OMNI SYRIA NEWSLETTER #5, 2013. Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace and Justice. (#3 Nov. 11, 2012; #4 March 5, 2013).

My blog: The War Department and Peace Heroes
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

Newsletters:
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

Index:
http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/

Contents #4 March 5, 2013
Shower for Shirene Duman-Elkerim Saturday

Kahf: Women Demonstrate for Nonviolence

Reports on Syria from Frank Brodhead (via Historians Against War, HAW)

Dec. 2012

Jan. 1, 2013

Feb. 1, 2013

Feb. 18, 2013

Feb. 26, 2013

[Sorry, I thought these would be active links. They are available in the web site. http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/ —Dick]

Contents #5
Sign Petition August 31, 2013
Dick, Non-Violent Options Missing from US Response
SIGN MOVE-ON PETITION AUGUST 31, 2013

Dear MoveOn member, In the wake of recent reports of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government, the Obama administration is preparing for air strikes against Syria. MoveOn members are reacting strongly, including many folks who are deeply concerned about the path we seem to be on, and wondering what we can individually do.

Here are three steps you can take.

1) Educate yourself—and others—through our Video Teach-In on Syria. We raced to pull together an emergency video briefing on Syria yesterday with several noted progressive thought leaders. The discussion provided context on what’s happening in Syria, explored reactions in the U.S. and around the world, and outlined some of the major concerns with—and alternatives to—military strikes.

Click here to watch the Video Teach-In on Syria and pass it along:

2. Speak out on how you feel about U.S. strikes against Syria.

MoveOn members and partner organizations have started circulating a wide range of petitions responding to the looming threat of military strikes. Just a few hours ago, President Obama committed to seek approval from Congress for military action—so we WILL have a chance to make our voices heard with our elected representatives in Washington. This petition from MoveOn Council member Rachel Royce in North Carolina is one you might find compelling:
We urge you to show real leadership in protecting the people of Syria with a more creative, effective, and prudent approach than military action.

- Galvanize world leaders to demand a multilateral cease-fire
- Arrange to evacuate people who choose to flee harm's way
- Care for the evacuees
- Assist with re-settlement once the civil war has ended

Do not be fooled into thinking that war-making will protect or defend a population.

Click here to add your name to the petition.

(If this approach doesn't speak to you, remember: anyone can start their own petition at moveon.org—take a look at other MoveOn member campaigns on Syria here, or start your own!)

3. Contribute to organizations providing emergency assistance to the Syrian people.

The group Doctors Without Borders is providing emergency healthcare inside Syria through six field hospitals. They have also worked with the victims of the reported chemical weapons attacks.

Click here to make a donation to Doctors Without Borders.

Thanks for your care and concern—and for all you do.

—Anna, Matt, Susannah, Joan, and the rest of the team

Sources:


Want to support our work? MoveOn Civic Action is entirely funded by our 8 million members—no corporate contributions, no big checks from CEOs. And our tiny staff ensures that small contributions go a long way. Chip in here.

St. Paul, Minnesota, March 21, 2013

Friends for a Non-Violent World publishes a special report:

PRES. OBAMA’S RED LINE IN THE SAND: WHERE ARE THE NONVIOLENT, NURTURING ALTERNATIVES? By Dick Bennett

LAWRENCE WOOCHER, ATROCITY PREVENTION FELLOW AT USAID’s Bureau for Conflict, Democracy, and Humanitarian Assistance in support of the interagency Atrocities Prevention Board created by Pres. Obama, part of Woocher’s excellent ideas in an interview
“KZ: What do you think the U.S. government should do about Syria or other violent conflicts already underway? LW: The difficulty of dealing with situations like Syria today should push us to invest more robustly in prevention. I think responses to ongoing violent conflicts should support a negotiated resolution of the conflict; protect civilians, which includes providing life-saving humanitarian assistance; and help lay the foundation for post-conflict peacebuilding, accountability and transitional justice. Most instances of mass atrocities occur in the context of armed conflict, so special attention needs to be paid to vulnerable civilian populations. . . .”

Woocher gives a succinct summary of alternatives to the violence preferred by the U.S. government. Instead of life-saving assistance, the Pentagon/Obama propose horrendously destructive cruise missiles. Instead of air attack as the last choice in peacemaking, and negotiation and cessation of violence the first, the US makes bombs its first choice and calls it peacemaking.

Our leaders frequently cannot connect their actions by which they could reflect. According to the news report, Sgt. Bales deliberately murdered 16 Afghan civilians last year and was sentenced to life in prison without parole. “Prosecutors described Bales as a ‘man of no moral compass.’” He murdered one of the children as she lay beside her already murdered father. And the Army followed the law and their moral revulsion to severe prosecution short of execution, and the general public and media generally agreed.

Yet now President Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry, and the Pentagon are preparing to bomb Syria because its leader allegedly killed some of his own citizens with chemical weapons, committing, in the words of Kerry, a “‘moral obscenity’ that has shocked the world’s conscience.” The Dallas Morning News and the Washington Post (reprinted in the ADG 8-24) called on Pres. Obama for strong action, without which, they opined, Pres. Assad would perceive a green light for more atrocities. If the allegations of chemical killings by Assad are true, Pres. Obama, the WP argues, should order “direct U.S. retaliation” against the Syrian military responsible and a no-fly zone in southern Syria “to protect civilians” (WP). That would be—because it has been so often in the past—the American way ever since Jamestown.

But how can bombing Syrians for revenge and punishment save the lives of Syrians? No weapon so far, not even the supposedly accurate drone, has avoided killing innocent people, and the cruise is a horrendously powerful bomb.

Instead, let us call upon constitutional professor Pres. Obama not to abandon law. US Secretary of State John Kerry said the use of chemical weapons against civilians in Syria “is undeniable,” and declared the US would “hold the Syrian government accountable.” But the lawful way, the method sure to avoid killing more innocents, would be to initiate the strongest Interpol and International Criminal Court proceedings against Syrian war criminals. Let us appeal to Pres. Obama not to give up on negotiation, but to support the United Nations in all the ways for which it was originally intended to pursue peace and justice. And let oppose our leaders pretending that a no-fly zone in one part of the country protects Syrians from US bombs in another part; let them end such hypocrisy. Instead, let us demand they send genuine, well-financed humanitarian assistance to the refugees-- the food, doctors and nurses, and housing the homeless, sick, and wounded desperately need. Assistance, not bombing, should be his green line in the sand, a line to preserve life and assuredly win the gratitude and friendship of people around the planet.
And as Lawrence Woocher observed, the experience should inspire US leaders to expand significantly all nonviolent methods available to humans for preventing wars, so shockingly neglected in the past.

References

Then and Now: The Syrian Revolution to Date -
A young nonviolent resistance and the ensuing armed struggle
By Dr. Mohja Kahf

The uprising in Syria is now beginning its third year. Today, Friends for a Non-Violent World (FNVW) released a special report on the Syrian uprising - one of the first to provide an in-depth historical perspective as well as an examination of the composition of the nonviolent, armed and political opposition groups. Please note that the report can be accessed at Syria Special Report Link.

