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<http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/06/19/syria-is-becoming-obamas-iraq/>

Syria Is Becoming Obama's Iraq

Empire Carries On

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In perfect Bush-like fashion, President Obama has invented a bogus pretense for military intervention in yet another Middle East country. The president's claim that the Syrian government has used chemical weapons — and thus crossed Obama's imaginary "red line" — will likely fool very few Americans, who already distrust their president after the massive NSA spying scandal.

Obama has officially started down a path that inevitably leads to full-scale war. At this point the Obama administration thinks it has already invested too much military, financial, and diplomatic capital into the Syrian conflict to turn back, and each step forward brings the U.S. closer to a direct military intervention.

Much like Obama's spying program, few Americans knew that the United States was already involved, neck deep, with the mass killings occurring in Syria. For example, Obama has been directly arming the Syrian rebels for well over a year. The New York Times broke the story that the Obama administration has — through the CIA — been illegally trafficking thousands of tons of guns to the rebels from the dictatorships of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. If not for these Obama-trafficked guns, thousands of deaths would have been prevented and the Syrian conflict over.

But even after the gun trafficking story broke, the mainstream media largely ignored it, and continued “reporting” that the U.S. has only been supplying the Syrian rebels with “non-lethal aid,” a meaningless term in a war setting, since all military aid directly assists in the business of killing.

The U.S. media also buried the truth behind the ridiculous chemical weapons claims by the Obama administration, which, like Bush’s WMDs, are based on absolutely no evidence. Having learned nothing from Iraq, the U.S. media again shamelessly regurgitates the “facts” as spoon-fed to them by the government, no questions asked. In reality, however, a number of independent chemical weapons experts have publicly spoken out against Obama’s accusations.

The U.S. media also refuses to ask: on what authority does the United States have to determine the usage of chemical weapons in other countries? This is the job of the UN. What has the UN said on the matter?

Top UN rights investigator Carla del Ponte said:

“According to the testimonies we have gathered, the [Syrian] rebels have used chemical weapons, making use of sarin gas.”

Again, the “rebels” have used chemical weapons, not the Syrian government, according to the UN representative. Many analysts have pointed out the obvious fact that the Syrian government would have zero military or political motive to use chemical weapons, especially when they have access to much more effective conventional weapons. Obama’s Bush-like lies are too familiar to the American public, who overwhelmingly do not support military intervention in Syria, or giving direct military aide to the Syrian rebels.

What has the UN said on giving military aid to the rebels?

UN chief Ban Ki-moon has called the Obama’s decision “a bad idea” and “not helpful.” This is because pouring arms into any country where there is a conflict only increases the bloodshed and risks turning the conflict into a broader catastrophe.

But like Bush, Obama is ignoring the UN, and there’s a logic to his madness. Obama has invested too much of his foreign policy credibility in Syria. His administration has been the backbone of the Syrian rebels from the beginning, having handpicked a group of rich Syrian exiles and molded them into Obama’s “officially recognized” government of Syria, while pressuring other nations to also recognize these nobodies as the “legitimate Syrian government.” Assad’s iron grip on power is a humiliation to these diplomatic efforts of Obama, and has thus weakened the prestige and power of U.S. foreign policy abroad.

More importantly, Obama’s anti-Syria diplomacy required that diplomatic relations between Syria and its neighbors — like Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey — be destroyed. These nations have peacefully co-existed for decades with Syria, but have now agreed — under immense U.S. pressure — to sever diplomatic relations while helping destroy the Syrian government by funneling guns and foreign fighters into the country, further destabilizing a region not yet

recovered from the Iraq war. Obama's Syria policy has turned an already-fragile region into a smoldering tinderbox.

If Obama were to suddenly tell his anti-Syria coalition that he's realized his efforts at regime change have failed and that he would instead pursue a peaceful solution, his allies and Middle East lackeys would be less willing in the future to prostitute themselves for the foreign policy of the United States; and the U.S. would thus find it more difficult in the future to pursue "regime change" politics abroad. If Obama doesn't back up his "Assad must go" demand, the U.S. will be unable to make such threats in the future; and U.S. foreign policy is heavily dependent on this type of political bullying.

Furthermore, Obama's anti-Syria puppet coalition is taking tremendous political risks when it shamelessly follows in Obama's footsteps, since the U.S. is terribly unpopular throughout the Arab world. This unpopularity is further proof that the "official" Syrian opposition that is asking for U.S. intervention has zero credibility in Syria, since very few Syrians would like to invite the U.S. military to "liberate" their country, especially after the "successful" liberations of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya.

Obama, too, is worried about domestic politics in his own country over Syria. He knows that Americans are sick of Middle East wars, while the American public is also worried that arming the Syrian rebels would mean giving guns to the very same people that America is supposedly fighting a "war on terror" against.

In response to this concern Obama has said that the U.S. will only give arms to "moderate" rebels. A European Union diplomat mockingly responded:

"It would be the first conflict where we pretend we could create peace by delivering arms... If you pretend to know where the weapons will end up, then it would be the first war in history where this is possible. We have seen it in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Weapons don't disappear; they pop up where they are needed."

In Syria U.S. weapons will thus end up in the hands of the extremists doing the majority of the fighting. These are the people who will be in power if Syria's government falls, unless a full U.S. invasion and Iraq-style occupation occurs. It's difficult to decide which outcome would be worse for the Syrian people.

It's now obvious that President Obama is escalating the Syrian conflict because his prized rebels have been beaten on the battlefield. Obama has thus chosen the military tactic of brinkmanship, a risky strategy that involves intentionally escalating a conflict in the hopes that either your opponent gives in to your demands (regime change), or your opponent gives you an excuse to invade.

Here's how former U.S. General Wesley Clark explains Obama's brinkmanship tactic in a New York Times op-ed, which is worth quoting at length:

“President Obama’s decision to supply small arms and ammunition to the rebels is a step, possibly just the first, *toward direct American intervention*. It raises risks for all parties, and especially for Mr. Assad, who knows that he cannot prevail, even with Russian and Iranian military aid, *if the United States becomes fully engaged*. We used a similar strategy against the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic in Kosovo in 1999, where I commanded American forces, and showed that NATO had the resolve to escalate.

“The risk of going beyond lethal aid to establishing a no-fly zone to keep Mr. Assad’s planes grounded or safe zones to protect refugees — options under consideration in Washington — *is that we would find it hard to pull back if our side began losing. Given the rebels’ major recent setbacks, can we rule out using air power or sending in ground troops?*

“Yet the sum total of risks — *higher oil prices, a widening war* — also provide Syria (and its patrons, Iran and Russia) a motive to negotiate.” [emphasis added]

Clark’s innocent sounding “no-fly zone” is in fact a clever euphemism for all-out war, since no-fly zones require you destroy the enemy’s air force, surface to air missiles, and other infrastructure.

In Libya Obama swiftly turned a no-fly zone into a full-scale invasion and regime change, in violation of international law. A no-fly zone in Syria would also immediately turn into an invasion and “regime change,” with the possibility that the U.S. or Israel would exploit the “fog of war” to attack Iran.

All of this madness could be stopped immediately if Obama publicly announced that the Syrian rebels have lost the war — since they have — and will be cut off politically, financially, and militarily by the U.S. if they do not immediately proceed to negotiations with the Syrian government. But this peaceful approach will instead be ignored in favor of untold thousands more dead, millions more made refugees, and a broader regional fracturing of Middle East civilization.