

Subjects of Empire: U.S. Public Opinion on Syria

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The American public remains firmly opposed to U.S. military intervention into Syria, according to a [Pew Research Center poll](#) released in mid-March.

In fact, the Pew survey finds a sizable 64% of the American populace opposed to the very notion that the U.S. has a responsibility “to do something” about the fighting in Syria. (Evidently Americans have yet to warm to their “responsibility to protect.”)

At the same time, 62% of Americans oppose bombing Syrian forces in order to protect anti-government groups, while 63% oppose sending arms to such groups. And as Pew finds, these anti-intervention sentiments stretch across party lines.

Ultimately, though, such widespread popular opposition to intervention is likely to have little influence on whether the U.S. shall intervene. For as Pew notes, when surveyed back in March of 2011, an even greater percentage of the U.S. public opposed either the bombing of Libyan air defenses (77%), or the arming of anti-government groups (69%). But as we learned then, when presented with an opportunity to dispose of those not toeing the imperial line—in this particular instance, Colonel “mad dog of the Middle East” Gaddafi—one cannot be constrained by such frivolous matters as domestic public opinion.

In this respect, all the intervention hawks in Washington clamoring for Syrian “regime change” can take a measure of solace in the public’s current sentiments. Indeed, for if we analyze the Libyan case further, we see that once the NATO bombardment began, the American public warmed towards the intervention. As the Pew report comments, “After the allies launched air strikes against Libya last year, there was modest public support for the military operation; 47% said the airstrikes were the right decision while 36% said they were the wrong decision.”

Quite predictably then, even with war fatigue on the ascendancy (Pew finds that 57% of Americans support an accelerated withdrawal from Afghanistan), U.S. war planning for Syria continues apace. As the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, informed the Senate last Wednesday, President Obama has gone ahead and requested that the Pentagon provide him with military options on Syria. All options, as the White House is quick say, remain on the table.

Of course, all this is not to say that public opinion is completely irrelevant. The sophisticated propaganda campaign well underway against the Assad regime is evidence enough that popular sentiments still retain a degree of relevancy. After all, the effort to mold public opinion to the imperial agenda is necessary to give a veneer of democracy to empire. And in the end, as the late Chalmers Johnson wrote, this is the choice presently confronting the American public. For the U.S. must choose between democracy and

empire. Its people must choose between being subjects to empire, or being citizens of a republic. They cannot be both. And until the American Empire is fully dismantled (whether this comes internally or externally), U.S. public opinion on foreign affairs stand little chance of shaping policy.

In the meantime, whether the American public ultimately joins in or not, the steady march towards Syria shall continue forth.

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