Since 2011, Friends for a Non-Violent World has been supporting Syrian nonviolent organizations and activists in their struggle for freedom, justice, inclusivity and democracy. After 11 months the nonviolent movement was eclipsed, but not eliminated, by armed struggle. The human toll in the revolution against a brutal dictatorial regime continues to be staggering.

“We asked Syrian writer, professor and nonviolent activist, Dr. Mohja Kahf, from the University of Arkansas, to provide us with a deeper understanding of the development and composition of the various components of the Syrian opposition, the current role of nonviolent groups and to address the criticisms that the opposition are pawns or proxies” said Gail Daneker, FNVW director of Peace Education and Advocacy.

“FNVW gratefully acknowledges Dr. Kahf for the work and commitment in the writing of this excellent and thought-provoking report.” said Daneker.

In Dr. Kahf’s words: “The Syrian uprising sprang from the country’s grassroots...not seasoned oppositionists... They share, rather than a particular ideology, a generational experience
of disenfranchisement and brutalization."

"The voices of the original grassroots revolution of Syria are nonviolent, nonsectarian, noninterventionist, for the fall of the Assad regime, and for the rise of a democratic, human rights upholding Syria that is bound by the rule of law. They are still present in this revolution."

The revolution has shape-shifted since autumn 2011. New organizations have emerged: military groups, political organizations created by expatriates, and more developed grassroots structures inside Syria. Dr Kahf explores the history and interactions of these groups.

About Dr Kahf:
Born in Damascus, Dr Mohja Kahf is a member of the Syrian Nonviolence Movement, and an associate professor of comparative literature. A poet (E-mails from Scheherazad, 2003) and novelist (The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf, 2006), she has taught Middle East Studies at the University of Arkansas since 1995, with courses in Palestinian Literature, Syrian Literature, and Arab Women's Writing. A signatory to the US Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel and former local board member of Arkansas' chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, Kahf has marched against the US war on Iraq and taken part in environmental protests in northwest Arkansas. She won the Arkansas Artist Award for poetry in 2002 and a Pushcart Prize for creative nonfiction in 2010. Her 2002-2004 sex columns at the progressive site MuslimWakeUp.com (since defunct) earned her death threats from Islamist extremists, and she has given keynote addresses at conferences such as Muslim Women and the Challenge of Authority (Boston University, 2012) and Arab American Women (Kansas State University, 2009). You can read some of her personal Syria stories at http://therumpus.net/2011/12/the-daughters%E2%80%99-road-to-syria/ and http://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/the-damascene-horse-dealers-daughter/Content?oid=1428935. Kahf tweets for the Syrian revolution @profkahf, focusing on nonviolence, nonsectarianism, noninterventionism, prisoners of conscience, and women.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Contact: Bob Nechal
Phone: 651-917-0383
Email: fnwbob@gmail.com

ABOUT FRIENDS FOR A NON-VIOLENT WORLD
Friends for a Non-Violent World is a state-wide Quaker-inspired organization of over 2500 constituents who affirm the dignity inherent in each human being. We share a commitment to advancing nonviolence as an ethic for honoring human dignity and a strategy for achieving peace and justice.

To learn more, visit FNVW's website at www.fnw.org
From: Mohja Kahf <damascenequeen@gmail.com>
To: Dick Bennett <j.dick.bennett@gmail.com>; Gladys Tiffany <gladystiffany@yahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 24, 2013 7:23 AM
Subject: Seeking OMNI endorsement for video campaign for Syrian prisoners of conscience

Dear Gladys & Dick,

First, the link to our video. I hope it works for you:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvUi2WJvC68

(Please note that the video is not for general release yet. Please don't share it except with those who need to see it as part of your group's process, and please let them know not to distribute the link. It will be launched from Freedom Days Syria's Youtube channel when we are ready.)

--made with the approval of the young man's family for including his personal details.

Then, my query:

Through the personal story of one nonviolent prisoner of conscience in Syria, I hope the video conveys the urgency of releasing all nonviolent prisoners of conscience in Syria; that is its aim.

Since we started working on it, Omar Abdulaziz, a nonviolence activist in his sixties who was imprisoned in poor health, has died, pressing on me the urgency of getting this video rolling.

The Syrian Nonviolence Movement (https://www.facebook.com/SyrainNonviolence?fref=ts), has signed on to the video, and SNM's logo is at the video's end, so it is an SNM project.

I'm writing to ask if you would add your group's name, OMNI Center for Peace, Justice, and Ecology, under the video.

Freedom Days Syria, the grassroots network formed inside Syria connecting some two dozen small local nonviolence groups there, has agreed to endorse it, as well as to release the video on its YouTube channel.

Also endorsing so far are: FOR, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, based in Nyack NY, the Association of World Citizens; and the British Association of Muslim Academics.  FOR is partnering with me to link the video to the FOR website.
A host of grassroots Syrian groups have endorsed, including:

1. Syrian Nonviolence Movement
2. Freedom Days Syria (network of civil resistance groups in Syria)
3. I Am Not Just a Number (Syrian activists campaigning for Syrian prisoners of conscience)
4. Damascus Girls Assembly, Syria (civil resistance group, Damascus, Syria)
5. Union of Free Syrian Students (civil resistance group, Damascus, Syria)
6. Nabd Collective, Syria (civil resistance group, Homs, Syria)
7. Kebreet, (civil resistance news & media group, Syria)
8. Suria Fowq al-Jamee (civil resistance group, Syria)
9. Qamishlo House (Syrian collective in southern Turkey promoting pluralism, nonviolence, women’s rights through arts and workshops)
10. Free Women of Daraya (civil resistance group, Daraya, Syria)
11. One Year and Counting campaign for Syrian prisoners of conscience detained over a year (Syrians, both in-country and expat)
12. Tuesdays for Free Syrians (Facebook page media group promoting awareness of Syrian prisoners of conscience, run by Syrians inside and outside the country in coordination)

Our current draft of the text to be posted with the video is:

We write to express grave concern over the fate of Syria’s nonviolent prisoners of conscience unjustly detained over a year in Syrian prisons for exercising their inalienable freedoms of opinion, expression, and assembly. While this video highlights the story of one such prisoner, it is concerned with all of them. We demand their release and hold the Syrian government and its security forces responsible for their well-being in custody.

While there is no completely accurate count of Syria’s current prisoners of conscience, we know at least that the following nonviolent prisoners of conscience have been wrongfully detained for more than one year. We demand their unconditional release.

