



Syria: four years of humanitarian intervention

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Humanitarian intervention is not really a legal doctrine, it is trying to put a good face on war, by calling it a 'lesser evil'

'Humanitarian Intervention' and the 'double game'



'About our country, there is another more sinister plan ... they want to provoke a war ... to have a pretext to intervene and, with the authority of being mediator and guarantor, to seize the country ... There is no more cowardly thing in the annals of free people; nor such cold blooded evil' - Jose Martí, 1889

→ Maine incident, 'Spanish American' war, 1898

Pretexts to intervene: a long history



\$50,000 REWARD.—WHO DESTROYED THE MAINE?—\$50,000 REWARD.

EDITION FOR GREATER NEW YORK

NEW YORK JOURNAL
AND ADVERTISER.

30. EATS. (Copyright, 1898, by W. S. Hearst)—NEW YORK, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1898.—14 PAGES. PRICE ONE CENT

DESTRUCTION OF THE WAR SHIP MAINE WAS THE WORK OF AN ENEMY.

\$50,000! Assistant Secretary Roosevelt
\$50,000 REWARD! Convinced the Explosion of
For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage! the War Ship Was Not an Accident.

\$50,000! **\$50,000 REWARD!**
For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage!

The Journal Offers \$50,000 Reward for the Conviction of the Criminals Who Sent 258 American Sailors to Their Death. Naval Officers Unanimous That the Ship Was Destroyed on Purpose.

FOR THE PERPETRATOR OF THIS OUTRAGE HAD ACCOMPLISHED.

W. S. HEARST.

'Humanitarian Intervention': what is it?

- '**Humanitarian intervention**' idea has been around for some time, but the doctrine of a '**responsibility to protect**' is quite recent.
- **Bass 2009**: 'humanitarian intervention' practised by the British against slavery and (contrary Martí) by the US in the Spanish-American war. This is opposed by both 'realists' and 'leftists'. Yet Bass cites British imperial era liberal John Stuart Mill, an opponent of slavery, yet an advocate of 'humanitarian intervention'.
- '**Liberal imperialism**' does not sit well today, with the UN charter and human rights agreements, based on the right of peoples to self-determination.
- The idea of a '**responsibility to protect**' is more specific:
 - 'Each individual state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity ... The international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States ... we are prepared to take collective action ... through the Security Council ... should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations' (UN 2005).
- None of this changes **international law**; intervention is banned except for:
 1. self-defence,
 2. collective security (as authorised by the UN security council)

'Humanitarian Intervention': the choices

Three options

1. Anti-imperial position

non-intervention on principle; always be a greater evil (empires responsible for most genocides), violates bill of rights (Art 1)

2. Accomplice to war (as 'the lesser evil')

support war – but with the history of 'double games', one must have regard to (a) International law, (b) Independent evidence on the pretexts, (c) observe conflicts of interest

3. Imperial position – advocate domination of entire regions

Inconsistent with international law and the United Nations charter

Overview - how the violence developed:

- Daraa March 2011 – salafi sniper attacks armed by the Saudis (Israeli news reports ‘seven police officers and at least four demonstrators in Syria have been killed’)
- Homs 2011-2012 – Farouk Brigade (FSA): “Alawis to the grave, Christians to Beirut” – ethnic cleansing of 50,000 Christians, in and around Homs
- Farouk defeated in Homs, massacres in surrounding villages: Houla, Aqrab
- Aleppo invasion from Turkey, 2012 – al Nusra-ISIS move into eastern Syria
- Syrian Army makes progress at Lebanese border, Qusayr liberated
- August 2013 – chemical weapons inspectors, incident in East Ghouta
- 2014: ISIS comes to dominate parts of eastern in Syria, esp. Raqqa, US declares new ‘war on terror’, distinguishes ISIS from ‘moderate rebels’

