

The Syrian Refugee Crisis and the “Do Something” Lie

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It didn't take long for the universal and entirely justified outrage over a picture of a dead three-year-old to be funneled by the “do something” pundits to justify regime change in Syria.

The “do something” crowd wants us to “do something” about the refugee crisis and “solve” the “bigger problem,” which, of course, involves regime change. To create the moral urgency and to tether the refugee crisis to their long-standing warmongering, these actors have to insist the US has “done nothing” about Syria. Here's the Guardian [editorial from Thursday](#):

The optimism of the Arab spring is spent. Colonel Gaddafi was a tyrant, yet Libya has unravelled violently in the aftermath of his removal. The refusal to intervene against Bashar al-Assad gave the Syrian president permission to continue murdering his people.

Here's London Mayor Boris Johnson in the [Telegraph](#):

I perfectly accept that intervention has not often worked. It has been a disaster in Iraq; it has been a disaster in Libya. But can you honestly say that non-intervention in Syria has been a success? If we keep doing nothing about the nightmare in Syria, then frankly we must brace ourselves for an eternity of refugees, more people suffocating in airless cattle trucks at European motorway service stations, more people trying to climb the barbed wire that we are building around the European Union.



Photo of Syrian refugees coming ashore on the Greek island of Lesbos that accompanied the Guardian's editorial (9/3/15) condemning "the refusal to intervene against Bashar al-Assad." (photo: Angelos Tzortzinis/Getty)

And [here's an op-ed](#) by Michael Gerson in the Washington Post from the same day:

At many points during the past four years, even relatively small actions might have reduced the pace of civilian casualties in Syria. How hard would it have been to destroy the helicopters dropping barrel bombs on neighborhoods? A number of options well short of major intervention might have reduced the regime's destructive power and/or strengthened the capabilities of more responsible forces. All were untaken.

But this is all a fantasy. The US has been "intervening" in the Syrian civil war, in measurable and significant ways, since at least 2012—most notably by arming, funding and training anti-Assad forces. [According](#) to a report in the Washington Post from June:

At \$1 billion, Syria-related operations account for about \$1 of every \$15 in the CIA's overall budget, judging by spending levels revealed in documents the Washington Post obtained from former US intelligence contractor Edward Snowden.

US officials said the CIA has trained and equipped nearly 10,000 fighters sent into Syria over the past several years — meaning that the agency is spending roughly \$100,000 per year for every anti-Assad rebel who has gone through the program.

In addition to this, the Obama administration has engaged in [crippling sanctions](#) against the Assad government, [provided air support](#) for those looking to depose him, incidentally [funneled](#) arms to ISIS, and not incidentally [aligned the CIA-backed Free Syrian Army with Al Qaeda](#). Regardless of one's position on Syria—or whether they think the US is somehow secretly in alliance with Assad, as some advance—one thing cannot be said: that the US has "done nothing in Syria." This is historically false.

Most of those advocating for the removal of Assad probably know this, but can't say "the US should do *more*," or "they haven't done *enough*," because this would raise the uncomfortable question of what they have done already.

And the answer to that, as is with most US meddling in other countries, is a lot of covert programs US officials—and thus their court press—can't openly acknowledge. So those in the establishment media are left to do a strange dance: at once ignoring all the US has already done while insisting the US should join a fight it's been a party to for over three years.

Another idea being advanced, for instance in the Guardian op-ed above, is the creation of a no-fly zone to help stem the tide of refugees:

To begin restoring that hope will inevitably mean international intervention of some kind. The establishment of credible safe havens and the implementation of a no-fly zone must be on the table for serious consideration.

Two things before discussing this further:

A) A no-fly zone would only be applied to Assad because anti-Assad forces don't have an air force.

B) While it may sound like a simple humanitarian stop gap—and that's no doubt [how it's being sold](#)—literally every no-fly zone in history has [eventually led to regime change](#). Which is fair enough, but those pushing for one should at least be honest about what this means: the active removal of Assad by foreign forces. Indeed, if one recalls the NATO intervention in Libya was originally [sold as a no-fly zone](#) to prevent a potential genocide, but within a matter of weeks, NATO leaders had [pivoted to full-on regime change](#).

But here again, there's some serious fudging going on by the Guardian. While there's no doubt many of the refugees are escaping Assad's bombing of cities, the boy in question, Aylan Kurdi, wasn't: He was escaping ISIS and the US bombing of his [hometown of Kobani](#), far from anything the Assad government is doing. A no-fly zone would not have saved his hometown. An absence of [fueling jihadists by the United States](#) and the [subsequent bombing](#) of said jihadists by the United States? Perhaps.

Once again, the disease becomes the cure, because a holistic diagnosis is not being advanced by Western media—only an evil dictator vs. freedom fighter cartoon. And why wouldn't it? These nuances complicate the messy narrative of "If we get rid of Assad we can solve the crisis," which has been US and UK orthodoxy since 2011. But the Guardian still has all their work ahead of them: If the West removes Assad, then what? Will the tens of thousands of radical, medieval wahabbists that have flooded in simply go away? Will the US bombing of ISIS simply stop?

The US funded, armed and fueled the very crisis its partisan media are now calling for it to swoop and in save. The moral ADD required by those pushing *further* US involvement in the Syrian civil war in the face of this fact is severe. That some in the media, eager to settle old scores, would so blatantly ignore history to indulge this fantasy is as pernicious as it is predictable.

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