1. Bassam Sahyouni, imprisoned since May 7, 2011
2. Anas Shughri, imprisoned since May 14, 2011
3. Muhammad Said Khoulani, imprisoned since May 19, 2011
4. Tareq Ziada, imprisoned since May 19, 2011
5. Shibli Alaysami, age 87, imprisoned since May 24, 2011
6. Khaire Dabbas, imprisoned since July 2, 2011
7. Jihad Nadim Alian, imprisoned since July 8, 2011
8. Hassan Walid Mabroukeh, imprisoned since July 17, 2011
10. Eslam Dabbas, imprisoned since July 22, 2011
11. Majd Kholani, imprisoned since August 8, 2011
12. Ali Aladdin, imprisoned since August 8, 2011
13. Ibrahim al-Esa, imprisoned since August 12, 2011
14. Mazen Shurbaji, imprisoned since August 15, 2011
15. Tareq Balsheh, imprisoned since August 19, 2011
16. Hussain Essou, imprisoned since September 3, 2011
17. Mohammad Taysr Kholani, imprisoned since September 6, 2011
18. Mazen Ziada, imprisoned since September 6, 2011
19. Yahya Shurbaji, imprisoned since September 6, 2011
20. Maan Shurbaji, imprisoned since September 6, 2011
21. Shepal Ibrahim, imprisoned since September 23, 2011
22. Mostafa Fawwal, imprisoned since September 26, 2011
23. Alaa Shweiti, imprisoned since October 16, 2011
24. Dr Muhammad Bashir Arab, imprisoned since November 2, 2011
25. Muhammad Ghazzy, imprisoned since November 10, 2011
26. Anas Zuhair Bayad, imprisoned since November 18, 2011
27. Muhammad Karim, imprisoned since November 19, 2011
29. Shadi Buqai, imprisoned since November 20, 2011
30. Kenan Sa’deldeen, imprisoned since November 20, 2011
31. Ahmad al-Zeer, imprisoned since November 25, 2011
32. Manaf Abazid, imprisoned since November 20, 2011
33. Mustafa al-Bat’heesh, imprisoned since December 10, 2011
34. Noor Hallak, imprisoned since February 11, 2012
35. Mazen Darwish, imprisoned since February 16, 2012
36. Husain Ghrer, imprisoned since February 16, 2012
37. Abdulrahman Hamada, imprisoned since February 16, 2012
38. Hani Zitani, imprisoned since February 16, 2012
39. Mansur Omari, imprisoned since February 16, 2012
40. Nabil Shurbaji, imprisoned since February 26, 2012
41. Obaida Baha al-Rakkad, imprisoned since February 26, 2012
42. Oqba Quwayder, imprisoned since February 26, 2012
43. Cegerxwîn Mullah Ahmad, imprisoned since March 3, 2012

Could you forward this to the Omni board (again, careful about the video not being shared anywhere until we launch) and let me know?
FRANK BRODHEAD’S REPORT ON SYRIA, APRIL 2, 2013
CIVIL WAR/INTERVENTION IN SYRIA

Syria: A Multi-Sided Chess Match

By Conn Hallinan, ZNet [April 1, 2013]

---- In some ways the Syrian civil war resembles a proxy chess match between supporters of the Bashar al-Assad regime—Iran, Iraq, Russia and China—and its opponents—Turkey, the oil monarchies, the U.S., Britain and France. But the current conflict only resembles chess if the game is played with multiple sides, backstabbing allies, and conflicting agendas. … According to the Guardian (UK), Netanyahu raised the possibility of joint U.S.-Israeli air strikes against Syria, which Israel accuses of shifting weapons to its ally Hezbollah in Lebanon. There is no evidence that Syria has actually done that, and logic would suggest that the Assad regime is unlikely to export weapons when it is fighting for its life and struggling to overcome an arms embargo imposed on it by the EU and the UN. But Tel Aviv is spoiling for a re-match with Hezbollah, the organization that fought it to a standstill in 2006. “What I hear over and over again from Israeli generals is that another war with Hezbollah is inevitable,” a former U.S. diplomat told the Guardian.

Analysis: World Plans for a Post-Assad Syria

By James Bays, Aljazeera [April 1, 2013]

---- World leaders have been drawing up contingency plans in case the situation in Syria decisively changes. Most commentators believe that in the end, Assad's regime will collapse. Opposition forces have been regularly capturing small villages and patches of land, and the Assad regime has lost effective control of large parts of the country and many of its supply lines. Conversations in recent weeks with ministers, ambassadors, international leaders and military commanders make clear that detailed planning is now being carried out for what comes next. Here is what the main stakeholders in Syria are planning in the event of a major change in the conflict:

Obama’s Syria Policy in Shambles as Assad Opposition Squabbles

By Hannah Allam, McClatchy Newspapers [March 25, 2013]

---- The Obama administration’s Syria policy was unraveling Monday after weekend developments left the Syrian Opposition Coalition and its military command in turmoil, with the status of its leader uncertain and its newly selected prime minister rejected by the group's military wing. State Department officials said they still planned to work with the coalition, to which the United States has pledged $60 million, but analysts said the developments were one more sign that the Obama administration and its European allies had no workable Syria policy. The opposition coalition, already in its second incarnation, has proved to be as beset by factionalism as its predecessor, the Syrian National Council, exacerbated this time by the meddling of foreign donors, analysts said. But, the analysts added, the United States has no other entity to back in a war that pits the regime of President Bashar Assad against a jihadist-dominated rebel movement.

Also useful - Leila Nachawati Rego, “Reasons to remain optimistic about Syria” Aljazeera [March 29,
Inside Syria

Syria Video – a powerful web service that maps Syrian war video by town and province

From Syria Comment [March 31, 2013]

---- Syria Comment Announces a new web service: Syria Video, which can be found at http://syriavideo.net. Syria Video is a web application that maps and aggregates Syrian war videos by tracking a large number of YouTube channels. The channels have been identified as reliable and tied to specific towns or regions of Syria. Syria Video collects all new videos released on these channels and attempts to identify their location in Syria and then displays them in chronological order. Since going online in early January, Syria Video has collected over 40,000 videos from 42 Syrian cities and 10 governates. http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/?p=18340

Assad Sends Letter to Emerging Powers Seeking Help to End Syrian War

By Rick Gladstone and Hala Droubi, New York Times [March 27, 2013]

---- President Bashar al-Assad of Syria beseeched a five-nation group of emerging powers on Wednesday to help halt the Syrian conflict, one day after the Arab League moved to further isolate Mr. Assad by ceremoniously filling his government’s vacant seat with the opposition coalition that has sworn to topple him. In a letter addressed to the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — the so-called BRICS group of developing nations, which convened a summit meeting in Durban, South Africa — Mr. Assad framed his request as a plea for assistance in the fight of good against evil. He depicted the opposition forces as terrorists bent on destroying Syria with help from a conspiracy of hostile Arab and Western countries. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/28/world/middleeast/syrias-developments.html?ref=world

More Arms to Syria

Recent Arms Influx Preparing Rebels to Attack Damascus

By Jason Ditz, Antiwar.com [March 27, 2013]

---- On Monday, it was revealed that the CIA is overseeing what is being called a “sharp” increase in weapons being smuggled to the Syrian rebels from abroad. Officials are not only confirming this, but say it is part of a specific policy to set up an attack on the capital. Syria’s government has mostly given up on fighting rebels in small battles nationwide, and has the bulk of its military forces in and around the capital city of Damascus. Arab officials say the surge in arms is part of a “master plan” to conquer Damascus militarily. http://news.antiwar.com/2013/03/27/officials-recent-arms-influx-preparing-rebels-to-attack-damascus/


A Regional War?