Second UN report, co-chaired by US delegate, ignores 15 independent witnesses

1. The Houla Massacre, May 2012

Table 1: Houla massacre (May 2012): significant reports	
Source/report	Method and conclusion
Mother Agnes Mariam	FSA previously attacked Christians and engaged in ‘false flag’ attacks, falsely blamed government
Most western media reports	Massacre by ‘Assad’s death squads’
British and French government	Massacre from Government shelling of civilian areas; later changed this to ‘regime thug’ attacks
UN Special Mission on Syria (UNSMIS)	Mood went to massacre site, heard stories that blamed both sides. Could not resolve the two versions.
UN HRC Commission of Inquiry	Interviews in Geneva, co-chaired by US diplomat; witnesses selection assisted by anti-government groups; Commission blames pro-government ‘thugs’ (shabiha)
FSA video, on Al Jazeera and elsewhere	Show young boy Ali al Sayed, he blames ‘shabiha’ in army clothes with shaved heads and beards.
Syrian Government, state news and TV	Four direct witnesses say attacks by armed gangs, who killed security and pro-government families
German journalist Alfred HACKENSBERGER	Interviews refugee ‘Jibril’ at Qara – massacre carried out by FSA gangs on pro-government families
German journalist Rainer HERMANN	Interviews anti-violence opposition – they say local gangs and FSA killed pro-government families
Dutch Journalist Martin JANSSEN	Notes large outflow of Christian and Alawi refugees from Houla; refugees at Qara blame FSA gangs
Russian journalists MUSIN and KULYGINA	Eight witnesses blame FSA-linked anti-government gangs, victims pro-government families
Correggia, Embid, Hauben and Larson	Critical review of evidence and the UN reports – say second UN report is not credible

Right, Houla massacre victims being buried
Most of those killed were from pro-government families, in an opposition held area



2. East Ghouta chemical weapons incident

Source/report/evidence	Method and conclusion
Carla del Ponte (UN)	Pre-East Ghouta: 'Rebels' believed to have used sarin gas in North Syria
Various news reports	Pre-East Ghouta: 'Rebels' (al Nusra) arrested in Turkey with sarin gas
'Syrian Rebels' and associates	1,300+ killed, including children, from Government CW shelling
Human Rights Watch	The CW used were only in possession of the SG
New York Times	Telemetry evidence links attacks to SG bases (later MIT studies force NYT to modify this claim)
Lloyd and Postol (MIT)	Rockets used had limited range and could not have been fired from suggested SG positions.
Gavlak and Ababneh (MINT Press)	CW had been supplied by Saudis to 'rebel' groups, some locals had died due to mishandling
Mother Agnes / ISTEAMS	Images were contrived, no social context, only eight people buried – who are the children?
John Mesler (NSNBC)	Parents identified children in photos as those kidnapped in Latakia, two weeks earlier
Seymour Hersh (LRB)	Interviewed US officials. Intelligence was manipulated to blame President Assad, false claims used.
Turkish lawyers and writers group	Saudi backed 'rebel' group Liwa al Islam believed to be responsible.
UN Dec 2013 report	CW were used; three of five CW attacks were 'against soldiers' or 'against soldiers and civilians'



The 'Islamic Front' claimed 1,466 killed, mainly women and children; the LCC said 1,188 victims; videos showed less than 500 bodies, not all dead. **Yet only eight bodies were buried.** "[The] remaining 1,458 corpses, where are they? Where are the children?" (ISTEAMS 2013: 36-41).

THE GHOUTA CW ATTACK: WHERE ARE THE MISSING CHILDREN?

Other war crimes and 'false flags'

Demonstrable crimes by the Syrian Army? – yes, execution of combatant prisoners



Daraya massacre: August 2012 massacre of 245 people in Daraya (Damascus), western media reports quickly suggest 'Assad's army has committed [another] massacre' (Oweis 2012). Contradicted by Robert Fisk, who observed that the FSA had slaughtered civilian and off-duty soldier hostages, after a failed prisoner swap.

Aqrab massacre: massacre of 120 to 150 villagers in Aqrab - *only 12-15km from Houla* - December 2012. New York Times suggests 'members of Assad's sect' were responsible. British journalist Alex Thompson reports, from the evidence of survivors, FSA and foreign fighters had held 500 Alawi villagers for nine days, then murdered many as the army closed in.

Lessons from Syria

- 'Humanitarian intervention' backed through proxy armies, as well as by direct intervention
- The US a belligerent party from the beginning of the Syrian conflict (March 2011) – so cannot be regarded an independent arbiter
- The R2P doctrine carries a great risk of aggravating serious crimes: proxy militia can carry out with impunity the worst atrocities, or manipulate their own crimes and casualties, to attract greater military support.
- that contribution to aggravated violence tends to vindicate the NOAM insistence, on greater respect for the principle of non-intervention
- for those who support war, great care on (a) international law (b) independent evidence and (c) conflicts of interest