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Syria and the US Imperial Project

Domination and Control through Cruise Missiles

By: ROB URIE

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In recent decades American political discourse has relied heavily on the very short memories of the American public for its effect. When George W. Bush initially pushed his disastrous war on Iraq he was met with large-scale resistance—the largest anti-war protests in history and widespread skepticism around his purported justifications for war. Mr. Bush made his push at a particular moment in history when the capitalist triumphalism of the (Bill) Clinton years was temporarily interrupted by the attacks on New York and Washington. Mr. Bush successfully co-opted America's compliant press whose mission, to the extent there ever was one, had shifted from a vague tendency toward public service to maximizing shareholder value at a time when war was considered good for business. Mr. Bush and his administration had a mission—to reassert American empire as adjunct to the capitalist expansion begun in the (Jimmy) Carter and (Ronald) Reagan years. And to those familiar with neo-con (neo-conservative) doctrine, the

outcome of Mr. Bush's war—one of the greatest social catastrophes in human history, was as desirable to its architects as would have been the effective re-colonization of Iraq by the U.S.

The 'Bush Doctrine' of 'pre-emptive self-defense' was a legal strategy to preclude the charge under international law of launching 'aggressive war.' The wholly fictional content surrounding WMDs (Weapons of Mass Destruction) successfully frightened the always-gullible American public into supporting Mr. Bush's portion of the decades old political (neo-con) and economic (neo-liberal) coup that continues today to segregate imperial capitalism's 'winners,' the very few on the inside of state and economic power, from its 'losers,' a/k/a the rest of humanity. As is outlined below, 'the West' did have real reason to fear chemical, biological and nuclear weapons because it had spent much of the prior half-century producing and distributing them liberally. U.S. President Barack Obama's current fret over the apparent use of sarin gas against a civilian population in Syria is morally justified but is implausible given the history of the U.S. in the Middle East and ludicrous given his own actions and those of U.S. 'partners' in creating existing circumstance in Syria. Put another way, Mr. Obama is pointing to the fire burning in Syria as justification for additional intervention when he and the U.S. substantially lit the fire.

The storyline evolving in the U.S. is that Mr. Obama is now acting responsibly to the offer by Russian President Vladimir Putin to negotiate control of chemical weapons away from the Syrian government. However, the historical timeline suggests Mr. Obama only took 'his case' to the U.S. Congress after it was evident the U.N. Security Council would reject air strikes and the British Parliament had rejected British participation in the strikes. Informal vote counts in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate suggested a major defeat for Mr. Obama if he continued his push for war on the path he was taking. Through regional proxies the U.S. has already been acting militarily in Syria for several years and the CIA has reportedly now taken a formal role in training, arming and supporting factions of the Syrian 'opposition.' This is to say that the more plausible explanation for Mr. Obama's move toward 'reason' is that his alternative was near universal public rebuke for launching a war that he has other less public ways of fighting. And lest we forget, in his march to war George W. Bush went to great lengths, including perpetrating the hoaxes of 'weapons inspections' and creating his 'coalition of the willing' to achieve the appearance of reason.

In the lead up to Mr. (George W.) Bush's war on Iraq it had been widely forgotten that Saddam Hussein's regime had been supplied chemical and biological weapons and training to manufacture nuclear weapons by the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations to improve Iraq's chances of winning the (U.S. proxy) Iran-Iraq War. U.S. and German companies

produced the components and the Reagan and (George H.W.) Bush administrations arranged that the weapons and related hardware, including the 'crop-dusting' aircraft needed to disperse them, be provided to Mr. Hussein's regime with full knowledge they might be used against civilian populations. And in George W. Bush's war on Iraq white phosphorous, banned as a weapon by the Geneva Conventions to which the U.S. is signatory, was knowingly used in the siege of Fallujah in which thousands of civilians were slaughtered. Similarly, in the current Syrian conflict British companies, with the approval of the British government, sent sodium fluoride, a 'precursor' chemical used in the manufacture of sarin gas, to front companies known to be associated with the Syrian regime. So to the point chemical weapons are present in Syria, yes we know they are because 'we' sold them to Syria.

For those who don't know the history, Iraq's President Saddam Hussein undertook the Iran-Iraq war as a 'soft' proxy for the U.S. against Iran partly in retaliation for the Iranian people expelling the corrupt, repressive government the U.S. had installed to gain control of Iran's oil. The Iran-Iraq war resulted in over one million people losing their lives. That war ended only a few short years before George H.W. Bush's 'Gulf War' against Iraq that resulted in the U.S. burying between 100,000 and 200,000 Iraqi conscripts (soldiers who were drafted) in the Iraqi desert to 'degrade' Mr. Hussein's military capability. An ensuing decade of devastating economic sanctions and regular aerial bombardment, believed to have caused the deaths of over 500,000 Iraqi civilians, was followed by George W. Bush's war in which over one million more Iraqis were killed. Despite Mr. Bush's attempt at legal legitimacy through his ruse of 'pre-emptive self-defense,' his war on Iraq fits the Nuremberg definition of 'aggressive war,' the most heinous of war crimes, and Mr. Bush revived the (open) use of illegal torture, the use of banned weapons and he substantially destroyed a modern nation-state. And after promising during his Presidential campaign to end the occupation of Iraq the newly elected U.S. President Barack Obama negotiated with the Iraqi government for a continued U.S. military presence there and only quit the country when the Iraqi government refused to give total immunity to U.S. troops there for crimes committed against the Iraqi people.

