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Putting Syria into some perspective

The anti-Empire Report

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The Holy Triumvirate — The United States, NATO, and the European Union — or an approved segment thereof, can usually get what they want. They wanted Saddam Hussein out, and soon he was swinging from a rope. They wanted the Taliban ousted from power, and, using overwhelming force, that was achieved rather quickly. They wanted Moammar Gaddafi's rule to come to an end, and before very long he suffered a horrible death. Jean-Bertrand Aristide was democratically elected, but this black man who didn't know his place was sent into distant exile by the United States and France in 2004. Iraq and Libya were the two most modern, educated and secular states in the Middle East; now all four of these countries could qualify as failed states.

These are some of the examples from the past decade of how the Holy Triumvirate recognizes no higher power and believes, literally, that they can do whatever they want in the world, to whomever they want, for as long as they want, and call it whatever they want, like "humanitarian intervention". The 19th- and 20th-century colonialist-imperialist mentality is alive and well in the West.

Next on their agenda: the removal of Bashar al-Assad of Syria. As with Gaddafi, the ground is being laid with continual news reports — from *CNN* to *al Jazeera* — of Assad's alleged barbarity, presented as both uncompromising and unprovoked. After months of this media onslaught who can doubt that what's happening in Syria is yet another of those cherished Arab Spring "popular uprisings" against a "brutal dictator" who must be overthrown? And that the Assad government is overwhelmingly the cause of the violence.

Assad actually appears to have a large measure of popularity, not only in Syria, but elsewhere in the Middle East. This includes not just fellow Alawites, but Syria's two million Christians and no small number of Sunnis. Gaddafi had at least as much support in Libya and elsewhere in Africa. The difference between the two cases, at least so far, is that the Holy Triumvirate bombed and machine-gunned Libya daily for seven months, unceasingly, crushing the pro-government forces, as well as Gaddafi himself, and effecting the Triumvirate's treasured "regime change". Now, rampant chaos, anarchy, looting and shooting, revenge murders, tribal war, militia war, religious war, civil war, the most awful racism against the black population, loss of their cherished welfare state, and possible dismemberment of the country into several mini-states are the new daily life for the Libyan people. The capital city of Tripoli is "wallowing in four months of uncollected garbage" because the landfill is controlled by a faction that doesn't want the trash of another faction.¹ Just imagine what has happened to the country's infrastructure. This may be what Syria has to look forward to if the Triumvirate gets its way, although the Masters of the Universe undoubtedly believe that the people of Libya should be grateful to them for their "liberation".

As to the current violence in Syria, we must consider the numerous reports of forces providing military support to the Syrian rebels — the UK, France, the US, Turkey, Israel, Qatar, the Gulf states, and everyone's favorite champion of freedom and democracy, Saudi Arabia; with Syria claiming to have captured some 14 French soldiers; plus individual jihadists and mercenaries from Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, et al, joining the anti-government forces, their number including al-Qaeda veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan who are likely behind the car bombs in an attempt to create chaos and destabilize the country. This may mark the third time the United States has been on the same side as al-Qaeda, adding to Afghanistan and Libya.

Stratfor, the private and conservative American intelligence firm with high-level connections, reported that "most of the opposition's more serious claims have turned out to be grossly exaggerated or simply untrue." Opposition groups including the Syrian National Council, the Free Syrian Army and the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights began disseminating "claims that regime forces besieged Homs and imposed a 72-hour deadline for Syrian defectors to surrender themselves and their weapons or face a potential massacre." That news made international headlines. Stratfor's investigation, however, found "no signs of a massacre," and declared that "opposition forces have an interest in portraying an impending massacre, hoping to mimic the conditions that propelled a foreign military intervention in Libya." Stratfor added that any suggestions of massacres are unlikely because the Syrian "regime has calibrated its crackdowns to avoid just such a scenario. Regime forces have been careful to avoid the high casualty numbers that could lead to an intervention based on humanitarian grounds."²

Reva Bhalla, Stratfor's Director of Analysis, reported in a December 2011 email on a meeting she attended at the Pentagon about Syria: "After a couple hours of talking, they said without saying that SOF [Special Operation Forces] teams (presumably from US, UK, France, Jordan, Turkey) are already on the ground focused on recce [reconnaissance] missions and training opposition forces." We know of Bhalla's comments thanks to the 5 million Stratfor emails obtained by the Internet hacker group Anonymous in December and passed on to Wikileaks.³

Human Rights Watch has reported that both Syrian government security forces and Syria's armed rebels have committed serious human rights abuses, including kidnappings, torture, and executions. But only the Holy Triumvirate can get away with the sanctions they love to impose. Assad's wife is now banned from traveling to EU countries and any assets she may have there are frozen. Same for Assad's mother, sister and sister-in-law, as well as eight of his government ministers. Assad himself received the same treatment last May.⁴ Because the Triumvirate can.