Iran’s support for Syria still appears strong - but is it hedging its bets?
---- When the Arab League handed Syria's long-vacant seat to the Syrian opposition on March 26 and endorsed military aid for anti-regime rebels, the first and loudest complaints came from Iran. Despite a two-year rebellion that has seen 70,000 deaths and 1 million refugees, Iran has not veered from its staunch support for Syria's embattled President Bashar al-Assad, whose regime it considers a critical piece of its anti-US, anti-Israel "axis of resistance." The Iranian complaints are the diplomatic side of an on-the-battlefield proxy war in Syria, with both sides reportedly receiving a surge of weapons from outside powers in recent months. Iranian military and financial support for Mr. Assad has been stepped up with near-weekly flights (and Russia still continues normal sales to its ally). Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, meanwhile, have ferried fresh weaponry to the rebels, with CIA support.

http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0328/Iran-s-support-for-Syria-still-appears-strong-but-is-it-hedging-its-bets?nav=87-frontpage-entryNineItem

Iran says Qatar 'intensifying bloodshed' in Syria with new rebel embassy

From Reuters, [March 29, 2013]

---- Iran, a close ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, accused Qatar on Friday of "intensifying the bloodshed" in Syria and criticized it for enabling an opposition bloc to open its first embassy in Doha. Syrian opposition leader Moaz Alkhatib, whose group is recognized by the Arab League as the sole representative for Syria, opened the embassy in Qatar on Wednesday. http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/iran-says-qatar-intensifying-bloodshed-in-syria-with-new-rebel-embassy-1.512608

Turkey Cracks the Whip

By Philip Giraldi, American Conservative [March 29, 2013]

---- Turkey is without any doubt the key player and most essential ally for the United States in the entire Near East region. It is frequently cited as an example of how democracy can function in a predominantly Islamic country. It is the NATO member with the largest army after that of the U.S., fought in the Korean War, has fully supported every U.S. intervention in its backyard save only Iraq in 2003, and shares long borders both with Syria and Iran. Whatever happens in Syria will largely be shaped by what Ankara decides to do, and President Obama knows it. http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/turkey-cracks-the-whip/

Israel's Anti-Missile System 'likely to leave civilians exposed in event of war'

By Harriet Sherwood, The Guardian [UK] [March 31, 2013]

---- Israel's vaunted missile defence system is likely to leave the civilian population exposed to an incoming barrage of rockets in the event of a war as it is deployed to protect key strategic and military sites, according the country's commander of the home front. Despite the success of the Iron Dome anti-missile batteries at intercepting rockets launched from Gaza during November's eight-day conflict, the five units currently operational are insufficient to protect against the superior firepower of Hezbollah in Lebanon. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/31/israel-missile-system-civilians-exposed

Israel and Turkey restore ties with energy as a motivator

By Joseph Dana, The International [United Arab Emirates] [Apr 1, 2013]

---- Over the past several years, diplomatic relations soured between the two traditional allies over Israel's stubborn refusal to apologise for the deaths of eight Turkish activists and one Turkish-American aboard an aid convoy en route to the Gaza strip in 2010. Analysts quickly pegged the apology to instability in Syria and even the Iranian nuclear crisis. But there is another possibility that could be fuelling this rapprochement: a potential stake in the lucrative export of Israeli natural gas. After years of fruitless exploration in the eastern Mediterranean, in 2009 Israel discovered some of the largest offshore reserves of natural gas in the last decade. The exact size of the gasfields are unknown but they are rumoured to contain upwards of 150 years' worth of
Turkey and Israel Feel the Effect as Syria’s Civil War Fuels Tensions at Borders


UN: Major Increase in Israeli Warplanes Over South Lebanon

By Jason Ditz, *Antiwar.com* [March 25, 2013]

---- The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has confirmed a dramatic increase in the number of Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace, with several incidents reported in the past two weeks alone.

Israeli warplanes wandering into Lebanon are not a new phenomenon, but UNIFIL reports that this year has seen twice the rate of overflights as 2012, and not all of these are small 1-2 plane incursions. On March 14, an estimated 25 Israeli warplanes conducted four separate flights into Lebanese airspace, heading up virtually the entire coast before turning back just short of Syria. Israel launched air strikes along the Syria-Lebanon border in January and is believed to be considering a full-scale war with Syria, so many of the incursions have been chalked up as posturing for a potential Syria war. Yet Israeli military leaders have talked up the “value” of invading Lebanon yet again, so this can’t be ruled out either.

http://news.antiwar.com/2013/03/25/un-major-increase-in-israeli-warplanes-over-south-lebanon/

Lebanon Is Like A Rolls Royce With Square Wheels…


---- The prime minister has resigned, there’s no government to speak of, there are further street battles in Tripoli, the threat of more kidnappings. Lebanon, as we used to say in the civil war, returns to normal. And in some ways, it’s true. Lebanon is always living through the greatest crisis since the last greatest crisis. But the current drama is a little more serious.

http://www.zcommunications.org/lebanon-is-like-a-rolls-royce-with-square-wheels-it-has-a-lot-that-s-worthy-of-praise-but-it-doesn-t-run-so-well-by-robert-fisk

Syrian Conflict’s Impact is Felt Across Border in Iraq

By Ernesto Londoño, *Washington Post* [March 27, 2013]

---- Syria’s civil war is increasingly threatening to destabilize neighboring Iraq, widening a sectarian divide in a nation still reeling from the messy aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion a decade ago. Iraqi officials have expressed alarm in recent weeks as fighting between forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad and the armed opposition has spilled across the border. After staying on the sidelines for more than a year, Sunni tribes in Iraq that straddle the frontier have decisively joined the effort to topple the Alawite Shiite-led government in Damascus. Many officials here fear that a growing Iraqi Sunni protest movement that has found inspiration from the uprising next door could quickly turn into all-out revolt in regions that formed the heart of the Sunni insurgency over the past decade.

How the West Fueled the Ever-Growing Carnage in Syria

The actions of the United States and its allies in Syria have only led to escalating violence and chaos.

On Tuesday March 27th 2013, Kofi Annan gave a speech at the Graduate Institute in Geneva. In his usual careful and diplomatic tone, Annan spoke firmly against Western calls for more direct military intervention in Syria.

"Further militarization of the conflict, I'm not sure that is the way to help the Syrian people," Annan said, "They are waiting for the killing to stop. You find some people far away from Syria are the ones very keen for putting in weapons. My own view is that as late as it is we have to find a way of pouring water on the fire rather than the other way around."
Like many who seek peace in Syria, Annan looks back on the "Action Group for Syria" agreement that he brokered in Geneva on June 30th 2012 as a foundation for peace that was promptly squandered by the United States and its allies. In Geneva, all five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council signed on to a plan that would lead to free elections in Syria, with a transitional government of national unity including members of the existing government and the opposition. The critical factor which made agreement possible was that the U.S. and its allies dropped their demand for the removal of President Assad as a precondition for the transition to begin.

As Annan wrote in a Financial Times op-ed as he resigned his post as UN envoy a month later, "We left the meeting believing a Security Council resolution endorsing the group's decision was assured… Instead, there has been finger-pointing and name-calling in the Security Council."

A few days after the Geneva agreement, Russia circulated a draft resolution in the Security Council as Annan expected. But, instead of honoring the commitments they made in Geneva, the U.S., U.K. and France rejected it. They drafted a rival resolution containing all the elements they had dropped in Geneva and which had previously prevented consensus: automatic triggers for sanctions; no commitment to pressure rebel militias to comply; and the invocation of Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter as a pretext for future military action.

With the Security Council once again deadlocked, Saudi Arabia sponsored a version of the West's resolution in the UN General Assembly, calling for Assad to step down and for sanctions if he did not. The resolution seemed likely to fail, with Brazil, India, South Africa and much of the developing world lined up against it, but a watered down version was passed.

The CIA has since stepped up its support to the rebels, providing satellite intelligence on Syrian military deployments and managing arms shipments from the Persian Gulf and Croatia via Turkey and Jordan. Predictably, the bloodshed has only increased on both sides. March was probably the deadliest month since the war began. In his speech in Geneva, Kofi Annan called the current UN estimate of 70,000 Syrians killed "a gross under-estimation."
In the early days of the conflict, UN casualty figures reflected unsubstantiated and probably exaggerated reports from the Syrian opposition and their allies in the Western media. Since then, the UN has held down its estimates as the killing has escalated and the real slaughter has almost certainly now surpassed the rebel propaganda, with the rebels themselves committing their fair share of it.

Norwegian General Robert Mood echoed Kofi Annan's analysis in a recent interview with the BBC World Service's Hardtalk program. Mood led the 300-member military observer mission that went into Syria in April 2012 to monitor the ceasefire that was the first step in Annan's six-point peace plan.

Mood prematurely suspended that mission in June 2012 because the ceasefire had failed to take hold and his unarmed observer teams were being fired on and threatened by hostile crowds. He said that the operation could only resume if all parties to the conflict were committed to the safety and freedom of movement of the observers. "The government has expressed that very clearly in the last couple of days," Mood said. "I have not seen the same clear statement from the opposition yet."

Reflecting on his mission 9 months later, General Mood told Hardtalk's Steven Sackur, "There was an opening, but that opening was not used, because... the kind of international leadership that we would need was not there. That leadership could have been Russia, China, the U.S. coming together and at least agreeing on a joint message so that the government in Damascus and the key people in the Free Syrian Army and the opposition groups were given the same message. That message could have been one option to both of them that we will push forward with a plan for bringing Syria out of this terrible violence and onto a political track - a strong message to both the government and the opposition that we will accept nothing else. If such a message had come both from all of them in the P5 and the Security Council together and united, I do believe still today that it would have had a strong impact."

Sackur asked Mood about the differences between the West and Russia and China over President Assad's role during a political transition. Mood explained, "This is how small and how big the differences between the parties were. In my mind at that time, it would have
been possible to lead Syria through a transition supported by a united Security Council with Assad as part of the transition. I believe there was an opening for that and I believe there was a willingness to do that. The insistence on the removal of President Assad as a start of the process led them into a corner where the strategic picture gave them no way out whatsoever…"

The more one studies the actions of the United States and its allies throughout this crisis, the more they seem to have been designed only to lead to ever-escalating violence. This raises the inescapable question whether, in fact, the slaughter and chaos taking place in Syria are in fact the intended result of U.S. policy rather than the tragic but unintended result of its failure, as Western propaganda would have us believe.

In stark contrast to cautious statements by U.S. officials, their actual policy appears to have consistently fostered the militarization and escalation of the crisis and to have undermined every peace initiative. In fact, their public statements may be only a smokescreen for a darker, more cynical policy:

- As the Arab League tried to broker a ceasefire in December 2011, ex-CIA officer Philip Giraldi reported that unmarked NATO planes were flying fighters and weapons from Libya to a "Free Syrian Army" base in Turkey; British and French special forces were training Syrian fighters; and the CIA was providing communications equipment and intelligence. Giraldi wrote, "Syrian government claims that it is being assaulted by rebels who are armed, trained and financed by foreign governments are more true than false."

- As Kofi Annan launched his peace plan in April 2012, the U.S. joined France and other allies at a series of so-called "Friends of Syria" summits, where they promised unconditional political support, weapons and money to their Syrian proxies, making sure that they would not comply with the ceasefire that was the first step in the Annan peace plan.

- After finally dropping the precondition of Assad's departure and agreeing publicly to Annan's "Action Group for Syria" proposal at the end of June 2012, the Western powers returned to the UN Security Council and reasserted all their preconditions, killing the plan before it could
get off the ground.

- The supply of weapons and fighters to the rebels has increased steadily since then. Saudi judges have sent Arab Spring protesters to fight and die in Syria instead of to prison. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Libya and other Arab monarchies send weapons, money and fighters. The Saudis fund shipments of European weapons from Croatia to Jordan to skirt the EU arms embargo. And the CIA provides military training to Syrian and foreign fighters in Jordan.

- Now, as if the U.S. has not been covertly fueling the conflict all along, the U.S. government is debating more open military support to the rebels.

To paraphrase an old riddle: "Are we governed by clever people who are putting us on, or by imbeciles who really mean it?" In this case, did the United States mean to open the gates of Hell in Syria, or did it just blunder into this mess?

Unfortunately U.S. policymakers have a dismal record of combining the worst elements of both. As the U.S. Congress debated war in Iraq in 2002, there were clever people in Washington who knew that chemical and biological weapons do not remain potent for more than ten years and that there was no evidence that Iraq had revived the banned weapons programs it dismantled in 1991. Senator Bob Graham, the Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, voted against the war authorization and begged his colleagues to read the classified National Intelligence Estimate, instead of the fake summary of it that they were given "to strengthen the case for going to war", as one of its authors, the CIA's Paul Pillar, has since admitted. There were other "clever" people in Washington who knew as much as Senator Graham but voted for war anyway: "clever people putting us on."

But the "clever people putting us on" were really as deluded as the "imbeciles who really meant it". They saw the WMD fairy tale for what it was, but they failed to see the inevitable consequences of their own actions - not just for the people of Iraq, who they were quite prepared to sacrifice, but for the U.S. interests they hoped to advance.

As General Mood told Hardtalk, "It is fairly easy to use the military tool, because, when you
launch the military tool in classical interventions, something will happen and there will be results. The problem is that the results are almost all the time different than the political results you were aiming for when you decided to launch it. So the other position, arguing that it is not the role of the international community, neither coalitions of the willing nor the UN Security Council for that matter, to change governments inside a country, is also a position that should be respected…”

As Mood said, "there will be results." The use of military force, overt or covert, will kill and injure a lot of people, because that is what modern weapons are designed to do. And sufficient violence covertly unleashed within a society will break down law and order and turn groups of people against each other. U.S. military leaders understand this perfectly well based on decades of experience.

