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Attacking Syria would make a terrible situation worse

by Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

An American attack has been averted -- at least for now.

In the face of strong public opinion against attacking Syria, the likelihood that a congressional resolution approving military strikes would be voted down, and international pressure to implement Russia's proposal to put Syria's chemical weapons under U.N. control, President Barack Obama has postponed possible U.S. military action against Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime.

Obama is making the case that Assad's forces were responsible for a chemical weapons attack that, according to his administration, killed more than 1,400 civilians. He says military strikes would help remedy the situation.

The use of chemical weapons is horrendous. But what about the widely reported 100,000 Syrian deaths overwhelmingly caused by conventional weapons? Are these deaths not also horrendous? Why has the United States largely ignored the terrible suffering of Syrians during their two-plus years of civil war?

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 2 million Syrian refugees have flowed into the neighboring countries of Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, which are largely bearing this overwhelming burden alone.

Hasn't the Obama administration learned anything from America's attack upon Iraq?

Is the Obama administration hoping to draw Iran into some sort of confrontation with the United States, giving Obama a pretext to strike that nation next?

Rather than launching a series of missile strikes -- which would surely kill and wound many more

innocent Syrian civilians, be a highly effective recruitment tool for militant groups like al-Qaida, and increase the possibility of a full-scale regional war that could easily involve American troops -- the United States should instead take the nonviolent moral high ground.

The U.S. should forcefully call for the total abolition of chemical weapons worldwide, which incidentally would pressure Israel to eliminate its stockpile.

Rather than answering violence with violence, the U.S. should aggressively and generously take the lead in adequately supplying much-needed humanitarian aid to the Syrian people and to the neighboring nations that are already providing generous refugee assistance.

Furthermore, the United States should be committed to getting all involved parties to the negotiating table.

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On Sept. 7, countless believers across the globe and more than 100,000 people in St. Peter's Square accepted Pope Francis' invitation to pray with him for peace in Syria and throughout the world.

During the four-hour prayer service at St. Peter's, the Holy Father said, "We bring about the rebirth of Cain in every act of violence and in every war. ... We have perfected our weapons [while] our conscience has fallen asleep, and we have sharpened our ideas to justify ourselves. As if it were normal, we continue to sow destruction, pain, death! Violence and war lead only to death, they speak of death! Violence and war are the language of death."

The pope is calling us to be countercultural, to swim against the nationalistic tide, which arrogantly proclaims: "My country is exceptional; it can do no wrong."

Pope Francis beautifully continued: "My Christian faith urges me to look to the cross. How I wish that all men and women of good will would look to the cross ... There, we can see God's reply: Violence is not answered with violence; death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue and peace is spoken."

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings about Catholic social teaching. His keynote address, "Advancing the Kingdom of God in the 21st Century," has been well received by diocesan gatherings from Salt Lake City to Baltimore. Tony can be reached at tmag@zoominternet.net.]

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