

Is Dropping More Bombs on Syria the Way to Solve the Refugee Crisis?

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We must resist attempts to turn humanitarianism into a pretext for war, says Kevin Ovenden, for it is wars, above all, which create refugees.

From the Greek island of Mytilene to Munich we are seeing something of the power of ordinary people and a collective counterweight to racist exclusion, poverty and war.

In Britain, it has forced notoriously anti-migrant and anti-refugee papers, such as the Sun and Daily Mail, hypocritically to claim they care for those facing death in the Aegean. That has left the likes of Peter Hitchens on an ever [diminishing island of bigotry](#), committed to the absurdity of Britain staying exactly as it is – or as he imagined it was.

Whatever contortions the tabloids and politicians make this weekend, it is not they who have led the upsurge of human solidarity.



Refugees from Syria

Millions of refugees have fled the civil war in Syria. Is the answer to their suffering more bombing of the country?

First, the refugees and newcomers to Europe are fighting for their rights. And winning many battles. No state or inter-governmental agency airlifted or brought them to Munich or other European cities.

They themselves battled across one border after another to get there.

That, and the [shocked reaction to the image of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi](#), has brought a groundswell of solidarity. That in turn is moving more people.

In Britain, there is a growing focus on those trapped at the Calais camp who would like to cross the Channel.

Governments across Europe are feeling some pressure and are having to work out what to do. David Cameron is cooking up a political response.

He and a section of the British establishment, including on the right of the Labour Party, are concerting an argument for bombing Syria. The latest is [former Archbishop of Canterbury](#), Lord Carey.

The moral depravity of what Cameron is doing is sickening. He is not even trying to make a convincing case for how dropping more bombs on Syria will somehow bring to an end the many-sided war there, which the West's policy has helped foment.

He knows there is no compelling case. That's why he is so nervous about pressing ahead. Unlike Tony Blair over Iraq who went to war despite a deep division in parliament, Cameron says he will move only with parliamentary consensus.

So why push for bombing at all, with so much doubt even among the military top brass, and with an unworkable policy of both regime change and stopping ISIS?

At this moment, it is in order to avoid having to break with the inhuman asylum and immigration policy and to allow refugees in. Something that is 100 percent guaranteed to help and not to make matters worse.

It is to exploit the suffering of millions of people who are on the move in order to justify an enhanced British military presence in the Middle East, even though that will create more refugees. It is to use deaths such as Aylan's to cement alliances with countries such as Saudi Arabia, which is [bombing neighbouring Yemen](#) and has not taken one single Syrian. Not one.

The callousness and cynicism are staggering. From ordinary people we are seeing a spontaneous upsurge of solidarity. Cameron is seeking to use the immediacy of the shock at what is happening to divert that solidarity into support for wider war.

That's why it is absolutely right that the organisation of solidarity from below is going hand in hand with an argument to stop Cameron doing that and to force him to do at the very least what the German government has been obliged to do in accepting many more refugees.

Most people quite rightly smell the opportunism of politicians trying to exploit a tragedy. "Keep politics out of it" is an understandable reaction. But it is not enough to stop what Cameron is up to or to "keep the politicians out".

That's because with the likes of Lord Carey and a pliant media governments present bombing as a non-political humanitarian act. It is the opposition to bombing which is then rounded on as "bringing politics into it". This is what they will try to do this coming week.

They will try to shift public opinion – which is very conflicted both over bombing and over taking more refugees (see the polls quoted in the article linked to) – politically to manipulate humanitarian instinct along pro-bombing lines.

Just saying keep politics out of it will not be enough to stop that. And it can end up echoing the right wing's political attack on those opposed to war.

That's what people like Bob Geldof and Bono have frequently ended up doing. I'm all for prominent figures and celebrities joining the solidarity movement. It's great that the German football club, Bayern Munich, has followed the lead of a large section of its fans and is donating and making clear its support for refugees.

A [major initiative from English football](#) is in the pipeline.

But those things are different from celebrity politicians who are wheeled out to support an establishment argument. It's because politicians are so generally distrusted that they so often these days have to rely on celebs to push a difficult political line.

The choice of who to focus on and what images to use in the media also subtly serves to frame the issues in ways which crop out the views of the people involved and the demands of the movement which is developing.

So there are few pictures right now of the second dangerous route, next to the crossing from Turkey to Greece, into Europe for people escaping war and devastation: from Libya across the Mediterranean.

Earlier this year two boats went down with many hundreds of people aboard within a few days of each other. Some of them will have been the same age as Aylan Kurdi.

Europe's leaders do not want us to include those images – and the media follows that cue, because it maintains that what the politicians and celebrities say is more important than anything else.

The reason is that we have already bombed Libya. Four years ago the British government led the way in exploiting people's heartfelt solidarity with those suffering in Libya in order for Nato to bomb, to enforce regime change and to... to end up with devastation and a refugee crisis from one end of the country to the other.

While the media has moved on from Libya and drawn a blanket over that Nato-made disaster, a lot of people in Britain and Europe have not.

There is a deep understanding among a section of the public that Western bombing will create more refugees not end the crisis.

That is true among people I know on the island of Mytilene (Lesvos) in Greece. They were charged with people smuggling because of their actions in helping refugees.

The campaign around their court case is what caused the current Greek government to change the law so that helping people ashore in the Aegean is not a crime.

The popular assistance for refugees in Greece which has been organised by ordinary people for many years has fought many political campaigns. It has resisted attempts to exploit suffering for military purposes.

So as this movement of solidarity builds towards [a day of action across the continent on 12 September](#) let's follow that example.

That means choosing to listen to the voices from below across Europe. It means saying that we have a genuinely humanitarian politics, which will reject false attempts to separate those fleeing Western-stoked wars and disastrous interventions into "deserving" and "undeserving".

And we will resist all attempts to turn humanitarianism into a pretext for war. For it is wars, above all, which create refugees.

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