After taking office Mr. Obama increased U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan, launched an illegal war against Libya that substantially destabilized the country, launched 'drone wars' across the Middle East that resulted in the murder of hundreds, and likely thousands, of civilians and he claimed the right to extra-judicial assassination of U.S. and foreign citizens at his whim. Mr. Obama has continued to put forward the U.S. (neo-con) 'big-lie' by accusing Iran of having a secret nuclear weapons program that U.S intelligence services agreed en masse did not exist in 2007 and then again in 2012. And to refresh, the Reagan and (H.W.) Bush administrations

provided Saddam Hussein's scientists with nuclear weapons training, if not materiel as is currently known, suggesting that they likely did the same in Iran when it was still considered an ally. Once again, was Iran to have a nuclear weapons program, which U.S. intelligence agencies claim it doesn't, this would be but one more case of the U.S. putting out fires it started. Syria and Iran are reported to have a mutual defense pact and the further isolation of Iran through the dissolution of Syria—Mr. Obama's implied goal with U.S. military strikes and covert war, would in theory weaken resistance to U.S. control of the Middle East as it increases human death, misery and suffering to levels at the outer bounds of human experience. So again, Mr. Obama's claim of moral outrage over civilian deaths from chemical weapons appears to diverge in both theory and fact from U.S. history in the Middle East and from his own administration's actions there.

(The paragraphs below relating NSA spying to U.S. actions in the Middle East were written before Thursday's revelations from Edward Snowden, Glenn Greenwald and the Guardian that the NSA is feeding raw intelligence on U.S. citizens to the government of Israel. To be clear, the same person, U.S. President Barack Obama, who has repeatedly assured U.S. citizens that the NSA activities under his direction are legal, limited and occur under judicial review—all of which are now demonstrably false, is also asserting he has knowledge of 'the facts' needed to 'legitimate' aerial bombardment of Syria).

Widely viewed as a separate issue, the NSA's domestic spying program recently endorsed and defended by the Obama administration is part-and-parcel of a global program to use the Internet as tool of U.S. imperial power and control that ties to the imperial project of the same neo-cons who were the architects of George W. Bush's war on Iraq. Thanks to revelations by Edward Snowden the U.S., through the NSA and Pentagon, is now known to have launched unprovoked 'cyber-attacks' around the globe, to have used the Internet to spy on allies and 'enemies' alike and to have compromised the security architecture of the Internet to gain effective access to, and control over, global electronic communications. In the Middle East this ties to U.S. and Israeli predations against Iran that include creation and delivery of the 'Stuxnet' computer 'worm' designed to cripple and destroy Iranian infrastructure. Mr. Obama's build-out and defense of the NSA's 'spying' capabilities tie to events in Syria through the relation of 'cyber' to physical warfare as strategies to create political instability through destruction—the cyber-attack on Iran was designed to destroy critical infrastructure much as the proposed aerial bombardment of Syria would be designed to do. And in fact, Mr. Obama's proposed targets in Syria are critical infrastructure, just as they initially were in Iraq.

The apparent perception of the liberal and progressive left is that the neo-con program was put in mothballs with the election of liberal Democrat Barack Obama. However, Mr. Obama's economic worldview—the 'neo-liberal' creditor's balance sheet view of national accounts, ties directly to the geopolitical hegemony sought by the neo-cons—there is no other plausible way to create the neo-liberal economic architecture because it is premised on economic imperialism backed by imperial state power. (The secrecy surrounding the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) is evidence of this imperial tendency). The neo-liberal view of national accounts isn't the 'correct' view; it is the method of economic imperialism that assures economic extraction regardless of the destruction it leaves behind. The geopolitical analog is the neo-con strategy of direct control through political hegemony (political 'value' extraction) or engineered chaos to prevent alternative systems of political economy from arising. This relation is reified in the embers of Iraq—the neo-cons are indifferent between Iraq laying in ruins and effective re-colonization much as the economic catastrophes of neo-liberalism never pry its internal logic open to conceive of different political-economic possibilities. Mr. Obama's tendency toward aerial bombardment of Syria following years of covert war comes straight from the neo-con playbook.

When viewed outside of historical context Mr. Obama's foreign policies, from the alleged 'humanitarian intervention' in Libya to the (forced) draw down of U.S. troops in Iraq to his unexplained buildup of troops in Afghanistan to his saber rattling against Iran and now to his 'moral' imperative to punish violence in Syria with more violence can only implausibly be put forward as 'humanitarian' actions. Or put another way, they are the liberal face on policies of capitalist imperialism that make them easier to sell as 'for the good of the world,' at least to the domestic population. However, practically speaking, an ineffective way to end the use of chemical weapons in Syria is to start dropping bombs and a strategy that stands a decent chance of working is to stop supplying the chemical weapons. One method of promoting political stability across the broader Middle East is to stop actively creating instability. And were ridding Syria of chemical weapons Mr. Obama's real goal diplomacy among the major players would have been the first step, not a face-saving fallback. When viewed against the realm of alternative strategies for political-economic relations in the world, those actually chosen by Mr. Obama, like those of his predecessors, clearly fit into the neo-con, neo-liberal project of imperial hegemony.

As the evidence suggests, the goal of the U.S. is not now, nor has it ever been, to produce 'good' outcomes—it is to dominate and control. This is the history into which Mr. Obama's plans to bomb Syria fits. Those sanguine that the worst is past, that Russian President Vladimir Putin played the grownup and gave the U.S. and U.S. President Barack Obama a 'way out' of bombing Syria, are forced to tie the improbable explanation that U.S. goals in Syria were / are related to

the use of chemical weapons to the instincts of national self-preservation that the U.S. has demonstrated for several decades now it does not possess. Should the U.S. continue to base foreign policy on the neo-con playbook we deserve what we get. The tragedy will be the death and misery caused the victims of imperial hubris, not the chaotic end of the U.S. imperial project. Last, the Internet was a really good idea. Please thank Mr. Obama, the NSA and the broader U.S. imperial project for destroying it.