

# Drumbeat grows for escalating war against Syria

Bill Van Auken  
11 September 2015

Politicians and the media in both the US and Western Europe have cynically seized upon the plight of refugees fleeing violence in Syria as the pretext for intensifying the war for regime change in that country.

French President Francois Hollande and British Prime Minister David Cameron, both of whom are feverishly working to keep all but a handful of refugees out of their respective countries, have announced bombing campaigns in Syria based on the apparent logic that the more high explosives are dropped over their heads, the more likely Syrians will decide to stay home.

Washington, meanwhile, has initiated a provocative confrontation with Russia over the latter's longstanding military aid to the government of President Bashar al-Assad, with increasingly hysterical warnings of a Russian "buildup" in Syria.

These recent developments only underscore the ephemeral character of the pretexts used by the Western imperialist powers for their bloody intervention in Syria. First, it was defending "human rights" against the Assad regime, then a struggle against the terrorism of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Now it is a question of refugees and Russian "interference."

The real forces driving Western intervention are naked geo-strategic interests in establishing hegemony over the world's key sources of energy and pipeline routes linking them to the world market. Under conditions of deepening economic crisis, the ruling class—first and foremost, the US financial aristocracy—is planning an intensification of militarist violence.

These tendencies find direct expression in the media's insistent drumbeat for an escalation of the Syrian war. Nowhere is this war propaganda more prevalent or more hypocritical than in the pages of the supposed liberal "newspaper of record," the *New York Times*.

Leading the pack is Roger Cohen, the affairs columnist whose piece entitled "Obama's Syrian Nightmare" appeared Thursday.

Cohen's thesis is that the plight of the Syrian people—a death toll of over 200,000, millions driven into exile or internally displaced and an entire society ravaged by civil war—is a product of "Western inaction."

"American interventionism can have terrible consequences, as the Iraq war has demonstrated," he writes. "But American non-interventionism can be equally devastating, as Syria illustrates. Not doing something is no less of a decision than doing it. The pendulum swings endlessly between interventionism and retrenchment because the United States is hard-wired to the notion that it can make the world a better place."

What reactionary lies and nonsense! Cohen, of course, does not share with his readers that he was a leading media advocate for the criminal war against Iraq. As for its "terrible consequences," they never bothered him much. In 2009, long after it was clear that the war had claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and wrecked an entire society, Cohen wrote, "I still believe Iraq's freedom outweighs its terrible price."

After the US-NATO war for regime change succeeded in toppling and murdering Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, Cohen wrote a triumphalist column entitled "Score One for Interventionism." Nearly four years later, the country is the scene of bloody conflicts between rival militias and the epicenter of the wave of refugees, thousands of whom have died seeking to cross the Mediterranean.

Since the US-NATO war in Bosnia in 1995, Cohen has backed every US military intervention as well as destabilization operations from Iran to Ukraine, serving

as the reliable journalistic servant of the US military and intelligence apparatus.

If he now finds fault with Obama's Syria policy, it is to promote the positions of those within the US ruling establishment who want to initiate a full-scale war.

Cohen indicts the White House for backing away from its 2013 threat to bomb Syrian government forces based on the fabricated claim that they had used chemical weapons against civilians. Ample evidence has since emerged that it was the Western-backed "rebels" who staged the chemical attacks in a bid to provoke direct US military intervention.

He criticizes Obama for a lack of "will" and "belief in American power," insisting that Syrian warplanes "could have been taken out" and that "arming the rebels early and massively might have changed the course of the war."

All of this twists reality beyond recognition. Obama decided to hold off on bombing Syria in 2013 in no small measure because of overwhelming popular hostility to another war. The debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan have disabused millions of Cohen's "hard-wired" notion that eruptions of American militarism "make the world a better place." Since then, the White House and military have been maneuvering to revive their war plans and working out new pretexts for intervention.

As far as "massively" arming the so-called rebels, this in fact took place, with billions of dollars worth of weapons funneled to Islamist militias via Washington's principal regional allies—Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar—and under the guiding hand of the CIA. If these arms failed to achieve Assad's downfall, it is because masses of Syrians are hostile to the foreign-backed Islamist cutthroats.

The Syrian people are the victims, not of "Western inaction," but of a series of criminal acts that stretch from the destruction of Iraq and Libya through to the fomenting of the sectarian civil war in Syria itself.

Cohen concludes by stating that, while Obama is "comfortable with pinpoint use of force," i.e., drone strikes and assassinations, he is "uncomfortable with American military power." The clear implication: get over it and launch another full-scale US war in the Middle East.

This perspective is echoed by Cohen's fellow *Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, who led the propaganda

charge for the war on Iraq. He argued in a column Wednesday that the only way to halt the flow of refugees was to either wall off the countries from which they are fleeing, or "occupy them with boots on the ground, crush the bad guys and build a new order based on real citizenship, a vast project that would take two generations." In other words, a military recolonization of the entire Middle East.

The logic of the drive to escalate the Syrian war was further spelled out Wednesday in a *Washington Post* editorial. Pointing to the alleged Russian buildup in Syria, it states, "Mr. Putin is acknowledging a truth that Mr. Obama has refused to accept: Any political agenda for Syria's future is meaningless unless it is backed by power on the ground... If Mr. Obama wishes to see the US vision for Syria prevail over Russia's, it will take more than phone calls."

The warning could not be clearer or more chilling. Behind the backs of the American people, powerful elements within the American ruling class and the state apparatus, with the collaboration of their media hacks, are preparing a military intervention that poses direct confrontation between the US and Russia, the world's two principal nuclear powers.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**