But, despite catastrophic failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, the "NATO rebellion" in Libya provided the U.S. and its allies with a new model for "regime change." NATO, Qatar and Saudi Arabia unleashed a war that killed at least 25,000 people and plunged the most highly developed country in Africa into an orgy of ethnic cleansing and unending chaos. They succeeded in butchering Colonel Gaddafi and installing a comprador regime to govern Libya's oil industry, but NATO-trained militias are still fighting each other for control of many parts of the country and have exported violence and militia rule to neighboring countries, including Mali, as well as to Syria.

Syria is a more densely populated, more complex country than Libya, with powerful military forces and a relatively popular government with decades of experience in managing the diverse elements that make up Syrian society. In December 2011, as NATO flew in fighters and weapons from Libya, 55% of the population told pollsters they still supported the government. That has surely eroded as the Syrian military has shelled and bombed its people, but that does not mean that people now support the foreign-backed rebels. What most Syrians want is exactly what Kofi Annan, General Mood and the current UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi have been trying to bring them: a peaceful political transition. But U.S., British, French, Saudi, Qatari and Turkish officials could not resist the temptation to adapt the Libyan "regime change" model to Syria, knowing full well all along that this would unleash an even bloodier and more destructive conflict. There seems to be no limit to the horror that our leaders will inflict on the people of Syria to get rid of President Assad.
Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has committed serial aggression, isolating, demonizing, dividing and destroying Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and now Syria. In each case, it has cited higher motives and good intentions, even as it concealed its own covert role in igniting, fueling and militarizing internal conflicts. As Harold Pinter said, "It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide, while masquerading as a force for universal good. It's a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis."

If post-war conditions permit, countries destroyed by U.S. aggression and covert war are recruited to join their more submissive neighbors as entry-level members of the U.S.-led capitalist world. Some American politicians appear to genuinely believe that this justifies the violence and slaughter that makes it possible, even though, as General Mood said, "the results are almost all the time different than the political results you were aiming for."

The folly and savagery of destroying country after country like this stems from a fundamental misperception of the post-Cold War world that is rooted in fantasies like Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History" theory. U.S. leaders imagined that, with the demise of the U.S.S.R., they stood at the threshold of a world made in America's image. Politics and history had passed away, to be supplanted by management, marketing and finance. They would run the world as a giant business enterprise, of which they would be the executives and majority shareholders.

But this new global dictatorship, like all dictatorships, faced the problem of what to do with dissidents who still resisted integration into America's informal global empire. By 1991, this seemed to have been reduced to a tantalizingly finite number of countries that the new American "superpower" could surely marginalize and, if necessary, destroy: Albania; Angola; Burma; Cambodia; Cuba; Iran; Iraq; Laos; Libya; North Korea; Palestine; Somalia; Syria; Vietnam; Yugoslavia; and, last but not least, China.

Twenty years later, many of those resistant regimes have been dealt with. But the United States is no closer to its cherished vision of a unipolar world. Their places on America's global "kill list" have been taken by newly independent governments even more solidly committed to resisting American imperialism, including popular democratic regimes in Latin America, which the U.S. has "plagued with misery in the name of liberty" for almost two
centuries, as Simon Bolivar predicted: Argentina; Bolivia; Ecuador; El Salvador; Nepal; Nicaragua; Pakistan; Russia; Sudan; Venezuela. Popular resistance movements to global capitalism keep emerging in countries around the world, from Maoists in India to Islamist groups in the Muslim world; and much of the economically resurgent global South now has closer ties to China than to the U.S.

After killing millions and squandering trillions in its futile quest for dominance, the U.S. confronts a world it has even less power to control. But the mindset of America's leaders seems set in stone. Its rapacious machinery of covert war has only expanded under President Obama. As in the 1950s, 1970s & 1980s, the CIA has exploited America's military failures to carve out a larger role for itself, and Obama has been seduced as easily as Eisenhower, Carter and Reagan into becoming its commander, its patron and its puppet. The U.S. political system is not designed to produce new leaders who say, "No, thank you, I don't need a secret private army." True to form, Obama asked only, "What else can I do with it?"

The secrecy that makes the CIA and its JSOC foot-soldiers such attractive "tools" to President Obama is the very thing that makes them so dangerous to the rest of us, as we really should know by now. A hidden benefit of secret U.S. military operations has always been that the deferential U.S. media will report only the cover stories, turning the press into powerful co-conspirators in these operations. Secrecy and propaganda are mutually reinforcing.

For a consummate media manipulator like Obama, who was named "Marketer of the Year" for 2008 by the American advertising industry, hiding a policy of covert war and assassination behind a dovish public image was an irresistibly "witty" global masquerade. His smiling face still beams out from Shepard Fairey's iconic campaign posters as his assassins ply their trade on a dozen manhunts each night.

In their 2006 book The Foreign Policy Disconnect, Benjamin Page and Marshall Bouton demonstrated that most of the crises in post-1945 U.S. foreign policy could have been avoided if U.S. leaders had paid more attention to the views of the public. But how can the public have any influence on secret policy-making? U.S. leaders have responded to public alarm at their aggressive and illegal use of military force, not by restoring law and order to U.S. policy, but by moving it farther into the shadows to protect it from public scrutiny and interference.
But the more this policy succeeds in its goal of secrecy and deception, the more it fails in the real world. Whether Presidents Bush or Obama are ever held to account for the death and destruction they have unleashed on other countries, our children and grandchildren will pay for our complicity in their crimes, as they struggle to invest what is left of our country’s resources in a belated effort to repair the damage of war, shattered international relations, looted natural resources, gutted public services and climate chaos.

China is already overtaking the United States as the world's largest economy, and may overtake the U.S. in military spending by about 2030. When will our leaders stop trying to bully a world in which they are no longer the biggest kid on the block? And where and when will they begin the vital transition to the peaceful, cooperative world order that is essential to our children’s future?

Syria would be a good place to start, and now would be a good time to do it.

Nicolas J. S. Davies is author of Blood On Our Hands: The American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq. He wrote the chapter on "Obama At War" for the just released book, Grading the 44th President: A Report Card on Barack Obama’s First Term as a Progressive Leader.

SEVERAL DOZEN REPORTS, WELL WORTH SCANNING

Syria Behind the LinesFRONTLINE explores the perilous reality of everyday life for Syria’s rebels and its regime (53:51)
A new report suggests those at risk of ethnic cleansing are not just the Sunni civilians currently being tortured, assassinated and bombed, but members of Syria’s Alawite elite.
Is the Syrian Regime Deliberately Targeting Civilians?
April 12, 2013, 12:47 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

A new report says the Syrian Air Force uses methods and means that do not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Live Chat Wed. 12:30 ET: Life and Death Behind Syria’s Front Lines
April 9, 2013, 9:50 pm ET · by Nathan Tobey

Join a live chat about “Syria Behind the Lines” on 4/10 at 12:30 p.m. ET with Olly Lambert, Syria Deeply’s Lara Setrakian and TIME’s Rania Abouzeid.

