhaps – this, they think, is 'escalation', and can be blamed for continuing the war.

To again quote Chomsky, regarding the initial arming of the revolution:

I don't think the Syrians made a choice. It happened in the wake of the Assad regime's repressive response. Syrians could either have surrendered or taken up arms. To blame them is akin to saying that the Vietnamese made a mistake responding by force when their US-backed government started committing massacres. Sure, the Vietnamese made a choice to arm themselves, but the alternative was accept still more massacres. It's not a serious critique [9].

Let's just clarify: a ceasefire would be an excellent thing; it is the massively armed regime which pulverises its whole country that is the block to one; getting a few small arms for self-defence does not hold off a ceasefire, unless those leftists pushing this view mean total surrender, the "peace of the grave"; and indeed, it may precisely be via getting better weapons that the resistance may be in some position to force Assad to the negotiating table, whereas with absolute military superiority, he has little incentive.

So, therefore, if the US-Russia chemical deal does not lead to a ceasefire, and Assad just continues the killing, it is simply back to square one; no-one should have had any illusions the US was about to help the revolution.

Palace coup?

There is one "solution" the US has long planned for Syria. Given the mess Assad has made, the impossibility of him crushing either the revolution or the jihadists, the US has long preferred the "Yemeni solution", that of a palace coup from within the regime, or an agreed cosmetic change within the regime that removes Assad and his closest henchmen but retains the core of the regime, and especially the military-security apparatus, to maintain Assad's Syrian ruling class in power to be able to deal with threats to class power. That represents US ruling-class interests.

Is there something in the offing now, a further plan being hatched up behind closed doors by the US and Russia, which, despite outward appearances, have ultimately had a fundamentally similar position on Syria?

As al-Monitor reports [10], speculation abounds about the escape, or trip abroad, of high-ranking Syrian Alawite officer, General Ali

Habib, following the chemical attacks, which perhaps have provided the opportunity, as the aftermath forced Assad to turn even more completely to Moscow. According to the report, rumours have it that his departure was made in agreement with Moscow.

On Habib himself, the *Monitor* reports:

"He served as chief of staff from 2004 to 2009, and then assumed the position of defense minister until his retirement on Aug. 8, 2011 following the eruption of the Syrian crisis. If the news is

confirmed, Habib will be the most prominent officer to leave the country. This is especially significant given that he is an Alawite from the town of al-Mandara, in Safita, on the Syrian coast. The Americans and Saudis know Habib very well, since he led the Syrian military units that participated alongside NATO in the war of liberation of Kuwait, after former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded and occupied Kuwait in 1990. A commander of Saudi forces in that war, Khaled bin Sultan, highly praises Habib in his memoir Desert Warrior. In many respects, the perfect candidate."

Would that require a US war? Perhaps not. Perhaps even limited strikes would put that in jeopardy. But does the current crisis situation, and its apparent resolution via high-level mediation between the US and Russia, facilitate the atmosphere for such a solution? Undoubtedly, yes.

Would that at least bring about a ceasefire, that the revolutionary forces could exploit? Perhaps. Hopefully. But no guarantee at all.

Would it solve the problems that led to the revolt of the Syrian sansculottes, for which they have paid in rivers of blood? No. The revolution, in one form or another, will most likely continue.

Michael Karadjis

P.S.

* <http://mkaradjis.wordpress.com/2013/09/25/syria-war-threat-the-us-russia-deal-and-left-delusions/>

Footnotes

[1] see this report for example:

<https://www.facebook.com/JasminePagesForRevolution/posts/508219659270122>

[2] As I write, there are indications that the first few guns may have arrived; but the numbers and kind so insignificant, and the wait till now so long, that it changes nothing in this contribution.

[3] <http://lb.boell.org/web/113-1317.html>

[4] see among others this apology to its readers even from the red-brown, conspiracist antiwar.com

<http://antiwar.com/blog/2013/09/20/retraction-and-apology-to-our-readers-for-mint-press-article-on-syria-gas-attack/>, and further this interesting stuff:

<http://www.al-bab.com/blog/2013/september/yahya-ababneh-exposed.htm#sthash.nFcwkPNT.dpb>

[5] [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505263_162-57582025/syrian-rebels-to-get-1st-direct-u.s-support-as-\\$8m-in-medical-supplies-rations-set-for-delivery/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505263_162-57582025/syrian-rebels-to-get-1st-direct-u.s-support-as-$8m-in-medical-supplies-rations-set-for-delivery/)

[6] <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-wary-quiet-on-syrian-front-may-soon-end>

[7] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/04/us-syria-crisis-chemical-israel-idUSBRE943097201>

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[8] see <http://solidarity-us.org/current/node/4000#comment-3578> for this suggestion

[9] <http://lb.boell.org/web/113-1317.html>

[10] http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/09/syria-general-defects-russian-solution-plan.html?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=8