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## Yemen, Syria, the Press, and Trump the War President

By Lucy Steigerwald  
April 12, 2017

How can you tell that Donald Trump is just another war president? Because in spite of the administrative chaos, the executive branch with its ever-shifting staff, and the half-conspiracies that surround him, the meat of the matter is the question, which near-war should the public pay attention to?

The recent gas attack on civilians in Syria has renewed interest in the West meddling further in the disaster that is that nation. "Never again" is a dangerously simplistic refrain that washes over the nuance of, for one, how disinterested the West was in saving the Jews who were imperiled by Hitler, but is convenient for any kind of international horror that hawks and supposed humanitarians wish to intervene in. (Intervene is another word for missiles.)

Airstrikes on Iraq – no hang on – Syria are the new, bold, neocon-approved Trump's MO. As the mainstream of media put it, bombing Syria made Trump more presidential. They were delighted. The press (in the pejorative sense) love that kind of thing so much more than their rambling Commander in Chief who previously made American Empire look so *undignified*.

The love affair won't last long, however. It has already dulled, in fact. Press Secretary Sean Spicer put his foot in his mouth repeatedly on Tuesday by suggesting Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad was worse than Hitler, because Hitler didn't use chemical weapons on his own people. He

then apologized for the remark by using the nonsense phrase "Holocaust centers" and *then* later suggested the whole thing was a distraction from Trump's important attempts to "destabilize the region" of Syria. This bizarre portrait of a man whose job it is to lie to the press, and who is doing such a horrible job of even that, is interesting, but as historically ignorant as Spicer's drivel was, it mostly *does* distract from Trump's star debut as a complete and utter advocate for American empire (what Spicer said).

Trump is simply a goofier version of the status quo president; that is, the war-making bully that the US has given the benefit for the doubt for the last many decades – perhaps centuries. And it is all too easy to dissect his weirder inanities and habits than it is to realize the same wars have been going on forever, and that the same mistakes are repeated on a 3-15 year loop, and that these mistakes are now Trump's.

Deep thought artists such as *The New York Times*' Thomas L. Friedman think the US should consider backing ISIS in the same way they propped up the Mujahadeen during their war against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. At least that's what it appears to say. The column is his usual mess, and doesn't even nod to the fact that one of those Mujahadeen fighters was a man named Osama Bin Laden.

But which country is actually next on the US war list? Probably not North Korea, though Trump said "you never know." Maybe not Iran, no matter how many stars *Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol wishes on each night. On the other hand, there's always the ongoing war in Yemen (with its helpful tie to Iran). Saudi Arabia has been leading that charge since 2015, but the US has been an enthusiastic helper. Currently, Yemen is about to break out into a full-on famine (along with South Sudan, Nigeria, and Somalia).

Some 4,000 Yemeni civilians have died in the last two years, with at least 7,000 injured. Yet Trump is reportedly in talks to kick up US involvement in the region. In short, to go to war, as opposed to pretending he isn't already (and that Obama didn't begin that with drones and support, though he also stopped arm sales to Saudi Arabia – at the very end of his record-breaking arms sale-friendly administration.). One of Trump's first undoubtedly "bold," "beautiful" and "presidential" moves was to okay the SEAL raid in Yemen that led to the death of untold numbers of civilians, including multiple children. A Navy SEAL was also killed in the January action.

The war in Yemen is ostensibly Saudi Arabia's fight against the Houthi rebels who are supported by Iran. The US is involved because it tolerates only certain humanitarian violations on certain days, but not others. Or, rather, it is allied with Saudi Arabia, and pretends that it never overthrew an Iranian leader, shot down an Iranian passenger plane, or helped Iraq use chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers, so why should there be any distrust between the US and Iran?

Another nasty group of people fighting another nasty group, however, is no excuse for making the situation much worse for innocents. Yemen has been blockaded since 2015, which makes attempts to reach citizens with food and other aid items almost impossible. It's difficult to see how more bombing, or disastrous SEAL raids will somehow smooth things over for the nearly-starving people.

Letting food and medicine into the country is the first thing to do if you want to actually help. That does not appear to be on the table, being only discussed by small-minded people at the UN, or in various aid organizations. On the other hand, more than 50 US congress members recently signed a letter asking Trump not to up his support for the Yemen war. There's always some hope that the US can stop before it dips fully into another war, but it's easier to slide back into one when it keeps its toes permanently in the shallow end of the pool.

Though an impressive number of his initial supporters appeared to be disgusted by the Syria airstrikes, Trump was applauded for them by the same kinds of important people who sneeringly dismissed him as a rich buffoon ten minutes previously. That kind of elite back-patting has had a murderous effect on previous world leaders. There's no proof whatsoever that Trump will turn out to be any different.