On March 25, the US and Turkish governments announced that they were discussing sending non-lethal aid to the Syrian opposition, implying quite clearly that until then they had not been engaged in such activity.⁵ But according to a US embassy cable, revealed by Wikileaks, since at least 2006 the United States has been funding political opposition groups in Syria as well as the London-based satellite TV channel, Barada TV, run by Syrian exiles, that beams anti-government programming into the country. The cable further stated that Syrian authorities "would undoubtedly view any U.S. funds going to illegal political groups as tantamount to supporting regime change."

Regime change in Syria has been on the neo-conservative wish list since at least 2002 when John Bolton, Undersecretary of State under George W. Bush, came up with a project to simultaneously break up Libya and Syria. He called the two states along with Cuba "The Axis Of Evil". On a FOX News appearance in 2011 Bolton said that the United States should have overthrown the Syrian government right after they overthrew Saddam Hussein. Amongst Syria's crimes have been their close relations with Iran, Hezbollah (in Lebanon), the Palestinian resistance, and Russia, and their failure to conclude a peace treaty with Israel, unlike Jordan and Egypt; all this constituting evidence to the Holy Triumvirate of Syria, like Aristide, being "uppity".

The clinical megalomania of the Holy Triumvirate can scarcely be exaggerated. And never prosecuted.

A closing word from Cui Tiankai, Chinese vice foreign minister for United States affairs:

The US has the strongest military in the world and spends more than any other country. But the US always feels unsafe or insecure about other countries. ... I suggest the United States spend more time thinking about how to make other countries feel less worried about the United States.⁶

President Obama's accomplishments

Last month, Alan S. Hoffman, an American professor from Washington University in St. Louis, was forbidden by the US Treasury Department to travel to Cuba to give classes in a course on biomaterials.⁷

At the same time, the State Department refused to grant two Cuban diplomats in Washington, DC permission to travel to New York City to speak at The Left Forum, the largest annual gathering of the left in the United States, which this year attracted over 5,000 people.⁸

The State Department has also been occupied recently with preventing Cuba from being invited to the Summit of the Americas in Colombia in April.⁹

And that's just the past month.

I mention all this to keep in mind the next time President Obama or one of his supporters lists US relations with Cuba as one of his accomplishments.

And I still cannot go to Cuba legally.

Another claim the Obamabots are fond of making to defend their man is that he's abolished torture. That sounds very nice, but there's no good reason to accept it at face value. Shortly after Obama's inauguration, both he and Leon Panetta, the new Director of the CIA, explicitly stated that "rendition" was not being ended. As the Los Angeles Times reported: "Under executive orders issued by Obama recently, the CIA still has authority to carry out what are known as renditions, secret abductions and transfers of prisoners to countries that cooperate with the United States."¹⁰

The English translation of "cooperate" is "torture". Rendition is equal to torture. There was no other reason to take prisoners to Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Egypt, Jordan, Kenya, Somalia, Kosovo, or the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, to name some of the known torture centers frequented by the home of the brave. Kosovo and Diego Garcia — both of which house very large and secretive American military bases — if not some of the other locations, may well still be open for torture business. The same for Guantánamo. Moreover, the executive order concerning torture, issued January 22, 2009 — "Executive Order 13491 — Ensuring Lawful Interrogations" — leaves loopholes, such as being applicable only "in any armed conflict". Thus, torture by Americans outside environments of "armed conflict", which is where much torture in the world happens anyway, is not prohibited. And what about torture in a "counter-terrorism" environment?

One of Mr. Obama's orders required the CIA to use only the interrogation methods outlined in a revised Army Field Manual. However, using the Army Field Manual as a guide to prisoner treatment and interrogation still allows solitary confinement, perceptual or sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation, the induction of fear and hopelessness, mind-altering drugs, environmental manipulation such as temperature and perhaps noise, and possibly stress positions and sensory overload.

