

Exploiting refugee crisis, NY Times' Kristof calls for escalation of war in Syria

Barry Grey
8 September 2015

Millions of people around the world have responded to the desperate plight of Middle Eastern refugees seeking asylum in Europe with horror and an outpouring of sympathy for the victims.

Statements of concern from the media propagandists of US imperialism, on the other hand, are laced with cynicism and deceit. Many are shedding crocodile tears for those fleeing Libya, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and other countries devastated by imperialist violence in order to argue for an escalation of the criminal policies that produced the catastrophe in the first place.

A prime example is Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times*. Kristof is the *Times*' propagandist in residence for "human rights" imperialism. He is a liberal whose humanitarian sensibilities always manage to coincide with the agenda of the Central Intelligence Agency.

An enthusiastic supporter of the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and Washington's regime-change wars in Libya and Syria, he now comes forward to argue, in the name of the millions killed, maimed or made homeless by these war crimes, for an escalation of the US intervention against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

In a column published in Sunday's *Times* ("Refugees Who Could Be Us"), Kristof notes that his father was a World War II refugee and then declares pompously, "If you don't see yourself or your family members in those images of today's refugees, you need an empathy implant."

Kristof was himself badly in need of such an implant when he was cheering on the mass killing in Libya as US war planes were pulverizing entire cities. In September of 2011, as the US-led war for regime-change was nearing its bloody end, Kristof wrote ecstatically of a recent trip to Tripoli, painting a rosy picture of a peaceful capital city whose residents were grateful to Washington and delirious over the US-organized overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi.

He neglected to mention the bound corpses of Gaddafi loyalists found in various parts of the city or the "rebel" detention centers where half of those being held and tortured were black sub-Saharan migrants, pulled off the streets

because of their skin color.

"Libya," he wrote, "is a reminder that sometimes it is possible to use military tools to advance humanitarian causes."

A lie that would make Goebbels proud! The "humanitarian cause" that motivated the war on Libya—just like the wars that preceded and followed—was the presence of massive energy reserves (Libya sits atop the largest petroleum reserves in Africa) and the drive of US imperialism for world domination.

Advocating all-out war against Assad is nothing new for Kristof. In September 2013 he complained bitterly about the decision of the Obama administration to pull back from an air assault on the country.

In his weekend column, Kristof moves seamlessly from his profession of empathy for the refugees to demand the creation of a "safe zone" policed by the US and Western military that would "at least allow Syrians to remain in the country." Criticizing the Obama administration for "dropping the ball on Syria," he urges it to do "something hard like using the threat of missiles to create a safe zone."

Finally, he quotes Chicago-based anti-Assad activist Lina Sergie Attar as saying, "Stopping the barrel bombs will save more refugees dying on the route to Europe than any other action, because people want to return and live in their homes."

The reference to barrel bombs, directed against Assad, ignores the fact that many, if not most, of the Syrian refugees are fleeing the murderous actions of anti-Assad Islamist forces backed by the US and allies such as Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf sheikdoms.

Kristof's "empathy" allows him to omit the fact that prior to the neo-colonial wars for oil and geo-strategic advantage that ravished much of Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, there was no such refugee crisis. This omission covers up his own guilt in churning out lies in support of these interventions.

In the online version of his column, Kristof links his call for a "safe zone" to a paper published September 2 by the

International Crisis Group entitled “New Approach in Southern Syria.” That report makes clear that what is being proposed in the name of a “safe zone” in southern Syria is the imposition of a “no-fly zone.”

The establishment of such a zone was the pretext used in Libya to carry out a bloody air war in coordination with ground attacks by Washington’s Al Qaeda-linked proxies, culminating in the overthrow and murder of Gaddafi. Behind the talk of a “political settlement” in Syria, the same fate is being prepared for Assad.

The International Crisis Group paper states: “[A]chieving a zone free of aerial attacks in the south could provide a model for a different approach by the rebels’ state backers in the north... A move by Washington to halt regime aerial attacks in the south could signal it would consider doing so in the north as well...”

What Kristof is really proposing, behind his deceptive talk of a “safe zone,” is a nationwide attack utilizing Tomahawk missiles and bombs far more destructive than the regime’s barrel bombs. He is indifferent to the fact that this policy killed at least 50,000 Libyans and ignited a war between rival Islamist militias that has reduced that country to an anarchic killing field, and that the US-stoked civil war in Syria has already killed some 250,000 people and displaced 11 million, half of the country’s population.

A glance at the firms that are represented on the President’s Council and International Advisory Council of the International Crisis Group indicates the real war aims in Syria. They include BP, Chevron and Shell Oil. Individuals listed as top officials or advisers include Bill Clinton’s national security adviser Samuel Berger, Republican neo-con and Iraq war-hawk Kenneth Adelman, former NATO commander Wesley Clark and billionaire speculator George Soros.

The timing of Kristof’s column makes clear that it is part of an effort by the *New York Times*, coordinated with the CIA and the Pentagon, to prepare public opinion for a US military escalation in Syria. The column appeared one day after a front-page article co-authored by the *Times*’ Pentagon mouthpiece, Michael R. Gordon, making vague and unsubstantiated allegations that Russia is preparing to step up its military support for Assad.

That article had all the earmarks of a planted piece, more or less dictated by military and intelligence officials and published by the “newspaper of record.” Citing unnamed Obama administration officials, it warns that Russia may be on the brink of dispatching hundreds of troops to Syria and launching air strikes in support of Syrian government forces. Its only evidence is the claimed transport by Moscow of prefabricated housing units and a portable air traffic control station to a Syrian airfield.

The day that article appeared, US Secretary of State John Kerry telephoned Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to warn him against any escalation of Russian military support for Assad.

Kristof is one of a crew of *Times* writers who have functioned as transmission belts for CIA and Pentagon lies in the service of imperialist war. They include the notorious Judith Miller, who penned lurid reports of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in the run-up to the 2003 US invasion based entirely on information from Bush administration and intelligence officials.

There is former executive editor Bill Keller and foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman, both of whom promoted the wars in Central Asia and the Middle East as exercises in democracy and human rights, although the latter also wrote that he had “no problem with a war for oil.”

And there is Roger Cohen, another liberal enthusiast for “human rights” imperialism. He published a column on Monday (“Aylan Kurdi’s Europe”) in which he took Europe to task for its treatment of refugees while managing to omit any mention of the US wars of conquest and annihilation that produced the crisis.

It is worth recalling that among those tried and convicted at Nuremberg for war crimes, alongside the surviving leaders of the Third Reich, was Julius Streicher, the editor of the anti-Semitic weekly *Der Stürmer*. The tribunal found that while Streicher played no direct role in formulating war policy, he played a vital role in poisoning the consciousness of the German people. He was hanged alongside the Nazi government officials.

In any serious accounting for the crimes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, those like Kristof, Cohen, Keller, Friedman and Miller who served the Pentagon’s war machine would have similarly to be tried for their promotion of aggressive war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact