

## **Learn the lessons from Iraq, Libya and other fiascos**

By Tara McCormack, Spiked Online, 26 September 2015

The current plight of migrants and refugees trying to enter the European Union is being used by the British government to build up public support for bombing Syria. The convoluted argument being made by senior government figures is that Britain needs to launch airstrikes in order to resolve the refugee crisis *and* tackle the Islamic State *and* create peace and stability in an Assad-free Syria.

### **A farrago of magical thinking and non-sequiturs**

It's hard to know where to begin to unpick such a farrago of magical thinking and non-sequiturs. It is of course the case that Syrians are leaving Syria because of the disaster unfolding there, but further bombing is not a rational solution to the Syrian catastrophe. The government is attempting to turn the political and economic issue of migration that *can* be resolved at home into a problem of national security that must be dealt with by military force abroad. More bombing, however, will only increase the chaos and misery in the Middle East.

In fact, military intervention does not bring peace and stability anywhere. There are facile claims being bandied around that had we launched airstrikes in Syria last year, or the year before, all would be fine in Syria today. After all, goes the argument, it's not like doing nothing is working out all that well. If the definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again, but always expect different results, then the pro-bombing brigade has certainly lost the plot.

### **They bombed Libya and unleashed a civil war**

Remember, the US and pals bombed and invaded Iraq in 2003 and unleashed chaos on an unprecedented scale. They bombed Libya in 2011 and unleashed a brutal civil war. And they invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and plunged it into years of unrest and uncertainty. So to say military intervention doesn't work is not a hypothetical argument; we have the results of two decades of armed interference right in front of our eyes in the shape of the collapsed Middle East. How much worse could things get? Much worse, as it happens. There are still whole countries and areas, even in the war-torn territories, that are perfectly inhabitable and at peace. Things will not necessarily stay that way.

Secondly, what's been completely left out of any of the government's pro-intervention statements is that several states are already intervening militarily in Syria, and have been doing so for over a year. The US, Canada, Australia and a few other states are bombing the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and training so-called moderate anti-Assad groups. So where are we at? Iraq no longer exists as a state and IS is advancing in Syria while Assad clings on to power. Meanwhile, at a cost of \$41million, **just 60 pro-US and anti-Assad rebel fighters** completed

American training and were sent out to fight in July – only four or five remain on the battlefield. Even if the **5,000 fighters** that the US had been aiming for had made it through training, it's pure madness to think they could have made any difference.

### **What is the aim of the ongoing intervention?**

Coalition states are indulging the fantasy that if IS and Assad can be thrown out of Syria by intervention then a democratic Syrian state will spring up in its place. We've been here before, of course. Even when the coalition did manage to install a government in Iraq, it could only rule through **murder, fear and ethnic pork-barrel politics**, convincing many of Iraq's Sunnis that al-Qaeda was the only option for survival.

Had Western states really wanted to bring stability to Syria, they should have got behind Assad as the civil war began to burn. After all, Western states have supported de facto dictators before: they cheered as Egypt's military leaders overthrew Egypt's elected Arab Spring government, massacred thousands and reinstalled themselves in power; and they supported Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen to suppress its post-Arab Spring uprising. But, of course, the West took a different approach to Assad by grandstanding about just how awful he is. Confused? It would be funny if it wasn't so horrific and hadn't cost so many hundreds of thousands of lives.

It is also important to understand that Britain is already part of a Western military campaign in Syria: British pilots 'embedded' with US and Canadian forces have been bombing Syria; and RAF drones, **as revealed last week**, have been engaged in targeted assassinations for months.

Drone strikes do not happen in a vacuum like some kind of *deus ex machina*, taking out bad guys and making the world a better place. Anyone with the slightest interest in democracy at home or peace in the Middle East should be concerned that the prime minister has been ordering these targeted assassinations without the electorate's knowledge. What is the government planning to do anyway? Individually execute the 2,000 British people believed to be fighting with IS? After all, according to government arguments, each one represents a 'direct threat'.

### **UK Parliament voted 'No'**

It is worth noting that David Cameron has already twice attempted to join the bombing of Syria. In 2013, he asked parliament to vote on joining the proposed US bombing. Parliament voted 'No'. Now, certainly the debate was **at times legalistic**, with worries over UN Security Council authorisation. However, there was also plenty of frank acceptance that outside intervention has always exacerbated, not resolved, these kinds of situations. Nothing has changed in that respect. The plight of migrants must not be used as an excuse to increase military intervention.

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