

On the “Duty to Protect” - The U.S.-British-French missile strike in Syria

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THREE FACTS STAND out about the April 14 U.S.-British-French missile strike on suspected (probable) Syrian chemical weapons facilities:

- 1) The action was blatantly illegal under international law, since Syria had not attacked or threatened a any of these three states.
- 2) It was illegal under U.S. law, since there was no Congressional authorization — as much as many Democrats would have eagerly given it.
- 3) It changed nothing on the ground to affect the ongoing horrific war, and probably wasn't even intended to.

Whatever the purpose of the bombing may have been, if anything beyond gratifying Donald Trump's ego, the official reason offered by Trump and UN Ambassador Nikki Haley was to protect civilians from the horrors of chemical attacks (which have killed a miniscule fraction of the victims of the Assad regime's campaign of slaughter, torture and mass population removal).

If the “duty to protect” innocent life is a fairly feeble pretext in this particular instance, it's worth considering as a principle. Socialists are anti-imperialists, not isolationists, so presumably we believe in some form of the “duty to protect” stripped of the imperial hypocrisy surrounding it.

For openers, let's talk about how the United States could protect civilian lives that it can actually save, without dropping bombs or lobbing Cruise missiles.

- The U.S. strategic ally, Saudi Arabia, is massively bombing and blockading Yemen, causing what's been called the world's most acute humanitarian disaster, including a million cases of cholera, outbreaks of diphtheria, and potential starvation facing some seven million Yemenis. The United States could stop supplying the planes and logistical support that enables this holocaust.
- The United States' most intimate partner in the Middle East, the state of Israel, is shooting Gazans demonstrating at the border, killing dozens and wounding hundreds on a weekly basis, including the deliberate targeting of children and journalist Yasser Murtaja, who was wearing a clearly visible “press” jacket. U.S. policy could force this ongoing massacre to end.
- Thousands of civilians are fleeing Honduras and El Salvador due to the drug gangs — and in Honduras, death squads — in these Central American states that have been ravaged by U.S.-sponsored genocidal wars. El Salvador's infamous MS-13 gang actually began in Los Angeles, and Honduras is ruled by a murderous regime that was installed in a U.S.-supported 2009 coup and has just retained power in a blatantly stolen election. The United States should admit and give refuge to these civilian victims of its own policies.

It's interesting to observe the intensity of Washington's rhetoric about human rights and crimes

against civilians whom it can do nothing to help — Syria, North Korea, Iran — compared to its neglect of the people it really could protect, without going to war. Readers should have little problem thinking of further examples.

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P.S.

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<https://solidarity-us.org/atc/194/finkel/>