After Panetta was questioned by a Senate panel, the *New York Times* wrote that he had "left open the possibility that the agency could seek permission to use interrogation methods more aggressive than the limited menu that President Obama authorized under new rules ... Mr. Panetta also said the agency would continue the Bush administration practice of 'rendition' — picking terrorism suspects off the street and sending them to a third country. But he said the agency would refuse to deliver a suspect into the hands of a country known for torture or other actions "that violate our human values."¹¹

Just as no one in the Bush and Obama administrations has been punished in any way for war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and the other countries they waged illegal war against, no one has been punished for torture. And, it could be added, no American banker has been punished for their indispensable role in the world-wide financial torture. What a marvelously forgiving land is America. This, however, does not apply to Julian Assange and Bradley Manning.

In the last days of the Bush White House, Michael Ratner, professor at Columbia Law School and former president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, pointed out:

The only way to prevent this from happening again is to make sure that those who were responsible for the torture program pay the price for it. I don't see how we regain our moral stature by allowing those who were intimately involved in the torture programs to simply walk off the stage and lead lives where they are not held accountable.¹²

I'd like at this point to remind my dear readers of the words of the "Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment", which was drafted by the United Nations in 1984, came into force in 1987, and ratified by the United States in 1994. Article 2, section 2 of the Convention states: "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."

Such marvelously clear, unequivocal, and principled language, to set a single standard for a world that makes it increasingly difficult for one to feel proud of humanity. We cannot slide back.

Joseph Biden

From a document found at Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan after his assassination last May: A call to kill President Obama because "Obama is the head of infidelity and killing him automatically will make Biden take over the presidency. ... Biden is totally unprepared for that post, which will lead the U.S. into a crisis."¹³

So ... it would appear that the man America loved to hate and fear was no more knowledgeable of how United States foreign policy works than is the average American. What difference in the War on Terror — for better or for worse — against the likes of bin Laden and his al Qaeda followers could there have been over the past three years if Joe Biden had been the president? Biden was an outspoken supporter of the war against Iraq and is every bit the pro-Israel fanatic that Obama is. In his 35 years in the US Senate Biden avidly supported every American war of

aggression including the attacks on Grenada in 1983, Panama in 1989, Iraq in 1991, Yugoslavia in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001. Whatever was Osama bin Laden thinking?

And whatever was Joe Biden thinking when he recently said the following after hosting China's presumptive next leader Xi Jinping in a visit to the United States?

America holds at least one key economic advantage over China. Because China's authoritarian government represses its own citizens, they don't think freely or innovate. "Why have they not become [one of] the most innovative countries in the world? Why is there a need to steal our intellectual property? Why is there a need to have a business hand over its trade secrets to have access to a market of a billion, three hundred million people? Because they're not innovating." Noting that China and similar countries produce many engineers and scientists but few innovators, Biden said, "It's impossible to think different in a country where you can't speak freely. It's impossible to think different when you have to worry what you put on the Internet will either be confiscated or you will be arrested. It's impossible to think different where orthodoxy reigns. That's why we remain the most innovative country in the world."¹⁴

Holy Cold War, Batman! This is exactly the kind of stuff we were told about the Soviet Union. For years and years. For decades. Then came Sputnik, the first artificial satellite to be put into Earth's orbit. It was launched into an Earth orbit by the Soviet Union on October 4, 1957. The unanticipated announcement of Sputnik 1's success precipitated the Sputnik crisis in the United States and ignited the Space Race. The USSR's launch of Sputnik spurred the United States to create the Advanced Research Projects Agency to regain a technological lead. Not only did the launch of Sputnik spur America to action in the space race, it also led directly to the creation of NASA.¹⁵

Notes

1. *Washington Post*, April 1, 2012 ↵
2. *Huffington Post*, December 19, 2011 ↵
3. [See the document on WikiLeaks](#) ↵
4. *Washington Post*, March 24, 2012 ↵
5. *Ibid.*, March 26, 2012 ↵
6. *Ibid.*, January 10, 2012 ↵
7. *Prensa Latina* (Cuba), March 18, 2012 ↵
8. See the video description on [Cuba's UN Ambassador at Left Forum '12](#) ↵
9. *BBC News*, "[Ecuador to boycott Americas summit over Cuba exclusion](#)", April 3, 2012 ↵
10. *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 2009 ↵
11. *New York Times*, February 6, 2009 ↵
12. *Associated Press*, November 17, 2008 ↵
13. *Washington Post*, March 16, 2012 ↵
14. *Ibid.*, March 1, 2012 ↵
15. [Wikipedia entry for Sputnik 1](#) ↵