Where Are Syria’s Weapons Coming From?
April 9, 2013, 9:43 pm ET · by Rania Abouzeid

How much do they cost? And how does the politics of their distribution impact the conflict on the ground? TIME’s Rania Abouzeid explains.

On Syria, World Powers Hedge Their Bets
April 9, 2013, 9:42 pm ET · by Sarah Childress

Two years into Syria’s civil war, no nation wants to end up on the losing side. Here’s how the world powers stack up.
Reporter’s Reflections: “I Almost Died in Syria”
April 9, 2013, 9:41 pm ET

Before FRONTLINE filmmaker Olly Lambert crossed into Syria, he had no idea how close he would come to death.

A Rare Glimpse Inside A Syrian Loyalist Stronghold
April 9, 2013, 10:40 am ET · by Azmat Khan

Everyone at the public high school in Aziziya knows that the senior boys may soon be drafted into President Bashar al-Assad’s army to take up the fight in the country’s escalating civil war.

March Was Deadliest Month in Syrian Conflict
April 2, 2013, 1:59 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

But a close look at the figures reveals a shift in who is dying.

Syria Two Years Later: Bloody Civil War With No End In Sight
March 15, 2013, 11:33 am ET · by Azmat Khan

The Syrian revolution started two years ago today in Dara’a, a small farming town 60 miles south of Damascus, as peaceful protests has grown into a bloody civil war with no end in sight.
FRONTLINE’s Olly Lambert is the first Western filmmaker to spend an extended period living on both sides of Syria’s war—and document, on camera, the realities of everyday life for rebels, government soldiers and the civilians caught in the crossfire.

Earlier this week, Moaz al-Khatib, the leader of the Syrian opposition coalition, had no intention of meeting with leaders from the U.S. and Europe at today’s “Friends of Syria” gathering in Rome.

The U.N. says Syria’s rising death toll is approaching a staggering 70,000 people killed since the rebellion broke out almost two years ago. But determining an accurate death count amidst a conflict is fraught with challenges.
August was the deadliest month since the Syrian rebellion began a year-and-a-half ago — and more deadly than some of the bloodiest months in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, as well as the recent uprisings in the Middle East.

What's Known about Syria’s “Murky” Opposition
June 22, 2012, 2:51 pm ET · by Sarah Childress

What began as a street uprising among united, angry Syrians has become a sprawling, scattered opposition force trying to bring down the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

Blast in Hama, Opposition Stronghold, Disrupts Fragile Syrian Ceasefire
April 26, 2012, 3:25 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

An explosion ripped through a poor neighborhood in the opposition stronghold of Hama this morning, disrupting the fragile Syrian ceasefire agreement brokered by U.N. envoy Kofi Annan last month.

Will Syrian Truce Hold?
April 12, 2012, 1:26 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Despite apprehensions in the lead-up to yesterday's deadline, a tenuous ceasefire agreement brokered by Kofi Annan took effect in Syria this morning.
“Syrian Society Is Beginning to Fall Apart”
March 29, 2012, 6:29 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Neighbors are turning on their neighbors, according to new accounts by refugees who have escaped Syria’s bloody conflict for eastern Lebanon.

With Russian Support, U.N. Security Council Adopts Watered-Down Statement on Syria
March 21, 2012, 12:42 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

After months of diplomatic stalemate resulting from the objections of Russia and China, the U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted a statement on the crisis in Syria today.

Syrian Opposition Accused of Serious Human Rights Abuses
March 20, 2012, 5:29 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Against the backdrop of the Syrian government’s brutal crackdown, the tactics of the country’s armed opposition groups have received considerably less scrutiny.

Syria One Year Later: Growing Evidence of Torture, Detainee Abuse
March 14, 2012, 4:04 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Bisat al-rih is Arabic for “flying carpet,” but for those detained by the Syrian regime, it can mean being blindfolded, stripped down to the underpants and strapped to a foldable wooden board.
Rare Video Evidence of Torture in Syrian Hospitals
March 6, 2012, 4:20 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Last night Channel 4 aired chilling footage of evidence of what appears to be the torture of injured civilians in a military hospital in Homs.

One Woman’s Proposal to Halt the Violence in Syria
March 2, 2012, 12:38 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Over the past few months, one woman has driven the debate over whether and how the international community should intervene in the Syrian crisis.

Why Hasn’t Syria’s Assad Been Labeled A War Criminal?
February 29, 2012, 1:19 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Syria’s embattled president Bashar al-Assad could fit the category of a war criminal, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said yesterday. But officially designating him one, she added, could “complicate” options for persuading him to step down from power.

What Is Al Qaeda Doing in Syria?
Yesterday, Iraqi forces arrested the head of Ansar al-Sunna, an Iraqi insurgent group Iraqi leaders say has links with Al Qaeda, as he tried to enter the country through its border with Syria.

U.N. Report Accuses Syria of Crimes Against Humanity

The Syrian state has committed “gross human right violations” amounting to crimes against humanity a panel of independent U.N. investigators concluded in a 72-page report released today.

Violence Intensifies in Homs after U.N. Resolution on Syria Fails

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the 11-month-long crisis in Syria have stalled after a resolution condemning the regime's crackdown on protesters failed in the United Nations Security Council on Saturday.

On 30th Anniversary of Hama Massacre, Syrian Troops Lock Down City

Thirty years ago today, the regime of then-Syrian President Hafez al-Assad launched what’s known as one of the bloodiest chapters of modern Arab history: the Hama Massacre.
High-Stakes Showdown Over Syria at the U.N.
January 31, 2012, 2:05 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

The fight to end the Syrian government’s brutal 10-month crackdown moves to the United Nations today.

Syria: “We No Longer Want Arab Solutions to the Crisis”
January 24, 2012, 5:55 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Calling it a “conspiratorial scheme” hatched against the country, the Syrian government rejected yesterday proposing that embattled President Bashar al-Assad cede power.

Pressure Mounts on Syria as U.N. Calls for Action to Prevent Civil War
December 2, 2011, 2:39 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Today U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay called for international intervention to protect Syrians from the government’s brutal nine-month crackdown, which the organization estimates has now killed more than 4,000 civilians, including 307 children.

UPDATED: A Guide to Sanctions on Syria
November 30, 2011, 1:00 pm ET · by Azmat Khan
Turkey, one of Syria’s top trading partners, announced wide-ranging sanctions against its neighbor today. But it’s not just Turkey: Below is a round-up of the various sanctions issued against the increasingly isolated nation.

**Syria More Isolated Than Ever as Arab League Suspension Takes Effect**
November 17, 2011, 11:47 am ET · by Azmat Khan

The Arab League formalized Syria’s suspension from the 22-member organization yesterday and threatened to impose economic sanctions if the government did ... Continue reading →

**Syria Calls Arab League Suspension “Extremely Dangerous Step”**
November 14, 2011, 1:56 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Syria’s foreign minister Walid al-Moallem called the Arab League’s vote on Saturday to suspend Syria’s membership in the 22-nation organization “an extremely dangerous step” and announced that the government has taken actions to comply with the terms of a peace plan proposed by the league. His statement comes as international pressure on the Syrian regime mounts.

**Report: Violence in Syria Amounts to Crimes Against Humanity**
November 11, 2011, 1:35 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Human Rights Watch called on the Arab League today to suspend Syria’s membership and to support a move by the United Nations Security Council to impose an arms embargo and refer Syria to the International Criminal Court.
Syria’s Secretive Ruling Minority Sect
November 8, 2011, 8:06 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Because their secret tenets and practices are known only to the few males deemed worthy to undergo instruction, Syria’s long-persecuted minority sect, remain a mystery to most.

Syria Agrees to Cease-Fire Proposal
November 3, 2011, 11:46 am ET · by Sarah Moughty

But the announcement has been greeted with skepticism and reports of new violence.

Syrian President Warns Against Western Intervention
October 31, 2011, 3:20 pm ET · by Azmat Khan

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad warned this weekend that a Libyan-style Western intervention a regional crisis.

Carl Gibson | The US Wants Syrian Oil, Not Democracy
Carl Gibson, Reader Supported News
Gibson writes: "If the US were really concerned about spreading Democracy in the Middle East, we'd be helping the Occupy Gezi movement oust Turkish Prime Minister Ergodan and condemning his violent suppression of human rights, rather than assisting the Free Syrian Army."

READ MORE

HOBSON: RELIGIOUS WARS
On Tue, Jun 18, 2013 at 10:32 AM, Art Hobson <ahobson@uark.edu> wrote:

Dear friends -

Things are getting worse fast in Syria. Egypt's Pres. Morsi, a Sunni Islamist from the Muslim Brotherhood, has cut ties to Syria, and called for a UN-endorsed no-fly zone over Syria. In other words, Sunni Egypt has essentially declared war on Shiite Syria, which is strongly backed by Shiite Iran and their Hezbollah allies in Lebanon. Thus the war has become an all-out religious war between the two major Islamic factions in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq?, Jordan, are strongly Sunni and can be expected to join the battle in one way or the other.

Zbigniew Brzezinski is one of America's most intelligent and level-headed foreign policy experts. He served as National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter from 1977 to 1981, negotiated the normalization of relations with China, strongly supported human rights claims against the Soviet Union during the cold war (he is Polish by birth), helped finance the mujahideen in Afghanistan in response to the Soviet invasion of that country, and much more. He is currently at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, and is a member of many important boards and councils.

Please view this 2-minute video featuring Brzezinski, on msnbc. His advice: The US should not support the rebels militarily but should instead negotiate with the Russians, Chinese, Europeans, and others toward a settlement.

The rebels are at least as bad as the Syrian regime, maybe worse because they appear to be more fanatic in their fundamentalist religious beliefs. We have no business supporting them,
yet we are supplying them weapons and already talking about enforcing a no-fly zone. US military involvement can only make a bad situation worse. Will we never learn?

I hope a mass protest against US involvement develops quickly. As the blunder in Iraq showed, we've got to stop US involvement before it begins.

- Art

Making War in Syria
By Charles Pierce, Esquire, 27 August 13, RSN
[Forwarded by David D. –Dick]

It looks as though the skids are properly greased, and the United States will be making some sort of war in Syria pretty soon. I say "making war in Syria" because that's different than going to war in Syria. We aren't sending troops. We're going to be sending cruise missiles and dropping bombs because that is how you make war without going to war and, if you make war without going to war, then it's a lot easier to pretend back home that you're not at war. Again.

The bipartisan consensus to make war in Syria seems to be growing. John Kerry played the role of Colin Powell yesterday, albeit with slightly more actual evidence on his side. But the proposed response doesn't seem to match the gravity of the rhetoric he used. Administration officials said that although President Obama had not made a final decision on military action, he was likely to order a limited military operation - cruise missiles launched from American destroyers in the Mediterranean Sea at military targets in Syria, for example - and not a sustained air campaign intended to topple Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian president, or to fundamentally alter the nature of the conflict on the ground.

If Kerry is to be believed, the "situation on the ground" is that the Syrian regime used chemical weapons against its own people, a monstrous crime. If we aren't trying to "fundamentally alter the nature of the conflict on the ground," then why in the hell are we making war in Syria in the first place? If we aren't trying to "topple" the Syrian president so he won't use chemical weapons on his own people again, why are we going to be firing high explosives into the country that are going to kill some of those people anyway? This is the difference between making war in a place and going to war in a place. If you're simply making war in a place, logic doesn't necessarily apply. Even a lot of the people proposing that we make war in Syria - even a lot of the liberals proposing it - admit freely that they don't know what will come next, or even on whose side we will be making war in Syria. This strikes me as an important thing to determine before you commit the nation to a course of action like the one proposed, but then, making war in a place enables you to do it from an antiseptic distance, to believe in the fairy-tale McNamara concept of "sending a message" by blowing stuff up, to believe that the most important thing for the World's Last Superpower to do is anything. The New York Times thinks making war in Syria will make the president a more believable president. And that, if the president decides to make war in Syria, the Iranians will wonder if they should still want a nuclear bomb. This time the use of chemicals was more brazen and the casualties were much greater, suggesting that Mr. Assad did not take Mr. Obama seriously. Presidents should not make a habit of drawing red lines in public, but if they do, they had best follow through. Many countries (including Iran, which Mr. Obama has often said won't be permitted to have a nuclear weapon) will be watching.
The Times declines to tell us how many Syrians have to die to enhance the president's credibility with the Iranians. Because when you make war in a place, actual people die actual deaths. Fathers get killed. Children get killed. School buildings and hospitals fall down all around the people inside them. The message you are sending with your missiles gets just a trifle muddled. Make no mistake. If we strike, we will be making actual war in Syria. Ordinary Syrians will not see our missiles as "bomb-o-grams," telling them with every deadly explosion that we're really on their side. We will be another belligerent making their daily lives brutal and deadly, and there will be enough of them to hate us for that to guarantee that we will have to make more war in that place, or in some other place, very soon. That is what we do now. **We make war in a place without going to war in a place, and nobody is fooled except ourselves.**

*Charlie has been a working journalist since 1976. He is the author of four books, most recently "Idiot America." He lives near Boston with his wife but no longer his three children.*

Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters: [http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/](http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/)  For a knowledge-based peace, justice, and ecology movement and an informed citizenry as the foundation for change.

**END SYRIAN NEWSLETTER #5**

--
Dick Bennett  
My blog: War Department/Peace Department  
[http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/](http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/)  
Newsletters  
Index:  
[http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/](http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/)  
National/International Days  
See Newsletters  
Peace, Justice, Ecology Birthdays  
See INMOtion  
jbennet@uark.edu